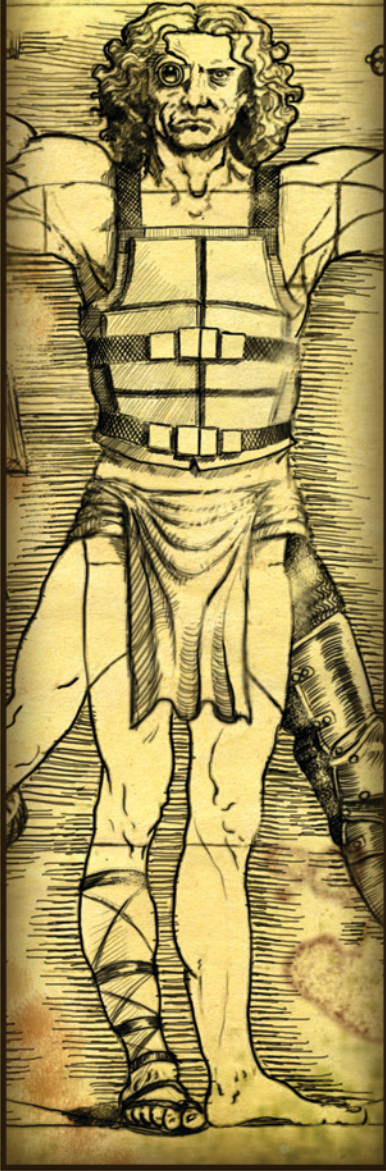


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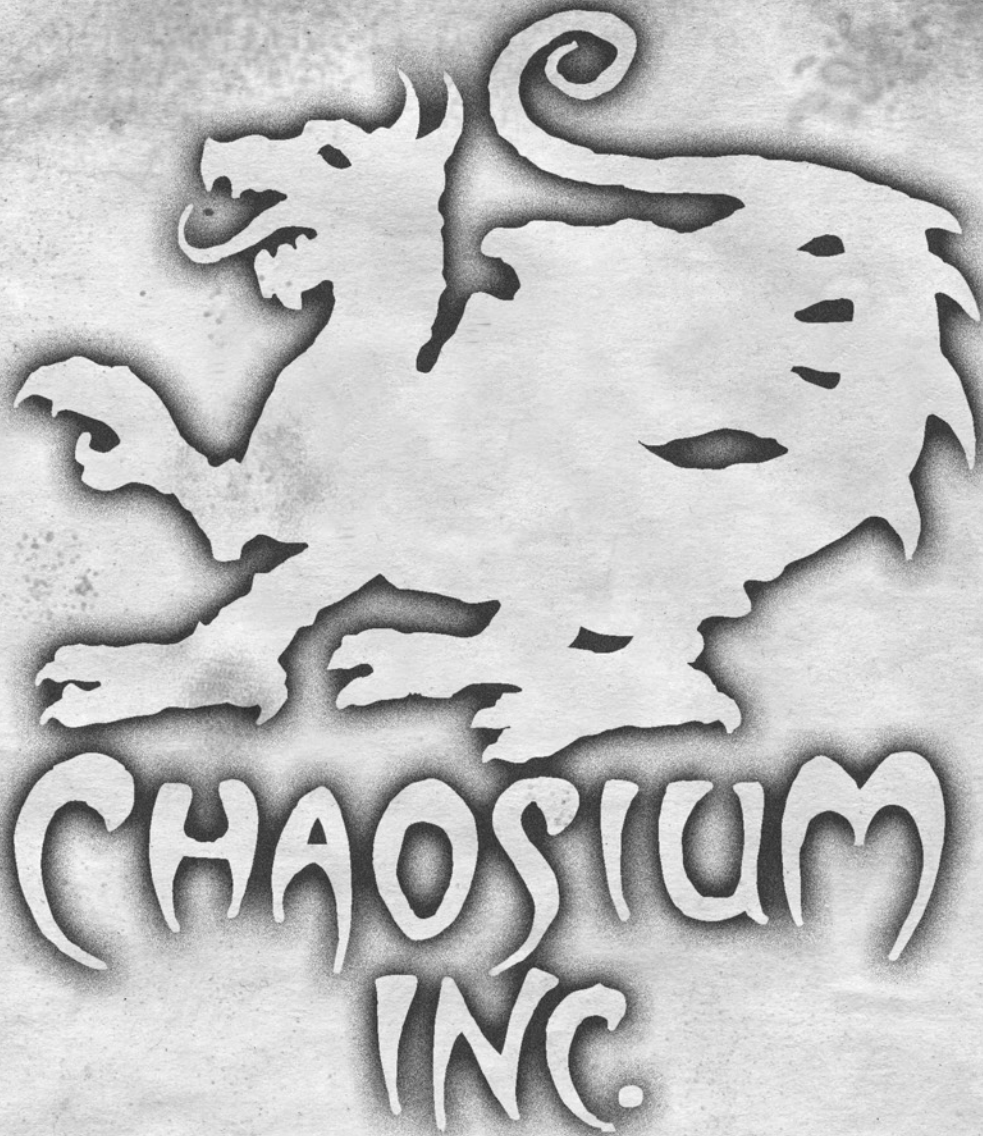
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DUST TO DUST



FURTHER EXPLORATIONS INTO
THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE





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Dust, to Dust



Forgotten, But Not Quite Gone....

A Supplement for Ashes, to Ashes, by Jeff Moeller.

Requires Ashes, to Ashes to Make Much Sense Out of It.

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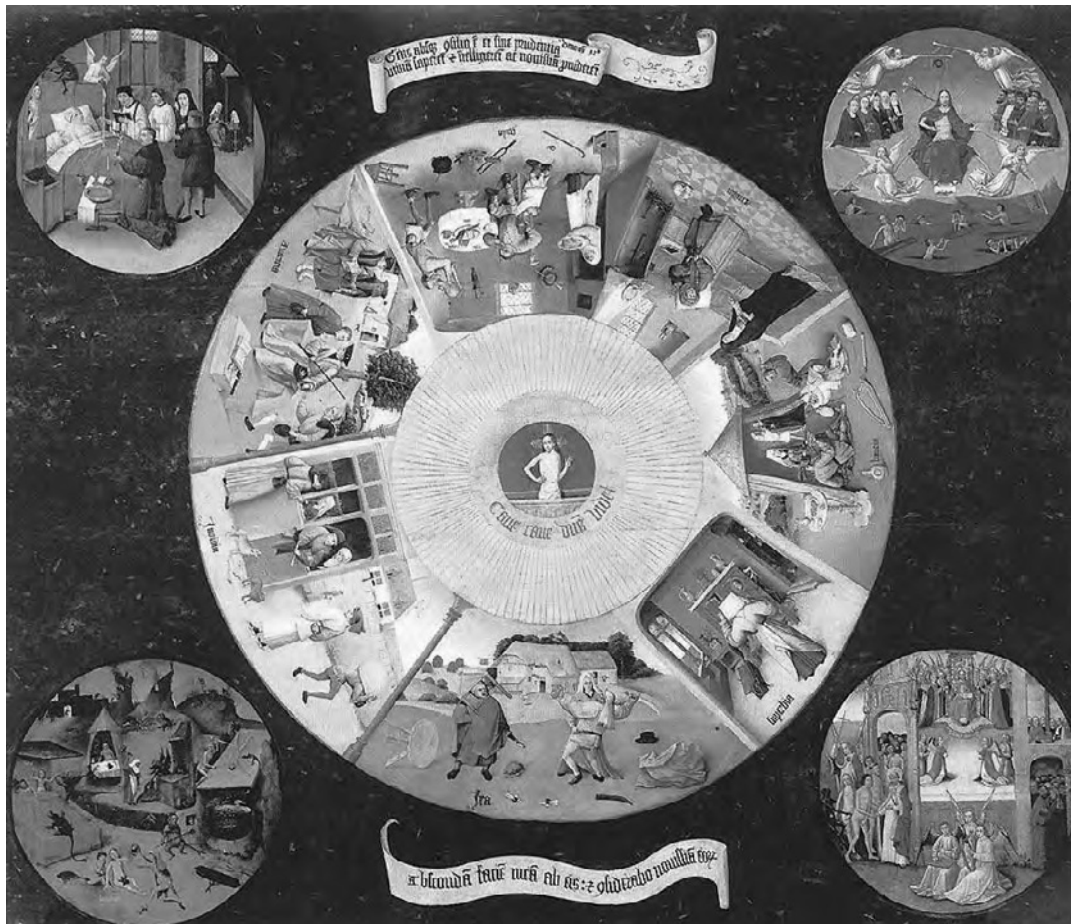
A web forum offering support for the *Ashes, to Ashes* setting can be found at Yahoo! Groups under "ashesttoashes"; the setting has its own forum at <http://www.basicroleplaying.com>.

Dust, to Dust

A Supplement for the *Ashes, to Ashes BRP™* Setting, Further Exploring the Darker Side of Human Nature, by Jeff Moeller

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	...3	Scenario— <u>It's Not a Lie, As Long As You Believe That It's True</u>	...80
Additional Rules, Gear, <u>etc.</u>	...5		
An Additional Organization—the Hidden	...11	Tales From the Winding Road: Adaptation Notes and Plot Seeds	...118
Gazetteer—The Western Isles (Sloth)	...15	Index	...121
Gazetteer—Takuk (Gluttony)	...52	Official! Character Sheet	...Apx



The Seven Deadly Sins and Four Last Things, by Hieronymus Bosch

Introduction

A Second (and More Expositional) Look At the World

This is a supplement to Ashes, to Ashes, a BRP™ setting that casts the PLAYERS as mavericks in a fantasy World that is losing a war it does not even know that it is fighting. Hidden demons and their mortal minions—many of whom do not even know who their masters truly are—manipulate events from the shadows, experimenting with social control mechanisms to steer the human cattle in the direction that they want them to go.

Ashes, to Ashes contained a fair amount of perhaps too subtle commentary, both in the nature of the lands themselves and woven throughout the back story. In this introduction, I want to peel back the curtain a bit, and outline what you can expect from Dust, to Dust.

The post-apocalyptic genre is, at its core, sociological commentary via a classic science-fiction trope. One changes a fundamental aspect of the world (the viability of society) and explores the ramifications. Some silly choice made by society has resulted in its downfall, but the downfall is really a literary device through which to examine the underlying foibles of the characters.

Often post-apocalyptic stories are anti-war commentaries, as with the countless stories where military carelessness lays waste to the world. One of my personal favorites concerns an event by which society, blindly oblivious to a threat and amused by its novelty, is literally struck blind.

The Ashes, to Ashes setting explores the classic Seven Deadly Sins: wrath, greed, lust, pride, sloth, gluttony and envy. That is how it all started: Scaraband the Traitor's sins and weaknesses. He lusts after the

Princess Millesse, and envies her family. Her family is too lazy to improve society, content with the way things are. Scaraband lets his pride lead him to betray humanity. He brings forth the demons to vent his wrath, and by becoming a demon himself to hold onto what he already has, lets his greed doom the World.

It's an allegory. The lands themselves reflect Scaraband's foibles, although like the World itself, these foibles have been broken up and spread around, one per land.

Fallingstar is the land of pride (which, of course, goeth before the fall). Eglantine, the thorny rose, is a fairy tale land consumed by wrath. "The Dells", at bottom a land inhabited by a bunch of farmers and their lusty daughters (including, in a sense, Millesse herself), is empty of anything meaningful. The "Majestic Plateau" is a land where you can live in material comfort, if that is all that matters to you. "The Farm" is sure to inspire envy in the hearts of strangers, and so must be kept hidden away. Only in the simplicity of the Crannoch is there any peace.

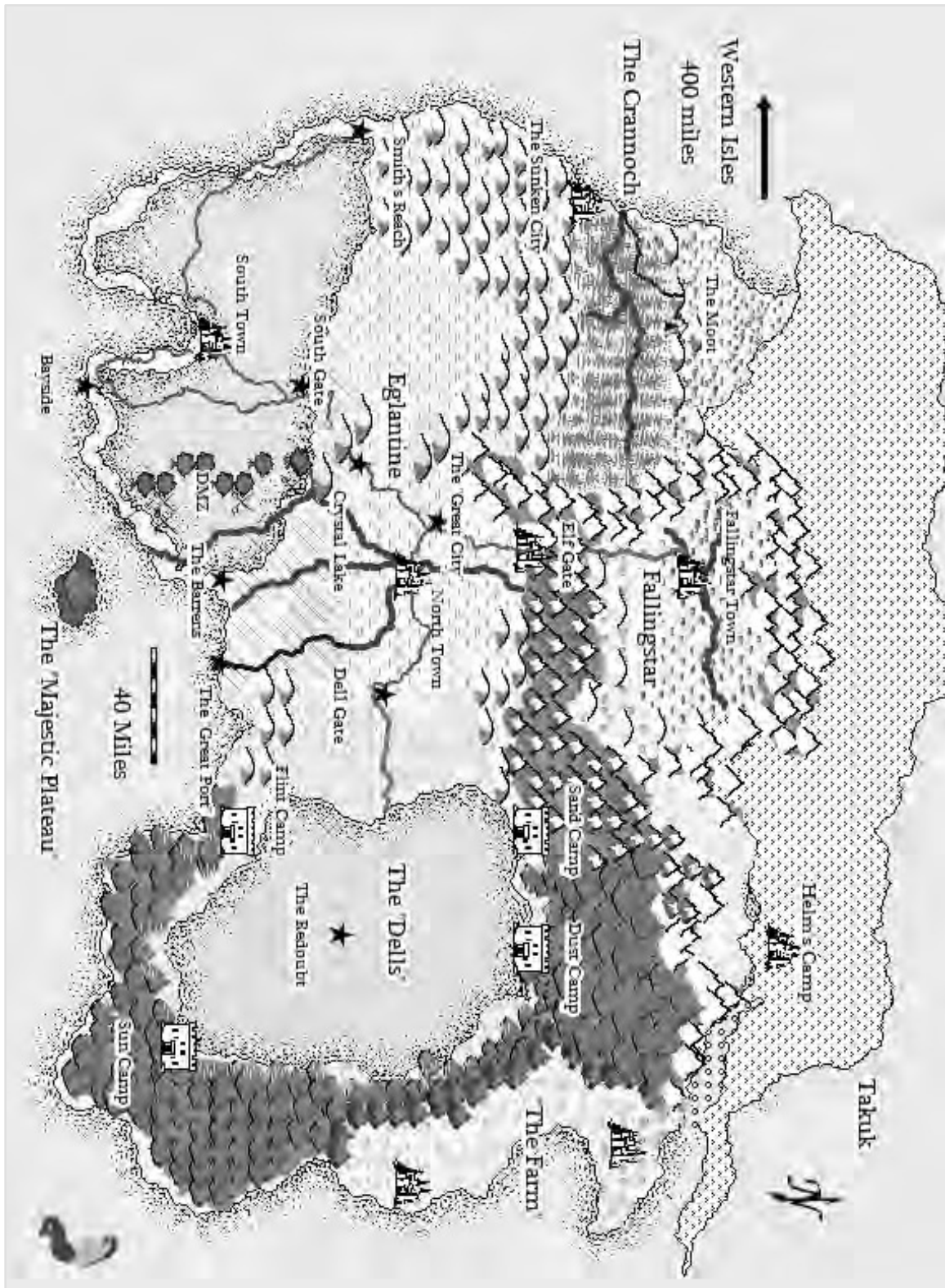
That leaves two lands and two Deadly Sins unaccounted for, and they are dealt with in Dust, to Dust. These are the Western Isles of Flatey and Muspel, mired in sloth; and the mystery of Takuk, which was consumed by its own gluttony.

Ashes, to Ashes is available through Chaosium's online catalog at chaosium.com. While I tend to cross-post things to that forum, most of the discussion of the setting has evolved over at <http://www.basicroleplaying.com>, and I encourage you to check it out.

On, then, with the four last things: two more lands, madness, and death. Good luck storming the castle!

Jeff Moeller, Cleveland, OH, May 2010.





Yeah, I've been working on the whole "map thing"....

Additional Rules, Gear, Etc.

The following section covers some additional *gear*; offers an optional *terror mechanism* to reflect both short and long-term mental wear and abuse; and summarizes *rules for drug addiction* and the treatment of same (important for roleplaying in the Western Isles).

Additional gear

Atlatl: A flexible, hooked board with leather straps that fits around the first two fingers, this ancient device holds a notched javelin and mechanically increases the length of the thrower's arm. It increases both effective range and penetrating power. For a video demonstration, check out <http://www.atlatl.com/>. These implements are popular with the gangs on Flatey, as they are simple, effective and require less practiced skill than a sling. Slings are too much trouble.

"Beat-stick": Unique in the World to

Flatey, this is a two handed, fire-cured club, fixed with a wrist strap and studded along both edges with razor-sharp obsidian flakes. While it is a somewhat clumsy weapon (-1 to initiative), it is not any fun to get hit by, as it can easily sever a limb. Fortunately, because they do take some time to make, not too many gangsters on Flatey wield them. Too much work.

Obsidian dagger: Also native to Flatey, these tend to be double edged slashing weapons, not much good for stabbing. While effectively sharp, they are more brittle than good steel and hence, not useful for throwing.

Bola: As per BRP, common in the Crannoch.

Lasso: As per BRP, used in the Dells.

Net: As per BRP, the water procession on Flatey often carries a couple of nets to subdue troublesome gang members.

Weapon Description	Beginning Attack & Parry	Damage	Special	Attacks/Round	HPs Resistance	Failure %	Range
Atlatl (with javelin)	15%	1d6+1+1/2db	Impaling	1	10	---	50
"Beat-stick"	25%	1d10+3+db	Bleeding	1	22	---	No
Dagger, Obsidian	25%	1d4+2+db	Bleeding	1	10	---	No
Bola	05%	1d4+1/2db +special	Entangle	1	1	---	15
Lasso	05%	Special	Entangle	1	1	---	10
Net	05%	Special	Entangle	1	6	96-00	5

Madness

This spot rule is intended as a simpler substitute for the Sanity mechanic of BRP, recast for a dark but heroic campaign. Heroes should not quake (easily, at least) at the mere sight of a horrendous monster or a dead body. At the same time, any mortal can be broken, be it by torture, deprivation, post-traumatic stress, and similar unpleasantness. As a result, a system to deal with those matters follows.

The Fear Check: There is no Sanity statistic used in Ashes, to Ashes. Rather, POW is emphasized as a measure of force of will and personality. POW increases through the confidence gained from extraordinary success, and POW is lost by extraordinary things that undermine hope.

The Basic Mechanism. *The mechanism is simple: things that are bad enough force a POW x5 check.*

Success indicates that no POW is lost, and no deleterious effects occur.

Failure indicates that 1 POW is lost (permanently) and the character suffers a reaction.

A fumbled POW check (96-00), even if it would be successful under a strict POW x5 count, fails and incurs a reaction.

Ordinary folk (common villagers, “mook” level bad guys) must make Difficult POW x5 checks when a Fear check is required.

An 01 result on a Fear Check is counted as a successful exercise of POW, as though it were an 01 on a Luck roll.

As PLAYERS get lower and lower on POW, they should be encouraged to play up appropriate personality quirks, phobias, and neuroses appropriate to the source of their discomfort. A PLAYER who is on the brink of starvation will hoard food; a person who has been tortured by a particular entity may be driven for revenge. These long-term effects should be matters of role-playing vs. statistic adjustment.

The KEEPER must be careful when deciding what does and does not provoke a Fear Check. It is not intended for every scary situation, such as “see a minor monster” or “be surprised by a corpse.” Rather, whenever hopelessness and despair are confronted, a check should be made, is it is bad enough, in the KEEPER’S discretion.

Appropriate Fear Check Stimuli

- ✓ Seeing a close friend killed.
- ✓ A Paired learning of the death or horrible suffering of the other half of the Pair.
- ✓ Being confronted by a *major* demon, or a seemingly hopeless fight against many demons.
- ✓ Horrible torture or abuse (per day).
- ✓ Imprisonment without hope of escape (as soon as hopelessness becomes apparent).
- ✓ Imminent death without apparent hope (about to be executed, truly hopeless odds in a fight where no quarter is expected).
- ✓ Total isolation (stranded on a desert island).
- ✓ Each time one’s hopes are dashed that a prior *Fear check* might be resolved (prison escape foiled, boat sails by your desert island, water is a mirage).
- ✓ Deprivation that immediately and severely threatens life (food, water, shelter).

People falling below a POW of 3 sink into a profound depression and are effectively retired until their POW recovers at least to 3. They may do things such as go underground, have a psychotic break, kill themselves, or launch a suicide mission. A POW of zero results in someone dying of fright.

The idea is that the stresses of the World will gradually wear on the patience, stability and resolve of the PLAYERS, and to provide a mechanism for explaining how a group of ordinary folk might be cowed into submission by repeated abuse.

What's Bad Enough to Force a Fear Check? Again, emphasize things that portray helplessness or despair, things that there is no apparent way to overcome. There should be no "hardening" against repeated stimuli; use that as a guidepost for what forces a check in the first place.

Failed Fear Check Reactions

- ✓ Close friend killed: **Enraged** for rest of combat, or **Distraught**.
- ✓ Paired: **Enraged** for rest of combat, or **Distraught**.
- ✓ Hopeless demon encounter: **Terrified**.
- ✓ Horrible torture or abuse (per day): **Terrified** or **Cowed** (if restrained).
- ✓ Imprisonment without hope of escape: **Distraught** or **Cowed**.
- ✓ Imminent death without apparent hope: **Terrified** or **Cowed** (if restrained).
- ✓ Total isolation (stranded on a desert island): **Distraught**.
- ✓ Each time one's hopes are dashed that a prior Fear Check might be resolved (prison escape foiled, boat sails by your desert island, water is a mirage): **Distraught** or **Cowed**.
- ✓ Deprivation that immediately and severely threatens life (food, water, shelter): **Distraught**.

Reactions From a Failed Fear Check. Reactions from failed Fear Checks should be those appropriate to eliminating or minimizing the cause. Cross-referencing the appropriate stimuli box, appropriate reactions might include (in addition to losing 1 POW):

Enraged: All-out attack (if in combat) until revenge acquired or physically restrained/rendered unconscious. If out of combat, inexorably bent on revenge (PLAYER must make a rechecked POW x5 to pursue other goals than revenge. Failure in rechecks cost another point of POW.

Rechecks are permitted in GM's discretion when loss is suffered out of combat).

Distraught: -10% to all checks until a second Fear Check is made (check 1/day). Failure in rechecks costs another point of POW, and being Distraught is cumulative.

Terrified: Flee at top speed until threat is no longer perceived. Recheck may be allowed in DM's discretion (first success undoes the reaction). Failed recheck on a Terrified reaction is a Cowed reaction, and costs another point of POW.

Cowed: Must make a further Fear Check to take any risky action against the source of the Fear Check (first success undoes the reaction). Failures in rechecks cost another point of POW.

Addiction

This spot rule deals with the effects of addicting substances, getting hooked, and withdrawal symptoms. This comes into particular play in the Western Isles, but is also a factor in Fallingstar (where alcoholism is a problem).

When dealing with the issue of substance abuse for any particular substance, there are five questions that need to be addressed:

1. How easy is it to get addicted? This is measured by the number of times that the user succumbs to the POT of the substance.

2. What are the ongoing health effects of being addicted? This is (usually) measured by a decrepitude check on the Aging table, with the frequency of how often a check is required varying on how dangerous the substance is and how much it is being abused. Some special, quasi-magical substances (e.g., the Black Lotus) are subject to special rules.

3. How hard is it to kick the habit? This is measured by a base combined (POW + CON x ½) x5 check, with adjustments depending on how pernicious the addiction is. Some special, quasi-magical substances (e.g., the Black Lotus) are subject to special rules

4. What happens to an addict between the time he stops “riding the horse” and the craving subsides? Sometimes this is mild; other times it is a constant challenge not to fall off the wagon.

5. Are there any beneficial effects to being under the drug’s influence? Almost always, the answer is yes, since otherwise, people would not take it. This can range from mild euphoria to pain dilation to heightened experiences.

While it is not the intention of the author to set out rules for every substance out there, there are three that need to be covered. Feel free to tweak these rules in light of particular circumstances.

Alcohol: Alcohol is a frequently used drug which is somewhat difficult to get addicted to (comparatively speaking). If lightly intoxicated or hung over, impose a -10% penalty to any action. If heavily intoxicated, impose a -20% penalty. If drunk beyond that (alcohol poisoning), treat as a POT 10 poison

Regular recreational use of alcohol runs (comparatively) little risk of addiction (POT 5, checked monthly, with each failed roll resulting in a cumulative 5% chance of addiction). Heavy use of alcohol (regularly getting drunk to impairment or the point of falling down) is another matter (POT 10, checked monthly).

Once addicted, alcohol is a moderately difficult habit to kick, and is moderately destructive. An addict will drink a lot, whenever the opportunity presents itself, and so will often be somewhat drunk and somewhat impaired.

An alcohol addict gets to make decrepitude checks on the aging table every 6 months. This means that, on average, an addict has about 2 points of characteristic erosion to look forward to each year.

To kick the habit, the addict must make a (CON + POW)/2 x5 check. Failure, alas, costs 1 point of POW.

The physical impact of quitting the sauce is fortunately (comparatively) mild. The addict is incapacitated for (20-CON) x5 hours, and unless you are feeling really mean, re-addiction risk can be a simple matter of role-playing.

Apart from a general sense of euphoria and loosening of inhibitions, there is no medicinal benefit to alcohol consumption. Mixing alcohol into water was used in Roman and medieval times to purify drinking water of questionable source. (More ale was drunk in medieval England than straight water for just this reason).



It’s All Fun and Games Until Someone Loses A Mind.

Laudanum: Laudanum was the opiate of the masses in Victorian England, literally. It formed the basis for many popular patent medicines of the era, combined with many different kinds of flavorings or other secondary ingredients.

In its purest form, laudanum is tincture of opium: latex from the opium poppy (with all of its lovely active ingredients, including morphine and codeine), dissolved 1:10 in alcohol. Delightful stuff, 1 milliliter is the therapeutic dose for adults each 6 hours, and 100-150 m.g. (2-3 teaspoons) is a lethal dose for those with no developed tolerance (POT 20 poison on an overdose).

Laudanum has a POT of 15 for a recommended dose (just enough to be effective). **Regardless** of whether this roll succeeds or fails, the user takes a penalty of -20% to all actions, as well as a state of euphoria and a general reduction in inhibitions, for its effective period (about 8 hours).

Each failed roll after the first results in a cumulative 5% chance of addiction. It does not matter how tough one is; prolonged use of broad spectrum opiates such as laudanum eventually and predictably leads to addiction.

Long term addiction to laudanum treats the addict to a decrepitude roll every 6 months. It deadens appetite, affects one's frontal cortex and decision making abilities, and ultimately over long periods of time can damage the lungs.

An addict will go to great lengths to keep his supply coming: theft, selling oneself, abandoning one's life. With proper medical care, people can (and do) remain on opiates for years, with little long-term physical damage beyond lung impairment. However, we are talking about addicts here, who will not attend to their medical needs (or most other needs than getting a fix).

Depriving an addict of laudanum is a recipe for pain. If deprived for more than 3 days, the addict makes an immediate decrepitude check, and then a decrepitude check every week, until a successful habit kicking roll is made.

The habit kicking roll $(CON + POW)/2 \times 5$ check is **Difficult** and should coincide with the decrepitude check. Make the weekly decrepitude check, and then allow a habit-

kicking check. Failure of a habit-kicking roll, as usual, costs 1 point of POW.

The addict also suffers shakes, nausea and stomach illness for the first few days, imposing a -20% penalty to all checks. A successful Medicine check will make the first (or a subsequent) habit-kicking check **Easy**; this involves isolating the addict from any further supply and stepping them down with other substances.

Finally, if presented with an opportunity, the addict will use again, and become automatically re-addicted, unless they succeed in a second **Difficult** habit-kicking check. And until the habit is kicked, avoiding temptation while suffering withdrawal must be a **Critical** success.



It started as a brand name for acetylated tincture of opium...really....

Laudanum does have some legitimate medical applications, but it was a major killer in its time from over-prescription or use without prescription. It is still prescribed today (with a "poison" label) as the medicine of last resort for fulminant diarrhea and otherwise uncontrollable



coughing. It also, of course, numbs pain, induces sleep and creates a sense of euphoria.

The Black Lotus: A staple of dark fantasy settings, of course we have to consider the effects of Black Lotus addiction. Central to

roleplaying in the Western Isles, where the bulk of the population are permanent Black Lotus addicts, the effects of the Black Lotus are discussed in the boxed material on p. 47.



Something with a little...poison in it...

An Additional Organization— The Hidden

General Notes on the Organization

There is a fifth organization in the World, known to but a few. They are *the Hidden*, and they, more than any other persons in the World, are the key to the demons' undoing. Joining the organization (or rather, becoming one of the chosen few) is entirely dependent on storyline, and is essentially a reward bestowed by the Elves of the Starwell upon the especially deserving.

An old legend (known to Roland of Evenstar, and perhaps contained in the library at the Redoubt) tells how certain great friends of the Elves were permitted to withdraw from the World for a time, so that they might know peace. Known as the *Gift of Sanctuary*, it was a magical enchantment that allowed those under it to avoid being bothered until they wished otherwise.

Such people were not invisible, exactly. They could be seen and heard, and interacted with if you happened to run into them. However, they could not be found. They received a magical sabbatical from life; no means of divination could find them, and no seeker could locate them unless by accidental encounter, or they found you.

So powerful was the enchantment that, while others might realize that the person was absent, they could not fathom why. Only if the person under the Gift of Sanctuary renounced the Gift, or allowed himself to be found, would the seeker even be aware that the Gift of Sanctuary was in play.

Before the Abjuration, to receive the Gift of Sanctuary, one first had to be a great friend to the Elves, as the Gift had to be bestowed

at the Starwell in Fallingstar, one of the Elves' most sacred sites. Second, one had to make a great sacrifice, so that the Gift would not be sought after lightly. Third, one had to be killed. The person's body would be cast by the Elven priests into the Starwell, and he would be reborn under the Gift of Sanctuary. His enemies could not then torment him further.

Any thoughts as to which character from Ashes, to Ashes we are alluding to here? Or how she got that way?

The Starwell was (and is) an ancient site of power in the southern forest of Fallingstar. In the center of the forest is a large, deep well surrounded by menhirs carved with ancient Elven runes, and an enormous apple tree known as the "Wizard Tree", which bears fruit rumored to cure any affliction.

The Starwell was (and is) also a powerful astrological divination site (+5 *Tool*) for those who know how to use it, and people sensitive to visions will often experience a revelation here. The area is rumored to be home to a few last vestiges of Elves, but no one knows for certain if any remain. Most doubt it. After the Abjuration, the Elves are widely believed to be extinct but for some mixed blood in Fallingstar.

In actuality, about two dozen full-blooded or mostly full-blooded Elves took up residence in the comparatively intact, though small, forest still surrounding the Starwell. These did not exactly survive the Abjuration, but rather are spirits trapped between life and death.

They found that the lingering magic of the Starwell enabled them to be barely functional, though a shadow of their former selves. They could not leave the Starwell if they wished, and are more akin to protective

tree nymphs and water nymphs now.

These continue to subsist however, using all of their magic to hide from humans and demons alike. They have conjured powerful illusions that make it seem as though the Starwell is abandoned, and are on constant watch to maintain them.

Despite the Abjuration, immersion in the Starwell can, if the Elves wish it, still provide similar, but more limited, benefits to what it could once bestow. Those few in the modern World under the watered-down (pun intended) protection of the Starwell are known as *the Hidden*.

Game Rule Information

Prerequisites: To be initiated into the Hidden, one must come to the attention of the Elven spirits of the Starwell, and be judged worthy of taking the risk of revealing their continued existence.

This means that the initiate will have to have journeyed to Fallingstar and adventured in the woods surrounding the Starwell. In addition, the initiate will have to have made a hugely favorable impression on the Elven spirits. This will require exemplary moral conduct while in the area of the Starwell, and leave the Elven spirits with no doubt that the person is of heroic intent.

The Elven spirits of the Starwell decide who gets in to the organization and who does not. Generally, they will only select one person out of a deserving group, as it is necessary that knowledge of the Hidden be kept as closely as possible.

Organization Benefits: There are three levels of organization benefits available to the Hidden, each dependent on storyline progress: *the Subtle*, *the Concealed*, and *the Hidden*.

The Subtle

A few days after the initiate leaves the area of the Starwell, he will find a note in his pocket. (The note has been there all along, but the illusion that previously concealed it will now have faded). The note simply asks:

“Are you a good man (or woman) who can keep a secret, even from your fellows”?

The note is written in Elven, but somehow, the PLAYER both knows this and can read it (regardless of his state of general literacy).

Assuming that the PLAYER decides that he can, a phantom voice whispers in his ear: “Then keep this one. A few of us survive, in a fashion, neither alive nor dead, waiting for better times. You are on a good path, and we will aid you. But tell no one, or we will trust you no more.”



Look closely, and make a wish....

As long as the PLAYER keeps the event strictly to himself, he gains several benefits. However, the PLAYER is not to be told what these benefits are. The KEEPER adjusts the results of appropriate dice rolls when the benefits come into play, and the PLAYER will only get the nagging idea that “something is watching out for him.”

Should the PLAYER ever relate his contact, or openly boast to anyone about his newfound abilities or suspicions, all gifts are immediately revoked.

Stealth: The PLAYER gains +10% to

Stealth.

Insight: The PLAYER gains +30% to any efforts to see through illusions or spot disguises.

Guarded Thoughts: Any magical effort (including mind-reading) that would have the effect of disclosing the PLAYER'S involvement with the Elves or his gift automatically fails. This translates into a total immunity from having one's mind read.

The Concealed

As time goes by, the Elves of the Starwell will monitor the PLAYER with a view toward gauging his ability to stay quiet and behave in a responsible fashion. If they are sufficiently impressed, a note (much like the first) will mysteriously appear in the PLAYER'S pocket.

The note will say: "We are pleased with your progress. Would you be Concealed?" No other information is offered. Assuming that the PLAYER accepts, he gains additional benefits:

Unseen Little Friends: The PLAYER gains the gift of *Quantum Alteration*, per the Adept's Lost Art. If the PLAYER already has this Lost Art, increase the range of the truly miraculous *Critical Luck* check to 01-10.

Inscrutable: The PLAYER becomes immune to divination and detection magic. This includes divination and detection magic cast either by friends, or by enemies. However, this immunity is noticeable. If someone can see the PLAYER and tries to cast a divination on him, they will know that it has failed.

The Hidden

If the Elven spirits become convinced that the PLAYER can be trusted with their existence, and is in true need of such a gift, either to defeat the demons or to gain a respite from true suffering, a third note may

appear in the PLAYER'S pocket. This time, the note simply says: "Go to the Starwell, and come alone." If the PLAYER journeys past the edge of the woods around the Starwell with anyone else, all gifts are revoked.

Otherwise, the PLAYER should proceed to the edge of the Starwell, where he will probably wonder what to do next. At that point, he will be attacked from all sides by unseen Elvish spirit archers, who will turn him into a proverbial pincushion full of poisoned arrows. His last memory will be of the World spinning, and of falling into the Starwell.

When he wakes up, he will be at the edge of the woods, fully healed (although the scars of the arrows will be easily visible). A final note will be found in his pocket. It reads: "Now you are Hidden. None can find you, not even your fellows, unless you wish to be found. Indeed, none will even know that you are missing." (At this point, the remaining PLAYERS should be told that they have forgotten why they are even there). The note continues: "As you were not truly killed, this will only last for one month. Make good use of it."

People that the Hidden voluntarily encounters will remember him, and be able to interact with him; but once he is gone, he is a giant, impenetrable "blind spot" to friend and foe alike.

By way of example, if a group of five PLAYERS is thrown into a cell, the guard will only think there are four prisoners unless the Hidden can be seen or heard. No matter how angry the demons are at the Hidden, they can neither find him nor even worry about him, unless he is on their "radar screen" due to some ongoing action.

Unfortunately, this is a two-way street; if the PLAYER gets separated from the group, they will not think about him, either.



Look closely, and make a wish....

Gazetteer—The Western Isles

Not that it matters anyway. Brother Eustace of Westhaven, Grey Monk, on nearly everything.

Overview

Population: ~5,000 (fluctuates unstably) on Flatey; humans 100%. ~100 hidden on Muspel, a mixture of demons, Overseers, humans under the Ritual of Obedience and children being evaluated.

Government: Anarchic; the Grey Monastery might provide some “good offices” in and around Westhaven in addition to their “usual duties” if they feel threatened themselves, but there is *no* effective law enforcement.

Important Entities: Brother Eustace, Grey Monastery’s Gatewarden (Neutral); Father Acedia of the Grey Monastery (Evil); Elaine of the Fields (Good, Chaotic).

Imports: Drugs (see below).

Exports: Demonic dinners (see below).

General Outlook: Neutral, Chaotic, lazy, indifferent, disinterested.

The Western Isles can be found about 400 miles to the west of the main continent, at about the same latitude as Fallingstar. Once a small, independent kingdom occupying one main island (Flatey) and a string of nearby small islands, the Western Isles were leveled by a tsunami generated by the Abjuration.

The population, once primarily occupied by fishing and limited agriculture, was devastated and the infrastructure of the island ruined. A number of people did survive by going to higher ground, but they had little to return to.

Then, almost immediately, came the Fever. Or so they think. It’s so fortunate that the Grey Monks arrived from across the oceans with their knowledge of medicine, people say, or the Fever would surely have wiped everyone out.



Welcome to the Western Isles. Sigh. Not that it matters anyway.

As with many things after the Abjuration, the Fever was a bit of a scam. There actually was a cholera outbreak on Flatey, after the tsunami wrecked the sanitation system and spread field droppings into the water. But it was hardly the non-survivable plague it was made out to be by the newly arriving Grey Monks.

Arriving from the eastern sea on a black-painted ship, they brought with them the Herb of Healing, which managed to miraculously check the Fever for most, so as long as you took it. Ever since then, the Monks have struggled mightily (so people think) to keep the Fever in check. Only their Herb of Healing can (allegedly) do so, as the people of Flatey well “know”.

In actuality, the original Grey Monks were a small contingent of demons and their mortal minions. Through guile and misdirection they have conquered and chemically subjugated the Western Isles without a shot being fired. They convinced the survivors that a plague had taken hold, that the water was irretrievably polluted, and that they held the only treatment in their sweet, aromatic white powder. The Herb of Healing, as the powder is known, worked to clear out the cholera, in addition to the fictitious Plague that was actually the cholera outbreak.

But the Plague never truly goes away, you know. You have to take the Herb of Healing for your entire life, and you cannot leave the island without endangering the rest of the World. The Monks take care to grow the Herb within their Monastery, and to interfere with the Monks is to bring death upon all.

The Herb of Healing is made from the legendary Black Lotus, an incredibly addictive narcotic with robs its addicts of their drive, their ambition and much of their sense. Nearly all of the populace of Flatey now wanders around doped up, devoid of focus and only pursuing the most rudimentary survival tasks.

Except for the Grey Monastery, the entire island of Flatey is a neglected, grown over,

unmaintained, anarchic slum. Imagine an island full of doped up opiate addicts with a small group of monastic shepherds, and you have the broad sense of Flatey.

Periodically, the Monks claim, the Herb fails for some reason. When such a thing occurs, the Grey Monks quarantine the afflicted from the rest of the populace, and they never return. These unfortunates are secretly exported to Muspel, where they are evaluated. Often they are infants. Sometimes they are troublemakers (conveniently). Those children that would make good Monks are evaluated, educated and gradually indoctrinated. Everyone else goes to the “Majestic Plateau”, where they join the demons’ larder.

The senior-most Monks are sometimes actively behind these periodic “failures”, although most of the Monks do not quite understand the full import of their regulation of the populace.

History

The Kingdom of the Western Isles had been stable and peaceful for several centuries before the Abjuration. An advanced seafaring society, Westerners were known for their fishing and sailing skills. They were isolationists, preferring not to treat with the kingdoms of Fallingstar or Eglantine many leagues to the east, except for the occasional trading mission or seeker of adventure.

They worshipped the Great God Liir, God of the Sea, and his priests extolled the virtues of self-sufficiency and of avoiding the worshippers of other gods. The people of the Western Isles generally listened.

The post-Abjuration tsunami left only a few structures standing: a pier here, a stone building there, and the King’s Harbor (a stone manor house used as the royal residence) atop a high hill overlooking the capitol city of Westhaven. Out of a pre-Abjuration population of roughly 50,000, only about 1,000 survived the flood and the bloody fighting and gang warfare that

erupted in its aftermath.

Had people been a little more organized and a little less panicked, this survival figure would have been more like 10,000. However, such petty concerns as keeping waste out of the water supply and basic hygiene got overlooked in the struggle to survive, and a cholera outbreak quickly erupted. People were too busy trying to fight for control over the remaining structures to bury the bodies, which drew vermin and only made things worse.

One night, a particularly vicious battle broke out in the dark of Westhaven. Rumors circulated that one of the surviving gangs was employing some foul sort of sorcery. The night lit up around the King's Harbor, and the warring gangs fell back into the hills. This massacre actually heralded the arrival of the demons of the "Majestic Plateau".

Zazeer's initial thought after the Abjuration was to fall back with those she trusted to follow her leadership to a remote island, clean it out, and gather her thoughts. She and her followers seized the castle at King's Harbor, and realized that between the devastated island, its remote location and the pathetic state of the populace, an ideal opportunity to establish a base of operations and enslave a supporting population was present.

Isolated, and with little chance of discovery should they be able to control the seas, Zazeer opted for chemical restraints. Rounding up a bunch of soul-bound humans and a few demons, she created a group of faux saviors in the form of the Grey Monks, purported wandering monastics with knowledge of healing and a duty to care for the sick. They arrived, set up shop in the now-available King's Harbor, and let everyone know that they had the cure for the Fever that was ravaging Flatey.

