

# DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

## JEWELS of the CAROLIFEX

#70: A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE  
BY HARLEY STROH



MULLEN

Plus a bonus adventure  
with Nockmort the evil  
treat: **Lost in the Briars**  
by Brendan LaSalle







**HAND OUT B**



# A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

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# JEWELS of the CAROLIFEX



## INTRODUCTION

Remember the good old days, when adventures were underground, NPCs were there to be killed, and the finale of every dungeon was the dragon on the 20th level? Those days are back. Dungeon Crawl Classics adventures don't waste your time with long-winded speeches, weird campaign settings, or NPCs who aren't meant to be killed. Each adventure is 100% good, solid dungeon crawl, with the monsters you know, the traps you remember, and the secret doors you know are there somewhere.

This adventure is designed for 6 to 10 3rd-level characters aided by stout-hearted hirelings. The adventure can also be attempted by a smaller party of 4th- or 5th-level characters and will prove no less challenging. The adventure requires a balanced mix of warriors, wizards, thieves, and clerics, as the talents of each will prove invaluable in turn.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

**A**t the end of a forgotten back alley, in the weird and otherworldly marketplace of faiths known as the Bazaar of the Gods, stand the ruins of a forgotten chapel. All that remains are a fallen staircase, a mound of toppled stones, and a sickly, leafless tree placed squarely in the center of the ruins.

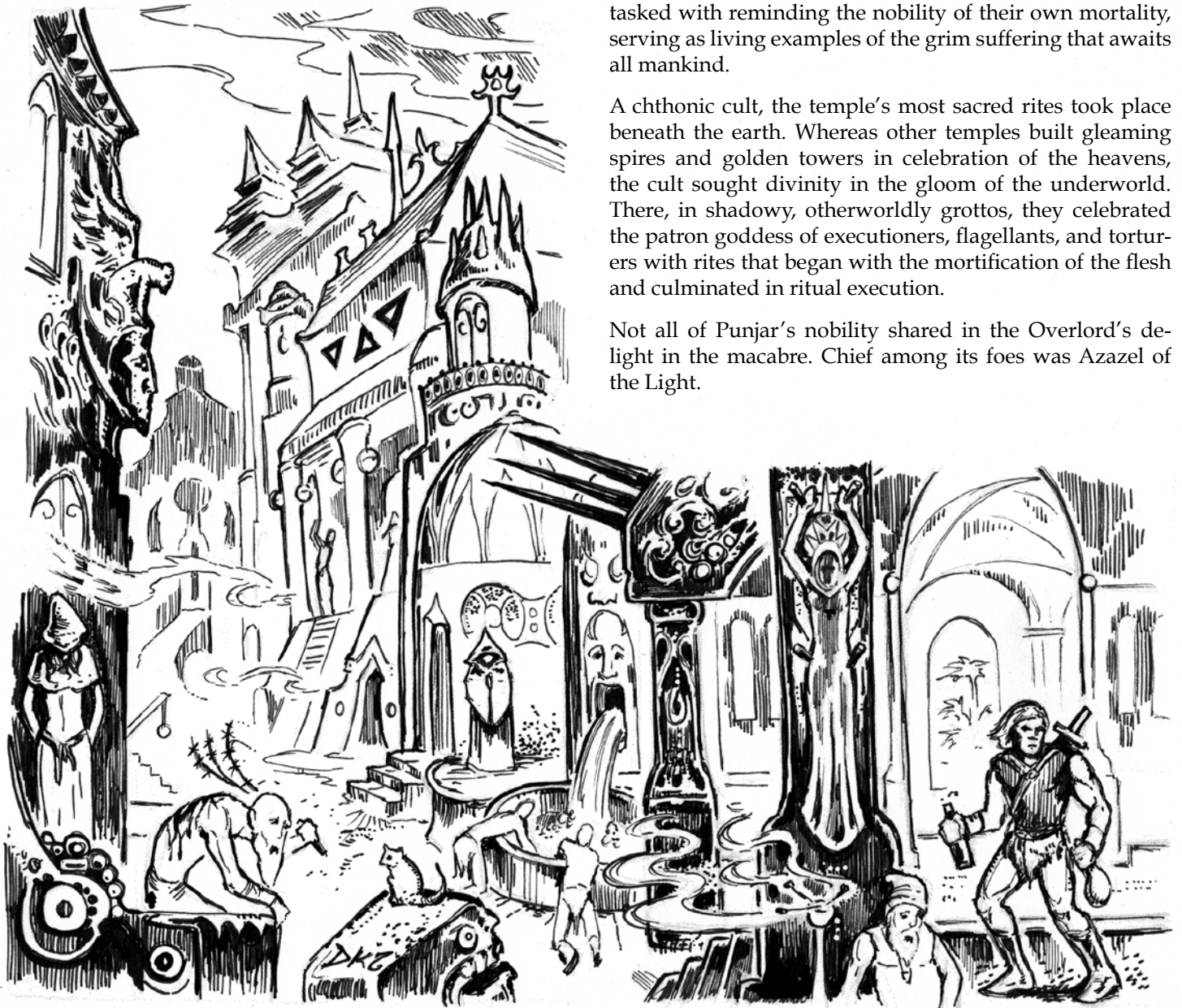
While such ruins are not uncommon in Punjar, the City of a Thousand Gates, the story of the chapel and its goddess is unique in all of Aëreth.

The Cult of the Carnifex took its ranks from Punjar's lowliest castes: the diseased and crippled, the criminally insane, and the untouchables. The cult embraced suffering and the transience of the mortal coil and exalted death as a release from the agony of life.

Serving as the Overlord's handpicked executioners and torturers, devotees of the Carnifex were celebrated in the highest, most decadent circles of Punjar. Cultists were also tasked with reminding the nobility of their own mortality, serving as living examples of the grim suffering that awaits all mankind.

A chthonic cult, the temple's most sacred rites took place beneath the earth. Whereas other temples built gleaming spires and golden towers in celebration of the heavens, the cult sought divinity in the gloom of the underworld. There, in shadowy, otherworldly grottos, they celebrated the patron goddess of executioners, flagellants, and torturers with rites that began with the mortification of the flesh and culminated in ritual execution.

Not all of Punjar's nobility shared in the Overlord's delight in the macabre. Chief among its foes was Azazel of the Light.





## AZAZEL OF THE LIGHT

**A** fanatical priest bent on scouring the world of the foul and unclean, Azazel was not sworn to any one god; he instead venerated the ideals of beauty and life. The cultists and their celebration of death were an affront against all Azazel held holy, an abomination that could not be permitted to exist.

Azazel rallied a small army of Punjar's finest youths, each a specimen of beauty and nobility. These men he dubbed the Swords of the Pious, a company of bright scions sworn to cleanse Punjar of the cult and all that professed its foul doctrine.

Girded in gleaming armor and wielding bright blades, the Swords of the Pious easily sacked the chapel, toppling its walls and putting the cultists to the sword. While razing the chapel's gilded altar, Azazel uncovered a hidden passageway. Marshalling his forces, the priest of light led his army down into darkness.

To his delight and dismay, Azazel found much more than a simple undertemple. Amid the chthonic gloom of the underworld, he uncovered a series of natural grottos, the earthly source of the Carnifex and all her powers. But for all his hatred, Azazel's power was insufficient to slay the goddess.

Desperate for victory, Azazel cried out to the heavens for an ally against the Carnifex, his fevered prayers reaching beyond deity and godling and tapping into the primal source of life itself. Seared by the blinding heat of raw creation, Azazel became the living Scion of the Light.

Suffused with positive energy, Azazel drove the Carnifex into the temple's innermost sanctum. Yet unable to defeat the goddess, Azazel cast her down into shadow, sealing the grotto with the sacrifice of three Swords of the Pious. Refusing to be defeated, he sealed all exits from the undertemple, ensuring that he and the Pious would stand watch over the Carnifex for all time. The goddess remains imprisoned there to this day, trapped within her own temple, warded over by the Scion of Light.

But no mortal body can withstand the undiluted power of creation. Today Azazel's form is but a fragile shell, held together by the priest's force of will and his unwavering dedication to the tyranny of light. Azazel's mere presence causes uncontrolled growth in all living things; vermin and plants grow to unnatural size, and the Swords of the Pious—once scions of beauty—are now bent with horrific mutations.

Despite the changes he inflicts in others, Azazel's mortal coil appears largely unchanged. His body radiates searing heat and is perpetually surrounded by a glowing nimbus of light.

Azazel's true nature is revealed when the priest is struck in battle. Rather than bleeding, his wounds release brilliant, blinding rays. Like the fragile shell of an egg, the remnants of Azazel's flesh crack away, exposing searing, unbearable heat: the forge and furnace of creation.

For more on Azazel, his devastating attacks, and the consequences of his defeat, see Appendix A.

## THE SWORDS OF THE PIOUS

**T**he Swords of the Pious, or simply the Pious, are the remnants of the original force that sacked the temple, slaughtering its celebrants and imprisoning their goddess. Handpicked for their martial skill and physical perfection, the Pious were once shining exemplars of the chivalric ideal, gallant in deed and distinguished by their virtue.

Today, the Pious are kept alive by Azazel's radiant energy, but at great cost: constant exposure to the avatar's primal life force results in crippling mutations. Once revered for their beauty, the Pious are now deformed monsters, wracked by pain and madness yet unable to die.

Nearly all of the Pious are hunchbacked and marred by irregular growths along their spines. Large, globular tumors hang from their diseased flesh. In their madness, the Pious celebrate the growths as evidence of divine favor, circumscribing them with tattooed starbursts and hanging rings and talismans from the largest growths.

While celebrating his followers' mutations, Azazel also shames the Pious for their hideousness, insisting that they conceal their faces with tightly sewn hoods, cinched closed with rope or braided twine. Each hood is unique to its owner: dyed red, blue, or yellow, hung with fetishes and the skulls and fangs of rats, and embroidered with fine silver or brass wire.

The Pious' former armor fails to accommodate their twisted frames, and the mutants resort to hanging their bodies with patches of ring mail, boiled leather, and hammered plates. The Pious fight with ruined blades, broken and rusted with age, great mauls, and banded staffs topped with hammered spikes.

The Pious strive to outdo their peers in battle, recalling the tales of valor that once inspired them to deeds of selfless heroism while secretly yearning for their own deaths. They hurl themselves into combat with wild abandon, only falling back if commanded by Azazel or as part of an elaborate, prepared feint.





## PREPARING FOR THE ADVENTURE



While short, the adventure is dense, with key areas sporting multiple elements designed to threaten, stymie, and terrify the boldest adventurer. Judges are encouraged to study the entire adventure prior to playing out the session, jotting down notes as needed.

Specifically, judges should study Azazel's goals and tactics so they can easily assume the role of the fanatical priest as he plots first to lure and then drive the PCs deeper into the undertemple.

The adventure places the PCs squarely between two opposing forces: the tyrannical Azazel, fully believing himself aligned with Law; and the grim Carnifex, neither wholly lawful nor chaotic, and patron of executioners and torturers. PCs are free to cast their lots with either side, though any choice (or even failing to decide!) incurs its consequences.

Finally, anticipating adventurers' penchant to poke and prod things best left undiscovered, the adventure provides for the release of the imprisoned Carnifex. However, this is **not** a forgone conclusion, and the judge should allow the PCs to decide for themselves whether they release the goddess or leave her hopelessly trapped for all eternity.

### RUMORS & SUPERSTITIONS



The ruined chapel and its grim history have long fired the imaginations of Punjar's fishwives, drunks, and rumormongers. A simple stroll through the Bazaar of the Gods will offer interested PCs the chance to overhear any number of legends, lore, and outright lies.

Before beginning the adventure, each player (not character) should roll 1d12 on the following table. It is up to the players to sort the truth from the lies, for while the rumors offer valuable clues, they can also lure foolish characters to their doom.

#### Roll (1d12)

#### Rumors & Superstitions

- 1 "Even after the cult was slaughtered, they never found their fabled gemstones. There's an overlord's ransom in jewels somewhere beneath that rubble."
- 2 "There must be a secret vault somewhere beneath the cobbles—everyone knows the real chapel of the cult was never discovered."
- 3 "Don't get caught picking around the ruins after dark. When the night fogs lift, all they'll find is your corpse hanging from the crow cages."
- 4 "An army of Punjar's finest noble sons disappeared beneath that accursed chapel. Whatever ate them is still down there, waiting for more."
- 5 "I always heard they were a cult of death worshippers. Nothing good can come of digging in them ruins. No fortune in gems is worth disturbing what's dead and buried."
- 6 "Ever seen the ruins after dark? There are weird lights and snow melts as soon as it falls."
- 7 "There's no way into the ruins from above. Stone is fused to stone, melted into glass even! Even if there were jewels 'neath the ground, they're surely ruined like the rest."
- 8 "Always heard the chapel was nothing more than a showpiece to allay the fears of the powers-that-be. The real wickedness took place below, feeding souls into the cultists' foul gems. Glad to see it sealed and hope it stays that way."
- 9 "The old church sat atop ancient caverns. Long ago, long before there was Punjar, or a chapel, or any cult, terrible acts took place in those grottos. Some secrets are best left forgotten."
- 10 "'Twas a cult of executioners and torturers. Grim, bloody work it was. The Overlord himself paid their way in gems, so there's a fortune to be had for any so foolish as to go digging in the darkness."
- 11 "No matter what they say, no cult ever dies. That wicked seed is still lodged in the soil beneath our feet. All it takes is a little blood to water it, a mind in which to sink some roots, and they'll rise again. Mark my words."
- 12 "My grandfather knew one of the cultists, a hunched, split-lipped, rat-biting leper. Earned jewels the size of my fist by pulling the tongues out of the Overlord's enemies. He died when the chapel was sacked, but they never did find those jewels."



## PLAYER INTRODUCTION



he adventure begins with the PCs acquiring a map to the forgotten passage (area 1-1) from Magmar the Lucky, a rogue of no small repute. The map could be won in a game of dice, given to the PCs to pay off a debt, or stolen off Magmar as he sleeps off an epic lotus binge. The map, little more than a few scribbled notes drawn on a wine-stained sheet of vellum, lays dubious claim to the existence of a hitherto unknown entrance to the Undertemple of the Carnifex.

With the map in the PCs' possession, judges have the choice of beginning the adventure immediately outside the forgotten passage (area 1-1) or allowing the PCs to investigate the ruined chapel above. Investigation of the ruins seemingly fails to provide much in the way of intelligence, but astute investigators can come away with subtle hints to the fate of Azazel and the Swords of the Pious.

If the PCs begin with an investigation of the upper ruins, see The Ruined Chapel below.

If the PCs begin with a bold plunge into the depths, read or paraphrase the following:

*With the ruins of the old chapel glowing weirdly in the foul night mists, you lead your companions down a dark alleyway. Prying open a rusted lock, you slip beneath the worn cobblestone streets and into a dry cistern. Every step leaves the familiar city further behind, and carries you further into the weird underworld. Strange, shelled worms crack underneath your hard-soled boots, glowing eyes lurk just beyond the reach of your lights, and your torches flair blue and orange in the foul miasma that passes for air.*

*Incredibly, the old rat's map proves right! A grim obelisk, topped with a stone skull, stands in the center of the passage, as if to bar your way.*

*All trepidation and fear is replaced by the thrill of adventure. Surely this must herald the start of your quest: a hidden entrance to the undertemple!*

Once a magical barrier, the skull-obelisk lost all its dweomers decades ago. Wizards and sages investigating the obelisk can glean as much, as well the knowledge that while the obelisk was once the focus of potent death magic, it is now little more than a grim statue.

