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The **Sunken City**

Adventure Omnibus & Guide



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The Sunken City

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Chapter 1

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Introduction & Overview

Welcome Dungeon Crawler! The book you hold in your hands (if perhaps only virtually) is an annual of sorts, representing the output of the first year of *Purple Sorcerer Games*. I can't begin to express my gratitude for the encouragement and support that has made the *Sunken City Omnibus & Guide* possible!

How We Got Here

My gaming roots reach back to mist-obsured epoch known as the 1970's. I can still remember overhearing a friend excitedly discussing some new *thing* in my middle school library: a game of pure imagination involving monsters and magic! Something electric passed through me that day, and in a very real sense my life changed. Tracking down a copy of the infamous *Blue Box D&D* basic set, I took to the role of Dungeon Master almost immediately. Fashioning adventures and worlds proved endlessly fascinating. It encouraged me to study history, economics, geography, art, computers and more. In hindsight, almost every skill I now use professionally—writing, graphic design, and computer programming—first began as a desire to meet some gaming needs, be it maps, character generators, or adventure!

And yet, after nearly 35 years in the hobby, I'd never sat down and ground out an adventure in publishable form. That all changed when I encountered a gaming company called *Goodman Games*.

Dungeon Crawl Classics

Like most long-time players, I've played many systems over the years. During the early days of *4th Edition D&D*, I picked up an inexpensive adventure entitled *Mists of Madness* from a company I'd never heard of before: Goodman Games. The adventure was excellent, but the maps were fairly simple and in black and white. I wanted something fancier to print out as battlemaps for my group, so I took an afternoon producing miniature-scale color versions, and sent them off to Goodman Games to add to their fan download section. Joseph Goodman himself replied with a friendly email; my first brush with 'gaming nobility', as it were.

Over the next months, like any good narcissist I checked in on the Goodman Games boards to see if anyone mentioned the maps. Alas, I don't believe anyone ever did, but my checking did mean I was around for the initial announcement that something new was coming from Goodman Games: a fresh system designed to recapture the glory days of gaming, but with a modern polish. For reasons I can't quite explain, I again experienced a jolt of electricity. At the time I knew nothing of the 'old school' OSR movement, but the idea of stripping game-play down to a more manageable level, while taking advantage of the best aspects of modern gaming appealed to me, and I waited anxiously for the beta of the new system to arrive.

When it did, the audacity of the system startled me. In particular, the concept of the funnel struck me as particularly outrageous. Roll 3D6 for each stat and apply them in order? Each player runs up to four characters? The GameMaster is encouraged to inflict massive blood and horror on the *players* in the first adventure? The system lacked the extensive crafting of characters with elaborate back sto-

ries we had all grown accustomed to in recent years. How would my players react?

The completely random nature of beginning play, however, represented a perfect opportunity to create a character generator, so I got to work building one. Professionally, I've created a number of projects that generate dynamic PDFs, so it was a fairly straightforward matter to build the script that spit out the ubiquitous four-character 0-level sheets now seen at funnel sessions around the world. As I tested the generator, the character sheets began to stack up, and I soon began tossing together an adventure to give this crazy funnel a shot. An early version of *Perils of the Sunken City* began to take shape.

When I contacted Joseph Goodman about the *0-Level Party Generator*, he responded with excitement, and shared it with Harley Stroh, who also reacted with friendly enthusiasm. It's strange to say, but if they hadn't been so courteous, Purple Sorcerer Games likely wouldn't exist. Because as the weeks went by and I began creating maps for *Perils of the Sunken City*, and added more and more details, the idea began growing in my mind that perhaps now was the time to finally push through and craft a polished adventure I'd be willing to share with the public. Using Goodman Game's *Portal Beyond the Stars* as my visual guide, *Perils* took shape fairly quickly: an enormous amount of work, mind you, but the process was far more enjoyable than I had expected. Finally, after running the final proof by my wife, with a trembling mouse finger I emailed a copy to Joseph Goodman, something I never would have dared if he hadn't been so professional and pleasant in the past.

Joseph responded positively and encouraged me to check out the Third-Party Publisher system for *Dungeon Crawl Classics*. After a week pondering whether the effort of creating an entire company presence would be worth it, Purple Sorcerer Games was born. And the first time I really tested the funnel with my new adventure? It turned out to be one of my most enjoyable gaming experiences in decades: complete with enormous thrills, instant character attachment, and the creation of campaign seeds galore. I guess Joseph knew what he was doing all along.

Enough Reflection!

So here we are nearly two years after the release of *Perils of the Sunken City*. It now sits in the top 2% of sellers all time at *RPGNow*. *The Ooze Pits of Jonas Galk*, *A Gathering of the Marked*, and *Lair of the Mist Men* followed to warm receptions, and I've now gathered them together into this single volume, with *Perils* getting a color overhaul in the process. To round things out, I've added a collection of new content to spice up the *Sunken City*, including a patron write-up, new monsters, a treasure room of new magic items, adventure seeds, and more.

I truly hope you enjoy this book. Creating it has granted me the incredible privilege of sharing both my love of adventure and my often quirky sense of humor. I treasure the opportunity to do so. All of this would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of each of you. Thank you one and all!

Why The Sunken City?

The Sunken City was created to meet specific needs in my Dungeon Crawl Classics campaign. Perils of the Sunken City introduces its main features: the massive ruin-filled swamp, the Sending Stones, Mustertown, etc, so I won't repeat that information here. But a brief background sketch of *why* the Sunken City was built could prove helpful.

First, the general deadliness of the funnel and higher-level play in Dungeon Crawl Classics creates campaign challenges many judges haven't had to deal with. You'll likely be stacking up bodies like cord wood in your campaign, with a corresponding need for regular replacement characters. Logically fitting additional funnel adventures into an ongoing campaign to provide replacement characters can prove challenging. **I knew I would need a way to quickly introduce funnel or low level adventures to the campaign whenever I needed them.**

The next challenge I recognized is that low-level characters in DCC are quite limited in how far they are designed to physically travel. They lack the funds for mounts, and the world is filled with perils they are ill-prepared to tackle. **I knew I needed a centralized location that could kick off many adventures,** as I didn't want to continually justify how my player's pathetic bands were managing to rove about the wide world seeking low-level adventure.

After much pondering, the Sunken City was born: a nearly endless swamp filled with the ruins of a once-great city. Such an expanse can house as many adventures as most judges would ever need, and the introduction of magical sending stones that transport parties into and out of the swamp allowed low-level characters to get to the adventure quickly from a central location. The creation of Mustertown and the Soiled Dove Inn provided a convenient and logical place for the beginning bands to gather. This central location can act as a nexus as the campaign begins to grow and expand; judges will find it easy to squeeze in a funnel adventure when needed to generate replacement characters which can be picked up by more advanced parties when they return to home base.

The Sunken City can serve many campaign needs:

- If you're just starting out and need a logical place for the new party to meet, the Sunken City makes that easy.
- If you need characters to replenish a depleted party, simply create a new mob and whisk them into the swamp and home again, without the need to create a new backstory or interrupt the flow of the campaign.
- If you want to run a one-off adventure but still have the exploits live on as 'lore' in the campaign, just place the adventure in the Sunken City, and the tales told in the inns of the Great City by the survivors will only grow with time!

Almost any adventure could be placed *somewhere* in the trackless swamps of the Sunken City, so it's a simple matter to add your favorite low-level adventures to the mix. Hopefully the four adventures found in this omnibus will get you off to a good start!

Handling The Funnel

The concept of the funnel seemed mad to me at first glance: running multiple characters with crappy stats was something I hadn't experienced since my early days in the hobby. Expecting the majority of them to be slaughtered immediately was an entirely new concept. Yes, it all seemed crazy *until I tried it.*

The brilliance of the funnel is that it is SO easy to create new characters (especially if you use our Zero Level Party Generator found on the Purple Sorcerer website) that the agony of losing a 'pains-takenly sculpted' character is erased. As your players' unformed and plucky serfs suffer one horrific death after another, the usual response will be gales of laughter erupting from your table! And yet, when the little nobodies somehow overcome incredible odds, and bravely more forward, the players become instantly attached to them. I've seen it again and again. Backgrounds and defining traits are created effortlessly, shaped by the funnel adventure. When the lucky few survive to select a class at first level, your players will have little need to artificially create a sense of attachment to their new characters. Their feelings will be very real.

The default DCC assumption is that the brutal player-death carnage of the funnel will continue into higher levels, but it's certainly not required. Many groups love the challenge of this style of play, but in my game, the pattern has emerged that once characters are established the mayhem slows a bit as the campaign develops. My players feel they get the best of both worlds: a delightful blood-fest during the low-level adventures, followed by more sedate character-driven play at higher levels. The choice of course, is yours: the DCC ruleset is robust enough to support many styles of play!

The Tao of TPK

Regardless of what style of play you pursue, Dungeon Crawl Classics is a deadly game, and with such a high death rate, the question of party survival becomes a very real issue. I think there are two broad schools of thought when it comes to TPK's (Total Party Kills) in the funnel. Some judges and groups love throwing waves of parties at a deadly adventure without worrying about continuity. A clever judge simply adjusts things on the fly to deal with the introduction of brand new parties, modifying the threats accordingly to account for the previous party's efforts.

I am in the camp that prefers to maintain at least *a thread* of continuity if at all possible, so that the acquired knowledge built up during the course of the funnel won't be lost with the death of the final character. Additionally, players won't be forced to go over 'old terrain' with new parties, or be required to conveniently 'forget' adventure details they once knew. To help this 'continuity' strategy along, the adventures found in the Sunken City Omnibus scatter potential replacement characters at strategic points throughout the proceedings. The Judge can take advantage of these pools to help a party replenish its ranks to avoid complete destruction, or help a particularly unlucky player get back in the game.

In addition, I approach traps that can effect the entire party with a certain caution. Most challenges in my funnel adventures are designed to whittle the party down. But players can do the darnedest things, and on more than one occasion I've heard of traps wiping out entire parties where such was certainly not my intent! In these

cases, I advise only effecting a sub-set of the party to avoid weakening them too much. Of course, many judges enjoy punishing their players ruthlessly for their mistakes, and if that's how your group rolls, mete out destruction with joy! As always, there is no right or wrong way to play for everyone: whatever you and your players enjoy is always correct.

The Adventures

The Sunken City Omnibus and Guide contains four complete adventures: three 0-level funnel adventures and one shorter first level adventure. The funnel adventures are only connected by theme, they can be run in any order you desire!

Perils of the Sunken City

As mentioned, Perils was the first adventure created in the Sunken City Starting Adventure line, and is organized in two sections. The first provides basic information about the Sunken City, in particular the Great City and its adjoining Mustertown. These can act as the launching point for any adventure in the vast swamps of the Sunken City, so it's a good idea to read this section even if you're planning on running one of the other adventures first.

The 2nd section details Madazkan's Court, a fiendish adventure consisting of a trap-filled court above, and a monster-filled dungeon below. Madazkan's Court is the best suited of the three funnel adventures for convention or demonstration play, as it is the shortest and can be completed in a single session by a motivated judge. (Tips for running Perils at a convention are included on page 95 of the Omnibus. I've heard back from many judges who have had a great time doing just that!)

The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk

The Ooze Pits is a significant departure from Perils of the Sunken City in that much of the action occurs outdoors, and a great deal of exploration and detective work are involved in successfully completing the adventure. The action is also much more extensive, and many judges have reported taking three or more sessions to reach its exciting conclusion.

The village of Slither's End from which the adventure embarks is full of insane personalities and wonderful opportunities for role-playing. A number of judges have reported making the town a regular stop in their campaigns. There is a good chance that your players might level up during the course of the adventure, and this will prove a good thing, as the series of challenges that confront players near the adventure's conclusion can be extremely challenging.

Ooze Pits also introduces the inscrutable Mist Men, who play a supporting role here, but act as the lead attraction in the first level adventure Lair of the Mist Men.

A Gathering of the Marked

A Gathering of the Marked one-upped The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk by offering THREE times the content of Perils of the Sunken City. Like Ooze Pits, it will likely require 2-3 sessions to complete.

Gathering is the darkest of the three funnel adventures, pitting the party against a host of twisted foes, often challenging the players to remain a cohesive unit against the nearly overwhelming odds presented by a dark master. By taking advantage of the aid offered by an unlikely ally, however, the party can win through and gain their freedom.

Lair of the Mist Men

Lair of the Mist Men began life as a proposed 'mini-adventure' offered as a reward for the Crawler's Companion Kickstarter. (Our Silver Ennie Award winning DCC utility!) What was originally planned as a 3-4 page lark grew and grew, as many gamers contacted me to express their excitement about discovering more about the mysterious Mist Men! The adventure eventually expanded to nearly the length of Perils of the Sunken City.

Lair is full of bizarre encounters and foes, and is well suited for single session play. The adventure also introduces a new foe that will prove central to the next round of our adventures!

But Wait, There's More!

In addition to the massive PDF appendix material included with the Sunken City Omnibus (over eighty pages of extra content, featuring paper miniatures, battlemaps, pre-gen characters and print-friendly adventure images), the Omnibus comes with a selection of new content to flesh out your adventures! Additional material includes:

- A patron write-up of the fiendish Malloc encountered in Perils of the Sunken City, courtesy of Jeffrey Tadlock of Iron Tavern fame. Jeffrey launched his long-running DCC campaign in the Sunken City, and Malloc has proved a boon and bane for his players from the first session.
- Monsters! For those who have always dreamed of running an Opossuman character, your wishes have been granted with a full character class write-up! Additionally, bedevil your players with a selection of new denizens of the deadly swamp: SkinDitchers, Mudforms, and Killy-Pads.
- Place your players on the path to adventure with exciting adventure seeds that flow from the honeyed lips of Honest Orkoff, one of the Great City's most knowledgeable merchants. Perhaps he knows the whereabouts of some of the 20+ new legendary treasures created for the Omnibus, including the Lead Chicken of Occasional Wisdom, Grumble's Sinister Spoon, and the Tiny Two-Handed Sword!



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The Sunken City Awaits!

Perils of the Sunken City: A Level 0-1 DCC RPG Adventure

Introduction

The Great City is old and faded, a pale reflection of its former glory. Life is a challenge for most, but for the weak and unconnected, the city is a place of unrelenting hardship harboring neither hope nor promise of escape.

With one exception: the Sunken City.

Most find death in the crumbling ruins that stretch beyond sight into the mists southward; once rich districts now claimed by swamp and dark denizens. But for the desperate few, the ruins offer treasures the Great City denies them: fortune, glory, and a fighting chance!

Overview

Perils of the Sunken City is a beginning or 'funnel' Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG adventure for 15 0-level characters or 8 1st-level characters. Players running 0-level characters should have 3-4 each, as player casualties are part of the fun! It has been observed: *There should be an expectation of the lessons of mortality.*

Judges are encouraged to tweak the number of enemy combatants (and resulting treasures) to provide the proper level of challenge to players, based on player experience and the size of the adventuring party.

This module is organized in two parts. The first section gives an overview of Mustertown: Gateway to the Sunken City, providing judges a consistent milieu to kick-off many different 0-level adventures. The 2nd section, Madazkan's Court presents the inaugural Sunken City adventure.

Background

For centuries the Great City has shifted north in hops and spurts as encroaching swamp swallowed the southern extents of the city. The ruins now stretch south for nearly 30 miles, with endless sunken avenues, courts and towers. Structures grow gradually more dilapidated the further one travels from the city, but pockets of higher ground remain in all areas, and the buildings in these locations have weathered the years somewhat more successfully – but these places also attract the worst sort of swamp denizens.

A powerful teleportation device, **The Sending Stone**, stands at the northern end of the ruins, connected to many other stones scattered throughout the city's rubble. The fearsome demon that powers the stone – **Sender** – transports adventuring parties for his own dark purposes between the stones... usually without incident. Bands of desperate adventurers known as Free Companies use the Sending Stone to explore the deepest parts of the sunken ruins, hoping for treasure and glory, but often finding horrible, muddy deaths instead.

Integrating the Sunken City into your Campaign

The Sunken City can be dropped-in as a deadly suburb to most large corrupt cities. In addition, almost any isolated low-level adventure could be placed somewhere in the vastness of the Sunken City, with Sender providing expedient means of travel. Energetic judges could run numerous 0-level funnel adventures in preparation for campaigning, all in an environment where characters, even of differing Free Companies, would be aware of each others activities and capable of forming more experienced bands.

And when the inevitable need for replacement characters arrives, the Judge has an accessible place to quickly send another band of willing serfs to winnow out a pool of replacement PCs.

(If you need a party of 0-level characters fast, visit puplesorcerer.com to use our free 0-level party generator!)

Part I: The Sunken City

Mustertown: Gateway to the Sunken City

Just outside the walls of the Great City a ramshackle collection of buildings known as Mustertown clings to the dry lands at the edge of the encroaching swamp. Any party of adventurers heading to the Sending Stone must pass through this collection of crumbling buildings, enduring the hungry stares of the ne'er-do-wells who inhabit them. Eager gamemasters can simply use Mustertown as a place to scrounge up supplies before setting their players on the causeway that leads to the Sending Stone. Alternatively, players can be introduced to the traditions that shape most ventures into the swamp: traditions formed and refined in a large, dilapidated inn known as the **Soiled Dove**.

The Soiled Dove and the Mustering Compact

The owner of the Dove (known affectionately as **Old Soily**) is a former Sunken City adventurer who built his establishment with treasure purchased with his own blood in the ruins. Though a thoroughly unrepentant rascal in most senses, Soily is honest in his dealings with adventurers, and the inn has become the nexus for most parties heading into the swamp. Over the years, a series of traditions have grown, multiplied, and been "codified" into an informal standard known to all adventuresome sorts as **The Mustering Compact**. Most of the traditions of the Compact are unwritten, but there are three chief elements of which all locals are aware:

The Free Charter: The poor and desperate of the Great City have few generally respected rights, but one is that they are free to form **Free Companies** to explore the ruins of the Sunken City. Participation in a Free Company can delay entrance to debtor's prisons, and often acts as a final stage of initiation for various seedy guilds and apprenticeships. (Even wizardly apprenticeships, as many masters wish to test the will and determination of their charges before providing the final keys to access powerful magics...)

The Counting: Each companion in a Free Company contributes a single copper piece to one of Soily's employees known as the **Musters Counter**, receiving a brightly decorated arm band of matching colors, as well as a

baked clay marker. Adventurers scratch their name or mark on one side and next of kin/location on the reverse and deposit it with the Counter, who will see that it is delivered to next of kin if the adventurer fails to return from the ruins to claim his marker.

Prizes: The dream of most Free Companies (beyond surviving) is to return with a **Bright Prize**: a treasure of particular distinction. Returning with a Bright Prize will result in general acclaim, and the Company's name will be inscribed into a board outside the Soiled Dove. Old Soily will likely be able to fence any bright prize the party returns with. (Though check out **Nardgrog's Note** on Page 11 on how to handle things if your world lacks the buyers necessary for such activity!)

A **Grey Prize** is a prize judged something less than a Bright Prize, but capable of constituting a successful adventure for those wagering on the party's success. (A local known as **No-Legs** determines the nature of all prizes, he's discussed momentarily.)

Key Locations

The Soiled Dove (1): The key tavern of Mustertown. The Dove can provide most adventuring items at the usual prices, along with room, board, and other less savory services.

The Circle (2): An open circle of bare dry dirt that is the traditional gathering place for most companies. No-Leg's shack is adjacent. Typically when a company departs, a crowd of gamblers, gawkers, and pickpockets look on, sizing up the party and shouting out encouragement, derision, or betting odds.

The Causeway (3): A berm of raised ground that serves as a path through the fringe of the swamp to the gates of the Sunken City and the Sending Stone.

The Swamp (4): Straying off the Causeway is dangerous. The swamp is full of grasping muck, hidden channels, snakes, bigger snakes, crocodillos, two-tongued mud-wumpers, and even an occasional shiny-spined turf-hurdler. Feel free to punish those foolish enough to wander.

The Lady's Hovel (5): A small shack located halfway down the causeway that houses a kindly, yet mysterious seeress beloved by all the wayward scum of Mustertown. The Lady is a potential source for both information and blessing.



Oh Wise Nardgrog, what is this funnel you speak of?

Welcome one and all to the sausage grinder! During 0-level play your players should expect to lose some or most of their characters! (Pressed through a funnel, as it were.) When mere peasants explore deadly dungeons, what else is to be expected? That's why it only takes moments to create new characters, and in many cases replacements for the unlucky can be found along the way. Those who survive will be ready to choose classes and begin the trek to legendary status!

Mustertown

Gateway to the Sunken City




The Soiled Dove



0-level characters possess many skills gained in their previous professions. Encourage and reward creative solutions from your players to help their blacksmiths and chicken-butchers shine!

Key Figures of Mustertown

Old Soily: Proprietor of the Soiled Dove and a former Sunken City survivor. Regardless of his moral failings, gives a fair price for major finds if he's able to fence the item. Knows everyone in Mustertown: a good source of info as long as your coins continue to flow!

No-Legs: A portly former-adventurer who suffered a mishap with the Proving Stone. Appraises all major finds to determine their "prize" status. His word is trusted in Mustertown.

The Lady: Lives in a shack on the causeway. Is kind to all, and has very powerful friends, including Sender. Can grant a limited number of boons to those who impress her. (Applies an ash mark to the forehead, providing a pool of 2 luck points to be expended on a single luck burn during the next adventure).

The Lady is potentially a source of information about the mysteries of the swamp and the sending stones. To many, she is the only source of grace available, and all in Mustertown revere her. Everyone knows that to harm the Lady in any way is to invite death. It is customary for the blessed to reward her with some small trinket left outside her hut on the return trip. Those who ignore this custom will find themselves cursed by fate. (-1 luck for a month).

The Gates of the Sunken City

Once adventurers cross the Causeway, the ground rises slightly as it approaches a large crumbling gatehouse and walls, forming a clearing. Through breaks in the walls, the ruins appear to go on forever...

Key Locations of the Gates

The Clearing (6): The ground is generally dry here. A gatehouse provides entrance to the Sunken City, but few take this route, as the districts close to the gatehouse were picked clean of treasures years ago. In addition, a fearsome warrior known as **The Warden** patrols the ruins near the gate, and is rumored to be quite unkind to sightseers.

This field of dry ground houses two huge stone monoliths, both extremely weathered: far more so than even the dilapidated ruins they shadow, hinting at great age. Most adventures enter the city by use of the first stone: the Sending Stone.

The Sending Stone (7): Standing nearly 20 feet tall, the Sending Stone is roughly cylindrical, tapering slightly at the top. Covered in lichen and grime, the stone sports crude symbols that can barely be discerned. Chief among them is a dark horned face that seems to have weathered the years better than the other markings. When an adventurer presses his hand to the stone, it slowly warms, and after 15 seconds, all who are touching the stone vanish as one - at the whims of Sender's powers.

While not common knowledge, it's possible for a party to return to the same spot on a return trek if they all concentrate on a place while touching the stone. *Remember everyone, there's no place like the Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk.*

The Proving Stone (8): Slightly smaller and less decorated than the Sending Stone, the Proving Stone provides a destination point for travel back from the Sunken City. The grass immediately surrounding the stone is withered and grey: newcomers might be warned to stand clear in case someone comes through on a return trip. Ignoring this advice could be deadly.

Though Sender is committed to providing safe, reliable service, his is a demon, with a demon's sensibilities. Each return traveler must make a DC 5 Luck save upon arrival or roll a d4 and suffer one of the following:

- 1) **Scarecrow:** You're buried up to your calves upon arrival. (Traditionally you buy all surviving companions a drink at the Soiled Dove if you're scarecrowed.)
- 2) **Wiggly Armor Stand (or Mud Dive):** Buried head first to the chest. Friends have to help you out or you suffocate in short order. (Traditionally everyone chips in to buy you a drink if you take a mud dive... but on occasion this has led to folks not getting rescued by stingy compatriots.)
- 3) **Sender's Diet:** Something goes missing. A fingertip, part of a toe, all your hair...
- 4) **Birdy-Birdy:** You arrive 6-8 feet up. DC 5 Ref save or twist your ankle. (-5 to speed and -1 to reflex rolls for one week)

If an adventurer has done something to truly anger Sender, such as harming the Lady, or defacing the Sending or Proving Stone, that traveler will not arrive safely. The usual penalty is known as **Paying Sender's Tithe**: you arrive without your head.

Key Figures of the Gates

Sender: Sender is the powerful demon that energizes the Sending Stones. Few understand the precise nature of his existence, but enough adventurers have returned from sendings with dark impressions to give his legend weight and shape. It is in the Demon's own interest to encourage as many sendings as possible, as each

sending brings it closer to reaching the terms of its release. Sender thus avoids mutilating adventures when possible, and occasionally sizes up parties to send them to locations where they can prosper.

If he holds an adventurer in ill-favor, he's perfectly capable of doing extraordinarily nasty things to them during transfer. He has a strange friendship with the Lady, as he is able to manifest in shadowy form in her hut, where she talks to him and treats him with kindness. He will kill anyone who hurts her. When the day finally arrives when he is free of the ages old necromantic compulsion that binds him to the stone, the Great City will mourn indeed.

The Warden: A powerful warrior who haunts the Sending Stone and environs. Any adventurer arriving at the Sending Stone who looks seasoned, experienced, or powerful is likely to lose 20 pounds of ugly fat off the top. Why the warden does this is a mystery: Is he protecting dark forces in the sunken city? Keeping the food supply coming? Defending the rights of the weak to have a chance at success? None truly know. Regardless of motivation, his influence is clear: only the weak of the city approach the Sending Stone. (For the experienced adventurer, there are rumors of another stone five miles to the south on a small, muddy island just off the coast – tales say it transports the bold to the very gates of The Shriken Tower itself - home of the mumbling necromancer Xax - in the darkest heart of the ruins. Be warned! The mumbles of Xax have driven the bravest men mad!)



Mustertown Lexicon

Mustertown has its own dialect. Those who wish to blend in will benefit by picking up some of the local slang.

Rats vs. Snakes: How the lowly of Mustertown describe the city elite's opinion of them. *They don't care whether we or the fiends in the swamp die, it's all just rats vs. snakes to them...*

Over the Undsy: Betting term about the number of warm bodies remaining in a company upon return from the ruins. *What's the over the undsy on this party? Six warm bodies?*

Melon Thumping: Unsavory practice of gamblers attempting to discern the strength/smarts of members of adventuring companies to improve betting strategies. *Shows us your teeth handsome... been eating regular like?*

Croc Scat: A particularly weak looking company. *This band's croc scat for sure...*

Three-Day Pastry: An overly cautious adventurer who has made numerous journeys into the ruins with little to show for it. *That be one stale company: check out the number of three-day's in the muster...*

Kind: Describes an adventurer who has prospered in the ruins, but at a terrible cost. *He's had luck, of a kind...*

Band of Scholars: A party that seems entirely too confident considering the talent at hand. *Like as not Sender will teach this band of scholars a thing or two about proper perspective...*



But Nardgrog, my world is a deliciously grim and brutish place...

It's assumed that the Sunken City rests near a 'great city' wealthy enough for Soily to easily fence the treasures that emerge from the fetid swamps. But what if your world is a darker, grittier place where finding a market for most treasures is nearly impossible? You have a few options:

You call that a city? There is a city adjacent to the swamps, but it's poor, with few wealthy patrons capable of purchasing expensive treasures. It's impossible for Soily to raise the cash for anything the adventures return with: he's barely able to keep the Dove supplied! The party will have to search to find buyers, which could trigger additional adventures. Also, instead of referring to bright or grey "prizes", successful parties will be known as "Bright Companies" or "Grey Companies" - since reputation and admiration are the only coins that the folks of the city will be willing to share.

We ain't got no stinkin' city: Mustertown is all that remains of the once great city, the last fringe of civilization on the edge of the swamp. The Soiled Dove operates as a crossroads inn, Soily spreading rumors far and wide of the riches of the Sunken City to attract customers. Adventuring parties are few and far between, the ring of gamblers a gathering of old-timers and drifters wagering apples to ward off the air of desperation and despair that surround their lives. Sender is not amused.

Part II: Madazkan's Court

Introduction

Adventurers seek death or glory in the Sunken City, and Madazkan's Court is the perfect place to find both! Madazkan's Court consists of both a surface and dungeon component.

Adventure Overview

Court: On the surface, players will make their way through an overgrown courtyard, battling a degenerate band of Opossumen and a pair of fearsome, though overfed Crocodillos. Next, they'll enter and explore Madazkan's twisted arena, where they'll eventually be driven to the arena floor by an angry crowd of blood-thirsty spirits. They'll confront sinister traps powered by a crazed elemental that will require feats of strength, agility, and smarts to overcome. At the heart of the deadly playground they'll encounter the only way out of the arena short of death: a blind leap into the blackest of pits.

Dungeon: In the dungeon below, adventurers will be ambushed by the cursed bones of enslaved gladiators, wielding the very chains of their oppression. Next, they can take a side trip to outsmart a gigantic catfish to gain a notable prize. If they manage to get past a potentially deadly shrine that tests their luck, and survive a room oozing with hungry slime, they will eventually discover Madkazan's pleasure chamber, and the true shrine to his dark patron:

Malloc the Creeper, the Dark World Tree whose roots penetrate the earth. The shrine holds both death, notable treasure, and opportunity.

Background

Madazkan was a right nasty old necromancer. Delving into the darkest sorceries, he consorted with the worst sorts of demonic and elemental powers. Feared throughout the Great City, he entreated with dark powers to build his signature marble arena and the dungeon that served it.

In the arena he indulged his darkest fantasies, sending hundreds to their deaths by means of an endless variety of death traps and twisted games.

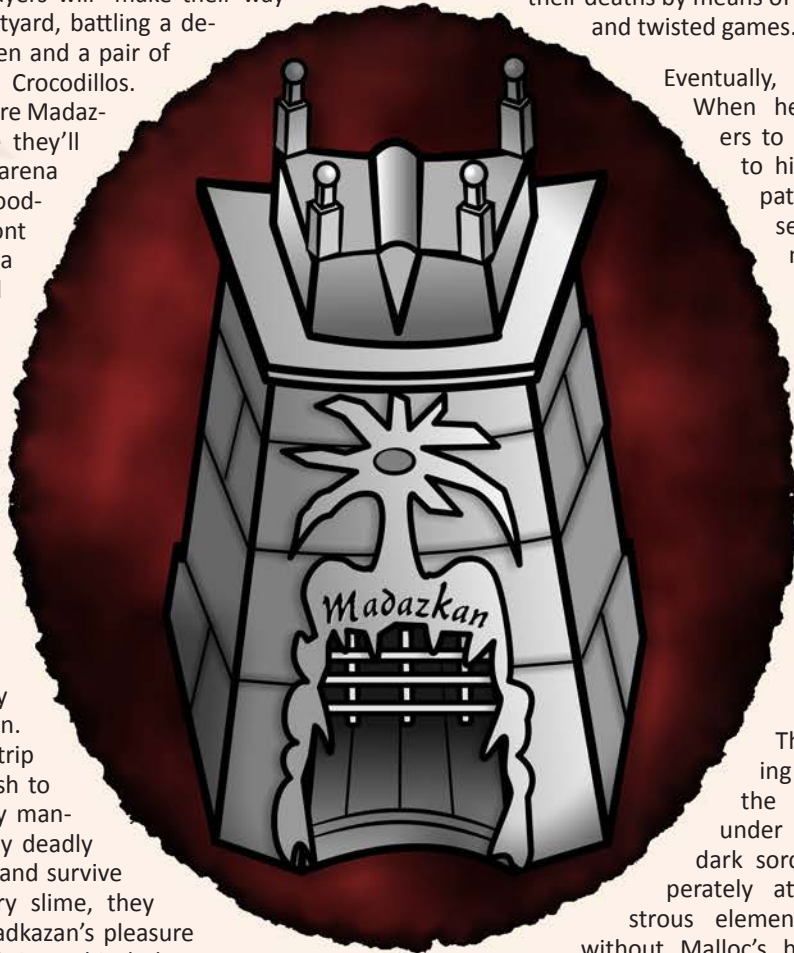
Eventually, his dark ways destroyed him. When he covenanted with new powers to construct a massive tower next to his arena, it angered his original patron Malloc. The Dark Creeper sent forth roots to destabilize the mighty structure, and it collapsed in a terrifying shower of stones, slamming into and nearly burying the northeastern corner of the arena.

Madazkan looked on in horror from his private pavilion in the arena, finding himself trapped as the stones from the tower blocked his only exit. The falling stones also damaged the intricate wards that kept the enslaved elemental who powered the arena in check...

The elemental ran riot, killing every slave and spectator in the arena. Madazkan's guards fell under waves of sheet lightning. The dark sorcerer was the last to die, desperately attempting to bring the monstrous elemental force under control. But without Malloc's help, he proved no match for the enraged creature, becoming the deadly arena's

final victim.

Until today.



Once more, into the abattoir! Or perhaps on second thought...

Many role playing games strive to carefully balance each encounter to protect players from 'getting in over their heads'. The DCC RPG is not one of those games! The world that DCC characters inhabit is a dangerous, unpredictable place, and players need to pick up on the clues you drop that on occasion it's best to run for their lives. While you won't find many such encounters in a 0-level adventure like **Perils of the Sunken City** (there's generally more killing by attrition), be aware that deadly encounters are out there and be prepared to help your players understand the joys, and perils, of truly heroic adventure!

Madazkan's Court

Arena



4

□ = 10 feet

5

2

1

3



Madazkan's Court: Arena

Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
A-2	C	Lethargic Crocodillos
A-3	C	Degenerate Opossumen
A-5	T/C	Arena traps, possible Opossumen

Player Introduction

After an endless moment lost in the swirling dark of the Sending Stone's transporting magic, you emerge into the light, your feet slapping into muddy ground in a shower of dirty spray. Your vision clears to reveal a tall weathered stone monolith rising before you.

As you and your companions stumble away from the stone, you turn to discover you're in a huge grass filled court, 120 strides to a side, veiled in a ragged dome of clinging mist. The wall ringing the court is largely rubble, and beyond the crumbling barrier the swamp extends into the mists in all directions. The scent of decay is overwhelming.

But to the north, a gleaming structure rises from the tall grass to dominate the far side of the court: a circular arena of shining marble, seemingly untouched by the years that have left the rest of the court in ruin!

From the west the subtle aroma of wood smoke and roasting meat cuts through the decay. At first glance the court appears empty of life, but the shoulder-high grass could hide almost anything...

Areas of the Map

General Features: Tall grass (3-5 feet) covers most of the court. The ground is generally firm, except near Area A-2 where the grass sinks into muck, and water can stand up to two feet deep. The sky is covered with slate grey mists, and vision in general is limited to fifty yards or so.

The stands of trees in the area contain a number of Weepers: trees that ooze large quantities of sticky sap. Any adventurer with an outdoor background would recognize them, and the sticky stuff could prove useful in the dangers to come.

Area A-1 – Great Stone: The stone before you is shorter than the Sending Stone at the gates of the city, but nearly as wide around at its base. Moss climbs the stone on all sides. A rough star of shaped granite radiates out from beneath the stone into the tall grass.

If adventures place their hands on this stone, it acts exactly like the Sending Stone in reverse, returning adventurers to the Proving Stone at the gates of the city.

Area A-2 – Crocodillo Wallow: As you push through the tall grass, the ground grows less firm with each step. As your final footstep sinks completely into ankle deep water, you make a grisly discovery: the remains of a half-eaten corpse lies mostly submerged a few feet in front of you.

This region of muddy ground is the lair of a pair of fearsome, but overfed crocodillos, heavily armored beasts resembling crocodiles with massive shoulders and thin whip-like tails.

The corpse is a recent victim of the male crocodillo: a half-eaten opossuman (only the bottom half remains).

Lethargic Crocodillos (2): Init -1; Atk bite +2 melee; Dmg 1d8; (or tail (all within 5 feet) +2 melee; Dmg 1, target(s) tripped prone) AC 14; HP 10; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref -2, Will -2; AL N.

The creatures are extremely difficult to spot in the grass (DC 14 search check). They are deft at moving silently and invisibly and could appear/attack from anywhere in the wallow.

Scattered throughout the wallow are a few prizes: two spears, a battered iron helm, two bottles of cheap wine resting at the edge of the mire, and a finely carved ivory miniature of a dead tree with spreading roots (5 GP).

The Opossumen from area A-3 have proved easy prey, and the crocodillos are well fed, and thus less aggressive than usual. If players flee the area, they won't follow.



Area A-3 – Opossumen Camp: *As you push through the tall grass towards the enticing smell of roasting meat, bristly faces with shining milk-white eyes suddenly appear in the grass at your feet. As you prepare to deliver a well-placed boot to drive the vermin off, they rise from the grass, to nearly the height of man! With a discordant chorus of hissing snarls, the opossum-headed humanoid spring forward with javelins and clubs raised!*

Whether the result of some horrific experiment gone awry, or a fiendish curse, the origin of opossumen is obscure. Regardless, mixing man and opossum has produced some extremely dubious results. Opossumen are shorter than menfolk, less intelligent, and shy away from both bright lights and confrontation (unless defending their food). To their credit, they do possess a certain low cunning, and see extremely well in the dark. Their greatest weakness is their uncontrollable compulsion to ‘play dead’ in combat situations. If any opossumen rolls a 1 in combat, they collapse immediately into a rigid state from which they cannot emerge for 30 minutes. Certain ‘evolved’ opossumen have overcome this weakness, but those who inhabit Madazkan’s Court are a particularly degenerate bunch.

The band is made up entirely of males, arrayed in rags and mismatched bits of hide armor. Most wield clubs, which are little better than their teeth (but won’t cause permanent personal damage if broken in combat). One in four possesses a crude javelin.

The ‘camp’ is a vile charnel pit of filthy lean-tos surrounding a smoky fire. The meat rotating on a crude spit over the fire is obviously humanoid. On the east side of camp are four new 2x2-foot crates. Three of the crates have been burst open and their contents ransacked, but the fourth is intact. (Eight bottles of fortified wine—packed in straw—labeled *The Two Copper Dropper*.) The crates are lashed together with 40’ of good quality rope, and show signs of being dragged from the east. Following the drag marks through a break in the wall reveals a small raft tied up next to a brackish body of water extending into the mists and parts unknown.

Degenerate Opossumen (8): Init +0; Atk javelin -2 melee; Dmg 1d4; (or club/bite - 2 melee; Dmg 1d4) AC 11; HP 2; MV 30’; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will -3; AL N.

(On attack rolls of 1 an opossumen “plays dead”: becoming immobile while its face sets in a rictus smile, releasing foul fluids from unsavory orifices. All foes within 10 feet must make a DC 8 Fort save or be at -2 to all activities while in range.)



Miniatures? The DCC RPG works great without them, but if you use figures in your gaming, the master appendix PDF is stuffed with battlemaps, paper miniatures, and other free enhancements!



If the adventurers kill/drive off the opossumen, they can piece together 2 sets of (filthy, repulsive smelling) hide armor (fits all, but only offers +2 protection), 1d5 javelins and 6 clubs.

Area A-4 – Sunken Guardhouse: *The stones of the crumbling wall are somewhat more intact here. In the roofless interior of what appears to be a collapsed guardhouse, the omnipresent grass is replaced by thick spongy moss, rising and falling over mounds of unidentifiable shapes.*

The ground here is extremely unstable. Anyone venturing into the crumbling structure will trigger a breakthrough. (DC 8 Ref save to spring clear, or fall 6-10 feet into a stony hole for 1d4 damage.) In the northwest corner, a thick layer of turf covers a trapdoor down to the only accessible escape tunnel from the dungeons below. This should prove nearly impossible to discover from the surface.

Area A-5 – Madazkan’s Arena: *The massive circular structure before you is in astonishingly well-preserved condition. The walls rise over twenty feet high in glistening marble brilliance, untouched by rot or decay. Two external stairwells flank an impressive gatehouse, its wrought-iron gate open in welcome. Above the gate broods a relief carving of a twisted dead tree. Its roots wrap around the word “Madazkan” and extend down in writhing tangles to border the opening. The air seems to crackle with barely-subdued elemental energy.*

This arena was Madazkan’s joy. In it he sported with the lives of slaves and those unfortunate souls his minions could ‘vanish’ from the poorest districts of the city.

The Elemental: The entire structure is powered by an elemental, once bound here by powerful magics, but who remains as a slave to its own mad compulsion: too keep the arena pristine! Normally the elemental is in a nearly comatose state, its energy and consciousness leached away into the very marble to maintain its beauty. But a fearsome lightning storm two days past repeatedly struck the large metallic orb that stands over the northeast section of the arena and the elemental is currently livelier than it has been in years!

A) The Walls: 20 feet of smooth marble, rises to 35 feet at the gatehouse and Madazkan's Box. The collapse of the massive tower to the northeast has buried the base of the walls in that area, and it's easy to scramble up the stones to within 5 feet of the top of the walls around the stands.

B) Outer Stairwells: These marble stairs flank the gatehouse and provide easy access to the stands.

C) Gatehouse: The iron portcullis is raised. Inside on the left wall a stairwell rises to an entrance to the stands above. In the far wall, a large opening grants access to tunnels disappearing into darkness both left and right under the stands. Otherwise the gatehouse is empty.

Passages under the Stands: These tunnels once circled the entire arena, providing access to bathrooms and concessions. The restricted areas to the northeast (tunnel G to the arena floor, the machinery room, and the stairs down to the dungeons below) are now blocked by floor-to-ceiling rubble. The open areas are empty and dark. (Though if the party is having an easy time of things, a party of opossumen could be lurking in the shadows...)

D) The Orb: This massive metallic orb rests on a 40 foot tall iron pillar near the northeast section of the arena, drawing energy from its surroundings, feeding the elemental and machinery room below. The collapse of the tower to the northeast cut off all external access to the machinery.

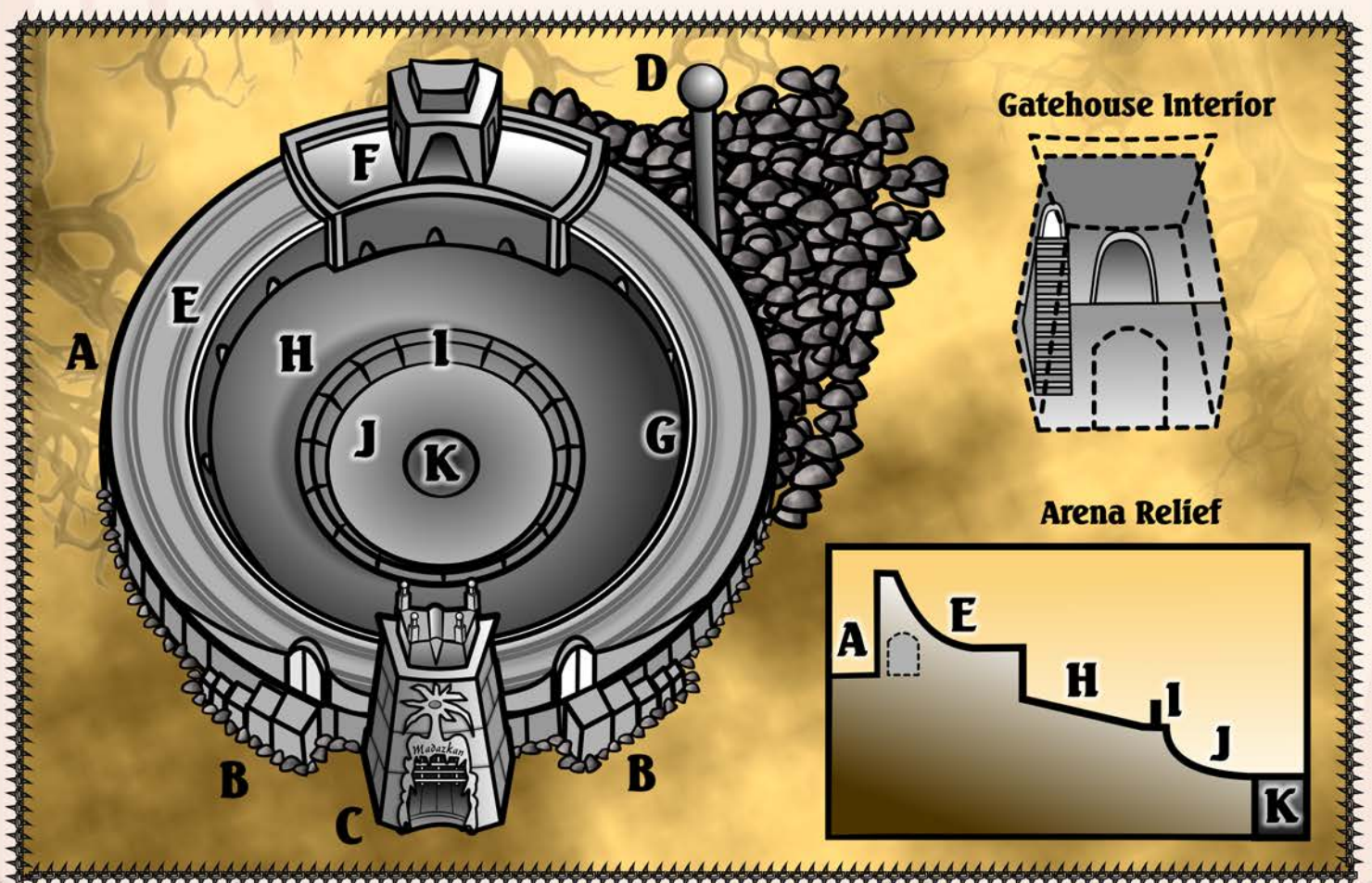
E) The Stands: Stadium style seating for roughly 1000 spectators. There are hundreds of skeletons scattered about, their clothing reduced to rags, many showing scorch marks. Most shiny valuables were picked clean by clever birds in the distant past, but a determined party could recover 2d20 silver pieces if they search long enough.