The Herb of Healing did indeed kill the cholera bacteria, as long as one took it. Of course, it also turned almost everyone into a drug-addled waste, but those addicted to it

could no longer muster the will to care.

Over time, things settled (if that is the right word) into a state of affairs that has persisted for nearly 100 years:

- The Grey Monks occupy the King's Harbor above Westhaven, together with its fortifications, gardens, geothermal heat and plumbing and clean wells. They live the part of cloistered, monastic ascetics. Most of them actually think of themselves this way, and are innocent of most things other than continued toleration of the state of affairs on the island. They grow the Herb of Healing (as well as, secretly, its antidote) and trouble themselves only with keeping the Fever in check and making sure that the populace does not completely exterminate itself.
- The Abbot (currently Father Acedia) is always a mortal under the Ritual of Obedience, as well as an Adept.
- The demonic presence in the Western Isles has retreated to the isle of Muspel to the east, where they have what is commonly believed by the Grey Monks to be a chapter house, school and hospital tending to the sick that need to be quarantined.
- In actuality, Muspel serves as a transshipment point and re-education facility. Troublemakers who are given the antidote to the Herb of Healing (to drive them nuts and explain their removal) are re-medicated here, interrogated, and either eaten or sent to the larder at the Majestic Plateau.
- Young people who display resistance to the Herb of Healing are removed to Muspel and evaluated over time. The tractable are "cured," and after years of careful education and brainwashing, are sent to the Grey Monastery to serve



as the next generation of Monks. Those who also display an affirmative aptitude for evil are brainwashed, schooled, and enter the service of the demons, occasionally in a senior position at the Grey Monastery. The less tractable are eaten.

- Meanwhile, the rest of the populace is a filthy, fecund, quarreling, disheveled, unsanitary mess. High birth rates, high death rates, high crime rates and utter disrepair would be worse than they are, if everyone were not so stoned all the time.

The Nickel Tour

Geography and Climate: The Western Isles are located in a windy, sub-arctic maritime ecosystem. The areas around the edges of the island (where all the former towns/current slums are located) are tolerably cold, but grey and rainy more often than not. It is always extremely windy, and even though Flatey is located so far north, it still gets the occasional hurricane thanks to the bizarre post-Abjuration weather.

All of the islands are volcanic in origin, and only several thousand years old. Most are covered with thin soil which would be suitable for very limited, very carefully managed agriculture, and could support scrubby subarctic trees like cottonwood and alder.

This, however, assumes that some semblance of careful management was going on, which (except on Muspel) has not happened for 100 years. On Flatey, the once arable land (a ring around the shore) is now largely tall sedges, weeds and lichens. Anything resembling a proper tree on Flatey (with the exception of the Monastery grounds on Flatey) is long gone; at best there are scrubby thickets here and there.

The landscape on Muspel (a roughly circular volcanic island about 2 miles across) reflects the best that could be coaxed from this terrain: groves of cottonwoods and alders in

places more sheltered from the winds, very carefully managed hay and barley fields in sheltered valleys, and small herds of hardy goats able to fend for themselves.

Other islands in the chain are much smaller, unable to support topsoil, and little more than bird rookeries, marine mammal beaches and hazards to navigation.

Flatey is roughly cigar shaped and runs 100 miles from east to west and 60 miles north to south. The interior of Flatey is actively volcanic; the landscape is largely rough, barren volcanic rock. The interior is much colder (average 30 F) than the shore (average 50 F), and is essentially impassible off established tracks; picture miles and miles of natural rubble. In the center of the island, forming a ridge running east to west, is a range of volcanic peaks (many active), dominated by the 3,000 foot high Mt. Fell.

A trail (once a good paved road, before 100 years of poor maintenance and neglect changed matters) runs in a ring around Flatey, connecting the slums that were once well-developed, picturesque fishing towns. Most other roads that once ran into the interior or through the mountains have crumbled to ruin, although there are passes through the mountain ranges.

The sustainable population on Flatey now hovers around 5,000 people. The interior has always been uninhabitable and devoid of most life. The people huddle in whatever shelter they can find near the coast. The former towns are in ruins, but some people still live in them, with the most makeshift and short-term of repairs keeping the cold out.

Apart from the towns, people live in constantly shifting, semi-nomadic gangs. They settle down for a while near a resource, and when that resource becomes too much work to exploit, they move on. The icy and constant wind, however, dictates a lot about where people huddle.

Resources and Know-how: Food is where and how you catch it. The weather is quite miserable, but except for the periodic freak

hurricane or sun-blotting volcanic eruption, it is not a survival threat. However, with the exceptions of the Grey Monastery, the “hospital” on Muspel, and a few urban legends, everyone is a lazy stoner.

The towns are still in use, but they are filthy, neglected slums torn by random violence and nightly robbery. Dead bodies lie in the streets, rats are everywhere, people use the sides of buildings as lavatories, and everyone is too lazy (and drugged) to care.

Annoyingly, the resources to fix up Flatey and produce a decent quality of life are actually and readily available. There is plenty of volcanic stone, ash, sand, lime, and other building materials to repair the stone buildings. But that’s too much work.

The land could support very carefully managed crops, since it has had 100 years to lie fallow. But that’s too much work.

Trade takes too much work. Digging a new lavatory takes too much work. Preserving food in anything but the most haphazard way—too much work.

It’s so much easier to just mug your neighbor if they’re stupid enough to advertise what they have. Why bother to repair the old wharf when you can snag today’s dinner from the shore, and then go have a snog and a nap?

Get the picture? It’s a good thing that there aren’t any video games, or everyone would starve.

Most of what people on Flatey eat falls into one of the four basic food groups: seabirds, fish, wild vegetables and rats. Seabirds and fish are both plentiful, although they are not diligently exploited. People raid the abundant coastline rookeries for eggs and birds regularly, and engage in snag fishing and set fish traps. They’d do better if they kept those traps in good repair, or bothered to fix up some of the old fishing fleet, but they are too far gone now for easy repairs and the know-how for dry-dock work has not been passed on.

There is virtually no agriculture. Flatey

really is not suited to anything but isolated agriculture to begin with, and the people are too lazy and chemically addled to carefully manage the land. People thus follow a hunter-gatherer sort of existence, with the places where people do their hunting and gathering depending on the shifting fortunes of gang warfare. The rare person might have a weedy garden.

In terms of game, there are rats everywhere around the edges of the human flops. There are also feral goats and packs of wild dogs. Marine mammals (seals, walruses, and whales) pass by the island and occasionally beach themselves. Someone inevitably gets killed messing with the walruses every year, and gang wars tend to flare up when a sizable whale is beached. Apart from birds, that is about it for animals.

The Grey Monastery has a two-masted, black sailing ship (crew of 10, 20 ton hold), well-tended nets and lines, and plenty of fish. A similar ship is kept at the concealed wharf on Muspel. Both also have well-tended vegetable gardens, orchards, and root cellars. The Monastery even makes spirits out of leftover orchard fruit.

Muspel has about 100 acres under active cultivation for barley and root vegetables, which are shipped back to the Monks on Flatey. (The Monks realize that cultivating anything outside their walls on Flatey would be more trouble than it is worth).

There is no easily accessible metal on either island. Iron tools from before the Abjuration were one of the Isles’ major imports; the islands are young and volcanic. There is, by contrast, ample stone, sulfur, guano, and obsidian deposits. Except for at the Grey Monastery and on Muspel (of course), most metal tools fell into disuse and rusted away long ago.

Obsidian is in fairly wide use, however, for things such as spear tips, weapons, needles, fish hooks, and the like. The local scrub also furnishes enough fibrous plant material to twist into twine and rope.

There is plenty of scrubby brush to burn to



stay warm in the winter, in the absence of whale oil. There are a few geysers and hot springs which the people make reasonably effective use of, since it is easier to camp there and stay warm than it is to cut brush. People tend to shift their camps and shanties to areas near a volcanic vent or hot spring in the winter. The Grey Monastery has actually harnessed a hot spring and pipes hot water under their floors in the winter. The “hospital” on Muspel manages its wood supply very carefully.

“Homes” for many people tend to be communal flophouses in various states of filth and disrepair. Hygiene is generally horrific. People often do not even think about the wisdom of where they are relieving themselves. The Grey Monastery, by contrast, has a well-tended system of potable water and leach fields.

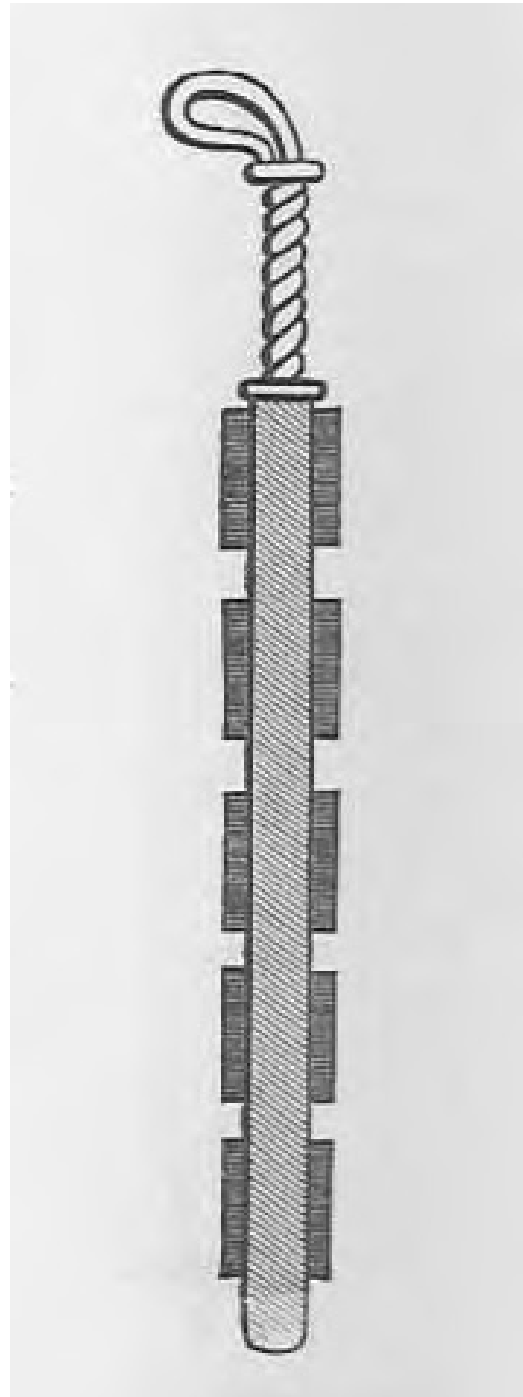
Apart from the Grey Monastery and its system of “medicinal” wells, there are no infrastructure improvements, government officials, priests, clerks, police, town guards, healers, or anything of that nature on Flatey. There is no law but the goodwill of the gang that you hang out with, and their strength. It is not unusual for one gang to defeat another, scatter the survivors, and absorb anyone perceived to have a use.

Armor is virtually non-existent. Most people who might be involved in a fight will have a wicker and/or leather shield. Rarely, a gang boss might have a leather jerkin and a boiled leather skullcap as protection. (Armor 2 or 3). A fire-cured, front loaded club studded with sharp obsidian shards along one or both edges (a “beat-stick”), flaked obsidian daggers, and slings are frequently used. So are nets, obsidian-tipped spears, and bolas, adapted from their usual employment as fishing and birding tools.

Trade really does not occur. That’s too much work and requires too much planning. People also generally do not bother with crafts, with few exceptions. People who survive to adulthood generally learn only a few skills: how to fish, make a weapon,

twist rope, sneak around, fight, and work leather.

Literacy is almost always not among the skills that people acquire as youths. Apart from those selected out by the Grey Monks, there is no formal education.



A Flatey Beat-stick

Medical skill is virtually non-existent

outside of the Grey Monastery. Beyond the simplest common-sense matters, people are generally too lazy to do anything about illnesses. The Herb of Healing introduced into the communal water supplies does insulate the people from most ingested parasites and intestinal diseases, but it does little good in terms of skin infections, sexually transmitted diseases, and the like.

Over the past 100 years, the Grey Monks have gradually acquired any scrolls or books floating around the islands. People know that this is the one thing that the Grey Monks will trade for, so if any are found, they usually end up at the Monastery's gate.

The only specialists tend to be rope-makers, tanners, cooks and clothes-makers, and this work tends to be undertaken by physically infirm people (or mothers with small children) who are not able to hunt, gather and fight. They serve as hangers-on and camp tenders to the gangs, which consist of constantly shifting and scheming groups of people of any age or gender who are able to hunt, gather and fight. People only pursue these crafts (and only give food to the craftsmen) because someone has to tend to them in order for everyone to survive.

Marriage and traditional family structures broke down long ago. Gangs operate as one big "family," with the most capable person currently alive acting as leader. No one knows who their father is, barring a striking family resemblance, as the communal nature of the living arrangements tends to confuse such matters.

A Couple of BRP Rules Reminders

In most of Flatey, the hygiene conditions count as unavoidably "poorly equipped and unsanitary." This means that all *First Aid* or *Medicine* checks are *Difficult*.

Strong winds (STR 2-6) are not uncommon conditions, especially in the coastal areas. This imposes a -10% penalty on appropriate skills and movement.

Life expectancy is similarly very short; most people die young and few people live past 40 due to the prevalence of disease (including syphilis). Infant mortality is extremely high, but people are constantly giving birth. Children leave their mother (or grandmother, or whoever is willing to watch them) as soon as they are able to run with a hunting party.

The Special Cases of the Grey Monastery and Muspel

The Western Isles is a land of contrasts. The vast bulk of Flatey is going to be far worse than anything the PLAYERS have seen elsewhere in the World. It is truly squalid, the people are generally not very bright, and it stinks to high heaven. The Grey Monastery and Muspel, by contrast, are far better than anywhere the PLAYERS are likely to have been, with the possible exception of Crystal Lake in Eglantine.

Size and Personnel: The *Grey Monastery on Flatey* occupies the former royal castle ("King's Harbor") in Westhaven. It is situated on a 100' high promontory, is roughly 500' square, and is accessible by land only either by climbing sheer cliffs or one paved, switchback road leading to the front gate.

At the eastern base of the promontory (connected by narrow, steep stairs switching back down the cliff, but equipped with a hoist able to lower goods and supplies down to the dock) is a small pier. This is the sheltered side of the promontory and is further protected by a breakwater.

Unless at sea making fishing or cargo runs, the Monastery's *Black Ship* (complete with black sails) is docked at the pier, under constant guard. A crew of ten normally mans the ship, a two-masted, shallow draft coaster specifically designed to be able to navigate the shallow waters around Muspel. As a result, its cargo capacity is limited to 20 tons.

The Grey Monastery houses about 100 Monks (of both genders) as well as an elite



paramilitary force of about 20 guards and 20 sailors.

The island of Muspel is extremely difficult to access by sea. The “island” is actually the highest part of a submerged (and thankfully dormant) volcano. It is surrounded by numerous small islets, rocky shoals, submerged ridges, and other hazards to navigation.

Unless one knows how to approach the island by sea, it requires a *Critical* success to *Navigate* a boat through the shoals without running aground. (The Monks know how, and the Black Ship and its Muspel-based twin are appropriately shallow-drafted to make the trip).

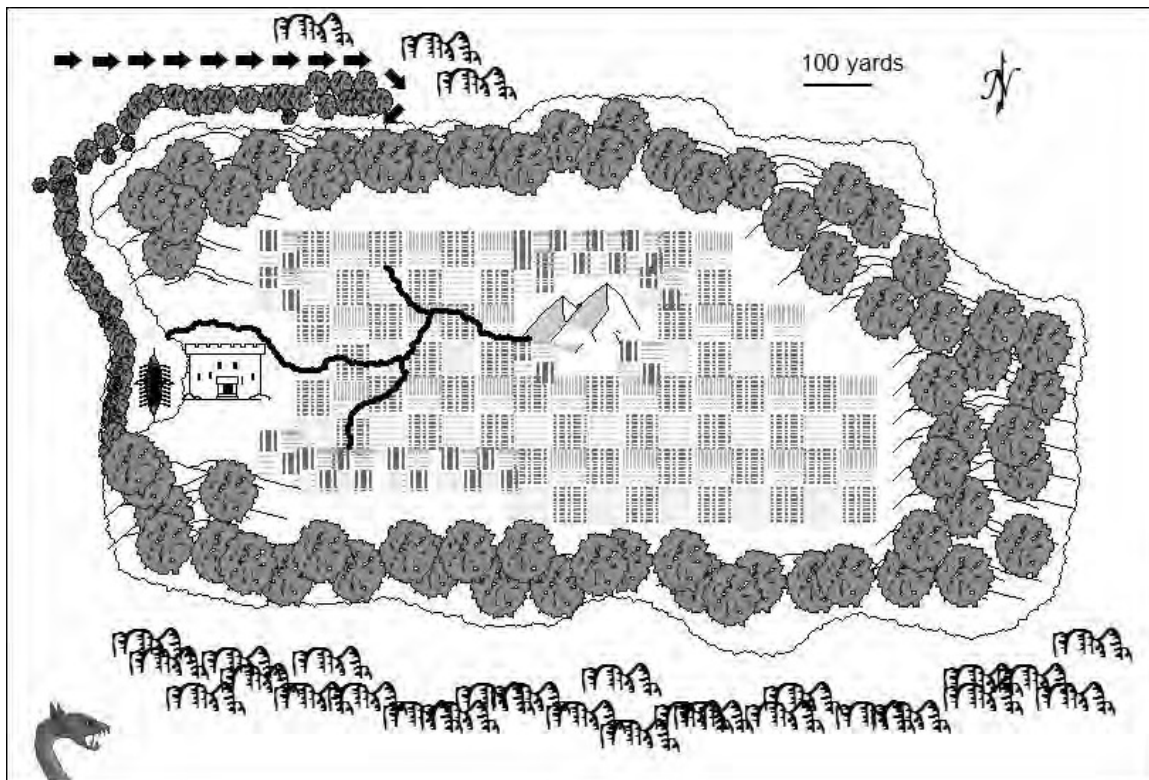
The proper approach is to sail in from the North and then backtrack toward the West and South through an unmarked and difficult channel, going to the oars when close to shore. (This is nothing new, incidentally, but few if anyone in the general populace on

Flatey will know how to do it. A few might have heard stories that there is a convoluted way to the old village site on Muspel, but will not know the details).

To make matters worse, the demons and (later) the Grey Monks terraformed portions of the approach such that the harbor on the western side of the island is now concealed by a breakwater planted with trees and grasses, effectively obscuring everything.

Unless you are coming in from the North, or viewing things from the air, there is nothing to see from the coast but rocks and sedges

Muspel was once a village of about 500 people, with a fishing port and an arable valley whose microclimate was able to support barley growth. It served as an appanage for the heir apparent to the throne in Westhaven; he (or she) would rule Muspel with a fair amount of autonomy until it was time to succeed to the throne.



A Secret Map of Muspel (Not Labeled), Kept Hidden in the Abbot's Desk.

Muspel survived the Abjuration almost intact; the tsunami hit the island but damage was minimal. Instead, the demons landed and killed everyone, either in combat or over time as their hunger needed satisfaction.

The demons and the Grey Monks took over the appanage's stone manor house and turned it into a sort of boarding school. It now houses about 20 Monks, 50-100 children of various ages, a few guards, and a contingent of about 10 Overseers, Reapers and demons. The Overseers and demons remain in (magical) human guises at all times, and the resident Monks and children have no idea how they are different.

General Operations: Ultimately, of course, the goal of the Grey Monastery is to control the populace and siphon off souls for the demons. How they go about this follows a fairly static business cycle.

Recruitment: The filthy conditions generate constant outbreaks of both viral and bacterial diseases. The Black Lotus extract that the Monks introduce into the potable water supplies suppresses the cholera, which is the most potentially lethal disease common to Flatey. People who do not drink from the communal water supply, or who are slipped the antidote, rapidly come down with an array of intestinal illnesses.

As with any drug, some people are naturally more resistant to the Herb of Healing. Roughly 10% of babies born to the populace are naturally resistant to the Black Lotus. These are spotted shortly after birth, as they come down with cholera or other intestinal diseases, despite the treated water. These are taken to the Grey Monastery (or picked up by the water procession) and taken back to the Monastery for evaluation.

The Monks are open about it: these children need to be kept away from the general populace because they are resistant to the Herb and could not survive outside the walls of the Monastery for long, especially not as children. As a result, they must be quarantined, but not to worry, those that

survive will become Monks. This accounts for about 50 babies per year. (People are constantly giving birth, but the infant mortality rate is ridiculously high).

Of these 50, a plurality ends up dying from their diseases, despite the efforts of the Monastery. Those with strong immune systems survive (on the order of 30 per year). These are screened for intellect. Those that seem inferior meet with convenient accidents at the hands of the demons and Overseers on Flatey (i.e., they are eaten).

Each year's surviving class is then given a basic liberal education and put to work either as farmers or craftsmen, as soon as they are able to work. Those that display excess rebelliousness or ask too many questions again are weeded out (under the cover story that they were sent back to Flatey). Again, in actuality, they are eaten.

Of those that survive, the more intellectual are steered toward monkhood, whereas the most athletic are trained as Monastery guards or sailors.

Anyone displaying any magical aptitude is given a choice: submit to the Ritual of Obedience (and become a Reaper) or be killed. Magic is not especially widespread in the Western Isles, so this is comparatively rare.

Anyone with an evil, ruthless streak who also appears to be intelligent is likewise pulled out and given the same choice. Those in this group end up being groomed for leadership positions: ship captains, Muspel trainers, guard sergeants, and the like.

The process is intended as a winnowing one aimed at maintaining a stable population at the Grey Monastery and on Muspel. As someone dies off, a replacement arrives. Those that take the Ritual of Obedience are never wasted, however; if there is a temporary fluctuation in numbers they are assigned missions elsewhere in the World.

The end result is perhaps 2-3 new Monks,



guards and/or sailors each year.

Interaction with the General Populace:

Interaction between the Grey Monastery and the populace is kept strictly limited and the Monks are conditioned to look at the populace as rabble that they have a sacred duty to prevent from annihilating themselves. The Monastery does not engage in general commerce, does not fraternize with the rabble (on pain of death) or treat the rabble as friends. A certain distance must be kept between the shepherd and his flock, you know, to best serve them.

There are a few exceptions to this rule. First, despite this rule, it does not stop the rabble from trying to fraternize. There is no shortage of panhandlers appearing at the gate of the Monastery, begging for this or that. As a result, the Monks have to have a gatekeeper to deal with people banging on the door. That lot falls to Brother Eustace at present.

Brother Eustace is a eunuch (to lessen any temptation that he might have to betray his fellows for the sins of the flesh). His job is to make the rabble understand that there are no handouts, without provoking a riot. He has some discretion as to how to handle any given situation, but would rather not have to answer the door at all. Over the years, he has become bored and filled with ennui.

Brother Eustace is really only interested in three topics of discussion. First, if petitioners come bearing learning (books, maps, or worthwhile intelligence), he may want to acquire it.

Second, if they come bearing sick infants (ones that are sick despite the Herb of Healing), it is his job to take the infant in and reward the parents.

Third, he keeps his ear sufficiently to the ground to have a general sense of balance of power fluctuations out in the slums. The Monastery does not want the flock killing each other in any kind of wholesale way.

Rank and File Monastery Guard

STR 16 DEX 14 INT 14 CON 16
APP 13 POW 14 SIZ 16 EDU 08
Hits: 17

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Skills: Brawl (65%), Climb (50%), Command (45%), Craft (Armor-smithing) (25%), Craft (Weapon-smithing) (25%), Dodge (55%), First Aid (55%), Grapple (55%), Hide (40%), History (25%), Insight (45%), Jump (45%), Listen (55%), Martial Arts (50%), Navigate (60%), Persuade (55%), **Pharmacy (25%)**, **Pilot Boat (25%)**, Religion (new) (30%), Research (Streetwise) (55%), Sense (50%), Spot (50%), **Status (35%)**, Stealth (50%), Strategy (30%), Survival (new) (80%), Swim (25%), Teach (40%), Throw (65%), Track (60%).

Attacks:

Dagger, obsidian, 70%, 1d4+2+db, impaling, 10 HP.

Spear, obsidian-tipped, 60%, 1d6+1+db, impaling, 15 HP.

Sling, 60%, 1d8 db, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

Defenses: Armor 4 (studded leather and helmet).

Round Shield, 70%, 1d3+db, knockback, Armor 20 (must parry).

Deity: Circle.

Gear: Studded leather armor & wooden shield, spear, sling, dagger (obsidian, steel), good quality traveling and camping gear.

Squad leaders carry “beat-sticks” in addition to the foregoing, which they wield as a staff of office and execution weapon at 60%.

The other way in which the Monastery interacts with the general populace is through the water procession. In order to

keep the cycle going, every two weeks a group of Monks, accompanied by ½ of the squadron of masked, black-liveried guards, sets out from the Monastery on foot carrying a bag of the Herb of Healing. This is known locally as the *water procession*.

Wells: The Grey Monastery has set up communal wells in a ring around Flatey, with a well every 10 miles. Each is connected by a passable ring road hugging the coast. The wells are well-engineered artesian wells with good clay filter fields. Into each, the Monks dump a predetermined amount of the Herb of Healing for the rabble, and then proceed on to the next.

A circuit around the island takes about two weeks. A few days after the completion of a circuit, the other ½ of the garrison starts its journey, on alternating cycles. The guards are highly trained security forces, observant, suspicious and dangerous. They do not bother themselves with most distractions.

However, they do not like it when someone messes with a well, the road, or the procession itself. Then things tend to get violent. Most gangs do not bother with the procession, but every now and then someone tries, and more often than not he gets clobbered.

What the Rank and File Monks Know: The rank and file brothers, sisters and guards know very little about what is really going on. They have been both selected and educated for being willing to follow and believing in what they do. Questioners and free spirits are weeded out when they are young.

The rank and file Grey Monks know about Muspel, the farm there, generally how to get there, generally what goes on there (although nothing about demons) and the general process of selection. They all know that the food production and fishing at the Grey Monastery is worthwhile, but that Muspel is the real breadbasket, both in terms of the “Herb of Healing” as well as actual food.

They do *not* know what happens to rejected

classmates, although a few suspect that that they are not sent back to Flatey to live. Anyway, it’s not discussed.

This is a weak point in the demons’ operation that could be exploited by clever PLAYERS. The notion that some Grey Monk might run into his aunt who might want to know what happened to his cousin is possible, and such a nagging thought might turn into something. The rank and file brothers are not affirmatively evil, so much as they are unquestioning and, in their own way, intellectually lazy.

The Leadership: At present, there are five people on Flatey who are more fully in the know, each subject to the Ritual of Obedience. These are the Abbot, Father Acedia (also a Reaper); the senior most female Monk (Sister Perezosa), and the captain and two ranking sergeants of the guard. This means that, with one exception per patrol, the water progressions actually think that they are doing the right thing.

The Monastery is not segregated by gender, either in terms of living arrangements or in terms of chain of command. The current Abbot just happens to be male, and the guards are both male and female.

While the Monastery generally adheres to a monastic lifestyle (moderation, fitness and piety), the brothers and sisters are permitted to (and do) canoodle with one another. Some are even married, and it is not unheard of for children to result.

The children of such unions are another potential leverage point and plot seed. The rule is that they are to be treated like any other children; if they are susceptible to the Herb of Healing, they are turned out into the slums (usually accompanied by a bribe so that they will be taken in by one of the gangs).

Given that the Monks are human and not doped half out of their minds, this process is not always drama free.



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 PARIS-41 Boulevard Haussmann, LONDON-83 Mortimer St. Montreal-87 St. James St.

No, I did *not* Photoshop this endorsement of cocaine laced wine. The truth is more telling.

Map Key for the Grey Monastery

1. The Inner Bailey: Formerly a royal castle for a small country, this well-fortified, well-maintained, three-story stone structure surrounds a central courtyard. It houses roughly 100 Grey Monks.

Apart from their water maintenance activities, they are a very insular and monastic community, spending their days mostly in silence, doing house chores, enjoying recreational pastimes, tending their gardens, cooking and baking, and following their devotions. There are no children, of course, in residence.

The Inner Bailey has a well-stocked library sufficient to power a **Library Use** check, as well as a scriptorium and hot and cold running water. A hot spring is tapped and

used for Roman-style baths and piped heating. Living quarters are dormitory style, except for the Abbot, who has his own private chambers and office.

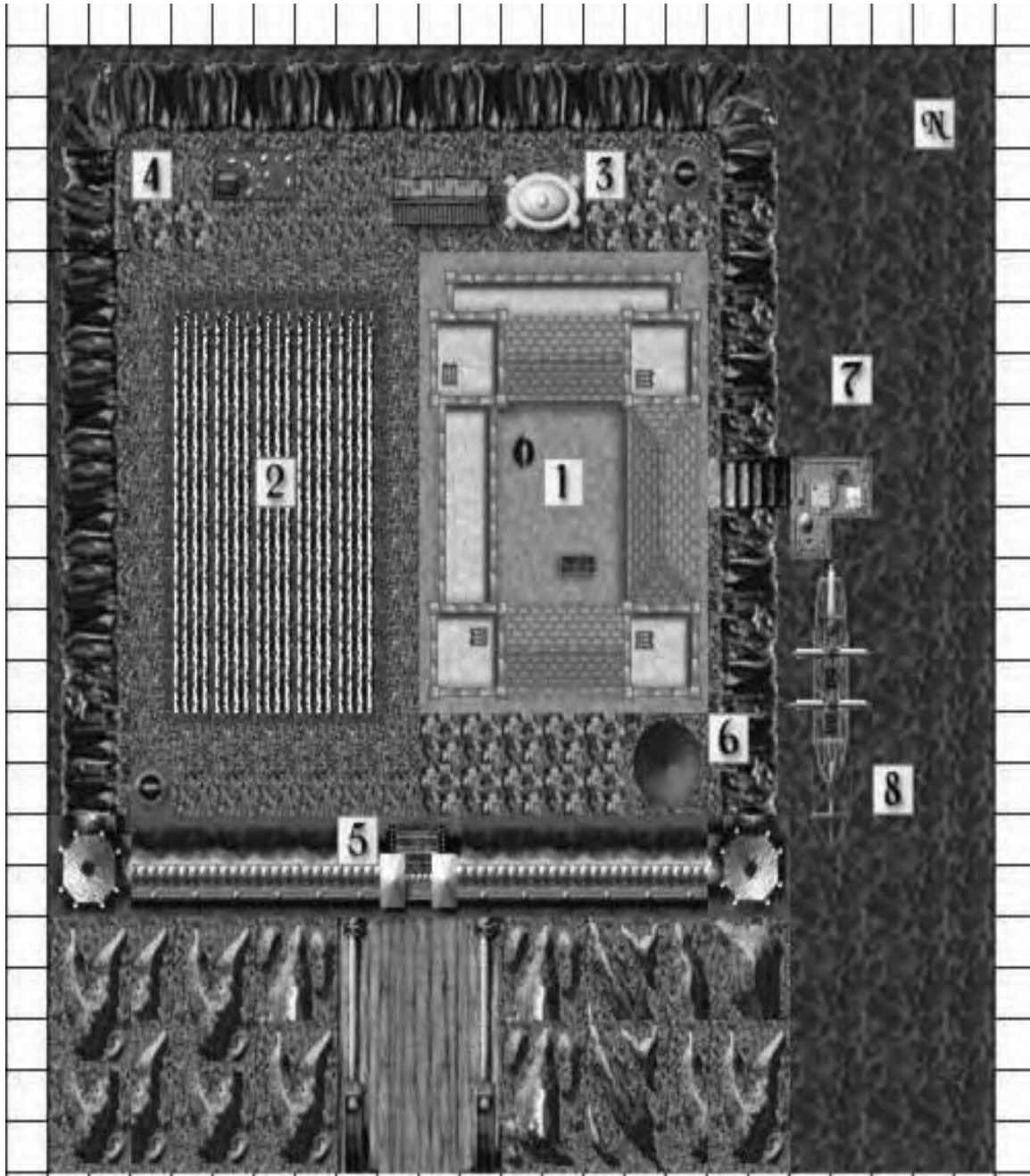
2. While there is a sizable vegetable **garden** and chicken coop for eggs, as well as a small orchard, it should be obvious to anyone who thinks about it that the plot is not large enough to sustain the needs of the 100 or so adults who live there.

3. This is an **ancient tower**, about 30' high, with marble arches, roof and pillars. There is an oil-powered, reflective beacon which is rarely lit (only as an emergency signal that the Monastery is under attack, or when the weather is foggy and a ship is expected).

It has an excellent view of the entire area, except for blind spots close to the cliffs and close in on the south side of the complex

(where the Inner Bailey obstructs the view).
 The tower is decorated with marine motifs, with dolphins and tridents being well-represented. (*Critical History or Library Use check*: the temples of the sea god Liir

took the form of marble lighthouses. It was said that lighthouses honor Liir by recognizing that the sea must always be respected).



The Grey Monastery, Flatey, Western Isles. 1sq. = 20 ft.

4. The *cliffs* are sheer (partly by nature and partly by engineering) and drop 100' to jagged rocks and pounding surf below. The wind is treacherous as well; a *Critical Climb* roll is needed to scale them from the bottom.

(*Critical History or Library Use check*: the Kings of the Western Isles would execute people by “allowing” them to attempt to climb to the top. If they made it, they would be pardoned. Anyone with a legitimate grievance against the condemned was allowed to stand at the top and do what they liked to stop them. No one was ever pardoned. The Grey Monks still use this in the rare instance that one of their own, or one of the rabble, has to be made a public example of for some reason).

5. The *gatehouse* is inhabited by Brother Eustace. He yells down at petitioners from the parapets (20' up). No one is ever let in; if Brother Eustace wants to examine something or make a trade, he and a guard or two come out. He has no other duties, and his rooms are in the gatehouse. He is always there.

6. The *guardhouse* is a separate, defensible tower about 30 feet high, with an underground level for stores and a secure cell. It houses the 40 soldiers and sailors in comfortable barracks style accommodations.

There is a great deal of *esprit de corps* among the guards, who perceive of themselves as chosen and elite. Except for a few days a month when the circuit riding shifts overlap, however, only 10 guards and 10 sailors are present, the rest either walking the circuit or on Muspel with one of the ships.

7. The PLAYERS may be surprised to see a *well-maintained stone pier and dock* at the base of the cliff. There is a narrow set of stairs (single file) carved into the cliff and switching back down its face. In addition, there is a dumb waiter (able to lift 500 pounds at a time) by which cargo can be lowered and raised.

8. The Grey Monastery is the home base for the *Black Ship*, an 80' wooden longboat,

equipped with both oars and sail. It is a very shallow drafted vessel, intended to be able to navigate the shoals and inlet at Muspel. While this compromises the amount of cargo that can be shipped back and forth at any one time, the Monks rarely want to do anything other than ferry passengers and groceries back and forth.

A few sailors (same statistics as the guards, with 10% lower combat skills and between 60% and 90% in *Navigate* and *Pilot Boat*) are always on watch. Both ships are likewise equipped with seine nets for fishing.

Ways and Traditions

Culture: Before the Abjuration, the people of the Western Isles were lovers of pleasure, but industrious ones. A heavily maritime society, the scarcity of timber and fragility of the environment bred a cautious, planning sort of people. They were skilled at preserving everything and making everything last. They were shipwrights and engineers, and would be hired on as experts in these fields by other lands.

They built to last, in stone, and got by without beasts of burden, ample metal or ample fuel by dint of clever invention. They had excellent roads, made the most out of the sea and the volcanic stone, and harnessed the geothermal resources to heat themselves. They planned their agriculture well, growing only things like fresh fruits and vegetables which they could not substitute for.

The arts emphasized writing, singing and dancing, and the whole of society was reminiscent of a medieval Languedoc, with minstrels and poets in competition with one another.

Now they are lovers of pleasure, but with the exception of the Monks, utter sluggards. They do not bother to wash, clean, grow food, plan ahead, learn things, make crafts or do much of anything than hunt, have sex, brawl and lounge about. Songs are drunken impromptus; poems are composed to curry

favor with gang lords; and disputes are settled with sticks and stones rather than with a singing or dancing contest.

Occasionally, though, the sounds of old drift forth, mixed with laughter, from the Grey Monastery, much to the annoyance of the nearby slum's denizens.



Sudhaven, from the coast

Outside of the Grey Monastery, which in many ways is simply the largest, most dominant, and most stable gang, society is gang oriented. Large gangs hold the ruins of each of the major towns (Westhaven, Osthaven, Nordhaven, Sudhaven); smaller nomadic gangs roam the island, moving from resources to resource.

Brush warfare is constant; coups are constant; fights over boyfriends and girlfriends and anything worth having are constant. Social status is measured by how

many friends you have, how many people jump when you say jump, and how many sex partners you have available to you.

In the Grey Monastery, things are much less violent and much more hierarchical. The sloth there is intellectual sloth. No one ever tries to make things better, either for themselves or for the populace outside the walls. "Leave well enough alone" is often given as advice.

While the Monks do learn hard sciences such as astronomy and engineering, agriculture and navigation, they do not learn philosophy, or critical thinking, or even theology as a subject. For a religion, the Circle on Flatey is more like a field manual than a complete belief system: a set of rules, observed by a set of rule-followers, whose intellectual laziness has paid off with a comfortable life. They never pause to ask themselves how things might be better.

Outside the Grey Monastery, the people are every bit as intellectually lazy as they are physically lazy. Occasionally, an above average specimen might realize how dumb it is for everyone to work at cross-purposes, and might actually start some kind of movement for change. These tend to collapse in rather short order, right around the time that the followers stop getting instant gratification for their loyalty.

The people of the Western Isles are, in short:

Lazy: The typical gangbanger gets up in the morning, urinates and defecates wherever is convenient, scratches himself, and then (when he gets around to it) goes and finds his friends. If food is scarce and he is hungry, he goes hunting or fishing. If not, eh, the animals will be there tomorrow. Time for a nap! Later in the evening, there will be games.

The typical Monk gets up in the morning, urinates and defecates in the privy, scratches himself, perhaps takes a bath, and then (when he gets around to it) goes and finds his friends. There are chores that need to be gotten through as quickly as possible, group meetings at which a daily lesson (selected



by the Abbot to keep the Monks on task) is read, and then it's time for fun. Or maybe a nap! Later in the evening, there will be games.

Unmotivated: Change? Why change? Leave well enough alone. Not that it matters, anyway. Both inside and outside the Monastery walls, the same words are heard. People's breath is better inside the walls than without.

Unquestioning: The general populace is too comfortably numb to ask many questions. The Monks are too comfortable and indoctrinated to ask many questions.

Filthy: Except for the Grey Monastery and the appanage on Muspel, hygiene is **appalling**. Lice, fleas, ringworm, scabies, dirt, grime, stench, venereal diseases, rotten teeth, garbage, refuse, excrement, filth, sputum, an utter lack of sanitation planning, fouling their own water supplies out of sheer disinterest, spoiled food, a lack of food preservation, waste, all these and more can be found in abundance. The Monk-controlled areas, by contrast, are pristine, as candidates are selected for their contentment with whatever task they are assigned.

Violent: "It's easier by half to take than to build" is a common saying amongst the rabble. People are caring, in an earthy, hippie sort of way, to "theirs", and violent at the drop of a hat toward anyone else. And who counts as one of "yours" shifts constantly, depending on what they have or whether they make your life easier.

The Monks, for their part, generally sublimate their violent impulses, although if someone messes with them directly (tries to steal their things, attack the water procession, or raid the Grey Monastery), they generally give no quarter.

Religion

Apart from the Monks and their associates, the Western Isles are noteworthy for not being under the thumb of some iteration of the Circle. The rabble does not really care enough; that would be too much work.

They know about the Circle (since the water procession constantly reminds them that the Circle is responsible for their continued survival). Some may pretend to care in an effort to curry favor with the Grey Monastery. This is just a bunch of lip service, however.

The Grey Monastery adheres to a stripped down version of the Circle that might be recognizable to the PLAYERS as similar to that in Fallingstar. It preaches acceptance, non-violence, and not disrupting the status quo. As there has been no magic among the populace since the Abjuration (the few showing talent are selected out for the Monastery), the anti-magic rhetoric is absent. There is, like in Fallingstar, no creation myth, and no iconography.

There is, however, a great deal of dogma, set out in written rules and commandments. They are highly detailed, comprehensive, and highly specific rewritten applications of the basic rules: do what your betters tell you, don't ask questions and don't rock the boat.

The faithful adherents of the Circle don't have to think about what to do in any given situation, it's right there on page 287. They're fond of quoting chapter and verse on any given topic, rather than trying to figure out a new situation.

The interesting thing is that the old, pre-Abjuration religion of Liir, while not followed in any official or meaningful sense, is still ingrained in the culture. People still throw back one fish out of a large catch as thanks, not out of any actual belief but because that's just how things are done. "By Liir" is a common oath of surprise.

And perhaps fortunately for the PLAYERS, the ancient law of the mariner is still followed (to some extent): a sailor from another land must make the first hostile gesture before they may be harmed.

There is the whole "Elaine of the Fields" thing, of course, but she's whacked out of her gourd, that one.

Names and Appearances

The people of the Western Isles are Caucasian and tend to be rather short and stocky, with brownish hair and brown eyes.

Sample female names: Marie, Robin, Nancy, Claire, Yvette.

Sample male names: Jean, Robert, Eustace, Pier, Denis.

Sample surnames: Surnames are not in common use, but nearly everyone has some kind of nickname (sometimes descriptive, sometimes crude, sometimes both): “Twitch”, “the Black”, “Big Mama”, “Long John”, “Three Fingers”, “Left Eye” and cruder from there.

So, it would be “Twitchy Jean” to distinguish from “Fleabite Jean” or “Peg-leg Jean”.

Only people descended from the former royal house (or who claim to be, plausibly or otherwise) tend to use a surname (“of the Fields”).

