

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS[®]

DWELLER BETWEEN THE WORLDS

DCC #102: A LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE
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A LEVEL 1 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.

Dweller Between the Worlds is a *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG adventure intended for a group of five to six level-1 characters. While the characters can be of any class, parties without at least one warrior or dwarf may find themselves at a disadvantage without those character's martial abilities, particularly in the first encounter, which requires the PCs to organize and lead groups of troops into combat. Clerics may also find their special abilities useful against Talaat's host, whose extraplanar nature makes them susceptible to turn unholy checks.

This adventure can be deadly, and the climax could irrevocably alter the PCs fates. The adventure draws the characters into a conflict with an ancient extraplanar entity that exists outside their world, whose hosts have consumed countless planets for raw materials and slaves that – if left unchecked – would transform their home into a desolate waste. If the characters succeed, they can drive the host back into the realm between the worlds, even close the portal for a time, but there is a high likelihood that the PCs may have to seal themselves behind the reft to prevent the further invasion of their own plane. In this case, this adventure can also be used as a launching-off point for judges who wish to take their campaigns into the extradimensional planes, with the PCs choosing to use the portal to find passage to other worlds or even confront the ageless entity and the source of the host itself.

BACKGROUND

Long ages past, when the primordial entropy out of which order was born first sent echoes throughout the void, the wormspawn of Chaos known as Talaat was born. Created from the same boiling abyss that coalesced into stars and planets, Talaat was instead cast aside by the gods of Law and doomed to writhe at the edges of existence, a place that was both space and not space, a place between the worlds. There, Talaat has existed for immeasurable time, ever-hungry for the forms of creation that border its yawning extraplanar prison.

Despite the efforts of the forces of order, Talaat has managed to find means to reach our plane, creating small refts, or portals, into the physical realm, that, if left unchecked, can grow to consume entire worlds. By directing the raw stuff of chaos where the barrier between dimensions is weakest, Talaat has opened countless such tears in space, unleashing an extraplanar host to raid for raw materials to feed its insatiable hunger. Such lands touched by the host of Talaat are condemned to be transformed into barren wastes as each reft grows ever larger between Talaat's plane and ours.



Talaat has now opened one such reft on the character's world, allowing the raw stuff of chaos to leech into this plane and awaken ancient evils and long-slumbering dark gods, sending its inexorable host to plunder and enslave its inhabitants. Now it is up to the PCs to fight off the hosts of Talaat and seal the portal to Talaat's realm before their world is destroyed!

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Dweller Between the Worlds is intended for characters early in their adventuring careers, after they have proven themselves able with weapon and staff to mark themselves as competent fighters; it can be introduced as a follow-on to a funnel or at the start of a longer campaign.

The adventure takes place in the Valley of Dalur, a land with no single ruler. Instead, Dalur is home to several different clans of peoples bound by kinship or fealty, pledged to lords known as thanes. When the adventure begins, the PCs are in the service of Lord Jannssen, thane of one of the largest western clans. The PCs may have begun their service as a result of a prior deed that brought them to Jannssen's attention, or they may simply belong to one of the many villages in the valley that have sworn themselves to Jannssen. However they arrived in his service, the PCs find themselves trusted, though minor members of Lord Jannssen's court.

A few weeks before the start of the adventure, an unseasonably early winter settled on the lands of the valley, and troubling rumors have spread of strange raiders emerging from the eastern forest with the woods themselves said to have grown dark and inhospitable to travelers. A great light has also become visible in the eastern skies at night, far away from any natural auroras that normally dance across the vault of the northern sky. Disturbed by these events, Lord Jannssen has traveled with his most trusted warriors, including the PCs, to meet with the thanes from each of the clans of the valley at the Fell, a place of council since ancient times, to debate what action to take. It is at this uncertain juncture that the adventure begins.

AREA A - THE FELL

The encampment sprawls across the low hills before you, a vast gathering of tents and campfires larger than you ever recall seeing. Thanes from a dozen clans and hundreds of warriors have answered the call to meet, and the air is filled with the ringing of blacksmith hammers and punctuated by the din of martial activity. What would normally be a festive atmosphere, though, feels oppressive, weighted down by the rumors of the strange raiders and the unnatural aurora that can be seen shining in the eastern sky at night, shimmering with a crimson glow that seems to grow with each passing day.

The adventure begins at the Fell, an area of weathered hills with exposed toothlike outcroppings of rock surrounded by a wide plain of grasslands; the site has been a traditional gathering point of the clans of the valley for hundreds of years. The encampment is both a mustering point and a festival, with stories, games, and food shared between the assembled clans as they await the deliberations of the thanes. Normally a festive time, the somber mood of the gathering is reflected in the overcast grey skies and bitter wind that steadily blows from the east. There are hundreds of warriors from across the land at the meeting, represented by well-recognizable banners, though notably as of yet none of the eastern clans have arrived, and those messengers sent with summons to their villages have not returned.

As the party waits along with the rest of the warriors, they are free to explore the encampment. Basic goods and equipment can be found for sale or trade at listed prices per the DCC rulebook, and the PCs can also find blacksmiths who can repair broken weapons and armor. The characters may also wish to gather information from the distant clans on what they have seen and heard about the recent strange events. Very little is known about the creatures said to be behind the raids, only that they suddenly appeared one month ago near the eastern forest, attacking nearby communities.

The following are rumors the PCs may hear regarding the strange creatures. Roll once per PC, rerolling any duplicates, and twice for warriors and dwarves who make a practice of enjoying the company of other martial types. It is up to the players to sort the truth from the more fantastical elements that may mislead the characters.

Table 1-1: Overheard Rumors

Roll (d12)	Rumor
1	"I saw a huge shadow swoop from the sky and clutch a whole cow in its claws before flying away."
2	"A woodsman from a village next to the forest was said to have fallen into a hole big enough to swallow an entire lodge-home."
3	"All the animals have left the eastern forest, and no light now falls beneath the canopy of trees."
4	"It is said a pale woman living in an ancient grove entraps travelers in the forest, consuming their minds as their bodies waste away for eternity."

- 5 "The river Lind has turned black where it touches the soil of the forest floor, and no creature will drink from it."
- 6 "Entire villages lay abandoned. The people disappeared so suddenly that they left forges lit and entire meals to rot on their tables."
- 7 "Haldura, the thane of the eastern clans, felled one of the creatures in battle before sickening and dying the next day."
- 8 "Riders on hellish mounts leave the forest after sunset to burn homes and crops on nightly raids."
- 9 "Worms the size of a person's forearm crawl through the earth, eating crops and even devouring small animals."
- 10 "The source of the shining glow comes from somewhere deep in the forest where a great comet fell to the earth and left a crater several miles wide."
- 11 "Wherever the creatures raid, it is said they covet anything made of iron or steel."
- 12 "The appearance of the creatures has awakened an ancient evil in the swamp that spans the central part of the valley."

The first two days of the gathering pass uneventfully as the clans await the decision of the thanes. On the morning of the third day, read or paraphrase the following:

On the third day of the assembly, you awaken to a blanket of snow that covers the encampment. The mutterings of your fellow clansmen and women voice what everyone knows: that this unseasonal advent of winter has not been heard of in the living memory of even the most elder members of the clan. The bitter cold bites at your skin, and you wish you had traded for some furs to keep you warm.

As the gloom-shrouded sun lifts above the horizon, cries sound out as several winged shapes – each the size of a longboat – descend from the clouds onto the camp. Lord Jannssen and the other thanes take up their arms with shouts to repel the attackers as scattered groups of warriors run to grab shields and weapons. Unless they are rallied, you realize that the disorganized fighters will be quickly overwhelmed by the creatures, slaughtering dozens of warriors.

The creatures are rakki, snakelike "children" of Talaat with large grotesque faces set between a pair of muscular arms extending below their wings. Rakki are large creatures, each roughly 30' long, that carry heavy curved blades the size of a full-grown human.

The scale of the conflict is vast – dozens of descending rakki engage groups of warriors from the different clans across the spread-out encampment, and the individual actions of the PCs have little effect on the outcome of the battle. Instead, during the ensuing conflict, each PC acts as the commander of a group of warriors, leading them in battle against the extraplanar raiders. During the conflict, combat follows additional rules as detailed in Appendix A. These rules represent a simplified approach to handling combat between large forces in DCC, allowing for larger-scale conflicts to play out while still keeping the basic concepts of DCC encounters.