F) Madazkan's Box: Access to the box is limited, since its entrance tunnel (accessed through the marble 'pavilion') was buried with the tower collapse. Adventures must surmount a 10 foot tall wall to climb into the box. Inside the pavilion are a set of iron levers that control the arena's traps. All levers are in the back, or 'off' position. When the elemental activates the traps of the arena, all the levers will slide forward and lock into position.

Madazkan and his guards made their last stand in the pavilion, and the area's protective enchantments have helped their possessions resist the decaying effects of time. Players can recover 3 sets of black scale mail, 3 long swords, 3 short bows, and a fine spider silk black robe (40 GP) from the desiccated skeletons.

Clutched in Madazkan's bony hand is his **Rod of Chains**: a black rod with stylized spiked-chain links running from above the hand grip to the crown of the rod, forming a spiked mace of sorts. This weapon acts as a mace in combat, and also has special significance to the chain skeletons in area D-1.

G) Access Tunnel: A few yards into the tunnel, the way is completely blocked by rubble from the collapsed tower.



The Deadly Playground

The arena floor rests 10 feet below the stands, empty save for a single skeleton. To access the floor, characters must be lowered down or hang and drop from the stands. Once a single adventurer steps foot on the arena floor, a number of events will be set in motion:

- The elemental that controls the arena will awaken from its slumber, immediately activating its 'lightning screens'. Coursing sheets of impenetrable energy will appear around the entire perimeter of the stands, blocking access to the outer stairwells and the rock pile. Additional screens block the entrance tunnel at G, and the pit at K. Anyone touching a screen takes 1 HP damage per round unless they make a DC 14 Fort save. (Players in the arena might catch vague glimpses of the shapeless elemental arcing along the walls, circling the arena, or flying up to the orb and back.)
- The ghosts of the arena will begin to stir, feeding on the elemental's energy. On the first round, distant shouts and chants will be heard. On the second, menacing phantom forms will begin rising from the remains of the dead, gesturing wildly toward the arena below. On the third round, anyone in the stands will begin to suffer scratches, cold flashes, and strange visions. Phantom hands begin forcing them towards the arena floor. On the fourth round, anyone who has not found their way to the arena floor will be pushed over the edge, suffering 1d4 points of damage when they hit the ground.

From this point on, until the elemental wears down in 24 hours, the only way out of the arena is through the pit to the dungeons below.

H) The Arena Grounds, Outer: The outer arena grounds are floored with smooth marble, and angle down to the wall of spikes at I. The grounds are empty save for the prone form of a single skeleton, which appears to be clutching a golden sword. (In reality just wood covered in gold leaf.) When the arena goes active, the following occurs in the outer grounds:

- Foot-long spikes begin powerfully poking out, then retracting from hundreds of holes in the outer ring of the wall of spikes.
- Steel orbs will shoot from small holes in the base of the outer wall, circling the arena like roulette balls. Randomly target half the adventurers each round. If targeted, the adventure must make a DC 8 Ref save or be struck by an orb for 1 point of damage, and knocked off balance, stumbling toward the wall of spikes unless restrained.

I) Wall of Spikes: All characters must somehow cross the 4 foot tall wall of spikes to the inner grounds. Anyone loitering within

range of the stabbing spikes suffers a spike attack (+0, 1d4 DMG). Players can attempt to leap the wall (DC 10 Ref save), or time the spikes properly to scramble over (DC 10 Int check). Failure on either check results in a spear attack. If players leap the wall, they'll likely slide uncontrollably toward the pit unless secured in some manner or caught by friends.

Reward players for clever solutions with a +2 to +4 bonus. Examples would include crossing where dead characters already gum up the spikes, clever use of rope, tree sap, poles, etc. If characters arrive at the wall off-balance from a steel orb strike, they will be forced to make an immediate crossing attempt at -2.

As indicated, characters that fail in their crossing roll suffer a spear attack, and must try again the next round to surmount the wall.



J) The Arena Grounds, Inner: The inner grounds are bowl shaped, steel plated and extremely smooth. Anyone entering the inner grounds with momentum and without means of restraint will slide uncontrollably towards the pit.

The steel plate is heavily charged. Each complete round in the inner grounds characters must make a DC 7 Fort save or take 1 HP damage as electricity arcs about.

K) The Pit: Once the arena is active, the circular pit is covered by a lightning screen. Anyone who slides down on the screen floats there taking 1 hp damage per round unless they make a DC 14 Fort save. They can step/roll off during their next action.

At the four compass points just outside the pit are small separate plates shaped like twisted trees. (DC 8 search check to spot). Pressing one of the plates disables the lightning screen for 2 rounds, revealing the black pit below. (Anyone on the screen when it is disabled falls into the pit unless they make a DC 12 Ref save to grab the lip of the pit.)

The pit's depths are cloaked in magical darkness: there is no way to see beyond the black barrier. Players must make a leap of faith into the dark to escape the deadly arena!

Spicing things up: A group of less savage Opossumen could be hiding behind Madazkan's Pavilion, forced into the arena by angry ghosts. Will they fight or assist? Perhaps 1 or 2 could provide replacement characters for particularly unlucky players!

The traps of the Arena should whittle a party down, not wipe them out! If your group is too cautious and is forced to the arena floor en masse, only roll damage for a subset to avoid weakening them too much!



Madazkan's Court: Dungeon

Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
D-1	C	Chain Skeletons
D-2	C	Giant Catfish
D-4	T/C	Purple Slime Monsters
D-5	T	Luck Shrine
D-7	T	Cave In
D-8	T/C	Malloc's Temple Servants

Player Introduction

You fall into darkness. For a gut-churning moment, it seems the dark will never cease, but you suddenly emerge into dim light before slamming into an icy pool of deep clear water. Clawing your way back to the surface, you find yourself in a stone lined pool in a small circular room. A dim light seems to seep from the walls themselves. Apparently there is a dungeon below the arena.

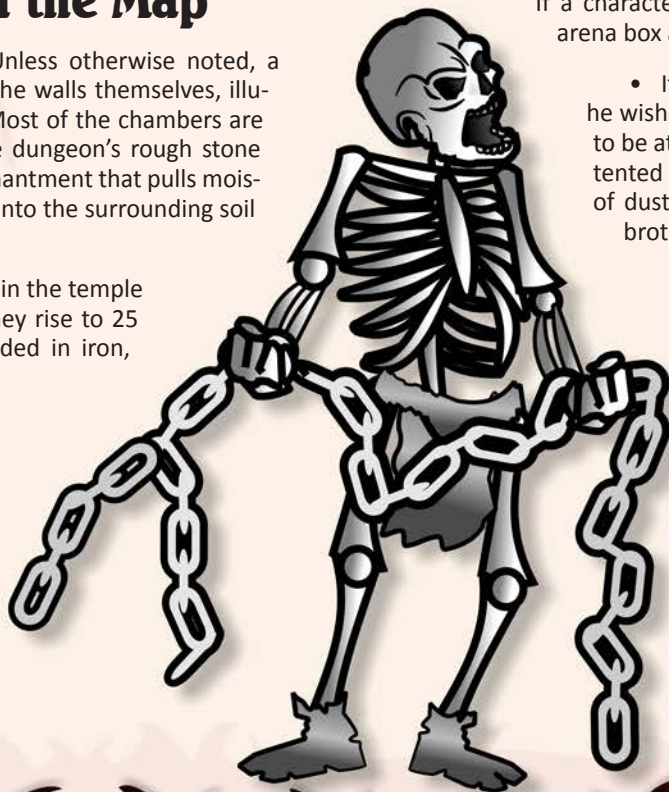
Sputtering, you pull yourself from the pool. As you shake yourself dry, you're astounded to discover that the fall into the pool, rather than causing harm, seems to have healed you in some way. All your pains have vanished; though you feel a strange emptiness somewhere deep down...

Sounds echo ominously in the chamber. Sinking down on a stone bench that circles the room you wait for your companions to make the terrifying plunge, all the while staring at the solitary door before you.

Areas of the Map

General Features: Unless otherwise noted, a dim glow radiates from the walls themselves, illuminating the dungeon. Most of the chambers are also surprisingly dry: the dungeon's rough stone walls hold a residual enchantment that pulls moisture out of the dungeon into the surrounding soil in most areas.

Ceilings are 10 feet, save in the temple and the grotto, where they rise to 25 feet. Doors are oak banded in iron, and are unlocked.



Area D-1 – Cells of the Arena Slaves: The pool where the characters arrive is part of a slave complex used by Madazkan to refresh those he forced into battle in the arena. The waters of the pool heal all temporary ills. (Up to once a week.) All adventurers who enter the pool are restored to full hit points. Long term, however, this healing power robs the body of general health to achieve temporary gain: Each successive use after the first causes a permanent loss of one point of stamina.

(If the party is in difficult straights, this is good location to place a band of replacement characters: perhaps the shattered remains of a group that just fled from the Chain Skeletons!)

The walls of the pool are lined with hand-grips, so even characters in heavy armor can find their way to the surface. When the players are finally gathered together, and pass through the unlocked door, read the following:

The door opens to reveal a large room filled with a twisting warren of small open cells. The walls emit a dim glow here just as in the room with the pool. A sudden rush of bone-dry air rushes past you bearing the unmistakable smell of death. The silence is broken by the clacking of bones and the whisper of chains: a skeletal figure emerges from the dark, twirling a barbed chain like a lasso about its bony skull!

Revenge is the only force that motivates the spirits of these dead slaves. They attack immediately.

Chain Skeletons (8): Init +0; Atk chain +0 melee; Dmg 1d3 and bind (victim immobile until DC 8 Reflex or Strength Check); AC 9; HP 3; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead, half damage from piercing and slashing weapons; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N.

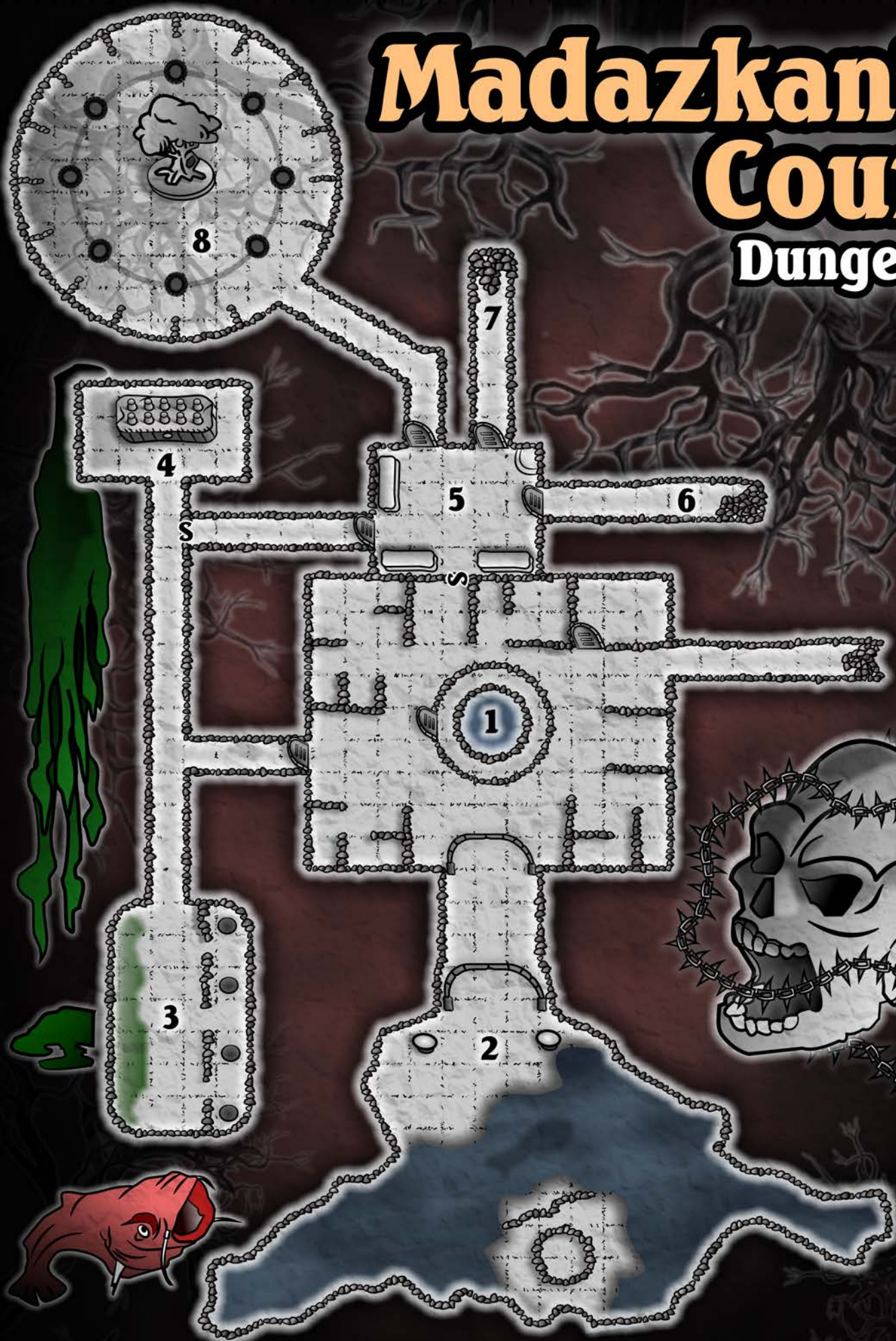
If a character wields **Madazkan's Rod of Chains** from the arena box above, the skeletons react as follows:

- If the rod-bearer communicates in any way that he wishes to set the skeletons free, or desires for them to be at peace, half of the skeletons will whisper a contented "we sleep now" and disintegrate in a shower of dust. The remainder hiss at the weakness of their brothers and fight on!

- Attempts to control the skeletons in any other way by the authority of the rod results in the skeletons going completely berserk. (Damage increased to 1d4 and the skeletons will hound the rod-bearer anywhere in the dungeon. Normally, the skeletons will not leave this room.)

Scattered throughout the chamber are rotting mats, 13 candles, six torches, yards of rusty chain, and a ten-foot pole. The lone room in the cell complex with a door housed the chief slave. His bones are scattered about his room, all showing signs of crushing blows. The secret door in the north wall of the complex can only be opened from the opposite side.

Madazkan's Court Dungeon



Area D-2 – Catfish Grotto: *The wide gallery running south from the skeleton's chamber opens up into a massive natural grotto. A sluggish underground river cuts the cavern in two, flowing from left to right. On the far side of the river the ground rises, but the chamber appears to have collapsed there, leaving only a small strip of ground that thrusts out into the river. A structure of some kind squats on this 'island' - something sparkling from its shore in the dim light.*

The water glitters a dull red, filled with hundreds - thousands! - of glowing scarlet crayfish. As you examine them, a massive shadow swims by in the depths of the river.

This large cave was once completely dry, and continued up to the surface. Favored victorious slaves could enjoy a portion of freedom here, and enterprising folks from the city set up stalls to serve the slave's various needs.

The cave collapsed with the fall of the tower, and eventually the river cut its way through, forming a deep channel. The dark shadow in the depths is a gigantic 20 foot long catfish, grown massive over the years feasting on the mutant crayfish. In spite of the endless food supply, the catfish is desperate for fresh flavors and will attack anything that enters the water.

Whiskers the Catfish: Init +0; Atk bite +4 melee; Dmg 1d8 and swallow on critical; AC 10; HP 26; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +0; AL N.

Attempts to attack the catfish with ranged weapons cause it to swim into deeper water until someone tries to cross.

Crossing The Water: Those characters who can swim can always attempt to swim across. The catfish can only eat one of them a round. There are other options:

Let's Go Boating: Two eight foot wide bowl-shaped copper braziers located near the passage north could be used as makeshift boats to reach the island. The catfish will attempt to overturn any such rafts. As it strikes the raft, all passengers within must make a DC 10 reflex save or be dumped into the water.

Jungle Adventure: The ceiling of the cavern is 20 to 25 feet up, but covered in stalactites. It's just possible that players could use them in some type of elaborate acrobatic rope swing.

The island: A man was trapped by the catfish on this thin strip of land for 2 years, where he slowly went mad on a diet of mutant crayfish and glowing water. Over time, he dug up a few treasures: scattered about his skeleton are his journal, 65 SP, a crowbar, 6 caltrops, 12 iron spikes, an empty lantern, and a lovely jade necklace in the shape of a panther (200 GP) that would constitute a Grey Prize.

In the journal, the man makes many claims about the catfish: that it is intelligent, enjoys word games and witty conversation, and

hates the name 'Whiskers', preferring to be called 'Errol' instead. Whether these are mad ravings or not is up to the judge.

Area D-3 – Shower of Slime: *This room appears to have once been a combination baths/jakes, a low wall separating the toilets from the rest of the room. The walls drip with moisture... and thousands of humming purple slugs!*

The slugs are harmless, but their masters, two hungry purple slimes, are not. They ooze out of separate potty holes and attack as soon as someone enters the room.

Purple Slimes (2) Init last; Atk pod +2 melee; Dmg 1d4; AC 10; HP 12; MV 5'; Act 1d20; SP half damage from piercing and slashing weapons; SV Fort +5, Ref -5, Will -5; AL N. (Madness Touch on hit: DC 8 Will Save or target breaks down babbling for 1d3 hours)

In a tightly sealed chest in the corner are 6 fluffy towels, embroidered with a tree motif. (5 SP each.) If characters could understand the alignment language of Slimes, Molds, and Edible Tubers, they could discern that the slugs are all singing a hymn of praise to their slimy god.

Area D-4 – Luck Shrine: *A large stone table sits in the center of this chamber, upon which ten sealed 18 inch tall clay vases rest. A circular symbol of hammered brass (presenting both a smiling and frowning face on opposite sides) is attached to its front. Elaborate but enigmatic twisting shapes are carved into the walls of the chamber. A single vase lies shattered on the floor in front of the stone table.*

Madazkan used this room as a twisted 'reward' for successful gladiators. When a vase is opened, roll a d10 + luck mod. On a result of six or greater, the vase contains a single electrum coin encased in wax at the bottom of the vase (that must be pried out). On a result of six or less, the vase releases toxic gas. (DC 12 Fort save or 1d6 DMG for opener, and 1d3 DMG for those nearby who don't immediately flee.) Each vase weighs 10 pounds. It takes 15 minutes for the poison to disperse enough for players to return to the chamber.

Area D-5 – Madazkan's Chamber: *This room must have once been quite a pleasure den. Tapestries depicting unspeakable acts and plush lounges now sag with decay. A tall bookshelf holds a number of moldering tomes. A padded table with shackles hints at darker purposes. Five stout doors exit the room, the eastern door hanging open.*

Madazkan spent a great deal of time in this room, as it gave him easy access to his tower, the arena, his temple to Malloc, and his slaves. Most of the books rotting on the bookshelf are decayed beyond reading, but one red leather bound tome is intact enough to provide a spell of the judge's choosing. The secret door in the south wall looks normal from this side.

One tapestry is weighted at the bottom by a bar cast from silver. Only the ends protrude from its encasing sleeve, so it might be difficult to spot (DC 7), but is worth 15 gold pieces if recovered.



Area D-6 – Collapsed Tunnel: *This dark tunnel ends in a heap of broken stone. A pair of rotting boots peek out from the rubble.*

The skeletal remains are those of Jaffa, one of Madazkan's chief servants. If his skeleton is uncovered, a golden medallion shaped like a tree (45 GP) is revealed. Doing so, however, triggers a collapse in the last 10 feet of the tunnel. Anyone caught in the fall must make a DC 12 Reflex save or take 1d4 damage.

Area D-7 – Escape Passageway: *The tunnel climbs steeply as you move north. Eventually, you arrive at a trap door, moss dangling at the edges.*

The trapdoor requires quite a bit of muscle to open, but eventually it gives way providing access to area A-4.

Area D-8 – Malloc's Temple: *A large circular chamber opens before you. The cream-colored marble floor is embedded with a pattern mimicking black spreading roots. Alcoves ring the chamber around its entire circumference. 8 gigantic oil lamps hang suspended over 8 black holes in the floor.*

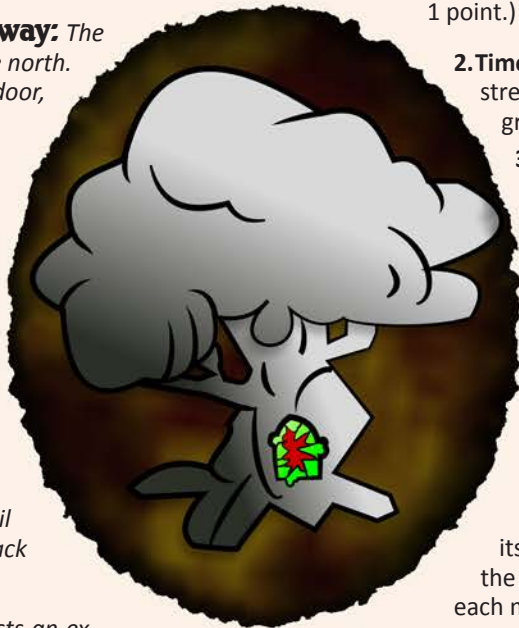
In the very center of the room rests an exquisite stone carving of a tree, its roots spreading down over its base to run along the floor as if a living thing. Hollowed out of the heart of the tree is a gaping maw filled with hundreds of writhing tendrils... tendrils that seem very much alive! As you stare transfixed at the writhing shapes, an oily whisper echoes about the hall: "Blood... always blood."

A skeleton wrapped in fine robes hangs half in, half out of the maw. A beautiful chalice of gold, rimmed with gems, (600 GP) lies on the lip of the maw. The body was that of Rakka, another of Madazkan's servants, who in desperation attempted to appease the idol with treasure, rather than the blood it preferred. Malloc got its blood in the end.

Alcoves: Each of the alcoves hosts a mini-shrine dedicated to one of mankind's secret weaknesses, such as greed, jealousy, and betrayal. (Malloc's roots spread everywhere, and uncover all the dark ways of men.) Each weakness is depicted by a fine oil painting. Removing a painting would likely earn Malloc's ire. Make this clear to players. (Sound of cracking stone, distant massive thuds, etc)

The Cup: The cup, however, is not sacred to Malloc, and players can safely abscond with it. (If they can get to it safely...) The cup constitutes a Bright Prize.

The Tree: The maw wants blood. Fresh blood. If something live is placed in the maw, the tendrils begin wrapping about the sacrifice to extract its blood. In the first round, an escape is possible with a DC 12 Strength check. This rises to a DC 16 on the 2nd round. After two rounds, escape is impossible. The tendrils will try to grab anyone attempting to grasp the chalice. (+2 group attack to attach)



The Black Holes: Unless mystical phrases (now lost to time) are uttered beforehand, once characters cross the circular line formed by the black holes, eight root like tentacles begin shooting out from the holes to encourage sacrifices to make the journey to the maw. The roots attack at +3; on a hit they grab their foe. One of three things can happen when grabbed:

- 1. Shun the unbeliever!** The root tosses its victim across the room. (1d4 damage, DC 12 reflex save to reduce damage to 1 point.)
- 2. Time for milking!** Squeezes its victim. (1d4 damage, DC 10 strength check to reduce damage to 1 point. Foe is still grasped.)
- 3. Feeding Time!** After two rounds of transport, the victim will be deposited in the maw.

Players can attempt to escape the root's grasp with a DC 10 strength or reflex check on their turns. Alternately, if they deliver more than 4 points of damage to a root (AC 8), the root drops whatever it is holding.

Once live blood is flowing in the maw, 2 rounds later the roots will withdraw down their holes.

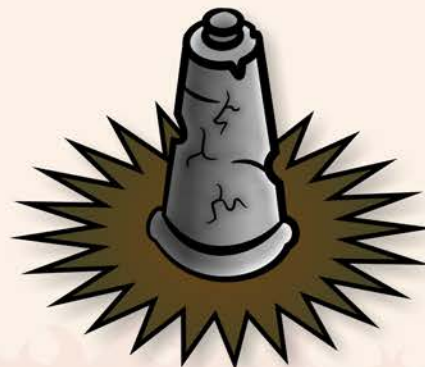
When the roots withdraw, all in the chamber who do not have Malloc as a patron will immediately come to its attention. In its own way, Malloc has a soft spot for the wastrels of the earth, and an oily voice will echo in each mind - *Do you seek the blessing of Malloc?*

Those who refuse will fall to the ground, stunned for five minutes. Those who agree will receive +1 to their lowest stat permanently. (They will also receive one of Malloc's 'gifts': a sixth withered toe, a strange tree shaped mark on their back, an overwhelming compulsion to avoid harming trees, etc. Be creative.)

Wrapping Up

As you struggle through the trapdoor to the surface, the misty sky, which had once seemed so dismal, nearly overpowers you with its brightness. In the distance the great sending stone and the safety of Mustertown await. Many who arrived with you will never again suffer the watery beer of the Soiled Dove... but you have survived, and will soon have coin in your pocket!

As you climb over the crumbling wall, and make your way through the tall grass, you imagine even greater treasures to come. But in the back of your mind, you can't help but reflect that a power - one you'd sooner forget - is now aware of you... personally.



Chapter 3

The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk

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Slither's End Beckons!

The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk: A Level 0-1 DCC RPG Adventure

Introduction

Once again the mysteries of the Sunken City beckon to the desperate souls of the Great City. As the confusion of the sending fades, adventurers find themselves calf-deep in muck on the borders of a rustic village. The local folk seem friendly enough, but the relentless symphony of the swamp issuing from the mists eats away at any sense of calm. One begins to wonder: Why does every home show signs of mourning? And who is this Jonas Gralk that all seem to mention with dark suspicion?

The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk introduces players to the colorful inhabitants of Slither's End. Could the folk of the village possibly be as kindly as they seem, or are they masking dark secrets? What dangers lurk in the swamps surrounding the village, and why do the children of the hamlet stare out into the mists with blank eyes and empty smiles? And where has the town's gravedigger Jonas Gralk and 2nd born members of the community disappeared to? Answers will be discovered in *The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk*!

Overview

The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk is a beginning or 'funnel' Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG adventure for 16 0-level characters or 8 1st-level characters. (The adventure is also easily converted to your favorite 'old school' system.) Players running 0-level characters should have 3-4 each, as casualties are part of the fun!

This adventure respects your initiative. If you think an encounter is too easy, increase the challenge! Too difficult? Just drop the number of foes. If a particular enemy doesn't fit in your campaign, replace them with a logical substitute with the same stats. Always bend the text to your vision!

There is lots to see and do in *The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk*, and it can take a number of sessions to see it all depending on how much exploring your players do. Have fun, and be prepared to be flexible if your characters manage to level up during play. The final encounter at the Ooze Pits can be extremely challenging depending on how you run it, so don't be concerned that your players will have too easy a time if they arrive at the Pits as swaggering first level characters!

Adventure Flow

The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk is organized in three parts:

Part One: Slither's End

Part one details the hamlet of Slither's End, where play begins and adventurers can learn about local troubles, uncovering clues about the grave digger Jonas Gralk and the many other mysteries that surround the village. Players will also experience a lively fair where they can test their skills, followed by a sharp battle with strange new enemies.

Part Two: Dangers of the Swamp

Many horrors haunt the swamp between the players and their final objective. A side journey to sack the keep of a river warlord offers useful booty and potential allies. The party will likely need this aid to surmount the many terrors of the swamp awaiting them!

Part Three: The Ooze Pits

Finally the players will confront the dark evil that has been destroying Slither's End from within. To defeat the loathsome power, and uncover its true identity and purpose, the party must successfully prosecute a large scale battle that will test the players' wills, planning skills, and mettle in battle.

The Appendix Booklet

Players can overhear many rumors and uncover a number of clues as they explore Slither's End. All of the rumors and clues (and a number of other cool lists) can be found in the separate master appendix PDF. (Appendixes A-E for this adventure are included at the end of this chapter for easy reference.)

In the master appendix PDF, rumors are separated onto individual strips to make it easy for you to cut them out. Then just hand them out to players during play whenever it seems appropriate. Clues are organized in a checklist: just check off each as the players uncover them.

Print out and explore the master appendix: it will make running *The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk* easier.

Part I: Slither's End

Slither's End: Under Siege

Though located deep in a forbidding swamp, for most of its history Slither's End has been an idyllic place, marked by friendly folks, reliable crops, and competent leadership. But troubles of various sorts have descended on the village in recent months, and the hamlet is now in a state of crisis.

From without, their economic lifeline to the greater world is threatened on two fronts. **The Slither**, a twisting ribbon of land that makes its way nearly ten miles through the swamp to the town's nearest neighbor—**Rook's Crossing**—is a troublesome path at the best of times. But now the way is threatened by a new and unfathomable enemy: the **Mist Men**, who seem to strike without cause or reason. Additionally, the only other easy passage to the outside world, **The Flow**, a swift flowing river located just north of town, is now the lair of a gang of river pirates. **Wuart Redhelm and his River Princes** lord over The Flow from their looming river-side keep, exacting crushing tolls that threaten to bring the town to its knees.

If these challenges weren't enough, danger stalks Slither's End from within as well. Recently, members of the community began to vanish in the night, without signs of struggle or distress. Over a score have been lost, and most mystifying of all, every missing soul is a second-born son or daughter of the community. A hamlet the size of Slither's End is ill-equipped to absorb such losses, and the muck melon fields stretching to the south of town are lying increasingly untended. **Jonas Gralk**, the town's Grave digger was seen dragging his mother out of town to the north three evenings ago, and all suspicion rests in his direction.

Locals have reached a point of desperation. In their quietest moments of reflection, they have finally come to a difficult realization: ***Darn it all: it looks like our unholy pact with the ravenous snake god Salissak just isn't up to snuff this time!***

Slither's End: A History

It wasn't always this way. In generations past, the sturdy folk of Slither's End humbly followed The Lady of the Harvest. Prosperous and forward looking, the town possessed a well-drilled militia garrisoned in a tidy stone tower at the entrance to The Slither. Muck melons, the local crop, proved remarkably nutritious and bountiful, and most importantly to the economy, provided a ready food source for the local pig industry. Lucrative exports of pork paid for the robust local garrison: the garrison insured the swamp-ridden fields and roads to market were cleared of threats. All was well in Slither's End.

Eventually markets began to suffer as portions of The Slither began to sink into the swamp. New threats also arose along the river, as did increasing dangers encroaching from the swamp. As profits dried up the garrison dwindled, and the stalwart keep began to decay, eventually toppling into the swamp. Fewer patrols resulted in more lost crops and livestock, causing further economic hardship until finally the town was caught in a downward spiral from which it could not escape.

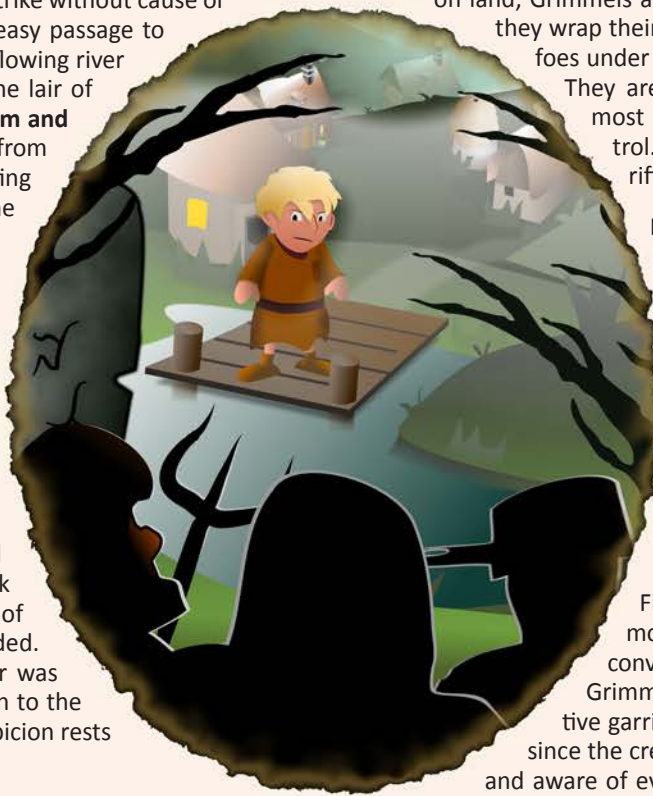
Kindly Folks and Snake Gods

One of the new threats facing the town were a race of diminutive amphibious beings known as **Grimmels**. Relatively weak and slow on land, Grimmels are deadly foes in the swamp, where they wrap their dextrous feet in the weeds and pull foes under the murky water in swarming packs. They are extremely effective at driving out most threats from the swamps they control. (As well as poaching hogs from terrified farmers.)

Most Grimmels are incapable of human speech, but each tribe of 3-4 packs has a single shaman of greater intelligence. A local trapper name **Houtnard** eventually made contact with the shaman called **Rat Feaster**. A deal was struck to provide a supply of pork to the creatures in return for an end to the attacks.

One step led to another... first a payoff, then a regular allotment. Finally Houtnard, who was spending more and more time with Rat Feaster, convinced the local town council that the Grimmels could prove an even more effective garrison than the old militia in its prime, since the creatures were at home in the swamps and aware of every threat. But such a commitment from the Grimmels would not come cheaply. Their shaman demanded a show of respect to **Salissak**, their dark snake god. At first only harmless rites were performed during the *Feast of Flies*. Then ritual hunts during the *Stalking Season*. And finally, when the town was wholly dependant on the Grimmels for their security, a sacrifice was demanded: one villager each year to act as a welding bond between the two peoples.

Caught in an impossible situation, the people of Slither's End agreed. What is one life in the face of many? Each Winter's End for the past 15 years an unlucky villager has been lowered into the pool at the center of town, where a host of Grimmel hatchlings swarm, dragging the offering to the depths. The older folks of Slither's End cloak their shame in fantasy, postulating that the sacrifice is only being escorted away to enjoy glorious feasts in the underground halls of mighty Salissak! The younger folk harbor no such illusions. Their empty stares and deep connection to the swamp hint at a darker future, when in a generation's time Slither's End will no longer be such a friendly and welcoming place.



Slither's End



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Overview of Events in Slither's End

After arriving at the Sending Stone and making their way to the hamlet, adventurers will be greeted warmly by the city council. If the party consists of a large mob of 0-level players, a subset of the party (perhaps one character from each player) will be invited to take a guided tour of the town, while the remainder can take part in the fair's activities.

At the end of the tour allow the characters to gather information and test their skills in various challenges at the fair, detailed in **Encounter S-1: The Fair**. This could prove a useful time for the players to learn about each other's characters and their strengths. When you feel your players have had enough of the festivities, trigger **Encounter S-2: The Mist Men Attack**. This sharp battle will provide a nice contrast to the information gathering that comes before and after the conflict.

After the Mist Men have been driven off, the grateful town will throw a feast in the adventurers' honor, followed by a discourse on the dangers the town faces and a desperate plea for help. If the players take up the offer, they can use the following morning to gather more information, then head north into the dangers of the swamp on the trail of Jonas Gralk and the missing villagers.

Mood in the Town

Almost all the adults the party encounter will initially seem distracted by unspoken concerns, but extremely friendly, perhaps displaying too much forced bonhomie. Young adults, with few exceptions will seem distant and unconcerned, avoiding eye contact but responding politely when spoken to. Young children will stare right through the adventurers, and rarely if ever speak or acknowledge the party in any way.

The Adventurers Arrive

When the players arrive read or paraphrase the following:

After what seems minutes lost in the swirling dark of the Sending Stone's transporting magic, you emerge into dull light. You find yourself on a small island surrounded on three sides by open swamp. The air is thick with the fetid fumes of the mire, and low mists run along the surface obscuring vision beyond a few hundred yards. Ahead of you across a thin strip of open water the ground rises leisurely above a small dock, a cluster of buildings and a large colorful tent. Pennants flap from tall poles, and the distant strains of pipe and viol echo across the water. It appears a fair of some sorts is underway in this hamlet in the heart of the swamp. A solitary boy in rough peasant garb stands mutely on the dock, but he pays no attention to your calls. Instead he gazes intently at the strip of water between you and the town, slowing shaking his head from side to side.

Slither's End sits in a very old section of the Sunken City. In ancient times these lands rested near the city's border, but now they have been completely conquered by the swamp for generations. The highlands of the town itself are dry, but everywhere else is a twisting maze of hidden waterways, tall grass, and clinging muck.

Key Figures of Slither's End

Jonas Gralk: Town grave digger. Lives with his mother above their home/shop located just south of the village graveyard. A loner, Jonas is now viewed by most as the chief suspect in the recent disappearances since Onus One-Arm and others witnessed him dragging his mother into the swamps three evenings ago.

Clotilda Desiré Gralk: Herbalist and proprietor of "Clotilda's Flower Pot". A quiet woman with a long memory.

Mayor Beechem: Head of the city council. Owns the muck-melon/pork processing complex on the south edge of town.

Miriam Pendreyson: City council member and tailor. Head of the Slither's End Tourism Board and town greeter.

Grimchops Leatherman: City council member and tanner. Miriam's right hand dwarf.

Vokas the Fire Mage/Man Ape: Eccentric old mage who believes he's been transmuted into the form of a fearsome giant ape. Wanders the town in nothing but a loin cloth and a smile. Not to be taken lightly.

Onus One-Arm: Manager of the processing complex. Injured years ago by a crocodillo in the swamp. Heavy drinker.

Tollybogs the Giant Halfling: City council member and proprietor of the Asp and Tattles, the only inn or tavern within ten miles. Serves a limited clientele in quality. Though Tollybogs will regale the party with all sorts of 'halfling blarney', in every way he looks like a normal man. (A full listing of Tollybogs' rustic wisdom can be found in **Appendix D: Tollybogs!**)

The Tour

After the party crosses from the island to the town, Miriam and Grimchops will immediately descend upon the adventurers with broad smiles and lots of glad-handing. Miriam will express suspicious wonder if anyone refers to the Sending Stone, but will soon demonstrate delight about the party's arrival:

It's so wonderful to have guests at this special time! Welcome to our humble village, where our borders are small, but our hearts are big! They say there's 'no end' to the hospitality you can receive in Slither's End, and by golly, I think they're right!

She will insist that select members of the party take a quick tour of town, filled with enthusiastic burbling about the wonders of Slither's End, but little mention of its trials and struggles.

The tour proceeds as follows: Fair area; melon/pork complex; central pool; the fallen keep; the Asp and Tattles; the Mayor's Manse; the bridges north; and finally a return to the Fair. A complete list of quotes describing the various town landmarks can be found in **Appendix C: Slither's End on Five Smiles a Day!**

Key Locations

Area S-1 – The Stone: The monolith here looks like a smaller version of the Sending Stone used to travel from Mustertown. When the party is ready to return, placing their hands on the stone for ten seconds will transport them back to the Proving Stone near the Great City.

The locals fear and avoid the stone, thinking it is cursed with some type of dark death magic. (Since no one has ever returned after being transported away.) Two cages mounted on poles hold the rotted remains of diseased pigs to warn children away.

The strip of water between the small island and the village is narrow but deep. Players will likely need to swim to cross. Grimmels are already swimming to the waters surrounding the island, detecting the strange new vibrations and scents, but the boy shaking his head on the dock will keep them at bay as long as the party is peaceful. Players might detect dark shapes moving in the murky water, but the Grimmels will keep their distance.

Area S-2 – Town Fair: The annual fair is normally a joyous time for the locals, but the recent disappearances have tempered things. Known locally as “All Fang’s Friday” the banners festooning the pavilion and tent declare “Happy Harvest Hoedown”. The adventurers can participate in many events at the fair, described in **Encounter S-1: The Fair**.

Area S-3 – The Pool: This deep pool is central to the worship of Salissak. Gimmel hatchling grow to maturity in its depths, fed by a steady supply of fresh pork (and occasional villager). The water is stained a deep red and looks disturbingly like a churning cauldron of blood. The alter extends over the pool, where a cage hangs by crimson-stained chains from a boom arm. A large wheel mounted to the crane raises and lowers the cage.

If asked about the crane or pool, Miriam and Grimchops have ready answers, but will dissemble if pressed:

Miriam: *Cage? Oh no! That’s the speaker’s lectern, don’t ya know? The view from up there is simply bracing!*

Grimchops: *Blood? Nay, tis’ but a touch of rust in the groundwater, don’t you see? Good for the constitution if you ask me! Would you like a sip?*

As long as villagers are present, it’s safe to enter the pool. The hatchlings and their minders will stay hidden in the depths. If the players enter the pool on their own, events would likely unfold like feeding time at the piranha pool.

Area S-4 – The Melon/Pork Complex: The muck melon fields stretch for miles to the south, interspersed with pig farms and rustic dwellings. Ripe melons are gathered in the elevated warehouse, while pigs ready for slaughter await their fate noisily in the pens. Normally a hive of activity, the complex is quiet due to the fair and recent goings-on.

Onus One-Arm, who appears to have started early on the fair spirits, will grumpily show the party around, and answer forcefully about what he witnessed the evening before. (Onus’ statement and other clues can be found in **Appendix B: Clues**.)

Each time Onus mentions ‘muck melons’, Miriam will interject ‘Golden Water Plums’ to Onus’s increasing frustration.

Area S-5 – The Asp and Tattles: A fine source for good eats at good prices. Tollybogs can also track down most basic equipment at normal rates. The large upper room is rarely used and can accommodate the entire party easily.

Area S-6 – The Tower of Vokas the Man-Ape: Vokas will often be found resting on the steps to his tower, or wandering about town in his signature loin cloth. His home is protected by deadly fire traps, far beyond the abilities of low-level adventurers. His mind was addled by a failed scrying charm years ago, but his mastery of fire magic is now focused to an ‘idiot savant’ level. His fire spells won’t fail: up to 4 times a day he can unleash a 5d6 bolt, or a 3d6 ball of fiery death.

