

BDKI-11

THE EVIL FROM BEYOND

A One-Round D&D LIVING GREYHAWK®
Bandit Kingdoms Regional Adventure

Version 1

by John E. Petty

Young girls are being killed in Rookroost during the Festival of Great Darkness. Are these random murders, the work of a crafty serial killer, or the beginning of something much, much worse? An adventure for characters level 1-6.

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This is an RPGA® Network scenario for the Dungeons & Dragons® game. A four-hour time block has been allocated for each round of this scenario, but the actual playing time will be closer to three hours. The rest of the time is spent in preparation before game play, and scoring after the game. The following guidelines are here to help you with both the preparation and voting segment of the game. Read this page carefully so that you know and can communicate to your players the special aspects of playing an RPGA scenario.

PREPARATION

First you should print this scenario. This scenario was created to support double-sided printing, but printing it single sided will work as well. There is enough room along the inside margin to bind the adventure, if you desire.

Read this entire adventure at least once before you run your game. Be sure to familiarize yourself with any special rules, spells, or equipment presented in the adventure. It may help to highlight particularly important passages.

When you run an RPGA D&D adventure we assume that you have access to the following books: the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*. We also assume that you have a set of dice (at least one d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, and d20), some scrap paper, a pencil, an RPGA scoring packet, and your sense of fun. It is also a good idea to have a way to track movement during combat. This can be as simple as a pad of graph paper and a pencil, as handy as a vinyl grid map and chits, or as elaborate as resin dungeon walls and miniatures.

Instruct the players either to prepare their characters now, or wait until you read the introduction, depending on the requirements of the scenario as described in the introduction.

Keep in mind that you must have at least four players (not counting the DM), for the game session to be a sanctioned RPGA event. As well, you cannot have more than seven players participating in the game.

Once you are ready to play, it is handy to instruct each player to place a nametag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name, race, and gender at the top. This makes it easier for the players (and the DM) to keep track of who is playing which character.

The players are free to use the game rules to learn about equipment and weapons their characters are carrying. That said, you as the DM can bar the use of even core rulebooks during certain times of play. For example, the players are not free to consult the *Dungeon Master's Guide* when confronted with a trap or hazard, or the *Monster Manual* when confronted with a monster.

Some of the text in this scenario is written so that you may present it as written to the players, while other text is for your eyes only. Text for the players will be in gray boxes. It's strongly recommended that you paraphrase the player text instead of reading it aloud. Some of this text is general and must be adapted to the specific situation or to actions of the player characters.

SCORING

After the players have completed the scenario or the time allotted to run the scenario has run out, the players and DM score the game. The RPGA has three ways to score its games. Consult your convention coordinator to determine which method to use for this scenario:

1. No-vote scoring: The players write their names and RPGA numbers on the scoring packet grid. You fill in the top of the grid. That is all. No one is rated. This method is used for people who are just playing for fun.
2. Partial scoring: The players rate the game master and the scenario on their player voting sheet, and provide personal information, but don't vote for other players. The game master rates the scenario and completes personal and event information, but does not rate the players as a team or vote for players. This method is used when there is no competition, but the event coordinator wants information on how the game masters are performing, or the game master wants feedback on his or her own performance.
3. Voting: Players and game masters complete the entire packet, including voting for best player. If this method is used, be sure to allow about 15-20 minutes for the players to briefly describe their characters to the other players, and about 5-10 minutes for voting. This method is used when the players want to know who played the "best" amongst the group, or when the adventure is run in tournament format with winners and prizes.

When using voting, rank the players in order of your voting choice while they are completing their forms, so that you are not influenced by their comments on your abilities. It's a good idea to have the players vote while you determine treasure and experience awards for the scenario.

After voting, give the Scoring Packet to your event coordinator.

This is a LIVING GREYHAWK Adventure. As a Living™ adventure, it is expected that players will bring their own characters with them. If players do not have a LIVING GREYHAWK character generated, get a copy of the current LIVING GREYHAWK character generation guidelines, a character sheet, and a LIVING GREYHAWK log sheet from your convention coordinator or the RPGA Web site, and then have any players without a character create one. Once all players have a LIVING GREYHAWK character, play can begin.

Along with the other materials that you are assumed to have in order to run a D&D game, it is also recommended that you have a copy of the LIVING GREYHAWK Gazetteer.

DETERMINING AVERAGE PARTY LEVEL (APL)

Because players bring their own characters to LIVING GREYHAWK games, this adventure's challenges are proportioned to the average character level of the PCs participating in the adventure. To determine the Average Party Level (APL):

- 1) Determine the character level for each PC participating in the adventure.
 - 2) If PCs bring animals that have been trained for combat (most likely war horses, dogs trained for war), other than those brought by virtue of a class ability (i.e., animal companions, familiars, paladin's mounts, etc.) use the following chart to determine the number of levels you add to the sum above. Add each character's animals separately. A single PC may only bring four or fewer animals of this type, and animals with different CRs are added separately.
- | CR | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1/4 and 1/6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 1/3 and 1/2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
- 3) Sum the results of 1 and 2, and divide by the number of characters playing in the adventure—round up.
 - 4) If you are running a table of six PCs, add one to that average.

By following these four steps, you will have determined the APL. Throughout this adventure, APLs categorize the level of challenge the PCs will face. APLs are given in even-numbered increments. If the APL of your group falls on an odd number, ask them before the adventure begins whether they would like to play a harder or easier adventure. Based on their choice, use either the higher or the lower adjacent APL.

APL also affects the amount of experience you may gain at the end of an adventure. If your character is three character levels or more either higher or lower than the

APL that this adventure is played at, that character will receive only half of the experience points awarded for the adventure. This simulates the fact that either your character was not as challenged as normal, or relied on help by higher-level characters to reach the objectives.

Note: LIVING GREYHAWK adventures are designed for APL 2 and higher. Three or four, or sometimes even five 1st-level characters may find difficulty with the challenges in a LIVING GREYHAWK adventure. If your group is APL 1 there are three things that you can do to help even the score.

- 1) Attempt to create a table of six 1st-level characters, or try to enlist higher-level characters to play at that table.
- 2) Advise characters to buy riding dogs to help protect them, and fight for them. All riding dogs are considered trained to attack. PCs who want their dog to attack they must succeed at a Handle Animal or Charisma check (DC 10). Failure indicates that the animal will not attack that round. This is a free action (spoken command) that may be attempted each round. If an animal loses half or more hp in a single round it flees, unless another check is successful.
- 3) A group of APL 1 adventurers who desire an extra hand can "enlist an iconic." The stats for the 1st-level versions of Tordek, Mialee, Lidda and Jozan are given at the end of each adventure. The group may pick one of these characters to joint them on this adventure. The DM controls that NPC.

If you are using a 591 CY adventure (campaign year 1) that uses the old Tiers, assume that the Tier multiplied by 2 is the APL suitable for that encounter.

IS IT A FULL MOON?

Since the hazards of lycanthropy are a current part of the LIVING GREYHAWK campaign, it may be necessary to determine if this adventure takes place during a full moon. For game purposes, the full moon lasts three days of each month. For a given scenario that does not state the phase of the moon, roll 1d10 before play begins. On a result of 1, the first day of the scenario is a night of the full moon (roll 1d3 to determine where in the sequence of three nights it falls).

LIFESTYLE

At the beginning of every scenario, each PC is required to pay upkeep costs matching the level of lifestyle they wish to maintain. The lifestyles, and the effects that each has on play, are:

Destitute: You have no living space, and must carry all your gear everywhere. You eat poor quality food. You wear a peasant outfit, your only change of clothes.

Poor: You sleep in poor accommodations, and eat poor quality food. You wear a peasant outfit, and have two sets of clothing.

Wild: You are living in the wild, either as a nomad, or perhaps in a cave. You hunt and gather your own food and your clothes consist of furs and/or hand-woven items. At times, food is scarce and you go hungry. But you survive. You must have six ranks in Wilderness Lore to avoid being Destitute.

Common: You have common lodgings, and eat common quality food. You have normal clothing for your profession (adventuring); nothing fancy. You probably have two or three sets of clothing.

Rough: You live in the wilderness, roaming a specific territory or living in a rude shack or tent. Your meals come from hunting and foraging, though you may cultivate a few small crops or herd some animals. You get by well enough to barter for equipment or to gather coins to pay for necessary repairs. You must have four ranks in Wilderness Lore otherwise you are Poor.

High: You stay in good quality lodgings, and eat good quality food. You wear anything in value up to courtier's outfits, and generally buy a new set of clothing every two weeks.

Luxury: You have luxurious accommodations (twice the cost of good accommodations), and you eat excellent foods. You can throw a banquet for your friends every day, and frequently do. You wear clothing up to the value of noble's outfit, and buy a new set of clothes every week.

Lifestyles come with bonuses or penalties to Diplomacy, Intimidate, Disguise, and Bluff skill checks. These penalties, shown below, should be applied at the DM's discretion, and can sometimes backfire—for example, a PC with a poor lifestyle would not have a penalty when talking to a beggar, but would when talking to a city official. A PC with a high lifestyle should have a penalty when dealing with a group of street thugs, where a PC with a destitute lifestyle might not.

DMs are encouraged to role-play these reactions whenever possible.

Lifestyle	Cost	Skill Modifier
Destitute	14 sp	-2
Poor	43 sp	-1
Common	12 gp	0
High	250 gp	+1
Luxury	500 gp	+2
Wild	14 sp	-1 (rural)/-2 (urban)
Rough	43 sp	-0 (rural)/-1 (urban)

ADVENTURE SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

Every year, the city of Rookroost celebrates the Festival of Great Darkness. This Festival lasts for an entire month, and celebrates the arrival of the dark time of the year, when the Oerth sleeps and renews itself. It is normally a time to prepare, both physically and spiritually, for the coming of winter and the long, cold months ahead.

This year however, the Festival has taken a rather more sinister turn. During each of the traditional feast days, a young girl has been found brutally murdered. There are thirteen feast days, twelve of which have passed at the time this adventure begins. (See Appendix 1 for a complete list of feast days.) Despite the best efforts of the Rookroost Police force, such as it is in the Bandit Kingdoms, the murders keep happening.

It is the morning after the 12th feast day that the PCs are brought into the adventure. The final Feast Day is two days away. While taking breakfast at an inn, one of the PCs receives a note from his mother that his sister has become the twelfth victim of the "Festival Killer." The note begs the PC to find the killer and prevent any more blood from being shed. Assumedly, the PC who receives the note will recruit his friends to help him in this mission.

The PC who receives the note may or may not have a sister. It is not up to you, as the DM, to dictate the character's background. If the PC decides to play along, saying that it is indeed their sister, then let them run with it. If the PC's natural response is to say they have no sister, then this is, in fact a case of mistaken identity, and the messenger has delivered the note to the wrong person. Either way the PCs can be drawn into the plot at this point.

During the course of the adventure, the PCs discover that the slaughter of the young women is part of an elaborate ritual designed to summon Q'Kal 'the Unspeakable' back to Oerth. Q'Kal is a powerful fiend, an entirely evil and malevolent creature who was banished a hundred years ago. The cult of Q'Kal, a radical offshoot of the temple of Iuz, who are responsible for the murders, believe that, at long last, the stars are aligned correctly for his return. They believe that they will be the favored of Q'Kal, and escape the doom that befalls the rest of humanity.

It is not possible for the PCs to shut down the cult in time to avert the Ritual of the Opening of the Gate, designed to summon Q'Kal. They are too widespread and too well organized. The best the players can hope to do is reseal the gateway before Q'Kal has a chance to fully manifest himself in this plane.

