

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

THE STAR WOUND OF ABADDON

#99: A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
BY MARZIO MUSCEDERE



William
Muscudere
2018
WM



Dungeon Crawl Classics

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THE STAR WOUND OF ABADDON

A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

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INTRODUCTION



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

This adventure sees the characters on a mad sojourn through the Star Wound of Abaddon, a blasted landscape of maddening terror and elder desolation. Therein, they must contend with vile creatures, dangerous vegetation, and strange locales, if they are to have any chance of successfully mending a tear in reality and finally putting an end to an ancient evil that has plagued this land for untold millennia.

Comprised of three parts, the adventure opens with a treacherous point-crawl through a nightmare wasteland mortared in ash and human gravel, followed by a dungeon delve into the benighted ruins of a buried cathedral, and culminating in an epic confrontation with an abomination from beyond the void.

This adventure is intended for a party of 3rd-level characters, but is versatile enough that it can easily be scaled to accommodate almost any level of adventuring party. Inspired by the works of Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith, judges wishing to do so can easily place this adventure in their own setting and campaign world.

During the course of this adventure, many instances will arise that call for the finding of defaced holy symbols and desecrated religious items. Tailoring these items to the PCs' beliefs will go a long way in making the adventure even more memorable for the players. Judges would be best served to know the deities, patrons, and faiths the PCs adhere to before commencing the game.

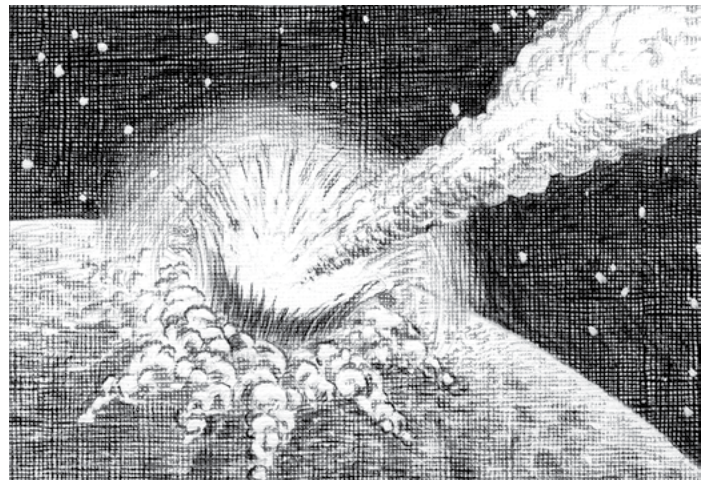
BACKGROUND



Men are ever loath to admit that they truly understand little of the world, and even less of the gods. Namely, that a piece of hell can fall from the sky just as assuredly as a portion of heaven. And for the ancient peoples of far antiquity, the comet that blazed across the horizon was unquestionably a gift from the heavens and a boon for the masses.

Thus, a fervor spread amongst the people. The old gods were repudiated, their idols defaced, their great temples razed. A new religion sprang from the mania; the *Cult of the Comet* was born. Led by astromancer-priests, the people worshiped the fiery orb as the one true God. Decadent rituals and obscene rites were performed under the open sky in reverence to the approaching star, for surely the tumbling orb was a gift from the heavens.

They couldn't have been more wrong.



For time uncounted the comet hurled through space, lost and rudderless, forgotten in the eternal emptiness of the void. Lurking deep in the dark and silent reaches of the universe it hungered, an engine of otherworldly destruction, ready to slake its thirst for mortal souls. Until, by chance, it heard a call from the most unlikely of sources — mankind.

Drawn by those believing it to be a god, it fell in fire from the void, scorching the horizon, throwing up a ring of mountains with the violence of its descent, and in doing so tearing the very fabric of reality. And out of the devastation crawled a thing not of this world, but a loathsome creature from the outer dark — *the Devourer of Souls*.

There, beyond a ring of jagged peaks, beneath the baleful gleam of cadaverous moons it took root in the blasted plain and sea of slaughter that had once been a prosperous people — and gorged upon their mortal souls.

Over time, men have come to name the ruin the *Star Wound of Abaddon*. A nightmare realm that exists within the colossal bowl of the fallen comet, whose mystic heavens and strange horizons wither and die in cosmic darkness. Born of atrocity and annihilation it sits as a gruesome scar upon the land, a grim testament to things terrible and best left forgotten. And for generations uncounted it lay forgotten and dreaming in a dark corner of the world, shunned by both man and creature alike.

But now something calls from its insufferable emptiness, promising paradise to all who enter. At first it began as only a whisper, rumors of mysterious disappearances and madmen claiming strange visions of paradise from beyond the void. Soon it became a roar, temples left abandoned, chapels defiled, men and women from across the realm renouncing their gods and making great pilgrimages into its ashen wastes — despite that all who enter never return.

The *Devourer* stirs once again!

Compelled by a ravenous hunger, it calls out to the weak and impressionable. Luring the credulous into its cadaverous wastes where it may sow its ruinous fields with the bodies of the deceived and slake its gluttonous appetite for mortal souls anew.

JUDGE'S NOTES

GEOGRAPHY

Under twin moons of sickly scarlet, the Star Wound of Abaddon stretches interminable beneath the black heavens. Strange winds howl from gulfs beyond time and space, sowing the ruinous fields with the gray dust of corroding planets and black ashes of extinguished suns. Yet at its heart, lies a veritable paradise amidst the infinite desolation, defiant despite the oppressive pall of death. A vernal oasis, rich and verdant, with towering trees that rise miraculously amid the mounded dust of timeless ruin.

And yet, despite the beckoning allure of that promised sanctuary, nary one of the thousand evil things that dwell in the dust of that loathsome hell obey its call. For they alone know the truth of this forsaken place. There are no gods in Abaddon, save for one, the lord of this place.

The *Devourer* in the wastes.

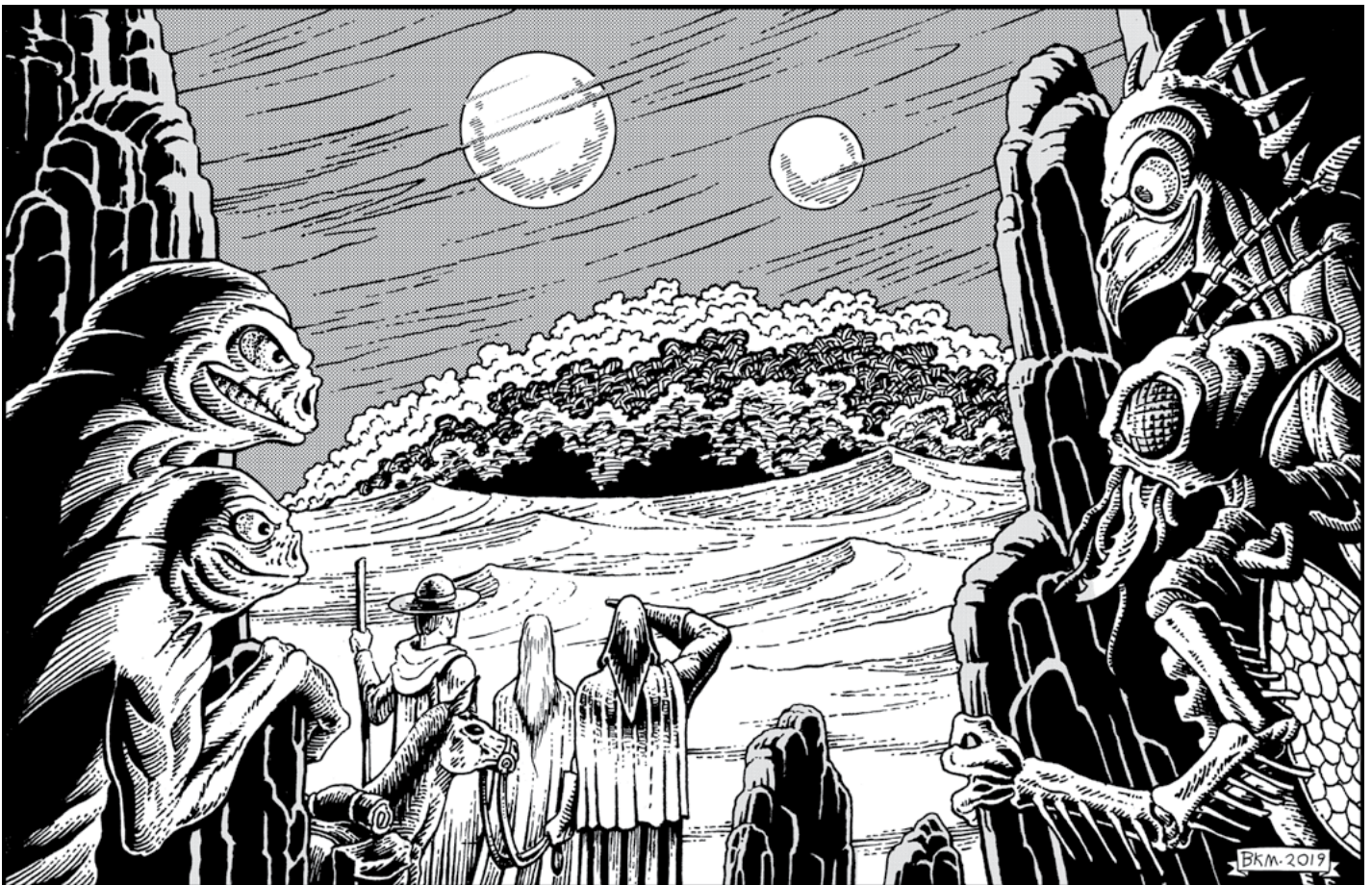
Within the Star Wound of Abaddon there are no days, no nights, no seasons—only endless existence, and the lure of the garden at its center. Judges are encouraged to play with the characters' sense of time and direction. Always have the garden just ahead in the horizon, regardless of the direction the PCs travel. Judges should note that there is no escape from this realm without first confronting the *Devourer* in its garden.

TRAVEL WITHIN THE WASTES

To better capture the surreal and nightmare qualities of the Star Wound of Abaddon, travel throughout the wastes is represented on the map via a point-crawl system. Each point on the map within **area 1** represents an encounter location, and the lines that run between the points represent PCs' line of sight through the miasmal haze of floating dust and coiling vapors that rise from the rotting earth. Vision, time, and direction are all distorted in a dream-like fog as locations seemingly appear without notice out of the night and silence, shimmering mirage-like in the distant gloom.

Unlike conventional travel, PCs within the wastes may only travel to encounter areas within Line of Sight. Judges should only read the **Line of Sight** descriptions for each encounter area provided. Note that the Forsaken Garden (area 3) is always within line of sight.

Because time and distance hold little meaning within the Star Wound of Abaddon, travel between points within the wastes varies arbitrarily from an effortless and quick jaunt to an exhausting and near endless slog (judge's discretion). This is represented via a **Despair Check** each time the PCs travel between encounter locations within the wastes.