Vokas will confront any direct attack on the town, but he’s uncomfortable in the swamp, and clearly can’t patrol the fetid mire. Thus his value as a defender is limited, but he loves Slither’s End, and hopes to protect it. (He doesn’t really comprehend the ‘whole snake god thing.’) His manner is friendly:

“Don’t let my fierce appearance fool you, young ones. Underneath it all I’m just a kindly old man...”

If contradicted about his ape-like appearance, Vokas will give the party an ‘oh the foibles of youth’ look and ignore the conversation completely.

Area S-7 – The Fallen Keep: All that remains of the once fine keep are tumbled stones half buried in the muck. A 25-30 yard wide berm of raised land, The Slither, twists away into the mists.

Area S-8 – Bridges to the River: Stout wooden foot bridges stretch between islands of solid ground heading north to the relatively swift-flowing river known as The Flow. See “Part 2: Dangers of the Swamp” for more information.

Area S-9 – The Mayor’s Manse: Easily the largest home in Slither’s End, the Mayor’s Manse sits atop a low hill, granting the finest view in town. Burglary could result in 200-300 SP of treasure, but it’s difficult to imagine the party going about unobserved in town successfully.

Area S-10 – Gravedigger’s Retreat: A faded sign bearing the title ‘Clotilda’s Flower Pot’ hangs from the eaves of this humble two-story structure: The house is unlocked. The first story is filled with herbs and apothecary equipment, a back dining room, and kitchen. The upper floor is wildly overdecorated in feminine style, featuring one large living space and a bedroom with three beds. (One clearly not used for a very long time.)

The ancient town graveyard rests behind the house. Numerous hints can be uncovered in these areas and are listed in **Appendix B: Clues**.



Encounters at Slither's End

The Fair: After the tour, the "Happy Harvest Hoedown" is a great time to introduce characters. Mayor Beechem will call out event participants with gusto, so it's a good occasion to learn names and character strengths! (Also note that the enthusiasm of the participants is exactly opposite what one might expect: the older folks jump about with giddiness, but the younger the villagers get, the more dour and rote their actions become.)

At the simplest level each of the events can be broken down into simple stat checks: each contestant rolls a d20. For games with 'rounds', if the player rolls under the pertinent stat, the character is still 'in the running', continuing on round by round until everyone is eliminated. For opposing challenges like arm wrestling, add the pertinent stat to the die roll, with the highest result winning. For races, you could link a series of rolls together, with results determining whether a player falls back or surges ahead.

Narrate the events in rapid-fire style, playing up the defining traits of players and the local competition! Prizes are simple affairs like pies and decorated ribbons, but you might throw in something of actual value (like a fine axe or spear) to increase tension. If a former occupation could reasonably help, consider a character's stat to be 2 points higher for the skill check. Example games:

Serpent's Eye Dagger Throw (agility). **Pin the tail on the crocodile** (luck/intelligence). **Swamp Shanties** (personality). **Muck-melon eating contest** (stamina). **Gigantic moss ball toss** (strength). **Race around the border** (agility/stamina)

A list of possible local competitors and prizes can be found in **Appendix E: Villagers at the fair**. (Have the players speak with Vokas at some point during the fair. When you have the seemingly crazy old man blast a massive fireball into the sky as a form of fireworks during the festivities, it should open some eyes about the dangers of fooling with him!)

Attack of the Mist Men: When you've determined that everyone has been introduced and it's time to move on from the Fair, read the following: *In the middle of the sack race, a muck covered young man suddenly dashes into the field, yelling at the top of his lungs. As the excited shouts of the fairgoers suddenly fade, you can make out his words: 'The mist demons are back! Yes, those bug-eyed devils the bubblers can't see! By Salissak's grasping scales, they're attacking my farm and Torku's as well! Please help everyone, they're taking our stock!'*

The village is ill-prepared to deal with threats that the Grimmels ('bubblers') can't handle. (Read **Appendix F: The Mist Men** in the Master Appendix to learn why!)

After the town council consults for a few minutes, Mayor Beechem and Vokas will approach the party: *"We know you have no duty to help us, but ask we will! If you accompany Grik back to his farm and help him rescue his hogs, we'll reward you with all the pork and ale you can feast on! And Grimchops has agreed to throw in 2 sets of fine leather armor. Will you rise to our aid?"*

If the party agrees, those few villagers who are able to fight will rally about Vokas and set off determinedly toward Torku's farm. Grik (the distraught pig farmer) will guide the party to his property.

If the party refuses, the villagers will shake their heads sadly, split their forces, and head off. It will be almost impossible to get willing information from villagers from this point on.

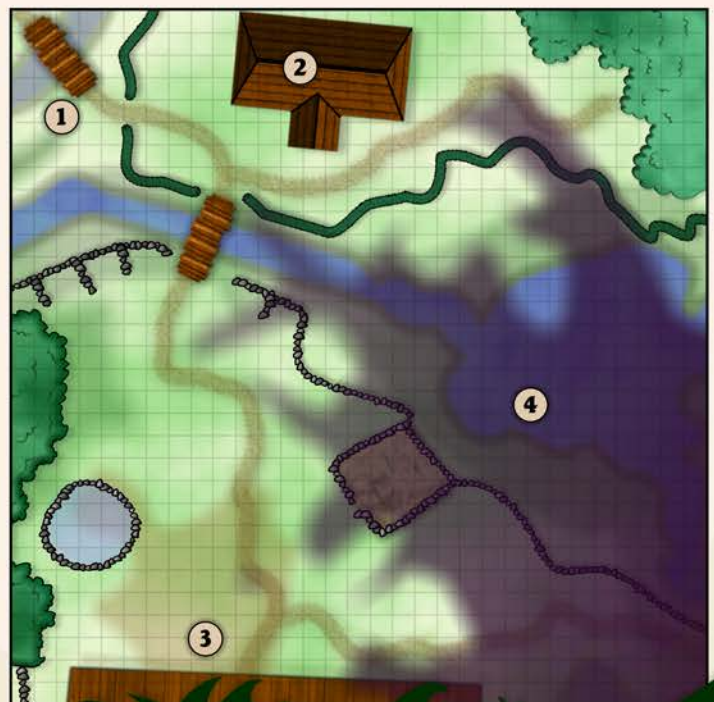
Grik will lead the party along The Slither for ten frantic minutes, arriving at **Location 1** to a scene of chaos at his farm:

A roiling black/red mist obscures much of Grik's farm, tendrils reaching out like grasping arms. Man-like shapes move about the edge of the mass. The mists seem to follow the figures: their features difficult to discern. The shrieks of pigs echo from the barn to the south, where the majority of the figures seem to be dragging lifeless hogs through the open double doors. Other figures stand near Grik's house, holding some strange metal device up as if measuring it in some way. Others crawl about on all fours, or stomp woodenly in the mire, seemingly fascinated by the splashing water. One is gazing intently at a chicken it holds up by its foot.

The invaders are Mist Men and for the purposes of this encounter most of their actions will seem incomprehensible. Twenty are at the farm: half are coming and going from the barn/pen at **Location 3**. All will ignore the party unless attacked, at which point those who aren't dragging pigs will turn on the party drawing 18 inch silver tubes from bands at their waists. The tubes shoot tiny darts that either stun (DC 10 Fort save or unconscious for 5-20 minutes) or wound (1d4 Dmg). Once a Mist Man has been slain the rest will switch to wounding darts. Players who attempt to grasp a silver tube will be burned (DC 10 Ref save or 1 point of damage.)

Mist Men (10): Init 0; Atk ranged +2 melee; Dmg 1d4; (or Stun: DC 10 Fort Save or unconscious for 5-20 minutes) AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; AL N.

Once six Mist Men have fallen, the roiling mist will turn bright red and the remainder will turn in the direction of the heart of the mist at **Location 4**, dropping whatever farm goods they're carrying. After a round of rising electrical fury, all Mist Men (dead or alive) and their artifacts will seem to evaporate into the mists, and the mass will retreat into the swamp at unbelievable speed.



During the fight, those who move deep into the mist will be at -2 to all actions, as visibility is very poor. Anyone caught in the mist when it retreats will suffer 1d4 electrical damage. (Give them fair warning that something nasty is about to occur, they have one round to sprint out of the mist before it's too late.)

Much more information about these mysterious foes and their purposes can be found in **Appendix F: The Mist Men** in the Master Appendix and in the adventure **Lair of the Mist Men**.

Conquering Heroes

If the party helps Grik save his stock, they will be welcomed back as heroic saviors. The promised feast will be like one that few in the party will ever have experienced, with an unending supply of delicious pork delights, accompanied by surprisingly tasty uses of muck melons. (Even a muck melon spirit that isn't half bad!) Tollybogs will put the party up for free at the Asp and Tattles, where they can sleep things off well into the next day.

If the party refused to help Grik, no doors will be open to them, and they will be forced to sleep in the open fair field. Rumors other than those gained at the fair will be difficult to acquire.

When the party finally arises, the town council will approach them with an offer (alter the text if the party refused to help):

Brave champions of the Swamp! We can not express our gratitude enough for your help with those strange creatures. As a community we could hardly afford to lose all of Grik's hogs! But as you might have heard mentioned, we've been suffering other losses as well of late. Folk from the village have gone missing almost every night. No signs of struggle! No others in the home aware of anything until they awake in the morning! Who could do such a thing, or WHY they would do such a thing is beyond us! Can you help us find our missing folk? Our fair village will die if this continues for much longer!

As a reward, the villages will offer the party six fine hogs, 4 good short bows and arrows, two suits of leather armor, two short swords left over from the militia days, and a guide north to the river. If the party helped with the Mist Men, the villagers will even allow them to depart with the weapons and armor as they embark on the mission.

Allow the players to spend a little more time gathering clues and rumors about town. (Refer to **Appendix A & Appendix B** for a list of both.) At the very least, the players should understand that Jonas Gralk the grave digger has been acting particularly strange of late, was seen dragging his mother into the swamp three evenings past, and that heading north would be a good place to start looking.

The Grave Digger's Dilemma

The local gossip is accurate in part. The recent troubles began with Jonas Gralk, but are now being driven entirely by the grave digger's controlling mother Clotilda. A month ago while digging a fresh grave, Jonas uncovered a strange bone mask, inlaid with brass, which had lain buried for ages untold. The mask is a totem of great power once worn by shamanistic priests of a forgotten god of decay known anciently as **It That Rots**.

Jonas dutifully took the mask to his mother, who while cleaning it felt compelled to place it against her face. The magic of the mask is powerful, and its essence amplifies the deepest desires and energies of the wearer. Though a quiet woman, Clotilda has silently burned with rage for years since her second born, a daughter named Miranda, was chosen by lot and sacrificed to Salissak eight years past. She now wishes to punish the village in any way she can, and the twisted council of the mask has shown her how to fulfill her desires: kidnap all the second born of the town in Miranda's memory, and work them to death unearthing an even more powerful mask of gold, hidden deep in a pit of poisonous ooze cradled between the foundations of two ancient towers to the north. Clotilda has made many trips to the towers, and when she obtains the power of the golden mask she will lay waste to Slither's End.

Clotilda has used her vast knowledge of herbs to prepare a powerful sleep smoke capable of knocking out everyone who breathes it in. Jonas sneaks into homes in the deep hours of the night to release the smoke, and after a suitable amount of time re-enters to carry the chosen victim away. Clotilda then applies a sticky green unguent called *Viper's Kiss* to the victims lips, which slowly releases a toxin that both pacifies and increases its user's susceptibility to suggestion. Jonas has snuck out of the village every night for three weeks, guiding the poor souls on the twisting path north.

The mask is also a powerful scrying device, allowing Clotilda to cast her mind out to the surrounding swamps and dominate the minds of the very weak willed. A small army of those she has dominated now guards the dig site, and a contingent waits on the far side of The Flow each night to meet Jonas and escort the new workers to the ooze pits.

But Jonas has grown tired and frightened. He hates what happened to his sister, but many of the villagers stolen away have been his friends. As his mother grew more dependant on the mask, his concern for her increasing fanaticism overwhelmed his passive nature. While she dozed in the early evening, he stole and hid the mask. Then when she woke and discovered his deed, he dragged her away from the village, an act witnessed by many in town.

In the light of day Clotilda was able to patiently reassert control over her son, and convinced him to return for the mask. She knows she can never return to her home since the town now suspects Jonas, and has redoubled her efforts. If the party delays, villagers will continue to die digging in the pits. Many more will perish when Clotilda recovers the dreadful artifact, which possesses powers that can scarcely be imagined!

The master appendix PDF is packed with useful information. Much of it is designed to be used at the table, so print it out and keep it handy.



Part II: Dangers of the Swamp

Overview

Once the players leave the relative safety of Slither's End, they'll have to overcome many dangers to confront Jonas and Clotilda at the Ooze Pits. They can gain valuable information by speaking to the Sisters who live in a tower overlooking the small docks linking Slither's End by river to the greater world. Though elderly, the Sisters are crack shots with their crossbows, and will brook no foolishness from the adventurers!

At the docks, the party will encounter a wily river trader named Eraskus Triskanian, who will make the party an offer. If accepted, the adventurers can help both Eraskus and Slither's End, acquire safe passage across the The Flow, and supply the party with much needed weaponry, but to do so they must overcome a deadly foe in Woart Redhelm and his River Princes. (And overcome a nasty surprise on the road.)

Once across the river, the party will move northeast to the Ooze Pits. Along the way they'll encounter an angry pixie and a tree the size of a mountain (with suitably large inhabitants). All that remains is to ford a small river, and the Ooze Pits are in their sights!

Environs Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
E-1	T/C	Flying Piranha Path
E-5	C	Snapdragon Lair
E-6	C	Woart Redhelm and his River Princes
E-7	C	Swamp Pixie and Revenger Trees
E-8	T/C	Nik-Nik the Squirrel King
Any	C	WindReaper the Enormous Owl

The Grimmel Presence

As the party moves north, they will sense that something is shadowing them in the water. (Lots of bubbles, strange splashes, small animals suddenly vanishing under the muddy water...) It's assumed that one of the older boys will be leading the party as far as E-1, so the Grimmels will not attack. Once the players reach the dry land south of E-2, they'll leave the unseen menace behind; the Grimmels are terrified of swift moving water and won't approach The Flow under any circumstances.

WindReaper

The description of Area E-8 details a gigantic tree and its inhabitants, but one foe that calls the tree home could be encountered anywhere: an enormous predatory owl called 'WindReaper'. The Sisters will warn players to 'watch the skies' and WindReaper can strike at any time you feel things need to be livened up.

The owl's attacks are described in E-8. It's assumed any unlucky adventurer carried off by WindReaper is lunch. But if the party numbers are dwindling, consider having the character catch up to the party before they enter the Ooze Pits, scratched and covered in saliva, mumbling about nests, long falls, and the luck of the gods!

Player Introduction

The swamp surrounds you as you make your way north of Slither's End. You trudge from one island of solid ground to another using the slippery pontoon bridges your young guide insures you are safe. The presence of the swamp is overwhelming, and you can't help but feel that something is shadowing your every move, hidden just beyond site in the muddy waters of the fens.

Ahead, the landscape appears to rise, with only a single isle and two bridges between you and solid ground. As you prepare to press on your guide stops suddenly, staring at the water suspiciously.

Area E-1 – Flying Piranha Path: *Your young guide tenses, then suddenly drops into a defensive crouch. Immediately, shapes begin bursting from the water on both sides of your foot bridge! The air is filled with hundreds of forearm-long winged fish leaping over the bridge, each bearing a mouthful of razor sharp teeth! 'Sorry strangers', your guide shouts, 'this is where I depart. I suggest getting to the high ground as quickly as possible! Don't follow me, they don't know you!' He then barks something in a guttural tongue at the water, and after a few seconds jumps in, disappearing into the murky mire.*

Ask each player whether they want to dash over the last two slippery sections of foot bridge, or move more cautiously. (Going back is a very poor choice...) Careful characters will require two rounds to reach safety. Each round they suffer one serious attack from a flying piranha. (The fish attack at -1 to hit, doing 1 hp Dmg)

Fast moving characters only suffer a single attack, but must make a DC 7 Ref save or slip off the bridge into the water. Characters in the water will be immediately consumed by piranha in glorious gouts of blood unless they make a DC 12 luck save. If they are lucky, the Grimmels in the water will encircle them and thrust them back out onto the bridge without harm. The character will feel strong hands, and might catch a glimpse of bulbous eyes and lanky hair, but will get no clear view of the creatures. (If the party is struggling, consider reducing the luck save to DC 5 or 7!)

Area E-2 – The Sisters & Eraskus: *The horrors of the open swamp behind you -at least for the moment- you catch your breath and sense a freshness in the air: the dank miasma of the mire has fled! Ahead of you the ground rises, then falls down to the lip of a free flowing river. A rough stone tower and two storage sheds overlook a small dock, at which a colorful river boat rests.*

Two elderly sisters, May and Rosie Fenn, manage this outpost transacting trade between Slither's End and the world. Business has been poor of late, since Woart Redhelm and his cohorts set up camp down river. The ladies are very cautious, and as the players approach the tower, they will clearly hear the sounds of crossbows being cranked, and smell the scent of burning oil on the air.

May will call down from the tower top, wispy grey hair peeking out from under a rusty helmet. As long as the characters are respectful there shouldn't be any bloodshed. (Both sisters are +2 with their massive heavy crossbows which do 1d8 damage! Each has two cocked weapons at the ready. A large vat of bubbling oil guards the stout iron bound door below.)

Slither's End Environs



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May will respond to questions as follows, Rose nodding at her side:

Travelers: *Traffic has been poor of late, since those benighted bandits set up shop! 'Lord' Redhelm my wrinkly backside! That strange boy Jonas and his Mother did pass through a few days back. Took one of the rowboats across The Flow but didn't return it! I've seen many strange fires on the far side of the river at night, but no one ever crosses over...*

The Gralks: *I used to be friends with Clotilda back in the day. But she got so quiet after her youngest was given... err... left town suddenly. Jonas is usually so quiet, but he seemed pretty worked up when they passed through.*

The Bandits: *They've got a rope across the river about a mile down the way, and a great mucking ballista that shoots lead tipped arrows the size of anchors: hole your boat quick as a snake strike! They'll want half of what you're carrying to pass. You'll want to talk to Eraskus down at the docks, he's looking for help to take down Redhelm and his River Dunces!*

Rumors about Slither's End's Strange Ways:

Look, folks have to do what they have to do, though don't believe everything you hear, especially from that rascal down by the river.

WindReaper: *Watch the skies! That owl is as big as a house and will carry you off like a field mouse! When the mists lift you can see where it must live: a tree the size of a mountain! I mean it!*

Eraskus Triskanian

The river boat down by the docks is painted like an elaborate fair attraction. Its owner Eraskus plies The Flow accompanied by 2 bulky guards, 5 lovely maids dressed like river faeries, and two enormous ensorcelled crocodiles attached to the front of the boat by enchanted elven rope. Eraskus is prepared for most threats (his guards are skilled fighters and his girls are all trained in the use of poisoned-dart blowguns) but giant weights falling from the sky through the deck of his boat is one challenge he's ill prepared to handle. After meeting briefly with the players, Eraskus will offer a deal:

Ho my dear new friends! What say we scratch each other's back parts, as they say? If you can root the foul bandits out of their keep down the river, Eraskus will reward you well! 4 fine longbows and a barrel of deadly arrows will be yours to treasure! And you can keep anything you find in the keep, I'm sure it's drunk with loot!

Depending on how well the players barter, Eraskus can be convinced to include a barrel of halfling stout, 2 old spears, and a silver cup shaped like an embarrassed bear hiding its face behind its paws, worth 20 sp. (Eraskus hates that cup.)

Eraskus can sketch out a very general layout of Redhelm's keep. Wise players will coordinate with Triskanian so that he arrives at the rope across the river as the players approach from the land side. This will make entering the keep vastly easier since all of the band's attention will be on the river below...

Eraskus has heard many rumors about Slither's End and can relate any from **Appendix A** that the players have not yet uncovered.

Area E-3 – The Flow: The river is only fast-flowing in relation to the stagnant waters of the swamp. Anyone with boating experience can lead a team rowing diligently across without moving downstream too much. The speed of the water increases dramatically as it narrows near Redhelm's keep. There are two large rowboats on this side of the river, each can accommodate ten passengers, with six spots for oar men.

Area E-4 – The Far Hut: *Two additional row boats rest on this side of the river at a small dock in front of a rustic hut. There are obvious signs that a band of slovenly folk have camped here recently, but no one is present now.*



The rough road was once of high quality stone, but is now largely broken up. Still, compared to the swamp it's a pleasant highway, and stretches in both directions along the river as far as the eye can see. A well trod path heads off north into the trees from the hut.

Area E-5 – Snapdragon Lair: *This stretch of the river seems almost pleasurable after the swamp, and you make good time along the rough but serviceable road. Ahead of you a small river runs into The Flow, a sturdy wooden bridge crossing its depths. As you get closer, you detect high-pitched snarls emitting from under the bridge!*

A mating pair of Snapdragons guard a clutch of eggs under this bridge and will swarm out and attack anyone who draws close. They will fight to the death.

Snapdragons (2): Init +2; Atk claws +1 melee; Dmg 1d4 or bite +1 melee; Dmg 1d3 and poison (DC 8 Fort save or -2 to all actions for 1 hour) AC 11; HP 7; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref +2, Will 0; AL N.

Snapdragons are the size of large dogs and as ferocious as badgers. Their wings allow them to glide up to 50 yards at a stretch, much further if they take off from a height. Snapdragon eggs can fetch five gp per egg if players can find the right buyer. (There are three eggs in the clutch under the bridge.)

Area E-6 – The River Keep of Wourt Redhelm: *Ahead of you a low bluff rises from the swamp, apparently cut in half by the river. Its entire crown on this side of the river is dominated by a ramshackle castle! A mad-man's blend of stone and wooden walls, the castle's rickety towers threaten to plummet into the river over which they hover. Smoke rises from a number of fires beyond the walls, and a single banner hangs from the tallest tower, featuring a crude red helm on a black field.*

Behold the noble fortress of Wourt Redhelm and his River Princes! Before embarking on his recent role as a despotic river bandit, Wourt made his way in life as a career strangler and amateur thespian. While traveling down The Flow with the aging all-lute festival band 'The River Princess', he was captured by the castle's previous bandit leader Fat Karnokus. Quickly rising through the ranks, Wourt eventually ousted Karnokus, who took a long lonely plunge into the river.

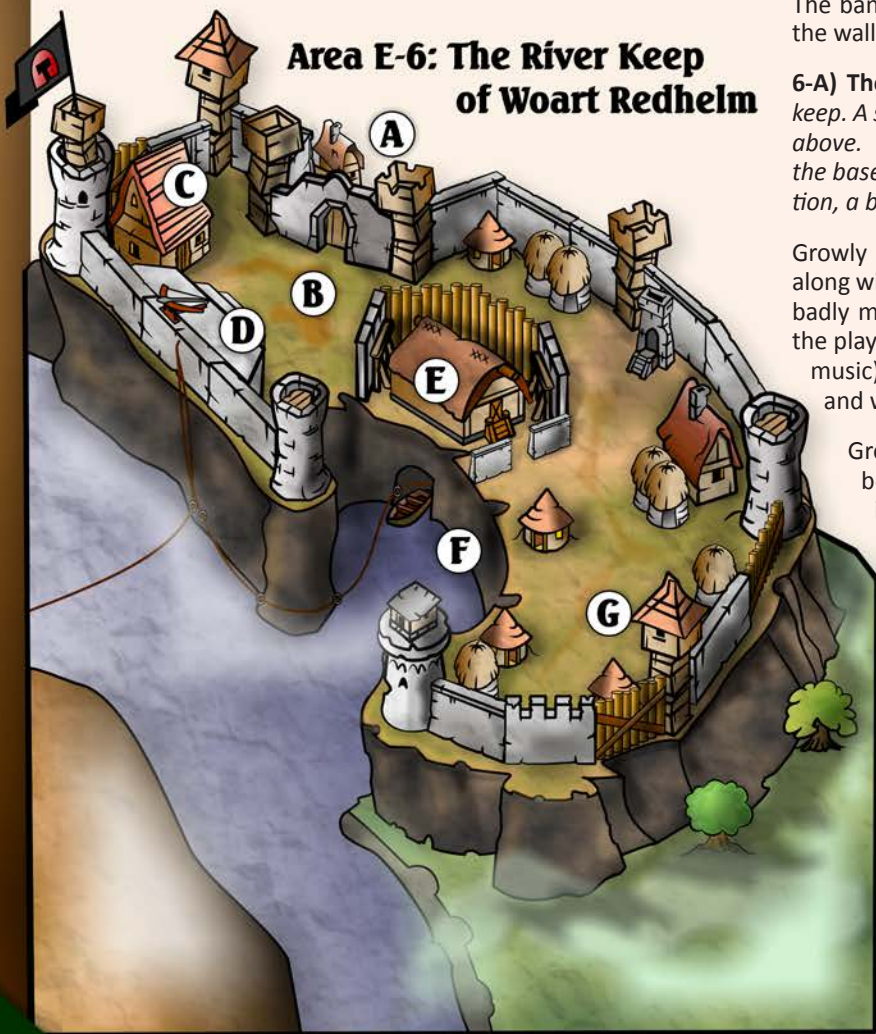
With the former lute-men turned bandits at his side, Wourt went about recruiting the best talent he could find along the river

(with little success), and increased the frequency of the raids on river shipping (having some success but losing half his band). Two months ago he captured a master wood smith and weapon maker named Thomas Dorapple. Redhelm soon coerced him into building the massive ballista that now threatens all traffic that passes beneath below, improving Wwart's future prospects immensely.

The band's numbers are quite small, and Redhelm depends on the castle's inaccessibility to keep danger at bay. The bandits have grown overconfident of late with the success of the ballista, and are not being particularly diligent. There are three broad scenarios the party will encounter when approaching the keep (though your players will undoubtedly come up with something unexpected!):

- 1) The party is both cautious and employs Eraskus as a decoy. Getting through the gate without being spotted should be a breeze, with a good chance of falling on the bandits gathered at 6-D with complete surprise.
- 2) The party is cautious and sneaky. They'll have to figure out how to neutralize the bored guard(s) at the gate and deal with the bear on the steps quietly. Once the players get inside the bandits will be spread out and much easier to handle.
- 3) The party is clumsy and detected by the keep's guards. Bandits man the walls with short bows and spears, and things will likely go very poorly for the players.

Area E-6: The River Keep of Wwart Redhelm



Wwart's Bandits

Wwart's band consists of the halfling Roscoe Twin-chops, bandit treasurer, Onk, a hulking former circus performer, the three 'River Princes' Prunk, Grimly, and Boog, the angry sisters Iphy and Trinkle, and Phil the Barbarian. (Don't ask.)

There are a number of camp followers and children near area 6-G. As soon as trouble starts they will kick loose a portion of the fence, and slide down the embankment to the swamp below. (They do this regularly for fun, and will get out of harms way immediately.)

Everyone left after the children and camp followers flee are stone cold murderers, torturers, and lutists.

Wwart Redhelm: Init +2; Atk axe +2 melee, Dmg 1d6+1; AC 11; HP 7; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

Roscoe Twin-chops: Init +1; Atk cleaver +0 melee (x2), Dmg 1d4; AC 11; HP 5; MV 20'; Act 1d16; SV Fort 0, Ref +1, Will 0; AL C.

Onk the Strong: Init -2; Atk great axe +2 melee, Dmg 1d10+1 or large rock +2 ranged, Dmg 1d6+1; AC 8; HP 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref -2, Will -1; AL C.

The Rest(6): Init 0; Atk rusty short sword +1 melee, Dmg 1d4 or shortbow +1 ranged, Dmg 1d6; AC 11; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will 0; AL C.

The bandits also have rough spears (1d6) they can use to defend the walls with if they have time to grab them.

6-A) The Stair: A simple hut squats on the road here below the keep. A steep set of stairs is cut into the living rock rising to the gate above. The area is deserted save for a bear chained to the rock at the base of the stair. It raises its head to stare angrily in your direction, a bright red fez perched jauntily on its massive head.

Growly is a dancing bear from the distant land of Keev, captured along with a troupe of circus performers a month ago. He has been badly mistreated by Wwart and is spoiling for a fight. If however, the players approach him with kindness, (especially if they employ music) he will hold off attacking, and if freed will follow the party and wreak unholy revenge on Wwart and his men.

Growly's fez is a magical item of some power that grants him both limited telepathy with his master who wears a matching fez, and increased intelligence/awareness. If removed, or mangled in any way, the fez will reappear on Growly's head at some future point when no one is looking, in perfect condition. Growly's master Kim-Kim is a prisoner in the keep above, and if freed will happily join the party. (Or alternately, Kim-Kim could have died at the hands of Wwart and his cronies, in which case whoever recovers Kim-Kim's fez can become Growly's new master/friend.

Growly the Empathic Dancing Bear: Init -2; Atk claw +1 melee; Dmg 1d6 or bite +0 melee; Dmg 1d8 AC 8; HP 12; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref -2, Will 0; AL N.

6-B) The Gate: At the crest of the steep stairs sits a dilapidated gatehouse. An awkward fusion of timber and stone, it looks vulnerable to a stiff breeze, but the beams of the oak door appear new and solid.

Normally one or two bandits man the rickety wooden towers, but if Eraskus is being waylaid on the river below, they will have foolishly abandoned their posts to watch the fun. The gate can be climbed with a DC 10 Ref check, or boards can be torn loose with a DC 14 Str check. The gate is easily opened from the inside.

(If there isn't a distraction on the river or a battle cry, the Angry Sisters will be here.)

6-C) The Treasury: Here rests the surprisingly meager treasures of Woart and his bandits. (Woart has recently invested hundreds of gold coins to have skilled craftsmen from a distant city upriver design and acquire supplies to build a lovely theater on site.)

The current treasures include a box with 140 sp, eight casks of oil, three grappling hooks, and 30 sheets of fine paper. A trapdoor locked with a beam leads to a dank pit below that houses the surviving captives of the keep. (Kim-Kim, Thomas Dorapple, and two captives from the circus. All the rest have died under the cruel ministrations of Woart and his followers.)

(If there isn't a distraction on the river, or a general battle cry, Roscoe Twin-chops will be here.)

6-D) The Ballista: From this stone platform, Woart shouts down at passing river traffic from behind his massive ballista. Six individual missiles are each equipped with 5 pound lead points and thin but strong trailing lines: the ballista has just enough strength to lob them with speed onto the boats below. Two thick ropes are attached to winches near the ballista, passing through metal rings at the top and bottom of the river wall. The first can be raised to block river traffic. The second is used by the bandit's boat to inch forward against the current to go alongside surrendering boats.

(If the party has arranged a diversion on the river, all of the bandits will be here, leaning over the wall and hurling insults and taunts at the boat below. Otherwise, the Princes will be lounging here.)

6-E) The Palace: Woart has great plans for this smelly, rat-infested former warehouse. He has began isolating it from the rest of the keep with a series of precariously stationed walls. Inside the single great room are a dog's breakfast of discarded and sagging furniture, and at least four beds. (Woart's thinking big...)

Hidden under a pile of moldy fur cloaks in the corner is Woart's personal treasure: A platinum engraved makeup case worth 200 gp. (This would constitute a Grey Prize in Mustertown. Learn more about the Mustertown prize system in SC-1: Perils of the Sunken City!)

In the center of the room what appears to be a well is actually a rung ladder leading down to the boat landing in the castle's bay. If a passing boat surrenders, Woart sends the Princes down the ladder to access the bandit's boat to ride out and claim their booty.

(If there isn't a distraction on the river, or a general battle cry, Woart will be resting inside while Onk guards the door.)

6-F) The Landing: The Princes lead the boat out onto the river from here using the guide rope to pull themselves against the current to the rope that blocks the river and waiting prey.

6-G) The Commons: The camp followers and children spend most of their time here. A captured baker, Mrs. Fritts, attempts to bring a little civilization to the chaos of bandit life, and will lead the escape should trouble get past the walls.

If things go very badly for Woart, he will attempt to escape to his room, grab his makeup case, and flee using the rung ladder and the boat below to reach the open river.

Regardless, once the threat is neutralized, if Eraskus is nearby he will guide his boat into the landing and give the players their reward if successful. (Otherwise the players will need to return to the docks.) Anything the players find in the keep is theirs to keep. (Don't overlook the six short bows and Woart's fine axe!)



Area E-7 – Swamp Pixie: As you follow a twisting path through the trees, you come upon a gruesome site: what's left of a villager lies next to the path, his body bearing grievous wounds as if hacked apart by an axe! Just when you notice his rictus lips are also stained a bilious green, a high pitched voice rings out from the surrounding trees. 'More flesh my minions! Give the woodsmen a taste of their own cruelty!' Suddenly two of the smaller swamp trees shamble toward you, bearing rusty axes in their misshapen tree-limb 'hands'!

Everyone in these parts hates swamp pixies. They are intemperate and never forget the slightest wrong. In this case, this pixie's favorite tree was cut down 300 years ago, and he's not ready to forgive! The trees are the crudest of foes, flailing blindly about with their dull axes, mindless save for the driving compulsion of their pixie master. But their strength is great, and their reach is long...

No weapon the player's bear other than fire can harm the trees to any real extent, and fire will require lots of oil. An easier method is to bulls-eye the pixie with a ranged weapon as he darts about the woods taunting the players. The pixie will re-spawn the following morning from the nearest swamp-lily if killed, but his compulsive power over the trees will end immediately upon his 'death'. (And he will drop an emerald worth 40 gp from his wooden crown as his body evaporates.)

Revenge Trees (2): Init -4; Atk great axe -5 melee, Dmg 1d12+3; AC 12; HP 30; MV 10'; Act 1d20; SP Most normal weapons only do 1 point of damage per strike; SV Fort +2, Ref -2, Will 0; AL N.

Lestyr the Swamp Pixie: Init +4; Atk none; AC 17; HP 2; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP Control of bonded trees, flight; SV Fort 0, Ref +4, Will 0; AL C.

The lips of the villager were stained by Clotilda's herb paste. (All villagers encountered will bear the same mark.)

Players can always run away from the trees. Lestyr will follow and taunt the players mercilessly to the edge of the woods, and each tree will manage a single free attack upon the fleeing characters.

Area E-8 – The Unusually Large Tree: *As you emerge from the thick stand of trees, the fog clears and you can finally understand what the old woman was talking about: rising above you is a tree so enormous that it stretches up into the clouds themselves! Impossibly large with a trunk the size of a castle and branches like looming towers! How the thing could stand without collapsing under its own weight is beyond your understanding. What at first glance appears to be butterflies flitting about the branches are in fact soaring eagles, dwarfed by the unimaginable size of the thing.*

This enormous tree is the result of one of the most spectacular spell failures of the last age. Some 35 years ago, the Arch Mage Morlak the Magnificent was cornered by a band of Death Knights of Blix on what was then a small hillock rising from the swamp. Since the Death Knights were nearly immune to arcane powers, Morlak poured all his power into a single spell to grow to enormous size, enabling him to stomp his foes into paste.

The mage was unaware that as he unleashed his spell he stood almost directly over the buried tomb of the fabled Lich of Wex, and the tomb's arcane wards. The two powers interacted disastrously: Morlak and everything within 20 feet grew to enormous size. Everything, that is but Morlak's skin, with suitably horrific results.

The combined spells created a closed loop that continues to feed power and arcane sustenance from the tomb below to the enlarged tree and occupants above. Eventually the power of the tomb will be sapped, and the collapse of the tree will lay waste to everything in its vicinity. (And unearth the tomb of the Lich of Wex as the massive roots erupt from the ground!)

The tree is now home to a raft of gigantic wildlife, all sustained by the power of the tomb. An entire adventure could be run exploring its upper reaches, but for the sake of this module, players will interact with only three of the tree's inhabitants: the self-proclaimed Nik-Nik, lord of the Squirrels, a gang of acorn dropping gigantic squirrels, and WindReaper the enormous owl.

Nik-Nik (formerly Nicholas) was a trapper working the local swamp at the time of the spell misfire. Witnessing the tree's transformation was too much for his simple mind to handle. He now fashions himself the protector/prophet of the tree, and has spent the last 35 years defending it. He is dirty and unkempt, and speaks in a strange patois combining common speech and simulated squirrel sounds.

Nik-Nik: Init +2; Atk club -1 melee; Dmg 1d4; AC 14; HP 6; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref +2, Will 0; AL N.

He lives in a tent fashioned from Morlak's cloak, and his prized possession is the Arch Mage's wand of fire itself! If the players can drive Nik-Nik away from his tent at the base of the tree, they can claim the powerful magic item for themselves! The wand can unleash goutts of fire (2d6 damage in a five foot wide, fifty foot long swath, DC 12 Ref save to dodge out of the way) 3 times per day.

On the downside, the wand is 6 feet long and weighs 160 pounds. Two characters might be able to lug the thing around and try to aim it. Luckily for the players, the activation word, which was once tiny and hidden, now stands out like a billboard. ('Dimpleskins')

And there's one other tiny caveat: the enlarging spell has weakened the magical bonds of the wand. On a roll of 1, it will detonate like an arcane bomb, incinerating everything within 5 feet. Any player

with a background as a magical or holy apprentice will recognize the warning signs.

When players break the cover of the trees, Nik-Nik will begin dancing about and shrieking at them in his strange tongue, commanding them to leave. If the players ignore his warnings, Nik-Nik will begin screaming up toward the branches of the tree. It will take players six rounds or so to cover the ground between the trees and the tent, and about halfway there the gigantic squirrels above will begin lobbing down equally enormous acorns. The acorns take a while to hit the ground, so dodging is not that difficult. Randomly select 2 characters each round to make DC 4 Ref saves to dodge or be crushed like a 0-level grape.

The acorns are so large, however, that when they hit the ground they cause the entire hill to bounce. Everyone must make a DC 6 Ref or Fort save (whichever is better) to stay on their feet. Any who fall will become the pool of potential targets for the next attacks. Fallen characters attacked on the following round must make a DC 6 Ref save to avoid being squashed. (Since their attention is distracted while they get back on their feet and underway.)

If the players reach the tent, Nik-Nik will flee to the tree trunk, entering hidden cracks and byways that the players will find impossible to follow. At this point the squirrels will lose interest and stop dropping acorns. The tent holds the huge wand, hand carved furniture shaped from giant acorns, a collection of enormous squirrel teeth, and a polished ivory walking stick worth 25 sp.

Remember that WindReaper the Giant Owl can arrive at any time to spice things up in this or any other area of the environs! The great owl will generally just swoop down out of the mists for a fly-by grab attack. If the players manage to hit it with an arrow (AC 17) it will veer off for the time being. It's unlikely the players could seriously hurt WindReaper, but you never know...

WindReaper: Init 0; Atk claws +2 melee, Dmg 1d10+3 or grab; AC 17; HP 85; MV 50'; Act 1d20; SP; Bite (if foe is grabbed) +8 melee, Dmg 1d12+6; SV Fort +2, Ref -2, Will 0; AL N.

Have the party make a group DC 10 Int check to spot WindReaper as he approaches. If they spot him they have two rounds to fire or seek cover before he strikes. Otherwise, they'll only have a single round to act. You can either have the Owl attack with a +2 bonus to grab a character, or allow the character a DC 12 Ref save to dodge out of the way, depending on whether you want to put the character's survival on your dice, or the players!



Part III: The Ooze Pits

Overview

The players have finally tracked Jonas and Clotilda to their lair! As the party approaches the Ooze Pits they will have an opportunity to ambush the guards overlooking a work party, and gain valuable allies or replacement characters.

How players approach assaulting the Ooze Pits is important. Careful players will plan their attack to maximize their strengths. Overly bold parties that charge in recklessly will likely experience the realities of mortality!

Once the party has defeated the Ooze Pit's defenders, and freed the captive villagers, all that remains is to confront Jonas and Clotilda in their tower. If the players overcome a final guard, and cross a precarious bridge over the caustic ooze, they will finally uncover the dreadful secret of Clotilda Gralk, and face her in all her twisted maternal fury!

Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
E-9	C	Working Party Ambush
E-10	C	The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk

Area E-9 – Working Party: *A slow moving, muddy river -more of a stream- meanders in front of you, cloaked in concealing mist. On the far side of the stream, you hear the unmistakable sounds of axes striking wood, mingled with coarse laughter.*

This encounter gives the party an opportunity to replenish their numbers before the final battles. Twelve drugged villagers are gathering timber to help in the exploration of the Ooze Pits. Eight lazy guards watch over them. The guards represent the type of weak-willed rabble one would expect to be snared by Clotilda's powers: three human drifters, and five smelly opossumen.

The human guards stand apart from their guard brothers, ignoring the workers and watching the cannibalistic opossumen with trepidation. For their part, the opossumen are occupied playing the popular opossuman game "Rock or Stick", where an opossuman holds a rock and a stick in his hands, throws one down on the ground, and puts the other hand behind his back. The other opossumen then bet on which item he's still holding. They're right about half the time...

Drifter Guards (3) Init +0; Atk club +0 melee; Dmg 1d4; AC 11; HP 3; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will 0; AL N.

Opossumen (5): Init +0; Atk javelin -2 melee; Dmg 1d4; (or club/bite - 2 melee; Dmg 1d4) AC 11; HP 2; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will -3; AL C.



Character sheets for the villagers can be found in the Omnibus PDF appendix. Use them to fill out a badly damaged party! More details about opossumen can be found in *Chapter 2: Perils of the Sunken City*.

(On attack rolls of 1 an opossuman "plays dead": becoming immobile while its face sets in a rictus smile, releasing foul fluids from unsavory orifices. All foes within 10 feet must make a DC 8 Fort save or be at -2 to all activities while in range.)

If the party approaches with stealth, give them a free round of attacks before the guards respond. If things are going badly for the guards, any surviving humans will drop their weapon and beg for mercy, the terror of the moment overwhelming and breaking Clotilda's compulsive mental powers.

The villagers will stand around in dazed confusion during the attack, but of the twelve present, eight are adults capable of eventually joining the party as replacement characters or temporary hirelings. (The other four are children who might bring trouble to the party.) One of the adults, a crafty farm wife name Emilias has managed to avoid this morning's application of the *Viper's Kiss*, and is largely free of its effects. She can answer many of the party's questions:

Why are the villagers so compliant? *It's that horrid paste they put on our lips. They call it 'viper's kiss' and it fogs your brain like a winter morning! It wears off quick enough though - in a couple hours all these folk will have their minds back if they don't get another dosing.*

The Ooze Pits: *Don't speak of it! Almost the entire interior is filled with a pit brimming with poisonous muck! It glows it does! And those foul feral creatures and the worst sort of river scum imaginable force us to dig! What they're seeking I know not, but they'll kill every one of us to get it!*

Jonas Gralk: *That fiend... he wanders about with this blank expression like he's above it all. He smears that horrid paste on us every morning, then climbs up to that bridge between the towers, and just sits! Staring at us like he's watching a parade! I never trusted that boy.*

Clotilda: *She just showed up a couple days ago. Jonas whisked her up to the far tower, and I haven't seen her since. I hope he hasn't done anything to her! She's been such a sad women since she lost her young daughter...*

Guards and Prisoners: *There's about ten more of us beyond the walls. They herd us into foul smelling sheds at night, but during the day we're in the pits! There's probably twice that number of feral beast men and scum watching over us. They've got clubs and spears, and aren't afraid to use them! There's also something horrid rumored to be living in the near tower. Krista had to pass there once to carry food up, and she couldn't speak for days!*

The Towers: *There's two. The near one has a door, and a foot bridge links it to the second from the upper floor. The far tower is beyond the pits, and the entire first level is bricked up tight! The only way in is that rickety, swaying bridge over the heart of the ooze!*

The Children: *Uh, why don't you give the little ones a wide berth, eh? The... uh, horrors of the pits have unnerved them a bit.*

If the party is willing to wait for the Viper's Kiss to wear off in two hours, up to eight villagers can join the party, depending on how much replacement help the party needs.

