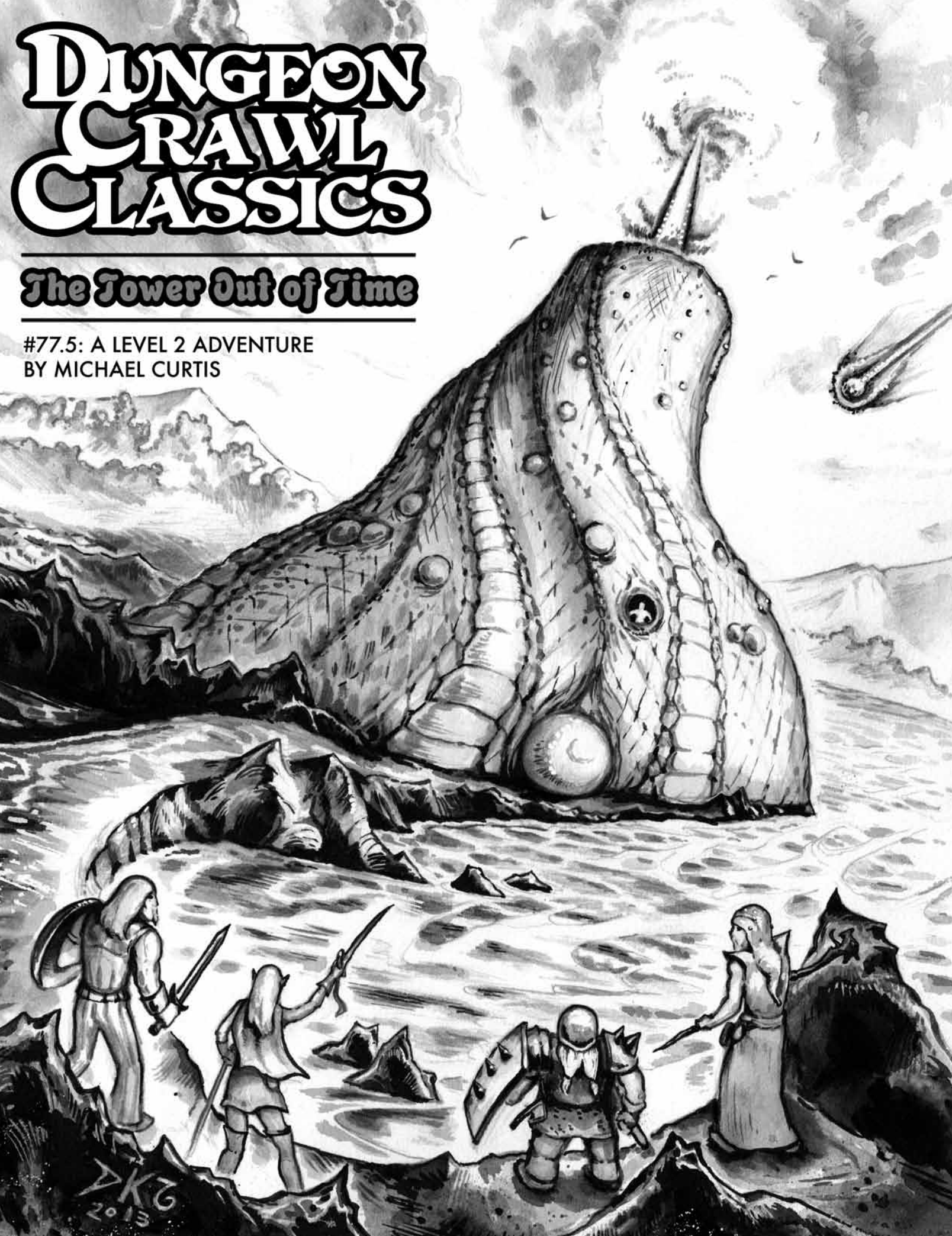


# DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

## The Tower Out of Time

#77.5: A LEVEL 2 ADVENTURE  
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# THE TOWER OUT OF TIME

A Level 2 Adventure

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his adventure is intended for six 2<sup>nd</sup> level PCs. *The Tower Out of Time* can be run as part of Free RPG Day to introduce new players to the exciting possibilities of *Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG* or inserted into an ongoing campaign as a short interlude between greater adventures. If used as part of Free RPG Day, the judge should use the pre-generated 2<sup>nd</sup> level characters provided with this adventure packet.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND



ons ago, when the world was a primal, savage place, the empire of E'shernulus arose in the tropical swamps. This realm was the dominion of the serpent-men, who lorded over the primitive denizens of that ancient epoch. At the height of E'shernulus' grandeur, there arose the wizard, S'lissakk, a sorcerer of great renown. S'lissakk was captivated by the mysteries of the night sky and would spend his evenings atop his observatory gazing into the cosmic gulf with a mixture of wonder and frustration. Thoughts of what lay beyond the glittering stars filled his serpentine mind, and having accrued great victories on earth, he set about to plumb those depths to discover its wonders.

After years of experimentation, with both magic and engineering, S'lissakk succeeded in building a void-craft capable of transcending the chains of gravity to explore the outer dark. The serpent-sorcerer could not predict the duration of his cosmic journey, nor the conditions that he might discover upon his return. To safeguard his eventual homecoming, S'lissakk constructed a tower to guide him back from the stars once his explorations were complete.

S'lissakk equipped the beacon tower with a mystical engine enabling the structure to leap-frog through time, pausing occasionally at future epochs to anticipate his arrival. His apprentice, H'lisk, was tasked with the care-taking and operation of the tower, known as the Pharos of Scales. It would be the duty of H'lisk to pilot the beacon through the ages until the time of his master's re-entry.