Other Races

None. There are no other races openly visible in the Western Isles. Other races are largely believed nowadays to be fairy tales.

Leadership and Governance

Government? What government? Flatey is the Wild West: there is no law enforcement outside of gang warfare. The most dominant gang, the Monks, are lazy in their own way and as long as no one messes with them, they make only scant effort to right wrongs or maintain order.

As long as the gangs do not make threatening moves toward the Monastery, interfere with the water procession, damage the wells, or do something otherwise truly dangerous to the Monks’ survival, they don’t care what goes on. If Jean steps on Robert somehow, Robert and whatever friends Robert can round up have to deal with it.

Rank and File Gang Banger

STR 13 DEX 11 INT 10 CON 10
APP 06 POW 11 SIZ 13 EDU 03
Hits: 12

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Skills: Brawl (35%), Climb (40%), Dodge (35%), First Aid (25%), Grapple (35%), Hide (40%), Insight (10%), Jump (45%), Listen (35%), Research (Streetwise) (20%), Sense (20%), Spot (30%), Stealth (40%), Survival (new) (40%), Swim (25%), Throw (35%), Track (30%).

Attacks:

Dagger, obsidian, 30%, 1d4+2+db, impaling, 10 HP.

Atlatl & Javelin, obsidian-tipped, 40%, 1d6+1+1/2 db, impaling, 10 HP, Range 50.

Beat-stick, 40%, 1d10+3+db, 2 hands, bleeding, 22 HP, -1 to initiative.

Defenses: Armor 2 (hides and headgear).

Leather/Wicker Shield, 40%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

Deity: None really.

Gear: Stitched (unhardened) hides and helmet, leather/wicker shield, atlatl & 6 javelins, dagger (obsidian), beat-stick, poor quality traveling and camping gear.

Above percentages assume the penalty for Black Lotus intoxication.

The foregoing assumes a typical young adult male. However, a sizeable percentage of the gangs are pubescent or even pre-pubescent youths who would have even lower statistics.

A gang-leader would have higher stats.

As a result, there is a constant, hot-and-cold, multi-factional, escalating and then de-escalating, running feud across the dozen or so gangs and sub-gangs. Occasionally



(usually corresponding with pressure being put on the easily accessible, sustainable resources) the feuds periodically erupt into wholesale slaughter, burning and rioting.

No one has the gumption or energy to try and organize everyone toward something resembling law and order.

The population fluctuates wildly as feuds, brawls, thefts and murder run rampant. People are constantly having children, people are constantly getting killed, and infant mortality is through the roof. Perhaps one in three children lives long enough to learn to hunt or fish effectively.

No one bothers to keep civic records in the gangs. The Monastery keeps immaculate, exhaustive journals of its activities, making its own paper out of reeds, and binding their own books, but only of the members of the community itself.

Economy

Apart from the Monastery (which, in conjunction with the Muspel installation, is self-sufficient), there isn't an economy to speak of. Too much work.

Most of the more intelligent or potentially diligent populace is weeded out by being eaten or shifted into Monastery. The gangs do not trade with one another, except in human resources (as people shift allegiances or prisoner exchanges are made).

Within each gang, there is a small group of people (often older people, injured people no longer able to fight, and children too young to hunt) who engage in the few crafts necessary to sustain life. They (when they feel like it) tan hides, make leather, weave rope, make (crude, non-labor intensive) clothing, tend communal fires, and cook.

A few people on the island who are naturally dexterous make atlatls and darts, obsidian knives, beat-sticks, and wicker shields. These people are valuable commodities and gang wars erupt over who controls them. These generally have the pick of the spoils in any gang, second only to whoever the current gang boss is.

The only things of real value on Flatey are books and intelligence about children who seem resistant to the Herb of Healing. These are the only things that the Grey Monastery will pay for, usually in the form of a weapon, food, clothing or other durable good. Currency is not in use.

Outsiders arriving on Flatey pose a situation that no one in the island has thought through. The rank and file has nothing worth trading for (unless you are in need of poor clothing, bad food, rope or obsidian). The Grey Monastery exists at a self-sufficient level and is not given to trading.

The mere identification of foreigners arriving on Flatey, however, triggers a cascade of reactions described below.

In terms of what is available, the answer is "not much". If the Monks were inclined to, they could render competent *First Aid*; let you use their library; provide just about any appropriate non-metal finished good or tool; fix or re-outfit a boat (even one that needs dry-dock work), or teach you some basic engineering principals. But by and large, they are not so inclined. Too much work.

The rabble have cruder things to offer: themselves (a good way to catch a disease); their services (for what they are worth); their children (which, unless one is looking to adopt a child, is a truly evil undertaking); and maybe a guide (if the general level of available intellect and work ethic is not off-putting).



Another day on the island...not that it matters anyway....

Law Enforcement

There is no formal law enforcement. Each gang tends to its own revenge, and that includes the Grey Monastery. The one thing that the PLAYERS do not have to worry about is doing something that provokes an island-wide hue and cry. Too much bother, and not that it matters, anyway.

Chases (except by the Monks' cadre of guards) are quickly abandoned. Searches are likewise quickly abandoned. For that matter, just about any enterprise is quickly abandoned, in favor of harboring grudges that are settled the next time a convenient opportunity presents itself.

If someone gets caught doing something sufficient to rouse someone to anger, the penalty imposed tends to involve little planning, forethought or diligence. Often such people are just robbed and subjected to varying degrees of violence.

People are usually not executed; if someone needs to die and gets caught, they are simply beaten to death. There are no secure prison facilities, except for a holding cell in the basement of the Grey Monastery. And even then, the Monks tend to just kill someone after they lose interest in interrogating them; most of the people that they would catch know nothing of value to them anyway.

On rare occasions, such as when one of their own has to be dealt with, or a very public example needs to be made, the condemned is made to climb the cliff beneath the Grey Monastery.

The Western Isles once had a rather elaborate code of laws, and a few people still know (or think that they know) what the traditional punishment for such-and-such an offense was. Ultimately, these arguments tend to be short and academic. Either everyone falls asleep and the prisoner escapes, or they get bored with the argument and whoever is leading the group hacks something off with a beat-stick.

The Monks have an elaborate system of

gradated punishment for internal offenses, but that is limited to their own selves. Anyone who messes with the few things the Monks care about (the wells, the water procession, or their own personal well-being) are usually just beaten or killed, depending on the severity of the offense. An organized effort to overthrow the Monks would be dealt with by climbing the cliffs, to send a dissuading message.

Bear in mind, however, that as discussed below, the arrival of persons who are believed to be outsiders poses its own set of reactions.

Plot Hooks

Reaction to Outsiders/Adepts: Unlike the other regions, where things tend to be a bit fluid in terms of how the PLAYERS interact with the populace, things in the Western Isles tend to be more predictable. Things can be divided into two phases: before they are outed as having come from off the island, and after they are outed.

Stage 1: Arrival and Covert Exploration. Almost certainly, the PLAYERS are going to sail on past Muspel initially, or get shipwrecked. Unless they know the channel (which is anything but apparent), it looks like an uninhabited volcanic island surrounded by treacherous, submerged lava reefs. Moreover, Flatey is visible in the distance from the western end of Muspel, and looks far more hospitable.

The PLAYERS will find it difficult to blend in for long, but they can do it for a short period of time. The mere fact that no one knows them, unlike in most other regions, is not the problem. People from various gangs are constantly shifting and moving about, and gang leaders in any given community will readily believe that the PLAYERS might be looking to join up. They will be put through a few loyalty tests, given an initiation to test their toughness and skills, but assuming they act passably local, they might be able to infiltrate a gang for some time.

Eventually, however, the PLAYERS are almost certainly going to be outed as foreigners. Several things stand to give them away:

Their general appearance: It is difficult to plausibly be as unkempt as the locals are on a consistent basis. Disguise checks might be appropriate to make sure that clothing and accessories are correct.

Their proclivity for hygiene: As long as the PLAYERS are discrete, and do not complain about the rats, vermin, filth and stench too loudly, and do not keep themselves *too* clean, they can probably get away with keeping some semblance of basic hygiene. Keep reminding them how bad the smell is, how poorly preserved the food is, and how ramshackle things are in general.

Non-local gear: This includes anything not locally available: any sort of metal anything; any clothing other than local skins and leather; non-native fibers. People are going to want to know where you got it from. The PLAYERS had better have a semi-plausible explanation (including trading for it with the Grey Monastery, in exchange for a book they found).

Turning down sexual opportunities: Everybody sleeps with everybody on Flatey, often through the simple expedient of rolling over in the middle of the night while sleeping near the communal fire, and going with whatever you find. Reacting badly (or, for that matter, not sharing the communal fire) is highly suspicious. People's first guess is that you are a spy for the Grey Monastery, although why they might be spying is something they will have difficulty explaining.

Trying to stay away from the well water (a two-edged sword): This is unheard of. The PLAYERS will see that the one thing that people are fastidious about is the wells, and that all drinking water comes from them. The PLAYERS can either drink out of the wells (in which case, they suffer the effects of the Black Lotus, including eventual addiction), or they do not (in which case,

they risk quickly becoming sick with a wide variety of waterborne diseases). Trying to obtain clean water in some other way, if noticed (such as boiling it, magic, or cutting it with alcohol) is sure to provoke questions.

Magic use: There are no active Adepts in the rabble on Flatey. There may be Adepts who have no idea that they are Adepts, because they are perpetually stoned. This does not necessarily mark you as a foreigner (particularly if the magic is plausibly spontaneous and uncontrolled—such things have been known to happen every few years), but it is an attention getter.

A revealed Adept becomes something valuable for your gang, either in terms of a weapon or, more likely, as something to be bartered to the Grey Monastery. You also become a threat to the status quo of any gang that you have been hanging out with, probably leading to a duel for leadership of the gang, post-haste.

Unless (or until) they come to the attention of the Grey Monastery, however, even people getting suspicious of the PLAYERS is an event likely to take quite some time to mature into trouble, especially if the PLAYERS deny being from off-island. People are generally too lazy to really investigate or sustain a line of inquiry, and crazy rumors and wild accusations fly all the time when people are actually awake enough to exchange them.

The best answer on Flatey to a half-baked accusation of off-island origin is a scoffing denial followed by a butt-kicking.

Eventually, however, either someone from the Grey Monastery will notice them, or a plausible report of a bunch of foreigners running around Flatey will come to the Monks' attention. The PLAYERS ought to know better, by the time in the campaign that they manage to reach the Western Isles, than to just waltz up to any priest of the Circle and introduce themselves. But if they do not know any better (say, by putting their ship into harbor anywhere within sight of the Monks or more than an isolated local),



then things on Flatey promptly progress to stage two.

The first stage will be occupied by getting a sense of the place, learning some legends and history, a gang brawl or two, an impromptu adventure or two, and perhaps moving up the hierarchy of a gang.

Stage 2, “Yes, It’s True, We’re From Across the Ocean.” Eventually, after perhaps a couple of false alarms, someone is going to take it into their head that the PLAYERS are definitely from across the waters, to the point where they decide that its worth mentioning to the water procession, or to Brother Eustace at the gate.

If enough of these rumors persist, or the water procession grows suspicious, then someone from the Grey Monastery (likely a several men-strong patrol of guards, led by the captain, possibly aboard the *Black Ship* depending on where they are) will come

looking for the PLAYERS.

Also, of course, if the PLAYERS just put into harbor at Westhaven, or an ocean-going vessel is otherwise discovered, then the query is going to concern not whether foreigners are ashore, but who the foreigners are. This quickly leads to a manhunt.

At this stage, it is probably better to be found than not be found, but no good comes of being found. The Grey Monks will try to capture the PLAYERS with as little or as much force as necessary and interrogate them.

Father Acedia (the Abbot) will lead the interrogation, which could range anywhere from inviting them to a feigned-politeness dinner at the Monastery, Bond-villain style, to killing some, subduing the rest, and throwing them in the holding cell in the Monastery’s basement.



I was curious what the recommended dosage was back in the day....

Either way, Father Acadia will be trying to buy enough time for word to be sent to Muspel via one of the *Black Ships* and for the ship to return with some Adepts and Overseers to take custody of the foreigners. Ideally, the PLAYERS will be subdued, drugged and taken to Muspel for “enhanced interrogation techniques”, and then killed and eaten by the resident demons. If an apprehended PLAYER is more valuable than as a snack (such as, for example, because one of the major demons has a bounty out on them), they may get shipped in chains to the “Majestic Plateau” instead.

Stage Three: The Fugitives: Obviously, getting captured and eaten is no fun, unless the PLAYERS are running some complicated con game whereby they allow themselves to be taken prisoner. (This will enable them to find the lotus fields on Muspel rather directly, assuming that they can escape custody once there). As a result, it is more likely that the PLAYERS will flee and/or escape custody. (One fun thing to do is to have one of the demons or Adepts who arrives from Muspel to be an old, perhaps half-forgotten, enemy of the PLAYERS, thereby tipping them off).

The PLAYERS will actually find it comparatively easy to lose themselves in the rugged wilderness of Flatey, to establish a base camp of some sort, to subsist indefinitely, and to wage some guerrilla warfare against the Grey Monastery. As noted in the “*Elaine of the Fields*” section below, they will have some company in this regard. That is, again, the most annoying thing about the Western Isles: if the populace were not drugged into insensibility, or if the Grey Monastery took the next step and actually cleaned up the water, the basic resources to rebuild a good standard of living could be there.

After some harrowing chases, and once the PLAYERS think to get inland and away from the coast, the chase will peter out, at least for a while. The Grey Monks are not free thinkers, and lazy in their own way.

They have to send for orders to deal with unexpected situations, and the demon/Overseer population on Muspel is extremely finite. They will probably have to send for reinforcements against any serious perceived threat, which should take a couple of weeks. This will give the PLAYERS some time to try and actually monkey-wrench the demons more directly than they may be accustomed to doing.

Elaine of the Fields, Urban Legend

Just about the entirety of the rabble on Flatey, and certainly all of the Grey Monks, have heard about *Elaine of the Fields*, and a few have actually seen her. (More will claim to have seen her than actually have).

Elaine is a folk hero in the Robin Hood mold. Believed to have been born to a mother of the Fields family in Osthaven about 25 years ago, her childhood is not well recorded, as she did not come to the attention of the Grey Monastery. She did, however, rise through the ranks of the gangs quickly, and for a while in her early teens was the leader of the largest gang around Osthaven.

One day, so the story goes, she got into some kind of altercation with the water procession, and had to flee into the wilderness. She is still out there, leaving gifts for the needy, tweaking the noses of the Grey Monks, stealing things from their camp out from under the noses of the guards, leaving graffiti on the walls of the Grey Monastery, and generally making a nuisance out of herself. The Grey Monastery denies her existence and makes no (overt, known) effort to track her down.

This is all true, but only part of the story. In fact, the Grey Monks are desperate to find and eliminate Elaine of the Fields, but are having great difficulty finding her.

Elaine represents a rare confluence of events on the Western Isles: she is naturally resistant to the Black Lotus, but also naturally resistant to waterborne diseases. As a result, she grew up with her intellect



and willpower intact, while also managing to avoid giving herself away to the water procession.

Elaine of the Fields

STR 11 DEX 12 INT 16 CON 14
APP 11 POW 16 SIZ 12 EDU 07
Hits: 13 Age: 27.

Damage Bonus: +0.

Allegiance Tendencies: Good, Chaotic.

Skills: *Archaeology (10%)*, Astronomy (25%), Brawl (65%), Climb (60%), Command (25%), Dodge (57%), Fast Talk (45%), First Aid (65%), Gaming (INT + POW%), Grapple (25%), Hide (66%), History (26%), Insight (55%), Jump (55%), Listen (50%), Navigate (50%), OCCULT (15%), Persuade (36%), *Pilot Boat (21%)*, Religion (new) (25%), Research (Streetwise) (55%), Sense (20%), Spot (52%), *Status (20%)*, Stealth (45%), Strategy (11%), Survival (new) (88%), Swim (35%), Throw (55%), Track (40%).

Attacks:

Dagger, obsidian, 30%, 1d4+2+db, impaling, 10 HP.

Atlatl & Javelin, obsidian-tipped, 40%, 1d6+1+1/2 db, impaling, 10 HP, Range 50.

Beat-stick, 40%, 1d10+3+db, 2 hands, bleeding, 22 HP, -1 to initiative.

Defenses: Armor 2 (hides and headgear).

Leather/Wicker Shield, 40%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

Deity: Liir?

Wealth: 3.

Special: The Faithful (Liir?)

Adjusted POW Bonus: Weather +5.

What actually happened, 14 years ago, is that at the age of 13, she figured out that the

Grey Monastery was drugging the wells and weeding out those who were naturally resistant to the drug. She tried to organize a revolt, but her gang lieutenants ratted her out to the Grey Monastery. She managed to escape with her life into the hills.

And then things got weird.

Elaine's first few months in the wilderness were difficult. No matter how good of a hiding place she would find or build, eventually the Grey Monks would somehow track her down. She had to keep moving, set traps, set up false camps, and constantly double-back just to stay one step ahead of them.

Then, deciding to climb high into the interior mountains to shake her pursuers, she finally lost them. Elaine does not understand why this is, only that she found somewhere to go to ground: the crumbled, overgrown ruins of a stone beacon tower with a commanding view of the entire island. Either the Grey Monks are too lazy to come up here, or they just don't. Either way, she's grateful.

As the years passed, Elaine learned a few things about *the Pharos*, as she called it. It seemed much like the crumbled lighthouses/shrines of the sea god Liir that were scattered around the island, one of which could be seen still standing from the right vantage point at the Grey Monastery. Yet there was more to it as well.

Beneath the tower she found a subterranean temple chamber, seemingly untouched by time, with blue tile work, frescoes, and a life-sized gilt statue of Liir in his seahorse-drawn chariot. At the center of this chamber was a large reflecting pool, whose bottom stretched out of site.

Elaine jumped into the reflecting pool one day and found that, depending upon which side of the pool (north, south, east or west) she jumped in, she magically surfaced in a hidden pool near the shore of the island, corresponding to each cardinal compass point. She could also return the same way. This enabled her to forage for food, steal

supplies, and generally live in comfort, if alone.

Elaine tried a couple of times over the years to rescue children and/or recruit followers, but without success. The ones that were already addicted to the “Herb of Healing” invariably went mad and died within weeks after being taken off of the well water. Others were difficult to find without exposing herself to capture. And so she accomplished little with her freedom, besides living free.

A few years ago, however, after many painstaking years of exploration and reconnaissance, Elaine managed to sneak into the Grey Monastery itself, and get into its library. She managed to steal a couple of books, ones that she was looking for in particular: a basic “how to read” children’s primer, and an illustrated book of the rituals of Liir.

The theft did not go unnoticed, but no one suspected that Elaine had anything to do with it. (She is smarter than to have actually left graffiti at the Monastery announcing her success, stories notwithstanding). The usual token effort at finding the books was undertaken—not that it matters, anyway.

Over the next couple of years, she taught herself how to read at a crude level, and puzzled out portions of the Rituals of Liir. And feeling that she had nothing to lose, Elaine began to perform some of those rituals. It was something to do.

Then the statue of Liir started talking to her. When she worked her rituals in the shrine (and to some extent, outside of it), the weather began to listen. The statue told her to bide her time, and that help would come from the sea for the people of the Western Isles, as it always did. And so she waits, a bit dotty from years of isolation, but in the kingdom of the doped, the slightly disturbed is queen.

It’s too bad for the demons that this potentially ruinous development has been occurring on Flatey: someone developing magical powers based on “faith” in a god

who was, in fact, sealed off from the World by the Abjuration. The Grey Monks are not the best observers, or reporters. Except for the senior-most leadership, they do not pay much attention or make mysteries their problem to solve.

Zazeer would be furious if she found out what had been going on at the Pharos of Liir.

Behind the Curtain

Several influences for the land of sloth came from classical literature. In The Odyssey, one of Odysseus’ first stops is the Island of the Lotus Eaters (*lotophagi*), who were so happy with their drug-addled lives that they thought little to change them. Add to this the fact that laudanum was (and still is) used as a medical treatment for severe dysentery, dating back to Thomas Sydenham’s 1669 medical treatise on the disease. It works; it just took people a while to glom on to the overwhelmingly negative side effects.

I also wanted to take a stab at the moral certitude of medieval cenobites, who lived a decent life in their cloisters, writing about and pooh-poohing the sad state of human affairs, while not bothering to improve that sad state by sharing their education.

Just for fun, here is Sydenham’s laudanum formulation: one pound of sherry wine, two ounces of opium, one ounce of saffron, one ounce of powder of cinnamon, and one ounce of cloves.

Upsetting the Apple Cart

It should not take the PLAYERS long to figure out what is afoot on Flatey. The people appear stupefied; the only tended water source on Flatey are the wells; everyone gets their water from them; the water procession is dumping aromatic powder into them with great ceremony; and the PLAYERS are going to feel woozy the first time that they drink any.

And those annoying addiction checks (which you should not be at all subtle about, since the PLAYERS will have well-defined cravings) will be the final nail in the coffin. If they know anything about the demons and how they operate, it should be obvious that they are behind it.

The PLAYERS may be a bit puzzled as to why it is that the Grey Monks themselves drink from the wells without ill effects. Perhaps some enterprising NPC can explain it to them, or they can witness some mother wordlessly handing over a dysentery-ridden child. Some of the more aware populace knows that those children who cannot be helped with The Fever are taken away by the Monks, and a lucky few survive and become Monks themselves.

Do not forget to play up the water problem with the PLAYERS themselves. They can drink the water from outside of the wells (a decent chance of contracting something awful), drink the water from the wells (a certain chance of contracting something awful), or resort to alternative means of water purification (boiling and filtering). This last option gives them away as outsiders more surely than anything else.

Attacking the Grey Monastery: If the PLAYERS choose to directly assault the Grey Monastery, play it out. Unless they are forewarned, only Father Acedia wields magic, so it is quite possible that the PLAYERS will be able to stage an effective assault. Father Acedia and the other Monks and guards under the Ritual of Obedience will take the Black Ship and try to flee a losing battle, abandoning the others to their fates, at least until they can return with demons, Overseers and Reapers from Muspel to try and set things right.

Alternatively, the PLAYERS might try to infiltrate the Grey Monastery by stealth. Unless they gain access to the Father Acedia's personal office (heavily guarded), they are only going to find a small, clean, well-kept, Monastery with hot and cold running water. They should notice (if they have not already) that the food situation is

not self-sustaining, and there is only a small quantity of the Black Lotus under cultivation. This means, of course, that there is another base somewhere nearby.

In Father Acedia's study are some damning items, including: a hidden map depicting the island of Muspel and its sea approach; a variety of correspondence between Father Acedia, one Father Goat on Muspel, and sundry other parties both on Flatey and on Muspel. Careful study of enough of this correspondence would reveal:

- The existence of a second base on the isle of Muspel, somewhere not far to the east;
- The fact that Muspel is the source of much of the food and "Herb of Healing" in use by the Grey Monks on Flatey;
- The approximate number of personnel on Muspel;
- The fact that Father Goat receives occasional, high-level operational orders from somewhere called the "Majestic Plateau", and that this occurs through magical means;
- There is even a reference to the "Lady Zazeer" as an authority figure at the "Majestic Plateau; and
- The purpose of the Muspel facility as a re-education camp for training prospective Grey Monks.
- There is even an icon depicting "Saint Zazeer, Angel of the Circle" on Father Acedia's study wall. (See illustration on the next page).

Interdicting Muspel/Debunking the "Garden of Healing": Crafty PLAYERS are more likely to take one of several more subtle approaches to disrupting the status quo. None of these are exactly bad ideas, but each faces significant practical obstacles.

The PLAYERS might sabotage one or more of the wells. This provokes a drinking water crisis for those communities dependent on that well. After a few days, the entire area begins to suffer from withdrawal, and mayhem ensues.



“Saint Zazeer, Angel of the Circle”

The PLAYERS might waylay or otherwise incapacitate the water procession. This provokes a drinking water crisis, starting in a few weeks, across the entire island (except for the Grey Monastery itself). The entire island begins to suffer from withdrawal, and massive mayhem ensues.

Well-spoken PLAYERS might resort to

challenging the sloth head-on: convince the people to make the effort to engage in basic sanitation and to purify other water sources instead of relying on the drugged water. Or, even better, they might lead by example and start an alternative.

One brutally effective way to stop the flow of the “Herb of Healing” is to interdict



shipping from Muspel. This leads, after the supply on hand at the Grey Monastery runs out (in a couple of months), to island-wide withdrawal and chaos. This is a good way to draw out the guards and sailors from the Grey Monastery, as they will venture out on the *Black Ship* to see what has befallen Muspel.

The PLAYERS might, alternatively, covertly alter one or more wells, somehow, to strain out the “Herb of Healing.” This, again, leads to the entire affected area beginning to suffer withdrawal in short order.

All of these roads lead to the same destination: chaos and violence. Flatey turns into a zombie movie. Several thousand people get desperate, violent and out of their minds all around the same time, and eventually (see boxed material following) 99% of those who live long enough go completely and suicidally berserk.

The 1% or so of the rabble who survive withdrawal, by dint of happy genetics, may or may not get swept up in the violence, and may or may not die of cholera. Barring the PLAYERS taking an active hand in saving some of the populace, only a handful of people on Flatey outside of the Grey Monastery survive. Visualize the end of a zombie movie.

The PLAYERS might be able to save a favorite NPC or perhaps even several NPCs, through magic, *First Aid*, hiding away somewhere until the carnage dies down, or some combination of these things. But the island is going to end up largely depopulated once the madness starts, no matter what they do.

Eventually, when the chaos achieves critical mass, a maddened mob storms the Grey Monastery, angry that they have been cut off from their “medicine,” and lashing out at anything that moves. Wholesale slaughter ensues. The Grey Monks turn on one another as there is a struggle over who can fit on the *Black Ship* and sail for Muspel.

As usual, those under the Ritual of Obedience stick together and screw over everyone else, and aren’t shy about screwing over each other, either.

Sticking a Fork in the Toaster

The question posed by the Western Isles is a different one than elsewhere in the World. On the main continent, the PLAYERS are confronted with large, deeply embedded schemes that they lack the power to quickly resolve. They have to build influence and social standing, gradually work to make a difference, lead by example, and hopefully pick off a demon every now and then.

The Western Isles, as this section illustrates, are different. The PLAYERS can plausibly blow the demons’ plans here to Kingdom Come. Due to its isolation, cleaning out the demons and their Obedient minions is an achievable task. The capacity for a sustainable and decent lifestyle is present on Flatey (and easily so on Muspel, once the Black Lotus is rotated out as a crop).

The PLAYERS can, if they want to, implement a managed Armageddon—much as the pre-Abjuration wizards did, just by shutting off the drug supply.

Just about everyone in the Western Isles—man, woman and child—will die horrible, painful deaths, ***but not absolutely everyone will.*** The PLAYERS, Elaine of the Fields, and any other survivors can build a new Kingdom of the Western Isles, once they get over the 5,000 or so casualties.

If the PLAYERS are arguing about ***whether*** they should do something start society over in the Western Isles, in addition to how to do so, then things are going exactly as planned.

Assault on Muspel: How an assault on Muspel might proceed will depend on the

outcome of one variable. That variable is whether the Monks on Flatey have sent an alarm to Muspel.

Note that Father Acedia and Father Goat, the schoolmaster on Muspel, do not have a crystal ball line of communication, nor do they communicate by magic. (Their efforts to do so in the past have failed; they have never quite gotten around to discovering why). It is a simple matter of the mountain in the middle of the island being in the way; Westhaven is in a “dead zone.” If they were to simply try from, say, Osthaven, there would be no problem. But that’s too much work.

The nature of the alarm, to make a difference in readiness on Muspel, needs to be something more than a suspicion of mainlanders afoot. Those rumors circulate every now and then. Rather, it needs to be in the nature of the Monks under the Ritual of Obedience taking flight, or a significant part of the island in withdrawal-related chaos.

If an alarm of that level happens, the Monks, demons and Overseers on Muspel will sanitize the Muspel installation. Everyone not under the Ritual of Obedience will be killed and/or eaten. If the remaining force of 30 or so Monks, demons, Reapers, and Overseers think that they can put down the insurrection safely, they will try to set up an ambush.

A useful tactic would be for them to allow the PLAYERS’ ship to enter the approach channel and then attack from all sides. Otherwise, if the PLAYERS and their allies seem like a viable threat (particularly from a magic-wielding perspective), they will sanitize and then set sail for the “Majestic Plateau.”

Absent that level of alarm, however, the

chapter house on Muspel is a reinforced, stone, two-story manor house in good repair. There are only 10 Reapers, Overseers and minor demons resident, all occupying management level positions, about 20 Monks (10 actual brothers/teachers--use guard statistics--and 10 crewing the ship) and 50-100 children of various ages.

The whole affair is run like a farming-oriented orphanage, with heavy dollops of a British children’s romance. It is a working farm and school, not a paramilitary camp, and absent solid reason, security is limited.

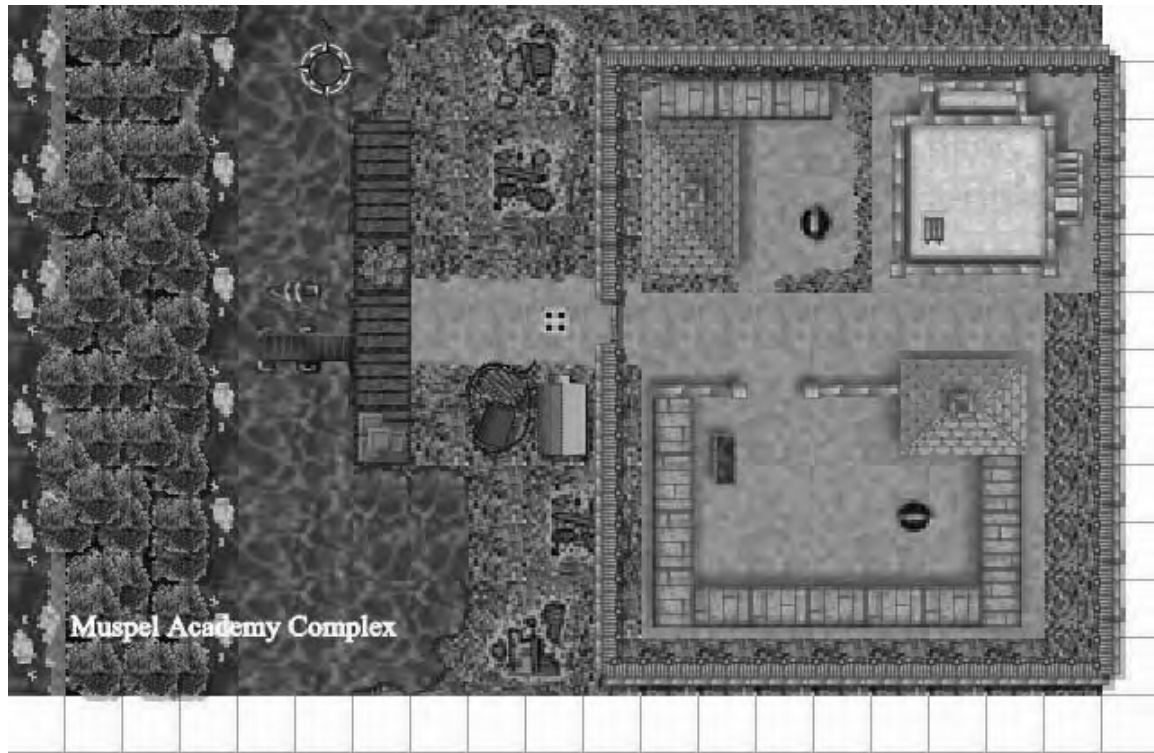
Two of the Reapers and Overseers man a lookout hut at the entrance to the approach channel and ring a bell when someone approaches—three rings for friend and a sustained ringing for foe. If a ship gets by this post unnoticed, it is entirely possible to catch the chapter house by surprise, and a desperate, chaotic fight may ensue.

What the children, whose level of brainwashing bears a direct relationship to their age, are likely to do in response to a change in control is anyone’s guess. Remember, however, that apart from those who have already taken the Ritual of Obedience, they are generally very good at following orders and not asking free-thinking questions.

The ages of the children follow a pyramid structure, with young babies and toddlers at the base. Everyone is aware that their classmates flunk out and/or are sent away, more every year, but that the best way to join them is to ask why.

All of the children show signs of long-term, systematic, psychological and physical abuse. The older children have had their resistance and individuality broken down, and show signs of Stockholm syndrome.





Western Isles Sites and Features

Map Key: 1 inch=8 miles. Travel rates depend entirely on whether the ring road is used or if the PLAYERS are attempting to go through the volcanic badlands away from the shore. A determined, lightly loaded person on the ring road can make 2 inches per day on the road, and 3 if they push it. Overland, 1 inch per day would be excellent progress.

Note that there is a trail leading along the rivers into the interior from Westhaven. This is, closest to Westhaven, an unmaintained, long overgrown road, but once one gets more than two day's travel along it, the paved road surfaces again and continues in an easterly direction up into the mountains to the foot of *Liir's Stairway*. Travel along this road is 2 inches per day. There are also abandoned wells and overgrown/ruined way stations along this path. The area is unbroken volcanic rock, occasional thin tree stands, and pumice gravel. It would not support long-term human habitation. As a result, the water in the stream is actually potable.

Westhaven (town): Chaotic; Area population: ~3,000. Westhaven was the former capital of the kingdom. The size of the ruin field, road remnants and infrastructure suggests a small port city that once was home to as many as 25,000 people and a large fishing and commercial fleet.

Except for the Grey Monastery, the city has not been maintained for 100 years. It is collapsed, completely overgrown, and generally looks like a large archaeological site at which a weekend rock festival is occurring. People use the standing ruins as supports for tents, yurts and other types of semi-permanent or makeshift structures. It is loud, boisterous (at all hours) and the stench takes some getting used to. Numerous gangs claim areas of the ruins and the surrounding countryside as their turf, and turf wars are common.

This is the nicest part of the island, for what it is worth. It is the sheltered side of the island, has the easiest shore fishing and is the most wooded part. There are also occasional hot springs that people tap for hot water.

People from other parts of Flatey

periodically try to move in, but unless they come in ones or twos and are accepted into an existing gang, rarely succeed in settling there.

Norhaven (village): Chaotic; Area population: ~500. This is the coldest and windiest part of the island, but there is a natural harbor and so, a few gangs roam the area. Few people live close to the ruined and almost completely overgrown town site, but there are a cluster of gang-camps in the area.

Sudhaven (village): Chaotic; Population: ~1,000. The town site at Sudhaven is still standing, as the people here are more sedentary and have made some half-hearted efforts at keeping the town from being reclaimed by nature. As a result, it looks more like a ramshackle town than a rave site after a long weekend.

Osthaven (village): Chaotic, Population: ~500. Osthaven is some distance from and quite isolated from the rest of the settlement areas on Flatey. Things, as a result, tend to be (while not much better in most regards), at least a little less violent. One gang dominates the area and controls the town site; a few small gangs roam the area. Most violence is internecine within each gang. They tend to be relatively open to new

arrivals to the community (they get very few), and the area's resources are not maxed out by the current population level.

The main Osthaven gang, the Fish Heads, is also not a big fan of the water procession. All of this makes Osthaven a good choice for an initial infiltration effort by the PLAYERS.

Ruined Temple/Liir's Stairway (site): The road that eventually surfaces, following the stream east from Westhaven, is old and well-engineered, if unkempt. It leads, ultimately, past a large geyser and winds through foothills before it seemingly ends at the foot of a mountain. However, a cursory search reveals a stone stairway, switching back up the mountain. Containing some 5,000 steps, it ends at the peak where the ruins of the Pharos lie. "By the 5,000 steps" is one of those common epithets on Flatey that no one knows exactly what it means any longer.

Muspel (village): Evil, Lawful; Population: ~200. Discussed in more detail above, Muspel's existence is no longer particularly well known amongst the rabble, and they certainly do not know that it is under intensive cultivation. And no one, apart from the Grey Monks, knows how to access the sailing channel.



Liir's Stairway

Life As A Black Lotus Addict, and Madness in the Time of Cholera.

Since the Grey Monks regularly introduce the “Herb of Healing” into the communal wells, and it does pass through mother’s milk, people on Flatey are introduced to the Black Lotus from birth, and even before. It is an island of crack babies. But roughly 1 in 100 babies born are immune to the effects of the Black Lotus. This is purely a matter of genetics, and tends to run in one bloodline on the island (the Fields family). These people are not hard to identify, since the filthy conditions on the island would lead to frequent outbreaks of cholera and other waterborne diseases were it not for the Black Lotus. They are almost always babies with cases of early age diarrhea.

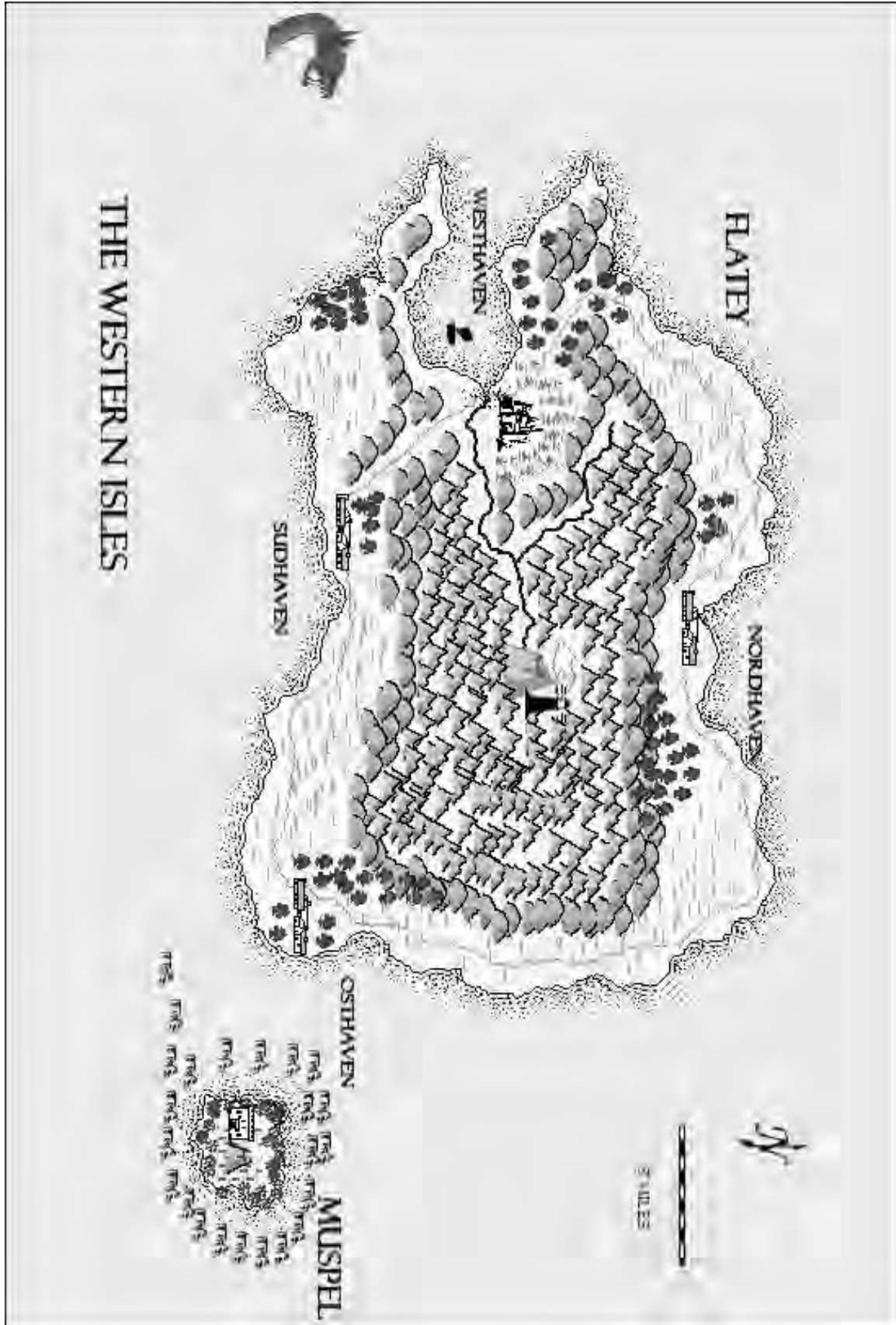
For the other 99% of the population, they are utterly oblivious to the fact that they are being drugged. They do not feel any different that they have ever felt as they go through their lives, and they never develop a tolerance for the drug. Any normal member of the populace that the PLAYERS encounter will have long ago failed all CON checks and be thoroughly addicted.

For the record, however, (or for the benefit of any PLAYER who drinks out of one of the wells), the drugged well water has a POT of 18. Failure results in all skills being at -20% for a day, as well as a general sense of contented laziness and a general reduction in inhibitions. Each failed roll results in a cumulative 5% chance of addiction. (The entire free-roaming rabble is addicted). It does have the benefit of killing any water-borne bacteria the addict might ingest, from any source.

Black Lotus addiction does not force any decrepitude checks, but.... Withdrawal is horrible and likely lethal. Depriving an addict of the drug (more than 2 days off of the tainted water) results in the automatic loss of 1 POW per day. The addict suffers shakes, nausea and stomach illness for the first several days (until POW goes below 3), upping the across-the-board check penalty to -40%. He is also now exposed to the various filth-caused diseases running rampant on the island. Such persons (often having no idea that they were being drugged in the first place) will be generally perceived, and be perceived by others, as manifesting an outbreak of The Fever. They are typically killed if they can be caught (although that takes a lot of effort...sigh...) or driven off into the wild (where the water is not “treated”). When POW drops below 3, the addict begins to hallucinate, becomes extremely agitated, and becomes aggressively violent. When POW drops to zero, the addict is beyond hope and either commits suicide or goes on a homicidal rampage.