At the start of the encounter, each PC is given command of one of the units of their clan. Lord Jannssen's troops are organized into 10 separate units of fighters. Each unit represents a group of warriors, divided into 6 units of spearmen, 2 units of archers, and 1 unit of knights, along with a special detachment of spellcasters. At the start of combat, each PC may choose one of the units to lead into battle based on their class per the rules in Appendix A. Any remaining units not led by one of the PCs does not act the first round as the forces are not able to organize in time.

Refer to Handout A for the disposition of the forces at the start of the conflict. If using a gaming mat, it is suggested that the judge represent each unit using a marker or chit to denote relative positions and movement.

Note: unit stat blocks are listed in a streamlined format that includes host value (HV) in place of HD and hp. Entries list the unit's starting HV followed by the reduced value when suffering from attrition. Large creatures, such as the enemy combatant rakki, are listed as individual combatants with standard DCC RPG stat blocks. Refer to Appendix A for rules on resolving attacks between units and large creatures.



LORD JANNSSSEN'S FORCES

Spearmen, unit (6): Init +0; Atk spear +2 melee; AC 14; HV 8/4; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; AL L.

Mounted knights, unit (1): Init +1; Atk longsword +3 melee; AC 16; HV 16/8; MV 60'; Act 1d20; SP charge (if moving in a straight line more than half their regular movement ending in melee with a target, the unit has +2 HV for that round); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL L.

Bowmen, unit (2): Init +1; Atk shortsword +0 melee or bow +3 missile fire (range 60/120/150'); HV 6/3; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +0; AL L.

Magician, unit (1): Init +0; Atk dagger -1 melee or spellcasting; AC 10; HV 9/2; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP magical unit, prestidigitation (target within 60' must make a DC 12 Will save or believe weapons have disappeared, lasts 1d6+1 rounds), harmful spell 3/day (+4 spell check, range 60'); SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +4; AL N.

ENEMY COMBATANTS

Rakki (3): Init +1; Atk sword +6 melee (2d12, plus special) or grapple +10 melee; AC 16; HD 10d6; hp 50 each; MV fly 60'; Act 1d20; SP plane shift 2/day, half damage from non-magical weapons and fire; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2; AL C.

As an action, rakki can temporarily open a portal between dimensions, reappearing in a new location up to 500 miles away. During combat, rakki will use this ability to appear behind defenders or to make a quick retreat after collecting any captives.

Ki-jai, unit (4): Init +4; Atk claw +2 melee or bite +4 melee; AC 12; HV 12/6; MV 90' or fly 90'; Act 1d20 or 2d16; SP may attack with both claws using a reduced action die, noiseless (surprise 50% of the time); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

Ki-jai are chimera-like creatures accompanying Talaat's host that can traverse great distances at an extremely high rate of speed. Ki-jai appear as a variety of animal types, with the head, torso, and legs of different creatures. Regardless of the type of locomotion, they appear to move entirely silently, seeming to run on wind and nothingness with driving, pounding legs, wings, or other appendages.

During the battle, the four units of ki-jai appear on round 2 of the encounter on the four shaded hexes located on the bottom two rows of hexes on Handout A. Unless detected, their appearance is a surprise to the characters. Characters specifically asking about the shaded hexes during the encounter set up are allowed a DC 15 Intelligence check to observe signs of the hidden units' activity.

After the battle: The fighting ends once the attackers are repelled or retreat but not before the characters see several of the creatures veer off and swoop in to grasp the thanes from the other clans in their arms before flying away. In the aftermath, Lord Jannssen takes charge of organizing the remaining fighters of the leaderless clans and quickly tending to the wounded and maimed.

After the battle, Lord Jannssen calls the PCs into one of the remaining tents that still stands. After praising their valor (or calling out their cowardice!), he tells them that he intends to organize the remaining warriors to pursue the creatures back to the eastern forest, though it will take several days to ready the clans and begin their march. Given the decimated state of the army, Jannssen tasks the PCs with a special assignment: travel to the village of Graenn to rally the missing eastern clans and rejoin the army as it marches toward the origin of the creatures.

If the characters ask for troops to accompany them, Jannssen tells them that all other able-bodied soldiers will be needed for organizing the decamping of the armies. There are also too few horses to spare, as many were slaughtered or taken by the rakki when they retreated. If the PCs showed a high level of valor or were able to successfully fight off the creatures before the clans lost too many troops, Jannssen will assign men-at-arms to accompany the party, one for each NPC-led unit that survived the battle, up to four men-at-arms total. For purposes of morale, treat these as retainers.

per the rules in the DCC rulebook p. 94, making a morale check when they first face combat or danger (e.g., a trap) in each encounter and at the end of each encounter.

Man-at-arms (up to 4): Init +0; Atk sword or axe +1 melee (1d6); AC 12 (leather); HD 1d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N.

Jannssen tells the PCs to plan to meet the army five days hence in the eastern forest at the source of the unnatural aurora.

THE EASTERN VALLEY



alur's eastern valley is less settled and more remote than the populous west. Bound by ice-covered mountains to the north and south, most of the inhabitants live on small farms scattered throughout the plains near the eastern forest, with only a few larger hamlets consisting of at most a few hundred people, the largest being the village of Graenn. Normally, the paths used by trade wagons would offer slow but safe passage to Graenn this time of year, but with the unnatural advent of winter, any such roads are unreliable, and much of the journey will require the party to travel overland through the wilderness.

The eastern valley map is drawn at a scale of 1 hex = 3 miles. It is assumed that the party can walk 3 miles (1 hex) per hour. See the Overland Speed table in the DCC RPG rulebook p. 308 for specifics on forced marches and other travel speeds. When traveling outside of a marked path through areas of the map marked with hills, swamp, or forest, speed is reduced by half. Traveling through mountains reduces speed to one-third normal, though glaciers are considered impassible. The icy-cold rivers are wide and swift and can only be safely crossed at marked fords or with a boat.

While the PCs know of the general area, the eastern clans have always been distant and more reclusive. During the journey, the PCs are also at risk to the increasing disturbances caused by the reft, including displaced creatures fleeing the forest where Talaat's host continues to grow in influence, or worse. In addition to marked and random encounters, the pervasive cold is brutally punishing to characters. Those without adequate precautions (heavy furs, protective magics) suffer -1d to all actions when traveling outdoors.

The following are location-specific encounters, keyed to the overland map.

Area 1-1 – Marsh-Dweller: *The central marsh spreads before you in every direction, a seemingly endless flat expanse of half-submerged swells of tall, reedlike grass and muddy game trails that pick their way across the soggy landscape surrounded by pools of stagnant water. Unhindered, the eastern wind bites into you with a renewed bitterness, presaging a slow and difficult passage.*

Awakened by the cosmic shock accompanying the opening of the reft, the marsh-dweller is an ancient malevolent spirit known as a grimmara that haunts the wetlands spanning the center of the eastern valley. Swathed in a white cloak and hood, the dweller navigates the waterways on a silent skiff of black wood, seeking the total enslavement of the minds of any life in the swamp. The marsh-dweller is en-

WHAT IF THE PCS DO NOT DECIDE TO INVESTIGATE THE GRAENN?

The PCs may forgo their orders and decide on a different course or even head directly for the source of the creatures – the eastern forest. The judge should determine what consequences and benefits they may receive by doing so. By not investigating the village of Graenn, they will not have an opportunity to discover the truth about the disappearances, nor gain valuable allies for the final encounter.

If the PCs instead take some other course, such as attempting to recruit more allies from the surrounding lands or even the non-human races, those encounters are not detailed here, and the judge should determine how effective they are. The following are some alternative suggestions based on specific actions the characters may take:

- The southern mountains are home to the Hallir, a reclusive race of dwarves who covet the lands to the west for expansion. They may be persuaded to join the clans with a promise of title to the lands.
- The hills along the northern ocean are home to a clan of seafaring halflings who seek a greater alliance with Lord Jannssen. Already affected by raids from Talaat's host, they can be easily recruited by any fellow halfling in the party who offers to marry into the clan.
- The western forest is home to a number of wood elves who, hundreds of years ago, clashed with the ancestors of the human clans. Persuading the long-memoried elves is not an easy task, but if they are convinced, they can provide additional spellcasters to support the army.
- Finally, while there are few other human settlements in the eastern valley, in the plains south of the Fell are several small villages where additional fighters can be outfitted, assuming the characters can cover the cost of new armor and weapons.

countered by parties traveling through the hex marked 1-1 on the overland map or one of the adjacent hexes, preferring to attack at night or when the PCs are encamped.

The dweller uses its inherent mental powers to overwhelm its prey, holding their physical forms in place as it consumes their minds. At the start of combat, the dweller attempts to place a mental hold on all creatures in a 30' radius, numbing their senses. Creatures that are awake must make a DC 10 Will save or fall asleep for 1d4 hours; they can only be roused with violent shaking or if they are directly attacked. Creatures already asleep receive no save and are automatically held in an unconscious state.

