

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS:
SAGA OF THE DRAGON CULT

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INTRODUCTION

Remember the golden days of role playing, when adventures were underground, NPCs were there to be killed, and the finale of every dungeon was the dragon on the 20th level? Well, those days are back. *Dungeon Crawl Classics* feature bloody combat, intriguing dungeons, and no NPCs who aren't meant to be killed. Each adventure is 100% good, solid dungeon crawl, with the monsters you know, the traps you fear, and the secret doors you know must be there somewhere.

The *Saga of the Dragon Cult* is a collection of four classic DCC adventures that guide four to six PCs from 1st level all the way to 10th level and beyond. Beginning play as mere apprentices, woodsmen, petty thieves, and sellswords, the PCs grow to become mighty legends, of whom tales of heroism are recounted across the North. By the final chapter, the fate of civilization rests in the hands of the PCs, as they chase a fearsome red dragon back to its lair.

DESIGN NOTES

Before there was *Áereth*, the *Known Realms*, or the gazetteer that hints to the myriad of adventures set therein, there was the *Tsathzar Rho*, the *Witch Queen*, *Nockmort the Mad Treant*, and *Pyraxus the Red Dragon*. Fearsome villains all, the four reigned with terror and violence across the *Known Realms*, and many a troupe of aspiring heroes fell before their evil machinations. Now all four classic villains can be found together in this single, epic adventure path: *Dungeon Crawl Classics: The Saga of the Dragon Cult*.

The *Saga of the Dragon Cult* firmly seats DCCs #2, 6, 10 and 17 in the *Known Realms of Áereth*. This boxed set takes the old-school gaming out of the dungeon and into the wilderness, where both danger and treasure can lurk behind every ridge and forest glade. While it is not necessary to own *DCC #35: Gazetteer of the Known Realms* to play these adventures, this adventure path does reference places and personas found in the *Gazetteer*. GMs playing without *DCC #35* are encouraged to make up their own backstory to fill in these details, endowing them with a life unique to your campaign world.

The original modules were written as one-shot adventures, each playable in a few sessions or less. In order to link them together into a coherent story-arc, changes were made to certain key encounters in each adventure. These suggested changes are included in this booklet, along with new player handouts and 3 interludes, brief side plots that serve to tie the adventures together.

The adventures of the *Known World* are set on the grand stage of *Áereth*. Travel times between the chapters and interludes can be quick and painless, or long and arduous, as best suits the needs of the GM and the players.

At their own discretion, GMs can run the four adventures separately, as they were originally intended. Regardless of their decision, GMs are encouraged to look over the four modules and this booklet closely, becoming familiar with their contents. Each presents its own challenges and dangers, and many are the PCs that have fallen prey to carelessness or overconfidence.

Finally, let no game of fantasy heroism and courage be beholden to mere rules. It is you, the GM who must be the final judge and arbiter of the game! Peruse the contents of this boxed set, let its contents fan the embers of your imagination, then unfold its adventures as you deem best.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

Following is a brief synopsis of each chapter and interlude, and the chief challenges contained in each:

Chapter One, The Lost Vault of Tsathzar Rho: Wherein the heroes first stumble upon the machinations of the *Dragon Cult*. Foiling a plot to return the mighty *Tsathzar Rho* back to *Áereth*, the PCs unearth an even greater mystery, one spanning back to the pre-history of the *Known Realms* and threatening the mightiest nations of the North.

First Interlude, Intrigue at the Standing Stones: In which our heroes are approached an agent of the Crown, and the *Dragon* cultists make their wrath known. The PCs stumble upon a foul ritual being used to determine



the final resting place of Pyraxus, mighty ally to the dread Tsathzar Rho.

Chapter Two, Legacy of the Savage Kings: While tracking fleeing cultists, the heroes stumble into the fetid demesne of Kyleth, the Witch Queen. There they are forced to do battle with a band of lizard folk corrupted by an eldritch curse, before facing down the Witch Queen herself.

Second Interlude, Wrath of the Dragon Cult: The trail leads further west into Stagwood, where agents of the Dragon Cult lie in wait. Surviving an ambush, the PCs press on to Garland's Fork, where the cultists seek a meeting with the demented treant Nockmort.

Chapter Three, The Sunless Garden: Wherein the heroes finally confront their antagonists, in the depths of the Sunless Garden, and learn the true purpose of the Dragon Cult.

Third Interlude, Mighty Pyraxus: Freed from the shackles of death, mighty Pyraxus returns to his mountain abode to recuperate his powers. With the armies of Thire and Crieate awaiting him, can the heroes shift the balance of an epic battle?

Chapter Four, Temple of the Dragon Cult: The conclusion of The Saga of the Dragon Cult. The heroes, now would-be dragon slayers, delve into a mountain fastness, questing for the red dragon Pyraxus.

BACKGROUND STORY

The foul legends of Tsathzar Rho have long inspired villainy across the North. Strong-willed warlocks and witches seek to rival the wizard's legendary might, while the weak and craven merely worship the memory of the demon-sworn wizard, proffering sacrificial blood offerings on dark and moonless nights, hoping to curry the dead wizard's favor.

But Tsathzar Rho was not alone. Sages point to musty tomes and bloodstained scrolls recounting the wizard's constant companion, the mighty dragon Pyraxus. More than a mere mount or shrinking servant, the drake was a ready accomplice to the wizard's plots. Some elder sages even claim that Pyraxus was the true author of Tsathzar's schemes, manipulating the mad mage like a puppet on a string, and encouraging Tsathzar Rho to ever-greater depths of depravity and arrogance. Though the tales are regarded as apocryphal by all but the most radical scholars, they have not failed to capture the imagination of cultists hoping to partake in but a small portion of the ancient dragon's legacy.

From these sparse legends and tales has sprung the Temple of the Dragon Cult.

Inspired by the myths of the once-might Pyraxus, the Dragon Cult has scoured the North, seeking out traces of Tsathzar Rho's legacy, legends of Pyraxus the Mighty, and ancient rituals best left undisturbed. The cultists have but a single purpose: to raise the long vanquished wyrm from the dead and restore the monster to all his former glory.

Towards this end, the cultists have plumbed the depths of eldritch libraries, uncovering the lost vault of Tsathzar Rho in the hopes of divining the location of Pyraxus' remains. At the same time, agents of the cult have sought out wicked weapons and magics to arm the dragon's growing army. And finally, at the foot of the Trolltooth Mountains, in Pyraxus' ancient lair, his most devoted servants work to transform themselves into the dragon's image, twisting their very bodies and souls into inhuman monstrosities.

One day soon Pyraxus will rise again, an army of fell beasts armed with unholy weapons will stand at the dragon's side, and the nations of the North will tremble in fear. Only the PCs stand in the way. The destiny of the North hangs in the balance.

GAME MASTER'S SECTION

ENCOUNTER TABLE

To help the GM prepare, we have included a quick reference table showing all encounters at a glance. The abbreviations used are: Loc – the location number keyed to the map for the encounter. Pg – the module page number that the encounter can be found on. Type – this indicates if the encounter is a trap (T), puzzle (P), or combat (C). Encounter – the key monsters, traps or NPCs that can be found in the encounter.

Loc	Pg	Type	Encounter	EL
1-1	6	–	The Beggar-Thief	–
1-3	8	C/P	Enris the Assassin, Ftr3/Wiz2	5
2-1	10	C	6 kobolds	3
2-2	11	C	Torslak, half-orc Clr4 4 berserker cultists	6
3-1	14	C	Fystan the Cutthroat, Wiz4 Xavor, Clr3 5 Cult Warriors, War1	7
3-2	15	C	Captain Welis, Ftr4 8 Cult Warriors, War1	6
		T	Poison dart trap	3
		T/C	Black diamond asp	2
		T	Fire trapped tent	3
4-2	20	C	Pyraxus the Red Dragon	13

SCALING INFORMATION

For each **Chapter**, alter the adventure as per the scaling instructions included in the DCC. For the **Interludes**, make the following changes:

Weaker parties (3 or fewer characters): Remove all of Enris' wizard levels; remove the berserker cultists aiding Torslak, leaving the cleric alone in the standing stones; remove Xavor the dwarf cleric from the encounter with Fystan; reduce the number of warriors aiding Captain Welis to 4.

Stronger parties (7 or more characters): Increase Enris' wizard and fighter levels by 2 each; double the number of berserker cultists defending Torslak; increase Fystan's and Xavor's levels by 2 each; double the number of warriors serving Captain Welis, and increase the Captain's level to 6.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

Involving the PCs in the extended adventure path requires presenting the PCs with a mystery greater than any single quandary presented in any of the individual adventures. The plot of the Cult of the Dragon casts a deepening shadow over much of the Northlands, making it crucial that the PCs are committed to its destruction. Groups of evil PCs may be

challenged to find a reason to thwart the cult, and can quickly derail a GM's campaign. Before beginning the adventures, GMs should consider the sort of adventure their players want – epic quests are not for the squeamish or faint of heart!

Not every PC needs to be committed to the quest, but it will make the GM's work easier if at least one or two of the PCs have a personal investment in defeating the Cult of the Dragon. Following are some suggestions for PC backgrounds. GMs are encouraged to use these suggestions as springboards for their own imaginations, suiting their PCs' backgrounds to their home campaigns.

- One of the PCs is a member of the Black Watch, a grim organization sworn to defend Áereth from unholy abominations and otherworldly horrors. Just before the PCs begin their exploration of the lost vault of Tsathzar Rho, the PC discovers a black arrow with azure fletchings outside his inn room – the sign that his master in the Black Watch has tasked the young explorer to root out the evils lurking within (and without!) the vault, and to follow every strand of the villainous web to its bitter end.
- Unbeknownst to the players, one of the PCs is a direct descendent of the mighty hero that slew Pyraxus eons ago. Upon entering the lost vault, the PC begins having powerful premonitions and visions, messages sent by her long deceased ancestor inspiring the PC to finish what her ancestor began. At the GM's discretion, the PC's family might even have a relic remaining from that long past age: A great sword that hangs above the family hearth, a potent staff with hidden magical powers, or a single arrow, forged to defeat the mighty Pyraxus. Whatever the relic, its powers can only be unlocked by the PC pursuing her inherited quest, no matter the cost.
- One of the PCs, either a rogue or a priest, is a secret agent of the Theocracy of the Lance, investigating rumors of cultists operating in and around the vault of Tsathzar Rho. The Theocracy's secret libraries hold ancient scrolls that cite a Cult of the Dragon, and its leaders are concerned about the cult's peculiar revival, and the wickedness it might bring to light.
- One of the PCs, perhaps a fighter, paladin or grandiose bard, has fallen in love with the daughter of a Crieite baron. The PC is an un-landed noble, if not an outright commoner, and must earn the acceptance of society before winning his lady's hand in marriage. This means service to the Emperor of Crieite, and the best way to gain the Emperor's notice is to serve Captain Senti in the Order of the Sable March. But how can a mere aspiring hero achieve such a vaulted goal? Only time, the handmaiden of fate, will tell.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LOST VAULT OF TSATHZAR RHO

Make the following changes to the appropriate locations in *DCC #2: The Lost Vault of Tsathzar Rho*:

Area 1-14 – Commander’s Chambers: In addition to the treasure listed, there is also a leather riding satchel hidden beneath the crude desk (Search, DC 10). The satchel is inscribed with various weird, glowing runes, but the kobold sorcerer Slazzik Balefire has already spoken all of the proper command words necessary to disarm the runes and glyphs.

Inside the satchel is a bone scroll case, and a shard of a broken longsword sword, wrapped in soiled cotton. The broken blade is made of some dark, brittle metal and razor sharp. The weapon also radiates a palpable aura of evil that will be immediately noticed by any clerics, paladins or druids. This is a shard of a blight blade, forged in the fetid, bug-infested marshes of the Great Swamp.

The scroll case contains a sheet of rolled parchment. Scrawled on the stained parchment is a letter written in Runic Northtongue, a precursor to Common used centuries ago (and still practiced by the servitors of Tsathzar Rho). Reading the letter requires a DC 15 Decipher Script check, or a casting of comprehend languages. If the PCs succeed in deciphering the script, show players Player Handout A at the end of this booklet.

The letter reads as follows:



Balefire~

We have met with the Witch Queen. Our ruse is a success! The foul Queen has consented to our demands. The first shipment of the enchanted blades will be arriving soon for your inspection, before being shipped east as ordered. When the mighty Wyrn arises, he will have a suitable army to serve his dread will! The greedy witch demands more gold; to buy time I have sent a sample of her work ahead for your inspection. Send gold only once you get word of the blades' arrival – I do not trust the Witch's motives any more than she should trust ours.

~Ruebald

The signature bears the wax seal depicting a rampant dragon, its fearsome maw closed around a dark orb.

Area 2-13 – The Outer Fane: Change the room description to the following:

This chamber serves as a minor temple for the kobolds. Its flat, smooth floor and ceiling reflect light cast upon them. The walls are covered in frescoes that depict a bald human male in blue robes calling bolts of lightning down upon a castle, binding a scorpion demon into a pentagram, blotting out the sun with a monstrous, black hand in the sky, and sundering the temple of some unknown god with a blast of scarlet energy. A fearsome dragon appears behind the wizard in each fresco, roaring with fury and triumph.

Eight pillars arranged in two rows of four each run from floor to ceiling. Each pillar is crafted to resemble a human in robes holding the ceiling with his outstretched hand. The figures wear holy symbols or display them on their robes, each symbol corresponding to a deity of good or neutrality.

FIRST INTERLUDE

INTRIGUE AT THE STANDING STONES

Having defeated the fiendish plot of Tsathzar Rho, the PCs retire to the town of Hadler's Gap, trading the hard flagstones of a dungeon floor for a civilized straw bed, taking the time to heal their wounds, relearn spells, and take stock of their hard won fortune.

But fate has plans in store for the rising heroes. Their adventures have drawn the notice of the royal crown of Crieste and the noble Captain Sentri, who is always on the look out for courageous and cunning adventurers willing to champion the cause of Good.

But not all their newfound fame is for the good. The PCs have also drawn the attention of those that would thwart the work of Captain Sentri and bring the Criestine Empire to its knees.

The encounters set in the first interlude should be played in order. Read through the encounters and then tailor them for your PCs' particular style of play.

Area 1-1 – The Beggar-Thief: Upon the PCs' return to Hadler's Gap, read or paraphrase the following:

The village-watch hails your party with cheers and upraised spears. Their heroes have returned from the ogre caves, triumphant! A crowd of townsfolk gather round, offering to buy drinks at the inn, eager to hear your tales and to witness first hand the glittering treasures wrenched from the heart of the Urkallan hills. Wide-eyed beggars look on, their hands held up in desperate supplication, while the village-watch forces a path through the awestruck crowd of commoners.

This is an opportunity for PCs to enjoy their fame; returning from Tsathzar's Lost Vault has made them into local heroes. Speeches are in order, and if the PCs comport themselves in an honorable and noble fashion (at least in public) they will earn a permanent place in the hearts of Hadler's Gap. Even if the PCs behave with arrogance, they will be treated as celebrities for the next few days, although the locals will be quick to turn their backs on the villains if they should get themselves into trouble.

Not all of the onlookers are simpleminded village folk, however. One of the beggars pleading for alms is actually an agent of the Sable March, the secretive order that works to stave off evil in the Empire of Crieste. The beggar, a pox-ridden, crippled boy (actually a female half-elf in disguise) forces his way to the front of the crowd, begging the PCs for bit of copper or even a spare silver piece. If the PCs show the beggar kindness, "he" slips a scrap of parchment into their hands as they give him a bit of coin.

If the PCs ignore the beggar's pleas, he stumbles against them as his crutch goes out from beneath him, permitting the beggar to attempt a Sleight of Hand check (opposed by the target PC's Spot check) as he slips the scrap into the PC's coin purse. If the PCs mistake the attempt as pick pocketing, the faux-beggar flees into the streets.

The scrap of paper is a letter, written in black ink. Show the players Player Handout B. The letter is penned in flowing, graceful script:

Noble Heroes,

This letter is to be delivered to your hands by my agent, Lady Marwyn. Your recent expedition has drawn the notice of many – some that would conspire to do evil against the empire.

If you would cast your lot with those who stand against the forces of Chaos; if you would stand as a champion of the weak and innocent, and visit violence against the wicked, meet with my agent at the Watchful Wyvern this very night. You will know my servant by a silver rose.

And if you would instead side with the corrupt, the tyrannous, the wicked and the cowardly, you will know my everlasting enmity.