The guards of the Ooze Pits will notice the delay in returning, but they'll just assume their compatriots are dawdling unless the party delays for more than three hours.

The work party has two blunt axes (1d4 Dmg.) The guards possess 8 clubs, 4 javelin, and 47 sp scattered amongst them.

A Decision

If the players have defeated the guards, and allow the villagers to recover from the Viper's Kiss effects, the party will be faced with a decision. If any of the guards have survived, the four village children will stare at them intently as soon as they come to their senses. After speaking briefly with the increasingly troubled older villagers, the children will approach the party.

[pointing at a guard] He That Slides demand this one for the swamp. We must introduce him to the mist. It will go well for you and your efforts if you stand aside and let the swamp claim its rightful prey.

The other villagers will be of no help, feigning that they don't understand what the children are talking about. They are terrified of the children, and will do nothing to interfere with their plans.

If the players allow the children to carry the guard away, they will disappear into the mists. 20 minutes later they will return without the guard or any explanation of what they've done. This will earn the favor of Salissak: at some key point in the coming battle at the Ooze Pits, a gigantic snake will flow out of the river, surmount the wall, and wreak havoc against the party's foes for a few rounds before sliding back over the wall into the water's depths. Unfortunately for the characters, Salissak will also now consider the party members in his debt.

If the party refuses to release the guard to the children, the young ones won't fight. No aid will come in the battle, and the players will need to walk very carefully in the swamp near Slither's End from this point forward.

Area E-10: The Ooze Pits

Anciently, this low hill housed a temple holy to *It that Rots*, with charmed tunnels digging deep into the earth below. When the cult died off, a twisted Aspect of the forgotten god was left to fester forever in the pits below.

Agas later, a monastery was built over the same spot. The corrupting effects of the Aspect oozed up from below, eventually driving the initiates mad, and the site was abandoned. The remains of the monastery should have tumbled into the swamp long ago, but somehow much of it remains intact. The circuit wall is broken in many places, and only rises to 8 feet where it's intact. The two much more heavily constructed squat conical towers have mysteriously weathered the ravages of time even more successfully, bound together by the Aspect's power. Any dwarf or character with a building background will notice this incongruity immediately.

Between the towers a bilious, bubbling pool of phosphorescent ooze the consistency of thick oatmeal rises up, eating away the surrounding terrain like an irregular sink-hole from hell. Anyone who comes in contact with the stuff must make a DC 8 Fort save or become infected with a wasting rot. (-2 points of Fort per week. Victim takes on a greenish hue within hours. In one week the Fort losses begin.) Those who spend significant time in the stuff, or who are completely submerged automatically become infected.

Wooden bracing walls have been added to the pit in various places to ease access. Captive villagers enter the pit with wooden buckets to scoop up the stuff, depositing it in low sifting boxes near 10-B on the map, where other villagers search through the ooze for anything of interest.

Given another week, half of the captives will die from rot and hunger, but one of the remaining souls will uncover *The Golden Mask of It that Rots*.

Defenses at the Ooze Pits

In addition to the guards in the work party, there are 6 men and 14 Opossumen spread about the grounds directing the workers, their weak minds controlled by Clotilda's powers. (Feel free to adjust these numbers based on the party's remaining strength.)

Most are armed as those in the working party, but half of the number also carry burst-able fist-size bladder bags filled with a particularly noxious blend of ooze Clotilda is manufacturing in the far tower. (The other guards were issued bags as well, but stashed them away to avoid having to carry the deadly things around. One of the men with a face that appears to be melting found this out the hard way.)

If struck by one of these thrown bags (both men and opossumen attack at +0 up to 30 feet away) a character takes 1 point of burning damage and must immediately make a DC 10 Fort save or become infected by the wasting rot, and roll on the minor corruption table and suffer the effects. (The corruption will remain as long as the character is infected with the rot. There is a chance for them to be cured if they best Clotilda.)

If a player hits a guard bearing one of the bags, there's a one in three chance the bag will burst, covering the guard with toxic ooze.

Two guards are stationed in a rickety wooden tower mounted to the top of the wooden building at 10-D. The surrounding mists make spotting anything quite difficult, so they've stopped trying. However, once the fighting starts, they have a primitive sling shot set up to lob large toxic bags down on invaders. The bags attack at -3, but if a player is struck, they take 2 points of damage, and the Fort save is DC 13. The slingshot's range is 75 feet, and the guards have 8 ooze bags in their inventory.



Ooze Pits Area Key

10-A: The Guardhouse. Two guards are always stationed here. (Which would seem to be a strange choice, as there are many gaps in the wall that enemies could squeeze through that aren't guarded.) The guardhouse is 15 feet tall, with stout wooden double doors to both the interior and exterior areas.

10-B: Sifting Station. Most villagers can be found here sifting ooze in a number of crude boxes with mesh on the bottom. Any villager not found here is working in the pit.

10-C: Villager Barracks. Foul smelling barracks where the villagers sleep. Ragged canvas bags are the only cover, and the food consists of a bucket full of meager roots and a pail of dirty water.

10-D: Guard's Quarters. The humans have taken to sleeping in the shack next to 10-C to avoid lying down next to the opossumen. The interior of the opossumen barracks defies description. A rough ladder leads up to the watch tower constructed on its roof.

10-E: The Ooze. The further one goes toward the center of the pit, the deeper one sinks and the less thick the ooze becomes. (Human characters sink to their waists near the center, and it's far easier to become submerged if one falls.)

10-F: The Near Tower. A short, squat, round structure, 40 feet tall consisting of two floors and an attic. A stout wooden door blocks the entrance to this tower on the ground floor, but it is unlocked and unbarred at most times. The tower's rooms are detailed later.

10-G: The Bridge. This rope and plank contraption stretches shakily between the two towers. Jonas likes to sit up here.

10-H: The Far Tower. A twin of the near tower, only the entire first level of this tower is bricked up. The only access is by crossing over the bridge from the Near Tower to the upper level. The upper level is now Jonas's home and Clotilda's workshop.

Player Description

As players view the Ooze Pits complex for the first time, read or paraphrase the following: *As you reach the north end of the small stand of trees where the villagers labored, you see the castle they have described rising from the mist. A low broken wall circles the gentle hill the compound dominates, numerous sections along its length collapsed into the wet ground. Beyond the wall, two thick towers, seemingly in much better condition, rise to forty or fifty feet high, topped with wooden spires.*

A gatehouse with sagging wooden doors guards the entrance. The cracks in the walls give you a tantalizing glimpse into the space beyond, but the ever present mist makes it difficult to discern details. The distant sounds of muffled shouts echo in the misty air.

Most of the guards loaf near the barracks at 10-D barking orders at the villagers unless the general alarm has been raised. A detachment of opossumen hunters has recently returned with a wild pig, and the aroma of pork over the fire fills the court.

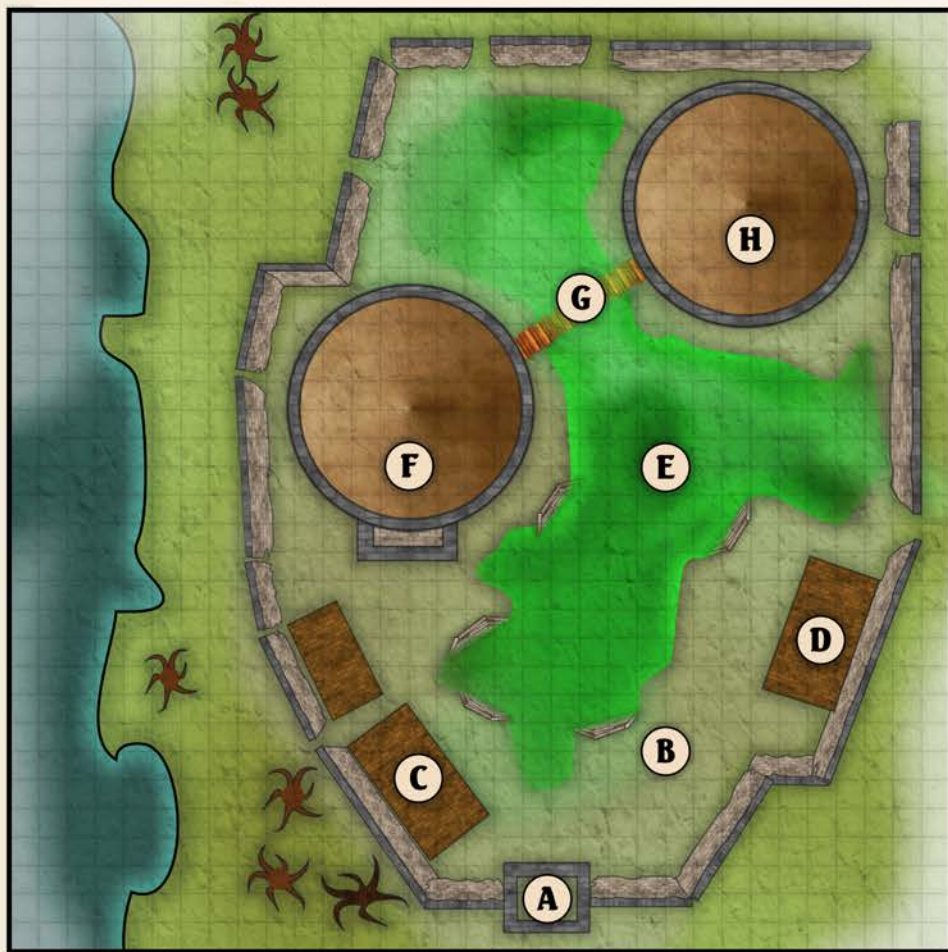
If the party has delayed for more than three hours after rescuing the work party, or if the characters have somehow managed to make their presence known, the keep will be on alert, and the chance of surprise or subterfuge succeeding will drop considerably.

Attack Plans

The battle of the Ooze Pits will likely be a chaotic, swirling affair considering the number of combatants and innocent bystanders involved! The players have many options available to them in planning their assault, including infiltrating the compound disguised as guards escorting the work party, approaching stealthily and swarming through the openings in the wall, or creating diversions to draw guards out. Creative groups will think of many other approaches! (Don't forget the possible game changing influence of the Arch Mage's wand, Growly the Bear, or Salissak's snake Aspect, and the possibility of characters/guards being shoved into the ooze!)

If you will be employing the Aspect, and the party is in good shape as they prepare for the battle, you might consider adding to the number of guards for the purpose of providing fodder for the snake, while leaving enough bad guys alive to represent a real challenge. In most cases, there should be twice as many guards as players at the start of the battle.

If the players do an exceptional job planning and initiating their attack, allow them one round of free swings at any guard in range.



Additionally, on the second round of the conflict, half of the guards will be unable to respond while they retrieve their weapons! A reasonable plan will grant one round of free attacks.

If the guards are aware of and waiting for the players, each will open the battle by lobbing an ooze grenade from the protection of the walls. Guards will be watching all the breaks in the wall, and things will likely be very difficult for the party.

When half of the guard have been slain, Clotilda's powers will no longer be strong enough to hold the remainder in check: they will break and flee by any path available!

Concluding the Assault

Once all the guards have been killed or have fled, the grounds will fall silent. The villagers have been recently dosed with Viper's Kiss, and won't be free of their daze until the following morning.

Players can recover 25 clubs, 16 javelins, two sets of filthy hide armor (+2 to AC), and 6 ooze grenades from the fallen guards. (If they dare carry them!)

Jonas and Clotilda will take no part in the battle, other than spying on events from the safety of their tower. Any characters who have been poisoned by the ooze rot will begin to feel its effects, Stat losses don't begin for a week, but characters will feel slightly weak and feverish, and their skin will begin to take on a greenish pallor.

At this point, technically the players have rescued the villagers. Villagers who have recovered from the Viper's Kiss could be tasked with escorting their dazed brethren back to town, but the road might prove fatal for many. If the players escort them back to town, assume everyone gets back safely. (Unless you want to spice up the return with encounters of your own!)

The Towers

If Clotilda is not dealt with, she will just go about slowly reassembling another army of slaves to complete her dig. To stop her, the players must defeat her in her tower lair!

Tower F1: *The squat tower looms over you, it's obviously new door set into a thick portico of stone. A noxious green mist escapes from under the door. Gazing up at the bridge which connects this tower to its twin across the ooze, you see no sign of movement anywhere.*

The new door is impressive, but unlocked. Clotilda considers her guard protection enough. When players open the door, read the following: *As you open the door, your eyes burn as a caustic mist flows out to the surrounding grounds. Visibility inside the tower is very poor, but you can see that a single room fills the entire first floor, with a stone stair to your right rising to the second level. The back side of the room is covered in a large pool of green ooze, in which something large is wallowing. Suddenly a ball of caustic ooze flies from the mist, and the large mass begins to shamble forward, dripping ooze from its form with each multi legged step!*

The guardian of the first floor is a deadly Ooze Spider that Clotilda managed to attract and dominate. It attacks anyone other than Jonas, Clotilda, or those under the effects of the Viper's Kiss.

Ooze Spider: Init +1; Atk bite +1 melee; Dmg 1d6 or ooze blob +1 ranged; Dmg 1d3 and poison (DC 8 Fort save or minor corruption and additional point of damage) AC 11; HP 17; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will 0; AL C.

As you would expect, the Ooze Spider is immune to the effects of ooze grenades. (Clotilda uses its poison in fashioning them.)

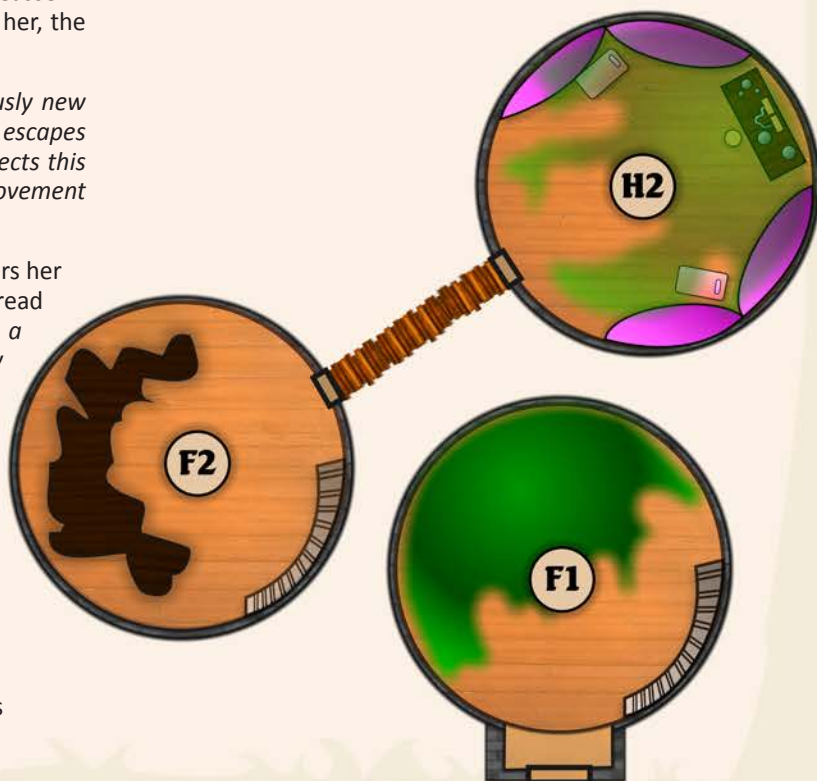
If the players dare poke around in the spider's ooze wallow, they can uncover an ancient brass helm, buried in slime, but seemingly immune to its corrosive effects. Once the helm is cleaned up, re-padded and strapped, anyone wearing it will find themselves immune to the ooze effects, healed of all rot after a day of use, and will receive a -1 bonus to all criticals rolled against them! (They will also be slowly tainted by the corrupting influence of *It that Rots*, but it will take weeks to begin manifesting.)

Up to one person a day can wear the helm to take advantage of its healing effects.

Tower F2: *After climbing the stone stairs from the ooze wallow below, you find yourself in a large, seemingly empty room. A large section of the wooden floor has rotted away, leaving a hole to the slime below. Beyond the rotted section, a ladder climbs to a trapdoor, apparently leading to the attic above. A single large door to your right grants access to the bridge. It is closed.*

The floor here is shaky at best, but if players are careful, they can skirt the hole in the floor to the ladder. However, when climbing the ladder there is a 1 in 6 chance one of the rungs will rip loose, sending the character plummeting down, breaking through the floor to the ooze below (1d6 Dmg), unless they make a DC 10 Ref save to catch themselves while falling.

The attic holds a number of chests filled with rotting junk, but a silver lined prayer book can be recovered worth 75 sp.



The Bridge: The rope and plank bridge between Tower F2 and Tower H2 is unstable at the best of times, but Jonas will make crossing it even more difficult. As soon as players open the door to the bridge from F2, read or paraphrase the following:

As you pull the stubborn door open to the rope and plank bridge, its matching door on the far side opens as well. A young man, a shovel in one hand, the other behind his back, steps out onto the bridge. 'Go back strangers.' he calls, tears streaming down his face. 'There's no point in fightin'. You can't win. You just can't win. She'll find a way in the end.... she always does.' Suddenly his hidden hand appears, and he throws a glass ball filled with swirling smoke in the direction of the party!

The glass ball is full of sleep smoke, but will be diluted in the outdoor air. As it shatters at the feet of the party, each round party members must make a DC 7 Fort save, or be rendered woozy for the rest of the combat.

It takes three rounds to cross the bridge under normal conditions. As soon as players start walking across, Jonas will begin swaying from side to side, causing the bridge to swing back and forth dangerously. He has lots of practice playing around up here, but the inexperienced characters attempting to cross will need to make DC 7 Ref saves each round (DC 12 if woozy), or be tossed off into the ooze below. (1d4 damage and automatically infected with the rot.) If players are just trying to hold on, and not attempting to cross, assume they can cling to the bridge without risk of falling. Anyone firing a ranged weapon from the bridge is at -2 to the attack due to the movement.

If players cut the ropes or otherwise seriously damage the bridge, it will collapse sending everyone into the slime below. Survivors will then need to find some other way up into the tower!

If characters reach the far side, the swaying will stop as Jonas begins laying about with his shovel. He's no fighter, but will die protecting the mother he has grown to hate, weeping the entire time.

Jonas Gralk: Init +2; Atk shovel -1 melee; Dmg 1d4; AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref +2, Will 0; AL N.

Tower H2: *The grave digger is dead, but where is his mother? The door to the far tower is open, and from within you hear the sound of chanting, the voice unearthly and guttural.*

When the players enter the tower, read or paraphrase the following: *Within, the tower seems to have been hastily decorated like a rich girl's room, with frilly pink linens hanging from the stone walls. But the frippery is now dripping with green ooze, and a bubbling assortment of pots and tubes burble away from the far side of the room. One vat seems to have human bones simmering in some foul liquid!*



A stooped figure stands in front of the alchemical devices. It must be the aged mother of the grave digger, but her face is hidden behind a primitive mask of bone inlaid with bronze. The chanting issuing from the mask is not that of an old woman, but something deeper and older still. As she raises one hand in your direction, the chanting ceases, and she speaks in your direction:

'The guilty will continue to pay. They MUST continue to pay for their sins. You cannot stop me from unearthing the greater mask! It is my destiny! Do you imagine that the foolish snake God the fools from Slither's End prostrate themselves before can protect you here? Do you seek to defend those willing to sacrifice CHILDREN to stave off their inevitable decay? We'll all sink in the end. You must know we're all only fit to rot!'

As the old woman stops speaking, she lifts her mask and sips from an oozing vial. Suddenly, her body begins to change. Her robe distorts as twisted limbs begin emerging from the folds, green ooze dripping from every opening. Within moments, the old woman is gone, replaced by a shambling mass of amorphous limbs, the mask riding on top like some horrific face!

Clotilda: Init +1; Atk ooze limbs +0 melee (x4), Dmg 1d4 + rot; AC 11; HP 18; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP Those struck must make DC 12 Fort save or be infected with the rot. On a critical, foes suffer minor corruption. Those slain by an ooze limb rise 2 rounds later as an ooze slave (2 Hp +0 Atk, Dmg 1d3); SV Fort +2, Ref -1, Will +3; AL C.

Clotilda will spread out her ooze limb attacks on as many foes as possible in a round. When she is in her ooze state, she's too large to fit through the door, and won't be able to follow characters that flee. It takes her 10 minutes to revert back to human form, and each time she shifts, it grows increasingly more difficult to do so accurately. After a couple more shifts, it will be impossible for her to maintain human form any longer.

If the players manage to slay her in ooze form, she will slowly revert to human form after the mask falls away from her body. If players manage some 'called shot' attack to knock the mask off during combat, it will trigger the reversion, but the effect will come long after the combat is over.

If players deliver the death blow, read or paraphrase the following:

The horrid creature suddenly bellows in a voice almost too deep to comprehend. The limbs spasm wildly as the mass lurches about the room. Finally it collapses to the ground motionless, the mask rolling off the remains to settle on the floor in the middle of the room.

With the defeat of Clotilda, the mask is the party's to claim. As an objet d'art, the mask is worth 300-400 gp to the right buyer interested in ancient relics. (And would constitute a 'Bright Prize' in Mustertown.) As a magic item, it holds great power, but any character who claims it will eventually walk down the same path as Clotilda. Its magic is tied to *It that Rots*, and anyone who wields it will eventually be bent to that foul one's will. (Feel free to craft it's specific powers for your campaign for the fools who persist!)

Also scattered in numerous small chests about the room are items Jonas stole from the homes of those he abducted in Slither's End. The collection of silver combs, jewelry chests, salt cellars and the

like would bring about 30 gp if sold in a large town or city, but many of the objects would be recognized by their owners in Slither's End.

The alchemical equipment could be sold for 10 gp to an interested party. Many of the components are labelled in Clotilda's neat hand. Including one large bottle marked 'rot cure'. There are at least 25 doses of the foul-tasting mixture in the bottle, and it will cure anyone who has been infected with the rot. (But the characters will be at -1 Fort for two days while they recover.)

Wrapping Up

As mentioned, Judges can make the return trip to Slither's End as easy or difficult as they wish. Depending on the success of their efforts, the party's reception will vary.

Regardless of outcomes, the City Council will thank the party for their efforts, and reward them appropriately. If a large percentage of the villagers have been rescued, another massive celebration will be thrown in the party's honor. They will be declared 'Champions of Slither's End' and treated as such from that day forward whenever the players return. (Villagers who joined the party will be more than happy to leave with the players when they depart.)

How the players react to the folk of Slither's End once they learn of the village's unholy pact is up to them. The older villagers will never admit to any dark deeds, mumbling that the player's just

don't understand the situation while trying desperately to change the subject to anything else!

Younger folk will react based on how the party dealt with the rescued children. If the party allowed the children to sacrifice the guard, the children will remain silent as usual, but will occasionally smile knowingly at the players in suitably creepy fashion.

Players will be guarded by the Grimmels as if they were part of the village, and intuitive players will sense that the thirty eyes of Salisak are upon them!

If the players kept the children from taking the guard, the young ones will be particularly cold. Secretly they will encourage the Grimmels to vex the characters wherever possible, and it will be unsafe for the party to enter the water near Slither's End at any time. (Save for when the party returns to the Sending Stone with the town watching.)

The town leaders will be horrified by the tale of Jonas and Clotilda, offering the Gralk's home to those who wish to remain. In fact, they will enthusiastically encourage one or two players to stick around as permanent residents. The Winter's End festival is only months away, and the players will surely find it fascinating, perhaps even acting as the town's special guest of honor!

Appendix A: Slither's End on 5 Smiles a Day!

As Miriam give the players a tour of town, she will enthusiastically describe all the major locations. Characters from the city or larger towns will notice that most of the structures in town have seen better days: many have probably been in decline for over fifty years.

The Fair: The Happy Harvest Hoedown is our way of saying thanks to all above and below for another successful crop! Folks stream in from all the surrounding farms... it's a lot of work to organize, but when you look at those smiling faces (pointing at morose, blank faced children) you know it's worth it!

Pork Complex: This is where they gather the latest harvest of Golden Water Plums, and prepare the hogs for market. Half of the town works here in some way or another, though everyone but Onus One-Arm the manager is off enjoying the fun!

The Central Pool: This is where the town gathers, to share... to learn from each other... to grow! It's the beating red heart of our community!

The Fallen Tower: In times past, we had need of a powerful garrison, but no more! Peace reigns from one end of the swamp to another!

The Asp and Tattles: You won't find a finer meal between Rook's Crossing and Bountiful Up-River! Ask about the perch, it's delicious!

Vokas's Tower: One of our most notable resident lives there. Word is Vokas was quite the charmer in his day! Though don't go visiting unannounced! Two years ago someone tried to sneak in and they had to clean him up with a broom! Naughty boy!

The Mayor's Manse: There it is, the finest home in all Slither's End. I love how Mayor Beecham cultivates a retiring, rustic charm about the grand place. That's not mold, it's character!

The Gralk's House: Beyond that small house is the resting place of our departed forebears. Folks have lived in Slither's End for generations without number...

The Bridges North: That's our lifeline to The Flow, a mighty river that carries Slither's End pork to the world! We've got a small tower up by the river, you'll have to visit sometime! Say hi to May and Rosie for me!



Appendix B: Rumors

The following conversational tidbits can be picked up by players as they roam Slither's End. They are included in the printable Omnibus PDF appendix in handout format, so print these out, cut them into individual snippets, and distribute them whenever it seems appropriate as the player talk with folks and gather information.

Juggler at Fair: *Nice to see some other travelers at the fair. Everyone here's a local... in most towns you usually see more folks coming in from outside for shindigs like this!*

Fiddle Player: *Slither's End? This place has a strange reputation, I must say. When our piper heard we were coming here he refused... wouldn't say why.*

Flute Player: *They tell strangers to stay out of the water in these parts. I wonder why? I've haven't seen any crocs or turfhurlers here, and usually the mire is crawling with them!*

Tumbler: *These little ones give me the creeps! Usually me best audience, but here they stare at me like a spider under glass!*

Band Leader: *Last month my brother lost half his performing troupe to those blasted river bandits! Do you know how expensive it is to replace a dancing bear?*

Muck Melon Farmer: *Had a great crop this season... but it's difficult to get everything in with the lack of workers. The council's got to get this figured out!*

Old Timer: *We've got to get those trade lines open again! Demons in the mist? Raiders on the river? I've always held we needed some way to deal with distant threats... like during the militia days when they patrolled from here to Rook's Crossing! No one remembers anymore...*

Pig Farmer: *Onus One-Arm who runs the exchange, has been in some kind of mood! We've got too much product, and not enough market! Prices are falling through the floor!*

Pig Farmer: *Just play along with ol' Vokas. He's not quite right in the head, but a good sort. And not to be trifled with!*

Pig Farmer: *You traveled here by the STONE OF DEATH? By Salisak's 30 all-seeing eyes you must be brave or stupid!*

Trapper: *Are you adventuring types here to do something about Redhelm and his gang on the river? Cleaning out that nest of thieves should get you a tidy pile in stolen loot!*

Local Teen: *The eyes of the swamp are on you strangers. Always. Oh, and try the muck-cakes, they're delicious.*

Butcher: *Oh, if you head up toward the river, say hi to my Aunt Rose. But don't piss 'er off, she's a tad liberal with that honking crossbow of hers...*

Pig Farmer: *There was another collapse along The Slither last week... with that and those things in the mist, I'm not sure where my next supply of hogs is going to go.*

Townie: *Jonas Gralk, yeah he's the gravedigger. Been acting strange of late! He was digging my Gram's grave and just stopped! What are we supposed to do, bury her half way? She's packed in salt down by the hogs, but how long can we keep that up?*

Townie: *Yeah, the Gralks live over by the graveyard, Jonas is the grave digger don't you know. His mom runs an herb shop out of the house. I hear the place is empty now since they took off so sudden.*

Children Whispering: *Thirty eyes for every day, thirty souls shall come his way. Wrapping, wrapping, one by one, every year the feast will come.*

Hunter: *When you're outside of town, watch yourselves! Death comes from above on giant wings it does! From above!*



Appendix C: Clues

As players explore Slither's End, they'll pick up lots of information. Here's a list of locations where key clues can be found to help them unravel the mystery of Slither's End and the Gralks. They are included in the printable Omnibus PDF appendix in handout format. Check them off as the information is delivered to players.

Gralk's house: There are many signs in Clotilda's workshop that it has been recently cleaned out of nearly all glassware, equipment and supplies. Clotilda labels everything very clearly, and missing items stand out like sore thumbs in her orderly shop.

Gralk's house: Portions of the workbench have recently been stained a bright, bilious green. Characters with an apothecary background have a 50% of recognizing the shade as indicative of the rare Viper's Lilly – which has a powerful narcotic effect.

Gralk's house: In the upper bedroom area of the Gralk house, a shrine of sorts has been built around the picture of a young girl. Many items are clearly missing from the display.

Graveyard: A half dug grave lies open to the skies. Inside are the shattered remains of an ancient disintegrating wooden box.

Graveyard: The farther one goes north toward the water, the older the gravestones appear to be. The half finished grave is near the oldest section.

Near open water: A crocodile swims toward the players, then suddenly vanishes under the water in a cloud of bubbles.

Near open water: A very small child stand near the edge of the swamp, as if listening to something no one else can hear.

Near the edge of town: Players discover a gigantic feather. Characters with the right background might be able to identify it as coming from an owl, but far too large.

Pork Complex - Onus One-Arm: 'Yeah, I saw Jonas Gralk dragging his mother out of town. Strangest thing I've ever seen. Usually it only takes a whisper from Clotilda to get her boy jumping. Can't imagine what's got into him, but it's mighty suspicious with the recent goings on.'

Fair: Almost half the older folk are wearing mourning garb. Players overhear bits of numerous conversations mentioning the 'missing ones', 'second born' and 'Jonas Gralk'.

Fair: Many of the folk will make strange 'slithering hand' motions as 'ward off evil' gestures during conversations. Most will seem completely unaware they're making them.

Fair/In Town: Many villagers will unconsciously refer to Salissak during conversation ('by Salissak's grasping scales', 'by the Bog Lord's 30 all-seeing eyes', etc. But no one will actually discuss him in any way, other than 'that's just a local saying, like top 'o the morning...')

Fair/In Town: Questions about Clotilda will invariably mention what a quiet, sad woman she is. If pressed, most will mention her lost daughter, but stories of how the girl was lost will vary widely. 'Left with strangers', 'eaten by a rogue croc', 'lost in the mire': there are as many tales as tellers

Note: The rumors and clues are included in easy to print and distribute format in the Omnibus PDF appendix!

Appendix D: Tollybogs!

Tollybogs' speech is stuffed full of halfling wisdom and homilies. Here's a few of his favorite sayings:

- I felt it from my curly head down to my curly toes!
- You big folk and your fancy shoes!
- There's always room for seconds!
- Careful boys, you never know where that road is going to take you!
- I'm just a small man in a big world, what do I know?
- That there swamp be fair teeming with danger!
- And me without elevenses!
- You folks been acting like you've got hold of some peculiar pipeweed!
- Avoid boats and large women.

Appendix E: Villagers

Try to keep the fair games moving as quickly as possible. If you have to, make up rules on the spot to keep things going! The challenges can be lots of fun, but you'll likely have lots of characters you'll want to introduce, so each game should be concluded with a few dice rolls if possible.

Sample Prizes:

- A muck melon stem carved in the shape of a coiling snake
- 5 pounds of pork jerky
- A woven basket of reeds filled with swamp apples
- A brightly colored ribbon embroidered with a smiling crocodile head
- A wooden cup engraved with gold leaf in the shape of a muck melon
- A hand carved flute

Notable prizes:

- A twisting dagger with ironwood handle
- A barbed iron spearhead mounted on a sturdy ash pole
- A pair of fine leather gloves

Top Local Participants: (And their prime stat)

Strong/Tough:

Ogan the Melon Chucker: 14 Str
Bodus Broadarms: 13 Str
Brint the Not Soft: 12 Str
Uggles the Badger: 13 Sta
Kova the Brick: 14 Str

Fast/Nimble:

Hamshire the Speedy: 13 Ref
Horix Six-Fingers: 11 Ref
Emil Blurfoot: 12 Ref
Jals Dreadstrider: 14 Ref
Pimco Preels: 12 Ref

Lucky:

Emiline Toose: 11 Luck
Aspiril GoldClover: 12 Luck
Baddle Quickens: 15 Luck

Charismatic:

Fenstin the Unwise: 12 Per
Tooshy the Fair: 14 Per
Osgood Slaughter: 13 Per

Smart:

Lacie Jane: 12 Int
Pordaz Grint: 11 Will
Lethan Hithcolo: 15 Int

Chapter 4

A Gathering of the Marked

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Doom Follows Those Who Bear The Mark!

A Gathering of the Marked: A Level 0-1 DCC RPG Adventure

Introduction

Rich and poor, bond and free: every few months an unsuspecting few awake to find a ragged circle of midnight black scrawled on their foreheads; a dark summoning whispering on the edge of their consciousness. All who live in the shadow of the Great City know that to ignore the call of the mark is to invite madness and a lingering and horrific death, so each will find his way to the sending stones, and the unspeakable peril that waits beyond.

A band of strangers must endure the mad games of a mysterious power. Can the summoned survive to wrest control of their lives once more? Will they turn on those they struggle with, or band together to defeat a common foe? Can they win through the twisted challenges to finally come face to face with the twisted power that has called them, and uncover its dark secrets?

Overview

A Gathering of the Marked is a beginning or 'funnel' adventure for 16 0-level characters or 8 1st-level characters. (The adventure is also easily modified to work in your favorite 'old school' system.) Players running 0-level characters should have 3-4 each, as casualties are part of the fun!

This adventure respects your initiative. If you think an encounter is too easy, increase the challenge! Too difficult? Just drop the number of foes. If a particular enemy doesn't fit in your campaign, replace them with a logical substitute with the same stats. Always bend the text to your vision!

Adventure Flow

A Gathering of the Marked is organized in three parts:

Part One: The Village

Part one describes the cursed village of Haven's Fall. Over one-hundred years ago the inhabitants of the village were wiped out by members of a cult seeking to restore the evil of their dread lord Athax. The party must pass through the village, fighting multiple horrors before reaching a broad river and finding passage across.

Part Two: The Manor

Mystery awaits in the gloomy manor that acts as the base of operations for the dark cult. But getting to this place is no easy task, as the way is plagued with terrors! Once players reach the great house they'll need to avoid deadly traps and outwit fearsome foes to reach a final test that, if overcome, will grant them access to the tunnels that run below the manor.

Part Three: The Despoiled Grove

Players must navigate the massive tunnel complex the cult uses as an underground highway. Can the party piece together clues to help them overcome the deadly challenge waiting in the despoiled grove of Athax? If not they face almost certain death!

Appendixes

The Omnibus PDF appendixes include rumor handouts, a player map, images, paper minis, and replacement peasants that can be discovered along the way to replenish the party!

History of the Gathering

The Shadow Wizard

Ages ago, followers of the dark power Malloc planted a grove in his honor on an isolated moraine overlooking the River Falling. The dark wood spread as the years progressed, nourished by the unspeakable acts committed under its boughs. Eventually the cult reached its zenith under the guidance of the shadow wizard Athax, a cruel man as twisted by evil as the most deformed tree in the grove. As the terror of the dark society spread throughout the land, Athax achieved such enormous command of the dark powers that even Malloc himself began to fear.

In a final act of power to declare his mastery over his former patron, Athax cut down the grove's first planting—The Dark Willow—and fashioned from it a new alter in his own honor. Malloc chose not to confront Athax directly for this sacrilege: Malloc the Dark Creeper possesses many ways to destroy an enemy that require no direct force whatsoever. To bring Athax down, rather than continuing to use his spies and agents to deflect attention away from the cult's activities, Malloc subtly began to guide and shape the forces of light in the region to combine their powers against the shadow wizard. For 25 years Athax reigned in blood and horror, never realizing his inevitable destruction was being lowered from above like a noose about his neck...

When the trap was finally sprung, Athax realized to his dismay that even his terrible powers wouldn't suffice as one formerly dependable ally after another failed to rally to his aid. A mighty host from the surrounding lands attacked, butchering his followers as a council of seven holy priests engaged Athax in a terrible duel. When only the Shad-

ow Wizard and a single priest remained, the great captain of the host broke through the wizard's wards and thrust a thrice-blessed spear through Athax's dark heart.

Every corrupt tree of the massive grove was cut down, and the remaining great priest blessed the hill so that no tree would ever grow to replace them. When the twisted limbs resisted the licking flames of the host of light, they were dumped along with the foul alter in a small lake at the base of the moraine. The priest blessed the waters to remain deadly forevermore to all who would honor the cult, so that the evil that had seeped into the wood over the years might never escape. The victors then fashioned a rough gallows, and hung the body of Athax by the neck for seven days from rope woven from the bark of a sacred Roundtree. They burned the body and dumped the ashes in the lake. The only signs the cult had ever existed were a forest of stumps that covered the moraine, and a bronze statue of the gallows and dangling wizard left near the lake to promise a similar destruction to all who dared pursue such dark paths.



Haven's Fall

And thus things should have remained, but the memories of men are short. Years passed as kingdoms rose and fell, until even the very wise had forgotten Athax and his cult. Eventually a wealthy merchant determined the lands below the grove at the break of the falls would prove a perfect location for a trading post. The hamlet of Haven's Fall grew into a small village, then a bustling town. Children played under the statue and swam in the pleasant, restorative lake; the dead thorn-covered hill above them nothing more than a source for frightening bedtime tales.

While fishing in the lake on a particularly clear day, a local woodsman spied the top layer of the massive pile of felled trees at the bottom of the lake. Raising the first log he was delighted to find it in perfect condition, nearly hard as iron with a dark texture that enchanted the eye. Within weeks a cottage industry of crafters had arisen working the logs pulled from the lake into all manner of goods that spread far and wide. Upon seeing the wood, the richest man in town, Lord Drexel Blackwater became obsessed with a desire to construct a manor of the material that would rival any in the great cities of his day. Conscripting half the town he extracted as many logs as



The rumors in the master appendix PDF can be printed out for your players. Judges are encouraged to weave in dark dreams and waking visions to hint at the cult's sinister history and the nature of the mark!

possible before depth and the twisted, interlocking nature of the tangle toward the bottom of the pile made it impossible to pull any more felled trees to the surface.

Upon its completion, Blackwater Manor proved a sensation, attracting visitors from all the neighboring towns, even wealthy merchants from the Great City! But the good times could not last: after a decade of happiness, the dark forces trapped within the remains of the felled grove—no longer constrained by the sacred waters—began to ooze forth, and life would never be the same at Blackwater Manor.

Within months, Lord Blackwater was plagued by dark dreams, and began to avoid contact with family and friends, preferring long walks in the mists surrounding the felled grove. In the basement of the great manor, the boards began to shoot forth trembling roots digging deep into the soil surrounding the manor. Within two years, the creeping roots had crossed under the river and begun to infect the trees surround Haven's Fall. Many trees grew sick and died, but others took on a darker aspect and soon the woods grew silent, as no child felt comfortable playfully exploring their depths.

Eventually Lord Blackwater's behavior grew so erratic that his wife and children fled to relations down-river, and rumors began to spread that a curse haunted Haven's Fall. Dark strangers began to gather at the manor, and trade with the outside world began to dry up as merchants chose more pleasant—and safe—destinations. Finally on one horrific evening, the people of Haven's Fall found themselves rustled out of their beds by rough men with blackened faces. All were herded to the lake below the grove, where they encountered Lord Blackwater dressed in a black robe with white cowl. With a mad fire lighting his eyes, the lord instructed his toughs to bring forth the mayor. Speaking dark words over the poor soul, Lord Blackwater brandished a twisted dagger fashioned from the dark wood of the grove and crudely carved a strange mark on the mayor's forehead. The mayor was then dumped in the lake, his body sizzling like scorched meat over a fire as he vanished under the surface! Realizing the desperation of their situation, the folk of the town attacked as one, but being neither armed nor skilled warriors, most were quickly cut down, their bodies left to rot in the woods. Within hours, every living soul in Haven's Fall had either fallen by the sword or had been sacrificed one-by-one to weaken the spell that guarded the lake. And for 100 years, as the swamp has slowly closed in on the village, not one soul has returned to restore the town to its former glory. The creeping tendrils of the dark grove, infused with the twisted will of Athax, have continued to spread for miles around infecting everything with their dark taint.

Current Situation

The Cult of Athax is fixated on retrieving the altar sunk at the bottom of the lake. They know the grove on the hill can never be restored until the altar is returned to its rightful place, thus breaking the curse. They continue Lord Blackwater's foul work of kidnapping folks, marking them with the symbols of the cult and offering them to the lake as sacrifice. As the holy wards respond to each tainted sacrifice, the power of the wards diminish as the repelling magic is slowly expended. (The wards are now very weak indeed, and it will not take many more offerings before they fail completely, removing any barrier to the cult entering the lake at will.)

But the cult learned well from their first destruction that drawing too much attention can be deadly, so they developed a wicked plan to bring in a fresh supply of victims without arousing the suspicions of their neighbors: Handsome male members of the cult undergo dark rites that forever bind them to Athax's will. Disguised as minstrels they travel to distant lands to charm and seduce women, vanishing as soon as the maiden is with child. These offspring live normal lives until they reach maturity, at which point the Mark of Athax (a dark circle) presents itself on their foreheads, and they begin to feel an overwhelming desire to make their way to the fallen grove, likely finding their own destruction. A continual stream of sacrifices and potential talent arrive every few months, and no one in the surrounding lands is any wiser to the cult's existence.

The Winnowing

As the adventurers arrive bearing the mark, they are observed at all times by the dark spirit of Athax. A series of challenges, known as the Winnowing, have been prepared to test the candidate's mettle. How the characters respond in overcoming the perils of the Winnowing determine how Athax will choose to use them:

- Those of either sex that show potential in the arcane arts are groomed as priests of the cult.
- Female characters that show great promise are trained as 'Cullers': dark assassins that serve the needs of the cult.
- Male characters of note are trained as 'Gatherers': minstrels and masters of seduction that replenish the ranks of the cult.
- Those who lack distinction, but have usable talents are brought in as 'Servants of the Grove': guards, cooks, and the like.
- Those who resist the offers of the cult, or who are deemed without merit are offered to the lake to weaken the holy charms.

It must be noted that all enemies the players encounter—until the final confrontation at the grove—are Servants of the Grove considered expendable by the leaders of the cult. Part of the goal of the Winnowing is to strengthen the Cult of Athax and bring in new talent. It makes no sense to sacrifice valuable resources on untested initiates.

Sender: An Unlikely Ally

The players have been teleported to a Sending Stone (known locally as the Gathering Stone) to begin the adventure by means of a powerful demon named Sender. (You can learn more about Sender and the sending stones in **Adventure SC-1: Perils of the Sunken City**.) Sender is compelled by an ages old geas that forces him to power the sending stones that dot the massive swamp that makes up the Sunken City. Usually Sender, and Sender alone determines where travelers arrive, but somehow the dark spirit of Athax has used its corrupting powers to tap into the geas to force Sender to transport the children of Athax to this particular location. A demon is not to be trifled with, however, and throughout the adventure Sender will secretly offer aid and cryptic clues to the party to annoy and bedevil his rival. (Though it also amuses the demon when mortals fail to interpret his clues correctly and suffer humiliating deaths: from his perspective, it's all good.)

Part I: The Village

Setting The Mood

The dark spirit of Athax hangs over the deserted village of Haven's Fall like the scent of a rotting corpse. Though he is not yet strong enough to communicate directly with his followers except in mystical drug-fueled dreams and ritual-driven visions, the presence of Athax corrupts everything for leagues around: every decaying leaf and twisted willow limb bear witness to his despoiling influence.

