

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

TALES OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

#83.1: THREE ADVENTURES
FOR LEVELS 1-5
BY MICHAEL CURTIS



TALES OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

LEVEL 1-5 ADVENTURES

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ales of the Shudder Mountains are short interesting encounters suitable for use in a Shudder Mountains-based Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG campaign. These adventures are each introduced via a local folktale, one likely heard while the PCs are guests of a Shudfolk family or when staying at one of the mountain's rare inns. The actual locations described in these scenarios can be placed anywhere the judge desires, either as prepared adventures or as interesting random encounters the party comes across while traveling.

TALE 1: THE GRAVE POOL

FOR LEVEL 4 CHARACTERS

THE TALE

"My grandfather told me that when he was a lad, a neighborman who lived in the backwoods died while felling trees. A big ol' hickory snapped and toppled on the man. When they pulled him out from under 'er, his skull was broken like a dried gourd. Grandad told me that the man's wife went to a witcher-woman out on Skeleton Ridge and she told the wife how to bring him back to life.

As the story goes, there's a deep pool out in one of the hollows, a pond surrounded by beech trees with water that glows cornflower blue in the moonlight. The witcher-woman said that if the wife sank her husband's corpse into the pool under the half moon, he'd come up again, full of life. The wife did what the witcher-woman said and, sure 'nough, her man came out of that pool sputterin' and cussin', full of spit and vinegar.

Grandpa said he never heard what became of the man and his wife. They moved away not long after he was reborn on account of the locals not wanting to truck with a former corpse. But, if you're willing to look for it and do what needs doing, maybe you can find that pool for yerself."

BACKGROUND

The Grave Pool, as some Shudfolk call it, does exist, located in a distant and unvisited hollow deep in the mountains. It is actually a spoil, one that formed at the bottom of a rocky depression, now long filled with water. The spoil's power permeates the waters of the pool and a corpse sunk beneath its surface is subject to its unusual properties. Of course, not all is what it appears in the Shudders, and despite what the tale might promise, the Grave Pool doesn't always revive the dead perfectly.

Complicating matters, the Grave Pool is surrounded by a grove of sinister trees. Many a Shudfolk has remarked that there are trees in the mountains that seem to turn mean after dark, demonstrating both a hatred for humanity and a thirst for raw, bloodied flesh. A cluster of these "night-trees" prowl the grove when the sun goes down.

A party visiting the Grave Pool by day isn't safe either. Lately, the hollow has become the lair for a backwoods lycanthrope, a nasty wereboar that heads a sounder of equally ill-tempered boars. Any party wishing to avail themselves of the Grave Pool's questionable power must overcome both dangers.

FINDING THE GRAVE POOL

A pool that potentially raises the dead is one of the great secrets of the Shudders. Those that know where to find it don't share its location readily. After all, who's to say the magic of the Grave Pool isn't finite and that you might, one sad day, need to restore a loved one back to the land of the living? Adventurers looking for the pool will have to either work to learn its location or rely on pure happenstance.

As the tale alludes, there is (or was) a witch living on Skeleton Ridge that could tell folks how to find the Grave Pool. The tales doesn't say what she might desire in return for revealing this knowledge, but the price for raising the dead can't be cheap. Assuming the witch or one of her descendants is still on Skeleton Ridge and the party can find her, the adventurers might have to slay a formidable monster and return with a choice body part, cut a deal with one of the Three, or perform any other vile or dangerous service the judge can dream up. If the party is lucky, the witch will fulfill her part of the bargain and provide directions to the Pool.

Alternately, the judge might simply have the party stumble across the Grave Pool as they travel the backwoods of the Shudders. If the party discovers the spoil in this manner, they are unlikely to know its properties and instead treat it as another hazard haunting the hollows of the mountains. At a later time, perhaps after a PC has died, the party might hear the tale of the Grave Pool and put two and two together to realize they know precisely where it is.