Captain Sentri,

Master of the Sable March and General of the Seven Armies

HADLER'S GAP

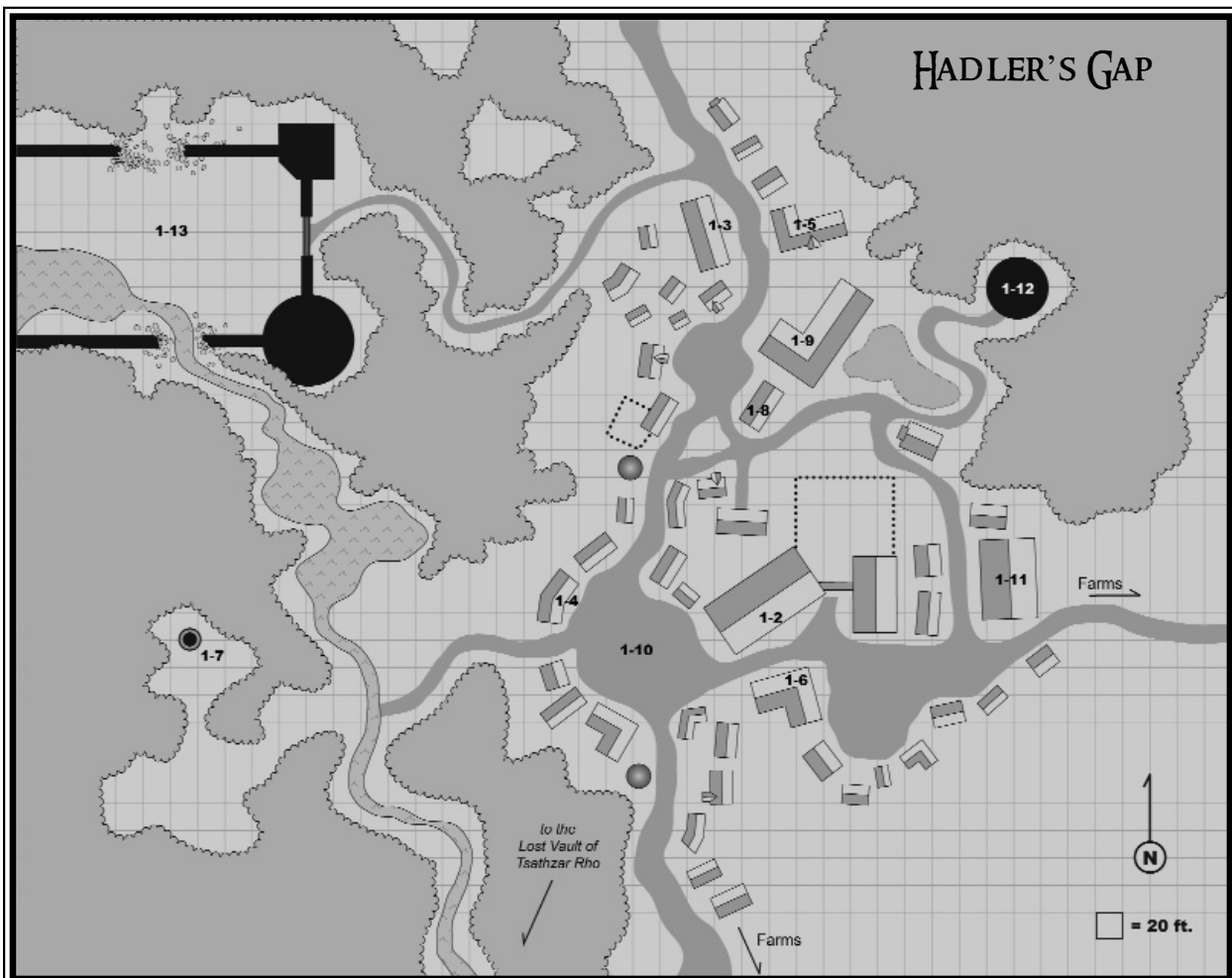
A small, frontier hamlet, Hadler's Gap has long served as a waystation for trade caravans making their way from Criede borderlands, to the northern kingdoms. Though far from cosmopolitan by any standard, the villagers see enough travelers to have a fairly liberal attitude towards non-humans. Standing on the edge of the wilderness, the hamlet can serve as a base of operations for any number of adventures.

Hadler's Gap (village): Conventional; AL NG; 500 gp limit; Pop 518.

Authority Figures: Amzel the Elder, male human Wiz3/Exp6; Dwurthim the Shire Reeve, human War5; Rygnia the Old Witch of the Wood, Sor3; Venjer the Moneylender Rog5; Eldoun of the Axe, male dwarf Ftr6; Father Donovan, Clr4.

Following is a brief key to the village of Hadler's Gap.

Location	Name
1-2	Hall of the Prancing Unicorn (Inn)
1-3	Sign of the Watchful Wyvern (Tavern)
1-4	Sign of the Hammer and Shield (Smithy)
1-5	Neshti's Bones (Gambling Hall)
1-6	Garren's Mercantile (Trader)
1-7	Witch's Hut (Healer)
1-8	The Golden Crown (Moneylender)
1-9	Sign of the Spear and Sword (Caravan Guild)
1-10	Town Square and Bazaar
1-11	Chapel of Justicia
1-12	Amzel's Tower (Sage and Town Elder)
1-13	Haunted Keep (ruins)





Marwyn, the Captain's Beggar, female half-elf Rog3: CR 3; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d6; hp 15; Init +3; Spd 30ft.; AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +2; Grpl +1; Atk dagger +5 melee (1d4-1/19-20x2) or dagger +5 ranged (1d4-1/19-20x2) or sling +5 ranged (1d4-1/x2); SQ immune to sleep, sneak attack +2d6, trapfinding, evasion, trap sense +1; AL CG; SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 9, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +7, Climb +2, Diplomacy +6, Disable Device +5, Disguise +8 (+10 acting), Gather Information +11, Hide +9, Intimidate +5, Listen +7, Move Silently +9, Open Lock +9, Search +6, Sleight of Hand +12, Search +3, Spot +7, Use Rope +5; Deft Hands, Weapon Finesse.

Possessions: Dagger, sling, tattered pouch with 5 stones.

Area 1-2 – Hall of the Prancing Unicorn: Read or paraphrase the following:

The common room of the inn nearly spills over with celebration. Sun-hardened caravan guards, blades at the ready, tell tales at the bar, each more unlikely than the last. A pair of eager farm lads dice with a sharp-faced trader, while a pair of fattened merchants look on, hiding their bemusement in their mugs. A half-elf bard sits near the fireplace, singing ballads to a half-interested crowd, while serving women weave and dance their way through the crowd, plates of steaming potatoes and mugs of ale and mead held high.

The Prancing Unicorn is busy day and night, with caravans and travelers coming and going at all hours. The common room is filled with a constant roar of conversa-

tion, laughter, shouts and curses, even as weary travelers try catch quick naps in the corners, their cloaks pulled tight around them.

The inn is managed under the able hand of Master Aedelwen, a stern man who has run the Prancing Unicorn longer than most of the inhabitants of Hadler's Gap have been alive. (It is rumored that the tall, thin man, has more than a little elven blood flowing in his veins.)

If approached politely, and if the questioner is free with his coin, the Master proves to be a fount of knowledge, since nearly every trader or personality passing through Hadler's Gap spends at least a few hours in his establishment.

Service	Cost
Private room (per night)	10 sp
Common room (per night)	Free
Mug of ale	1 sp
Small beer	5 cp
Blackbriar Wine	1 gp
Soup	1 sp
Stew	3 sp
Roast Fowl	1 gp
Meat Pie	5 cp
Cheese and bread	1 sp

There are always 4d8 patrons in the inn, and roughly two thirds will be merchants, exotic travelers and caravan guards passing through the village on their way to Crieeste or the northern nations.

There is a 50% chance that 2d3 patrons will be mercenaries passing time in the inn as they look for work. Hardy, adventurous souls, the men- (and women-) at-arms will entertain the idea of serving a PC in exchange for room, board, 1 gp per day of service, and a half share of all treasure gained. Mercenaries will have 1d4 levels in the Warrior NPC class, own studded leather armor, short spears, light or heavy wooden shields, fighting daggers and longswords. All other gear will have to be purchased for them by the PCs. There is a 1 in 20 chance that a mercenary is really a brigand scouting out potential targets, and will lure the PCs into an ambush when the party decides to leave town.

Sleeping in a private room is relatively safe, but those electing to sleep in the common room have a 10% chance of having their purses picked by a rogue during the night. For a small fee of 5 sp, the Master of the hostelry is willing to lock up valuables in his own personal vault. The Master is scrupulously honest when entrusted with other's valuables and will not betray the PCs trust, no matter the worth of an item.

Area 1-3 – Sign of the Watchful Wyvern (El 5): Read or paraphrase the following:

The low, rough hewn door opens to reveal a smoke filled dive. Smokey lamps cast dim light

over the swarthy drinkers. All are hard men, dressed in boiled leather and ringmail, with notched blades at their sides or heavy axes over their shoulders. A heavy-set barkeep with a barrel-gut looks up as you enter, sizing you up with his small, beady eyes.

While the Hall of the Prancing Unicorn is home to travelers and merchants, the Watchful Wyvern is a local drinking hole, where local loggers, woodsmen, and hunters go to slake their thirst. The bartender, a man called Jiton, serves up a steady supply of drinks and plates of the Wyvern's famous sausage and potatoes. Jiton is known for keeping the secrets of his patrons, and knowing when to look the other way.

Marwyn waits by the door of the inn, a cloak drawn close around her small frame. She has been following the PCs since their return from the vault of Tsathzar Rho, gauging their behavior. If the PCs have acted with honor and virtue, she approaches the PCs when they enter, drawing up her sleeve to reveal the tattoo of a silver rose on the inside of her forearm.

The Pitch: Marwyn calls for drinks and explains her story to the PCs. She is an agent of the Sable March, in the service of the Emperor of Crieste. She has been sent to the town of Hadler's Gap to investigate rumors of a mystery cult having something to do with the ancient wizard, Tsathzar Rho (Marwyn is unaware of Pryraxus, or the cult's true motives.). The cultists, Marwyn shares with the PCs, can be recognized by the symbol of the three-fingered hand, worn as a brand or tattoo. If the PCs show Marwyn any of the gold pendants looted from the kobolds in the lost vault of Tsathzar Rho, the rogue pales visibly. The pendants are an exact match for the markings she describes.

This very night, Marwyn reveals, the cultists are meeting at the ring of druidic standing stones deep in the forest north of town.

As this point, the rogue pauses as a young serving boy (the assassin Enris, in disguise) brings drinks for Marwyn and the party.

Marwyn downs her glass of wine in a single gulp. Once the serving boy has left, Marwyn places a leather satchel containing 100 pp on the table, promising one for each PC if they join her in investigating the cultists. If the PCs agree, she takes a scroll case from her belt and unrolls a map illustrating the standing stones, and begins to outline a plan for the night's mission. (Show players Player Handout C.)

The Assassin's Flight: Regardless of the PCs' reaction, the very next round Marwyn collapses onto the table gagging, and then slides to the floor, dead. Her wine was poi-

soned with *quicken* (see sidebar) dark reaver powder. PCs succeeding on a DC 15 Spot check see the serving boy darting into the kitchen, shedding his apron. A Search (DC 15) of Marwyn's drink reveals gritty film, which any PCs with ranks in alchemy or healing will recognize as tell-tale signs of poison.

The PCs' actions at this moment are critical to the outcome of the encounter. Other drinkers in the bar will assume that the PCs are responsible for Matwyn's death; PCs immediately chasing after the assassin will confirm these suspicions. The bar patrons, innocent bystanders with no connection with the assassin, move to stop the PCs from "fleeing" until the authorities can be summoned. There are 1d4+3 of these would-be-heroes. They can be dissuaded with a dramatic show of armed prowess (such as downing one of their number in a single round or spell), by a DC 17 Bluff check, or by an excellent cover story (at the GM's discretion). Note that PCs cutting their way through the bar patrons are committing a despicably evil act. How the PCs decide to resolve the situation will have a direct impact on how they are regarded in the community, and PCs slaying common bar patrons will be hunted and tried for murder.

Meanwhile, Marwyn's assassin continues in his flight,

NEW SPELL: QUICKEN POISON

Transmutation

Level: Wiz 4, Evil 4, Asn 4

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Range: Touch

Target: 1 dose of a non-magical poison

Duration: Permanent until discharged

Saving Throw: None.

Spell Resistance: Yes.

This spell speeds the effects of a single dose of natural poison, so that both the initial and secondary effects take place at the same time. The spell is cast upon a single dose of poison; if cast upon a larger volume of poison, the spell effects the first dose consumed, applied via injury, touched (for contact poison), or inhaled.

Researched and developed by mages in service of the Slayers, this spell is universally reviled by good-aligned nations across the Known Realms; in certain cities, even the possession of the spell in a spell book is grounds for immediate execution.

The spell does not function in conjunction with the *poison* spell. Poisons derived from magical creatures are affected by the spell.

running out the back of the inn and to the end of the dark alley where his riding horse is quartered. Because of Enris' Run feat, PCs may be hard pressed to catch up with the assassin. If he succeeds in eluding the PCs, Enris rides to the standing stones where he will be encountered in area 2-1.

PCs investigating the kitchen find Jiton's corpse slumped in a corner and covered in canvas sacks. A DC 20 Search reveals an empty flask, and a pair of discolored gloves. A DC 20 Healing or a DC 15 Craft (alchemy) check reveals that the mug of wine, vial and gloves all contain trace amounts dark reaver powder. There is not enough poison remaining to serve as a dose.

Marwyn, the Captain's Beggar, female half-elf Rog3: CR 3; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d6; hp 15; Init +3; Spd 30ft.; AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +2; Grp +1; Atk mwk. rapier+6 melee (1d6-1/18-20x2) or dagger +5 ranged (1d4-1/19-20x2) or light crossbow +5 ranged (1d8/19-20x2); SQ immune to sleep, sneak attack +2d6, trapfinding, evasion, trap sense +1; AL CG; SV Fort +1, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 9, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 10, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +7, Climb +0*, Diplomacy +6, Disable Device +5, Disguise +8 (+10 acting), Gather Information +11, Hide +7*, Intimidate +5, Listen +7, Move Silently +7*, Open Lock +9, Search +6, Sleight of Hand +10*, Search +3, Spot +7, Use Rope +5; Deft Hands, Weapon Finesse. *Includes a -2 armor check penalty.

Possessions: Chain shirt, masterwork rapier, dagger, light crossbow, bolt case with 15 bolts, 5 silvered bolts, cloak, belt pouch with 15 gp, 23 sp and 10 cp, riding satchel with 100 pp.

Enris the Assassin, male elf Ftr3/Wiz2: CR 5; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d10+2d4+5; hp 35; Init +3; Spd 30ft.; AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +4; Grpl +5; Atk short sword +6 melee (1d6+1/19-20x2) or composite shortbow +8 ranged (1d6+1/x3); SQ immune to sleep, summon familiar, scribe scroll; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +3; Str 13, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 15, Wis 9, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +9, Concentration +9, Intimidate +8, Ride +11, Swim +9; Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Run, Scribe Scroll, Weapon Focus (shortbow), Weapon Focus (short sword).

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/3; base DC = 12 + spell level): 0—*resistance, read magic, flare* (x2); 1st—*shield, ~~mage armor~~, magic missile*.

Possessions: Composite shortbow (Str +1), short sword, quiver with 14 masterwork arrows, belt pouch with 52 gp and 10 pp, spell book with the following spells: 0 — *acid splash, flare, mage hand, read magic, resistance*; 1st — *mage armor, magic missile, shield, true strike*.

Inn Patrons, male human War1: CR 1/2; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8+1; hp 9; Init +1; Spd 30ft.; AC 14, touch 11, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +1; Grp +2; Atk longsword +3 melee (1d8+1/19-20x2); AL NG; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will 0; Str 13, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Handle Animal +1, Intimidate +1, Ride +3, Swim +1*; Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword). *Includes -1 armor check penalty.

Possessions: Longsword, studded leather armor, dagger, belt pouch with 1d12 sp.

Area 2-1 – The Clearing (EL 4): Read or paraphrase the following:

Through the darkness and thick branches you make out Druid's Hill. Lightning cracks in the stormy-black skies, and light washes the hilltop. For an instant, madly dancing figures are illuminated atop the hill, in the center of the standing stones, before the night recedes back into total darkness.