To do this, they need to find both the Book of Belphegius and the Seal of Skartoom. Armed with the Seal and the Book, they can, with a bit of luck, block Q'Kal from entering this plane, and consign him back to his home in the outer planes for another hundred years, until the stars are once again in proper alignment.

There's a problem with retrieving the Book and the Seal, however. The Book is currently in the possession of Zarthok the Mad, an ancient wizard who lives in the wastelands on the outskirts of the city. He lives in a black obsidian tower with no doors or windows that is only accessible by magical means. Zarthok lives in the upper level of the tower, where he has his workroom/laboratory. It is also where he keeps the Book of Belphegius. Zarthok has cast a *wish* spell on the book, duplicating *contingency* so that it cannot be opened or removed without a terrible *meteor swarm* instantly descending upon a small, nearby village. Obviously, by taking the book, hundreds of people will die, but without the book, humanity may well be done for. Of course, it is entirely possible that Zarthok is lying through his teeth. Oddly, he freely tells the adventurers where to find the Seal.

The Seal is equally problematic, however. With a *wish*, Zarthok has transformed the Seal into a beautiful woman named Zorinda. Zorinda lives in a small cottage outside of Rookroost where she has dedicated her life to caring for orphans and homeless children. She is aware of her current state and will do nearly anything to preserve the life she has been given. She tries to convince the PCs that they don't need the Seal, that the Book is enough. *Dispel magic* has no effect on her, but a spell from the Book of Belphegius can return her to the form of the Seal, but it also in effect, kills her. It is worth noting that if the PCs do return Zorinda to her former state, they now have 8-10 small children running around that need to be taken care of.

The two encounters above are designed to present moral dilemmas to the players. The DM is encouraged to let the players make their own decisions on these matters and not to provide them with an easy way out. The whole point is to encourage role-playing and spark discussion/argument. There are no right or wrong answers. There are, however, consequences of choices made.

Ultimately, the adventurers come face-to-face with the Cult of Q'Kal just in time to see them complete the Ritual of the Opening of the Gate. If they've managed to acquire the Book and the Seal, they are able to attempt to close the gateway before Q'Kal has a chance to fully enter. If not...

If, at this point, the PCs do not have either the Seal or the Book, all is not lost. The ending has been structured to allow for any possibility. Again, though, the players have to live with the consequences of the choices they make.

INTRODUCTION

Please read the following the players:

In the Bandit Kingdoms, heroes can be made, bought, or sold, all in the same day and all depending on the situation and the price. The question isn't what is the right thing to do in a given situation, but rather, what will be the ramifications of any decisions I make? Whose bad side do I NOT want to be on?

When will I need to call in a favor? Remember, everything's negotiable, and some things are more negotiable than others.

As the adventure begins, the PCs have recently returned to Rookroost from their last adventure. They may be staying in an inn together or they may have gone their separate ways. As morning comes, determine where the players are, and what they are doing.

Choose one character to receive the letter in Player Handout 1. This character will be the hook upon which this adventure hangs, and hopefully gathers the rest of the adventurers. The best choice is a character with a family. If none of the player characters have family, restructure the hook to be "an old family friend" or some such. In such a case, the term "sister" could be a very close friend that the character grew up with, or as stated previously, it can be a complete case of mistaken identity.

It is a beautiful morning in Rookroost, capital city of the Bandit Kingdoms. You have just returned to town after your latest adventure, and you passed the night comfortably. Since you've been back, you've been trying to catch up on the local news and gossip. You've heard about a highly-placed city official being involved in some kind of scandal; about a paladin that went out of town a human and came back a dwarf; about a series of rather gruesome murders that the Town Guard are working on; more bardic tales of the heroic Beat Gnome Schwartz Clan, who dress in black and play strange drums; and some talk about the activities of the local thieves guild. Typical town chatter, right?

As you sit down to your morning meal, an official looking courier wanders into the inn. You take but fleeting notice of him until you catch your name being mentioned to the innkeeper. The innkeeper points to you, and the courier approaches.

"Excuse me sir/ma'am, but I was told to deliver this to you."

The courier hands the PC the letter in Player Handout 1, and then quickly makes their way out of the inn, disappearing in the morning crowd.

As you read the innkeeper approaches you with a tankard of ale. He is a large, bald man with a droopy handlebar moustache. Even this early in the day, he smells strongly of ale.

If the PC questions the innkeeper, or anyone else about the murders, no information other than that which was in the letter is gained. However, the innkeeper suggests that a visit to the town guard's tower might be worthwhile.

At this point, the PC must decide on a course of action. Of course, the DM should by all means encourage the PC to gather up the other players to accompany him.

Once all the characters are gathered, the party has two choices. They can go to the Temple of Pholtus (Encounter 3), as suggested in the letter, or they can go to the Rookroost Guards Tower (Encounter 1) to gather what information they can about the murders.

ENCOUNTER 1: THE GUARD'S OUTPOST

As you approach the Guard's Outpost, you can feel the tension in the air increase. What guards you see are going about their business in a very quiet, very determined manner. There is little, if any, conversation. An air of gloom seems to have settled over the town.

You reach the main entrance to the Tower to find your way blocked by a Guardsman. He is a young man, probably in his late twenties, with intense dark brown eyes and black hair. He looks as if he has not slept in several days. His demeanor is proper and correct, but cold and detached at the same time.

"Please state your name and your business," he says, in a stern voice that brooks no argument.

At this point, the PC who was given the note should be able to either identify him/herself as the latest victim's older sibling, as a member of the immediate family, or express appropriate concern regarding the case, and confusion regarding receiving the letter. Either way, the PCs are allowed inside. If, however, any of the characters become belligerent or overly insistent, they are asked, politely and firmly, to wait outside. These guards aren't in the mood to take grief from anyone.

As you enter the Guard's Outpost, you notice again how quiet it is. The usual bantering you'd expect from soldiers is entirely absent.

You are shown into the office of Captain Hierol Asthlan. Captain Asthlan is a middle-aged gentleman, still in excellent shape, with salt-and-pepper hair and a neatly trimmed moustache. His uniform is perfectly cleaned and pressed, even though the bags under his eyes betray his lack of sleep, and he wears several impressive campaign ribbons on his chest. His voice is deep and sonorous, but at the same time hard and authoritarian. This is obviously a man that is used to respect and obedience.

Hierol Asthlan: Male human Ftr15; Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 15d10; hp 117; Init +5; Spd 20 ft.; AC 28 (touch 12, flat-footed 27); Atk +23/+18/+13 melee (1d10+9/17-20, +3 bastard sword), or +20/+15/+10 ranged (1d8+7/19-20[x3], +2 mighty composite longbow); AL NG; SV Fort +13, Ref +8, Will +6; Str 18, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 8, Cha 10. 6 ft. 3 in.

Skills and Feats: Climb +14, Craft (armorer) +5, Craft (weaponsmith) +6, Handle Animal +9, Jump +14, Listen +5, Ride +11, Spot +5, Swim +13; Cleave, Dodge, Mobility, Exotic Weapon Proficiency (bastard sword), Great Cleave, Improved Critical (bastard sword), Improved Critical (composite longbow), Improved Initiative, Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (bastard sword), Weapon Focus (composite longbow), Weapon Specialization (bastard sword)

Possessions: +2 full plate armor, +2 large metal shield, +3 bastard sword, +2 mighty composite longbow [+4], 50 +1 arrows, potion of cure light wounds, potion of endurance, +2 cloak of

resistance, +1 ring of protection, boots of speed, +2 amulet of natural armor, potion of heroism, eyes of the eagle.

"Good morning," he says. "How may I help you?"

After the PCs identify themselves, they can question Captain Asthlan about the murders. He can't offer too much more than what they already know, but he can tell them the following, depending on their questions:

- The murders have all been committed in a ritualistic fashion, with organs removed from each girl. Brianna was found missing her heart.
- Most of the victims were found near an old stone circle east of Rookroost, except for one, the fourth, that was found in a farmer's field. Asthlan feels, however, that that particular victim was killed elsewhere and carried to that location to divert suspicion.
- Before the murder, the only unusual thing that happened was the seemingly overnight construction of an obsidian tower outside of town. The Captain had meant to have it investigated, but with all that's happened, and considering the tower has no doors or windows, it's been a low priority.
- That several people have reported seeing flying creatures around the tower, but the Captain chalks these isolated reports up to seasonal hysteria, always high at this time of year, coupled with the recent rash of murders.
- That increased cult activity has been noticed in the area. The Captain chalks it up to the season, but has made a note of it anyway.
- A man was found two days ago wandering the streets and babbling incoherently. Obviously insane, he was taken to the Followers of Fharlanghn, where he is now being cared for. Though unlikely, he has not been disregarded as a possible suspect.

PCs who make a successful Knowledge (religion) check (DC 20) with regards to local cults can be given Appendix 2.

After answering the PCs questions politely, the Captain will excuse himself, saying that he has a lot of work to do. If the girl is indeed the sister of the PC who received the note, as the party starts to leave the room, the Captain approaches them.

"I'm very sorry for your loss", Captain Asthlan says, "and intend to do everything within my power to bring this murderer to justice. If you'd like to say goodbye, your sister's body is in the next room. I'd understand either way, whether you want to see the body or not."

The decision about whether or not to view the body is entirely up to the PC. There is no information to be gained here, as it is merely a chance to encourage role-playing. In any event, only the PC whose sister it is will be allowed into the room where the body lies.

In the event the PC chooses to view the body, the next section should be read. If the PC chooses not to see the body, the PCs may leave the Guards Tower and proceed along their way.

Note: Please feel free to censor for squeamish and younger players.

You enter a smallish room, done entirely in white tile. In the center of the room, a body lays on a marble slab, covered with a sheet. You step forward, your footsteps echoing in the cold whiteness of the morgue, both compelled and horrified by what lies before you. As you approach the body, memories of Brianna wash over you. You stand before the cloth-covered body.

As the PC pulls the sheet away:

You see Brianna's long, strawberry-blond hair, and her fresh, unspoiled features, looking for all the world as if she was merely asleep and might at any moment open her eyes and smile warmly and throw her arms around your neck. However, there is a gaping hole in the center of her chest, worse than anything you have ever seen. The flesh is ripped apart and the ribs sundered in an obvious amateur operation to remove the heart. You can only imagine how your sister's last moments must have been as her still-beating heart was ripped from her tender young chest.

The PCs may, at this point, elect to further investigate the cults that they have learned about. They are able to find out little about any of these groups, as they all tend to keep a rather low public profile. Give the players the information in Appendix 2, but don't allow them to waste too much time on this sidetrack.

They may also go to either the Temple of Fharlanghn (Encounter 2) or the Temple of Pholtus (Encounter 3)

ENCOUNTER 2: THE FOLLOWERS OF FHARLANGHN

The followers of Fharlanghn are, as are most of the non-Luzian followers in the Bandit Kingdoms, hard to find. With a certain amount of perseverance, however, you are directed to an encampment on the outskirts of town. Under normal circumstances, you don't believe you even would have been spoken to.

Coming into the area, you see what could be mistaken for a small traveling circus. Small tents are set up everywhere around one large, central structure, which looks like nothing so much as a circus big-top, although much larger than any circus tent you've ever seen. Made of various types of leather stitched together in an intricate pattern, this, you learn, is the Temple of

Fharlanghn, God of Roads and Travelers. The entrance seems to be a large flap in the side of the large tent.

As you step through the tent flaps a middle-aged woman greets you. Creases line her solid, attractive face, more the mark of travel than of age. She wears a shirt and pants made of comfortable brown deerskin, with matching brown boots. A forest green sash encircles her waist, and she carries a gnarled walking stick.

"Greetings to you," she says, her voice perfectly modulated. "I am Lythera. How may I help you?"