With the necessary arrangements for his journey complete, S'lissakk departed the world and embarked on his expedition into the cosmic void. H'lisk, devoted to the end, bid farewell to his own time period and engaged the power sources of the Pharos of Scales, throwing the tower into the future to await the return of his master. The Pharos has traveled the time stream ever since, pausing from time to time in its journey to provide a sign post for S'lissakk's homecoming. Each of these interruptions saw no reply from S'lissakk's void-craft, but now, after nearly a million years of travel (but only weeks by H'lisk's reckoning), the

Pharos has arrived at the time and place of S'lissakk's imminent arrival home. H'lisk awaits in the Pharos, anxious to greet his master and whatever cargo the serpent-mage acquired on his long trip into the outer dark.

## BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE



he judge can introduce this adventure at any time and place of his choosing in the campaign, although placing the Pharos of Scales in a forest close to the PCs' current base of operations is suggested. The first hint of the events that follow comes in the form of a newly-discovered comet sighted in the night sky. PCs who are wizards, elves, clerics of sky deities, or have the astrologer occupation notice this vagabond star automatically. Other PCs likely learn of its arrival through market gossip, tavern tales, or happenstance. This new "bearded star," as it is referred to by astrologers and mystics, has been dubbed "Serbok" by its observers. The comet is white-green in coloration and bears a long, sinuous tale. A DC 10 Intelligence check recalls that "Serbok" is an old word meaning "serpent," and the name is apt considering its serpentine tail and coloration. Unknown to the masses at this point, the comet is no astronomical body, but S'lissakk's void-craft returning from the stars.

Serbok's appearance inspires numerous rumors of ill fortune ahead, as comets are wont to do. The judge can play up these rumors, creating encounters with half-crazed prophets in the town market or terrified villagers predicting plague, famine, or the births of monstrosities. However, it's the next consequence of S'lissakk's return that truly begins the adventure.

A few days after Serbok's appearance in the sky, another event has the populace uneasy. Woodcutters plying their trade in a nearby forest report a strange sight encountered near the verge of the wood. They report witnessing the sudden appearance of a great, dark lake within the woods, one which has never existed there before. Compounding this mystery is an odd tower that squats along the lake's shore. Although the woodcutters did not tarry long in the vicinity, they say that the tower had a decidedly leathery appearance, as if constructed from the hide of some monstrous reptile instead of stone and mortar. As the woodcutters fled the location, a burning ray of light erupted from the tower's apex to streak into the sky above. This incandescent ray remained observable even after the woodcutters exited the forest, steadily blazing away above the tree tops.

Depending on the distance between the woods and the PCs' base of operations, confirming the truth to the woodcutter's tale may be as easy as looking towards the forest. Even in daylight, the tower's beacon is bright enough to be

seen from a distance of several miles and, after nightfall, the crimson ray is detectable from a distance of almost 75 miles, weather permitting.

The PCs may decide to investigate the lake and tower of their own accord or be approached by local officials to do the same. In the latter case, the local constabulary offers payment of 50 gp total and the pick of one item each from the inventory of confiscated items currently held by local law-enforcement officials (as determined by the judge). Payment is promised once the PCs investigate the lake and tower, and determine the purpose of their abrupt appearance.

## ENCOUNTER TABLE

| Event | Type | Encounter                                 |
|-------|------|---|
| 1-1   | C    | 2 Green Spitters                          |
| 2-1   | C    | 3 ape-men and 3 cerebraleeches            |
| 3-2   | T    | Rampway trap                              |
| 4-1   | C/T  | H'lisk and 2 ape-men<br>Serpent door trap |
| 4-2   | C    | 2 giant trilobites                        |

## THE PHAROS OF SCALES



The PCs arrive at the woods after an uneventful journey. Two anomalies are evident as the party approaches the forest. The first is the thick cluster of drab clouds that hang over the forest. These swirling thunderheads are present even if the sky is otherwise clear. The clouds are a product of the primal atmosphere surrounding the lake, which alters local weather patterns. The clouds hang ominously over the forest.

Secondly, the incandescent beam spoken of by the woodcutters is also visible if not noticeable before. The searing ray shines straight into the sky, parting the cloud cover above like a burning blade. With the beam to guide them, locating the tarn and tower is a simple task. The PCs encounter no threats as they journey through the forest and wood-wise adventurers notice that the woods seem unnaturally silent, as if local wildlife has vacated the vicinity.

Less than a mile beyond the edge of the woods lies the uncanny lake and tower. The judge should read or paraphrase the following upon the PCs' arrival at the lake.

*The air grows warmer and more humid as you push your way through the last few yards of forest. Abruptly, as if parted with a great godly blade, the wood ends and you stand before a wide, dark lake. A rocky beach of jagged, glossy black stones surrounds the mysterious waters, bringing to mind shards of broken glass left behind by some titanic mishap. The water steams beneath the gray clouds above, throwing off spiraling tendrils of mist that half-occlude the ebony waters.*

*Huddled on the shore some hundred yards away is the weird tower you heard spoken of. Measuring 90' in height, the turret is unlike any you've seen before. Its asymmetrical walls lean and twist, giving it a slumped, melted appearance. The tower appears constructed from a hard, leathery substance, one with more com-*

*monalities to an animal's hide than stone and mortar. A number of small apertures line the walls, each covered with a thick, semi-opaque film, reminding you of blisters about to rupture. A much larger membrane-covered gap stands at the base of the tower, seeming to serve as a portal by which to enter.*

*A bloody beam of light shines directly upward from the tower's apex, disappearing into the sky above.*

The Pharos is constructed of prehistoric reptile hide given structural integrity by forgotten serpent-man sorcery. A pattern of scales, many the size of large shields, decorates the tower's exterior. The hide is very resilient and even prolonged attacks with bladed weapons produce only minor scouring of its scaly exterior. The Pharos can be climbed with a DC 15 climb sheer surfaces check. PCs scaling the tower arrive at area 5-1.

