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ISSUE #1



TOMB OF THE SQUONK & THE SILENT ARMY

COMPATIBLE WITH
**DCC
RPG**

TOMB OF THE SQUONK ε THE SILENT ARMY

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TOMB OF THE SQUONK

Low to Mid-Level - By Daniel J. Bishop

INTRODUCTION

Travelling through a swampy region bordered by nearby hills, the party encounters Arvind Shar, a strange, sad creature who begs them to restore him to his rightful body, located in a tomb in the hills. Investigating the tomb uncovers Arvind's body, but when no means to put him back in it is forthcoming, the creature flies into a rage.

This encounter is designed for 4-6 3rd-level characters. Because of the trap-heavy nature of the adventure, a party without at least one thief is seriously handicapped, and may not survive.

BACKGROUND

Arvind Shar is one of several children of Farmer Gaxman. They are "Patricians" - a group of human-appearing interdimensional beings that fight in an endless internecine conflict that they term "games." The point of these games is to humiliate, and eventually to kill, the other Patricians through a "board" that consists of multiple universes, on a playground that includes other times as well as other spaces. Although they do not look it, the Patricians are all thousands of years old or older. They travel the multiverse through gates created by alien technology that the Patricians inherited, but do not truly understand.

About three months ago, Arvind Shar was captured by his sister, Yona, who transferred his body into that of the squonk, a hideous creature from a far distant plane. He has survived ever since on frogs, raw fish, and the bodies of those who refuse to speak with him or help him. Travellers who encounter Arvind are terrified, and in his rage he often kills them. If the judge desires, the characters may hear rumors that a hideous creature of the swamps has been accosting wayfarers in this region. Meanwhile, Yona watches to gain full satisfaction from Arvind Shar's humiliation.

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

It is about mid-morning as you are travelling through the swamp. There is an odd beauty here, but the biting flies have turned it into a torment, and you must pause occasionally to remove one of the thick brown leeches that seem to worm their way inside even tight breeches and boots. Suddenly, a horrific smell of sulfur and rotten meat washes over the path in a miasma of choking foulness.

When you recover from the odor's initial assault, you see the creature it emanates from - a sodden lump of darkness

with an elephantine trunk, bulging eyes, clawed hands, horns, and a thick tail ending in tentacle-like grasping appendages. The trunk ends in what appears to be a stinger of some sort. Spikes and boney nodules stud its hide.

It hisses at you with a burbling voice: "Save me!"

This creature is Arvind Shar in his current body.

If the characters are willing to talk, Arvind will tell them how he was seduced and captured by an evil witch (who looked like a comely young lass, of course) who called herself Yona. She trapped him in this horrific form, but torments him with the knowledge that his true body lies in a tomb just within the low hills. If the party will only help him, Arvind is certain that there is a fortune in jewels lying not far from his uninhabited shell. He is lying, of course. The party may find treasure in the tomb, but he is not at all concerned with this.

If the party refuses to speak with him, or refuses to help him, he attacks, fleeing into the swamp if wounded to half hit points or less. His statistics are found in Area 1-7, below.

If the party - or any part of it - agrees to help him, Arvind leads them through the trackless swamp for several hours toward the low hills bordering it. Every time a bird passes overhead, Arvind flinches, and burbles out "the Eyes of Yona".

At some point during this trek, a meteor whistles down from the heavens. Have each PC roll 1d20 + their Luck modifier. The lowest roll is the meteor's target. It has a -4 penalty to hit but does 3d6 damage if it does hit. There is no chance of it targeting Arvind, and if asked the creature will merely say, "Yona doesn't want you to help me." The meteor is made of three pounds of extraterrestrial iron, which is lost in the swamp if it misses, but may be recovered if it hits.

The group reaches the tomb as light begins to fade. Arvind anxiously nags parties that tarry, pointing out that Yona may well send more meteors. The squonk reluctantly agrees if the PCs decide to rest and tackle the tomb in the morning. Nothing disturbs the group's rest save insects and the stench of the squonk.

The tomb is located on the shallow part of a low hill rising from the swamp. A set of bronze double doors hangs open, showing a black space beyond. On either side of the doors, the marble walls are carved with images of a well-proportioned man and woman, one on either side. The rest of the tomb is buried in the hill.

AREAS OF THE MAP

General Features: Built from hardened marble, the walls of the tomb radiate a soft illumination that allows for clear vision within line of sight. All of the interior doors are of thick, strong bronze that remain open, once the PCs pass through them. Unless otherwise noted, corridors are arched to a 12' height, and rooms are 15' high.

Area 1-1 – Laser Beams and Jenkin Brown:

Past the doors, you can see a 10-foot wide corridor stretching out before you some 30 feet before entering a wider space. The walls give off a soft radiance, making it easy to see. Lying near the opening is a human corpse, obviously several weeks dead and crawling with beetles and flies. The man's head lies some 10 feet further down the corridor – from this distance, it appears to have been neatly shorn off.