If the PCs identify themselves, and ask to see the insane man who was brought in recently, Lythera is at first, reluctant to disturb the poor man, but if the PCs make the urgency of their quest apparent, she eventually helps them.

Lythera leads you down a cool, quiet hallway. A myriad of rooms seem to be elaborately constructed from hanging leather curtains. It looks like the entire encampment could be broken down and moved on a moment's notice. Soon, Lythera leads you to a somewhat less active wing of the Temple.

"Poor man", she says. "He's obviously lost his way. He's done nothing but rave since he got here."

You come to a flap in the wall, which Lythera pushes aside. The room inside is comfortably, yet sparsely furnished, with a bed, a table with a candle upon it, and a chair. Sunlight streams in from another opening in the leather wall.

On the bed sits a man with a look of terror on his face. He has his arms wrapped around his knees and is rocking back and forth, muttering to himself. "Q'Kal...Q'Kal...Q'Kal..." is all he seems to be saying.

As soon as he sees you, however, his attitude changes. His eyes open wide and he freezes, like a startled deer. Suddenly, the man springs from his bed and falls at your feet, sobbing.

"Have you come to help?" he asks. "Please tell me you've come to help! We were wrong. So terribly, terribly wrong"

If the PCs treat the man gently, he talks to them. He has quite obviously lost his mind, although he is clear on a few important points. This man was a member of the Cult of the Risen Q'Kal, but lost his mind during the last ritual, when he realized the full impact of what he was doing.

If the PCs ask about the word "Q'Kal:"

"Q'Kal? Q'Kal is the Great Old One, the Great Beast of Primordial Legend. He Who Comes Through The Gate Bringing Terror and Destruction In His Wake! From a million, million years He comes to drink deep from the pool of humanity! HE is coming...coming...coming. IA! IA! IA!"

If the PCs ask about the murders:

"Not murders, sacrifices! All to appease great Q'Kal and bring him through the Gate! One more! One more and he will appear!"

If the PCs ask about who is in charge of the cult:

"He who calls Q'Kal to Oerth and condemns us all to death!"

If the PCs ask who the man is:

"I? I am nothing. I am Death and the Destroyer of Worlds. I am Torment and Pain that comes from the stars and sears flesh from bone and rots mind and tongue. I am the abyss. Look deep within me and despair, O Man, for I am thy end."

After the PCs have questioned the man, just as they are leaving, he suddenly has a brief moment of lucidity and grabs the nearest PC.

"Wait!" the man cries. "You must retrieve the Book of Belphegius and the Seal of Skartoom. Only with the Book and the Seal can you close the Gateway and prevent Q'Kal from entering our world. You must retrieve the Book and the Seal at any cost! That is mankind's only hope! And now I, the Bringer of Death, have become the Bringer of Hope!"

The man starts to laugh insanely. After a few moments, the laughter turns into wracking sobs as the man lies on the floor and cries. Quietly, Lythera leads you from the room back into the hallway.

"He's totally insane," she says, "poor thing. But we'll take care of him and try to make him comfortable. May Fharlanghn's Path be revealed unto him."

ENCOUNTER 3: THE FOLLOWERS OF PHOLTUS

The PCs are required to make a successful Gather Information check (DC 20) spending no less than 10 gp in bribes and drinks in order to discover the location of the followers of Pholtus.

The followers of Pholtus are even more difficult to find than the temple of Fharlanghn, and you know you wouldn't find them in normal times. Eventually, after buying many a drink and greasing a few palms, you are lead blindfolded into an underground passage.

As you approach a couple of plain wooden doors, a young woman greets you, and your blindfolds are removed. She seems to be about twenty years old, with long black hair and deep green eyes. She wears a suit of light chainmail, covered by a white and silver surcoat tied at the waist with a white sash. On her chest is a small brooch, a full moon partially eclipsed by a crescent moon. A silver cloak hangs from her shoulders, and a white bandana is tied around her head. She smiles as she sees you and speaks in a clear, even voice.

"Greetings to you," she says. "All who seek justice are welcome here. I am Arbiter Aestheana. How may I help you?"

The woman knows nothing more about the murders than the PCs have already found. If asked politely, she takes the PCs to Father Cormeer. If the PCs are rude, she is less inclined to help them.

Arbiter Aestheana shows you into a small, elegantly furnished room. Small bookcases line the walls, filled with volumes that, at a quick glance, seem to be extremely ancient. A compact mahogany desk sits at the far end of the room, behind which a man is seated. He is an imposing figure, large and powerful looking, with a stern face and a square jaw. The top of his head

has been shaved into a tonsure. He is dressed in similar fashion to the woman who showed you in, although his chainmail seems to be made of solid gold. His dark brown eyes look at you intently. In that brief moment, you feel like he is looking into your soul and judging your worthiness. Apparently satisfied with what he sees, the man rises and addresses you.

"I am Father Cormeer, Shining Lord of Pholtus, Defender of Law and Keeper of the Sun and the Moon. How may I help you?"

At this point, the PCs should introduce themselves to Father Cormeer. If the PC that received the letter is indeed the sibling of the dead girl, they may remind him of their longstanding family friendship. If the PCs are polite and show the proper respect, the father talks to them. If not, they are shown out, forcibly if necessary.

After the PCs have identified themselves:

"Ah yes," Father Cormeer replies. "I know your family well. I share your grief, my child. Your sister was a lovely girl. I will pray that Pholtus accepts her soul into His Just House of the Blinding Light. But come, if we must speak of such things, let us walk in the garden instead of abiding in this musty room."

You follow Father Cormeer out of the office and down the hall into a lush and perfectly manicured garden, even more amazing as you remember that you are totally underground. Shining globes set on stands in each corner of the room mimic sunlight, and give the garden a warm and welcoming feel. You are struck by just how perfect everything is. Nothing seems out of place or haphazard, from the precision of the brickwork, to the perfectly even spacing of the rows of plants. The mood you feel in the temple is one of strict adherence to order, which is manifested at every turn.

"The murders are a horrible thing, to be sure," continues Father Cormeer, "but I know nothing more than my contacts in the Town Guard. We pray daily that swift and severe justice may be visited upon this malefactor. I fear we live in dark times, indeed."

It is then that you hear cackling laughter coming from behind a bush. As you look in the direction of the sound, an almost impossibly old man steps out from behind the bush, laughing and muttering to himself. He is dressed in an old blue robe with dirty white trim. He is barefoot, and leans on a sturdy staff. Seemingly unsurprised, Father Cormeer looks at you apologetically.

With a heavy sigh, the Father says, "Please forgive Old Aeric. He was, at one time, a mighty priest, until a rather unfortunate accident robbed him of his mind. As he was on a special mission for our church at the time, we have cared for him ever since. He's loud, but mostly harmless."

Throughout this section, it is important to make clear to the players that Aeric is obviously and totally mad. Mad or not, however, he does have a piece of information that the PCs need.

"Heh heh, Hoo hoo. Arrrrrooooooo!" Aeric shouts in a thin, reedy voice, "I know a poem...a poem...a poem! Shall I tell you my poem? Eh, eh, shall I? Runefelder the Great would listen to my poem!"

With that, Aeríc starts to dance around the garden, singing a tuneless tune to himself. "As I said," repeats Father Cormeer, "he's entirely mad."

"NO!" replies Aeríc angrily, "NOT mad! Not! I know things! Things that you do not! The Gods talk to me and tell me secrets! Mighty secrets! Secrets that I could tell...if I wanted to!"

"Certainly, Aeríc, certainly," Father Cormeer replies soothingly. "Why don't you go back to your cell and take a nice nap." You sense an uncharacteristic fondness in the Father's tone, as if he genuinely cares about the broken, shattered man standing before you.

At this point, choose one PC, preferably one who seems sympathetic to Aeríc. Aeríc suddenly grabs the PC's arm. The following is addressed to that PC.

"You!" Aeríc shouts, "You! Will you listen to my poem? Will you? You must! You must, I say!"

If the PC agrees to listen to the poem, Aeríc recites the following. If not, Aeríc begins reciting quietly to himself, repeating the poem over and over several times through. Any other PC can pick up on this with a Listen check at DC 16.

Aeríc smiles at you and, in a weak, singsong voice cracked with age, recites his poem:

"The Book resides in Tower black,
The Seal in a humble shack.
The Book protected by a curse,
The Seal by a spell far worse.
You must decide what path to take,
Who lives, who dies...your choice to make!"

With that, Aeríc turns and dances away from you obviously lost in his own version of reality.

If the PCs ask about Q'Kal, the Book of Belphegius, or the Seal of Skartoom, Father Cormeer allows them to use the Temple library (made up of fifty or so old tomes) to research their question. If they take the time, they can find the following, using any Knowledge check as a modifier:

- **DC 10:** The Cult of Q'Kal, according to legend, believes that at some point the stars will be aligned correctly for his return. They believe that they are the favored of Q'Kal, and will escape the doom that will befall the rest of humanity.
- **DC 15:** Q'Kal is a demon lord, an entirely evil and malevolent creature who was banished to the outer planes nearly a hundred years ago.
- **DC 20:** According to legend, the Seal of Skartoom was used to banish Q'Kal, along with a ritual found only in the mythical Book of Belphegius. The legends go on to say that only these items have any power over Q'Kal.

- **DC 20:** The last time Q'Kal came to Oerth, tens of thousands of years ago, the ritual was performed at an ancient stone circle east of Rookroost.

As Father Cormeer leads you toward the front gates, he turns to you, a grim look on his face. "My children," he says, "If you are to face the madman responsible for these deaths, as I feel you will, take with you the blessings of Pholtus. Remember always that Justice is the ultimate good, and that the path to Justice is hard and fraught with sacrifice. I charge you to reveal the truth, punish the guilty, right the wrong, and always be true and just in your actions. If you follow these strictures, I know that you will be successful in your quest. There is not much I can do to help you, but this might be useful to you."

The PCs are given a *potion of cure light wounds*.

If the PCs manage to get thrown out of the Temple, the encounter with Aeríc happens outside on the street. In addition, the PCs do not receive the *potion* if they have been ejected, nor do they have the use of the library.

ENCOUNTER 4: ZARTHOK'S TOWER

As you head out of town, about five miles out, you see the tower of which both Captain Asthlan and Aeríc spoke. Estimating the height at about fifty feet, you are almost mesmerized by the way the light catches the black rock, reflecting a myriad of rainbow colors from its surface. As you watch, the tower seems to ripple and fade in and out, although you're certain that that's just a trick of the light. You're not sure, but from a distance, you seem to see creatures flying around the tower.

Drawing closer, you are puzzled to see that the Tower seems to have no means of entrance. However, the flying creatures seem to be able to enter and exit the tower without any problem.

No matter how long the PCs search, they do not find an entrance. Spells such as *passwall*, *transmute rock to mud*, and *stoneshape* provide easy entrance.

However, if the PCs do not have the appropriate spells, or are all non-spellcasters, they are quite able to attempt to break down a section of the wall. There are even some appropriate sized battering ram trees nearby, which allows the PCs to *cooperate* as per the rule on *Player's Handbook* page. Treat the battering ram the same as a great club doing 1d10 damage plus the strongest PC's Strength bonus plus two for each PC who manages to make a successful Strength check (DC 10).

🗡️**Tower Wall:** Thickness 1 ft.; Hardness 8, hp 90; Break DC 35; Climb DC 15.

Of course, as soon as the PCs approach the Tower, the winged creatures attack.

APL 2 (EL 4)

➤ **Vargouille** (2): hp 9 each; see *Monster Manual* page 182.

APL 4 (EL 6)

➤ **Gargoyle** (2): hp 38 each; see *Monster Manual* page 94.