The roots that began sprouting from the manor house some 100 years ago have now stretched to infect the entire region: there is no location the party can travel to in the surrounding lands that Athax will not detect their passage and sense their actions. He is always watching and weighing, determining who might prove useful, and who is only fit for sacrifice. He has placed challenges in the path of the party like game pieces on a board: everyone the party encounters is considered expendable by the cult, useful only in determining the worth of the Marked.

As the players are driven forward by compulsion into Haven's Fall, find ways to remind them that a malevolent presence hovers over them: Dark trees loom menacingly. Languid leaves drip with black ooze. The forest is devoid of sound. The wind keens through the deserted buildings like a woman wailing. The mark on the characters' foreheads should always be active: burning like fire in a moment of failure, coursing with almost sensual pleasure with each success. Always it will drive them forward toward some destination they can almost see in their mind's eye, but never quite grasp. The village of Haven's Fall is corrupted by death and madness and you should never forget that in presenting the place to your players!

Overview

The party will arrive at the Sending Stone near nightfall, encountering a mysterious figure who will offer subtle clues. In a deserted village they will speak to a mad man and his puppet companion: a source of direction and possible dissension.

In the village, the party will briefly explore the ruins before being set upon by hordes of relentless shambling horrors. The horrors will drive the party forward, forcing them to make quick decisions. Two main paths await the party: down to the low lands where they can encounter dark acolytes, a sacred lake, possible reinforcements, and a harrowing river crossing. Or up through a dark wood filled with deadly foes to a precarious rope bridge and death from the sky. In any case, the party must cross the dangerous river to reach the manor beyond, and the shambling horrors will haunt their every step!

Village Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
1-2	C	Old Gus and Commodore Teak
1-3	C	The Shambling Horrors
1-5	C	Priests of Athax
1-6	C	Shard Skeletons and Tentacle
1-7	T/C	Forest Wraiths
1-8	T/C	Swaying Bridge and Wings of Athax

Area 1-1: Arrival *The long darkness finally passes as you are expelled into the murkiness of the deep swamp. The strangers that travelled with you stagger about, each bearing the same dark mark on their foreheads as you. Looking about, you find yourself on a low hill rising between a large mist-cloaked river to your right, and a thick tangle of dark willows below to your left. A dark stone monolith—a Sending Stone—rises behind you, crowned with a stunted, grub-white tree whose roots descend about the pillar like encircling tentacles. As you look closer, you notice the roots ooze; the fluid thick and red, pooling at the base of the stone like the blood from a day-old kill.*

Though it is likely that the party entered the Sending Stone in the morning, observant characters will notice from the hazy light that sundown is now only an hour or so away. It is very quiet near the stone, and even the natural sounds of the wood and river seem muted and constrained. Vision is limited to a couple of hundred yards by the ever present mist of the mire. When the party sets off, read or paraphrase the following:

A thin path leads down from the stone along a descending ridge. At the bottom an old broken road of cracked and sunken stones runs from the river on your right to a cluster of dilapidated buildings peeking out of the morass of trees to your left. Stretching out over the river, a stone bridge has collapsed a third of the way along its length. On the far side of the river you see no signs of civilization, only low twisting trees and mist. The opposite side of the road in front of you seems to offer nothing more than tangled trees and endless swamp. There are no signs of life, but somewhere in this forsaken place is the source of the compulsion that has driven you so far from home. You must find it!

As you ponder your route, the dirt alongside the road begins to twirl as if being stirred by a sudden dust devil. The growing tower of dust soon darkens into a mini-cyclone spitting small rocks and twigs in every direction! Finally, with a roar the column disintegrates in a final powerful gust, revealing a small figure standing where the swirling mass used to be, cloaked in shadow. It appears to be a



Haven's Fall



young dark-haired girl, age seven or eight. She's dressed in a simple grey peasant's dress and wears a small headdress fashioned from deer bones and twine—though the swirling shadows that cling to her make precise identification difficult. Extending a bone-white hand, she points silently at (name a party member's) pack, then raises a single finger to her lips. After a few moments she swivels, pointing at the trees and structures in the distance.

The figure is a manifestation of Sender, and during the characters' transport to the Sending Stone the demon placed a short length of Roundtree cord (an extremely rare rope-like weave constructed from the fibers of a tree sacred to many in this region) in the pack or pockets of the character she points at. (Characters with forestry or holy backgrounds will recognize it as such immediately.) The first time the character grasps the chord, his forehead mark will suddenly burn with great pain, which will continue until the chord is again returned to pocket or pack. The cord will prove useful in dealing with the cult later on in the adventure, and kindly judges will find ways to encourage the party to hang onto it. (At the very least one of the party members should know it is valuable.) Sender will appear two more times in this guise to offer additional cryptic, but important clues. The figure will not respond to the party in any way, and if attacked will simply vanish in a cloud of foul smelling dust.

Area 1-2: Emissary of the Winnowing As you move east along the road towards the buildings, it becomes clear that whatever vibrancy this village once possessed is long gone. Most roofs have collapsed, and the twisting dark branches of the ever-present willows seem to pry apart the wooden buildings like relentless fingers cracking open a clutch of walnuts. The leaves that cover the trees dangle in lank, dark clumps, and ooze a black oil as if rotting from within. Tall, thistle-filled grass grows everywhere.

One house at the edge of the village sitting flush against the road seems in somewhat better repair, its walls are intact and lined with a ramshackle collection of empty boxes and barrels. Reclining in a rough wooden chair on the porch is the second figure you have encountered in this desolate place: an old man, dressed in tattered garb, clutching a wooden doll of some kind to his chest. He seems to be smiling in your direction, but even from a distance the shine of his eyes seems a bit too bright, the rigidity of his expression a shade too fixed.

Old Gustav (or Gus) acts as the emissary of the winnowing, tasked with providing a bit of direction, as well as disturbing the candidates and sowing the first seeds of dissension and mistrust. His little friend 'Commodore Teak' does most of the talking. Constructed of crudely painted planks and dressed in a tattered naval uniform, Teak riffs in a rumbly, salty voice, punctuated by gales of creepy laughter. (Bold judges should feel free to go 'full pirate' voicing the

Commodore, if they dare.) Gus's ventriloquism will appear truly remarkable to the players, as his lips offer nary a twitch as Teak carries on. If players manage to disturb Gus's filthy robe, they notice that tendrils shoot from Teak's wooden frame to bury themselves in Gus's arm, and matching vines erupt from the old man's legs to run along the ground hidden in the thick grass.

If attacked, Gus will cower back in terror while still carrying the puppet about in a bizarre dance, while Teak brandishes a tiny cutlass and begins laying about with furious strokes. If Gus falls, the tendrils shooting from Gus's body will elongate in horrifying fashion as the Commodore leaps forth to take the fight to the party! (A less disciplined author might suggest that Teak 'goes all bat-poop Yoda' on the party.)

If the adventurers somehow destroy the Commodore without killing Gus, the old man will simply weep while holding the remains of his puppet, offering no further useful information. If however, the players return the old man's locket (listed below) Gus will emerge from his grief for a few moments to whisper 'beware the trees...' before relapsing into tears once more.

Gus: Init -2; Atk punch -1 melee (1d3); AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 2; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref -2, Will +1; AL N.

Commodore Teak: Init +2; Atk Tiny Cutlass +3 melee (1d3); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 17; MV 0' (30' if Gus is down); Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will 0; AL C.

(Teak's HP might seem unusually high for a yard tall (with legs) wooden puppet, but this largely reflects how most blows send him flying without doing much real damage. One tactic the players could try is trapping Teak in a net or under a container: there are a number of nearly intact barrels and boxes lying about Gus's cabin. Nabbing him requires a DC 13 Agility check, modified by player cleverness. If captured, Teak will curse the players, but offer little information of value. If the vines are cut between Teak and the grass, the Commodore will lapse into an inanimate state.)

The Wisdom of Commodore Teak Below are a listing of Teak's statements. Gus will react to the more disturbing passages with mutters of 'Oh Commodore!' and the like.

"Welcome strangers. Ol' Gus here doesn't like to gabber much, do ya Gus? As for me, friends, they call me Teak. To you, I be the Commodore."

"Tis a fine day to die, wouldn't you say? To those that bear the mark, death be circling like a coven of fin-backs. Best be quick about it boys, no one wants to die in the dark. And death is all you'll find in the dark here!"

"There be no rest for the likes of you 'til ye reach the manor. Keep moving, forward, across the water and up the hill. Some's be that might even live to see it."

"You all dance to the Master's tune. Every moment, strength ye be showing, or hissself might grow tired of you. Such are only fit for chum or an icy swim..."

"Yonder village? Every day be a parade in Haven's Fall! Filled with fancy folk just waiting to introduce its most hidden nooks. Wander forth and see..."

"See that dark spot in the center of town? Here be a little secret: it only requires one dropped in to satisfy the hunger... just one. What be one ship to save the fleet from blood and horror? Surely the strongest and smartest be seeing this? Just one."

"A wee lass in a whirlwind? You be spinning tales? You'd best not be spoofing the old Commodore, sea dogs don't care to be teased..."

If the players dispatch Gus and the Commodore, a search of the shack will reveal little of value other than a small sea chest filled with exotic shells (3 gp), and a silver locket that when opened reveal sketches of a handsome young sailor on one side (vaguely resembling Gus), and a lovely young woman on the other side labeled 'Elsbeth' (4 gp).

Area 1-3: The Village of Haven's Fall *It would seem that many years have passed since villagers roamed these streets. Thick grass pokes up everywhere through the dilapidated road, and the buildings are in shambles. A faded sign bearing the words "The Gallowsman" and a crude drawing of a man dangling from a gallows hangs sideways from a chain attached to what once might have been an inn. The surrounding wood encroaches on all sides, devouring the village board by board.*

Allow the players to explore the deserted ruins for a short time until they discover the root-lined pit at the center of town:

Before you, a gaping hole some 10 feet across lurks in the center of the village square. Quivering roots line the walls of the pit, and it's impossible to discern the depth as the hole becomes completely opaque only 8-10 feet below its mouth!

If the party takes advantage of Commodore Teak's advice and hurls someone into the pit, the unfortunate soul will be snared by the quivering roots after a 20 foot drop, and will be slowly shifted further down into the seemingly endless dark. His screams will last for minutes before being suddenly snuffed out. (If the players make it to the final confrontation of the adventure, they will meet the (likely very angry) adventurer again.

Any player who willingly enters the pit has one round to be yanked free by friends before the roots entangle them completely and begin the process of dragging them to the depths below.

Any sacrifice will be rewarded by howls of laughter emanating from Gus's cabin (if Teak is still alive) and nothing more. When the party finishes their exploration/actions at the pit, read or paraphrase the following:

As the light begins to fade with the approach of sunset, rustling, crackling sounds begin to rise from the deeper darkness of the wood. Suddenly a single figure emerges from the trees: seemingly a man or corpse wrapped in roots and vines shambling in your direction! A moment later another appears around the corner of a

building located deeper in the village. And then another. And another! Soon the air is filled will the surreal whisper of vines dragging through the grass as an army of shambling horrors staggers from the dark in your direction!

The Shambling Horrors

The shambling horrors are made up of the defiled remains of those murdered when Haven's Fall perished. They range from children to fat burghers all trapped in a horrible state of preservation: not quite rotted, but certainly not living. They bear a variety of pitiful weapons from rusty short swords to crude clubs, and seek only to batter and capture those who still walk free. They will pursue the party relentlessly all the way to the river (and beyond if possible), and possess a crude instinct to drive the party in this direction.

The shambling horrors will appear from all directions, though they'll be heavier in the south part of town. If the players move north quickly, pick out 3-5 characters for the mob to concentrate on: each should suffer 2-3 grab attacks as the horrors attempt to slow them down as noted below. If players rush to help those targeted, have about half suffer a single weapon attack in the swirling chaos. If the players keep moving north at speed, they will leave the horrors behind in 3 rounds, giving them a few minutes of exploration time at other locations before the mob arrives.

The horrors' primary instinct is to capture and entwine candidates, dragging them into the woods to eventually be handed over to the priests of the Cult of Athax. If a player is reduced to zero HP by a horror attack, make a DC 5 Luck check for each character felled. A successful roll means the character is merely knocked out. Whether an adventurer is dead or alive, the shambling horrors will wrap them in vine-like hands and begin dragging them off into the trees.

If a character is grappled by one horror, their speed is slowed by five. If grappled by two or more horrors, the character will begin to be dragged towards the trees. Adventurers can break free on their round with a DC 10 Strength or Agility check, or by having their friends kill the horrors who bind them. Otherwise, after three rounds of being dragged, the characters will disappear into the nearly impassible trees and be lost to the party. (The party might encounter such captured characters again at the end of the adventure!)

If a horror shambles too close to the pit, they can be knocked into the dark by clever players with a DC 8 Strength check. If eight horrors have been dispatched or knocked in the pit, the rest will fade back into the trees for a short period. But even those 'killed' by the party will begin to re-knit after this short break, and the party really has no choice but to flee in the face of the return of scores of these relentless foes. Horrors can be turned temporarily by clerics using the normal rules. (Clerics of nature gods get +3 to their rolls!)

Use the shambling horrors as a tool to create tension and to keep the party moving: keep the players from getting bogged down battling what is essentially an unbeatable foe.



Shambling Horrors (10-50): Init -4; Atk crude weapon -2 melee (1d4) or grab +0 (No damage but held) ; AC 9; HD 1d6; hp 3 each; MV 10'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref -2, Will -2; AL C.

Area 1-4: The Crossroads *The rough road splits here in the shadow of the dark wood. The path to your right descends quickly, and seems to open up into some type of clearing. To your left, the path rises into gloomy darkness: the thickest and tallest trees you have yet encountered hover over the path, blocking out nearly all the available light.*

The trees that have overwhelmed the village are extraordinarily thick and run together in twisted tangles. If players try to leave the path, it requires great effort to make any headway, made all the more difficult by the oppressive dark.

If the party takes too long to decide on a direction, the shambling horrors will begin to arrive...

Area 1-5: The Sacred Pool *You have escaped the attention of the shambling horrors, at least for the moment.*

The trees open up here, revealing damp, swampy ground leading to the river ahead. A rickety pier rises above the mire to your left in the direction of the river. To your right, a good sized lake rests behind a tiny wooden dam, disappearing into the mists that run along the base of the dark thorn-covered hill that rises above the village. Strangely, the oppressive weight that pressed down on you in the village has diminished here, and the dim light on the lake shimmers with an ethereal glow.

The momentary feeling of peace vanishes however, as you hear a shriek ring out from a small copse of trees near the shore of the lake.

If the players approach the trees they encounter two men dressed in black robes with grey cowls. The duo are manhandling a struggling figure bound in sheets of burlap cloth into a small boat. Three other still forms, bound like the struggling figure, lay in the grass. Once the robed figures notice the party, they attempt to push away from the shore. When over deep water, one pulls a crossbow from the boat and the other begins chanting and waving his hands in mystical forms. If the party reacts immediately, they have two rounds before the robed ones are ready to attack, otherwise they only have a single round to act!

Chanting Priest: Init +1; Atk Shock of Athax +3 spell (1d4); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 9; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

Crossbow Priest: Init +1; Atk crossbow +1 missile fire (1d6); AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 6; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

(A second Crossbow Priest could be on guard in the trees if the party is particularly strong.)

The Prisoners If the party defeats the acolytes and free the bound figures, they learn that the four men are a party of fishermen captured along the river a few days back. (A father and his three burly sons.) Each wears nothing but ratty pants, and the

crude form of a twisted willow tree has been carved onto their chests, the wounds already darkening in a sickening manner. If the party manages to pull the boat back to the shore, when the final fisherman (the father) is freed and steps from the boat into the lake, he shrieks in agony as his foot and lower leg are somehow burned by the waters. (The player characters are unaffected.)

The fishermen have few details to offer about the cult, other than describing being ambushed by robed figures, blindfolded, and then tossed into an earthy pit where they were forced to drink a strange concoction. The father awoke to find the robed figures crouched over him chanting and carving up his chest with a twisted dagger. His memories seem fogged by whatever he was forced to drink, but he does recall them chanting something about "poisoning the poison to weaken the wards" and "unbinding the alter of Athax which rests in the depths".

If the party has suffered major casualties to this point, one or more of the fisherman will happily join the party out of gratitude for their rescue. (Stats can be found in the Omnibus PDF appendix.) Otherwise they will thank the party, and depart down river.

Exploring the Pool For those not ritually marked by Athax (the forehead marks do not count in this regard), the waters of the lake will heal 1d4+1 points of damage the first time they are tasted. If the party searches around the copse of trees, they discover a stone foundation covered by a large bronze plate. Something has clearly been chiseled from the plate, and lying half buried in the grass are twisted chunks of bronze and bronze shavings, and what appears to be more of the metal cast in the shape of interlocking timbers with a cord of some kind dangling from the end piece. (Clever players will recognize the gallows from the inn sign.) Players also discover a faded placard next to a collapsed cabin inscribed with the words "Madam Miracla's Miracle Water", and a collection of tiny shattered glass containers.

If an adventurer submerges his forehead mark completely in the water, there is a small chance they might experience a holy change, but at a terrible risk! Roll a d20 modified by luck: 1-5: The character's forehead is burned horribly! 1-4 point of damage, and lose 1 point of personality permanently. 6-15: No effect other than a painful burning sensation. 16+: The mark is cleansed! The character no long suffers from the compulsion to gather. In addition, they gain 1d4 points of personality permanently as they are blessed by holy powers. If they seek to become a cleric of a god of law at first level, they gain a bonus starting spell. This personality bonus and holy blessing will only manifest for the first characters who make such an attempt.

After the players have had time to do some quick exploring, read or paraphrase the following:

With rising intensity, you again hear the terrible shifting, crackling murmur of the shambling horrors as first one, than another appear at the edge of the dark wood. They have found you again, and soon the entire length of the wood is alive as the horde staggers from the trees!



Area 1-6: The Pier *The ground here grows less firm the closer one gets to the river. To your left, upriver, in the darkness you can barely make out a thundering waterfall sending mist drifting in your direction. A crude pier runs out into the murk to reach the open water beyond, slick with the mist from the falls. Two small punts are tied at the end of the structure. A matching dock rests on the far side of the river, the ground rising quickly into trees and darkness. From the tallest logs of the pier dangle skeletal forms, each attached to the top of the beams by thick twisting vines descending to wrap about the bony skulls. How the bones of the skeletal bodies are held together is a mystery, but you have no time to ponder: behind you, the horde of horrors slowly approaches!*

The small boats can hold up to 5 characters at a time, and take 3 rounds to row across the river on a DC 6 Intelligence check by the 'pilot'. (Automatic if the pilot has a boating background.) On a failed check the boat drifts downstream, and one additional round will be required to fight back against the current.

As soon as most of the party members have ventured onto the pier, read or paraphrase the following:

As you make your way across the slippery dock, the skeletons dangling above you twist slowly in the dying evening wind. Suddenly, one of the skeletons stirs, a bony hand reaching inside its own rib cage to pull forth a shard of bone drenched in some dark fluid! A dull red glow springs to life inside its empty eye sockets as the hideous creature flings the foul object in your direction!

If struck by a flying shard, a character takes 1 point of damage and must make a DC 10 Will save or fall into an unnatural slumber that lasts for 10 minutes. No amount of kicking or screaming will rouse the sleeping character before that time. If the players manage to cut the vines that hold a skeleton aloft (AC 16, 2 HP), or chop down the pole a bony assassin hangs from (AC 6, 12 HP), that skeleton will immediately return to quiescence after it plummets. Other damage to the skeletons, such as from staffs or shovels, will cause bits and pieces of the creature to fly off, but will do little to slow the attacks.

It takes 10 rounds for the shambling horrors to reach the pier. Be sure to describe their approach in grisly detail! In addition, after 6 rounds of activity on the dock, read or paraphrase the following:

Without warning, the entire pier suddenly lurches six inches to the left, followed by a deathly silence. Then with a sickening slurping gurgle, a massive black and purple tentacle slowly begins slithering from below onto the deck of the pier, reaching out towards a prone comrade!

Two rounds later, a second huge tentacle will rise from the other side of the pier. Players grabbed by a tentacle are dragged below on the following round to never be seen again. 0-level characters are likely incapable of damaging the Thing Under the Pier, though they might come up with some extremely clever plan to drive it off for a short time. Reward them if they do. Once the shambling horrors close off access to dry ground, the only escape available is by way of the river. Keep the action moving and attempt to have the worst danger close in while the final rescue boats are struggling to return to the dock! (Characters that cross arrive at Area 2-1.)

Shard Skeletons (4): Init +3; Atk sleep shards +1 ranged (Dmg 1); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 11; MV 0'; Act 1d20; SP sleep on shard strike (DC 10 Will save) SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C.

The Thing Under the Pier: Init -5; Atk tentacle grab (x2) -5 melee (On hit, escape only possible with DC 20 Strength or Agility check during a character's next action, otherwise dragged under and killed); AC 14; HD 18d8; hp 110; MV 5'; Act 2d20; SP Suction grab; SV Fort +5, Ref 0, Will 0; AL C.

Area 1-7: The Dark Wood *You have outpaced the shambling horrors for the moment. A thin path twists through the trees ahead, but your surroundings are beginning to descend into complete darkness as the tree-cover clouds out the remaining light. As you move forward you suddenly detect a light off in the woods to your right. It is difficult to see with any certainty through the thick trees, but there looks to be some type of cottage huddled back in the wood: a soft glow escaping from its windows.*

There is no friendly cabin in the woods, only two deadly **Forest Wraiths** whose powers of suggestion prey on the fears of their victims. As soon as any party members enter the clearing where the cabin seems to rest, the open space will be plunged into total darkness, and there will be little chance for escape. Secretly give the smartest character who draws near the clearing a DC 10 Intelligence check to sense that things are not as they seem. If the party returns to the path before reaching the clearing, they will sense a forbidding darkness and a rising horror closing in on them from behind as they push through the trees, but the wraiths will not follow onto the path.

Those that enter the clearing have little chance to defend themselves in the unnatural darkness (consider the Wraiths AC 16: a successful hit drives one away for a round), and will likely need to flee back to the path to survive. Have the players make a DC 8 Luck or Intelligence check (whichever is more friendly) each round to move in the correct direction to find the path once again. Two successful checks return characters to the path and safety. A missed roll drives them deeper into the wood. Each round the wraiths randomly attack two characters, either those fleeing the clearing or others who have left the safety of the path to help their comrades. (The wraiths are +1 to hit, and do 2d6 Stamina drain on a hit: characters fall prone when Stamina reaches zero). If characters on the path shout or otherwise make noise to help their friends, grant a +3 to the Intelligence or Luck check to move in the correct direction. Once all the characters are back on the path, the wraiths will trouble them no more.

Drained Stamina recovers quickly once players are returned to safety. (3 points + normal Stamina bonus per area reached.) If the players dawdle too long in this area, the shambling horrors will arrive from the south.



Area 1-8: The Swaying Bridge *You leave the troubling darkness of the trees just as the sun sets to the west, bathing the river before you in a crimson haze. The ground falls steeply to the swift water some 25 feet below, and a thin rope bridge spans the racing flow, attached to iron hooks that flank a carved passage in the bare rock wall on the far side. The roar of a waterfall echoes from the west. A body lies on the ground just before the bridge, unmoving and covered in dried blood.*



From behind, you hear the distant faltering strides of the shambling horrors; have they tracked you even to the river's edge?

The body is that of a young man, his form crisscrossed with hundreds of thin cuts that have stained his simple peasant garb with jagged strips of dried blood. Inside his rough backpack the players find a crude map of the immediate area, showing the village and all major landmarks. A note is scribbled in the margins of the map: "Most likely your sister has been taken to that horrible manor. Search there. Pray she hasn't been sacrificed in the lake below the hill. Its waters are a balm to you or I, but death for those corrupted by those foul fiends!" The man's quest to rescue his sister seems to have ended here, but there is a chance she still lives, trapped in the depths of the manor, but willing to join the party if rescued! (A copy of the map can be found in the Omnibus appendix.)

Time to ponder the situation is short: the shambling horrors will arrive in three rounds. If the party chooses to leave the path and travel east along the river's edge, they will eventually arrive back at the Sending Stone after an uncomfortable slog through damp, swampy ground. To the west, a wisp of a path descends through the trees to the swamplands that surround the pier.

The only way forward is to cross the bridge. Despite its rickety appearance, it is actually quite safe. It sways alarmingly when crossed, but requires no roll to safely traverse in three rounds under normal circumstances. It is constructed sturdily, and will not collapse under any load unless one of the main ropes are cut (AC 5, 12 HP, immune to bludgeoning weapons). Crossing the bridge does, however, trigger an attack. Read or paraphrase the following when the first character is a third of the way across the bridge:

Those crowding from behind to step onto the bridge hear a new sound rising from the trees to the north: a snickering whisper as if an army of tailors were snapping their shears open and closed en masse. A dark cloud suddenly rises from the trees, framed against the red sky as it hurtles in your direction. Hundreds of birds! But not birds: as they draw near each appears to be some type of twisted blood-red root with shuddering leaves for wings!

The Wings of Athax will dive at those on the bridge, attempting to slash the party with their claw-like barbs. Each round, randomly choose six party members to be attacked. Players can strike at the Wings, but risk tumbling off the precarious bridge if they do so. On each round a character attacks, make a DC 5 Ref save to avoid tumbling into the swift moving waters below. Characters on either side of the falling hero can attempt to snag their comrade with a DC 8 Ref save, but if they miss, they must make their own DC 5 Ref save or tumble themselves. (And their neighbors can attempt to grab them, and so on!) Once all players have crossed the river, or five of the Wings have been brought down, the attack ceases.

Wings of Athax (50): Init +0; Atk slash +0 (1d2); AC 11; HD 1d4; hp 2; MV 50'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C.

Players in the water can make one DC 10 Strength check to fight their way to the side before going over the falls. (DC 6 if they have a swimming background.) If swept over the falls they take 1d6 damage. If they survive, the characters drift slowly towards the dangers of Area 1-6: The Pier.

While the bridge stands, the shambling horrors will cross in relentless pursuit of the party. Crossing the bridge leads to Area 2-2.

Area 1-9: The Hill *The feeling of oppression experienced in the village only grows in intensity as you approach the bare hill that rises above it. Its steep slopes are barren save for thick thorns that wrap around the thousands of bare black stumps that litter the hill. On closer inspection, the inch-long thorns seem to weep with some shadowy fluid, forming a sinister barrier that is all but impassible.*

The hill of the grove looms over everything on this side of the river: refer often to its sinister presence. Attempting to climb through the thorns requires a DC 7 Ref save each round to avoid taking a point of stinging, burning damage. Characters should quickly learn that it's all but impossible to scale the hill from below.



Part II: The Manor

The Lay of the Land

The manor house squats at the apex of a tall hill. The front approach is relatively steep and grass covered, but a clear stone path makes climbing easy. The back side of the hill is much steeper and features deadly rocky crevasses. The house is completely encircled by a low wall of stone near the top of the hill, with locked iron gates located front and back. There are a number of gaps in the wall, and it is easily scaled by all but the most clumsy of adventurers. (Or halflings...) The wall hugs the cliff on the back side of the manor, and it is a sheer and deadly drop in this area save for the path described in Area 2-2: The Back Way. The manor grounds within the wall are overgrown with tall grass, thorns and wild fruit trees, and footing is often treacherous.

There are no windows on the first floor of the manor house, and except for the front door and the servants entrance on the back side of the house, the only other way in is a large hole cut into the wall to provide access to the kennels at Area 2-5. (This entrance is hidden behind large bushes and is difficult to spot unless the characters are right on top of it.) Climbing the walls is a chancy affair, as the boards are slick with slime. It requires a DC 15 Climb check to reach the 2nd floor, and all the windows are securely barred in iron regardless.

If players circle the house from the front, traveling to the right they must pass through the twisted remains of an orchard filled with painful thorns before arriving in the back yard. If they move left from the main doors the way is fairly open and travel is much easier. In any case, as they move about the grounds, an uncanny silence haunts the place, save for the wind that cries as it races through the trees that dot the tall hill. (If the party moves near the gate at the back of the property after approaching from the front, feel free to trigger the encounter with the ghosts detailed in Area 2-2: The Back Way at the top of the switchbacks as opposed to the bottom as described in the area description.)

Overview of Events

If the party approaches the manor house from the front, they must pass through a deadly field teeming with bloodthirsty severed hands, who wish for nothing more than to add to their numbers! The back way is guarded by a menace capable of severely damaging the party, but the dangerous switchbacks hide helpful treasures that might be obtained with the assistance of a pair of friendly spirits.

Entering the house, the players must overcome deadly obstacles, monsters, and crazed servants as they attempt to reach the second floor. Unfortunately all routes up invite little more than death! Those who survive the terrors of the first floor must pass a final test on the upper floor before reaching an unholy altar. This altar hides the path to the tunnels hidden below the manor house.

Manor Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
2-1	T/C	The Grasping Hands of Athax
2-2	C	Rock Demon
2-5	C	Darkmounts
2-6	T	Pits of Eldritch Ooze
2-7	T/C	Strangle Snakes
2-9	T	The Deadly Stair
2-10	C	Beauregard the Swamp Ogre
2-11	C	Cooks and Fire Kobolds
2-15	T/C	The Room of Testing

Area 2-1: The River Approach *Stepping off the dock, you stare up at a thin path that runs up an embankment, climbing quickly into a thick stand of trees. The willows seem almost black in the gathering gloom, but as you press on, you soon emerge from the heavy tree cover into dim light. The hill continues to rise above you, but the trees now stand in isolated pockets surrounded by large patches of tall grass that race up the side of the hill. Everything is bathed in eerie moonlight, almost devoid of color.*

A well paved path twists back and forth as it climbs before you, glinting in the moonlight. Benches for weary climbers are positioned along the way. Near the top of the hill what appears to be a dilapidated fountain squats in front of a low wall, beyond which you can make out the tops of a few more trees and an enormous manor squatting at the top of the hill. It must have once been an amazing

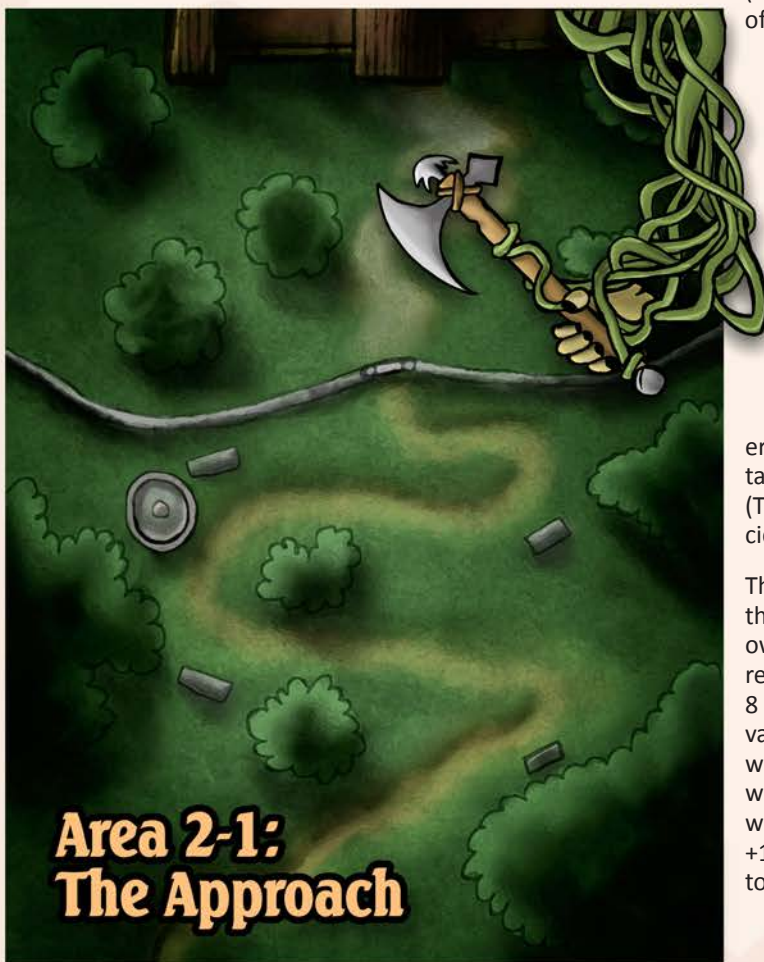


site: three stories tall and as broad as a small castle! But now, even from a distance, the decay of split boards and runnels of slime are only too apparent. Darkness radiates from the place like the glow from an unholy fire.

The path was created with great care, and is largely free of encroaching plant life. But the tall grass that grows around it is often more than three feet tall, and offers great cover for the threat in this area. The fountain was once the locus of a terrible rite known as The Grasp of Athax. Willing devotees would place a hand on a dark altar that still stands next to the fountain, followed by willing priests of the order hacking off the member with a cursed axe! After the severed hand was tossed into the fountain, the acolyte would be gifted with a twisted rootlike appendage that would slowly grow in its place over the course of the next few days. Such devotion to Athax is rare to find in these declining years, but the unholy offerings of the fanatical sect members remain in the fountain, animated by the twisted devotion of their former owners!

As the players begin to make their way up the hill, choose one or two of the most intelligent characters to make DC 12 Intelligence checks. (DC 5 if they have a spyglass.) If one succeeds on their check, read or paraphrase the following:

You detect motion near the fountain at the top of the hill. It seems that some type of small creatures—crabs?—are scuttling over the lip of the fountain, vanishing into the tall grass.



As the party makes it way up the hill, they begin to sense subtle movements in the grass, accompanied by scuttling sounds, and a whispering hiss like a rope being dragged through the grass. When the tension is ripe, read or paraphrase the following:

A small creature scuttles from the tall grass onto the path before you: a fist-sized, bloated spider! But no, it is no spider, but rather a severed hand seemingly animated by some dark will! And it is not alone: soon ten more, then a hundred scramble from the grass skittering in your direction!

Following behind the hands are long twisted vines that snake across the ground attempting to trip up characters. Assuming players begin sprinting up the hill, it will take three full rounds to reach the wall and 'safety.' Each round choose 4 characters, preferably one from each player if possible, to make DC 8 Ref saves to avoid being tripped by the vines. If tripped, a character is immediately swarmed by dozens of severed hands. On the following round, they must make a DC 10 Strength check to throw off the horrible gripping monsters. Friends who remain behind to help a swarmed comrade can clear the hands with a successful attack against AC 12, but must endure their own DC 8 Ref save to avoid being tripped. Characters that spend a full round pinned suffer a terrible fate: a hand holding an axe will ride out of the grass, gripped by one of the foul vines. It will attack at -1: a successful strike does 1 precise point of damage, and severs the character's hand! The Hands of Athax immediately lose all interest in the character as the severed hand joins the fray! If the character survives the damage he is free to stagger up the hill attempting to staunch the black, oozing wound. (A vine hand will slowly emerge from the wound over the course of the adventure!)

If players race back down the hill, the hands and vines will only follow them for a round before returning to the grass, awaiting the party's return.

Master Shock At one point in the encounter, have a tripped character notice a strange silver-colored, full-faced helm lying in the grass nearby. If the adventurer grabs the helm, he will be unable to attempt to throw the hands off that round. If the character survives and is later able to examine it, he finds the words 'Master Shock' engraved roughly across the brow of the helm. When the keyword is uttered while the helm is worn, the user experiences a sudden rush of energy that can be directed through his hands in an unerring arc of shocking energy that delivers 1d8 points of stunning, non lethal damage to a target up to 20 feet away. The effects last for about five minutes. (The first time the character tries to use the helm, be sure to accidentally electrocute a nearby companion for laughs.)

The helm can be used up to 3 times per day, but unfortunately if the damage roll is an 8, it discharges the full shock damage into its owner, likely rendering the character unconscious in a sun-bright release of energy. In addition, roll the d8 one more time. If a second 8 is rolled, the helmet shorts out catastrophically, exploding and vaporizing the head of the unfortunate adventurer. Visibility from within the helm is very poor, and any agility based actions are at -2 while it is worn. (If the character growl-shouts 'MASTER SHOCK!' while extending both hands during an attack, they do an additional +1 points of damage. Whether this increases the risk of failure is up to the Judge.)

Area 2-2: The Back Way *The passageway at the end of the rope bridge cuts through bare rock before emerging at a crossroads at the base of a tall hill. To your right, the path circles about the hill before disappearing into a thick stand of trees. To your left, the path descends steeply as it circles the hill.*

If the players take the right path, they eventually arrive at Area 2-1: The River Approach. If they go left, read or paraphrase the following:

You eventually arrive at a small stand of trees at the base of what is almost a sheer cliff. Everything is bathed in pale moonlight, and a thin path precariously switchbacks up the side of the cliff to a low stone wall at the top. Beyond the wall a majestic manor house rises, silhouetted against the dark sky.

This thin, dangerous path is the home of a **Rock Demon**, a wily feral beast that looks vaguely like a bald orangutan with six inch long claws and the disposition of a hungry wolverine. The creature will wait semi-patiently in a small cave near the second to last switchback, and then spring out attempting to knock characters into the crevasse below.

Rock Demon: Init +1; Atk claw +1 melee (1d3); AC 12; HD 3d6; HP 14; MV 35', climb 25'; Act 2d20; SP Touch of Whimsy, loss of balance. Low-light vision; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C.

If a player is struck by the demon, they must make a DC 9 Fort save or be confused by the creature's Touch of Whimsy for 3 rounds. If they take any action they must make a DC 15 Ref save or risk tumbling off the path into the crevasse below. (1d6 Dmg)

The Trapped Spirits The bodies of two of the demon's victims lie in the dark below. Their trapped spirits haunt this entire area, and perceptive characters will sense their presence, which could benefit the party in a number of ways. As the party ponders climbing the difficult path, the ghostly shapes of two men will slowly appear to the two characters with the highest personalities, but will remain invisible to the rest of the party, though their ghostly voices can be heard by all.

The first spirit, **Jogoo**, is dapper and mustachioed, with a somewhat gloomy, despairing demeanor: "Death is all about us! The scythe descends on all who tread the path of life... fate cares not for you or me, so accept its will!" The second, **Harlestro**, is smaller, a bit scruffy, with a cheery disposition: "Pes! Be a brother and help some lost souls out! We'll make it worth your while..." During the conversation, the ghosts will argue back and forth, each blaming the other for their demise. Given enough time, perceptive characters can piece together that the two had successfully burgled the manor house above at some point, but on their return were ambushed and killed by the rock demon. They can describe the first floor of the manor in general terms, but not its current occupants. They desperately wish their bodies to be pulled from the dark and given some sort of proper burial so they can move on from this terrible place. They hint at a handsome reward for those that set

them free: the treasure they acquired from the manor above! They clearly warn the players of the 'horrible creature' hiding in the rocks if questioned respectfully.

If the players defeat the demon and manage to retrieve the moldering, savaged bodies (lying 25 feet down in a crevasse 2/3 the way up the hill) and give the bodies a proper burial, Harlestro will guide them to the pair's pack hidden in a nearly impossible to detect cave. Inside are 3 silver candlesticks worth 5

gp a piece, two blocks of incense that when burned heals 1d6 hp to all within 10 feet, two Athax cult robes with grey cowls, and a pair of magic gloves.



These are the fabled **Gloves of Esmil the Sharp**. They are mildly sentient, and can only be worn by those whom the gloves feel are worthy. (Judges discretion.) When slipped on, the wearer immediately gains one point of agility permanently, but will find the gloves impossible to remove for one week. If during this probationary

period the player displays enough feats of cunning and artifice to impress the gloves (and the player will sense the gloves's pleasure), at the end of the week the gloves will infuse the character with an additional 1d6 points of agility, up to a maximum of 18! In addition, if the character chooses the path of the thief at first level, they gain a permanent +1 in any one thieving skill of their choice. But if the gloves are displeased by the actions of a timid or retiring character after the first week, they will instead drain 1d6 points of agility from the character, while granting +1 to personality and intelligence. In either case, the gloves will slip from the characters hands, lying dormant for six months awaiting their next 'apprentice'. The same will occur if a character wearing the gloves is slain.

Area 2-3: Entering the House *The wicked, poisoned trees of the cursed town across the river seem sunny in comparison to the looming presence of the manor house. It's as if the evil of the wood has been concentrated somehow in the act of cutting and fashioning. The thick boards are nearly jet black, and though obviously shaped and decorated with great care they seem to ooze with decay. Putrescent runnels of green/black slime hang languidly from rusted gutters, and the broad iron-banded windows of the upper stories are covered in dark film and offer no light, save for a single large window on the second floor from which a wan crimson glow radiates.*

If the party is approaching from the front, read or paraphrase the following:

Massive double doors wait at the top of a short flight of stairs, the walls of the manor stretching left and right into stands of trees that hug the building's exterior.

If the party is approaching from the back, read or paraphrase the following:

A solitary door appears to grant access to the back of the towering manor house. The small windows set in the door are thick with grime, and it's impossible to see what waits on the far side.

The Second Visit In both cases, when the party approaches the house read or paraphrase the following:

As you ponder your approach, the air begins to swirl as a mini-cyclone begins to form in front of the doors. Suddenly the strange shadow-clouded figure of the young girl you encountered near the Sending Stone returns in a blast of wind! She stands motionless as her blank eyes move back and forth slowly appraising the party. Finally, she raises a thin hand and extends two fingers, waving them before the adventurers as if playing a party game. When the girl seems sure that all have seen her strange pantomime, she raises both hands to her neck, and with a sickening snap pops her head off in one smooth motion! Shaking her head in the direction of the doors, the young girl's entire frame begins to tremble, until she suddenly collapses inward in another foul cloud of choking dust!

Neither entrance is locked, and all doors swings freely on well-oiled hinges.

Area 2:4 The Welcoming Chamber *The doors open with little resistance, lacking the ear-piercing hinge-shriek one would expect from such an ancient place. The chamber waiting on the far side is dim and musty, roughly twenty feet deep and forty feet across. Massive double doors mirror the entry doors on the facing wall, and two smaller portals exit the room on the adjoining walls. Gilt picture frames line the walls and every inch of the place is covered in elaborate wood carving: clearly this was once a place of particular splendor. But the fine molding and carved flourishes are now covered in creeping mold, and the once lush carpets are filthy rags that cover warped and cracked floorboards. All is quiet, save for a deep rumble that occasionally echoes from beyond the massive double doors.*

*There are eight portraits on the walls, each covered in grime except for the image of what appears to be the lord of the manor, which has been clumsily wiped clean by a few rough hand swipes. This large image is matched by a portrait that must be of his wife. Three smaller paintings are placed on each side of the larger portraits: depicting children in descending ages. The lord of the manor is striking: in his mid-forties with jet black hair, a white forelock, and piercing black eyes. The mother and children seem happy and care-free, with no obvious signs of concern darkening their expressions. The large portraits are labeled **Lord and Lady Drexel Blackwater**.*



If interpreted properly, Sender's clues can help the party overcome difficult odds. If your players fail to follow them, or come up with their own plans, be ready to adapt to their clever thinking!

The Pile One corner of the room is filled with junk, much of it seemingly tossed onto the pile recently. If players dig through the stack for any length of time they discover a rusted mace (1d5 dmg), a pitted handaxe (1d4 dmg), and a warped spear (1d6 dmg). Each will break in combat if maximum damage is rolled. (After delivering the damage.)

Area 2-5: The Stable *When the door is pushed open, a blast of foul air assaults the players. Many in the party recognize the smells of a stable or kennel, but this room reeks of those odors overlaid with another smell with which they are growing all too familiar: death! Though this room must once have served as a pleasant sitting room, it has been crudely converted into a stable of some kind, though the jet-black creatures lined up in the three rough stalls on the wall opposite are like no beasts anyone in the party has ever encountered: skeletally thin horses with the heads of gigantic hawks!*

These Darkmounts are used by the servants of the cult to quickly travel between the manor and distant cities. Normally the valuable steeds would be kept out of harm's way during the arrival of the marked, but the trainer has mistakenly returned them to the stables before the scheduled time. Dressed in foul smelling leathers, he will leap between the creatures and the party in shock and confusion on first sight, brandishing a pitchfork and screaming for the party to leave immediately. If attacked, he will whistle shrilly and the Darkmounts will leave their stalls, hooves flashing!