Addiction is *incredibly* difficult to treat. Treatment requires five successful *Medicine* or *Difficult First Aid* rolls, plus 1 day for each point of POW lost (either before treatment starts or due to a failed roll during treatment), as well as restraint and isolation. Alternatively, powerful magic might suffice. Finally, just because some people’s anatomies are different, give each addict a 01% chance of snapping out of the addiction after the first point of POW is lost. Most people, in short, either have to get excellent treatment or get back on the drug somehow, or they are doomed. Getting back on the drug does *not* reverse POW damage.

Persons exposed to cholera (anyone drinking contaminated water, every day that they do it) must make a *Difficult* Stamina roll (CON x5). If they fail, they quickly develop debilitating diarrhea and fever, costing 1 CON per hour. After 4 hours, one may attempt another *Difficult* Stamina check to prevent further CON loss, and then another every hour until the tide is stemmed or death results. Cholera kills its share of people, and does so quickly, but most healthy people simply end up severely debilitated and dehydrated. A successful *Medicine* check stems the tide. Lost CON is regained at the rate of 1d3 per day, assuming rest and clean water to drink. The Grey Monks have an “antidote” to the Black Lotus, which blocks the action of the drug for 1d3 weeks. It does not block the effects of withdrawal, and is used to get rid of troublemakers. This is a secret restricted to those under the Ritual of Obedience.



THE WESTERN ISLES

Important People

Father Acedia, Grey Monastery Abbot

Father Acedia is the elderly abbot of the Grey Monastery in Westhaven. He is, on the surface, polite, reasonable, calm, and grandfatherly. In private, he is polite, reasonable, calm, and completely Machiavellian.

He is under the Ritual of Obedience. He knows everything that there is to know about the Abjuration, including how it occurred, who the important demons are (to the extent anyone knows), and every detail of the whys, hows and wherefores of the operation on Flatey.

He has actually met Zazeer, one of the few mortals in the World who can say that. Zazeer looks at him as you might the especially bright grade school student down the street: certainly not your equal, but amusingly precocious and capable of a surprising insight every now and then.



He is also smart enough to know that if a group of foreigners are confirmed to be in the Western Isles, containment has been broken and they are likely a serious threat. Finally, he is an Adept of no small ability, although this is a closely guarded secret and

only known to those Monks under the Ritual of Obedience.

Father Acedia

STR 09 DEX 10 INT 18 CON 11
APP 14 POW 18 SIZ 11 EDU 11
Hits: 11 Age: 68.

Damage Bonus: +0.

Allegiance Tendencies: Evil.

Skills: Bargain (25%), Command (50%), Craft (Engineering) (75%), Etiquette (35%), Fast Talk (50%), First Aid (50%), Hide (50%), History (75%), Insight (50%), Listen (65%), Navigate (50%), OCCULT (50%), Persuade (70%), Religion (90%), Research (Streetwise) (70%), RESEARCH (Library Use) (70%), Spot (55%), **Status (80%)**, Strategy (55%), Survival (70%), Swim (45%).

Attacks:

Dagger, obsidian, 99%, 1d4+2+db, impaling, 10 HP. (Parry is also 99%).

Defenses: None.

Special: Lost Art: Quantum Alteration; Lost Art: Terrible Presence; Second Sight.

Adjusted POW Bonuses: Weather +4, Mind +8, Detect +8.

Tools: Usually has a variety of (non-magical) scrying and divination equipment at hand sufficient to give him tool bonuses in Mind and Detect at up to +3.

Incantations: Lightning +2 (use Weather for adjusted POW bonus), Countermagic +4, Control +4, Vision +4, Perception +4.

Deity: The Circle (nominally).

Wealth: 9.

Gear: Usually does not wear armor or carry weapons, except for his knife, which he is *shockingly* good with.

Notwithstanding these qualities, he is, in his own way, as sluggardly as the rest of the Western Isles. He is overconfident, will take the time to gloat and monologue if he has the PLAYERS in awkward position, and is initially dismissive of any tired, old reports of strangers from across the sea. He's heard it all before.

Brother Eustace, Grey Monastery Gatekeeper

Eustace has been specially selected and educated to be a stubborn jerk. He follows in the proud traditions of the gatekeeper at the Emerald City and the French soldiers atop Castle Aaargh, combining officiousness with disinterest at the stream of constant supplicants.

Brother Eustace

STR 13 DEX 14 INT 13 CON 13
APP 13 POW 13 SIZ 12 EDU 09
Hits: 13 Age: 52.

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Allegiance Tendencies: Neutral, Lawful.

Skills: Astronomy (25%), Bargain (80%), Dodge (60%), Etiquette (60%), Fast Talk (70%), First Aid (60%), Hide (30%), History (40%), Insight (50%), Listen (50%), Navigate (40%), Perform (Sing & Storytelling) (40%), Persuade (60%), Religion (the Circle) (60%), Spot (60%), **Status** (40%), Stealth (40%), Survival (60%).

Attacks: None over base.

Defenses: None over base.

Deity: The Circle.

Special: None.

Big Jane, Friendly Gangbanger

Big Jane is a popular and respected member of the Fish Heads, the dominant gang in Osthaven. She is, well, big: 6 feet, 4 inches tall, around 200 pounds, with large limbs,

large feet, and large just about everything, as well as a deep, Kathleen Turneresque voice. She has dirty blonde hair, a big nose, and swings both ways.

She presently has no children and no significant other. All three of her children survived infancy. Her oldest taken seven years ago as an infant by the Grey Monks because he took ill with The Fever; her second was killed in a brawl last year (at the age of five) and her baby son disappeared one night last year under mysterious circumstances. (She was not culpable, but has no idea what occurred).

Her hygiene is borderline offensive by off-island standards. This means that she washes her clothes occasionally, cleans her teeth occasionally, and makes an effort to avoid filth. That's about all it means, though. She breaks wind, belches, has no table manners, snores like a freight train; apply your imagination. Were she cleaned up, taught some manners and adapted to a more sanitary environment, her APP would be in the 10-11 range.



Big Jane

STR 13 DEX 13 INT 11 CON 13
 APP 08 POW 16 SIZ 16 EDU 03
 Hits: 15 Age: 19.

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Allegiance Tendencies: Neutral,
 Chaotic.

Skills: Brawl (55%), Climb (40%),
 Dodge (35%), First Aid (25%), Grapple
 (35%), Hide (40%), Insight (30%),
 Jump (45%), Listen (35%), Research
 (Streetwise) (50%), Sense (20%), Spot
 (30%), Stealth (40%), Survival (new)
 (50%), Swim (55%), Throw (35%),
 Track (30%).

Attacks:

Atlatl & Javelin, obsidian-tipped, 44%,
 1d6+1+1/2 db, impaling, 10 HP, Range
 50.

Beat-stick, 48%, 1d10+3+db, 2 hands,
 bleeding, 22HP, -1 to initiative.

Defenses: Armor 2 (hides and
 headgear).

Leather/Wicker Shield, 49%, 1d2+db,
 knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

Deity: None really.

Gear: Stitched (unhardened) hides, and
 helmet, leather/wicker shield, atlatl & 6
 javelins, dagger (obsidian), beat-stick,
 poor quality traveling and camping gear.

Above percentages assume penalty for
 Black Lotus intoxication.

Special: None.

Deity: The Circle (nominally).

Wealth: 4.

Jane is, by Flatey standards, reasonably smart and reasonably with it. She is friendly and has a brassy sense of humor. In her way, however, she is as lazy as the rest. She has no ambition to better herself.

You will want Big Jane, or someone like

her, to hang out with the PLAYERS so that they can get a flavor of the place. And if someone turns down sex with her, she (and those around her) will wonder what the hell is wrong with them.

And no, the age given is not a typo, notwithstanding the ages of her various children.

Novitiate Jehan, Schoolboy

Jehan has lived at the school on Muspel for as long as he can remember. He has no memories of his mother or where he came from. He gets up before dawn, works in the fields, and studies after dusk or when the weather is bad. There's plenty of time for fun, like more studying and calisthenics.

But still, he has a few complaints.

For one thing, he finds it annoying that he keeps losing friends every year. Everyone knows that you always do what you are told, because those who don't are sent away. It's the will of the Circle, though, he supposes.



For another thing, he's been getting headaches. He has been frequently getting them whenever he is around some of the teachers, especially the headmaster, Father

Goat. Nothing that he does seems to do any good, but he reported his symptoms to his supervising brother, as the Circle dictates.

Ever since he did that, though, he's had trouble. One of the older boys, Novitiate Roger, two years ahead of him, has been brutal. He's been calling him names, sabotaging his work, physically bullying him, and generally terrorizing him. Yesterday, Roger broke his finger and held his head in a chamber pot for no reason.

He cannot stand it any more. He's complained to the brothers, but they just tell him to get back to work.

This morning, he found an obsidian dagger in his clothing.

Father Goat has sensed an opportunity in young Jehan. He suspects that Jehan may be an emerging Adept, or at least a wild talent. This mean that he either has to be liquidated, or convinced to give himself over to the demons in short order.

Zazeer suggested a test. An older boy was selected, one who had recently been marked as disposable. The older boy, Roger, was told as a test of his faith, he had to drive Jehan to want to leave Muspel.

If Jehan crumbles, then he is an Adept who cannot be counted on, and his fate is sealed. If he defends himself recklessly, then he cannot be counted on, and his fate is sealed.

However, if Roger mysteriously disappears, or if Jehan convincingly creates a case for self-defense, then he has the ruthless, but superficially law abiding, streak that the Majestic Plateau can use. He will then be offered the Ritual of Obedience to absolve his crime, and be on a track to either be a Reaper, or maybe, a future abbot. He has

long been noticed for his force of will.

He might survive the encounter with Roger; he is quite big for his age. Big hands, big feet, big everything.

Novitiate Jehan

STR 06 DEX 11 INT 13 CON 06
APP 12 POW 18 SIZ 07 EDU 08
Hits: 6 Age: 8.

Damage Bonus: -1d4.

Allegiance Tendencies: Lawful.

Skills: Climb (50%), Craft (Farming) (45%), Dodge (30%), Etiquette (15%), First Aid (30%), Hide (30%), History (20%), Insight (30%), Listen (35%), Navigate (20%), Persuade (25%), Religion (new) (30%), Research (Streetwise) (30%), Sense (50%), Spot (35%), **Status (15%)**, Stealth (30%), Strategy (10%), Survival (45%), Swim (25%).

Attacks: None above base.

Defenses: None above base.

Special: Second Sight.

Adjusted POW Bonuses: None yet.

Tools: None yet.

Incantations: None yet.

Deity: The Circle.

Wealth: 2.

Gear: Obsidian dagger, 1d4+2+db.



Gazetteer--Takuk

Know how many people died building that marvel? More importantly, know how many bones were used? Best show some respect for the dead.—Thorstein of Helm’s Camp, local pundit.

Overview

Population: 129. 91 humans, 7 demons, 1 magical pre-Abjuration creature, 30 lobotomized human slaves.

Government: Athenian-style democracy at Helm’s Camp; clan-based at The Kin.

Important Entities: Thorstein of Helm’s Camp (Neutral); Rachael of Helm’s Camp (Good); The Kin (as Evil as you get); the Questing Beast (motivations not well understood).

Imports: Anything that someone cares to bring with them.

Exports: Nothing, although refugees, ivory and furs would be possibilities.

Outlook: A regretfully Machiavellian sort of Neutral (nearly everyone in Helm’s Camp). The Kin are particularly cruel and disgusting demons. The Questing Beast is a force of entropy.

Geography and New Meaning for the Term “Cold Waste”

Takuk has always been a sparsely populated arctic hinterland. It is a vast region, essentially the entire circumpolar part of the World, but only a couple of areas are warm enough to be habitable.

Takuk is unique in that it is the one region where the humans are not directly under the thrall of, or even the active manipulation of, the demons. The humans did an admirable job of ruining things for themselves after the Abjuration, without demonic assistance.

They stripped what few non-sustainable resources there were in the region, as rival bands sought to establish control in the wake of the Abjuration.

Now it is an environmental disaster zone, except in one spot. The tundra which could once sustain a very modest amount of life now sustains almost none. Only a small band of humans, hugging a remaining warmer current, lives anywhere within several hundred of miles of other humans. And these, the folk of *Helm’s Camp*, do whatever they must to survive. And that, sadly, includes eating whatever is available. And that, sadly, includes the remains of each other.

Society has almost used itself up and died out, but by turning to cannibalism and necrophagy, in addition to what fish and marine mammals they can lay their hands on, Helm’s Camp still clings to a fragile existence. Leagues and leagues stretch before you, without a tree, shrub, animal or even bird to break the monotony.

Takuk is thus one isolated town near the North Pole of the World, with hundreds of miles of iceberg choked ocean and denuded polar desert in every direction. Plus, there are a few oddities here and there. Most are reasonably nearby the Camp:

The Monument, a paean in bone to the (late, unlamented) Great Leader, dominates the landscape from anywhere near the Camp.

The Observatory of Pisto, several days’ journey to the southwest of the Camp, is an important archaeological site which—in a refreshing change of pace—actually has the magical wonders attributed to it by legend still in place.

Finally, *The Kin* are a splinter group of seven demons (one representing each of the Seven Deadly Sins) inhabiting a nest south of Helm’s Camp. They prey on the humans,

taking one each per year to sustain themselves. The Kin are, as discussed in the scenario *It's Not a Lie, As Long As You Believe That It's True*, not exactly what you would call schemers, but they are quite dangerous.

The interesting part of Takuk, Helms' Camp and its environs, lies far to the north of the Known World. It can only be practically accessed by sea. The Observatory of Pisto, up against the southern mountains, lies a good 500 miles north of the northern map edge of Fallingstar. This means that it (and Helm's Camp) are about a month's worth of sailing either north up the west coast from the Crannoch, or a week or so up the east coast from Suncove (the "Farm").

Since the demons try very hard to interdict all sea travel headed toward or from Suncove, in all likelihood any PLAYERS headed to Takuk will be headed for the Observatory by sailing north up the western coast. When the KEEPER decides to either introduce the PLAYERS to Takuk generally, or to send them on an errand to the Observatory of Pisto specifically, an old sea map should be introduced, depicting only the western marine route.

The western marine route can be safely traversed by any reasonably sound, shallow drafted ocean-going vessel travelling during the summer, with careful precision. It is entirely possible to get iced in and forced to winter in Takuk; the passable season is about four months per year. Other than the sheer length of the voyage, getting there is largely a matter of provisions and knowing where you are going.

The weather and light conditions are highly seasonal. Helm's Camp is above the World's northern sidereal circle. For a few days around the summer solstice, there is little darkness. For a few days around the winter solstice, there is little light.

Temperatures in the summer at Helm's Camp range between 20 and 40 degrees F. and between -20 and 0 degrees F during the winter. Dangerously cold days, where travel

is extremely risky if not probably fatal (below -20 degrees F) are not uncommon. It is also windy, with wind chills often knocking an effective 20 degrees off the temperature.

Note that, in this regard, the weather is far more predictable and actually less deadly than it can be in Fallingstar, with its violent killer blizzards. It may be that this is because Takuk was farther removed than Fallingstar from the Abjuration. In any event, the PLAYERS still must have good winter gear, or they will freeze to death aboard ship before they ever get to Helm's Camp.

There are virtually no resources once one gets above the sidereal circle. There is no wood; there is not even tundra or scrub. There is only barren, icy, rocky desert with frozen over fresh water sources. The icebergs can be mined for fresh water, and there are fish in the seas at just the right spots. There are no birds except for arctic marine birds (puffins and the like), and even they are scattered. Seals, walruses, whales and the occasional polar bear might be spotted. The only wood is driftwood at odd intervals.

Someone trying to eke out survival in Takuk would do one of two things. If they were smart and good stewards, they would follow a pretty basic subsistence lifestyle. They would position themselves somewhere sheltered and warm(er), where there was fresh water. They would live largely on fish and marine mammals; burrow into the earth to try and stay warm; and use every part of an animal down to the squeal. They would carefully scour the environment for anything edible or buildable, including any isolated plant pockets (kelp, northern berries), and hang on as best they could.

Either that would happen, or they'd use up what there was pretty quickly, raid and steal everything into one location, and then kill one another until an equilibrium was reached. That brings us to the history of Takuk, post-Abjuration.



History

Takuk has always been a polar region with few if any permanent residents, a few more seasonal fishing, logging and whaling camps, and no government or political organization. Expeditions would sail north from Fallingstar and/or Suncove in the spring and come back with shiploads of timber, ivory, salted fish, and whale in the fall. Often they would establish a seasonal beach camp, some of which would be semi-improved or reused perennially.

No one agreed on who governed the area, but because few enough people ventured into the far North, it never really came to blows. Everyone claimed the region, but no one did anything to enforce that claim. Piracy and bandits did occasionally spring up, but it was up to the government of the aggrieved, or the aggrieved themselves, to do something about the problem.

When the Abjuration came down, a goodly number of groups of survivors decided that the farther away they could get from what was left of the Known World, the better. Flotillas of refugees sailed far to the north, thousands in all, with many stopping at known hospitable campsites and seasonal bases. The smarter ones took supplies and other things particularly suited to exist in an arctic environment. Others took their chickens, sick relatives, and even a few cows.

It only took toward the end of the first winter after the Abjuration for tensions to rise and for war to break out. At first, ill-prepared people faced with starvation stripped everything edible that they could find from the countryside, from fish to berries to bark to the animals they brought with them. When those ran out, they started raiding anyone else that they could find for supplies.

When it dawned on people that those they were raiding were as desperate as they were, people began to see the other people themselves as the resource—and as the next meal. The frozen ground and plentiful salt

water made preservation and storage of fellow refugees a snap. Cannibalism ran rampant in short order. Everyone told themselves that it was just to last through the winter, until relief came.

The next summer, a few people tried to sail south. More people would have, if bodies had not started to float back with startling regularity. After that, it only took a few appearances by the ghost ships to deter anyone from trying to leave.

The largest group of refugees, made up of related clansmen from Fallingstar, numbered in the several hundreds. Their clan (from the Crosston area) had historically worked a small, seasonal ivory base at Helm's Camp, and they rendezvoused there.

They beached their ships at the head of the harbor and found the most sheltered and hospitable part of the harbor that they could. They used the timbers from their ships to build defensible buildings and a watch tower, and tried to become as self-sufficient as possible. Being from Fallingstar, and knowing that the wizards had left to do something desperate, they figured more than others that they would best be far away from the war for a long while, and planned accordingly.

Despite their best efforts, however, the people of Helm's Camp began to suffer the same fate as the rest: the area that they had settled just was not big enough for several hundred men, women and children over the long term. While they resisted for over a year, and never stooped to murder, people succumbed to disease and starvation and the remains of these were (if you will pardon the pun) fair game.

As the years went on, Takuk became dotted with several dozen refugee camps, ranging from a few dozen to several hundred people, exhausting the local resources in the hope of just staying alive. One by one, the camps were overcome by raids from others, and consumed (figuratively and literally).

After a decade, someone got the bright idea that putting together an effective, well-

armed raiding force that stuck together against everyone else, no matter what, might be worth a try. A short but charismatic fellow, who took the name of Moon Sun Sky when he rose to power, organized the people of Helm's Camp. (His name, though known, was not permitted to be spoken in his presence; hence, he became colloquially referred to as the "Great Leader").

The Great Leader drilled the camp in the ways of guerrilla warfare, and taught them the value of not just fighting an enemy, but intimidating them before a blow was struck. This he did by sinking to new lows of ruthlessness.

People who spoke his name in his presence were killed and eaten. People who fought back were killed and eaten. People who submitted were killed and eaten, some time later and generally last, but every once in a while, deemed worthy of joining the Great Leader's camp.

As a testament to his greatness, but mostly to keep people in line when he was not looking, the Great Leader caused *the Monument* to be erected. The Monument is an immense, cathedral-shaped building hundreds of feet high, visible from many miles away across the flat and denuded expanse of Takuk.

The Monument's building blocks were the cracked, gnawed and devoured remnants of anyone who fell afoul of the Great Leader, glued together with pitch, supplemented with rock and built into as high a tower as possible.

Over the next several years, everything of value in Takuk was sucked dry and/or transferred to Helm's Camp. Every tree, flowering shrub, worthwhile person, movable food source, fuel source, bit of buildable stone, bucket of pitch, weapon, tool or other usable thing that could be located was brought back to Helm's Camp and used to maximize the standard of living for the Great Leader's "chosen few."

As these things tend to go, the "Great Leader's" declared enemies (everyone but his chosen few) eventually were wiped out. By then quite old, the "Great Leader" then made a mistake. Desperate to maintain his position, the "Great Leader" attempted to create a new enemy—anyone at Helm's Camp who were not completely loyal to him. This did not go over well.

The "Great Leader" was promptly assassinated, and the remaining people of Helm's Camp reverted to the traditional, clan-based consensus government that they had followed in Fallingstar. Some of the "Great Leader's" lessons and attitudes stay with them, however.

The "Great Leader" was assassinated about 50 years ago. Since then, the resources that they stripped from a vast area have sustained Helm's Camp at a population level of around 100. There's enough food (either in the ocean or, if fish cannot be caught, in the nearby graves/storage lockers) to sustain the population at this level, at least for a while.

They have gotten very good at stretching things, recycling, and making things last, while they look for a way out. Unfortunately, they do not have the wherewithal to build a large, ocean-going ship, and early efforts to send out exploratory skiffs were met rather rudely.

People no longer stray far on expeditions away from Helm's Camp, and have not done so for decades. Doing so is widely viewed as suicidal.

The reasons why people stick close to camp nowadays are threefold. First come *The Kin*. No one is certain exactly what The Kin are, but people are frightened of them. No one is certain how many of them there are. The consensus is that there are more than a few, but they are careful about being seen. They appear seemingly out of nowhere, grab one or more people, and vanish.



The only one that anyone has gotten a good look at is a huge, hulking brute of a man, dressed in furs, and wearing a hood. Estimates of his size vary from 7 to 9 feet tall, and his weight from 300 to 500 pounds of hulking muscle.

Once, a voice from the darkness called this one “Junior”, which is how “The Kin” got their name. They do not always attack expeditions, and they sometimes raid Helm’s Camp itself; however, marine expeditions headed south are always driven back, minus a few hands.

Each year, with regularity, between 5 and 10 people are taken, never to be seen again. Efforts to track them have failed, and no one has ever returned once taken. “Junior” snapped the first few warriors to try and stop him in half with his bare hands.

What they cannot figure out, though, is how The Kin always seem to know when

someone is heading out. The answer is that one of The Kin, a shape-shifting doppelganger, lives among them, changing identities periodically (and eliminating the real person) to avoid suspicion and maintain continuity.

“Uncle Bob” was, for many years, an elder and right-hand man to the Great Leader, and was instrumental in his assassination. Later, he assumed the identity of a young girl, a popular cook, and a young man determined to find out if any people in the south still survived.

At present, “Uncle Bob” has gone back to being the cook (Rolf) again, a position that puts him in the middle of social activity. He is quite proud of his success so far.

The second factor discouraging exploration is *The Questing Beast*. The Questing Beast is a pre-Abjuration feature of life in Takuk that survived the Abjuration. Stories and

rumors about it continued to persist well after the Abjuration, and mysterious disappearances of explorers or remote settlements continued to be attributed to it, up until the time of the “Great Leader.” People then started to run into it, and away from it. Fortunately, it has not attacked Helm’s Camp, and does not give chase for long.

The Questing Beast is said to have been visited on Takuk by one of the nature gods of old, as a punishment for damage to a sacred grove. It is said to be an immense carnivore of some sort, with three heads, consuming all in its path.

In fact, the Questing Beast does exist, and is as these stories describe it. It is not a demon, but rather a magically summoned creature that survived the Abjuration by virtue of the remoteness of the area. In fact, if it ever ran into a demon, it would probably try to eat it. The Questing Beast is a magical sort of fiery, entropy elemental, consuming all in its path.

Third, there really isn’t anything left nowadays to pillage.

Motivation-the people

To get a sense of how the people of Helm’s Camp go about their daily lives, the KEEPER might want to review such “stabilized aftermath” post-apocalyptic films and stories such as Land of the Dead (2005), 28 Weeks Later (2007), and especially Nevil Shute’s 1957 novel On the Beach. As far as they know, the rest of the World has been wiped out, they are (mostly) safe for now, but their supplies are limited and, eventually, they are all doomed. So it’s time to maintain a stiff upper lip and wait to die, but why suffer while waiting for the inevitable? As a result, they live for the here and now.

The people have learned on a superficial level that they need to be careful in how they live their lives and use resources. Nonetheless, they believe that in the absence of any prospect of escape or betterment, they

are *entitled* to a certain amount of creature comfort, and conduct themselves accordingly. And that entitlement mindset is at the core of everything that they do.

No one new has arrived at Helm’s Camp since the time of the Great Leader, and they believe that it is likely that they are the last people in the World, setting aside who or whatever The Kin are.

At the same time, there is a siege mentality afoot. The people of Helm’s Camp keep getting picked off, with predictable regularity, by something they cannot find and cannot seem to defeat.

Ways and Traditions

Culture: As in Fallingstar, emphasis is placed on values such as courage, self-sufficiency, determination, and generosity. Social status is measured by the extent to which one is able to be hospitable and give gifts.

Know-how and Resources: Everyone is copasetic with the idea of eating the dead. What else are they going to do with them? Let the fish eat them? (Sometimes, actually, they do let the fish eat them, as bait and in small bits). They’re not religious about it or anything; it’s simply what they have to do to survive in relative comfort.

People dress in skins (mostly furs and leather from marine mammals). Grease is used to waterproof clothing. Clothing is well-made. Armor is non-existent, beyond the protective value of their leathers; it is far too cold for metal armor.

Everyone person of fighting age will have a willow and/or leather shield and a leather skullcap as protection, in addition to their furs (Armor 2 or 3). Distressingly for The Kin, however, and for any demons that might have to face a Takuk export, there are a decent number of iron or steel tools and weapons at Helm’s Camp. There are a goodly number of steel battleaxes, spearheads and arrowheads, and just about every one has a carefully cared-for, honest-to-goodness steel dagger.





If you don't use it, then what good is it?

Bows are also in fair abundance. As in Fallingstar, they are, prized, almost irreplaceable possessions, invaluable for hunting game, and made from laminate, bone and sinew. The people also tend to be skilled slingers, learning to use them to take seabirds at an early age, and the sling is a

very common weapon.

The people know how to smith, and a smithy is available to fix iron tools, but as this is very fuel intensive, it is rare that the fire is stoked that high.

As in Fallingstar, the people are skilled at weaving, spinning, fulling, and surviving

their harsh climate. Most are literate, and families teach their own children the basics of reading, writing and farming, in addition to any family trade. Medical knowledge is quite good, and the healers understand and equate dirt with infection. Healers are able to treat or at least ameliorate most common curable diseases, infections, and survivable wounds.

The initial wave of refugees did bring books with them, and there is a fair collection of books in each house. People also keep their own family bibles, recording births, deaths and other significant events.

Most supplies are theoretically available in Helm's Camp, if you can somehow convince the populace to let you have them. Good luck with that.

Motivation--The Leaders

To give you an idea of what the leadership situation is like in Helm's Camp, another movie reference is in order: The Thing.

There are only 92 entities at the camp at present: 91 humans and one demon (Uncle Bob posing as human). No one is really in charge, in the sense of having any legitimate, compulsory authority. People are scared and under stress, but as long as things are quiet, routine decisions get made by consensus. However, there is usually a lot of bickering, deal-making and trade-offs involved. And no one *ever* goes outside alone.

When someone goes missing, a cycle of panic sets in. People yell and scream and flail about, until a few alpha types take charge and start barking orders. Sometimes they get listened to, and sometimes they do not. People tend to follow whichever conflicting opinion most assuages their concerns about what to do and how to keep safe, at least for a while.

Then the dickering and efforts at consensus decision-making strike back up. Things tend to settle down in a few days, and the cycle repeats. People are able to gather and have rational discourse about things not

related to The Kin, often putting things to a show of hands. The threat of being abducted imposes a certain attitude of camaraderie and "not sweating the small stuff", so the democratic approach works as long as no one feels like they are being treated "unfairly". This means that no one gets anything that everyone else does not also have. That is, at least, until the next time that someone goes missing.

Regional Personality

Superficially Loyal: There is a lot of lip service paid in Helm's Camp to the notion of sticking together, but people are quick to scapegoat and/or sacrifice anyone who threatens their personal comfort. Things are constantly put to votes, but the votes are only followed through on if everyone concerned feels like they are getting their fair share.

Xenophobic: A few people suspect that The Kin, whoever they are, have an agent on the inside. They always strike at the worst possible moment, when people are distracted or at their most vulnerable. They seem to know how to get in and out of town unobserved. Anything new or strange is going to be viewed with suspicion until they satisfactorily demonstrate that they are not demons.

Cautious: The culture perceives itself as absolutely entitled to a certain standard of living, to be maintained as long as possible. They are careful with resources, not because they give a fig about ecology or future generations, but because what's theirs is theirs.

Hedonistic: New and unusual things have enormous value and lend great social status. A new book that no one else has is invaluable. Of course, such a thing will become the subject of an emergency meeting of the town, where vote after vote will be taken as to what to do with it.

Votes are openly bought and sold, and people learned long ago to carve out their slice of pork from the democratic process.



If they do not get what they have coming to them (in their view), they do not vote for it. A lot of time is spent debating what is “fair” and “just”, as opposed to “lawful” or “wise.” A lot of time and energy is also spent in coming up with new games, hobbies and ways to have fun.

Competent: These are, however, smart people with good skill sets. They are literate and educated (they have to keep themselves amused when the fish are not biting). They know how to do many tasks correctly and efficiently, except, sadly, for government.

Atheist: The PLAYERS might well be relieved to not have to deal with priests of the Circle for a change. Religion has not made it this far north. The people believe that the gods were shut off when the Abjuration came down, and the past 100 years of bare bones survival have given them no reason to think otherwise.

It bears mention that the foregoing descriptors apply with equal force to The Kin’s demonic splinter cell. They are nominally consensus-oriented, but their greatest weakness is that they really are not loyal to one another. They are competent, cautious and paranoid, but it is all a thin veneer over their individual agendas.

Names and Appearances

The people at Helm’s Camp are all of human descent and their ancestors hail from Crosston in Fallingstar. None of them have any significant amount of Elven blood in them. Everyone at Helm’s Camp uses a Norse style patronymic (e.g., Robert Rolandsson, Gerta Rolandsdottir), and all view themselves as still belonging to the Crosston clan of Fallingstar.

Sample female names: Thora, Freyja, Gerta, Birgit, Lissa, Maire.

Sample male names: Roland, Robert, Sven, Thor, Uif, Bjorne, Arne.

Outlooks

Strangers: The arrival of anyone at Helm’s Camp, or even the mere sighting of a ship,

provokes a crisis. No one has been seen for 100 years and the people of Helm’s Camp believe that they are the last men in the World, living on borrowed time. So the arrival of strangers at Helm’s Camp results in a cascade of progressive psychological stages, the first being fear and suspicion. The initial consensus will be that it must be some kind of trick, and that perhaps the PLAYERS are demons. They will probably be shot at from shore, and responding with violence will probably result in a panic.

Efforts at diplomacy and negotiation will probably result in the PLAYERS being asked to drop anchor or otherwise make camp outside of town. A gaggle of frightened alpha male types will approach the PLAYERS’ camp or boat, and will look to be convinced that the PLAYERS are other mortals.

Role-play out these efforts; the truth and the PLAYERS following security-related requests from the locals are most likely to be persuasive. (The locals are aware that demons cannot easily be harmed other than by steel, since The Kin resist weapons of bone and flint. The PLAYERS allowing themselves to be cut by a flint knife will go a long way toward defusing tension).

Assuming that the locals decide that the PLAYERS are not demons, attitudes will shift quickly. They will be invited into Helm’s Camp, and once the rest of the populace becomes convinced, they will become celebrities. People will want to know what they have brought; what news is there of the World; how they got here; can any of them work magic; what is left of the World to the south; and why they are here. Again, honesty is the best policy.

Following shock and elation will come bargaining. Factions will quickly form. Some will want to bargain for passage away from Takuk. Some will want to bargain for knowledge and/or goods (especially those that are not locally produced). They do have steel, leather, ivory and a variety of food and durable goods to trade. Some will throw themselves at orientation-appropriate

members of the PLAYERS' crew, regardless of their marital status.

Eventually, though not at first, this kind of competition may erupt in violence, either involving, or simply over, the PLAYERS. If the PLAYERS seem unable to defend themselves, the citizenry may try to eliminate them and steal their ship.

The entire worldview of the people of Takuk will have been rocked; they will be especially interested to know how things are in Fallingstar, or whether there is more sustainable land to be had somewhere (say, in a newly depopulated Western Isles). The PLAYERS' navigation charts will be worth killing over.

Finally, "Rolf the Cook" (the demonic Uncle Bob) will certainly take notice of the arrival, and The Kin will be alerted to the newcomers. They, too, will be interested to learn about whatever is left of civilization to the south, and particularly of any rumors about organized demonic activity. Not so that they can join up with other demons, necessarily, but rather simply because knowledge is power.

Adepts, in particular, will be seen as rock stars. These people know what magic can do against demons, and are more covetous of it than afraid of it. Adepts will also be high on the target list for assassination by The Kin.

Magic: Native spell-casters are not unheard of, with perhaps 1 in 500 births having magical Aptitude. In the early years after the Abjuration, there were a handful of Adepts born in Takuk; and without the "Majestic Plateau" demons nudging the people toward prejudice, they were viewed as valued and welcome members of society.

That was before the time of the "Great Leader", however. Seeing Adepts as a threat to his control, those alive at the time managed to meet unfortunate deaths or otherwise mysteriously disappeared. Some were murdered by the Great Leader, others were sent on suicide missions by The Kin's

infiltrator, and still others died in the various raids and consolidation campaigns.

At present, there are no Adepts in Helm's Camp. If one was born, the child would probably be targeted for elimination by The Kin, but would be carefully protected and welcomed by the people of Helm's Camp.

Demons: Demons are generally believed to have been wiped out—along with the *rest* of the World—in the Abjuration. However, it is generally known (accurately, for a change), that a few of them managed to survive.

No one is sure exactly how many there are in Takuk, other than "at least a few." All the ones that they have seen are generally humanoid in size and shape. The people of Helm's Camp have learned the hard way about how only steel or magic are much of a defense against the demons.

Enemies and Conflicts: Apart from internal bickering and periodic harassment at the hands of The Kin, things are fairly peaceful. Society is consumed (pardon the pun) with making sure that everyone is not just surviving, but as comfortable as possible. People act entitled, and resist taking away their creature comforts as unfair.

Other Races: No one alive has seen any living race other than a human, but they know that they existed at one time. There are a few dwarf and Halfling bodies out in the ice cairns, but those are viewed as last ditch rations.

Religion

The old gods and goddesses of Fallingstar are still invoked, although not actively worshipped. The chief among these are Wohn, god of the sky and productive industry, and Iton, goddess of luck and the hearth.

No one has come up here spreading the creed of the Circle.





Map Key

1 inch=8 miles. Travel cross-country by land is extremely difficult and easily lethal for the unprepared. See the accompanying boxed material for arctic region spot rules and travel guidelines.

Sea travel speed varies, but in an ice free season with a competent crew and navigational charts, ship speed should work out to about 2/3 of normal.

Helm's Camp: The last stand of humanity in Takuk, Helm's Camp sits on an excellent natural harbor, sheltered from the worst of the environment, and on a warm current supplied with fish, fowl and marine mammals. Please refer to the key on the accompanying map.

1. Wharf. This is a well-built and well-maintained stone and wood dock, complete with a harbormaster's office and piles of hard stores (crates, barrels, stone, driftwood)

carefully arranged and sheltered from the elements. There is a great deal of hard stores on the dock: hundreds of tons of each, meticulously stripped and stockpiled here over the past 100 years from a good chunk of the planet.

A fleet of about 10 or so small, short-range vessels (coracles, skiffs) are moored at wharf or hauled out onto shore, depending on the season. There are no large or seaworthy vessels, although the beached and picked over skeletons of several dot the shore of the area.

2. Non-indigenous trees. Decades ago, the early refugees (and later, the "Great Leader") scoured the land for hardy examples of northern trees, as well as topsoil. Helm's Camp is surrounded by a windbreak of mature pines, hawthorns and hardy apricots, as well as stands of salmonberries. These are invaluable to the community both from the standpoint of

providing pitch but as well as from fending off scurvy.

Of course, there now are not any others for hundreds of miles in every direction, but to the people of Helm's Camp, that's OK because there aren't any other people left in the World. Right? And even if there are a few other people left in the World, they need what they need.

3. Ice Cave/Crevasse. Used by the community as a cesspool. Who knows what is down there after 100 years of occupation.

4. Lichfield/Ice Cairns. These stretch, literally, for about ½ mile in every direction from the occupied part of town. Basically, they are shallow mass graves dug in the permafrost, full of stripped, gutted and salted remains. Some of the ones closer in are of fish and marine mammals; most, however, are human. Some care has been given to preventing the heat from town from radiating out into the cairns.

The people do not volunteer information about what lies in the thousands of cairns, and since they eat human remains as a last preference, the topic might never come up. Anyone spending any amount of time in Helm's Camp will see meat being taken out of one or more cairns on a regular basis, and might simply conclude that they are using the permafrost as natural refrigeration.

On the other hand, they don't lie about it either. They tend to be very matter-of-fact about the entire situation: "waste not, want not."

5. Lookout Tower/Beacon. This former lighthouse is about 50' high and in immaculate condition. It is always kept manned by a pair of lookouts with spyglasses and alarm bells. They are on the lookout for The Kin, and will initially assume that anyone seen approaching must be them. The beacon is not kept lit, apart from enough light for lookouts to work by.

6. Town Hall. This is a larger, two room building where a fire is kept, meals are communally prepared, and people hang out

when not working. There are books, games, music, singing, contests, public debates, other forms of social intercourse.

7. Workshop. A second forge fire is kept here, along with carpentry, weaving and metalworking tools and projects.

8. "Private" Quarters. The entire populace sleeps either in the workshop, harbor master's office, lookout tower, common hall, or in one of five vintage, pre-Abjuration stone bunkhouses at the center of town.

Quarters are tight, to say the least. Most people spend most of their off-time in the common hall.

BRP Rules Reminders—The Arctic

With the exception of the area immediately around Helm's Camp, the land in Takuk is what the BRP rules book would call a "freezing cold/ice" environment. Movement is horrible: 20% of usual, or 1/3 with adaptive gear (sleigh, skis, and snowshoes).

In the Cold Waste areas, it is further plagued by winds which are on average STR 5 (-10% to all skills, and a potential for being blown over if exposed to the wind's full force when any extraordinary action is being taken).

Regardless, the freezing cold begins to impose penalties given enough time. After ½ CON days of exposure, any physical action beyond very slow movement requires a Stamina (CON x5) check. Failure means that 1 point of damage is sustained, although the action still succeeds. After a number of days equal to CON, all rolls (mental and physical) are considered *Difficult*.

9. Shrine of the "Great Leader". This is an old temple. At a distance, it appears to be made out of white stone. On closer examination, it is built out of cracked bits of (often human) bone mortared together with pitch and guano. It is, nonetheless, rather artistic, with delicate arches and buttresses.



Inside, it is empty save for a stone slab on which lies, encased in semi-opaque pine resin, the well-preserved body of the “Great Leader.”

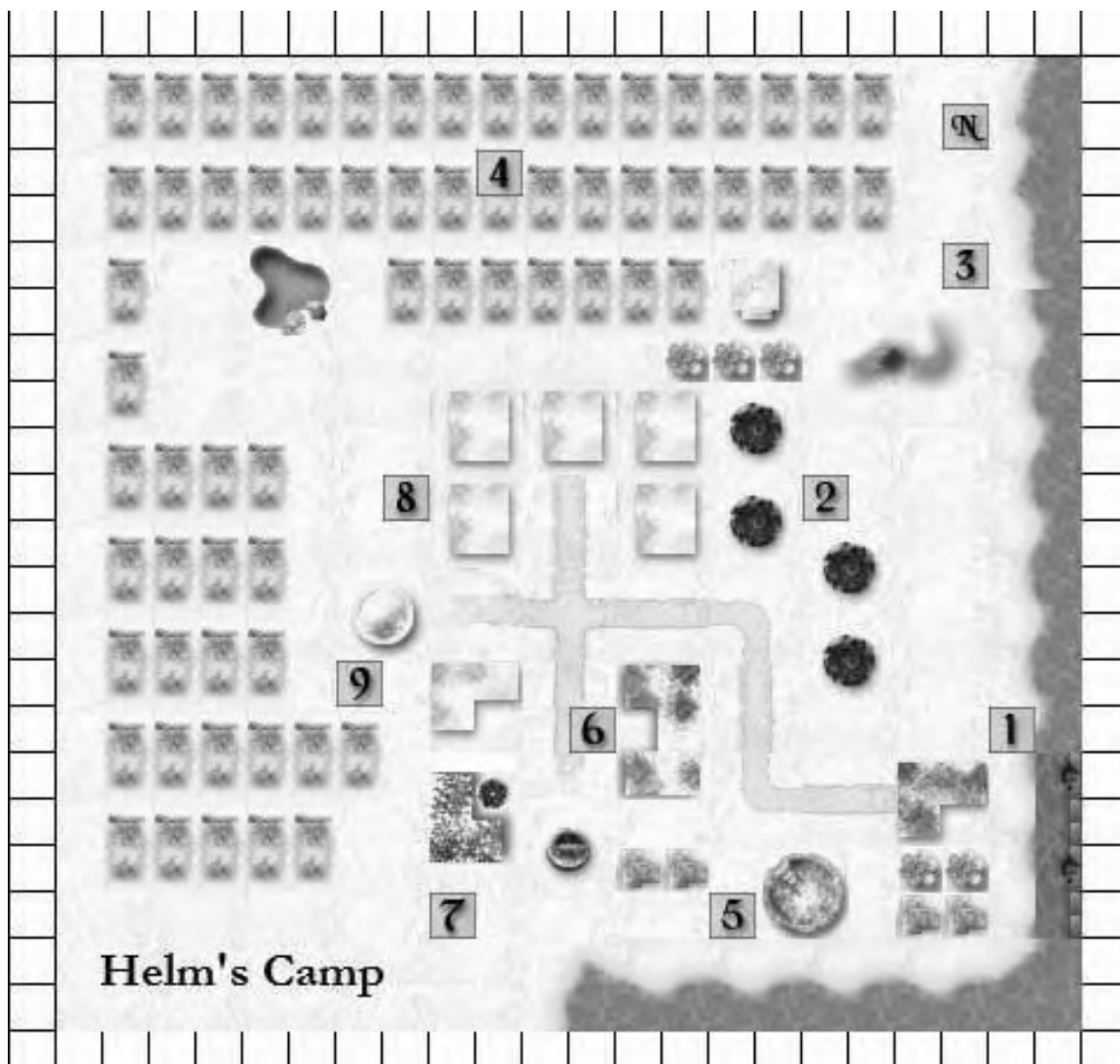
The psychic stench of evil is overwhelming to any Adept using *Second Sight*, and this would be an excellent place to drop a prophetic vision of doom on the PLAYERS.