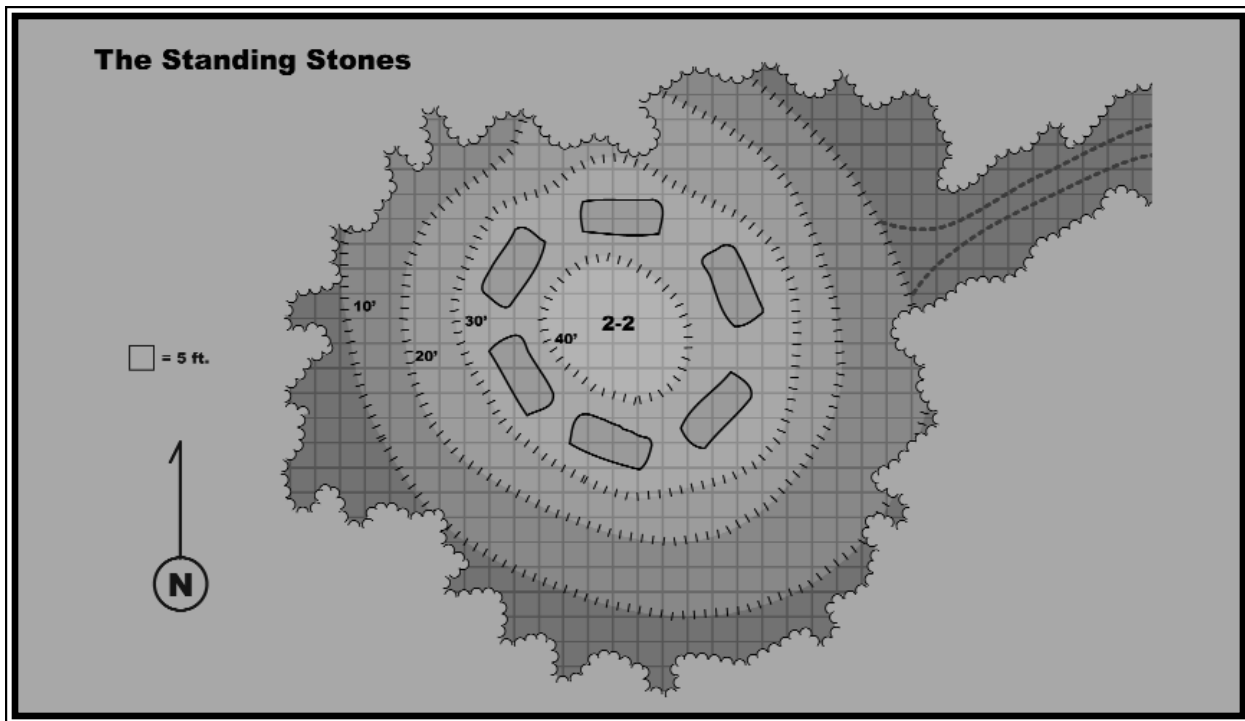
As the PCs break free of the trees at the base of the hill they are ambushed by a kobold war party hidden in the trees. The kobolds have taken pains to hide themselves in the trees, taking 20 on their Hide checks and making them very difficult to Spot. As the PCs pass below them, the kobolds drop from hiding, calling out a warning to their allies atop the hill.

Other than the occasional flash of lightning, it is utterly dark in the woods, impairing all PCs without darkvision. Unless the heroes stop to light a torch or otherwise shed light upon the area, all creatures in the combat (both the PCs and their foes) gain concealment, benefiting from the 20% miss chance. Regardless, lighting a torch or lantern (or casting a *light* spell) instantly draws the attention of the cultists on the hilltop. Similarly any sounds of battle that stretch on for more than 3 rounds will alert the cultists, and allowing them to ready for the coming battle.

Kobold, War2 (6): CR 1/2; Small Humanoid; HD 2d8; hp 14; Init +2; Spd 30ft.; AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +2; Grp -1; Atk/Full Atk short spear +4 melee (1d4+1/x2) or dart +5 ranged (1d3+1/x2); SQ darkvision 60 ft., light sensitivity; AL LE; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will -1; Str 12, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Craft (Trapmaking) +4, Hide +11, Listen +1, Search +5, Spot +1; Alertness.

Possessions: Shortspear, leather armor, bandolier with 6 darts.



Area 2-2 – Standing Stones (EL 6): Atop the hill is Torslak, a vicious half-orc, sworn to the service of Pyraxus. A towering vision of darksome majesty, Torslak stands just short of seven feet in height in his spiked half-plate armor, a mighty, glowing heavy mace hanging at his side.

Dancing around Toslak are 4 cultist berserkers, mad-women committed to dying in the defense of the cult. The berserkers maintain their positions atop the hill amid the standing stones, using both higher ground (+1 to melee attacks) and the cover of the standing stones (+4 to all attacks) to their advantage.

If Enris survived his flight from the tavern (area 2-1), he is here as well, flanking the PCs and striking from the shadows. The assassin fights until it becomes clear that the PCs have the upper hand; then he attempts to slip away under the cover of darkness.

While his minions defend Torslak, he is using the powers of the standing stones to cast *divination* (see below), using the spell here to confirm the final resting place of Pyraxus' skull. The spell has 2 rounds remaining in its casting time. Torslak continues to cast the spell, even as the PCs attack his fellows. The frequency of the lightning increases, the thunder becoming a constant drone. The completion of the spell brings a tremendous crack of lightning. The bolt shatters one of the standing stones, throwing huge shards of stone about the hillside. Anyone within 5 feet of the shattered stone must succeed on a DC 20 Reflex save or take 2d6 points of damage from the falling stones.

As the *divination* spell is completed, a great murder of crows comes winging over the tops of the forest. One is a familiar, beholden to the agents of Pyraxus. As the ravens pass overhead, Torslak calls out the words, "Garland's Fork," (the location of Pyraxus' skull). The ravens continue on their course, the familiar delivering its message to its master. Torslak takes up his mace, gives a terrible war cry, and charges down the hill to die in defense of Pyraxus the Mighty.

The Standing Stones: Once a place of great druidic power, the standing stones still retain much of their ancient majesty. When standing within the circle of stones, divine casters of 3rd level or higher can cast *divination* once per day, and all druidic spells are +1 CL. Divine casters of 6th level or higher can also cast *scrying, greater* once per day. Finally, divine casters of 9th level or higher can also cast *legend lore* once per day.

While the stones function for all divine casters, they react unpredictably when their powers are employed by non-neutral casters. Any time a caster without the neutral alignment descriptor attempts to use the stones, the act calls up a terrible lightning storm. Bolts of lightning streak across the sky, thunder causes the very earth to tremble, and icy drops of rain hammer down from the sky.

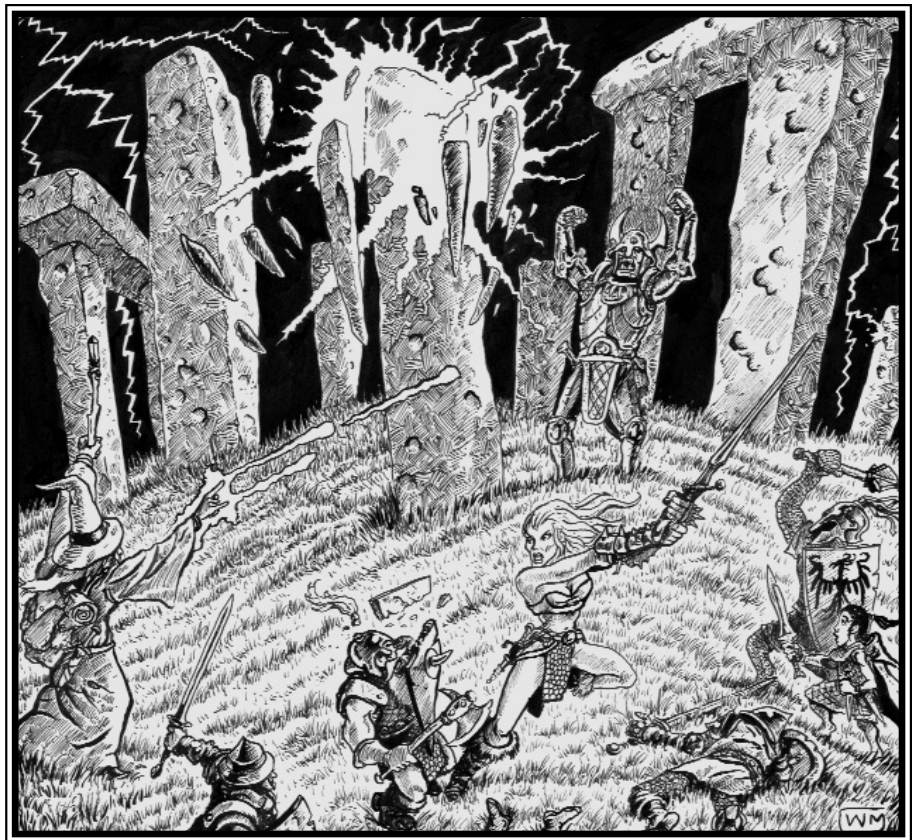
Torslak, male half-orc Clr4: CR 4; Medium Humanoid; HD 4d8+8; hp 29; Init +0; Spd 30ft.; AC 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +3; Grp +6; Atk/Full Atk +1 *heavy mace* +8 melee (1d8+5) or heavy crossbow +3 ranged (1d10/19-20); SA smite 1/day (+4 attack/+4 dam-

age); SQ turn and rebuke undead; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +7; Str 17, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 8, Wis 16, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +5, Heal +6, Knowledge (religion) +1; Power Attack, Weapon Focus (heavy mace).

Possessions: Spiked half-plate armor, +1 heavy mace, heavy crossbow, bolt case with 15 bolts, belt pouch with 10 pp, 15 gp, and a small ruby (worth 50 gp).

Cleric Spells Prepared (5/4+1/3+1; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0—cure minor wounds (x2), detect magic, guidance, resistance; 1st—bane, cause fear, cure light wounds, entropic shield, protection from good*; 2nd—bull's strength, hold person (x2), shatter*. *Domain spells (Destruction, Evil).



WRAPPING UP: THE WAY EAST

Berserker Cultist, female human Bbn1 (4): CR 1; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d12+6; hp 18; Init +0; Spd 40ft.; AC 10, touch 10, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +1; Grp +4; Atk/Full Atk Claws +5 melee (1d4+3/x3); SQ illiteracy, fast movement, rage 1/day; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +0, Will 0; Str 16, Dex 11, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Climb +4, Intimidate +4, Jump +9, Listen +1, Ride +4, Survival +4; Toughness, Weapon Focus (claws).

Possessions: Metal claws.

While Raging (Duration: 8 rounds):

Berserker Cultist, female human Bbn1: CR 1; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d12+8; hp 20; Init +0; Spd 40ft.; AC 8, touch 8, flat-footed 8; Base Atk +1; Grp +6; Atk/Full Atk Claws +7 melee (1d4+5/x3); SQ illiteracy, fast movement, rage 1/day; AL NE; SV Fort +7, Ref +0, Will +2; Str 20, Dex 11, Con 20, Int 9, Wis 11, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Climb +6, Intimidate +4, Jump +11, Listen +1, Ride +4, Survival +4; Toughness, Weapon Focus (claws).

If the PCs succeed in defeating Torslak and his minions, the storm clears, revealing a full moon and bright night sky and permitting a cursory search.

If the PCs inspect the bodies of their foes, they discover that all bear a three-fingered brand that matches the talismans found on the kobolds in the vault of Tsathzar Rho.

A Search of the hillside (DC 15) reveals wagon tracks headed west. PCs succeeding on a DC 15 Survival (Track) check are able to follow the tracks west and south for many miles, until the tracks are lost amid the Great Swamp.

CHAPTER TWO

LEGACY OF THE SAVAGE KINGS

All of the kobolds slaving for Kyleth in the Forge are workers on loan from the Cult of Pyraxus. Each kobold carries a crude golden talisman in the shape of a three-fingered hand. Each talisman is worth 10 gp.

In addition, make the following changes to the appropriate locations in *DCC #17: Legacy of the Savage Kings*:

Area S-1 – Stygoth the Damned: The wagon destroyed by the diseased black dragon, Stygoth, was the same wagon sent from the cultists in encounter 2-2 to collect *blight* weapons from the Forge. All of the corpses scattered about the muddy swamp bear a three-fingered brand that matches the talismans found on the kobolds in the vault of Tsathzar Rho.

Area S-2 – Remnants of Slave Caravan: The orcs found in the mist are not slavers, but servants of the Cult of Pyraxus. All of the orcs bear a three-fingered brand that matches the talismans found on the kobolds in the vault of Tsathzar Rho.

Area 1-7 – Kobold Barracks: If any of the kobolds are tortured (Intimidate, DC 15) they reveal the destination of the *blight blades*: a small village known as Garland's Fork, where agents of the Dragon Cult are to exchange gold for the weapons.

PCs Searching the kobold barracks (Search, DC 17) discover a scroll case, carved from hardwood in the shape of a dragon with ruby chips for eyes (worth 15 gp). The case holds a simple letter written in Runic Northtongue. Reading the letter requires a DC 15 Decipher Script check, or a casting of *comprehend languages*. If the PCs succeed in deciphering the script, show players Player Handout D.

The letter reads:

Torgo,

The wagon train will be coming soon, delivering the gold to be exchanged for the necromantic weapons. Ensure that the shipment goes as planned and that the cargo is safely delivered to

our Master in the East. Our mighty army must be ready to serve once the Great Wyrms are freed from the shackles of Oblivion.

~Ruebald

A close inspection of the barracks (requiring a second DC 20 Search check) also turns up a crude map drawn on a poorly tanned rabbit fur. Show the players Player Handout E.

Area 1-11E – Witch Queen's Chamber: Change the unfinished letter in the atop Kyleth's desk to Player Handout F, found in this book.

The letter reads:

Master Darsov,

I received the message brought by your emissary. The bore is now regretting his indiscretion at the bottom of the Maw. I choose to believe that any arrogance was his own, and not born out of an attitude shared by his masters. In the future, choose your agents more wisely.

The delivery of blight blades will arrive as per our agreement. Idle and empty threats will not speed their delivery, and if they continue, will only endanger our already tenuous relationship. My agents will make the exchange in Garland's Fork on the next full moon, as agreed. I urge you not to miss this meeting – my spies tell me that the armies of Thire are already swarming about your sacred mountain, and without my weapons your lives will surely be forfeit.

As to your queries of the source of the Blight: I suspect the initial cause of the Blight was an ancient demon prince, a spirit so profane that I dare not give it a name. Local lore suggests that the demon was slain by a barbarian warlord. If remnants of the demon still exist, and if they were ever

The letter is unfinished.

SECOND INTERLUDE

WRATH OF THE DRAGON CULT

Having successfully defeated the Witch Queen and her minions, the heroes turn their gaze east. By this point, the PCs should have enough information to deduce that agents of the Dragon Cult are awaiting a shipment of *blight blades* at Garland's Fork. Any bard succeeding on a DC 15 Bardic Knowledge check, or a PC succeeding on a DC 20 Knowledge (geography) check knows Garland's Fork to be a small but vibrant logging village found on the woods west of the Great Swamp, on the border of Thire.

The following encounters take place en route to the village of Garland's Fork. The encounters assume that the PCs take the most expedient route east, but PCs are nothing if not unpredictable; GMs should alter the encounters to match the particulars of their game.

Area 3-1 – Ambush! (EL 7): The first encounter takes place on the road several miles outside of Garland's Fork. The PCs have earned a reputation for themselves, and a team of cultists has been sent to waylay and murder the PCs. The cultists have dug a pit in the road, and lined the bottom of the pit with sharpened wooden stakes. Five cultist warriors are hidden in the woods along the roadside, along with a demon-scarred wizard, Fystan, and the group's cleric; a violent and ill-tempered dwarf.

Both Fystan and Xavor have pre-cast a number of their spells. Following is a summary of the pre-cast spells, and their effects (not included in their stat blocks):

Fystan:

Protection from Good: +2 deflection bonus to AC, +2 resistance bonus to saves.

Mage Armor: +4 armor bonus to AC.

Xavor:

Bless: Allies gain a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls and saving throws against *fear* effects.

Protection from Good: +2 deflection bonus to AC, +2 resistance bonus to saves.

Entropic Shield: Ranged attacks suffer 20% miss chance.

Development: As the PCs pass the trap, Fystan casts *web* in an attempt to trap PCs that avoided the pit, as Xavor casts *doom* on an enemy warrior. Then the cultists, dressed as common brigands, charge out of the woods, attacking the heroes with violent abandon.