DESPAIR CHECK



Characters traversing the wastes find themselves treading a nightmare world of unnatural sorrow and oppressive despair that fills the living with an aura of suffocating melancholy and bleak apathy. Sounds are curiously muffled and accompanied by strange echoes. The very air sits heavy in the lungs with the taste of ash and powdered bone, while food and spirits no longer carry any taste at all. Fire, once lit, gives off no heat and sputters with a strange emerald glow, and a pronounced lethargy creeps into the soul that even rest can no longer alleviate.

Each journey made between encounter locations within the wastes results in a temporary loss of 1d3 points of Personality (DC 8 Willpower save to avoid). Note that the oppressive despair of this place can never reduce a PC to a Personality score lower than 3. Lost points are regained normally. PCs who suffer five or more points of Personality damage or are reduced to a Personality score of 3, are filled with a strange and alluring vision.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The growing fog of despair that has permeated your soul suddenly vanishes in a moment of profound clarity. A vision of an elderly man seated in a garden paradise fills your mind with a calming sense of peace. With eyes full of wonder and sadness the figure extends his hands in a gesture of peace, his voice as clear and soothing as a summer rain, "Fear thou not, for salvation awaits. Seek ye the garden. Seek me within."

Unbeknownst to the PC, the vision is similar to those experienced by the pilgriming townsfolk, and is nothing more than a ploy propagated by the Devourer to lure fresh souls into its garden, so that it may feed.

MAGIC WITHIN THE WASTES



The Star Wound of Abaddon lies hidden from both gods and patrons alike. Here, the watchful gods and supernatural patrons of proper and well-ordered lands are blind to the unknown horrors and nightmare pleasures that haunt this realm. Clerics, so often accustomed to hearing their god's own voice are met with only an eerie silence, while the powers that govern arcane spellcasting for wizards and elves can prove to be erratic within this nightmare realm.

Special Rules for Divine Disapproval: With each point of divine disapproval gained, a cleric drifts further and further away from their deity and closer to the true horrors of the universe. Each time a cleric is required to roll on the Disapproval Table, a d100 is also rolled against the cleric's disapproval rating. A roll equal to or below the current disapproval rating calls forth an *Empty Light* from beyond the stars, drawn to the aura of the cleric no longer in communion with his god.

This living cloud of darkness and cosmic filth will center about the cleric and attempt a melee attack each round against all targets within its diameter. A successful melee



attack deals 2d4 damage, as all living matter within its atomizing embrace slowly dissolves into a fine mist.

Empty Light, 30': Init +4; Atk atomizing embrace +4 melee (2d4); AC 12; HD 8d8; hp 32; MV 50' (flight); Act 1d20 per target in 30' radius; SP darkness 30'; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +3; AL C.

Cosmic Perversion: Each time any spell is attempted within the Star Wound of Abaddon there is a 15% chance per spell level of triggering a *Cosmic Perversion* (see table on page 5), as spectral energies and cosmic filth from beyond the void react to the phlogiston disturbance created by the spell attempt. Note that the *Cosmic Perversion* result is always resolved before the spell check is made, as outlined in the table below.

COSMIC PERVERSION TABLE

Roll D16+
Luck Modifier

Result

1 or less

Reverse gravity. Everyone within a 50' radius of the caster rockets d100' into the air...then tumbles down for damage (1d6 per 10', round down; DC 15 Reflex save for half). Original spell attempt fails but is not lost.

2

Caster bears witness to the bleak horrors of the cosmos and is transported twisting and turning into the void. Although the entire event seems to last only seconds, the caster returns aged 1d30 years per spell level. For every 20 years aged, the caster permanently loses 1 point of Strength, Agility, and Stamina, but gains 1 point of Intelligence and Personality. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.



3

Explosion! Everyone within a 30' radius of the caster takes 1d6 damage per caster level (DC 15 Reflex save for half). Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

4

Everyone within a 30' radius of the caster is affected as by the wizard's spell, *Slow*. All targets within range are *slowed* to half their normal speed (DC 13 Willpower save to resist) and can take normal actions only once every other round. The effect lasts for 1d4+1 rounds. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

5

Spell affects a random target among those available (caster and allies are included among random targets). Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

6

Caster feels nothing more than a sharp and fleeting tear at their psyche. In truth, a doppelganger of the caster is immediately created back in their home world, wreaking havoc, living their life or worse. Caster is unaware of the doppelganger, until of course they return home. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

7

Spell appears to fail but, unbeknownst to the caster, fires normally 1d5 rounds later. Roll spell check and resolve effect as indicated above.

8

Unbeknownst to the caster, the next phrase spoken by him becomes true, lasting for 1 turn. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

9

Different spell effect. Randomly determine any different spell of the same level and follow the results for the spell check rolled. Roll spell check as indicated above.

10

Caster gains a new and permanent mercurial effect for the spell attempted. Roll on mercurial magic table to determine effect. Caster also regains all current lost spells. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

11

Caster and all allies heal 3d12 hit points. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

12

Everyone within a 30' radius of the caster is affected as by the wizard's spell, *Haste*. Gaining double movement speed and one extra action die each round. The effect lasts for 1d4+1 rounds. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

13

Power surge! Spell takes effect with maximum results for the spell check rolled. Max duration, damage, number of targets, etc. Roll spell check and resolve as indicated above.

14

1d3 Star Stones (see description on page 11) per caster level boils up from the earth. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

15

Ultimate power surge! Spell fires as if the maximum spell check result was rolled. Resolve spell as indicated above.

16+

Caster imbued with eldritch wisdom and immediately gains working knowledge of a randomly determined spell. For wizards, this spell instantly appears in their grimoire. Roll spell check and resolve effect as normal.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventure begins when a temple leader, high priest, or wizard's patron call upon the PCs to discover what has been causing good, god-fearing people to renounce their faith and undertake a treacherous pilgrimage into a forsaken land – despite that any who enter never return.

The PCs are tasked to enter the Star Wound of Abaddon, wherein they must mend the tear in reality and finally put an end to this unholy menace – for the very gods demand it!

For judges wishing to incorporate this adventure into their on-going campaign world, the Star Wound of Abaddon can easily be placed in any area off the beaten path. Although this adventure does not deal with the characters' journey to the Star Wound, judges are encouraged to flesh out the journey with as much or as little detail as they see fit.

This adventure opens with the PCs on the trail of a group of pilgrims, deep in the heart of the Halo Mountains, at the very Doorway to Doom...

RUMORS & SUPERSTITIONS



Since time immemorial the Star Wound of Abaddon has always been a source of fear and superstition. Few if any have ever ventured beyond its hoary gates, yet frightful legends and dire tales abound.

Before beginning the adventure, each character should roll 1d10 on the following table as many times as per their Intelligence modifier (min of 1 roll). It is up to the characters to determine if what they have heard is fact or fiction.

1. A holy man both wise and ancient lives within the Star Wound of Abaddon. He is the gate and the key, the answer to life and death. (F)
2. Gods and patrons alike cannot see into the Star Wound of Abaddon, for it resides in a void outside of time and space. Both arcane and divine magic can prove to be unpredictable and erratic within. (T)
3. One does not simply walk into Star Wound of Abaddon. There is evil within that does not sleep, that is ever watchful. It is a barren wasteland, riddled with ash and dust and death. The very air is a poisonous fume, and nightmare creatures roam both above and below ground. (T)
4. The Star Wound of Abaddon was created when a titanic comet toppled from the heavens and scorched the earth, tearing a hole in the very fabric of reality. (T)
5. A garden paradise resides in the center of the Star Wound of Abaddon, granting eternal life to all who seek shelter there. (F)
6. Gold and glory abounds for those brave enough to enter this forsaken land. Time-lost treasures and forbidden sorceries lie buried within an ancient cathedral beneath the dust. (T)

7. A renegade heretic responsible for unnamed atrocities against the gods hides somewhere within the Star Wound of Abaddon. A red priest, known as the betrayer of the gods. (T)
8. It is said the very gods themselves are vexed by the existence of the Star Wound of Abaddon. Sealing it from the world would undoubtedly bring great favor from the gods. (T)
9. Men and women from across the realm have been renouncing their gods and making great pilgrimages into the Star Wound of Abaddon's ashen wastes. They claim something calls to them from within, promising paradise to all who enter. (T)
10. A brave band of adventurers led by a priestess of Justicia entered the Star Wound of Abaddon weeks ago, determined to bring an end to this nightmare realm – none have returned. (T)

ENCOUNTER TABLE

Area	Type	Encounter
Start	P	Pallid Gate Visions of Dead Dreamers
The Wastes	H/C	Despair Check Tornado of Souls Void Moths
Area 1-2	C	Dwellers in the Dust
Area 1-3	C	Tarn Lizards
	H	Withering Waters
Area 1-4	C	Frenzied Pilgrims of Doom
Area 1-5	H	Abyssal Cacti
Area 2-1	C	Goat Snakes
Area 2-4	P/T	Night Door Chain Lightning Trap
Area 3-1	T/C	Harvester of Sorrow
Area 3-3	C	Roots of Wrath
Area 3-4	C	Devourer of Souls



PLAYER START —

THE DOORWAY TO DOOM

Under a sunless sky of leaden vapors, the day draws drear and sullen by the thickening evening shadows. The mighty oaks and elms of the previous days have given way to scrawny poplars and twisted pine where any trees can be found at all. Following the trail left by pilgrims who have come before, you scuff along an expanse of bare stone, little more than a winding track running along the gully of a great fissure. All about you the black outcroppings and titanic precipices of the Halo Mountains hook the sky, fading into purple as they reach the horizon.

Abruptly, just beyond a sharp bend, looms the object of your destination — the Pallid Gate. It is a narrow mountain pass of coiling mist set in an immense arch recess, beyond which lies the Star Wound of Abaddon. A pair of white, titanic stone pillars flank the threshold, carved to resemble two snakes intertwined, their heads lost in the vaulted gloom. A lone firepit scars the ground before the gate, further signs of the pilgrims' passage.

Standing before the grimly yawning gate, a cold wind combs through your surroundings, seemingly causing everything that had once lived to shiver — a final plea to those who would dare enter the Star Wound of Abaddon...

Halo Mountains: This barren ring of towering, broken crags were created by the titanic fall of the comet. Dwarves within the party immediately recognize that these mountains were not shaped by the slow, steady crawl of the ages, but born of something entirely unnatural. All other classes may discern the same information with a DC 14 Intelligence check.

Old Campfire: Situated in the clearing before the Pallid Gate is the remnants of a large campfire. A closer inspection of the ashen remains (DC 5 Intelligence check) reveals the fire was last lit over a week ago. While a DC 10 Intelligence or Luck check also turns up several charred and blackened holy symbols among the ashes (judges are encouraged to include a holy symbol pertaining to a deity worshiped by a PC in the party).

The fire was used in a scene of great ritual by the most recent group of pilgrims to travel here. Sacred holy symbols and religious iconography were cast into its flames in a final display of abandoning old faiths before entering the Star Wound of Abaddon.

The Pallid Gate: A closer inspection of the serpentine pillars reveal various names scratched into the lower coils, a crude graffiti left by the many pilgrims who entered the nightmare realm beyond the gate (judges are encouraged to include names the PCs recognize). PCs that scratch their own names into the Pallid Gate are filled with visions of horror and madness (see *Visions of Dead Dreamers* below).