This is the body of Jenkin Brown, a local who had pity on the squonk. He was decapitated neatly by a laser beam, set about 5' from the floor and crossing the hallway. If pressured, Arvind will admit that Yona might have set traps, but will claim to know nothing about poor Jenkin. "Perhaps he tried robbing the tomb," the squonk suggests.

The laser is set high enough that a halfling, or the squonk-bodied Arvind, can pass below it without even noticing that it is there. A dwarf would typically

take 1d8 damage while singeing the top of his head, but a human or elf passing through here is decapitated (Reflex DC 12 – a success allows the PC to stop in time, taking only 3d6 damage from the laser). If the maximum damage is taken, the character's throat is so wounded as to make speech impossible until the damage is healed – and then only if a DC 10 Fort save succeeds.

A thief who successfully finds traps (DC 10) should be told: "A narrow beam of near-invisible light springs from a small lens set into the wall. It disappears into the stone through a similar lens in the opposite wall. The air is perceptibly warmer near the beam". A successful check to disable the trap (DC 15) indicates: "The beam might be diverted by mirrors or diffused by dust or smoke. Or you could simply duck under it."

Jenkin Brown wore only rough homespun garments, but he had a dagger thrust into his belt, and his boots are still in wearable shape.

Area 1-2 – The Heat Field: *The corridor enters into a square marble room, 30 feet to a side, with an archway exiting in the middle of both the far wall and the wall to your right. Marble benches line the west wall. The room is otherwise bare. As with the corridor, the walls glow softly.*

This area is trapped with a heat field, which causes 4d6 damage to anything that enters. Anyone foolish enough to remain in the room for a whole round takes an additional 8d6 damage. The heat field is triggered by touching the floor – even a small stick is enough to trigger the field – or the presence of warm bodies within the room.

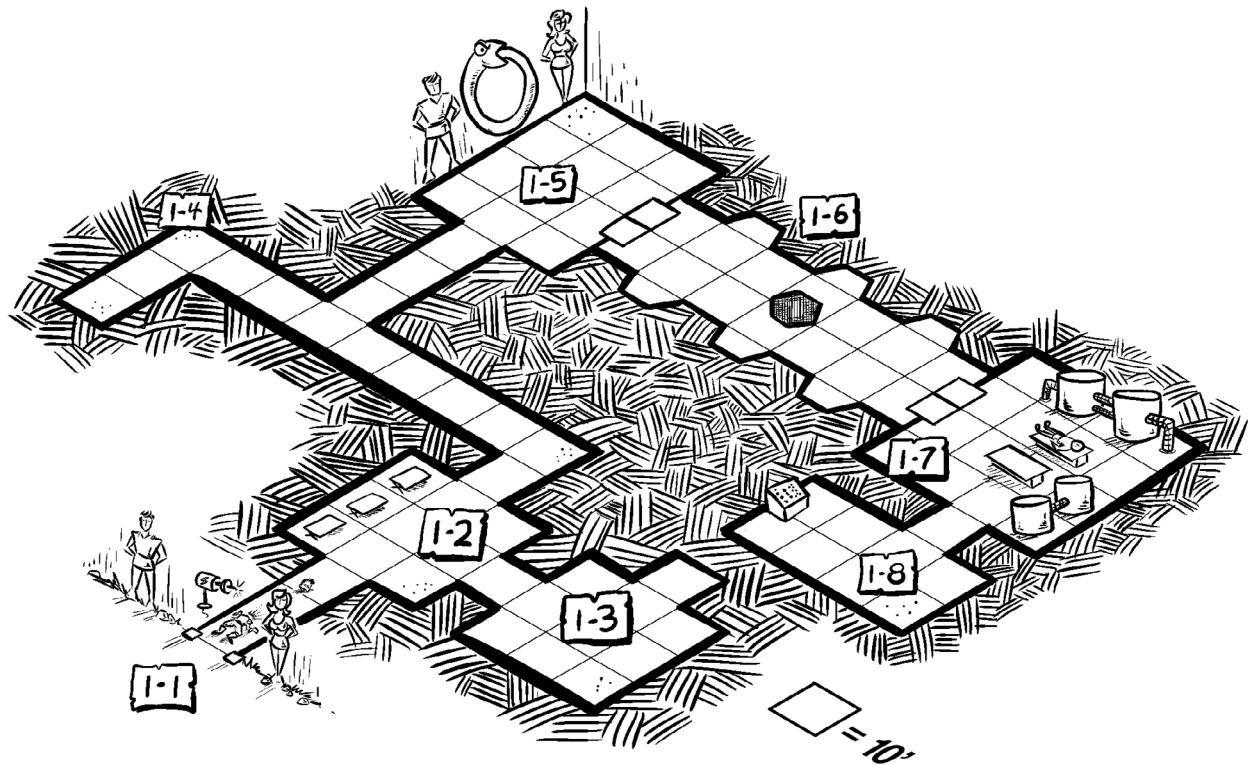
Once the field is triggered, it takes a few seconds to reset, allowing a character to throw in an object to trigger it, and then dash across the room. Doing so requires a Reflex save to succeed – DC 10 for creatures with a 30' movement rate, and DC 15 for those with a 20' move. If a character has taken precautions, such as soaking himself with water, before the dash, he gains an additional DC 10 Fort save to take half damage.