Characters passing the obelisk enter area 1-1.

## JUDGE'S NOTE



he final battle takes place over a range of locations (areas 2-5 to 2-8). This running battle, with its feints, parlays, and deceits, will prove a rewarding (albeit challenging) encounter for judges of any stripe. Judges are encouraged to photocopy the stats from area 2-5 for ease of reference.

## ENCOUNTER TABLE

Area	Type	Encounter
Chapel	C	Captain 8 swordsmen 3 shield-men
1-1	C	Mutated spider
1-2	T	Skull trap
1-3	T	Collapsing stair
1-4	C	6 shades
1-5	C	Wood door
	T	Bronze door
	C	Clay door - frog demon
2-1	C	3 Swords of the Pious
2-2	C	Luthold the Mad
	T	Seven-point trap
2-3	T	Pit
2-4a	T	Cumdach trap
	T	Fuinginous gas
2-5	C	Azazel of the Light The Justicar 30 Swords of the Pious
2-7	T	Ravenstone trap
2-8	T	Stone of Five Seals





# THE RUINED CHAPEL



**General Features:** Little remains of the original chapel save a simple stone stairway rising over three archways, a pile of rubble, and a sickly, leafless tree growing from the very center of the ruins.

The stones are carved from black marble, shot through with veins of verdigris. Those investigating the rubble discover that the lower stones are fused together, as if by great heat or pressure, their seams melted together like volcanic glass. At night the rubble glows softly in the foul mists, and heat constantly radiates from the crumbled stones. All religious motifs, carvings, or iconography have been hammered into dust, leaving the rubble barren of any history or identity.

The ruins are surrounded by rusted iron crow's cages, or gibbets, hung from wooden poles at irregular intervals around the ruined chapel. Each contains the corpse of a would-be chapel robber in various states of decay. The fresher corpses buzz with flies and are jealously warded by black-winged birds of carrion, while the older corpses are little more than bones—picked clean and bleached in the blistering sun.

The ruins are watched over by the families of the original Swords of the Pious. The families aim to ensure that the ruins and the remains of the Pious are allowed to rest in peace. Each family draws noble sons from its ranks to watch over the ruins, a rite of passage that has persisted over the hundred years since Azazel first ventured into the ruins.

At dusk, the noble sons encircle the ruined chapel with flaming brands to deter would-be tomb robbers. Together the sons keep close watch on the ruins, confronting any PCs brazen enough to approach the chapel. They demand the PCs leave the ruins, resorting to violence if the PCs refuse. In battle, the swordsmen charge into melee, while the shield-men hang back, using their actions to take attacks directed at the captain.

The noble sons know little of the chapel's past, other than it was a home to a wicked cult that devoured their kinsmen. Over the decades, the sons have thoroughly destroyed every icon, carving, and sigil, until nothing remains to identify the ruins.

The troop is composed of eight swordsmen, plus three shield-men and their captain. They know little of the ruins, save that their collective families have defended the site for generations, believing that their own kinsmen died defeating a fell and wicked cult.

**Swordsmen (8):** Init +0; Atk longsword +0 melee (1d8); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 6 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +0; AL L.

**Shield-men (3):** Init +0; Atk spear +0 melee (1d8); AC 16; HD 1d8; hp 5 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +0; AL L.

**Captain:** Init +1; Atk longsword +1 melee (1d8); AC 16; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +1; AL L.

## THE UNDERTEMPLE



The sole way into the undertemple is via the forgotten passage, as detailed in the map given to the PCs by Magmar the Lucky.

**General Features:** Except where noted, the undertemple is unlit. The air is stale and dead, undisturbed in the hundred years prior to the PCs' arrival. The stone walls are black with mold, and hard bits of lichen hang from the ceiling. In the early areas of the level, the drone of the crashing waterfall dominates the chambers, but as the PCs press away from area 1-1, the constant drone is replaced by the ominous, unbroken silence of the grave.

**Area 1-1 - Forgotten Passageway:** *The shattered passageway ends before a gaping chasm. Above, you can see where the sewers once joined. A muddy torrent cascades from the shattered pipe, spilling past you and down into unfathomable darkness below.*

*Your goal lies across the gulf and through the torrent: a stone portal, set atop a carved platform and marked with a single carved skull, engraved in green.*

The chasm plummets down 200 feet into darkness. Characters slipping into the gulf plummet to their death, their corpses washing up broken and crushed on some unknown underground shore.

It is a mere 15 feet from the sewer tunnel to the stone platform, but any attempt to reach the portal is stymied by the falling wall of freezing water. Characters can attempt to leap through the curtain of water (Dex or Str check, DC 15) but hooking the platform with a grapple and climbing through the pummeling cascade is far safer (Str check, DC 10).

**Spider:** However, gaining the platform is the easiest of the challenges presented by the chamber. An enormous spider, grown to horrific proportions, hangs from the ceiling above the chasm, some 30 feet above the platform. Mutated by the positive energy of Azazel, the monster's form is barely recognizable. The enormous arachnid is immobile, glued to the ceiling and covered in diseased globules.

The spider-thing attacks by entangling its victim with a long, sticky thread of spider silk spooled from its spinneret. A PC caught by the thread on a successful attack is hoisted into the air towards the spider-thing. In 3 rounds the PC is drawn within reach of the spider's enormous fangs. The thick, resilient spider silk has the following stats: AC 15 and 10 hp; worse, the spider drools a corrosive poison that dribbles down the thread, automatically inflicting 1d4 points of damage each round the PC is caught on the thread.

The spider-thing can keep up to three threads spooled from its spinneret at any one time. If a silken thread is severed, it takes the spider two rounds to spool out another thread.



**Skull Portal:** The skull portal is not locked; rather it is circumscribed by hundreds of tiny runes, carefully carved into the stone portal and filled with lead. Wizards and thieves can easily interpret the intent of the runes (Int check, DC 10): to form a seal preventing the portal from being opened from the outside. Any attempt to open the door by physical means fails, causing the portal to flare bright green.

So long as the lead seal remains intact, the door cannot be opened by either might or magic. However, removing any of the lead destroys the seal. Once the seal is broken the enormous portal can be pushed in with a DC 15 Str check.

**Mutated Spider:** Init +3; Atk silk +2 ranged (1d4 acid; see text); AC 13; HD 5d8; hp 23; MV 0'; Act 2d20; SA maw +3 melee (1d12); SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +1; AL C.

**Area 1-2 – Saints' Sepulcher:** *The portal opens to a small, circular room. A spiral staircase stands in the center of the chamber, rising through the vaulted ceiling. Across the chamber, a second set of stairs descends into darkness. A circle of runes set into the floor circumscribes the entire chamber.*

*The chamber walls are covered in alcoves; each alcove is stacked with scores of bleached skulls wedged in tight rows, soaring to the ceiling dozens of feet above.*

The spiral staircase rises through the ceiling to area 1-3. The steps opposite the PCs descend further into the undertemple. PCs inspecting the rising spiral staircase note a trail of water seeping down the steps, staining the steps green and white.

**Runes:** Translated by a wizard, sage or thief (Int check, DC 10), the runes set in the floor read:

YOU ARE WHAT WE ONCE WERE

WE ARE WHAT YOU WILL BE

**Skulls:** The skulls belong to devotees of the Cult of the Carnifex. Each skull is stamped with the sigil of an animal circumscribed by runes. The stamps record the year and season of a cultist's death. Each stamp bears the icon of an astrological sign, either ascendant or descendant. Wizards or thieves succeeding on a DC 13 Int check can readily infer the meaning of the sigil and the rough date of death. The dates range from 500 to 200 years in the past. An exhaustive search of the skulls reveals a single strange skull boasting curling horns and long fangs whose death mark is precisely one year in the future.

Undisturbed, the stacked skulls present no threat to the heroes. However, disturbing the skulls (by the PCs removing a skull from the stack or by collapsing the stairs above) results in a macabre avalanche of dire proportions:

First, the PCs hear the high-pitched grinding of bone on bone, like a million chattering teeth. Then a handful of skulls fall from their perch, exploding into dusty shards as they strike the stone floor. The PCs have only an instant to react before hundreds of skulls spill down into the chamber like a cascade of chalky white marbles. The avalanche itself poses little threat to the adventurers, inflicting a mere 1d6



damage to PCs caught in the slide, but it propels them deep into area 1-4. PCs carried into area 1-4 by the avalanche must make a DC 17 Will save or drop whatever they were carrying beneath the tide of the skulls. Additionally, non-magical lights have a 3 in 4 chance of being extinguished in the slide.

Returning to the chamber through the debris of fallen skulls is a gruesome task, though readily accomplished. For the purpose of tracking speed (in pursuit of the frog demon from area 1-5, for instance) all movement is halved.

**Area 1-3 – The Collapsing Stair:** *The spiral staircase ends abruptly before a ceiling of fallen rubble. A steady stream of water drips through the debris above. A crude humanoid statue lies pinned between the highest stairs and the fallen rubble, glistening in the constant rain.*

PCs investigating the "statue" discover that it is not a statue at all, but a human skeleton covered in a thick coat of minerals deposited by the constant stream of water. The skeleton belonged to one of the original Pious, trapped here long ago by the collapse of the upper works.

The skeleton's lower torso and legs are trapped beneath the rubble. The skeleton's upper torso, skull, and arms are coated in a hardened layer of minerals. In order to fully examine the skeleton, the PCs must lift away the rubble and chip away the mineralization.

Smashing free the mineralized skeleton is a simple affair. Examining the skull and torso reveals that the skeleton wore a helm and a chainmail hauberk, both now corroded by rust. A golden chain hangs around the skeleton's neck, but the holy symbol hanging from the end of the chain is





trapped under the rubble. Inquisitive PCs can also note the remains of a scroll case trapped beneath a fallen boulder.

Dwarves and miners instinctively know that shifting the rubble to free the gold chain or crushed scroll case is dangerous. Hoisting the rubble requires a successful DC 10 Str check but immediately causes boulders to rain down from above, filling the stairway and inflicting 2d12 damage (Ref save, DC 15 for half) to anyone in areas 1-2 or 1-3, as well as triggering the avalanche of skulls in 1-2.

However, creative PCs can attempt alternative methods of retrieving the items without triggering a collapse. The items can be torn from beneath the rubble (Str check, DC 15) or filched (pick pockets, DC 13). Each attempt incurs a 10% cumulative chance of triggering a collapse in 1d3 rounds, regardless if the attempt is successful or not.

PCs are sure to come up with far more creative attempts to gain the items, and the judge should feel free to adjudicate alternative ideas in a similar fashion.

While the scroll case is destroyed with rot, its contents have survived. Inside the ruined case is a rolled scroll of hammered copper, now green with age. A map is inscribed on the scroll (show players Handout A, page 22).

The holy symbol depicts a radiant starburst of platinum set around a large ruby and is worth 150 gp. Clerics and sages can readily identify the symbol as the ensign of Light and Law.

**Area 1-4 - Death's Shadow:** *Stone stairs descend into an antechamber below. The vaulted ceiling is held aloft by pillars carved in the shape of terrified youths being dragged beneath the earth by skeletal hands. Actual bones, blackened with age, lie scattered about the stone floor.*

*A low pedestal stands in the center of the chamber. Atop its marble surface sits a hammered copper bowl containing a dozen simple wafers.*

*Across the antechamber rests a large arch, carved with intricate runes. A powerful green glow emanates from within, and tendrils of thick mist waft up from below.*

The antechamber presents a critical node in the expedition: careful explorers can discover a secret door leading to the true vault of the Carnifex, while those missing the secret door press on to almost certain doom.

As noted above, PCs carried into this area by the avalanche must make a DC 17 Will save or drop whatever they were carrying beneath the tide of the skulls. Additionally, non-magical lights have a 3 in 4 chance of being extinguished in the slide. PCs searching amid the skulls in the darkness can attempt a DC 10 Luck check once per round to find a lost item.

**Shades:** Six shades—the remnants of slain cultists—lurk in the shadows of the chamber. Though nearly invisible in shadows, the shades eagerly hiss their intent to, “Usher the faithless on to their reward.”



The shades attack any living creatures entering the antechamber, greedily devouring their life force. The unholy creatures cannot attack any PC bearing a light. The hungry shades attack until all PCs are slain, the only remaining PCs carry light sources, or the shades themselves are vanquished. Extremely silver-tongued PCs can also forestall the shades' attacks by convincing them that the party has come to purge the undertemple of Azazel and his minions.

**Bones:** The bones belong to cultists who died in defense of the temple. A cursory review of the chamber turns up the skeletons of six bodies. Intermingled with the skeletons are rusted war flails, suits of ruined ring mail, and the small image of a three-headed raven hung from a silver chain. Clerics can easily identify this holy symbol as the sigil of the Carnifex.

**Pedestal:** Adventurers investigating the pedestal find that the wafers are as fresh as if they had been baked that day. Each wafer is pressed with the image of a three-headed raven. Clerics and sages readily identify the wafers as a holy host: ritual, unleavened bread sacred to the cult of the Carnifex.

**Secret door:** A secret door is hidden in the north wall of the antechamber. Dwarves or elves making a careful search of the walls can discover the portal's seams; other PCs will need to use their ingenuity to discover the secret door, as simple searches are insufficient to find the masterfully hidden portal. Tapping on the walls reveals a hollow space hinting at the presence of a secret door, as does slipping a thin sheet of velum into the cracks. Explorers are sure to find other creative means of discovering the hidden door, but opening the portal is another matter altogether.

In order to open the portal, the PCs must place a holy wafer into a carved mouth on each of the four pillars, speeding them on their way to the underworld. Once accomplished, the stone door shifts open and the wafers vanish from the mouths of the statues.

Unless spiked or otherwise barred open, the portal grinds closed in 5 minutes. There isn't an apparent means of opening the portal from the far side. The door can be forced open from behind (Str check, DC 20) or by successfully inflicting 100 hp of damage to it, but it easily swings open if approached by a faithful devotee of the Carnifex.

Finally, judges should note that PCs can easily miss the well-hidden portal through no fault of their own. The temples' original defenders were not, after all, interested in giving invaders anything resembling a chance at survival.

**Shades (6):** Init +0; Atk chilling touch +1 melee (1d4 Str & Sta); AC 20; HD 1d8; hp 6 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +2; AL C.

**Area 1-5 – Ars Moriendi:** A vaulted gallery emerges from the green mist. Flaking murals painted along the ceiling depict hellish scenes where hordes of armed skeletons herd men and women of all rank and station, driving them on like squealing pigs to the slaughter.



Three portals stand before you. The first door is wooden and carved in bas-relief upon it is an emaciated child begging for a scrap of bread. The second door is hammered bronze and depicts a proud warrior driven to his knees by scores of arrows and bleeding from grievous wounds. The final portal is shaped of clay and depicts an ancient, squat man, his sad toad-like eyes giving his face the look of someone reflecting on a life half lived.

Tendrils of glowing green mist drift about the ceiling, casting an unworldly pall over the chamber.

This chamber presents a false puzzle: there is no "right" answer. Rather all the portals offer peril to hapless PCs.