Several windows pierce the tower's sides. These windows begin 20' above the base and are placed without design or obvious pattern. Each window is protected by a thick organic membrane, like that of a blister or the tympanum of a frog. These semi-opaque coverings are also impervious to physical harm and edged weapons only scratch their surfaces. The windows allow some light to enter, but peering through them only allows the viewer to glimpse indistinct shapes and colors, and perhaps movement of creatures within if applicable.

The doorway at the Pharos' base is covered by a thin, permeable membrane. Pushing against it or stepping through the barrier causes it to part like a soap bubble. The membrane reforms once passed through, keeping the integrity of the tower's interior environment intact. Slashing weapons slice open the barrier, but it quickly repairs itself once the weapon is removed.

The surrounding lake is of prehistoric origin and it accompanies the Pharos on its travels through time. PCs examining its black waters discover it is bath-warm and contains a variety of odd fish—armored catfish, many-finned gars, and other long-extinct fish swim in the lake's waters. The lake is very murky and measures 30' deep at its center.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

During one playtest, the organic nature of the Pharos of Scales had the party more worried than expected. The PCs were convinced that the tower itself was a living creature waiting to attack and kill them if they got too close. This led to a number of preventive attacks on the Pharos, hoping to goad it into revealing itself as a threat while the party was at a safe distance. Gazebo, anyone?

Although the players may have been incorrect about their assumption that the Pharos was about to spring to life and attack, they weren't wrong about it being a threat to life and limb—just not in the way they expected!

# THE PHAROS INTERIOR



As noted above, entry into the Pharos of Scales is accomplished by stepping through the filmy membrane covering the tower's ground-level door. Doing so leads the PCs to area 1-1.

**Area 1-1 – The Arboretum:** *The air is rich and heady beyond the membrane-cover door. A riot of green plants bearing vibrant green, pink, and purple blossoms of tremendous size fills the space beyond. A trio of pools seemingly filled with a substance more plasma than liquid, burble and slurp, producing plate-sized bubbles and tendrils of mist that hide the chamber's leathery floor. A similarly scaly-looking ramp rises along one wall, terminating in an opening in the fleshy ceiling overhead.*

H'lisk and the other residents of the Pharos hail from a primordial time where the atmosphere was more robust and oxygenated. The vegetation and pools of primeval sludge provide an environment more to their liking. As a safeguard against intruders, a pair of green spitters roam freely about this space.

**Green Spitters (2):** Init +4; Atk bite +3 melee (1d6) or spit +2 ranged (20' range, poison); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 20, 16; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP poisonous spit (DC 11 Fort save or be paralyzed for 1d8 turns), camouflage (+10 to hide attempts); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AL N.

Green spitters are a species of dinosaur that once ranged the ancient past. They may share a common ancestor with the dilophosaurus, as they closely resemble that beast, albeit at a slightly smaller scale. Measuring 9' from nose-to-tail, green spitters are bipedal with weak, truncated forearms. As their name suggests, they vary from olive green to deep emerald in coloration, making them difficult to spot in heavily vegetated environment. Green spitters attack their prey by incapacitating it with blinding, paralytic venom similar to a spitting cobra, and then tear their immobile quarry apart with razor-sharp teeth.

The green spitters are ambush predators and position themselves to attack the party from both the front and the rear. PCs in those positions must make an Intelligence check (DC 1d20+10) to avoid surprise. The green spitters use their venom against foes, aiming for their victim's faces. PCs not wearing helmets are more vulnerable to the venom attack. Treat their AC as 10 plus any modifiers due to Agility and shields. Helmet-wearing PCs gain the full benefits of their armor type. Combat with the dinosaurs alerts the occupants of 2-1 above to intruders in the Pharos.

The pools in this area are filled with a primordial soup, rich in amitotic fluids and rudimentary enzymes. The viscid matter is dense and measures 4' deep. Probing its depths uncovers a number of skeletons that bear a mixture of simian and human features. These are the remains of Antehumans who perished in feeding the beacon and were then dumped in the pools to nurture the primordial soup life. The fluid is mildly acidic, but only exposure to it for long periods inflicts harm on living flesh (1d4 damage per hour of immersion).

**Area 2-1 – The Habitat:** *The ramp debouches into a warm, humid space lit by dirty sunlight shining through membrane-covered windows. Several hammocks crafted from immense woven leaves hang along the walls. The floor bears a number of mats, similarly crafted from interlaced fronds. Bowls and gourds containing water, fruit and raw meat are arranged upon the mats beneath small clouds of buzzing flies. Three large apish creatures crouch here as if anticipating your arrival. Similar to gorillas, but bearing longer, matted hair, each of the brutes bears an odd protuberance at the back of its head. These gray-colored lumps resemble 2' long fleshy sacks that pulse obscenely with life.*

These ape creatures are antecedents to the modern gorilla and were used as slave labor by the serpent-men. Of low intelligence, each ape-servant is commanded by a cerebraleech, a parasitic invertebrate of immense mental capacity. The symbiotic relationship between servant and master makes them formidable opponents.

**Ape-men (3):** Init +2; Atk bite +4 melee (1d4+3); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 19, 16, 11; MV 20' or climb 30'; Act 1d20; SP +10 to hide checks in jungle terrain; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +1; AL N.