Climbing a serpentine pillar to its 100' summit (DC 12 Climb Sheer Surfaces check) reveals the carved snakes are in fact goat-headed. Those that gaze upon the unsettling



demonic carvings are also filled with the same unsettling visions, see below.

Visions of Dead Dreamers: Those who experience these visions relive the titanic fall of the comet and its ensuing devastation through the eyes of one of the countless mass-sacred.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The world suddenly vanishes as you plummet through a dark limbo of unshared time and space, only to awaken in a mind not fully your own, gazing out the eyes of another...

You stand among a nervous throng of citizens, anxiously gazing up at the sky. When from out of the blue streaks a comet, vast and fiery, plummeting toward you. In an instant, the world explodes in roaring flame and deathly shadow. Choking on the stench of your own burning flesh, you let out a tortured wail...only to awaken once again, in the here and now...

This nightmare vision proves to be both blessing and curse for the affected PC, resulting in an immediate loss of 1 point of Luck, as both the smell of burning flesh and echo of screams lingers long after the vision has subsided.

Yet, once the Pallid Gate has been crossed, the boon is suddenly realized, as fragmented images of future events flash through the PC's mind, granting the player a re-roll to any 1d5 rolls while within the Star Wound of Abaddon.

PART 1: SOJOURN INTO NIGHTMARE

General Features: A landscape of maddening terror and elder desolation, the Star Wound of Abaddon is a doomed world lost in the twilight of decaying moons. An evil silence broods over the land, broken only by the lonesome howl of interstellar winds that gust corpse-cold from gulfs lost in Stygian darkness. The very air is a noxious fume, heavy with the taste of ash and powdered bone.

Once the PCs have passed into the Star Wound, the Pallid Gate disappears, and the surrounding Halo Mountains appear as little more than mere specks far off in the distance. Only a garden, lush and distant, can be seen on the horizon.

Area A — The Wastes: *Twin moons lie as crimson orbs upon the horizon, emitting a feeble light that curls like the vapor-ing of blood, casting all in a cadaverous pallor of sickly scarlet. You stand upon the very ground of nightmare and legend, a land mortared in ash and human gravel.*

Bones, charred and splintered, lie exposed to the eternal indignity of the heavens, transforming the plains into a vast crypt floor. Turning, you realize that all trace of the Pallid Gate from whence you came has disappeared, and the looming Halo Mountains appear as little more than mere specks far off in the horizon. Only a strange wind, chill as the touch of death, howls across the sprawling desolation.

For you now tread the Star Wound of Abaddon, a doomed world lost in the twilight of decaying moons - and the dead cobble your way.

Upon entering the Pallid Gate all characters are required to make a **Despair Check**, as the lonesome devastation and suffocating sorrow of this place seeps into their very souls, robbing them of both energy and spirit.

Line of Sight: Off in the distance, images appear out of the night and silence. PCs may travel to any of the below locations. Read or paraphrase the following:

Just a short distance off, a single strange-looking rock protrudes from the ashen wastes like a decaying tooth in a rotten maw (area 1-1).

A garden lush and distant can be seen far off on the horizon, promising respite from the insufferable emptiness (area 3).

Area 1-1 — Sign Post from Hell: *Standing before you is a gruesome sight: a man, half-naked and lashed to an odd-looking rock formation slumps motionless beneath the baleful gleam of those cadaverous moons. A makeshift placard slung about his neck reads, "ABANDON THY GODS, YE WHO ENTER HERE".*

A closer examination of the body (DC 5 Intelligence check) reveals a thin copper necklace dangling from the corner of the corpse's lifeless mouth. While a DC 10 Intelligence check also deduces that the man was severely beaten to death by a mob of some kind, as the bruises that cover the mangled corpse show signs of different assailants. Those that proceed in the grisly task of extracting the necklace,

JUDGE'S NOTES: SPECIAL ENCOUNTERS WITHIN THE WASTES

Tornado of Souls: PCs that attempt to travel directly towards the Forsaken Garden or distant Halo Mountains are in for a rude awakening, as neither can be reached by simply traveling in their general direction. Any attempt results in a perilous encounter with the *Tornado of Souls*; a horror beyond compare, comprised of countless deceived souls that perished with the fall of the comet. The *Tornado of Souls* sweeps over the open wastes, feeding the land with the ashen remains of creatures trapped within its suffocating vortex. PCs that encounter the *Tornado of Souls* are enveloped in choking sheets of stinging grit and darkness, suffering an automatic 1d8 damage and 1d4 points of temporary Stamina and Personality loss.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The earth suddenly cracks and rises, blooming into a billowing whirlwind of blasted grit and ash. A cyclopean vortex reaches out beneath the black skies, churning with threshing limbs and a million terror-stricken faces that cry out in torment. The inhuman maelstrom swirls black across the horizon, blotting out all of creation in its fury, engulfing you in sheets of stinging grit and the roaring thunder of countless massacred souls.

Once the whirlwind has passed, the PCs inexplicably find themselves in the very location they had originally departed from. Note that the Forsaken Garden (area 3) can only be reached by using *The Golden Astrolabe* or by following the *Children of the Damned* in their subterranean tunnels.

Death from Above: Should a character take to the air (via spell or other means) at any time within the wastes, they are immediately set upon by dread Void Moths. Native to the outer void, these solitary creatures are terrible to behold, and appear as colossal moths the size of elephants, with gray mold-like fur and a bulbous head equipped with a single pair of serrated mandibles.

A Void Moth attacks unexpectedly from the sky, gaining a special *death from above* attack on its initial strike against an unsuspecting target. The *death from above* attack deals 3d6 damage and can only be avoided by a DC 15 Reflex save. Note that a Void Moth rarely attacks creatures on land.

Void Moth (1): Init +2; Atk bite +6 melee (1d10); AC 13; HD 8d10; hp 40; MV 10' or fly 80'; Act 1d20; SP death from above; SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2; AL C.

THE STAR WOUND OF ABADDON

AREA ONE

The Wastes

Underground
to Area
2-1

Area 3

1-6

1-2

A

1-1

1-4

1-3

1-5

HALO
MOUNTAINS

Tornado
of
Souls

THE
PALLED
GATE

old
campfire

Player Start

Void
Moth

SBP

expose a crude copper holy symbol that was forced down the man's throat. The holy symbol and chain is worth a mere ten copper pieces and is a common possession for a peasant (judges are once again encouraged to use a holy symbol that is representative of a deity worshiped by one of the PCs).

Odd-Looking Rock: A closer examination of the rock in which the body is lashed reveals it to be the uppermost portion of a large obelisk, now buried and eroded by the ages. Erected by the ancient people of this land, it still bears a strange script upon its time-worn face, along with a carved image depicting slaves constructing a massive telescope under the watchful eye of robed priests. A successful DC 10 Read Languages check deciphers the exposed portion of ancient script to read: "O god of gods! O sun of suns! Thou art the eye of the world, descend upon us in all your glory..."

Line of Sight: Off in the distance, images appear out of the night and silence. PCs may travel to any of the below locations. Read or paraphrase the following:

Despite the ceaseless gloom, you catch sight of dark and sinister mounds half hidden in the fog of oblivion ahead (area 1-2).

A dark tarn stretches out in the distance, its glimmering surface reflecting ghostly gleams from the sanguine moons above (area 1-3).

A garden lush and distant can be seen far off on the horizon, promising respite from the insufferable emptiness (area 3).

Area 1-2 — Leprous Mounds: *The blasted plain gives way to low-lying hills pitted with corrosive lichens and black bloated fungi that foul your boots with every step. Dark, narrow cave openings fanged with black stalactites dot the hills like open mouths trapped in endless agony. Just ahead, atop the summit of a steep hill squats the silhouette of a knotted and leafless tree limned by the moons' unholy light.*

These cankerous hills are home to hoary creatures that have crept in from nether worlds—the Dwellers in the Dust. Anyone attempting to reach the steep hill's summit without a successful DC 12 Sneak Silently check is set upon by these loathsome creatures as they vomit forth from their dark caves en masse. The Dwellers gain a free surprise attack (DC 15 Reflex save to avoid) as they launch an ambush aimed at incapacitating the PCs in order to sacrifice them before their sacred totem, the *Tree of Skulls*.

When the Dwellers in the Dust attack, read or paraphrase the following:

Through the miasmal haze of floating dust, figures suddenly burst forth from the dark cave openings – twisted manlike things with pale, hairless, egg-shaped bodies and long skeletal-thin appendages. Their misshapen heads loll upon withered necks, and their oddly sloping faces sport wide toothless mouths.

Seemingly without number, 1d3 Dwellers join the fray each round of combat (5 rounds max), bolstering the ranks of their hideous brethren. The Dwellers attack with balled fists, savagely bludgeoning their opponents prior to dragging them before their hideous effigy. Although fierce in

battle, the Dwellers in the Dust are primitive by nature; elaborate spell effects (e.g., fire, light, frost, etc.) cause panic within their ranks compelling them to scurry back to their holes on a failed morale check (DC 15 Willpower save to avoid). The Dwellers in the Dust fear the wastes and will not give chase beyond their mounded sanctuary for any reason.

Dwellers in the Dust (8): Init +1; Atk fist +2 melee (1d3 non-lethal damage); AC 12; HD 1d8+2; hp 6 each; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP bolster; SV Fort +2; Ref +1 Will -2; AL N.

Note that the Dwellers in the Dust possess no souls, making them enemies of the true gods. Clerics of any alignment may attempt to turn them as unholy.

Tree of Skulls: *A strong smell of rotting flesh and filth emanates from atop the steep rise. At its summit squats a hideous effigy comprised of rotting human skulls and caked mud, shaped to resemble a gnarled and leafless tree. The bloody stain of sacrifice streaks the ground about the blasphemous icon, congealing in pools of sickly gore.*

This twisted parody of a tree is the sacred totem of the Dwellers, created to resemble the likeness of the *Devourer of Souls*, whom they fear and worship as a god. Those that approach the grisly effigy feel an eldritch hum (DC 8 Personality check to notice) emanating from within. The abhorrent effigy can be destroyed by dealing it 30 points of damage or with a single successfully placed "Mighty Deed" attack. Buried within the effigy is a **Celestial Disk** (see description on page 17) and an ornate golden longsword that glows with a radiant light. The magical longsword belonged to one of the followers of Justicia who entered the Star Wound weeks ago, but met their grizzly end at the hands of the Dwellers.

Justicia's Mercy, magical golden longsword +1: Int 5; AL L; Bane: thieves/bandits/assassins (Shattering blow; on a critical hit, sword inflicts an additional 1d10 damage); Communication: simple urges; Power: Holy brand - inflicts an additional +1d4 damage against unholy creatures; shed constant light in a 20' radius.

Note that destroying the *Tree of Skulls* immediately causes the Dwellers in the Dust to scurry back to their caves, fearful of having angered their lord.

Line of Sight: Off in the distance, images appear out of the night and silence. PCs may travel to any of the below locations. Read or paraphrase the following:

Just a short distance off, a single strange-looking rock protrudes from the ashen wastes like a decaying tooth in a rotten maw (area 1-1).