The “Great Leader” himself is not an impressive sight. A small, old, fat, unattractive man with distinctly Fallingstar-derived features, he is dressed in full steel, gold and silver chased battle plate armor

(SIZ 10) and lies in state with a steel great sword.

Of course, one would have to chisel off the petrified resin to get it, and the locals probably would not like it much. They do not revere him, exactly, so much as fear what would happen if the tyrant’s body were disturbed.

As additional temptation, an incantation for the *Sharpen* spell at +5 Adjusted POW might be inscribed on the sword, requiring examination of both sides of it to take advantage of.



Map of Helm's Camp. 1 sq.=50'. No, it's not a big place.

The Monument: Some 80 miles inland and to the west of Helm's Camp is *the Monument*. Constructed by the "Great Leader" as a testament to his might and control, and to cow any possible opposition, the Monument is a huge pile of potential resources. Thousands and thousands of people—all the victims of the "Great Leader" who either were not fit to eat or who were previously eaten—are piled here in what amounts to a enormous burial mound.

Periodically, as bones are accumulated, the people of Helm's Camp make a perilous journey across the White Waste to add to the mammoth midden heap and build it into a cathedral. It really does not make any sense, to tell the truth; it's just the way they have become accustomed to doing things.

This tradition started in the days of the "Great Leader" and was always a grand party, with competitions and feats of strength to determine who got the honor of hauling the bones away. There is no sentiment at all in Helm's Camp to take the hard-earned party away from the people.

The Monument will profoundly disturb any Adept who even catches sight of it (and it is visible from many miles away). It acts as a **Crazy Powerful Artifact** for **Destroy** magic: an automatic +5 to adjusted POW for any **Destroy** magic if within sight of it, a further +5 **Tool** if close to it, and a +5 **Incantation** for any spell deemed to call upon **Destroy** magic if the Adept is actually touching it. It also immunizes the caster against spell burn from any **Destroy** casting, but not from **Graying**.

If the KEEPER is using **Fear Checks**, drawing on the sympathetic magic of the Monument will force a **Fear Check (Distraught)**. It's a viscerally nasty place.

The White Waste: There is not much to say about the White Waste, because there is *nothing there*. **Survival** checks for food are **Impossible**; water is plentiful if you have some way to melt ice.

Imagine if you had a piece of pristine but

stark tundra, and dumped thousands of refugees on it. Then, over the course of the next 100 years and the reigns of several totalitarian, environmentally indifferent warlords, what little was there had been systematically stripped clean, even the dirt. A stray bone, old stump forest, or patch of willow that people overlooked breaks the frozen monotony, but that is about it. The land has been stripped completely bare.

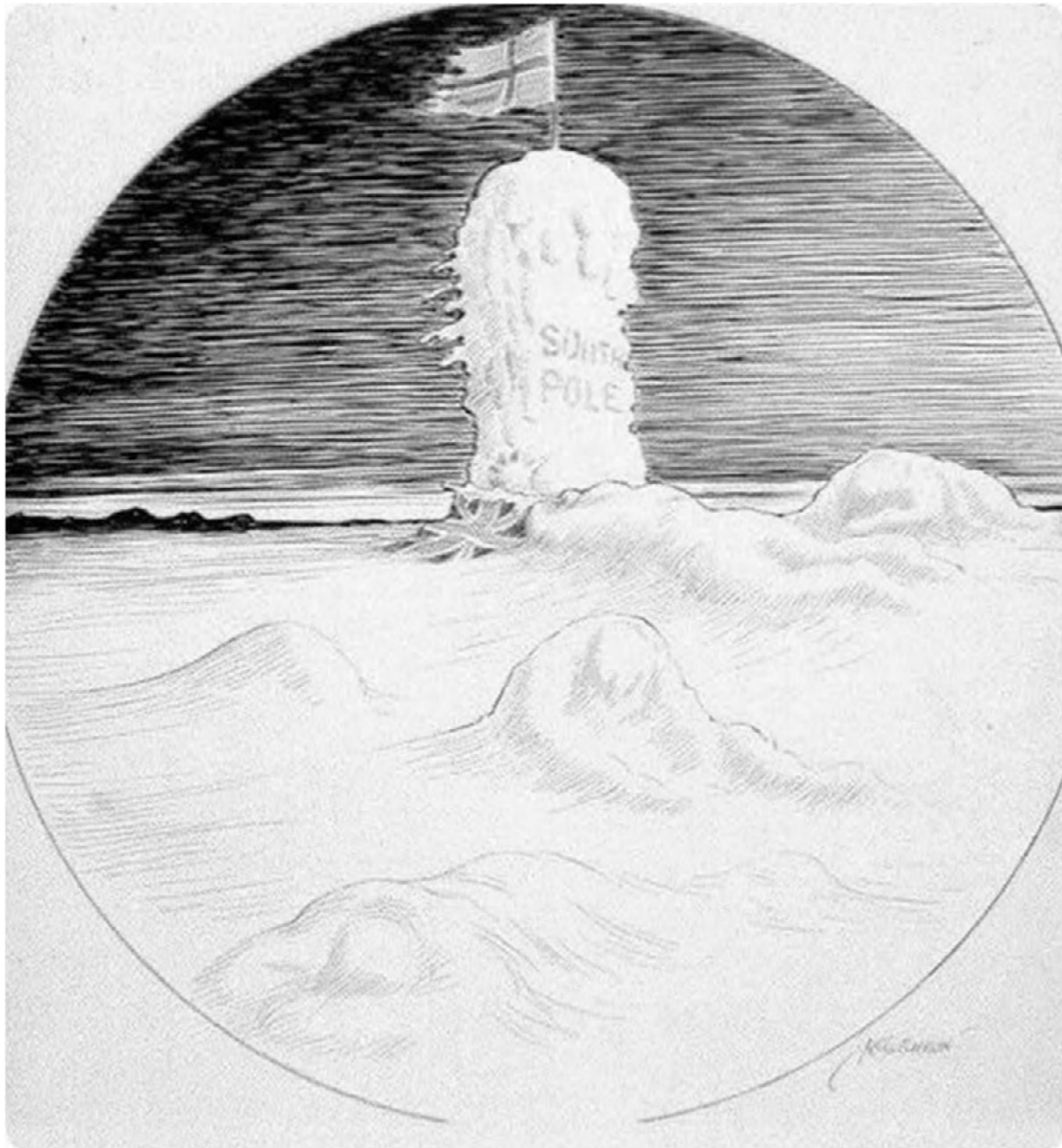
The Observatory of Pisto: The Observatory of Pisto ("PIE-sto") is a place of legend, known to most experts in arcane lore throughout the World. Knowing exactly where it is, however, is another matter.

The Observatory was, before the Abjuration, the private tower of the Elven wizard Pisto the Magnificent. Feel free to trot out whatever stereotyped or hackneyed "great white wizard" legends you see fit to apply to the mysterious Pisto: impossibly old, impossibly powerful, kindly, sage, fond of travelling about the lands in disguise to the test the goodness of the small folk, an equally magical steed with eight legs; feel free to lay it on thick. What is important is that Pisto disappeared before the Abjuration was brought down, and the stories are consistent that he was not at the last stand at The Redoubt in the Dells.

As alluded to above, Elven magic was focused on the acquisition of knowledge and the withholding of knowledge. They were masters at seeing, knowing and hiding. Pisto was renowned for his ability to find anything, for a price. Depending on what it was that you were looking for, the price was often prohibitive, but he always maintained that he could do it. The Observatory was where his retreat, where he would work on his most complex problems. He would also teach master's classes to worthy Adepts in the fields of divination and concealment.

The location of the Observatory is indiscernible through magical means. The Hooded One (the demons' master of magic) has been trying for a long time to find it, if it even still exists. You need a physical map to find it, or to stumble upon it physically.





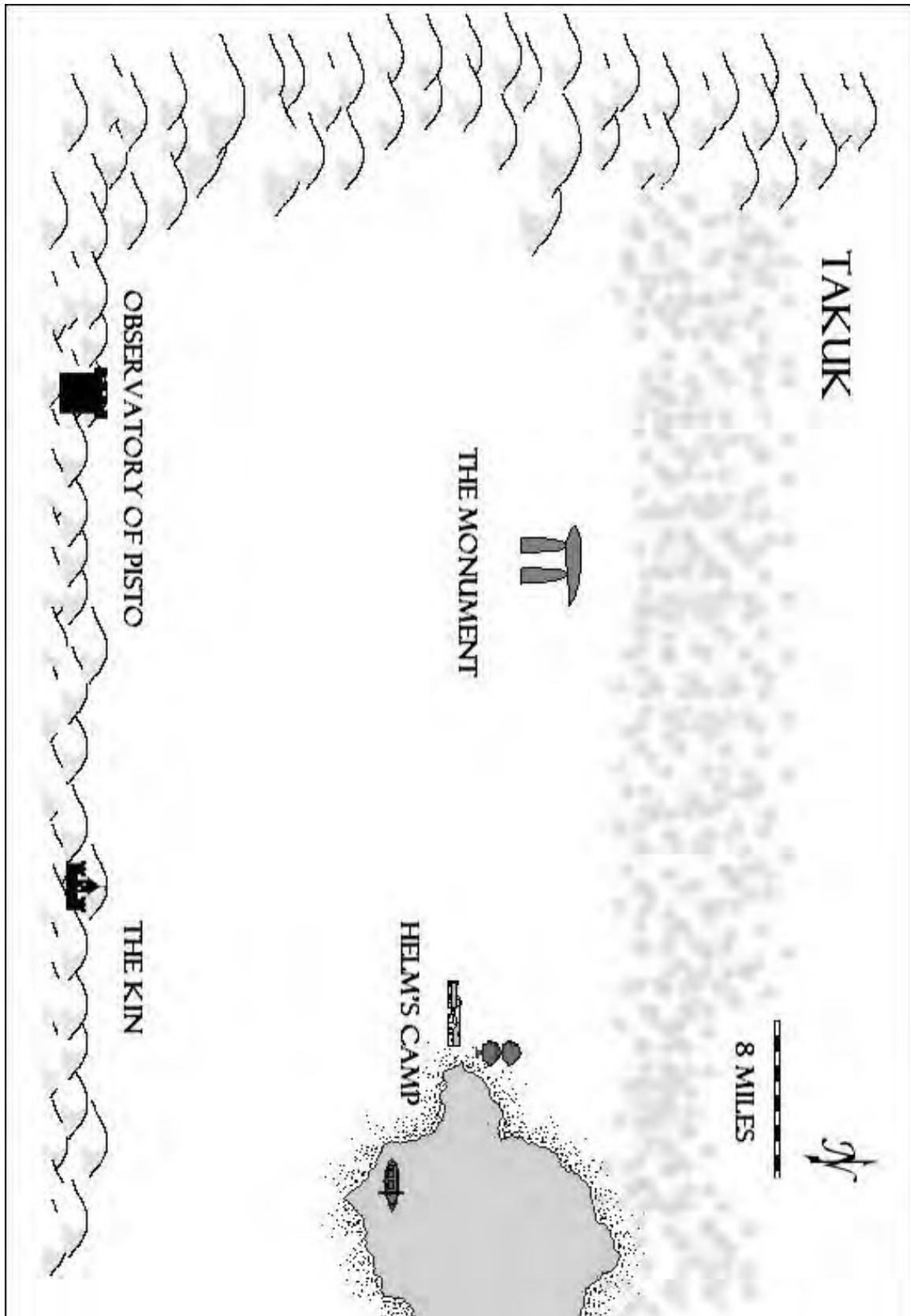
What price, prestige???

A more detailed description of the Observatory is provided in the accompanying scenario, *It's Not A Lie, As Long As You Believe That It's True*. But by way of overview, it lies in hidden in the mountains between Fallingstar and Takuk, only about 30 miles southwest of The Kin's lair. It is a small Monastery complex, currently uninhabited.

Well, mostly uninhabited. The Kin know

that it is there, and as an obviously still active magical site, have some of Wayne's spawn hang out there to keep an eye on things.

It is also a terminus of sorts for the long-forgotten *Wizards' Highway*. The Highway is a sort of magical, time-compressed subterranean travel route. The branch line connecting it to the Academy in Fallingstar is still intact, but completely forgotten.



Behind The Curtain

Dante's treatment of the gluttons in the Inferno was my starting point, complete with an arctic environment and Cerberus wandering around, eating anyone who strays too far away.

I also wanted to get back to my Jared Diamond inspired discussion of how civilizations fail, here because culture is too consumed (pardon the pun) with short-term lifestyle maintenance at the cost of long-term lifestyle sustainability.

In addition, I wanted to highlight how civilizations under food stress often go totalitarian to maintain quality of life for a few, even if it crashes the population.

Finally, I wanted to have a paranoid, eat-or-be-eaten tension to the region.

Like the Monument, the Observatory is a ***Crazy Powerful Artifact*** for ***Locate*** magic: an automatic +5 to adjusted POW for any ***Locate*** magic if within sight of it, a further +5 ***Tool*** if close to it, and a +5 ***Incantation*** for any spell deemed to call upon ***Locate*** magic if the Adept is actually touching it or inside it. It also immunizes the caster against spell burn from any ***Locate*** casting, but not from ***Graying***. In addition, there is a magical engine on the roof that can convert magical items into one-shot uses of magical energy. More details follow in the scenario.

The Kin: ***The Kin*** are a splinter group of seven demons who have set up shop at the southern edge of the interesting part of Takuk, between Helm's Camp and the Observatory at Pisto. They are far enough away from each that people headed to, or visiting, either locale will not stumble upon their home, which is partially concealed underground.

None of them are magically Adept, and to be frank, none of them are all that bright.

Like the humans at Helm's Camp, they believe that they and they alone of demon-kind survived the Abjuration. They know nothing of the "Majestic Plateau", social engineering, or anything at all far-sighted. They just exist and eat what humans they can catch.

The Kin are thoroughly depraved. Apt films to review to give the KEEPER an idea how to handle these fiends are House of 1,000 Corpses, The Hills Have Eyes, Wrong Turn, Vacancy, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, and other entries in the "inbred, depraved, cannibal hillbilly" genre.

While they are structured as and (to some extent) see themselves as a nuclear family, they are not actually related. In fact, the isolation and limited interaction with their own kind have driven them a bit barmy. Capsule descriptions and statistics for each The Kin follow. Note that each corresponds to, and has personality flaws reflective of, one of the Seven Deadly Sins:

Pa: A greedy, grasping, conniving schemer, Pa is the brains of the outfit (to the extent that there are any). He runs the family because he is the overall most competent. He takes the pick of whatever he wants, and really does not give a hoot about anyone else. He is all about himself, and only himself.

Pa is stuck in his half-human, half-wolf shape, and generally runs around naked since the cold does not bother him. Nor do morals, social graces or most other things bother him. He does dress in black and wear a mask when attacking Helm's Camp, along with Junior and Sissy.

Note that, thanks to the Abjuration, Pa cannot infect anyone with lycanthropy.



Min-maxing Destroy magic at the Monument.

Pa (Werewolf), STR 21, CON 13, SIZ 13, INT 13, POW 13, DEX 13, Move 13, HP 13, db: +1d6

Attacks: Bite, 65%, damage 1d4 + 1/2 db (bleeding).

Claws, 45%, damage 1d6+db (bleeding). Gets one claw/claw/bite routine per round.

SQ: 10 points of **armor** (ineffective vs. magic or steel; also, ineffective vs. silver or fire); **regenerates** 1 point/round (unless done with silver, magic or fire). Climb 75%, Dodge 65%, Etiquette 0%, Hide 60%, Jump

80%, Listen 70%, Sense 90%, Spot 70%, Stealth 80%, Track 90%.

Ma: An avatar of gluttony, Ma is an enormous, corpulent, reeking, feral semi-humanoid beast, with long talons, greasy hair, and over 600 pounds of shambling bulk. She only croaks in monosyllabic sentences.

If she cannot eat it, she does not care about it. She is easily distracted by food, and rarely bothers to dress, either.

Ma (Somewhere Between a Ghoul and a Female Avatar of Y'golonac), STR 14, CON 11, SIZ 22, INT 8, POW 13, DEX 11, Move 4 (she's rather ponderous), HP 17, db: +1d6.

Attacks: Bite, 30%, damage 1d6 +db (bleeding).

Claw, 30%, damage 1d6+db (bleeding). Receives one claw/claw/bite routine per round.

If the bite hits, Ma automatically hangs on and does 1d6 of eating (foregoing claw attacks) each successive round. She cannot be dissuaded once she has started feeding, except by brute force, even to the extent of allowing assailants to get unimpeded attacks on her.

SQ: 10 points of **armor** (ineffective vs. magic or steel); Climb 60%, Dodge 45%, Etiquette 0%, Grapple 50%, Hide 35%, Jump 50%, Listen 60%, Sense 40%, Spot 50%, Stealth 60%.

Uncle Bob: Representing pride, Uncle Bob is the smartest of The Kin, but also the physically weakest. He is a doppelganger, able to perfectly mimic human shapes and mannerisms, indefinitely.

He has lived among the humans at Helm's Camp, acting in a variety of roles, for decades. Occasionally, he stages his own death when The Kin attack, and assumes the identity of whomever The Kin successfully carry off. In his natural state, he is a featureless, hairless, sexless, grey humanoid.

Currently, and for the past several years, he has been posing as Rolf the one-armed cook, loved and trusted by all at Helm's Camp after he lost an arm fighting The Kin. He is happily married to a young lass named Jenne who is half his apparent age. (Fortunately, the prohibition on demon spawning applies with equal force to Uncle Bob, or Jenne would have even worse problems).

Uncle Bob is easily flattered and extremely overconfident, and might give himself away under pressure of suspicion.

Uncle Bob (Doppelganger), STR 11, CON 11, SIZ 11, INT 14, POW 11, DEX 11, Move 8, HP 12, db: +0.

Attacks: By weapon. Typically wields a kitchen cleaver (hand axe) 90%, 1d6+1 (bleeding), HP 12.

SQ: 10 points of **armor** (ineffective vs. magic or steel); **shape-change** to perfectly imitate any human (although the armor sometimes gives him away); **Disguise 90% (extremely skilled but overconfident)**, Climb 80%, Cook 85% (human 95%), Dodge 65%, Etiquette 60%, Hide 70%, Jump 70%, Listen 65%, Persuade 60%, Sense 50%, Spot 55%, Stealth 75%, Track 35%.

Junior: Reflecting wrath, Junior is a hooded, deranged, none-too-bright but oh-so-violent hulking killer. He dresses from head to toe in stitched-together, flayed human hides, and wields a length of 3" thick mooring chain as a weapon. He is huge, mute, and the people of Helm's Camp are **Cowed** by him. He and Pa are the two members of The Kin who have been reliably sighted by the humans.

Junior has numerous tactical weaknesses: not smart, not patient, single-mindedly brutal (he **only** listens to Ma or Sissy) and incapable of retreat. He also plays by slasher-flick rules: he senses and preferentially targets misbehavers, even if that is poor strategy. The bad news is that he is **very** hard to kill.

If unmasked, he is a cross between a pus-encrusted zombie and an impossibly shredded weightlifter.

Junior also noticeably avoids the sunlight.

Junior (Troll), STR 23, CON 18, SIZ 26, INT 7, POW 7, DEX 11, Move 8, HP 20, db: +2d6.

Attacks: Great Big Mooring Chain, 90%, damage 1d10 +2 +db (crushing) (cannot be used to parry).

Grapple 90%, special.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); *regenerate 1d3 hit points per round (unless hacked to bits--negative 50 H.P.--, in direct sunlight, or any damage caused by fire)*; Dodge 35%, Sense 55%, Spot 55%. When reduced to between 0 and negative 49 H.P., Junior appears dead, and will lie there, apparently so, until he regenerates and/or can really surprise and hurt someone.

Grand-mama: Emblematic of sloth, Grand-mama does not carry her own weight, except in one important regard. In fact, she (?) is rarely seen. She has a room at The Kin's homestead which she rarely comes out of.

Some sort of female undead, Grand-mama was badly injured, almost destroyed, in the pre-Abjuration war, and never fixed up through sorcery. She is crippled and often hides under her things to surprise the unsuspecting.

Indeed, The Kin probably would not even keep Grand-mama around if her ability to hypnotize mortals with her gaze were not handy. Without it, the 30 or so humans they keep in their "larder" (a dank cave system) as a hedge against starvation would have to be physically subdued before they could be crudely lobotomized with an ice pick to keep them under control. And if they were not lobotomized, they would struggle too much when The Kin vented their twisted impulses on them.

Grand-mama is fond of attacking downed, helpless or otherwise unsuspecting victims, grappling them with her iron grip, and biting their ankles to death.

Grand-mama (Desiccated Corpse-Thing), STR 18, CON 18, SIZ 6, INT 6, POW 20, DEX 6, Move 2, HP 6*, db: +1d4

*Injured and unable to heal post-Abjuration.

Attacks: Grapple, 30% (90% with initiative and successful *Stealth* roll), special.

Bite, 30%, damage 1d4 +blood drain (stifles all resistance and automatically drains 1d6 STR each round thereafter). Works on ankles.

Gaze, POW vs. POW on resistance table, hypnotize and force victim to obey simple, non-destructive instructions. One thrall at a time, please. "Hold still" is her favorite command, while she clamps on to an ankle, or one of the other Kin lobotomizes the thrall from behind. Obviously self-destructive instructions from Grand-mama permit the thrall a roll at INTx5 or less to snap out of it.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel; also ineffective vs. fire); Etiquette 0%, Hide 70%, Listen 60%, Sense 75%, Spot 75%, Stealth 80%.

Sissy: Standing in for lust, she at least is (usually, mostly) dressed. Sissy appears completely, indistinguishably human, but she does not look the same to any two people. Rather, she appears as the viewer's ideal of female beauty, so descriptions of her often contradict one another.

She is a lascivious, flirtatious, uninhibited libertine who will do anything with anyone, at any time. She is easily distracted by shiny things or new things to torment. At the same time, she is thoroughly evil and unspeakably cruel, often conning her targets into believing that she will help them or is not as bad as the rest, only to suddenly turn on her victim in a paroxysm of matter-of-fact slaughter.

Sissy (Succubus), STR 25, CON 18, SIZ 10, INT 10, POW 13, DEX 18, Move 8, HP 14, db: +1d6.

Attacks: Arm, 80%, damage 1d3 +db +grab.

Kiss, only vs. grabbed, immobile or willing targets, 1d3 STR drain per round; this STR loss is permanent. Unwilling victims can make a STR vs. STR check to break away each round (good luck!). Victims drained to 0 STR are dried, lifeless husks.

SQ: 10 points of *armor* (ineffective vs. magic or steel); Dodge 50%, Etiquette 50%, Hide 70%, Insight 60%, Jump 75%, Listen 60%, Persuade 80%, Sense 75%, Spot 75%.

Wayne: Wayne has to be kept locked away,

because he (?) is jealous of everyone and kept picking fights with the rest of The Kin. They throw him a human to eat once a year, and others to breed with every now and again. Beyond that, they just hope that he does not manage to get out and cause more trouble. Only Sissy occasionally sneaks into his dank, filthy cave for conjugal visits, because that's just how she is.

Wayne is not even vaguely humanoid, but rather a tentacled, black, semi-solid Lovecraftian nightmare with a crude face at both ends. Simply seeing Wayne should (at the KEEPER's option) provoke a **Fear Check**.

The World would be far better off without Wayne, because he (?) is the exception to the rule about demons needing lots and lots of souls to breed true with mortals. He only needs one to produce a hybrid Wayne-Spawn.

Every now and then, The Kin cajole, lie, threaten or torture a particularly uppity human into voluntarily sacrificing their soul in the act of getting Biblical with Wayne.

Male or female, Wayne doesn't care and it works either way, with Wayne always being the "father" and the soulless, lobotomized human being the organic test tube for the month or so it takes.

The Spawn eats the parent following eruption for its early nutritional needs. They are then set to various guarding tasks or other errands for The Kin, consistent with the very limited intelligence.

Wayne-Spawn are smaller versions of Wayne, with half the base demonic armor (similar to Overseers). Obviously, the "Majestic Plateau" would love to find out about, and get their hooks into, Wayne.

Wayne (Manga-fu Nether Spawn), STR 17, CON 13, SIZ 21, INT 3, POW 13, DEX 11, Move 7, HP 17, db: +1d6

Attacks: Tentacle Fu, 50%, damage 1d6, attacks with 1d6 tentacles each round.

Grapple 90%, damage special.

SQ: 10 points of **armor** (ineffective vs. magic or steel); half damage from all physical attacks.

Name	Pa	Ma	Uncle Bob	Junior	Grand-mama	Sissy	Wayne
Type	Filthy Beggar Type Werewolf	Corpulent Ghoul	Doppelganger	Slasher Flick Troll	Undead Ankle Biter	Succubus	Tentacle Fu!
Special	Somewhat Smart	Vicious; Can Control Junior	Sneaky	Tough; Scary	Hypnotic	Charming	Spawner; Scary
Sin	Greed	Gluttony	Pride	Wrath	Sloth	Lust	Envy
Flaw	Incredibly Greedy	Tunnel Vision, Only Cares About Food	Overconfident	Single-mindedly Violent, Doesn't Take Precautions	Physically Weak, Immobile	Not Real Bright; Likes Shiny Things.	Mindless, Kept Hidden Away.
INT	13	8	14	7	6	10	3

The Questing Beast

Originally summoned by a priest of an obscure nature god to wreak havoc on a seasonal ivory camp that he thought needed punishing, the Questing Beast is one of the few magically summoned creatures that survived the Abjuration. An informed student of magic might theorize that this is because it was tied to a particular area and a particular task, and this would be correct.

However, as with most creatures tied to the land (c.f., the Elves), the Abjuration drove the Questing Beast a bit barmy. What's an elemental summoned and given a quest to "wreak revenge on civilization" to do when civilization goes kerblooey?

In the case of the Questing Beast, it has interpreted its programming as best it could in light of the radically changed circumstances. It has become an agent of entropy. It does not know where it should go to best effect chaos and change, nor is it capable of formulating any sort of plan. Instead, it lurks around Takuk, tries to figure out what amounts to "organized civilization", and then consumes it. At least, it does so until whatever it happens to be consuming no longer fits the definition of "organized civilization", at which point it gets very confused and tends to wander off.

For the past several decades, it has been stuck in a decision loop. The humans and The Kin seem to be in equipoise. It does not consider that combined state of affairs to amount to "organized civilization." It is more like civilization slowly dying (which is what it wants). If one side ever manages to pull noticeably ahead, the Beast will descend on their stronghold and burn everything that moves. At least, it burns things until it thinks that the balance is restored.

It tends to drift back and forth between The Kin and Helm's Camp, trying (and failing) to make up its rudimentary mind about who deserves to be burnt. It keeps an eye on the Observatory of Pisto, and would definitely not like it if someone tried to activate the tower there.

The Beast appears, generally speaking, to be an elephant-sized, three-headed carnivore (dog-like?) made out of swirling black flames. It does not, however, give off any light or warmth.

The Questing Beast, Fire/Entropy Elemental, STR 13, CON 30, SIZ 30, INT 4, POW 16, DEX 16, Move 10, HP 30, db: +2d6.

Attacks: Bite 90%, 1d6 + 1d6 per round thereafter (lit on "fire"). Even though it has what might be viewed as three "heads", it only gets one bite + one breath blast per round. "Only".

Grapple 90%, damage special +1d6 per round thereafter (lit on "fire").

Disintegration Breath, 50%, 1d10 + lit on "fire", 16 meters range. Target is immolated in black "flames" which ignore fire immunity, fire resistance and all armor. This counts as **Destroy** magic for resistance purposes.

SQ: *Immune to Fire or Destroy magic; invulnerable to most non-magic attacks or damage.* Enchanted weapons do normal damage. Healing magic does damage equal to the number of points that would otherwise be healed.

Skills: Demolition (75%), Dodge (75%), Understand Simple Commands (75%), Listen (75%), Sense (75%), Spot (75%). Impossible to reason with.

A torch or fire lit by the Questing Beast's flames never burns out naturally (although it can be put out normally), and such a torch acts as a +5 **Tool** for either **Fire** or **Destroy** magic.





The handwriting's on the wall, and the party's almost over....

Important People

Thorstein of Helm's Camp: Thorstein is the *de facto* leader of Helm's Camp. That really does not mean a whole lot, since no one really listens to anyone else. Rather, he's a big, charismatic alpha-male type. When people get scared enough to pull in one direction, Thorstein is usually in the vanguard.

As such, he's probably the person who will take the lead in dealing with strangers, try to maintain order when fighting breaks out over the strangers, and deal with attacks from The Kin.



Thorstein, Reluctant Leader (Sort Of)

STR 16 DEX 13 INT 11 CON 16
APP 14 POW 13 SIZ 16 EDU 08
Hits: 16 Age: 46.

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Allegiance Tendencies: Neutral.

Skills: Bargain (40%), Brawling (65%), Dodge (60%), Command (50%), Craft (Fishing) (60%), Hide (40%), Listen (40%), Navigate (30%), Stealth (40%), Status (55%), Spot (40%), Survival (new) 80%.

Attacks:

Spear, steel, 60%, 1d6+1+db, impaling, HP 15.

Sling, 60%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

Defenses: Armor 3 (leather and helmet).

Shield, wicker & leather, 65%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

Deity: Lip Service Only

Wealth: 8 (from a foreseeable future perspective, they are quite comfortable. Who cares about the environment or the future?)

Gear: As listed.

Rachael of Helm's Camp: Rachael is a hyper-intelligent, over-intellectualized 11 year-old dweeb. If she lived in modern New York, she would be a freshman at Columbia, double majoring in French literature and neuroscience, and have a full plate of social adaptation neuroses.

Instead, she is orphaned, lives on the fringes of Helm's Camp society, and has lots of great ideas about how people are doing things wrong.

She wonders if everyone might be better off if they outfitted a fleet and tried to sail south. So what if there are hazards? Eventually, they are all dead if they stay put, so shouldn't they at least try to go somewhere better?

The form of government they follow just keeps things the same; shouldn't the smartest people lead?

She cannot fathom why is it that the other people don't see the pattern to The Kin's attacks: a certain number every year; always striking at an opportune moment when watchfulness is at its lowest; and people rarely if ever see anything. And at least one of the victims is always someone in a position of comparative trust or influence.

Isn't it *obvious* that there's an infiltrator or a traitor?



She keeps detailed notes of her observations, interviews, snatches of overheard comments, charts of who claimed to be where when, and whose stories seem mistaken or suspect. Her journals are kept in duplicate and carefully hidden; she is extremely paranoid about trusting anyone with their existence, contents, or location.

There are a few people that she is fairly sure are not traitors; Thorstein is one of them. She's tried to clue him in, but he *just won't listen*.

Whoever the current traitor is, she is fairly sure that it is one of the adult men, based on her pattern analysis. She also believes that the traitor has been different people over time. She is not quite sure who it currently is, yet. Nor is she sure what to do if she puts the last few pieces together.



She does not understand much about magic; if someone explained to her that the same

creature might assume serial identities, she would pinpoint the culprit fairly quickly.

Rachael started out as a healer's apprentice, but after the healer mysteriously disappeared last year, she took over full time. She is brusquely efficient and it is the one area of endeavor where people are not entirely dismissive of her.

"Uncle Bob", for his part, is on to her. He has not eliminated Rachael yet because he thinks that she would be too hard to emulate effectively. She needs to have the proverbial tragic accident. Or maybe a newcomer needs to be framed for her death. However, Rachael is *extremely* smart, and has contingency plans for just about everything.

Rachael, Too Smart For Her Own Good

STR 06 DEX 13 INT 18 CON 13
APP 13 POW 13 SIZ 07 EDU 08
Hits: 13 Age: 11.

Damage Bonus: -1d4.

Allegiance Tendencies: Good.

Skills: Dodge (40%), Fast Talk (70%), First Aid (90%), Hide (60%), History (70%), Insight (75%), Listen (40%), Navigate (40%), Persuade (30%), Research (Streetwise) (70%), Spot (70%), Stealth (40%), Survival (new) (90%).

Attacks: Knife, steel, 1d3+1-db. Always seems to have one, no matter how many you take away.

Defenses: She's a little kid.

Deity: Thinks it's all a bunch of mumbo-jumbo for weak minds.

Gear: Knife, a satchel full of useful items like flint and steel, cord, needles, oil, wax; a ridiculously detailed map of the camp and a mile in every direction; a journal detailing her observations.

Wealth: 5.

Rolf the Cook (the real one): Rolf has seen better days.

Several years ago, while he was cleaning up the kitchen at Helm's Camp, he was surprised by something that looked a great deal like himself. Whatever it was, it beat the hell out of him, drug him outside, and handed him off to a couple of vaguely human seeming things.

The things threw him into a stinking pit with a bunch of other humans, or at least, things that had been humans once. Now they were scarred, mutilated, amputated, filthy and catatonic.

And then the visitations started: six different monsters in all. Wayne was the worst. It did not take long for him to break, and start begging for mercy.

Luckily (perhaps) for him, when he started begging for mercy, he directed his pleas at Ma, who was trying to decide who to eat: him, or the next slave over. She was in a mood to ask him why, and he had a good answer: he could cook.



So now he does. He cooks his fellow slaves when their time has come; when this happens, he is given a slightly longer chain leash, remaining under the watchful eyes of Ma and Junior.

He gets his own "room" (chained up in the kitchen, which is equally filthy, disgusting and dank) in recompense. In addition, he knows that he will not be eaten until last. So as long as The Kin keep capturing enough new victims to eat, he is comparatively safe.

He is comparatively safe, that is, in terms of still breathing. His special status has not done anything to spare him The Kin's occasional attentions, and his mind is nearly gone. Several suicide attempts have been thwarted, and he's about given up trying.

If he should somehow get loose and overcome his fears, then unless restrained or calmed down somehow, he will launch a suicide attack against any demon that he can find. But he'd really like a piece of Uncle Bob (pun intended).

Rolf the Cook

STR 04 DEX 07 INT 12 CON 04
APP 05 POW 04 SIZ 08 EDU 08
Hits: 6 (4) Age: 49.

Damage Bonus: -1d6.

Allegiance Tendencies: Good.

Skills: Beg for Mercy (90%), Craft (Cook) (75%), Fast Talk (70%), Hide (60%), Stealth (70%), Survival (new) (90%), Teach (50%).

Attacks: None above base

Defenses: None.

Deity: Anyone who might listen.

Gear: A few filthy rags and some non-steel cooking implements.

Note: *Cowed* with respect to all members of The Kin except for "Uncle Bob."

Wealth: 1.

Plot Seeds

Takuk, like the Western Isles, is structured to play out as a finite campaign arc, rather than serve as a base of operations. The PLAYERS will be given a reason to go exploring the Arctic, be surprised to find an isolated community, go through a few adventures, and then have a denouement.

Conceptually, the author suggests introducing the PLAYERS to Takuk, running them through a campaign arc along the following lines (perhaps while wintered in), and then resolving the arc at ice-break the following spring. Then, sometime later in the campaign (ideally, the very end), the Observatory of Pisto quest can be introduced, giving them a reason to return.

A Monumental Failure: The whys and wherefores of how the PLAYERS might get to Takuk bear some discussion.

There are two main McGuffins available to lure them up there, given that Takuk is isolated from the rest of the World and not even known to exist in terms of settlement. One, of course, is an epic journey to find and use the Observatory of Pisto (It's Not A Lie, As Long As You Believe That It's True).

The second, and a good way to simply introduce the PLAYERS in a general way to Takuk, is to set up a quest where some McGuffin at hand has to be destroyed. **The Monument** is one of those places that are well-suited to destroying (or **Destroying**) an otherwise indestructible evil artifact. An example appears in the accompanying box.

The PLAYERS can then: be encouraged in a general way to head to the North in search of a monument to destruction; stumble upon Helm's Camp after noticing signs of environmental strip-mining; get wintered in; role-play out the social challenges of Helm's Camp; journey overland to the Monument; and perhaps encounter the Questing Beast. Then, the PLAYERS can try and deal with the morality play that erupts when they decide to set sail away from Helm's Camp.

A Sample McGuffin

Shemit began his post-Abjuration existence in league with the "Majestic Plateau" demons, but was one of those reckless, arrogant sorts who could not bring himself to play well with others. To make matters worse, he was dumb enough to try and organize a clumsy coup. He failed.

As a result, Shemit went from mid-level lieutenant of the "Majestic Plateau" to a shiny bauble. If he could not play well with others, the Hooded One reasoned, then his existence should be limited to those who would play with him. The Hooded One, along with Zazeer and several Reapers, turned him into a kaleidoscope. About six inches long and filled with sparkly glass, if you look in it and turn the lens, it makes pretty patterns. Shiny!!!

It took decades, but Shemit has managed to make some headway in his prison. He has imbued a lot of his essence into making the kaleidoscope a "bad penny": it cannot be destroyed by conventional means, and keeps turning up, no matter what you do to it.

Every time that someone looks into the kaleidoscope, it drains a magic point. When it has built up a store of 10 magic points, it can match its POW of 16 against the next viewer's POW.

If Shemit/the kaleidoscope wins, it takes control of the victim's mind for 1d3 hours. Usually it then has the victim kill someone, whose soul is consumed by Shemit. It then shows up somewhere else, far away.

To destroy it, one would have to successfully inflict **Destroy** magic on it against a magic point cost of 50. That's a big number, but rumors, divination, or prophecies tell of a horrible Monument somewhere far in the North where such a powerful working might be attempted.

Halt, Who Goes There? If the PLAYERS are going to spend any amount of time at Helm’s Camp, they are going to be put to work. And since they are mighty heroes, this means that they are going to be pulling guard duty.

Scare them. Here is a place where not only do demons exist in the open, but the people can name other people who have been drug off by a big demon in a leather human suit. Have them get into a skirmish that ends in a stalemate, or even some near casualties. Junior is really, really hard to kill, especially at night, so don’t be shy about throwing him into a brawl with the PLAYERS.

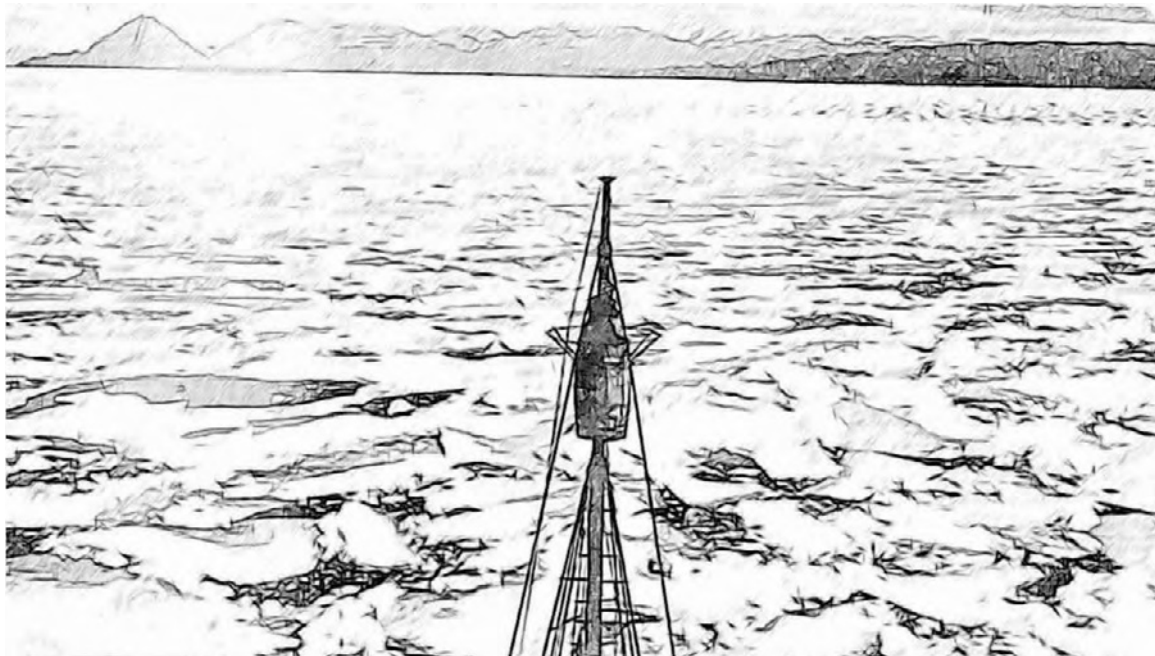
Being no dummy, and once she subjects them to a large number of tests to make sure that they themselves are not demons, Rachael will try to get whoever she thinks is the smartest PLAYER to listen to her. She will share her research, and make a damned persuasive case that The Kin have help on the inside.