APL 6 (EL 8)

➤ **Wyvern** (2): hp 59 each; see *Monster Manual* page 186.

Treasure: Regardless of the EL, the creatures present possess one amethyst (value 50 gp) and a thunderstone.

ENCOUNTER 5: THE GUARDIANS OF THE TOWER

Once the PCs gain entrance to the Tower:

As you gain entrance into the tower, you feel the temperature drop severely. By the time you make it through the wall, you see your breath hanging in little white puffs in the air.

You find yourself in a large, circular room that you would swear is larger than the outer diameter of the tower. A soft amber light emanates from glowing orbs set at four points around the floor. It is the only illumination in the room. In the center of the room is an obsidian spiral staircase leading up into a hole in the ceiling. Twelve large rectangular boxes, crafted from the same obsidian as the tower, rest around the walls, evenly spaced from one another.

As soon as the PCs step onto the staircase, or cross the threshold, the boxes open, revealing the undead guardians of the tower. If the PCs think to Search for traps on the stairs (DC 20), they may disarm the mechanism with a successful Disarm Device check (DC 25). If they find a way to bypass the stairs, the encounter is avoided.

APL 2 (EL 3)

➤ **Medium-size Skeletons** (8): hp 6 each; see *Monster Manual* page 165.

APL 4 (EL 5)

➤ **Ghouls** (6): hp 24 each; see *Monster Manual* page 97.

APL 6 (EL 7)

➤ **Ghasts** (4): hp 40 each; see *Monster Manual* page 97.

Treasure: If searched, the undead carry pouches with coins adding up to 122 gp, a carved bone figure of a deer (5 gp), and a smokestick.

ENCOUNTER 6: THE BOOK OF BELPHAGIUS

As you ascend the obsidian spiral staircase, you feel the temperature continue to drop, becoming somewhat uncomfortable. You keep climbing and climbing and climbing. You're sure that, viewed from the outside, the tower wasn't anywhere near this tall.

Finally, you see a light in the distance. You reach a large landing that seemingly stands by itself in the empty blackness of space. The floor is tiled and, as you step on it, you see the tiles change color in a regular rhythm. You turn around to discover that the stairs you climbed have disappeared.

A great stone archway stands before you. It is 60 hands tall and 30 hands wide and made of the same strange obsidian as the tower, but this obsidian seems a lot rougher and a lot older than the smooth, well-dressed stone that makes up the tower's exterior. You can see a large, stylized "Z" carved into the keystone at the top of the arch. Through the archway is only blackness.

If the PCs touch the arch, strange mists form in the doorway and swirl around in weird colored patterns.

At this point, give the PCs time to decide on a plan of action. Once they decide to enter the doorway, read the following.

As you step through the doorway, you find yourself in what seems like a different place entirely. You are in a large, circular room made of what appears to be rough sandstone. The room is mostly open, with eight pillars holding up the roof and ceiling. Oddly, even though the room is almost entirely open, you feel not the slightest breeze. If you look out, you can see that you are far, far above the ground below. Strangely, the land you see looks like nothing you recognize.

The room itself is filled with bookcases and tables covered with what appear to be scientific instruments. Beakers and retorts filled with strange looking substances, scrolls and parchments flung everywhere, and the occasional gizmo or gadget lie about the room. It looks exactly like what you'd imagine a wizard's spell laboratory would look like.

At the far end of the room is a huge desk carved from stone. As you look more closely at it, you notice that the desk is carved to resemble dozens of life-size human bodies seemingly writhing in pain. A chill runs through you as you realize that maybe the desk isn't carved after all.

Behind the desk, a huge gilded-frame mirror dominates the space from floor to ceiling. It seems to pull you in as you gaze at it, and perhaps the most remarkable feature of the room is the odd-looking man sitting at the desk. Dressed in red robes trimmed with gold and silver, you can tell that he is impossibly tall and thin, like a skeleton with a fine layer of flesh drawn tight over bone. His head and face are unnaturally long and narrow. He is bald, except for a ring of fine brown hair around his head, and has a long, narrow beard that comes to a sharp point. As he looks up, you see his fascinating flake-gold eyes peer at you over the brim of his sharp, hawklike nose. He licks his thin, shriveled lips as he speaks.

"Ah, visitors," he intones in a quiet, sibilant voice that reminds you of a cobra's hiss. "Look, Pervertimus, we have visitors."

From behind the desk shuffles a small, squat mockery of a man. Horribly twisted and deformed, he is covered with blotchy patches of slimy gray fur, only slightly covered by a dirty brown loincloth. His nose twitches and you notice that he has a long set of fine, white whiskers. He also has a nasty-looking pink rat-like tail that he whips around expectantly.

The man behind the desk seems to sense your shock. "Think nothing of Pervertimus. He is merely a failed experiment in induced lycanthropy. Nothing to concern you."

"Who are they, Master?" Pervertimus chitters nervously. "What do they want?" He clicks his teeth together as he talks.

"Why, I don't know, Pervertimus. I suppose we shall have to ask them."

The man turns to you and sweeps the party with a steely gaze. "I am Zarthok the Great", he says. "You must be brave and hearty to make it past my guardians, and persistent to climb all the way up my staircase. So, then, what do you want?"

➤ **Zarthok the Mad:** Male human Wiz20; Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 20d4; hp 76; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 23 (touch 16, flat-footed 20); Atk +10/+5 melee (1d6, quarterstaff); AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +9, Will +13; Str 10, Dex 14(16), Con 13, Int 20(26), Wis 12, Cha 8. 7 ft. 2 in.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +24, Alchemy +31, Scry +21, Bluff +31, Spellcraft +31; Brew Potion, Combat Casting, Craft Staff, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Great Fortitude, Heighten Spell, Improved Initiative, Lightning Reflexes, Quicken Spell, Spell Penetration, Toughness.

Possessions: ring of protection +2, +2 gloves of dexterity, amulet of natural armor +2, ring of wizardry I, bracers of armor +6, +6 headband of intellect, staff of frost, rod of absorption.

Spells Prepared (4/12/6/6/6/5/5/5/5/4; base DC = 18 + spell level): 0—detect magic (x2), ray of frost, resistance; 1st—charm person (x3), color spray (x2), mage armor (x2), protection from good (x2), ray of enfeeblement (x3); 2nd—darkness (x2), flaming sphere, invisibility, resist elements, summon swarm; 3rd—hold person (x3), lightning bolt (x2), magic circle against good; 4th—contagion (x2), fire shield, improved invisibility, phantasmal killer, stonkskin; 5th—cloudkill, feeblemind (x2), Mordenkainen's faithful hound, summon monster V; 6th—antimagic field, chain lightning (x2), control weather, flesh to stone; 7th—insanity, spell turning (x3), teleport without error; 8th—horrid wilting, incendiary cloud, maze, Otto's irresistible dance, trap the soul; 9th—freedom, imprisonment, meteor swarm, time stop.

Zarthok the Great, more commonly known as Zarthok the Mad, is a high-level wizard who has traveled to witness Q'Kal's entry into this world. He plans to steal Q'Kal's power as he comes through the gateway and harness that energy to then rule this world and, eventually, others. He is also the current owner of the Book of Belphegius.

If the PCs ask, Zarthok answers any questions fully and honestly. Zarthok considers the PCs too far beneath him to bother lying. He is, however, obviously mad, and should be played that way. He does not attack the party unless provoked, and normally only defends himself in combat. Also, he only makes a half-hearted attempt to keep them away from the book.

If the PCs ask about the Book:

"Ah, yes," the wizard replies. "I thought someone might come for that. Here it is."

He gestures to his left to an incredibly ancient book sitting on a black marble pedestal. The book is closed, but its leather cover writhes and undulates as if it were made from living creatures.

"The Book of Belphegius" Zarthok says, looking at you with an amused expression, like that an adult would give to a precocious child. "And what would little adventurers like you want with the Book of Belphegius?"

Without even giving you a chance to respond, Zarthok continues. "Puny little mortals," he sneers. "You think that you can solve all the world's problems with simple swords and spells. Well, let's see what you're really made of. Let's see if you have the courage to do what must be done."

"You may have the book, but at a price. I have placed an enchantment on the book such that if it is opened or moved without the use of a command word that only I know, a village nearby will be utterly and instantly destroyed by a terrible rain of fire from the sky. Make your choice, and I'll even tell you where to find the Seal of Skartoom."

This is one of the moral dilemmas that are central to this adventure. You are forcing the characters to make a choice with no easy path. There is no clear-cut "right answer". Allow the players time to discuss and weigh their options, and make their final decision. Of course, any lawful good characters should have a real problem with allowing innocent people to die in this fashion.

If PCs take the book, offer them Player Handout 2. Do not offer 3, 4, or 5 unless they ask for it. If the PC's choose not to take the book, Zarthok still offers to send them to the Seal of Skartoom.

"And so you have chosen," Zarthok cackles triumphantly, "and, as I promised, I shall reveal to you the location of the Seal of Skartoom."

Zarthok turns and gestures at the huge floor-to-ceiling mirror behind the desk. The surface of the mirror clouds up and ripples as you watch, and finally resolves itself into a scene of a smallish cottage nestled in a green, peaceful valley. Smoke rises languidly from the chimney of the cottage and children play in the adjacent field. You cannot imagine a more bucolic scene.

"All you need do is step through the mirror and you will find the Seal," says Zarthok, laughing madly. "I do hope your journey is a pleasant one."

ENCOUNTER 7: THE SEAL OF SKARTOOM

As you step through the smoky mirror, you find yourself stepping into the peaceful scene that you witnessed just moments before. Ahead of you is a small cottage with a thatched roof. Smoke comes from the chimney, and the smell of food cooking mingles pleasantly with the scent of wildflowers on the warm summer breeze. Several small children and animals play on the ground

before you. The scene brings back memories of hearth and home, and the families you have left behind.

As you approach, the children see you and, panicking, run into the cottage, screaming about strangers.

A few moments later, a beautiful woman emerges from the cottage. In fact, she is possibly the most beautiful woman you have ever seen. She appears to be about twenty years old with milk white skin and shining blonde hair that falls about her creamy shoulders like liquid gold. She has deep ice blue eyes that threaten to pull you into them the more you look at her. She wears a simple blue cotton skirt and blouse that match the color of her eyes almost exactly. Her voice, when she speaks, is clear and resonant, and reminds you of the breeze sighing through crystal wind chimes.

"Hello," she says. "I am Zorinda. May I help you?"

Zorinda poses absolutely no threat to the party. If they ask, she tells them that she has lived here in the valley for many years (she won't be specific as to how many) and that she cares for orphaned and homeless children who have nowhere else to go, as the Bandit Kingdoms can be a dangerous place for the young and the weak and the helpless.

When she is asked about the Seal of Skartoom, she does her best to change the subject. She does not outright lie, but she tries to divert the conversation from this subject. Eventually, however, if the PCs are persistent, the full story comes out. If the players guess that she is the Seal, she admits it.

The problem is that Zorinda is the seal. Many years ago, Zarthok, used a wish spell, transforming the Seal into the form of a beautiful woman to keep it safe. Since that time, Zorinda, who is fully aware of her former state, has become a surrogate mother to many orphaned and homeless children. Twelve children live with her currently, ranging in age from several months to about six years old. The fact that the number of children living with Zorinda is the same as the number of children that have been killed is nothing but a red herring. It is possible, with the proper spell from the Book of Belphegius, to return Zorinda to her original state, but that would, in effect, kill her. The only other way to return her to her Seal-state, without the book, is to kill her outright. Upon death, she reverts to her Seal-form. If the party decides on this option, Zorinda does not resist. The children, however, are terrified and refuse to go anywhere near the adventurers afterward.