A dark tarn stretches out in the distance, its glimmering surface reflecting ghostly gleams from the sanguine moons above (area 1-3).

Far off through the misty radiance an emerald fire cuts through the gloom (area 1-4).

A garden lush and distant can be seen far off on the horizon, promising respite from the insufferable emptiness (area 3).

Area 1-3 — Fetid Tarn: *A lonesome tarn of stagnant, corpse-colored water dots this low area of the plains. Barely discernible above the pallid water are the remains of a crumbling stone jetty. Great bloated lizards lie in statuesque repose by its fetid banks, watching with hypnotic eyes. Each carry something held aloft in its open jaws that sparkles with a poisonous gleam.*

Nesting along the forlorn banks are a lounge of tarn lizards, each with a shiny jewel (see *Star Stones* below) held high in their open mouths. Once resigned to life belowground, these lizards were forced to the surface when the comet toppled from the void and scorched the earth. Now they dwell aboveground, feeding upon the crystal shards of the fallen comet for warmth (see *Star Stones*), they have mutated to enormous size and learned to hunt.

Any who gaze upon a *Star Stone* held aloft in the creature's maw are inexplicably drawn to its hypnotic eyes, whereby they are *enticed* for 2d3 rounds (DC 12 Willpower save to resist). *Enticed* victims eagerly attempt to gain possession of the *Star Stone* for the duration of the effect, engaging in brazen combat with the creature if need be, thereby drawing the victim into close proximity to the lizard so that it may feed.

Tarn lizards are over twelve-feet in length and three hundred pounds with terrible looking spines and sickly green scales. Along with the single *Star Stone* held in its open mouth, intrepid PCs who carve into a dead lizard's stomach uncover 1d7 additional *Star Stones* within.

Tarn Lizard (3): Init +1; Atk bite +1 melee (1d6) or claw +2 melee (1d4) or tail whip +0 (1d8); AC 12; HD 5d8+4; hp 22 each; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SP entice; SV Fort +3; Ref +3 Will +2; AL N.

Note that a Tarn Lizard depends largely on its acute vision to hunt. A successful DC 15 Hide In Shadows check will successfully allow a PC to reach the crumbling jetty undetected.

Crumbling Jetty: *Almost entirely submerged, an ancient and decaying stone walkway still projects over the water for a short span.*

PCs that make their way to the end of the jetty notice a small rotting rowboat resting listlessly in the center of the tarn (DC 5 Intelligence check to spot). Reaching the boat can prove to be difficult, for it rests 300' from shore, afloat the *Withering Waters* (see below). PCs that do manage to reach the boat find the lifeless and unnaturally-aged remains of a robed adventurer within. A platinum signet ring graces the corpse's withered hand, marking him as one of the lost adventurers who entered the Star Wound weeks ago under the leadership of a priestess of Justicia.

Searching the body reveals the following:

- A platinum signet ring bearing the radiant-eyed shield and golden longsword sigil of the goddess Justicia (300 gp)
- Garish silk robes woven with cloth of gold (30 gp)
- Ornate silver dagger with ivory handle (100 gp)

- A heavy grimoire bound from pterodactyl wing which contains the following wizard spells:

Level 1: *Choking Cloud*, *Color Spray*, *Comprehend Languages*, *Mending*, *Ropework*

Level 2: *Scorching Ray*

Along with the grisly discovery, any within the boat feel an eldritch hum (DC 8 Personality check to notice) emanating from deep below the pallid water. Anyone brave or foolish enough to dive into the water can find a **Celestial Disk** (see disk on page 17) resting along its bottom with a successful roll under their Luck check and two rounds or searching. Each failed Luck check results in another two rounds of searching to continue.

Withering Waters: Corrosive to the touch, this putrid water stings when in contact with bare flesh (1d3 damage per round) leaving open sores that weep with a sickly pus. Anyone who gazes or immerses themselves in the immemorial brine is struck with a horrific sight, as their reflection in the pallid water begins to age and wither before them.

Gazing or plunging into the water immediately ages an individual 2d30 years (DC 13 Willpower save to negate). For every 20 years aged, the character permanently loses 1 point of Strength, Agility, and Stamina, but gains 1 point of Intelligence and Personality.

Line of Sight: Off in the distance, images appear out of the night and silence. PCs may travel to any of the below locations. Read or paraphrase the following:

Just a short distance off, a single strange-looking rock protrudes from the ashen wastes like a decaying tooth in a rotten maw (area 1-1).

Despite the ceaseless gloom, you catch sight of dark and sinister mounds half hidden in the fog of oblivion ahead (area 1-2).

Far off through the misty radiance an emerald fire cuts through the gloom (area 1-4).

A garden lush and distant can be seen far off on the horizon, promising respite from the insufferable emptiness (area 3).

NEW ITEM: STAR STONES

Born of fire and the pit, these translucent yellow crystals are shards of the fallen comet that are warm to the touch and vibrate with the energy of lost eons. Possessing otherworldly properties that strengthen willpower and arcane potency, anyone in possession of a *Star Stone* may "burn" the crystal for an immediate +1 bonus to Willpower saves. Spellcasters may also use these stones in lieu of their regular spellburn sacrifice; thereby "burning" stones rather than abilities scores. Each stone "burned" grants a +1 bonus to the spell check. Multiple stones may be "burned" at once. "Burned" stones flare with a sudden burst and turn to ash.

Area 1-4 — Pilgrims of Doom: *An emerald campfire sputters through the suffocating gloom, casting grotesque shadows of the pitiful and degenerate men and women that huddle about its unnatural light. Some weep, their cheeks streaked with tears; others stare vacantly, their eyes hollow voids of sorrow and despair; while a few cut their own limbs, making cosmetics of their blood.*

As you approach, the pungent smell of filth and unwashed bodies assails your nostrils, as emaciated faces soiled with ash and dust cry out to you, their voices broken with misery and woe, "Do you know the way to the garden, my brothers? Do you know the way to paradise?"

The PCs have stumbled upon the most recent group of pilgrims to enter the Star Wound of Abaddon in search of paradise. Lured by the false dreams of the *Devourer*, this ragtag group of pitiful wretches have renounced their gods and gone mad searching for passage to the garden at its center. Lost and hopeless, they squat pitifully in the dust, their sanity frayed by the constant threat of madness and death that lurks within this nightmare realm.

Judges are encouraged to include individuals the PCs recognize within the group of pilgrims (possibly from their own village or town). Although mostly harmless, some of the pilgrims of doom will not suffer displays of religious iconography or rhetoric. Should a PC openly wear a holy symbol or espouse religious dogma, a group of frenzied pilgrims will launch an attack upon the offending individual. Blaming the offending PC for their own inability to reach paradise, these frenzied pilgrims attack with a zealous fury, savagely beating their victim before crucifying them as a warning to others.

Frenzied Pilgrim of Doom (8): Init -2; Atk fist -1 melee (1d3 non-lethal); AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref -2, Will -1; AL C.

Note that although the frenzied pilgrims are human, their time spent within the Star Wound has warped their minds and souls, making them enemies of the true gods. Clerics of any alignment may attempt to turn these raving zealots as unholy.

Replacing lost characters: If an unlucky player has lost his character during the adventure, the judge can allow the other PCs to recruit one of the pilgrims of doom to their side. Realizing their dire predicament, this repentant pilgrim offers to join the party, becoming a PC under the player's control. The player should roll up the PC per the standard rules.

The remaining pilgrims of doom are too weak and listless to accompany the PCs on their journey, and opt to stay here despite any chance at freedom the PCs might present. Note that should the PCs return to this location, they may always replace lost characters as needed.

Line of Sight: Off in the distance, images appear out of the night and silence. PCs may travel to any of the below locations. Read or paraphrase the following:



Despite the ceaseless gloom, you catch sight of dark and sinister mounds half hidden in the fog of oblivion ahead (area 1-2).

A dark tarn stretches out in the distance, its glimmering surface reflecting ghostly gleams from the sanguine moons above (area 1-3).

Through the gathering haze of horror and unreality a copse of strange cacti loom in the distance (area 1-5).

Shining morose in the sunless distance you catch sight of a giant brass cylinder that protrudes from the dust (area 1-6).

A garden lush and distant can be seen far off on the horizon, promising respite from the insufferable emptiness (area 3).

Area 1-5 — Abyssal Cacti: *The desolate wastes give way to a grove of strange cacti the color of purpling flesh. Their shapes, gruesomely distorted in the uncertain light assume unnatural and disturbing forms. Off in the distance, half-hidden beneath the tangle of strange vegetation lies a curious looking bundle.*

These strange half-rotten cacti dot the ruinous plain, their stunted stems twisted into nightmare shapes alien to both human sanity and reason. Anyone traveling through the abyssal cacti becomes disoriented by the unsettling shapes and fetid stench, stumbling into its many wicked thorns for 1 point of damage (DC 10 Willpower save to avoid).

Creatures that stumble into the thorns are afflicted with a spreading bacterium that eats all the bones of the body, starting with the teeth and nails (DC 16 Fortitude save to resist). Each day that the bacteria spreads unchecked deals 1d16 damage. PCs who fall to zero hit points or below collapse into a quivering, boneless mass of skin and hair that undulates along the ground before dying in excruciating pain. The disease can be healed naturally with a successful DC 16 Fortitude save (once per day).

Curious Bundle: Anyone attempting to reach for the bundle must make a DC 15 Agility check to avoid the wicked thorns, as the press of cacti proves to be exceptionally dense in this area. Alternatively, a nimble thief may bypass the thorns when reaching for the bundle with a successful DC 10 Pick Pocket check. The sack-like bundle are the remains of a priestess of Justicia, now nothing more than a boneless pile of decaying flesh and hair. Determined to seal this nightmare realm from the world, she entered the Star Wound weeks ago with a band of brave adventurers only to succumb to the horrors within. Searching the loathsome pile reveals the skin to be riddled with thorns – a grim testament to the abyssal cacti's lethality. Along with the gruesome discovery are the following items:

- A platinum signet ring bearing the radiant-eyed shield and golden longsword sigil of the goddess Justicia (300 gp)
- A small worn leather prayer book (acts as cleric scroll) containing two spells:
Level 3: *Speak with Dead*
Level 5: *Righteous Fire*

Casting Mechanism: Spell check must be made by reader, at his normal result. Followers of the Goddess Justicia may attempt the spell check with a +1d bonus to the roll.

A single journal entry written hastily in a frantic hand can be found at the back of the prayer book (see Player Handout B).

Line of Sight: Off in the distance, images appear out of the night and silence. PCs may travel to any of the below locations. Read or paraphrase the following:

Far off through the misty radiance an emerald fire cuts through the gloom (area 1-4).

Shining morose in the sunless distance you catch sight of a giant brass cylinder that protrudes from the dust (area 1-6).

A garden lush and distant can be seen far off on the horizon, promising respite from the insufferable emptiness (area 3).

Area 1-6 — The Eye of God: A canted brass cylinder over five feet in diameter rises from the dust, stretching skyward beneath the baleful gleam of those twin cadaverous moons. Built of joined brass plates, an open aperture at its summit reveals the strange metal tube to be hollow.