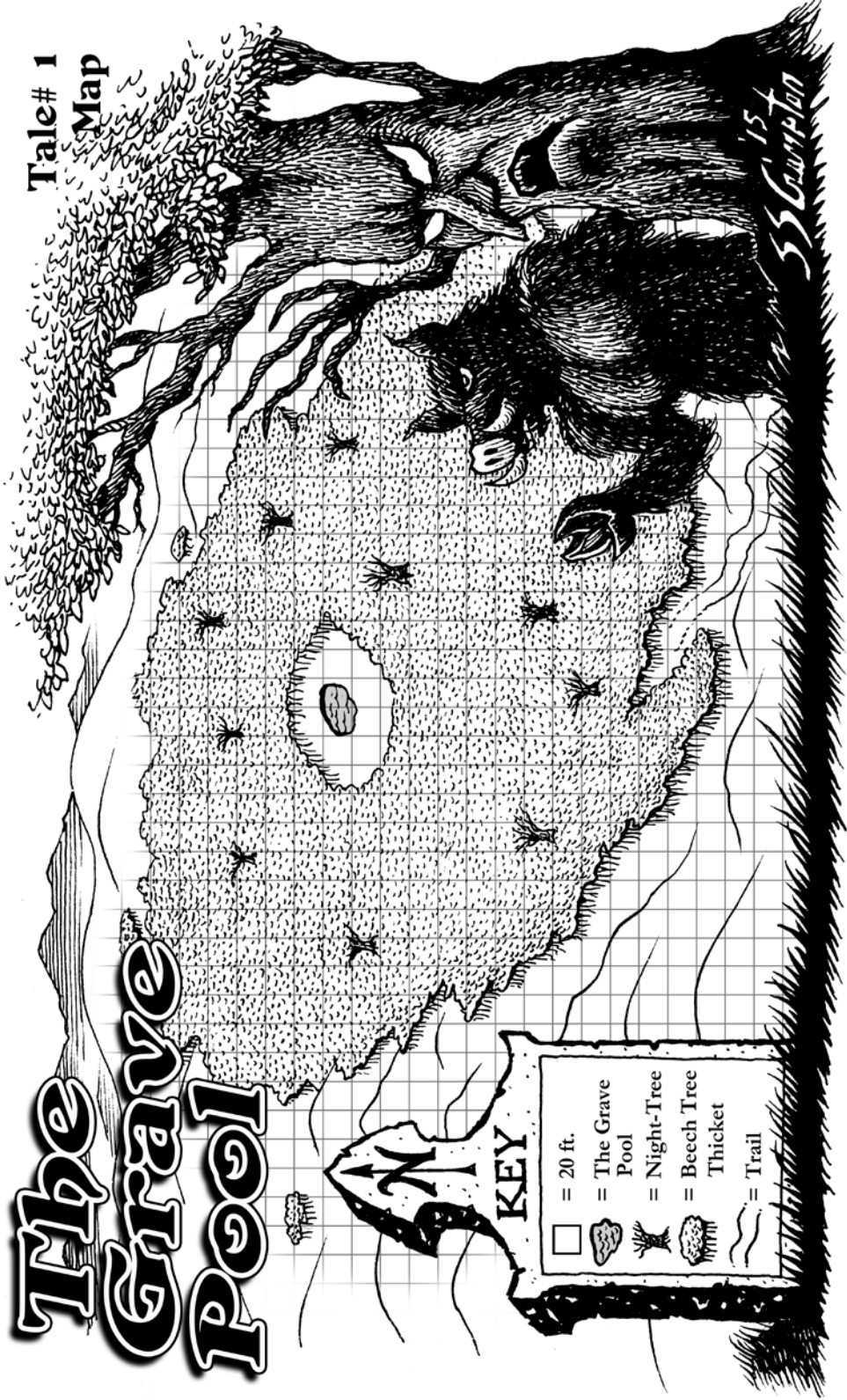
THE GRAVE POOL

The surrounding foothills slope down to form a secluded tree-filled hollow. An old trail, partially overgrown with witch-hazel and ivy, winds down the hillside and vanishes into the trees. A number of white stones the size of a child's fist appear irregularly along the side of the path, serving as guides. A lone crow cackles in the distance.

During the daytime, the hollow is a quiet place. An animal might disturb the branches above or a soft breeze may rustle the beech leaves, but otherwise a hush hangs about the thicket-filled vale. The floor of the wood is thick with fallen leaves and beechnuts, and curious swaths of disturbed debris crisscross the forest floor. These trails are made by the beech trees moving at night.

The wereboar and his hog-kin patrol the interior of the thicket during the day, but make certain they are outside of the woods before the sun goes down. A party entering the woods during daylight is automatically detected by the lycanthrope unless all the PCs make successful checks to avoid detection (DC 15 Agility, Sneak Silently, or Stealth) and are downwind of the boars (judge's determination). If detected, the hogs rush towards the party with the sound of snorting, crashing underbrush, and a hideous, almost human-like screaming.

The Grave Pool



KEY

- = 20 ft.
- ☐ = The Grave
- ☐ = Pool
- ☐ = Night-Tree
- ☐ = Beech Tree
- ☐ = Thicket
- ☐ = Trail

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100

Coy Hogg, Wereboar: Init +1; Atk gore +3 melee (1d8+1); AC 15; HD 6d8; hp 40; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP immune to damage from normal weapons, lycanthropy (see below); SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2; AL C.

Wild Razorback Hogs (2 per PC): Init +0; Atk gore +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

Anyone injured by the wereboar's gore attack might contract lycanthropy. At the end of the combat, all PCs injured by Coy must make a Fort save vs. a DC of 5 + # of hit points lost to the wereboar's attack. If the saving throw fails, the PC contracts lycanthropy and becomes a wereboar at the next full moon. Wereboar PCs become chaotic (if not already) 1d4 months after contracting the curse and eschew the company of men. Such characters become NPCs and are removed from the campaign. Lycanthropy can be cured by a *remove curse* spell or certain esoteric means of the judge's creation.

THE THICKET AFTER DARK

"It minded me of how I'd heard, when I was a chap, about day-trees and night-trees, they weren't the same things at all; and the night-trees can crowd all around a house they don't like, pound the shingles off the roof, burst in the window glass and the door panels; and that's the sort of night you'd better never set your foot outside..."

—"The Little Black Train" by Manly Wade Wellman

The woods become even more dangerous once the sun goes down, which is also the only time the Grave Pool's magic functions. Those wishing to utilize its power must either evade or destroy the hollow's nocturnal guardians—the night-trees.

As soon as the sun creeps beneath the mountains, the woods become alive with the sound of rustling leaves, cracking branches, and the noise of *something* big crashing through the underbrush. These big forms reveal themselves to be large beech trees with whipping branches and gaping bole-hole mouths craving flesh. The night-trees, detecting the PCs' body heat, advance to their location with the intent to feed.

Night-trees (10): Init +0; Atk branch slam +3 melee (1d6), tendril grab +7 grapple attempts only (see below), or bite +6 melee (1d10); AC 12, HD 6d10; hp 35 each; MV 20'; Act 4d20; SP nocturnal, infravision 120', vulnerable to fire, immune to piercing weapons, immune to mind-affecting spells (*charm, sleep, etc.*); SV Fort +5, Ref -2, Will N/A; AL C.

Night-trees are malicious versions of normal trees, the Mr. Hyde to their daytime Dr. Jekyll. Night-trees become active once the sun goes down, prowling the forests to crush and devour. These vile trees supplement their meals of sun, soil, and rain with fresh meat and blood. Night-trees attack with their branches, some of which are actually tendrils they use to grab prey. Grappled foes are hauled to the tree's mouth, which appears as an ordinary bole-hole during the day, and devoured. Each branch has a reach of 15' and 6 hit points. Reducing a branch to zero hit points with slashing or bashing damage breaks the branch. Each tree has up to six branches they can attack with.