It should be noted that, in her human form, Zorinda is worthless to the party. Only the Seal, in its true form can assist in closing the Gateway. In her human form, Zorinda has absolutely no unique abilities or powers. As she is fully human at this point, she does not detect as magic, nor does she radiate magic in any way, shape or form.

Zorinda's main concern, though, is not for her own life, but for the welfare of the children who have no one to take care of them once she is gone. She clearly understands the consequences should the Seal not be retrieved, but her primary concern is still for the children. She does her best to convince the party that they don't

need her, that all they need is the Book. This is, of course is untrue, and is about the only out-and-out lie that Zorinda tells.

The DM is encouraged to play this section out with the understanding that this is another of the key moral dilemmas upon which this adventure is based. The party can either kill Zorinda (paladins should have a lot of problems with this course), thus retrieving the seal and taking them one step closer to vanquishing Q'Kal, or they can leave Zorinda alone and hope they can find another way to keep the Great Evil from being unleashed upon the Oerth.

The Seal, in its natural state is a circular piece of stone about 1 inch thick and 8 inches across, with a five-pointed star carved into it on either side. There are various glyphs carved into the edge of the Seal as well.

Armed now with whatever they have managed to retrieve, it is time to confront the cult.

Looking to the southwest, towards the stone circle that has been the site of so much horror, you see black clouds gathering. Unlike clouds, however, these amorphous black shapes move in several directions against the wind, as if they possessed intelligence. As you stand and watch this unnerving sight, you feel a wave of what can only be described as great evil wash over you. You know intuitively that that is where you must fight your final battle.

ENCOUNTER 8: THE COMING OF Q'KAL

Once the party decides to head for the Stone Circle, where the Ritual is to be held:

It is now the last day of the Season of Great Darkness. Today is the festival known as The Night of Great Darkness, marking the longest and darkest night of the year. An eerie tension hangs over the land, an expectancy that is real and palpable. The sense of anticipation is so thick you feel you could almost cut it with a knife. Your skin prickles and you have the oddest feeling that someone is looking over your shoulder. Of course, there is no one there, but the feeling persists all the same. Suddenly, like a whisper from another world, a passage of poetry runs through your mind unbidden:

*"Like one, that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread."*

Source: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Shaking your head, you move on. The feeling of discomfort and unease becomes more and more pronounced as the sun begins to set and the evening shadows cover the land, as if the darkness had finally won its eternal battle against the forces of light. You

suddenly long for just one more sight of the dying sun, almost expecting to never see it again.

As the PCs approach the standing stones on the eastern edge of town, they can see fires burning, and people in white robes gathered. This is the final ritual of the Summoning of Great Q'Kal.

➤ **Acolytes (12):** Male human Com2; CR 1/4; Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 2d4+2; hp 8 each; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (touch 11, flat-footed 12); Atk +1 melee (1d4/19-20, dagger); AL N; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +2; Str 14, Dex 12, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11.

Skills and Feats: Craft (various) +5, Listen +5, Spot +5; Great Fortitude, Iron Will.

Possessions: dagger, leather armor.

➤ **Miskaton Whately, High Priest of Q'Kal:** Male human Adp15; CR 14; Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 15d6+30; hp 92; Init +4; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (touch 10, flat-footed 17); Atk +8/+3 melee (1d8, heavy mace); AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +15; Str 12, Dex 11, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 18, Cha 15.

Skills and Feats: Alchemy +19, Concentration +20, Knowledge (arcane) +10, Knowledge (religion) +10, Spellcraft +19; Combat Casting, Dodge, Mobility, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes.

Spells Prepared (3/4/4/4/3; base DC = 14 + spell level); 0—detect magic, ghost sound, read magic; 1st—bless, burning hands, command, obscuring mist, protection from good; 2nd—~~bull's strength~~, endurance, mirror image, web; 3rd—bestow curse, lightning bolt (x3); 4th—cure critical wounds, ~~stoneskin~~, wall of fire

As they get closer, read the following:

As you approach the ancient stone circle, you are witness to a grim sight. Several dozen men and women in blood red robes stand around the circle chanting in a language you cannot understand. In the center of the circle stands a tall man in a moss-green robe holding a knife above his head. On a slab in front of him is tied a young girl who can't be much more than fourteen years old. She struggles against her bonds, but to no avail. Arrayed around her are what can only be the body parts stolen from previous victims.

At this point, if the PCs make themselves known and attempt to stop the ritual, the Acolytes will break off from the circle and attack. The Acolytes are 2nd-level commoners under the effect of a *bless* spell. They attempt to cause enough of a delay for the ceremony to be completed.

After four rounds of combat:

The ceremony reaches a fevered pitch as the chanting gets louder and louder. The rising and falling of the chant mesmerizes you for a moment. But that moment is more than enough. Before you can even react, the green-robed man plunges his knife into the young girl's chest. As the girl's breast is pierced, a blue-white beam of lightning climbs up the knife blade, through the body of

the green-robed man. The man screams, but seems unable to move.

You watch in horror as his eyes melt from their sockets and his skin burns from his bones. Having consumed the high priest, the lightning shoots skyward, where it explodes in a blinding flash. Seconds later, as you recover your eyesight, you see a jagged wound seemingly ripped in the sky. The edges of the wound pulsate with eerie green and red light, and you sense that the hole leads to someplace other than the reality you know.

The cultists left alive are all enwrapped in the blue-white lightning. They are convulsing horribly and are slowly rising off the ground and beginning to circle the standing stones. The look of horror on their faces is the most terrible thing you have ever witnessed.

As you watch, you see a shaft of green extrude from the hole. As it moves closer, you see that it is a slimy, green tentacle coming from within the wound in the sky. Following the tentacle is what you can only imagine must be a face. But it is a face born in the deepest pits of madness and dementia. Green and pustulent, great orbs, which might be eyes on extruded stalks sweep over the landscape. As if seen through a veil of delirium, the image seems to waver and change as you look at it. You force yourself to tear your gaze away, lest you go mad from the very sight. From the corner of your eye, however, you see a tentacle snake down and enwrap one of the cultists, who screams in agony as he is drawn up into the hole, where he vanishes. His anguished screams linger long after he is gone.

If the PCs try, they can rescue one of the cultists trapped in the energy field. The tentacle goes after the remaining cultists, but comes back eventually for the one that was rescued. Unless the gate is closed, all cultists are devoured. The tentacles are AC 15 and have 10 hit points each.

One cultist is devoured for every two rounds. Therefore, with twelve acolytes, the party has twenty-four rounds to complete the adventure. If all the acolytes are devoured before the party has sealed the gate, use Encounter 8d.

At this point, if the PCs have both the Book and the Seal, go to Encounter 8a. If the PCs have the Book only, go to Encounter 8b. If the PCs have the Seal only, go to Encounter 8c. If the PCs have neither the Book nor the Seal, go to Encounter 8d.

Note: Remember, in her human form, Zorinda is useless to the party. She must be reverted to her Seal-form to have any effect.

ENCOUNTER 8A

The party may gain the following information from a rescued cultist or from the Book of Belphegus itself. Player's Handout 2 details the contents of the book.

Wait a few moments for the players to ask for info on Player Handouts 3, 4, or 5. If they seem stuck ask them what rituals they would like to review to spur them on.

To seal the gateway, one PC must stand in the center of the stone circle and hold the seal above his head while another PC reads the Ritual of the Closing of the Gate from the book (Player Handout 3). Neither PC may be

interrupted while performing the ritual, or they must begin again.

Assuming the ritual is completed successfully:

As the final words of the ritual fade into the cold night air, a hush falls over the land. Then, starting softly, but quickly growing louder, you hear a sound like the screaming and wailing of a million damned souls coming from the gateway. The red and green lights that had been playing around the jagged outline have now become a brilliant yellow color, pulsing and throbbing around the gateway. As the light gets brighter, the screaming gets louder and louder, until you feel your head will burst from the noise. Visions of pain and suffering in a place worse than you've ever imagined flood your brain. You feel the torment of lost souls in agony wash over you as you fall to your knees, begging whatever gods you believe in to make it stop.

And then, with a soft sigh like the whisper of a kiss, it is over. The remaining acolytes fall to the ground, still convulsing and foaming at the mouth. As you check them, it is apparent that, although their bodies survived, their minds did not.

You spend some time recovering yourselves and trying to forget what you've seen. Soon, the first rays of daylight break over the far hills, and you know that the danger is over and the evil is passed. As you watch the sunrise, you know that all will be right with the world.

ENCOUNTER 8B

Wait a few minutes for the players to ask for info on Player Handouts 3, 4, or 5. If they seem stuck ask them what rituals they would like to review to spur them on.

As you watch the horrible sight unfolding before you, all seems lost without the all-important Seal of Skartoom. As you try to figure out what to do in the face of this cosmic monstrosity, you hear a voice behind you. One of the cultists you thought dead shambles towards you.

"You-you must...must stop this," he says, literally on his last legs. "W-we were w-wrong. So w-wrong. I see that n-now. Do y-you have the B-b-book and t-the Seal?"

Once the PCs respond that they have the Book only:

"T-that is too bad," says the dying man, "but t-there is s-still hope." The man continues in a voice that is barely audible over the screams of the cultists. "One of you m-must perform the R-ritual of the S-summoning of the Seal. O-only with both pieces c-can Q'Ka's gateway be closed."

To seal the Gateway without the Seal, one PC must perform The Ritual of the Summoning of the Seal (Player Handout 5). The PC may not be interrupted while performing the ritual, or he must begin again.

Assuming the Summoning ritual is completed successfully:

Suddenly, a purple vapor appears before you. As you watch, the vapor coalesces and becomes the beautiful girl Zorinda. Her eyes are blank and glassy, as if she is seeing something far removed from your reality. "As I have been called, so I have come as I was bade," she says in a hard, edgy, toneless voice that reminds you of

slabs of granite rubbing against each other. "Who summons the Seal?"

Let the PC who performed the ritual answer. Then:

Once the seal has been summoned, the Ritual of the Closing of the Gate from the book (Player Handout 3) must be performed as well. Once again, any interruption will necessitate beginning the ritual again from the top. Once both rituals have been completed, both Zorinda and the book are reduced to a pile of dust and sucked into the closing gateway.

"By the Will of the Ancient Ones, I must obey he who has summoned me", Zorinda says. "What would you have of the Seal of Skartoom?"

"She m-must act as the Seal while you p-perform the ritual", the cultist says. "S-she must stand in the c-center of the circle while y-you intone the words! Q-quickly! There is n-not much time left!"

If the PCs still refuse to sacrifice Zorinda, go to Encounter 8d.

Assuming the ritual is completed successfully:

As the final words of the ritual fade into the cold night air, a hush falls over the land as you watch Zorinda become surrounded by a vibrant purple energy field. A hum like the buzzing of a million bees fills the air as you see the energy field contract, obliterating the beautiful girl where she stands. Soon, all that is left is a pile of dust upon the spot where she stood. You watch the dust rise up in a column and swirl into the jagged wound in the sky. Then, starting softly, but quickly growing louder, you hear a sound like the screaming and wailing of an infinite number of damned souls coming from the Gateway. The red and green lights that had been playing around the jagged outline have now become a brilliant yellow color, pulsing and throbbing around the Gateway. As the light gets brighter, the screaming gets louder and louder, until you feel your head will burst from the noise. Visions of pain and suffering in a place worse than you've ever imagined flood your brain. You feel the torment of lost souls in agony wash over you as you fall to your knees, begging whatever Gods you believe in to make it stop.

And then, with a soft sigh like the whisper of a kiss, it is over. The remaining acolytes, including the one who helped you, fall to the ground, still convulsing and foaming at the mouth. As you check them, it is apparent that, although their bodies survived, their minds did not.