**Wooden Door:** The wooden door is not locked, and is hinged to open towards the PCs. The door seems stuck, requiring a DC 10 Str check to "open." But once pulled with sufficient strength, the handle gives way, dissolving in the PC's grasp. Fiber by fiber, the door rots away into nothingness in the span of a breath. Behind the door, the PC (and only the PC) sees a spectral starving urchin, a begging bowl clutched in the child's hands.

The child looks to the PC with pleading eyes. Unless the PC immediately offers the urchin succor (a scrap of food or a single coin is enough), the pleading immediately transforms into ravenous, feral hunger. The phantom hurls itself at the PC, its mouth cracking open impossibly wide.

The target must make a DC 15 Will save or collapse in fear before the phantasmal onslaught. If the PC succeeds on the



save, he courageously drives back the spirit, causing it to vanish. If the PC fails, he perceives himself devoured by the monstrous maw of the starving child. Though other PCs see only the PC fall to the ground, the target must make a second save (Fort, DC 10) or temporarily lose 1d8 points of strength and have his hair turned preternaturally and permanently white.

Past the door is a small chamber. A tiny skeleton lies half buried in soil and fallen debris. Enormous roots, yellow with age, hang from the ceiling like giant tentacles. Rays of pale light shine from above, casting disturbing shadows on the chamber floor. Seeking out the light requires PCs to climb up into the mass of tangled roots.

Ascending the thick roots is a simple task. Determined PCs emerge into area 2-3.

**Bronze Door:** The bronze portal is seemingly stuck with age and opens away from the PCs. Forcing the door requires a DC 15 Str check. Unless PCs take specific precautions, those forcing the door open risk plunging down the low steps immediately behind the door (Reflex save, DC 15 to avoid tumbling down 1d12 steps for 1d3 damage).

While the stairs are trapped, the traps are only *activated* by PCs descending the steps. The steps are safe until the furthest PC attempts to ascend back into the chamber. Once primed, traps are *triggered* by an absence of weight on lower stairs. Thus, the trap on the fifth stair isn't triggered until there is no weight on the sixth stair or any lower stairs. Sufficient weight (10 lbs. or more) on any step lower than the trap stair is sufficient to prevent triggering the traps. Once activated, a trap continues its attacks for 1d3 rounds.

Thieves can discover the stair's secret with a DC 10 find traps check; successive checks locate specific traps. Thieves may attempt to disarm the traps, one by one (DC 15 per trap), but failure triggers all the traps for 1 round. Clever PCs can weight down the steps or wedge a step in place, but PCs attempting to climb or fly back up the steps transform the entire area into a stabbing, whirling, scything, blistering stairway of doom.

- **First Stair:** A trio of iron spears stab down from the ceiling. PCs take 1d6+2 damage (Ref save, DC 15 to avoid).
- **Fifth Stair:** Flaming oil gouts from pinholes in the step.

Targeted PCs take 1d8 damage (Ref save, DC 10 for half damage) and +1d4 damage per round until extinguished.

- **Ninth Stair:** A scything blade slashes across the stairway at head-height. Targeted PCs take 1d12+2 damage (Ref save, DC 15 to avoid, DC 10 for halflings or dwarves).
- **Eleventh Stair:** Stone blocks smash out from either side, crushing anything caught in their path for 2d8 damage (Ref save, DC 15 to avoid).
- **Thirteenth Stair and beyond ...** The stairs end at the thirteenth step, plunging 50 feet down a sheer pit. It is assumed that PCs falling into the pit plummet to their deaths, but generous judges can permit a roll for falling damage (5d6).

**Clay Door:** The clay door has no visible hinges. The clay is flecked with dull clumps of lead and bright slivers of adamantine; small bits of cracked clay lie scattered on the floor at the foot of the "door." What masquerades as a door is actually only a façade concealing a horrific frog-demon, trapped in place by the dweommed clay. The passage of decades has weakened the binding spells, and the demon is on the verge of escape.

Patient PCs pausing to watch the chamber for the source of the glowing green mist note that tendrils slowly slip from the mouth of the squat man.

Trying the door, either pushing or pulling, causes the sculpture of the old man to exhale glowing tendrils of mist. The tendrils immediately coalesce into thick, sticky tongues that ensnare the PCs and attempt to draw them onto the clay-man's mouth.

There are three tongues in total, each attacking of its own accord. A tongue can extend up 20 feet. On a successful attack, it seizes its target in an iron grip and draws the PC towards the clay-man. Targets take 1d4 points of crushing damage each round held by a tongue. PCs can escape a tongue by succeeding on a DC 15 Str check or by inflicting 15 hp in damage against AC 12. If a PC hasn't escaped by the end of the second round, the tongue smashes the PC into the clay façade, inflicting 1d10 damage on the PC and freeing the frog demon.

Released after centuries of imprisonment, the frog demon fights its way past the PCs, hopping towards area 1-1. The demon eagerly attacks the PCs as it goes, dragging along any victims caught by its horrific tongues.

Reaching area 1-1, the frog demon plunges down into the gorge, vanishing into the mists below. It is up to the judge to determine the fate of any PCs dragged into the darksome gulf, and whether or not the PCs ever encounter the fell demon again.

**Frog Demon:** Init +2; Atk maw +2 melee (1d10+2); AC 17; HD 6d8; hp 35; MV 45'; Act 3d20; SA 3 tongue +1 ranged (1d4); SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +3; AL C.



## THE HIDDEN SANCTUARY



Reached either through the secret door in area 1-4 or the ruined ceiling of area 1-5, the hidden sanctum once housed the mystery cult of the Carnifex and served as the seat of her power in ancient Punjar. The conquering Pious imprisoned the godling in her innermost sanctum; the Carnifex waits there to this day, thirsting for blood-soaked vengeance.

The inner temple is carefully watched over by Azazel and the surviving soldiers of the Pious. Unless the party exercises extreme caution and stealth (and enjoys a great deal of luck!) their actions will quickly alert Azazel's sentries, spurring an immediate and calculated response. See area 2-5 for details on the Pious' defense of the inner temple.

**General Features:** Except where noted, the inner temple is overrun by thick moss and hanging roots. All have grown to the point of collapse, giving the sanctum the appearance of a sickly jungle. Fed by Azazel's boundless life force, the deathless plants sprout tumors and bulbous, sappy growths. In general, the vegetation is far too moist and reedy to burn well; attempts to set the vegetation aflame result in scorch marks and little more.

Torches are set throughout the complex, burning weakly and casting a sputtering, yellow pall across the chambers. The dancing shadows and thick overgrowth provide opportune conditions for stealth on the part of the PCs as well as the Pious. The air is thick with smoke and the smell of rotting plants.

The walls and ceiling of the sanctum are formed of carved stone, plastered over with a thick coat of lime. Once decorated with elaborate murals depicting the rites of the dead, the ceilings are now covered in a thick coat of oily soot, cast off by centuries of burning torches. Except where noted, all iconography celebrating the Carnifex has been defaced or destroyed.

Mutated rats, slugs, and worms are common sights throughout the level. All have grown to an impossible size and are covered in foul growths. Despite their monstrous proportions and horrific mutations, they present no threats to the PCs.

**Area 2-1 - Antechamber:** *Ascending the steps, you are almost overwhelmed by the hot stink of rot rolling from the chamber before you. Sickly yellow roots hang from cracks in the walls and ceiling, and the floor is overrun with thick patches of black moss and scabby lichen. Across the chamber crumbling stairs rise to a stone balcony above.*

*Sputtering torches hang about the lower level, casting weird, flickering shadows throughout the chamber. A slow, methodic drumming comes from somewhere in the darkness above.*

A trio of Pious keeps watch from the balcony, ensuring that the heretic (in area 2-2) doesn't attempt to escape. Hunched and bent from massive tumors and growths, the three wear tattered cloth hoods, stitched with grandiose sigils and hung with the bones of rats. They are armored in

patchwork chain and ring mail, and wield spiked, banded staves. Each carries a quiver of 7 javelins at his waist.

**Drumbeat:** Two Pious keep watch on the chamber at all times, while the third beats slowly on the drum. The instant lookouts see something, or someone enters the room, they signal for the drummer to stop. Cessation of the drumbeat alerts Azazel and the other Pious that the temple is under attack. Resumption of the drumbeat does **not** indicate that all is clear but serves only to confirm the defender's fears. (If ever the Pious accidentally cease drumming, a runner is sent back to answer to Azazel before drumming is resumed.)

**Balcony concealment:** Until light is cast onto the balcony, the trio is nearly invisible from below, enjoying +4 to AC. At any point the Pious can withdraw to the back of the balcony, vanishing from view. The Pious gain +3 on attacks with their banded staves against PCs climbing the stairs, and a hit inflicting 5 or more points of damage knocks the PC back into the chamber below.

**Attack plan:** Ignorant of Azazel's plans for the wayward explorers (see **Azazel's Gambit** below), the Pious attack any intruders and fight to the death, buying their brothers time to mount a counterattack. The Pious hurl javelins from above and use their staves to hammer at anyone attempting to gain the balcony. The Pious only descend from the balcony if the PCs withdraw into one of the two side chambers.

**Exits:** A close search of the lower chamber reveals two portals set into the south wall. Both are covered in hanging roots that must be cut away before the PCs can enter. The south-east door is smashed open, while the south-west door is chained closed from the outside. The chain is secured by a simple lock (pick locks, DC 10) and can be smashed open by PCs inflicting 20 or more points of damage with a blunt weapon.

**Balcony:** The upper balcony, 20' up, is regularly cleared of growth, though tendrils of fresh roots protrude from cracks in the low ceiling. Twenty makeshift javelins stand at the back of the balcony along with four bundles of torches, their tips smeared in rendered rat fat and pitch. A large kettledrum dominates the balcony. The skin of the drum is fashioned from tanned human flesh, dyed red and tattooed with the sign of the starburst. (The skin belonged to one of the temple's original defenders). A human femur serves as a mallet, its head wrapped in the skin of a rat.

**Swords of the Pious (3):** Init +0; Atk spiked staff +1 melee (1d8) or javelin +0 ranged (1d6); AC 14; HD 3d8; hp 13 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will -1; AL L.

**Area 2-2 - Oubliette of Luthold the Mad:** *The door opens into a short, narrow hall, ending in a bowled-out chamber. Roots, lichen and moss cover the walls, ceiling and floor, nearly congesting the hall. Past the vegetation, in the cleared chamber beyond, you can make out a figure hunched over the coals of a dying fire and what looks like thousands of runes scrawled upon the ceiling, walls, and floor.*

This tiny oubliette is the cell of Luthold the Mad, a heretic cast out by the Pious for refusing to accept Azazel as a godling. Imprisoned in what was once a robing room, Luthold has spent the decades boring out the bare stone with his fingernails and using his own blood to paint sigils and runes on the walls of his prison.

Sustained and mutated by Azazel's primal life force, Luthold succumbed to madness long ago. He mistakes the PCs for the Pious and bids them welcome, hoping to lure them into a trap and make his escape. Luthold bustles around the chamber, welcoming the PCs to his hovel, giggling madly, uttering seemingly meaningless phrases, and asking them to sit.

**The eight trapped arcs:** Alert PCs may note that Luthold has divided the chamber into eight arcs radiating out from the central fire pit. The mad monk has carefully hidden seven spring traps in the shadows above his chamber, fastening each with sharpened stakes. When triggered by Luthold, the traps lash down, attacking seven of the eight arcs.

Luthold invites the PCs into the chamber, carefully making certain that he is standing in the safe arc. Once the PCs are settled, Luthold pulls on a braided rope, releasing the trap and spearing the PCs in the trapped seven arcs. Each PC must make a DC 12 Ref save or be speared for 1d12+4 points of damage; if the save is a natural 1, the trap inflicts double damage. If more than one PC is standing in a particular arc, the trap targets the PC with the lowest Luck.

After triggering the trap, Luthold flees from the chamber. PCs that avoided the trap can immediately give chase, but those struck must spend a round extricating themselves.

**Conversing with the madman:** Cunning PCs can glean valuable clues from Luthold in the moments before he springs his trap. The giggling madman goes on talking until all the PCs are in the trap's reach. If pressed, he offers to tell them the secret of the three-headed crow, the location of the executioner's relics, why Azazel refuses to eat noodle soup, or a hundred other meaningless facts. Most importantly, regardless of how desperate the madman becomes or how much the PCs press, Luthold cannot summon the clarity to engage in actual conversation.

Sadly, escaping the oubliette snapped what little was left of Luthold's mind. If the path to area 1-1 is open, he plunges to his death. If the path is not clear, Luthold collapses to the floor, weeping and gibbering incoherently. If disturbed by the PCs, he leaps to the attack, hoping to end his cursed existence.

Searching the oubliette reveals little save for a bundle of rags. PCs investigating the rags discover a string of worn prayer beads, fashioned from polished ivory. If worn by a cleric, each *bead* grants a one-time +3 bonus to a spell check. Once used, the glossy beads turn a dull, cracked yellow. Of the 33 beads on the cord, only 7 retain their power. Using multiple beads to augment the same spell does not double the bonus, but it does exhaust the beads.







Wizards, sages, and thieves may attempt to decipher the runes (Int check, DC 17). Predictably, the runes and sigils are the cryptic scrawlings of a madman; judges can use the Maddening Speech table (see sidebar) as inspiration for deciphered text.

**Luthold the Mad:** Init +2; Atk club +1 melee (1d6); AC 10; HD 2d8; hp 9; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref +1, Will +2; AL C.

**Area 2-3 – Trapped Hall:** *The narrow hall is nearly blocked by thick, hanging roots. Through the curtain of vegetation you make out a small chamber, where the roots shrivel, thin, and die, leaving bare stone.*

Note that if the PCs come up from area 1-5, they are aware of—and not subject to—the pit in the floor. However, if they enter from area 2-1, incautious explorers risk missing the pit hidden amid the roots covering the floor (DC 15 Ref save to avoid falling in). PCs falling into the pit plummet into area 1-5, taking 2d6 damage.

**Area 2-4 – Sacked Reliquary:** *The overgrown hall opens to reveal a small square chamber, some three paces wide on a side. In the center of the room is a toppled altar, lying cracked on the floor. The flagstones beneath the altar have been pried up, revealing a small vault, once hidden beneath the altar.*

*Roots and moss spill into the chamber from the hall, dying off before reaching the far side. The exposed walls reveal an intricate mural depicting an army of skeletons herding the living like cattle into a dark cave.*

This chamber was a false reliquary designed to fool robbers intent on sacking the temple's treasures. The ruse was a success—the Pious mistakenly believe they discovered and destroyed the artifacts sacred to the cult of the Carnifex.

As evidenced by the dying roots and moss, the true reliquary remains hidden in the rear of the chamber. The relics are so potent that the back of the chamber is devoid of all life, and PCs approaching the far wall are overcome by a faint sense of dread, as if sensing their own impending doom. Closely inspecting the mural reveals that while the mural is done in bright pigments, the color of the cave wall was rendered hastily with dark clay. PCs brazen enough to dig out the clay discover that it covers a narrow hole in the wall, 4 inches in diameter and 17 inches deep. Those reaching into the hole can feel a small metal ring. Pulling on the ring causes the mural to shift and rotate, revealing the true reliquary (area 2-4A).