If the night-trees are defeated and their bole-hole mouths examined, each reveals a hollow, fleshy space within the tree's trunk. Each of these stomachs contains 2d20 cp, 1d10 sp, and 1d4 gp left by previous unlucky meals.

THE POOL

At the center of the wooded thicket is an open glade. The grass covering the clearing is strangely colored, appearing as alternating blades of washed-out gray and dark, shadowy black. The clearing's center contains a natural pool of roughly oval shape, its banks bare of reeds or other vegetation. A thin strand of gravel encircles the pool.

The pool is a "burn spoil," and anyone spending more than a minute within the clearing must make a DC 10 Fort save or suffer 2d6 damage from the searing field of eldritch energy that emanates from the still waters. After this initial exposure, contact with the spoil does no additional damage for the next 24 hours, but the save must be repeated if the Grave Pool is visited again in the future.

The Grave Pool's water appears normal during most of the month, but for three nights around the date of the half moon, the waters seem to burn with an incandescent blue fire. This light throws odd, dancing shadows around the clearing, shadows that sometimes seem to assume human shape. While the waters burn, a single corpse sunk into the Grave Pool potentially returns to life (see "Raising the Dead," below).

The water's magic is finite and can take decades to replenish once exhausted. The judge can simply determine that the pool works X number of times, with X being equal to whatever he feels appropriate to his campaign. Once exhausted, the Grave Pool will never function again in the campaign's lifetime.

Alternately, for judges enjoying an element of chance, the Grave Pool has a cumulative 1 in 6 chance of being exhausted each time it is used. Thus, the first time a corpse is resurrected, the judge rolls 1d6 and on a result of a 1, the Grave Pool is exhausted. The next time increases the chance to 2 in 6, the third to 3 in 6, etc. Once exhausted, the Grave Pool requires 1d100+10 years to recharge, during which time the burn spoil lies dormant.

RAISING THE DEAD

Any humanoid corpse immersed in the Grave Pool has a chance of returning to life. The base chance of a successful resurrection is 100%, but this chance is reduced by 5% for every 24 hours that has passed since the corpse's demise. After 21 days, the pool is incapable of restoring life to a corpse.

If the Grave Pool successfully works its magic, the character restored to life makes a Luck check. Depending on whether the check succeeds or fails, there is a chance the former corpse comes back to life...changed. A successful Luck check means it is less likely for a serious side effect to accompany the resurrection, while a failed check almost ensures something has gone wrong. Creatures failing their Luck check are automatically *grave weary* (see result #1 on table 1-1), cumulative with any additional side effect determined by a roll on table 1-2.

Table 1-1: Successful Luck Check

d10	Resurrection Side Effect
1-3	Grave Weary. The creature permanently loses 1 point of Stamina and 1 point of Personality as a result of the strain on body and soul to return to life.
4-5	Troubled Sleep. The creature suffers horrible nightmares for the rest of its (newly returned) life. The creature only recovers 1 hit point for a full day of bed rest and no hit points if he spends the day adventuring (see DCC RPG core rulebook, p. 94).
6-10	No side effects. Creature returns to life unchanged by its demise.

Table 1-2: Failed Luck Check

d10	Resurrection Side Effect
1	Spiritual Hitchhiker. The creature returns, but another soul has stowed away within his body. This other soul is evil and seeks to pursue a malicious purpose now that it's returned to the physical world. The second soul can take control of the creature's body for short periods of time. This effect is identical to a spellcheck result of 24-26 of the <i>transference</i> spell (DCC RPG, p. 232). Treat the stowaway soul as if CL 6 for the purpose of duration and the DC for Will saves is 20.
2	Altered Species. The creature returns in a body not his own. He might return as an elf, dwarf, or halfling if formerly human, or even as a serpent-man, orc, man-bat, or other humanoid creature of roughly man-size. The exact body type and any advantages or disadvantages of that shape are left to the judge to determine.
3	Forever Changed. The creature is restored to life, but changed physically in a horrible manner. The judge rolls or chooses an appropriate physical appearance from Table 9-5: Physical Appearance of Un-Dead (DCC RPG, p. 381). The creature suffers a loss of 1d4+1 Personality points as a result.
4	Path of Darkness. The creature is restored to life, but his alignment takes a dark turn. Lawful creatures are now neutral, while neutral creatures become chaotic. If the creature was already chaotic, he suffers no side effect.
5	Touch of the Grave. Although technically alive, the creature bears some taint of un-death. He is affected by clerical turning (if the priest affects un-dead), suffers damage from holy water, and may not be able to enter sanctified spaces at the judge's discretion.
6-10	No additional side effects.

TALE 2: MOONRICKET BRIDGE

FOR LEVEL 1 CHARACTERS

THE TALE

“There’s an old legend of a covered bridge out over Lost Creek, and the legend tells it’s a haunted place. The old folks say that a traveler, bound to meet his sweetheart over in the next hollow, met a gang of robbers on that bridge. The robbers cut the traveler’s throat, stole all he had, and threw his body in the creek. Now, that poor man’s restless soul haunts the bridge, terrifying anyone unlucky enough to try and cross it after dark. Those that do, see him appear, pointing angrily at them as he is ‘bout to take misplaced revenge on them for his death. I hear some locals once posted a reward for anyone who could drive the ghost off, but nobody ever claimed it.”

BACKGROUND

Much of the tale is true: Moonricket Bridge is a covered span that crosses Lost Creek, a rushing rivulet that pours down from a rocky ridge. A traveler did indeed meet his death at the hands of bandits there some fifty years back, but the robbers didn’t steal everything of value he carried. The traveler was on his way to propose marriage to his sweetheart and carried a gold wedding ring, an old family heirloom, with him. Fearing he’d lose it, the traveler sewed the golden band into the hem of his shirt and it was overlooked by the robbers. When they dumped his body into the fast creek under the bridge, the ring went with it.

