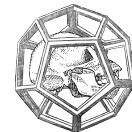# The Black Gem

by Jeff Sparks

AN ADVENTURE

FOR 3–5 CHARACTERS OF 1ST TO 3RD LEVEL

FOR USE WITH LABYRITH LORD AND SIMILAR GAMES

Synopsis

After being drugged and captured by the townsfolk of Gant, the party awakens to find themselves in a large cemetery as the sun sets. Bound and stripped of their possessions, the heroes have been left as sacrifices for the hungry undead. In order to survive, they must gather resources; avoid or defeat the undead; and discover the source of the evil that infects the graveyard: a cursed jewel, buried there with its former owner: The Black Gem.

GM's Overview

The Black Gem is a short adventure written for 3–5 player characters of 1st to 3rd level. It is designed to be played in as little as a single evening. A good mix of character types is recommended. If placing the adventure into an existing campaign, the GM can use any location where an isolated village and a large cemetery can be set.

Background

The town of Gant is a typical fantasy setting village of a few hundred souls. The nearby cemetery is far too large for such a dorp. It is far older than the town, in fact; a remnant necropolis built for a nearby ancient ruined city.

The people of Gant used the cemetery for its intended purpose for generations without incident until about ten years ago. A former townsman who had left Gant to make his fortune passed away. His last request was to be buried with his family in the old graveyard. His body was interred in a fine casket with an impressive monument erected above the familial plot.

Unfortunately, one of the items buried with the merchant was a garnet pin. The stone was large and of an unusually deep red, so as to appear almost black. How he had come by it, no one knows, but he was not the original owner. It had been the prized possession of an evil necromancer years before, and was imbued with many of that wizard's foul magics. The merchant had no inkling of the item's powers, and so never used it.

As the gem lay in the ground, surrounded by death, its power reached out and began to corrupt the cemetery's residents. Every new moon, its power would reach an apex, and the dead would rise. At first only one or two would shuffle out of their tombs or graves; but as time went on, more and more would stir.

The undead soon found the village and began to attack every month, always when the moon was dark. After learning that some sort of curse had come to the graveyard, the town's dead are now twice blessed by the local priest and then cremated, with their ashes scattered. The people of Gant discovered that the foul things were seeking living flesh to devour, and so decided to leave sacrifices for them in the cemetery. Animals were ignored by the restless dead, so the Gantmen resorted to human meals for the unholy predators. The old or sick were sometimes left, but if a wayward traveler happened along, he might be "volunteered" for the task. Sometimes a stranger might be captured and kept prisoner for weeks in order to have him available at the next new moon. The party was just unlucky enough to have been passing through on the precise day.

Gant is far too remote to receive much outside help, and while another town might hire the heroes to help them instead of sacrificing them, the villagers are unwilling to risk it.

The Black Gem

Buried with its owner decades ago, this garnet brooch is a cursed item infused with necromantic energies. It is a large, very dark garnet surrounded by small diamond chips (As jewelry, its estimated value is approximately 500 gold pieces). If wielded by a magic-using character, the item can cast a temporary version of *animate dead* once per day as a random level caster (2nd-12th), but the effect only lasts six hours. Using the gem (even once) causes the bearer to slowly (over weeks) take on a cadaverous appearance, as if undead himself, eventually taking on a lich-like visage. The gem is also cursed, so that whomever possesses it will refuse to willingly give it up. *Remove curse* (LL25) or *dispel evil* (LL22) can free the possessor of the gem, but only if cast by a 9th level or higher cleric. Any corpselike changes to appearance are permanent.

The jewel can be destroyed simply by smashing it, but doing so causes an explosion of negative energy in a 20' radius. The blast deals 2d6 damage to living targets and heals undead by the same amount. Any undead created by the gem—except those inside the blast radius—begin to decay rapidly, falling to pieces in one round. Those undead imbued with energy from the blast are affected by a *haste* (LL32) effect for 3 rounds before crumbling.