The toppled altar was shattered by the Pious. The face of the altar bears sigils of the Carnifex and decorative skulls. Characters inspecting the nook beneath the toppled altar find an ancient sheet of fine silk embroidered with sigils of the Carnifex and now stained with blood. The nook beneath the altar is large enough to hold a two-handed sword, specifically the *Executioner's Wand*, now wielded by the Justicar in area 2-5.

## GIBBERING MADNESS

It is nearly impossible for Luthold the Mad to string together two lucid thoughts. To aid in presenting his disjointed, giggling conversation the judge should randomly pick or roll on the table below. Note that while many of his gibbering thoughts hold clues that can aid the party, PCs find it impossible to force Luthold to elaborate on any point.

### 1d12 Maddening Speech

- 1 Has that mad archpriest recanted yet? Scion of the Light? Heathen, I say!
- 2 Just a little more blood now, and I'll be free. Seven of eight it is!
- 3 And the goddess of Death? Has the raven flown her coop?
- 4 They say I'm mad. Azazel's the mad one. Bleed the light out of him, if I could!
- 5 Damnable growths! Mark my words, friends, too much life is worse than death!
- 6 Trapped here for ages! When will you be leaving, eh?
- 7 The three-headed raven watches over her. Some doors you just don't open.
- 8 Think you matter? We're nothing but pawns. That's what they don't see.
- 9 We'll all live forever, buoyed by the Light. Never a more bitter fate.
- 10 Have you found the relics yet? Or is old Az still chasing his tail?
- 11 Roots feed off Azazel. The rats, off me. Which of us is divine?
- 12 The wardens may watch the cell, but after so many years, who imprisons whom?

**Area 2-4A – Hidden Reliquary:** *The mural rotates away to reveal a large nook set within the wall. Seated atop a black silken shawl is a large golden box, a reliquary depicting the hooded Carnifex upon her throne of skulls. Gilt gold skeletons circle the base of the throne, announcing her triumphant coming. Some blow enormous horns, others hammer on drums, while knights atop skeletal chargers thrust aloft golden war banners.*

*A golden three-headed raven rests upon the Carnifex's shoulder, its ruby eyes glinting in the faint light.*

The chasse, or box-reliquary, is roughly 3 feet on a side, though much of this is the delicate gilt gold and carvings of the Carnifex and her court. Clerics and sages instantly recognize the reliquary and its purpose: protecting relics and holy artifacts sacred to the cult of the Carnifex. The chasse is the source of the dread sensed by the PCs in area 2-4; the first PC to touch the chasse has a powerful sensation of impending doom and must succeed on a DC 17 Will save or be overcome by a brooding melancholy. A PC failing this save becomes suicidal in battle, enjoying +2 to hit and damage but fighting without regard for his own safety (-2 to AC, and refuses to parlay). This minor curse, the *kiss of the Carnifex*, lasts through the next battle but can be dispelled by a cleric successfully *laying on hands* or by the PC accepting the Carnifex as his patron.

Thieves or dwarves inspecting the chasse quickly note that it opens from the front, beneath the throne. A keyhole is cleverly hidden behind the rearing chargers, and picking the fragile lock requires a deft hand (pick locks, DC 15). The reliquary can also be pulled open with a DC 10 Str check

or by simply wedging a sharp blade between the golden portals.

The reliquary is not trapped; the cultists assumed, rightly, that its contents would impart their own dooms to those that would misuse them.

Within the chasse are three drawers lined with black silk velvet:

The topmost drawer contains a simple ceramic vial sealed by a wax stopper. The stopper is stamped with a sigil depicting a pair of crossed swords. The vial contains extremely viscous black liquid, the dreaded *Oil of Slaying*. Bladed weapons anointed with the oil are considered blessed by the Carnifex, so that when a living target is struck by a weapon anointed with the oil the target must succeed on a DC 13 Fort save or instantly be struck dead. There is sufficient oil to anoint three small weapons (daggers, arrowheads, darts, etc.), two medium weapons (most swords and hand axes), or a single large weapon (a two-handed sword or battle axe). Note that even this fabled oil cannot overcome Azazel's primal life force.

The second drawer contains three silver flasks sealed with corks and stamped with the likeness of a three-headed raven. Clerics or sages recognize that all three contain holy water consecrated by the cult. When plied against Azazel or the Pious, the merest splash inflicts 1d8 points of damage.

The third drawer contains a fell tome, protected by an elaborate cumdach fashioned from sheets of hammered gold





RUSS

and silver tracery. Three rubies, representing the *Jewels of the Carnifex*, adorn the cover and are set in a circle around the image of a three-headed raven. The cumdach is secured with an elaborate platinum clasp composed of three discrete locks. In order to open the locks, all three must be picked at precisely the same instant (pick locks, DC 10, by three different thieves).

Alternately, the cumdach can be pried open with a mere DC 13 Str check. This crude technique releases a howling, banshee-like wind that immediately extinguishes all nearby lights. Characters in area 2-4 must succeed on a DC 15 Fort save or be struck deaf for 1d12 minutes. Additionally, any PC inside area 2-4A (i.e., close enough to open or examine the cumdach) must also succeed on a DC 15 Ref save or suffer 1d12 points of frost damage.

Within the cumdach is the fell *Grimoire Nex*, an exhaustive catalog of the obscene rituals and foul rites for contacting every known god, devil, and demon claiming the domain of Death. Clerics and sages instantly recognize the danger presented by this forbidden text. The simple act of reviewing the tome is enough to tear the rational mind asunder, and anyone attempting to study the grimoire must succeed on a DC 15 Will save or collapse into a coma for 1d12 days. Upon awakening, the reader can recall nothing of the text, but is haunted by demonic nightmares to the end of his days. (A reader critically failing the save by rolling a 1 is driven instantly and irrevocably mad; the poor soul tears out his own eyes in an effort to erase the obscene images before collapsing to the ground in a quivering pile of mindless flesh.) Clerics, wizards and elves that succeed in mastering the tome gain a +3 bonus when using it to invoke a patron or summon divine aid from powers associated with Death or when binding or dismissing the same. Each successful use of the grimoire **automatically** incurs a minor corruption.

Finally, the silk shawl beneath the chasse bears gold and silver embroidery depicting two skulls, each marked with the sigil of the Carnifex. Retrieving the shawl requires lifting the chasse, releasing billowing tendrils of fuliginous gas. (DC 10 for thieves to detect/disarm the trap.) All characters within the chamber must succeed on a DC 15 Fort save or fall unconscious. The PC can attempt to regain consciousness once per round by succeeding on a subsequent save. For every round spent unconscious, the PC ages 1d12 years. Allies can attempt to shake their fellows awake, granting a +4 bonus to the save. Judges are encouraged to consult the original DMG for suggestions on the effects of aging on the PC.

Borne by a character of Neutral or Chaotic alignment, the *Shawl Silenti* grants +2 to all saving throws and improves the bearer's AC by +1. When borne by followers of Law, the *Shawl* grants the same benefits but **permanently** reduces the bearer's hp by 1 each time the PC succeeds on a saving throw or avoids being hit in combat.

To devotees of the Carnifex, the value of the chasse and its contents are nearly inestimable. True disciples will be willing to pay 25,000 gp or more for the undamaged reli-

quary, though finding a buyer with such resources would be an adventure in itself. Those brazen souls willing to melt down the chasse for its base metals and jewels (no common smith would dare) are able to extract roughly 2,500 gp worth of raw gold. It is up to the judge to determine just how and when the Carnifex seeks her revenge for such an audacious act.

For those daring judges willing to foist the curse of wealth upon their PCs, see Appendix B for suggestions on how to deal with this sort of treasure in your campaign.

**Area 2-5 - Killing Hall:** *The wide hall is overrun with an abundance of vegetation: thick roots crack the ceiling and roll across the floor, where bulbous mounds of moss and lichen lay about like soft hills. Smokey torches are arrayed throughout, fastened to standing roots, staked in the moss, and wedged into cracks in the stone.*

Cautious PCs note the silhouetted line of seven hunched figures amid the drifting smoke and flickering shadows within the hall.

**Attack formation:** Alerted by the absence of the warning drum (in area 2-1), the Swords of the Pious sprang into action. Ten marched quickly down each hidden passage flanking the hall and wait there in hiding, while seven more positioned themselves in the hall among the roots and moss. The last three Pious and the Justicar lurk with Azazel in the vault.

The hall's seven defenders ignore attempts at parlay by the party and hurl javelins as soon as the PCs are within range. Their aim is to lure the PCs deeper into the hall, allowing their allies within the walls to spring upon the rear sentries. The Pious are very disciplined, falling back only two or three rounds after the PCs close for melee in what appears to be a rout. All seven fall back into the vault (area 2-6).

The twenty hidden Pious spring forth once the PCs give chase to the seven in the hall or on the Justicar's command once it is clear the PCs won't fall for the trap. The secret doors concealing their positions are covered in moss and hanging roots. In order for the PCs to have any chance whatsoever of discovering the secret panels, they must cut away the roots and scrape back the moss from the walls. The twenty Pious aim to drive the PCs deeper into the temple but will settle for fighting the PCs into a bloody stalemate.

**Battle conditions:** Combat within the hall is confounded by the proliferation of roots. Missile and spell checks for ranged spells suffer a -2 penalty to attack rolls, and all movement is reduced by half. Even the Pious labor under these constraints, though they can use the hidden corridors to speedily advance to either end of the hall.

**Negotiations:** Before either side can win out, Azazel calls for a halt in the battle, declaring that the PCs and the Pious fight for the same cause. See **Azazel's Gambit** for the reasons (and duplicity) behind the Scion's plea for peace.

If the Gambit fails and the Pious are seriously pressed, Aza-





zel again calls out for parlay, though no longer bargaining from a position of strength. Rather, he offers the PCs all his treasure and access to the Throne of Death (area 2-8), in exchange for his men's lives. To secure his promise, Azazel offers his Justicar in trade for a PC. If he betrays the PCs, they are free to slay his right-hand man. Azazel demands a hostage for his own guarantee against betrayal. Azazel has no intention of honoring the bargain and withdraws to a defensible position before slaying the PC. The Justicar is fully aware this plot and goes to his end willingly.

Finally, if all Azazel's tricks and deceptions fail, he orders his men to fight to the bloody end, in defense of the temple and in memory of ancient honor.

**Combat tactics:** If forced into melee, Azazel fights with a fell morningstar, hammering his foes into submission. His disciplined façade gives way to howling, feral anger. See Appendix A for Azazel's unique critical hit table and details on defeating the archpriest.

The Justicar fights with a mighty headsman's sword, the infamous *Executioner's Wand*, stolen from the false reliquary (area 2-4). The blade still bears the grim emblems of the Carnifex, its pommel capped with a silver skull. When wielded by a character with 16 or greater Strength, the blade grants +1 to hit and damage and +2 to all rolls on the critical hit table.

The other Pious are armed with spiked staves and each carries a sheaf of 5 javelins.

Note that while Azazel's divinity is immune to the effects of the *oil of slaying*, the Swords of the Pious are certainly not.

Warriors, dwarves and soldiers know intuitively that Azazel is the lynchpin in the Pious' morale, but the truth is far grimmer. Defeating Azazel brings an end to the preternatural life force that has sustained the Pious through the ages. The fall of Azazel heralds the fall of the Pious: the misshapen mutants collapse to the ground, wailing in agony, as their bodies rapidly age, wither, and then die.

**Azazel of the Light:** Init d16+1; Atk two-handed morningstar +2 melee (1d8+1); AC 17; HD 10d8; hp 45; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SA critical hit on natural 17 or greater, unique crit table, +2 for Pious within 50', death throes; SV Fort -1, Ref +1, Will +4; AL L. See Appendix A for full details on special abilities.

**The Justicar:** Init d16+0; Atk *Executioner's Wand* +1 melee (1d10+3) or javelin +0 ranged (1d6+2); AC 14; HD 7d8; hp 33; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will -1; AL L.

**Swords of the Pious (30):** Init +0; Atk spiked staff +1 melee (1d8) or javelin +0 ranged (1d6); AC 14; HD 3d8; hp 13 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SA +2 to hit if Azazel is within 50 feet; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will -1; AL L.

**Area 2-6 - Vault:** This large chamber has been cleared of the vegetation that overruns so much of the ruined temple. While roots still poke through cracks in the ceiling and dark moss has laid claim to cracks in the floor, the bulk of the chamber has been cleared of debris.

Nearly two score pallets line the floor, circling a large fire pit. Wooden javelins harden beside the glowing coals, while suits of makeshift armor lie amid piles of scavenged metal.

The far wall is dominated by a towering alien idol woven of roots and reeds and stuffed with black moss.

## AZAZEL'S GAMBIT



hile Azazel never imagined that tomb robbers could find their way into the inner temple, he is quick to turn the assault to his advantage. After countless years trapped beneath the ruins of the temple, the PCs represent Azazel's chance to end his timeless stalemate with the Carnifex.

The Scion of the Light has two goals in his defense of the temple: first, to ensure that none of the invaders escape back to the surface; and second, to coax the PCs into destroying the *Jewels of the Carnifex* (in area 2-7). Once the jewels are destroyed, Azazel will offer up the PCs' bodies in bloody sacrifice, sealing the Carnifex within her prison for all eternity.

He allows the PCs to be lured and then driven into the vault (area 2-6). As the battle with the Pious reaches a fever pitch, Azazel calls out to the party leader, requesting a parlay. If the party accepts, the Pious cease their attacks. Should the party refuse to negotiate, Azazel and the Pious attempt to drive them into the nave (area 2-7) in the hopes that the PCs might relent or destroy the *Jewels* by accident.

Azazel asks to speak with the party's leader in the vault, giving time for surviving members of the Pious to regroup (or close) as needed. The negotiations take place within sight of the party, just as the Pious take pains to keep watch on each hero. (Attempts to hide in shadows while under watch require DC 15 check.)

Azazel offers his regrets for the battle, claiming that the Pious and the PCs aim for the same greater good: imprisoning the wicked godling known as the Carnifex. And as if this weren't enough to sway any goodly soul, Azazel offers the PCs the treasure hoard of the old temple. All the Scion asks is that the PCs complete a small task: destroying the *Jewels of the Carnifex*. This simple act, Azazel avers, will allow him complete the rites entombing the Carnifex forever.

If the PCs press the question, Azazel reveals that he and the Pious are unable to approach the *Jewels*; as in a divine comedy, Azazel requires allies less holy than himself in order to destroy his hated foe. It is not an option to allow the PCs to leave with the *Jewels* intact. Azazel demands that the PCs commit to destroying the artifacts.

While the PCs may assist Azazel, he has no intent of allowing them to leave the temple alive. Even the most devoted and pious of the PCs falls short of his vision of divinity, and those found wanting must be expunged. Once the PCs have destroyed the *Jewels* or the instant they dare to counter his plans, Azazel gives the signal and the Pious fall upon the PCs like starving wolves.

Show the players Handout B (see inside cover). This chamber is home to Azazel and the Swords of the Pious, though likely the bulk of the battle with the villains takes place in areas 2-5 and 2-7.

The pallets are plaited from the root fiber and rest on mounds of moss. There are 43 javelins in various stages of fire-hardening. The awkward, makeshift armor can be worn by PCs, but grants only a +2 bonus to AC. PCs searching the chamber also discover five casks of highly volatile oil made from rendered rat fat and sap.