**Cerebraleech (3):** Init +2; Atk mental blast +4 ranged (60' range, dmg special); AC 10; HD 2d8; hp 14, 11, 11; MV 10'; Act 1d20; SP telepathy 90' range, mental blast (DC for attack is 10+ target's Personality modifier; target suffers 1d3 damage and must make a Will save vs. DC equal to the mental blast's attack roll to avoid being stunned for 1 round); SV Fort +2, Ref +3 (-2 if detached from ape-man host), Will +6; AL C.

On the first round of combat, one of the cerebraleeches uses its telepathy to warn H'lisk of the PCs' intrusion, while the other two direct their mental blasts at obvious spell-casters or the strongest-looking combatants in the party. Alerted to the party's presence, H'lisk activates the trap in 3-2 below. On subsequent rounds, the cerebraleeches alternate between commanding the ape-men to attack and continuing to blast the party with their psychic attacks. When using their mental blast, the cerebraleeches cannot command the ape-men to attack and the beasts stand unmoving while their masters' mental energies are otherwise occupied.

A PC can attack either the ape-men or their parasitic masters. Warriors and dwarves can target the cerebraleeches with a Mighty Deed of Arms vs. AC 10. Even if the deed die result is less than "3", but the attack roll is high enough to strike AC 12, the attack succeeds. Other classes attempting to make a "called shot" on the parasites must hit AC 12, as the cerebraleeches have the benefits of cover from the ape-men's bodies. Spells cast upon the ape-men that mentally control or incapacitate their targets (*charm person, paralysis, sleep*, etc.) are saved against using the cerebraleeches' Will save modifier, not that of the ape-men.

If a cerebraleech is killed before its ape-man host is, the simian creature is momentarily confused by the severing of the mental link and loses its action for the round. The following round, the uncontrolled beast lashes out in unrestrained anger at a random target and continues to attack potential targets until slain.

The bowls and gourds contain fresh water, raw fruit and uncooked meat. The meat is the flesh of Antehumans that died while powering the beacon. The flies are of an extinct, harmless species. A film-covered doorway in the western wall leads to 2-2. Hanging on the wall besides this door is a large iron key on a ring. It opens the pen in 2-2. Another upward-rising ramp exits the room through a gap in the ceiling above.

**Area 2-2 – The Antehuman Pen:** *The pungent stench of unwashed bodies and excrement assails your nostrils as you pass through the thin membrane into this dark chamber. The sound of frightened hoots and screams fill your ears. These cries come from a crowd of hairy anthropoids cowering beyond a barrier of metal bars that bisects the dim room.*

The anthropoids are Antehumans, precursors to humanity who lived during the time of the serpent-men's earthly reign. They appear a mixture of ape and man (equivalent to *homo habilis* on the evolutionary line) and stand 4' tall. They are unclothed, filthy, and terrified. H'lisk powers the Pharos' beacon with their lives and the Antehumans fear any creature entering this room, knowing it leads to the removal and utter disappearance of their number. The Antehumans' pen is locked, but the key in 2-1 opens the metal door to their cage.

**Antehumans (12):** Init +1; Atk bite +1 melee (dmg 1d3) or punch (1d2); AC 11; HD 1d8; hp 5; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP None; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will -1; AL N.

The Antehumans possess slightly better than animal intelligence and do not have a language, making communication with them difficult. If freed, the group flees the Pharos, only to find themselves stranded in a world and time they don't understand. The future of these temporal castaways is left to the judge to determine.

If *charmed*, an Antehuman will accompany his new friend, but remember that the spell does not impart the ability to communicate with an enspelled target. *Comprehend languages* allows a PC to understand an Antehuman, but because of their limited intelligence and verbal development, communication is limited to single words such as "danger," "hungry," "frightened," etc. A friendly Antehuman can be equipped with rudimentary weapons such as clubs or spears, but will refuse armor and more complex weapons as they are beyond his primitive ken.

**Area 3-1 – Salon:** *A circular table fashioned from smooth, dark wood and a chair of similar construction occupies the center of this area. A number of barrels and small boxes stand against the wall. Atop these containers are three wooden cages containing 1' long, unrecognizable rodents. An open archway shaped like two serpents meeting face-to-face, stands to one side, beyond which a ramp leading upwards is visible.*

This is H'lisk's dining area. Two barrels contain water and a third holds fragrant wine unpalatable to human taste. The four boxes atop them hold a variety of oddly-curved eating utensils, pickled meats, small bags holding weird spices (20 gp total value), and delicate glass drinking vessels. The



wooden cages contain eight rodents, extinct ancestors of the capybara which H'lisk dines on regularly. If freed, they scurry off unless captured or killed.

**Extinct Rodents (8)** Init -1; Atk bite -1 melee (dmg 1d2); AC 12; HD 1d4; hp 2; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP None; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will -3; AL N.

Moments after the PCs arrive in this area, a sibilant, hissing voice is heard in the air around them. It speaks in a stilted, archaic Common, "Who art thou and what is thy purpose in my domicile?" This is H'lisk, using an arcane feature of the Pharos to communicate with them. H'lisk warns the party to leave or face destruction, but emboldened by his master's immediate return, will continue to parley with the party if they question him. He reveals his identity and purpose, bragging that "mine master's arrival is nigh. He returns, his long journey into the outer dark complete! He brings untold wonders from beyond the reaches of night, upon which I and thou unworthies might soon glimpse in amazement and horror." The judge should tailor H'lisk's replies to questioning as he sees fit, but prolonged interrogation of the serpent-man should leave the party with the belief that something bad is headed towards their world very, very soon. Under no circumstances does H'lisk give the party permission to ascend higher in the Pharos and terminates conversation if the party becomes rude or bothersome.