Player's Introduction

Your head throbs dizzily as you come to your senses. There is a pain in your wrists and shoulders and you realize your hands are bound behind you. You can feel some sort of bar pressing into your back, too. You open your eyes and look about.

You are outdoors, sitting awkwardly on the ground. The shadows are long, so it is either early or late in the day. Taking stock of your surroundings, you appear to be in a graveyard. There are headstones and monuments around you, but the grounds are unkempt. Grass and brambles grow thick and creeping vines cover several gravestones.

Your head clears a little and memories come trickling back. You had been on the road a while, following up on rumors of a ruined city with hidden vaults yet unplundered. You had reached that little town: Gund? Gont? Gant! That was the name! You'd stopped for the day, grateful for the chance to sleep under a roof. You and your party had been sitting in the taproom, having some food and ale, and then everything went dark. Drugged, obviously. But why?

A weathered signboard leans against a nearby crypt. It looks as if it were written a good while back, but is in the modern style of the Common Tongue. It reads:

> **FORGIVE US, STRANGERS. WE BEAR YOU NO MALICE, BUT THE DWELLERS MUST HAVE THEIR FARE OR THEY MAY LOOK TO OUR TOWN IN HUNGER.**
>
> **PARDON US FOR KEEPING YOUR TRAPPINGS, BUT YOU HAVE NO MORE NEED OF THEM. IN RETURN, WE PROMISE TO RETRIEVE YOUR BONES IN THE MORNING AND GIVE THEM A HERO'S PLACE IN CONSECRATED GROUND, SO YOU WILL NOT LATER JOIN THOSE WHO WILL SOON FEAST UPON YOU.**

You realize you're wearing nothing but a homespun smock. All your possessions are gone. The pain in your wrists flares again. You crane your head to see. Your companions are there, bound the same as you, to a low iron grating set into the ground. Underneath it is a stone slab. The word pops into your mind: a mortsafe—a cage anchored over graves to keep robbers out. You begin to struggle with the ropes as your friends do the same.

As you work at the bonds, the light begins to fade and mist starts to pool on the ground. It is sunset, and you are sure you can hear a scratching noise coming from the crypt that the sign leans upon.
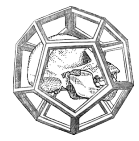
Moving Around

Some players may decide their best bet is to get clear of the cemetery as quickly as possible. To do this is difficult, but not impossible—and not without its risks.

The cemetery shows years of neglect. Paths are overgrown and graves are covered in brambles. Iron fences have rusted and mausoleums are begrimed. Even in daylight, walking through here would be difficult. Characters move at ²/₃ normal movement. To find one's way out of the burial ground is difficult, but not impossible. It also takes time; moving at faster than a slow walk is a recipe for tripping and falling. Straight lines are impossible as one weaves through rows of headstones, hills, and copses of stunted trees.

As the power of the gem waxes, its death magics chill the night air; thick tendrils of fog begin to rise among the graves. Visibility is drastically reduced and one's senses play tricks, making it difficult to keep one's bearings. This is in addition to the normal darkness from a moonless night. Characters suffer a –2 for near total darkness, and –1 for the fog. Visibility is limited to 20' (including infravision). Magic can disperse the fog temporarily, but it is not directly magical, and the conditions that created will cause it to reform quickly.

If all that were not enough, packs of the restless dead have begun to roam the grounds, hunting for the flesh of the living. Wild animals and birds have long since learned to shun the place, so our heroes are the only fare to be found. Every grave in the cemetery does not yield a monster, but there are more than enough of them scattered about to make things quite perilous. The undead do not rely on mortal eyes and ignore visibility penalties (though they are still slowed by the terrain).