Stinky the Dark Whisperer: Init +1; Atk pitchfork +0 melee (1d8); AC 11; HD 1d4; hp 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0; AL C.

Darkmounts (3): Init +1; Atk hooves +0 melee (1d3); AC 12; HD 1d4; hp 3 each; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL N.

If the party attempts to parley with Stinky, he is unlikely to provide any useful information, other than telling the party that 'the marked are wanted within' — all the while attempting to ferry the mounts through the gap in the wall to the welcoming safety of the dark beyond.

The tower adjacent to the stables is collapsed internally, and impossible to enter.

Area 2-6: Floor of Death *This small room has seen better days: the floor is nearly rotted through, and a foul odor ascends from the blackness below. A door exits on the adjacent wall to your right. The door opposite lies shattered off its hinges; a wall of broken timbers blocking access into whatever room waited beyond.*

Unless the party fashions some type of foot bridge from materials found elsewhere, they will need to leap from safe section to safe section to reach the exiting door. The jumping isn't difficult, but the floor is likely to give way at any time. Select four characters to make DC 8 Luck checks. On a failure, the rotted boards snap off, sending the character tumbling into the reeking dark below!

The foul liquid that has pooled below this room breaks the character's fall, so they don't take any immediate damage. But the unholy miasma (the accumulated effluvia of 50 years of weeping cursed wood) that now covers the unfortunate serf might have other deleterious effects! Roll a d10 modified by luck: 1-4: The character's skin is burned horribly: 1d3 damage and the character is permanently scarred. 5-8: The character accidentally swallows some of the foul brew: a horrid worm quickly grows in the character's

Blackwater Manor



Deserted Second Floor

stomach unless the character makes a DC 10 Fort save. The worm is detectable after a few hours moving about the stomach. After a day the character takes 1 point of Stamina damage, and an additional point each week until healed by some appropriate manner! 9+: Somehow the foul fluids have supercharged the character's eldritch potential! Immediately gain 1d4 points of Intelligence as the secrets of the universe begin to unfold in the character's mind!

Additionally, if the character pursues the path of a wizard they gain a bonus spell at first level. But the transformation is not without cost: roll immediately on the minor corruption table, modified by luck.

The damp below is only eight feet down, so it will not be difficult for the characters remaining above to hoist their comrades back to safety. The tower beyond the shattered door is filled with broken timber and is impassable.

Area 2-7: Hall of Guards *After the ruin of many of the chambers you've already encountered, this large hall seems like something out of a palace: the floor looks sound, almost polished. What must once have been a stunning fireplace runs along the wall to your right, and large blackened windows line the upper reaches of the wall to your left allowing only the dimmest of moonlight to penetrate into the room.*

Two small doors exit to the interior of the house on each end of the massive fireplace, and another door is positioned at the far end of the chamber directly opposite. Two rows of four armored suits face each other in the center of the room, at rest in the gloomy darkness. The tall ceiling is covered in thick cobwebs, a series of beams crisscrossing two-thirds of the way up.

The real threat in this room are the **Strangle Snakes** hiding in the webs above. They will silently stalk the party as they explore the suits of armor, striking from above when the players reach the center of the room. (DC 15 Intelligence check to detect the snakes if the players specifically state they are watching the webs above.)

On a successful attack the supernaturally strong snakes sink their fangs into the shoulder of their victims while looping a coil about the target's neck, hoisting the unfortunate adventurer into the air. Comrades in the vicinity have one round to slash at the snake while it is in this vulnerable state: if they deliver 3+ points of damage, they cut the snake in two, and their friend tumbles to the ground without damage. (The snakes only take half damage from blunt or piercing weapons).

Otherwise, on the following round the snake rises into the darkness above and the strangled character is likely done for! (The snakes automatically deliver 1d8 of crushing damage the next round against wrapped victims unless the character makes a DC 15 Strength check.)

If a snake misses on its attack, it will return to the darkness above immediately. If it attacks again, players will be able to strike first as it descends as long as they are paying attention to the threat above.

Strangle Snake (2): Init +3; Atk bite +2 melee (1d3); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 12; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP Strangle (1d8 damage the round after a successful attack) Vulnerable while lifting prey; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +0; AL N.

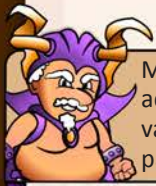
Upon inspection, the armor is worthless costume armor of no value. Hidden behind a stone in the fireplace is a small box containing a jade scarab worth 10 gp. Seven decaying peasant corpses are stored in the rafters of the hall. If players are desperate enough to retrieve the bodies they can liberate 2d20 sp from the remains.

Area 2-8: The Library *This room must once have been the jewel of the manor: lovely windows overlooking the cliff below, with comfortable couches, and two enormous shelves filled with tomes! But now all is in ruin: the windows are dark with filth, the couches broken and wet with mildew, the books rotted beyond repair. This might be the saddest sight you have seen in this place of despair.*

All is lost in this chamber, save one treasure that's power has largely withstood the elements: **The Manual of the Swordsman!** This powerful tome lies hidden under a stack of rotting books, but is otherwise unharmed. Written ages ago by the master swordsman Jholen the Black in ink fashioned from his own blood, the Manual is Jholen's witness that his instruction dominates all other considerations in determining mastery of the blade. To insure this fact, only the weakest and slowest can find the work, but those who do so and successfully read it are infused with the power Jholen himself poured into the work, gaining a massive infusion of both strength and agility! But this sort of devotion comes at a cost: for every two points gained in strength and agility, one point must be sacrificed from another stat!

If the party searches the library, have each character with strength and agility scores BOTH below 8 make a DC 10 Luck check to discover the Manual. (If more than one character is successful, have the higher roll succeed.) If no character matches this criteria, have all characters with EITHER strength or agility below 8 make a DC 13 Luck check. The character with the highest successful luck check discovers the tome. That character alone will be able to open the book. When they do, they will become aware of the bargain the book is offering, and will have one chance to either accept or reject it. If rejected, the book snaps shut, never to be opened again by anyone in this party. Jholen is too proud to accept such a rebuke! (It still might fetch a good price if the right buyer can be found.) If accepted, immediately grant the character a permanent +1 to any attack involving a blade, and a +1 to both strength and agility. The player must subtract one point from another stat to compensate for the raise (never strength or agility). Thereafter, each day the character repeats the stat raising/lowering process as long as they study from the book, until they reach 15 in either stat. From that point they can continue up to 18, but at the cost of two compensating stat points lowered per day from other stats. The character can stop at any time, but once they do so, the instruction ends, and the book snaps shut never to be reopened.

The Manual has not completely escaped the corrupting influence of the manor however. Each time the character engages the power of the book to raise stats, they must make a DC 8 Luck check, or lose one point of luck permanently. Each time this occurs, the character is aware that the effect is caused by something other than the Manual's magic, accompanied by a certain dark oiliness that haunts the character's dreams for days to come.



Magic items and effects are scattered throughout the adventure that can give characters a lift when they advance to 1st level; usually at a price! If your campaign is particularly gritty, just tone down the benefits.

Area 2-9: The Second Stair *Badly damaged wooden steps rise up the four walls of this square tower. It would seem a stiff breeze could bring them down! A small landing peeks invitingly some 15 feet above in the shadows, the rickety steps rising into the darkness beyond.*

Any character with construction/building/carpentry experience will recognize that this area is a death-trap waiting to be sprung. The timbers rise into the darkness beyond the landing, and anything that upsets the lower beams will bring the entire structure down, dealing 2d6 damage to anyone within the tower. Players being players, if they attempt to scale their way up, have three characters make DC 7 Luck checks at random while they make the attempt. On a fail the structure begins to collapse. Characters near the landing can make a desperate DC 12 Ref save to leap to safety, otherwise they take full damage as they go down with the wooden support structure.

Characters halfway up are basically in an impossible situation, and must make a DC 12 Ref save to take half damage, and will likely be killed. Characters at the bottom need only make a DC 8 Ref save to jump back through the door to safety, taking no damage. Once the tower has collapsed, the way is impassable (outside of hours and hours clearing timber) and characters trapped above will have to wait for their compatriots to make their way up, or find their way to the main stairs down to reunite with their friends.

Area 2-10: The Great Hall *This massive chamber must once have been the home of galas and splendid dances! The walls soar on all sides vanishing into the darkness above. The floor still displays small patches of sparkling wax where it must have shined under the light of hundreds of candles twinkling in the chandeliers above. But now most boards are cracked and splintered, and darkness dominates. Instead of a stand filled with pleasant musicians, there is only a single massive chair in the room, squatting in front of the wide stairs that lead to the stories above. In the chair lounges a giant man —no, a monster of some kind— twice the height of any man! Thunderous snores rattle about the room as the giant's almost comical wooden crown bounces in time with the creature's breath. A massive hammer, as large as any man in the company, rests comfortably in the monster's massive hands.*

Beauregard the Swamp Ogre is tasked with keeping as many interlopers as possible from gaining the levels above. If the players have made any sort of commotion (likely) he is only feigning sleep, and will be fully aware of the party. (Otherwise he wakes when the party steps within 20 feet on the creaky boards.) He has encountered many companies before, and is experienced with most of their tricks: it will take a very ingenious plan to fool him. He loves

this job, and is fed in delightful fashion by the manor staff. He's really not a bad sort, and holds no ill will toward the party, but being an ogre, will kill without remorse to maintain his pleasant position.

If a group fully dressed in cult robes approaches, and act as if they know what they're doing, Beauregard will allow them to pass to the stairs beyond without incident. Anyone else will feel his hammer. He is truly a deadly foe for 0-level characters, and players might decide that the best tactic is to simply rush past him, knowing that he can only kill one or two characters before they reach the top of the stairs, and in fact, Beauregard won't follow if the party gets past him. If characters attempt to shoot at him from a distance, he simply pulls a massive portrait frame from behind his chair to block the arrows and bolts. (The frame is already peppered with ammunition from previous parties.)



Beauregard speaks in rumbling rhymes, and he likes to chat. When players get within 30 feet of his chair, he'll begin speaking freely. Phrases include:

"None shall pass. All are grass. Crush your bones like ruby glass!"

"Food is good. Work is light. Blood of men is my delight!"

"Men in robes. Short and sweet. Promise Beauregard a treat!"

"Come and see, no need to clamor, all will meet my fearsome hammer!"

Beauregard the Swamp Ogre: Init +0; Atk Hammer +3 melee (1d10); AC 13; HD 5d8; hp 31; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N.

If Beauregard drops below half his hit points, he begins taking the fight seriously, and will make TWO attacks per round.

If the party does indeed attempt to rush by, Beauregard will manage at least two attacks before they get beyond his range. If he misses with both his attacks, he'll make one final rushed attack (-1 melee) at the trailing party member with the lowest Agility score.

If the players stand and fight and somehow manage to defeat the ogre, they discover a week's worth of cakes and other assorted goodies stuffed into his bag crammed under the chair, along with 22 gp and a small silver statue of a pig raised up on its hind legs holding a bastard sword. (A copper plate affixed to the base of the statue says "Lil' Hammy Shows 'Em How". It's worth 25 gp if the correct sort of tacky art collector can be found.) The ogre's hammer is much too heavy for the players to wield.

Area 2-11: The Larder *The door to this room swings open noiselessly. Before you is a well stocked larder, stuffed with boxes and barrels of fresh food stuff. Cabbages, sausages, wheels of cheese and more fill the chamber with a lovely aroma... but after*

a moment you detect the odor of decay and rot underlying all, as if a lovely roast pheasant has been crammed into a mildewed burlap bag. A large open door leads out the chamber on your right, a flickering light shining from beyond. Two closed doors, one single, one double, exit to your left.

While a certain relentless filth oozes from the cursed walls, someone has clearly made an attempt to keep this area clean, and the food here is completely safe to eat. If the players spend more than a few moments exploring, read or paraphrase the following:

Suddenly a tiny face peers around the corner of the passage leading to the flickering light. The minuscule red creature, about two feet tall with bat like ears and an impish face, smiles broadly at you, its mouth filled with sharp, twisty, rotted teeth. With a sudden flash the creature bursts into flames, the smile vanishing as it scampers in your direction!

The creature is a **Fire Kobold**, and is quickly followed by six of its brothers. The kobolds work as kitchen staff for the master of the kitchen and his wife—their immunity to fire allows them to freely move into and out of the roaring oven located in the kitchen. If ‘slain’, they reappear in the ovens moments later, but won’t venture forth from the flames as the ‘death’ transition is quite painful, preferring to hurl kobold insults from the relative safety of the fire. (Pulling the oven doors quickly shut if the party attempts to extinguish the flames.)

Fire Kobold (7): Init +1; Atk fiery poke +0 melee (1d2 fire damage); AC 11; hp 2; MV 20; Act 1d20; SP immune to fire, born of the flames and cannot be killed as long as their home fire burns); SV Fort -1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL N.

If a character falls, there is a 50% chance that any fire kobold near the body will abandon the attack to begin feasting on the fresh bloody flesh, roasting the meat on the fly as they dine.

Area 2-12: The Kitchen *A massive brick oven dominates this room, along with scores of pans hanging from hooks dangling from the ceiling. Huge double doors exit to the left, a smaller door is located directly opposite you in the far wall. Heat radiates from the oven, and the temperature soars in the room to dangerous levels as small fiery creatures rush about. A middle-aged man and woman move amongst the confusion, dressed in neat white uniforms, seemingly unaffected by the heat. When the woman notices the party, she turns to the man with a confused expression on her face. “My husband Lobar, strangers are in the kitchen!” Grabbing an enormous cleaver, the man calmly turns toward the woman. “Yes, Krattice my wife, I see. We must do something about that. Indeed, we must do something about that...” Both begin striding toward the adventurers, two enormous steel hooks appearing in the woman’s hands as if by magic.*

Lobar and Krattice come from a very distant land, and have had difficulty understanding the ways of the other cult members, and are thus considered expendable. They are excellent cooks, however, and take great pride in their work area: they attack the party out of professional pride, not from devotion to the cult. If either are badly hurt, both will flee out of the double doors into the great hall, calculating the ogre will cover their escape while they dash for the front doors. (They feed the ogre very well, and thus are fast friends with the hungry giant.) If one of the pair is slain, the other will immediately stop fighting and rush to the side of their mate, singing a strange lilting song of mourning.

Lobar and Krattice (2): Init +0; Atk kitchen utensils +1 melee (1d4); AC 10; HD 2d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +3; AL N.

Fire Kobold (3): Init +1; Atk fiery poke +0 melee (1d2 fire damage); AC 11; hp 2; MV 20; Act 1d20; SP immune to fire, born of the flames and cannot be killed as long as their home fire burns); SV Fort -1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL N.

The Fire Kobolds are quite fond of the cooks, and will defend the pair vigorously if they can.

There is little of value in the room, but the collection of pots and pans could fetch 10 gp in the right market, but would be quite bulky to carry off.

The Dumb Waiter A tiny dumb waiter can be raised by means of chains in a compartment in the wall next to the oven. It rises up a wooden shaft to an empty chamber on the second floor. Only a halfling could possibly fit in the available space, and then only by being forced in by strong hands. Unfortunately, a diseased raccoon has taken up residence in the floor under the second level, and has chewed through the wall of the shaft. It regularly steals food as the dumb waiter rises from below, and will attack the unfortunate halfling as soon he rises into view in the near total darkness. You can choose to conduct the combat in the dark (the raccoon has 3 hp, AC 10, and attacks at +0 for 1 point of damage) or you can simply describe the screams and howls and let the party decide whether to rescue their friend with a quick pull of the chains.

Area 2-13: The Great Tower *This large square tower goes up and up. It would seem that once a substructure granted access to the levels above, but all is now bare. Even the doorways above appear to have been boarded up. In the center of the large chamber sits a platform of fresh pine, embedded in the ground. Railings of wood rim it on three sides, but there doesn’t appear to be any obvious use for the structure.*

The platform actually rests over a pit that descends to the tunnels far below. More of the small grasping roots like those found in the pit in the center of the village are capable of slowly shuttling the platform down to a chamber below, where supplies can be loaded and brought to the surface. Activating the platform requires a specific chant known only to cult members.

If the party is struggling with casualties, a large cage in the corner of this large room holds a band of 2-6 peasants deemed unworthy during previous gatherings that could be used as replacement characters. (Including the sister of the man found dead at the rope bridge at Area 1-8.) They were drugged soon after being deposited here to ease their time while waiting to be offered to the lake, and remember little of their previous interactions with the cult. (Other than noting the relative kindness of the cook and his wife.)

Area 2-14: The Servant’s Table and Office *A long table lined with sturdy wooden chairs runs nearly the length of this room, but is currently empty of any effects. A door leads to a small office with a desk and two chairs, also uninhabited. Clearly this room is used frequently, and seems to be kept as tidy as possible considering the condition of the house—much like what you found in the kitchen—but there is no one here now.*

This area is the hub for all the servants of the cult, where they discuss daily plans and eat their meals. The head butler usually works out of the office, but is holed up now in the Chamber of the Elder Grub deep below the manor along with the rest of the servants. Both rooms are empty of anything of value, but are yet another evidence that the manor is far from deserted.

The Second Story

Once players reach the top of the main stairs, they encounter a railed landing that rings the open space overlooking the great hall. Many doors lead off the landing, and another large stair leads to the third floor at the far end of the landing at the opposite end from the main stairs. If players explore this level they discover many rooms filled with dormitory style beds, simple tables, and empty cabinets and bed chests. Everything is kept in neat condition, all the more creepy as the place is completely deserted. Feel free to play up the tension as players roam the empty halls and chambers, but nothing will jump out at them and there are no traps. Only silence, and the dread creaking of a house that seems to press in on the characters at every turn.

One chamber near the front of the manor sports a massive chandelier shaped like a tree suspended in space. A number of dark candles still burn here, and if extinguished will flare back to life after a few moments. This would seem to be the source of the light seen from outside the house. A number of mats are spread about the floor in concentric circles about the chandelier, and are worn with heavy use. Like everywhere else on this floor, the room is otherwise empty and as silent as the grave.

The Third Story

Area 2-15: The Room of Testing *The stairs creak and moan as the party ascends to the third level of this cursed manor. At the top of the stair waits a small chamber, unadorned save for a single door engraved with the outline of a spreading willow tree. The massive latch on the door is fashioned from copper, shaped like a twisting vine. From beyond the door the party can hear murmured voices, and the sense of dread and expectation has reached an almost unbearable pitch. Everyone's mark burns as if on fire, and each member of the party senses that some thing of great import waits on the far side of the door!*

The challenge in this chamber is the final test before the marked are granted access to the tunnels below the manor. Again, the cult cares not whether those the party encounter in the room live or die, only that they challenge the party appropriately. When the players open the door to the chamber, read or paraphrase the following:

The door opens on a hellish scene: the chamber before you is massive, as tall as three men, and it must take up nearly the entire third floor of the manor! A pool some twenty feet across filled with flaming liquid cuts the room in half, bathing the entire chamber in a dull red glow. On this side of the pool stretches open floor, with massive framed portraits of robed figures lining the walls. Four skulls burning with some type of internal fire are mounted to the walls between the portraits, offering additional light.

On the far side of the pool stand a number of pedestals, each topped with a large melon of some sort resting on a crimson cloth. As your eyes adjust to the light you can see that there are figures carved onto the face of each melon that resemble every member of the party! A number of melons lie smashed on the ground in front of empty pedestals—the count would seem to match the number of members in your party who have fallen along the way! A small gnarled man in a black robe leaps between the various pedestals, wielding a long black dagger. Behind the man on the far wall, four robed figures holding tall bows stand on platforms mounted eight feet up the wall. A single door waits below them, seemingly the only other way out of this strange place!

The small man suddenly shouts in your direction, his wild black beard dancing: "I am the Gibleter! You are almost there Children of Athax! Simply reveal the weak amongst you, and the strong may pass! Hurry, my hand cannot be stayed much longer!" With that, he runs the dagger along the surface of one of the melons (the character with the lowest luck). As he does so, the four archers perk up, and put arrows to string!

If a melon is damaged in any way, the archers will begin raining arrows on that particular character. If the number of damaged melons exceeds the number of archers, they will choose randomly from the available targets.

If the players are clever enough to begin destroying the glowing skulls, for each skull destroyed the archers are at -1 to their attacks as the room darkens. Also, the frames holding the portraits can be pulled from the walls easily, granting the characters who hold them +4 to armor class against the archer's attacks. (Though characters can only move 10 feet per round holding the heavy frames, and can't possibly cross the pool holding such an unwieldy load.)

When players get close to the pool they notice that irregularly spaced foot-wide poles rise from the blood-like 'liquid.' Also, thousands of tentacles or roots teem just below the surface stirring the liquid in a sickening manner. (The 'flaming blood' effect is illusionary and the pit is only about four-feet deep, but the grasping, crushing roots are very real.) Crossing the slippery pillars will require two dangerous short leaps. (DC 6 Agility check or tumble into the pool. A fallen character must make a DC 8 Strength check each round or be dragged under the 'surface' taking 1 point of damage. A DC 12 Strength check is required to pull oneself out without help. (DC 5 with assistance.) A character with a move rate above 20 feet may attempt to clear the entire pool with a mighty running leap! (DC 14 Agility check.)

The Gibleter will scream at the party the entire time until silenced, calling on them to mark one of their own. If the players don't take action to damage a melon with ranged weapons within 2 rounds he will plunge his dagger into the melon of the character with the lowest luck, and the archers will begin firing! Each round he will stab a new melon. Once players cross the pool, he will attack directly with his dagger. Both the Gibleter and the archers will fight to the death, understanding that the only way back into Athax's graces is by impressing the dark master with their ferocity and courage.

The Gibleter: Init +1; Atk dagger +2 melee (1d4+1); AC 12; HD 2d6; hp 7; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

Cult Archers (4): Init +1; Atk bow -1 missile fire (1d6); AC 10; HD 1d6; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

The wicked dagger is +1 to attacks, but stains the fingers of the user black with each successful attack, taking one week to fade away. Anything the character touches during this week will be stained inky black as well. The bows of the archers are normal long bows in good condition. The simple door in the far wall is unlocked.

Area 2-16: The Upper Altar *The door swings open easily, revealing a small dark chamber. Two smoky torches smolder on the walls, casting just enough light to illuminate a simple altar resting before the large statue of a spreading willow tree. The altar is covered in a dark red cloth, holding a brass carving of a face in torment, captured in the moment of death, resting on a golden plate. Strange herbs surround the bust. Also lying just in front of the plate is a strip of parchment upon which the words 'Claim your destiny' have been scrawled in red ink.*

Upon closer examination, the head has clearly been cut from some larger statue, and the neck of the bust has curiously been carved away around its entire circumference. (Where the rope once was.) Players feel a strong compulsion to claim the head as their own, and while heavy, it is not a difficult load for a strong character. Every character can sense that in some way the head is central to escaping some terrible fate. Judges can use any method they desire to determine who claims the thing. (But make sure someone does, or the chance of surviving the adventure is very small!)

The golden plate is carved with various floral patterns in brilliant detail, and is worth 400 gp or more. The herbs heal 1d4 damage. There are enough leaves for 8 doses.

The tree is hollow, and when searched reveals metal rungs mounted on its interior descending into the dark below. Climbing down is cramped and creepy, but not difficult. The rungs have been worn shiny with regular use. After some 80 feet of claustrophobic descent, the players will arrive at the Reliquary in the tunnel system below the manor.



Part III: The Grove

The Way to the Grove

The players have almost reached the conclusion of the adventure. The tunnel complex below the manor is massive and twists for miles in every direction. The main tunnel, however, is huge, relatively straight, and easy to follow. It dips from where the players enter below the house, running down and below the river, to rise once again on the far side, climbing from within to the peak of the hill that looms over the village. If players leave the safety of the main tunnel to wander down side trails, they can easily become lost. Make it clear that everything looks the same, and after a few twists and turns they will likely lose their way.

The huge main tunnel and the largest of the side tunnels have all been dug by the Elder Grub, a massive worm-like creature that roams about this subterranean world. It will not be encountered by the party, but occasionally the ground will rumble as if stirred by a small earthquake as the creature passes below the adventurers!

Most of the tunnels are lined with twisting roots, lit dimly by a phosphorescent fungus that glows a dull green on the surface of the tangle.

Overview of Events

The party will first have to pass through the Reliquary, a bone filled section of the tunnel inhabited by a terrible acid-spitting monster. They might make a brief foray to explore a chamber housing a crew of Opossumen workers, and gain some valuable treasure and possible help if needed. Eventually they will explore and cross the length of the great tunnel, encountering a pair of acolytes at the mouth of the cave on the far side.

After a final visit from the mysterious shadow-child, they will emerge from the tunnel to meet their destiny within the heart of the old Grove of Athax! If they can take advantage of Sender's clues, they have a chance to turn the tables on their supposed masters and reclaim their freedom, otherwise they face almost certain death or a life as cultists!

Way to the Grove Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
3-1	C	Boneflenser
3-2	C	Opossumen Workers
3-4	C	Acolytes of Athax
3-5	C	The Despoiled Grove

Area 3-1: The Reliquary *Your arms and hands burn mightily as you finally reach the bottom of the rung ladder. The near total dark of the claustrophobic journey down has given way to a dull green glow as you sense the space opening behind you. You have arrived in a massive cylindrical cave hidden under the manor house. The*

cave is not empty: piles of bones reaching to the height of a man cover the floor in untidy heaps. A thin path of clear ground twists this way and that between the stacks as it meanders descending deeper into the cave.

The cave is some 30 feet tall, tube-shaped, and runs off in a vaguely straight line for as far as the eye can see. Roots both small and large line almost every inch of the walls, and most are covered with a thin layer of faintly glowing green lichen. The dim light provides just enough radiance to see comfortably about 30-40 paces out. Walking on the bones that fill this section of the cave is extremely difficult, and any activity is at -3.

The bones come from a variety of sources: human and animal. Every one is perfectly clean, scoured meticulously of all tissue and filth. They practically shine. As the players begin to move forth, read or paraphrase the following:

The piles of bones skitter and collapse with the slightest touch, sliding across each other and the makeshift path in front of you. Someone must work diligently to keep the way clear! Up close the bones appeared almost polished in their smoothness, twinkling in the dim light. Suddenly, from off in the dark you hear a sharp clatter as a pile of bones crashes to the ground, followed by a sound similar to hot gravy escaping a steaming pot, sizzling as it strikes the stone below. "Oh yesssss..." a thin raspy voice echoes from the dark, "bones... tasty bones on the move!"

The bone pile extends for about 100 feet along the cave floor before gradually petering out. The horrible **Boneflenser** that stalks this area will observe the party as they make their way through the pile. While never seeing the creature, the party will hear bones sliding in the dark, accompanied by quiet and disturbing mutterings: lips smacking, low laughter, appraisals of bone structure. At an appropriate moment, the creature (which looks like a gigantic deformed iguana with a 20 foot-long tongue) will strike from the dark to add to its collection!

Boneflenser: Init +3; Atk acid tongue +4 ranged (1d5 + acid burn); AC 13; HD 3d6; hp 12; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP acid damage on hit: 1d4 temp personality loss as skin is horribly burned, low-light vision; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

(If the party has more than 10 characters still active, consider adding a second Boneflenser with 8 hp to the fight!)

The Boneflenser will not follow the party out of the bone pile. If the party manages to slay the Boneflenser rather than flee, and search the pile, they discover a 'non-bone' mound shoved into the corner of the cave. Treasures include 1d6 normal weapons, 47 sp, and an exquisite full-length white leopard coat large enough to fit a burly man, with an accompanying fur-lined hat. Undamaged, the coat would fetch hundreds of gold coins, but sadly two broad strips of acid damage render it nearly worthless. (If the players didn't encounter the Rock Demon on the back approach to the manor, a generous Judge could add the Gloves of Esmil the Sharp and/or the healing incense to the pile.)

Area 3-2: The Elevator As you move down the massive tunnel, the layer of glowing roots that emerge from the walls cover almost every free inch. Occasionally, small passageways shoot off the main way, but they are dark and twisting, with no subtle glow to guide the way. The marks on your foreheads continue to burn as if in anticipation as you move down the tunnel. As you step near the side path they flare once again! A return to the main path offers momentary relief. Your destination must wait at the end of this tunnel.

After a short walk, you come upon the largest secondary passageway you've encounter so far. From it emits the golden glow of torches, and you hear the murmur of raised, guttural voices. Peeking around the corner of the tunnel you see a band of animal men, seemingly a twisted blend of men and opossums, sitting on and around a collection of boxes under a large rectangular shaft that rises into the ceiling above.

The creatures are degenerate opossumen, a bizarre blend of man and animal. (A more complete description of the pathetic creatures can be found in **Adventure SC-1: Perils of the Sunken City.**) Opossumen are none too smart, and are used as laborers by the cult. A couple hundred yards down the tunnel another passage leads to the surface and the river. Shipments of goods are ported from boats down to this chamber: the shaft above rises to the large tower platform on the first floor of the manor. Normally the platform would have descended by now to be loaded, but the gathering has interrupted operations. If the party takes any time to observe the band, read or paraphrase the following:

The creatures seem to be extremely bored, and some have taken to playing a game of sorts: two of the creatures are standing some twenty feet apart, while the others gather about shouting encouragement. As you watch in fascination, one of the creatures puts his hands in front of him as if to catch a piece of tossed fruit, while the other rears back to hurl a javelin in his direction! Apparently this game is quite deadly, as you now notice a third creature lying near the side of the cave with a short spear sticking out of his chest! The air is thick with the smell of death and other less savory aromas.

If the players wait long enough, the Judge can whittle down the band as much as he wants as one opossuman after another falls playing *Catch the Javelin*.

Degenerate Opossumen (3-8): Init +0; Atk javelin -2 melee; Dmg 1d4; (or club/bite - 2 melee; Dmg 1d4) AC 11; HP 2; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will -3; AL N

(On attack rolls of 1 an opossuman "plays dead": becoming immobile while its face sets in a rictus smile, releasing foul fluids from unsavory orifices. All foes within 10 feet must make a DC 8 Fort save or be at -2 to all activities while in range.)

If the adventurers kill/drive off the opossumen, they can piece together 3 sets of (filthy, repulsive smelling) hide armor (fits all, but only offers +2 protection), 1d6 javelins and 4 clubs.

Also, if the party has been truly savaged up to this point, this is the last place where potential replacement characters could be introduced. If needed, up to four chained peasants huddle in the corner of the chamber. They will happily join the party if freed from their opossumen captors. (With stories much like the fishermen.)

Area 3-3: The Tunnel Those who have spent time underground sense you are descending deeper into the earth, though the air seems somewhat fresher. A wide secondary tunnel intersects the main passage here, climbing steeply to your left. It appears well traveled, and a brighter light can be detected from that direction.

If players press through the burning of the mark and explore this tunnel, they exit after a few hundred yards near the river and a small dock. The clearing at the cave mouth is surrounded by thick tree cover, and is located on the same side of the river as the manor house, four or five hundred yards down the river from the falls.

When the players return to the main tunnel, read or paraphrase the following:

The way goes on and on as you descend deeper and deeper. The weight of the mighty river must now be roaring over your very heads! Occasionally the ground rumbles as if shaken by a minor earthquake, but the sensation soon moves on. You must have passed hundreds of tiny side tunnels, each capable of hiding almost anything, but the compulsion of the mark drives you on. You can feel you are getting close! Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the tunnel begins to rise. And steepen! In the far distance you can sense a greater light, and the marks on your foreheads begin to pulse once again. With each step you draw closer to your fate. You can feel it!

Area 3-4: The Place of Preparing The way has grown steep: the tunnel now ascends like a great stair! What could have carved this passage you cannot tell, but it is clearly coming to an end. Dim moonlight pours in from the mouth of the tunnel ahead, the tunnel widening into a chamber at its conclusion.

As you draw close, you see that the room is filled with gigantic dark roots that descend from the ceiling and disappear into the floor below, dividing the chamber into separate passages and nooks. From the dimness you hear voices engaged in heated discussion:

"What are we doing here? There were rumors that a Gathering is underway! Shouldn't we be in the Chamber of the Elder Grub? You know Grimmus hates us."

—"Do you believe everything you hear Falsta? We are here to attend the Grey Master and his attendants in the Grove, nothing more! And you should fear boring me more than anything that fat overseer can do! Remember last week when that toady Halfdan spoke of an army of light descending from the south? As if such a force could slip past our spies? Fools blather Falsta, and Athax knows there are enough fools about... fit only for the culling!"

"But what if we are being culled? If at this very moment a gathering of the marked is walking up the sacred tunnel? What then?"

—"Then we will meet them with courage Falsta! If Athax has determined we are weak, we must convince him of our strength by slaying the unworthy! Otherwise we deserve being cast into the lake to burn! Besides, you worry too much, I have seen no sign of any gathering. Pass me some muck melon."

At the first sign of the adventurers, the two acolytes will attack as promised.

Acolytes of Athax (2): Init +1; Atk Shock of Athax +1 spell (1d4); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 9; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

Near the mouth of the tunnel the roots form a cloak room of sorts. Thirty or so dark grey robes with matching cowls hang by hooks here. Anyone not wearing a robe who steps into the evil grove above will feel uncomfortable, and will be shocked for 1 point of damage and pressed back into the tunnel if they continue.

The Final Visit Before the characters exit, they will receive one final message from the manifestation of Sender. Assuming the party has the brass head, read or paraphrase the following:

Once again, the air begins to swirl as a mini-cyclone begins to form in the space before you. The strange shadow-clouded figure of the young girl you have encountered twice before returns in another blast of wind. As before, she stands motionless as her blank eyes move back and forth slowly across the party. Finally, she raises a thin hand and extends a clenched fist. She points first at the party member holding the brass head, then she pivots to gesture at the character holding the sacred Roundtree cord. Finally, she smiles a thin smile, drawing her bone-white thumb across her throat. As the thumb proceeds, a black line trails behind marking her neck, until finally the dark wound widens and erupts upward in a violent fountain of choking dust—the girl vanishing as the tower of particles collapses!

All that remains is for the characters to step out into the moonlight of the despoiled Grove of Athax the Shadow Mage!

Area 3-5: The Despoiled Grove *One might think that tasting the cool night air once again would be a pleasure after the long hours spent in the tunnels below, but not in this place. Black stumps cover the lifeless expanse that surrounds the cave exit. Under friendlier conditions, the view might be spectacular, with the red moon and stars twinkling above, and the black outline of the river twisting far below in the mists and dim light. But now, you feel only dread. A thin path runs from the mouth of the cave to a small overhang at the very top of the hill. Four figures in red hoods line the path, gazing from the shadows of their cowls in your direction, each casually bearing a wicked looked longsword glinting dangerously in the dim light. At the apex of the hill stands a solitary figure dressed in a black robe with a shining white hood and red mask, flanked by a large stump and what appears to be a headless statue. The figure has the face and form of a young woman, but the eyes peeking out from the mask are old and dead, and her raised hand shines in the moonlight as if drenched in blood.*

Below her on the lip of the escarpment lie three struggling figures wrapped in burlap sacks, strapped to wide planks of wood, much like sleds. Far below the overhang the sacred pond shimmers in the night. The white hooded figure extends a rod shaped like a twisted willow tree in your direction. The marks on your forehead are bathed in a sensation bordering on the sensual: "Come forth Children of Athax, and claim your destiny! Reunite the form of the Master and become one with your brothers and sisters. You have been judged and found worthy. Your reward awaits!"

While the high priestess holds the **Rod of Mastery**, it is almost impossible for any of the characters to ignore her commands. (DC 17 Will save to refuse). The priest expects the characters to approach and place the head of the statue upon the body, after which she will begin pronouncing unholy rites, binding the party to the will of

Athax forever. The surviving characters will then be sifted into the various cult occupations as the priestess determines.

Obviously, to some this might constitute a sub-optimal conclusion, but the characters have a way out: if they play along and place the bronze head on the statue, followed immediately by wrapping the neck of the statue with the sacred Roundtree cord provided by Sender, the compulsive power of the mark will be suppressed—Athax himself will reel in terror momentarily, and the unholy hold on his followers and offspring will be temporarily lifted. If this occurs, read or paraphrase the following:

As you place the bronze head on the statue, its eyes suddenly pop open, and you're almost overwhelmed by the full power of Athax's attention! But as you reach out with trembling hands and wrap the sacred cord around the statue's neck, its eyes go wide and the bronze face freezes once more: the sky itself is split by a horrifying cry! The dark compulsion that has compelled you for so many days is suddenly lifted! The white cowled figure shrieks and stumbles, the rod falling from her trembling hand. The four other hooded figures drop to their knees, clutching their heads as their swords tumble to the ground, shrieking in distinctly feminine voices.

The players have two rounds to act while the cult members recover. All cultists are AC 10 while recovering. If a character grabs the rod while the priestess is staggered, and hurls it into the sacred pool below, she will become so agitated that she will fling herself from the precipice, tumbling down the steep hill after the rod, eventually splashing into the lake to be burned alive by the sacred waters! (If the high priestess somehow recovers the Rod of Mastery during the fight, she will take a round to swipe the cord away from the statue, then turn on the party, reasserting her command.)

The Test The character that claims the rod will have to overcome one final temptation to part with the powerful artifact: immediately after grasping the rod the character will gain 6 points of temporary Intelligence, Will, and Personality! The character will feel power surging through his or her body, and can make one 1d6 shocking attack with the rod immediately. The rod promises more, much more if the character will only bend to the will of the cult! The power is a fiction, of course, and will abandon the character as soon as the high priestess is within range to grab the rod. The artifact will turn on the player, exerting energy to lock the muscles of the character while the priestess reclaims the rod: she will immediately strike the defenseless character down for his insolence!

High Priestess of Athax: Init +1; Atk Rod of Mastery +4 spell (1d6+2) or Fists +3 melee (1d6+1); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 16; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP Bracers of Stoneskin (-3 to critical rolls made against the bearer) SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +3; AL C.

During the first round of the fight, clever players can snatch up the swords of the shrieking Cullers, to use them against their former owners. These female warriors are quite skilled with their fists however, and will put up a tough fight once they recover.

Cult Cullers (4): Init +2; Atk Longsword +2 melee (1d8) or Fists +2 melee (1d4+1); AC 13; HD 2d8; hp 11; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +1; AL C.

The three struggling figures near the precipice are to be offered to the sacred pool as part of the dark rites binding the party members to Athax—sent down the steep hill on a final wild ride on the planks of wood. If the players offered a character to the well in the town

square, that character will be one of the trapped figures. (Staring daggers at his former comrades, most likely!) Also, any characters captured by the Shambling Horrors and dragged into the wood could be here as well. If fewer than three have met such fates, then the roster can be filled out with the cook and his wife, poor Old Gus, or even an opossum or two. During the fight, former party members can be freed to join the fray in a round (perhaps even Gus can take up arms in disgust for his treatment at the hands of the cult!) A character sacrificed to the pit in the village might have plans other than helping the party if freed...

If the players manage to defeat the forces of the cult, their moment of triumph is short. Within minutes the quiet of the night is split by the cries of dozens of voices echoing from the cave mouth. The entire host previously gathered in the Chamber of the Elder Grub is now rushing up the tunnel, sensing that something has gone terribly wrong. The party has only minutes to decide what to do!

The Cullers each wear a lovely platinum ring shaped like entwined vipers worth 100 gp. (Easily recognized by any member of the cult.) If the body of the High Priest is available, she wears the silver Bracers of Stoneskin, and has a pouched filled with 20 pp.)

(If your players failed to put Sender's clues together, you'll have to improvise. Perhaps Sender's avatar could arrive in a whirlwind to grant the players one round of free action, or the prisoners could break free, distracting the cultists for a while, giving the players a chance to knock the rod from the priest's hand. Or you might just let the dice fall where they may!)

Escaping the Cult The hill itself is lined with broken stumps and thick thorns, and is nearly impossible to descend safely by climbing down. However, the area of the hill below the precipice has been made smooth to facilitate the passage of the sacrificial planks. There are dozens of planks stacked near the mouth of the

cave, and players can take advantage of this to ride down the hill to safety! If they choose to do so, read or paraphrase the following:

You can't believe that you are attempting such a dangerous drop, but as hordes of hooded figures erupt from the mouth of the cave, you know you have little choice! Pushing over the side of the cliff, you pick up speed rapidly as you fly down the hill. You bounce wildly as stumps go racing by: each would mean certain death if you slammed into one at these speeds. You hear the screams and shouts of your friends echoing off the side of the hill as they take the same insane plunge!

The dark mass of the lake grows and grows as you fly down the hill, your stomach tightening into a thick knot. Finally you slam into the cool waters, swallowed whole by its chill embrace... and immediately feel a peace like none you have experienced in ages. The burning on your forehead has been wiped clean! Your mind is clear of any compulsion. As you surface your body tingles with a feeling of total calm: you have been healed of all your wounds... the curse of the mark has been broken!

As you gather with your comrades at the edge of the water, you see cultists shaking their fists and screaming at you from the top of the hill. But none seem willing to take your path. You detect shambling horrors roaming at the edge of the woods, but they seem confused and aimless, and none wander in your direction.

Quickly you assemble, and take off up the now familiar path back towards the Sending Stone and its transporting magic. The vile compulsion that has hounded and driven you is gone, and you can't wait to taste the freedom of the Great City! You are free!

Wrapping Up

The plans of the Cult of Athax have been seriously disrupted, but eventually they will regain their fallen strength. (If the party has successfully removed the Rod of Mastery from their control—and thus the power to summon a Gathering of the Marked—it will take years.) There are still many Cullers and Gatherers about in the lands, however, and the cult will eventually seek an opportunity to repay the party for what they have done. But that lies in future days.

For now let the party enjoy their spoils in the markets of the Great City. At least for this day, they are heroes indeed!



Appendix A: Rumors

"Yer' one of the marked? It's bad luck to be speaking to the likes of you! Your kind go through that cursed stone and are never seen again. It's the Lady of Luck's way of protecting her own."

"You ever notice how none of the marked ever have a pa around? It's a curse on the mum for her loose ways!"

"Rumor has it that you marked are sent to a damned village where the trees walk about like giants. They pluck off your heads for sport! Would you like to buy an axe?"

"My gran tells me she once had a friend who had the marking and left. Many years later at the coronation of the Lady of Silver Towers she saw her in the crowd. She was carrying a sword, and the way she moved she seemed to know how to use it! No one in our village had a sword... gran didn't know what to think!"

"I once saw one of the marked from my village many years after touching the stone! A minstrel he was in the Great City, singing like he had not a care in the world! Tried to talk up my niece until I sent him off. Pretended not to know me, but I knew him: he was Ginger Colton's boy no mistake."

"You must hurry to the stone! I once knew someone who tried to hide away and pretend he wasn't marked. They found him a week later in the woods... he'd carved away the top of his head piece by piece with a skinning knife. Can't think of a worse way to go..."

"They say the the demon of the stone always sends your kind to the same place, though no one knows where that is. Don't know how they'd know that, truth be told, but it was my understanding the demon never does the same thing twice."

"Wherever you go, get yourself back here! This mystery has been going on since before my Grandpa's time, and it's not right that so many of our son's and daughters are taken away without word or story. It's just not right!"

Chapter 5

Lair of the Mist Men

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What Terror Waits in the Mist?

Lair of the Mist Men: A Level 1 DCC RPG Adventure

Introduction

The day has come when you can finally confront an enemy previously cloaked in mist, hidden and impervious to retaliation. For the past 3 months, strange creatures known as Mist Men have plagued your village and roads, striking without warning or apparent purpose, only to vanish into the mists from whence they came. After their latest raid, however, they left something behind: a talisman found by a farm boy that will guide you to their hidden lair. Finally, your questions will be answered, and revenge will be yours to savor!