**Area 3-2 – Trapped Rampway:** *Beyond the ornamental archway is a rising ramp that winds 30' upwards along the tower's interior wall. Unlike the others you've ascended, this slope is enclosed on both sides by fleshy, scaly walls, making it more corridor than open inclined plane. At the top of the ramp stands a metal door etched with intertwined serpents. It looks to be a formidable barrier between you and the upper levels of the tower.*

The metal door is very solid and requires a DC 20 Strength check to break open. Up to three PCs can assist in breaching the door. Each additional PC adds either a +1 bonus to the Strength check or his Strength modifier, whichever is higher. A pair of small 2" long iron posts are set in the doorway, placed to appear as the protruding fangs of one of the serpent etchings along its face. These iron posts are electrical battery terminals that create a spark when the rampway's trap is activated (see below). The scaly walls are identical to the tower's exterior and cannot be hacked through to escape the trap.

The archway contains a concealed metal door housed overhead. A DC 15 Find trap check reveals its presence and a DC 15 Disable traps prevents it from falling when triggered. Raising the fallen door requires a DC 25 Strength check, and up to six PCs (three on either side of the door) can as-

sist in the attempt as above. A pressure plate set halfway up the ramp (also noticed with a DC 15 Find trap check) causes the door to fall, trapping any PCs on the rampway inside. The plate is automatically triggered by any PC ascending the ramp if not noticed. When the door seals the rampway, a hissing sound is heard as the sealed corridor fills with hyper-oxygenated air. Three rounds later, an electrical spark arcs between the terminal posts in the upper door, causing the air to ignite in a fiery blast (2d6 dmg to all within the rampway; DC 12 Fort save for half damage). If H'lisk hears the trap detonate, he begins casting his defense spells as noted below.

The blast damages the upper doorway slightly, causing it to bow in noticeably. Breaking the door open after the fiery detonation requires only a DC 15 Strength check and multiple PCs can assist.

| <b>AREA 4-1 SERPENT DOOR PUZZLE - SEE HANDOUT A</b>  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| Serpents facing away from the door   |  | No effect; door remains locked.   |
| Serpents facing towards the door   |  | Arms trap. A sound similar to a bolt being thrown is heard, but the door becomes electrified. A PC touching the trapped door suffers 2d8 damage (DC 12 Fort save for half damage). A DC 15 Find trap check detects the trap. Trap cannot be disarmed except by arranging the tiles correctly. |
| Serpents arranged so each is facing the tail of the one next to it (clockwise-fashion)         |  | No effect; door remains locked.   |
| Serpents arranged so each is facing the tail of the one next to it (counter-clockwise-fashion) |  | Sound of a bolt being thrown; door is unlocked.   |
| Any other arrangement  |  | No effect.  |

**Area 4-1 - The Beacon:** A grotesque wonder occupies this bright chamber. Three fleshy slabs stand at acute angles around a monstrous, bulbous mass that resembles an exotic jungle flower. Each slab bears a small, hairy anthropoid creature. Numerous crimson tubes extend from the horrible flower, greedily siphoning the life blood from these creatures. From the top of the flower shines a burning beam of light, extending upwards and out through a membrane-covered hole in the ceiling. Other oddities fill the room, but further observations are curtailed by the presence of a snake-skinned humanoid dressed in archaic robes and a pair of lumbering ape-men. The serpentine figure gestures and the simian beasts attack!

The scaly humanoid is H'lisk and the ape-men are his servants. All fight to the death to defeat the PCs.

**H'lisk, Serpent-man sorcerer:** Init +1; Atk bite +4 melee (1d4 + poison; DC 14 Fort save or painful spasms for 1d6 dmg) or sword +4 melee (1d6); AC 12 (plus *magic shield*); HD 1d10+2+4d4; hp 21; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP spells (+5 spell check modifier; *comprehend languages*, *detect magic*, *flaming hands*, *magic missile*, *magic shield*, *read magic*, *mirror image*, *shatter*), immune to *sleep* spells, hypnotic gaze 1/day; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +4; AL L.

**Ape-men (2):** Init +2; Atk bite +4 melee (1d4+3); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 17, 14; MV 20' or climb 30'; Act 1d20; SP +10 to hide checks in jungle terrain; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +1; AL N.

If the PCs trigger the trap in 3-2, H'lisk prepares for battle, casting *mirror image* and *magic shield* upon himself. Otherwise, these spells are the first ones cast while the ape-men engage the party. He then follows up with his ranged spells. H'lisk uses his hypnotic gaze on opponents that close with him, commanding them to abandon the fight and depart the tower. If his mind control fails, he *shatters* their weapons

and armor if possible before using his magic, sword, and bite attack on his assailants. H'lisk is immune to *sleep*, the result of a steady regimen of serpent-man drugs he's been using to remain awake while awaiting his master's return. See 4-2 for more details on this drug. H'lisk wears an electrum diadem decorated with a cobra's head containing a pair of bloodstone eyes (total value 100 gp) and bears a serpentine metal bracer on his left arm. The bracer is magical and allows the wearer to *charm* normal and giant serpents as per the spell (+3 spell check modifier) once per day.

On the inside of the door frame of this room's entrance is an iron lever. It arms and disarms the trap in 3-2. When the PCs enter the room, the lever is in the up (armed) position.

The beacon can be deactivated by removing the blood-sucking tubes from the Antehumans restrained on the slabs. Pulling the tubes free inflicts 1d6 points of damage on the creatures, perhaps slaying them in the process (each has 1d4 hp remaining). It takes 2 rounds to remove the numerous tubes from each subject, but doing so causes the burning beacon ray to dim. After all three Antehumans are disconnected from the beacon, the light is completely extinguished. The beacon itself can also be destroyed with edged weapons. Treat it as AC 12 and having 45 hit points. When reduced to zero hit points, the great organic lantern goes dark and the tubes can be removed from the Antehumans without injury.

