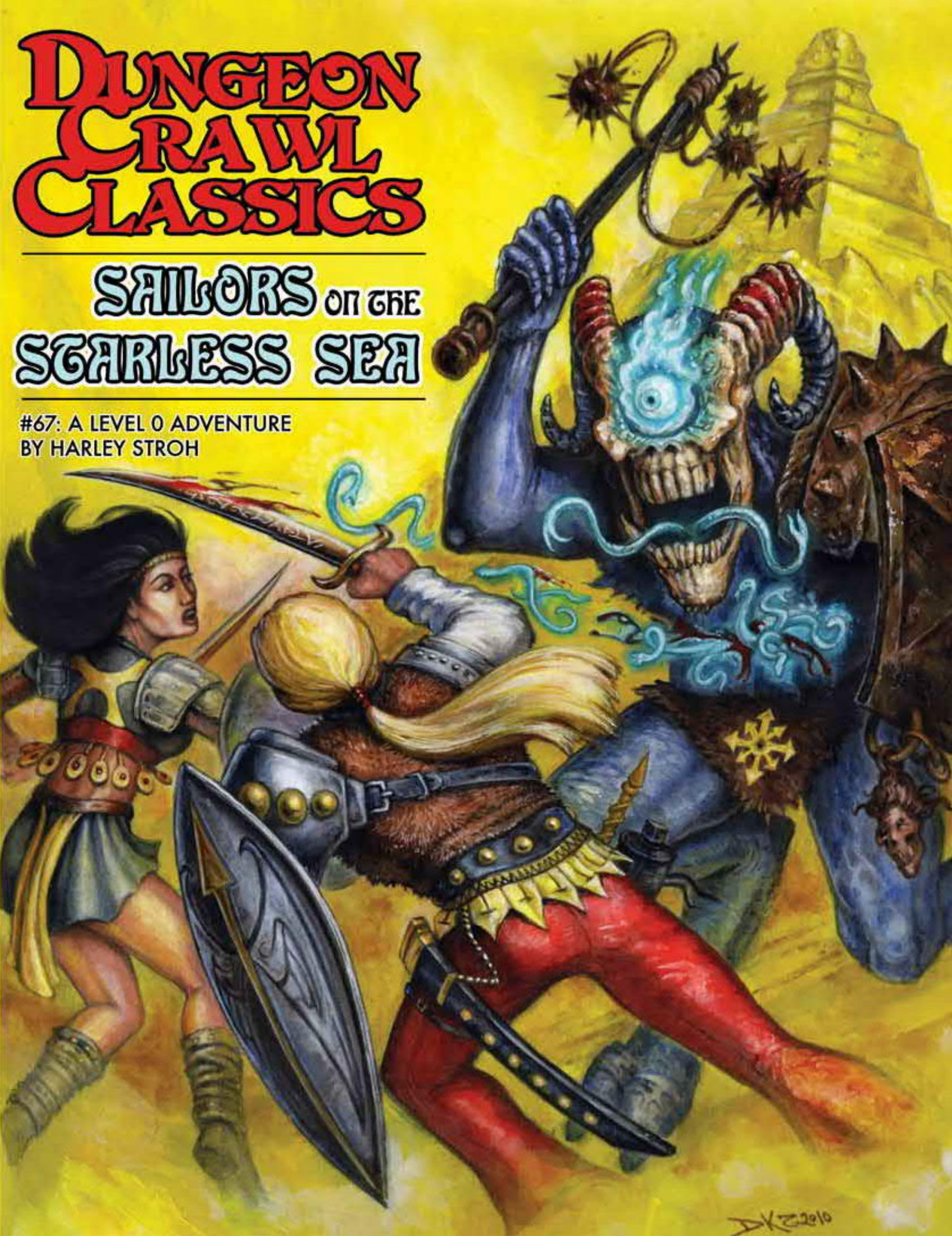


# DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

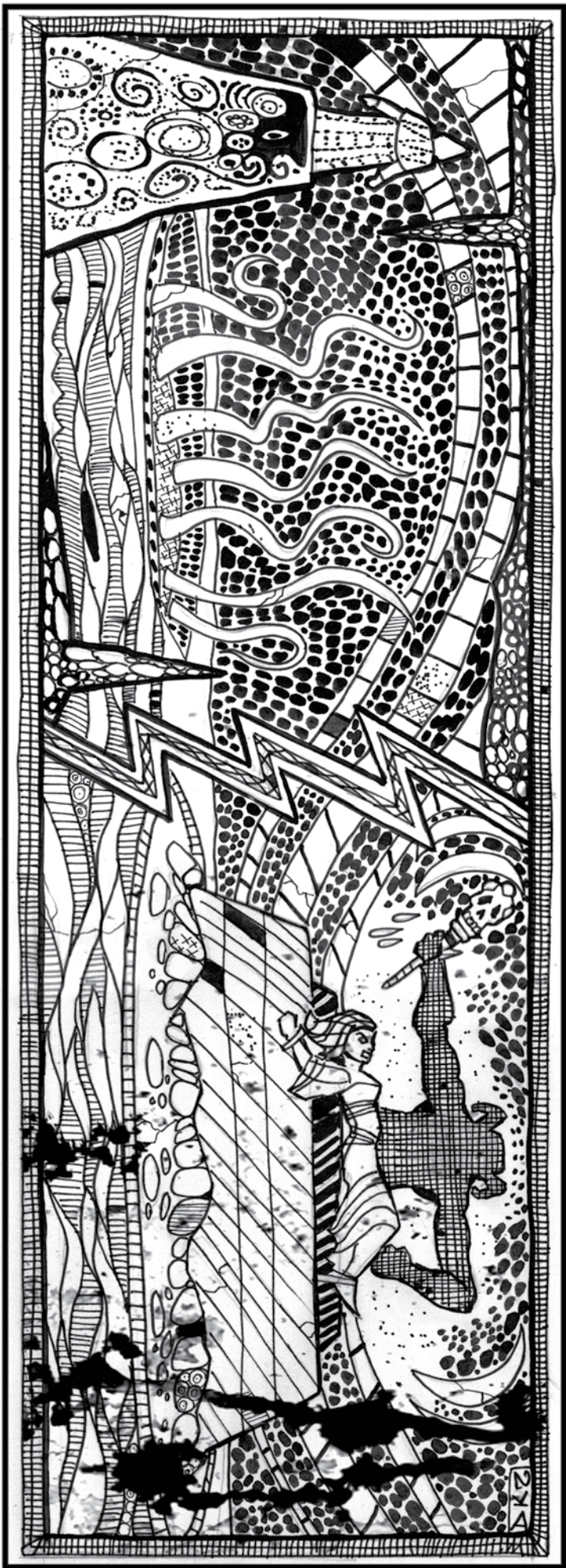
## SAILORS ON THE STARLESS SEA

#67: A LEVEL 0 ADVENTURE  
BY HARLEY STROH



DK22010





EAST WALL ↓

HAND OUTS: AREA 1-2

WEST WALL ↓





# SAILORS ON THE STARLESS SEA

## A LEVEL 0 ADVENTURE

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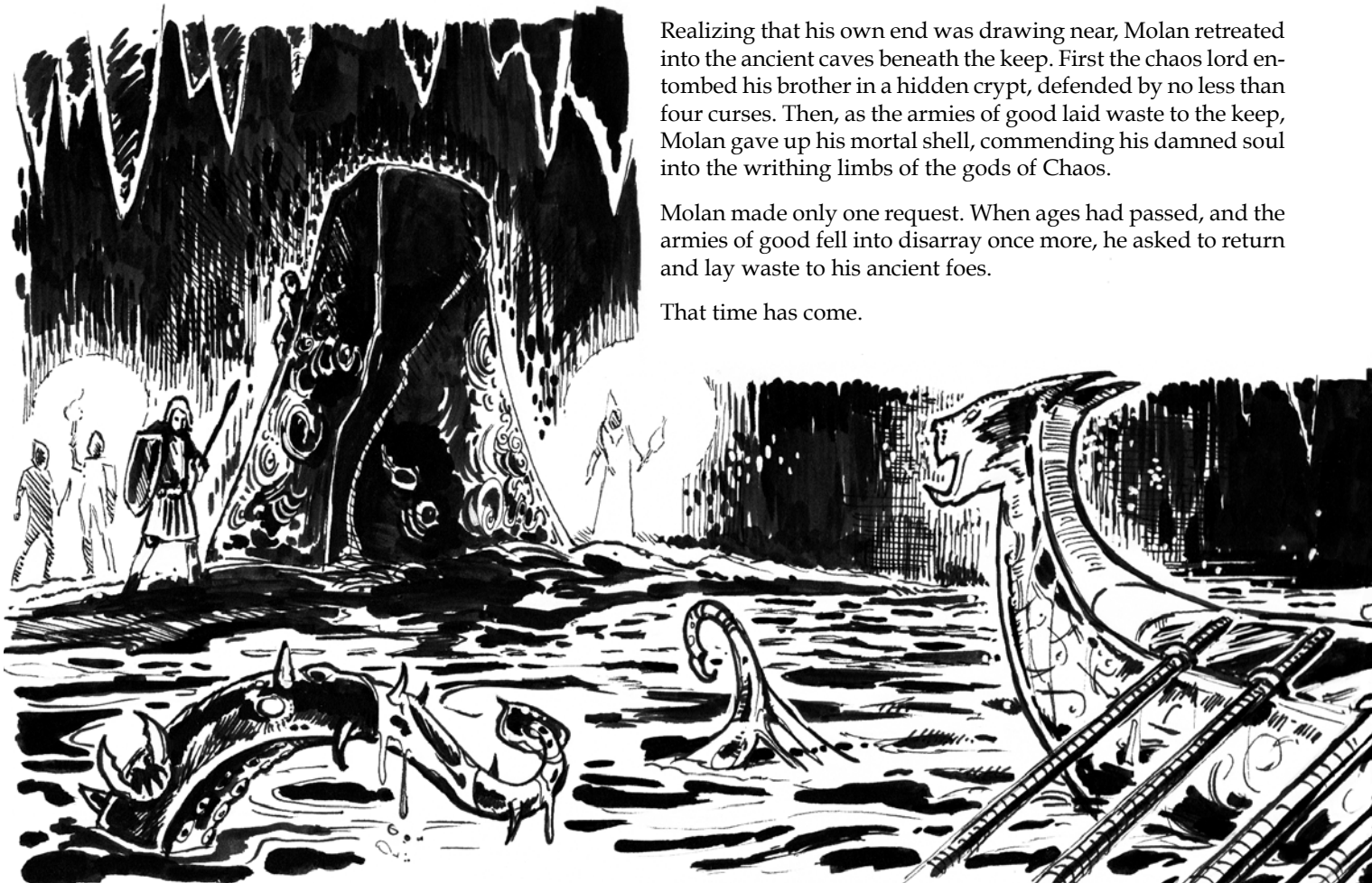


## INTRODUCTION

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

This adventure is designed for 10 to 15 0-level characters. Remember that each player should have 3 characters. In playtest groups of 15 PCs, 7 or 8 typically survive. The adventure can also be enjoyed by a party of 1<sup>st</sup>- to 2<sup>nd</sup>-level characters who are aided by hirelings.