The ghost of that traveler haunts the bridge, doomed to remain unable to move on to the afterlife until the ring is returned to him and he can present it to his sweetheart. The circumstances of his death trap him at the bridge and he cannot travel downstream to where his bones and the tattered remains of his shirt – which still holds the ring – now lie.

Contrary to the tale, the traveler’s ghost doesn’t point vengefully at anyone attempting to cross the covered bridge at night, but is instead gesturing despondently downstream to where the ring can be found, hoping someone might seek out his bones and return the wedding band to him. Until someone recovers the ring and presents it to him, his spirit is doomed to haunt the bridge.

Note: Neither the ghost nor his bride-to-be appearing in this tale are given names. This both represents the vagueness of certain old mountain tales where names and places change with the telling, and allows the judge to personalize this scenario to best fit his campaign and its residents.

MOONRICKET BRIDGE

Moonricket Bridge is a covered bridge that crosses a wild mountain stream. The clapboard-sided and split-shingled roofed bridge was once painted red with white trim, but the paint is long faded and the bare wood beneath is visible in many

places. The bridge is 40' long and 20' wide, and stands 4' above the creek below. The creek is steep-sided and littered with river rocks; white water crashes down the creek, filling the air with noise.

During the daytime, the bridge is unassuming in appearance, but travelers crossing it are susceptible to feelings of uneasiness as if someone is lurking nearby. Particularly sensitive individuals (those with Personality scores of 14 or better) often feel a cold line across their throat, as if a naked knife blade was pressed there. Wayfarers seldom spend a moment longer than necessary at Moonricket Bridge.

When night falls, the bridge grows even more unnerving. Shadows collect in the eaves of the bridge, the cries of hoot owls echo through the bridge's empty interior, and the creek sounds become sinister, sounding almost like a wild animal growling in the darkness. Travelers crossing the bridge after dark have a 75% chance of witnessing the ghost's appearance. Anyone purposely waiting at the bridge automatically see the ghost.

THE GHOST

The Ghost of Moonricket Bridge forms at a point two-thirds of the way across the bridge, appearing like a shaft of moonlight trapped inside the span. The ghost manifests as a glowing, yet solid-seeming human male in his early twenties. The ghost is washed of all color, making it impossible to determine the color of his skin, hair, or clothes in life. A jagged wound crosses the ghost's throat, weeping watery blood that drifts about the spirit's head like a gruesome halo.

Anyone witnessing the ghost's appearance must make a DC 10 Will save or flee the bridge for 2d4 minutes. A second DC 12 Will save allows them to return to the span once this time elapses. Those unshaken by the ghost see it extend its right hand, raising it slowly with index finger outstretched. The ghost points at the downstream interior wall of the covered bridge, then slowly turns its arm towards the group. It then opens its hand, palm up, and turns its arm back downstream.

The injury that killed the ghost in life has echoes in his death: he cannot speak with his slit throat and his monomania about recovering the ring limits his miming to imparting clues to its whereabouts. The ghost becomes frustrated if the party attempts prolonged conversations or if they taunt or mock his restless existence. In this event, his features turn dark and malicious as his un-dead nature gets the best of his lingering humanity. The ghost immediately attacks.

The Ghost of Moonricket Bridge: Init +2; Atk paralyzing touch +6 melee (DC 14 Fort save or paralyzed for 1d4 hours) or draining touch +6 melee (1d4 random physical ability point damage); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 16; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead traits, immune to non-magical weapons, turn invisible; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL N (C when angered).

The ghost, if reduced to zero hit points or turned by a cleric, vanishes immediately. He re-coalesces the following evening. Only by returning the lost ring to him can he be permanently put to rest.

Moonricket Bridge

Tale# 2
Map



THE HELLBENDER CAVE

PCs who deduce the intent behind the ghost's gesture might embark on a search of the creek to see if there's anything of interest in its rushing waters or on its steeped banks. The creek winds for several miles before meeting a larger river, but a dedicated search of its twists and turns (and a DC 12 Intelligence check) notices a pile of water-borne debris collected on a stony ledge along one of the creek's many bends. PCs actually in the water notice the debris automatically.

A closer inspection of the old branches and reeds reveals that the pile partially obscures the mouth of a riverbank cave leading deeper into the rocky bank. The cave mouth has a low 2' high ceiling, but a 4' wide mouth. A slimy stony tunnel leads into darkness. Any PC making a DC 14 Intelligence check notices a single 12" long footprint with long, spindly toes partway down the tunnel. It is the track of one of the giant hellbenders that lair in area 1-1.

Area 1-1 – Hellbender Den: *A rocky, muddied-floor cave lies buried in the riverbank a short distance from the rushing creek. The air is damp and smells of river mud and slimy flesh. A trio of log-sized shapes squirm about the roughly 20' square space, their stubby legs moving their striped red and black bodies to face you. Gaping mouths open wide in anticipation of a new meal.*

This cave is home to a trio of giant hellbender salamanders. The three massive amphibians normally rest during the day in the shady, muddy cave, but the arrival of the adventurers has stirred both them and their appetites up. They fight to defend their den, but will flee if seriously injured (less than 5 hp remaining).

Giant Hellbender Salamanders (3): Init -2; Atk bite +3 melee (2d4); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 16, 14, 10; MV 20' or swim 30'; Act 1d20; SP camouflage (+10 to hide attempts); SV Fort +2, Ref -1, Will -2; AL N.

The den has a low 4' ceiling, making actions difficult for any race other than dwarves or halflings. Tall PCs suffer a -1d penalty to attack rolls and the salamanders gain a +2 bonus to melee attacks against those characters.