While this field can be detected by a thief (DC 20), there is no way to disarm the trap from here.

Area 1-3 – First Decoy: *After 10 feet, the passage enters another 30-foot square chamber. A corridor leads out in the center of the left wall. As with all areas you have seen in the tomb thus far, the walls are of softly glowing marble.*

A pressure plate 5' inside the doorway drops a smooth 6-inch-thick bronze plate across the archway leading out. Characters caught by the plate take 6d6 damage (Reflex DC 12 for half damage); If the affected PC survives, he or she has leaped out of the way. Unless the player declares which way the character jumps, a Luck check (DC 10) is needed to place the PC





in the corridor instead of the room. A thief can discover the bronze plate by finding traps (DC 10) (the edge of the plate is visible at the top of the arched corridor) and can similarly locate the pressure plate. There is no exposed mechanism to disarm, although the trap is easily avoided once it and its trigger are located.

The left-hand corridor goes nowhere; it exists only to draw explorers into this room. Without magic, there is no way to raise the plate from here. It can be raised in Area 1-8, but that has its own dangers, as the would-be rescuer may instead trigger a heat field similar to that in Area 1-2. If this occurs, hopefully trapped characters will have the cleverness to retreat into the shortened corridor to the west.

Area 1-4 – Second Decoy: The eastern bend in the corridor here is a red herring to draw explorers to their doom. When a character stands on the marked space, a pressure plate is triggered, dropping a 6-inch thick smooth bronze plate at the junction between the corridor leading to this area and the corridor leading to Area 1-5. As in Area 1-3, both bronze plate and trigger can be detected by a thief (DC 10), and this bronze plate has the same consequences for any character caught where it falls (6d6 damage, Reflex DC 12 for half damage and Luck DC 10 to be in the “safe” part of the corridor).

When the plate falls, it opens a sluice leading from a water reservoir into the end of the corridor. Water will rush into the area, rising 1 foot every 10 minutes. Controls for the sluice, as well as for drains at the end of the corridor, are located in Area 1-8.

Area 1-5 – The Temporal Serpent: *The corridor ends in a room 30-foot wide and 40-foot-deep with a pair of bronze double doors in the center of the right hand wall. Carved into the walls are the images of the well-proportioned man and woman as seen on the marble walls at the beginning of the tomb. Between them is the image of a snake swallowing its tail.*

When characters enter the room, read the following:

Suddenly, a ten-foot-long white-furred snake, bleeding from several hideous wounds, appears at your feet. It is clearly dying.

This snake is a temporal serpent, and it has appeared here from the future.

Temporal serpent: Init +3; Atk bite +2 melee (1d3 + poison); AC 13; HD 6d8; hp 30; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP temporal blink, poison (Fort DC 12), half damage from cold; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +0; AL N.

The temporal serpent lies dying for 1d3 rounds. If it is injured during this time, it “blinks” as described

below, and the battle begins. If it is unmolested during this period, the snake suddenly appears uninjured and attacks.

Each round that the temporal serpent is injured, it "blinks" out of existence. The next round 1d3-1 versions of the serpent appear bearing the wounds dealt to it thus far. For instance, up to two serpents could appear, each with whatever hit points remain. Likewise, the serpent may not appear in a given round. Each version of the serpent present during its initiative count may attack. If at any time any version of the serpent is reduced to 0 hit points, all versions of the serpent disappear. The next round the serpent reappears as it did at the beginning of the encounter, dying. This time, it simply expires and fades away.

Those bitten by the temporal serpent must make a Fortitude save (DC 12) or take a 1d4 penalty to initiative. This poison continues to work on the affected character until the save is passed, the character is healed of the poison or has slept for six or more hours.

The bronze double doors are heavy but not locked. They require a DC 20 Strength check to open, and up to 4 characters can pool their Strength bonuses to make this check.

Area 1-6 – Hall of the Hexagons: *The corridor beyond the massive bronze doors is 20-foot wide ending in another set of massive bronze doors 70 feet away. There are hexagonal niches built into the walls, three to the left and three to the right, large enough for a man to easily stand within. Midway down the corridor, the floor is marked with a large crimson hexagon 20 feet across – above it, the ceiling disappears into a 20-foot-square shaft of unknown height.*

The hexagonal niches to east and west are all one-way gates into other worlds. Anything tossed into them is lost, unless the character passes through the gate to recover it – and then, he must find some other way home! If Arvind is with the characters, he will caution them about the gates, but he is evasive about the source of his knowledge.

If any PCs choose to pass through one or more gates, the judge should take the opportunity to introduce any adventure he likes – perhaps <the cyber satyr> or an encounter from *In the Prison of the Squid Sorcerer!* The gate can lead to any world or any era, leaving the judge free to modify adventures from very different systems or genres to run using the DCC game. Consider providing exit gates from the new world, but these need not lead the PCs directly home.