Bent on stopping the rash of abductions plaguing their village, the characters discover a horde of vile beastmen inhabiting the ancient keep on the hill. Seeking the source of these abominations, the PCs uncover an ancient chaos cult and its source: an antediluvian ziggurat set in the center of a vast, underground sea. There, at the font of chaos, the PCs witness a wicked rite culminating in the sacrifice of their fellow villagers. If the PCs can interrupt the rite before its conclusion and stave off the re-birth of the legendary chaos lord, they stand a chance of escaping the underworld alive. But if their courage or luck should fail them, the PCs will suffer a fate more fearsome than death, their spirits fueling the infernal might of the reborn chaos lord.



## BACKGROUND

**T**hrough the ages past, innumerable chaos cults flourished on the edge of civilization. For each holy spire rising to extol the virtues of goodness and law, there was an infernal reflection, offering mankind material power and wealth in exchange for cruel acts and bloody sacrifice. Humanity was a young and foolish race, and many a prince and peon sold his soul in exchange for power over his foeman. But as civilization endured, uniting tribes into clans and clans into kingdoms, slowly the light of law beat back the chaos.

Not to be outdone, the powers of chaos and evil sought out champions of profound wickedness and cruelty, mortals possessed of the strength of will to lead the hordes of chaos against the armies of the enemy.

These champions were the chaos lords.

The brothers Molan and Felan were two such champions. Vicious and cunning beyond measure, and without a scrap of mercy in their war-hardened hearts, they led hordes of bestial humanoids to victory against the armies of good. With the spoils of their bloody campaigns, they raised a mighty keep and rained terror and violence down upon all in their demesne.

In the end, the brothers' success was their undoing. Disparate forces of men, dwarves, and elves rallied together in a crusade against the wicked chaos lords. For thirty-nine days, the allies laid siege to the foul keep. And on the fortieth day, the captain of the elves dealt Felan a mortal blow.

Realizing that his own end was drawing near, Molan retreated into the ancient caves beneath the keep. First the chaos lord entombed his brother in a hidden crypt, defended by no less than four curses. Then, as the armies of good laid waste to the keep, Molan gave up his mortal shell, commending his damned soul into the writhing limbs of the gods of Chaos.

Molan made only one request. When ages had passed, and the armies of good fell into disarray once more, he asked to return and lay waste to his ancient foes.

That time has come.

## RUMORS & SUPERSTITIONS



he keep looming high on the hill has long been a source of fearsome tales and terrible legends. The locals are steeped in superstitious lore surrounding the keep; some of the tales ring with truth while others are misleading wives' tales or the fanciful mumblings of a town drunk.

Before beginning the adventure, each player (not character) should roll 1d10 on the following table. It is up to the players to sort the truth from the lies, for while the rumors offer valuable clues, they can also lure foolish characters to their doom.

### 1d10 Rumors & Superstitions

- 1 The great treasure vault of a lost dynasty remains hidden beneath the keep.
- 2 The keep sits atop an ancient horror, a seed so wicked that it taints all that come near.
- 3 While the keep fell to the armies of good, they did not eradicate its fell legacy. Evil still festers within the ruined walls, awaiting the day when it can emerge once more.
- 4 Some of the villagers kidnapped in the night return as feral, bestial monsters!
- 5 The keep was ruled by chaos lords. Even after their defeat, their corpses were never discovered.
- 6 A sleeping dragon lurks beneath the keep. Accept his quest and he will grant you a wish.
- 7 Beware the well! It has swallowed many a poor soul.
- 8 Nothing good can come of disturbing the evil ruins. You'll only unleash the horror beneath the hill.
- 9 Look for treasure in the keep's sole remaining tower. A wealth of gold is hidden there.
- 10 The keep was once ruled by a pair of brothers—chaos lords, the foulest champions of evil to ever stalk the land.

## ENCOUNTER TABLE

Area	Type	Encounter
A	C	2 vine horrors
B	T	Collapsing slope
B-1	T	4 banes
C	T	Portcullis trap 2 beastmen
E	C	Tar ooze
F	P	Well of Souls
G	H	Sinkhole
H	C	Beastman champion 6 beastmen Rot grub
1-1A	T	Blade trap
1-2	T	Pool trap
1-4	C	Chaos leviathan
1-5	C	22 beastmen
1-5a	C	Chaos Lord Beastman shaman 3 beastmen acolytes

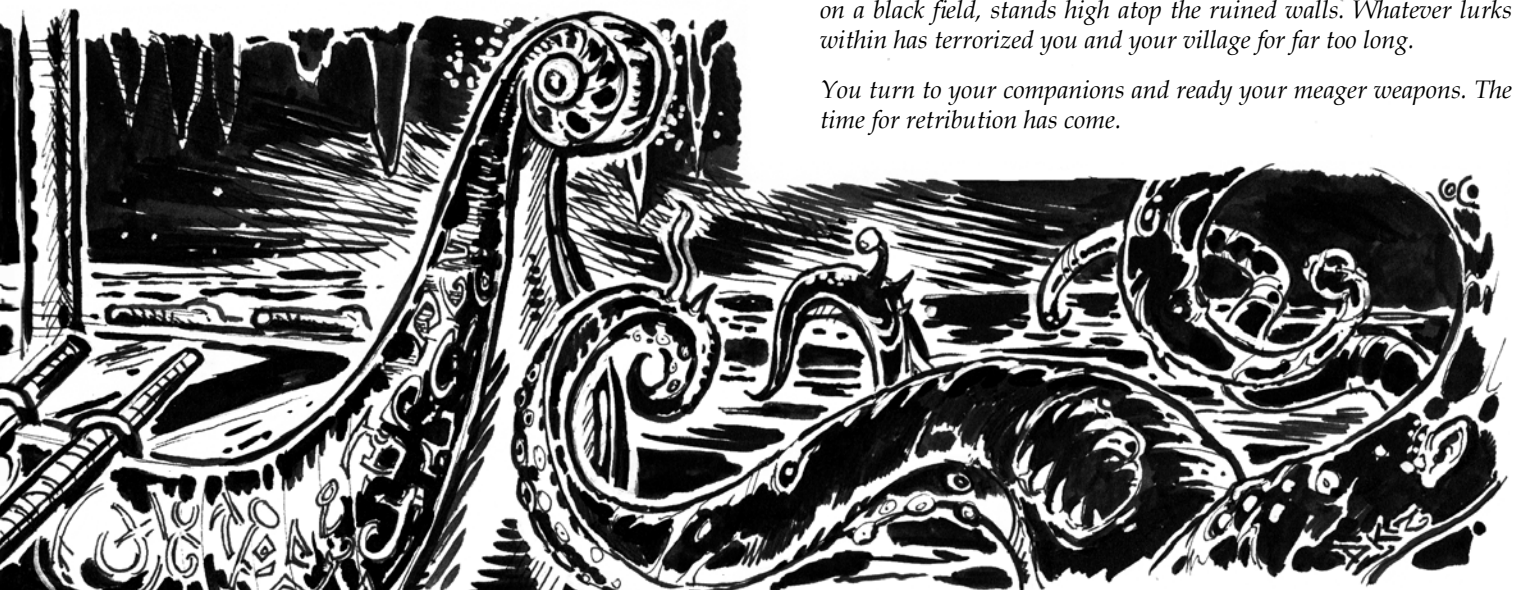
## PLAYER START

*You stand before the ruined keep, which squats atop a low, craggy hill, its walls of toppled stone and massive granite blocks hinting at forgotten battles and the clash of mighty armies. Now the ruins seem host only to creeping vines and the foul miasma that drifts down from the keep.*

*The air is overrun with pestilence. Fat flies bite at you incessantly, and clouds of small black insects choke your every breath. The long-abandoned land is strangled with thorny vines that drape the sickly trees and hang from the ruined walls. There is an odor of rot and decay, as if the hill itself were decomposing from within.*

*A sight gives you pause: a ragged banner, depicting a crimson skull on a black field, stands high atop the ruined walls. Whatever lurks within has terrorized you and your village for far too long.*

*You turn to your companions and ready your meager weapons. The time for retribution has come.*



# THE RUINED KEEP

**General Features:** The keep's walls rise 30 feet from their rammed earth embankments. The walls and all the fallen stones are covered in a patchwork of moss, sickly vines, and lichen. Rather than simple carved blocks, the keep seems to have been built of enormous standing stones and mighty dolmens. The blocks are fitted together crudely, leaving cracks between the stones for rotting vegetation and pools of water that act as host to the gnats and mosquitoes.

**Approaching the Ruins:** The PCs are free to enter as they see fit. While the most obvious approach takes them up the causeway (area A), this is also the most dangerous. Wily characters will be rewarded for their suspicion, though hesitation should never be mistaken for caution.

Approaching from the west requires the characters to ascend the rubble (area B). Picking their way through the fallen blocks is not difficult, but carries its own risks as noted below.

Approaching from northeast brings the PCs directly to the sinkhole (area G).

Characters attempting to ascend walls face a difficult climb. Each character must succeed on a DC 15 climb check or pitch from the wall—falling 20 feet for 2d6 damage—before tumbling down to the base of the rammed earth mound.

**Area A – Devil's Causeway:** *An old dirt road, now overrun with weeds and sickly vines, rises towards the ruined citadel. A grisly sight bars your way: a pair of bodies, secured to poles by long ropey vines. The wicked vines have wormed their way inside the bodies' eyes, ears, and mouths. To your horror, you realize the bodies are still moving.*

The bodies are vine horrors: corpses animated by the foul vines growing from seeds planted in their chests. The rotting bodies serve both as nutritious hosts for the vines and as seed pods for future vine horrors.

The horrors' true nature becomes apparent when the characters approach. The vines unwind from the posts, freeing the horrors to shamble toward the PCs. Each horror attacks twice per round, flailing with its long, ropey vines.