The muddy cave contains only old animal bones, driftwood, and similar water-borne debris. An examination of the walls reveals high water marks, indicating the space floods from time to time. At the rear of the cave is another small tunnel leading 5' further into another, smaller cave.

Area 1-2 – Old Bones: *At the end of the short tunnel is a small cave measuring about 10' square. The entire floor of the grotto is covered in thick, wet mud. Judging from the ends of the fallen branches you see sticking out of the stinking stuff, the layer is a few feet deep.*

River mud measuring 3' deep fills this cave. Buried in the soupy mess are branches, drifted leaves, and the old bones of the slain traveler whose ghost haunts the Moonricket Bridge. The bones are found with a successful DC 12 Intelligence check or simply a prolonged prodding and poking of the mud with a long pole.



The skeleton is only partially intact, missing its skull and right leg. Mud- and aged-stiffened old traveling garments hold the rest of the bones together. An examination of the spinal column notices score marks along its top, evidence of the violent knife strokes that cut the traveler's throat. Anyone searching the crumbling old clothes detects a hard object sewn into the hem of the shirt. Cutting open the cloth reveals a golden ring of antique style worth 25 gp. It is the lost wedding ring that keeps the ghost from moving on.

ENDING THE TALE

A party that located the traveler's mortal remains and recovered the ring have the power to resolve the bonds keeping him from his rest. They might also display callowness and avarice, and choose to keep the ring for themselves. Both actions have the consequences.

A party that chooses greed over compassion, keeping the ring for its value, suffer from a fearsome nightmare the next time they sleep. In the nightmare, each PC is alone in an autumn corn field, their vision obscured by the dried, standing stalks which rustle in a chill wind. The howl of dogs rings out and the PC flees through the corn, pursued by hounds he is unwilling to face. A rumbling voice echoes these words through the corn:

*Your heart beats so quickly,
But Death's hounds run more swiftly.
No boundary between life and death,
No second chance when breath has left.
Your life shall not be saved from the grip of the grave.*

As the unseen pursuers snap at his heels, the character stumbles and feels cold shapes pounce on him. He awakens in terror.

For their greed, each PC is now under the effects of a curse: the Curse of Death's Dogs. Because they've offended one who straddles the border between life and death, the cursed PC finds it impossible to cling to that same thin boundary. Death's hounds constantly shadow the character, waiting to strike.

The curse carries a -2 Luck penalty and leaves the character feeling hunted. The curse automatically kills the PC when he is reduced to zero hit points. The charac-

ter does not bleed out nor is he allowed a Luck check to see if he wasn't actually killed. Like a 0-level PC, reaching zero hit points is an automatic death sentence as the character's soul is dragged off to the afterlife by Death's tireless dogs.

This is a moderate curse and it can only be remedied by making restitutions to the unquiet dead. Merely returning the ring to the ghost of Moonricket Bridge is insufficient, however. Since the curse was born by greed, the PCs must spend at least 100 gp in a gesture to acknowledge the memory of the traveler and his would-be bride. Possible solutions include building a monument, refurbishing Moonricket Bridge, restoring the would-be bride's cabin (see below), or similar actions.

Assuming the PCs have a shred of decency and they return the ring, a much different ending awaits them. The ghost takes the ring from the party, his face transformed by a beatific smile. He bows his head to the PCs, holds the ring to his heart, and walks out of Moonricket Bridge, following the road. The party can easily keep pace with the spirit.

The ghost walks for a few miles down the winding mountain road. The trees crowd the road, but seem more like watchful sentinels than oppressive lurkers. The moon shines on it, turning it into a ribbon of silver in the dark mountain night. Eventually, the spirit reaches an old cabin by the side of the road. The roof has collapsed, the front door fallen in, and kudzu is slowly reclaiming the structure. The ghost walks past the ruin without stopping, taking a narrow trail that leads behind the cabin and ends in a small family graveyard twenty yards beyond.

In the cemetery, next to a worn stone marker, stands another ghostly figure. This second spirit is of an elderly woman dressed in a colorless homemade dress. Her hair is thin and her face is wrinkled by a lifetime of sorrow. She seems oblivious to her surroundings. As the traveler's ghost steps into the graveyard, the woman's spirit looks up and gazes upon him, a look of shocked wonder on her face. The traveler gets down on bended knee, his mouth moving in unheard words. He extends his hand, displaying the ring to her and she is suddenly no longer an old woman. Instead, the woman's form has become that of a carefree young woman in her late teens with a coronet of woven wildflowers on her brow. She clasps the traveler's hand, lifting him to his feet before embracing him. Glistening, spectral tears stream down both their faces.

The two ghosts stare into each other's eyes for a moment longer, before they both turn to the PCs. They stand together, holding hands and waving farewell at the party. The spectres fade away and there is the soft sound of a heavy ring falling onto the dried grass that carpets the graveyard.

Each PC gains 1 Luck point for reuniting the lovers. A quick search of the graveyard discovers the dropped wedding ring, left behind by the departed ghosts. Its purpose served, the PCs can take the ring without ill effects.

No ghost is ever seen on Moonricket Bridge again, but some say young lovers walking the road nearby at night sometimes see warm, welcoming lights burning in the ruined cabin and hear the sound of laughter drifting in the night air. But that's another mountain tale...

TALE 3: THE WITCH- MAN OF DARKWEATHER MOUNTAIN

FOR LEVEL 5 CHARACTERS

THE TALE

"Gather 'round, children, if you 'uns want to hear about Darkweather Mountain and the strange fruits that grows a'top 'er. Long ago, back before your great-great-great-great-grandfathers were born, the folks in Frog Hollow found a witch 'mongst them. The Shudfolk banded together, taking up swords and pitchforks and torches, and drove the witch-woman out of the hollow. They chased her up the side of Darkweather Mountain, her arm bleeding from a sword scratch.