**The Idol:** The idol standing at the head of the vault represents the primal life-force venerated by Azazel and the Pious. It towers over 14 feet above the floor, with thick, tentacle-like roots for arms and a strange, bulbous head ringed with five eyes. The torso and head of the idol are stuffed with black moss wrapped around treasures looted from the cult of the Carnifex. The moistened moss oozes a foul-smelling, viscous slime that wicks away the magical properties of the relics. While the idol is too moist to be set on fire, it can be toppled with a DC 17 Str check or felled by chopping through a leg.

A gold-plated decanter (once worth 1,000 gp, now worthless) sits beneath the idol, catching the falling ichor. Upon close inspection, the ichor radiates a soft green light and

is shot through with flecks of gold. This *ichor vitae* radiates preternatural life force. Characters foolish enough to imbibe the ichor must immediately succeed on a DC 15 Fort save or take 1d24 points of damage and suffer a major corruption. The ichor is highly dangerous; a mere splash inflicts 1d8 points of damage to living creatures as their own flesh quickly grows, blisters, then erupts into weeping wounds. There is sufficient ichor to fill eight flasks; to mad warlocks and others possessed by the desire to bring life to the unliving, a single flask of *ichor vitae* can fetch as much as 1,000 gp.

Dissecting the idol reveals a trove of relics, sacred to the cult of the Carnifex. While nearly all of the items have been ruined, some have survived. Within the heart of the foul statue, PCs discover a gold chalice set with semi-precious stones (25 gp); a handful of gold death's-head rings once worn by the cult's assassins (7 rings, worth 5 gp each); a silver figure of a three-headed raven (45 gp); a silver coffer (worth 100 gp) spilling over with 555 gp; and a platinum-chased headman's axe. The axe is an enormous two-handed weapon, unwieldy in combat (-1 to hit) but capable of inflicting devastating wounds (2d6 damage).

**Area 2-7 - Grotto of the Worm:** *The carved stone and polished blocks of the undertemple give way to a strange, unworldly grotto. Glistening beads of moisture drip down a forest of bril-*



liant stalactites and splash over rolling folds of flowstone. The water collects at the base of the grotto before trickling away into the gloom below.

Dominating the center of the grotto is a bizarre statue of jade resembling a monstrous worm, nearly 5 feet in height. The worm clutches a glinting ruby in its weird beak and one in each of its two claws.

Several dozen candles are arrayed in a line, bisecting the cavern. The candles spit and spark violently, as if to ward off the worm and the darkness.

Astute PCs may infer that the greater temple was built to house this natural grotto, home to the cult's chthonic rituals. The sunken chamber and area 2-8 are both source and sanctum for the cult of the Carnifex.

Characters inspecting the candles discover that each is shot through with flecks of gold. Extinguishing a candle's flame reveals the candle's faint green glow. Each of the candles is suffused with *ichor vitae*; together, they form the first bulwark of the thaumaturgic prison holding the Carnifex. Extinguishing every candle destroys the first of the goddess' bonds. Dowsing the last candle releases a howling wind from area 2-8, buffeting areas 2-7 and 2-6, and making missile attacks impossible for 1d16 rounds. As the wind dies down, the PC that extinguished the final candle receives the Carnifex's blessing in the form of a +1 bonus to his Luck stat.

The weird statue holds three rubies of unparalleled beauty and size: the fabled *Jewels of the Carnifex*. Sacred to the cult of the Carnifex and hated by the Pious, each of the three jewels is worth up to 2,500 gp to wealthy patrons, and up to 10,000 gp to devotees of the Carnifex. The chthonic might of the jewels ensures that neither Azazel nor the Pious can destroy them; that task must be left to others.

Snatching the jewels from the statue runs the risk of ruining any thief's career. The stone is impervious to attempts to cause physical damage, and the jewels repel clerics and priests of opposing beliefs (inflicting 1d4 Stamina damage for each round a cleric spends within 5 feet). While thieves and dwarves inspecting the statue do not detect any traps, they do note a powerful feeling of doom radiating from the jewels. Removing a jewel by hand causes the stone beak to lash forward and snap shut, inflicting 1d12 damage and neatly clipping off 1d4 fingers (Ref save, DC 15, to avoid). If the PCs wisely opt for alternate methods of removing the jewels (prying with daggers, "popping" the jewels out with a rope, etc.) ask the players to precisely describe their PCs' actions to determine the likelihood of a finger or hand being targeted by the beak.

The jewels are rose-cut and are the color of pooled blood. As relics sacred to the Carnifex, they grant +5 on any attempt to invoke the goddess or summon her aid. Additionally, the jewels grant +3 to hit and damage when carried in battle against foes of the Carnifex (Azazel and the Pious, for instance).

Destroying the jewels is a simple task once they are removed from the wormstone. Any attack with a heavy, blunt weapon (such as a mace or hammer) shatters a jewel into a thousand worthless shards. Destroying all of the jewels robs the Carnifex of her power, trapping her in the grotto below for all time.

If the PCs are pressed into the grotto in their battle with the Pious, Azazel and his men use the terrain to their advantage, hurling casks of oil into the sunken chamber and setting the oil aflame with torches. Characters caught in the conflagration take 1d8 fire damage per round, but those sheltering in the shallow pools of water take only half damage. The oil from a single cask is sufficient to cover one third of the grotto, but the flames will not press into area 2-8. The oil burns for 1d12+6 rounds, inadvertently giving the PCs time to break the seal in area 2-8.

Once the flames die down, Azazel and the Pious will, hesitantly, pursue the PCs into the grotto but suffer Stamina damage (as above) if they come within 5' of the jewels.

**Area 2-8 -Throne of Death:** *The worn steps open into another natural grotto, but a massive boulder blocks the way. The stone is carved with a single large rune above seven smaller runes and is sealed to the surrounding cave with thick rivulets of wax shot through with flecks of gold.*

*A pool of inky water conceals the floor. Three skeletons lie in the water before the ominous stone.*

The skeletons belong to the three brave Swords of the Pious that placed the stone blocking the cave and inscribed the rune of binding, trapping the Carnifex within. Azazel sealed the stone in place with the sacrifice of their lives, strangling the Pious with their own holy symbols before returning to the upper gallery.

The skeletons wear chain mail, now ruined with rust, and once carried morning stars, now sunk at the bottom of the pool. A holy symbol hangs from a golden chain around each skeleton's neck. The holy symbols depict a radiant starburst and are worth 15 gp. Clerics and sages can readily identify the symbols as the ensign of primal life and light.

The runes of binding are carved in a script common to Lawful faiths. Wizards, clerics, and thieves can attempt to decipher the runes (Int check, DC 15), and Lawful clerics receive a +3 bonus on the check.

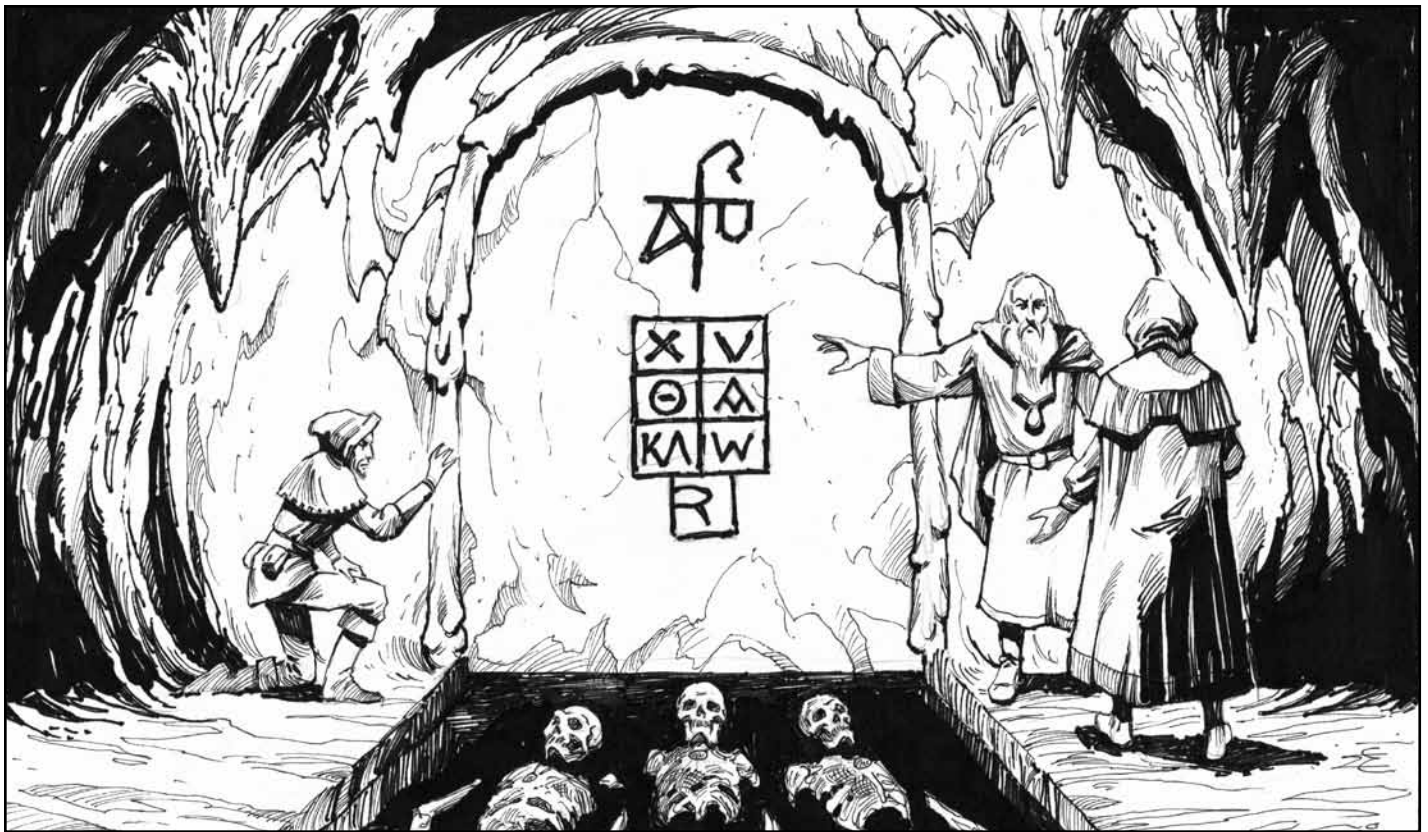
Properly deciphered, the runes read:

*DEATH*

*BOUND TO THE PIT BY THE SACRIFICE*

*OF FOUR NOBLE LIVES: LIAF, BAUHERM, MAGIN & AZAZEL*

Astute sages and clerics have a chance of inferring that the binding was never completed: Azazel refused to give his life like the others. Even those that fail to decipher the runes can infer that four names are listed, but only three skeletons are present. The other Pious have never seen the inscribed stone and have no knowledge of Azazel's duplicity.



Moving the stone is dangerous, requiring both skill and cunning. Close inspection shows that the wax is composed of five distinct segments placed in a specific order. (Refer to diagram in margin of map.) Wizards (and thieves succeeding on a DC 13 find traps check) will inherently know that the segments must be gently heated and peeled away in the **reverse** sequence, and that failing to do so will unleash a deadly trap.

Thieves can learn clues about the order in which the seals were placed with successful DC 15 find traps checks; additionally, PC clerics or wizards can aid the thief in the study, granting +1 per assistant. Each successful check gives the thief one clue in the order listed below. The thief can continue attempting checks until failing one. Additional thieves can build off of the knowledge of their peers, also attempting checks until they fail. There are four clues in all:

- I Segment C was placed last.
- II Segment B was placed immediately after segment E.
- III Segment D was placed before segments A or E.
- IV Segment A was placed after segment B.

The proper sequence for removing the wax segments is the **reverse** of the order of placement, thus: C, A, B, E, D. Once the wax is removed, the stone can be rolled aside with a DC 17 Str check or by the combined efforts of three characters.

Removing a segment in the wrong order instantly triggers a trap. The wax liquefies and then hardens around the thief's hand, locking him in place (no save). The judge should ask for PC actions and begin to count aloud to twenty.

Pausing at the count of seven, inform the players that the tunnel has begun to shake as if due to an earthquake and that the runes on the stone have begun to glow brightly. Resume the count with ten.

On reaching the count of fourteen, inform the players that the boulder has begun to tremble violently, causing stones and dust to fall from above as rays of searing light shine from the runes. Resume the count with seventeen.

Upon reaching the count of twenty, the stone explodes with the violent life force of the three slain Pious. Characters adjacent to the stone are struck by flying shards and the concussive blast for 3d12 damage and hurled 10 feet up the stairs (Fort save, DC 15, for half damage). Those on the steps take 2d10 damage (Fort save, DC 13, for no damage); finally those in area 2-7 who have not explicitly sought cover take 1d8 damage (Fort save, DC 10, for no damage).

For thieves caught by the wax, there are few options. No manner of Herculean strength can tear the thief from the waxen hold. The thief can either cut off his own hand or pray an ally shatters a portion of the stone by inflicting 10 or more points of damage with a blunt weapon. In both cases, the thief and his ally (as well as any wizards or clerics aiding in the puzzle) must act without hesitation or be caught in the immediate blast radius.

Those able to see into the pit once the stone is removed see a sooty grotto below and a long, serpentine tail swishing through the gloom. A moment later the Carnifex emerges from her prison in the form of a beautiful young woman with flawless, pale skin wearing a hooded cloak. The wormstone from area 2-7 animates and alights on the shoulder



of its queen, transforming to the size and appearance of a large raven. The Carnifex thanks each PC in turn, gracing each with an icy cold kiss. While the Carnifex's manner and speech are kind and beguiling, she is like a spider moving among flies, every motion invoking deep-seated aversion in the bravest of souls.

The sundering of the seal and the release of the goddess spurs Azazel to desperate measures. See the sidebar for details on this final, bloody gambit, and the goddess' influence over the battle.

Once the Carnifex is released from her prison, the grotto behind her vanishes, replaced by a blank stone wall.

## THE FINAL BATTLE



If Azazel and any of the Pious remain in the temple, the sundering of the seal triggers their attack. They press down through the grotto heedless of flames or the *Jewels of the Carnifex* in a final effort to drive the Carnifex back into the prison.

While the goddess does not deign to enter the melee, her power is immediately evident. She gently asks if her saviors will grant her one last boon: cutting a bloody swath through her hated foes. Characters (but not allied NPCs) receive the following blessings for the duration of the final battle:

- +3 to hit and damage
- Critical hits struck on natural rolls of 17 or greater
- While conscious, PCs regenerate at a rate equal to their Stamina bonuses +1/round
- PCs reduced to 0 hp or less fall unconscious but do not die (see below)

If every PC should fall during the battle, they awaken in the streets of Punjar just before dawn. Each PC has been fully healed and wears a simple silver necklace bearing the stamp of the three-headed raven. They retain all treasures won in the adventure save for the *Jewels of the Carnifex*.

If the PCs triumph in the battle (and retain their consciousness) the goddess thanks them for their service. If any PC is carrying the *Jewels of the Carnifex*, the goddess smiles knowingly and extends a slim pale hand to the PC.