A strange contraption consisting of fleshy, fluid-filled bladders and bellow-like devices with levers stands against the wall. This device is the Pharos' temporal transporter that moves the tower along the time stream. A DC 15 Intelligence check identifies the object as an arcane mechanism, but not its purpose. A PC attempting to operate the device, or who pierces any of the five fluid reservoirs causes the

## BEHIND THE SCENES

Sometimes it's worth suffering through the villain's monologue where he reveals his master plan now that the heroes are powerless to prevent it from coming to fruition (or so he believes). During playtesting, one party chose to let H'lisk ramble on and charged directly up the ramp to confront him before the serpent-man could prepare to repel them. In their haste, the party ran straight into the rampway trap! They survived, but were at a severe disadvantage from their wounds when confronting H'lisk in the final encounter.

The final battle with H'lisk appears to favor the party in simple numbers. Provided they've all survived this far, they outnumber H'lisk and his minions 2:1. But in the random world of DCC RPG, good and bad dice rolls can really make a difference. In one playtest, H'lisk blew his spell check roll for his *mirror image* spell, not once, but twice. He later made up for it with a massively successful *magic missile* that resulted in all six of the PCs taking damage. Thus are the swings and roundabout of *Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG*.

Originally, H'lisk was given a second d16 action die due to his use of the serpent-man drug regimen he is using to help even out the numerical imbalance between forces. However, during playtesting, that additional die (even if lower on the dice chain) caused the forces of evil to wipe the floor with the PCs! The final battle ended with H'lisk slain, but at the cost of all but one PC. The two ape-men were uninjured as the PCs wisely concentrated their efforts on H'lisk, and the surviving PC had to flee for his life.

If the PCs are careful and lucky enough to disarm/bypass the rampway trap, they'll have a greater chance of overcoming H'lisk and his allies, as the serpent-man will initially lack the advantages of his *mirror image* and *magic shield* spells.

device to malfunction, inadvertently triggering a creeping rot that begins eating away at the Pharos' organic construction. Patchy, gray-green corruption appears throughout the Pharos, rotting the tower from top to bottom. This decay destroys the Pharos in one hour, turning the turret into a mass of stinking jelly that flows into the lake. PCs (and other inhabitants) can flee the tower easily before its complete destruction, but the acidity of the rot destroys anything of value left behind.

A locked metal door stands in the southwestern wall. Show the players **Handout A** when they approach it. The metallic frame surrounding the door bears twelve 6" square plates, each one etched with an elongated serpent. Four tiles are placed in the lintel and four are on either side of the door. Inspection of the tiles reveals they can be spun, allowing the serpent on each to face either towards the door, away from it, looking up or looking down. Spinning the tiles to orient the serpents' facing produces different effects as indicated on the table on page 6. Lacking a keyhole, the door cannot be picked.

**Area 4-2 - H'lisk's Chamber:** *This uncomfortably warm room contains a simple pallet lacking bedclothes, a wardrobe fashioned from the great bole of a tree, and a stone table holding a number of thin metal sheets. A low-sided box filled with shredded woodchips lies across from the bed.*

H'lisk occasionally rests here, but it is more often occupied only by the serpent-man's pets, a pair of giant trilobites that nest amongst the woodchips. They emerge to investigate intruders and attack if not immediately thrown a scrap of food to appease their hunger.

**Giant Trilobites (2):** Init -3; Atk bite +3 melee (dmg 1d4); AC 16; HD 1d8+2; hp 8, 7; MV 30' or climb 20'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +3; AL N.

The bed and box are empty of anything of interest or value. The tree-trunk wardrobe holds several robes and three clay vials atop a high shelf. Two of the vials are empty; the third contains a gummy resin that has a strong floral odor. This substance is a serpent-man drug that allows the user to function without sleep for up to a week at a time and renders him immune to magical *sleep*. It is specially designed to work with a serpent-man's physiology, but other species can benefit from the drug in a lesser manner. A non-serpent-man consuming the drug can remain awake for up to 48 hours without ill effect and gains a +4 bonus to saves vs. *sleep* during that time. There are two uses remaining in the vial. A metal coffer at the bottom of the wardrobe holds 15 unworked, semi-precious stones (5 gp value each). The dressing cabinet itself is worth 50 gp due to its odd construction, but weighs 300 lbs.

The metal sheets are inscribed with angled lettering. This writing is in the serpent-man language and contains the magical formulae for all of H'lisk's known spells.

**Area 5-1 - Tower Roof:** *A concave membranous dome occupies the center of the tower's flat room. A 10' diameter ray of searing blood-red light emerges from the dome to shine directly upwards into the clouds overhead, carving a hole through the thunderheads.*

The beacon's light is extremely intense and anyone foolish enough to attempt to peer down through the membrane-covered dome to the area below must make a DC 20 Fortitude save or be permanently blinded by the light. Even if the save is made, the beam is too bright to allow an observer to see through the semi-translucent covering. The membrane resists attempt to breach it as the tower's walls, but attempts to hew through it alert H'lisk of intruders.