The cemetery map gives a general layout of the grounds. Each hex represents approximately fifteen minutes' travel under the above circumstances (i.e. fog, darkness, broken terrain, and evading undead.). Each time the party crosses from one hex to the next, roll two separate six-sided dice. The first die determines whether the PCs have an encounter in the new hex. There is a one in six chance of encountering something (rolling a six). See the encounters table below for more details. The second die indicates the party's direction as they leave the old hex. A one is the direction the PCs intended to go, then move clockwise around the hex's sides to determine where they head next. It is perfectly possible to double back on their trail! Without special rules or magic to aid in navigating, there is simply no

reliable way for the party to maintain its bearings. Creative players may decide to try things like lighting a beacon fire (if they can) to orient themselves by. While cleverness shouldn't be punished, a fire or other bright light will attract monsters, and from there following the PCs' trail becomes quite simple (and deadly!). Also once the fire is out of direct sight, such as behind a hill, the fog diffuses the light making it difficult to pinpoint its source.

Encounters

d6	Result
1	1d6+2 Skeletons (LL95)
2	1d6+2 Zombies (LL103)
3	1d3 Ghouls (LL76)
4	1 Wisp
5	1d3 Skeletons and 1 Skeleton Warrior
6	Haunting

Terrain

For most hexes and encounters, the terrain is pretty similar. The cemetery is overgrown, as well as full of headstones and other grave markers. GMs should place or mark a few pieces of terrain for a given encounter however he likes.

Holing Up

Cautious players may feel that roaming about the cemetery at night is too dangerous (and with good reason!) and decide to seek a bolt hole. There are several large mausoleums and lych houses scattered about. Being made of solidly built stonework, these may seem ideal as impromptu fortifications. Despite these structures' sturdiness, such a plan is not without drawbacks. GMs should feel free to torment the cowardly PCs with the following rude awakenings:
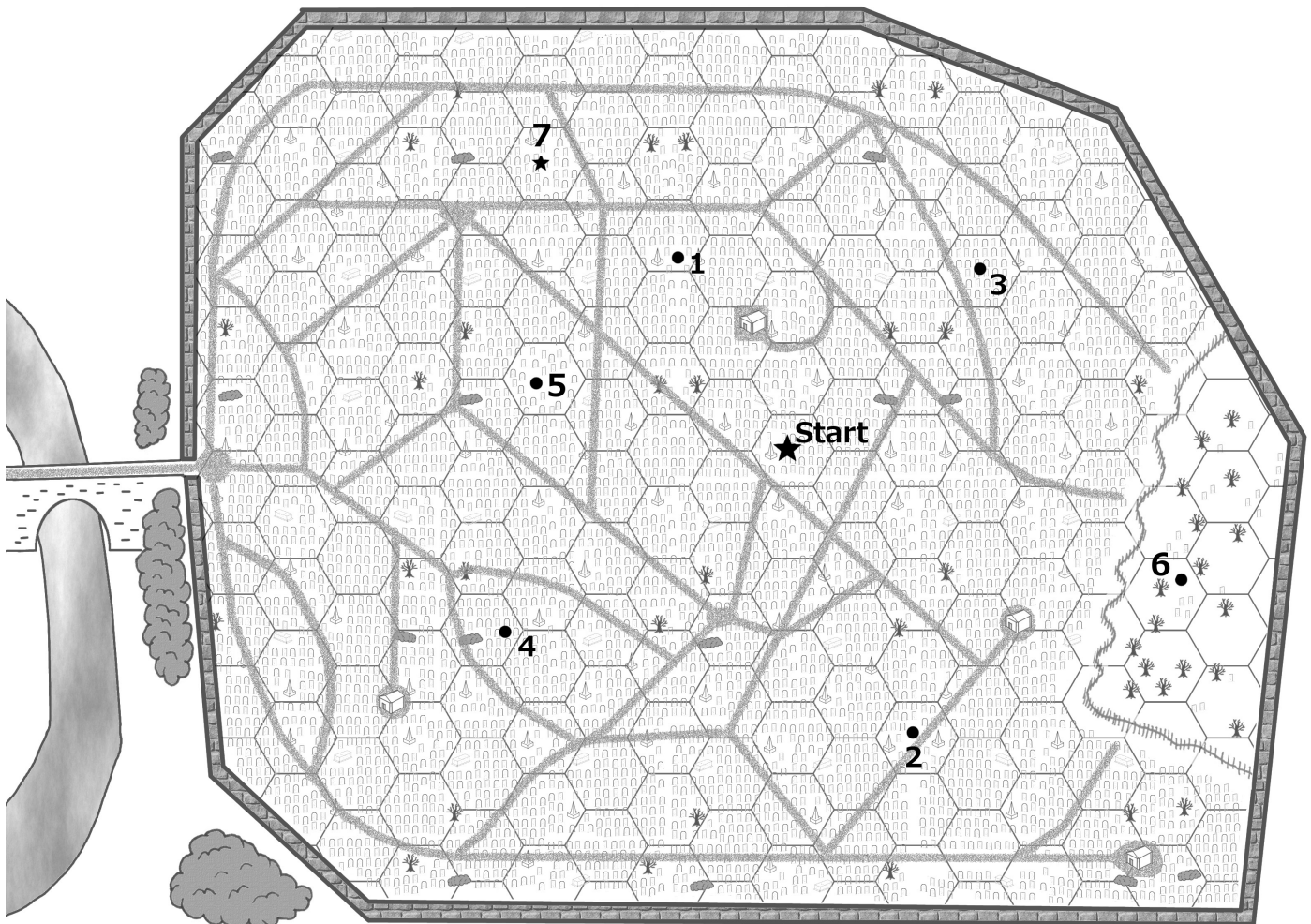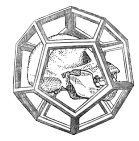
- These structures are all in a state of disrepair, and the gates that blocked the entrances are badly rusted. They will not lock properly, and the undead can reach through the bars. An Open Doors check will pull the gate from its hinges.