The angled brass cylinder is in fact the long optical tube of a giant telescope (The Eye of God), now all but buried beneath the wastes. Reaching more than 20' overhead, its open aperture is long devoid of a lens and can easily be scaled and entered by any wishing to do so.

The slowly tapering tube angles its way 180' below the surface, culminating in a dust choked bottom. Shards of thick broken glass from the shattered optical lens dot the interior of the tube, but poses no threat to any who climb down. A gaping hole at the tube's bottom scars a portion of the cyl-

inder where a large brass plate has been removed, allowing egress into the chamber beyond (Observatorium, area 2-1).

Line of Sight: PCs may travel to any of the below locations. Read or paraphrase the following:

Far off through the misty radiance an emerald fire cuts through the gloom (area 1-4).

Through the gathering haze of horror and unreality a copse of strange cacti loom in the distance (area 1-5).

A garden lush and distant can be seen far off on the horizon, promising respite from the insufferable emptiness (area 3).



PART 2: THE CATHEDRAL OF THE COMET



uried beneath the flotsam of annihilation lies what remains of the Cathedral of the Comet, a great mountain-top observatory, now nothing more than a shadowed ruin. It was here that the astromancer-priests of a lost age declared an age of illumination, an age that saw the fiery orb that fell from the heavens as their one true god. Here, within these profane halls debauched priests lolled upon silken cushions and unknowingly awaited their doom.

Now the buried cathedral is home to the Children of the Damned, the accursed progeny of those responsible for unleashing a chaos from the outer dark upon mankind. Forced to live beyond the sight of the gods, these abhorrent wretches wander the trackless depths of their doomed world. A once proud and pious people, now reduced to things of nightmare and legend, doomed to relive the fall of their race until the end of days.

General Features: Except where noted, the walls and floor of the cathedral are scorched and blackened by flame. Great murals and elaborate frescoes depicting red-robed priests destroying idols and razing temples dedicated to the common gods of proper and well-ordered lands can still be discerned beneath the collected grime. All throughout the cathedral lie the blasted remains of men, women and children, reduced to nothing more than preserved husks of ash and soot, their open mouths frozen in rictuses of agony. The air is stale with the long-imprisoned mustiness of the tomb and a sepulchral silence haunts these shadowed halls.

Area 2-1 — The Observatory: *You stand within a great circular chamber, its high-domed ceiling constructed of sheer crystal. Beyond the translucent glass, the press of ash and earth weighs heavily against the structure. A colossal brass telescope rests in the center of the room. Its long optical tube cuts through the crystal dome and earth above.*

Astromancer-priests once used this chamber to gaze upon the fiery comet as it plummeted through fields of ancient void, hurtling its way towards mankind. Now the observatorium is home to vile creatures from the outer dark - a pair of giant Goat Snakes that have entered via the Eye of God to feed upon the Children of the Damned within.

These massive goat-headed serpents wait in silence, gaining a free surprise attack (DC 15 Intelligence check to avoid) against the first person to enter the chamber. At over 50' in length, a goat snake that scores a successful gore attack immediately wraps its coils around the victim. Each round thereafter, it constricts the trapped victim for an automatic 1d6 points of damage (DC 15 Strength check or successful "Mighty Deed" attack to escape), and attempts to swallow the victim whole with a successful bite attack. Once swallowed, a victim is dealt an automatic 1d3 points of acid damage each round as they are awash in the beast's

digestive fluids. Swallowed victims can escape from the creature's gullet with a DC 20 Strength check, or by slaying the dread beast.

Goat Snake (2): Init +4; Atk gore +4 melee (1d8) or swallow +2 melee (special); AC 14; HD 5d10; hp 26 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP surprise, constrict (1d6), swallow whole; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AL C.

The Eye of God: This giant brass telescope now serves as the only means of egress from the temple to the wastes above. Gazing into the Eye of God no longer has any effect, as the lens has long shattered. Should a new lens be installed, the Eye of God may be repaired (DC 15 Intelligence check). Alternatively, a thief in possession of a new lens may repair the telescope with a DC 10 Disable Trap check. Once operable, the massive telescope gazes upon a strange green planet and set of constellations no astronomer has ever witnessed. Note that the order of these constellations is the key to opening the Night Door (area 3-4).

Observers in the Dark: Beyond the crystal ceiling, the Children of the Damned watch, hidden within the soil and ash, incapable of entering the cathedral since the Goat Snakes made it their lair. Anyone within this chamber notices strange movement within the press of soil above.

Read or paraphrase the following:

You are suddenly aware of furtive movements just beyond the crystal dome above, something writhing through the press of dirt and dust beyond the glass.

Area 2-2 — Astromancer-Priests' Chambers: *Strewn about the hall and branching rooms are bodies frozen in their final agonizing moments. Charred husks of men, women and children — their final cries strangled in throats of ash.*

These chambers have all but collapsed from the weight of destruction above. Walls and ceilings have given way to dirt and crumbling rock. A deathly solitude and aura of unnatural sorrow hangs over these benighted halls.

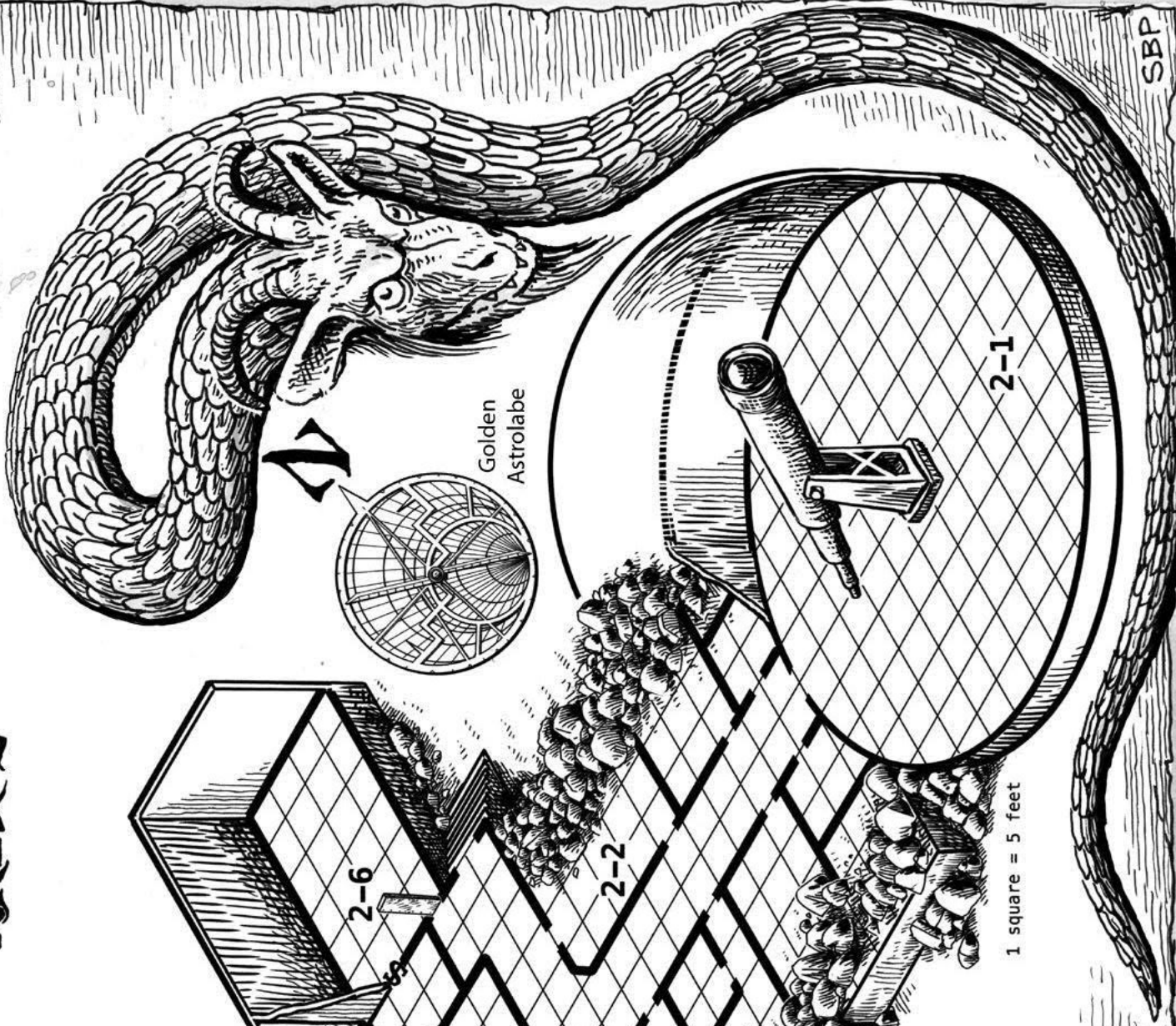
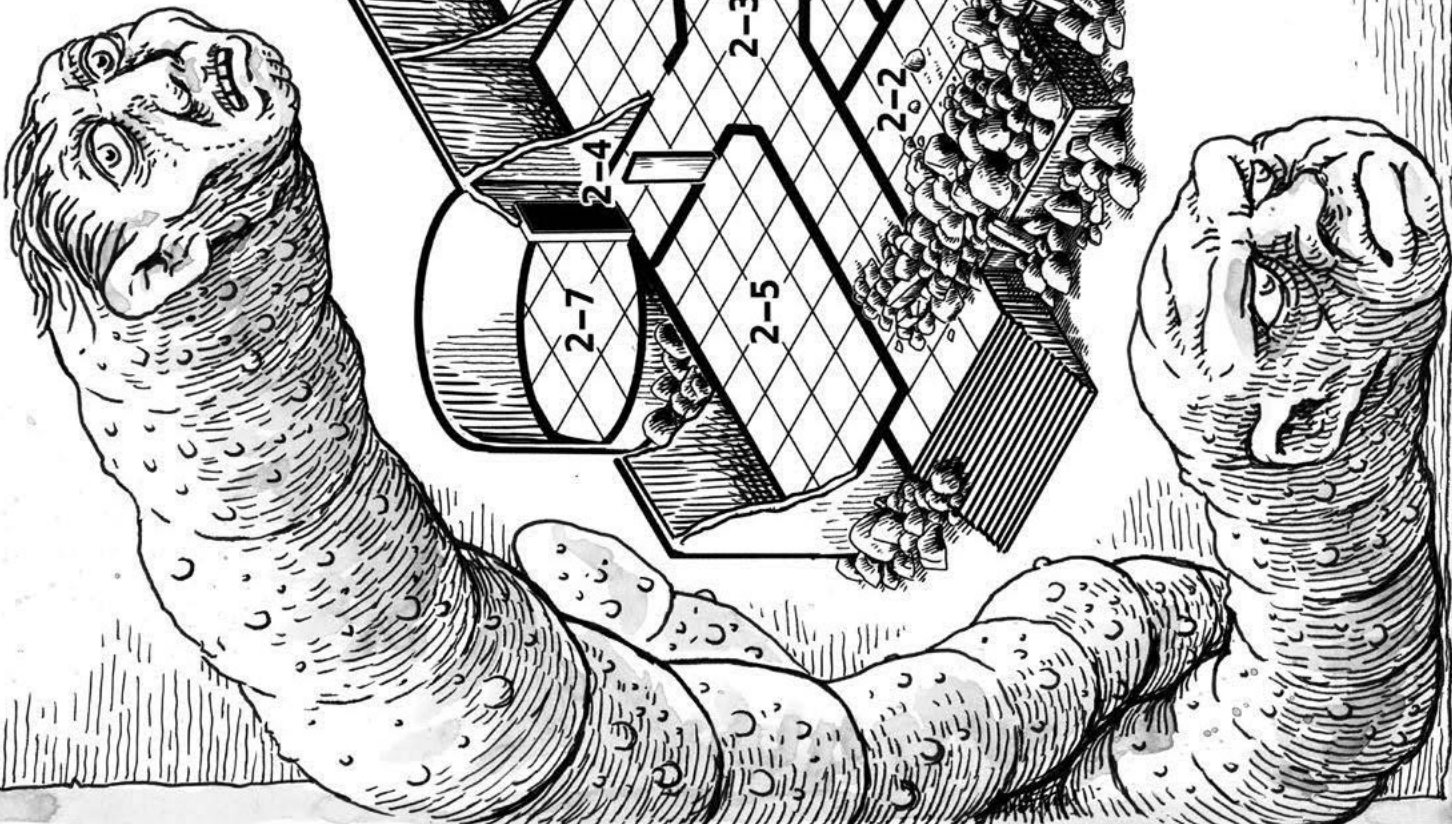
Area 2-3 — Children of the Damned: If the Goat Snakes (area 2-1) have been slain or driven out, read or paraphrase the following:

You are suddenly aware of something dim and sinister lurking in the darkness. Furtive noises unlike those made by human foot. Abruptly, a raspy voice spoken through ropes of mucous calls out from the shadows.

"Fear us not people-from-aboveground. For we are not creatures of hell, though our bodies have long been rendered loathsome for our sins. We are the descendants of a once proud race, a great race, whom succumbed to the vile temptations of a false deity and in doing so betrayed the true gods. Look you and take pity. For we are the wretched Children of the Damned. Forced to live beyond the sight of the gods."

CATHEDRAL OF THE COMET

AREA 2



Into your wavering circle of light crawl shapeless organisms, larval forms pale as bacon fat, their bodies bereft of limbs. Human worms, fat and bloated, writhing along the ground, trailing greasy offal in their wake. They gaze up at you with distorted human faces, their eyes filled with sorrow and despair.

"Look you, people-from-aboveground upon the wretched children who must live forever atoning for the crimes of ancestors long ago fallen into dust. Take pity upon us born innocent yet forever damned. Free us from these loathsome bodies. Deliver us from this ancient curse. Seek ye the celestial disk, beyond the night door. Seek ye the garden."

Rutted and hairless, these abhorrent human-worms slither in darkness, their bloated bodies resembling some demonic fungi pulled from the earth. Forced to live beyond the sight of the gods, the larvals wander the trackless depths of their doomed city and have returned once again to the cathedral now that the threat of the Goat Snakes has passed. They beseech the PCs to aid them, asking them to kill whatever evil lives in the garden, thereby mending the tear in reality and lifting the nightmare that haunts this land. They know only that their ancestors called down the abomination from the sky, and a *Celestial Disk* can be used to battle the creature. As for what the creature is or looks like, they do not know. If asked, they will lead the PCs to the Forsaken Garden (area 3) through one of their many underground tunnels.

Should anyone attack the larvals, these pitiful creatures are poor in combat and pose little danger, save for their caustic blood. When a larval is slain it bursts in a shower of foul smelling, caustic ooze inflicting 1d10 damage on its assailer (DC 16 Reflex save to avoid).

Children of the Damned (22): Init -3; Atk bite +0 melee (1d3); AC 8; HD 1d4; hp 2; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP caustic blood; SV Fort +1; Ref -2 Will +0; AL N.

Area 2-4 — The Night Door: *You stand before a massive door wrought from polished black stone. Its smooth surface is stamped with tiny silver flecks that glimmer unnaturally like stars in an alien sky; its entire surface seemingly alive with the energy of lost eons.*

The doorway has no handles or fixtures, and its surface offers no bolt or catch. The Night Door is magically locked and can be opened by pressing a certain pattern of strange constellations upon its face. The proper pattern of constellations can be discerned by doing any one of the following:

- Gazing into the repaired Eye of God (area 2-1).
- Deciphering the Star Chart (area 2-5).
- A DC 22 Disable Trap check.
- A successful casting of *Dispel Magic*.

Each time anyone attempts to open the Night Door without first pressing upon the proper order of constellations triggers a magical chain of lightning that bursts forth with a sonorous clang (DC 13 Reflex save to avoid) into the offending character for 2d6 damage (4d6 damage if wearing

metal armor). The lightning bolt will continue to arc into each target in the chamber, one at a time, so long as the Reflex save is failed. Once a character succeeds in a Reflex save, the current dissipates.

Area 2-5 — Celestial Athenaeum: *This room stands untouched by the destruction that swept throughout the other chambers. Its walls, paneled in beaten lead are emblazoned with astrological calculations; star charts the likes never seen before by man. A colossal table wrought of pure ivory dominates the center of the room, and a heavy iron cabinet squats in the corner.*

Once the repository for the cult's blessed texts and holy teachings, the walls are still rife with sacred mysteries and forbidden knowledge hidden within transcendental algebra and abstruse formulae.

Star Charts: Two star charts of note dominate the walls:

- One depicts the esoteric formula necessary for travel to a perilous purple planet. Arcane spellcasters may copy the equation into their grimoires for future study, as the ritual takes months if not years of study to master.
- The other is an incomplete set of equations to a distant constellation never seen before by man; its central star being a strange green planet named "Yag". Note that knowledge of this constellation can be used to open the Night Door (area 2-6).

Iron Cabinet: Within the iron cabinet are strange astrological paraphernalia wrought of silver (200 gp) and several large crystal lenses. Note that these lenses can be used to repair the Eye of God (area 2-1).

Area 2-6 — Prime-Astromancer Chamber: *Beyond a heavy iron door lies a bed chamber of bygone luxury. An ornate marble couch festooned in moldering hides rests beside a delicately carved armoire. A grand mural of a grim-faced man bedecked in a bright scarlet cassock graces the far wall, a lavish comet-shaped amulet strung about his neck.*

The man in the mural is Hastion the Red, prime-astromancer of the Cult of the Comet, and known betrayer of the gods. Now turned immortal thrall to the *Devourer*, he lives his life as the Harvester of Sorrow (see area 3-1).

Armoire: Astonishingly, the heavy oak armoire and its contents have survived the destruction. Tucked away between festering silk garments is the *Golden Astrolabe* (250 gp), and a worn red diary.

Golden Astrolabe: This small circular device (six inches in diameter) has moving parts that slide, enabling its user to solve navigational problems relating to the sun, stars, and sky. PCs in possession of the *Golden Astrolabe* can use it to easily navigate the wastes and finally reach the Forsaken Garden (area 3).

Red Diary: This small leather diary is written upon archaic vellum in an ancient language. With a successful DC 10 Read Languages check and 1 hour of study, PCs come to learn the following:

- The priest in the mural is Hastian the Red, Prime-Astromancer of the Cult of the Comet.
- He led his people to renounce their gods and wage a holy war against all faiths within their great city.
- Temples were raised, monuments pulled down, and devotees put to the sword, all in the name of the great comet that blazed across the heavens.
- Built upon the bloody wages of rebellion, he erected the mountaintop observatory which he named the Cathedral of the Comet, and constructed the great telescope known as The Eye of God.
- With the use of Celestial Disks, he and his followers called down the fiery comet from the sky, only to realize too late that the comet contained a creature from beyond the void. An abomination from the outer dark with a hunger for mortal souls.
- His people and their city were destroyed. The very fabric of the universe torn from the devastation of its impact, forever closing their world from the true gods.

Secret vault: A secret vault is set into the wall beyond the mural. Pressing upon the comet-shaped holy symbol in the mural (or a successful Luck check) grants access to the vault via a swinging slab of stone. Within are the following temple treasures:

- *Cassock of the Comet* – Once the holy garb of the prime-astromancer, this scarlet vestment is adorned with cloth of gold worked into a thousand small images of fiery comets. Once donned, it grants its wearer immunity to all fire, both magical and mundane.

- A metal strongbox (DC 15 Pick Lock check) filled with rubies (5000 gp).

Area 2-7 — Inner Sanctum: A blinding light streams forth from beyond the black door, bathing everything in its vibrant yellow gleam. Your eyes adjust to reveal a circular chamber, aglow from its domed ceiling of radiant yellow crystal. A large mural depicting red-robed priests, each with a strange disk held high above their heads, covers the curved walls. In the chamber's center, atop a carven marble altar, rests one of the very disks depicted in the mural. A concave metal dish, parabolic in shape and no larger than a warrior's shield.

The object is a **Celestial Disk** (see sidebar), the most revered of the cult's holy artifacts.

NEW ITEM: CELESTIAL DISK

Be it an object from the remote future or a remnant from the distant past, none are alive who know of their true origin. Used by astromancer-priests long ago to call down the fiery orb from the heavens, these strange oval disks are crafted from a light-weight alloy and are roughly the size of a warrior's shield. Seemingly alive with an eldritch hum, the dull drone intensifies within the presence of the *Devourer*. The bearer of a Celestial Disk is immune to the *Devourer of Souls'* psychic assault, directing the attack back upon the *Devourer* for an automatic 1d16 damage. (See Player Handout A.)



PART 3: THE FORSAKEN GARDEN



Note that the Forsaken Garden can only be reached by using The Golden Astrolabe or by the aid of the *Children of the Damned* and their subterranean tunnels. Attempting to travel here without the aid of one of the above results in an encounter with the *Tornado of Souls* (see description on page 8).

Read or paraphrase the following to any who finally enter the Forsaken Garden:

You pass into a green wall of untamed wilderness, jungle-like in its vitality, with clambering vines and gigantic boles thick with vegetation and fraught with the oppressive odors of lush growth.

Yet despite the surrounding verdigris, the air is hauntingly still and silent; there are no birds, no insects, no whisper of leaves – only a baleful and ghostly silence greets you.

General Features: The garden stands implausibly amid the desolate gray landscape; defiant despite the oppressive pall of death. Only a primeval silence haunts the arboreal gloom, and a lingering sense that some invisible presence is watching.

Area 3-1 – The Harvester of Sorrow: *Soon the dense vegetation begins to dwindle, giving way to a large open glade. A mud and wattle shack, overgrown with creepers and vines, squats pitifully in the mud; a thin finger of smoke rises slowly from its crumbling chimney. While on the other side of the clearing, beneath the shade of a colossal tree, a stooped and white-haired man drags a rake across a freshly sown garden. Noticing you, the old man ceases his labors and greets you with a friendly wave.*

“You are safe now, all of you, safe! Please come, let me see to your wounds. The wastes can be a terrible and unforgiving place, this I know. Please, rest and be at peace, you no longer need to fear.”