## S'LISSAKK'S ARRIVAL



Whenever one or more PCs depart the tower after their confrontation with H'lisk (which may be a result of the serpent-man's hypnotic gaze), read the following:

*As you exit the weird tower, a roaring noise sounds in the heavens above. Looking skyward, you witness a burning orb streaking across the sky, its radiance making it visible even through the clouds overhead. A rumbling thunder accompanies the orb's rapid descent. It appears only moments away from striking the earth.*

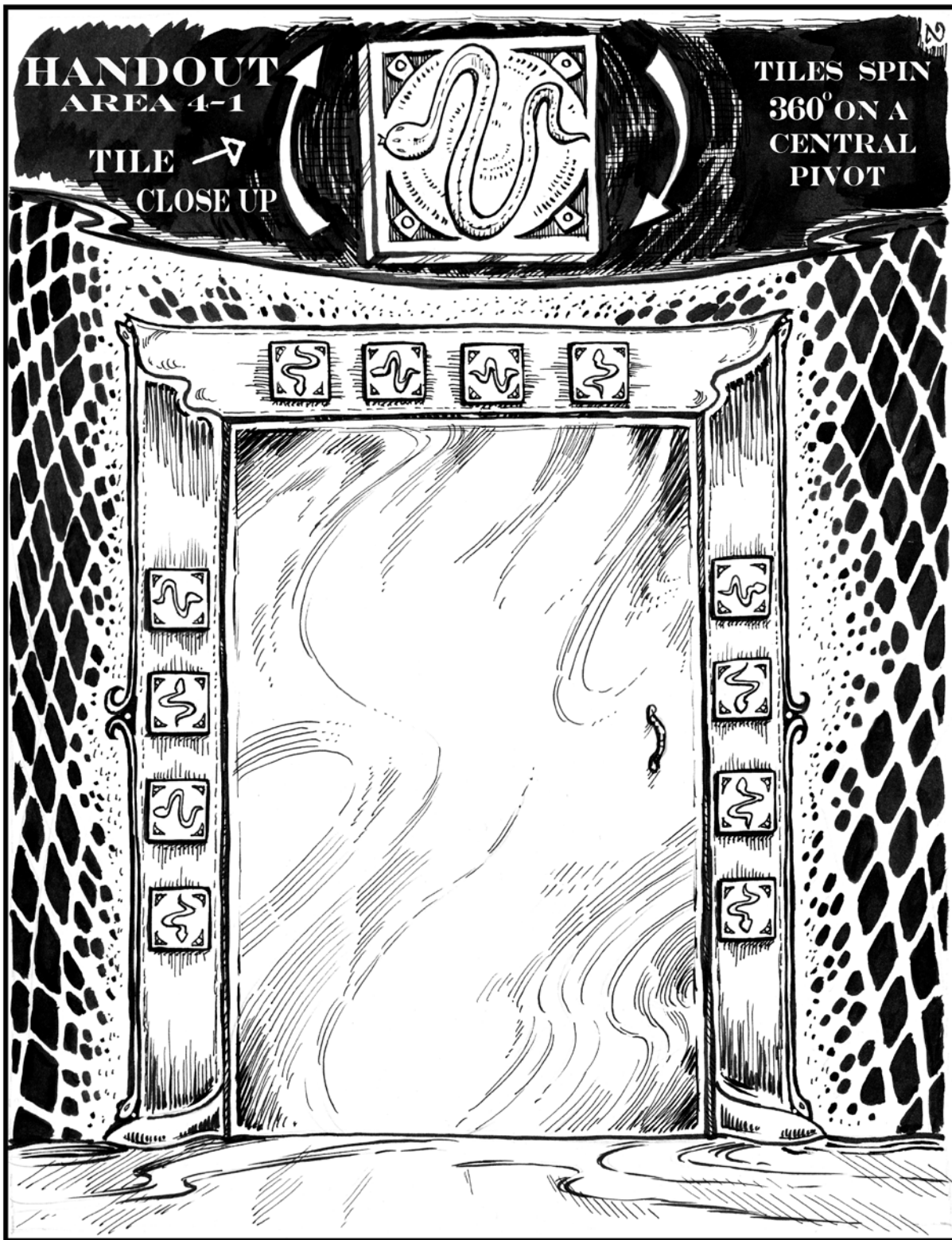
The burning object is S'lissakk's void-craft re-entering the atmosphere and it is only minutes away from landing. The craft's landing point depends on whether or not the Pharos' beacon is still functioning at this time. If the PCs have not extinguished the guiding light of the tower, the craft lands in the lake beside the tower, slowing abruptly at the last moment to splash down in the water, throwing up a cloud of hissing steam and rippling waves. It bobs the surface a moment later. The craft is a large, smoking, oval mass of charred vine-like vegetation, craggy igneous rock, and seared metal roughly the size of a small keep. It floats ominously on the lake's surface as if awaiting investigation.

If the PCs have destroyed or deactivated the Pharos' beacon, the craft loses its illuminated guide path and comes to rest some distance away from the tower. Its exact landing place is left to the judge's discretion, and depending on the judge's desires (and whether or not he possesses a cruel streak), the craft might land somewhere else in the forest, in nearby mountains, or perhaps even on the very town the PCs' departed from to investigate the Pharos! Regardless of its arrival place, its mysteries and dangers beg investigation and PCs unmotivated to locate and explore the craft on their own are likely to be hired to do so by local authorities.

The interior of S'lissakk's craft and its contents are left to the judge's devising for now, but may be detailed in a future adventure by Goodman Games. For the moment, assuming the PCs have defeated H'lisk and his minions, the party is triumphant and the mysteries of the Pharos of Scales are solved. More adventures await them and, if this is the players' first exposure to *Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG*, a new and exciting world of roleplaying remains to be enjoyed!



# HANDOUT A



**HANDOUT  
AREA 4-1**

**TILE  
CLOSE UP**

**TILES SPIN  
360° ON A  
CENTRAL  
PIVOT**

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# SERBOK: THE SLITHERING SHADOW



**W**hile some scholars recognize the word “Serbok” as an archaic term for “serpent,” there are few living today who know the word is also the legacy of a devious entity who stalked the worlds in epochs past. In the days when the serpent men laid claim to the world, the scaly sorcerers paid homage to the mightiest of their race, Serbok, also known as “He of the Scintillating Scales” or “the Slithering Shadow.” It was Serbok who taught the serpent men guile, treachery, and brutality, ruling a hundred lesser kingdoms from the shadows by magic, blackmail, and fear.