Eventually, things might even get down to a loyalty test—let’s see whose hand cannot be cut by a sharp piece of stone. This is going

to force “Uncle Bob’s” hand: he will try to replace someone who has already passed the test when no one is looking, or eliminate Rachael before she makes her move. And since the people of Helm’s Camp eat dead humans anyway, disposing of the body of someone replaced just requires a little covert action in the kitchen. Stew for everyone!

Lifeboat Ethics 401: The difference between greed and gluttony, at least in this setting, is that greed is absolute and gluttony is relative. As long as everyone is comfortable and everything is “fair”, then people can function as a group. Play up how concerned everyone in Takuk is with “getting their fair share”, because that sets up the horrible denouement when the PLAYERS decide to leave. And there’s only so much room on their boat.

It’s carnage. No one will agree on who gets to go, and no one will wait for future relief. Murder, backstabbing, and desperate deal-making ensue. The PLAYERS (and anyone they take with them) either have to fight or sneak their way out (the latter option being nearly impossible).



Getting out of Dodge....

It's Not A Lie, As Long As You Believe That It's True

It's Not A Lie, As Long As You Believe That It's True is intended as the blow-off scenario for an Ashes, to Ashes campaign. The end of this scenario should be the last chapter of the story, barring only some kind of narrative epilogue about how things turn out years down the road.

The PLAYERS will plumb the secrets of the White Tor in Fallingstar, one of the lands that is intended as the beginning point for the Ashes, to Ashes setting, bringing the game full circle. It is intended to get the PLAYERS talking about concepts such as social engineering, the nature of evil, and whether a group of heroes should even try to use magic to change the World.

It is also going to prove to be a test of character, as *if they are successful, one of the PLAYERS is going to get a full-out wish*. There are some limits to the wish, but not many. The wish might even out-and-out reverse the Abjuration. The entire point of the scenario is to provoke a memorable, in character argument at the end (between the survivors) about what the wish ought to be. Everything else is secondary.

PLAYERS easily can and perhaps ought to die toward the latter end of this scenario, although the author suggests allowing at least two to avoid death before the wish is made. Once the PLAYERS have the Union Key and are fleeing back toward Fallingstar, the author suggests telling the PLAYERS that the proverbial safeties are off, or inquiring if any of the PLAYERS are interested in a role-playing challenge, as this is the end of the campaign. Offer those who are interested the possibility of volunteering for a memorably heroic demise, and allow them some input into how it occurs.

Synopsis and Overview

This adventure is intended for experienced role-players, and they should know the basic score of what is going on with the World. They should know that the demons are real, that they are running the World, and that the gods of old are no longer listening because the World has been sealed off from both the gods and further demons by a powerful magical working known as the Abjuration. It works well with at least one Knight of Old trying to adhere to his creed against competing desires from other party members.

Action begins in Fallingstar (outlined in Ashes, to Ashes, but critical information is reproduced below). The PLAYERS will, in the course of mundane adventuring, stumble onto the secret of entering the White Tor, the mysterious, featureless tower in the northwestern portion of the region.

Exposed in the Abjuration when a mountainside fell away, the only way into the White Tor is one featureless, black, and (until now) impossible to open door. The PLAYERS will learn the purpose of the White Tor: it is the “generator” for the Blessing (now the Curse) that hangs over Fallingstar.

The Curse can be shut off or rewritten from inside the White Tor, but the PLAYERS will need something called the Union Key to gain entrance. The Key is not some kind of physical lock opener, it is a metaphor. The Key is perseverance—surviving undaunted through the worst imaginable times. The PLAYERS need to find, and bring to the White Tor, the Elf and the human who have suffered the most in the World, since only the greatest suffering can fully inform

needed change. Well, parts of them need to be brought, anyway.

The first part of the scenario has the PLAYERS literally stumble onto the *tomb of Evenser*, the Elven archmage who crafted the Blessing as a wedding gift to his daughter Evensha and her husband Roland, the first King of Fallingstar. They will find a hidden subterranean library which will tell them more of the story of the Blessing, and advise them that it can be rewritten from within the White Tor.

What they find there takes the PLAYERS to *Evenstar*, last refuge of the mad creatures with too much Elven blood to cope with the Abjuration. There, amidst an odd absence of the usual sorts of trouble, they will learn the whereabouts of the last truly living Elf, whose lifeblood they will need to somehow procure.

The third part of the scenario will send the PLAYERS overland and by raft to the Moot in the Crannoch. There, they will meet up with *Langulin the Fair*, the last surviving Elf. They should be flabbergasted at her reaction, which is to sacrifice herself immediately in furtherance of their quest.

The fourth part of the scenario takes the PLAYERS via ship to Takuk, and overland to the *Observatory of Pisto*, a magical tower where it is said that, for a price, anything can be located, in search of a lead on the human who has suffered the most in the World and yet survived.

This would be Rolf the Cook, who has survived years of demonic torture of every conceivable description from *The Kin*. The Observatory will point them in the right direction, but they will have *the Questing Beast* to contend with.

The fifth part of the scenario has the PLAYERS *infiltrating the lair of The Kin* and absconding with Rolf the Cook (or, at least, his one remaining hand). This is the point where the proverbial safeties should come off. How the PLAYERS accomplish this might vary, but some possible scenario tracks are described. These include raising a

strike force, stealth, allowing themselves to be captured (not recommended), playing The Kin off against each other, and taking advantage of other locals (the Questing Beast) to cause chaos.

The sixth part of the scenario has the PLAYERS, with a nearly catatonic Rolf (or his hand) in tow, *heading back for the White Tor, pursued relentlessly by any remnants of The Kin*, with blood on their minds. A shortcut readily presents itself through long-abandoned (?) magical tunnels.

Once any remnants of The Kin are disposed of, things seemingly calm down, until the PLAYERS emerge near the White Tor and see what the demons have been up to while they have been gone, in an effort to uncover their plans. At which point, they may be *beset by some of the faster-moving representatives of the "Majestic Plateau."*

Finally, whatever is left of the PLAYERS—some of whom may be dead, broken, traumatized or worse—*returns to the White Tor and gains entrance*. At which point, one of those who is left get to make a wish, at the cost of self-sacrifice. They only get one shot, since the last Elf has sacrificed herself to help them.

Do the PLAYERS accept their fates and remake the World? What of their dead friends? Are they even wise enough to remake the World correctly, or do they limit themselves to consequences that they can understand?

All that should remain after the switch is flipped is an *epilogue*.

Scene 1—A Routine Mission in Fallingstar

The Blessing: Fallingstar (*Ashes, to Ashes*, pp. 70-89) is a sub-arctic, comparatively well-off land representing the sin of pride. The back story is that, for thousands of years prior to the Abjuration, it was disproportionately wealthy, with enormous mineral resources, skilled trades, and numerous academies (scholarly and magical). It was also home to the World's

Elven population. The ruling house (the Mortrands) were descended from the union of an ancient human king (Roland) and his Elven princess bride, Evensha.

The story goes that at the wedding of Roland and Evensha, millennia ago, her father blessed the union with a powerful, permanent Blessing that worked subtly in the background to keep the fortunes of the land on a positive track. This story is quite true, although knowledge of exactly how the Blessing worked was a closely held secret, entrusted to only a handful of senior wizards in each generation. These were all killed in the Abjuration.

The Blessing went like this:

*Wealthy and blessed shall your people be,
Evensha and Roland, husband and wife
Until the stars rain down from the sky,
Should ye live a noble life.*

After the Abjuration, the populace commonly believes that the Blessing is now ruining their homeland, subtly frustrating efforts to rebuild or improve matters. This, again, is entirely correct. The “stars fell from the sky” at the Abjuration, so the people are not “wealthy and blessed” any longer.

No one understands, however, how the Blessing (now known as the Curse) survived the Abjuration and its disruption of the fabric of magic. The answer is that the White Tor (originally hidden within a mountainside to keep it away from potential meddlers) powers the Blessing/Curse on a continual basis, and it is really, really powerful.

Think of the Tor as a magical radio transmitter, now exposed to the elements when the mountainside it had been in crumbled away at the Abjuration. It needs to be fixed, shut off, or have its “frequency” adjusted to stop, reverse or alter the Blessing/Curse. It is far more powerful even than the Abjuration, which is why it is still functioning according to its rather literal

programming. However, there is no apparent way into the White Tor, only a black, featureless door that has resisted every effort to open it.

The Dullest of Missions: It is unimportant what kind of mission the PLAYERS are undertaking at the beginning of the scenario, other than it should be dull, low-risk and uneventful.

A suggestion might be a journey east across the Great Bridge to Risemark (see [Ashes, to Ashes](#), p. 84). A deal struck with the clan leader at Risemark to allow caravans to pass by, trading timber and game from the east for finished goods from Fallingstar Town, seems to have either fallen through or is having its strength tested. Bandits, appearing to be Risemark clansmen, have been raiding caravans, in apparent contravention of the deal, which permitted Risemark to extract a toll.

Sonner Sand, the sheriff of Fallingstar Town, has decided to ride out to Risemark to see what is going on and if he can use his good offices to mediate. He cashes in a favor and has the PLAYERS accompany him, along with several NPC town guards, so that he has some intimidating backup.

Really, however, the precise nature of the mission is unimportant. Somewhere well outside of any settlement, perhaps near the Great Bridge, the PLAYERS are attacked by an old enemy that has hunted them down. Again, the nature of the old enemy is unimportant, as long as it is a legitimate threat to the PLAYERS, but not a lethal one.

The attack should come at night, shortly before dawn, in the middle of watches, and should be brutal. NPCs should be slaughtered and the entire scene should be chaotic.

One or more of the PLAYERS should be encouraged to take cover in some nearby ruins well off the beaten track of the road. Do not kill any of the PLAYERS, and have the enemy either finally be disposed of, or beaten off.

The ruins do not radiate magic, but should appear to be very, very old indeed. Anyone with *Second Sight* should be permitted to sense that the ruins, whatever they may be, are of great importance, and see glimpses of a vast wedding pageant at which many humans and Elves are present.

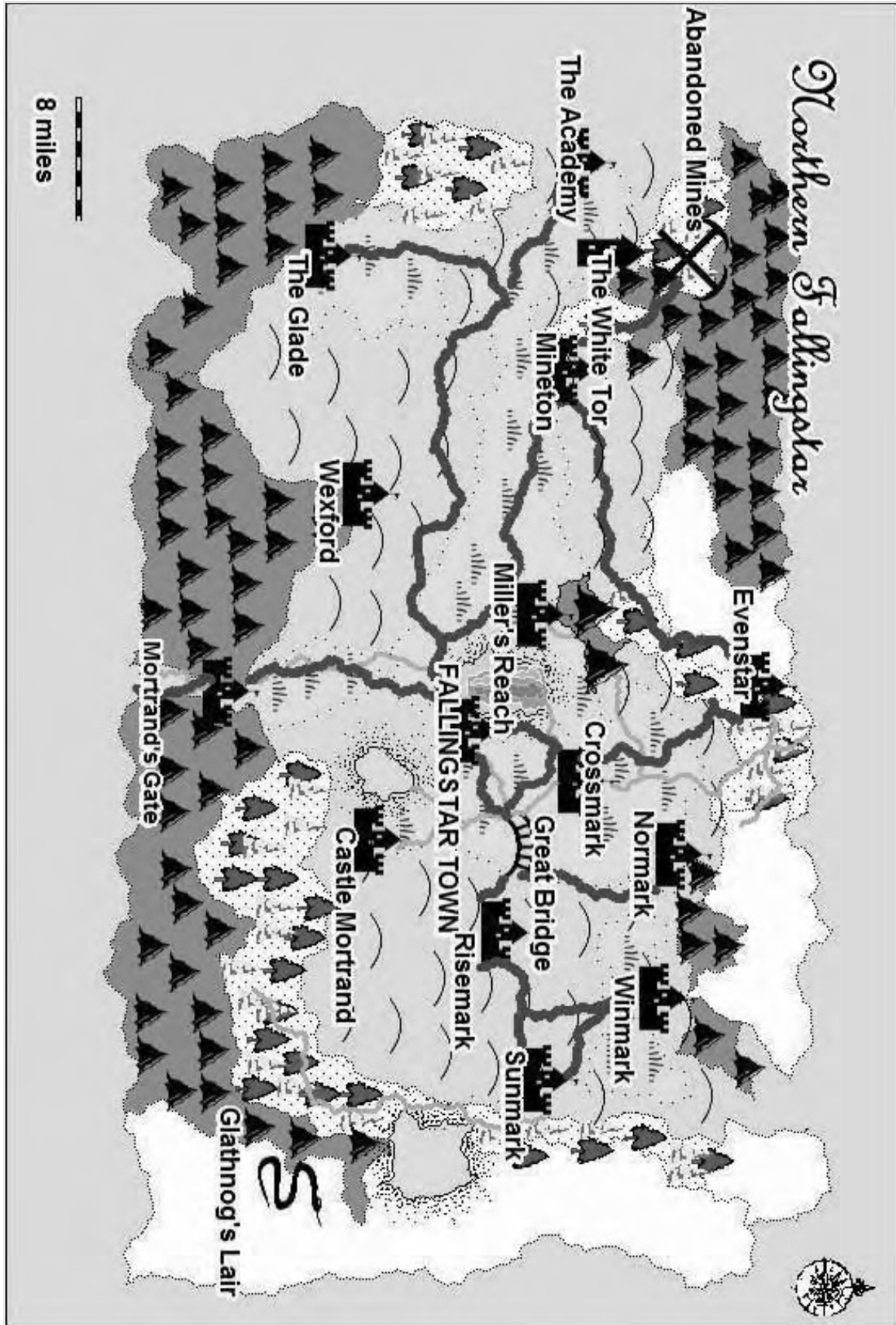
Poking around the area after the sun rises, the PLAYERS find, in a nearby rocky hillside, what appears at first glance to be a

cave opening. It appears to have only recently been exposed; the hillside is crumbling and a layer of fallen shale lies around the foot of the hill.

However, upon entering, the “cave” is clearly a very ancient temple, and the ruins around it are the remnants of the portico.



What's this in the rocky rubble???



The Elven Temple

The entrance (see nearby map) leads into a dark, well-preserved marble hallway. Area references are to the accompanying map.

1. Entrance: The walls, floors and ceilings are all of shiny, marble-like white stone that reflects any light introduced quite well. Carved into the walls are numerous different representation of regal Elven figures, each occupied with a different task: war, craft, hunting, *etc.* An *Idea* roll suggests the representation of a pantheon of gods and goddesses. Large concepts (sky, forest, hunting, magic) seem to be represented toward the entrance, whereas figures down the hall seem concerned with more specialized tasks (weaving, poetry, dance).

One of the figures toward the very end of the hallway is depicted twice as large as the others, and inlaid with silver, gold and gems. (This figure radiates magic). (*Idea* roll: this is probably this figure's temple. **Critical History** roll: this is a typical Elven temple layout from before the Abjuration).

Despoiling this figure is likely game over for the perpetrator: a subtle shifting occurs behind the walls (**Difficult** Listen to detect). If anyone steps on (or is standing on) the 20' square directly before the stairs, it collapses for a 100' drop onto jagged spikes (10d6 +10 damage). Thanks for playing.

Examining the figure, it depicts an elderly Elven woman seated in a chair. She is holding a branch (of silver and emeralds for leaves) in her right hand (an obvious sign of peace) and a scepter in her left (a symbol of power), with power being less important than peace. Her elderly status suggests wisdom (*Idea* rolls all around for these insights). This is a representation of Lashasse, a minor Elven deity of tolerance and mercy. (This will not be apparent to the PLAYERS at first, but they will be clued in later).

It might also be appropriate to allow someone with the **Higher Mysteries Lost Art** to make a **Difficult Library Use** check.

If successful, the Adept realizes that sympathetic magic may be afoot (in post-Abjuration terms, the temple was constructed as a **Tool** to work a specific kind of magic).

2. Altar: A simple white slab of marble, 3 feet high and five feet square. On it are a silver tree branch (starting to tarnish; the room was sealed off from the elements for millennia, but it is not magical) and silver scepter (likewise). A **PLAYER** with appropriate divination spells or secret door spotting ability can ascertain that there is a seam and a hollow space under the altar, but there is no obvious way to open it. (Smashing it open with pickaxes or magic is an option, but one with a price. See Area 5, Statue).

The altar does radiate magic.

3. Riddle Stairs: On their way down these stairs, the **PLAYERS** should be given serious pause by a series of magic-radiating symbols inlaid on the stairs in silver. From the top of the stairs on the way down, they make no sense at all. Again, **Second Sight** used anywhere in the temple complex results in the lavish wedding pageant vision.

From the bottom of the stairs, heading out, they reflect the light in a certain way that they become legible. It is written in both Elven and human language. The writing is a riddle, containing the secret to opening the hidden door under the altar:

The Riddle

Of no use to one, bliss for two.

Free when small, dear when old.

*Lied for by the scoundrel, paid for by
the cheat, and never an accident.*

*The lover's privilege, the hypocrite's
mask.*

*To the maiden, faith; to the matron,
hope; and to the crone, charity.*

The answer is "a kiss." Let them puzzle this out. Evenser the Great figured that this



would occur to anyone who had any business at all gaining access to his workshop, and would prevent careless explorers, lone thieves and demons (who would never think to kiss anyone) from sneaking up on him.

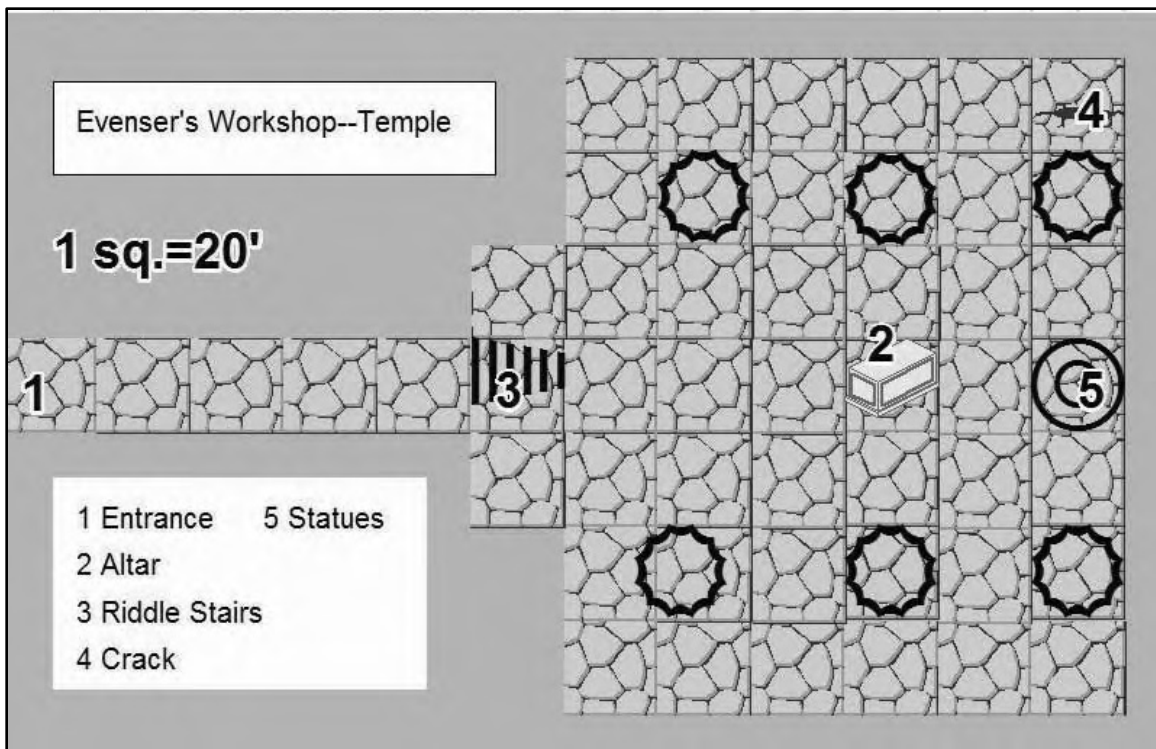
A shared kiss in front of the altar causes it to silently pivot open, without disturbing the guardians of the temple. Spiral stone stairs lead down.

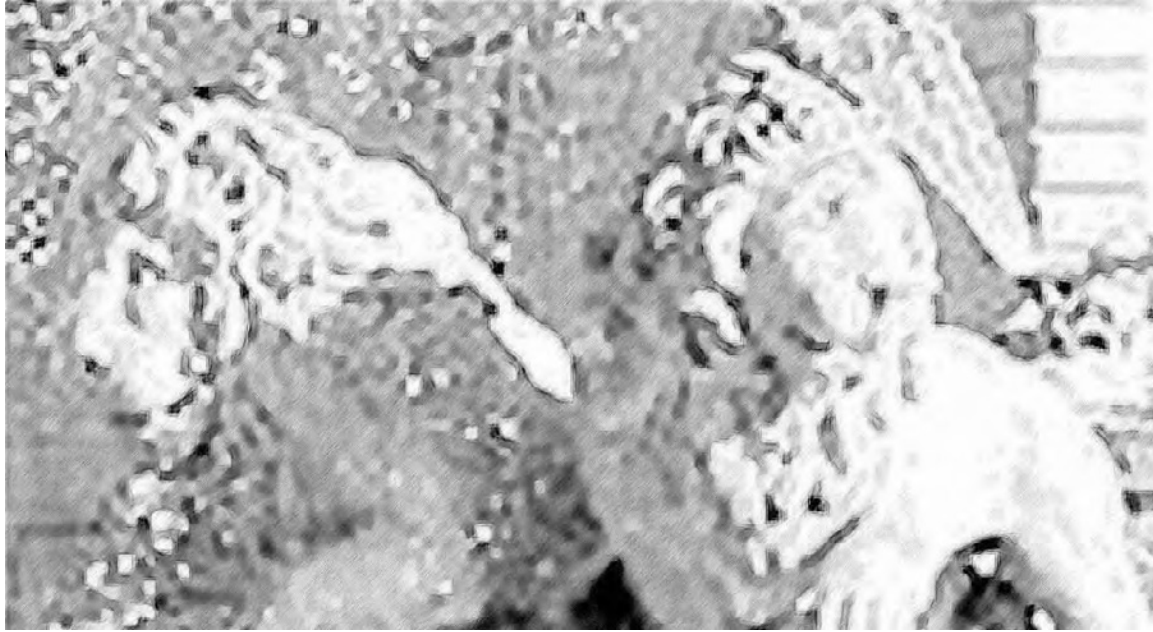
4. Crack: While experienced gamers can probably guess that there is a secret door somewhere, especially once they see the riddle, this is a little extra tip off. A crack in the stone floor here reveals an open space below. Dropping something down into it results in a 10' drop and an impact sound.

5. Statues: Not a statue of our friend Lashasse, but rather of a life-sized gang of six (6) stone lions. Their job is to deal with anyone in the temple area proper (down the stairs) who defile the temple. They animate

and slaughter anyone who has defiled the temple (restricting their attacks to those engaged in the defilement).

Guardian Lions of Lashasse (x6)		
STR 19	DEX 19	INT 10
CON 11	POW 13	SIZ 17
Luck 65	Hits: 15.	
Damage Bonus: +2d6.		
Move: 10".		
Armor: All non-enchanted physical attacks do minimum damage (they're made out of animated stone).		
Skills: Listen 50%, Spot Hidden 50%, Track Temple Defiler 50%.		
Attacks: Bite 40%, 1d10.		
Claw 60% (in addition to Bite), 1d6 +db.		





When all defilers present have been eliminated, they return to their pedestal. They will continue in hot pursuit of any defilers who flee the temple, but will ultimately give up and return if they lose sight of the perpetrator.

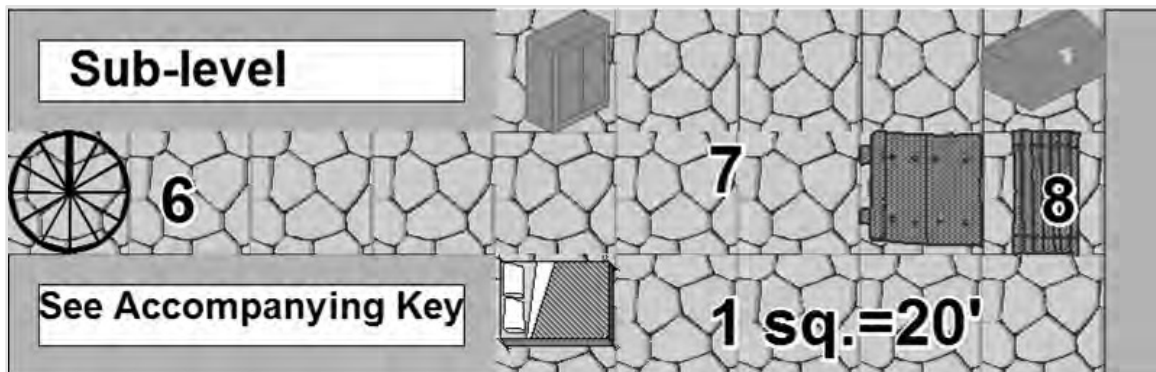
Keepers should use their discretion on what amounts to a defilement of a temple devoted to tolerance and mercy, but smashing the altar clearly qualifies. Stats for the lions appear in the nearby box. They are relentless and smart enough to go after anyone able to easily hurt them (magic users, magic weapon wielders).

6. Second Antechamber: The altar swings open to reveal a spiral stairway headed

down into the darkness. The sub-level is constructed of the same, light reflecting stone.

7. Scriptorium: This is a comfortably appointed wizard's work space, specifically one for making magic scrolls. There is a bed, a chest, storage space, and a work table, plus work tools (and some *Tools*).

Feel free to embellish the contents with things that would be appropriate to creating sympathetic magic to bless something: mysterious feathers from some odd thing with wings, vials of holy water, inks made of ground gems, griffon quill pens, lenses made of high cathedral window glass, etc.



8. *The Workbook of Evenser the Great (and an unpleasant surprise)*: Evenser was quite concerned with someone finding out the secret to the Blessing and monkeying with it somehow, so he has done people the favor of leaving the instruction manual behind to undo any shenanigans. Evenser also left himself behind, subject to powerful contingency magic that would resurrect him to wreak horrible vengeance upon anyone not of pure heart who seeks to take the book.

He sits in his chair, an impossibly old, but strangely well-preserved, Elf (although he is now showing signs of crumbly decay since the temple has now been exposed to fresh air).

If anyone in the party could fairly be described as not being “pure of heart” (and apply a stern test), Evenser begins to glow, stretch, and rise. His eyes burn with a pure white flame. And then the Abjuration catches up with him.

There is **no** coming back from the dead after the Abjuration, no matter how tough one is, and so Evenser the lich wannabe crumbles into ineffectual dust. After prompting a **Fear check** on the part of all concerned, of course. D’oh! So much for the ultimate security measure of an invincible Elven archmage guarding his most valuable secrets from beyond the grave. Sadly, the wizards of the Abjuration had other, more pressing concerns than Evenser’s secret contingency plan, not that they even knew about it.

If all of the PLAYERS might be fairly described as “pure of heart”, then Evenser just sits there. At least, he sits there unless and until the Abjuration is lifted. This potentially makes for an interesting end game (see the Epilogue).

The Workbook itself is a scroll of thin, flexible metal like nothing the PLAYERS have ever seen. It resists fire and just about anything else the PLAYERS might muster.

(Someone with the **Higher Mysteries Lost Art** might have heard (**Difficult Library Use**) of some mysterious Elven metal known as “mithril”, the making of which is lost to

the ages. The workbook tells the whole story. It is written in the Elven language, alas, but some simple magic ought to get around that problem. Alternatively, the PLAYERS will have to do some simple translating; allow for someone in Fallingstar Town to have a simple dictionary adequate to the modest task.

The Whole Sordid Story: Read the following to the PLAYERS. It is the gist of the mithril scroll.

Evenser, father of Evensha, first Queen of Fallingstar, was a mighty wizard of the Elven people. He was not only the greatest archmage of his day, but the greatest archmage that anyone could remember. He doted on his only daughter, Evensha, and had great plans for her.

*Then she decided to marry a human. **A human!!!***

Evenser was appalled, and he resolved to make this young Roland’s life a living hell for his presumption to seek his daughter’s hand in marriage. To gain his permission for the wedding, Roland would have to serve Evenser for seven years. Evensha begged Roland not to go through with it, but Roland calmly agreed.

For seven years Evenser put his future son-in-law through every obstacle that he could set in his path. He sent him on quest after quest to the most dangerous corners of the World. Roland was maimed, mutilated, imprisoned, tortured, and at one point, even dragged to the Realms Below. He had to fight his way out, and came back physically broken. Yet he pressed on in Evenser’s service.

After seven years, what was left of Roland drug himself before Evenser and declared his service at an end. Evenser was dumbfounded, and asked Roland how he had managed to survive his trials. “Simple”, explained Roland. “I thought only about Evensha’s suffering, and how I needed to succeed to end it.”

Evenser was chastised. In his pride, he had

*overlooked that his daughter really cared for this human, and that his behavior was causing **her** to suffer as well. Giving his permission, he realized, would not be enough to right the wrong that he had caused.*

The great archmage built a temple to Lashasse, the Elven goddess of tolerance and mercy, in a secluded cave. And there (here), with the power of faith behind him, he planned his wedding present to them: the Blessing. The Blessing was a great magical engine, enclosed in a featureless White Tor that was hidden inside a solid mountain, and which would last forever.

Evenser wed the two long-suffering lovers at the foot of the mountain that contained the White Tor, and pronounced the Blessing. And then he fell dead, as the Blessing was a wish, and wishes, everyone knows, require one to sacrifice oneself for the greater good. His will called for Evenser's body to be sealed within the temple he had built, his final act of repentance.

But even so, Evenser was still not completely convinced that his daughter would truly be happy. And so, he built in a failsafe to the White Tor: the Union Key. Evenser's thinking was that if things got bad enough that his daughter wanted to end her life, it might be a good idea to be able to switch the Blessing off, or rewrite it.

Like all wishes, the Blessing was literal and capricious: it would backfire if Roland and Evensha started to lead other than "noble" lives, or if the "stars somehow fell from the sky". But that would never, ever happen.

The Union Key requires that the hand of the human who has suffered the most in the World paint a sigil, a simple circle, in blood on the door of the White Tor. The blood must be the life's blood of the Elf who had suffered the most in the World.

With this done, the Tor will open, and the Blessing can then be rewritten into any other Blessing that a person would be willing to give his own life for.

As with all wishes, the Blessing cannot directly harm anything, living or dead, and must be a true and honest wish. Since this wish must also be a Blessing, it must be aimed at improving the land of Fallingstar, and its reach will be so limited.

Of course, "improvement" is a rather vague term, and the PLAYERS may well have different ideas of what that means. And yes, the scroll just says the hand; it does not say anything about it being attached to its owner.

Scene 2, Now What?

The PLAYERS now are faced with the most important quest that they will ever have been on: the possibility of making a broad, sweeping, World-altering wish. Three things will be required: someone to sacrifice himself at the end; the life's blood of the World's most put-upon Elf, and a little cooperation from the World's most put-upon human. Simple, right? But...

The first problem is that the PLAYERS very likely do not know of *any* living Elves. There are a few barmy sots running around Fallingstar driven more or less mad by some residual Elven blood, but they are hardly Elves. And how does one identify the sorriest Elf in the World? For that matter, how does one identify the sorriest human in the World?

Finding the human and the Elf who have suffered the most in the entire World should obviously be a task for magical divination, but that is a whopper of a divination.

Research: Elf? No readily at hand magic or research source will help the PLAYERS here. Common knowledge says that all pure-blooded Elves died out in the Abjuration. (While this is not exactly true, all but one are Hidden and not completely alive anyway, and magic will not locate them). However, research will not be necessary, as the PLAYERS will soon realize.

The PLAYERS' initial instinct should be to get back to Fallingstar Town, the largest



settlement with the largest concentration of people and books in the region. As they go, something creepy starts to happen. They start to pick up camp followers. Barmy, ragged, filthy individuals start to appear from behind rocks, out of isolated wood stands, in ones or twos. These unfortunates bear all the tell-tale signs of having too much Elven blood to function after the Abjuration: slight builds, fine features, odd eye colors, all in various degrees of expression.

They make no threatening moves, but rather simply follow, awe-struck. Any who are questioned simply ask, "Can't you FEEL it"? They are referring to the mithril scroll; this occurs regardless of whether the PLAYERS have been able to translate it yet.

By the time that the PLAYERS get to Fallingstar Town, the town is in a tizzy. Many barmy part-Elves have walked into town and just sat down, waiting). An emergency meeting of the regional Althing is gathering. Even the King, Basil the 24th, is up and about, temporarily forgetting that he thinks he is a squirrel. He even knows his name and station.

If the Reapers are still active in Fallingstar at this stage of the campaign, they are surprisingly absent from the proceedings. Should anyone go looking for trouble, short of going all the way to Castle Mortrand, they might find one or two, full of crude javelins and with their throats slit or skulls bashed in, by a large number of assailants.

The one barmy fellow who will not show up at what becomes a peaceful sit-in around Fallingstar Town is the elusive Roland of Evenstar. Roland is well known around Fallingstar, but rarely seen. (See Ashes, to Ashes, pp. 87-88). If the PLAYERS do not note his absence, have the crazy guys start murmuring, "where's Roland"?

By way of recap, whether Roland of Evenstar is a half-Elf is frequently debated. Regardless, he is quite unusual, even among the eccentric and crazy bandits that seem drawn to the "abandoned town" of Evenstar. He is also their unofficial spokesmen as well as a common and well-known source to try and approach for obscure information. He claims to have been born 130 years ago, which would have made him 30 years old at the time of the Abjuration.



They come from everywhere and nowhere....

Meanwhile, At the “Majestic Plateau”....

For the first two weeks, they are up to nothing. They do not even receive a report that anything is amiss until the ambushed Reaper patrols are found, or until whatever agents they may have left in Fallingstar, if the Reapers have been eliminated, take note of the unusual activity.

Once the report is received, a lieutenant level demon is dispatched to investigate. (Red Ralag, Ashes, to Ashes, p. 174, would be suitable. Otherwise, any recurring villain demon of middling rank would work well).

The emissary rounds up some Reapers and others under the Ritual of Obedience, takes note of the strange situation, and investigates cautiously. This takes about another two weeks. Finally, they figure out that the PLAYERS found a temple, found some kind of mithril scroll, started asking about surviving Elves (preposterous!) and then headed west.

The demons try to find the PLAYERS, but have little luck with magic; something is interfering with their scrying efforts (although not at the Hidden level; they can detect the interference). This fact alarms Zazeer, since it suggests that Elven magic is afoot. A massive sortie from the “Majestic Plateau” is ordered, trying to find the PLAYERS.

By the time they would arrive at the Moot, the PLAYERS have already left, believed to be headed North. Only a few swift demons are sent far to the Northern polar regions, since the demons are not aware of anything being there. Whoever is sent to the far North should ideally be someone or something with whom the PLAYERS have unfinished business.

On any past occasions, he has not outwardly appeared to be Elven, but that could be because he dresses in rags and had not shaven or bathed in many years.

Whereas most crazy bandits seem completely dysfunctional, and Roland is dysfunctional in many ways, he has in the past also been surprisingly lucid. He is well-spoken, if filthy, ruthless and decrepit. He also has a reputation for knowing things that are difficult to explain.

He knows odd and obscure details about the history of the Abjuration War. He knows that some of the demons survived, and sometimes what is going to happen in the future. It is almost as though Roland had lived through these past events and had the ancient gift of foresight that some Elves were said to possess.

Obviously, it's time to go find Roland. If the PLAYERS have met him before, they will remember him as crazy, filthy, deranged, and fond of mocking them with cryptic, misleading, but always accurate visions of the future, but not a threat to attack them. He is also usually hard to find unless he wants to be found.

If any of the encamped Evenstar folks are asked, Roland was last seen back in Evenstar, “cleaning his house.”

The journey to Evenstar is surprisingly uneventful. If the PLAYERS use scrying magic or scout off the road, they might find signs that some of their new Evenstar groupies are blocking for them, such as a bandit gang left in ruins by a large number of attackers.

Nothing happens, in any case, until the PLAYERS walk into the ruins of Evenstar itself. When the PLAYERS arrive, they can hear sounds of hammering from quite a distance away. Everything else is utterly still, and Evenstar is deserted (except for the cadre of barmy sots following them just out of eyesight).

A clean, shaven, long-haired, thin and malnourished, middle-aged man is busily



repairing a house on the center square. A large pile of nasty refuse is being burned in a pit dug some distance away; the stench of burning dung fills the air. The man is only barely recognizable as Roland if the PLAYERS have met him before.

Roland of Evenstar, Once Deranged Prophet, Now Half-Elven Construction Worker

STR 13 DEX 14 INT 12 CON 13
APP 15 POW 18 SIZ 12 EDU 15
Hits: 13 Age: about 130.

Damage Bonus: +1d4.

Allegiance Tendencies: Chaotic.

Skills: Dodge (75%), Hide (75%), History (85%), OCCULT (50%), Perform (Sing) (in Elven) (85%), Stealth (75%), Survival (85%), others a matter of conjecture.

Attacks:

Spear, 42%, 1d6+1+db, impaling, 15 HP.

Sling, 99%, 1d8, 80 yards, crushing, cannot parry.

Defenses: Armor 0 (his usual leather helmet, painted with weird symbols and which he NEVER takes off, is now strangely AWOL).

Shield, wicker & leather, 99%, 1d2+db, knockback, Armor 10 (must parry).

Special: *Second Sight* and *Dreams Lost Art*; further magical ability a matter of conjecture.

Deity: The old Elven gods of Fallingstar.

Wealth: 4.

Gear: Weapons, rope, torch, carpentry tools, clean(!) but well-worn clothing.

He stiffens as the PLAYERS draw near. Clean and sober, Roland definitely does not look entirely human, but still mostly such. He looks, actually, like a member of the

Mortrand ruling family: human, but with a strong Elven streak.

Assuming that the PLAYERS have prior experience with Roland, he looks both bemused and disappointed. *“Oh, it’s you lot. That figures, it explains some of what I’ve seen, and this is all a big cosmic joke anyway. Let me see it, please.”*

Assuming that they do let him see the mithril scroll, Roland continues. *“Yes, it’s real. You do know what this means, do you not? You have the power to fix everything for the people of Fallingstar. **Everything! Don’t blow it!!!** You knew that I was named after the first King, didn’t you?”*

If the PLAYERS have not glommed on to the fact that, if their quest is successful, they can rewrite the Blessing in a way that will change the World, he explains to them in a bored, exasperated tone of voice, like he was explaining something to a slow eight year old.

“Obviously, someone’s going to have to die, and you’re going to have find a couple of people, and maybe kill one of them, but nothing is free, is it? I’d do it, but I can’t be trusted to make the right wish, can I? (Cackles to himself). No, no, it will have to be one of you. You found it, and I have foreseen it.”

If one of the PLAYERS is a Knight of Old, he adds: *“Probably you, I imagine. You lot are all about sacrifice, aren’t you?”*

The partial restoration of Roland’s sanity is just that, only partial. He is still quite nuts and as cryptic, teasing, mocking and uncooperative as ever. He keeps changing the subject back to which one of the PLAYERS is going to sacrifice himself to fix things, and how they might best go about it. But just as the PLAYERS get frustrated with him as he keeps losing focus and drifting back to his carpentry, Roland shoots up with:

“I suppose you’re wondering how to tell who the Elf who has suffered the most is? Well, I’m pretty sure old Evenser would

have insisted on a full-blooded Elf. Racist old fart. And there's only one of those, you know, who's still completely alive, not like those spirit wankers down at the Wizard Tree, so I guess she's suffered the most, by definition, hasn't she? And it also means that you're only going to get one shot at rewriting the Blessing, so do get it right, won't you?"

Depending on how the campaign has gone, the PLAYERS may have heard rumors that one Elf maiden, **Langulin the Fair**, somehow survived the Abjuration. They may or may not have encountered her. Either way, her survival is essential to this scenario, so if it appears that she died at some point in the past it will have to have been an apparent, comic-book style death. Barring that, another Elf will have to have survived in the fashion that Langulin did, and be ensconced at the Moot.

If they have not encountered Langulin before, Roland volunteers that she frequents the Moot in the Crannoch, and then starts laughing:

"Don't you appreciate the irony? A crusty old fart of a wizard, all concerned with Elven racial purity, has created a magical engine that is going to require you, the mighty heroes, to kill the last pure, fully living Elf to set things right! BWA-HA-HA-HA! Good luck with that, she's tough from what I hear."

Research: Human? Research is probably not an effective way to answer a metaphysical question such as which (living) human in the World has suffered the most. The PLAYERS ought to be thinking along the lines of magical divination. (**Idea** roll).

Turning to magical lines of inquiry, anyone with the **Higher Mysteries Lost Art**, or with any POW bonuses in **Locate** magic, can advise the PLAYERS that this kind of metaphysical inquiry is a monumental undertaking. Discerning the fairest of them all, strongest of them all, or most miserable of them all anywhere in the World is a huge undertaking (perhaps on the order of 25 magic points—essentially impossible without the perfect Tools, perfect Incantation, some kind of unique Item of Power, etc.). It is both too broad in scope, and to imprecise a target (not like finding a particular person or scouring a particular room).

A **Library Use** roll when reviewing pre-Abjuration magic reference sources, or perhaps a **Critical History** roll might clue the PLAYERS in on the Observatory of Pisto, discussed ante. Failing that, it's one step at a time, and the next step is the Moot.

Scene 3--the Crannoch and the Moot

Travel from Fallingstar Town to the Crannoch, and then on to the Moot, is best accomplished on foot by striking northwest and then north through the comparatively low and passable mountains in the northwest corner of Fallingstar, and then down into the swamp. From there, one takes a raft down the river to the Fork Camp and north up the trails to the Moot.