- The crypts are not empty. Generations' worth of families' remains may be inside or below. There is a chance every encounter roll that some or all of the dead occupants may animate.

- Walls do not stop ghosts or other immaterial undead. While haunts and wisps won't directly harm the PCs, they can draw other things to the party's location.

- There may be catacombs that connect to the crypt below, giving access to the monsters outside via tunnels.

Looting

The PCs might try raiding a few tombs for gear (digging up a buried coffin would take a lethally long time, but pushing the lid off a tomb is an Open Doors check). Most of the graves contain nothing of note, but there is a one in six chance that there is something of interest. Every time the PCs stop to loot a grave takes long enough to trigger another encounter roll within that hex. Roll on the table below to determine what the party finds.

d6	Result
1	Jewelry or coins worth up 1d6 x 10 gp
2	Holy symbol (brooch, pendant)
3	Leather armor (leather vest or tunic)
4	Shield
5	Short sword or mace
6	Occupant "wakes up" and attacks! (1–3: zombie, 4–6 skeleton)

There are other useful things to be found in the cemetery besides in graves. Rusted iron fencing is often topped with religious symbols. These could be snapped off and used by a cleric as a holy symbol. Flower vases and urns could hold holy water from the Crying Angel (see "Set Pieces"). Trees wield stout branches for cudgels or makeshift torches. A tomb's lid might help block a mausoleum doorway. Players should be encouraged toward creative problem solving.

Set Pieces

1: Grave Robbers

2: Crying Angel

3: Soldiers' Garden

4: Ghoul Gate

5: Potter's Field

6: Beyond the Pale

7: Danse Macabre (the Black Gem)

1: Grave Robbers

A pair of recently killed grave robbers is part of a zombie rabble. Their corpses are far fresher than their allies'. Several interesting effects can be found on their persons:

One has lockpicks, a silver holy symbol around his neck, and a vial of holy water in his pouch. The other has a prybar, flint, steel, an unburnt torch (which he is currently using as a club), and a silvered dagger at his belt.