When attacking, the dweller sends a wave of fell power and evil intent that overwhelms its victims. Creatures targeted by the dweller must make a DC 15 Will save; those that fail are unable to act: no combat, skill, or magic use until the effect drops. Each round thereafter, the victim loses 1d3 Personality as the character is overcome by the force of the dweller's mind. Targets reduced to 0 Personality are mentally consumed by the dweller and are reduced to mindless physical shells. Once held, characters can attempt a new Will save each round to resist the mental attack but otherwise may only break free of the assault if the dweller is slain or driven off. The grimmara may only target one creature at a time with this ability.

The dweller almost always achieves surprise in its native marsh, stalking its victims in the early hours when the white fogs of night began to rise from the meres and dark waters. If not detected through some magical means, the dweller chooses the moment of attack and always achieves surprise. In death, the dweller dissolves into a sticky, oily substance accompanied by a foul charnel stench. The dweller will retreat if reduced to half its hit points but will continue to stalk the party until they leave the marsh.

Grimmara: Init +2; Atk special; AC 10; HD 4d6; hp 24; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP mental parasitism, paralysis, un-dead traits; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +8; AL N.

Area 1-2 – Mountain Pass: *The trail climbs higher into the mountains until it reaches a snow-filled pass, now completely blocked by the unnatural winter storm. Steep ice-coated cliffs tower on either side, climbing 100' above the frozen ground.*

The pass through the southern mountains is currently blocked by the abnormal winter storm, and parties attempting the passage must spend half a day ascending the steep ridges on either side of the pass. Characters using ropes or other basic ascent gear must make a DC 10 Strength or *climb sheer surfaces* check (DC 15 without climbing equipment) or slip off the frozen surfaces partway through the climb, taking 2d6 damage as they fall 20' onto the ice-covered rocks below. Nearby companions within 5' of a falling PC can attempt to catch them with a successful DC 10 Ref save.

Any characters who fall or any loud noises made by the party also risk triggering an avalanche, requiring the PC with the highest Luck to make a Luck check, with failure sending a sheet of snow down the cliff that knocks any climbing PCs off the ridge (2d6 damage, no save) and buries them on the floor of the pass under 10' of snow, requiring a DC 10 Fort save or be knocked unconscious. Buried PCs lose 1d3 Stamina per round until they can dig themselves out or be rescued. Any characters reduced to 0 Stamina die from suffocation and the intense cold. Lost Stamina is recovered with a full hour of rest in a warm location.

Area 1-3 – Witch's Skerry: *A thick mist covers the banks of the river where the road meets the ford. Peering out over the water, you can make out several oddly shaped rocks jutting just above the surface, barely visible through the fog.*

A hundred years ago, a mad thane of the eastern clans, paranoid that his court seers sought to cast enchantments over

him, cut out their tongues before drowning them in the river at the ford. As they drowned, though, the severed tongues caught on fire and erupted in a thick black mist, choking and killing many of the thane's men-at-arms as he barely escaped with his life. When the thane returned with his remaining retinue, they found only stone where the bodies of the drowned witches once lay. Since that time, no eastern thane has crossed the ford, fearing the drowned spirits' curse.

If the PCs approach the water, read the following:

As you approach the water, a white longship, its wooden prow carved into the shape of a huge snake, emerges from the fog and silently glides to a halt against the nearby bank. There are no signs of a master or oarsmen aboard the ghostly vessel.

If the party boards the boat, they find themselves conveyed across the eerily placid water. During the journey, spellcaster PCs see ghostly human shapes hovering in the mist just beyond the gunwales. Once the ship reaches the middle of the river it suddenly stops, and the ghostly shapes surround the boat, appearing to wait for some action on the part of the PCs.

The spirits of the drowned witches can only be appeased by stealing the voices of living creatures. Each PC who speaks to the spirits must make a DC 12 Will save or be struck mute for 24 hours. Characters who stay silent do not have to make a save, and if none of the PCs speak, the ghostly forms slowly retreat into the mist. Once appeased or dispersed, the longship continues its journey to the far bank. Attacking the spirits causes the longboat to instantly disappear, casting the PCs into the freezing water.

PCs attempting to cross the river without the aid of the boat find their ankles grabbed by unseen hands that attempt to drag them underneath the surface. Grabbed characters must succeed on an opposed grapple check or be pulled below the water and begin drowning. Drowning characters take 1d6 points of Stamina damage per round and die when Stamina reaches 0; lost Stamina is restored immediately if they can surface. Drowning characters can make a new opposed grapple check each round to break free of the spirit's hold.

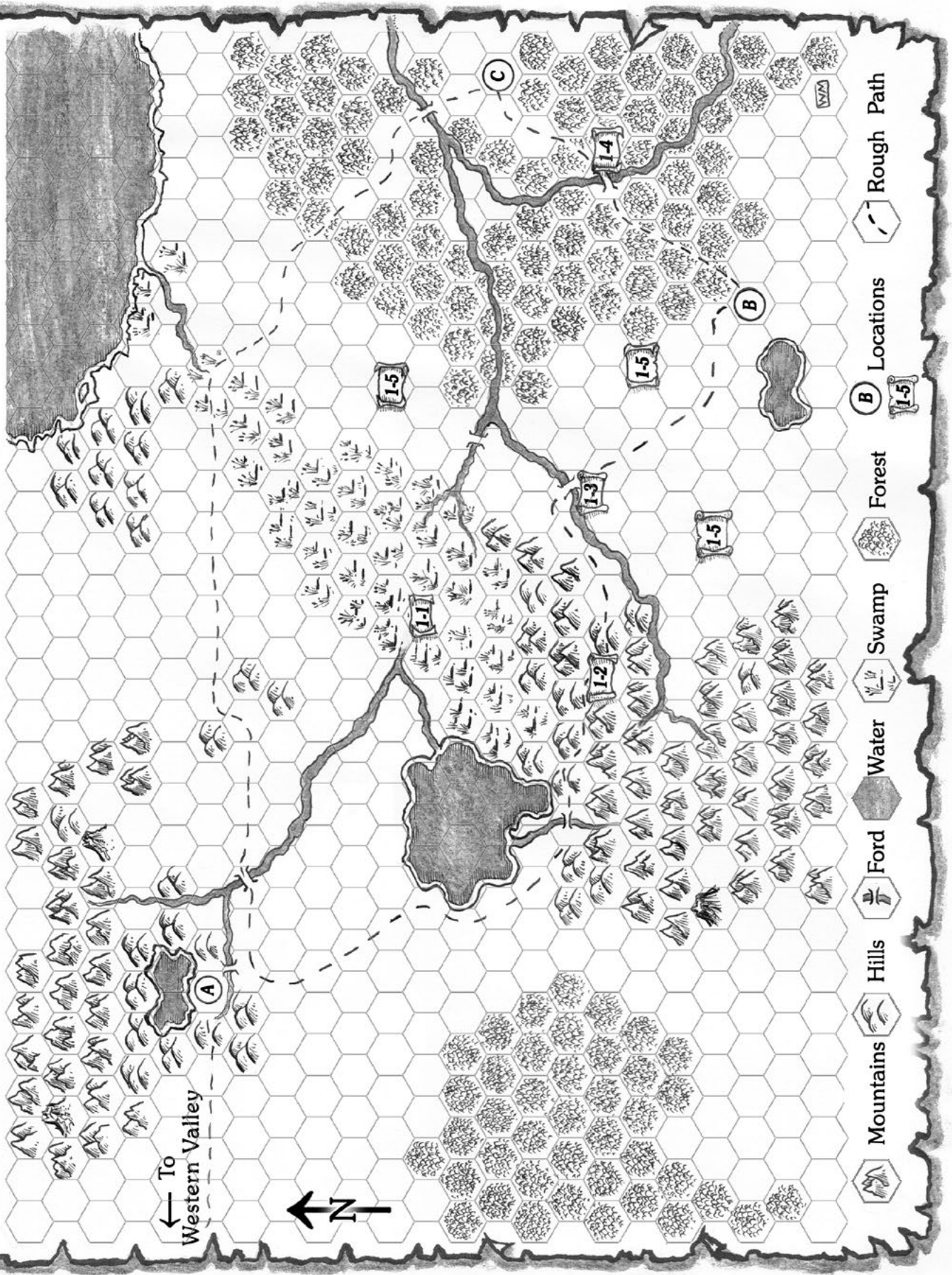
Spirits of the drowned witches: Init +2; Atk grapple +5 melee (special); AC 10; HD 4d5; hp 15; MV fly 30'; Act special; SP un-dead traits, immune to non-magical weapons, grapple (attacks all creatures in the river, grappled creatures are held underwater and begin drowning); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +4; AL C.