If both vines strike the same victim in one round, they entangle the target, automatically inflicting 1d6 points of crushing and choking damage on the following round. An entangled victim can win free with a DC 15 Strength check.

**Vine Horrors (2):** Init +2; Atk vine +2 melee (1d4); AC 13; HD 2d10; hp 10 each; MV 20'; Act 2d20; SP entangle (automatic 1d6 damage on next round if both vine attacks land; DC 15 Str check to escape); SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

On the attack that kills a vine horror, the host corpse splits open, spilling out thousands of small seeds slick with mucus. The seeds become unviable in 12 hours but can move 1 foot per hour until then. If a seed reach a corpse before expiring, the corpse rises as a vine horror in 1d4 days.

The corpses belonged to Keary and Alban, sons of the village smith. The brothers vanished from the village eleven days ago. The beastmen killed the brothers and seeded their corpses with vine horrors to ward off any investigations from the

townsfolk. Keary's corpse is still carrying a short sword and dagger (gifts forged by his father), and Alban's corpse has 5 cp hidden in its right boot.

**Area B – Ruined Wall:** *The keep's massive wall has collapsed here, spilling cyclopean stone blocks down the rocky slope. The blocks are precariously balanced atop one another, like a titan's game of dice.*

It is relatively simple work for the PCs to pick their way up the blocks and enter the keep. Several of the blocks are poised to shift if disturbed.

Cautious PCs that choose to carefully inspect the slope can detect and avoid the dangerous blocks with a DC 10 Intelligence check. Dwarves or miners receive a free check (Intelligence, DC 8) to notice the same. Dwarves should apply their racial bonus to the check.

Those ascending the slope without noting the danger inevitably trigger a slide. One false step and massive granite blocks tumble down the slope, crushing all in their path. Clouds of choking dust fill the air along with the screams of the dying and the deafening crash of stone against stone.

All PCs on the slope are targets: Atk avalanche +5 melee; dmg 1d10. The gear of anyone killed in the slide is destroyed. Once the slide is triggered, the slope is safe.

Triggering the avalanche reveals the entrance to a long-forgotten tomb. Characters searching the rubble in the aftermath discover a narrow, rocky shaft descending 14 feet before opening into a small cave at the foot of an enormous, rune-carved portal. This is area B-1.

**Area B-1 – Tomb of the Fallen:** If the PCs approach from the northwest, read or paraphrase the following:

*You squeeze down through the narrow opening, dropping into the small cave below. The air is choked with chalky dust and the pervasive smell of rot. A single shaft of light cuts through the swirling dust to illuminate an enormous stone door set in a portal.*

*The portal is circumscribed in runes. At the center of the door is a large pentagram inscribed within a circle. Both the runes and the pentagram are set with silver and seem to glimmer faintly in the dim light.*

If the PCs approach from area 1-1, read or paraphrase the following:

*A strange and foreboding portal bars your way. The portal is circumscribed in runes. At the center of the portal is a large pentagram inscribed within a circle. Both the runes and the pentagram are set with silver and seem to glimmer faintly in the dim light.*

Wizards, their apprentices, fortune-tellers and astrologers may attempt to decipher the runes (Intelligence, DC 12). A successful check reveals the following phrases:

*the burning purge, which scours the earth  
the hardened glamour, stilling life  
the baleful storm, heedless to supplication  
the raging tempest, devourer from within  
banes four I place upon this gate:  
Fire, Ice, Storm and Hate*



On a failed check, the judge is encouraged to make up a misleading translation.

Though heavy, the stone portal is not locked, and can be opened with a DC 20 Strength check. Forcing the door triggers the first ward: a blast of flame engulfs the door, targeting any within 10 feet (Atk fire ward +0 melee; dmg 1d10). Those scrambling out of the hole (Reflex save, DC 15) take only half damage.

Once the portal is cleared the PCs see the following:

*As the last wisps of flame fade, you can make out a soft crackling sound rustling in the chamber beyond. An icy chill settles over the air and your breath condenses into misty clouds.*

*Through the portal you can make out a low funerary bier. A body lies in repose atop the stone. The body was once a warrior of some sort – it wears a suit of thick hide armor and clutches an enormous battle axe to its chest.*

*The entire chamber sparkles with a soft, elfin glow.*

This chamber is the tomb of the warrior Felan, brother to Molan, and fellow chaos lord. Felan was killed in battle with the forces of good and was entombed here to prevent his corpse's capture and desecration.

The elfin glow emanates from a hardened sheet of ice that coats the entire chamber. Though there is no light source within the tomb, the ice refracts the sunlight from above, bathing the entire chamber in a soft glow.

As evidenced by the characters' breath, the chamber is preternaturally cold. The cold and ice pose three threats:

- Characters must make a DC 12 Fortitude save for every round spent within the chamber. Each failed save lowers the PC's movement by 15 feet as his body succumbs to the cold. Once a PC's movement drops to zero, he can no longer take any actions.
- The floor is covered in polished, hardened ice. Characters attempting to walk across the ice must succeed on a DC 15 Reflex save or slip to the ground. Attempting to stand takes 1 round. The ice is slick enough for PCs to slide. A PC can push off the bier (or get a running leap from outside) and slide across the room.
- After 5 rounds within the chamber, the PC takes 1d4 points of cold damage per round.

Felan was an enormous man, nearly seven feet tall and muscled like a bear. His hide armor is of excellent craftsmanship, sewn from the thick hides of basilisks and the fur of polar worms. Felan's enormous axe is forged of meteoric iron and can only be wielded by a character with a Strength score 16 or better. The terrible weapon inflicts 1d10 damage on a hit and inflicts critical hits on a threat range expanded by 1 (i.e., a natural roll of 19-20 for most characters, or 18-20 for a warrior or dwarf who is already at a 19-20 crit range).

Unfortunately, the corpse and its treasures are all frozen within the ice. A DC 20 Strength check is required to break the axe free of the corpse. (This is particularly grisly, snapping Felan's icy fingers in the process.) Freeing the corpse and its armor is even more difficult, requiring two subsequent DC 23 Strength checks. Each attempt to free the axe or corpse from the ice takes 1 round.



Heroes escaping the tomb with either the axe or the armor are subject to two last wards: the curse of storm and hate. Judges are encouraged to create their own curse, specific to their home campaign. Following are some sample curses to serve as inspiration:

- The next time the PCs are at sea, their ship is overtaken by a fearsome storm. Just as their ship is torn asunder, the heroes see an image of Felan, silhouetted in the heart of the clouds. To survive the PCs must make it to a jungle island, where ancient reptiles lie in wait.
- The wielder of the Axe of Felan is slowly overcome by his passions. At the judge's choosing (at least once per adventure) the wielder must succeed on a DC 15 Will save or succumb to a violent rage, mindlessly attacking his foes and savagely pursuing them to the death.
- The next time the PCs are traveling through the wilderness, they are overtaken by towering thunderclouds on an otherwise clear day. Just before the rain starts to fall, the PCs spy the silhouette of Felan in the heart of the roiling black clouds. Then comes the lightning. Each PC that entered the tomb is attacked by a bolt of lightning: Atk lightning bolt +1 missile fire; dmg 2d10.

**Area C – Gatehouse:** *The dark, moss-eaten gatehouse towers above you, grim and forbidding. Murder holes, fashioned in the likeness of looming toads, threaten to gout forth flaming oil and tar. Black arrow slits pierce the high stone walls. You can hear the flap of the heretical banner above, hidden from sight by the vine-draped battlements.*

*The ancient drawbridge has long since fallen away into ruin, leaving only a few rotting planks placed across the ditch. The heavy iron portcullis stands half-raised, the rusty spikes a mere four feet above slots cut into the stone floor.*



## BEASTMEN

The beastmen lurking within the keep are all villagers corrupted by the lure of the chaos gods. The transformation is both slow and torturous, inevitably driving the subject mad with pain. And while the end result is always horrific, each beastman is mutated in its own unique fashion.

In general—insofar as such a term can be used—most beastmen resemble their namesake: a hunched, feral cross between a man and a beast. Consult the following table to determine the specific mutation of any particular beastman or use it as inspiration for your own unique monstrosities.

### 1d12 Mutation

- 1 Thick, bristly fur, and the head of a (1) bear, (2) ram, (3) rat, (4) ape, (5) tiger, or (6) wolf.
- 2 A hunched, furred back, with a second, diminutive head.
- 3 Dense coat of feathers and the head of a (1) vulture, (2) raven, or (3) owl.
- 4 Receding lips that curl back to reveal saber-like fangs, and the slit pupils of a cat.
- 5 Mottled, clammy flesh and the head of a (1) frog, (2) octopus, (3) eel, or (4) salamander.
- 6 Curling ram's horns and bulbous, oversized eyes.
- 7 Oversized, hanging jowls that drip black ichor and tiny pinholes for eyes.
- 8 Iridescent scales and the head of a (1) snake or (2) lizard.
- 9 A face devoid of mandible form, leaving a flapping, wet mess in the place of the mouth and nose.
- 10 A body that weeps maggots, larvae, and flies from its open maw, ears, and eyes.
- 11 Thick, leathery skin and the head of an (1) elephant, (2) bull, (3) horse, or (4) rhino.
- 12 Dark, shiny skin and the head of a (1) fly, (2) spider, (3) cockroach, or (4) ant.

While beastmen have the capacity to take orders, only the champions and shamans retain the reasoning that once distinguished them from the animal kingdom. In the place of true intelligence, they develop animal cunning, stalking their prey like a pack of wolves or a pride of lions.

Two snarling beastmen lurk on the second floor of the gatehouse (accessible only from area H). Cautious PCs pausing to listen will hear animal-like sniffing sounds and the scratch of claws on stone coming from above.

The beastmen wait for the PCs to enter, then drop the portcullis on the last rank (Atk portcullis -5 melee; Dmg 1d6/round). A hero pinned by the portcullis takes ongoing damage each round until he dies or is freed (DC 23 Str check; alternately, 4 characters lifting together can hoist the portcullis if their combined Str exceeds 40).

After dropping the portcullis, the beastmen toll a great bell. This alerts their brothers to the PCs' presence. Their work done, the howling beastmen withdraw to area H.

**Beastmen (2):** Init +1; Atk spear +0 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

**Area D - Courtyard:** *The courtyard is overgrown with sickly weeds and thick brambles. A deathly silence hangs in the air, as if even the frogs and insects are afraid to draw attention to themselves. The smell of rotting vegetation is pervasive, and the ground sucks at your boots with every tentative step.*

*Nearly all of the courtyard's buildings have fallen into ruin. A single burnt-out shell set against the keep's east wall is the only remaining structure. Set near the heart of the courtyard is a well, framed with a crude pulley system. To the east is the keep's sole standing tower.*

Heroes pausing to inspect the ground easily discover a muddy trail leading from the gatehouse through the brambles to the south tower (area H). The small side trail runs to the well (area F).