It is up to the PC to infer her meaning and desire; if the PC fails to hand over the *Jewels*, the goddess acquiesces with a quiet nod. Simple violence is beneath her; the goddess of executioners has all the patience and motivation to seek a more artistic revenge at a later date.

If the PCs turn over all of the goddess' *Jewels*, each PC is granted +1 bonus to his Luck stat and +1 to a second stat of his choice.

In either case, the Carnifex and her familiar vanish with the sound of ravens' wings. A single black feather settles to the ground and the PCs are left with the sinister sense that they have not seen the last of the Carnifex.

## APPENDIX A: COMBAT WITH AZAZEL OF THE LIGHT



Whether by deceit or by force of blade, Azazel aims to ensure that the PCs never see the light of the day again. He uses the Pious to flank the party and drive them deeper into the undertemple for their slaughter. If he can coerce the PCs into destroying the *Jewels of the Carnifex*, so much the better.

Azazel directs the battle from afar, only deigning to enter combat when forced. Pious within 50 feet of their master receive a +2 to hit and fight to the death, so long as their beloved Azazel directs them and doesn't make any attacks. Once Azazel enters melee, this bonus is lost and the Pious risk being shaken by the sight of their divine master entering combat with mere mortals.

Azazel fights with a large, two-handed morning star, hammering his foes into the ground and inflicting grievous wounds with the star's long spikes. He howls like a maddened wolf, his lawful discipline giving way to self-righteous fury. His eyes burn with the heat of the sun, and bright rays cascade from his open maw. As Azazel is wounded in battle, he doesn't grow weaker; rather, more and more of his fragile shell breaks away, revealing unbearable beams of light until there is naught left but an unbound light that dissipates, leaving nothing in its wake. Characters are not so much slaying the being of light (an impossible task) as hammering away the shell that gives it form and function.

When Azazel is "defeated," the last of his mortal coil falls away, releasing a blast of light. Characters within 50 feet of Azazel must succeed on a DC 15 Fort save or lose consciousness for 1d4 hours as the searing wave washes over them, eclipsing them in a fiery umbra. Once the light recedes, a sliver of divinity remains with the PCs, and all those within the radius of the blast receive a permanent blessing of +1d4 hp and +1d3 to their Luck scores.

**Azazel Critical Hit Table:** Azazel's attacks are brutal and overwhelming, and unique to the being of light. Consult the table below when the Scion of the Light scores a natural 20 on his attack roll. As in all critical hits, Azazel's results are inversely modified by the PC's Luck.

### 1d12 Result

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| -3 | Miss! Azazel's mindless rage opens him to quick riposte. Target PC receives free action.  |
| -2 | Miss! Azazel's powerful attack leaves him out of position. His next attack is at -4 to hit and damage.                                  |
| -1 | Miss! Azazel's buries the morning star in the ground, causing him to fall to the bottom of the initiative count on the following round. |
| 0  | Morning star wedges in the PC's armor for +1d6 damage. Azazel loses his next attack as he wrenches the weapon free.                     |

## APPENDIX B: A TREASURE HOARD WORTHY OF THE OVERLORD



he adventure offers PCs the rare opportunity to make away with unimaginable wealth. While this can be a terrifying thought to judges, it need not catapult their campaign into the realm of the Monty Haul. Though cunning and thorough PCs might indeed make off with loot worth tens of thousands of gold pieces, converting it into disposable wealth is another matter altogether.

Consider: Between the Hidden Reliquary and the Grotto of Worm alone, PCs can emerge with over 50,000 gp worth of treasure. But very little of this can be sold to advantage on the open market or even through a fence. The box-reliquary is of value primarily to celebrants of a long-dead cult, and the jewels are sacred to the Carnifex and sure to draw the enmity of the same.

Even as PCs cautiously seek out wealthy patrons willing to purchase such dire artifacts, they must also contend with the wrath of the Carnifex herself. Released from centuries of imprisonment, she has no shortage of ire for those that cross her.

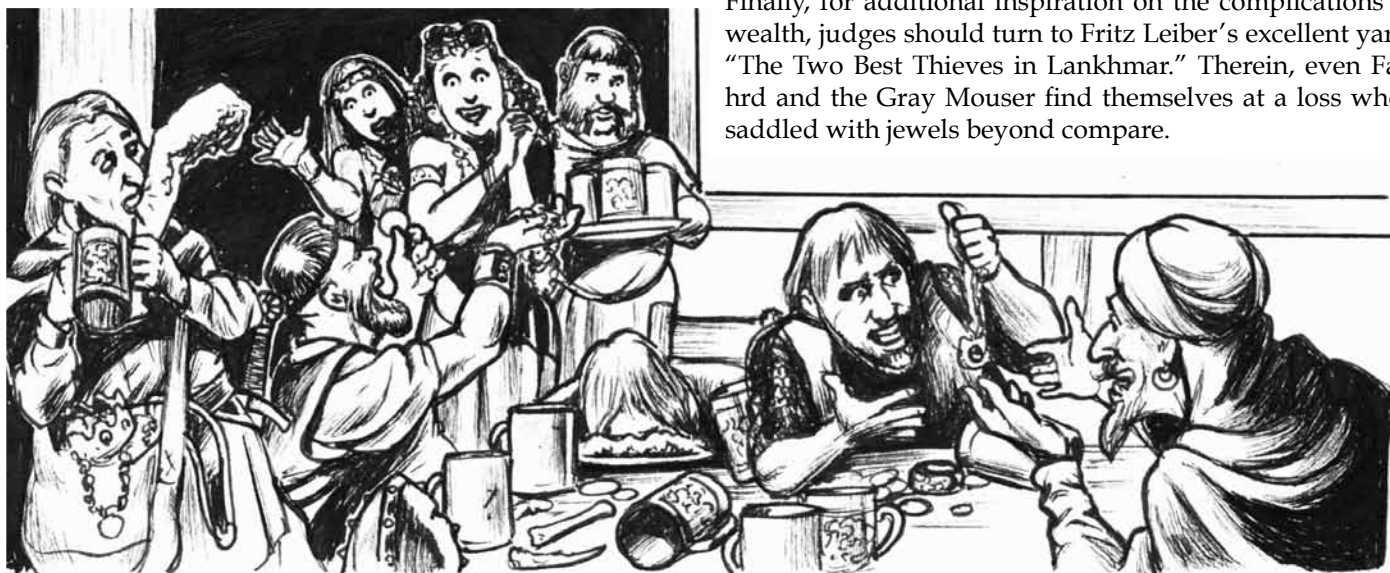
Worse, all the while the PCs will draw the attention of other rogues eager to make off with the party's legendary treasures. (Though, by this time, the PCs might well be happy to be rid of the accursed relics.)

Rather than styming the PCs in their search for buyers, the unique treasures serve far better as trophies, living records of the PCs' daring escapades. Even the brashest Prince of Thieves will not be able to out-boast a PC who wears the sacred jewels of a goddess around his neck, and few priests of Law could offer to their deity more than the outright destruction of a reliquary containing a book of unholy knowledge.

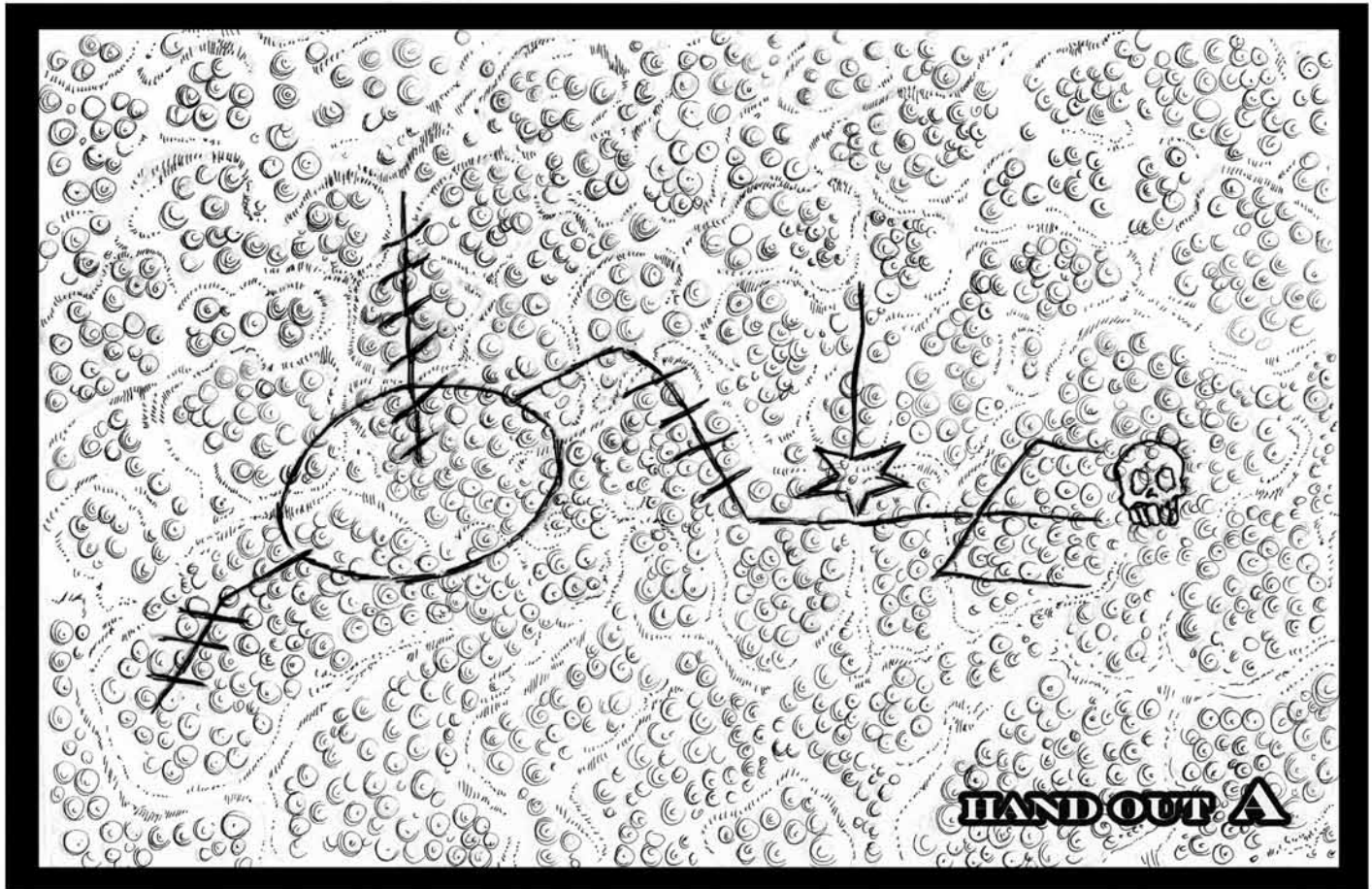
Such treasures are worth far more than any sack of gold: they record the adventures of a lifetime.

Finally, for additional inspiration on the complications of wealth, judges should turn to Fritz Leiber's excellent yarn, "The Two Best Thieves in Lankhmar." Therein, even Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser find themselves at a loss when saddled with jewels beyond compare.

- 1 Stunning blow! Dazed and bloodied, the PC falls to the bottom of the initiative count for the remainder of the battle.
- 2 The morning star shatters the PC's shield. If no shield, the PC's weapon is knocked 1d20' distant.
- 3 Blast to the face obliterates PC's eye socket. Attack inflicts +1d6 damage and target blinded in one eye.
- 4 Azazel catches target by the throat. Attack inflicts +1d8 damage and target bears burned handprint on throat and forever struggles to speak louder than a whisper.
- 5 Fearsome blow drives PC helpless to the ground. Azazel instantly makes another attack.
- 6 Disabling blow hammers PC's sword arm. Attacks at -3 for remainder of battle.
- 7 Glancing blow to the skull disables PC for 2 rounds. PC can only take move actions.
- 8 Blow reduces PC's weapon to flaming shards.
- 9 Azazel slams target full in the chest. Spikes puncture lungs for +1d8 damage and reducing movement by half.
- 10 Azazel seizes target by the face and exhales the searing light of creation into the PC's mouth, throat, and lungs. Attack inflicts +1d12 damage as the blistering kiss scorches away soft tissue and flesh.
- 11 The morning star's spikes puncture the PC's cranium even as the force of the blow explodes his spinal column. Int drops to 0 and PC suffers total loss of motor function as he bleeds out over the next 1d12 rounds.
- 12 Azazel's blow reduces PC's head to pulp. Instant death, even while the headless corpse staggers about for 1d3 rounds before collapsing to the ground.







*"Swirls" on map represent texture of hammered copper.*

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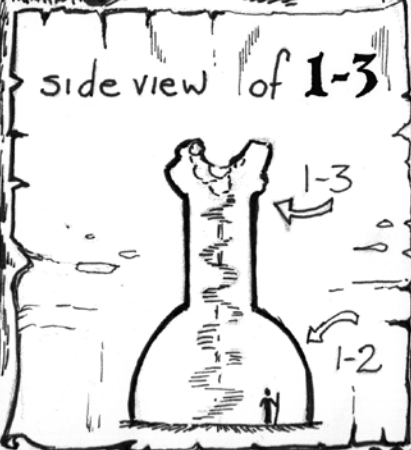
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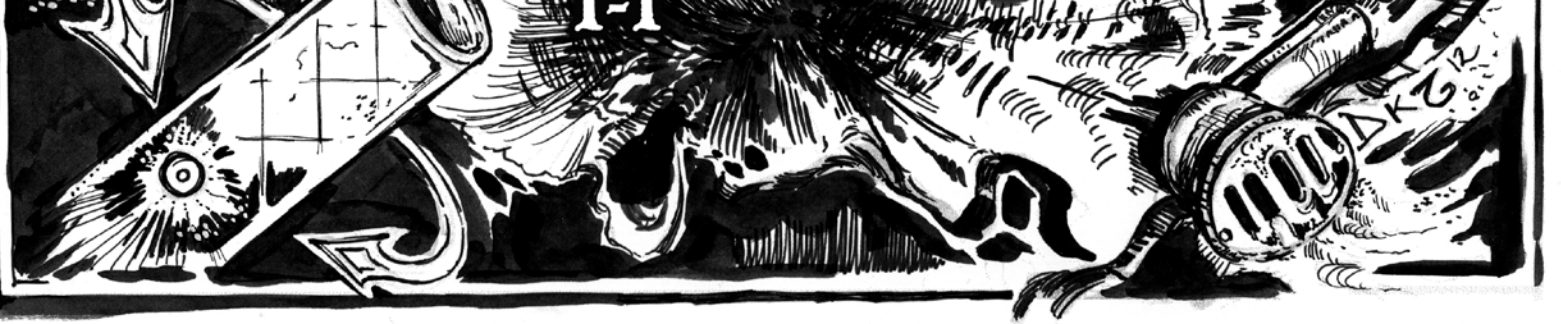


**LEVEL**  **TO 2-1**



5 = □

**PLAYER START**







# LOST IN THE BRIARS

## A Level 3 Adventure

By **Brendan J. LaSalle** • Editor: Rev. Dak J. Ultimak • Cartography: Gill Pierce • Interior Art: Peter Mullen • Playtesters: Brian Courtemanche, Ben Grimes, Doug Hopkins, Jeffrey Laluc, Michael Webster • Special thanks: David Hughie, Travis Callahan, Don Loffredo, Scott Snider, Carlton Spense, Jonathan Starrett

## INTRODUCTION



*Lost in the Briars* is a 3<sup>rd</sup>-level outdoor adventure. The woods around Garland's Fork suddenly go mad – a huge bramble wall springs up, trees animate and attack, animals flee, and humans are under attack from all sides. What is going on?