Area 1-4 – The Dark River: *The path winds through heavy growth of spruce, pines, and birch that become more twisted as you journey further into the depth of the forest. In a clearing ahead, you see a dark ribbon of water, a river of inky blackness at least 20 yards across. The path leads down a grassy slope to a shallow rock-strewn ford.*

Bourns and rivulets of black, mirrorlike water run unseen beneath the eastern forest, flowing outward from the source of the reft like veins from a heart. As the rivulets empty into the Lind river, a slowly flowing stream that eventually empties into the far eastern sea at the edge of the lands of the valley, it has been transformed by the leeching chaos into a black band of water empty of natural life.

Eastern Valley of Dalur

□ = 3 Miles



The banks of the dark river are lined with a long, straw-colored grass that does not stir even in the heaviest of wind. The grass is strangleweed, a type of carnivorous vegetation spawned by the spreading chaos from the reft.

Characters traveling through the banks find the tangle of roots and dry stems difficult to pass through and only slowly become aware that their legs and ankles are being entangled by the grass. For each round that a character stands within the grass, they must make a DC 5 Ref save. The difficulty increases by 5 for each additional round the character stands in one spot. Failure means that the character is trapped by the grass, which they only become aware of if they attempt to move again. To break free, a character must make a Strength check against the cumulative DC of the entanglement, e.g., if a character was standing still or held by the grass for four rounds, they would need to make a DC 20 Strength check to free themselves. On the fifth round, the DC check would be 25.

Once trapped, the grass slowly strangles its victims, dragging them to the ground and consuming them. Strangleweed takes double damage from fire-based attacks, but any victims trapped also take normal damage from any flames.

Strangleweed: Init -4; Atk special; AC 12; HD 4d6; hp 18; MV none; Act special; SP attack all creatures in the strangleweed, entangle (cumulative DC 5 Ref save for each round victim stands or is entangled within the strangleweed), half damage from non-area attacks, vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +2; AL N.

The Lind river itself has been transformed by the leeching power of the reft; travelers whose skin comes in contact with the inky black water or who drink from its depths must make a DC 15 Fort save or suffer from its strange effects, rolling a d7 modified by Luck on the following table:

Table 1-2: Effects of the Dark River

Roll (1d7)	Effect
1 or less	A shadow grows within the PC. Over the next 1d4 weeks, the PC's alignment slowly shifts one step closer to chaotic (i.e., if lawful, the shift is to neutral; if neutral, the PC becomes chaotic). If the PC is already of chaotic alignment, they begin to feel a growing compulsion to return to the forest and seek its center, eventually abandoning all else to do so. The compulsion only ends with the closing of the reft.
2	A wave of forgetfulness overwhelms the PC, causing the loss of 1d3 XP.
3	The PC is overcome by a great weariness and, unless physically prevented, seeks respite by laying down in the banks of strangleweed next to the river.
4	The PC's mouth becomes parched and dry, and for the next 1d4 weeks they develop an unquenchable thirst no matter how much water they drink.
5	The PC's perception of time alters, with its pas-

sage sometimes being swift and at others eddying in slow arcs. For the next 3d6 years, the PC ages at twice the normal rate; thereafter they age at only half the normal rate.

6 The PC is tainted by demon blood, gaining one of the following traits (roll 1d4): 1) *detect good* (+2 spell check), 2) *infravision 60'*, 3) half damage from non-magical weapons, 4) half damage from fire, acid, cold, electricity, and gas. Thereafter, the PC is corrupted and can no longer be healed or blessed by divine magic.

7+ The dark waters fill the PC's mind with an awareness of the vast branching forest and its connections between worlds, granting a brief glimpse of the underlying order of the universe. The knowledge of one random 1st-level spell is etched into their mind forever after.

Area 1-5 - Destroyed village: *Atop a nearby hill is a small village, consisting of perhaps a dozen simple buildings enclosed by a low wooden fence. There is evidence of a recent battle, including toppled houses and burn marks on several of the structures.*

The village was recently attacked by Talaat's host, and its inhabitants were either captured, driven away, or killed and left for scavengers. The largest house contains a corpse, laid out on a table in funerary clothes and wearing jewelry and rings worth 50 gp. Stealing any of the consecrated corpse's jewelry draws the ire of whatever minor gods were worshiped by the village and incurs a permanent loss of -1 Luck to the would-be thief.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

In addition to the marked locations, each day that the characters journey in the valley, roll 3d6 on the following encounter table. When using this table, judges should add the cumulative value of the party's current Luck modifiers to the roll. (For example, a party of five PCs with +1, -2, +0, +1, and +2 Luck modifiers would add +2 to the roll). Most encounters are not tied to a specific location, and judges should insert the encounters where appropriate during the PCs' travels.

Table 1-3: Random Encounters (3d6 modified by total party Luck)

Roll	Encounter
1 or less	Rakki
2-3	Ki-jai patrol
4-5	Ambush
6-7	Carnivorous giant toad
8	Blizzard
9-12	No encounter
13-14	Recruits
15	Blind hermit
16-17	Abandoned farm
18+	Evacuees

Results from table are listed alphabetically.

Abandoned farm: In a clearing ahead are several simple pit houses, their peaked thatched roofs jutting above the surrounding tilled land. An eerie stillness hovers over the farm, and the PCs see no sign of its former inhabitants. A search of the huts reveals one survivor: a gaunt, elderly warrior who, if revived and offered food, reveals that all the members of his clan left after the raids started several weeks ago. A cache containing worn leather armor, 2d6 arrows, and a simple two-person hide boat can be found in one of the abandoned pit houses if the party spends at least an hour searching.

Ambush: A group of 2d3 half-starved deserters fleeing from the battle at the Fell have set an ambush for any passing travelers, intending to kill and rob them of equipment and coin.

Clan deserters (2d3): Init +4; Atk dagger +1 melee (1d4+1); AC 11; HD 1d8+1; hp 6 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

Blind hermit: The characters come across a simple wooden shelter. Inside is an old hermit, seemingly blind, wearing beautiful, gray-feathered garb. The hermit tells the PCs that he is missing his "seeing" eye and asks for their help recovering it. The hermit's eye has been stolen by a family of murids nesting nearby and can be found by characters spending an hour searching the area with a DC 10 Agility or Intelligence check, treating the roll as untrained unless the PC has an appropriate occupation such as a trapper or hunter. When held up to one's eye, the hermit's eye allows the bearer to see invisible creatures for one turn with a DC 10 spell check. If recovered and returned, the hermit graciously offers his thanks and gifts the feathered tunic to the PCs as a reward.

The tunic is a magical skein that allows the wearer to transform into the bird whose feathers make up the tunic, gaining the abilities and additional extra hit points of the creature at the time of transformation. It takes a full round and action to perform the transformation. If struck or attacked while they are transformed, damage is taken from the extra hit points first before being applied to the PC's own hit points. When the extra hit points are gone, the wearer immediately reverts to their human form and cannot use the garment until it naturally heals per normal healing rules in the DCC RPG rulebook p. 94.

Owl-skein: Init +3; Atk talon +2 melee (1d6); AC 15; HD 3d6; hp 10 (plus wearer's original hit points, damage reduces additional hit points first after which wearer reverts to original form); MV fly 40'; Act as wearer; SP night-vision, excellent hearing; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N.

Blizzard: A sudden winter storm overtakes the PCs, driving a heavy cloud of snow with it. For the next day, vision is reduced to 30' and travel speed is halved.

Carnivorous giant toad: A giant amphibian makes its home in a nearby body of water. Giant toads are large creatures, and a fully grown adult is typically 8' long and weighs up to 300 lbs. Despite their size, they are incredibly quick and attack using their jaws to lacerate targets or attempt to drag

them into prone positions to be vulnerable to further attacks. With a successful bite, the giant toad receives a +4 opposed Strength check against its opponent. If the giant toad wins the Strength check, the character is knocked prone and must spend an action to stand up.

Giant toad: Init +4; Atk bite +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 3d8+2; hp 18; MV 30' or swim 50'; Act 1d20; SP knock prone; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

Ki-jai patrol: A small patrol of ki-jai pass through the area. If they are not surprised, PCs that are travelling cautiously and scouting ahead may avoid the patrol. Otherwise, they discover the PCs and attack.