The muddy prints indicate a wide variety of creatures: human footprints, the tracks of large creatures with only three toes, hawk-like talons, and perhaps even the slithering trail of an enormous snake. While seeming to hint at a variety of monsters, all the tracks belong to mutated beastmen.

**Area D-1 - Forgotten Cache:** *Pulling away the dead brambles and matted weeds, you find a long flagstone, half-buried in the muddy ground. Digging away the rotting soil, you discover a sigil carved into the face of the flagstone.*

The cache can only be found by PCs explicitly searching the courtyard. The flagstone is actually a capstone concealing a small subterranean cist. The small chamber was intended to conceal treasures in case the keep was abandoned to invaders.

Wizards, their apprentices and scribes can attempt a DC 12 Intelligence check to translate the rune. Properly identified, it reads: *'Til Death Shall Pass*. If the check fails, the judge is welcome to make up a misleading translation.

Hoisting the capstone requires prodigious might (Strength check, DC 30). Alternately, clever PCs might opt to use the block and tackle from the well to lift the stone. Lifting the capstone reveals a small, coffin-like nook, walled and floored with stone.

A hide-wrapped bundle, roughly 5 feet in length, sits atop a pair of wooden rests. Inside the bundle is:

- A stone idol depicting the chaos god Nimlurun.



- A longsword forged of milky steel sheathed in a jewel-encrusted scabbard (worth 75 gp).
- A fur-tufted longbow and a leather quiver containing 25 arrows. Age has ruined the bow: on a roll of a natural 1 or 2, the bow snaps, inflicting 1d2 points of damage to the wielder. This weakness is immediately obvious to any hunter or forester.
- A leather pouch containing a granular green powder and a roll of five cloth bandages. When wine or water is added to the green powder, it forms a poultice that heals 1d4+1 hp of damage. Any healer, herbalist, shaman, or cleric can readily identify the powder, or PCs can discover its purpose through experimentation. There is sufficient powder for 10 applications.

The hide is the fur of a rare spotted mountain leopard and can fetch up to 50 gp if sold to the right buyer.

**Area E – The Charnel Ruins:** *This once-proud edifice has fallen into ruin like the rest of the keep. All that remains of the building are fire-scarred high stone walls and toad-faced gargoyles leering from above. The singed, bronze doors – cast with hundreds of wailing demonic faces – are barred from the outside. The portal is marked with a single word drawn in flaking red paint: REPENT.*

When the keep fell to the forces of good, acolytes of the chaos god sought refuge within their chapel. Fearing to tread on unholy ground, the invaders barred the doors from without and set fire to the temple, burning the wicked acolytes alive.

It is a simple matter to open the portals. Heroes removing the great wooden beam can easily draw open the bronze portals by the enormous rings held within the maws of two fiendish demons.

Inside, the PCs discover a horrific scene:

*Six charred skeletons lie about the chapel, some crushed by burnt fallen beams. At the head of the chapel is a fountain depicting a squat, demonic toad. A foul, black ichor seeps from the toad's broad lips, pooling in the basin seated at the foot of the fountain.*

Even though the slaughter took place decades ago, the stench of charred flesh lingers in the air along with the sour scent of freshly burnt incense.

Brave PCs that dare to test the skeletons find that the charred bones are hot to the touch, as if the fire burned only yesterday. Cinders glow red and orange beneath each fallen bone.

A cursory inspection of the frog fountain reveals red gemstone eyes and jeweled fangs within the loathsome maw. All together, the 12 semi-precious stones are worth 150 gp.

The following items lie scattered about the temple and skeletons:

- A golden censer, hanging at the end of a long bronze chain, blackened from the heat. The censer is worth 65 gp and can be used to placate certain agents of Chaos (see below).
- A blackened iron coffer, half-buried in the rubble. The coffer is locked and must be picked (DC 15 pick locks) or smashed open (DC 12 Str). Inside are three cones of in-

cense wrapped in sanctified, unholy cloth stitched with golden signs of Chaos.

- Three scorched chainmail hauberks.
- Three blackened maces and one flail.

Retrieving any of the gear or the gems requires entering the chapel. Those stepping inside the temple immediately hear the crackling of cinders and feel the heat of the blackened earth beneath their feet. Though unsettling, this poses no threat to the heroes. Similarly, the charred skeletons offer no danger.

The same cannot be said, however, of the black ichor dribbling from the fountain's maw and collecting in the fetid basin. Heroes coming within 10 feet of the basin can feel the heat coming off of the toad-fountain. As the PCs come within 5 feet, the ooze animates and rolls up and out of the basin, attacking the nearest PC.

On the round following a successful pseudopod attack, the tar ooze ignites, inflicting 1d4 points of fire damage and setting fire to the unlucky PC. Putting out the fire requires 1 action and quickness on the part of the hero. ("Stop, drop and roll!" is sufficient, but PCs whose players are unable to succinctly describe *how* they put out the flaming tar burn for another round.)

The tar ooze can also be placated by swinging the charred censer, filling the fallen chapel with incense smoke. So long as the area is suffused with smoke, the tar ooze sits motionless, unmoving and still. There is sufficient incense in the censer to keep the ooze still for 5 rounds. The 3 cones sealed in the coffer can also burn for up to 5 rounds each.

The censer can also be used to placate the chaos leviathan lurking beneath the waves in area 1-4.

**Tar Ooze:** Init (always last); Atk pseudopod +4 melee (1d4 + ignite for additional 1d4 on following round); AC 10; HD 2d10; hp 10; MV 5', climb 5'; Act 1d20; SP half damage from slicing and piercing weapons; SV Fort +6, Ref -8, Will -6; AL N.

**Area F – Well of Souls:** *A barren ridge of black stone rises from the overgrown courtyard. A low stone wall marked with eerie sigils is built atop the crest of the stone, marking a well. A stout block and tackle frame supports a single thick chain that plunges into the inky blackness. A soft moan rises from the well, like a faint cry for help.*

Though resembling a normal well, the Well of Souls is far more sinister. For reasons unknown even to the chaos lords, the well opens up into an inter-dimensional nexus, permitting access to the raw stuff of proto-elemental chaos. Before the keep fell to the forces of Law, the well was used to condition living sacrifices. Now the inhabitants of the keep use the well to transform captives into the savage, half-feral beastmen.

Very little good can come from toying with the well, but heroes are nothing if not fools.

Those daring to peer into the depths of the well see a yawning darkness. Depth perception and spatial reality have no relationship within the well; it seems to fall away from the PCs even as they draw closer, forcing any PC that peers into the depths to succeed on a DC 13 Will save or pitch over the lip of the well. Adjacent heroes can attempt DC 15 Reflex saves to catch their falling comrade; otherwise the unfortunate soul



plummets down into darkness. The victim never strikes bottom; instead, his mind, body, and soul dissolve into nothingness, lost to the ceaseless winds of Chaos.

A falling PC has one last chance to catch himself—a DC 15 Reflex save to catch the chain, but the damage is already done.

Characters entering the well are subsumed by chaos and emerge from the well forever changed. As the PCs descend, damned souls circle about them, and the links of the chain grow tacky, then soft to the touch, and finally drip away like rivulets from a molten candle. The very being of the PC is flayed, with unpredictable results.

For every round spent within the well, the PC must roll 1d10, plus Luck modifier, on the minor corruption table (see DCC RPG core rulebook), as if he had rolled a 1 on a spell check.

Curiously, the well acts as both a boon and bane to wizards. Arcane spells cast within 50 feet of the well receive a +10 bonus to the caster's spell check. However, **each** spell cast automatically incurs a corruption (rolled normally on the minor corruption table). Attempts to invoke lawful patrons within the well's sphere of influence always fail.

**Area G - Sinkhole:** *A yawning sinkhole has devoured nearly a third of the courtyard, causing a tower and wall to collapse and plunge down into the depths. Mist billows up from the sinkhole, obscuring sight. Tortured faces and writhing forms appear briefly in the mists above your heads, only to dissolve back into nothingness as quickly as they appeared.*

The raw power emanating from the temple of Chaos (see area 1-5) has undermined the ground, causing the earth to collapse. Approaching the edge is risky—any additional weight can cause the earth to give way.

## 500 FEET OF ROPE? LET ME CHECK MY PACK!

So there is always the chance that—by either obscene miracle or shifty recordkeeping—the PCs actually have enough rope for the sinkhole at area G. Never mind that carrying that much medieval rope strains credulity. Where does descending through the nigh-endless mists get them?

Heroes that succeed in anchoring the rope and rappelling into the black emerge a mere 55 feet from the island (see area 1-5), with the chaos leviathan lurking just below the surface of the inky waters. Worse, after half the party has descended the rope, the beastmen charge from the tower (area H) and attack the party. If the beastmen win the battle, they sever the rope, sealing the surviving PCs within the depths of the underworld.





Heroes coming within 15 feet of the lip of the sinkhole have the eerie premonition that the earth is hollow beneath them, as if they were walking on a frozen lake. If the PCs come within 5 feet, the earth gives way. A PC must succeed on a DC 13 Reflex save to seize hold of the crumbling lip or plummet to his doom.

A PC can pull himself up over the lip with a desperate DC 15 Strength check. Other heroes can leap to his aid, but their weight causes the edge of the sinkhole to fall away, sending allies plummeting to their deaths and starting the cycle anew. Heroes can counteract the weak crust by splaying out, spread eagle. However, at the judge's discretion, large PCs or those encumbered by heavy armor may cause the earth to give way regardless.

Characters peering down into the writhing mists can see only 30 feet before their vision is entirely obscured by the billowing clouds of mist rising from below. While the goal of their quest lies exposed, over 500 feet below, descending the sinkhole is almost physically impossible. Heroes can rappel down the side of the sinkhole, but after 45 feet it opens into the ceiling of the yawning cave. Without several hundred feet of rope, the PCs will be forced to find another route to the caverns below.

**Area H – Tower of the Beast:** Flanked by crumbling stone walls, the moss-covered tower stands proud despite the ravages of time. A tall, rust-bound portal bars the tower's sole entrance, watched over by a leering demonic gargoyle. Rings of deep arrow slits pierce the thick walls, and overarching battlements loom high above.

Heroes trying the tower door discover it barred from within. Breaking down the door requires a DC 20 Strength check. Alternately, a PC armed with an axe or hammer can destroy the door with 5 minutes of hard labor.