The hexagon on the floor is different: it triggers a vortex that can pull a man-sized creature (or two halflings, etc.) 30' up the shaft to another gate. This one is two-way and leads into the atmosphere of a super-heated gas giant. Any character passing through the gate

drops back down 1d4 rounds later – charred and asphyxiated.

The vortex draws a creature up at the rate of 5' per round and can be defeated simply by adding another creature to the glyph – if there are more creatures than it can draw, the vortex collapses. Creatures that are 10' or higher when this is discovered suffer falling damage as usual.

The bronze double doors are heavy but not locked. They require a DC 20 Strength check to open, and up to 4 characters can pool their Strength bonuses to make this check.

Area 1-7 – The Transmogrification Chamber:

The area beyond the doors is 40-foot square, with a 10-foot wide corridor leading out to the right. The room is filled with vats of foul-smelling liquids with tubes and pipes leading from the vats connecting two marble slabs, one of which contains the body of a statuesque man. This is the man on the tomb carvings you saw earlier! But it is clear that this body will never walk again, as it has been splayed and dissected, and the head has been cleanly removed and placed on the slab beside the headless corpse. The head's eyes are open, as if to watch you enter the room. The other slab is bare.

This was Arvind Shar's body, and when he sees it, the squonk goes berserk attacking the characters with the aim of paralyzing one to steal that character's body. All the while, Arvind mutters how he will take vengeance on his sister once he has his new body. The judge should make it clear what Arvind intends. If Arvind is wounded to 15 hp or less, he flees (dragging along a paralyzed PC if possible) to Area 1-6, and passes through the first gate possible.

There is nothing of obvious value in this room. A wizard or elf would have to study here many years to even have an idea of how Yona transferred Arvind's mind from one body to another. If a character with reasonable knowledge of human anatomy examines Arvind's original body, though, it is clear that while Arvind Shar may once have appeared human, he was not.

Arvind Shar, squonk: Init +4; Atk trunk sting +4 melee (1d2 + poison), claw +2 melee (1d6), or tail slap +3 melee (1d6 + constriction); AC 18; HD 10d8; hp 40; MV 20'; Act 3d20; SP poison (Fort DC 15 or paralysis 1d3 x 10 minutes), constriction (automatic 1d6 damage each round with successful tail strike); SV Fort +10, Ref +3, Will +10; AL C.

As a squonk, Arvind is strong enough to carry an armored human while moving at his normal speed. In a contest of Strength, the squonk has a +8 bonus.



Area 1-8 – Control Room: *After 10 feet, the corridor opens into a room 20-foot deep and 40-foot wide. To the far right is a control panel studded with buttons.*

Passing into this room triggers a hidden gate – a field that sends the lower 3' of the character to Area 1-1 while allowing the upper portion to continue into this room. Obviously, characters 3' tall or shorter are merely transported – but this is not immediately obvious to those left in the room. Otherwise (and barring extraordinary circumstances), a character blithely passing into the room is slain.

A thief that succeeds at a find traps check (DC 20) understands the archway is suspicious, but cannot say why – the hairs on the nape of the thief's neck rise, and he instinctively draws back. The trap can be disarmed (DC 15) by pressing a hidden stud near the top of the archway. This is apparent once the thief succeeds at the disarm trap check. Pressing the stud closes the gate and it does not automatically reset.

The buttons on the control panel are all gemstones and can easily be pried loose, but doing so ruins the mechanism and makes the buttons impossible to use. They are, from right to left:

Two red garnets marked "A" and "D" (worth 10 gp each): "A" activates the laser beam in Area 1-1, and "D" disarms it.

Three eye agates marked "A", "D", and "C" (worth 5 gp each): "A" arms the heat field trap in Area 1-2, "D" disarms it, and "C" makes the field run continually. It burns itself out in 4d6 days if left on.

One unmarked amethyst (worth 100 gp), two bloodstones marked "A" and "D" (worth 20 gp each), and two eye agates marked "A" and "D" (worth 5 gp each). The amethyst raises the bronze plate in Area 1-3. The bloodstones activate and deactivate the pressure plate trap in Area 1-3, and the eye agates activate or deactivate the heat field trap in the same room. If left on, the heat field burns out in 8d6 days.

One unmarked amethyst (worth 100 gp), two bloodstones marked "A" and "D" (worth 20 gp each), and two aquamarine stones marked "S" and "D" (worth 250 gp each). The amethyst will raise the bronze plate in Area 1-4 but only if the water is drained first. The bloodstones activate and deactivate the pressure plate in the same area. The aquamarine marked "S" will change the sluice position to "open" or "closed," while the aquamarine marked "D" does the same for the drain. It takes 1 minute to drain 1 foot of water from the corridor once the drain is activated.

A single star rose quartz gem (worth 50 gp), causes a temporal serpent to appear in Area 1-5 when acti

vated. Pushing the button again does not make the monster go away; it simply causes another temporal serpent to appear!