Serbok is commonly depicted as either a serpent man of tremendous size or a human male with slitted pupils dressed in courtly finery. His true form is that of a reptilian humanoid with a cobra’s hood and a serpent’s body in lieu of legs. His scales glitter a thousand colors, ranging from the shining browns of a copperhead, the reds and blacks of a coral snake, and the vibrant emeralds of a forest boa.

Serbok is rarely sought after as a patron by non-serpent men, as few realize the Slithering Shadow still lives. Believed long dead, Serbok dwells in multiple disguises, pulling the strings behind the thrones of gods and devils alike. Those that do call upon Serbok for aid harbor similar ambitions, albeit on a mortal scale.

### **Invoke Patron check results:**

- 12-13 Serbok lends assistance in the form of a ward against death by poison. The caster gains a +4 bonus on his next saving throw against poison.
- 14-17 Serbok reinforces the caster’s will with his own, protecting his servant from magical control. The caster gains a +2+CL bonus on all Will saving throws against mental domination (including *charm person*, hypnotism, and *sleep*). The bonus lasts for 1d4+CL rounds.
- 18-19 The caster becomes supernaturally persuasive, able to convince others to serve him even if not normally inclined to. For the next CL rounds, the caster gains the spell, *charm person*, casting it with his base spell check modifier. If the caster already knows *charm person* or is a serpent-man with hypnotic gaze, he gains a +4 bonus to his spell check when casting that spell or using his hypnotic gaze for the next CL rounds. The duration of the *charm person* is determined by the spell check result and can exceed the number of rounds determined by the CL.
- 20-23 The caster can disguise his appearance as the serpent-man illusion ability (see *DCC RPG* p. 425) for a number of hours equal to 5+CL. If the caster is a serpent-man, the DC to pierce his illusion increases to 35 and he can alter his appearance twice in a single day instead of once.
- 24-27 The caster vanishes from sight, making him immune to direct physical and magical attacks. This disappearance is the result of mentally clouding his enemies’ minds and not true *invisibility*. The caster remains undetectable for 2d6+CL rounds or until he breaks his concealment by attacking another. The caster can still be harmed by indirect attacks (such as being caught in a *fireball*’s area of effect, for example) but this does not break his concealment. Certain divination spells such as a *detect evil* spell whose spell check exceeds the caster’s *invoke patron* spellcheck will reveal the caster’s presence.
- 28-29 A great venomous serpent appears to protect the caster. A giant viper (see *DCC RPG* p. 428) slithers up from the ground and obeys the caster’s commands for 1d4+CL rounds before vanishing.
- 30-31 As result 28-29 above, but Serbok sends 1d3+1 giant vipers to assist his servant.
- 32+ The caster sheds his skin, removing all injuries and ailments along with it. This process takes two rounds to complete. Once the skin is shed, the process heals all damage, disease, and poison suffered by the caster. The shedding does not regrow lost limbs, remove corruption, cure paralysis, or end curses, but does cure blindness, deafness, broken limbs, and organ damage. Any injuries or baleful conditions received during the skin shedding process are applied to the rejuvenating caster as they occur, possibly slaying the caster before the transformation is complete.

## PATRON TAINT: SERBOK

Servants of Serbok who suffer corruption begin manifesting his serpentine and treacherous attributes. When patron taint is indicated for Serbok, roll 1d6 on the table below. When a caster has acquired all six taints at all levels of effect, there is no need to continue rolling any more.

### Roll Result

- 1 The caster's skin undergoes a cosmetic alteration. If the caster is non-serpentine in race, his flesh becomes scaly and obviously reptilian. If the caster is of a reptilian race, his scales become colorfully mottled like that of his patron. Patches of red, yellow, copper, emerald, black, white, and tan scales cover his body.
- 2 The caster loses the ability to speak truthfully and becomes prone to telling falsehoods when directly questioned about important matters. Whenever asked a question where a truthful statement would be in the caster's best interests ("Do you need healing?" for example), the caster must make a DC 10 Will save to tell the truth. Otherwise, he must answer with a lie. Even telling the truth with gestures or incomplete statements is impossible if the save is failed, and the judge is free to require higher DC Will saves or assume temporary control of the character if this taint is not properly roleplayed.
- 3 The caster no longer derives nourishment from dead plants and animals, but subsists entirely on living creatures such as mice, rats, toads, and other small animals. The creature must be consumed while still living in order to satiate the caster's hunger. If the caster is already dependent on living creatures for nourishment, he must consume twice as many specimens at a meal as normal for his race in order to maintain his existence.
- 4 The caster's legs grow together and elongate, transforming into a 6' long serpent's tail. He suffers a -5' penalty to his speed as a result of moving about on the cumbersome appendage and obviously cannot pass as a normal biped without magical disguise.
- 5 The caster attracts serpents to his presence whenever in an area home to snakes. These serpents accumulate at the caster's location if he spends more than 12 hours in one place. Thereafter, snakes arrive at a rate of 1d3 each hour. There is a 50% chance each serpent is of the venomous variety. The caster has no control over the serpents, and while the snakes are not inclined to attack the caster outright, agitating them in any manner will likely result in a violent response.
- 6 The caster refuses to accept subjugation by others, be it physical, political or social. He deigns to take instruction or orders from anyone (excepting Serbok) and will attempt to usurp positions of power whenever possible. The caster need not openly assume command and is content with allowing another to "rule" in his stead while holding the reins of power from the shadows. If the caster cannot assume control of a group, power bloc, or social circle, he'll leave its ranks to pursue his own unfettered schemes.



□ = 20'  
AREA MAP