You spend some time recovering yourselves, trying to forget what you've seen, and reflecting on the sacrifice of the brave young girl. Soon, the first rays of daylight break over the far hills, and you know that the danger is over and the evil is passed. As you watch the sunrise, you know that all will be right with the world, thanks to one person who realized that there is honor and glory in sacrifice.

ENCOUNTER 8C

If the party has not retrieved the Book, closing the Gateway is problematic, but not impossible.

As you watch the horrible sight unfolding before you, all seems lost without the all-important Book of Belphegius. As you try to figure out what to do in the face of this cosmic monstrosity, you hear a voice behind you. One of the cultists you thought dead shambles towards you.

"You-you must....must stop this," he says, literally on his last legs. "W-we were w-wrong. So w-wrong. I see that n-now. Do y-you have the B-b-book of Belphegius?"

When the party answers "no":

"Then there is o-only one thing to d-do", he says softly. The man's voice grows softer and softer. You realize his end is near. "Take m-me to the altar," he says weakly. "I shall b-be the B-book, Y-you must hold the S-seal."

To seal the gateway without the book, the dying cultist must sacrifice himself for the good of the World by The Ritual of the Closing of the Gate Through Sacrifice (Player Handout 4. Rather than giving the players the handout, I suggest the DM read it as the NPC acolyte). The dying man recites the ritual as the PC holds the Seal. Neither the PC nor the dying man may be interrupted while performing the ritual, or they must begin again. Once the ritual is completed, the dying man and the seal will be reduced to a pile of dust and sucked into the closing gateway.

With the Seal only, assuming the ritual is completed successfully: As the final words of the ritual fade into the cold night air, a hush falls over the land as you watch the dying man who intoned the ritual become surrounded by a vibrant purple energy field. A hum like the buzzing of a million bees fills the air as you see the energy field contract, obliterating the person inside it. Soon, all that is left is a pile of dust upon the spot where he stood. You watch the dust rise up in a column and swirl into the jagged wound in the sky. Then, starting softly, but quickly growing louder, you hear a sound like the screaming and wailing of an infinite number of damned souls coming from the gateway. The red and green lights that had been playing around the jagged outline have now become a brilliant yellow color, pulsing and throbbing around the Gateway. As the light gets brighter, the screaming gets louder and louder, until you feel your head will burst from the noise. Visions of pain and suffering in a place worse than you've ever imagined flood your brain. You feel the torment of lost souls in agony wash over you as you fall to your knees, begging whatever Gods you believe in to make it stop.

And then, with a soft sigh like the whisper of a kiss, it is over. The remaining acolytes, including the one who helped you, fall to the ground, still convulsing and foaming at the mouth. As you check them, it is apparent that, although their bodies survived, their minds did not.

You spend some time recovering yourselves, trying to forget what you've seen, and reflecting on the sacrifice of a man whose name you never even learned. Soon, the first rays of daylight break over the far hills, and you know that the danger is over and the evil is passed. As you watch the sunrise, you know that all will be right with the world, thanks to one person who realized that there is honor and glory in sacrifice.

ENCOUNTER 8D

You watch in horror as the gruesome sight unfolds before you. You realize that your inability to make difficult decisions has sentenced the world to the worst fate imaginable. You think of your family and your friends and realize that they soon will be dead because of your failure.

Just as all seems darkest, however, you hear a voice speaking in your mind. A voice that is, at the same time, soft and strong, and one you know you can trust. By the reactions of your comrades, the voice speaks to them also.

"I cannot allow this," the voice says. "This evil must not be loosed upon the Oerth. Who will give their life that mankind may live?"

If none of the party volunteer, read Ending A below. If any PC agrees to make the sacrifice, go to Ending B.

ENDING A

There is suddenly silence in your mind for a moment until the voice speaks again, this time with a tone of sadness and disappointment. "So be it. I will do what must be done, but you shall not forget your failure this day."

With that, words in a language that you cannot understand, but that you know to be incredibly ancient, wash over the land like a cleansing tide. If sound was visible, you know you could see the words rushing to the jagged wound in the sky.

As the final words of the ritual fade into the cold night air, a hush falls over the land. Then, starting softly, but quickly growing louder, you hear a sound like the screaming and wailing of a million damned souls coming from the Gateway. The red and green lights that had been playing around the jagged outline have now become a brilliant yellow color, pulsing and throbbing around the Gateway. As the light gets brighter, the screaming gets louder and louder, until you feel your head will burst from the noise. Visions of pain and suffering in a place worse than you've ever imagined flood your brain. You feel the torment of lost souls in agony wash over you as you fall to your knees, begging whatever Gods you believe in to make it stop. Your forehead burns, as if it were on fire, and you pass out from the pain.

You awake a short time later to find the remaining acolytes fallen to the ground, still convulsing and foaming at the mouth. As you check them, it is apparent that, although their bodies survived, their minds did not.

As you look at your comrades, you see each of them has been branded on the forehead with what you seem to know instinctively is a Divine Rune of Cowardice (See Appendix 3). Touching your forehead, you find that you, too, have been marked.

You spend some time recovering yourselves and trying to forget what you've seen. None of you can yet face the others, so deep is your shame. Soon, the first rays of daylight break over the far hills, and you know that the danger is over and the evil is passed. As you watch the sunrise, you know that all will be right with the world. But will things ever be the same for you?

ENDING B

There is suddenly silence in your mind for a moment until the voice speaks again, this time with a tone of gladness and pride. "So be it. We will do what must be done, but you shall not be forgotten for your sacrifice this day."

You watch as your friend is transported to the altar at the center of the standing stones, floating gently above it.

With that, words in a language that you cannot understand, but that you know to be incredibly ancient, wash over the land like a cleansing tide. If sound was visible, you know you could see the words rushing to the jagged wound in the sky.

As the final words of the ritual fade into the cold night air, a hush falls over the land as you watch your companion become surrounded by a vibrant purple energy field. A hum like the buzzing of a million bees fills the air as you see the energy field contract, obliterating the person inside it. Soon, all that is left is a pile of dust upon the spot where your friend once stood. You watch the dust rise up in a column and swirl into the jagged wound in the sky. Then, starting softly, but quickly growing louder, you hear a sound like the screaming and wailing of an infinite number of damned souls coming from the Gateway. The red and green lights that had been playing around the jagged outline have now become a brilliant yellow color, pulsing and throbbing around the Gateway. As the light gets brighter, the screaming gets louder and louder, until you feel your head will burst from the noise. Visions of pain and suffering in a place worse than you've ever imagined flood your brain. You feel the torment of lost souls in agony wash over you as you fall to your knees, begging whatever Gods you believe in to make it stop.

And then, with a soft sigh like the whisper of a kiss, it is over. The remaining acolytes fall to the ground, still convulsing and foaming at the mouth. As you check them, it is apparent that, although their bodies survived, their minds did not.

You spend some time recovering yourselves, trying to forget what you've seen, and reflecting on the sacrifice of your brave comrade. Soon, the first rays of daylight break over the far hills, and you know that the danger is over and the evil is passed. As the last of the evening stars begin to fade, you see a new constellation in the sky, and you realize that truly, your comrade will never be forgotten. Deep within, you know that all will now be right with the world, thanks to one person who realized that there is honor and glory in sacrifice.

Once a PC volunteers to be the sacrifice (only in Encounter 8d, ending B) is lost and cannot be returned to life in any way. Please collect his logsheet, character sheet, and any certificates for destruction.

CONCLUSION

Note: Only if the Town was Destroyed by Zarthok's Curse

Traveling back towards Rookroost, you and your companions spend a great deal of time in quiet contemplation, reflecting upon what you have seen and done. You were called on to make some hard decisions, and you have paid the price for them. You realize that a great disaster was narrowly averted, and many, many lives saved, but the image of Zorinda still haunts you.

As you pass the place where Zarthok's tower stood, you're not surprised to see that it is no longer there. "Good", you say to yourself, "That's one less mad wizard to threaten Rookroost." That part, at least, you can count as a triumph.

The quiet travel and the beautiful weather soon combine to quiet your nagging doubts, and soon your heart feels lighter and you walk with a firmer, more purposeful stride. "After all", you think, "it isn't every day you get to save the world." Maybe you really are the hero that people say you are.

You travel on, feeling better and better with each step. Soon, you and your companions begin to talk and joke again, and all seems right with the world.

And then it happens. At first it is just a stray scent wafted on an errant breeze. Ash...smoke...and burnt flesh? Your senses prick up, tuning you in to whatever might come next. Ready yourself for battle, you crest the rise of a small hill, and are frozen in horror.

Lying at your feet, in a small, wooded valley, are the remains of the Village of Hommel, a small community of about 1,000 people on the outskirts of Rookroost. You knew the Village well as a child, and spent many hours playing here when you visited your aunt and uncle. Now all that remains is a charred ruin.

Running down the hillside towards the village, you come across an old woman lying on the ground, near death. Before she dies, she tells you a terrible story.

"orrible, it was," she said, her speech wracked with hacking coughs. "Nuffing we could do. 'ere we are, one minute, mindin' our own business, and the next minute, fire's rainin' from the sky on our 'eads. We didn't know where it was comin' from, or even what to do. Everyone's dead...everyone, and now I'll go join 'em."

With that, the old lady dies in your arms and you remember Zarthok's warning about the curse he placed on the Book of Belphegius. You had thought him to be mad, or bluffing or lying.

As the sun dies slowly over the hills, you hear the faint sound of mocking laughter borne across the errant breeze, and you realize that sometimes the Devil tells the truth.

The End.

EXPERIENCE POINT SUMMARY

To award experience for this adventure, add up the values for the objectives accomplished. Then assign the discretionary roleplaying experience award. The roleplaying award should be given for consistent character portrayal and contribution to the fun of the game. You can award different roleplaying amounts to different characters.

Award the total value (objectives plus roleplaying) to each character.

Encounter Four

Defeat Flying Monsters 100 xp

Encounter Five

Defeat Undead 100 xp

Encounter Six

If party retrieves Book 50 xp

Encounter Seven

If party retrieves Seal 50 xp

Encounter Eight A, B, C

Perform ritual(s) successfully 100 xp

Total possible experience for objectives 400 xp

Discretionary roleplaying award 0-50 xp

Total possible experience 450 xp

TREASURE SUMMARY

Player characters may keep items from the scenario that are listed on the treasure list below or which meet the following conditions:

1. The item must be non-magical and specifically listed in the text of the adventure (e.g armor on foes). If it is not listed in the text, the characters cannot keep it. Items of this nature can be sold for 50% of book value, or recorded on a log sheet.
2. Animals, followers, monsters, henchmen, and so forth (any living being, basically) may not be kept from a scenario for any reason unless the treasure summary lists the being specifically. It is okay for the player characters to form relationships with NPCs, but these will not be certified and cannot bring material benefit to the character. Contacts (sources of extra information) must be specifically certified.
3. Theft is against the law, but may be practiced by some player characters. Items, which are worth more than 250 gp that are of personal significance to the owner (including family heirlooms), and all magical items, will be discovered in the possession of the character by one means or another. The character

must return the item and pay a fine equal to three times the value of the item stolen. In addition, the PC caught receives campaign-decided penalties for being known as a thief. For other stolen items which meet the criteria in #1 above, use your judgment and the circumstances within the game to determine whether a PC thief gets away with the theft or not.

Any item retained according to these rules, which does not have a certificate, will not ever have a certificate issued for it.

The campaign staff reserves the right to take away any item or gold acquired for things, which it later finds unreasonable but which were allowed at the time.

Encounter Three

- *potion of cure light wounds* (50 gp)

Encounter Four


- 1 amethyst (50 gp),
- 1 thunderstone (30 gp).