Fystan and Xavor hang back in the trees, casting spells and enjoying the benefits of cover (+4 AC). If the battle turns against the cultists, Xavor enters the melee, hoping to turn the tables, while Fystan turns tail and flees. If allowed to run, Fystan's trail (Track, DC 15) leads to back to the cultist's camp (area 3-2).

All of the cultists bear the same three-fingered brand as the kobolds in the vault of Tsathzar Rho. If any of the cultists are captured and interrogated (Intimidate, DC 17) they reveal that the location of their camp (area 3-2).

Fystan the Cutthroat, human Wiz4: CR 4; Medium Humanoid; HD 4d4-4; hp 13; Init +6; Spd 30 ft.; AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +2; Grp +1; Atk/Full Atk Quarterstaff +1 melee (1d6-1) or dagger +4 ranged (1d4-1/19-20); SQ summon familiar; AL LE; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +5; Str 9, Dex 15, Con 9, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +6, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (geography) +6, Listen +4, Search +6, Spellcraft +12, Spot +4; Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Scribe Scroll, Toughness.

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/4/3; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0–*flare* (x2), *resistance*, *touch of fatigue*; 1–*charm person* (x2), ~~*mage armor*~~, ~~*protection from good*~~; 2–*scorching ray* (x2), *web*.

Possessions: Dagger, quarterstaff, leather shoulder pouch with 34 gp, ruby ring (worth 35 gp), spell book with *daze monster*, *detect magic*, *flare*, *invisibility*, *read magic*, *mage armor*, *protection from good*, *resistance*, *scorching ray*, *touch of fatigue*, *web*.

Xavor, male dwarf Clr3: CR 3; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d8+9; hp 32; Init +0; Spd 20ft.; AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +2; Grp +3; Atk/Full Atk +1 *warhammer* +5 melee (1d8+2/x3); SA *smite* 1/day (+4

attack/+3 damage), SQ dwarf traits, turn and rebuke undead; AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +8; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 9, Wis 16, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +10; Iron Will, Weapon Focus (warhammer).

Cleric Spells Prepared (4/4+1/2+1; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0 – *cure minor wounds* (x3), *resistance*; 1st – *bane*, *bless*, *doom*, *entropic shield*, *protection from good**; 2nd–*cure moderate wounds*, *darkness*, *shatter**. *Domain spell (Destruction, Evil).

Possessions: Scale mail +2, shield (heavy wooden), warhammer +1, golden torque (worth 100 gp), 250 gp worth of gems and precious metals woven into his beard, belt pouch with 55 pp.

Cult Warrior, human War1(5): CR 1/2; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8+2; hp 6; Init +0; Spd 30ft.; AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +1; Grpl +3; Atk/Full Atk Longspear +4 melee (1d8+3/x3) or light crossbow +1 ranged (1d8/19-20); AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate +3, Jump +5*; Rapid Reload, Weapon Focus (longspear). *Includes a –1 armor check penalty.

Possessions: Light crossbow, longspear, studded leather armor, bolt case with 15 bolts, belt pouch with 1d20 sp.

Spiked Pit Trap: CR 2; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; DC 20 Reflex save avoids; 20 ft. deep (2d6, fall); multiple targets (first target in each of two adjacent 5-ft. squares); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+2 each); Search DC 18; Disable Device DC 15.

Area 3-2 – Cultist Camp (EL 6, 3, 2, 3): The cultists are encamped just outside of the entrance to the Sunless Garden. Encounter 3-2 replaces the entry for The Hidden Entrance on page 7 of *DCC #10: The Sunless Garden*.

Read or paraphrase the following:

You come to a clearing and a small hill. A lone tree dominates the landscape, huge and half-barren of leaves. Four small tents are gathered around the base of the ancient tree, with a fifth tent pitched at the very base of the tree. A heavy wagon stands halfway up the hill before a small cooking fire, with half a dozen grizzled men in armor crouched before the fire.

The cultists have set up camp here while their leader haggles with Nockmort for Pyraxus' skull (found in area 2-51). From here they will proceed east to the base of Hellfrost Mountain.



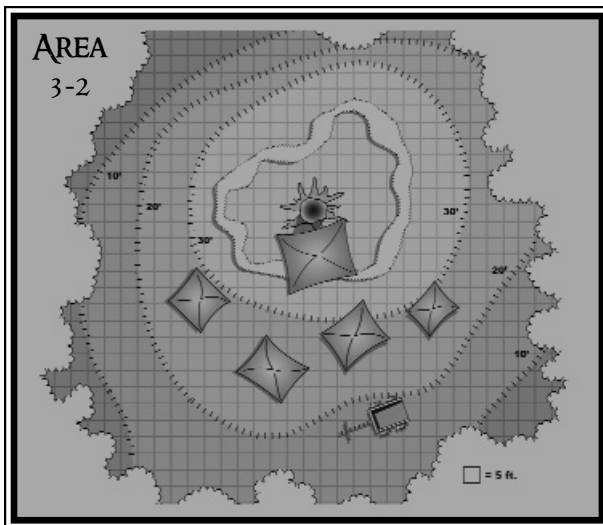
The 6 men before the fire are warriors in the service of the Dragon Cult. They are inattentive, assuming (wrongly) that the PCs were defeated by the ambush (area 3-1). The warriors are laughing and swearing, passing a drinking jack of wine between them. Crude, violent and spoiling for a fight, the warriors are far from bright, and can be tricked into believing the PCs are agents of the Dragon Cult with successful Bluff checks.

Two other warriors, and the group's leader, Captain Welis, are in a tent at the top of the hill, reviewing plans for the remainder of their journey west. The three investigate any sounds of battle. All of the cultists gladly fight to the death, willingly going to death with the battlecry, "For Pyraxus and glory!"

If Fystan fled the battle in area 3-1, he is here, reporting his failure to Captain Welis. In this case, the warriors seated about the fire are only feigning inattention, while discretely watching for the PCs.

Three of the smaller tents have cramped accommodations for 5 each, with 5 bedrolls, a cask of cheap wine, a single crate of travel rations, a lantern, and 8 javelins standing in one corner. The fourth tent is the Captain's quarters. The tent holds a single cot, a small iron brazier for heat, a pair of lanterns, a single small chest, and a crude table made from planks of a crate. Atop the table is a map detailing the journey to Hellfrost Mountain (show PCs Player Handout G), pinned to the table by a pair of daggers and a jug of wine.

The chest is locked, and the key is hidden in the mud beneath the cot (Search, DC 25). The chest's lock can be



opened with a DC 20 Open Locks check, but unless an innocuous brass stud on the back of the chest is depressed while the lid is opened, a poison dart fires from inside the chest. Inside the chest are a series of small drawers holding 5 small emeralds worth 20 gp each, 23 pp, a silver ingot worth 20 gp, and a live black diamond asp. The ferocious snake lashes out at the PCs opening its drawer, pursuing its victim with the uncommon tenacity of its species. The black diamond asp is a snake much like a normal viper, but highly aggressive and endowed with an uncommonly deadly poison.

The larger tent pitched at the base of the tree is cut from dark cloth emblazoned with runes sewn in gold thread (worth a total of 250 gp based on materials alone, or twice that to a collector with an interest in cults). The tent's wide flaps are tied closed with heavy ropes laced with silver and protected by a *fire trap* spell. The spell can be bypassed by speaking the command word, "Pyraxus."

Inside the large tent is a large crate filled with straw. Shackled to the crate are the corpses of three humans dressed in religious robes. The corpses are still warm, but all are gaunt, their skin drawn unnaturally tight about their bodies, their faces twisted in horror. A DC 20 Healing or Spellcraft check confirms the obvious: that the clerics were slain by some wicked magic that devoured their life forces. The designs on the clerics' robes indicate their previous owners' affiliations to good deities: Delvyr, Aristemis, and Elyr respectively.

A close inspection of the crate (Search, DC 15) reveals a depression in the straw, where a heavy object, roughly the shape of an orb once rested. If magic is detected, residual traces of evocation (evil). The residual magic and the depression in the straw are both the result of the *Orb of Tsathzar Rho*, a minor relic that was activated by the sacrifice of 3 good-aligned souls. The *orb* is in the possession of the cleric Ruebald the Mad, who will use it

to raise the red dragon Pyraxus from the dead (see area 2-51 in *DCC #10: The Sunless Garden*).

The very back of the tent is open to the tree. The base of the tree is hollowed out, with a lattice of roots. A rope is tied to one of the roots and snakes down the hole into darkness. If the PCs descend down the hole read or paraphrase the second block of italicized text on page 7 of *DCC #10: The Sunless Garden*.

Captain Welis, human Ftr4: CR 4; Medium Humanoid; HD 4d10+8; hp 40; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 15, touch 10, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +4; Grp +6; Atk/Full Atk +1 *greatsword* +8 melee (2d6+6/19-20) or heavy crossbow +4 ranged (1d10/19-20); AL LE; SV Fort +6, Ref +1, Will +4; Str 15, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 13, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Climb +0*, Handle Animal +3, Intimidate +7, Ride +2; Cleave, Great Cleave, Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (*greatsword*), Weapon Specialization (*greatsword*). *Includes a -1 armor check penalty.

Possessions: Breastplate, +1 *greatsword*, heavy crossbow, shield (heavy steel), 2 *javelins of lightning*.

Cult Warriors, human War1 (8): CR 1/2; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8+2; hp 6; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13, touch 10, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +1; Grpl +3; Atk/Full Atk Longspear +4 melee (1d8+3/x3) or light crossbow +1 ranged (1d8/19-20); AL LE; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +0; Str 14, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 9.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate +3, Jump +5; Rapid Reload, Weapon Focus (longspear). *Includes a -1 armor check penalty.

Possessions: Light crossbow, longspear, studded leather armor, bolt case with 15 bolts, belt pouch with 1d20 sp.

Poison Dart Trap: CR 3; mechanical; action trigger; manual reset; Atk +8 ranged (1d4 plus poison, dart); poison (Large monstrous scorpion venom, DC 14 Fortitude save resists, 1d4 Con/1d4 Con); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 18.

Black Diamond Asp, Small Viper: CR 2; Small Animal; HD 1d8; hp 4; Init +3; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.; AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +0; Grp -6; Atk/Full Atk Bite +4 melee (1d2-2 plus poison); SA Poison; SQ Scent; AL N; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +1; Str 6, Dex 17, Con 11, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Balance +11, Climb +11, Hide +11, Listen +7, Spot +7, Swim +6; Weapon Finesse.

Poison (Ex): An asp has a poisonous bite that deals initial and secondary damage of 1d10 Con, Fort DC 15.

Fire Trap: CR 3; spell; spell trigger; no reset; spell effect (*fire trap*, 4th-level wizard, 1d4+4 fire, DC 13 Reflex save half damage); Search DC 29; Disable Device DC 29.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SUNLESS GARDEN

The third chapter of the epic takes place in the Sunless Garden, a dungeon hidden beneath the dark glades of the Stagwood, and ruled by the mad treant Nockmort. Although Nockmort and his minions are not beholden to Pyraxus or his cult, they are involved in dealings with cultists. In his diseased madness, Nockmort plans to twist the servants of the Dragon Cult to his own ends.

To accommodate the epic scope of the adventure path, make the following changes to *DCC #10: The Sunless Garden*:

The Hidden Entrance: As detailed above in area 3-2, the hidden entrance to the Sunless Garden is now occupied by a band of cultists.

Area 1-11 – The Smuggler Prisoners: Instead of smugglers, the 8 prisoners are actually soldiers for the Thirean army, sent to rally forces to war against the Dragon Cult. The soldiers were captured 3 weeks ago and have served as slaves of Nockmort since. Nockmort poisons the soldiers every night with black moss powder and feeds them an antidote every morning. This ensures that even if the soldiers do succeed in escaping his clutches, they will be transformed into trees shortly after, unable to communicate their knowledge of his vile operations. The demanding physical labor, poor nutrition, and strain of repeated poisonings has left the soldiers in terrible physical condition – they are unresponsive, slack-jawed and permanently exhausted (move at half speed, -6 penalty to effective Strength and Dexterity).

A successful Heal check (DC 23) and some food and water will rouse the soldiers to a state where they can communicate. They report that they are part of an army being raised against the Dragon Cult, and were sent to Garland's Fork to hire rangers and able-bodied woodsmen to serve in defense of Thire. The army is being gathered at the foot of Hellfrost Mountain west and north of here, but the soldiers have no idea how soon the generals plan to march on the well-defended Cult of the Dragon.

Bards succeeding on a DC 15 Bardic Knowledge check,

or a PC succeeding on a DC 20 Knowledge (Geography) know of Hellfrost Mountain, the highest of the south-east peaks in the Trolltooth range.

Though good of heart, the soldiers are no heroes; even fully revived, they will flee at the first chance, hoping to make good their escape.

Areas A and C: All of the bugbears encountered in these encounter areas are aware of the Dragon Cultists, and can be tricked into believing that the PCs are a part of the cult. Although they are on orders to be on their best behavior (such as it is), the bugbears will refuse to permit disguised PCs into their treasure room (area C-23), dens (areas C-24 and C-25), or the chambers of their chieftain (area C-28).

Area 2-46 – Lower Guard Room: The 6 bugbears here are aware of the cultists delving into the lower chambers (although they do not know the cultists' purpose) and will immediately assume the PCs are part of the cultists' party. If the PCs are quick on their feet to reinforce the bugbears' error (GM's discretion), the bugbears wave them through the door to the east.

If the PCs are slow to pick up on the deception, or overplay their hand, the bugbears realize their mistake, but still wave the PCs through the door to the east, then ambush them, hurling their exploding apples into the narrow corridor before closing for battle.

Area 2-46 – The Well: Sitting at the base of the well is a pair of backpacks (left by Ruebald and his henchman as they descended into the well). In the backpacks are 50 feet of rope, a hammer, 10 spikes, and one empty steel flask (previously contained lamp oil).

Area 2-48 – Flood Chamber: A DC 21 Spot check permits PCs to notice several sets of wet footprints. The tracks are from both the hag (who the cultists parlayed with) and Ruebald and his bootlick Suerick (now in area 2-51). A DC 15 Survival (Track) check will identify 3 sets of footprints, one of which was barefoot (incriminating Huelga, the Sea Hag).



The tracks meander about the room, but PCs succeeding on a DC 15 Survival (Track) check determine that the tracks terminate at the secret door in the west wall. PCs succeeding on following the tracks to the secret door can find the door on a DC 20 Search check. Ruebald has cast an *alarm* spell on the secret door, alerting him if anyone passes this way, and allowing him to pre-cast his defensive spells.

Area 2-49 – The Chieftain’s Hidden Quarters: As above, a DC 21 Spot check permits PCs to notice sets of wet footprints. A DC 15 Survival (Track) check will identify 2 sets of footprints: one set belonging to human, the other to a halfling or gnome. As above, the tracks meander about the room but PCs succeeding on a DC 15 Survival (Track) check determine that the tracks end at the secret door in the west wall. PCs succeeding on following the tracks to the secret door can find the door on a DC 20 Search check. The door is not locked.

Area 2-50 – The Pendulum Blade Trap: The door on the western end of the corridor is open.

Ruebald has cast a *glyph of warding* at the first pressure plate. A *spell glyph*, the *glyph* releases a *command* spell, forcing the target to “freeze,” immobilizing the PCs as the pendulum blade strikes. This negates a rogue’s uncanny dodge ability.

Whether or not the trap is triggered, as the PCs pass the first pressure plate, Suerick (hidden in shadows in area 2-51) uses his sneak attack to fire his crossbow at the lead PC, using an *arrow of slaying* if appropriate. The following round, Ruebald fires his *wand of scorching* ray down the hall. The pair continue to use partial cover to making sniping attacks at the PCs as long as possible, hoping to prevent the PCs from detecting the other pressure plates

in the hallway. See area 2-51 for stats on both Ruebald the Mad, and his bootlick halfling, Suerick.

Area 2-51 – Grand Display Room (EL 11): Alerted by the *alarm* spell in area 2-48, Ruebald the Mad and his henchman, Suerick the halfling, are lurking in the display room, ready to launch surprise attacks on PCs proceeding down the pendulum blade hall (area 2-50). The two making sniper attacks on the PCs for as long as possible. Both are committed servants of the Dragon Cult and bear the signature three-fingered brands on their chests. They fight to the bitter end.