Overview

Lair of the Mist Men is a short adventure designed to be run in a session or two for 6-8 1st-level characters. Judges can flesh out the adventure by adding encounters in the swamp leading to the lair.

This adventure respects your initiative. If you think an encounter is too easy, increase the challenge! Too difficult? Just drop the number of foes. If a particular enemy doesn't fit in your campaign, replace them with a logical substitute with the same stats. Always bend the text to your vision!

Motivation

It's assumed that the party of adventures is seeking the Lair of the Mist Men to redress the raids that have plagued the surrounding villages for months. (Motivated either out of a sense of duty or acting as hired swords.)

Alternately players might be on the trail of strange magics rumored to be in the possession of these new enemies, and have paid the guide to lead them through the swamp.

Adventure Flow

After trekking through a fetid swamp, players will arrive at a large stone massif rising from the mire. They will need to defeat a band of Greyfolk and their outraged shaman, primitive swamp-dwellers who hold the rock (and its mystical cave) sacred. Players will then have to climb the treacherous path that encircles the massif, surviving an ambush by boulder-dropping Mist Men.

Once inside the cave, the true fun begins. Players will pass through mystical gates to move between chambers of the Mist Men lair, possibly rescuing captured villagers and gaining valuable information. They will battle alien creatures and experience reality-bending environments, all the while struggling to maintain a grip on their sanity as they move closer to the core of the Lair. Finally, at the heart of the Lair, they will uncover the true cause of the Mist Men's continuing presence, and encounter a deadly new foe that might plague the characters for years to come!

Getting to the Lair

To this point, it has proved impossible for anyone to track the Mist Men back to their base of operation. They travel too quickly, their tracks vanishing within minutes in the roiling black mist that seems to follow their every move, and they leave behind no clues.

The morning after the most recent attack on a remote farm, a farm lad made a startling discovery: one of the Mist Men weapons (a featureless silver tube) remained behind in the tall grass, emitting a keening whine just above the threshold of hearing. **Mingus**, a legendary local trapper, soon discovered that rather than burning the hand of all who attempted to grasp it, this particular tube was cool to the touch. When Mingus orientated the tube north-northwest, he noticed the whine cut out. Marching five miles north on the edge of the swamp to triangulate the angle where the sound cut off, the wily veteran guessed immediately where the two lines would cross: **Korik's Heart**: a massive rock resting twenty miles distant in the heart of the swamp. He will lead the party to this place, but at great risk, for the rock is sacred to the primitive folks of the swamp, and they have been known to feast on intruders!

At the Sacred Rock

Player Introduction

After two days slogging through the mire, it seems there is no part of you that isn't covered in clinging muck. Your boots, pack, cloak: all reek with the odor of the swamp. As you look about, the eyes of your compatriots peer back from faces stained brown by drying mud and runnels of filthy sweat. The swamp mist that has been your constant companion still surrounds you, but you now sense a subtle change: a chillness wholly foreign to the fetid swamp brushes your skin, and your hairs (those still free of the muck) rise as if bathed in some strange energy.

"We're here," mutters old Mingus, your guide, checking the strange rod he carries one final time. Pointing up into the mists, he smiles grimly. "I believe that to be the fell place you seek..."

"What madness is this?" You wonder. As you stare ahead, you can barely detect a dark mass rising from the miasma of the swamp, but it is soon obscured by the mist, the ever present mist...

"Touch the rod, fool," your guide barks, "I've told you it is the key to this strange magic." As you place your hand on the cool metal of the rod, to your amazement the mist seems to peel back like curtains caught in the wind, and the lair of your prey is revealed for the first time: a towering stone massif rising from the swamp, a precarious path encircling it as it climbs. Near the top, a cave reaches into the heart of the stone. But that is not all: above the cave bizarre spheres of —brick?— seem to erupt from the stone like gigantic boils, coursing with some strange energy! Your guide is correct, this place can only be the Lair of the Mist Men!

Korik's Heart: The Sacred Rock

The stone massif called Korik's Rock rises out of the swamp as a solitary sentinel, dominating the land for miles around. In the best of times it is obscured by the haze of the mire, but since the arrival of the Mist Men it is perpetually cloaked in an uncanny clinging mist. It is a place of tremendous eldritch power: a soft spot between planes and a nexus of ever-replenished arcane energy. For generations without number, cultures have risen and fallen within its shadow. But in all ages the place has been considered sacred by shamans and thaumaturges of every ilk.

A thin path climbs the rock, circling about it twice before arriving at a cave that has long been the center place of mystical activity. It is a habitation of visions and dark rituals, and is now the entrance to the Mist Men's lair.

Before the arrival of the Mist Men, the guardians of the rock consisted of a rabble of loosely connected clans known collectively as the **Greyfolk**. Once great builders and sorcerers, the Greyfolk shattered their culture centuries past in a terrible arcane war. The survivors eke out a meager existence in the swamp, literally preying on the more civilized folk who live near the edge of the swamp. The arrival of a new enemy has further damaged their precarious existence, and they've suffered many casualties at the hands of foes they cannot begin to understand or combat.

Their leader, the Greyfolk shaman **Elock-tad** is desperate to maintain the confidence of his beleaguered followers. The arrival of the party is a perfect opportunity to strike at a foe his minions can

comprehend, and perhaps overwhelm. A round of ritual sacrifices might regain the favor of his dark gods, granting him the power to drive out those who have desecrated the Sacred Rock!

Fury of the Greyfolk

As the party approaches the rock, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the towering rock, your guide steps aside to let you pass. "I must return to the village with confirmation of this location, this secret cannot die with us. With luck, we will cross paths on your return. Oh, and remember, keep your eyes open for Greyfolk. They do not take kindly to strangers, and rumors have it that they hold this part of the swamp sacred."

Bidding farewell, you move forward, the ground rising as you approach a tangle of low twisted willow trees. A thin path lined with tree stumps leads to a stone megalith that appears to grant access to the tangle.

When the party enters the clearing, read or paraphrase the following:

You quickly emerge into a large clearing. On the far side of the open space the path continues up the side of the massif. It appears a crude path has been carved into the rock, climbing into the mist. In the center of the clearing, a large stone table stained dark crimson squats half buried in the turf.

The calls of the swamp have increased in intensity as you have moved toward the rock, until even the former shop-dwellers of the party can tell that something is terribly wrong. Suddenly the fierce calls cease, and a single guttural voice splits the silence:

"Blassimers! Descrators! You spoil the Between Place! We will clean Ki-Re-Raknet! You will be cut out!"

With this cry, a swarm of shapes suddenly erupt from the surrounding bramble: tall mud-covered men with stringy grey hair waving short stabbing spears!

Greyfolk Warriors (10): Init 0; Atk spear +1 (1d6); AC 11; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref +1, Will 0; AL C.

Elock-tad the Greyfolk Shaman: Init +2; Atk spear +1 melee (1d6+1) or Curse of the Rock +2 ranged (1d6 and DC 12 Will save or confusion 1d4 rounds, 30' range) AC 12; HP 11; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref +1, Will +3; AL C.

(Confused characters roll a d4 for their action: 1) Attack nearest creature while shrieking in strange tongue. 2) Move away from combat at half speed. 3) Gaze up at the rock. 4) Act normally.)

Elock-tad will hang back shouting curses while his warriors take the fight to the party. If he or six of the warriors are slain, the remainder will flee into the swamp, leaving behind 1d6 crude but serviceable spears. If the Shaman escapes, he will attempt to rally more warriors to the cause and can be used to bedevil the party on their return journey.

The stone table is covered in dried blood. Bones, human and otherwise, clog the underbrush surrounding the clearing. If the party searches for any length of time the character with the highest luck discovers a silver torq worth 30 gp lost amidst the detritus.

Fury of the Greyfolk



The Lair of the Mist Men

Overview

Since their arrival three months past, the Mist Men have proven a deadly threat to all who live within range of their predations. But none of their actions (at least originally) were motivated by malice: they are simply a colony of castaways trapped in a reality they are struggling to comprehend. If not bound to the Sacred Rock against their will, they would have departed long ago. But a second dark power has every reason to keep them chained, and all will benefit if the party can uncover this truth and sever the link that binds the increasingly desperate Mist Men to this reality!

Background

The Mist Men are travelers of a sort, beings of energy moving between planes of existence that bear little resemblance to our own. Normally it would be impossible for them to drift into a reality such as the players inhabit, but Korik's Heart acts as a gateway that makes the transference possible. The fit is uncomfortable for the Mist Men however, and they would have quickly moved on if possible. But sinister envoys of a power capable of manipulating gateways like Korik's Heart —**The Vortex Temple**— detected the arrival of the ethereal travelers and quickly moved in to trap them as a spider in her web, feeding off the Mist Men's raw energy.

The Mist Men are now engaged in a desperate struggle to free themselves from this dark power, but the manner in which they manipulate energy and matter leaves them nearly defenseless against the new threat. Mist Men adapt to the distinct realities of the planes they move through by shaping matter to create analogs of forms common to the realm they currently inhabit. But the forms they create break down in the presence of the arcane devices used by The Vortex Temple to trap and bleed them of energy.

As their energy reserves reach critical levels, they have turned to the surrounding environment in a desperate attempt to fashion local 'resources' into forms that can engage their enemy. That this involves kidnapping local farmers and livestock and butchering them to create horrific hybrids fused together with cosmic goo means nothing to them, but for the remaining villagers trapped in the heart of the Lair, the terror is all too real.

Physical Environment of the Lair

The Lair of the Mist Men is made up of numerous 'bubbles' of reality connected by cosmic gates, all existing inside, below, or on the edges of Korik's Heart. Most of the environment's domed chambers will appear almost mundane to the adventurers. Instead of walls of gleaming machinery, the party will encounter stone, worked wood, and iron. But the translation is not perfect, and everything will appear slightly off. Colors will be too bright, textures not quite right. The air itself will seem too thick and cloying. The cumulative effect of all this dissonance and the basic strangeness of this alternate space will eventually take a toll on the party, and some will struggle to maintain a grip on their sanity!



Peruse **Appendix A** at the end of this chapter for a fun method of dealing with the sanity-bending effects of visiting the Lair.

Mist Men Appearance

The default form for the Mist Men encountered is based on a race they met long ago in a reality somewhat analogous to the adventurer's world. The race's breathing requirements are somewhat different, which explains the special canisters and masks they wear. If the Mist Men were not starved for energy they would fashion a new form suited perfectly for their new environment, but creating new living 'templates' is extremely expensive in terms of energy required, so they must make do with what they have. Existing forms can be broken down to raw energy, at which point the memories gained while in the new form are slowly (2-3 days) reabsorbed into the colony's 'hive mind.'

Lair Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
A	T/C	Mist Men Guards
B	T	The Portals
C	T/C	Room of Changing
D	C	Transmutatron Horrors
E	C	Mist Men and Rag Men
H	T	The Place Between
K	C	The Vortex Advance Party

Area A – Approaching the Cave: *You follow the thin path exiting the clearing, and begin to climb as you circle the massive rock. As the swamp recedes below, you find yourself in a strange netherworld floating above the mists. The rock path before you is often slick, seldom more than 3-4 feet wide, and finding your footing is a challenge. The drop-off to your right is not sheer, but the idea of tumbling down the side of the massive rock into the swamp below holds no charm. Suddenly from above, you detect the sound of clattering stones, and a small boulder the size of your head whips past you into the haze below!"*

The thin path is known as the Shaman's Road, and in many places it has been literally carved from the rock. The Mist Men guard it closely. While they came into this world oblivious to the ways of men, the Mist Men are slowly learning to adapt to the savagery of the swamp. Five guards are stationed at the top of the path at the mouth of the cave, and will rain down stones on all who attempt to approach. Players will need to 'run the gauntlet' for about 50 feet of path before they can round the corner and move beyond the danger zone.

From that point on players will make one more circuit of the rock before reaching the mouth of the cave. When players approach the cave, the Mist Men will draw their silver tubes and attack to kill.

Mist Men (5): Init 0; Atk rods +2 ranged (1d4); Boulders +1 ranged (1d4 and DC 10 Ref save or slip and drop weapon. If save misses by 5 or more, players tumble off edge for an additional 2d4 damage and will need to re-climb from swamp below) AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; AL N.

Lair of the Mist Men



Area A: Inside the Cave: *As you step inside the cave, you are nearly overwhelmed by the sheer sense of age present in this place. Nearly every inch of the smooth rock walls have been carved or painted in some primitive manner. Many of the crude animal or abstract shapes have been worn smooth by the years but others are obviously of more recent make. The air seems to crackle with eldritch power.*

As you press deeper into the cave, you are confronted with a startling scene: as the chamber broadens toward the back, a sphere of glowing blue stone unlike the cave walls juts into the chamber! A door of some sort seems to grant entry to the cottage-sized sphere, but it is filled with a mass of green vapor swirling like a whirlpool to the netherworld!

It is impossible to see into the portal. Players can stick their hands or other objects into the swirling mist experiencing nothing more than a strange tingling. Once more than half of their body passes into the portal, they will be drawn in and sucked down what appears to be a gelatinous tube of pulsing green energy, eventually popping out the other side of the portal in Area B. As characters pass through the tube, they will experience their first taste of the madness of the Lair. (See **Appendix A** for one approach to handle the slow onset of Lair Madness.)

Area B: The Portal Chamber: *You pass through the strange portal, dumped unceremoniously into a chamber shaped like a half-sphere the size of the small house. The walls are of simple cut stone, blank grey and smooth to the touch. But the color of the stone seems to somehow... dance. The chamber is bare save for three circles of midnight black seemingly painted on the floor in the center of the chamber, and another green portal on the far wall.*

As players recover from the strange journey through the first portal (and perhaps begin dealing with the first stages of Lair Madness) find ways to hint at the strangeness of the place. In most areas of the Lair, all surfaces are in some sense reactive to the thoughts of those nearby, so occasionally startle your players with momentary reflections of loved ones/enemies flashing on some surface, or a distant grumbling hum that sounds vaguely like a hated schoolmaster from years gone by...

This chamber is currently being reconfigured by the Mist Men to conserve energy, and is in a half-finished state. If a character steps on circle 1, they will fall through the floor and immediately tumble from a hole that appears in the roof of the chamber to crash onto the member of the party with the lowest luck score. (DC 12 Ref save by each of 1d4 dmg.) Circle 2 will teleport the first character who steps on it into a globe of restorative goo seemingly floating in the infinity of space, from which they will suddenly return five minutes later fully healed. If they enter the globe at full strength, they will instead receive a +2 luck bonus that will apply on their next luck roll. To those remaining in the chamber, the player will seem to vanish, the circle inactive from that point forward. Circle 3 will attempt to rebuild the character who steps on it from scratch, but will succeed only in granting anyone who steps on it a mop of bright red hair in the Mist Men style!

The portal on the far side of the room (and all other green portals) behaves exactly like the one the party just passed through.

Area C: The Room of Changing *As you emerge once again from the sickening passageway, you find yourself in a chamber shaped much like the one you just left, but on a much larger scale. However, there's one startling difference: above you, instead of a stone dome, lurks a dark night sky filled with millions of shining, glimmering stars!*

The ceiling is illusionary, and its appearance will be changing shortly! (Though characters with stargazing in their background will immediately recognize that the constellations bear no resemblance to those they know!) The Room of Changing acts as a battle trainer for the Mist Men, and the environment can be changed at will by those with the proper skill and knowledge to imagine different threats. The players possess neither of these things, so the room will react somewhat chaotically to their disorganized thoughts.

After 10 seconds, players will hear a 'click' that echoes about the chamber, and the scene will switch to a completely new environment (domed ceiling and floor) swarming with monsters. Every two rounds, the scene will change again. All of the 'foes' will charge directly at the adventures, have the same stats, and will vanish if they suffer any damage, only to be replaced by new foes with the next shift. Feel free to re-create past enemies from the minds of the characters, or use foes from the list below:

- Foot long scorpions racing through a blazing desert.
- Angry villagers storming through a burning village at night.
- Dog-sized vampiric rabbits leaping about a bone littered field.
- Smiling cherubs with flaming eyes and red bat-wings flitting amongst puffy clouds wielding sharp little spears.

If players attempt to use either of the doors on the far side of the chamber to escape, they will find they are inactive. (The door they came through still works.) In the center of the chamber is a small platform bearing three lecterns, each with a large key-like shape jutting from the top. Turning the center key ends the simulations. Turning the left and right keys activate the appropriate door leading to areas D and E respectively.

Force Beasts (12): Init 0; Atk varies +0 melee (1d4); AC 8; HP 1; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will 0; AL N.

Area D: The Transmutatron Horrors *While your passage through the portals remains an uncanny experience, the scene before you leaves you breathless! Another circular chamber opens before you, a large contraption towering above you to your left. It seems to have been fashioned from huge boards of bleached driftwood and crackles with some demonic energy. Two 'arms' reach out from the machine, each with a creature tied to the top: on the first a chicken struggles in a shower of feathers, on the other rests what appears to be the still form of an old man. On a low platform in line with the arms, a young man lies bound by a thin cage of metal, shrieking in pain.*

Two of the Mist creatures hover over the man, while a third stands in a corner next to a large cage holding two creatures of nightmare. With a muffled shout, the third Mist Man throws open the cage door, and the two monsters, seemingly some unholy blend of beetles and pigs, scuttle across the room toward you!

Exo-Hogs (2): Init 0; Atk tusks +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HP 9; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref 0, Will -2; AL N.

Mist Men (3): Init 0; Atk ranged +2 melee (1d4 or Stun: DC 10 Fort Save or unconscious for 5-20 minutes); AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; AL N.

The machine is central to the Mist Men efforts to create a hybrid foe capable of battling their enemies. So far their efforts have proved less than satisfactory. The exo-hogs are powerful, but difficult to control, and they tend to disassemble in clouds of ichorous goo when brought close to the devices of the Vortex Temple foes. The old man has been dead for days, but the Mist Men haven't quite figured this out, and their sense of smell is quite primitive in their current form. The young man is named Saynen, and is generally unharmed—save for a clucking chicken head sprouting from his neck—but is quite mad. If the players treat him with kindness and attempt to gently extract information, they will be rewarded with the following info: (Bullying will only elicit enraged clucks.)

- *They have the others in the pens. Not many left... beware the rag men! Beware the rag men!*
- *They cut Sue up! Right in front of me like it was nothing! Put one piece there... another there! What are these things? Why are they doing this?*
- *They took Brinlock through a room full of stars to spy on the triangle men through the crack in the world! The triangle men are doing something they want to stop! But something jumped out of a star and bit him! When he came back he could only tell that story over and over again until they chopped him up...*
- *Take me with you! I'll kill anything you want me to! Do you want me to kill him over there? Do you?!?*

If armed, Saynen will fight alongside the party like, well, a mad man. His chicken head will shriek horrible curses with each deranged stroke. He can also describe in general the path back to the pens in Area E.

The machine is controlled by Mist Men mind powers, and thus immune to the twisted imaginations of the players. The chicken on the machine is alive and completely edible.

The red portal (and all other red portals on the map) travel to other chambers in the Lair inaccessible to the players. The surface will resist passage as if the players were pressing against a wall of gelatin. If players are having too easy a go, Mist Men can appear through these portals at any time, or you can make them passable to add extra chambers of your own design to the Lair.

Area E: The Pens *As you step from the portal, you are nearly overwhelmed by the reek that permeates the chamber before you: a thick miasma of offal, blood and death! Three Mist Men stand rigidly near two crude pens that have been constructed on the far side of this circular chamber. The first pen is packed with pigs, chickens, goats, cows, and a few filthy villagers. The second contains horrors almost too terrible to describe: twitching gangly creatures that seem to consist of body parts from many creatures, haphazardly stitched together with glowing eldritch twine!*

Upon noticing intruders, two of the Mist Men will draw their silver tubes and attack while the third releases the Rag Men.

Rag Men (8): Init -3; Atk punch +0 (1d4+1 from burning ooze); AC 8; HP 4; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref 0, Will -2; AL N.

Mist Men (3): Init 0; Atk ranged +2 melee (1d4 or Stun: DC 10 Fort Save or unconscious for 5-20 minutes); AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; AL N.

The Rag Men represent early efforts on the part of the Mist Men. They drip ichorous ooze wherever they go, and when dropped to 0 hit points explode in a fountain of spraying slime. Anyone facing a Rag Man when it goes down must make a DC 7 Ref save or be blinded the next round. (If a player attempts to protect their eyes while attacking, forgo the save, but give them a -2 penalty to hit.)

There are 3 surviving villagers in the pens, and if anything they are even more crazed than Saynen in Area D. They will fight with great vigor, but offer little information other than repeating 'Talk to Saynen! They took him, but he knows!' If Saynen is with the party, they will fall in behind him and follow his every crazed command.

Areas F & G: Storage Chambers *After the insanity of recent destinations, this chamber appears almost mundane: a collection of boxes and cast-asides, and two additional portals, one red, one green. Tis a wonder... even the Mist Men have junk rooms!*

Players can rest safely in either chamber for a time. (Unless you wish to have more foes appear through the portals.) Spread amongst the clutter of the two rooms are many uncanny Mist Men artifacts, and a few useful items:

- A giant mahogany foot the size of a small cow, with four toes.
- A leather-bound log book written in a language no one understands, but filled with amazing charts of unknown lands and sketches of bizarre creatures.
- 18 still-edible ration bars wrapped in a strange crinkly paper labeled *Munchy Lunchies Lembas Plus, twill fill a stout man for TWO days!*
- A box with two matching earrings that allow separate wearers to hear each other's conversations regardless of distance. (But which cause the bearer's ear to imperceptibly grow over time, eventually swelling to half again the normal size.)
- A jet black wand that when used by a wizard will stain the wizard's hand a deep burgundy for ever more, but grants a +1 casting bonus to any spell involving fire.
- A stack of scrolls filled with incomprehensibly clumsy erotic poetry from a race who refer to themselves as the "All Out Lords of the Muddy Pomp."
- A lovely short sword that remains ever sharp and grants a +1 bonus to damage. On a critical it does an additional 1d4 damage, filling the room with the sound of ethereal whispers.
- Eight vials of green brackish liquid that restore 1d12 HP per horrifying dose.

The Lair is lit throughout by the ambient glow of blue/green lichen that cover many sections of the walls. (The lichen is actually the Mist Men intelligences in their most natural physical form.)



Area H: The Place Between *Of all the sights you have witnessed in this strange place, nothing has prepared you for what lies before you now. You stare into a massive sphere seemingly filled with the very stars of the sky! Amorphous shapes drift between the lights, with an occasional racing spark dancing from one side of the sphere to the next. The place is impossibly large, dropping below and climbing above to heights and depths the Sacred Rock could not possibly contain! And yet here it is, and it would seem ones needs to cross this space, as a sister doorway awaits you on the opposite side of the sphere.*

The boundaries between dimensions are thin here, and things tend to drift in and out from the great beyond. The size of the space is deceptive as well, and though it appears impossibly large, a determined traveller can cross it in 3-4 rounds by 'swimming' through the nearly zero gravity space. The greatest dangers are the otherworldly entities that drift about in the cosmic soup. To be touched by one of these creatures is to invite madness, or worse!

Any character with a swimming background can cross the divide in three rounds. Those without take four. Each round a character is in open space, roll a d8:

- 1) A 'shooting star' of chaotic energy rushes toward the character. (DC 13 Ref save or roll on the Cosmic Corruption chart.)
- 2) An ethereal mass drifts lazily in the direction of the character. (DC 7 Ref save to clumsily swim out of the way or take one step on the path to madness. See **Appendix A.**)
- 3) A wave of entropy engulfs the character. (DC 10 Will save or take one step on the path to madness. See **Appendix A.**)
- 4) Lighting strike from beyond! 1d6 electrical damage. (DC 10 Fort save for half dmg)
- 5+) The character moves safely.

Probably the safest method to cross is for a single adventurer to make the journey trailing some type of line, tying it off on the far side in some manner. Characters that pull along a fixed line can cross in two rounds. Regardless, reward your players for creative solutions —remember all the farm animals in the pens!— and stress the absolute weirdness of the environment.

Cosmic Corruption (roll 1d6)

- 1) The character's eyes turn jet black, filled with twinkling stars.
- 2) If the target is a wizard, he forgets one random spell, but comprehends a new random one on the spot. Non-wizards take one step on the path to madness.

- 3) The character's skin glows a subtle blue in the dark.
- 4) From this point forward, the character will no longer recognize his own name, and will refer to himself as "StarRider".
- 5) The vastness of the cosmos is simply too much to comprehend. Lose 1 point of intelligence permanently, but gain one point of personality.
- 6) The character takes on aspects of a comet of ill luck. The first person to touch the character each day loses 1 point of luck.

Area I: The Crack in the World *You emerge in the smallest chamber encountered yet. The room positively shines with the amount of radiant lichen covering the walls. To your right is another portal, glowing bright blue like none you've seen before. To your left is a jagged crack in the wall large enough to step through from which pours a languid purple light. Through this crack you feel, more than hear, a bone rattling hum that cycles on and off every two seconds like an unholy heartbeat.*

When the players reach this point, the Mist Men intelligence will at long last coordinate all that they have learned of the inhabitants of this plane, and comprehend that perhaps these primitive beings might actually be the answer to their problems in confronting the Vortex Temple. The glowing lichen on the wall will begin shifting into strange formations, and images will begin to flash in the players minds. Choose memories that will resonate with the players, but they should involve three themes:

- **Help** (party rescuing the villagers, saving a friend from a fall)
- **Binding / Leeching** (mosquito sucking blood, ship at anchor)
- **Reward** (chest of treasure, cheering crowd)

If the players peek through the crack in the wall they'll see a twisting passageway of natural stone bathed in purple light. Just inside the path are the remains of numerous hybrid creatures that have failed to penetrate the Vortex Temple's cave. Most have disintegrated, but there is a clear demarcation point where the Mist Men matter cuts off, and the passageway beyond that point is clear and bare.

Area J: The Core *This blue portal resists all your attempts to pass through it.*

The portal from area I leads to the Core of the Lair and is inaccessible to the players as long as the Vortex Temple device is in operation. If the players engage the enemy in area K and return, the portal will operate differently...



Area K: The Vortex Gate As you make your way down the thin rock passageway, you sense that you are no longer in the Lair—the air has changed—and the stone feels like stone once more. The pulsing hum continues to grow in intensity until you arrive at the mouth of the passageway to peek warily into a large natural cavern. Before you is a strange triangular device—apparently the source of the sound—that glows purple with each pulse. Attached to the device is a thick rope of some kind twisting toward the back of the cavern.

Through this rope—in a manner that is difficult to describe—you can sense the power of the Lair, in all its strange and twisted character, being drawn away toward yet another portal. But this new portal is different than those you have encountered in the Lair: larger, triangular in shape, and glowing purple. Through the portal you can even see trees, fields, and a distant village! You are unable to enjoy the view for long, and quickly duck back into cover: the room is inhabited, and the occupants are no Mist Men!

The Vortex Temple, amongst other talents, are masters of gate travel, using them to move instantly between all the places of power in this world. They also seek out sacred sites such as Korik's Heart to probe them for artifacts of power. It was pure luck that the Mist Men stumbled into their net. But stumble they did, and the Temple has no intentions of letting their reluctant prey depart!

The power of the Lair is being drawn into the triangular device, which passes down the 'rope' and through the purple gate to a matching device on the far side. The device also acts as an anchor that keeps the Lair trapped in this plane of existence.

This advance party from the Temple consists of 4 Guardians of the Vortex and one leader, known as a Seeker. Each appears as a tall, thin human, masked and hooded, dressed in dark purple (almost black) leather armor. Stitched across each chest is an upside down triangle of midnight black. The Guardians each bear two wicked knives, and the Seeker is adept in arcane powers, creating a blast of fire by forming his fingers into the shape of a triangle before him. All have the ability to teleport short distances to aid them in battle.

They will silently—and apparently without coordination—leap to attack at the first sign of the party. The Guardians will engage the front line, focusing on any who appear to possess ranged or eldritch powers, teleporting if necessary to achieve an advantageous position. The Seeker will hang back in the vicinity of the device, sending out arcs of deadly fire.

(Note: there are many large boulders strewn about the chamber to provide cover for the successfully sneaky.)

Guardians of the Vortex (4): Init +4; Atk knife +4 (1d4+1); AC 13; HP 9; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d16; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +1; AL C. (Special: short range teleport, 20', once per day)

Seeker: Init +4; Atk Triangle of Fire +3 ranged (1d10), 30' range) AC 12; HP 11; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; AL C. (Special: short range teleport, 50', twice per day)

The forces of the Vortex Temple will fight to the death, and if defeated, the Seeker will make a final gesture toward the vortex device before he falls. Its 'pulse' will increase in intensity, and the cavern will begin to shake violently. Finally, after about 60 seconds, the device will detonate, vaporizing the entire cavern. (The same chain of events will be triggered if the 'rope' from the device is severed. Consider it AC 12 with 10 hp. Anyone who targets it will gain the immediate attention of all the servants of the Vortex.)

Once the Vortex device is no longer operating, the Lair will immediately begin the process of leaving our space, eventually riding the shock wave of the Vortex device's explosion to travel to some reality beyond the comprehension of men.

Wrapping Up

At the close of the fight—in either victory or defeat—if the party dashes back towards the Lair, they will find that the blue portal is now shaded green, and if they pass through it they will suddenly appear on their backs in Area A. If they have defeated the Vortex forces, and the destruction sequence has begun, all of Korik's Heart will shake as the Lair of the Mist Men breaks free from the Vortex device and begins transitionally away from this plane. The 'bubble' entrance to the Lair will slowly vanish, leaving nothing behind but the original cave wall covered in primitive art.

Alternately, in victory the party might wish to jump through the Vortex gate before it collapses, finding themselves in the presence of another Vortex device resting on a bluff overlooking a river village. This could be any location in your world. (Alternately, the gate will take them to the struggling community of

Blessed Home, starting point for **Adventure M-1: Against the Vortex Temple**, where your players can learn much more about the Vortex Temple and their sinister plans for humanity!)

If the players were defeated by the Vortex forces, they can attempt to make their way through the Lair again at some point. The Mist Men will not engage them in any way, but the players will still need to deal with the maddening effects of the Lair. (Alternately, you could have the first portal transport them directly to the Crack in the World.) Whether or not the Vortex forces have been reinforced in the party's absence is up to the GM, depending largely on one's predilection for tormenting players.

If the players defeat the Vortex forces, their actions will not be overlooked by the departing Mist Men. As the party opens their packs for their next meal, each will find a nearly inexhaustible Mist Man weapon tube, attuned to their individual use that will burn the hand of any other who attempts to grasp it!



Appendix A: The Path to Madness

The Lair of the Mist Men is an environment that will test the sanity of normal men. Everything about it is 'wrong', and as your players move through the lair the mental effects will slowly accumulate.

There are many systems for dealing with sanity in a game, and if you have a preferred method, use it! But what follows is a simple (and humorous) method that will add some personality to your characters while keeping the game moving.

Have your players make a DC 5 Will save for each character as they pass through any portal in the Lair. (If they're teleporting into a fight, roll after the combat is complete.) Alternately, choose three or four unlucky souls each passage if the party is too large. Each time a character fails a roll, their reality is bent in some way, and they take one step down the *Path to Madness*. After three steps, they go crazy!

When a character 'takes their first step', choose a topic significant to that character, or roll d24 and reference the following chart. This topic will spontaneously arise in the character's mind with great force: an absurd obsessive madness the character will begin contemplating with great interest in a subconscious attempt to block out the chaos around him. The mania will start small, but grow in intensity with each fail. The character might fear the topic, or love it, and the effects can last as long as the judge wants: remember, it's for fun and to add personality to the game! (But trust Nardgrog, when a reference to a character's obsession pops up out of the blue five adventures down the road, it'll be hilarious.)

Obsession

- 1) Chickens (Either the species or one particular chicken)
- 2) Hair loss (And the fragility of dwarven self-image)
- 3) Cows (Meat, leather, or milk?)
- 4) Poetry (Of the lonely gong farmer)
- 5) Oil (And the merits of lighting things on fire)
- 6) Thatch (Just thatch, sweet thatch)
- 7) Mud (How deep? Is there something in there?)
- 8) Pole arms (And the question of fairness)
- 9) Your Great Aunt Gretchie (And her death-mouth kisses)
- 10) Your baker (And his questionable sourdough genealogy)
- 11) Things that won't break (And why not?)
- 12) Sneaky elves noticing things (And whether they're ALL blackmailers or just that bastard GoldenBow)
- 13) Halflings (And that whole two weapons thing)
- 14) Cheese (And its potential for dealing death)
- 15) Goblins (And their questionable choices in footwear)
- 16) Broken toenails (And the value of hoarding nails and other effluvia as a hedge against black magic)
- 17) Barmaids (Beefy)
- 18) Villagers (Who like cats)
- 19) Teak (And other strange woods)
- 20) Ducks and wolves (Particularly how they don't interact)
- 21) Back hair (And the werewolf threat)
- 22) Taxes and fees (And the violence inherent in the system)
- 23) Corruption (And whether creams will help)
- 24) Bastard swords (And other vaguely naughty weapons)

Stages Along the Path

Stage 1: The topic pops into your head with slightly more than comfortable regularity.

Stage 2: You begin to annoy your fellows by discussing the topic more than is really necessary, bringing it up at inappropriate times or even out of the blue. You dream about your topic and begin creating amateur art or poetry about it.

Stage 3: You barely keep yourself in check. At the slightest excuse or provocation, you break into maniacal discourse about your topic. You're capable of violence if crossed about your topic. You start a club or organize a convention.

Path to the Cave

□ = 5 feet

50 ft rise ↑

30 ft drop ↓

Adventuring in the Sunken City

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New Patron: Malloc the Dark Creeper

Also known as the Dark World Tree, Malloc works his roots into the dark nooks of the world. Its single intent is to gather knowledge to exert power and control over this world and beyond. Malloc has a near insatiable desire for knowledge and information and uses those that call him their patron to acquire it. Malloc exerts his formidable destructive power to broker exchanges of information, happily threatening the safety of entire towns and structures to achieve its mysterious ends.

Malloc's jealousy also leads him to be locked in a bitter rivalry with Yddgrll, the World Root. Though Malloc is often thought to be uninterested in nature, he demonstrates a peculiar affinity towards particular trees, seeking to protect them with destructive force when necessary. Some say Malloc is jealous of Yddgrll's much closer bonds to nature, though this is pure conjecture.

Malloc expects its followers to search out forgotten knowledge and to report it using whatever means necessary, including force. Malloc rarely communicates its desires in a forthcoming manner to its followers, preferring cryptic messages delivered by speaking trees, faceless figures, and scrawled messages in flesh. Malloc is prone to jealousy if any of his patrons seek to stray from his patronage. Resenting the loss of any source of information, it will frequently strike out in a devastating display of power to rein in or punish a follower from leaving his patronage.

Invoke Patron Check Results:

12-13	Malloc responds to the call but is quickly distracted by something else that comes to his attention. Before he leaves he grants the caster significant insight into the weakness of the creature the caster is fighting. This insight provides a +4 on spellcaster checks for the next 1d4 rounds.
14-17	Malloc is annoyed and admonishes the caster severely before begrudgingly causing the caster's skin to become bark-like (AC +4) and an increase of 2d3 to the caster's Strength ability. These effects last for 1d4 turns and the ability score increase can be spellburned.
18-19	Malloc responds to the call and appreciates the dire circumstances that led to his calling. He grants insight to the situation the caster and his allies are in and grants each a +4 to attacks, skill checks, and spell checks for 1d4 turns.
20-23	Malloc sends forth root-like tentacles that burst forth from the ground regardless of the type of surface and grapple nearby objects and creatures. The roots cover a 20' radius centered at a point the caster dictates. These summoned roots slow the enemy's movements by half and causes a -2 to all attack, skill, and spellcraft checks. Those trapped in the grasping roots must make a DC 18 Strength check to escape their grasp.
24-27	Malloc sends a pair of dark roots out of the ground near the caster's legs. These dark roots wrap around the caster's ankles with some strength. From the initial round and for each round the caster does not move from this position the caster receives 1d4 hit points in healing and 1d2 ability point damage healed. Once the caster moves, the root-like tendrils curl back down into the ground.
28-29	Malloc calls forth several powerful roots to press forth from the ground at a location dictated by the caster. These roots will target the creature closest to that point and attempt to grab them (Atk +10, plus grab). Once a root has successfully grabbed the victim they will work together to pull the victim back beneath the ground. It takes 1d3 rounds for the roots to suffocate the victim underground. A DC 20 Strength check escapes the roots.
30-31	<p>A massive tree is summoned forth by Malloc at the location desired by the caster. This tree (see below), with a great, gaping maw, erupts from the ground over the course of 1d3 rounds. When fully surfaced it stands 40' tall with numerous leafless limbs. 8 of these limbs proceed to make attacks on any opponent the caster orders it to. The caster can dictate each of these 8 attacks but can perform no other action on his turn when doing so. The tree remains summoned for 1d4 turns.</p> <p>Tree, avatar: Init +2; Atk bite +10 melee; Dmg 2d12 and swallow on critical; AC 15; HP 58; MV 5'; Act 8d20; SP: Free bite attack if victim delivered by limb. SV Fort +8; Ref +0; Will +8; AL N</p> <p>One of three things (1d3) happen when an opponent is struck by one of the limbs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The limb grabs the victim and then proceeds to hurl the victim with great force. The victim takes 2d8 damage (DC 16 Reflex Save for Half). 2) Upon grabbing the victim the limb begins to squeeze the victim with tremendous force. The victim takes 4d4 squeezing damage (DC15 Strength Check to take Half damage; DC 18 Strength check to escape the root) 3) The limb grabs the victim and begins squeezing. The victim takes 4d4 squeezing damage (DC 15 Strength Check to take Half damage; DC 18 Strength check to escape the root). On the 2nd round the root will deposit the victim in the tree's maw.

Invoke Patron Check Results:

32+	<p>Malloc's ire has been raised and he unleashes his destructive force in a startling display to protect those who call him patron. An earthquake caused by many roots and tendrils erupts all around the spellcaster and his allies. The earthquake focuses on a 400' radius area around the caster, though the caster and his allies are shielded from the effects of the earthquake.</p> <p>Outside this protective sphere all must make DC 22 Reflex saves to avoid falling into deep fissures causing 3d6 damage from the fall. For those that succeed on their Reflex save they must make another one each round until they are outside the area of effect.</p> <p>Once in the fissures they begin to close and shift causing 6d6 crushing damage over the next 6 rounds. Two successful (not necessarily in a row) DC 18 Strength checks are needed to begin escaping the crushing forces of the fissure. For each round in the fissure the victim is subject to another 6d6 damage.</p> <p>This quake also causes structural damage to any buildings caught in the ferocity of the thrashing roots causing this earthquake. Towers and multi-level structures are likely to sway, possibly collapsing in ruin. Foundations of one-story buildings are sundered, heaving portions of the building up and others sinking below the earth's surface.</p>
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Patron Taint: Malloc

Malloc strives to mark its petitioners, endeavoring for them to resemble it in appearance and form. When patron taint is indicated, roll 1d6 on the table below. When a caster has acquired all six taints at all levels of effect, there is no need to continue rolling anymore.

1	The caster's skin become rough and almost scratchy to the touch. If this result is rolled a second time, the caster's skin transitions from being scratchy to appearing and feeling like smoothed bark (-1 Agility checks, +1 AC). If this result happens a third time, the caster's skin transitions to that of actual bark (-2 Agility checks, +2 AC).
2	The caster's hair begins to become stiff and bristly to the touch. If this result is rolled a second time, small twigs become part of the caster's hair with small leaves. If this result is rolled a third time, the caster's hair becomes composed entirely of small twigs and leaves. If the caster chooses to shave their head, the small twigs and leaves will return in their entirety by morning.
3	When the caster casts a spell the immediate area (20' radius) tremors. No damage is caused, but items rattle and clink if they are not secured. If this result is rolled a second time, when the caster casts a spell the immediate area (20' radius) trembles, small cracks appear in the ground and small, non-secured items topple over. If this result occurs a third time, when a spell is cast by the caster the immediate area (20' radius) suffers a minor quake, the ground heaves from roots thrashing about in the ground causing the area to become difficult terrain. DC 12 Reflex saves are required by those in the immediate area to avoid falling prone and there is a chance of minor structural damage
4	The caster finds himself becoming more possessive of his belongings. Being asked to share his belongings are met with great annoyance. If this result is rolled a second time, the caster shows much more annoyance and vocal distrust of others wanting to borrow or use his things. The caster will refuse to share or let others use his belongings. If this result is rolled a third time, the caster refuses to loan his belongings out. The caster also become always suspicious that people are after his belongings. When situation arise that others are pressuring him to share his belongings, the caster must make a DC 15 Will save to avoid the incident from escalating into outright conflict.
5	The caster finds himself unable to hydrate orally and must resort to pouring water or other beverages on his feet. Liquid poured on the caster's feet is readily absorbed and used by the caster's body for hydration. If this result is rolled a second time, the caster finds it more difficult to obtain nourishment orally. Though the caster can eat and obtain some nourishment the caster obtains more nourishment by pouring nutrient rich liquids on his feet. If this result is rolled a third time, the caster can no longer eat or drink normally for sustenance. All nourishment must be through some form of liquid or nutrient rich liquid poured on his feet and absorbed by this body.
6	The caster has an insatiable desire to venture forth after a piece of lost knowledge. The caster receives a vision of the object that holds this knowledge and a vague idea of location. The caster must retrieve the object from the vision and study it (Minor Quest – 5-7 days in duration). If this result is rolled a second time, a revelation comes to the caster regarding the object retrieved from the first occurrence. The caster must now find a second piece of information that will help determine the meaning of the first. (Medium Quest – 25-30 days in duration). If the result is rolled a third time, the caster receives another cryptic vision which the caster must decipher involving the two objects previously obtained. (Major Quest – 3-6 months).

Spellburn: Malloc

Malloc exacts a cost for those that seek his aid during times of need. When a caster utilizes spellburn, roll 1d4 on the table below or build off your own ideas to create an event specific to your situation.

1	Malloc needs blood. Roots push their way up through the ground and wrap around the caster's legs for 2 rounds. During this time the caster is unable to move, though he can still cast. The roots drain blood from the caster (expressed as Stamina, Strength, or Agility loss).
2	Malloc is creating another avatar of himself and requires teeth as a component. The caster must remove one or more of his own teeth as an offering to Malloc, which will be used to bring the maw of Malloc's avatar to life. For every 2 points of spellburn the caster must sacrifice one tooth.
3	Much as tree limbs and roots crack, Malloc wishes to exact this punishment through the cracking of bones in the caster's body (expressed as Stamina, Strength, or Agility loss).
4	Malloc seeks to exact his mark on the caster and carves the word Malloc on the caster's body. The depth and size of this mark is determined by the amount of points expended in this spellburn.

Patron Spells: Malloc

Malloc grants the following three spells to those that petition him:

Level 1: Snarling Roots

Level 2: Forest Perception

Level 3: Quaking Roots

Snarling Roots

Level: 1 (Malloc) **Range:** 125' **Duration:** 1 turn per CL **Casting Time:** 1 round

General : Malloc has creeping roots beneath the ground ready to be summoned when the need presents itself. The caster conjures forth an area of snarling roots that impede his enemy in both movement and actions.

Manifestation: Roll a 1d4: (1) thick gnarled roots, cluttered with dirt pierce the ground; (2) thin, brownish green roots with freakish agility and speed protrude from the ground; (3) a large ball of roots shoot from the caster's hands and arcs through the air to the target area; (4) a swirling mass of greenish brown vapor is hurled from the caster's hands exploding into a mass of roots at the target area.