One has a scrap of paper marking the specific tomb they were trying to rob. A scrawled note in the margin says simply "The Jewel." There are several recognizable landmarks on the map, so an Intelligence roll (LL55) would allow the PCs to follow the map to the tomb from where they encountered the zombies. The jewel marked on the map is, of course, the Black Gem's location (see "7: Danse Macabre").

2: Crying Angel

There is a granite statue on a plinth of a man-sized angel; its face buried in it hands as if crying. The figure is grimy, but otherwise in good condition. A weed-choked basin the size of a shallow cauldron is at its feet.

This fountain was constructed centuries ago during the height of the old city's power. It was enchanted to flow constantly, with "tears" of holy water falling from the weeping figure's hands. However, for the fountain to work, the basin must be cleared. If players spend a few minutes cleaning it out, the tears begin to flow once more. The liquid can be carried away if collected in a relatively clean vessel. The water rushes out initially, giving 1d3 flasks' worth of its tears. It then slows to a trickle, only producing one pint of holy water per hour, and never enough to overflow the basin.

3: Soldiers' Garden

Small, identical grave markers lay in straight, orderly rows. Time and the elements have worn them nearly smooth, but here and there an engraving in the shape of a sword can be seen on the facings.

In front of the ranks, a large marble tomb stands on a stone yard. Moving in perfect unison, some twenty skeletal soldiers—tattered scraps of uniform hanging from their frames—march back and forth in front of the tomb. Each carries a spear resting against a bony shoulder.

The name on the side reads PALLUC. Those characters with some knowledge of history can make an Intelligence roll to know that he was a famous general of ancient times, known for the fanatic loyalty of his troops.

The skeletons will attack anyone (living or dead) that approaches within 30' of the tomb. If half or more of them are destroyed, Palluc will rise from his grave as a Haunting (see "New Monsters"). He cannot harm the PCs directly, but his presence will cause 1d6+6 more skeleton warriors to rise from their graves and attack. Once all the skeletons are destroyed, the haunting will dissipate.

The soldiers' spears are usable, but very old. They suffer a –1 penalty to hit and damage. To open the stone lid of Palluc's tomb requires a successful Open Doors check at a –1 penalty (LL44). Inside, the general's corpse wears a ornate cuirass (banded mail), and holds a massive two-handed sword. Both are in good condition. The sword is enchanted with a +1 bonus, but it very bulky and slow (–1 to initiative).

4: Ghoul Gate

When the cemetery was in good repair, signs pointed visitors to various parts of the grounds, as well as the gates. These have fallen or rotted away over the years, but there are faded signboards still hanging from poles in a few places. The one the PCs first spot is pointing to "LYCH GATE." While this may sound ominous to characters in a fantasy setting, if the players are unfamiliar with the term, allow them to make an Intelligence roll for their characters. A success will tell them that "Lych Gate" is the entrance by which funeral coaches or wagons enter a cemetery bearing the deceased. This would seem a stroke of luck for the heroes, finding a sign pointing toward the exit—and in other cases it might be. Unfortunately, it is a devious trick played by a pack of four hungry ghouls.

The signs fell down years ago, but the ghouls re-hung them pointing toward their lair which lies beneath a ruined mausoleum. There are three signposts, each approximately fifty yards apart. The last is only 30' from the lair. The ghouls will be hidden among the broken masonry, gaining an ambush bonus when the party arrives at the last sign (surprise on a 1–4). If the characters choose not to follow the signs, roll twice for encounters within this hex. A six on either roll means they encounter the four ghouls as the monsters come seeking the prey that was so inconsiderate as to not follow directions.