Ki-jai (3): Init +4; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4+2) or bite +4 melee (1d12); AC 12; HD 2d10; hp 11, 12, 14; MV 90' or fly 90'; Act 1d20 or 2d16; SP may attack with both claws using a reduced action die, noiseless (surprise 50% of the time); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

Evacuees: The characters encounter a caravan of steer-drawn wagons traveling from the east. They are wary of any groups they encounter and will only talk from a distance while holding makeshift weapons. If asked, they say they are fleeing from the growing evil in the east. They do not know of the fate of the village that the PCs are bound for, only that none of those who journeyed there returned.

If the PCs present themselves as able fighters, the leader of the group offers to pay them up to 10 gp each to provide protection to escort them until they reach their destination a day's journey to the west.

Rakki: A portal opens in the sky above the PCs and a winged black shape emerges and attacks the party! If pressed, the rakki will attempt to grapple one of the members of the PCs' retinue before retreating using its plane shift ability.

Rakki: Init +1; Atk sword +6 melee (2d12, plus special) or grapple +10 melee; AC 16; HD 10d6; hp 50; MV fly 60'; Act 1d20; SP plane shift 2/day, half damage from non-magical weapons and fire; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2; AL C.

Recruits: The characters meet a group of warriors journeying from the south to meet the armies of the clans. They are grateful for any news that the PCs can share and are eager to continue traveling to join the clans. With a DC 15 Personality check, 1d3 fighters from the group can instead be persuaded to accompany the characters as additional men-at-arms.

AREA B - THE VILLAGE OF GRAENN

Each night of the journey toward the eastern forest, the crimson glow grows brighter, dancing like unnatural northern lights. As the PCs approach the village of Graenn, read or paraphrase the following:

Entering the lands of the eastern clans, the wilderness slowly turns into a series of gently rolling hills. Clearly a rich land with good earth, nothing stirs in the cold air under the cloud-shrouded sky as you approach the village of Graenn.

Graenn itself lies on the edge of the eastern forest, the dark canopy of trees ending just outside its border. Set on a rise, a hillfort surrounded by a timber wall commands the surrounding plain where numerous pit houses with rooms dug halfway into the earth lay. Perhaps home to several hundred people, you see no sign of any inhabitants.

Graenn is the largest of a group of small villages under the rule of Haldura, the thane of the eastern clan. Fed by streams from the nearby mountains, the land in this part of the valley is verdant and known for its rich soil. Approaching Graenn, the PCs see that all the buildings are intact, but there are none of the normal signs of normal village life – cooking fires are unlit and, if approached at night, no torches burn at any of the sentry points.

Area B-1 – Pit Houses: *A number of small dwellings with thatched roofs and curved walls made of wattle and daubed with a mixture of clay, animal dung, and water lay outside the wall of the hillfort. Each has a central excavated pit, so that the floor lies below ground level, keeping them cool in summer and warm in winter.*

Other than being strangely empty, there is nothing unusual about these houses. Within each dwelling are typical household items, including spinning wheels, wooden wheat threshers, and small stone ovens. Inside the buildings characters can find ample food and drink, including smoked meat and fish and herbs hung up to dry that has been seemingly abandoned by the former household.

Area B-1a – Alchemist Hut: *Set slightly apart from the other structures, the door to this pit house is marked with a rune that indicates it is the home of a potion-maker.*

The rune itself is magically trapped and can be easily detected with a DC 10 Intelligence or *find trap* check. Disabling the arcane ward is much harder, requiring a successful casting of *dispel magic* or a separate DC 15 *disable trap* check, with failure automatically triggering the trap. If triggered, the rune explodes in a flash of light, inflicting 1d6 damage and blinding anyone within 10' for 1d3 hours (DC 15 Fort save to resist).

Characters entering the pit house find a cluttered workshop with several stone furnaces and melting-pots. A noxious odor lingers in the air from the various potions and powders. With a thorough search of the equipment, characters may make a DC 12 *handle poison* or spell check to recover enough material for 1d3 doses of a random elixir. Rolling a natural “1” on the check results in an explosion that causes 2d6 damage to everyone inside the pit house.

Table 1-4: Recovered Elixirs

Roll d4 Elixir

- 1 Pollen of a rare jungle lily. When cast in a target's face, it induces a temporary paralysis that lasts 1d4 rounds (DC 15 Fort save to resist).
- 2 Sleep vapor. When released, this soporific drug quickly vaporizes into a gaseous cloud that fills up to a 30' × 30' area. Any creature entering the cloud must make a DC 10 Fort save or fall into a deep, sound sleep that lasts for 1d3 hours or un-

til they are vigorously shaken awake. Even on a success, the target finds their mind clouded with fatigue and are -2 to all actions for a similar period. Creatures already asleep when exposed to the drug are automatically affected by it. The cloud dissipates after 3 rounds.

- 3 Philter of violence. When imbibed, this pungent philter inflicts a maddening rage that, unless restrained, causes the imbiber to attack the nearest creature. So potent is this elixir that it acts as a solvent for all forms of paralysis or stupor and is strong enough to even temporarily revive those close to death and dying or bleeding out. The effects wear off after 2d6 rounds.

- 4 Powder of the fetid apparitions. When ignited, this rare powder made from volcanic ash burns with a clear flame, creating a tasteless, invisible cloud of vapor that causes any creature inhaling it to experience hallucinations of phantasmal shapes. Creatures within the cloud must make a DC 15 Will save each round or flee in terror. One dose of the powder is enough to fill a large room, and two doses will fill the entire level of a small building. Effects last 2d6 rounds or until the fire is extinguished.

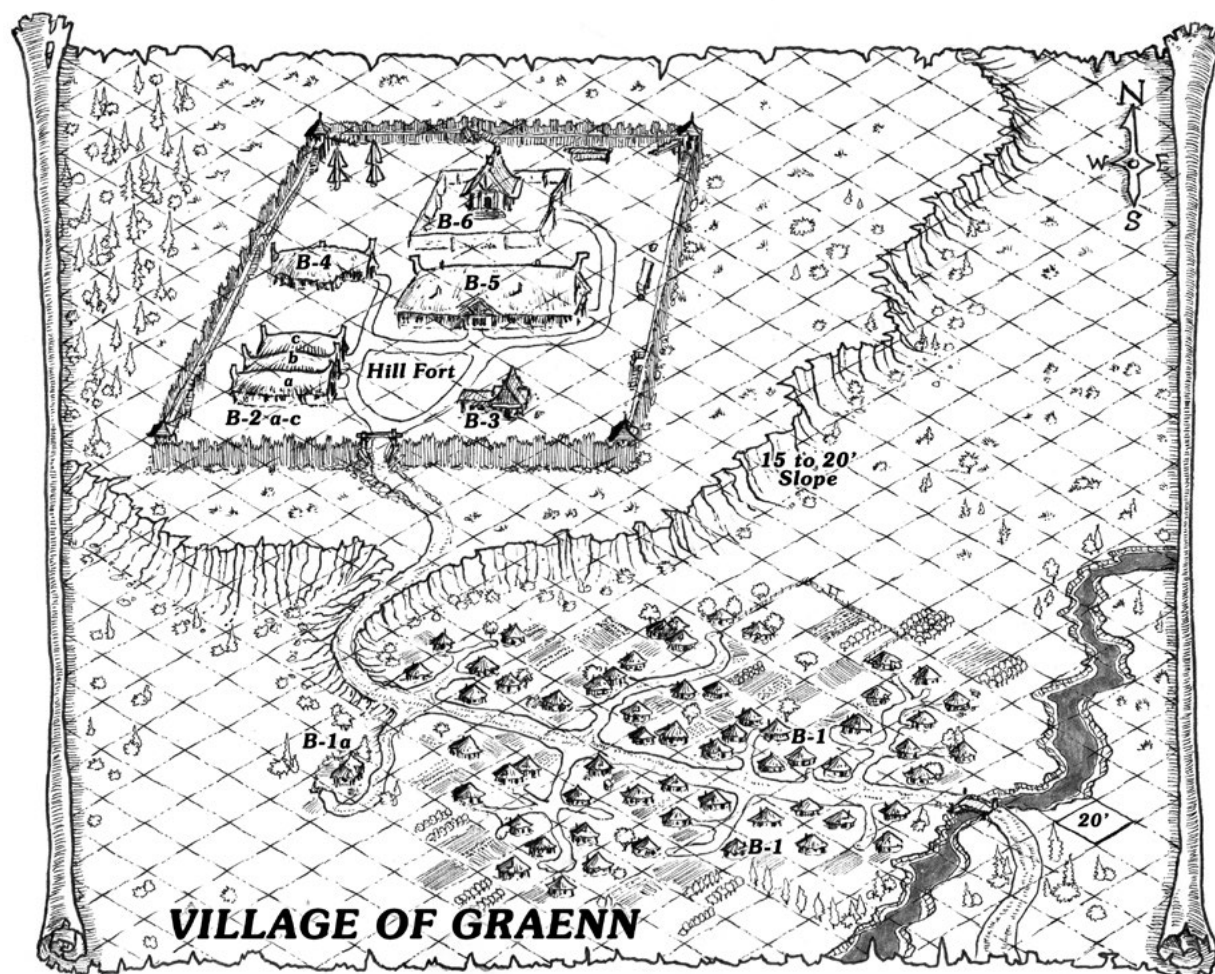
Beyond the pit houses, Graenn's hillfort is set on a low rise 15' above the surrounding plain. The hillfort contains Haldura's residence and feast hall, serving both as a gathering place for village celebrations and a refuge when the village is threatened. As the PCs approach the entrance, they see that the 8' wooden gate is wrenched off its hinges. Inside the wooden palisade are several larger structures made of clay-lined walls and covered with thatched roofs. In addition to Haldura's residence and feast hall, inside the hillfort are stables, the blacksmith, and several large houses for those families bound to the thane through kinship or fealty.