The miniature castle in the center of the room has been pushed off the table, and in its place is a small bed of straw. Resting atop the straw is polished orb, 12 inches across, pulsing with a brilliant red light. This is the *orb of Tsathzar Rho*, a necromantic relic created by the ancient wizard to *raise* himself from the dead if he ever were to perish, but being used by the cultists to *raise* mighty Pyraxus instead. Its powers were activated by the souls of three good clerics (see area 3-2 above), and set into motion by Ruebald moments ago. One round after the PCs gain the room, the *orb’s* glow grows to encompass the entire room then fades to a dull mote and then extinguishes altogether, its magic spent.

The dragon skull hanging above the door, however, has begun to undergo a transformation. Its eye sockets blaze with a fierce red light. The following round, the lights begin to dance about the skull, causing it to tumble from the wall, inflicting 1d12 points of crushing damage to anyone standing beneath the skull and failing a DC 15 Reflex save. Spectral dragon bones begin to appear from seemingly thin air, aligning themselves with the skull. First the long, serpentine spine appears, then the limbs and wings, and finally a skeletal rib cage. Driven by the powers of a minor artifact, there is nothing the PCs can do to halt this transformation.

In the space of mere moments, the spectral dragon is complete, filling the chamber and forcing all living creatures remaining in the room to succeed on a DC 25 Fortitude save or take 1d8 points of Constitution damage. Living creatures must make this save every round they are in contact with the dragon. If either Ruebald or Suerick are still alive, they willingly fling themselves into the spectral dragon, and die, absorbed by the spirit of their master.

Though not truly undead, for the next 5 rounds the incorporeal Pyraxus has no physical body. It can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, magic weapons or creatures that strike as magic weapons, and spells, spell-like abilities, and supernatural abilities. It is immune to all nonmagical attack forms. Even when hit by spells or magic weapons, the dragon has a 50% chance to ignore

any damage from a corporeal source (except for positive energy, negative energy, force effects such as *magic missile* or attacks made with ghost touch weapons).

The following round the spectral Pyraxus springs into the ceiling, vanishing as it claws its way to the surface. By the time it gains the surface, the dragon is fully alive once more, a terrifying beast of fangs and dragonfire. Pyraxus takes to wing and flies east to his ancient fastness, the Hellfrost Mountain.

Ruebald the Mad, human Clr6/Wiz4: CR 10; Medium Humanoid; HD 6d8+4d4+23; hp 65; Init 0; Spd 30ft.; AC 16, touch 10, flat-footed 16 (+6 armor); Base Atk +6; Grp +7; Atk +1 *morningstar* +9 melee (1d8+2/x2) or +1 *hand crossbow* +7 (1d4+1/19-20x2 plus poison); Full Atk +1 *morningstar* +9/+4 melee (1d8+2/x2) or +1 *hand crossbow* +7/+2 ranged (1d4+1/19-20x2 plus poison); SA smite 1/day (+4 attack/+6 damage); SQ turn and rebuke undead, summon familiar; AL CE; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +12; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 16, Wis 17, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +14, Decipher Script +10, Heal +12, Knowledge (arcana) +15, Knowledge (religion) +15, Search +7, Sense Motive +7, Spellcraft +15; Combat Casting, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (Hand Crossbow), Lightning Reflexes, Scribe Scroll, Toughness, Weapon Focus (morningstar).

Cleric Spells Prepared (5/4+1/4+1/3+1; base DC = 13 + spell level): 0—*cure minor wounds*, *detect magic*(x2), *light*, *resistance*; 1st—*command*, *divine favor*, *entropic shield*, *protection from good**, *shield of faith*; 2nd—*aid*, *cure moderate wounds*, *find traps*, *hold person*, *shatter**; 3rd—*glyph of warding*, *magic circle against good**, *protection from energy*(x1), *shape stone*. *Domain spells (Destruction, Evil).

Wizard Spells Prepared (4/4/3; base DC = 13 + spell level; Arcane Spell Failure 10%): 0—*acid splash*, *ray of frost*(x2), *read magic*; 1st—*alarm*, *magic missile* (x2), *shield*; 2nd—*mirror image*, *scorching ray*(x2).

Possessions: +1 *hand crossbow*, +1 *morningstar*, *mithral shirt* +2, *wand of scorching ray* (15 charges remaining), spell book with *acid splash*, *alarm*, *magic missile*, *mirror image*, *ray of frost*, *read magic*, *shield*, *scorching ray*.

Suerick, male halfling Rog4: CR 4; Small Humanoid; HD 4d6+8; hp 26; Init +4; Spd 20ft.; AC 19, touch 15, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +3; Grp +3; Atk/Full Atk Short sword +8 melee (1d6/19-20) or light crossbow +8 ranged (1d8/19-20); SQ sneak attack +2d6, trapfinding, evasion, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge; AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +9, Will +1; Str 11, Dex 19, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Balance +6, Bluff +7, Climb +2,

Diplomacy +2, Disable Device +8, Disguise +0 (+2 acting), Hide +15, Intimidate +2, Jump -2, Listen +8, Move Silently +13, Open Lock +11, Search +8, Spot +6, Survival -1 (+1 following tracks), Tumble +11; Rapid Reload (light crossbow), Weapon Finesse.

Possessions: +2 *leather armor*, short sword, light crossbow, bolt case with 20 bolts and 3 *bolts of slaying* (Humans, Elves, and Halflings), masterwork thieves' tools, *potion of cure serious wounds*, belt pouch with 2 small rubies worth 25 gp each, 10 gp, and 32 sp.

WRAPPING UP: PYRAXUS REBORN

By the time the PCs return to the surface, all traces of Pyraxus are gone. If the local creatures are questioned via magic, they reveal that an enormous red dragon clawed its way to the surface and flew east. As the PCs begin to formulate their next step, alert members of their group (Spot, DC 20) notice a cloaked figure watching them from the trees. The figure raises a hand in salute and steps from the forest glade, pulling back the hood of the cloak to reveal a grizzled, male ranger, with a thick beard and matted, oily hair. He introduces himself as Leonal of the Green Wood, sworn liege-man of the Emperor of Crieste.

If the PCs announce their names, the ranger drops to one knee in respect, recognizing the PCs as valued and respected agents of Captain Senti. Leonal explains that he was sent to investigate the death of Marwyn, and tracked the PCs' progress east. Leonal saw Pyraxus break free of the earth and fly east, and is aware of the army of Thire amassing at the foot of Hellfrost Mountain, although he is largely ignorant of the Dragon Cult.

If the PCs share what they know of the Dragon Cult, a horrifying realization dawns on Leonal. He begs the PCs to travel east to join the army of Thire; meanwhile, Leonal will contact Captain Senti and entreat his master to send an army from Crieste. Leonal estimates that, if the border forts are alerted, he can have an army riding towards Hellfrost Mountain within three days. With that the ranger takes his leave of the PCs and vanishes back into the woods.

If, in the course of their adventures, the PCs failed to encounter Ruebald and witness the rebirth of Pyraxus, Leonal reports all he witnessed bringing the PCs up to speed. The crux of the encounter is the same, with Leonal begging the PCs to join the Thirean army, while the ranger sends for Cristine reinforcements.

THIRD INTERLUDE

MIGHTY PYRAXUS

Following the PCs' near-defeat of the cultists in the Sunless Garden, the fates turn towards Hellfrost Mountain and the final showdown with the Dragon Cult. The trip north and west can be as quick or as dangerous as the GM likes. Two numbered encounters occur. These encounters are geographic in nature and do not require a specific map, so they can occur at whatever location the GM designates.

Area 4-1 – The Army of Thire: Read or paraphrase the following:

The climb into the mountains proceeds slowly, hampered by heavy snowfall and dangerous mountain paths that require all of your wildcraft to follow. But after many days, your band finally summits the snowbound saddle.

Before you stretches a high mountain valley. To one side of the vale are several dozen tents collected around crackling bonfires. Even from a distance, you can see hundreds of soldiers preparing their arms and armor, while the green, blue and yellow standards of the Thire flap overhead.

On the opposite side of the vale are the towering, ice-laden slopes of Hellfrost Mountain, looming like an enormous fang over the valley.

Riders astride mountain ponies cross the valley to the PCs. At the head of the riders is a half-elven warrior bundled in furs, with a sword at his side and a scored shield slung over his shoulder. He hails the PCs, introducing himself as Tael'haen Amgion, general of the Western Army of Thire. General Amgion welcomes the PCs into his camp as champions and heroes, making space for them beside his own tent. There, the PCs are treated to a feast by the general and his men, serenaded by scalds and bards, and asked to share tales of their triumphs against the dragon cult.

The next morning the general outlines his plan with the PCs, actively seeking their council. Amgion and his men

are awaiting the arrival the Criestine army; with their arrival, the combined armies will march on Hellfrost Mountain. Amgion asks that the PCs serve as champions, leading his men into battle and inspiring them to greater triumphs. Regardless of the PCs reply, go to encounter 4-2.

Area 4-2 – The Battle of Hellfrost Pass: Read or paraphrase the following:

A cry rings out through the camp. The half-elven general strides to the door of his tent and shields his eyes from the snowy glare. An army of brightly armored knights and stalwart spearmen have crested the pass! Over two hundred strong, their banners fly triumphantly as their war-horses lunge through the deep snow. The army of Crieste has arrived!

With the Criestine forces still over a mile and a half from the Thieren camp, the mighty Pyraxus attacks. *Invisible*, the dragon drops into the very center of the Criestine army, crushing men beneath its bulk, causing panic throughout the ranks, and then unleashing a deadly blast of dragon fire. Then the dragon takes to wing, uses its ring to become *invisible* again, waits 1d4 rounds for its next breath weapon and repeats the cycle anew.

In order to save the GM from rolling 250 Will saves the first round (not counting mounts), statistics allow one to assume that roughly 95% of the army is panicked by the dragon's *fear* effect. Those that resist the effect close with the dragon and attack. Every round that the dragon is visible and within range, odds are that 2 attackers succeed in rolling natural 20s, thereby scoring hits and threatening critical hits. Check for critical hits as per normal (the attackers will need a second natural 20), deducting the dragon's damage reduction from any damage inflicted. Meanwhile, the dragon repeats its cycle of *invisible* attacks followed by breath weapons.

The dragon continues on his rampage through the Criestine forces, then tears into the Thieren forces. PCs will find that with hundreds of panicking soldiers

between them and their foe makes closing with Pyraxus challenging. Terrified soldiers stampede over the PCs, even attacking them to clear the way for their flight. Before the PCs can inflict any serious harm to Pyraxus, the dragon turns invisible one last time and wings away. But by then (and likely sooner) the armies of Crieste and Thire have been laid to waste.

Surveying the destruction, General Amgion turns to the PC – the nations' last hope. Their only option is to send the PCs into Hellfrost Mountain to tear out the cult from its roots. Thus begins *DCC #6: Temple of the Dragon Cult*.

Pyraxus, young adult red dragon: CR 13; Huge dragon (fire); HD 19d12+95; hp 218; Init +4; Spd 40 ft., fly 150 ft. (poor); AC 26, touch 8, flat-footed 26; Base Atk +19; Grp +37; Atk bite +28 melee (2d8+10); Full Atk bite +28 melee and 2 claws +23 melee (2d6+5) and 2 wings +22 melee (1d8+5) and tail slap +22 melee (2d6+15); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft. (15 ft. with bite); SA Breath weapon, crush (Ref DC 24 or pinned and 2d8+15 damage), frightful presence (150 ft. radius, Will DC 21), snatch, spell-like abilities, spells; SQ Damage reduction 5/magic, darkvision 120 ft., immunity to fire, sleep, and paralysis, low-light vision, spell resistance 19, vulnerability to cold; AL CE; SV Fort +16, Ref +11, Will +13; Str 31, Dex 10, Con 21, Int 14, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Appraise +24, Bluff +24, Concentration +27, Diplomacy +26, Disguise +2 (+4 acting), Intimidate +26, Listen +26, Search +24, Spot +26, Survival +2 (+4 following tracks); Alertness, Blind-Fight, Improved Initiative, Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (bite), Weapon Focus (claw).

SA –*Breath Weapon (Su):* 50 ft. cone, 10d10 fire damage, DC 24 Reflex half.

Spell-Like Abilities: 5/day – *locate object*. Caster level 5th.

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/7/5; save DC = 12 + spell level): 0 – *acid splash, detect magic, message, read magic, resistance, flare*; 1st – *identify, mage armor, magic missile, shield*; 2nd – *invisibility, see invisibility*. Caster level 5th.

Possessions: *Ring of invisibility*.

The following armies replace the army detailed in the Appendix II of *Temple of the Dragon Cult*.

Crieste Conscript, human War1 (200): CR 1/2; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8+1; hp 9; Init +0; Spd 30ft.; AC 11, touch 10, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +1; Grp +2; Atk spear +3 melee (1d8+1/x3) or throwing axe +1 ranged (1d6+1/x2); AL LN; SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will -1; Str 13, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 9, Wis 9, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Intimidate +4, Jump +5; Power Attack, Weapon Focus (spear).



Possessions: Axe (throwing), padded armor, spear.

Crieste Knight, human Ftr3 (50): CR 3; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d10+3; hp 26; Init +0; Spd 50 ft. (mounted); AC 19, touch 10, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk Lance +6 melee (1d8+2/x3) or longsword +5 melee (1d8+2/19-20x2); AL LG; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 15, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 14.

Skills and Feats: Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +8, Knowledge (nobility & royalty) +2, Ride +6; Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Ride-By Attack, Trample, Weapon Focus (lance).

Possessions: Half-plate armor, lance, longsword, shield (heavy steel), heavy warhorse.

Crieste Commander, human Pal8: Medium Human; CR 8; HD 8d10+16; hp 67; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 20, touch 10, flat-footed 20; BAB +8; Grp +11; Atk masterwork longsword +12 melee (1d8+3/19-20) or composite shortbow +8 ranged (1d6/x3); Full Atk masterwork longsword +12/+7 melee (1d8+3/19-20) or composite shortbow +8/+3 ranged (1d6/x3); SA Smite evil 2/day, turn undead (6/day); SQ Detect evil, divine grace, lay on hands (24 hp/day), aura of courage, divine health, special mount, remove disease; AL LG; SV Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +7; Str 16, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 16.

Skills and Feats: Diplomacy +16, Knowledge (religion) +13, Sense Motive +13; Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Great Cleave, Power Attack.

Spells (2/1; save DC = 12 + spell level): 1st–*bless, magic weapon*; 2nd–*resist energy*.

TO DUEL WITH DRAGONS

A dragon – even a young adult dragon – is an opponent of legend, capable of leveling cities at will. Dragons are fearsome, terror-inspiring foes, and this is your chance to instill this fear in your PCs.

Pyraxus' Frightful Presence eliminates the majority of his foes. Of the army's soldiers within a 150 foot radius, only 1 in 20 succeed in making their Will save. The rest are panicked, dropping their weapons, and trampling one another in their attempt to flee the dragon at top speed (further disrupting the ranks of those outside the *fear* radius). Of those that stay to fight, only 1 in 20 manages to hit in a single round, and even then Pyraxus' damage reduction reduces most attacks to a mere 2 or fewer points of damage.

Put another way, if Pyraxus lands in the center of 200 soldiers, 10 stay to fight, and the odds are only 50% that one might land a blow on any given round, inflicting 1 or 2 points of damage. Meanwhile, the dragon averages a 55-point damage breath weapon every 5 rounds.

What follows is utter carnage. Facing a panic-stricken army, unable to harm its foe and trampling one another in their flight, Pyraxus' only problem is catching them all.

From a role-playing point of view this might seem a pointless exercise in mathematics, but actually it is quite the opposite. It is crucial to play out the battle, or at least a portion of it, so that the PCs can appreciate the true might of Pyraxus.

Let them watch as the dragon appears from nowhere, causing the overwhelming majority of the army to panic and flee. Let them watch as Thire's archers unleash a rain of arrows on the dragon, with the odds that only 1 does any damage at all. Let them watch, helpless, as the dragon unleashes its fiery breath time and again, incinerating scores of men into stinking cinders of blackened flesh and melting iron.

This is their foe, the mighty Pyraxus.

And just as the PCs begin to close on the dragon, Pyraxus withdraws, vanishing into thin air with a mocking roar, as it returns to its mountain abode.

This scene serves a two-fold purpose. The first is to give the heroes a respect for the dragon's near-divine might. If the PCs are going to muster the courage to fight the dragon in its own lair, they are going to need to be at the very top of their game.

The second purpose is just as important: to instill within the PCs an understanding of what differentiates themselves from common sell-swords: While others cannot help but to flee, the PCs have a chance of withstanding the dragon's frightful presence; while an army of archers cannot even scratch its scaly hide, the PCs have a chance of dealing a mortal blow.