As the witch clawed her way up the mountain, a storm began to brew something fierce. Lightning and thunder crackled and rumbled, and big ol' raindrops fell like a waterfall. Still, the goodly folk of Frog Hollow pursued that witch until they trapped her atop the mountain. As they moved in to put an end to her evil, a big ol' thunderbolt came down and struck her smack dab on top of her head. That old witch twitched and danced, and her arms writhed, throwing blood from her wounds across the bare stone. When the lightning flash cleared away, the folks of Frog Hollow saw the witch was dead, but everywhere her blood landed, weird bushes sprang up, laden with berries as black as coal and smelling like brimstone. The folks of Frog Hollow wanted nothing to do with such evil and fled the mountain, leaving the witch's bones to the vultures.

Today, 'mongst them that know, it's whispered that the berries still grow on Darkweather Mountain and witch-women and conjure-men steal up there to sample the fruit. Some say the strange fruit gives their sorcery an extra wallop and that no living man can withstand the spells of a witch who has supped atop Darkweather Mountain."

BACKGROUND

The details of the tale are surprisingly correct, albeit missing some pertinent details. The witch of Frog Hollow was a servant of Haade, one of the Three who vie for control of the souls of the Shudder Mountains. Although not an especially powerful sorceress, she had learned several esoteric rites from Haade and was calling upon that power atop Darkweather Mountain. As her magic coalesced about her, priming itself to blast the folk of Frog Hollow from the face of the earth, an errant lightning bolt fell from the sky, striking the witch. This freak mixture of magical and natural forces produced a unique, never-before-seen act of spontaneous mystical genesis. The witch's blood, empowered by nature's potent energy, manifested into the famed berry bushes of Darkweather Mountain. Each bush holds a portion of the dead witch's power, granting anyone who consumes the dark berries a magical amplification of their own sorcery.

The properties of the berries are known only to a handful of spellcasters who've



either learned their secrets from one of the Shudder's study-witches (Shudfolk who study but do not practice magic) or sampled the fruit themselves. Those who know the truth keep quiet lest others strip the shrubs of the potent food. This silence has ensured that a more recent development on Darkweather Mountain remains unknown by the inhabitants of the Shudder Mountains.

Two years ago, a flatlander sorcerer named Zhru the Calamitous learned of the berries on Darkweather Mountain and journeyed to the Shudders to taste them firsthand. Awed by their effect on his magic, Zhru took up residence on the mountain, claiming the mystical fruit as his own. Those who have climbed the mountain since his investiture have been slain, their bodies turned into lightning-born monstrosities called thunderstrucks, charged with guarding the bushes and defending their master. Zhru dwells easy atop the mountain, confident that between his empowered magic and his magical guardians, no one has a hope of unseating him. He may even be correct.

LEARNING OF AND LOCATING DARKWEATHER MOUNTAIN

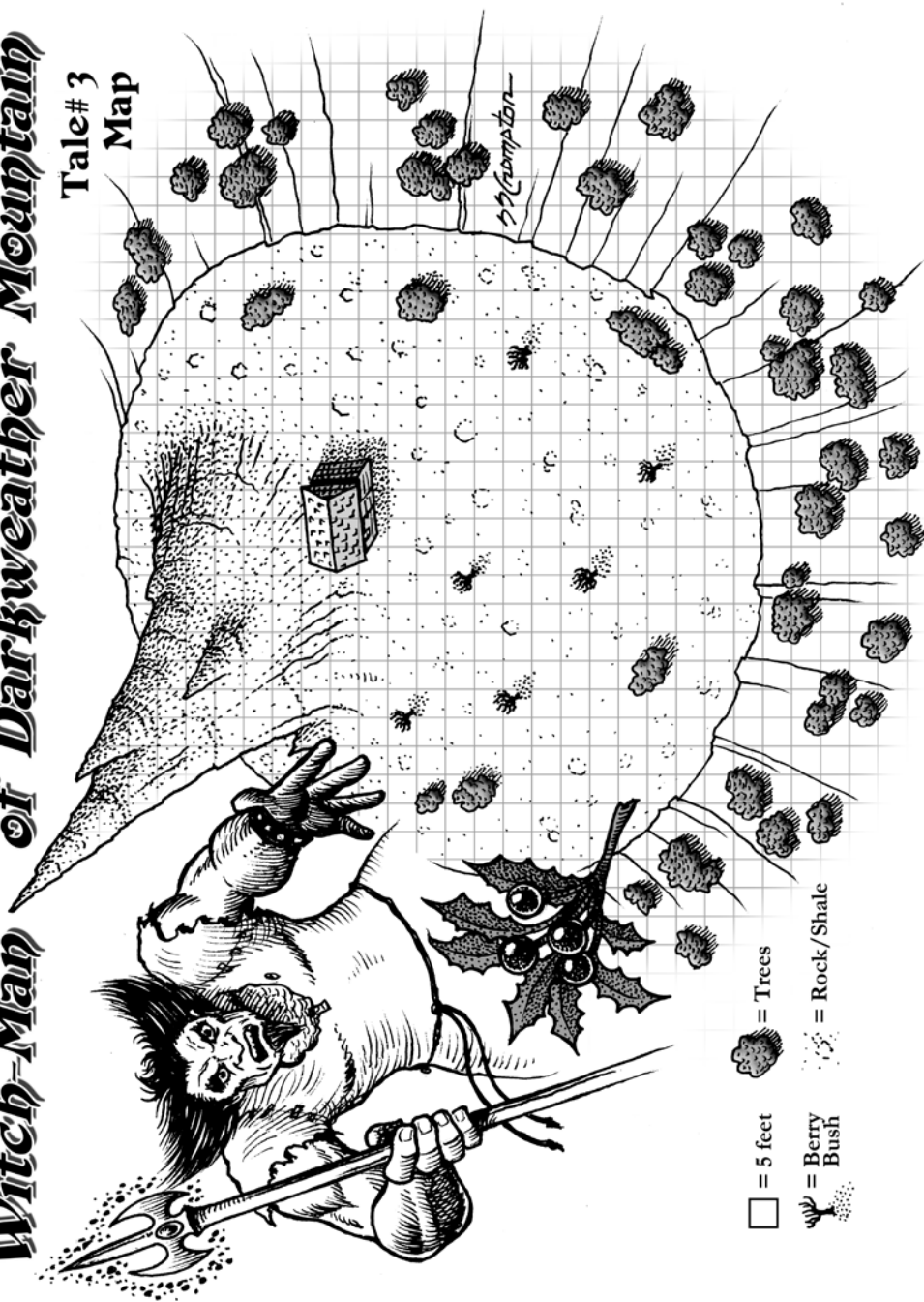
Darkweather Mountain can exist anywhere in the Shudder Mountains the judge desires. One possible location is north of Dogged Mountain, centered in between Old Piney Woods and the Wild Wood (see The Shudder Mountain Overland Map), but any suitably secluded spot will suffice.