One black opal gem (worth 150 gp) and four fire opals marked "C", "E", and "W" (worth 250 gp each). The black opal arms or disarms the vortex trap in Area 1-6. The fire opals activate or deactivate the gates in the same area, and refer to the upper gate in the ceiling shaft ("C"), the eastern three gate "E", and the western three gates ("W"). Removing these gems permanently deactivates the gates they are linked to.

Three emeralds marked "D", "A", and "C" (worth 500 gp each). The emerald marked "D" *activates* the hidden gate in the entryway to this room. The emerald marked "A" *deactivates* it. The emerald marked "C" *changes* the field so that the lower 3' passes safely to the area beyond, while the remainder of anything passing through the gate is transported to Area 1-1. If the "D" and "A" gem are both removed, the gate is permanently deactivated, but if the "C" gem is removed, the archway leading back toward Area 1-7 permanently becomes a gate leading to any location the judge desires - this is Yona's last vengeance, so the judge should choose somewhere interesting.

CREATING PATRICIANS

Patricians have used super-science to be physically more imposing than humans, but they are childish, petty, and spiteful. If the judge wishes to have Yona or other Patricians appear in future adventures, the following method may be used:

For Strength, Agility, and Stamina, roll 5d6 and subtract the lowest die.

For Personality, roll 4d6 and subtract the lowest die. Patricians are often handsome or beautiful, and have commanding personalities despite their obvious character flaws.

For Intelligence and Luck roll 3d6. Patricians are no more intelligent or lucky than anyone else.

Although Patricians always appear to be in their mid-20's, they are all approximately 1d12 x 1,000 years old.



THE SILENT ARMY

Low-Level -- By Charlie Scott

Travelling through a dense forest, the party is beseeched by residents of a hunting village to discover what drove the men on a recent hunt catatonic with fear. They soon find they face no mere diabolical cult or earthly abomination, but a soldier from another world bred for conquest. The Silent Army is meant for a party of characters level 1-3. Parties of lower-level characters may have problems with the final encounter.

BACKGROUND

A Tsinchin is an advanced cybernetic organism designed to act as a precursor to an invasion. The Tsinchin infiltrates a planet, absorbs characteristics of the environment and its inhabitants for camouflage and adaptation to terrain, and converts the population itself into an army programmed to do its bidding. It then awaits the arrival of its alien masters.

The corrupted wizard Lazarax, who lives in a cave near the hunting village of Hartsthorn, was toying with dark magic to summon a demonic familiar; instead, he opened a portal through which a storage pod containing a Tsinchin fell to earth, causing a huge conflagration in the forest.

As the fire receded and Lazarax was able to leave his cave, he saw a strange, metallic, scorpion-like creature with tentacled legs crawl from the crater. It went to one of the trees and touched it, causing branches and leaves to almost instantly sprout from its back. Thinking that he had been successful, Lazarax approached the Tsinchin, ready to command it. The creature had other ideas, however, and quickly seized him. The last thing the wizard saw using his own eyes was the Tsinchin rise above him on cloven hooves much like his own....

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

The thick forest, its high green canopy rustling in the breeze, has provided ample fruit and quarry during your travel. Still, little sunlight makes it through the trees, and you welcome the thinning of the forest as you approach the small hunting village of Hartsthorn. Given the town's idyllic setting and the legendary hospitality of its people, you expect to hear the work songs of the village women, children teasing each other at play, and the laughter of men returning from the hunt. What you find sends a chill through your heart.

A dozen men, most wearing the trappings of hunters, all stand perfectly still, their gazes drawn west to the hills. A crying child tugs at the cloak of one of these living statues,

begging, "Papa, please wake up." A group of women are gathered around an outdoor table where an animated conversation is taking place. Some are crying. Others make impassioned pleas while gesturing to the group of men. One woman notices your arrival and comes to greet you. Her stride bespeaks the dignity the people of Hartsthorn are known for, but her face is drawn from sadness.

The woman is Meranda Featherstone and her husband, Rolland, is the hunt chief and one of the catatonic men. As all of the men of hunting age have been afflicted, it has fallen to her to lead the village during this time of desperation. "We in Hartsthorn are accustomed to being the ones to offer succor to weary travellers through these woods," she says, with a prideful tone that soon melts, "but I'm afraid we must now beg for your assistance."

Meranda willingly gives the party any information they require about the current situation, whether or not it seems they will help. She is at her wit's end and feels she has nothing to lose.

Two nights ago a thunderous sound roused the village from sleep. Those that went outside saw a fireball rising from the hills to the west about an hour away near a cave where the wizard Lazarax resides. Rolland deemed it too dangerous to investigate the fire at that time; a watch was set to warn the village if the fire—or anything else—got too close, and the morning's hunting party would discover the source of the fire and the fate of the mage.

At dawn the fire extinguished and the hunting party, including Rolland, set out for the cave. By dusk they had not returned, so another group of men went to find them. They were not seen until the following morning when the entire lot returned as the party sees them now: silent, immobile, and facing the western hills as if waiting for something.