Encounter Five

- 122 gp
- A carved bone figure of a deer (5 gp),
- Smokestick (20 gp).

Encounter Eight

- For those players that obtained neither the book nor the seal, and did not have a character volunteer to be the sacrifice (Ending 8D, Version A) The receive the following:

The Divine Rune of Cowardice () is a symbol that is branded upon the forehead when one has earned the displeasure of a MAJOR god. Anyone seeing the Rune instinctively knows what it is, and will treat the bearer accordingly.

APPENDIX 1: THE SEASON OF GREAT DARKNESS


Darkness Festivals

- 1 – (Day 1)The Day of Last Light: A time to bid farewell to the light time of the year and prepare for the oncoming darkness.
- 2 – (Day 3)First Shadow: The first appearance of true darkness in the land.
- 3 – (Day 5)Time of Hidden Secrets: A time of assessing and confronting hidden truths that have not been shared with anyone.
- 4 – (Day 7)Night of Inward Looking: A time of personal assessment. Decisions and resolutions about how one will go through the coming year are made here.
- 5 – (Day 10)Long Dark Night of the Soul: A night of penitence and atonement for the secrets and hidden truths that have previously been examined.
- 6 – (Day 13)Second Shadow: A further encroachment of darkness.
- 7 – (Day 15)Light Death Festival: All flame and light extinguished for 24 hours.
- 8 – (Day 18)The Time of Revealed Secrets: Secrets and hidden truths confronted earlier are now shared with others and atoned for.
- 9 – (Day 20)The Night of Life in Darkness: Ritual blindfolds are donned for 24 hours to propitiate the darkness that is gathering.
- 10 – (Day 22)Third Shadow: The Darkness grows stronger.
- 11 – (Day 25)The Night of Truth in Darkness: A time of further confession and redemption.
- 12 – (Day 27)Deep Shadows: A time of personal transformation and growth through the confrontation of difficult inner truths.
- 13 – (Day 30)The Night of Great Darkness: The Darkest night of the year.

APPENDIX 2: THE CULTS OF ROOKROOST

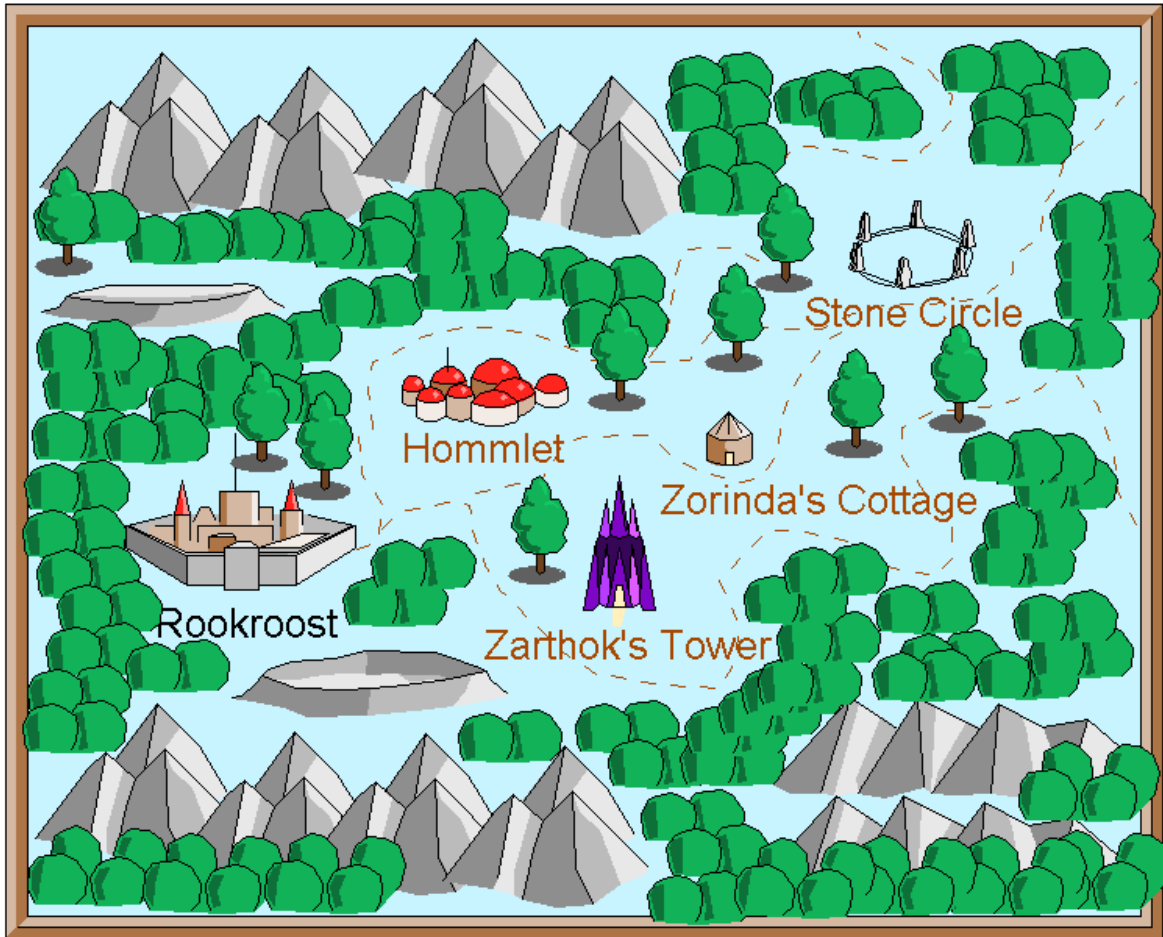
- The Cult of the Risen Q'Kal is the newest of the local cults. They believe that Armageddon is approaching in the form of an ancient demon lord who will return when the stars are properly aligned and wreak havoc on the Oerth, slaughtering all but his faithful and his elect. They hold rituals at an ancient standing stone site on the eastern side of town.
- The Followers of the Nameless Beast have been in Rookroost for several years. They believe that a nameless force is coming soon to reclaim the world for the beasts of the land. Humans will be slaughtered for food and sport by intelligent animals. The cult believes, however, that they can survive by taking on as many of the characteristics of beasts as possible. To this end, they dress in animal skins and run around town barking and howling and acting as much like animals as possible. They have always been thought of as mostly harmless. They hold their rituals in the forest to the north of town.

APPENDIX 3: THE DIVINE RUNE OF COWARDICE

The Divine Rune of Cowardice () is a symbol that is branded upon the forehead when one has earned the displeasure of a major god. Anyone seeing the Rune instinctively knows what it is, and will treat the bearer accordingly.

APPENDIX 4: MAP OF THE AREA

(Not to scale)



PLAYER HANDOUT 1

My Dearest Child ~

I hope this letter finds you well, and quickly. I know you have been away adventuring and growing in fame and renown. Even this far out of town, your father and I have heard of some of your exploits, and we couldn't be prouder of you.

Unfortunately, our pride in you is all but overshadowed by the grief we now feel. I wish there were an easy way to tell you our tragic news, but there isn't. Prepare yourself for a shock.

Your little sister, Brianna, is dead.

No doubt you've heard of the so-called "Festival Killer", the fiend who has been butchering innocent young girls ever since the Day of Last Light. Each Feast Day, another girl has been found, brutally murdered, for what purpose the Gods themselves only know. The Town Guards have been helpless to do anything to stop this madman. We, however, have been less concerned than we might have been with these crimes. Living on the outskirts of town as we do, I had thought the danger too far away to reach us.

Alas, I was wrong.

Last night, there was a horrible scream from the field behind our house. Your father and I ran outside, only to discover the still-warm body of your sister, lying on the ground, mutilated and violated by a monster. The sight of your sister lying there in that state, after having just tucked her into bed mere hours before, is an image I shall never be able to burn from my memory. I do not know why or how the killer chose Brianna, I just know that she is dead.

You have chosen for yourself a path of adventure and struggle and justice. Rather than seeking after treasure, riches, and fame, I beg you now to use whatever means are at your disposal to bring this terror to an end. The killer must be stopped. Visit Father Cormeer at the Temple of Pholtus. He has long been a friend of our family, and knows much about what goes on in town. No doubt he will give you whatever aid he can. Also, I'm sure that you have friends in Rookroost who would be honored to accompany you on this most important quest.

My child, please know that I do not make this request lightly, as I know how dangerous a mission of this type must be. We have lost one child already. The loss of another would be almost too much to bear. However, there is a greater good here that I hope will guide you through whatever trials are ahead. As much as I would like to welcome you home and hide you away from harm as much as it is in my power so to do, I know that you can serve a greater purpose by preventing any more families from feeling the loss that we all suffer now. I ask you to do this, not selfishly and from revenge, but as a mother who wishes that all other mothers might be safe from the loss of a child. Remember that there is honor and glory in sacrifice as well as in battle.

Whatever your decision, and wherever your path leads you, please, please know that I love you, and anxiously await your safe return.

As always, I remain,

Your loving Mother

PLAYER HANDOUT 2: *THE BOOK OF BELPHAGIUS*

1. The Ritual of Cleansing
2. The Ritual of Purification
3. The Ritual of Preparation
4. The Ritual of Propitiation
5. The Ritual of the Grace of the Elements
6. The Ritual of the Candle
7. The Ritual of the Blood
8. The Ritual of the Sand
9. The Ritual of the Breeze
10. The Ritual of the Spirit
11. The Ritual of Atonement and Confession
12. The Ritual of Evisceration and Sacrifice
13. The Ritual of Enclosure
14. The Ritual of Protection from Lesser Evils
15. The Ritual of the Calling and Summoning of Lesser Evils
16. The Ritual of Commanding Lesser Evils
17. The Ritual of the Banishing and Dismissing of Lesser Evils
18. The Ritual of Protection from Greater Evils
19. The Ritual of the Calling and Summoning of Greater Evils
20. The Ritual of Commanding Greater Evils
21. The Ritual of the Banishing and Dismissing of Greater Evils
22. The Ritual of the Calling and Summoning of the Elder Gods
23. The Ritual of the Summoning of the Seal
24. The Ritual of the Opening of the Gate
25. The Ritual of the Closing of the Gate
26. The Ritual of the Closing of the Gate through Sacrifice
27. The Ritual of the Sealing of the Gate
28. The Ritual of Redemption
29. The Later Ritual of Purification
30. The Later Ritual of Cleansing
31. The Greater Ritual of Atonement
32. The Greater Ritual of Sacrifice

PLAYER HANDOUT 3: THE RITUAL OF THE CLOSING OF THE GATE

To You who Read these Words:

I write the following in the hopes that it will never be read, but I have been allowed to peer through the Misty Corridors of Time, and what I have seen horrifies me. The Time has come, and the Stars have aligned so that Great Horror is soon to be loosed upon the Oerth. Even though your time is far, far removed from mine, still I shiver at the thought of The Great Beast being released for a season of Death and Destruction. Still, where there is life there is hope.

To perform the Ritual of the Closing of the Gate requires two people, one to hold the Seal of Skartoom at the Center of Power, which is the site at which the Final Summoning was performed, and the other to read the ritual. May whatever God there be grant you Strength and Courage in your Hour of Greatest Trial.

In the Name of those that tread the Nameless Corridors of time,
In the Sight of the Great Blind Beings,
By the Grace of the Higher Powers and the Fallen Masters,

I call upon the Element of Air by its Secret Name of Ithaqua!
I call upon the Element of Water by its Secret Name of Neireish!
I call upon the Element of Fire by its Secret Name of Salaquam!
I call upon the Element of Oerth by its Secret Name of Ilkator!
I call upon the Element of Spirit by its Secret Name of Hool!