The first PCs into the tower discover a hellish scene:

*The hot stench of rot rolls from the tower, raising bile in the back of your throat. The floor of the wide tower is covered in rotting hides of cattle, sheep and men. A narrow staircase spirals around the tower wall. Dark forms hang from chains spiked through the wall – surely these are your fellow countrymen!*

*A pack of snarling beast-men slowly emerges from the shadows, bloody spears clutched in their gnarled hands!*

The beastmen lurk within the tower, trying to lure the PCs inside one at a time. An enormous beastman champion—a seven-foot monstrosity with the head of a feral bull—crouches atop the spiral staircase directly above the door, attacking the PCs with surprise from above.

The beastmen fight so long as the champion lives, then do their best to flee the tower into the courtyard. They refuse to surrender but take captives if they are able. Captured PCs are bound in chains and hung upside-down from the arrow slits

like their fellow villagers, before being subjected to the soul-warping energies of the Well of Souls, transforming the erstwhile heroes into feral beastmen.

The beastman champion wears a large silver torc hung with bleached skulls. Each skull is branded with a chaos rune. By virtue of the craftsmanship and precious metal, the torc is worth 100 gp, but when donned by a chaotic wizard, the torc grants a +1 bonus to all spell checks. Destroying the torc grants lawful aligned PCs a bonus of +1 XP, while earning them the notice (and perhaps enmity) of the gods of Chaos.

**Beastman Champion:** Init +1; Atk axe +2 melee (1d6+2); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

**Beastmen (6):** Init +1; Atk spear +0 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 4 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

The tower floor and the steps spiraling up the wall are covered in gore-covered furs. Searching the chamber scatters waves of fleas and lice. Worse, there is a 1 in 6 chance that the searcher encounters a rot grub hidden amid the rotting hides. On a successful attack, the grub burrows into the PC's flesh, working its way toward the heart in 1d4+2 rounds. Digging out the grub requires a DC 15 Agility check, causing 1 hp of damage per attempt. Barbers, surgeons, and other PCs with a medical background receive a +2 bonus to the check. If the grub isn't removed in time, it burrows into the victim's heart, resulting in instantaneous death.

**Rot Grub:** Init (always last); Atk burrow +0 melee (special); AC 10; hp 1; MV N/A; Act 1d20; SP burrow (causes instant death 1d4+2 rounds after successful attack); SV Fort +0, Ref -4, Will +2; AL N.

Persistent searchers discover a small alcove set in the floor, hidden by piles of rotting hides. The alcove contains loose coins (53 sp, 23 gp, and 2 pp) and an elven short sword set with emeralds (worth 150 gp) wrapped in a simple green cloak. Sewn into the hem of the cloak is a treasure map inked on vellum and leading to the location of the judge's choosing. Three torches, still flammable despite their age, are set in sconces on the wall.

Finally, if an unlucky player has lost all his PCs in the course of the adventure, the judge can opt to allow the PCs to rescue villagers from their chains on the walls. Nursed back to consciousness, the unfortunate souls offer to join the party, becoming PCs under the players' control. Regrettably (though perhaps mercifully), freed villagers can recall nothing of their ordeal after their capture. The player should roll up the 0-level PCs per the standard rules. At the judge's discretion, up to six PCs can be added to the party from the captives hanging in the tower.

If none of the players need replacement PCs, the freed captives are too weak and terrified to do anything other than flee back to their village. Regardless of how many captives are freed, they are but a third of the total villagers kidnapped from the characters' home.

## THE STARLESS SEA

**General Features:** Unless noted otherwise, the dungeon is dark and the air is cool and wet.

Doors are unlocked but swollen with moisture and must be forced open. A door can be forced open in a single round with a DC 15 Strength check. Otherwise, battering down the door takes 1d4+1 rounds, alerting anyone (or anything) lurking beyond.

Judges should note that there is little native light in the underworld. PCs can use the torches found in area H, the glowing skulls from area 1-2, or improvise their own light sources.

**Area 1-1 – Trail of Gold:** *You pause for an instant on the broad stone steps. The hint of gold glimmers at the edge of your light, several steps below.*

Closer inspection reveals the glimmer to be entirely mundane: three gold pieces forgotten on the gray stone step. The coins were dropped by the beastmen transporting the wealth of precious coins from area 1-1A to 1-5.

The beastmen failed to fully close the vault's secret door. The entrance to area 1-1A can be found with only a cursory inspection. However, PCs that don't pause to search miss the entrance to area 1-1A.

A second concealed passageway stands opposite the the vault, leading to area B-1. The narrow crack in the passage wall is readily noticed by attentive PCs.

**Area 1-1A – The Empty Vault:** *The narrow hall is lined with cut stone blocks. Dusty cobwebs hang from the low ceiling and time itself seems to weigh upon this ancient place. A trio of upended chests rest in the shadows in the rear of the chamber amid a scattering of coins. Tracks in the dust record the path of recent looters.*

This vault once held the amassed wealth of the chaos lords. Unfortunately, the beastmen have already transported the bulk of the wealth to area 1-5. All that remains are three chests and the spilled coins littering the floor (1d20 cp, 1d12 sp, 1d8 gp). While all of the chests are unlocked and emptied of wealth, the beastmen missed a secret compartment hidden in the base of the second chest.

While the hidden compartment is easy to discover (the floor of the chest is 4 inches too high), opening the compartment poses a danger. The compartment can be opened by sliding a false panel in the back of the chest. Unless the PC also succeeds on a DC 15 Reflex save, the PC is struck by a slim, scything blade trap, inflicting 1d4 points of damage and slicing off 1d2 fingers.

Hidden inside the compartment are two silver rings set with emeralds (worth 15 gp each), a silk tabard stitched with the sigil of Chaos (worth 5 gp) and a steel vial containing two doses of black lotus oil. Characters imbibing the lotus oil gain 1d10 hp for 1 hour, but at the end of the hour lose any hp gained from the oil and must succeed on a DC 10 Fortitude save or take 1d4 points of damage.





**Area 1-2 – The Dread Hall:** *Wide stone steps descend into a long hall. The walls are decorated with elaborate tile mosaics depicting foul ceremonies to horrific and baleful fiends. The walls are slick with condensation and black algae. The condensation runs in rivulets and collects in a long, brackish pool set in the center of the hall.*

Have the PCs make a Luck check; on a DC 15 result, a character feels a strange compulsion to inspect the base of the pool, then pick up and carry off a skull once discovered (as described below).

When the cult was young and strong, this chamber was used by acolytes to prepare their minds and souls for the awesome presence of the scions of Chaos. Now the chamber has fallen into disuse, scarcely noticed by the beastmen as they pass freely between the underworld and the sunlit lands above.

Characters inspecting the mosaics discover three distinct scenes, as shown on the player handouts (see inside cover):

- A hooded form standing atop a towering stone on the edge of a vast lake; seven tentacles wave from the water. *This mosaic offers a clue as to the means of crossing the sea (area 1-4).*
- Two armored figures, holding a single flail, commanding legions of hunched, beast-like warriors. *This mosaic depicts the brothers Molan and Felan, prior to their defeat by the armies of Law.*
- A low island set in the center of a black lake. A golden pyramid is set atop the island, and a figure armed with a flail is preparing to sacrifice a maiden. *This hints to the nature of the chaos lord and the fate of the kidnapped villagers.*

A casual inspection of the chamber reveals four nooks concealed in the corners of the hall. Each nook contains a single hooded robe, embroidered with bizarre sigils stitched in silver thread. While the robes are mold-eaten and rotten to the touch, they can still be worn as disguises in dim light. The beastmen retain a subconscious memory of the sacred order of Chaos, and, unless provoked, will not attack anyone wearing a robe. Of course, if a PC wearing a robe does attack a beastman or chaos beast, any pretense is immediately ruined.

The fetid pool set in the center of the chamber is thick with black algae and natural slime. Narrow in relation to its length, the pool is 20 feet deep, and its base is lined with hundreds of skulls.

If a character peers into the pool, a skull rises to the surface, a faint glow emanating from its eye sockets. The skulls are the last remnants of challengers that sought to dethrone the chaos

lords and still hold a spark of their former spirit, bearing an unholy hatred for the brothers Felan and Molan.

The skulls can be lifted from the murky water and glow brighter the closer they are brought to area 1-5. Though the skulls and their infernal spirits are not lawful-aligned by any means, their hatred can aid the characters in their battle against the chaos lord (see area 1-5A).

If the PCs are brazen enough to enter the pool and dig through the mounds of skulls, they discover a simple bronze ring, roughly 12 inches in diameter, set into the floor of the pool. Rotating the ring 90 degrees causes the floor of the pool to fall away, taking the brackish water, the skulls, and the unfortunate soul that released the valve along with it. The PC is sucked down a narrow tube, slick with algae, into area 1-3. A character sucked down the tube must succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or take 1d4 damage as he crashes into area 1-3. Those descending the tube by normal means can climb down to the pool below without risk.

**Area 1-3 – The Hidden Pool:** *The inky cave is nearly submerged with water, the slick ceiling dripping with black algae. Stalactites hang to the dark water's surface, obscuring the far side of the cavern. Half-submerged along the banks of the pool, skulls leer at you through empty eye sockets. The chamber is as still as a tomb, save for the slow drip of water and slime from above.*

The chamber's ceiling is a mere 4 feet above the floor and only 2 feet above the water's surface. The water runs in a trickle out the far side of the chamber, down through the rubble, and finally empties into the underground sea (area 1-4).

The chamber can be discovered by opening the valve in area 1-2 or by inquisitive PCs exploring the rocky slope above area 1-4.

The floor of the pool is covered in a slurry of bones and mineral-heavy silt from above. Lucky searchers (DC 12 Intelligence or a DC 12 Luck check) may discover a plain iron ring set with three small rubies on a finger bone. When held in total darkness, the rubies pulse like faint embers. This seemingly simple ring is actually the *band of fire*, an arcanist antiquity belonging to the enigmatic wizard Sezrakan. When worn by low-level characters, the *band* has the following powers:

- The wearer may attempt to cast *magic missile* thrice per day.
- The wearer may attempt to cast *fire resistance* twice per day.
- The wearer may attempt to cast *scorching ray* once per day.
- Finally, when worn by a wizard, the ring grants a +1 bonus to all spell checks. A natural 1 still results in failure and possibly worse.

Non-wizards attempting to harness the powers of the *band* make spell checks at 1d16 + class level, but do not add their Personality or Intelligence modifiers. Penalties for bulky armor still apply. Wizards using the *band of fire* make their spell checks per the core rules.