Travel from Fallingstar Town will be roughly two weeks: one week to the border and through the mountains, four days poling down the river, and two days on the trails. The Crannoch region is outlined at pp. 90-97 of Ashes, to Ashes.





The Moot is both a particular place as well as an area name given to a small, comparatively high and dry area of the Crannoch bog system. The particular place is an ancient basalt column field whose purpose is lost to history. The area is a reasonably survivable place where people who do not want to be found hide out in a variety of huts, shacks, campsites, bunkers and the occasional building. It is the secret location of the headquarters of the Knights of Old—anyone who has made the pilgrimage there will know the way.

Failing that, Roland of Evenstar has told them where to look, based on rumors he has heard, and such rumors (*Difficult Research (Streetwise)* when talking either to a Halfling, all of whom know the area, or a well-traveled person) can give the PLAYERS a general idea of where it is.

Once they get within a day or two of it, *Locate* magic to find the basalt column field (which is, strangely, easily detectable by such magic—5 MPs of appropriate *Locate* spell levels are all that is needed) or inquiry of a friendly local guide, suffices.

The Crannoch is always a treacherous and dangerous place. The six days that the PLAYERS have to traverse the bog *should*

not be hand-waved. They should have to deal with disease-carrying bugs, crocodiles, vipers, piranha-like fish swarms, hyper-aggressive, anaconda-like snakes in the water, natural hazards, and *Survival* checks *every day*. (Otherwise, the Moot makes little sense as a far-off-the-grid place of exile. Remember, the reason that people hide at the Moot is because it is risky for anyone to spend a week or so slogging through the muck to find them).

If the PLAYERS have made enemies of any Bogmen in the past, the Bogmen will be sure to remember, and the PLAYERS will get to add slings and arrows from the canopy and sabotage to their raft and gear to their list of troubles. Hostile Bogmen deal with enemies by trying to strand them in the bog so that the bog can do its work, and/or by picking them off one by one.

The Moot proper is not a village, but rather a series of hideouts spread around an area of higher ground about 1 mile square. Some people who are able to get along with one another live together or near one another, haphazardly. Some Bogmen (mostly women who are married to or living with someone) are occasionally seen; others surface occasionally depending on how

social they are. The trail through the swamp leads directly to the basalt column field, and stops there.

A Knight of Old can go from there (leaving non-Knights waiting behind), and find the Seneschal. Assuming that he is convinced they have a good enough reason, he can tell them where to look for Langulin.

Otherwise, the PLAYERS' best bet (since she is *Concealed* and undetectable by magical means, but not a total "blind spot") is to make camp at the Moot and put out word to people as they come along as to their identities and that they would like to speak to her.

It does not take Langulin long to notice that the PLAYERS have arrived and are looking for her; she instinctively senses the mithril scroll and is drawn to it. However, she takes her time and avoids the PLAYERS until she gets a sense of who they are and what they want.

Again, if a PLAYER is a Knight of Old, she

will be inclined to hear him out regardless. Otherwise, the PLAYERS might need to resort to a *Persuade* roll to convince her of their sincerity.

Hopefully, the PLAYERS do not leap to the attack and try to assassinate her. For one thing, that would be incredibly evil. For another, she actually is quite tough, being several hundred years old and having several hundred years of combat experience, and will defend herself. And she has pre-Abjuration Elven war gear, which she dons as soon as she hears that someone is looking for her.

Langulin is a full-blooded Elf, something that the PLAYERS will only have seen, at best, in a picture book. She would be utterly mad due to the Abjuration, but has a magical item, a *Periapt of Clarity*, that keeps her somewhat calm and focused. As a result, her POW loss from madness has been halted at 3. She is paralyzed by depression, but has not yet succumbed to complete madness.



The *Periapt* is an Elven magic artifact, a large, black pearl, set in mithril, that (in normal terms) imposes a -10 adjusted POW (before the resistance check) to any *Mind* or *Emotion* magic aimed at the wearer, and grants +10 POW on *Fear checks* against despair. Ordinarily, this would mean that the typical wearer would only fail a despair-oriented *Fear check* on a fumble.

In Langulin's (and every other Elf's) case, however, the Abjuration's severance of their ties to the fabric of the World amounts to a constant, maddening, despair-oriented *Fear check*. They quickly go mad and die.

The competing forces (Abjuration vs. Periapt) have put Langulin on the brink, but not over. She is sad, listless, alone, depressed, and hopeless, but minimally functional, a state of affairs that has lasted 100 years. Even if she were not the "most miserable Elf" winner by default of being the only Elf left truly alive, she would be a strong contender.

Langulin is five feet tall, about 90 pounds, and appears to be in her early middle age. She is incredibly beautiful, graceful, and lithe, with silver hair, brilliant violet eyes, pointed ears, and sharp features. When Langulin decides that she is ready to talk to the PLAYERS, she will stride directly into their camp, in full mithril war gear. She will look weary more than anything else. She will ask the PLAYERS to state their business.

The PLAYERS' best bet is to come totally clean with her: tell her everything that has happened, show her Evenser's mithril scroll, and ask her advice as to how to proceed. In such a case, she listens thoughtfully, reads the scroll for herself, and tells the PLAYERS to meet her at the basalt column field at dawn the next morning. (Alternatively, play out efforts to kill her, a thoroughly evil act).

Langulin does not appear the next morning. Instead, a Bogman appears with a note written in human language, her periapt, and a very pink ship in a bottle.

Langulin the Fair, Elven Warrior

STR 09 DEX 20 INT 20 CON 16
APP 18 POW 03 SIZ 08 EDU 18
Hits: 12

Damage Bonus: +0

Move: 11"

Skills: Brawl (65%), Climb (65%), Command (65%), Craft (Armor-smithing) (85%), Craft (Weapon-smithing) (85%), Dodge (95%), Etiquette (75%), First Aid (95%), Grapple (65%), Hide (95%), History (85%), Insight (85%), Jump (65%), Listen (75%), Language (Human) 99%, Language (Elven) (99%), Navigate (90%), Persuade (75%), OCCULT (50%), Perform (Sing) (95%), *Pharmacy (95%)*, *Pilot Boat (65%)*, RESEARCH (LIBRARY USE) (95%), Research (Streetwise) (95%), Ride Horse (95%), Sense (90%), Spot (90%), *Status (75%)*, Stealth (95%), Strategy (90%), Survival (new) (99%), Swim (75%), Teach (90%), Throw (95%), Track (99%).

SQ: Night Vision, 8 levels.

Attacks: Longsword, mithril, 125%, 1d8+db, bleeding, 30 HP. A mithril weapon has double normal hit points, and is treated as magical.

Elven Warbow & 20 mithril tipped arrows, 125%, 1d8+1+1/2db, impaling, 10 HP, 120 range, 1/round.

Dagger, mithril, 125%, 1d3+1+db, impaling, HP 30.

Defenses: Armor 6 (mithril chain shirt, no penalty to Agility skills); Round Shield (mithril), 125%, 1d3+db, knockback, Armor 20 (must parry, no penalty to agility skills), HP 40.

Deity: The Elven gods of old.

Other Gear: *Periapt of Clarity* (see above), *Swan Ship* (see below).

The ship (a *Swan Ship*) is a gaudy model of a single-masted longboat, with no below-deck other than a small hold. It is painted in bright pink, with a swan for a masthead, and the sail is pink as well with a rampant swan as a herald. The note says:

“Thank you for refocusing me on my task. 100 years ago, when the Abjuration fell, I had been sent by the armies of the World to recruit the wizards of the Crannoch to our cause, in the company of some other noble warriors, Elves and humans. The others went mad and soon died, but this Periapt enabled me to focus my mind enough survive, albeit barely.

My mission was to find help to defeat the demons, and now my mission is complete. I am in no state to accompany you, but that does not mean that I cannot further your quest.

Follow this Bogman and you will find the rest of what you need. Break the bottle at the shore and it will take you on one journey. I hope that you like pink. Dress warmly.”

This is, of course, a suicide note. The Bogman takes you to a clearing about a mile away, where this is a small but tidy hut. Inside the hut, apart from her obsessively kept war gear and a *great* number of disturbed sculptures (100 years worth) is the body of the last Elf. She left herself looking out her east facing window, to see the dawn one last time.

Her life's blood can be collected easily, and the PLAYERS are welcome to her war gear. Play this as horrifically, sympathetically, or matter-of-factly as you think will impress the PLAYERS with the importance of the task before them. The mithril chain shirt fits anyone of SIZ 7-9.

A book has been left open on her table; there are many other books that might be found if one dug through the sculptures long enough. This book dates from before the Abjuration, and is entitled “Magical Wonders of the World.” The section that the book is open to discusses the great *Observatory of Pisto.*

It's location is not exactly known, other than that it lies somewhere to the North and East of Fallingstar, high on the highest mountain in the World. It was built there by ancient wizards not so much for its use as a vantage point, but rather for the sympathetic magic value of just being there. The only way to find it is to quest for it; magic will not find it.

The wizards of the Observatory, it was said, could find just about anything not carefully hidden by magic, no matter where it was in the World. The price was dear, however; such powerful magic required the sacrifice of powerful magic, best of a sort that improved one's senses or one's mental acuity.

Of course, the PLAYERS now have such a thing (*Idea* roll): the *Periapt*. No one else, or any other source that they might access, will offer any better insight: the exact location was a closely guarded secret even before the Abjuration. Who knows if the Observatory even exists any longer? Still, if it does, that is exactly the kind of engine that the PLAYERS might use to discern the location of the most miserable human in the World.

As promised, when the bottle containing the *Swan Ship* is broken at the shore, it grows into a single-masted, 30' long, Viking-style longboat, suitable for river travel as well as coastal travel. It has only a small below deck hold; people are intended to make camp on deck and handle the elements as best they can. “Pink” does not begin to describe it. It is festooned with pink paint and gaudy, over the top feminine decorations. It is good for one journey, which the magic of the boat will define as being at anchor for two sunrises without interruption, at which point it crumbles.

The *Swan Ship* can accommodate 10 people and their provisions at the most, and still be stable at sea.

The PLAYERS now have a specific target, a very general idea of which way to go, and not much else. The good news is that the

Swan Ship pilots itself, making minor adjustments at the rudder and taking the safest available course available given the general way that someone tries to steer it.

Scene 4--Over the Blue (and White, and Grey)

Assuming reasonably diligent perseverance and heading as north as the seas will allow, it will take about a month of sailing (from the mouth of the Crannoch delta; about 2 days to get there from the nearest point on the river to the Moot) to spot Helm's Camp. The fires of Helm's Camp are easily visible from the ocean coast, which will lead the PLAYERS to head down the sheltered inlet. Some general discussion about how this month at sea should go is appropriate.

The first week or so will take the PLAYERS up the coast and past the mountainous tundra to the north, which forms the northern rim of the Crannoch's delta. **Survival** rolls should be allowed to forage for food and water during the first week or so. It is cool, but not dangerously cold.

The second week, the PLAYERS get into cold water and poor weather (wind and sleet) and the coast is very rugged. **Difficult Survival** rolls should be allowed to pull in some fish; fresh water is not a problem as it deluges the PLAYERS. (Hopefully they are smart enough to stockpile the fresh water in barrels or skins).

The third and fourth weeks are grueling. The PLAYERS should have ample food supplies to survive this week from what they are carrying or have foraged up to this point. The weather grows extremely cold (circa 0 degrees F.) and the spot rule for cold exposure must be invoked from here on out, until the PLAYERS find true shelter.

Regardless of precautions, the freezing cold begins to impose penalties given enough time. After ½ CON days of exposure, any physical action beyond very slow movement requires a Stamina (CON x5) check. Failure means that 1 point of damage is sustained, although the action still succeeds. After a

number of days equal to CON, all rolls (mental and physical) are considered **Difficult**.

This charitably assumes, of course, that they are dressed for the weather; stay huddled together for warmth, and have managed to keep dry. Failing that, start in with the above checks as soon as the weather turns, and require an additional Stamina (CON x5) check every day, assuming some ability to keep warm, to avoid 1 point of damage. The damage does not go away until true shelter is found.

Someone who gets drenched and cannot get dry, or who is so poorly clothed as to invoke hypothermia, gets to make a Stamina check every ten minutes until reasonably dry and warm (the damage remains until true shelter is found). Pretty much the only thing that would count as true shelter is Helm's Camp, or burning the Swan Boat for warmth.

The sea is choppy and full of ice floes, but the Swan Boat keeps going in a generally northerly direction, deftly avoiding them.

In week four, the PLAYERS should be allowed to spot ruin sites along the shore at places where the land is sheltered and the ice is broken. Allow them to find several of these, increasing in size, as the PLAYERS head on. (A **Navigate** or **Survival** roll will show that in its effort to go north, the Swan Boat is now tacking north while mostly headed east).

Investigation of these ruin sites reveals that every single thing that could be stripped and moved by human power and barged off, has been stripped and barged off. Holes where isolated willows once stood; topsoil, stone, you name it, it is all long gone. No bodies can be found (the bones are useful). **Second Sight** might pick up glimpses of horrible slaughter by sea-borne raiders, who literally took everything with them.

These former settlements get larger and more substantial as the PLAYERS sail north and east. Ultimately, the Swan Boat rounds a cape and briefly heads south so that it can enter a sheltered bay and head back north

and west. The PLAYERS have arrived at Helm's Camp.

Encounters along the way are at the KEEPER'S discretion, but it would not do to have any of the PLAYERS die in so anti-climactic a fashion.

If This Is Not Their First Trip to Takuk...

Well, that's all well and good, and perfectly in keeping with the "blow-off" sub-theme of this scenario.

Takuk is designed to be a campaign arc that ends essentially in a stalemate: The Kin are battled to a standstill; the inside man is identified and perhaps eliminated; and only whatever discrete task that brought them here gets accomplished. Lots of unfinished business remains.

The PLAYERS should not have been allowed to get close enough to the Observatory of Pisto to really check it out previously. However, if they have been here before, saw the fire in the distance, and asked about it, the location of the Observatory will be no mystery.

The PLAYERS likely left Helm's Camp in a hurry, as chaos erupted over who would get to go with them. They may be expecting trouble in Helm's Camp once it becomes distressingly apparent that this appears to be their destination.

If so, they missed the point. Anyone left behind at Helm's Camp is overjoyed to see them—the PLAYERS must have finally returned to "do the right thing" and treat everyone exactly the same.

The PLAYERS would be wise to get out of Helm's Camp A.S.A.P. on arrival, though. When the Swan Boat's magic expires, people are going to panic and a riot will quickly break out, until they realize that everyone is still the same, and hence, being treated "fairly."

Scene 5--Helm's Camp and Overland to the Observatory

Helm's Camp: Refer to the description of Helm's Camp in the Takuk chapter, ante, for an overview of this comfortable yet ultimately pathetic place. They can (with a modicum of barter and role-playing) rest, heal and resupply before heading on to wherever it is that they are heading. The PLAYERS will probably be after four pieces of information before heading out, but if you want to run some of the Takuk plot points, feel free to weather them in for as long as it takes.

The four central questions are:

"Has anyone heard of the Observatory of Pisto?" The short answer is "no." No one has ever come looking for it; it is not mentioned in any of their books; and there are not any Adepts at Helm's Camp who would have reason to know.

"But it is said be on top of the highest mountain in the World?" That revelation will prompt both some information and some warnings. The Observatory, they realize, must be that site to the southwest, at the fringe of the mountain range, which the Questing Beast is so fond of.

It is not visible from Helm's Camp barring unusually clear weather, but they can give the PLAYERS directions: four days march west, and three days march south. Look for the stairway up the mountain, with the ruined, perpetually burning tower on top. It's rather hard to miss.

"What's the Questing Beast?" Assuming that they have never been to Takuk, they will certainly want to ask about whatever lurks around the place they are going. No one is exactly sure what it is, but they do not think it's a demon. The Beast appears, generally speaking, to be an immense, three-headed carnivore (dog-like?) made out of swirling black flames. It does not, however, give off any light or warmth.

People who have ventured out onto the White Waste over the years have sometimes



encountered it. Generally, it comes out of the night, bellowing like an enormous hound, after camp is made. It does not give chase if you flee, but rather sets about burning down your tent. Occasionally, it has been seen at the edge of the horizon by the town lookouts. A couple times since the Abjuration, it has even been said to have charged the town, but when people scrambled in fear, it veered off and no one was harmed.

Once it was seen to come barreling down the mountain from whatever the burning ruin at the top of the stairs is.

If your PLAYERS could use the hint, either Rachael (see Takuk, Important Persons, pp. 75-76) or some other smarty-pants might venture the opinion that the Beast seems to not like it when people are organized, like a moth to a flame. This is an accurate insight, but Rachael (or whomever) is quickly shouted down.

“Can we get a guide?” Yes, they can. However, they probably should be subtle about asking, since anyone getting anything that the others do not have will lead to a squabble about sharing.

Overland

There is not much out in the White Waste, and it is a simple matter of trekking four days west and three days south, toward the end of which a mammoth mountain range appears. A sheltered stairway (cut into the mountain's face) switches back and forth up several thousand feet.

Apart from the weather conditions (see Arctic spot rules, ante), there are only two real concerns on the way out).

Potential Problem #1: The Kin: The KEEPER will have to address the question of whether Uncle Bob is still “undercover” in Helm's Camp as Rolf the Cook or someone else. If he is, take careful note of how much the PLAYERS divulge and how tough they might appear to be to him.

Likely, Uncle Bob will conclude that they are not worth mentioning. (Remember, he's

proud and overconfident). Only if he recognizes them as a major threat (powerful magic, prior encounters with the PLAYERS that went badly for The Kin) will he leave town after they are out of sight and warn the rest of The Kin.

If The Kin do not have an agent inside Helm's Camp at this point in the campaign, then the PLAYERS will only be bothered by The Kin, at worst, as a testing feint on the way there. It is more likely that they simply avoid them. (If The Kin recognize them as a significant threat, they may simply get ready for an attack at their lair).

Potential Problem #2: The Questing Beast: The Questing Beast, however, will be an intermittent, hit-and-run sort of problem. Each day of the seven day journey to the mountains, make a group **Luck** roll. The Beast's programming might sense that the PLAYERS are up to only good, and the Beast does not like that. Remember, it wants to keep civilization in shambles, and it generally accomplishes this by burning people or things that are moving society forward.

The **Luck** roll, if failed, means that the Beast has managed to find them. (It does occasionally hang out at the Observatory if it has nothing else to draw its attention, but mostly it wanders back and forth between Helm's Camp and The Kin's lair).

The KEEPER has an opportunity here to use the Beast as a bit of a weathervane. Hopefully the PLAYERS have gotten ahead of themselves and have been debating what the optimal way to rewrite the Blessing will be. The more likely it is to really put civilization as a whole on a better track, the more likely it is that the Beast will actually attack. If their idea is self-centered, downright bad, or difficult to gauge long-term (e.g., lift the Abjuration and see what happens), it may just lurk at the edge of sight, unnerving everyone.

The best response to a Beast attack is to run in terror in as disorganized a fashion as possible. This swings its judgment the other

way and it tends to only destroy obvious signs of advancement (such as a camp) before barreling off. Fighting the Beast only prolongs the incident, probably resulting in a painful death. (An overly brave NPC might drive this point home in the one round it will

take, if necessary). This encounter should only be run once, unless the PLAYERS do something new (apart from heading toward the Observatory) that merits a fresh look from the Questing Beast.



Lonely but clear....

Scene 6--The Observatory of Pisto

Apart from a small chapterhouse, and a magic-assisted shortcut connecting it to northwestern Fallingstar, the Observatory's function was to act as a supreme site from which to work *Locate* magic. As the highest point in the World, it had the best vantage point to find things, from a sympathetic magic perspective.

Numerous permanent rituals, *Tools* and other boosts were installed to amplify any *Locate* magic cast here. In addition, a copy of every map produced in Fallingstar, or that could be acquired by the caretaking wizards, was kept here in a durable form.

The caretakers abandoned the place to fight in the Demon Wars and were wiped out in the Abjuration. It was shielded by distance from the worst effects of the Abjuration, with the result that the place continued to work.

This bastion of civilization, of course, was completely unacceptable to the Questing Beast, which wrecked the place as thoroughly as it could as soon as its wizardly defenders were gone. It is now a ruin, missing half of its roof, with portions of it permanently burning with the Beast's black flames.





The Tower of the Observatory of Pisto

Climbing Up: On foot, the Observatory is an apparently exhausting, leg-destroying, 15,000 foot ascent. A sheltered stairway, partly made of masonry and partly cut into the stone, with occasional window openings for light, switches back up the mountain.

It only takes a couple of hours to climb. Strangely, the PLAYERS do not get as tired as they think they might, and their steps are hastened. There is magic afoot, as any detection effort will discern. The ascent corridor obviously took many years, if not decades, to construct.

The PLAYERS should be disturbed to note that the entire floor of the corridor, all the way up, is scorched and bubbled as though exposed to intense heat.

As the PLAYERS reach the end of the day, they cannot help but to note dancing shadows, as though from a large fire, at the end of the causeway, although they feel no heat.

The Fiery Furnace: The causeway exits onto a small plateau, quite frozen over. It is obvious that it was not always so. Dead trees remain in neat orchard rows, and a lake is frozen over. (Much as at the Grey Monastery, the chapter house kept a small, protected garden to help feed the caretakers).

However, much as at the Grey Monastery, an **Idea** roll realizes that even if the entire plateau was devoted to food production, it seems awfully small. Either they were feeding themselves magically, or somehow otherwise getting food supplies regularly to this very, very remote location.

Despite the ice cover, the entire area right in front of the exit, and leading up to the gate, is covered in black flames. The flames extend 10 feet to either side of the opening, and 50 feet out to the smashed, destroyed, burning remnants of a stout gate.

The PLAYERS have a few options here. They could fly over the flames, which is the

easiest choice, but might burn up some valuable MPs.

They might get very creative in terms of skirting the edge of the flames. Anyone who falls into the flames and fails to get out immediately takes 1d6 of damage; anyone who tries to run through the flames to the outside takes 1d6 leaving and 1d6 if they reenter at the gate; and anyone who tries to run through the flames to the gate takes 3d6. The damage should also be applied to all of their gear.

It is not necessary to run back in at the gate. If they scout around the edge of the plateau, a **Climb** roll will allow them to shimmy along the edge of the cliffs and enter through one of the curtain wall breaches.

A map key for the Observatory follows.

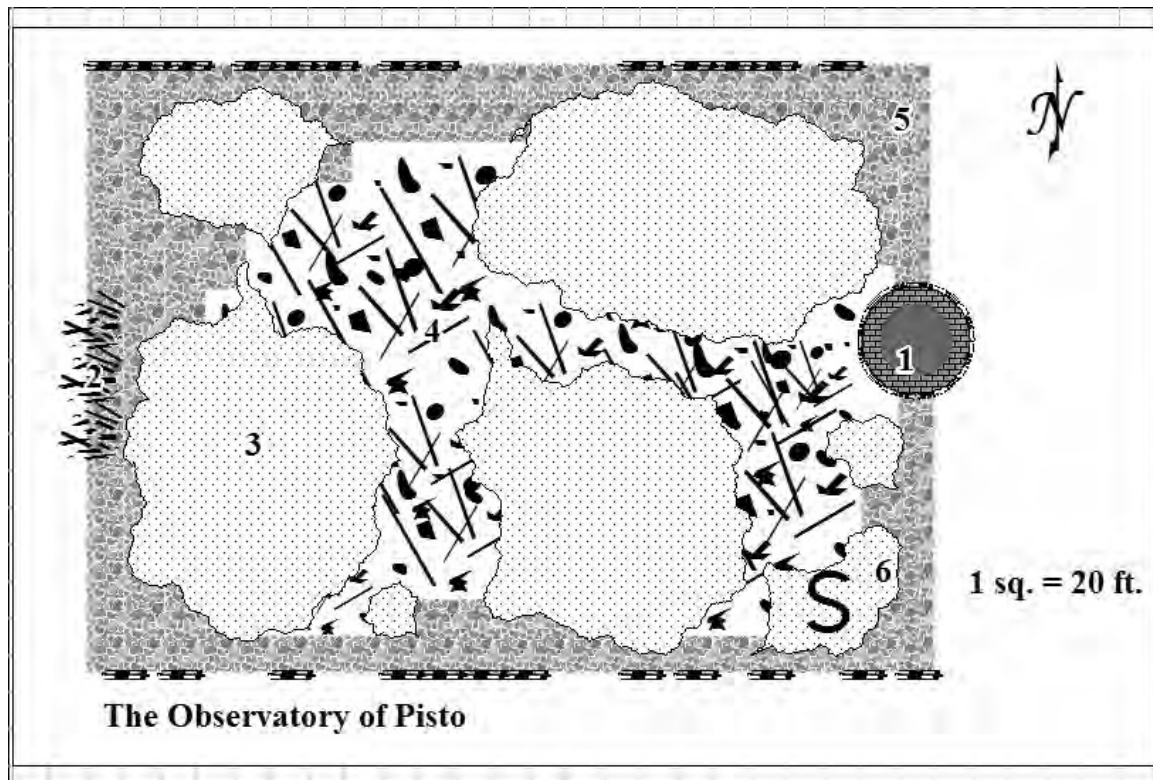
1. This is the **Tower**. It is about 50 feet high and perched on the edge of a promontory. It is ruined and utterly quiet. A disconcerting side effect of the Observatory is that people always feel as though they are being watched.

The only conventional entrance to the Tower is at its western base, through the courtyard. However, there is a stairway that emerges from the top.

More on the interior and roof of the Tower is below. The Tower itself is the magical engine.

2. The **Gate** has been blown off its once very sturdy hinges and reduced to mostly disintegrated rubble by the Questing Beast. The parts of the Gate's remnants that are not directly exposed to the elements are still burning, and will be until directly extinguished. Those that are exposed to the elements consist of piles of ash. If the PLAYERS have gotten to the Gate, they can pick their way through it without serious risk of suffering from the black flames.





3. The roof of the Observatory's *chapter house* (20 feet high) has mostly fallen in, except around the curtain walls. The areas shown on the map in hashing (such as Area 3) are covered by *blown snow and ice drifts*.

4. The *open areas* are burned and disintegrated rubble, care of the Questing Beast.

5. The *areas under what remains of the roof* are still burning with black flames. There is nothing worth salvaging, or for that matter, even identifiable, in the rubble.

6. Under about *five feet of snow and ice drift* in this area is a spiral stairway leading down into the mountain. It would be quite obvious except for the enormous mound of hard pack covering this entire corner of the complex. The PLAYERS are only going to find it through magical means; by randomly digging all the way through it, or once they manage to have a look around the map room.

But...the Questing Beast does not like any serious efforts at digging in this area. See

Exploratory Excavation, below.

Guards! Whereas the humans at Helm's Camp may not know of the Observatory by name or reputation, The Kin certainly do. They can sense its magic, and as a result, it is one of the few locales in Takuk (the other being the Monument) where they station Wayne-spawn to deter intruders.

Scattered randomly around the Observatory complex are a whopping dozen of the suckers, with 6 inside the tower and 6 scattered around the grounds. Treat them as rather stupid pack predators: one or two might allow themselves to be seen to lure someone off, or make some hit-and-run attacks, but they are only going to attack if they can bring a large gang to bear and think they can win.

Wayne-Spawn are smaller versions of Wayne (see description in The Kin section of Takuk), with half the base demonic armor (similar to Overseers). That is to say, they are porridge-like, sluggish, oozing Lovecraftian horrors with a face at either

end (different faces, depending on the parent). They are quicker than they look, however.

Wayne-spawn (Manga-fu Nether Spawn) x12, STR 11, CON 13, SIZ 11, INT 3, POW 13, DEX 11, Move 7, HP 17, db: +0.

Attacks: Tentacle Fu, 50%, damage 1d3, attacks with 1d3 tentacles each round.

Grapple, after first two successful tentacle hits. After a successful grapple, the Wayne-spawn just whale away with 1d3 other tentacles, but they tend to get very focused on what they have caught. What they do to someone who is grappled is left up to your imagination and how much “squick” your PLAYERS can take. They cannot reproduce themselves, but they don't know that.

SQ: 5 points of **armor** (ineffective vs. magic or steel); half damage from all physical attacks; **Sneak** 75%; **Spot** 40%; **Hide in Rubble** 75%; **Climb by oozing up a wall** 100%; **Ooze through door crack** 100%.

Use the Wayne-spawn to play cat and mouse with the PLAYERS as they attempt to search the grounds, and make them pay if they split up. (Actually, a good way to outfox the Wayne-spawn is to fake someone wandering off, then blast them when they scurry forth. They're not too bright).

The Tower and the Map Room: Once the PLAYERS manage to dispose of enough of the Wayne-spawn to operate freely, they will eventually enter the Tower. The Questing Beast has not laid waste at all to the Tower, and if it has pursued the PLAYERS this far, it pulls up short and rumbles off.

The door to the Tower is closed but can be opened with some difficulty. (The Wayne-spawn can just ooze up to the top and

through the window). The Tower is one open room, 40 feet square and 50 feet high. An open construction, bronze spiral staircase winds up the middle of the tower, ending in a trap door at the ceiling.

The Tower itself strongly radiates magic, and is basically one big spellcasting **Tool**. Anything and everything that you can think of that would have anything to do with seeing a long distance or recording what is there is represented here, hung from the walls all the way up the Tower, including lenses of many types, ordinary telescopes, navigational aids, preserved birds of prey, and many, many maps (each etched into thin metal and framed). All of this (automatic for an Adept with the **Higher Mysteries** Lost Art, or an **Idea** roll), in addition to a lookout tower on top of the highest mountain, is to aid **Locate** magic.

Assuming that the PLAYERS have a look around, allow them to find a floor plan map of the Observatory as it existed pre-Abjuration, helpfully labeled. While the various living quarters, workspaces, libraries and other living quarters of the chapter house are now of academic interest, clearly depicted in the southeastern corner of the complex is a stairway going down. This is simply labeled, “to Fallingstar.” That should get them digging.

At the top of the stairway in the Tower is an easily opened trap door; the spaces around it are quite sufficient for the Wayne-spawn to ooze through. The door opens onto the roof, which is not nearly as intact as the Tower's interior. In fact, all that there is on top of the roof is an ancient, ruined, crumbling section of wall, out in the middle of the tower, seemingly transplanted from somewhere else, with an open window.

In front of the window is a large, closed stone urn, with a lid. Lifting the lid reveals (in addition to the high possibility of one or more Wayne-spawn hanging out in it) a lot of ash and fire damaged precious metals—gold, silver, jewels, crowns, etc.



A Room With A View....To Anywhere.

If the PLAYERS cannot figure it out for themselves, allow *Idea* rolls, or anyone with *Higher Mysteries* to automatically succeed. While this is a naturally advantageous place to cast *Locate* magic (+5 *Tool*, +5 to adjusted POW, +5 *Incantation*), it can also convert and “burn” other kinds of magic. Thus, pre-Abjuration, someone who was not even an Adept could sacrifice some magical item here and get a sizeable *Locate* spell out of the deal, as the magic in the item is burned out, literally to fuel one spell.

Post-Abjuration, things are wonkier. The urn still works, but an Adept is still going to have to cast a *Locate*-oriented spell to do any work. The worth of the sacrificed item should be added to the adjusted POW of the Adept, on top of the +15 total POW bonuses of the Observatory. The target magic points for *Locating* the most miserable person in the World is 25 (Adjusted POW x3 vs. a target number of 250).

The *Periapt of Clarity* is an ideal candidate for sacrifice—it is itself a magical focusing device, and a powerful one. Sacrificing that to the urn gives a one-time POW charge of 100, so the check with that (assuming non-combat) is going to be (Adept's POW + *Locate* Aptitude +118) x3 vs. 250.

In other words, with the Periapt sacrificed, the Adept automatically succeeds, although *Graying* is certainly an issue. Indeed, wielding this much magic is *certain* to result in *Graying*—1 point automatically, and 2d6 (ouch!) on a 99-00. (Allow the Adept who fails this so badly as to die to nonetheless fall with an outstretched finger pointing in the right direction).

Using some other magical item will result in a boost of its worth in POW (KEEPER'S discretion) x5 if not oriented toward clarity or location, or x10 if it is.

Success causes the view through the window to change. The view will spin almost due east and focus on a one-armed man in a cave, cooking over a pot. A voice from nowhere will intone, “*Four days journey to the East, find Rolf the Cook.*”

(Now, this may come as an unpleasant surprise to the PLAYERS or any Helm's Camp guides with them, since they may think Rolf the Cook is back at Helm's Camp. This ought to cause the PLAYERS to realize that their presence and activities might be under scrutiny).

Exploratory Excavation & The Wizard's Highway

Careful investigation of the maps in the Tower reveals that something lies beneath the ice pack in the southeastern corner of the chapterhouse ruins, with the curious notation “To Fallingstar.” The PLAYERS might rightly wonder, given how easily they scampered up a 15,000 foot mountain, whether there might be a further network of “moving sidewalks” to hasten physical travel. There is, and this is the entrance to one.

Peeling off the pack ice will require 6 man hours with appropriate tools. Halve the effectiveness of anyone working without tools; allow appropriate magic to hasten the effort in the KEEPER'S discretion.

Underneath is a set of stairs heading down into the darkness. Although conventional light sources (e.g., torches, candles) and magical light function in the stairwell, magical light abruptly gives out at the bottom.

Artificial light reveals a flat, flagstone floored passageway headed southwest. The entire passage radiates strong *Move* magic. No matter how much artificial light is brought to bear, the PLAYERS can only see 10 feet ahead and 10 feet on either side of them.

A line of blue tiles demarcates the center of the passageway. A sign on the floor, etched into the stone, reads: “*Fallingstar, 3 days. First stop: 14 hours.*”

The passageway continues on for 14 hours, whether the PLAYERS run, walk or crawl. At which point, they encounter a sign on the floor that says, “*First Stop.*” Here, light fills the area (a 30' x 30' room) that is

provisioned with (magically preserved) food, water, firewood, and sleeping pallets.

This pattern repeats to the “*Second Stop*”, and finally, after another 14 hours, arrives at “*Fallingstar*.” A stairway ascends to a rubble-choked opening. Clearing the rubble takes 1 man hour, and brings the PLAYERS crawling out of the ground in some ruins at the edge of the Academy in Fallingstar.

Straying from the visible path is a bad, bad idea. The light, strangely, does not reach past 10 feet on either side of the blue line, even if one walks 10 feet away from it bearing the light. If that person keeps going, he steps into darkness. If he steps completely into darkness, he cannot come back on his own, having ventured into mind-bending, non-Euclidean space.

If he stops immediately, someone can haul him back onto the path, but the wandering malcontent gets to make ten ***Fear Checks***, the first failed one going to ***Terrified***, and the rest to ***Distraught***. (Even a demon would get to make these checks). The person should appear aged, with his hair turned grey and a wild, bestial look in his eyes. Two ***Fear Checks*** should be automatically failed at a minimum.

No Digging, Please: As the PLAYERS begin to excavate, however, they hear a LOUD roar of anger, echoing through the mountains from far below. This is followed by a distant rumbling, which gets louder and louder, until it starts coming ***up*** the mountain through the ascent corridor.



To Fallingstar. Mind the Crack.

If the digging stops immediately, so does the thundering approach. If the PLAYERS try to beat the clock, the Questing Beast

descends upon them and does its best to liquidate them (literally) in 2d100 minutes from when the digging starts. Opening up the Wizard's Highway is a strong move in the direction of civilization and unnatural intrusion onto nature, and the Questing Beast will have none of it.

So if they are lucky and have a concerted digging effort underway with enough people, the PLAYERS will escape down the stairway. Otherwise....

Scene 7--Overland & the Lair of The Kin

The trip to the lair of The Kin is four days, basically due East, following the edge of the mountains through the cold waste. At the end of the fourth day of travel, the PLAYERS see an obvious, large cave opening. In front of this is a large debris field of bones and other offal, human and otherwise. The cave leads to a geothermal source, reeks of sulfur and is quite warm. So it's hard to miss once you get close. Small hot springs bubble up from the ground in the general area.

Potential Problem #1, The Kin, Redux: None of The Kin are particularly brilliant, but the KEEPER will have to determine whether they have been tipped off that the PLAYERS are coming. The Kin will be at three different potential stages of alert when the PLAYERS draw near: oblivious, wary, and ambush-ready.

Oblivious: This state of affairs only occurs if Uncle Bob the doppelganger is, for some reason, unable to get word to The Kin that adventurers are around. The Kin might, in that instance, be in their respective quarters, torturing the rabble in the slave pit, doing something bad to Rolf the Cook, be out and about, or otherwise amusing themselves.

It's the KEEPER's call, but the PLAYERS might be able to get the advantage of surprise. They may encounter one or two of

them out on the cold waste; this would almost certainly be Pa and/or Junior.

Wary: This state of affairs will result if The Kin have some idea that adventurers are about, or if the Questing Beast has been making a lot of noise (such as due to excavation efforts).

Everyone except Wayne (who only comes out to eat or breed) and Uncle Bob (who will stay at Helm's Camp) will stick together and generally be at **Area 4** until fighting starts. 3 of the 10 total Wayne-spawn will keep watch from the cave mouth and report any sightings.

Ambush: All of The Kin except Wayne, Grandmama and the 10 Wayne-spawn will be hiding outside of the cave, waiting for most of the PLAYERS to go in.

Wayne, Grandmama and the Wayne-spawn will ambush them from all sides in **Area 4**, and Grandmama will try to hypnotize the first PLAYER to resort to magic, and turn him against the others PLAYERS. The rest of The Kin (including Uncle Bob, who will have fled from Helm's Camp) then will come in from the rear, trapping the PLAYERS in a pincer maneuver. The Kin's full stats are at pp. 71-72; the summary table is reproduced below.

The Ambush level of readiness should be reserved for the situation where a Wayne-spawn manages to escape from the Observatory, after seeing the PLAYERS use the Observatory; or if the PLAYERS are known as serious threats from prior adventuring or encounters.

It takes a lot for these schnooks to actually work together. They all rather easily get distracted by their principal flaws if the opportunity presents itself. Each must succeed in an INT x5 roll not to do so. Pa will grab valuables and try to save his own skin; Ma will eat something inappropriate; Junior will charge headlong into bad odds; Grandmama has to be cajoled to do anything; Sissy is a temptress who herself can be tempted; and Wayne lacks any real intelligence.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Pa</u>	<u>Ma</u>	<u>Uncle Bob</u>	<u>Junior</u>	<u>Grand-mama</u>	<u>Sissy</u>	<u>Wayne</u>
Type	Filthy Beggar Type Werewolf	Corpulent Ghoul	Doppelganger	Slasher Flick Troll	Undead Ankle Biter	Succubus	Tentacle Fu!
Special	Somewhat Smart	Vicious; Can Control Junior	Sneaky	Tough; Scary	Hypnotic	Charming	Spawner; Scary
Sin	Greed	Gluttony	Pride	Wrath	Sloth	Lust	Envy
Flaw	Incredibly Greedy	Tunnel Vision, Only Cares About Food	Overconfident	Single-mindedly Violent, Doesn't Take Precautions	Physically Weak, Immobile	Not Real Bright; Likes Shiny Things.	Mindless, Kept Hidden Away.
INT	13	8	14	7	6	10	3

Potential Problem #2, The Questing Beast, Redux: As before, the Questing Beast will probably hover at the edge of the horizon, its programming trying to decide what to do about the PLAYERS. Use the same guidelines for its reaction as on the way to the Observatory.

At the Lair of The Kin: Following is an area-by-area description of The Kin's cavern lair. As discussed below, the cavern is considerably larger than depicted—in fact, it is vast. However, as most of it lies below the entry level, and comprises the extended slave pit, it is not detailed.

General notes: Except for *Area 1*, there is no natural lighting. The entire cavern is warm through nearby geothermal activity (about 60 degrees).

Where The Kin and the 10 Wayne-spawn are to be found depends, as described above, on The Kin's state of readiness. The following assumes that they are oblivious to the PLAYERS' approach, but nonetheless active. During periods of inactivity, they generally retire to their respective chambers

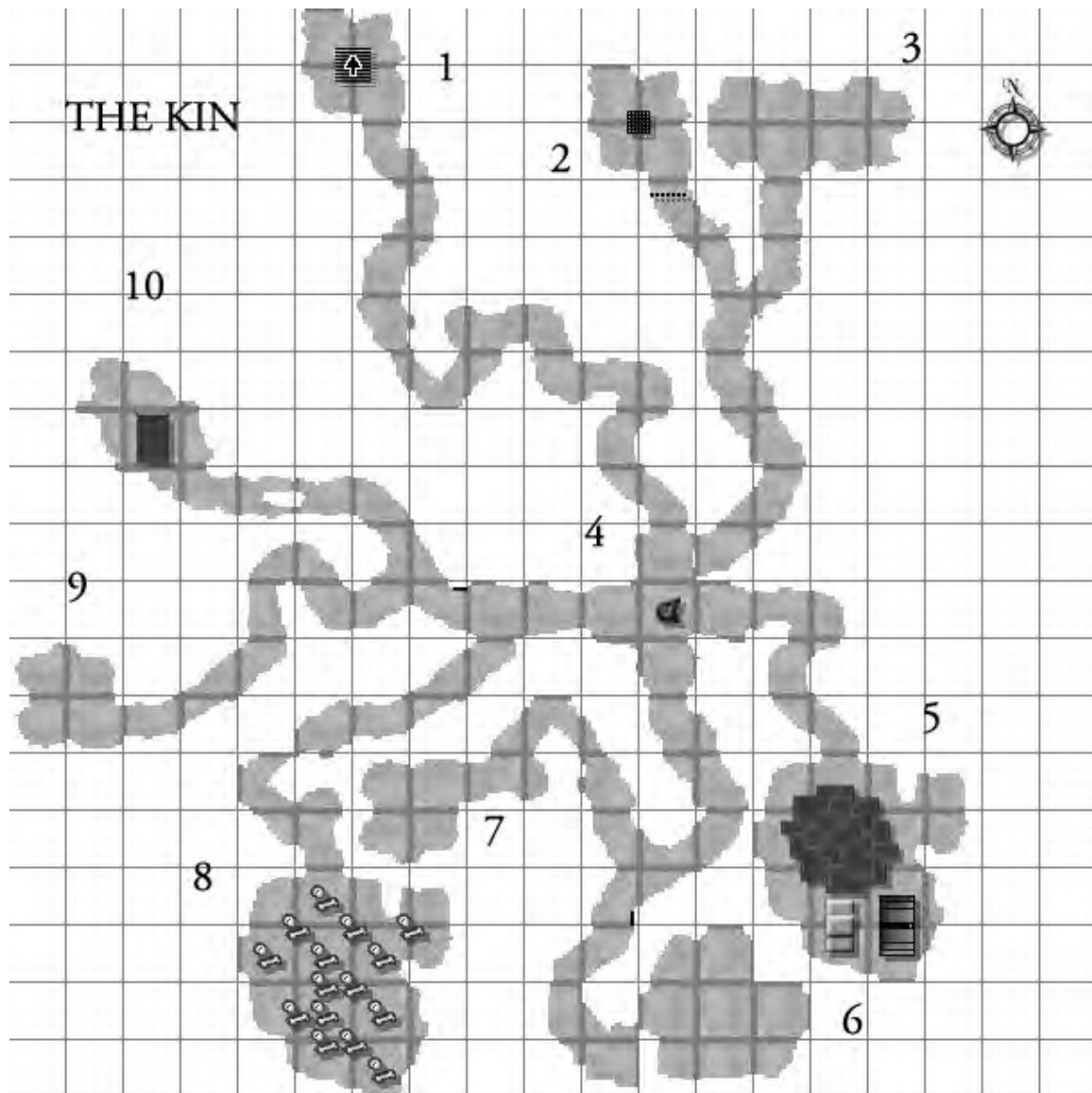
(except for Sissy, who always finds her way into someone else's, essentially at random).