Meranda is convinced that they were all in a fear-driven stupor. She says others believe that the fiendish Lazarax has ensorcelled them for some fell purpose. Although there was always something unsettling about the wizard, he never did the village any harm and would often trade with them. He always wore a long, woolen cloak that went to his feet, even in the heat of summer.

She lets them know immediately that the village is willing to pay for their services, and they can keep anything they find. The village has little money but will give them each 50 gp worth of (heavy) pelts, food, water, and lodging any time they travel through Hartsthorn; also, each will receive beautiful, indi-

visualized daggers with ornately etched handles fashioned from deer antler. She does ask, however, that they bring back some proof they have solved the mystery.

THE SILENT ARMY

The 12 catatonic hunters are soldiers in a silent army under the control of the Tsinchin. The army only moves if their outpost (the village or its inhabitants) is attacked, or the army itself is attacked. Otherwise, they await the non-vocal orders of the Tsinchin.

The army ignores anything the PCs say to them and even tolerates being poked and prodded up to a point. Any real harm or perceived threat (such as a swing of an axe, aim of a bow, or incantation) to a member of the army results in a swift reaction and counterattack. If a soldier loses half his hit points, then other soldiers join in. If the army loses around half its ranks, Lazarax and the Tsinchin respond, arriving within four turns on their speedy legs (see **Into the Blast Zone** and **The Cave of Lazarax**). If the party tarries for too many days in the village, the Tsinchin arrives and the silent army attacks.

A close inspection of the army reveals a web-like, silver disc about the size of a thumbnail on the back of each of their heads. This is the tail end of a neural spike, approximately six inches in length, which the Tsinchin buried in its victims' brains. A filigree of nano-scale fibers have sprouted from this tube and latticed through their cortices. The spike gives the Tsinchin complete control over its army, but removal results in the death of the soldier.

Silent Army (12): Init +1; Atk fist/kick +3 melee (1d3), or short bow +3 ranged (1d6) or short sword +3 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 2d12; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP Battle link, Mindwall; SV Ref +1, Fort +2, Will *automatic*; AL N

Battle Link: Even though the silent army is ostensibly made up of level-0 hunters, they have a mental link with the Tsinchin that gives them the hardiness, discipline, and skill of warriors.

Mindwall: As no consciousness exists within them, the silent soldiers automatically succeed at all Will-power saving throws.

INTO THE BLAST ZONE

Flakes of ash flutter by like snow as you near the area where the fire once raged. Smoldering tree trunks each as thick as a man have been blown back from a crater, like petals radiating from the center of a vast flower. Half buried in the bottom of the depression rests a metal disk, about 10' across. A jagged gash is ripped in its side. Across the crater you see the gaping mouth of the cave and, standing before

it, a graying man in a wizard's robe, staff in hand. Beneath the robe you see the downy legs and cloven hooves of a goat.

The corrupted wizard Lazarax, now another soldier in the Tsinchin's army, and he will attack the party if they enter the crater or come toward the cave.

The crater is about 60 feet wide and 20 feet deep. It's too steep to walk across but can be climbed. Picking through the debris to circumvent it and reach the cave takes a turn.

The disk is an alien munitions container used to store the Tsinchin for future battles. The impact weakened the container enough for the creature to rip out of it. The interior is barren and has nothing of value, but the alien language imprinted on the outside further confirms the otherworldly nature of the Tsinchin. The metal is a hardened alloy built to withstand great temperatures. Working with it is beyond the ken of the PCs without the aid of some advanced magic or super-science.

If, after defeating Lazarax, the party decides to return immediately to Hartsthorn, the Tsinchin will give chase.

Lazarax: Init+2; Atk goat kick +5 melee (2d8), or staff +3 melee (1d6+1 damage) or staff (*magic missile* Spell Check +5, 3 charges); AC 12; HD 5d8; hp 27; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP Battle link, Mindwall, Goat kick; SV Ref+1, Fort+1, Will *automatic*; AL N.

Battle link: Like the silent army, the link with the Tsinchin imbues Lazarax with knowledge of martial tactics far beyond those of a typical wizard, augmenting his offensive and defensive capabilities.