Area B-2a-c – Storehouse and Stables: Three large 15' × 30' longhouses are divided into stables and a storehouse filled with the village's grain reserve and animal feed. The doors to the stables are broken and wrenched open from the inside as if a stampede of horses tried to escape. The animals, maddened by Talaat's host when they attacked, broke free and fled into the surrounding wilderness.

Area B-3 – Blacksmith: Inside the small structure is what was clearly once a blacksmith; however, there are no traces of tools or a forge, and any iron and steel were plundered by Talaat's host. A thorough search recovers a fine set of human-sized chainmail hidden beneath the floorboards along with 3d6 gold coins.

Area B-4 – Barracks: This large 20' × 50' longhouse housed those members of the clan bound to the thane. PCs entering the building find a group of dull-eyed warriors who rise to attack the party.

Thrall (4): Init -1; Atk sword +1 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 11 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP immune to mental attacks; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will -2; AL N.



Thrall are former warriors of the clan who have succumbed to the control of the Regent's rod (see area C) and left to ambush anyone entering the village. Thrall can only be released from their mental enslavement by destroying the rod or its master.

Area B-5 - Haldura's Longhouse: Haldura's residence is a long, narrow thatch-roof building bigger than all the other structures with decorative carvings on the woodwork bordering the doorway. Inside, the longhouse is divided into two sections, the residence of Haldura and her family and the feast hall.

A group of survivors is barricaded in the rear of the feast hall, mostly the aged, infirm, and very young. The entryway to the feast hall is trapped by a spiked hammer that swings down on intruders (DC 10 *find trap* check to discover and a separate DC 10 *disable trap* check to disarm). If triggered, the first PC through the doorway can make a DC 15 Ref save to jump aside, otherwise they take 1d6 damage.

If the survivors are brought to trust the PCs, they tell them that, several weeks ago, farms near the forest began to be attacked and whole families began disappearing. As the attacks increased and stories of strange raiders pillaging for iron began to spread, thethane, Haldura, sent her best warriors to patrol the frontier, leaving a few fighters to defend Graenn.

Several nights ago, Haldura went to consult the clan's gods in the cult house for guidance and has not been seen since. Then last night, creatures came out of the woods to attack the village. The remaining fighters manned the walls while

the old and very young barricaded themselves in the feast hall. They tell of how the shouts and cries were horrible, then everything fell silent. Fearing everyone else in the village to have been slain, including Haldura, they have dared not leave the feast hall since. Unbeknownst to the surviving clan members, Haldura is alive but has fallen under the spell of the two forest spirits that have taken over the cult house, keeping thethane prisoner (see area B-6).

Area B-6 - Cult House: Separated from the rest of the buildings by a 5' inner fence is a square two-story structure with a peaked timber roof. The building is the village cult house, a place of worship that houses idols to the gods of the eastern clan. When Haldura attempted to consult the clan's gods for guidance, the wooden idols instead became animated by two malevolent spirits of the forest quickened to life by the growing tendrils of the reft - Gammur and Drekk - that have held the enthralledthane captive ever since, gleefully pricking her memories with dreams of being endlessly pursued by faceless hunters.

When the characters enter the cult house, read the following:

Inside the building is a large, high-ceilinged room lit by a single brazier that glows with a low red flame. Centered in the chamber is a wide wooden altar, well-worn through years of use. A female warrior dressed in the style of a chief or lord rests atop the altar, seemingly asleep or dead. Just beyond the altar are two elaborately carved 10' pillars dyed dark red from years of sacrifices. Each pillar is topped with an animistic-looking carving of an eagle and a dragon, respectively.



Just as your eyes adjust to the dim light, suddenly, the brazier ignites with a blue flame, illuminating the room in an unnatural azure witch-light. At the same time, the two pillars rise into the air and attack!

Gammur and Drekki, animated idols of the forest spirits: Init +1; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4) or special; AC 14; HD 3d6; hp 12, 13; MV fly 30'; Act 1d20; SP *lotus stare* 3/day (Gammur, +3 spell check), breathe fire 3/day (Drekki), half damage from piercing weapons; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +4; AL C.

The animated spirits attack any PCs entering the cult house. In combat, Gammur and Drekki fly to the ceiling of the chamber, swooping down to bite targets with their beak and teeth. As an action, up to three times per day, Gammur can cast *lotus stare* with a +3 spell check and Drekki can breathe a cone of flame 5' wide at its end and 10' long. All within the breath weapon's range must make a DC 12 Ref save or take 2d4 fire damage.

Destroying the idols releases the hold over Haldura. After the battle, the thane thanks the PCs for saving her and the remaining survivors of the village. She agrees to gather what warriors she can from the nearby villages and ride to join the mustering clans at the source of the strange glow, promising to meet the PCs there. If they ask to accompany her, she states that she intends to travel light and fast by horse, and anyone traveling by foot would only slow her down. Instead, she suggests the characters journey to rejoin Lord Jannssen and the clans by taking a nearby footpath through the forest used by hunters that will lead them northeast toward the glow.

THE EASTERN FOREST

The eastern forest, always a mysterious place, has grown ever wilder and menacing since the reft appeared. A ubiquitous mist fills the gaps between the stands of spruce, pines, and birch that spread unbroken for leagues, flattening sound and hindering exploration. A sense of foreboding accompanies the characters as they journey under the dark canopy of trees, and an eerie silence pervades the air absent the comforting sounds of animals and birds.

The path into the forest is easily located and seemingly leads toward the center of the woods and the source of the strange shimmering light. In fact, where PCs might expect to see game trails and hunting paths branching off the main route, they instead find that any such pathways are covered by dense brambles and twisted roots, almost as if the forest was guiding - or luring - them into its center. PCs who choose to cross into the wildness off the trail quickly find themselves surrounded by a tangle of impassible undergrowth.

As the characters journey through the forest, judges should check for random encounters using a 2d6 modified by party Luck in place of the 3d6 normally rolled due to the increasingly malign effects of the reft.

AREA C - THE REFT

The path eventually leads the party to the center of the forest. As the characters approach, the shimmering light grows until it encompasses the entire sky. As the PCs emerge from the trees, read or paraphrase the following:



Before you, a vast clearing has been created in a vale in the middle of the woods; twisted and blackened trees line the edges where the forest meets the clearing. In the center of the vale lies the source of the dancing light – what can only be described as a scar in the very fabric of reality, a tear seemingly dropping to the base of the world to strike down into earth's heart itself. Inside the rupture you can see a strange landscape – a shifting alien plane before a black void filled with unfamiliar stars.

To the north, at the base of the slope into the vale, you can see the remnants of the clan forces, apparently just having repelled an attack from a group of demonic skirmishers now retreating toward the reft. Inside, more of the peregrine otherworldly forces can be seen organizing under gonfalons emblazoned with horrible demonic symbols.

As you take in the strange sight, a group of riders detach from the clan army and ride up the slope toward you. You recognize Lord Jannssen at the head, his armor dented and worn from the recent fighting.

Reaching the reft, the PCs arrive just as the clan army has repelled an attack from the Talaat's host after a hard-fought battle, but more creatures are seen gathering inside the reft itself. Jannssen tells the PCs that, even with the allies brought by the characters, he has little hope of overcoming the mustering forces inside the reft. Instead, Lord Jannssen has a bold but risky plan to draw out the enemy forces, allowing the PCs to lead a few groups of fighters into the reft itself behind the distracted enemy army in the hopes they can destroy the source of its power.