Any noisy combat (anything more than total surprise and immediate elimination of the threat) will result in a general alarm, and the various Wayne-spawn and members of The Kin will sally forth to investigate. Keep track of your Wayne-spawn!

1. Entryway: Natural light spills into this area, which is down a gradual slope 10 feet from the surface. Light from *Area 4* can only be seen with a direct line of sight to *Area 4*.

Apart from *Areas 1 and 4*, all other areas are pitch black. Each of The Kin sees just fine in the dark.

Three of the Wayne-spawn will be stationed here if The Kin are wary of possible attack. They will all immediately flee to raise the alarm and the first sign of any assault; the PLAYERS will have to be quick to stop them.



The Lair of The Kin, 1 sq.=20 feet.

2. Slave Pit: Across the neck of the cave passage leading into this area is a barred cell door secured with a latch on the south (non-prisoner) side. The stench of offal here is overwhelming. Moans and screeches can be heard emanating from the darkness below.

The hole in *Area 2* leads down about 20 feet to a *vast* underground cave system, not further described here.

Clustered around or near the opening at all times, however, are 2d10 naked, blinded,

filthy, lobotomized human meals in waiting. Ma dumps slops down to them often enough to keep them fed, and water is available in the cave system.

Each seems largely oblivious to its surroundings, and are not capable of communicating. Each bears a gruesome, healed over wound under their left eye, where they have been crudely lobotomized. They do not make any effort to resist being led about, but are beyond help.

3. **Ma:** Littered with refuse from her snacks. Other than that, this room is empty and unremarkable. Trying to liberate Ma's snacks from the Slave Pit sends her into a reckless fury, to the point of abandoning any semblance of strategy.

4. **Central Chamber/Kitchen:** This area is kept lit through a fissure in the floor, leading to some kind of luminescent geothermal source. It is quite warm (100 degrees F.). Tables, chairs and a pallet in the corner are also present. A variety of (non-steel, non-sharp) cooking implements are available.

In the middle of the room is a second geothermal vent that has been built up into a hearth. On the hearth rests a bubbling cook pot. You can probably guess what is on the menu. The stink of human offal is likewise strong here.

Chained (literally) to the cook pot is the real **Rolf the Cook**. Unlike the mindless refuse in the slave pit (**Area 2**), Rolf is unlobotomized and aware of his surroundings, though utterly broken through his many years of torture. If the PLAYERS watch for any length of time, they might see Wayne undulate forth into **Area 4**, at which point Rolf meekly submits. If that doesn't tell the PLAYERS that Rolf is the one they are looking for, nothing will.

Rolf's reaction at the prospect of rescue will be one of overwhelming shock, disbelief and gratitude. He will not resist, and will numbly nod his agreement and urge immediate flight. However, if he can get his remaining hand on any sort of weapon, he will fly into a berserk rage and launch himself at the nearest demon. He will have to be restrained to stop.

Note that, under the literal terms of the enchantment on the White Tor, the PLAYERS only actually need Rolf's one remaining hand (attached or not). They do not necessarily need Rolf intact, although that it is obviously preferable.

Some of the resident Wayne-spawn are often in this area.

5. **Pa:** Pa's lair is jam-packed full of material wealth (which, if the PLAYERS were so inclined to actually remove it, would bump them up two permanent Wealth levels). Armor, weapons, raw material, foodstuffs, spices, gold, gems, jewelry, medical supplies, clothing, books, you name it, 100 years worth of plunder and despoilment are uselessly stockpiled here. Pa likes to roll around in it. Trying to take anything from it sends him into a reckless fury, to the point of abandoning any semblance of strategy.

Allow the PLAYERS to find armor that fits them, up to chain shirts, at least one steel weapon of whatever sort they are looking for, and good bows with steel tipped arrows. But make it take a long time to dig through the mountain of hoarded stuff, and make them pay for it dearly in terms of strategic advantage.

6. **Wayne:** There is nothing in Wayne's chamber but Wayne and/or some of his spawn. Wayne's chamber is only accessible through a small (SIZ 6) chokepoint through which the semi-liquid Wayne can flow without difficulty. As noted above, there is only one thing on Wayne's "mind" and he tends to get easily distracted from other tasks.

7. **Grandmama:** This room is full of junk, cluster and dust. Unless specifically hauled out to make use of her hypnotic ability, Grandmama is found here, hiding underneath a space that is too small for a full-sized being to hide under. She generally cannot be bothered to attack anyone, unless they are alone and injured, or she otherwise has an easy shot.

8. **Junior:** **Area 8** is empty as well (Junior does not sleep, being undead), except for a number of mummified heads representing Junior's grisly trophies from over the years.

The only kind of "strategy" that Junior tends to observe is slasher-flick strategy: he listens to Ma for short-term instructions; he lays ambushes; he preferentially attacks naughty people; he charges straight ahead

once he attacks; and he plays dead (even if he isn't) until no one is looking, then he sneaks off to regenerate. Or, he gets up silently and stabs them in the back.

9. Uncle Bob's Room: This is one of two rooms that are capable of being lit (lamps for light) and is furnished to accommodate an essentially human person. It is meticulously arranged, although probably dusty, as Uncle Bob spends almost all of his time undercover at Helm's Camp.

Captured! (Entirely Optional)

One of the most hated and hackneyed tropes in fantasy gaming is the "prisoner" scenario: the PLAYERS lose all of their stuff, get flung into a pit or jail cell, and then have to somehow escape. Often, this occurs with the help of conveniently placed fellow prisoners, helpfully left behind makeshift weapons or some other deus ex machina.

This is certainly a direction that this segment of the scenario could head in: the KEEPER pulls his punches and The Kin decide they would rather eat the PLAYERS later than kill them outright if the PLAYERS are defeated. Or, the PLAYERS deliberately allow themselves to be captured, in order to "attack from the inside".

This plan will quickly fall apart—*as it should*. They will be restrained, hypnotized one by one, lobotomized one by one, and brutalized by Sissy and Wayne, one by one. Even though they are not very smart, any bad guy with half a brain would not leave adventurers with the run of their home.

This trope should be thoroughly spanked, but give the PLAYERS a fighting chance as they see the red-hot lobotomy iron being readied in the distance (or, have an NPC go first).

10. Sissy: This is the other such room, a cross between Victorian frills and sadist's dungeon. Sissy is often here, especially when a fresh human has been captured. She

toys with such freshly lobotomized newcomers until she gets tired of them, and then they get tossed into the Slave Pit.

Junior, Sissy and Wayne are the most dangerous combatants. Sissy might try to pass herself as a human captive (a very beautiful one), and is hard to deal with if she grabs you. Wayne is very good at seeming to be dead, only to pop back up a few minutes later. Wayne is just plain hard to damage.

If the PLAYERS are totally getting clobbered, the Questing Beast might decide that The Kin are doing too well, and need to be brought down a peg. The Beast's bellowing, approach and eventual assault might create a distraction or turn the tables on The Kin at a critical moment.

Scene 8--Back to the Observatory, and Hot Pursuit, In More Ways Than One

The PLAYERS ought to be able to extricate Rolf from The Kin's lair, unless they bumble their way into an ambush. They can pick them off in small groups as they scramble to react. Rolf does not move quickly (he is in bad shape), so he might have to be carried or magically transported somehow.

In all likelihood, the PLAYERS will make a beeline back to the Observatory, hoping to take the "subway" back to Fallingstar. They might try to get there some other way; if so, play out their efforts logically.

Possible Problem #1, The Kin: Any surviving members of The Kin will, of course, come after the PLAYERS as they flee. Unless they get lucky, this will probably include Junior and any Wayne-spawn that they overlooked.

Uncle Bob, if not at the lair, will be notified by a surviving Wayne-spawn and head on an intercept course at top speed.

Junior will keep coming, and coming, and coming, until they hack him to tiny bits in exquisite detail, or catch him in the sunlight.



Definite Problem #2, The Questing Beast: Defeating (or mostly defeating) The Kin sets a terrible series of events into motion. This will swing the pendulum of what counts as “civilization” sharply back towards Helm’s Camp. The Questing Beast will then make its way there and level the place in detail. There might be a few survivors, since it wants to spread chaos, not kill everything.

The PLAYERS should be able to guess at what is going on once they hear the echoing roars from that direction. Role-play out the dilemma of getting Rolf back to Fallingstar vs. trying to save Helm’s Camp. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, etc.

Then, not being terribly happy that the PLAYERS are uncovering the “subway” to Fallingstar, the Beast will bellow and charge for the Observatory, as discussed above. The PLAYERS had either better hope that they get things done quickly, or that some of The Kin (Junior, again?) are in the Beast’s way.

The Questing Beast does not leave Takuk, and, as a result, stops at the stairway down to the “subway.” The Kin have no such compunctions.

Scene 9--Into the Darkness

At this point, as the PLAYERS scurry down the Wizard’s Highway, Rolf will want to be read in to what the heck is going on. He will agree to cooperate, after he gets over his initial surprise that Fallingstar (or anywhere else in the World) even exists.

The PLAYERS are not safe on the Wizards’ Highway. Not at all. Apart from any stray remnants of The Kin, this is when the “Majestic Plateau” will finally arrive on the scene.

Maintaining A Sense of Peril, and Taking the Opportunity to Clean Up Loose Ends: Logically, once the “Majestic Plateau” figures out that something fundamentally disruptive to the status quo was afoot, they would investigate by descending on Fallingstar, “interrogating” those they could

find, and then sending the swiftest things they had available to catch up to the PLAYERS.



The Light at the End of the Tunnel Might Be A Train....

This would include demons such as quasits (see AtA, p.160), hellhounds (see AtA, p.160), a vampire or two (see AtA, p.160-61); Red Ralag or similar soldier devils (see AtA, p.174), and possibly even Zazeer if she

would not completely obliterate the PLAYERS (see *AtA*, p.173).

They should be sent in numbers and strength that will give the PLAYERS a serious challenge, and perhaps even take a few of them out. (As, from this point on, the scenario is easily completed in one sitting, it is time to take the safeties off if this is intended to end the campaign. Heroic last stands to enable other PLAYERS to escape should be encouraged and/or played along with).

Note that because of the way the magic of the Wizards' Highway works, the PLAYERS will not be caught in transit between rest stops. Rather, they will either be caught at a rest stop, or everyone will emerge at a rest stop simultaneously, leading to a chaotic free-for-all in a small space. (And remember the horror that awaits for someone who strays out of the grounded reality portions of the Highway).

If any of the fast-moving sorts of critters that will catch up to them might be unfinished business from the campaign, be sure to give the PLAYERS an opportunity to settle old scores.

Scene 10--Back at Fallingstar

Whatever is left of the PLAYERS, along with whatever is left of Rolf the Cook, emerge at a second stairway that leads up to some overgrown and concealed ruins near the Academy.

A villager or two might be standing slack-jawed as the PLAYERS clamber up out of the ruins, possibly allowing the KEEPER one last chance to have superstitious peasants try to assault the PLAYERS.

Things are quiet at the Academy village, and down the road. It is a one-day trip to the White Tor. As the PLAYERS approach the Tor, however, they cannot help but notice that things are quite wrong.

Mutilated and eaten bodies are flung willy-nilly by the roadside, and near the rocky hillside where the Tor has been exposed, a large number of buzzards, ravens and other

carrion birds are circling.

Chaos and Carnage, but Fortunately, the Demons Don't Know For Sure What Is Going On: As the PLAYERS arrive, a pitched battle rages on in the shadow of the White Tor. A gang of about 20 demons are methodically finishing up the slaughter of a shockingly united force of a couple hundred humans, led by the crazies with part Elven blood.

The forces of good have actually managed to take down a demon or two, but without steel or magic, they are fighting a losing battle. They have been broken and routed as the PLAYERS arrive, but isolated pockets of fighting are still going on, and some of the demons are chasing knots of humans through the foothills.

This time around, "demons" refers to a mixed group including some of the "big bads" from the "Majestic Plateau". They are not all here, since they still have not quite figured out what is going on. Others are controlling the towns and major routes, or are scouring the landscape for the PLAYERS. However, they are suspicious enough that the White Tor may have something to do with the PLAYERS' plans that they have put some "A-Listers" here.

Certainly among the ones present is the Hooded One, the demons' master of magic, if he is still alive. He will be flinging fire willy-nilly at anything that moves and isn't clearly a demon. He might be spouting incongruous things such as "I won't let them spoil all my hard work!" Or, "I gave strict orders to wipe out ALL the Elves so that the Curse would stand forever! What is going on here?" (The Hooded One is, of course, Scaraband the Traitor, "enjoying" his "reward" of immortality from the demons).

Indeed, if the entire Fangtooth plot from *AtA* is still unresolved, and you want to clearly resolve it, then Fangtooth (a.k.a. the Princess Millesse of Eglantine) would also be here. She might, in the momentary wave of comparative sanity that accompanies the mithril scroll, regain her wits just enough to

sacrifice herself to help the PLAYERS get past him, or go for mutually assured self-destruction with the Hooded One to exact her revenge.

This is another opportunity for any PLAYERS who want to go down in a blaze of glory to do so, throwing blocks for others so as to enable them to get inside the White Tor with Rolf the Cook. Maybe they even get to take out Scaraband/the Hooded One. Let the scene play out, but it's no fun if at least one PLAYER does not survive to make it inside.

Scene 11--Inside the White Tor & Hitting the Reset Button

The White Tor is a single open space. The interior walls are covered with delicate mithril wiring embedded into the stone, all the way up its 200' height. It hums with raw magical power.

Apart from this, the Tor is empty except for a pile of belongings at the center, covering and surrounding a low stone table. There are a number of different kinds of things in the pile, but all of them are the sorts of things that would have great sentimental value: weddings rings; family heirlooms; a drawing of a happy family by a young child; a lock of someone's hair. They are precious things that one would not want to part with unless was one highly motivated and very serious about the giving.

On top of the pile on the stone table is a simple scroll, a quill, and an inkpot, with the words of the Blessing/Curse:

*Wealthy and blessed shall your people be,
Evensha and Roland, husband and wife;
Until the stars rain down from the sky,
Should ye live a noble life.*

All that has to be done is rewrite the couplet. Whatever the PLAYERS do, it has to be in the form of a four-line couplet, and it has to be a Blessing of some kind. The PLAYER who remakes the Blessing expires in a flash of bright light.

And the campaign ends abruptly. Fade to black.

Scene 12--Epilogue

All that should remain is to tell the PLAYERS a story, set some years in the future. It should be a small story, an episode in someone's life, that gives the PLAYERS a hint, but only a hint, of how their version of the Blessing has affected the World.

A child going to school; a good crop being brought in; a new apprentice casting his first spell at the Academy; the first steel sword coming off the forge at Miller's Reach and being taken up by an NPC from the PLAYERS' days; any would be a good focus. And if the PLAYERS chose wisely and selflessly, it should end with someone remembering the PLAYERS by name as heroes.

(Note that although the Blessing is limited to Fallingstar, if Fallingstar improves enough, it can become an anchor for the rest of the World).

The PLAYERS' best bet is to think small: rewrite just the third line to some event that will never happen. Things then start erring on the side of going right, vs. going wrong, for Fallingstar, and the demons are in big trouble, since they cannot change it a second time.

Lucky break after lucky break begin to occur for the people of Fallingstar. The demons and any remaining stooges are driven out. The mines and the Academy reopen. A PLAYER who was an Adept becomes seen as a great hero, perhaps one who nobly gave his life for the Kingdom of Fallingstar. Attitudes shift about Adepts as a result; maybe they aren't all so bad.

Some version of this story will occur if the PLAYERS act selflessly in the writing, regardless of the details.

What happens if the PLAYERS do something that breaks one of the rules of the Abjuration is more complicated. The PLAYERS may wish someone (or multiple someones) back from the dead, wish that

magic was stable, wish that the gods of old would return, or do something else “against the rules.”

The Tor interprets any such “rule breaking” request as one for lifting of the Abjuration, and poof, it is lifted within the boundaries of Fallingstar. This is what the Blessing has to do in order for any of these rules to be broken. The gods come back, and so does a big army of demons. So does Evenser if he hasn't crumbled to dust previously. Magic works properly again.

The World is turned again into a divine vs. demonic battlefield, with the humans caught in the middle. Whether this is better or worse is a difficult determination. Try to have the final vignette be ambiguous, emphasizing the good and the bad.

If the PLAYERS act selfishly (wishing for power, wealth, magic, or some such short-term, self-absorbed matter), then give it to them. Poof. The demons have a good laugh, since the PLAYERS passed up the opportunity to really put one over on them.

The PLAYERS will then be utterly forgotten in time. The Curse might be gone, so things will be somewhat better, but the vignette should be one of Zazeer talking to her generals about some new scheme to subjugate Fallingstar, and how they narrowly avoided a lasting defeat.

If they wish for immortality, they are turned into demons, and their terrorization of the populace should be the focus of the vignette.



Sunrise, or Sunset?

Tales From The Winding Road

Tales from the Winding Road is intended as advice on how to adapt or expand on the material presented. First, I will suggest how you can make some use of the “themed lands” in a typical fantasy setting.

Second, I will provide some summary adventure seeds that might provoke some thoughts about how to use the source material presented in *Ashes, to Ashes*. They are not fully scripted, or even more than talking points. Instead, I prefer to focus on how the underlying themes of the World can be presented, and to give a general sense of what kind of sessions might be run.

Finally, I briefly outline how I might approach a comprehensive campaign, from a mile high view.

I have divided these by region covered in *Ashes, to Ashes* (except for the Farm, which is more of an adventure itself than a base of operations). Each group of suggestions focuses on the corresponding flaw in each region (or, in the case of the Crannoch, its lack of flaws and what happens when flaws are introduced).

How to Make Use of These Books, Even if You Think the Setting is Too Weird

Some of the commentary that I’ve seen online about *AtA* has expressed bewilderment at how one might make use of the various lands outside of the post-Apocalyptic, demon-orchestrated context presented here. Let it not be said that I don’t cater to people who plunk down for supplements. Three of the lands in particular can easily be teased out of the setting.

Fallingstar: Fallingstar is comparatively straightforward. The Abjuration is completely unnecessary to run Fallingstar straight on, as are the demons.

Rather, Fallingstar can easily be all about the Curse, and its own subtle but insidious efforts to maintain its stranglehold on society. All of the things that the demons do to grind Fallingstar into the ground are things that a nearly all-powerful Curse might do. The Curse might simply have been triggered by a meteor shower, or some other event, perhaps with some minor rewording of the Blessing couplet. It is a giant magical “oops” on an immense scale.

The Curse would naturally interfere with magic and magic development to the greatest extent possible, since magic could make things better. It would naturally try to shape and structure society to crush and/or appropriate emerging Adepts to its cause. The only magic that would be tolerated by an all-powerful magical Curse is magic that suppresses uncontrolled magic.

If the PLAYERS are wielding powerful magic, then so are the Reapers. In fact, if the PLAYERS grow in power, so do the Reapers to offset them.

Since the Curse is territorial (limited to “Fallingstar”), you could plop Fallingstar down just about anywhere in a sub-Arctic environment. This is because another thing that the Curse would do to perpetuate itself is to strive mightily to physically isolate Fallingstar from the rest of the World. Fallingstar might be on some old maps, or the subject of old stories, but like a very miserable Brigadoon, no one can actually find it. The PLAYERS would have to stumble on it somehow. They would then be annoyed when they cannot simply teleport back out. Or walk out, or fly out, at least not without events conspiring against them.

The Curse would make people who do escape its borders forget where they have been. It would not do to spread the word about Fallingstar, because then more troublemakers might come in.

Things would always be steered toward continued misery, but not extinction, since then there would be no “Fallingstar” to be the opposite of “wealthy and blessed.” And the Curse is subtle, not wanting to call undue attention to itself, so temporary advances and small victories are possible. However, eventually, once the PLAYERS turn their attention to other matters, something always happens and partially undoes whatever good they have achieved.

The only way to really fix Fallingstar is to deal with the pride of the archmage Evenser, who felt the need to work some mighty wish to ensure his daughter’s happiness when marrying some lowly human. This means getting into the White Tor and trying your own hand at wish-making. The basics of the end game could still be in place, with a different, hard to come by failsafe McGuffin needed to unlock the Tor’s secrets.

Eglantine: The themes at issue in Eglantine are timeless, and likewise don’t necessarily depend on the Abjuration or the demons.

The basic idea is that the priesthoods on both sides of the war are secretly in cahoots, maintaining their power and prestige at the expense of the entire society. They keep the war going so that no one has cause or opportunity to challenge their interpretation of the will of the gods. All of the deprivations (trade, once great ruined cities, material, only one black market safety valve) work to keep the war going and to keep either side from gaining more than a temporary advantage.

Neither side has the money for mercenaries, and the land has been so despoiled that neighboring powers have decided that conquering it isn’t worth the effort any longer. Adventurers rarely go there without a particular reason to do so (including being very down on their luck).

The poverty, wreckage of the land, and trench warfare would all eventually result from decades of artificially sustained war in a comparatively small country, Abjuration or no Abjuration. Likewise, each side will

screen its population for emerging Adepts, and indoctrinate them into the higher ranks of the military effort, perhaps even groom them for the priesthood.

Eglantine works well if both sides’ priesthood is worshipping the same god or goddess of war, but the senior leadership may belong to a secret, evil, forbidden heresy that believes that war is always good, without purpose or end.

The Western Isles: A lower-level party can be run through the Western Isles as is. (Teleport-level magic tends to undermine the plot, since it makes it difficult to justify how things have been going on as long as they have). The Isles are remote, the Monks are secretly led by a demon (any old demon) on Muspel, and they interdict any ships headed in their direction.

Lead the rebellion and detox the rebels!

Plot Seeds, Get Your Plot Seeds!

Fallingstar (Pride):

The Summit—clan boundary dispute, PLAYERS are asked to judge. Neither side will back down an inch, no matter how wise it would be. Fighting breaks out, and everyone loses.

Try the Punch, It’s Delightful—Trepminster infiltration, is there anything wrong with submerging one’s identity to a brainwashing cult in order to survive in a tough world? The locals think so, especially when one’s little sister is involved with the cult.

The Crannoch (State of Nature):

The Golden Fleece—a valuable McGuffin is introduced by the demons, in an effort to get the camps to start fighting over it. They don’t, the demons get frustrated, and they show their hand.

This is Only a Test—a PLAYER is sent on a fool’s errand for rare item in exchange for magic. Although it looks like a plot, the Bogmen are just having some fun with the PLAYERS.

They Were Supposed to Be Wookies—rogue demons attack the Crannoch, guerrilla warfare ensues, complete with deadfall traps, snares and alligators vs. demons.

Whack a Mole—a demon is undercover at the Moot, the PLAYERS must identify and eliminate him. The locals don't much seem to care, being concerned with their day-to-day lives.

Eglantine (Wrath):

The Duke of A Little Something—the sequel to *The Lord of Nothing*; Elf Gate asks the PLAYERS to help it expand its territory and impose peace--by ruthless force.

Tekeli-li!—PLAYERS mount an expedition into the Great City to see what has become of a group of South (or North, who cares) prisoners of war. They find them, but the prisoners are hostile, and their lack of focus and cooperation gets them picked off, one by one, by Slithlug the Crawler.

The Neutral Zone—a third faction in the war arises in the DMZ. Both North and South run parallel operations in an effort to eliminate the new party. They fail because they cannot resist the temptation to fight each other.

Spring Break at Crystal Lake—a particularly nasty war criminal has set up shop in Crystal Lake and been given citizenship; what do the PLAYERS do? How about if he is making things better for the rest of Crystal Lake? The North (or South, who cares) cannot forgive his crimes, and break the neutrality of Crystal Lake in an effort to eliminate him.

The Dells (Lust):

Cue the Cheesy Battle Music and Unbalanced Spears--Oasis dweller hits on PLAYER; her friend doesn't like it and challenges PLAYER to highly ritualized death duel.

Exit, Stage Left--Ousted youth is hiring adventurers to stage a coup to win back his/her lost love; demons favor the status

quo.

Snipe Hunt--A trading caravan from Crystal Lake has vanished in the Dells; PLAYERS must find it. It really hasn't vanished; the caravaners have been absorbed into an oasis to balance the genders. But they aren't telling the PLAYERS that.

The Resurrection and the Life. A fifth oasis appears; a land stampede ensues, led by young men otherwise faced with ouster or becoming eunuchs. The demons try to work a storm to restore the status quo.

The "Majestic Plateau" (Greed):

The Pecking Order: PLAYERS are trapped in the slave pits. All they have to do to escape is climb out. But for that, they need a boost. And those don't come cheaply.

Number 16: PLAYERS are approached by one demon faction to assassinate another. They can get whatever material item they want if they succeed. It's a trick—they will be paid, but their reputations will be ruined, and the enemies they gain will be astonishing.

The Low, Low Price: Wandering priest of the Circle encourages people to take the Ritual of Obedience in exchange for wealth and comfort for their families.

Pyramid Scheme: Someone under the Ritual of Obedience believes that they can get their soul back if they can get 7 others to sign up. True, in a fashion, but of what value is what they get back after damning 7 others?

How to Structure a Campaign in the Canonical World 101

Some commentators on AtA have asked for my thoughts on how to best structure a campaign somewhere as bleak as the World. The World, indeed, is an unpleasant place, but I can offer some suggestions as to how to keep a group of PLAYERS alive and moving forward until they are powerful enough to start scoring meaningful and lasting victories against the demons.

Phase 1—Exploration and Being Under the Radar: Early in a campaign—when the PLAYERS probably lack any steel and the spellcasters are comparatively poorly controlled—you will want to make exploration the focus of the campaign, while dropping hints about other things. They should hear stories about demons and the way things used to be, before the Abjuration. They should get to know people, and go up against human opponents (e.g., Reapers, enemy soldiers, demonic agents).

They should have opportunities to find, take or steal steel weapons, tomes, **Tools**, **Incantations** and other things useful for survival very early on.

They should also quickly learn that “wealth” in this system is not so much about gold coins as it is land and influence. They should try to acquire valuable land (be it a keep, an inn, a prominent role in a village, citizenship in Crystal Lake) and support a variety of henchmen. They should build a network of friends, allies and people who owe them a favor.

It is important to stress that there are only about 200 or so actual demons. Their numbers are finite and they can be killed. The demons are not accustomed to being able to be killed, and they take pains to avoid it. As a result, the actual demons themselves are hardly omnipresent. One has not been seen (reliably or not) in Fallingstar for many years (or at least, no witnesses have been left behind).

And of the 200 or so demons, many are comparative mooks. Zazeer is not going to charge out to smoke a new band of humans; what if one of them gets in a lucky shot? Most of the remaining demons learned that lesson between 90-100 years ago as they saw their fellows picked off by lucky humans.

It will be some time, as a result, before the PLAYERS come to the attention of the demons in any meaningful way. And even then, the demons are not going to jump out

into the open (at least, not the smarter ones at the “Majestic Plateau”).

Where to Begin? Either of two lands is well suited to be the “starting point.” These are Fallingstar and Eglantine.

Both Fallingstar and Eglantine have what “beginners” need to get started. Each has a comparatively friendly and stable place to base operations (Fallingstar Town and Crystal Lake, or maybe even the Elf Gate rebels). Each has a lot of “big time” ruins to explore and dungeon delve in, where any number of things might be found.

These two lands are also next to each other, and with some effort, one can go back and forth (although the peasants will marvel at the accomplishment). Fallingstar is very prejudiced against magic; Eglantine not as badly. Eglantine offers the potential for structured adventures involving the military of either side or earning citizenship in Crystal Lake.

On the Subject of Organizations: The Organizations are meant to be used. They are a big edge that the PLAYERS will have over those they will run into. In addition to significant character sheet benefits, essentially for free based on storyline progression, they give the PLAYERS a group of friends and allies to interact with and trade favors with.

The Knights of Old, in particular, have a code of loyalty, can provide assistance in dire circumstances, and get well-equipped. The Coursers are very useful for moving around an “Underground Railroad” where corrupt locals and/or demonic servants do not notice the PLAYERS’ movements. People know better than to attack a Paired healer; it’s just not in their own best interest. This cover does not literally extend to their traveling companions, but as a practical matter, if a Paired healer says “they’re with me”, it is going to take a pretty good reason for someone to begin hostilities against the PLAYERS. The Brotherhood of the Raven, well, maybe not so much.

A typical adventuring party of six might



consist of a Knight of Old (usually only one per party), a Courser, a Pair, and a couple of others. A well-balanced party should include multiple and complementary Adepts and/or Wild Talents; a combat-oriented one and divination-oriented one would balance well. Nothing says that you have to start out with raw rookies, either; one could allow each PLAYER to be at the entry level of an Organization based on their back stories.

And even at early stages of the game, the PLAYERS should have NPC camp followers: a Squire, an apprentice, a guide, a friend or two. Later, if the PLAYERS come to control an area of the World, they will have house guards, refugee Adepts flocking to them seeking sanctuary, adventurers looking to sign up or test their mettle, and the like.

The PLAYERS should be allowed to get steel weapons and significant Tools and Incantations at an early stage in the campaign. They will need them to survive and be heroes. Just don't let such things be commonplace with the general populace.

Phase 2—Who Are Those Uppity Humans?

What is going to get the PLAYERS in trouble, eventually, is becoming notorious enough that the “Majestic Plateau” is going to take a direct interest in their affairs. This should take time. There aren't that many demons and they aren't (with few exceptions) closely at hand. Notoriety means that they are going to be known magic-users, or otherwise set up enough that they are undoing demonic efforts (such as by running a village as a safe haven).

When the demons themselves do take notice, they are not going to stomp out and try to lay waste to the PLAYERS' stronghold. (At least, the smarter ones won't). They will use proxies; stir up fights and resentments; spread rumors; and maybe send in a disguised agent to foment strife and spy on them. As I said in AtA, it's a world-building game with a big cast.

When the “Majestic Plateau” demons decide that the PLAYERS are worth eliminating,

they will try to send them on a fool's errand, so that they just “disappear.” See The Redoubt adventure for pointers on how they might try to do such a thing.

Phase 3—Stirring Up Trouble: Once the demons are (as far as the PLAYERS are concerned) out in the open, they still aren't going to engage them directly. (At least, the smarter ones aren't). The demons do not want to die, and have no intention of putting themselves in harm's way if they can avoid it. The smartest of the smart will fall back from a potential combat with the PLAYERS. Why risk it? They are potentially immortal, and the PLAYERS are not.

So the PLAYERS will have to seek them out. Hopefully they try to do so very carefully, and stealthily. This is the phase of the campaign where the Dells, the “Majestic Plateau”, the Western Isles, and Takuk might get visited, and in the cases of the last two, possibly liberated or have their “buttons reset.”

Successfully overthrowing the demons in an area is one of the few things that will result in comparatively direct demon reprisals. Now the PLAYERS have to be eliminated, once and for all. Risks must be taken. But nonetheless, the smartest demons will still try to get someone else to do the heavy lifting and expose themselves to the risk of destruction. The only time that the PLAYERS should ever meet Zazeer, the Hooded One or a certain lazy dragon is if they are bound, gagged, and being interrogated. Or in the last session of the campaign.

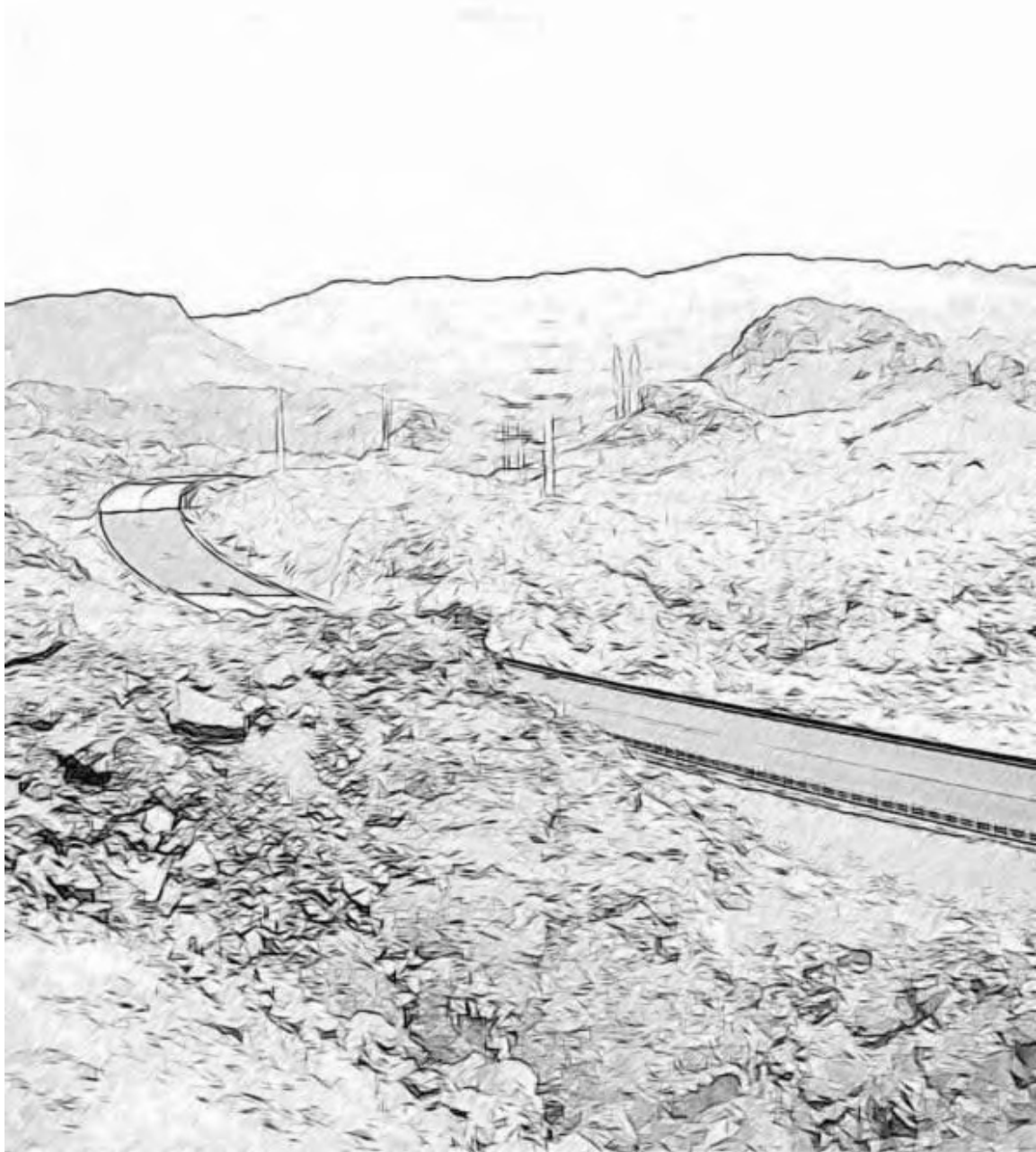
Phase 4—The End: I highly recommend the approach suggested in “It's Not a Lie, As Long As You Believe That It's True” as a way of ending the campaign, even if you do not use the scenario itself. The PLAYERS get a shot at making a big change to the World, a lasting blow to the demons.

This might be resetting the White Tor; sacking the “Majestic Plateau” at the head of an army; overthrowing the leadership in

Eglantine and installing a new king or the rightful heir to the throne; or establishing a new religion through one of the Faithful as an organized front for change. Whatever it may be, it should lead to a showdown with the “big bads” of the “Majestic Plateau”.

Once a decisive action to change the World has accomplished by the PLAYERS, for

good or ill, the campaign simply ends. Period. In mid-combat if necessary, in mid-sentence if necessary, just fade to black. Let the victory speak for itself, except for an epilogue, along the lines of that suggested in the closing scenario.



INDEX

Acedia, Father, stats	48	Periapt of Clarity, magic item	96
Acedia, Father, study contents	40	Incantations, spell-casting (mechanics)	36
Addiction, spot rule	7	Pharos, temple of Liir	38
Arctic conditions, spot rule	63	Questing Beast, stats	73
Big Jane, stats	50	Riddle (a kiss)	85
Black Lotus, addiction and “treatment”	46	Roland of Evenstar, clean and sober version, stats	92
Blessing couplet	82	Rolf the Cook, stats	77
Blessing, unedited back-story	110	Sea travel, arctic	98
Cliff climbing, means of execution	28	Subtle, status	12
Concealed, status	13	Swan Ship (PINK!!!), magic item	97
Cutting off the Black Lotus, zombies	42	Takuk, map	67
Elaine of the Fields, stats	38	Temple of Lashasse, dungeon	85
Eustace, Brother, stats	49	Water procession (drug pushers)	24
Fallingstar, northern, map	84	Wayne-spawn, stats	105
Fear check, mechanics	6	Western Isles, map	47
Filthy conditions, spot rule	21	White Tor, inside	116
Gang members, Flatey, stats	31	Wind, spot rule	21
Grey Monastery, map	26	Wizard’s Highway, subway system	107
Helm’s Camp, map	62		
Hidden, status	13		
Kaleidoscope (Shemit), demon	78		
Kin, The, stats	68		
Kin, The, stronghold, map	109		
Langulin the Fair, last Elf, stats	72		
Liir’s Stairway (internal road)	44		
Lions of Lashasse, stats	86		
Monastery guards, stats	24		
Monastery sailors, stats	28		
Monument, The	65		
Muspel, map	22		
Observatory of Pisto, map	103		



Ashes, to Ashes



Wrath, Envy, Pride, Gluttony, Sloth, Lust and Avarice: Eglantine, the Farm,

Fallingstar, Takuk, the Western Isles, the Dells, and the Majestic Plateau

Characteristics & Rolls		Name: _____	
STR _____	Effort roll _____	Race: _____	Gender: _____ Handedness: _____
CON _____	Stamina roll _____	Height: _____	Weight: _____
SIZ _____	Damage Bonus _____	Age: _____	_____
INT _____	Idea roll _____	Description: _____	_____
POW _____	Luck roll _____	_____	_____
DEX _____	Agility roll _____	Distinctive Features: _____	_____
APP _____	Charisma roll _____	_____	_____
EDU _____	Know roll _____	Tendency: _____	Wealth: _____ Move: _____

Hit Points

Skills

COMMUNICATION

- Bargain
- Command
- Disguise
- Etiquette
- Fast Talk
- Perform
- Persuade
- Status
- Teach

PHYSICAL

- Climb
- Dodge
- Hide
- Jump
- Pilot Boat
- Ride Horse
- Stealth
- Swim
- Throw
- Grapple

MANIPULATION

- Art
- Art
- Craft
- Craft
- Fine Manipulation

MENTAL

- Accounting
- Appraise
- Archaeology
- Astronomy
- First Aid
- Gaming
- History
- Law
- Medicine
- Occult
- Pharmacy
- Strategy
- Survival
- Religion

PERCEPTION

- Insight
- Listen
- Navigate
- Research, Library Use
- Research, Streetwise
- Sense
- Spot
- Track

COMBAT

- Martial Arts,
- Martial Arts,
- Weapon
- Weapon,
- Weapon,
- Weapon,
- Brawl
- Grapple
- Shield, type
- Shield, type
-

Weapons

weapon/type	attack/parry	damage	range	attacks	length	hand	HP	Note
Brawl		1d3+db		1		1h		crushing

Armor

armor type	armor value	shield type	attack/parry	damage	hp

Hit Points

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

Organization Memberships & Benefits

Equipment

Magical Aptitude Bonuses

Fire		Animal		Destroy	
Earth		Plant		Animate	
Air		Body		Resist	
Water		Heal			
Cold		Harm		Tools:	
Light		Emotion		Plus 1	
Darkness		Sense/Detect/Divine		Plus 2	
Weather		Mind		Plus 3	
Locate		Move		Plus 4	
				Plus 5	
Incantations:					

DUST TO DUST

...

This is a supplement to *Ashes to Ashes*, a BRP setting that casts the players as mavericks in a fantasy world that is losing a war it doesn't know it's fighting. Hidden demons and their mortal minions manipulate events from the shadows, experimenting with social mechanisms to steer their human cattle in any direction they want them to go.

Requires *Ashes to Ashes* to make much sense out of it.

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