The party can hear the tale concerning the witch and the fruit of Darkweather Mountain at any Shudfolk gathering or, if a PC is both a spellcaster and a native Shudfolk (or has earned the trust of one), be told it by their mentor or ally. The storyteller also can confirm that the berries of Darkweather Mountain do indeed amplify a spellcaster's magic. This should hopefully be enough to set the party on the path to Darkweather Mountain.

If the party requires a more noble reason to scale the mountain, a Shudfolk friend might seek them out and request their help: A friendly study-witch went up Darkweather Mountain recently and hasn't been seen since. Could the party please investigate the mountain and learn what became of her?

Witch-Man of Darkweather Mountain

Tale# 3
Map



THE MOUNTAIN

Darkweather Mountain is one of the taller peaks in the Shudders, measuring just over 7,000 feet high. Despite its grandeur, three of the mountain's sides have shallow slopes and are covered with a thick blanket of oak, beech, and poplar trees that give way to spruce and pine in the upper extents of the peak. The fourth side is nearly sheer, a craggy face that plunges to the ground in a series of jagged steps. Darkweather's peak is off-center and is a spire of bare stone adjacent to the mountain's craggy slope. A somewhat-level shelf of rock lies beneath the spire, and it is on this flat space that both the berry bushes of Darkweather Mountain and Zhru the Calamitous can be found.

Climbing the mountain on any of its sloped sides is possible for even the most unskilled mountaineer. Adventurers climbing the slopes of the mountain can do so without danger, although the judge should feel free to add encounters with some of the Shudder's more dangerous animal and monstrous inhabitants to spice up the trip if so inclined. The fourth sheer face requires many DC 15 Strength or Climb Sheer Surfaces checks to scale, with failed checks resulting in (1d6)d6 points of damage from a fall.

Once the party ascends more the three-quarters of the way up Darkweather Mountain, have each PC make a DC 14 Intelligence check. If successful, they feel they are being watched, but are unable to spot their observers. They instead see a shadow move in the depths of the woods, hear the sound of a tumbling stone kicked loose on the slope, or – more puzzling – smell the fresh scent of ozone drifting on the mountain breeze.

These unsettling occurrences are the result of the thunderstruck shadowing the party. The magical guardians are under orders to watch anyone approaching the mountain top, but to remain hidden until it becomes clear that intruders intend to climb the peak. The thunderstruck ambush the party when they close to within 300 feet of the mountain's top ledge or if they decide to camp for the evening on the mountain. If no PC succeeded in the earlier Intelligence check, the party is automatically surprised; otherwise, they are alerted to the advancing thunderstruck with a DC 12 Intelligence check.

Thunderstruck (1 per PC): Init +3; Atk shocking touch +3 melee (2d4+1) or lightning strike +4 ranged (3d6); AC 14; HD 4d8; hp 20 each; MV 30' or fly 20'; Act 1d20; SP immune to electrical damage, throw lightning strike (once every 3 rounds; 60' range), vulnerable to water (water-based attacks inflict double damage; normal water inflicts 1d4 damage per pint of volume); SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +0; AL C.

Thunderstruck are the electrocuted mortal remains of humans granted magical animation via ensorcelled lightning. They have scorched skin and clothes, singed hair, and black fingernails. Blue sparks crackle in their empty eye sockets and electricity writhes along their arms and legs. Thunderstruck can fly when required, born aloft on sizzling bolts of lightning as they pursue their quarry. Possessing animal intelligence, thunderstruck carry out their orders to defend Darkweather Mountain to the best of their ability, but can be fooled or misdirected by smarter foes.

THE BERRY PATCH

The trees thin as the top of the mountain approaches, finally leaving just isolated thickets of pines scattered about. Beyond these small groves, the mountain abruptly levels, leaving a broad, flat ledge of rock lying beneath an 80' high spire of bare stone. Five large cracks mar the spire's face, making it appear as if black scorch marks discolor the naked mountain stone.

At the base of the spire is a crude log cabin, chinked with dirt and bearing tattered clothes and blankets sewn together as both door and window shutters. On the ledge outside the cabin, growing intermittently among the piles of broken stone and fallen scree, are six verdant bushes. Each bush is roughly six feet in diameter and has rusty red leaves. Clusters of ebony berries bearing purple-crimson highlights grow on the bushes. When an errant mountain breeze rustles the bushes, the sharp smell of sulphur taints the air.

Any PC stepping onto the ledge is immediately detected by the five thunderstruck concealed in the cracks along the spire's face unless invisible or otherwise magically obscured (there is no cover to hide behind aside from the bushes and cabin). Thunder rumbles as the lightning-born sentinels emerge from their hiding places and descend upon the intruders. The thunder alerts Zhru, who is inside the cabin. The sorcerer observes the battle from a hole in the blanket door, determining which PCs might prove the most difficult opponents. He also scoops up an extra handful of Darkweather berries to use as necessary. He then casts both *magic shield* and *fire resistance* on himself in preparation for battle.