The PCs aren't merely the only ones willing to take on the dragon, they're the only ones with even the slightest chance of success. An army has tried and failed. It falls to the heroes to carry the day.

Possessions: Masterwork longsword, full plate armor, heavy steel shield, composite shortbow, 40 arrows, 3d20 gp.

Thire Archers, half-elf Ftr2 (100): CR 2; Medium Humanoid; HD 2d10; hp 16; Init +2; Spd 30ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +2; Grp +3; Atk Handaxe +3 melee (1d6+1/x3) or longbow +5 ranged (1d8+1/x3); SQ immune to sleep; AL NG; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will -1; Str 13, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 9, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Craft (Bowmaking) +1, Intimidate +4, Jump +2*, Spot +1, Swim +1*; Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (longbow). *Includes a -2 armor check penalty.

Possessions: Chain shirt, handaxe, composite longbow (Str +1), quiver with 20 arrows.

Thire Captains, human Ftr3 (20): Medium Human; CR 3; HD 3d10+3; hp 20; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +5; Atk/Full Atk Longsword +5 melee (1d8+2/19-20) or shortbow +4 ranged (1d6/x3); AL LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +2; Str 15, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 12, Wis 12, Cha 10.

Skills and Feats: Climb +7, Jump +7, Rise +7, Swim +6*; Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack. *Includes a -2 armor check penalty.

Possessions: Longsword, studded leather armor, light wooden shield, shortbow, 30 arrows, 3d4 sp, 6d6 cp.

Thire Clerics, human Clr5 (5): Medium Human; CR 5; HD 5d8+5; hp 32; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 15, touch 10, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +3; Grp +3; Atk heavy mace +3 melee (1d8) or sling +3 ranged (1d4); Full Atk heavy mace +3 melee (1d8) or sling +3 ranged (1d4); SQ Spontaneous casting (cure spells), turn undead; AL LG; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +7; Str 10, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 11, Wis 16, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +9, Heal +11, Knowledge (religion) +8; Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Extra Turning.

Cleric Domains: Good and Healing.

Spells (5/4+1/3+1/2+1, save DC 13 + spell level, *indicates domain spell): 0–create water, cure minor wounds (x2), mending; 1st–bless, cure light wounds* (x3), obscuring mist; 2nd–aid*, cure moderate wounds (x2), bull's strength; 3rd–cure serious wounds, dispel magic, magic circle against evil*.

Possessions: Heavy mace, sling, 20 bullets, chainmail, 2d4 gp, 1d4 sp.

APPENDIX I

NORTHERN CRIESTE, WESTERN THIRE, AND THE BORDERLANDS

Full information on the world of *Áereth* can be found in *Dungeon Crawl Classics #35: Gazetteer of the Known Realms*. Following is a gazetteer of the lands that surround the events in this adventure path. Refer to the back cover of this book for a full-color map.

Amon Falls: (Small Town, 1,600) Perched at the lip of an unusually large waterfall from which the settlement took its name, Amon Falls was once a large and prosperous town. Serving as the base of operations for several nearby mining communities, and as a trading outpost for many of the dwarf clans, Amon Falls was Thire's chief source of iron, silver and gold. Its guards were well armed and vigilant, and it seemed that Amon Falls was sure to prosper for many years to come. Few could have predicted that the town's great enemy would prove to come from within its stone walls.

Curuia the Red was a portly trader from the Southern Province who sought to unify the many caravaners under a single guild. When the Council of Elder spurned his advances, Curuia sought power a different way, betraying the town to an orcish warband fighting under the banner of the Sundered Skull. When the tribe of the Sundered Skull advanced on Amon Falls, the town's watch had all been either poisoned or bought with bribes. The townsfolk, led by adventuring heroes, refused to cede the town, and were determined to make the wicked humanoids pay in blood. In their ambition and heroics, however, the alliance of humans, dwarves and gnomes failed to comprehend the callous cruelty of their foes. Rather than fight for the town block by block, Curuia and his horde simply set fire to the town and let the defenders burn amidst the homes they would defend.

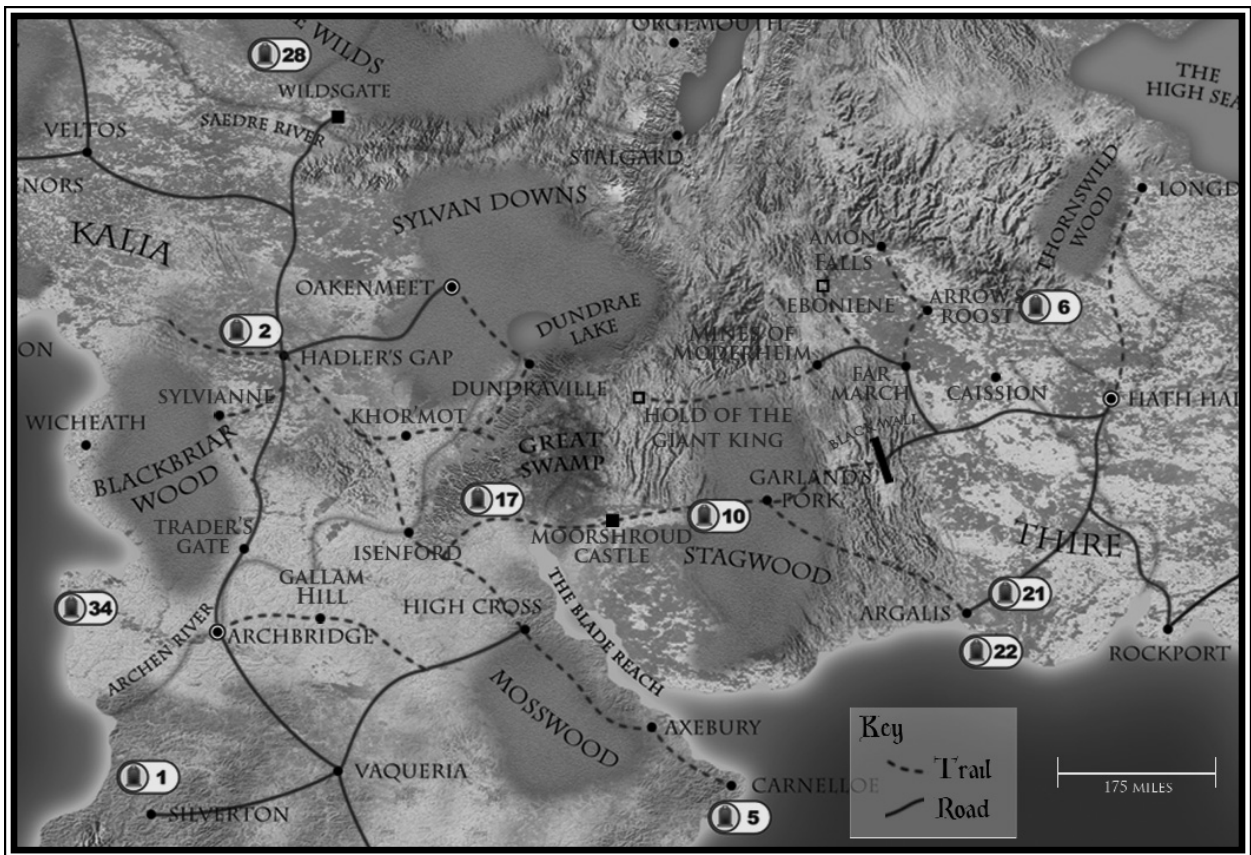
Today Amon Falls is but a soot-stained reminder of its previous glory. Evil mercenaries, orcs, ogres, and gnolls freely stride cobblestone streets, and wicked wizards astride nightmares haunt the night. The few buildings that survived the blaze have all been converted to bawdy houses, miserable gambling dens and drinking halls. The new buildings that have been erected share none of the graceful wood-on-stone architecture common to Thire,

but instead are all built of scorched and cracked stone – defenses for the day that the people of Thire attempt to retake their city. Curuia the Red still reigns, having styled himself King Curuia, and ruling the settlement with depravity and vengeful cruelty, and the chief export is no longer refined metals, but slaves, stolen from the lowlands of Thire and sold to merchants trading with the wicked denizens of the Underdeep.

Arrow's Roost: (Village, 780) The community of Arrow's Roost is so small that it hardly merits mentioning, were it not for the men and women living in open defiance of Amon Falls. For as long as northern Thire has been settled, woods folk and trappers have made their home in the hollow of Arrow's Roost, fending off the depredations of evil humanoids, trading furs and exotic lumbers with the occasional passing merchant, and otherwise passing their lives in simple solitude. But with the bands of slavers riding out from Amon Falls, the people of Arrow's Roost have rallied around the leadership of Old Anye, a wise woman and reputed witch.

Now riders approaching Arrow's Roost are closely watched by vigilant archers, and strings of skulls hung over the road serve as warning to the wicked humanoids that would test an archer's aim. Old Anye has a penchant for predicting raids, and is a powerful healer in her own right. However, despite the powers the old witch has managed to muster, her village is short of heroes capable of taking the fight to the enemy, and it is only a matter of time before King Curuia decides to pluck the thorn in his side that is Arrow's Roost.

Blackwall: (Keep, 130) Found where the ridges and southern peaks of the Ul Dominor run to the Lirean Sea, Black Wall serves to watch over the western border of Thire. The keep itself was raised atop an ancient wall built of massive basalt blocks, and marks the furthest reach of Thire's military might. While only the more prominent villages and thorps of the Stagwood pledge allegiance to Thire, all dispatch runners to the Blackwall in times of need. Similarly, the Black Wall stands as the first safe hold east of the Moorshroud Castle, and many a



merchant has given thanks when sighting the archers of Thire standing watch giant, the moss-covered boulders in the misty dusk.

The Blackwall garrison is made up of equal parts spearmen and archers. To a soldier, the spearmen are drawn from the hardy hill tribes of the southern Dominors, while the archers hail from the Stagwood and eastern dales. The spearmen carry wooden shields and dress in mail of iron rings, while the archers settle for suits of boiled leather and oiled chain. Typically only captains enjoy mounts, though in recent skirmishes the goblins of the Stagwood begun firing at those astride horses – chittering in delight as the unit’s leader falls before a hail of raven-fledged arrows.

Blackwall’s commander is a Thirean knight, exiled from the court of Hath Hall. Known as Lord Seyrean to the Blackwall soldiers, the commander was once a celebrated champion of Thire by the bards and skalds of Thire, but now the lord is all but forgotten by Hath Hall. Little is known for certain about the champion’s fall from courtly grace, but when plied with mead, the soldiers of Blackwall gossip that the Blackwall’s commander was exiled from Hath Hall after a tryst with a half-elven lady-in-waiting. The truth of the matter is best left to court rumor-mongers – those who would pry into the commander’s past have a habit of finding themselves assigned to patrol duty deep within the Stagwood.

Lord Seyrean is served by a slim elven sorcerer, Arinil the Enchanter. The quiet, watchful elf served in the Border Wars, and wears a black leather mask to conceal his scarred visage.

Despite the grim nature of Blackwall’s commanders, or perhaps because of their no-nonsense attitude, standards of discipline are high. This, paired with the constant threat of attack by the monsters that range the dark hills and valleys, keeps the men and women of Blackwall at a constant state of readiness.

The archers of Blackwall are of special note. The western slope rising to the ominous Blackwall has been cleared of all vegetation to eliminate the chance of attackers seeking cover. A series of thick-trunked rylm trees are all that remain, spaced at 100 foot intervals. The archers uses the trees to practice their archery day in and out, so that foes charging up the rocky slope are peppered with arrows that fall with unerring accuracy. The furthest tree, broad-leaved and proud, stands a full 1,000 feet from the Blackwall. To date only the half-orc archer Orim-Ona has succeeded in hitting it, and his raven-fledged arrow hangs in the tree to this day. Rumor has it that Lord Seyrean has offered a purse of gold and a quiver of magical arrows to anyone that can duplicate the feat.

Caisson: (Small town, 1,040) The community of Caisson is typical of the dozens of small towns and villages that make up the bulk of Thire’s communities. Sustained by hunting and farming, most of Caisson’s people live out their entire lives within twenty miles of where they were born. Farmsteads are passed down through the generations, with sons working the same soil and living under the same thatched roofs as their fathers.

Caisson is ruled by Lord Olspun, a gray-bearded man who is more wag than warrior. Olspun’s favorite pastime is to invite passing merchants and adventurers into his manor house and

exchange rugged meals and glasses of wine for stories of the world outside Caisson. It has been years since the Lord of Caisson donned his breastplate or removed his broad sword from above the hearth, and with every passing season it becomes less likely that he ever will again.

For all its sleepy, rustic bliss, Caisson's history is far from peaceful. Just a scant fifteen years past, an innocuous priest from some southern city built a small chapel outside of town. The cleric's sermons offered the promise of might and wealth to his congregation, and soon its ranks were swollen with slovenly souls and ne'er-do-wells. The chapel grew into a temple, and the temple a fearsome fortress, replete with leering, wicked altars to infernal powers best forgotten. The previously unknown cleric, now declaring himself the Abbot of the North, levied a tax upon all the towns, villages and hamlets of the region, and sent his black-mailed riders to demand tribute.

The people of Caisson, allied with the Riders of Thire, marched on the temple and laid siege on the wickedness therein. For forty days and nights, the battle raged, the defenders of Thire raining arrows and spears down upon the defenders, only to be forced back by some demon or devil summoned from the pits. But on the forty-first day, a band of hardy fresh-faced nobles, arrived from Crieste. Armed with bright swords, stout shields and the blessings of Gorhan, the heroes fought deep into the heart of the temple and smote the wickedness within. Of the original twelve heroes, eight had been slain, one vanished altogether, and only three survived. But their sacrifice was not in vain; the temple's grip over Thire had passed, and the people of Caisson rejoiced.

The temple is but an empty shell now, barely worthy of note. Over the course of the last winter, rumors emerged of humanoid raiders taking up residence once more in the temple's ruins, and huntsmen reported seeing strange lights glimmering within the old walls. Discerning minds are quick to dismiss these tales as the ramblings of drunken men, muttering over their ale.

Eboniene: (Ruins, ?) Once the stronghold of a proud lord intent on bringing civilization to the wilds of the Ul Dominor Mountains, the high towers and strong walls of Eboniene have since slipped into ruin. Today creeping vines cover the crumbling walls, scrub brush has sprung through the cobblestone courtyards, and the beams supporting the roof of the mighty great hall have collapsed.

Legend holds that the Fall of Eboniene came during the Long Winter (For further reference, see Duke Rangar Derinax's thesis, *Cataclysms of the Olde Worlde: Their Cosmic Cycles*.) Cut off from the outside world, their rations exhausted and with snow drifting up to the top of the castle's walls, the keep was assaulted by a horde of bugbears, goblins and hobgoblins driven down from the peaks. When spring finally cracked winter's icy hold and the train of merchants rode through the keep's shattered gates, all that remained of the keep's defenders were corpses, mummified from the cold. Of all the keep's defenses only the great tower had survived the assault. Piled before the portcullis and iron-bound portals were the crow-picked bodies of four score goblinoids. The tower itself remained covered in a coat of unnaturally persistent ice that resisted all the merchants' attempts to sunder the frost-bound portals.

To date the tower has yet to be breached. Eboniene remains unoccupied, save for the occasional band of giants or orc clan. Even these fell beasts seldom stay long, driven out by some unnamed horror that haunts the long abandoned keep.

Far March: (Small Town, 1,520) Far March marks the far western outpost of Thire's regular forces. Built around a staunch keep, the bulk of the town exists to support the needs of the keep. In times of danger, the population of Far March can nearly double as the serfs and peasants of outlying hamlets swarm the outpost. Defended by units of spearmen and elite archers, the citadel has withstood dozens of sieges over the past several decades, including orcish warbands, ogres on the march, and even a clan of stone giants astride dire cave bears.

The commander of Far March is a fiery-haired warrior renown for her skill with the spear and lance. Lady Korcen is often found patrolling the border of Thire, girded in her suit of scale mail forged from the hide of a black dragon.