Note that while non-wizards may attempt to use the first three powers, they are also subject to any corruption or misfires resulting from failed spell checks. At the judge's discretion, the *band* may grant additional powers to powerful wizards (5<sup>th</sup> level and above).

This is a powerful magic item. If other adventurers hear of the PCs' possession of it, they can expect to be challenged.

**Area 1-4 – The Starless Sea:** *The wide stone steps run down to the dark-sand beach of a vast underground sea. Far out across the water, you can make out a golden glow through the gloom. An enormous menhir stands at the water's edge, dark waves lapping at its intricately carved faces.*

*Past the towering standing stone, a dragon-prowed longship emerges from the darkness, its hull scrawled with forbidding sigils and runes that glow a sickly green in the dim light. The ship draws to a stop some 50 feet offshore.*

*The beat of distant drums and far-off wails of terror mixes with the quiet lapping of the waves.*

A quick inspection confirms the beach is churned by hundreds of bestial feet, talons, and hooves. Characters pausing to search carefully also discover a single trail of human footprints—tracks left by their fellow villagers chained together—and 1d6 silver coins.

The Starless Sea presents two puzzles to the characters, one apparent and one hidden. The first: how best to board the enchanted ship. The second: how to avoid the wrath of the chaos leviathan lurking beneath the waves of the wine-dark sea.

The menhir is carved with mesmerizing spirals that are almost impossible to trace. Characters that attempt to trace or decipher the carvings are struck by the overwhelming urge to sacrifice their fellows to the leviathan lurking beneath the waves. The PC must succeed on a DC 15 Will save or attack his nearest fellow with the intent of offering his victim's still-beating heart to the leviathan. The geased PC can attempt to shrug off the compulsion once per round; having made a successful Will save, the PC cannot be compelled by the menhir again.

A narrow series of steps wind up the surface of the menhir. Those climbing to the peak of the standing stone discover that the top of the stone has been fashioned into a platform. A shallow bowl has been cut into the center of the platform. The bowl is partially filled with hardened wax, and the stub of a red candle sits atop the mounds of wax.

**The Dragon Ship:** Boarding the enchanted ship can be as simple as the PCs swimming out into the sea and clambering aboard the ship. This inevitably draws the wrath of the leviathan: a tentacle slithers after the first swimmer that climbs aboard. See below for details on the battle sure to follow.

Relighting the candle—or lighting a new candle—atop the menhir draws the enchanted ship to shore, allowing characters to board in safety.

Once all the PCs have boarded, the ship sets course for the island temple at the heart of the sea (area 1-5). However, halfway through the journey, the PCs must deal with the leviathan (see below).

The ship can also be drawn to shore by lighting the censer (found in area E).

The dragon ship is equipped with oars and, failing magic, can be rowed to the island (area 1-5).

**Treating with the Leviathan:** Upon discovering the underground sea, the original chaos lords struck a pact with the fell beast, and their contract holds to this day. Crossing the underground sea requires successfully dealing with the leviathan lurking in the watery depths. As soon as the enchanted dragon ship crosses halfway to the island, the leviathan's tentacles emerge from the black waters. Unless the PCs succeed in placating the leviathan within 5 rounds, two great tentacles wrap about the stern, arresting the ship's progress across the sea. The following round, the leviathan attacks the fools that would dare to cross its domain without offering the required tribute.

Pressed for time, the PCs are certain to come up with innovative and wild solutions to their dilemma. However the PCs attempt to treat with the leviathan, the judge is encouraged to entertain clever solutions and punish foolish ones. Following are some guidelines and indications to help the judge adjudicate the encounter:

- Burning incense in the censer dedicated to the forces of Chaos (found in area E) stills the great tentacles. The leviathan acknowledges its age-old pact, placing its tentacles at the feet of the summoner, before sliding back beneath the waves.
- Sacrificing one or more creatures to the leviathan (as depicted in area 1-2) appeases the leviathan but sorely offends any gods of Law. Characters taking this route damn themselves to the service of wicked gods, or worse, to the absence of any patron whatsoever. Alternately, PCs sacrificing more than 500 gp worth of goods (pouring them into the waves) can placate the chaos beast without offending the patrons of Law.
- False Sacrifice: PCs may attempt to distract the beast by "chumming" the water with corpses or blood. Depending on the sophistication of the ruse, this can buy the PCs time. In this case, the furious leviathan seizes the boat as it draws within 50 feet of the island-temple's shore.
- Battle the Leviathan: while battling the chaos beast is certainly direct, it likely ends in the destruction of the party, or at the very least the death of those unlucky enough to come within reach of the beast's 75-foot-long tentacles. The only hope of those electing to attack the beast lies in a critical hit; otherwise, their doom is nearly certain.

In battle, the leviathan first pulls PCs into the sea, then tears them limb from limb. On a successful attack, the leviathan can opt to forgo inflicting damage and instead loop around the PC's limbs or waist. The following round, the PC must succeed on a Strength check (DC 20) or be drawn into the dark waters.

Note that the leviathan's body never surfaces and only tentacles emerge dripping from the water. Characters diving beneath the waves to take the battle directly to the leviathan



discover an enormous beast covered by thousands of thickly hooded eyes and slack jaws—the horrified, tortured faces of all its previous victims.

Dealing 66 hp of damage to the leviathan does not slay the mighty creature. Rather, the beast withdraws from the battle, propelling itself deep beneath the waves. Any PCs still caught within its tentacles are permitted one last Strength check (DC 20) to wrest free of the leviathan’s mighty grip. Those that fail are drawn beneath the waves and never seen again—except perhaps as terrified, slack-jawed faces embedded into the leviathan’s gibbering hide.

**Chaos Leviathan:** Init +0; Atk tentacle +6 melee (1d8+2); AC 15; HD 10d10; HP 66; MV 50'; Act 6d20; SP grapple on successful hit (Str DC 20 to escape); SV Fort +10, Ref -2, Will +6; AL C.

**Area 1-5 – Temple of Chaos:** *The island draws closer, revealing the source of the golden glow: a towering ziggurat, with burning light radiating from within the sliver-thin cracks between its massive stone blocks.*

*A wide ramp circles the edifice, sloping to the top of the temple. Hordes of beastmen crowd the ramp, howling to the darkness, hammering on massive hide drums and pushing a terrified string of prisoners to the ziggurat’s glowing peak. High atop the temple, you can make out a fearsome silhouette of an enormous armored figure, wreathed in infernal smoke lit from below.*

The ziggurat serves as a mystical forge designed for a single purpose: reuniting the spirit of the chaos lord with a physical body. The beastmen are driving the kidnapped villagers up the ziggurat to be slaughtered, their bodies pitched into the molten heart of the ziggurat along with a king’s ransom in gold, silver, and copper. A beastman shaman reigns over the ceremony, hoisting an effigy of the chaos lord high into the smoke. While the effigy cannot fool PCs reaching the uppermost level of the ziggurat, it is sufficient to deceive characters peering up from below.

PCs disguised as chaos priests (with the robes from area 1-2) or as beastmen (with the hides and furs from area H) can pass through the throngs of beastmen with little difficulty. The judge should call for Personality checks to maintain the tension, but the beastmen are lost in religious fervor and not expecting infiltrators within their midst. Of course, if the PCs attack either the beastmen or the mock chaos lord, the con is instantly detected.

If the characters haven’t adopted a ruse, gaining the peak of the ziggurat is more difficult. The beastmen do not immediately notice the PCs’ arrival; if the PCs sneak and climb along beneath the ramp, there is a slim chance they can draw close to the peak of the ziggurat before being discovered. The lead PC must make a series of Agility checks with increasing difficulty to avoid notice as the party climbs higher up the temple. Circling the first level requires a DC 10 Agility check; circling the second, a DC 15 check; ascending the third level, DC 20. Climbing from the third level to the peak of the ziggurat immediately alerts the beastmen to the characters’ presence, but the PCs gain a free surprise round. (Thieves can use their skills in place of an Agility check.)

Finally, if the PCs opt to attack the beastmen from the onset and take the temple by storm, they will pay the price in blood.

Again, the PCs are granted a free surprise round before the beastmen turn their full might on the audacious characters. There are 22 beastmen crowded onto the ramp, with another 3 acolytes atop the ziggurat attending the beastman shaman.

**Beastmen (22):** Init +1; Atk spear +0 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

**Area 1-5A – Atop the Temple:** PCs reaching the peak of the ziggurat discover a horrifying scene:

*The peak of the temple is dominated by a vast, smoking pit that glows with a hellish light. A mighty beastman hoists an effigy of a fearsome armored figure high into the swirling clouds as the prisoners are hurled screaming, one after another, into the pit. A trio of snarling beastmen upends woven baskets, pouring thousands of coins in after your fellow villagers, producing gouts of hissing smoke and flame! All about you is the thundering cacophony of drums and bestial howls as the bizarre ritual nears its climax!*

However the PCs decide to reveal themselves, the beastmen swarm towards the PCs while the shaman and his acolytes do their best to finish the ritual. The beastmen on the ramp do not fight to kill, but rather try to seize the PCs, bear them to the pit, and hurl the characters into the sacrificial flames. A PC is seized on a successful attack and must succeed on a DC 15 Strength check or be borne 15 feet up the ramp towards the pit. Adjacent beastmen making successful attacks on the same PC increase the difficulty of the Strength check by +2 per attack. On the PC’s own turn, he can do nothing but attempt to escape the grapple with another Strength check.

Characters carried this way to the pit are hurled into the flames and permitted one final save (Reflex DC 15) to catch hold of the edge of the pit. Anyone failing this check plunges to his death in the magma below.

Unlike their fellows, the shaman and his acolytes understand the gravity of the PCs’ presence and fight to kill. If the PCs reach the peak of the ziggurat, the shaman howls to the darkness above and pitches the chaos lord’s effigy into the pit. This immediately extinguishes the flames and plunges the cavern into darkness. The only light remaining is the hellish glow emanating from the pit.

Characters with a view of the pit see the sacrificial bodies and coins consumed by a pool of unholy magma. The effigy bursts into flame, magically drawing in the flesh and gold-steeped magma. Animated by the spirit of the chaos lord, the glowing effigy emerges from the magma, rapidly cooling into a hardened, blackened form. One round later, the rock crust shatters, revealing the fully-armored body of the chaos lord: a hellish, horned humanoid, with a single, cyclopean eye that blazes with infernal light. Molan emerges from his unholy forge and strides into battle, hammering down foes with his triple-headed spiked flail. The skull-faced chaos lord eagerly fights to the death, madly reveling in the destruction of life.