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Twenty years ago a fire streaked across the sky above the tiny trading town of Garland's Fork. Nockmort, a peaceful and reclusive treant priest of the primordial gods of creation and growth, investigated the impact and found a crater nearly a half-mile long, gouged by a glowing rock that fell from space.

The treant decided that the meteorite was a significant and singular natural phenomenon, one worthy of study and consideration. Nockmort took a sliver of the great rock and wore it as a pendant.

Within days, the baleful effect of the meteorite's strange glow made itself manifest in the unwitting treant. He grew hateful and angry, seething with rage at humanity and the other "despoiler" races. In time, he became a twisted and evil thing, bent on the destruction of all sentient life on earth.

The mutated creature hatched a scheme to destroy the tiny town of Garland's Fork with a petrifying poison. However, adventurers penetrated Nockmort's sunless garden and destroyed his physical form, and took away every scrap of the meteorite.

A fragment of Nockmort's body survived the bonfire, and took root in the earth, deep in the forest north of Garland's Fork, a 400 hectare old growth forest called Briarwood Deep. It took years but he managed to regrow his physical form, tapping into ancient magics and the innate power of the earth. As he put his physical self together, the earth whispered to him, the winds shared its secrets, and some unknown Power of Chaos shared with Nockmort the means to transcend his physical form and become a demigod. The ritual has taken ten years, but now, with the horrific death of twelve elves, it is about to take effect. Fortunately for the world at large, one of Nockmort's elf sacrifices managed to take his own life before he could be impaled, spoiling the ritual.

The empowered Nockmort now controls Briarwood Deep. He can see through the trees, he can listen through the winds. He willed a wall of thorny brambles to grow around the edge of the forest, trapping all within.

Nockmort needs one more elf to complete the ritual – a wizard or a Lawful cleric might work in a pinch, but another elf is necessary to insure success. But the treant cannot leave Briarwood Deep without jeopardizing the ritual.

And so Nockmort sets a trap.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

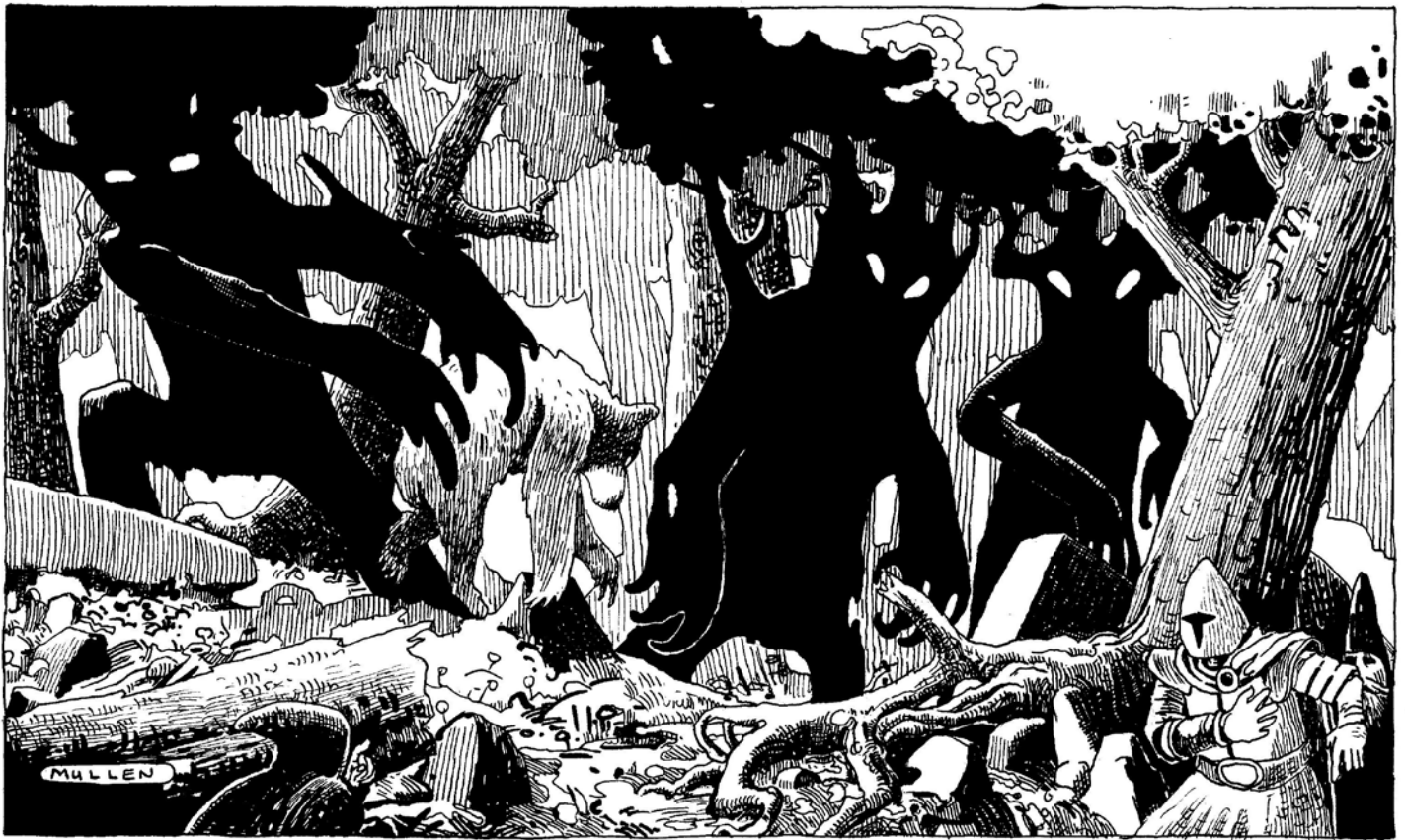
Nockmort needs an elf to complete his vile ritual, and so he creates a situation that he hopes will attract adventurers. There are many ways the characters can encounter the strangeness in Briarwood Deep.

- The PCs either encounter, or hear tale of, the giant thicket wall that sprung up overnight and go to investigate.
- Nockmort attacks Garland's Fork to flush out adventurers. The bramble wall flings rocks at structures until they are mostly destroyed, but ignores humans, hoping they will flee and seek help – and of course the displaced Forkers seek out the PCs.
- The PCs discover a rough line of gold and silver coins – 2d10 of each – that leads from outside the forest up to the bramble wall. The coins were carefully pitched there by the trees to lure adventurers in. The line continues for a few more feet inside the wall (1d6 more of each coins), then stops.
- The PCs could be hunting for either Zunichte and the Northfork Lads, either for the 200 gp bounty or for reasons of their own, and discover the strangeness that has come to the forest.
- The PCs find peasants fleeing the Briarwood Deep area. They all tell the same story – the animals and birds all fled the forest once the trees went mad and started attacking people. Nockmort is letting a few humans escape every hour to attract the curious.

## BEHOLD THE POWER OF A GOD

Nockmort's near-godhood grants him supernatural influence throughout Briarwood Deep. He can perceive through every tree and blade of grass throughout, up to and including the bramble wall, as if he were standing right there. He can animate up to 13 trees at any given time. The foul treant can also control the weather over the forest, so he keeps it dark with cloud cover and rain.





## RANDOM ENCOUNTERS WITHIN THE FOREST

The PCs have a 1 in 6 chance of an encounter every half-hour they spend in Briarwood Deep. Roll a d20, or choose an encounter that best furthers your story.

**1-2, Extreme Weather:** Nockmort alters the weather briefly, as part of his campaign against the residents of the forest. Roll a d5: (1) snow and hail, (2) extreme high winds, (3) pelting rain and thunder, (4) random lightning strikes 5 - extreme cold or heat. The altered weather lasts an hour.

**3-5, Animals on the run:** Roll a d12: (1) 1d2 eastern red bears, (2) 1d4 boars, (3) 1d4 deer, (4) 1d5 timber wolves, (5) 1d8 rabbits, (6) 1d4 wild turkeys (7+) a combination of 1d5 animals (roll 1d5 times on this with a d6 instead of a d12). All the animals in the forest fear the unnaturalness of the woods and are attempting to escape. Roll a d3 - on a 1 the PCs encounter animals that have been hurled by the trees (see below), so they are injured beyond defending themselves, having broken legs and spines and the like. Predator animals, such as bears or wolves, may attack the PCs in their fear and rage.

**Eastern Red Bears:** Init +2; Atk claw +3 melee (1d4+2) or bite +1 melee (1d4); AC 13, HD 3d6; hp 15; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP Grapple; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will+0; AL N.

Eastern Red Bears are indigenous to the woodlands and hills in the Briarwood Deep area. They are easy to spot by their long auburn fur. They are reclusive vegetarians, who normally avoid contact with humans unless their habitat or

cubs are threatened, or if they get thrown at an adventurer by an animated tree.

In one on one combat, an Eastern Red Bear will grapple (Strength check +3). While they hold prey in a successful grapple, their attack roll for their bite increases to +4.

**Timber Wolf:** Init +3; Atk bite+2 melee (1d5); AC 12, HD 1d6; hp 6; MV 35'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will+1; AL N.

Timber Wolves are dangerous pack hunters, cunning, careful, and organized. They normally only attack if the odds are clearly in their favor.

**6-10, Trees Transporting Animals:** Nockmort is using animals against the people of Garland's Fork and Braley's Mill. The PCs encounter trees handing a line of dangerous animals from one to the other, bucket-brigade-style, transporting them in preparation for an assault. The line consists of some combination of the following, (roll a d4 1d4 times, keeping multiple results except for the dog, which is a unique animal): (1) 1d3 timber wolves, (2) 1 eastern red bear, (3) 1d3 venomous snakes, (4) a single domesticated dog. The line stops and starts - the evil treant can only animate thirteen trees at a time, so if he needs to animate trees in another part of the forest, the line stops and the animals are simply held in the trees, whimpering, whining, and roaring to be released.

If the players follow the bucket brigade of monsters, Nockmort uses this to his advantage and diverts the branch-to-branch to lead them directly to him to The Ritual Ground, making sure the PCs can keep up.



If the players attack, the trees throw animals at them, which attack, and then swat at the PCs with their branches. The exception is the dog, an exceptionally intelligent creature which belongs to the Hermit. If the dog is tossed, it twists its body so it falls short of the PCs, then runs off to find its master at area 1-3.

**Average Animated Tree (up to 13):** Init -2; Atk branch swipe +4 melee (1d6+3); AC 8; HD 4d12; hp 28; MV 0; Act 1d20; SP Immune to sleep/ charm, max. 1 point of damage from piercing weapons, vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +12, Ref -4, Will+0; AL N.

The stats above are for an average size tree – the PCs might encounter a larger or smaller one, with plus or minus 3HD, or even more for exceptional specimens.

**11-14, Bandits:** When the forest went mad, the chaos separated many of the Northfork Lads from their band. These wretched few are simply trying to escape the forest at this point, and if questioned they first attempt to lie and say they were guards protecting a merchant caravan. Their goal is either to escape the forest, or to find their way back to the larger group to report to.

**Bandits (1-3):** Init +0; Atk cudgel +0 melee (1d4) or sling +1 missile fire (1d4) or knife +0 melee (1d3); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 6; MV 30; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will+0; AL C.

Each bandit wears hide armor and carries a cudgel, a sling with a pouch full of stones, a concealed knife, a waterskin, 1d3 days of dried rations, 3d10 cp, and 1d14 sp.

**15-18, Fleeing Peasants:** The PCs come across a group of 1d5 terrified peasants, caught in the forest and attempting to flee. They are likely farmers from the Garland's Fork area, who were caught either on their way to or home from Braley's Mill. If the PCs seem friendly the peasants ask if they can travel along with them for safety; if they seem dangerous the peasants run away. Peasants each have a cudgel.

**19-20, Mister Saturday Night:** Nockmort began his ritual, but then had to cease it when his final sacrifice died prematurely. This far along, the ritual cannot be stopped, and it now exists as a palpable magical event, a swirl of power and cosmic possibilities which hangs in the multiverse like a beacon. It draws strange forces to itself from beyond the ken of the world, and the first to arrive is Mister Saturday Night. No mere monster, Mister Saturday Night is an immortal force of evil, a dark shape formed from the nightmares of the survivors of terrible violence. It appears to be a human of our world, immaculately coifed and wearing a

tailored tuxedo, but it has no facial features – just a blank expanse of skin – like a man with a molded mask hiding his identity. The ongoing ritual freed him from an interdimensional prison, and now he is free to roam Briarwood Deep.

Once Mister Saturday Night encounters the adventures he first stalks them, carefully planning at terrorizing them, then slays them as he can, first isolating them one by one for preference. If the players stand and fight and defeat him, he reforms later and continues his campaign of terror, choosing other victims to randomly terrorize and slay. However, if the fiend manages to make the PCs flee or otherwise escape an encounter with him, he never stops chasing them until he kills them all or they find a way to destroy or imprison him indefinitely – every time the PCs destroys it, he reappears and finds them again.

Mister Saturday Night is cunning personified, so feel free to use any diabolical tactic or devious strategy against the players. It is a patient stalker, as much interested in spreading terror as in actual violence, and it might enact a campaign of toying with his prey that could go for months or even years.

**Mister Saturday Night:** Init +0; Atk fire axe +7 melee (1d8+3); AC 14, HD 8d8; hp 45; MV 30; Act 1d20; SP Signs of his Coming, heightened senses, exceptional stealth, immortality, mute polyglot, immune to poison, regenerate 1d3 hp/round; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +8; AL C.

Mister Saturday Night is a shape taken on by a dark alien force, unfathomable to man. Its senses are three times as sharp as a human, and once it focuses on a victim it can unerringly find that person for as long as they remain on the same plane of existence. It is also exceptionally stealthy – it has the equivalent of the thieves' abilities Hide in Shadows and Sneak Silently, both with a check of d24+5. It can't speak but understands every language.

Mister Saturday Night is immortal: it's physical form has no need to eat, breathe, or sleep, and is fully immune to poison. The creature's body regenerates 1d3 hit points per round until he is brought to zero hit points, after which it reforms 1d24 weeks later, traditionally on Saturday Night. It currently possesses a steel fire axe, the weapon it held when the college students it was stalking finally managed to enact the ritual that imprisoned it in the void of Limbo, but it is proficient with all standard melee weapons, improvised melee weapons, crossbows, and firearms.

When Mister Saturday Night stalks a victim, the victim begins to see signs of it as first – they will find a corsage of white flowers, or a pair of white gloves, or a neatly butchered animal gruesomely displayed. The creature has a theme song that follows it, and those it stalks begin to hear it everywhere, sometimes with no source at all, and sometimes from unlikely sources like singing birds or whistling workmen.

A sufficiently powerful Lawful cleric can turn Mister Saturday Night.



## KEY TO THE MAP

### The Wall

The bramble wall sprung up overnight. It is between eighteen and twenty-two feet tall in any given place, with unnaturally long thorns. Trying to squeeze in from the outside in takes three successful Strength checks (DC 13, need not be consecutive). Each attempt – successful or failed – causes 1 point of damage. If anyone tries to climb through from the inside out, the wall actively attacks them – the Strength check DC increases to 15, and the damage increases to 1d3 points per round.