Once the prime-astromancer and head of the Cult of the Comet, the frail old man now lives his life as the Harvester of Sorrow. Cursed with immortality, he alone takes care of the mysterious and evil tree as its eternal thrall, spending his existence in service to the old god.

Area 3-2 – Harvester’s Hovel: *Hoary with age, the old man’s hovel is nothing more than a single room. Within, a crumbling stone fireplace crackles with a small fire and a large iron cooking pot emits a delicious aroma.*

PCs that accept the Harvester’s invitation find the hovel to be warm and comfortable. The Harvester will share food and potent opiates to any visitor while entertaining them with tales of battles, heroes, witches and women.

Any who partake of the Harvester’s strange but tasty stew regain 3d12 hp; while sharing in his potent pipe weed restores 1d7 points of lost Stamina and Personality.

Dream Weaver: Those that listen to the Harvester’s fantastic tales find themselves lulled into a deep slumber filled with alluring and wondrous dreams (DC 18 Willpower save for effect, see below).

JUDGES NOTES: PLAYING THE HARVESTER

Judges should roleplay the Harvester of Sorrow as a doddering old man, overjoyed to receive visitors after such a long time alone. He is eager to tell and hear stories and is grateful for the company. If asked about his situation, he responds by stating he no longer remembers his name, where he came from, nor how long he has lived here. He knows only that beyond the garden is certain death, and claims (falsely) to know of a way to escape from this nightmare realm “if ye be true of heart”.

The Harvester of Sorrow will offer the PCs food and shelter, bidding them to join him about his hearth and share some of his fine pipe weed. Once his guests have been lulled to sleep, he buries them within the *Grove of Torment* as sacrifice to his master, the *Devourer of Souls*. Note that if the Harvester is slain, the *Devourer* attacks immediately, in an attempt to “create” a new thrall.

Any who fail the Willpower save awaken buried within the Grove of Torment (see Buried Alive area 3-3).

Those that succeed in the save awaken before the Harvester has had a chance to bury them, and find themselves still lying within the Harvester’s hovel – quite possibly with some of their companions missing.

Seemingly content with tending to his garden, the Harvester of Sorrow will not engage in combat unless attacked: whereby he responds in kind, unleashing dark eldritch powers granted to him by the *Devourer*, which mimic spells of the same name. The Harvester can employ the following powers, with their DCC RPG rulebook page numbers for reference:

Chill Touch (133), *Darkness* (258), *Paralysis* (264), *Ray of Enfeeblement* (190), *Word of Command* (268).

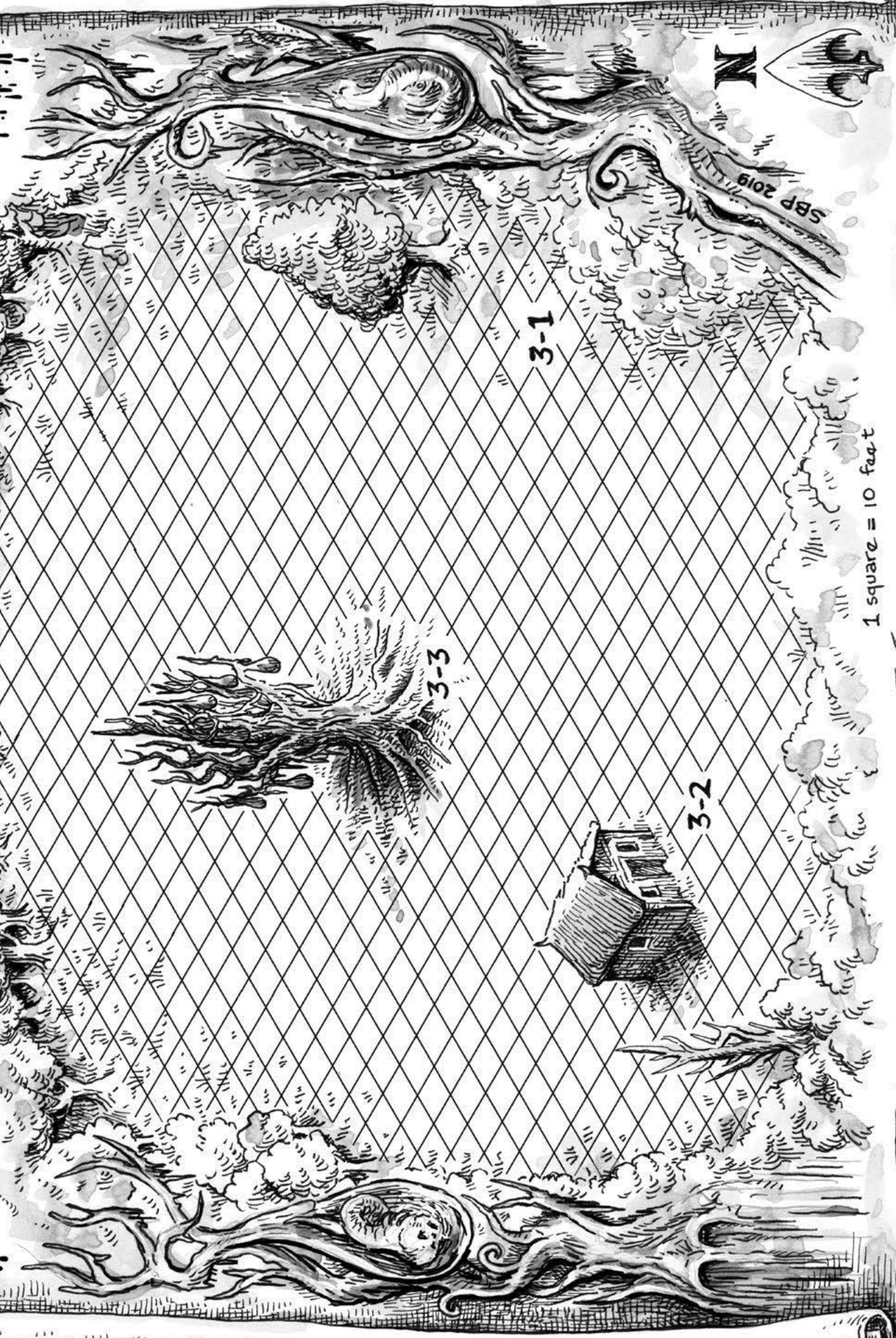
All “spells” are cast with a 1d20+3 spell check; on a failed casting the “spell” is not lost but cannot be attempted again for 3 rounds.

Harvester of Sorrow (Hastion the Red): Init +1; Atk rake -1 melee (1d4) or “spell”; AC 10; HD 3d10; hp 15; MV 20’; Act 1d20; SP dream weaver; eldritch powers; SV Fort +0; Ref -2 Will +2; AL L.

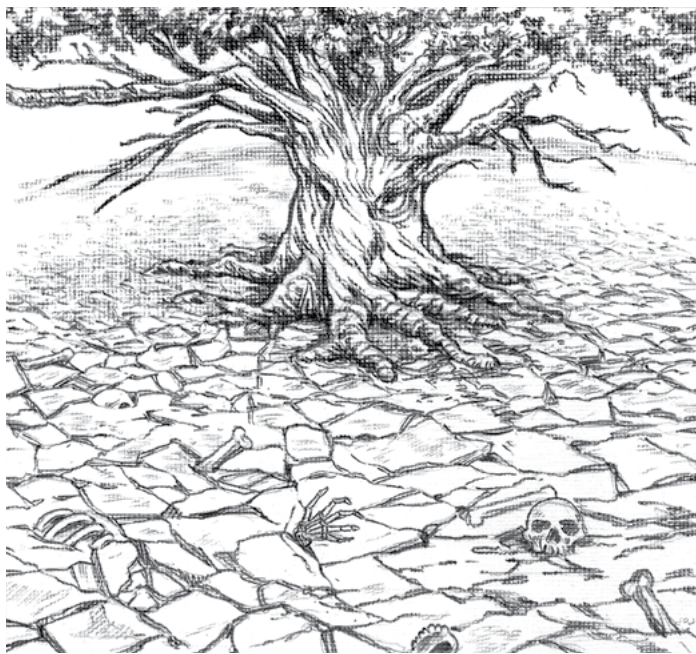
The Harvester still wears the comet-shaped ruby amulet (2000 gp) depicted in the mural (area 2-3) hidden beneath his fouled robes.

Area 3-3 – The Grove of Torment: *A large patch of freshly tilled soil sits beneath the shade of a majestic tree.*

PART 3: THE FORSAKEN GARDEN



SBP 2019



The plot of soil surrounding the disguised *Devourer* is meticulously groomed and cared for by the Harvester of Sorrow and the place wherein he buries sacrifices to his master. A closer inspection of the grove reveals the desolate soil is forsaken and incapable of sustaining life. Human bones of all ages choke the earth, only inches below the ground, and the natural moisture found in the soil is not water — but blood.

The Devourer Disguised: Ensorcelled with potent mind-altering glammers, the Devourer resembles nothing more than a noble oak tree when not engaged in combat. Should the Devourer attack, its true form is revealed (see *Devourer of Souls* below). Note that anyone in possession of a Celestial Disk that comes within 50' of the *Devourer*, notices the eldritch hum emitted by the disk intensify in volume and pitch the closer they approach.

Buried Alive: Anyone who succumbs to the Harvester's unnaturally induced slumber awakens buried within the Grove of Torment, enveloped by thick ropey roots that grope along in the dark like tentacles.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Your eyes open to oblivion. Trapped in blackness, the taste of mud and decay in your mouth. You struggle to scream as the press of cold, cruel earth robs you of breath and mobility. No longer are you in the comfortable confines of the old man's cabin but trapped belowground — buried alive!

Each round, a buried victim takes an automatic 1d3 points of damage as small puckered mouths along the *Devourer's* roots greedily gorge on its host (DC 15 Strength check to escape back to the surface) draining them of their flesh and soul. Note that the *Devourer's* roots cannot attack anyone above ground.

Roots of Wrath (1 per buried PC): Init first; Atk gorge (automatic) (1d3); AC 10; HD 3d10; hp 8; MV 0'; Act n/a; SV Fort +0; Ref -2 Will +2; AL C.

The Devourer of Souls: What was moments before a lush and majestic tree is now a leprous and gnarled trunk that rises from the dank earth, its misshapen and twisted branches groping skyward like a deformed hand locked in the rigidity of death. From its massive branches blossom large cocoon-like sacks with bulbous, semi-transparent membranes; their interiors alive with writhing squamous shapes.

Few, if any, have ever come to understand the machinations of this eon-veiled horror of hate and death. Some claim the comet that fell from the sky was a portion of a dying world. Others contend it was a prison. What cannot be denied is the thing that crawled from the devastation was not of this world, but a loathsome creature from the outer dark — a strange and alien tree. But not all trees offer shelter for the lost, fruit for the hungry, and protection for the weak.

Some are hunters.