Any skulls brought from the pool in area 1-2 flare bright with hatred. The skulls can be hurled at the chaos lord (Agility check, DC 10 to hit); the skulls shatter on impact, erupting in flame and causing 1d6+1 damage to the chaos lord. Any immediately-adjacent targets take half damage (Reflex save, DC 12 to avoid taking damage altogether).

**The Destruction of the Chaos Lord:** Upon taking 20 hp of damage, the body of the chaos lord dissolves back into magma, the chaos lord's spirit unable to sustain its hold on its physical form. The flail and the demon armor fall to the ground, the sole remnants of their fallen master.

If the PCs take up either the flail or the armor within 5 rounds, the magma surges back to life with unholy fury, forming a pillar of flaming brilliance. The magma lashes out at any PC within 10' (Atk +2 melee; dmg 1d4+3). But even the chaos lord's hatred cannot sustain this form for long: regardless of whether the PCs deal it damage or not, the pillar collapses back into formlessness on the third round, never to rise again.

This true death of the chaos lord triggers the destruction of his temple and cavern. A low rumble rolls through the cavern, building to a deafening roar. Massive stone slabs peel away from the cavern's ceiling and fall into the sea. Waves crash up the sides of the ziggurat, even as sizzling magma seeps through the seams in the stone blocks. It should be apparent to the PCs that their time atop the chaos lord's temple is drawing to a close. The PCs have only 1d6+2 actions to escape to the dragon ship before the western cavern collapses, driving a towering wall of water 30 feet over the top of the ziggurat. The judge should not warn the players about their characters' impending doom. Rather, the judge should make the roll in secret, describe the cataclysmic acts taking place within the cavern, and ask the players to describe their PCs' actions. Reaching the ship and climbing aboard requires 2 actions.

When the roaring wave engulfs the ziggurat, those aboard the ship are swept towards area 1-6, and all others perish amid the dark waters. Characters that fail to reach the ship in time can attempt a final DC 17 Luck check to pull themselves aboard.

**Favor from the Gods:** The characters' patrons look on with favor as the chaos lord is destroyed. Characters worshipping good or lawful deities, or those with supernatural patrons who would be opposed to the reign of Chaos, receive a permanent +1 bonus to Luck when the chaos lord is destroyed.

**Treasure:** A king's ransom of gold and silver is consumed in the chaos lord's rite, but not all the wealth is lost; ample coinage remains scattered about the top ziggurat. A PC can sweep up 1d20 gp and 2d20 sp per action.

Finally, there remains the arms and armor of the chaos lord himself. Topped with blackened iron and ringed with spikes, the chaos lord's *spiked flail* is a weapon of great power. In addition to being +1 to both hit and damage, once per day the wielder of the *spiked flail* can wreath the weapon in flames for 3 rounds, inflicting an additional 1d6 points of damage on a successful strike.

The chaos lord's armor is plate mail forged of blackened iron. While it has no magical properties, its superior construction grants its wearer a Fortitude save (DC 20) against the effects of critical hits.

Taking up either the *spiked flail* or the armor requires an action.

**Chaos Lord Animated Effigy:** Init +0; Atk flail +6 melee (1d6+1); AC 13; HD 5d10; hp 20; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +4; AL L.

**Beastman Shaman:** Init +1; Atk effigy +0 melee (1d4+2); AC 10; HD 2d8; hp 6; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +3; AL C.

**Beastmen Acolytes (3):** Init +1; Atk claw +0 melee (1d4); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 5 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

**Area 1-6 – Into the Unknown:** *The towering wave propels you with terrifying speed towards the distant cavern wall! Ahead, through a sea of towering whitecaps and the debris of falling boulders you spy the mouth of a narrow cave! The dragon-prowed ship rides down the crest of the giant wave and shoots into the rocky maw, the howling surf crashing all around you!*

The ending of the adventure (and the start of the next) is entirely up to the judge. Area 1-6 can open into an above-ground river, seated deep in the base of a ravine, or plunge the PCs deeper beneath the surface of the earth. The former allows the PCs to return to their home village, lick their wounds, and consider their next quest. The latter plunges the PCs into another adventure before their first has scarcely ended.

Whatever the judge's whim, XP and Luck should be awarded prior to the beginning of the next adventure, for – be it by luck or skill – surviving PCs have surely earned their just rewards.

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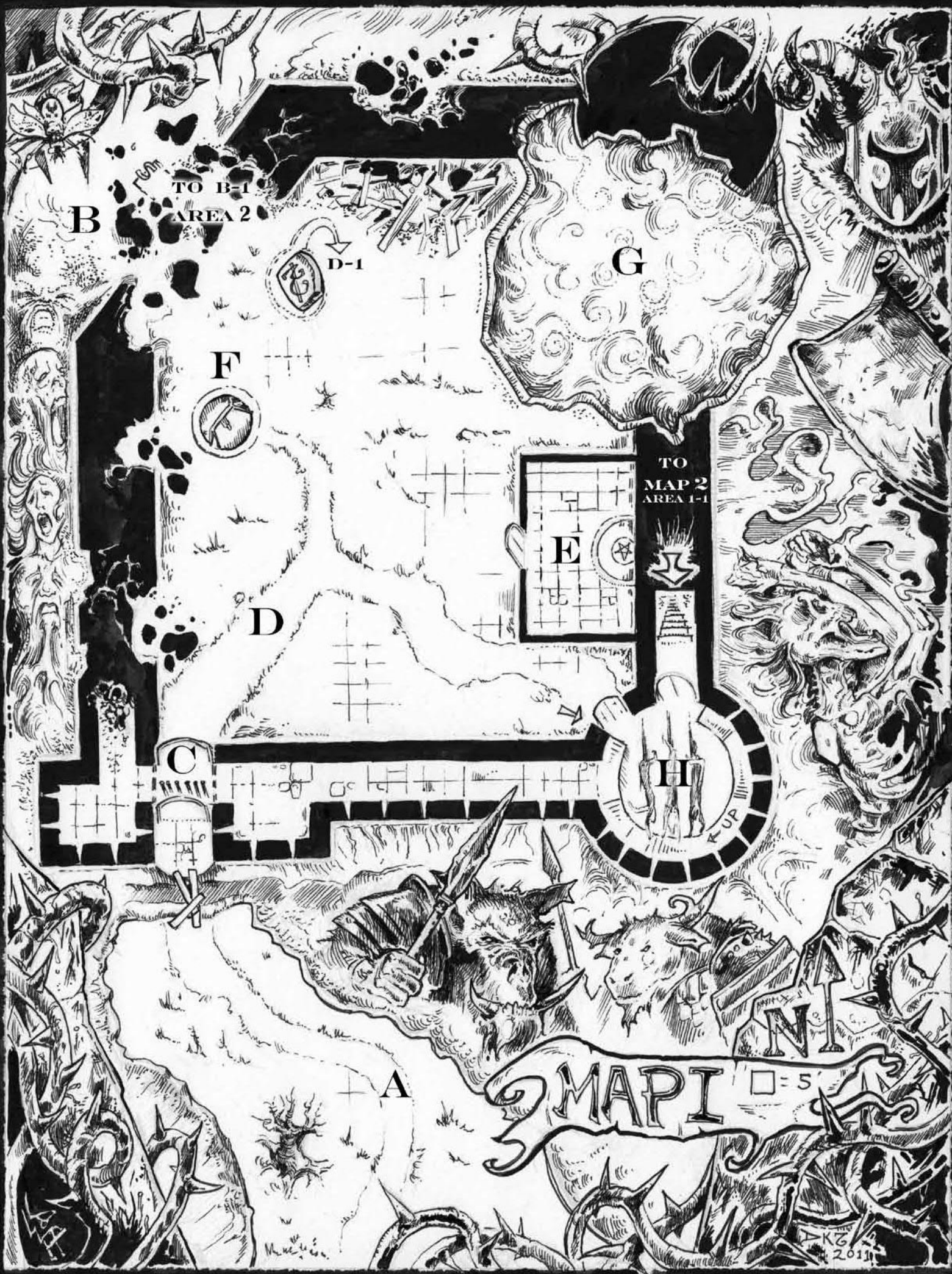
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## THE SUMMONING PITS (AREA H)

*Publisher's Note: This adventure module was the first release for DCC RPG and has proven very popular. I am very excited that it has reached the milestone of a second printing. In honor of this second printing, I asked author Harley Stroh what he would have done differently if he had the chance to do it again. He answered that he wanted to expand on the vine horrors encountered early in the adventure. Here, then, is the new addition to the adventure. Area H can be encountered as the adventurers progress along the ramparts toward area 1-2 in the original adventure. Enjoy! – Joseph Goodman*



The summoning pits were used by the lords of chaos to bolster their strength in the war against the forces of Good. While they failed in this regard, the lords were successful in summoning two powerful extra-dimensional beings: a devil, now trapped within a greatsword (see area H-3), and a powerful, alien, plant-like entity – the source of the vine horrors (found in area H-5).

The ruins are warmed by heat generated from the decomposing vines. The air is moist and rich with the smell of rot. The walls and floors of the sub-level are sticky with condensation and PCs are constantly assaulted by drops of sappy water falling from the ceiling.

The remaining magic circle in area H-3 burns with green flames, casting faint ambient light throughout the sub-level. The effect won't be noticed in area H-1 unless the PCs extinguish all their light sources, but grows brighter as they near the summoning chamber. Standing within area H-3, the PCs can see as well as on a moonlit night, and have no need of torches or lanterns.

Thorny vines can be found in every chamber except H-3. They hang from the ceiling and walls, and spill like rope over the floors. The vines have bored through the ceilings and walls, but astute characters will notice that the vines seem to grow larger as the PCs near their source, area H-5.

The passage of time, combined with the effects of the chaos-rot and creeping vines, has wreaked havoc on the stone making up the sub-level's floor, walls and ceiling. The weakened stone crumbles in the hand, pulling away from the walls and ceiling like clods of hardened dirt. Scaling the crumbling walls is difficult (DC 17 climb sheer surfaces or Agility check), unless the PCs are willing to climb on the nearly ubiquitous vines (DC 10).

**Area H-1 – The Hot Pits:** *Flagstones here have fallen away to reveal a yawning hole in the floor. Five gore-spattered chains hang in the pit from spikes anchored in the floor. An intense heat wafts up from below, accompanied by the stench of rot.*

The original entrance to the summoning chambers collapsed long ago; now the sole entrance is through the collapsed floor. Three feet across, the lip of the hole is coated with blood, bits of hair and bone. (If any player has been reduced to two or fewer characters, the PCs also discover large wicker baskets here, stuffed with bound 0-level villagers. While bereft of equipment or weapons, the villagers are more than happy to aid their rescuers in their battle against the beastmen and their masters.)