In the Name of the Prime Beings, I cry to Thee!
By Right of the Sacred Covenant of Sier-Legonis, I call upon thy aid!
Hear me, and listen unto the desire of my heart!

I invoke the Powers of Q'Tah the Undying!
I invoke the Blessings of Tyronos the Unliving!
I invoke the Majesty of Kitar the Unforgiving!

Now, by the Names and the Powers and Rites, which I have invoked,
I command that this Gateway be Closed!

PLAYER HANDOUT 4: THE RITUAL OF THE CLOSING OF THE GATE THROUGH SACRIFICE

To You who Read these Words:

I have written this tome in the hopes that it will never be read, especially the ritual contained herein. But I have been allowed to peer through the Misty Corridors of Time, and what I have seen horrifies me. The Time has come, and the Stars have aligned so that Great Horror is soon to be loosed upon the Oerth. Even though your time is far, far removed from mine, still I shiver at the thought of The Great Beast being released for a season of Death and Destruction. Still, where there is life there is hope.

If your desperate path has led you here, you are facing the Greatest Trial that can be imagined. Truly, it is one that you will not survive. You must stand at the Center of Power, which is the site at which the Final Summoning was performed, and offer yourself as Proof and Seal against the Great Evil that seeks Entrance.

May whatever Gods there be look upon you with favor.

I come before you in humility and disgrace.
What I ask, I ask not for myself
But for my brothers and sisters and for all of mankind.
Take heed of my pleading, and allow me to be an instrument of thy will!

In the Name of those that tread the Nameless Corridors of time,
In the Sight of the Great Blind Beings,
By the Grace of the Higher Powers and the Fallen Masters,

I call upon the Element of Air by its Secret Name of Ithaqua!
I call upon the Element of Water by its Secret Name of Neireish!
I call upon the Element of Fire by its Secret Name of Salaquam!
I call upon the Element of Oerth by its Secret Name of Ilkator!
I call upon the Element of Spirit by its Secret Name of Hool!

In the Name of the Prime Beings, I cry to Thee!
By Right of the Sacred Covenant of Sier-Legonis, I call upon thy aid!
Hear me, and listen unto the desire of my heart!

I invoke the Powers of Q'Tah the Undying!
I invoke the Blessings of Tyronos the Unliving!
I invoke the Majesty of Kitar the Unforgiving!

Now, by the Names and the Powers and Rites which I have invoked,
I ask that the Gateway be closed with the Seal of My Immortal Soul!!

PLAYER HANDOUT #5: THE RITUAL OF THE SUMMONING OF THE SEAL

To You Who Read These Words:

As the legends tell, there was a Great War upon the Oerth, fought by the Elder Gods, forces of Cosmic Chaos and Terror, and the Prime Beings of Order, forces for Balance and Wisdom. The worst among the Elder Gods was Q'Kal, the Great Beast. Only by the use of The Ritual of the Closing of the Gate contained herein, and the power of the Seal of Skartoom was Sier-Legonis, Supreme Order Lord of the Ilkataum, able to imprison Great Q'Kal within the Shadow Lands until the stars should complete their cosmic cycle. Eventually, the stars will return to their places and Q'Kal may be freed. May the Gods help you if you live in that Cursed Age.

To Summon the Seal, you must perform this ritual with a pure and untroubled heart.

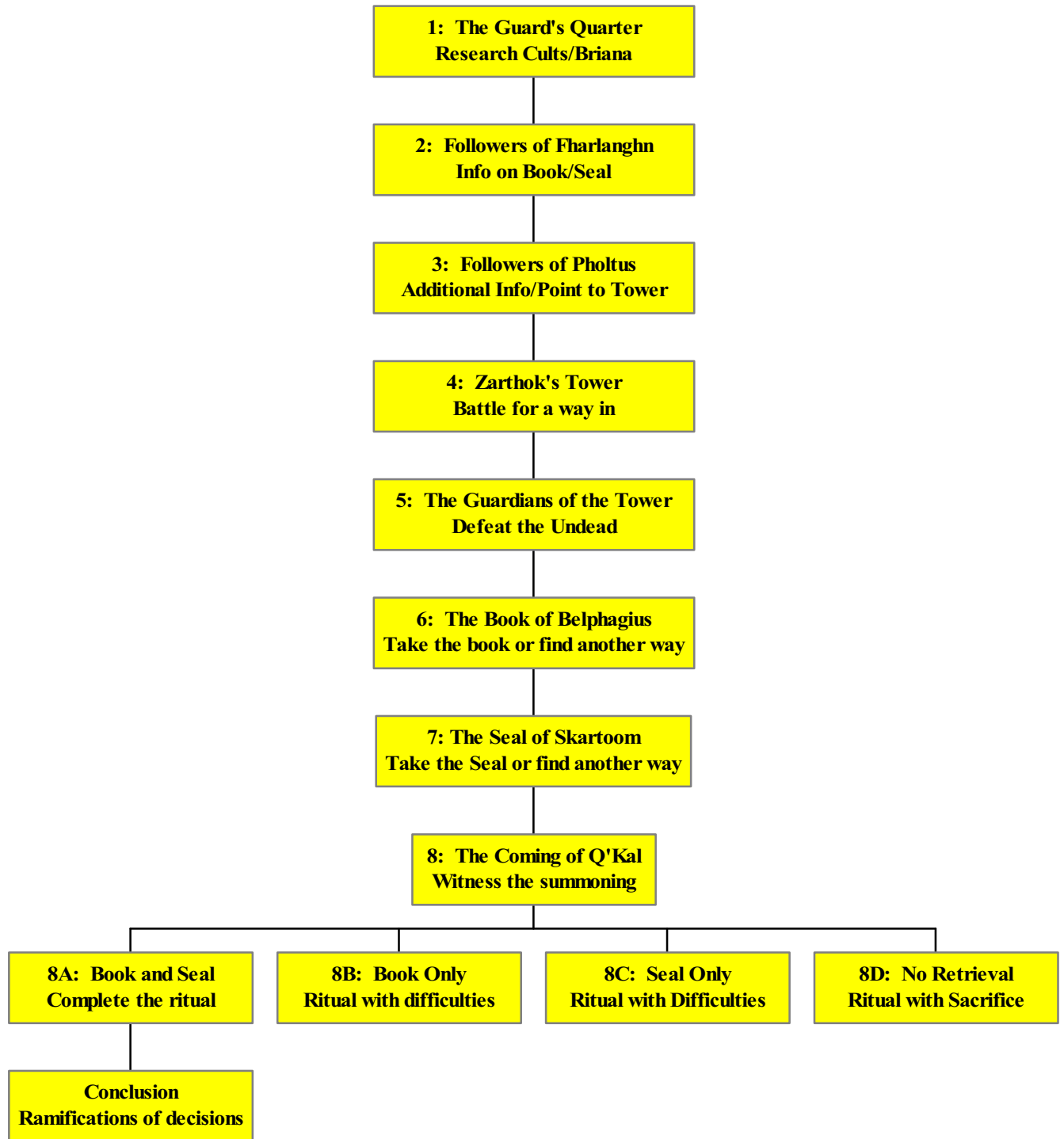
By the sacrifice of Sier-Legonis,
By the Grace of the Ilkataum,
By the Blessed Face of the Cosmic Mother,

In the Name of the Three Prime Powers,
In the Sight of the Three Great Seers,
In the Heart of the Three Facets of Life,

I bow to the Gods of Order,
I prostrate myself unto the Will of the Revealed Universe,
I beseech the protection of the Most-Wise.

By the Three times Three, I Summon Thee,
By the Sacred Nine, my life is Thine.
In the Name of All, now heed my Call!

DM AID: FLOWCHART OF ENCOUNTERS



ENLISTING THE ICONIC

☞ **Tordek, male dwarf Ftr**: CR 1; Medium-size humanoid (dwarf); HD 1d10+3; hp 13; Init +1; Spd 15 ft.; AC 17 (touch 11, flat-footed 16); Atks +4 melee (1d10+2/x3, dwarven waraxe), or +2 ranged (1d6/x3, shortbow); SQ Dwarven traits; AL LN; SV Fort +5, Ref +1, Will +1; Str 15, Dex 13, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 6.

Skills and Feats: Climb +0, Jump +0; Exotic Weapon Proficiency (dwarven waraxe), Weapon Focus (dwarven waraxe).

Possessions: Traveler's outfit, scale mail, large wooden shield, dwarven waraxe, shortbow, quiver with 20 arrows, backpack with waterskin, 1 day trail rations, bedroll, sack and flint and steel.

☞ **Mialee, female elf Wizr**: CR 1; Medium-size humanoid (elf); HD 1d4+3; hp 7; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 13 (touch 13, flat-footed 10); Atks +0 melee (1d6, quarterstaff), or –6 melee (1d6, quarterstaff) and –10 melee (1d6, quarterstaff), or +3 ranged (1d6/x3, shortbow); SQ Elven traits; AL N; SV Fort +0, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +4, Knowledge (arcane) +6, Listen +3, Search +6, Spellcraft +6, Spot +3; Scribe Scroll (virtual), Toughness.

Spells Prepared (3/2; base DC = 12 + spell level): 0—*daze, ray of frost, read magic*; 1st—*mage armor, sleep*.

Spellbook: 0—all of them; 1st—*charm person, mage armor, magic missile, sleep, summon monster I*.

Possessions: Traveler's outfit, quarterstaff, shortbow, quiver of 20 arrows, backpack with waterskin, 1 day trail rations, bedroll, sack, flint and steel, 10 candles, map case, 3 pages parchment, ink and pen, spell pouch, spellbook.

☞ **Lidda, female halfling Rogr**: CR 1; Small humanoid (halfling); HD 1d6+1; hp 7; Init +7; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16 (touch 14, flat-footed 13); Atks +1 melee (1d6/19-20, short sword) or +4 ranged (1d8/19-20, light crossbow), or +1 melee (1d4/19-20, dagger) or +5 ranged (1d4/19-20, dagger); SA Sneak attack +1d6; SQ Halfling traits; AL CG; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 10, Dex 17, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Climb +6, Disable Device +6, Gather Information +1, Hide +11, Jump +6, Listen +6, Move Silently +9, Open Locks +7, Search +6, Spot +4, Tumble +7, Use Magic Device +1; Improved Initiative.

Possessions: Explorer's outfit, leather armor, shortsword, light crossbow, 10 crossbow bolts, dagger, Backpack with waterskin, 1 day trail rations, bedroll, sack, flint and steel, thieves' tools hooded lantern, 3 pints of lantern oil.

☞ **Jozan, male human Clr**: CR 1; Medium-size humanoid (human); HD 1d8+2; hp 10; Init –1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 15 (touch 9, flat-footed 15); Atk +1 melee (1d8+1, heavy mace), or –1 ranged (1d8/19-20, light crossbow); SA Turn Undead 4/day 2d6+2; AL NG; SV Fort +4, Ref –1; Will +4; Str 12, Dex 8, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +6, Heal +6, Listen +4, Knowledge (religion) +0, Spellcraft +4, Spot +4; Alertness, Scribe Scroll.

Spells Prepared (3/2+1; base DC 12 + spell level); 0—*detect poison, guidance, read magic*; 1st—*bles, protection from evil**, *shield of faith*.

* Domain spell; *Deity*: Pelor; *Domains*: Good (good spells cast at +1 caster level) and Healing (healing spells cast at +1 caster level).

Possessions: Cleric's vestments, scale mail, large wooden shield, heavy mace, light crossbow, 10 crossbow bolts, backpack with waterskin, 1 day of trail rations, bedroll, sack, flint and steel, wooden holy symbol (sun disk of Pelor), 3 torches.