5: Potter's Field

This low field lacks any markers or monuments. Here lay the mass graves for paupers. The bodies have long since rotted away, leaving tumbled bones and empty space under the turf. Walking across the field has a one in three chance of falling through a weak point in the ground. The victim only falls ten feet, but lands amidst a pile of bones. Movement within the pile is limited to a single movement at one half speed (no running). Starting the next turn, and every turn after, 1d6 skeletons will assemble and animate to attack the interloper. The skeletons will not stop until there is nothing living inside the cavity or within 30' of the opening.
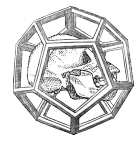
6: Beyond the Pale

The headstones and monuments are less frequent here, while the vegetation is thicker. A rusty iron fence blocks the way ahead, cordoning off a wooded section of this necropolis. A low gate swings crazily on one hinge nearby. Hanging from its bars is a faded sign which bears but a single word: PALE. A few crooked grave markers can be seen under the nearest trees beyond. The darkness and mist, which have been a constant trial since you awoke here, seem somehow thicker past these rails.

This is unconsecrated ground, where suicides, heretics, and unrepentant criminals were buried. The stones are fewer, and plainer here than the rest of the cemetery. People consigned to be buried here were usually given shallow graves and little regard. The fence's bars have holy symbols on top of them (see "Looting"), and were set there to keep evil spirits confined to this area.

Because this area was never hallowed to begin with, the power of the gem is particularly strong here. GMs make encounter rolls twice for each hex beyond the pale using the special chart below:

d6	Result
1–2	1d3 zombies
3–4	1d3 skeletons
5–6	2 ghouls

There is also an especially dangerous set piece here: The ghost of Sad Sondra.

Sad Sondra

Sondra Fletcher was a young girl of Gant, driven to suicide after being seduced by a wandering adventurer. She has haunted beyond the pale for many years. Since the black gem came to the cemetery, her power has grown. She can manifest much more substantially on nights that the gem is active. (See "New Monsters" for more information.)

When the party sees her, she appears as a pretty girl of about seventeen in simple villager's garb. She is solid and seems alive and normal. She tells the party she was caught here after dark and hid in the groundskeeper's hut. She came out just now because she thought she heard voices and saw someone with a torch walking in the mist. Players that have encountered wisps will recognize her description.

As Sondra speaks her voice takes on a musical quality, becoming mesmerizing in tone. Her form begins to fade and become spectral in appearance. She can use her voice to hypnotize one target per round. The victims remain entranced as long as she keeps singing. Her voice also attracts other undead, summoning a random result from the Pale table every 1d6 rounds.

7: Danse Macabre

The Black Gem's powers not only animate the dead within the cemetery, but bind them to the bearer's will. With no living wielder, the gem's power gives no direction to its creations, but the weaker and more mindless undead are drawn to the energies like moths to a flame.

A dark purple light emanates from within a mausoleum, illuminating an eerie scene. Dozens of decayed corpses, some lacking even a complete set of limbs, stand and shuffle around the structure in a loose circle. The undead seem to

have no purpose other than to be close to the light. There are 20 skeletons and 12 zombies. They are all unarmed.

Anyone approaching the scene is ignored at first. Attacking the undead will give an automatic surprise round, after that they will all react normally. If any living person approaches with 30' of the mausoleum, the gem will sense him. It will animate the merchant's corpse as a WIGHT (LL102) and move to attack the characters. The gem operates without intelligence, only a fierce will to consume the life force of its victims.

If the wight is defeated, the gem's power still operates. A magic-using character can take up the gem and try to command it, but it requires a saving throw vs. spells to attune to it first. Further, the item is evil and will eventually corrupt the wearer, turning him to evil (see "The Black Gem" for more information).

Aftermath

If the party manages to survive the night, they may wish to return to Gant in order to retrieve their gear (and possibly have words with their former hosts). How this plays out will depend on several factors, not the least of which is how the PCs approach the situation. Needless to say, the villagers would be more than a little surprised to see the characters again, and feeling not a little guilty about what they did. The villagers don't wish a fight, especially with anyone who could survive the cemetery. So they will—if asked—give the PCs all the ready cash they have (200 gp) as a weregild for their trespasses against them. If it becomes known that the characters found the source of the curse (the gem) and destroyed it, they will be hailed as heroes. The Gantmen are not evil, they are scared of the evil creatures that have plagued them for years.