The chains hang down in the darkness below, and vary from 13' to 23' in length. Each chain ends in large barbed hooks, on

each hook is the corpse of a villager. It is 30' from the lip of the pit to the floor.

The beastmen use the pits to grow vine horrors. Living victims are lowered into the pit, infected with the vines, and then hauled back out again to be used in defense of the keep.

There are 7 bodies total hanging from the chains, each host to a young vine horror. The horrors cannot climb the chains on their own, but eagerly attack if they are hauled from the pits or if PCs attempt to climb down past the horrors en route to area H-2.

Ending the combat is as simple as releasing the chains from their anchors. If the horrors are dropped from their anchors, their bodies explode upon striking the floor in area H-2.

**Combat:** If both vine attacks from a single vine horror strike the same victim in one round, they entangle the target, automatically inflicting 1d6 points of crushing and choking damage on the following round. An entangled victim can win free with a DC 10 Strength check.

**Vine Horrors, Young (7):** Init +2; Atk vine +2 melee (1d4); AC 13; HD 2d6; hp 7 each; MV 20'; Act 2d16; SP entangle (automatic 1d6 damage on next round if both vine attacks land; DC 10 Str check to escape); SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

**Area H-2 – Prison of Rope:** *The walls and floor of the ledge are threaded with vines – it is impossible to step anywhere without hearing the wet crunch of vines underfoot.*

Pools of sticky sap have collected on the floor. The pools are easily avoided, but if the PCs investigate the viscous red fluid, they find it faintly acidic, eating away at the flesh of their fingertips and weakening the soles of the boots. Consumed, the liquid inflicts 1d5 damage before destroying the unfortunate soul's digestive tract.

The chamber's exits are obscured by the vines. In order to enter the passageways, or go down the steps, the PCs must squeeze past, or cut their way through the vines. If the vines are cut, a torrent of acidic crimson sap gouts forth; PCs within 5' of the cut vine take 1d8 damage (DC 10 Ref save to avoid). If, by some obscene spate of ill-luck, multiple vines are cut, the acid-sap rises to a depth of 2', inflicting damage for every round of contact.

The eastern stairs are built of the same crumbling stone as the walls. Inquisitive dwarves and masons alike quickly note the danger. The stairs collapse when weighted with 300 lbs or more, pitching characters 30' down into an empty pit below for 3d6 falling damage.

A pair of passageways exit either side of the chamber, and both are obscured by the vines. The exit to the north is lit by a flickering beryl light. The passage to the south appears to be the source of the vines, with the massive stalks filling nearly half the passageway.

**Area H-3 – Summoning Chamber:** *A pentagram, circumscribed by a circle of runes, is carved into the stone floor. Sickly green flames lick and dance within the circle, casting the chamber in a ghoulish light. In the center of the circle floats a greatsword, wreathed in emerald flames.*

Here the chaos lords successfully summoned a fiend and bound its hellish spirit to a sword. However, the chaos lords were never able to break the devil's spirit, and the fiend-blade has languished here ever since, yearning for slaughter.

The flames within the circle give off no heat or smoke; more accurately, the intense temperatures and choking fumes are held in check by the circle of runes.

Inanimate objects are incinerated as they cross the circle; rope burns like a fuse, swords melt into slag, poles catch fire and are reduced to crumbling cinders. Even stones shatter, as trace amounts of moisture are heated into steam, causing the stones to explode.

Any living creature crossing the runes (either above or below) is instantly transported *inside* the circle, and begins to asphyxiate, taking 1d3 points of Stamina damage per round, falling unconscious when his Stamina reaches 3, and dying when his Stamina reaches 0. Lost Stamina is restored immediately if the PC escapes the circle alive.

Once inside the circle, PCs find it impossible to escape via mundane means: living creatures cannot pass the circle and non-living things are incinerated. Magic readily pierces the circle, but PCs trapped without spells or divine aid face certain death. Predictably, the fiend-blade offers an escape.

The flaming, beryl sword contains the spirit of the trapped devil. Mastering the sword requires great force of will (DC 15 Personality check). Failing the check, the PC can also elect to

sacrifice 1d3 points of Personality, exerting his will over the sword. A character that successfully masters the sword can take up the flaming brand and strike down the invisible barrier; a total of 3 hp damage shatters the barrier, freeing the PC in an explosive rush of heat and smoke, followed by an influx of oxygen. See sidebar for additional details on the blade and regaining lost Personality.

Characters that attempt to wield the blade before mastering the fiend are engulfed in beryl flames, taking 1d10 points of damage per round.

**Area H-4 – Stairs:** *Dozens of thick, braided vines have wormed their way up the steep stone steps, nearly filling the stairway. The walls, ceiling and vines are all slick with moisture billowing up from below.*

The vines are extremely slick, and unless the PCs take precautions, the descent to area H-5 is fraught with peril. These precautions need not be elaborate – simply tying off to one another, or anchoring a rope is sufficient – but those failing to do so must make DC 10 Agility checks as they descend the stairs.

Characters failing the check slip down the slick vines and shoot out into the rift at the base of the steps. Characters can attempt a DC 15 Reflex save to catch themselves on the vines before plummeting into the abyss, but those who fail vanish down into darkness, never to be seen again. (Or, at the judge's pleasure, returning as horrid vine-liches much later in the campaign.)

## THE FIEND-BLADE

In order to wield the sword, a character must first master the fiend (DC 15 Personality check). Failing the check, a PC must focus all his will on mastering the sword, an exhausting task that reduces the wielder's Personality score by 1d3 points. If a PC ever fumbles the Personality check, or allows his Personality to drop to 3 or less, the blade possesses the character, working to cause the most chaos and destruction possible. The blade remains in control of its former master until the PC is slain or disarmed.

Characters can recover lost Personality in two ways: Rest (recovering 1 point per day), or by using the blade to inflict chaos and ruin (recovering 1 point of Personality per sentient creature slain, or for each ruinous act committed in the name of chaos). The specific nature of these acts are left to the judge's determination, but should be suitably severe.

The sword possesses limited telepathy (range 20') and the judge is encouraged to play out these battles of will. The blade can present a devilish charm, but this facade conceals the absolute, unredeemable desire to inflict cruelty and harm on the living.

The fiend-blade inflicts damage as two-handed sword, capable of striking magical, ethereal and astral creatures. When wielded by a Chaos-aligned PC, the blade erupts with blue-green flames that inflict an extra 1d3 damage to flammable creatures.

Finally, by once again exerting his will, a character can command the following effects. Note that each specific effect requires an additional Personality check or Personality sacrifice. (*Example: If a character wanted to increase the blade's attack bonus to +1 for a battle, and also needed to cast magic shield, he would need to make two DC 20 Personality checks, or sacrifice Personality points twice.*)

- **DC 20 Personality check, or 1d5 Personality points:** Increase the blade to +1 to hit and damage for the duration of a single battle; *magic shield* (1d20 spell check); +3 to one saving throw.
- **DC 25 Personality check, or 2d5 Personality points:** Increase the blade to +3 to hit and damage for the duration of a single battle; *magic missile* (1d24 spell check); negate a critical hit.
- **DC 30 Personality check, or 3d5 Personality points:** Increase the blade to +5 to hit and damage for the duration of a single battle; *dispel magic* (1d30 spell check); heal wielder 1d5 hit dice.





The base of the stairs open to a black rift in the earth, the source of the vine-god. Crossing the gap to area H-5 is readily accomplished, though there is no room for error. Long, ropey vines cross the gap over the rift to the altar chamber; all that is required of the PCs to cross is the courage to walk or crawl along the vines (DC 5 Agility checks). Characters failing the checks may desperately grab at the vines (DC 10 Reflex save), or plummet to their doom.

Otherwise, the craggy gap is a 15' leap, with edges of crumbling stone. Characters refusing to trust the vines can try to leap the gap (DC 15 Strength check) but those failing the check have no chance to catch themselves: the crumbling stone gives way beneath their grasping hands, pitching the screaming PCs down into darkness.

**Area H-5 – Face of the Slow God:** *A crude stone block stands amidst a mass of thick vines. Four skeletons, fully entangled in the vines, stand around the stone like grisly marionettes; a fifth is splayed out on the block, in mid-dissection. Each skeleton is a bipedal creature, taller than a man, but with the head of a bull, bear or bird, with bleached bones raised in an unholy caricature of worship.*

*Hanging all about the chamber are dozens of fleshy green globes. The floor of the chamber is covered in a thick soup of rotting vines and sap.*

The vines are the manifestation of an otherworldly being wholly alien to the races of elf, dwarf and man, but so powerful it can best be termed a god. It perceives time on a glacial scale: years are experienced as brief moments, and whole centuries pass like lazy summer days.

Curious about the notion of worship, the slow god is play-acting a sacrifice with the skeletal bodies of 5 beastmen. While motionless to the eyes of PCs, the vine-horrors are slowly acting out a ritual over the course many eons.

The vine-horrors ignore the PCs (which are scarcely perceptible to the slow god) unless the characters interfere with the ritual or attempt to take one the fruits (literally the body and blood of their god). Alerted, the horrors turn on the PCs with startling swiftness. The “sacrificial victim” atop the altar knits itself back together, and all 5 of the vine-horrors fight to repulse the PCs.

The fleshy globes hanging from the vines are fruits of the slow god. Characters consuming even a bite fall into a coma lasting 1d4 hours. While unconscious, they bear witness to the experience of the slow god, and upon awakening, the PCs have been transformed (roll 1d5):

**1d5 Blessings of the Slow God**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | +1d3 Personality                                   |
| 2 | Word of command, as per cleric spell (1d16), 2/day |
| 3 | +1d3 Stamina                                       |
| 4 | Lay on hands as per cleric ability (1d14), 3/day   |
| 5 | +1d3 Luck  |

Characters eating from the vines a second time fall into a coma – and cannot be awakened by means mundane or magical – for 1d3 years. Those eating from the vines a third time are subsumed into the personality of the plant thing, emerging decades later as agents of the slow god.

**Vine Horrors (5):** Init +2; Atk vine +2 melee (1d4); AC 13; HD 2d10; hp 10 each; MV 20'; Act 2d20; SP entangle (automatic 1d6 damage on next round if both vine attacks land; DC 15 Str check to escape); SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.



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