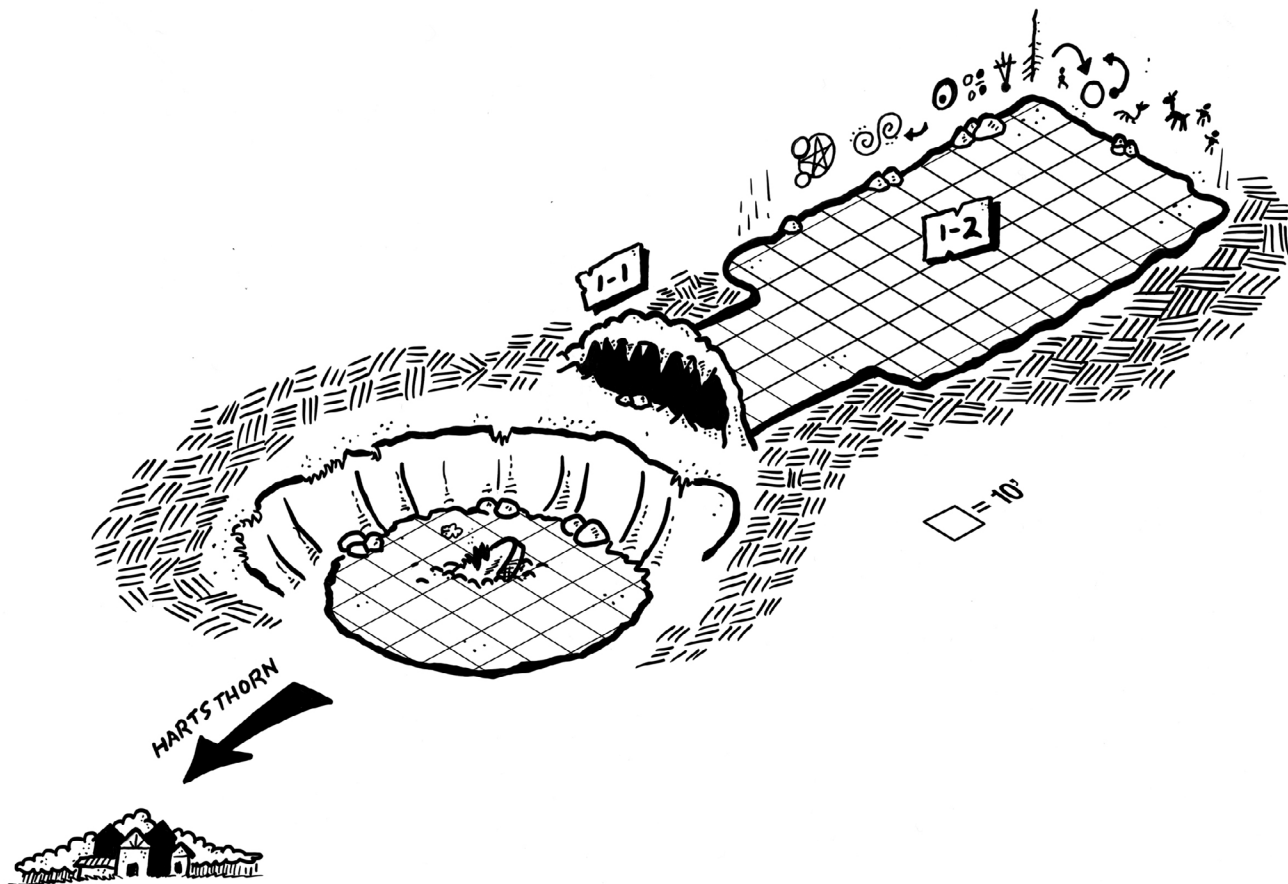
Mindwall: Lazarax automatically makes all Will-power saving throws.

Goat kick: Lazarax's taint allows him to deliver a powerful goat kick that can cause 2d8 points of damage.

While under the Tsinchin's command, Lazarax's soul has no control over his corporeal body; consequently, he can no longer communicate with his patron for spell casting but does wield a staff, hewn from the trees of the forest, that inflicts +1 damage and retains three charges of *magic missile* with a +3 to the Spell Check. Lazarax's patron is sickened by the wizard's current state and destroys the staff when the last charge is used.

THE CAVE OF LAZARAX

Area 1-1 - The Mouth: *As you enter the mouth of the cave all noises from the forest cease, and the air becomes very still. Even your footfalls seem wispy and groundless, slightly throwing you off balance as you walk down its*



gentle slope. Sixty feet ahead, a dim glow silhouettes the form of yet another wizard...with the legs of a goat. Has Lazarax risen? The mage raises his staff and begins an unholy incantation.

This second Lazarax is an illusion created by the original's *Prism of Ibn Sahl* mounted into the rocks of the cave. The illusionary Lazarax fires either *magic missiles* or a *fireball* each round (Spell Check +5). These spells appear to do real damage, and any character that "dies" as a result of these spells must still make a Recover the Body check (see DCCRPG core rulebook, page 93). On a successful Luck check, the character simply awakens without further effect. On a failed check, the character loses 1 point of Intelligence, Personality or Wisdom permanently (randomly determined).

The illusionary Lazarax appears to take no damage from physical or magical attacks; in fact, any attack seems to pass right through him. The wizard taunts the party with declarations of his puissance and invulnerability throughout the entire conflict.

The *Prism of Ibn Sahl* can be located by *detect magic* and is affected by *dispel magic* (Spell Check 22). Unless dispelled, the illusion continues for 1d6+2 rounds before disappearing, reappearing 1d3 turns later.

For melee purposes, the cave mouth expands from 40 feet at its entrance to 60 feet by the time the party reaches the main chamber.