If the party simply managed to escape, the villagers can probably be convinced to return the PCs' equipment in exchange for promises not to exact revenge or call down the authorities. Reaction rolls or Charisma ability checks will most likely be in order here. GMs should be flexible about how things pan out, but remember that the townsfolk still outnumber the PCs and are unlikely to give up too much to them just because they wronged our heroes.

If the party has broken the curse (by removing or destroying the gem), then the villagers will be more apologetic, and grateful. They will offer to fete the PCs, as well as return all their equipment. It's up to the characters how much (or little) of this gratitude they accept.

LL Bestiary

Skeleton (LL95)

Move: 120 (40'); AC: 7; HD: 1; Attacks: 1; Damage: 1d6; Save: F1; Morale: 12; Hoard Class: nil; XP: 13

Tattered rags or no clothing. Armed only with bony, claw-like fingers.

Skeleton Warrior

Move: 120 (40'); AC: 4; HD: 2+2; Attacks: 1; Damage: 1d8; Save: F2; Morale: 12; Hoard Class: nil; XP: 47

Wears a bronze breastplate. It carries an ancient sword or axe and shield. All three items are tarnished and old, but perfectly usable.

Skeletal Soldier

Move: 120 (40'); AC: 7; HD: 1; Attacks: 1; Damage: 1d6 (spear); Save: F1; Morale: 12; Hoard Class: nil; XP: 13

Zombie (LL103)

Move: 120 (40'); AC: 8; HD: 2; Attacks: 1; Damage: 1d8; Save: F1; Morale: 12; Hoard Class: nil; XP: 29

Attacks last each round.

Ghoul (LL76)

Move: 90 (30'); AC: 6; HD: 2; Attacks: 3 (2 claws/1 bite); Damage: 1d3/1d3/1d3 + special; Save: F2; Morale: 9; Hoard Class: XXI; XP: 47

Turn as 3 HD undead. A successful attack by a ghoul forces a save or target is paralyzed for 2d4 turns.

Wight (LL102)

Move: 120' (40'); AC: 5; HD: 3; Attacks: 1; Damage: Drain; Save: F3; Morale: 12; Hoard Class: XXI; XP: 110

A hit by the wight drains one level (or HD) from victim. Silver or magic weapons are needed to hit the wight.

New Monsters

Sad Sondra

Move: 120' (40'); AC: 7; HD: 2+2; Attacks: 1; Damage: Special; Save: C2; Morale: 10; Hoard Class: nil; XP: 54

Sondra can target one victim per round with her voice. Target must save vs. spell or become entranced and helpless, similar to the hypnotic pattern spell (AEC51), for as long as Sondra continues to sing. Only silver, magic, holy water, or fire can harm the spirit.

Wisps

These evil spirits appear as lanterns or torches in the distance—through trees or fog. They also make faint voice-like noises, tricking the ear as well as they eye. They lure travelers and those out late at night astray, inevitably toward danger. They make no attack themselves, merely leading their victims to their doom. If attacked, they disappear then reappear later in a different area. Anyone who follows a wisp for more than two Long movements distance will automatically have a random encounter. Once the true threat appears, the wisp vanishes.

Haunting

A haunting is not a true ghost in the undead sense. It is more like an echo of an ended life. Such things are not uncommon, as far as the supernatural goes. Here under the influence of the black gem, they appear much more often.

A haunting usually appears as a translucent apparition, much as it did in life. It may or may not be aware of anyone or anything around it. Sometimes it merely remains motionless, floating or standing near its grave. Sometimes they act out some scene, over and over.

If a haunting is spoken to, it may react. Usually it merely looks at the person and then looks away. If it touched or attacked, it breaks apart into tatters of smoke, but not before howling in anguish. The haunting's cry has a Fear effect. It also causes another encounter check (the noise attracts other monsters).