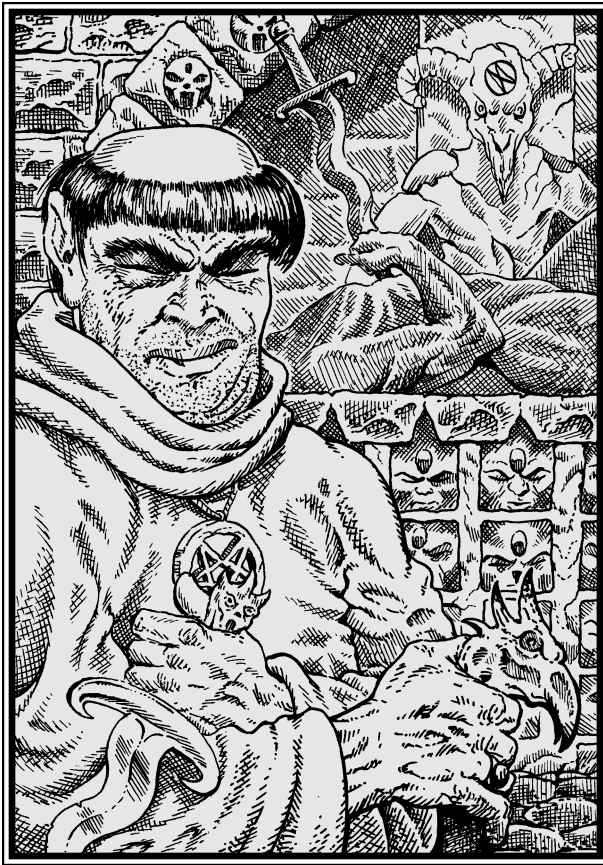
In the hills to the west of Far March is a deep ravine, home to an uncommon number of wicked humanoids lairing in the limestone caves that riddle the walls of the ravine. The humanoids raid the outlying farms and caravan trains, taking goods and slaves to sell to denizens of the Underdeep. Despite repeated attempts by the forces of Far March to root out the evil, the humanoids have succeeded in withstanding all challengers. It is suspected that the humanoids are supported in turn by agents within Far March itself, who warn the humanoids of impending attacks.

Gallam Hill: (Small Town, 971) The Gods of Creation saw fit to fashion central Crieste in a fertile, sweeping valley, and at the head of that valley stands Gallam Hill. When the might of Crieste was at its height, Gallam Hill was where the nobles of Crieste went to enjoy great galas and fetes away from the stern, martial seriousness of Archbridge. Secure in the heart of Aereh's mightiest empire, the manor halls and sun-dappled gardens of Gallam Hill were built for pleasure, not defense.

All this changed with the Interregnum and the dark age that followed. With the rise of brigands and vile humanoids, the nobles abdicated their country estates for the safety of Archbridge, leaving the manors and fete-halls empty. The thriving populace of merchants, artisans and master craftsmen dwindled to a sullen, bitter few that either insist on reliving the faded glories of the past, or simply are too poor to leave.

The glorious manors have all fallen into disrepair and ruin. The stone walls are thick with vines and moss, broken windows gape like empty eye sockets, and clay tile roofs have been beaten in by the winter storms. Gallam Hill's famed gardens have reverted to dense, wild thickets inhabited by ferocious beasts, and the fine marble fountains have all been overturned. The people treat the ruins with a superstitious mixture of fear and admiration; the allure of lost grandeur coupled with an open fear of the beasts that haunt those same halls. Though seldom shared with passing visitors, it is well known that dancing lights can be seen in the abandoned halls on moonless nights, and that certain dark gardens are *not* overgrown, but tended by something not of this world.

Hold of the Giant King: (Ruins, ?) Standing high atop a barren, mountainous ridge, the Halls of the Giant King rise in stark



defiance of the fierce winter snows and pitiless storms that hammer the southern Ul Dominor mountains. In a climate where few creatures can survive, let alone thrive, the Hold of the Giant King are a solemn testament to the giant races that once ruled the Northlands – and might again.

The Halls are approached via a long flight of steps that rises several thousands of feet via a knife-edge ridge flanked by sheer cliffs. The giant-sized steps are crusted with ice year round, and winds batter the steps day in and out. At the summit of the ridge, the steps come to an abrupt end before an arching stone bridge that spans a great crevasse. On the far side stands a cloud-shrouded palace, replete with gold domes, somber towers of ancient design, and silent corridors drifted over with snow and glacial ice.

The wisest of sages are hard put to explain the fate of the Hold's denizens, and given that no explorer has taken more than seven steps down the darkened halls, it seems certain the mystery will confound scholars for years to come. Tapestries depicting the Hold have been found as far west as the Dünerain Mountains, lending credence to the notion that the Hold was once a palace to a giant lord respected across the Northlands. Some wild theories promote the belief that the masters of the Hold still reside within its icy halls, passing the centuries in arcane slumber, awaiting the day when they will awake, sound the long-silent warhorns, and bring a fiery end to the nations of the North.

Isenford: (Village, 540) The village of Isenford is found along (and above) the banks of the mighty Archen River, where the waters cut a deep gorge into the rocky hills. The small commu-

nity subsists predominately by fishing along the frozen banks during the winter, and many offer their services as polers and guides for the merchant barges passing downstream to the capital during the remainder of the year. The caves are elaborately built with interwoven tunnels, vaulted galleries and an ingenious system of wooden troughs that funnels fresh water into the complex and carries off the village's waste.

The bottom of the Isenford Gorge is wide, with long, sandy banks and the river slows to a placid, gentle pace, permitting the easy docking of boats and barges. A ready work force of hardy young children swarm the docks, eager to pick up work loading and unloading supplies and fresh water, all the while plying the traders for coins and treats. Some traders allege that the children are all thieves, trained in arts of distraction and slight of hand. While the truth of such claims is dubious at best, visitors are advised to keep a close watch on their coin purses.

The Isenford maintains a small militia trained in the use of barbed javelins and crossbows. The village also retains the services of a champion to mete out justice and confront water pirates and intelligent monsters. For his services, the champion receives free room and board, a monthly stipend, and the right to demand payment of travelers (who benefit from the champion's work, but otherwise contribute little to his livelihood). The current champion is an ox of a man named Ferrus the Lion. Ferrus fights with a greatsword and wears a breastplate into battle. The champion also owns a fearsome helm adorned with the mane of his namesake, and claims that the magical relic grants him the strength and courage of the lion. To date, no citizen of Isenford has witnessed the helm's powers at work, but few are so foolish as to call Ferrus a liar.

Khor'mot: (Large Town, 4,370) Maps show that fifteen years ago the settlement of Khor'mot was little more than a collection of old farmhouses, a chapel and a single village tavern. All that changed when the master swordsman Demos Jaraque (recently exiled from Archbridge) settled in the area and opened a school dedicated to the art of the sword. Bringing with him a rogue's court of duelists and warriors, Master Jaraque was granted a small holding by Archbridge nobles looking to put as much distance between themselves and Jaraque as possible.

In its early years, the school was informal at best, with discussion of tactics held over the kitchen table, while sparring took place in the hayloft. Since that time the school has expanded considerably, but still retains much of its rustic flavor, owing much to the personality of its master. Jaraque, now entering his fiftieth year, is no less the swordsman (or scoundrel); his hair shows more silver than black, and his skin is weathered from years spent sparring in the fields, but many in Archbridge would think twice before crossing blades with the master of Khor'mot.

A vibrant town has sprung up around Jaraque's academy, with armor and bladesmiths, tanners, taverns, inns and hostleries of every sort. Despite Jaraque's penchant for mischief, the town itself is relatively peaceful; few rivalries arise that can't be sorted out through a friendly battle with mock weapons, and those that insist on causing trouble must first meet with the master's blade. More than one noble's son has thought himself too privileged to risk expulsion, only to find out all too late that the academy's master is beholden neither to gold nor glory.

Those hoping to join the school need only journey to Khor'mot and seek an audience with Jaraque. A small cave complex outside of town is maintained for the sole purpose of testing new applicants. While it seems that only the most talented of swordsmen are accepted, Jaraque keeps his own council, and occasionally admits those that certainly have neither talent nor skill with a blade. What potential he sees in these young men and women is always mystery, but without fail they grow to become his finest pupils.

Finally, those exploring the environs surrounding Khor'mot might chance across a simple cave, hung with ferns and set beside a small waterfall. In the back of this overhang is a simple marble statue depicting a woman arrayed in noble dress and with a sword by her side. Locals refer to figure as the Statue of the Sword Saint, though none can explain its purpose or how it came to be placed in the cave. Sharp-eyed visitors, however, are quick to note that the stone blade hanging from the saint's baldric is the exact match of that worn by Jaraque.

Mines of Moderheim: (Small City, 9,140) The dwarf-lords of Moderheim have long been staunch allies of the people of Thire, and with the tragedy that befell of Amon Falls, Moderheim iron and steel has become more valuable than ever. But no matter how many ingots are carried down the well-defended caravan tracks to the west, the Mines of Moderheim will always be associated first and foremost with shining mithral. Every Warden to sit upon the throne at Hath Hall has worn a suit of the bright metal, fashioned with the care and craft known only to the dour lords.

The Mines are approached via a long stone causeway cut into the side of the mountain. Rising at a gentle slope, the High Highway (as it is called by merchants) is flanked away down steep cliffs on one side, and is defended by a rock wall riddled with dwarven defenses on the other. Recognizable only by the bolt-slits, murder holes, and ballista gates, the defenses follow the Highway for miles, forcing any advancing army to accept hundreds (if not thousands) of casualties before even meeting the enemy.

The Highway terminates at the mighty gates of Morderheim; built on a grand scale, the gates see the stately march of dragons once every year when metallic dragons descend from their mountain fastnesses to mark the anniversary of sacrifice of the great silver wyrm, Saralunias. (See Elder Eroidej's *Of Drakes and Wyrms*.) The gates open immediately to a vast, vaulted hall, a thriving marketplace that sees the stone and metal crafts of hundreds of dwarf and gnome masters. Legend holds that the gates and the accompanying great hall were designed to accommodate the span of an ancient wyrm in flight, though in the last hundred years, no battle has demanded such desperate measures.

The city itself radiates out from the gates like veins of precious ore, following vaulted galleries, low halls, and carefully crafted corridors. Built over the course of centuries, every inch of the Mines shows the creative mark of a master craftsman; pillars are carved in the shape of terrible beasts, doors are inlaid with gleaming gems, and high, delicate balconies seem to fly in the face of engineering.

While the Mines have a long standing, friendly relationship

with Thire, and racial ties to the Holdfast of the Steel Overlord, in practice they are an independent city-state. The Mines are ruled by a council of clan elders, who in turn elect the Speaker of the Mines. The current Speaker is the white-bearded Lord Rezalo of Clan Hammerfall. Unusually tall for a dwarf, and strong – even by dwarven standards – Lord Rezalo spent his youth traveling the North in a company of dwarven sell-axes. These experiences blessed Rezalo with a flexible mindset, far more forgiving than most of his kinfolk. Such subtleties, however, are often lost on ambassadors and visiting nobles, as a dwarf's version of flexible, open negotiations often could pass for another race's fiercest stonewalling.

Moorshroud Castle: (Small Castle, 430) The fastness known as Moorshroud sits atop a low ridge overlooking the Great Swamp. Squatting like a great, watchful reptile over the fog-snarled wastes, the castle is defended by successive rings of ditches, sharpened stakes, and finally a steep slope rising to the castle walls. The killing fields are littered with the corpses of swamp trolls, torn orcish war banners, and the flocks of ravens that pick their way through the bodies of the fallen.

The men and women who serve in Crieeste's easternmost citadel are a dour, sullen lot, perpetually anticipating the next attack, be it swamp trolls from the west, stone giants coming down from the mountains, or gnolls astride dire wolves, riding out of the east. Moorshroud Castle does what it can to protect the merchant trains attempting to make their way east to Thire and the Theocracy, but in practice the castle is little more than a stationary target, drawing the ready wrath of the swamp's monsters.

The castle is commanded by Countess Teskain of the High Moor, a tall, long-limbed warrior whose family has ruled Moorshroud Castle since before the Interregnum. The Countess never shies from combat, and is often found in the heart of the battle, expertly directing artillery while hammering foes with her enchanted war axe. While the Countess is feared and respected by her troops, there is little that she can do to inspire them to patrol the marshy fens out of sight of Moorshroud. For this reason the Countess is known to welcome champions willing to venture into the swamp and launch attacks directly into the heart of Mourshroud's foes. It is said that the Countess has spent a fortune funding such raids, and whatever the source of her lady's wealth, it is as plentiful today as the day she inherited the County of the High Moor.

Moorshroud houses a small non-martial community within its overhung walls. Numbering fewer than 150 souls, these merchants, gamblers, brewers and ladies-of-the-night eke out an existence off the backs of the soldiers, providing what scant entertainment can be had in the sodden bars and taverns. A welcome light to the otherwise gloomy environs is the noted bard Danier of the Lute, a light-hearted, idealistic young man who has made it his mission to bring music and laughter to the grim barrooms and darksome halls.

The old citadel's history is fraught with mystery and lost secrets. It is built atop the stones of a far older ruin, and even experienced sappers and miners find it difficult to distinguish where the citadel ends and the ridge begins. The high rocky ground is riddled with fissures and seams that feed into water-filled caverns and dark grottos. The caves have a long history inviting occultism; every decade or so the rulers of the High



Moor discover a band of cultists operating from within the Moorshroud. No cult activity has been reported in the fastness for over 11 years, and many aver that the wickedness associated with Moorshroud Castle has been stamped out for all time.

Sylvianne: (Small town, 1,800) Found on the northeastern edge the Blackbriar Wood, Sylvianne serves as Criesete's principle trading outpost with the elves of the Blackbriar. A constant stream of caravans and merchants file through the town's gates, trading raw metals and gems for Blackbriar wine, superior furs, exotic woods, and elfin blades, armors and works of art.

All of the great merchant houses of the Northlands maintain a presence in Sylvianne, in walled compounds that could pass for small keeps. As one of the few elven nations that actively trades with Criesete, Blackbriar presents a lucrative opportunity for the sharp-eyed merchant. With a king's fortune in gold to be had, the merchant houses engage in a constant battle for economic supremacy. Though the bulk of this struggle takes place in the markets squares and tradehalls, it is no secret that all of the great merchant houses retain the services of skilled rogues and thugs. Occasionally these rivalries spill over into violence, with the sellswords of two opposing merchant-lords engaged in running street battles. For this reason, accomplished duelists (or simply those that claim such honors) can always command a high fee, although siding with one merchant house earns a sell-sword the enmity of the family's dozen rivals. The finest of the city's champions are treated with the distinctions accorded befitting nobles. Troupes of sycophants follow on their heels, would-be lovers offer adoring worship, and even the town's aristocrats vie for their attention.

Sylvianne is led by Palasentia Shadow'ore, an elf maid esteemed for her devotion to her people, as well as her woodlore and arcane prowess. Nearly every citizen of Sylvianne has seen Lady Shadow'ore in her suit of shining mail and mithral scale, hunting falcon on her wrist, her fur-tufted bow slung on her saddle. The guise of the warrior-maid conceals an astute diplomat, and Shadow'ore is adept at playing one merchant house off the next to the advantage of her people. While the merchants despise the Lady of Sylvianne (and more than one would pay hard gold to see the elf removed from her position) Criesete's Council of Barons value her ability to straddle the diverse worlds of man and elf.

Trader's Gate: (Large Town, 2,201) Trader's Gate sits along the banks of the Archen River, marking the place where the caravan lords riding from North transfer their cargo to the barges of the River Folk, who pole the freight south to the capital via the Archen River.

The river is wide and placid here, and Trader's Gate is a community on the water, with scores of ships bobbing alongside the docks. In the dock and low quarter, buildings are even built above the water, standing on tall stilts. Smuggling reaches epidemic proportions in Trader's Gate, with rogues poling their way beneath town in flat bottomed skiffs, and many (if not all) of the warehouses sport trapdoors built into their floors for this very purpose.

The town watch of Trader's Gate is notoriously corrupt, so that most merchants simply factor the cost of bribes into their expenses. The lords-barons of Criesete have sought to counter this by installing Naros Gaach to watch over the docks. As an imperial tax collector, Gaach has the authority to inspect any vessel at any time, and confiscate any cargo not accounted for on the ship's manifest. Needless to say Naros Gaach is universally despised throughout Trader's Gate, and were he not constantly accompanied by a personal mage and band of bodyguards, his career as tax collector would have ended months ago. As it is, Gaach splits his efforts between monitoring the caravans and barges, and plying the rulers of Trader's Gate with thinly veiled threats. It is only a matter of time before this delicate balance is upset, and Gaach falls to an assassin's bolt or calls down the might of the Emperor's army to occupy the town and hammer it into submission.