THE PRISM OF IBN SAHL

The Prism of Ibn Sahl can record a series of three-dimensional illusions of its creator and play them back continuously. It's a "write once, read many" medium, however, so the PCs must be content with it playing reruns of Lazarax for eternity. Although magical, it is made of common glass and can be easily chipped or broken, distorting the image and influencing the believability of the illusion. Once activated, the illusion plays continually, as above. Activating or deactivating the prism requires a Spell Check (DC 15).

Area 1-2 – The Main Chamber: *The mouth spills into a main chamber about 60 feet wide and 80 feet deep. Ensnconced torches and candles cast a dusky light over the room. The walls and ceiling are covered in phosphorescent drawings of orbs, men and beasts of myth, arrows, and scrawls of formulae.*

In the center of the room a tall creature stands on two goat-like legs, looking like a horrific version of the satyrs of forest lore. Its body and whip-like arms shimmer as if encased in metallic armor and a spiked, segmented tail curls behind it. Its eyes are similar to a man's, but its sallow, waxy face sways upon a stalk. Upon its back and shoulders sprout twisted, lichen-covered branches and leaves.

The **Tsinchin** cannot be surprised because he has known about the party's arrival into Hartsthorn and was warned both by Lazarax and his illusion.

The chamber is sparsely furnished, with only a bed, a chest, a stove, and three wooden tables. The tables are covered with magical tomes, scrolls, and various notes written by Lazarax. A knowledgeable wizard can discern that Lazarax was dabbling in an esoteric astrology that attempted to map the placement of the stars as seen from other planets. Watchful characters note a resemblance between the alien script on the disk and some of the runes in the tomes. Lazarax had spent most of his money on these tomes and whatever value and secrets he got from them were lost in his death, though taken together they could bring 1,500 gp from a wizard or other buyer of the arcane arts. Judges are encouraged to use these texts as jumping off points for other adventures, for providing wizard or cleric characters clues about otherworldly patrons or gods, or provide clues to further incursions by alien influences. A small leather pouch on one of the tables contains 132 gp.

If the characters dissect or similarly examine the Tsinchin, they will find the mechanical and organic viscera unfathomable. They will, however, locate the **Tsinchin Heart** in the being's chest cavity, an opalescent stone about the size of a grapefruit that provides its electronic systems with power.

THE TSINCHIN HEART

Although it would be difficult for PCs to harness the power of the Tsinchin Heart, it can provide a source of continuous light and warmth enough to make a 20x20 room comfortable. Unfortunately, it is also mildly radioactive and any character in possession of it must make a Fort Save at DC 10 once per week or lose one point of Stamina due to radiation poisoning. Subterranean creatures, such as dwarves, are immune to this and a dwarf "smells" the Tsinchin Heart as a valuable gemstone. Note that this item is not magical and cannot be affected by *dispel magic*. Its value, if sold, is up to the judge to determine.

Tsinchin: Init +4; Atk tail +7 melee (1d6+2 plus paralysis) or two tentacles +4 melee (2d6+3 plus neural spike); AC 19; HD 6d10+12; hp 57; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP paralysis, neural spike, immune to mind-altering spells, heals 2 hp per round; SV Ref+3, Fort+3, Will +6; AL N.

Paralysis (Fort Save DC 16): Upon contact, the Tsinchin's tail injects thousands of microscopic nanobots into the victim's bloodstream to short-circuit its nervous system. A successful saving throw results in the temporary loss of 1d4 Agility points; a failed saving throw results in permanent paralysis. This paralysis requires 5 dice of clerical healing/lay on hands to counteract.

Neural spike: The Tsinchin tries to penetrate a paralyzed or grappled (+6 on Strength checks) character's skull with a neural spike from one of its tentacles.

Once installed, the neural spike wires itself into the victim's brain and links with the Tsinchin within 1d4 rounds. At that point, the PC becomes controlled by the judge, becoming part of the Silent Army and attacking the party. The spiked character has the Battle link and Mindwall special abilities and during combat effectively operates at 2 HD higher than their actual level. At the judge's discretion, the Tsinchin may also take on a unique physical characteristic of the PC. If the Tsinchin is killed during the 1d4 round enervation period, the PC survives but permanently loses 1 point of Intelligence. Otherwise, the victim dies when the Tsinchin is killed and neural link is severed.

AFTERMATH

When the party returns to Hartsthorn after slaying the Tsinchin, they will find a somber sight.

Despite your victory, you return to a village in mourning. The smoke from a dozen funeral pyres wafts above the trees and into the hills beyond. The villagers are gracious and give you thanks, but their hearts are numb with sorrow.

Meranda Featherstone sees the party and thanks them. If they have some proof of their deed (like the head of Lazarax or the Tsinchin), the village will make good on their promise of payment.

"It will be hard, but our village will survive," Meranda says. "The next generation may have to grow up sooner than expected." A brief smile of hope flickers across her face, but soon disappears.

"There is one thing," she says, her voice small. "When the men fell, their final words were, 'They are coming. They are coming.'

"Who is coming? Who are they?"



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