Based on the mustering forces within the reft, the PCs have little time to prepare. Allow each PC to choose a type of unit

to lead into the reft from the list of following forces. Unlike the first battle, there are no limits on the number of types of units available to the characters, and they may choose to lead any unit as long as they meet the requirements for PC leaders listed in Appendix A. Once the PCs have readied their forces, the clan army begins moving toward the reft, drawing Talaat's reformed host out to meet them and creating the distraction needed for the PCs to slip inside.

As you cross the bridge to enter the reft, the world around you changes. Before you yawns an endless void filled with distant stars that shine with a luminous intensity brighter than any star in the night sky. Beyond the edge of the bridge, several shifting landforms float in the "sky" before you, merging and breaking apart in a seemingly arbitrary fashion.

Further across the black chasm is a larger landform where a pulsing orb of primordial matter flares at intervals, apparently fueled by a number of humanoid figures casting weapons and armor gathered from nearby huge piles into its glowing center. A creature with monstrous batlike wings carrying a gleaming metallic rod oversees the thrall workers. With each pulse, the orb sends jets of crimson energy toward the portal's opening.

The reft is growing, the raw spark of chaos at its center fueled by the iron and steel stolen from the PCs' world and kept constantly fed by the enslaved thralls controlled by the overseer's rod. The overseer is Talaat's Regent, Tris'ash-sur. To close the reft, the PCs must reach the far landform and kill the Regent, freeing the enslaved thrall and starving the very chaos that holds the portal between Talaat's realm and the PCs open.

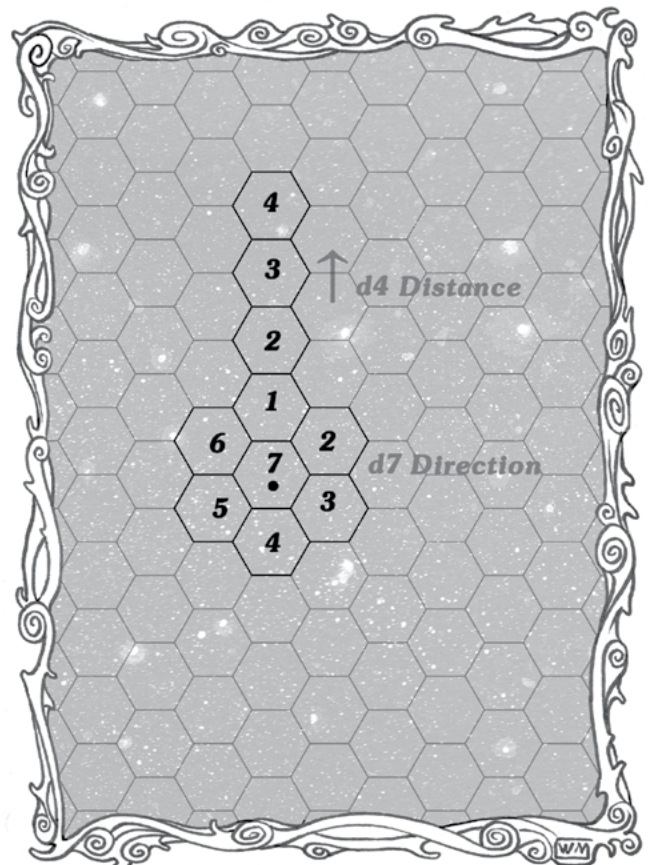
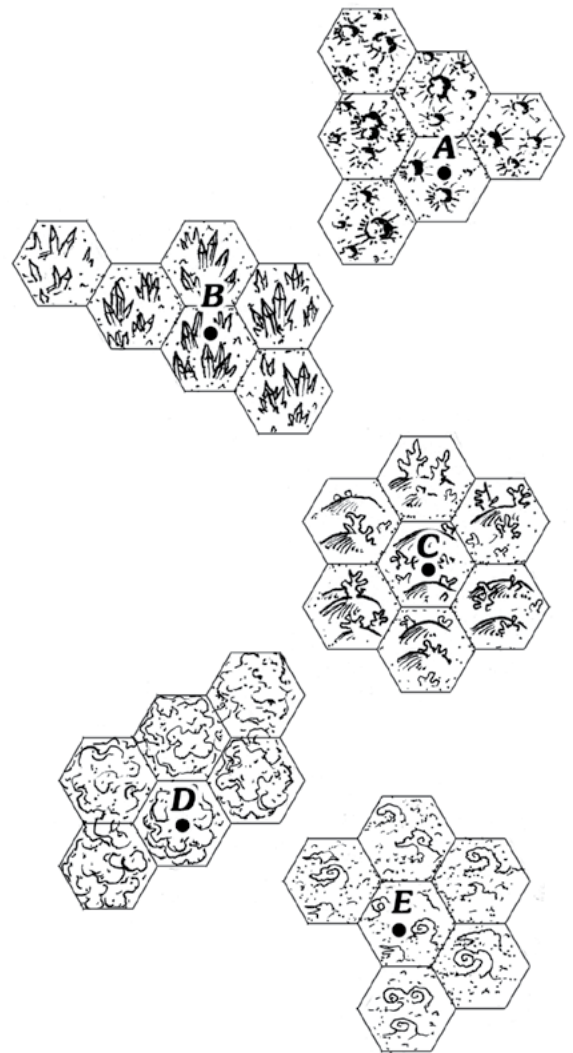
To reach the Regent, the characters will not only have to contend with Talaat's host but also the shifting terrain of the plane inside the reft. The floating islands of land are the end results of countless worlds consumed by Talaat, their remains cast about the void. As they move, they shift, attach, and break apart by seemingly random forces.

During the encounter, the shifting plane inside the reft works as follows:

- At the beginning of each round, roll two dice for each landform to determine its movement – a d7 for direction and a d4 for distance. A result of 7 on the direction die indicates that the landform does not change positions that round.
- The landform movement happens simultaneously. Landforms that intersect with another landform at the end of their movement stop where they come into contact.
- During the round, any connected landforms are considered contiguous for purposes of movement but retain their characteristics by terrain type (see the following descriptions).
- Spellcasters inherently sense they may attempt to control the chaotic forces behind the movement of the landforms they are standing on. To control a landform, the spellcaster must make a DC 12 spell check. With success, they can choose the number on one of the two movement dice (direction or distance) prior to it being rolled at the beginning of the round. With a failed spell check, the spellcaster instead loses control of the forces of chaos, causing it to spin wildly. The landform moves as normal, but in addition, the judge rolls an additional d6 die to determine a random direction the landform rotates.

Types of Landforms: Each of the five irregularly shaped landforms are roughly 70' to 100' across and have different appearances and properties as follows:

- Landform A – A grey landscape pockmarked with numerous craters, the gravity on this landform is a fraction of that of the PCs' world. In addition to normal movement, creatures may leap 20' at a time. Creatures unused to fighting in the abnormal gravity are at -1d to actions.
- Landform B – Flecked with crystals of various sizes, a wreath of clouds hangs over the surface of the landform. Creatures on the landform cannot see further than 30' and lose any sense of direction without some means of magical tracking.
- Landform C – Rolling hills covered by grey alien vegetation that sway in an unseen wind are spread across the surface. The strange vegetation acts as a collector for phlogiston, attenuating the forces of nearby spellcasters, who receive a +2 bonus on spell checks while standing on the landform.
- Landform D – The landform is actually a type of living stone, severed from the rest of its body by the cataclysm that destroyed it. The entity's psychic screams of longing and pain send vibrations through any creatures standing on its surface, inflicting 1 hit point of damage each round (DC 10 Will save to resist).
- Landform E – A layer of fine blue powder covers the surface of the landform, sending up plumes of dust with each step taken by creatures moving on its surface, which hangs in the air before slowly settling back down again. Creatures breathing in the alien dust must make a DC 10 Fort save or lose sense of time in the vastness of the void, taking no action but to gaze into the yawning abyss for the rest of the round.



Refer to Handout B for the disposition of the forces and landforms at the start of the conflict inside the reft. Cut-outs are provided for use by judges to track the positions of the landforms each round.

PC Forces: The PCs may choose from any of the previously listed human clan units to lead into the reft (following the rules for leaders in Appendix A).

Enemy Combatants: The following units remain in the reft to support the Regent. Note: If the PCs freed Haldura, her forces arrive to reinforce the gathered clans, and the two rakki are removed from the encounter:

Rakki (2): Init +1; Atk sword +6 melee (2d12, plus special) or grapple +10 melee; AC 16; HD 10d6; hp 50 each; MV fly 60'; Act 1d20; SP plane shift 2/day, half damage from non-magical weapons and fire; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2; AL C.