The population totals for Trader's Gate does not take into account the colorful River Folk, nor should it since it would shame any River Folk to be caught sleeping indoors. At night the bonfires of their barges can be seen along the banks of the Archen, while their lively music dances over the rolling waves. Each barge master is like a prince unto his realm, reigning over his craft and crew with absolute authority. Dealing with a barge master is more art than science, as it is assumed that most of the river people are criminals and thieves. In truth, each barge master cleaves to a peculiar code of honor, but it is often a gamble whether or not the code applies to anyone other than River Folk.

BALEFIRE

WE HAVE MET WITH THE WITCH QUEEN.

OUR RUSE IS A SUCCESS. THE FOUL QUEEN HAS
CONSENTED TO OUR DEMANDS & THE FIRST

SHIPMENT OF THE ENCHANTED BLADES WILL BE
ARRIVING SOON FOR YOUR INSPECTION BEFORE
BEING SHIPPED EAST AS ORDERED & WHEN THE

MYIGHTY WYRM ARRIVES HE WILL HAVE A SUITABLE
ARMY TO SERVE HIS DREAD WILL & THE GREEDY

WITCH DEMANDS MORE GOLD & TO BUY TIME I
HAVE SENT A SAMPLE OF HER WORK AHEAD FOR

YOUR INSPECTION & SEND GOLD ONLY ONCE YOU
GET WORD OF THE BLADES ARRIVAL & I DO NOT
TRUST THE WITCHES MOTIVES ANY MORE THEN
SHE SHOULD TRUST OURS &

RUGBOLD

Noble Heroes,

This letter is to be delivered to your hands by my agent, Lady Marwyn. Your recent expedition has drawn the notice of many — some that would conspire to do evil against the empire.

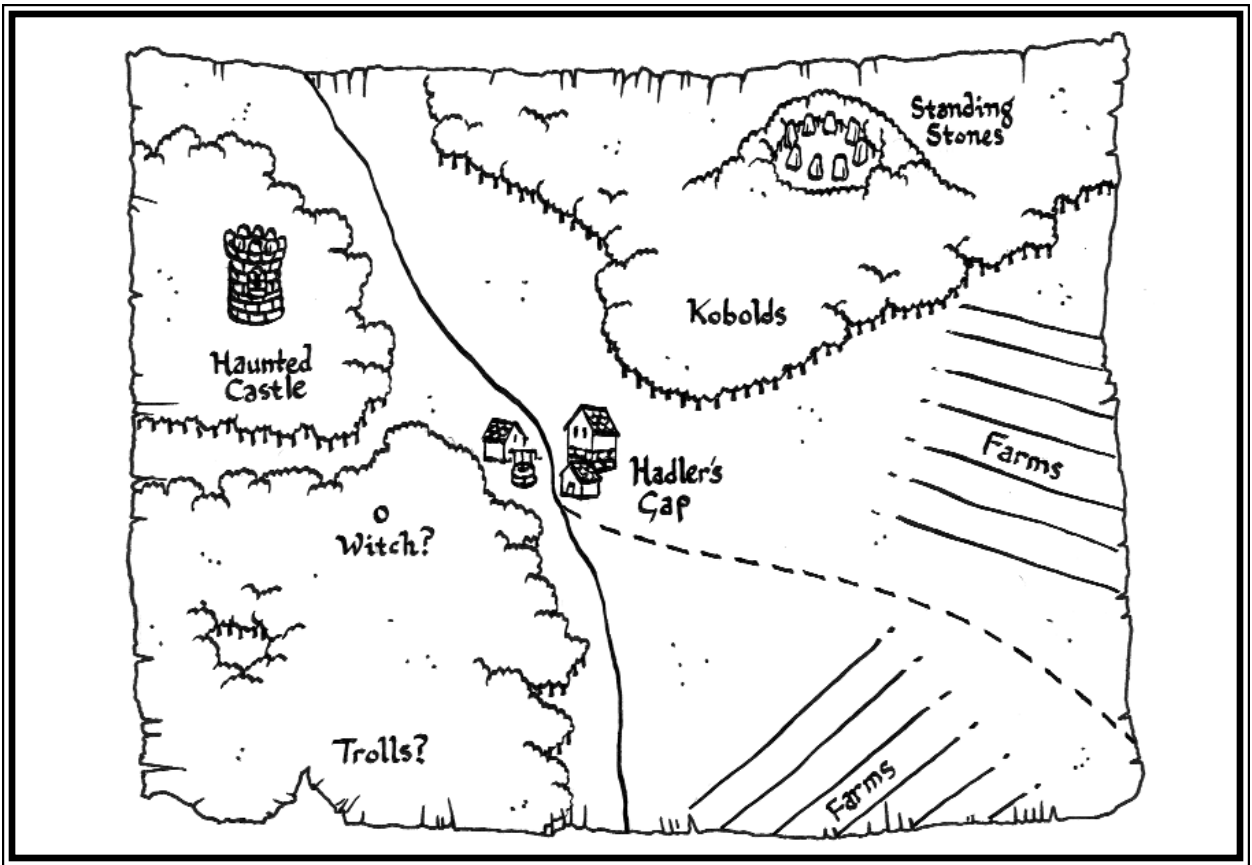
If you would cast your lot with those who stand against the forces of Chaos; if you would stand as a champion of the weak and innocent, and visit violence against the wicked, meet with my agent at the Watchful Wyvern this very night. You will know my servant by a silver rose.

And if you would instead side with the corrupt, the tyrannous, the wicked and the cowardly, you will know my everlasting enmity.

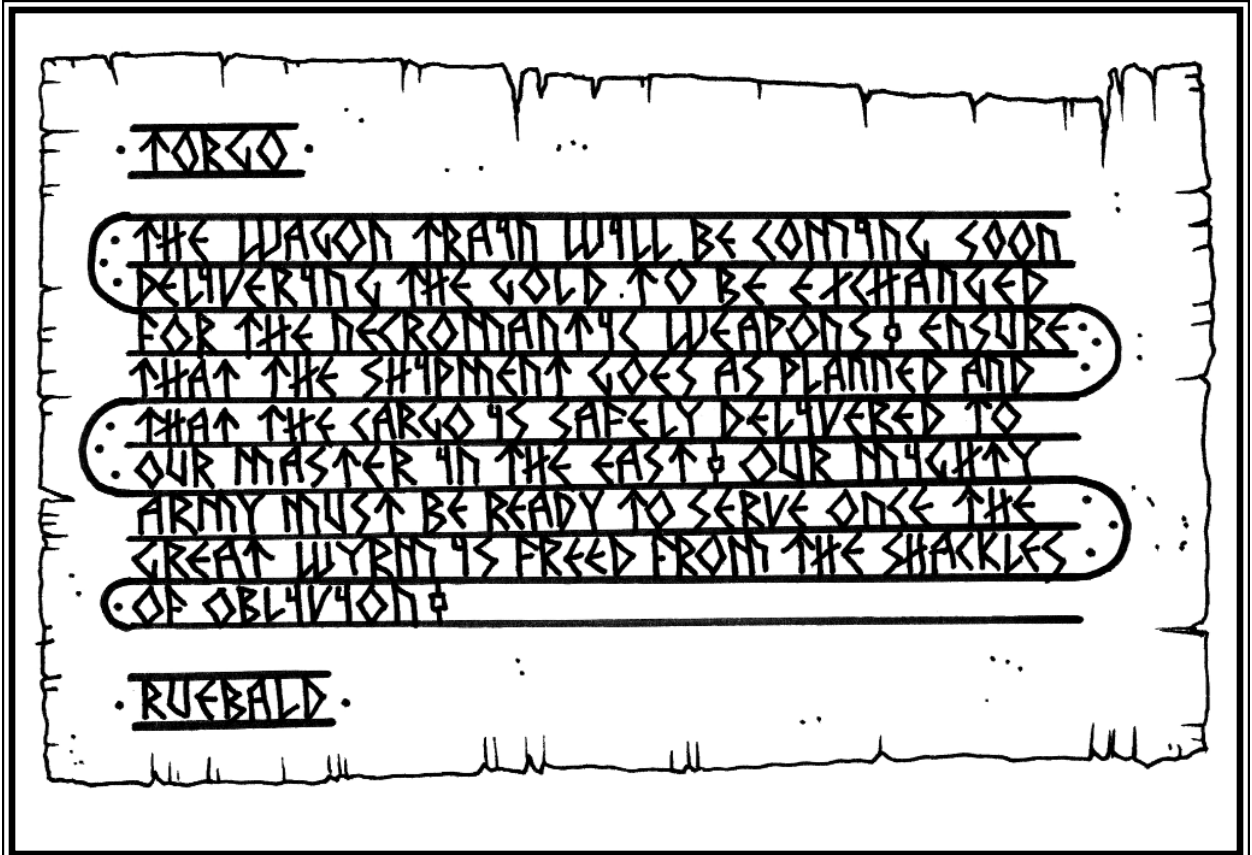
Captain Senti,

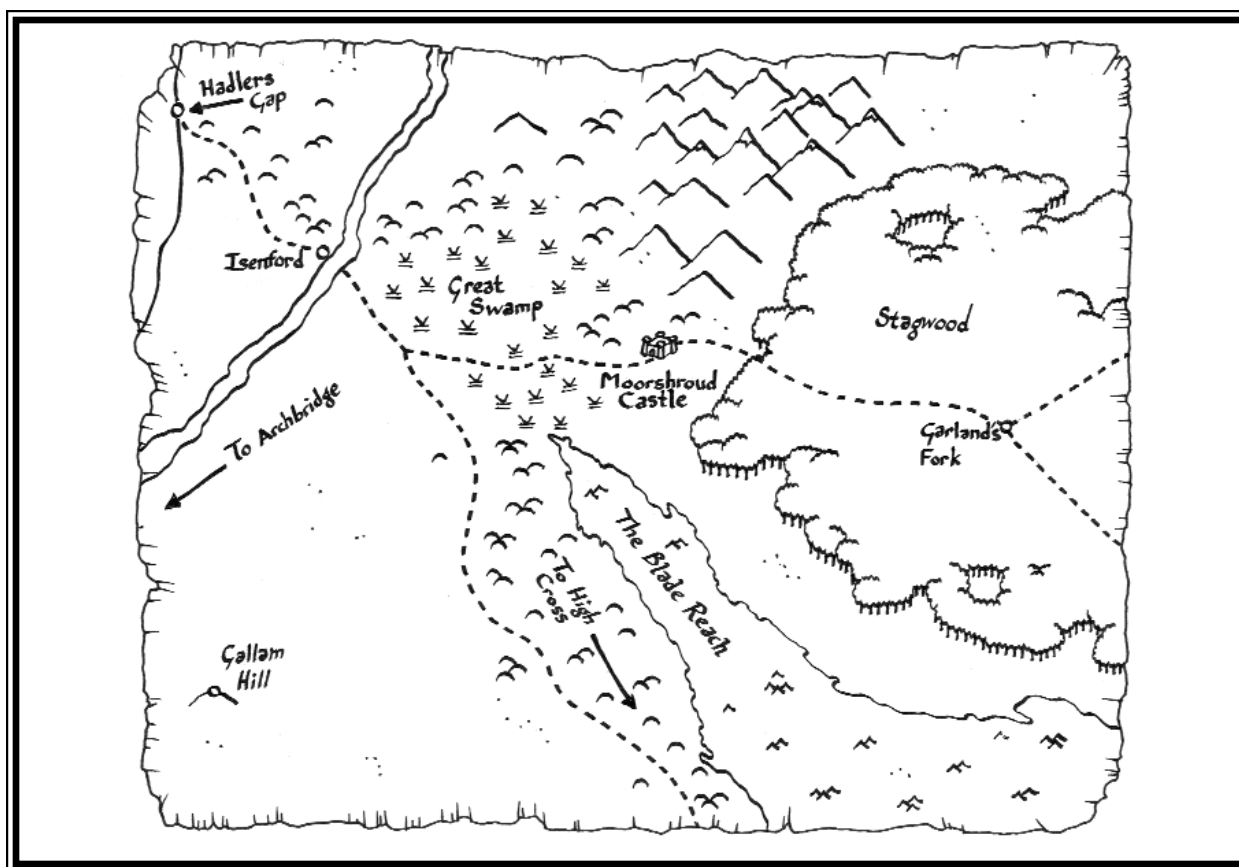
Master of the Sable March and General of the Seven Armies

PLAYERS' HANDOUT C



PLAYERS' HANDOUT D

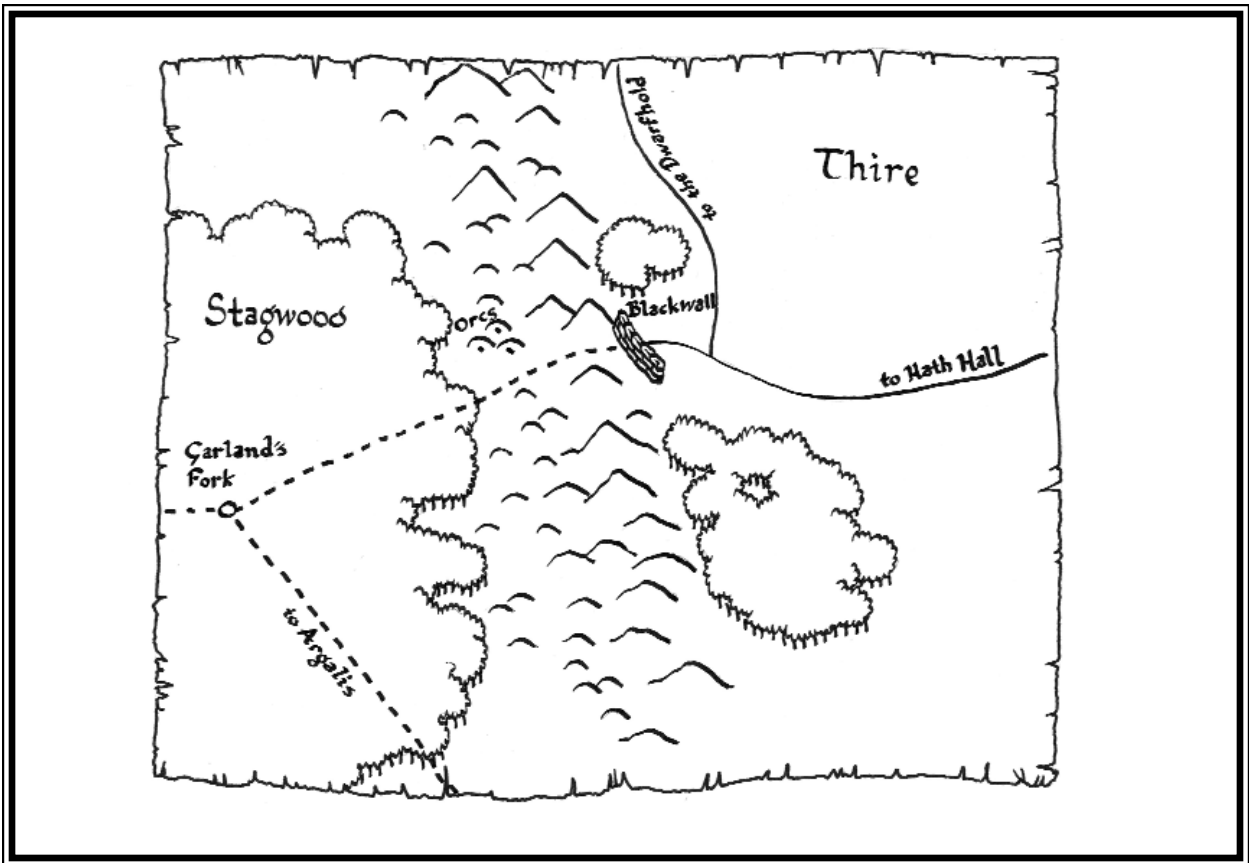




Master Darscv,

I received the message brought by your emissary. The bore is now regretting his indiscretion at the bottom of the Maw. I choose to believe that any arrogance was his own, and not born out of an attitude shared by his masters. In the future, choose your agents more wisely.

The delivery of blight blades will arrive as per our agreement. Idle and empty threats will not speed their delivery, and if they continue, will only endanger our already tenuous relationship. My agents will make the exchange in Garland's Fork on the next full moon, as agreed. I urge you not to miss this meeting - my spies tell me that the armies of Thire are already swarming about your sacred mountain, and without my weapons your lives will surely be forfeit. As to your queries of the source of the Blight: I suspect the initial cause of the Blight was an ancient demon prince, a spirit so profane that I dare not give it a name. Local lore suggests that the demon was slain by a barbarian warlord. If remnants of the demon still exist, and if they were ever



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