1	Lost, failure, and patron taint.
2-11	Lost. Failure.
12-13	A 10' radius area becomes entangled with roots coming up from the ground. No prior vegetation is needed. Creatures within the area lose 5' from their movement rate and suffer a -1 to attack, skill checks, and spell checks. A DC 13 Strength check allows targets snarled to move and act without penalty for one round.
14-17	A 20' radius area becomes entangled with roots coming up from the ground. No prior vegetation needed. Creatures within lose 5' from their movement rate and suffer a -1 to attack, skill checks, and spell checks. A DC 15 Strength check allows targets snarled to move and act without penalty for one round.
18-19	A 20' radius area becomes entangled with roots coming up from the ground. No prior vegetation needed. Creatures within move at half their normal movement rate and suffer a -2 to attack, skill checks, and spell checks. A DC 17 Strength check allows targets snarled to move and act without penalty for one round.
20-23	A 40' radius area becomes entangled with roots coming up from the ground. No prior vegetation needed. Creatures within move at half their normal movement rate and suffer a -2 to attack, skill checks, and spell checks. A DC 17 Strength check allows targets snarled to move and act without penalty for one round.
24-27	A 50' radius area becomes entangled with roots coming up from the ground. No prior vegetation needed. Creatures within move at half their normal movement rate and suffer a -4 to attack, skill checks, and spell checks. A DC 18 Strength check allows targets snarled to move and act without penalty for one round.

Snarling Roots

28-29	A 60' radius area becomes entangled with roots coming up from the ground. No prior vegetation needed. Creatures within move at half their normal movement rate and suffer a -4 to attack, skill checks, and spell checks. A DC 20 Strength check allows targets snarled to move and act without penalty for one round.
30-31	A 60' radius area becomes entangled with roots coming up from the ground. No prior vegetation needed. Creatures within move at one quarter their normal movement rate and suffer a -6 to attack, skill checks, and spell checks. A DC 20 Strength check allows targets snarled to move and act without penalty for one round.
32+	A 80' radius area becomes entangled with roots coming up from the ground. No prior vegetation needed. Creatures within are unable to move and suffer a -6 to attack, skill checks, and spell checks. A DC 22 Strength check allows targets snarled to move and act without penalty for one round.

Forest Sensing

Level: 2 (Malloc) **Range:** 500' (+500' per CL > 1) **Duration:** 1 turn per CL **Casting Time:** 3 rounds

General : Despite Malloc's often loose ties to nature, he is fully capable of bending the will of nature to serve his needs in the quest for knowledge and information. With the power of Malloc the caster is able to tap into the senses of nearby plants and trees, hearing what the plants hear as if the caster was present.

Manifestation: Roll a 1d4: (1) The caster's ears turn into leaves for the duration of the spell; (2) A thin root sprouts from the ground and gently wraps itself around the caster's leg for the duration of the spell; (3) a globe of green, misty light is conjured during the casting of the spell erupting in a fine spray of water; (4) the caster's skin turns a mottled greenish-brown for the duration of the spell.

1	Lost, failure, and patron taint.
2-11	Lost. Failure.
12-13	Failure, but spell is not lost.
14-15	The caster indicates an area with some form of plant-life within the casting range of the spell. The caster is now able to hear normal conversations and ambient sounds occurring near the target plant for the duration of the spell. Once a plant is chosen the spell cannot be redirected.
16-19	The caster indicates an area with some form of plant-life within the casting range of the spell. The caster is now able to hear normal conversations and ambient sounds occurring near the target plant for the duration of the spell. If the caster wishes to change the target of the spell, he may do so until the duration of the spell expires.
20-21	The caster indicates an area with some form of plant-life within the casting range of the spell. Through the plant the caster has amplified hearing allowing the caster to hear normal and whispered conversations and ambient sounds. If the caster wishes to change the target of the spell, he may do so until the duration of the spell expires.
22-25	The caster indicates an area with some form of plant-life within the casting range of the spell. Through the plant the caster is able to hear normal conversation and ambient sounds. In addition, if the caster does not normally know the language spoken, the caster understands the language for the duration of the spell. The caster can retarget the spell until the duration of the spell expires.
26-29	The caster can indicate multiple targets that listen (up to CL). Through each of these plants the caster is able to hear normal conversation and ambient sounds occurring near each of the targeted plants. The caster is able to supernaturally make out and process each of these conversations without difficulty. Once chosen the targets cannot be re-selected.
30-31	The caster is able to select multiple plants for listening and retarget as desired for the duration of the spell. The caster can also choose to have a particular person followed from plant to plant for the duration of the spell automatically. Through the plant the caster is able to hear normal and whispered conversation and ambient sounds. In addition, if the caster does not normally know the language spoken, the caster understands the language for the duration of the spell.
32-33	The caster is awash in overheard conversations and sounds from all plant-like entities within range of the spell. Within the first minute of casting the caster must choose the number of targets equal to his CL and amount of points spellburned to continue listening to for the duration of the spell. Once the targets are chosen the caster can continue to hear normal and whispered conversations, ambient sounds and comprehend the language spoken from that target for the remaining portion of the spell. Targets can be re-chosen until the spell expires.
34+	The caster is able to listen to all surrounding plants in the range of the spell. The caster is able to supernaturally able to process all of this information without difficulty and does not need to choose targets. All normal and whispered conversations and ambient sounds are heard and the caster is able to comprehend all languages obtained in this manner. These effects last for the duration of the spell.

Quaking Roots

Level: 3 (Malloc) **Range:** 225' **Duration:** 1 round per CL **Casting Time:** 1 round

General: Malloc's ire has been raised and his wrath shall be felt. The caster calls upon Malloc's power to summon forth powerful roots to thrash about causing the very earth itself to quake.

Manifestation: Roll a 1d4: (1) A tangled ball of roots is conjured between the caster's hands which is hurled to the target area of the spell; (2) a spiraling vortex of roots is launched from the caster's position to the target area of the spell; (3) a sphere of fine, black dirt showers upwards from the ground at the target site immediately prior to the quake starting; (4) the sound of multiple stones cracking echoes sharply through the air around the caster.

1	Lost, failure, and patron taint.
2-11	Lost. Failure.
12-15	Failure, but spell is not lost.
16-17	In an area of the caster's choosing within range of the spell powerful roots erupt from the ground in a 20' radius. These roots flail about possibly striking creatures in that area (3d6 damage, DC 12 Reflex for half). In addition the ground begins to shake from the thrashing, -1 to attack rolls, skill checks and spell checks.
18-21	In an area of the caster's choosing within range of the spell, large, powerful roots erupt from the ground in a 20' radius. These roots flail about, actively seeking to strike creatures in the area (4d6 damage, DC 15 Reflex for half). In addition the ground begins to shake from the thrashing, -1 to attack rolls, skill checks, and spell checks.
22-23	In an area of the caster's choosing within range of the spell, very large and powerful roots erupt from the ground in a 30' radius. These roots flail about, actively seeking to strike creates in the area (5d6 damage, DC 16 Reflex for half). In addition the ground begins to shake violently from the thrashing, -2 to attack rolls, skill checks, and spell checks
24-26	In an area of the caster's choosing within range of the spell, very large and powerful roots erupt from the ground in a 40' radius. These roots flail about, actively seeking to strike creates in the area (6d6 damage, DC 18 Reflex for half). In addition the ground begins to shake violently from the thrashing, -2 to attack rolls, skill checks, and spell checks.
27-31	In an area of the caster's choosing within range of the spell, extremely large and powerful roots erupt from the ground in a 45' radius. These roots flail about, actively seeking to strike creatures in the area (8d6 damage, DC 20 Reflex for half). In addition the ground begins to shake violently from the thrashing, -3 to attack rolls, skill checks, and spell checks.
32-33	In an area of the caster's choosing within range of the spell, very large powerful roots erupt from the ground in a 50' radius. These roots flail about actively seeking to strike creatures in the area (10d6 damage, DC 22 Reflex for half). In addition the ground begins to shake violently from the thrashing, -4 to attack rolls, skill checks, and spell checks. Structures within the effects radius begin to exhibit signs of minor structural damage.
34-35	In an area of the caster's choosing within range of the spell, very large powerful roots erupt from the ground in a 60' radius. These roots flail about actively seeking to strike creatures in the area (15d6 damage, DC 25 Reflex for half). In addition the ground begins to shake violently from the thrashing, -5 to attack rolls, skill checks, and spell checks. Structures within the effects radius begin to exhibit signs of major structural damage.
36+	In an area of the caster's choosing within range of the spell, very large powerful roots erupt from the ground in a 80' radius. These roots flail about actively seeking to strike creatures in the area (20d6 damage, DC 30 Reflex for half). In addition the ground begins to shake violently from the thrashing, -6 to attack rolls, skill checks, and spell checks. Structures within the effects radius exhibit significant structural damage up to and including collapse.

Malloc patron write-up courtesy of Jeffrey Tadlock (www.ironavern.com)

Creatures of the Swamp

Opossumen Characters

Opossumen are a degenerate lot, but for some players the rustic allure of running such earthy worthies as player characters is too strong to resist. Here are guidelines for adding Opossuman players to your campaign.

You are a foul-smelling denizen of the fringes of civilization. Your natural home is a charnel pit filled with the marrow-sucked bones of your fallen foes. But your natural cunningness hints that something more might exist; that a wider world full of possibility waits somewhere out there, beyond the mists.

Hit Points: An opossuman gains 1d7 hit points at each level.

Weapon Training: An opossuman is trained in the following weapons: club, mace, javelin, and dagger. They can use any sword at -1, because swords are vaguely shaped like clubs. They can use any armor they can get their hands on. (Blissfully unaware that heavier armor might effect their agility-based skills...)

Alignment: Almost always chaotic, though more advanced specimens might choose to emulate another path if befriended by a lawful or neutral companion.

Thieving skills: Opossumen are natural thieves of the basest sort; crafty and cunning when it comes to relieving others of their goods. They are skilled as chaotic thieves in sneak silently, hide in shadows, and find (but not disable) traps. (See pages 35-36 of the DCC Rulebook for rules.)

Intelligence: An opossuman with high intelligence is not smart in the typical sense. Advanced topics such as reading or toilets are generally beyond them; their intelligence manifests itself in cunning and guile: the ability to read enemies, avoid danger, and seek out easy opportunities for booty.



Luck: Unfortunately, while opossumen routinely recklessly push their luck, they are so naturally unlucky that they can actually 'suck luck' from those around them! Whenever an opossuman burns luck, roll a d6: on a 1 they must immediately convince a compatriot to spend as many point of luck as the opossuman just burned: otherwise the action automatically fails and the opossuman must make an unmodified roll on the fumble chart, with the judge adapting the results to the situation at hand! However, this basic opossuman persistence in doing dangerous and inherently stupid actions has its rewards: each morning their luck resets to the default value to enable another daily round of jack-assery.

Playing dead: At zero level, whenever an opossuman rolls a 1 on an attack roll, they immediately fall to the ground as their muscles lock in an autonomous rictus state for the next 20(-Sta) minutes! Concurrently they release foul fluids from various unsavory orifices that make it difficult for any foe to stay near: All non-opossumen within 10 feet must make a DC 8 Fort save or be at -2 to all activities while in range.

At first level, players gain a little control over the response, and can ward off the effects with a DC 10 Will save, though they experience a normal fumble result if they do. 2nd or higher level opossumen have evolved beyond the response all-together and experience regular fumbles like everyone else.

Infra-vision: Opossumen are most comfortable lurking in the dark. As such, they can see in the dark up to 30'.

Treasure Sense: Opossumen can naturally sniff out the presence of precious metals or food. Large concentrations can be smelled out to a distance of 100'. Smaller hoards require close proximity to detect, inside 20'. Extremely powerful smells might mask this ability.

Action dice: An opossuman uses his action dice for any normal action, including attacks and skill checks.

Level	Attack Die	Crit Die/Table	Action Dice	Ref	Fort	Will
1	+0	1d12/II	1d20	1	1	0
2	+1	1d14/II	1d20	1	1	0
3	+2	1d16/II	1d20	2	2	0
4	+3	1d20/II	1d20	2	2	1
5	+4	1d24/II	1d20+1d14	3	3	1

Titles:

Level 1: Chicken Snatcher

Level 2: Thug

Level 3: Boss

Level 4: King of Opossumen

Level 5: God King of Opossumen

SkinDitchers

SkinDitcher: Init -2; Atk Limb Flurry +2 melee (1d6 all within 10 feet of trunk); AC 16; HD 6d8; MV 15'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref -2, Will +0; AL N.

SkinDitcher Pod: Init +1; Atk Pod Wrap +3 grapple (Special); AC 11; HD 1d6; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +0; AL C.

Also known as *Hanging Trees*, SkinDitchers appear as twisted willow trees with numerous blackened corpse-like shapes dangling from the boughs on thick vines. At night, or when driven by great hunger, these massive forms are capable of slowly shuffling forward, closing in on prey using a nearly unerring sensitivity to subtle ground vibrations.

When prey is within range, the SkinDitcher casts 1-4 bag-like, man-shaped pods to the ground, which shuffle forward with surprising speed to attack. The pods attempt to grapple foes, attacking with a +3 bonus. On a successful grapple, the pod wraps about its prey like a filthy, clinging, acidic blanket. On the following round it begins dragging its victim back to the SkinDitcher at a speed of 10 feet per round. Grappled foes must succeed at a DC 10 Luck or Agility save (PC's choice) each round or take 1d4 suffocating/burning damage!

Each round, prey can attempt to escape the grapple, but the pod's grapple bonus grows by 1 per round as its grip grows more sticky and sure. When the pod returns to the SkinDitcher, a vine lowers to reattach the pod, lifting it up to dangle during digestion.

Friends who attack a feeding pod from without grant one point of grapple bonus to their ally's next attempt per point of damage delivered, but deal one-half of this damage to their friend. If a pod is 'killed' through damage it collapses to the ground, unraveling into a limp mass. Any trapped prey is immediately freed.

If the SkinDitcher itself is attacked by axe or heavy sword (it's immune to most other weapons, including flaming arrows, being coated in swamp slime), it begins flailing about wildly with branches and pods, attacking all foes within 10 feet. If the threat is great enough, it begins moving, seeking out the foulest, most difficult to traverse muck of the swamp, terrain over which it moves easily.

Killy-Pads

Killy-Pad: Init +2; Atk bite +1 melee (1d4 plus deathspin); AC 12; HD 2d6; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N.

Killy-Pads are ambush predators that lay in wait near the shorelines of turgid pools. A retractable fold located just below the lips of these loathsome beasts floats on the surface of the water, closely resembling a normal lilly pad. The Killy-Pad's tongue is pressed up through this fold, appearing to the casual observer like a plump and nearly catatonic frog. Any creature which attempts to snatch the frog suffers a savage bite as the fold retracts and the Killy-Pad's powerful, razor-filled mouth snaps shut!

Prey that takes more than 3 points of damage from the Killy-Pad's bite are immediately dragged under the surface unless they defeat the creature in an immediate grapple check. (The Killy-Pad has +1 to the grapple roll.) Characters grappled by the Killy-Pad take an automatic 1d4 damage each subsequent round as they are deathspun about in the inky darkness of the swamp. Prey can attempt to break the grapple every round.

In areas with large sentient populations, the Killy-Pad has adapted to display tongue-frogs that seem to be wearing tiny golden crowns.

Mudforms

Mudform: Init +3; Atk punch +1 melee (1d8); AC 11; HD 1d8; MV 20' (30'); Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

Rising from the slime of the eternal bog, mudforms are evil spirits desperate to regain physical form. They prey on those traveling in thigh-deep or deeper swamp, causing a massive upwelling of slime to rise up out of the depths, completely encasing their targets. The muck solidifies almost immediately as the chill essence of the spirit-beings binds the material together into a frozen cast.

The slightest struggle on the part of the target will cause the slime-form shell to break apart into large pieces, which fall back into the swamp, seemingly ending the threat without damage.

Within 10 minutes, however, the form will rise again from the swamp, restored to the rough shape of the target, now filled with the worm-filled effluvia of the swamp bottom, and seemingly alive!

The dark spirit of the mudform will commence a ceaseless pursuit of its living model, intent on slaying its dopplegänger with its heavy fists. Upon the death of its target, the mudform will drink deeply of the life-force and memories of its prey, achieving a nearly perfect likeness of the fallen, even capable of fooling unknowing, and/or unwary associates!

Mudforms who achieve this advanced state assume the movement speed and one random ability of their prey. Successfully assuming the identities of their targets is beyond the capabilities of a mudform. They will attempt to stay quiet, using their new forms to achieve surprise on new victims, gaining new life-force and staving off the inevitable decay of their new forms...

Regardless, the rot of the swamp will eventually return. After a week, the mudform will begin breaking down, shedding foul-smelling clumps as it dissolves.

Each new sentient kill will extend the decay by a day or two, but once it begins, within hours the mudform will be forced to flee the decaying form, shrieking in agony back to the degenerate swamp to await another victim.



Honest Orkoff: Adventure Seeds

There are many paths to adventure in the Sunken City, but one of the surest is to seek wisdom from those who trade in difficult to acquire information. None knows the secrets of the Great City better than the wily trader Honest Orkoff...

Honest Orkoff

They say in Mustertown if you have to describe yourself as "honest"... *you ain't*. If you're bartering with Orkoff, the maxim holds true: Orkoff will insist your silver crown is painted tin, while the worn-out walking stick he's offering in return is actually carved from the "heart roots of Malloc hisself, granting strength and virility, after extended use of course..."

Orkoff is generally trustworthy, however, when it comes to his specialty: utilizing his vast network of contacts to direct adventurers to interesting treasures and buyers willing and able to purchase exotic finds. His fee is 10% of the item's value: his appraisal of both the item's price and the willingness of his contact to purchase it are unfailingly accurate. Payment is required up front, as often getting to the buyer or recovering an item is a deadly adventure in itself, and while the value of the item is more or less guaranteed, the adventurer's safety is not...



Potential Customers

Lady Derimple (Fine jewelry)

"My, that is a fine piece. I know just the buyer. But she doesn't deal with riffraff. One of you will need to clean up, and you'll need to acquire a fine suit and robe. Travel into the city to the heart of the Gold District to the Shining Sea King Inn. Whoever travels with you will need to look like they've been there before or the street guard will be on you like flies. Once you reach the Sea King, everyone waits near the servants shack while your dandy and his guard enter. (Watch out for the other servants, they're often jealous of new blood.)

Find a table and order something expensive to drink. Look bored. After 10 minutes, summon a servant and tell him you want to see the wines. If you've convinced the unseen eyes that you are a bored lordling they'll take you to the back room. Be on your guard, the actual bored lordlings you find there will be drunk, and spoiling for a fight. They usually only play to blood, but accidents happen. You may have to beat someone at cards or darts if you avoid a duel. Eventually make your way to the curtains in the back. Look enticing. If the Lady likes your look someone will invite you to join her. Charm her and the deal is yours. She knows you're playing a game, she just enjoys watching those who play it well."

Algric Blackspider (Dark, chaotic, unholy finds)

"Hold it up to the light please, NO I don't want to touch it... yes, I believe Algric will have use for this. Travel on the hill road 4 miles toward Enric's Crossing. You'll see a dead tree to the left of the road with three yellowed skeletal hands hanging by strings from its twisted limbs. Leave the path and continue down into the tangle of trees that lie just beyond the dead one.

Keep going down until you come to a crevasse digging into the heart of the vale. You'll see an iron cauldron hanging by chains at its mouth. Pour a goodly sum of honey into the pot and wait 5 minutes. Don't make sudden moves. After five minutes, descend into the dark crevasse until you come to a black door at its end. Don't look up. Knock on the door once, then wait for Algric's call. It may take an hour or more. Don't move.

When you deal with Algric, name the price I've given you. No more, no less. Speak quietly and with respect or you will never leave the crevasse. On your way back, be mindful of brigands, they often spy from a distance the entrance to Algric's lair, and they know you'll be leaving with coin."

Gagrim the Collector (Strange and unusual objects)

"Oh my, this is a strange one, isn't it? Lucky for you, I know someone who's into strange... Down near the water, outside the Blind Queen's Quay, you'll find a large warehouse with hundreds of rusting sculptures of sea birds mounted to its face. DON'T enter through the front doors. Go to the side and ring the bell. When the iron thing opens the door, DON'T panic. Just step inside and treat it like a normal servant.

You'll find yourself in a waiting area with large iron doors leading to the main space of the warehouse. DON'T go through the doors: you might have to wait a while, Gagrim is easily distracted. If a different metal thing wanders through the iron doors, you might have to defend yourselves: not everything he's working on is completely under his control. If you have to destroy something, Gagrim will understand, but he'll want a full report of how it behaved. Don't bring up your dead, it will only confuse Gagrim and ruin your sale. That should be about it... oh, one more thing, don't touch the copper mermaid, it will kill you."

Leads to Interesting Treasures

The Eyes of Jesper Primm

"The Sparkling Eyes of Jesper Primm? A festival tale? I think not. There's only three days a year when those gems appear and one can claim them from the cursed statue in which they are bound:

1. The anniversary (to the exact moment) of Jesper's beheading.
2. The anniversary of the death of the Chop who beheaded Jesper. (The gems appear at the same time, and for as many minutes as it took the Chop to stroll about the stand displaying Jesper's head to the shrieking mob.)

3. The entire evening of the Mistress of All Black Omens, when the gaze of old Jesper reaches up one more time from the statue to peer at his former patron and benefactor.

Most folk only know about this third occasion on accounts of the Festival of Black Eve, but you won't be able to do any snatching on that night: the crowds that surround Jasper's statue will see that no foolishness takes place, regardless of how busy and excited everyone gets watching the Black Jacks stuff the poor sacrificial Gutter Man with rotted fish. (Once that doomed soul stops gurgling and struggling, the mob gets a lot more vigilant...)

So it is the quiet nights that are your friends in this matter: you must be in the Punisher's Court at just the right moment on one of those two evenings to succeed, and therein lies the challenge. The records of Jesper's demise burned along with Chalk Hall on the Night of Balefires in the time of our great-greats. Folks guess, of course, but they're always wrong, and besides, the moment of opportunity is gone in a blink, so you'd have to get all quicky-grabby in your play for the stones. Too risky, if you ask me, because the cursed statue still marks every hand that grazes against it as black as Jesper's soul, so a desperate flick of the wrist might be one's last: the Mistress's collectors will eventually come to claim the offending member, and once they do the only thing you'd be grabbing at is straws, wouldn't you lefty!

So, to succeed, you need to know the night and time of the Chop's death, and for a recompense so small as to barely be worth mentioning, I can tell you where in this cursed pile of stones that exact time is carved in eternal granite, a secret known to none but myself. I know without question that the chop's stroll about the stand flaunting Jesper's head took over a minute, so you've got a good chance to arrange something not-touchy to pop out those glorious stones. Thus, a mere handful of shineys buys you a chance at immortality and riches your minds can barely conceive of... If I was a younger man, I'd have made the attempt myself!"

The Blades of Fallik

"Everyone knows that Fallik made six master blades, each greater than the last: weapons never equalled to this day! (60 of which can be found any morning in the red markets down off DeadWind Following.) Few, however, know that a seventh blade ended the swordsmith's brilliant career forever..

Now of course, despite all of the smith's skill, it was his forge-demon Allatrix that made the first six masterpieces possible. It's said the fires of the forge burned so hot at the demon's command that bread in the village nearest Fallik's workshop cooked in half the normal time! But apparently Fallik wasn't happy with sheer mastery of his craft: he tired of its unpredictability, where weeks of work could be lost to a single unlucky stroke. So he coaxed another demon named Gix into his hammer, to help impart a bit of the smith's iron will into the blade with each measured strike.

Well, things worked out about as well as one would expect: like two demanding wives sharing a disinterested husband, the whole enterprise went down the jakes in a hail of jealousy and revenge as the blade reached its final quenching: both demons departed with half of poor Fallik clutched in their bloody, demonic claws as they made their angry good-byes and returned to the Netherworld.

I should say more like 4/10 of the man each, as a tiny bit of Fallik was still trapped in that final blade, cracked as it were near side to side as the blade was doused. Now this is where the tale gets

interesting. Because I know where that final blade hangs, over the hearth of a man who has no more idea of its history or value than Brunk the Jumping Monkey down in the square. And he certainly doesn't know that if one taps the blade in just the right location a final time with a blessed hammer, it will give up the spirit of Fallik into the service of the tapper for one year's time! But I, of course, know both, and would be most happy to share the information to the right buyer for appropriate compensation: a mere pittance compared to the royal treasure certain powers would pay for the secrets one could learn from Fallik's ghost! Imagine the techniques and methods lost to this degenerate age he could share, not to mention the true names used to summon both Allatrix and Gix!"

The Blood Cloak of Bocaster the Mad

"You strike me as brave folks, you do... This tale might be of interest to stout fellows such as yourself.

Some thirty years past, a wild-eyed beggar emerged from the darkest warrens of Northside Downwind, setting up station in Juggler's Square to loudly declare the truth, as he saw it, to all within 50 paces. As would be expected, the grim folk who skulked in that dark place took not kindly to his preaching, and one afternoon hacked his body into 30 pieces and fed them one by one to the local street dogs. (Who had grown somewhat bold and desperate in their hunger that late winter.)

The bits left over, which even the dogs wouldn't worry, were gathered into the man's tattered cloak, and dumped as a bloody lump into a dry, poisoned well the bully boys used as a dump. And there it lay, year after year, as the accumulated filth of a generation piled upon it endlessly.

Now, what the foul folk of Juggler's Square could not have known was that their victim, though mad indeed, was no mere street prophet. Some twisted bit of sorcery had tangled Bocaster the Arch Mage's mind, but an arch mage he remained. With the final bloody stroke of his killers, the soul of Bocaster fled back to his high tower in GoldenStreet, into a golem fashioned of the finest steel, prepared for just such an occasion. When it marched forth that night, the terrified screams in Bloody Square savaged the ears of folks two districts over!

Now, this is where it gets interesting. For once the steel golem had finished its deadly work, the light seemed to fade from its metallic eyes, and it trudged back into Bocaster's tower, from which it never emerged. The tower remains locked tight to this day. Though hundreds have tried, none have found entrance, either from above or below!

What none but myself knows is that the key to entering the tower is the very cloak Bocaster wore on the day of his death! One wearing it can open any door, pass any ward, and open any chest they find in that fabled place. Imagine the treasures that await the bold heroes willing to dare the arch mage's tower!

For a merest trifle of coins, I can share the location of the now paved over pit in which the cloak hides, protected all these years by the blood of the Arch Mage! A few days of digging will be rewarded with treasures beyond the imagining of mortal men! Will you claim these treasures as your own? Will you dare the tower of Bocaster the Arch Mage?"

Items of Eldritch Wonder

Though rare, items endowed with magical energy can be discovered in many parts of the Sunken City. While the items listed below can benefit your players, most come with a potential sting as well: magic can never be trusted in the vastness of the Great Swamp!

Abattoir Apron

This blood-stained leather apron appears normal upon first glance, but when strapped around a character it immediately grants a +1 to armor class. In addition, once per week the bearer of the apron can disregard the effects of a single critical hit. Doing so, however, requires that the character make an immediate DC 12 Will save, or suffer subtle mental damage. The character experiences a mounting fear of death that can only be assuaged by a 'good offence' — shedding lots and lots of blood. If the apron is not 'blooded' at least once a week, the character will find they must take matters into their own hands, spilling blood wherever one can find it, be it ally or innocent bystander!

A second failed save increases the frequency to every 3 days; a third, every day. A fourth missed save results in madness and uncontrollable homicidal behavior. Instructions about the apron's powers (but not consequences) are carved in a clumsy hand on the interior of the apron.

Augie's Pound of Flesh

Housed in a smelly leather bag, the Pound of Flesh appears as a roiling, lurid blob of meat. It can be applied and sculpted on the user's body to either aid in the creation of extremely convincing disguises or to provide utility such as replacing a missing hand temporarily. If used in utility mode, the flesh tires quickly, and becomes unresponsive after 20 minutes of use. As a simple prop, the flesh can remain in place for days.

The Pound of Flesh occasionally displays simple intelligence, subtly reacting to the emotion of the wearer and altering its texture and color. After 24 hours in place, gruesome mouth-shaped openings randomly appear briefly on the surface of the flesh, mumbling incoherently in an unknown tongue before vanishing.

Balm of Brilliance

Two fingers of this magical balm applied to any metal surface will cause it to reflect light brilliantly. If applied to a shield, during the user's next combat, in the presence of a suitable light source the shield can be used in a single blinding attack. The target must succeed in a DC 12 Reflex save or be blinded for 1d4 rounds.

Clever players will likely come up with other useful purposes for the Balm. The container contains enough balm for 8 applications.

Bog's Lucky Boulder

Carrying this 85 pound boulder grants a temporary +1 bonus to luck. If broken apart, the boulder loses all enchantment, and those responsible lose 1 point of luck, feel particularly sad, and suffer a nearly overwhelming craving for mashed potatoes for one week.

Bowl of Cleanliness

Twice per day this simple wooden bowl can be commanded to fill with pure, clean water. The water can be used for drinking, but also to miraculously clean any dirty object. Once per week the bowl can create either sacred water or fine wine, but additional attempts in the same week will only produce filthy water.

Simple instructions are inscribed in common on the bottom of the bowl, along with a crude sketch of a smiling man bathing.

Chalk Tablet

This sturdy slate tablet can be marked with chalk like any other tablet. However, once per day if special arcane words are uttered ('chalky, chalky, show what's wanty'), the tablet will draw an arrow pointing in the direction of any desired object sketched adequately on the surface. The arrow will persist and update for 30 seconds before fading.

The special key phrase is subtly 'burned in' on the surface, and can be detected by carefully examining the slate while clean.

There are rumors of a second Chalk Tablet that when paired with the first allows the users to share messages and drawings over great distances, but if such a thing exists it has not been seen in an age.

Comfy Blanket

This small, woolen blanket remains touchably soft and comfortably clean regardless of environment or circumstance. Those who sleep clutching the blanket will heal twice the normal amount from their injuries. In addition, the user will remain warm and toasty in anything short of frigid conditions.

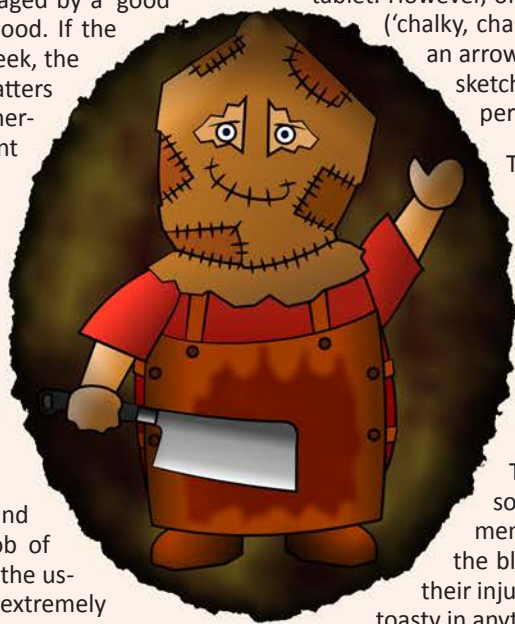
Unfortunately, with continued use, the bearer of the comfy blanket runs the risk of becoming attached to the thing. After each week of regular use, the bearer must succeed on a DC 6 Will Save or find themselves unwilling to part with it, carrying the thing about publicly and occasionally stroking it with great affection.

Fez of Binding

This matching pair of sharp red fezzes forge a subtle psychic link between the wearers. General emotions can be felt even from miles away, and simple one-word impressions are possible with practice.

If attached to a large animal such as a bear or horse, the animal will gradually benefit from the link to its human-intelligence partner by demonstrating increased intelligence and memory. After extended wear (six months to a year), the fez will seem impossible to remove or destroy, simply reappearing in subsequent moments of inattention upon the head of the wearer.

Killing the bearer breaks the link, and the magical fez slips to the ground for anyone to claim. If a pair have been bonded for many years, the breaking of the link can inflict terrible psychological pain on the survivor. If enemies are bonded through the Fez, the more experienced wearer can inflict disturbing nightmares and feelings of anxiety on the inexperienced partner.



Grumble's Sinister Spoon

Save for a series of stubby fork-like barbs that protrude from its front edge, this simple iron spoon appears perfectly normal. But it holds a useful, yet progressively dark enchantment: Any meal consumed by the Sinister Spoon will taste markedly better, take twice as long to reach its delicious conclusion, and will provide double the nutritional content of the meal eaten by normal means. Unfortunately, with repeated use the bearer of the spoon will grow increasingly reluctant to forgo its epicurean benefits...

After a week of regular use, the merry eater will require a DC 10 Will Save to share bites from the spoon, or to allow others to handle it. After two weeks, sharing becomes psychologically impossible: the bearer will angrily rebuff anyone who shows too much interest in the Spoon. After a month, if meat ever runs low, the bearer of the Sinister Spoon must succeed at a DC 8 Will Save or begin fashioning an insane plan to snack on a (hopefully defenseless and fleshy) companion. If the Spoon-bearer succeeds in actually harming someone, with each delicious cannibalistic bite he is granted an additional DC 8 Will Save to come to his senses. Each bite deals 1 point of damage to the victim.

When used aggressively as a weapon against foes with suitable expanses of bare flesh, the spoon acts as a +2 dagger, but if victorious, the wielder must make a DC 8 Will Save or immediately begin feasting on a downed foe!

Henkark's Hungry Helm

To the untrained eye, this helm appears to be nothing more than a simple dinner pot. And while it excels in preparing tasty dinners, the Hungry Helm can manifest magical properties if a meal of particular distinction is prepared in its iron belly.

If used to prepare normal fare, the helm acts as normal armor the next day. But if the flesh of a creature with magical properties is prepared in the helm, on the next morn, the helm will take on aspects of the creature for a single day. For example, Minotaur meat might grant a smashing head-butt attack! Judges should be creative and adapt to the unique situations your players encounter.

If the Hungry Helm goes unfed for more than three days, using it as a helm is highly dangerous as it will seek out a quick meal from the nearest source of unprotected flesh!

Lead Chicken of Occasional Wisdom

This crudely cast lead chicken stands precariously on two iron legs that jut from its misshapen body. Once per day however, if the owner pours wine on the rough statue, it springs to life, strutting and scratching as if alive! After about 90 seconds it runs down and returns to its original form.

If the surface that the Lead Chicken capers upon is suitably 'scratchable', then careful study of the markings it creates will reveal two roughly shaped words scratched out in common. If a question was clearly phrased before the pouring of the wine, there is a 50% chance that the words will have some relevance to the question at hand. Otherwise the words are random nonsense, but they might lead questioners down interesting paths nonetheless.

Leper Stick

Anyone who holds this unassuming two-foot long stick for at least five continuous minutes will suddenly manifest all the symptoms of one suffering from advanced leprosy. The signs will fade after 24 hours, and the user will suffer no long-term ill effects.

Límberskins's Lute

This exquisitely carved lute grant the owner the ability to play the slowly-building tavern classic 'Sparrow of Liberty' flawlessly at will, regardless of musical ability. Once per day, upon request, the player can produce a down-tempo version of the ditty that both calms the potentially hostile and relaxes friends. Is someone utters 'Sparrow of Liberty' within 20' of the Lute, a chord will sound out suddenly of its own accord at maximum volume. The lute has no effect in combat.

Mellik's Mechanical Spider

This tarantula-sized metal spider is a marvel of dwarven engineering. Via a crank on the spider's back, the operator can wind up the device and whisper one Dwarvish word of command into the tiny cone protruding from the Spider's back. The device will then scamper up to 100 feet in a more or less straight line from the user, perform its simple task, and return to its master.

The spider can climb vertical surfaces and pass through small spaces, but is incapable of exploring on its own or performing complex tasks. If instructed to 'bite' it will simple move forward to the first creature it meets in a straight line, attempt to deliver a painful nip (no real damage), and return.

The device recognizes 37 dwarven words, including 'bite', 'cut', 'grab', 'plumb', 'hiss', and 'dance'. If the single-word command is followed by a number, the spider will travel that distance in feet before performing its action.

Each time the spider performs an action, add one to a running tally. Roll percentile dice, and if the number rolled is under the tally, at some point during the Spider's action, it will malfunction. The only way to repair the Spider is to take it to a master dwarven watchmaker or artificer. If the percentile check roll is a perfect '00', the Spider explodes in a shower of metal bits, delivering 1d4 damage to anyone within 5 feet of the detonation, destroying the device.

Míthral Mirror

This sturdy, shining silver mirror glows a faint blue in the presence of iron, and as such is favored by elves of every persuasion. Additionally, the bearer can place one item up to 3 feet long and 6 inches thick into a magical space beyond and through the surface of the mirror. The item is clearly visible in the background of the reflection of anyone looking into the mirror.

If the mirror is cracked, it loses all power immediately, and any item held inside is lost forever.



Mr. Jingle's Bowler of Wonders

Once per day, the owner of the Bowler of Wonders can place the hat on the ground, and attempt to dance energetically and skillfully about it for five minutes. If the dance is successful (DC 8 Agility check), something vaguely useful will appear in the hat: Celery, a copper coin, a tasty pastry, candles, a cheese wheel, string, etc.

If the dance check roll is greater than 15, the item that appears might prove particularly useful to the situation at hand, even prophetically so. Up to five friends can join in on the dance, each granting a +1 bonus to the roll if they demonstrate sufficient enthusiasm. Performing such a dance in front of strangers might have unexpected consequences.

Instructions on the hat's use is kept on a small card hidden inside the brim's inner lining.

Rumble Hammer

Bearing a precious steel head lashed to an ironwood handle, the rumble hammer acts as a standard hammer in combat, but once per day the bearer can strike the ground a tremendous blow, causing the earth to shake as if experiencing a minor earthquake. Anyone unprepared for the strike within 50 feet of the user must make a DC 10 Reflex save or fall prone, and depending on the surroundings, there is a small chance that the rumbling will jiggle some small treasure to the surface. There is an equal chance that the shaking will trigger some negative effect such as a rock slide, cave-in, or attracting the attention of an underground beast. Be creative and match the potential results to the situation at hand.

Sample odds

Rich Underground Ruin: 1 in 4 chance of uncovering a gold necklace worth 10-40 gp, but an equal chance of triggering a partial cave collapse. (DC 10 Reflex Save or 1d6 damage for each person in the area.)

Open Field off the Trade Route: 1 in 20 chance of revealing an old farmer's strong box containing 2-20 sp and an iron drinking cup. Equal chance of summoning a hungry Blood Gopher.

The phrase "Let us getteth ready to rumble" is inscribed in Dwarven runes on the hammer's head.

Shield of Catching

A large heater shield constructed entirely of metal, the Shield of Catching sports dozens of small steel hooks and barbs protruding from its face. If worn by a fighter or dwarf, once per round on any miss targeting the bearer, the shield can be used to attempt a Mighty Deed to trap to the offending weapon. Freeing a trapped weapon requires a DC 12 Strength or Agility check by the foe, and when wrenched free, there is a 1 in 4 chance a twist by the shield-bearer will disarm the foe. If the weapon is a non-magical sword or spear, the weapon snaps in half instead.

Stone of Shadows

This otherwise ordinary appearing smooth river stone seems perpetually cloaked in shadow. However, when tossed on the ground, the darkness clinging to the stone will expand to create a natural appearing shadow in a small confined area that otherwise might be devoid of shadow. The stone grants a +1 to +3 bonus to hide attempts depending on the quality of the hiding space. Unfortunately, the stone darkens the wits of the bearer as well, inflicting a -1 penalty to the intelligence of anyone carrying the stone.

Staff of Attracting/Repelling

The bearer of this iron shod wooden staff receives a +1 bonus to armor class against all missile weapons with metallic heads, the magnetic field generated by the staff subtly misdirecting all attacks targeted at the wielder.

Once per day the staff can instead be used to automatically attract any one ranged shot in view, even attacks directed at others, out of the player's turn. The missile will veer of its intended course and fly unerringly to embed itself in the staff. For the rest of the day however, the staff will inflict a -1 penalty to AC against all missiles fired at the bearer.

Tiny Two-Handed Sword

Appearing as nothing more than a finely detailed letter opener, this tiny sword shockingly has the heft and weight of a massive two-handed blade! In combat the user's actions mimic those of a warrior swinging and stabbing with a massive blade, but are hampered by the blade's tiny reach. As a result, the sword suffers a -3 penalty to hit, but delivers full damage on a hit.

Torc Of The Mighty Mane

When first handled, the bronze of this torc is extremely malleable, but when pressed into place, it hardens like iron. The bearer will notice no immediate effect, but over the course of 7 days, the wearer's hair will grow and thicken into a glorious mane of flowing, ultra-teased hair, seemingly ever-tossed by a generous breeze. As long as the hair remains uncut, the bearer of the torc receives a +1 bonus to Strength and Personality.

Unfortunately, after a two week lull, the hair will begin growing anew, eventually over the course of months achieving astonishing length, volume and weight. After 3 months the character will find the hair interfering with movement and free action, resulting in a -1 penalty to all physical efforts. In addition, nagging neck pain will begin haunting the character day and night.

In addition, as the hair grows, strands will reach out to wrap and encircle the torc, making it impossible to remove without cutting some hair. After 1 year, the hair will have grown to the point of making breathing and sight difficult. To continue on the adventuring path, cuts must be made. Upon the first slice, the torc will burn fiercely for a few minutes, causing a single point of damage. The torc will then grow rubbery as if having been heated over a forge, tumbling from the character. All benefits are immediately lost, and over the course of the next 24 hours, all of the character's hair will begin to slough off, resulting in total baldness. After 2-3 months, the character's hair will begin to regrow to its normal state.



Running at a Demo/Convention

Tips for Perils of the Sunken City

Start play with the characters arriving at the stone monolith in Madazkan's Court. Read or paraphrase the following before reading the player introduction on page 8:

You are a band of desperate souls, gathered together on the outskirts of the Great City. Farmers, bakers, chicken butchers... you are no heroes. But you know that the massive swamp that lies in front of you, this Sunken City, holds treasures that your peasant minds can barely comprehend, and they are yours for the taking if you can but muster the courage to claim them!

Before you sits the fabled Sending Stone, a monolith some 15 feet tall. By placing your hands on its rocky surface you know that by some cursed power you will vanish and reappear again somewhere deep in the heart of the swamp, where dark denizens and glory await. It is time to go: as one you place your hands on the stone, and within moments you know that your former life is vanishing like all else about you as you are drawn into the impenetrable darkness of the Sending Stone's power!

Demo Keys to Play

- Keep things moving! With the number of characters you'll be dealing with you have to think on your feet and streamline rolls when necessary to keep the pace up. If you're in a situation where you have to make 15 rolls, choose four characters (one from each player if possible) and only make rolls that affect them, rather than the whole mob!

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- Have players roll a group initiative, and have each player perform all of his character's actions in a single burst.
- Once they get to the arena, get the party to the floor as quickly as possible. Exploring the 'master's box' is necessary, so streamline their search as much as you can.
- The threats of the arena should only whittle the party down a bit, not wipe them out! If they hesitate in the stands and are forced to the floor as a group, only have a subset of the group take damage to avoid weakening them too greatly.
- If the party has taken terrible losses before arriving in the dungeons, have a small party of replacement characters available in the room before the cells of the chain skeletons. They have been savaged by the skeletons and have retreated to this room for safety. Also remember the possibility of having Opossumen characters join the party in the arena above if necessary. This has always proved popular and good for a laugh in my sessions...
- If you get your players to the dungeon quickly enough, you shouldn't have any troubles completing the adventure in a single session

Final Thoughts

Thanks to all the wonderful judges that have written in with session reports from the Sunken City Adventures! I never tire hearing about the insane things players come up with to overcome the challenges of these adventures. It is such a pleasure and privilege to play a small part in providing an evening of fun for friends gathered around the table. Thank you all... Keep rolling my friends!

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