A five-foot section of wall can be destroyed with 25 points of slashing or fire damage. The wall repairs a five foot section per round, so breaches close very quickly.

### Big Bug River

A narrow but fast-moving river passes through the forest. There are several places to cross using rocks or fallen logs. Mayflies swarm over it in many spots.

## ENCOUNTER AREAS

**Area 1-1 – Braley’s Mill:** The PCs find the ruins of Braley’s Mill. Until the current crisis Braley’s Mill was a productive and profitable mill on the swift-moving Big Bug River. It was the first target of Nockmort’s animated trees: first they pelted it with boulders, then they threw dangerous animals into the breaches. When the PCs arrive, the mill is a ruin – the upper floors have been collapsed by heavy rocks, the

outbuildings are all smashed, and the corpses of several humans lie broken in the yard.

The front door of the mill is smashed down, and there are dozens of small and medium rocks in the doorway. If they go inside, the PCs find the miller’s fourteen-year old son Murph trapped on a teetering rafter – on the ground below is a wounded mountain lion, furious and injured after having been thrown into the breached roof by the trees. It immediately attacks the PCs and fights to the death.

Murph can give a timeline of the events – in the hours just before dawn it started to rain, and then the pounding began. The mill had just begun its work day and there were six people inside – Murph is the only survivor. The miller’s son is mad with his desire for revenge, and will follow the PCs as long as they are investigating the events in Briarwood Deep.

**Mountain Lion (1):** Init + 2; Atk bite +4 melee (1d4+3); AC 13, HD 2d8; hp 11 (normally 17); MV 45; Act 1d20; SP heightened senses; SV Fort + 4, Ref +4, Will+1; AL N.

**Area 1-2 – Bandit Camp:** Zunichte and the Northfork Lads have used this area as a hideout for years, and have cleverly avoided detection by the authorities. Unfortunately for them, they kept hidden by using tree houses, which were all thrown to the ground when Nockmort first exerted his influence over the forest.

The characters find a section of forest littered with piles of lumber and scrap branches, interspersed with eight dead bandits and various camp detritus – pots and pans, broken





wine bottles, etc. These are the former treehouses and platform hideouts of the Northfork Lads.

The bandits have a herd of light war horses, seventeen in all, tethered to a long hitching post at one end of the camp. Their saddles and tack are all hung on nearby tree branches, along with 3 50' hanks of rope and a bag of grain. The horses are all terrified and will be difficult to ride or control until they leave Briarwood Deep (attempts to ride or control horses are 1d lower on the die chain until they leave the unnatural forest).

Bandit Chief Zunichte and seven of his men have survived – they are currently all hiding in a 15' x 15' pit in the ground 20' from the horse paddock, with a cleverly disguised lid with a hollow tree stump mounted atop. They are watching the forest, waiting for their chance to strike. If the PCs go over and investigate the horses, they attempt to stealth out of their pit and strike. Zunichte is no fool – if the fight is going badly for him and his men he may attempt to negotiate, or order a retreat, or flee without his men.

The bandits' treasure is in an unlocked chest in a corner of the pit: 1,241 cp, 368 sp, 44 gp, a small pouch containing a handful of mixed uncut gems worth 300 gp in any major city.

**Bandits (7):** Init +0; Atk cudgel +0 melee (1d4) or sling +1 missile fire (1d4) or knife +0 melee (1d3); AC 13, HD 1d8; hp 7; MV 30; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will+0; AL C.

Each bandit wears hide armor and carries a cudgel, a sling with a pouch full of stones, a dagger, and a waterskin.

**Zunichte (4<sup>th</sup>-Level Warrior):** Init +5; Atk two-handed sword 1d6+1d6 (deed die)+1 melee (1d10+2+deed roll) or crossbow 1d6+1d6 (deed die)+1 (1d6+deed roll); AC 15, HD 4d12; hp 41; MV; Act 1d20; SP mighty deeds as warrior; Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

Zunichte wears chain mail and carries a two-handed sword, a crossbow, a quiver with 15 bolts, a pouch with 15 gp and 22 gp, and a concealed dagger. He wears a silver chain with a gold lucky charm, worth 50 gp.

**Area 1-3 – The Hermit's Hovel:** The PCs see a wooden hut in the middle of a wide cultivated garden, bordered by a low ring of stones. In its center is a tiny hut with oversized eaves and outward facing shelves on every wall. The shelves are crowded with potted plants and gardening implements. There are two shuttered windows and a single rough-hewn door.

The hermit is Whilinda Frem, a resourceful and thoughtful former physician from a far-off metropolis. Her contempt for her fellow man and all of their foolish ways grew and grew, until on her 31<sup>st</sup> birthday she decided to leave civilization for good.

Whilinda is not happy to see people, not interested in news of the outside world, not interested in trade, and truly uninterested in aiding or assisting the PCs in their quest. If characters initiate contact, she does ask if they have seen her dog.

The dog is the only factor that can change Whilinda's attitude. If the PCs helped free her dog from the clutches of

Nockmort's animated trees (see *Trees Transporting Animals* in the Random Encounter section). If the PCs helped free the dog, the dog instantly runs up to them barking a greeting. Whilinda realizes why in an instant, and she is grateful. She tells the PCs the one relevant fact about the incident that she knows – she saw lights in the sky to the north at the beginning, when the forest first went mad. She points out a deer trail visible from the north end of her homestead as heading in its general direction. If the characters follow the trail it eventually leads them to The Ritual Ground. If the PCs remain gracious and don't say anything too stupid by this point, the hermit also gives them a gift: three herbal healing draughts, each in beeswax-sealed gourd. Drinking one slowly heals 1d3 hit points – it takes a full hour to gain its benefits – and gives a second saving throw against venom or disease effects.

The interior of the hut is simple – a small wooden table and single stool, a sleeping pallet of straw, and a huge assortment of homemade farming tools, along with a stockpile of vegetables and dried herbs.

**Area 1-4 – The Ritual Ground:** The PCs see a tall hill, its crown ringed in an impenetrable 40' high wall of trees grown together to make a formidable palisade. There is one entryway, a 15' wide gap through which strange lights escape.

At the center of the ring of trees is Nockmort, a 60' tall nightmare treant. Surrounding him is a ring of 12 living saplings, each of which impales an elf, still alive and in great pain. There is one sapling empty.

If there is an elf among the adventuring party, Nockmort immediately attempts to snatch him up and impale him on the last remaining tree, which will complete the ritual and turn Nockmort into a demigod representing the destructive potential of unchecked nature. Once the elf is grappled, it takes Nockmort 1d3 rounds to successfully impale him on the sapling, which instantly drops the victims hit points and Stamina score by half and renders him immobile. Breaking the grapple frees the victim from the sapling as well.

If there are no elves in the party, he attempts to negotiate; if the PCs will go and find him an elf to sacrifice, he will make them all powerful and immortal agents of Chaos. If the PCs agree and do find him an elf to sacrifice, he somewhat keeps his promise – he turns them all into living trees that will guard the Ritual Ground, which becomes the newly-made demigod's sacred space.

If the PCs attack, Nockmort works to destroy them all, beginning by calling lightning down on their biggest warrior, and then attempting to summon a monster. If the players use fire, Nockmort makes it rain to put out the flames.

If there is a wizard or Lawful cleric in the party and the fight seems desperate, Nockmort may attempt to grab them and force them onto the sapling. If he successfully sticks them on the sapling as above, roll a d10:

**1-6:** Ritual fails! Nockmort is furious, tries to destroy everyone.

**7-9:** Ritual is incomplete but salvageable, he can try again with an elf.

**10:** Ritual complete! Nockmort becomes a demigod and the world shall tremble.

If the PCs destroy Nockmort, the ritual ends. The weather becomes mild and dry. The tree ring in the Ritual Ground and the bramble wall remains, but no longer regenerates.

Piled at the edge of the ritual ground is the treasure Nockmort collected from his elvish victims: 376 gp, 472 gp, 8 mithril longswords, 7 mithril daggers, 5 sets of mithril chain mail armor, one mithril shield, and one magical mithril two-handed sword called *The Blade Aware*. The blade is +1 to hit and damage, and once per week the wielder can use it to create a temporary secret door through any wall up to two feet thick. The door appears to be a secret door appropriate to the wall (in a brick wall the door follows the lines of the mortar joints, in a wooden door it might appear as a slyly designed gate, etc.). Created doors last 1 turn, or can be automatically dismissed by the wielder.

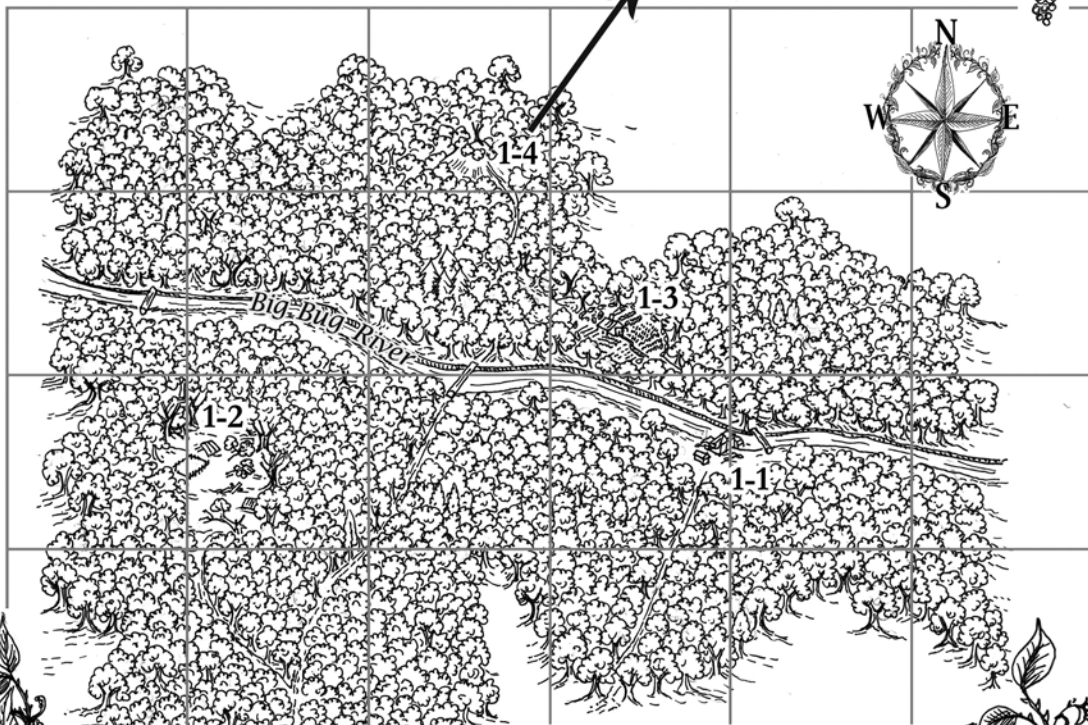
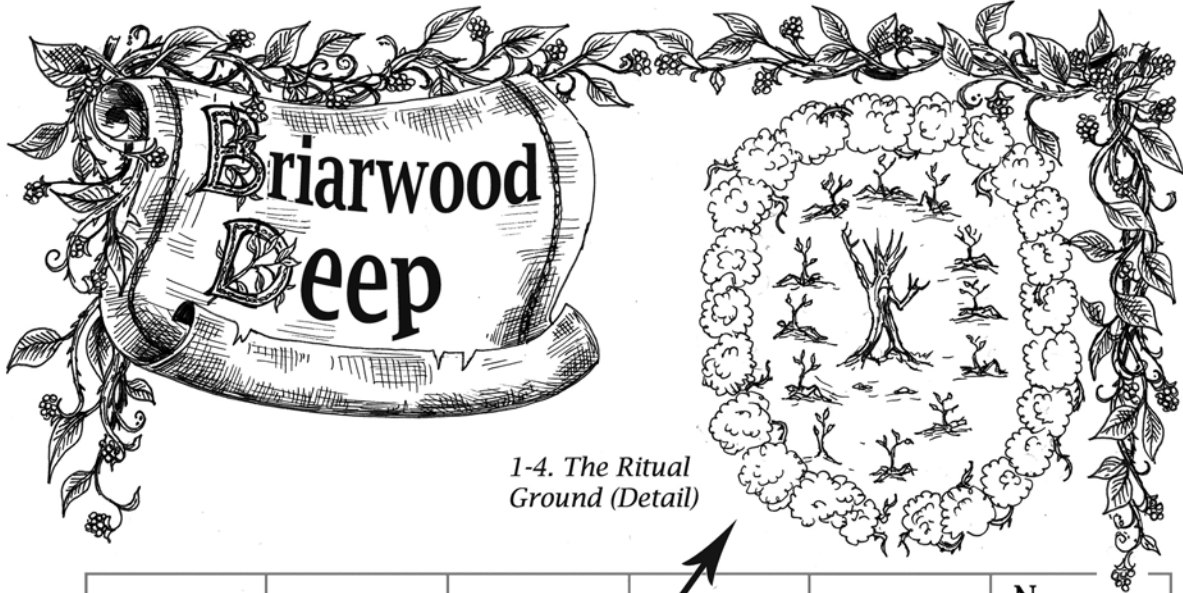
**Nockmort:** Init +1; Atk branch slam +8 melee (1d14+4); AC 18, HD 10d8+20; hp 82; MV 20; Act 1d20 +1d14; SP plant powers, animate plants, mighty grapple (check +6), spells (check +7, see below), weather control, vulnerability to fire; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will+12; AL C.

Treants are normally peaceful wardens of the land, who quietly work to insure the peace and longevity of the forest. Nockmort was a treant druid, an atavistic mystic of primordial times, until his transformation. His ancient form was twisted by the power of the meteorite, and when that form was destroyed by heroes he simply regrew in new soil. Now he is preparing to become the very personification of the chaos and unrelenting power of merciless nature.

Nockmort is a Druid of the Inner Circle, an adept of the 15<sup>th</sup> Mystery and, should his dark ritual be successful, the originator of the 16<sup>th</sup> mystery. He can cast the following spells, with a spell check of 1d20+7 (which drops to 1d20+3 if he leaves Briarwood Deep, or if he loses contact with the earth): *Blessing*, *Curse*, *Darkness*, *Protection from Evil*, *Resist Cold or Heat*, *Snake Charm*, *Word of Command*, and one arcane spell, *Monster Summoning*.

Nockmort can control the weather over the forest. He keeps dark clouds pregnant with rain in the sky at all times, so he can instantly make it rain as he needs. Once per minute he can call down a single lightning bolt to strike a foe, who takes 7d6 electrical damage, DC 14 Reflex save for half.

Nockmort can animate plants to do his bidding in Briarwood Deep. He can manipulate up to 13 trees at once. Animated trees can bend, grab, and strike, but they cannot uproot themselves and move. Nockmort is a living plant creature. As such he is immune to sleep and charm spells, and is vulnerable to fire. He is enormous, and can grab a human-sized target with one branch (grapple check +6).



**Key**

- 1-1 Braley's Mill
- 1-2 Bandit Camp
- 1-3 The Hermit's Hovel
- 1-4 The Ritual Ground

1 Mile



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