The *Devourer of Souls* is a savage predator cloaked in bark and foliage, as old and ancient as the dawn of time. A thing of mystery and legend, this highly intelligent creature relies upon both its thrall and the nightmare realm it has created for itself for sustenance and care.

Should the *Devourer* come under physical attack, or if the Harvester of Sorrow is slain, a great eye opens along its gnarled trunk unleashing an agonizing psychic wave once per round that blasts the minds of any within a 300' radius. All within the area of effect must make a Willpower save and consult the **Psychic Assault Table** below for results.

A Bargain from the Outer Dark: The *Devourer* is far too wise and wary to risk its life against formidable opponents. If brought below 35 hp, it telepathically bargains with the PCs, offering to return them to their home world in exchange for one of their number willingly becoming the new Harvester of Sorrow. If the *Devourer* is brought below 15 hp, it offers to return the PCs to their home world, no strings attached.

Should the PCs accept the *Devourer's* offer, they are immediately transported out of the Star Wound, suddenly appearing before the Pallid Gate. Of course, if one of the PCs has accepted the offer to be the new Harvester of Sorrow, they can always be found in the garden, tending to their new master for eternity...or until rescued.

Fruit of Agony: Suspended from the *Devourer's* dead limbs like nightmare fruit are strange cocoon-like sacks containing the growing forms of the Children of the Damned. Each time the *Devourer* feeds upon a victim buried within the Grove of Torment it draws their souls into its roots where they are born again as abhorrent larvals. Note that a larval's face resembles that of the person buried within the garden.

Devourer of Souls: Init +0; Atk psychic assault (special); AC 15; HD 20d12; hp 75; MV 0'; Act special; SP immune to mind effecting spells and critical hits, vulnerability to cold (double damage); SV Fort +13; Ref -5; Will +9; AL C.

PSYCHIC ASSAULT TABLE

Will Save Result

On a natural roll of 1	If the Harvester of Sorrow is alive – Target's head explodes in a shower of pink mist and bone. Instant death!
	If the Harvester of Sorrow is dead - The target loses all sense of self and personal history and becomes the new Harvester of Sorrow. Not only does the target lose all his mental facilities, but he can no longer recall friends, allies, enemies, relationships or even the place of his birth. The <i>Devourer</i> is all that matters. Only the slaying of the <i>Devourer</i> can restore the target to their normal self.
6 or less	Target suffers 1d16 damage and is thrown back 1d30 feet. Foe is stunned for the following round.
7-10	Target suffers 1d12 damage and is knocked prone.
11-13	Target suffers 1d8 damage and is deafened for 1d3 rounds.
14-16	Target suffers 1d4 damage.
17+	No effect
On a natural roll of 20	Target is imbued with a portion of the <i>Devourer's</i> intellect, permanently gaining 1 point of Intelligence. If the character is a spellcaster he automatically gains permanent working knowledge of one randomly determined spell that can immediately be cast if desired.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the *Devourer* is brought to 0 hit points, read or paraphrase the following:

Long jagged fissures open along the abomination's withered trunk like the cracking of over-baked clay, bringing with it a cloying rot of ancient decay. Pain lances your eyes as a searing light spills forth from the splintering trunk, waxing powerful as the sun. And with the sudden wail of a thousand tormented voices – both tree and alien sky are gone.

With the *Devourer* destroyed, its hold upon reality fails and the tear in the material plane is mended. Once again blue sky and life-giving sun reign over the wasteland. The gods, ever watchful, return their gaze upon this place, claiming the tormented souls denied them these many years. Over time the surrounding desolation once again gives way to life, and the horror that had once been the Star Wound of Abaddon fades from memory into legend.

If the PCs are destroyed by the *Devourer*, read or paraphrase the following:

Blinded and defended by absolute dark, you feel the presence of something ancient and demented envelope you in its cold embrace, forever trapping your soul in cosmic oblivion.

JUDGMENT OF THE GODS

Chosen of the Gods: Destroying the *Devourer* does not go without favor, as both patrons and gods alike bestow upon the characters the title, *Chosen of the Gods*. Each character may choose one of the following boons.

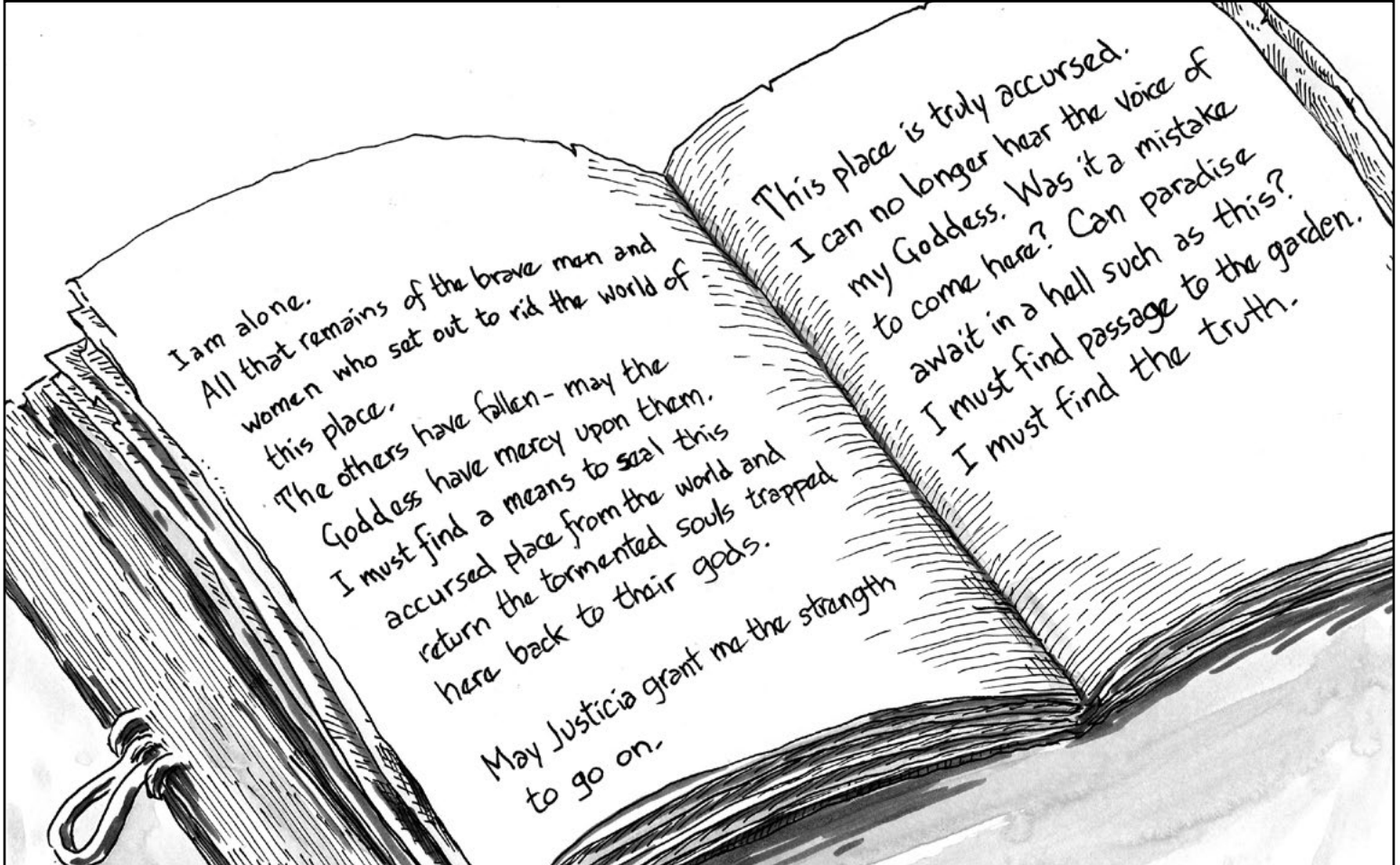
- **Blessed are the Masterful** – PC gains a permanent 1 point increase to any chosen ability score.
- **Blessed are the Awakened** – Next time the PC is brought below zero hit points, he is granted one automatic *recovering the body check*. The recovery is always successful and requires no Luck check. The PC recovers to full hit points, suffers no penalties, and sustains no permanent injury.
- **Blessed are the Miraculous** – Spellcasting PCs gain one additional *known spell*. This spell is of their choosing and does not count against the *known spell* limit indicated by their level.
- **Blessed are the Vigorous** – PC gains a permanent 1d5 hit points.

Godforsaken: PCs that accept any of the *Devourer's* dark bargains to save their own souls draw the wrath of the gods, and are forever forced to bear the shameful title, *God-forsaken*. Each character must roll 1d4 and accept their fate.

1. **Cursed are the Menial** – PC loses a permanent 1 point in a random ability score.
2. **Cursed are the Feeble** – PC loses a permanent 1d4 hit points.
3. **Cursed are the Ill-Fated** – PC loses a permanent 1d3 points of Luck.
4. **Cursed are the Gluttonous** – PC loses one-half of their current total wealth.



HANDOUT A



I am alone.
All that remains of the brave men and
women who set out to rid the world of
this place.

The others have fallen - may the
Goddess have mercy upon them.
I must find a means to seal this
accursed place from the world and
return the tormented souls trapped
here back to their gods.

May Justicia grant me the strength
to go on.

This place is truly accursed.
I can no longer hear the voice of
my Goddess. Was it a mistake
to come here? Can paradise
await in a hell such as this?
I must find passage to the garden.
I must find the truth.



MARZIO WINS THE RODNEYS!

This adventure came to Goodman Games for publication as part of the Rodneys Design Award at Gamehole Con. Gamehole Con is held every November in Madison, WI (visit Gameholecon.com). For the 2017 con, Goodman Games sponsored the DCC Track for the 2017 Rodneys Design Award. After reviewing a slew of submissions, we were very happy to select The Star Wound of Abaddon as the clear winner! Marzio attended and was awarded the trophy as well as a contract to have his adventure published. And now that has finally happened! Congrats to Marzio for his terrific adventure concept, and for following it all the way through to publication. Here are some photos of his award ceremony at the con!



The trophy itself! Although having this module in print is the real prize, right Marzio?



Alex Kammer of Gamehole Con (left) awards the Rodneys trophy to Marzio Muscedere.



Who won the Rodneys? That guy! Left to right: Brendan LaSalle, Dieter Zimmerman, Brett Brooks, Marzio Muscedere, Allyson Brooks (back row), Michael Curtis

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THE STAR WOUND OF ABADDON

#99: A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
BY MARZIO MUSCEDERE

For time uncounted the Star Wound of Abaddon lay dreaming in a dark corner of the world, a grim testament to things terrible and best left forgotten. Born of atrocity and annihilation, it exists within the colossal bowl of a fallen comet, long-shunned by man and creature alike.

But now something calls from its insufferable emptiness, promising paradise to all who enter. Men and women from across the realm renounce their gods and make great pilgrimages into its cadaverous wastes—despite that all who enter never return.

What unknown horrors and nightmare pleasures haunt this place? Who calls out from the blood black emptiness within? Are there any who can stem the tide of innocent souls lost beyond its hoary gate? A band of brave adventurers set off in search of answers...but will they find only death instead?