If the PCs destroy two or more thunderstruck, Zhru emerges from the cabin. He hurls spells at the party, cursing them for trespassing on his land and attempting to steal his "rightful crop of conquest." Given his prolonged usage of the Darkweather berries, Zhru will die without a constant supply of the ensorcelled fruit and fights to the death to keep the berry bushes under his control. Should any of the bushes be either purposely or accidentally destroyed, the sorcerer goes berserk, gaining an extra 1d16 action die for the rest of the combat.

Thunderstruck (5): Init +3; Atk shocking touch +3 melee (2d4+1) or lightning strike +4 ranged (3d6); AC 14; HD 4d8; hp 20 each; MV 30' or fly 20'; Act 1d20; SP immune to electrical damage, throw lightning strike (once every 3 rounds; 60' range), vulnerable to water (water-based attacks inflict double damage; normal water inflicts 1d4 damage per pint of volume); SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +0; AL C.

Zhru the Calamitous: Init +1; Atk sickle +3 melee (1d5), wizard staff +4 melee (1d4+6), or spell (special); AC 12 (plus *magic shield*); HD 5d4+5; hp 20; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP 5th-level wizard (+7 spell check: *charm person, color spray, detect magic, magic missile, magic shield, read magic, sleep, fire resistance, wizard staff, gust of wind, lightning bolt, and make potion*), wizard staff (see below), +1d16 Act if berserk, weird sorcery pool (see sidebar); SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +7; AL C.

Zhru the Calamitous is a large human male with black hair swept up in outlandish "wings" extending out from the sides of his head. His goatee is speckled with the dark juice of the eldritch berries and he bears a gnarled wooden staff and iron sickle in his hands.

His staff is a *wizard staff* that acts as a +1 weapon and inflicts 1d4+6 damage on a successful strike. It provides a +2 spell check bonus when casting *magic shield* and a +2 bonus to saving throws (factored into Zhru's stats above). If destroyed, Zhru takes 4d4 points of damage.

THE CABIN

Zhru's cabin is a small, single room affair. It contains a simple pallet, chair, hearth, and a worktable laden with earthenware jars and bowls, wicker baskets, and various sorcerous tools. One basket holds 1d10 Darkweather berries.

The table also bears the supplies necessary to fashion magic potions. With these supplies, a wizard can create a single potion without expending the required money (DCC RPG, p. 223). He must still acquire any special ingredients needed for the potion type, however.

Beneath a flagstone in the hearth, covered by a layer of ashes, is an iron box (DC 10 Intelligence to notice, but only if the ashes are swept aside). The chest is unlocked and contains 112 cp, 67 sp, and 23 gp. There are also a *potion of giant strength* and a *potion of un-dead control* inside.

WEIRD SORCERY POOL

Zhru's constant diet of magical fruit has granted him phenomenal abilities with his magic. He can expend some of this consumed energy to increase his magical talent and to avoid the consequences of magic gone awry. By spending one point from his weird sorcery pool, Zhru can enact one of the following effects each round at the cost of an action:

- Increase his action die for spell checks by +1d.
- Negate the effects of a failed spell check, resulting in no lost spell, misfire, corruption, etc.
- Gain a +1d bonus to any saving throw vs. a magical effect (spell, magical item, etc.).
- Reroll a failed saving throw vs. a magical effect.

When Zhru joins the battle, he has 10 points in his weird sorcery pool. At any time during the battle, so long he can move freely, Zhru can consume the handful of berries he grabbed before leaving the cabin. Doing so is an action that rejuvenates his weird sorcery pool by 1d5+1 points (up to a maximum of 10 points).

Note that these effects are different from those given below. This is because Zhru has consumed the berries daily for over two years and the witch-born fruit has had an irrevocable effect on his metabolism. Should he ever cease to regularly consume the fruit, Zhru would become wracked by horrible physical pain (-3 die penalty to all actions) and die in 3d6 days.

THE DARKWEATHER BERRIES

The black, witch-born fruit of Darkweather Mountain is a potent substance, but its effects can be highly unpredictable. Some people react badly to consuming the berries, becoming tainted by the witch's evil or simply dying from a lethal allergy to the Darkweather fruit.

The first time a spellcaster eats one of the Darkweather berries, he must make a Luck check. Chaotic creatures make the Luck check using a d16; all other creatures make the check normally. If the check is successful, the caster's metabolism accepts the berry and he need not make the Luck check ever again when eating the fruit. If the Luck check fails, the caster's body is malignantly affected by the Darkweather berries and he gains no benefit from eating them. Also, he must roll 1d12 on the table below to determine the consequences of the ill reaction. The die roll is modified by the creature's Luck modifier, if applicable.

Table 1-1: Darkweather Berry Negative Effects

d12 Result	Berry Consumption Effect
1 or less	DC 20 Fortitude save or die.
2-6	The creature gains a random greater corruption effect.
7-9	The creature gains a random major corruption effect.
10-11	The creature gains a random minor corruption effect.
12+	The creature suffers 1d10 points of temporary ability damage to a random ability score.

A creature who fails the Luck check must make another check each time he consumes a Darkweather berry. Each subsequent Luck check is made at a +1d penalty, and each failure results in another roll on table 1-1. Once a creature has succeeded in the Luck check, his body has acclimated to the fruit and he never has to make another Luck check again when eating the berries.

Any spellcaster whose body accepts the Darkweather berries gains a +1d bonus to spell checks each day he consumes one of the fruits. The effect wears off after 24 hours or once the caster invokes a number of spells equal to his caster level. Consuming multiple berries during a 24-hour period has no effect. The berries remain fresh for 1d7 days after picking and each bush holds 3d30 berries when first discovered. Picked berries regrow at a rate of 1 per week.



DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

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BY MICHAEL CURTIS**

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