Ki-jai, unit (4): Init +4; Atk claw +2 melee or bite +4 melee; AC 12; HV 12/6; MV 90' or fly 90'; Act 1d20 or 2d16; SP may attack with both claws using a reduced action die, noiseless (surprise 50% of the time); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

Thrall archers, unit (4): Init -1; Atk bow +1 missile fire (range 40/80/120'); AC 12; HV 6/3; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SP immune to mental attacks; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; AL N.

Thrall swordmen, unit (4): Init -1; Atk sword +1 melee; AC 14; HV 10/5; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP immune to mental attacks; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will -2; AL N.

The thrall have flat eyes and grey faces drained of color. There is a 1 in 10 chance that the PCs recognize a thrall as a neighbor or resident of a town.

Tris'ash-sur, Regent of Talaat: Init +2; Atk rod of Talaat +6 melee (1d8+1) or claw +5 melee (1d6+1); AC 15; HD 5d10; hp 22; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP control alignment; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +4; AL C.

Talaat's Regent, Tris'ash-sur, is a large, bat-winged creature with long tusks that curl from its jaw into sharp 6" horns and wearing an elaborate armored vestment decorated in alien stones. Standing 7' tall, Tris'ash-sur towers a full head above the enslaved thrall feeding the nearby spark of chaos. As a symbol of its office granted by Talaat, Tris'ash-sur carries a metal antennalike rod of unearthly craftsmanship, designed to control thoughts and amplify mental speech over great distances, evoking both a mystical attraction and ser-

vitute in those under its control. The rod is both a potent tool and potential trap for the unwise.

The rod appears as a heavy, unornamented cylinder a little less than an inch thick and 3' long made of a very hard, bluish substance. Tiny knobs set in a curved line along one side control its functions. By pressing the buttons in a specific sequence, the user can control the strength of the rod's attunement as well as activate a mental transmission channel along a pre-set wavelength. As a final function, the rod can be transformed into an 8' long spearlike weapon with a two-edged, razor-sharp lance head at its end. The metal javelin is perfectly balanced and receives a +1 to attack rolls when used as a weapon. Mastering the rod takes months of study and even then requires the user to channel the wild forces of chaos to successfully activate.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the characters defeat Tris'ash-sur, the rod becomes inert, freeing the Regent's control of the minds of the enslaved captives. Without the influence of the rod, the freed thrall route the remaining host of Talaat, which dissolves in a confused retreat. Even in victory, however, the PCs receive only a temporary reprieve. Unfueled, the spark of chaos feeding the reft will slowly extinguish over time, but more forces can be seen gathering further inside the reft, and even more distant still, the vast adumbrated wormlike shape of Talaat writhes impatiently as the rod yearns to be reunited with its master. The PCs can return to their world but will likely face future assaults. Still, if they can master the rod, they may have a powerful weapon to use against any returning host.

Another choice awaits the PCs: casting the rod of Talaat into the spark of chaos. Doing so severs Talaat's last connection to the PCs' world, instantly closing the reft and marooning any remaining characters, leaving them to search for another way home from Talaat's realm between the worlds. The PCs may also choose to pursue the retreating host, taking the battle to the places between the worlds. Talaat has built a host of enslaved followers from many worlds and is a powerful entity for the PCs to confront. However, they may potentially find many allies in worlds devastated by Talaat's host who they could recruit to aid in their holy war. Such journeys taken by the characters are not detailed in this adventure and are left to the judge to realize the many worlds that may intersect their paths.

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APPENDIX A:

ALTERNATIVE RULES FOR LARGE-SCALE COMBAT

In pitched battles between large forces, judges may choose to offer the PCs the chance to lead large groups of fighters instead of taking individual actions. These rules are intended to provide simplified alternative rules to standard DCC RPG combat for larger scale battles between opposing forces.

Mass combat rules for DCC are similar to that of regular combat, with each PC-led unit standing in for individual PCs. Two additions are the concepts of a *host value* and *attrition*.

- Host value is the numerical value assigned to a unit to reflect its combat ability. A unit's host value is a substitute for hit die and hit points when tracking a unit's strength and effectiveness. When comparing host values, a unit with a host value of 2 is roughly twice as strong as a unit with a host value of 1, and so on.
- Attrition tracks the results of combat in a simplified system. Individual combatant hit points are not tracked; instead, a unit is considered either fully effective or to have suffered attrition, impacting their ability to maneuver, attack, and defend. Units have an attrition value listed after their host value in the unit stat block. Units suffering attrition can recover through time, healing, or resupply (see below). When a unit suffering attrition suffers attrition again, it is destroyed. Attrition is determined by comparing the results of the attack roll to the difference in the HV of the two units on table 1-6.

Combat Sequence: Large-scale conflicts use a modified sequence of combat as follows:

- Before the first round, the judge checks for surprise.
- Based on the result of the surprise check, each unit rolls for initiative. Units led by a character add the character's initiative modifier to the roll.
- Units act in initiative order.
- Attacks are resolved by rolling dice, adding modifiers, and comparing the result to the defender's Armor Class. If the attack roll overcomes the defender's Armor Class, check for attrition on Table 1-6 Unit Attrition.
- At the end of the round, apply attrition to any units that were affected. Unlike regular combat, the results of attacks are only applied at the end of the round after all units have taken their actions.
- Any units that suffered attrition must also make a morale check by rolling 1d20 and adding the unit's Will save. A result of 11 or higher is success – the unit can keep fighting. On a 10 or less, the check is failed – the unit attempts to flee the combat. PC-led units also add their leader's Personality modifier.

The attack roll:

- When attacking or casting spells at a target, a unit rolls its

action die, adding any modifiers. Units led by warriors or dwarves also add their deed die to the attack roll.

- Rolling a natural crit increases or reduces the difference in HV by the next result in favor of the attacker. For example, a unit with HV 8 attacking a unit with HV 10 that rolls a crit would use the value of "even" instead of "-1-2" on the attrition table.
- Rolling a natural "1" on the attack roll is resolved by rolling d4 on Table 1-5: Unit Fumbles, modified the Luck of any PC leader, if applicable.
- PC-led units may also burn Luck to modify the attack roll.
- Standard attack roll modifiers for cover, attacking from above, range, etc. apply per the DCC rulebook p. 78.

Calculating attrition:

- When calculating attrition, PC-led units add their level to the unit's host value.
- Adjacent units engaged in melee against the same enemy increase the attacking unit host value by +1 per adjacent unit.
- Large creatures (giants, dragons, etc.) and individual PCs fighting outside of a unit use their HD for their host value when calculating attrition. Large creatures and PCs suffering attrition means they are injured, but unlike units, they do not reduce their host value. Injured creatures that suffer attrition again are killed. For purposes of tracking hit points for healing purposes, a large creature or PC suffering attrition is assumed to lose half of their total hit points.
- When attacking creatures with resistance to attacks, the attacking unit's host value is halved for purposes of calculating attrition.

Table 1-5: Unit Fumbles

d4	Result
0 or less	The unit is the laughing stock of the army but suffers no other effects!
1	The rushed assault exposes the unit to a counter-attack. For the next round, attacks made against the unit increase or reduce the difference in HV by the next result in favor of the attacker.
2	Discipline breaks down with the failed strike. On its next attack, the unit increases or reduces the difference in HV by the next result in favor of the defender.
3	Unit is out of position and is unable to maneuver (move) during the next round but may attack as normal.
4+	Unit is disorganized and must spend the next round recovering, losing all actions.

TABLE 1-6: UNIT ATTRITION

Difference in Host Value
(Attacker minus Defender)

Attack Roll (Must also overcome target's AC)

	1-11	12-13	14-17	18-19	20-23	24-27	28-29	30-31	32+
+11 or more	A	A	A	A	K	K	K	K	K
+9-10	A	A	A	A	A	K	K	K	K
+7-8	A	A	A	A	A	A	K	K	K
+5-6	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	K	K
+3-4	NE	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	K
+1-2	NE	NE	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Even	NE	NE	NE	A	A	A	A	A	A
-1-2	NE	NE	NE	NE	A	A	A	A	A
-3-4	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	A	A	A	A
-5-6	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	A	A	A
-7-8	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	A	A
-9-10	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	A
-11 or more	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE

NE = No effect on defending unit.

A = Defending unit suffers attrition. If the unit is already suffering attrition, it is destroyed instead.

K = Defending unit is destroyed, regardless of whether it has previously suffered attrition.

PC-led units: PCs may lead units as follows:

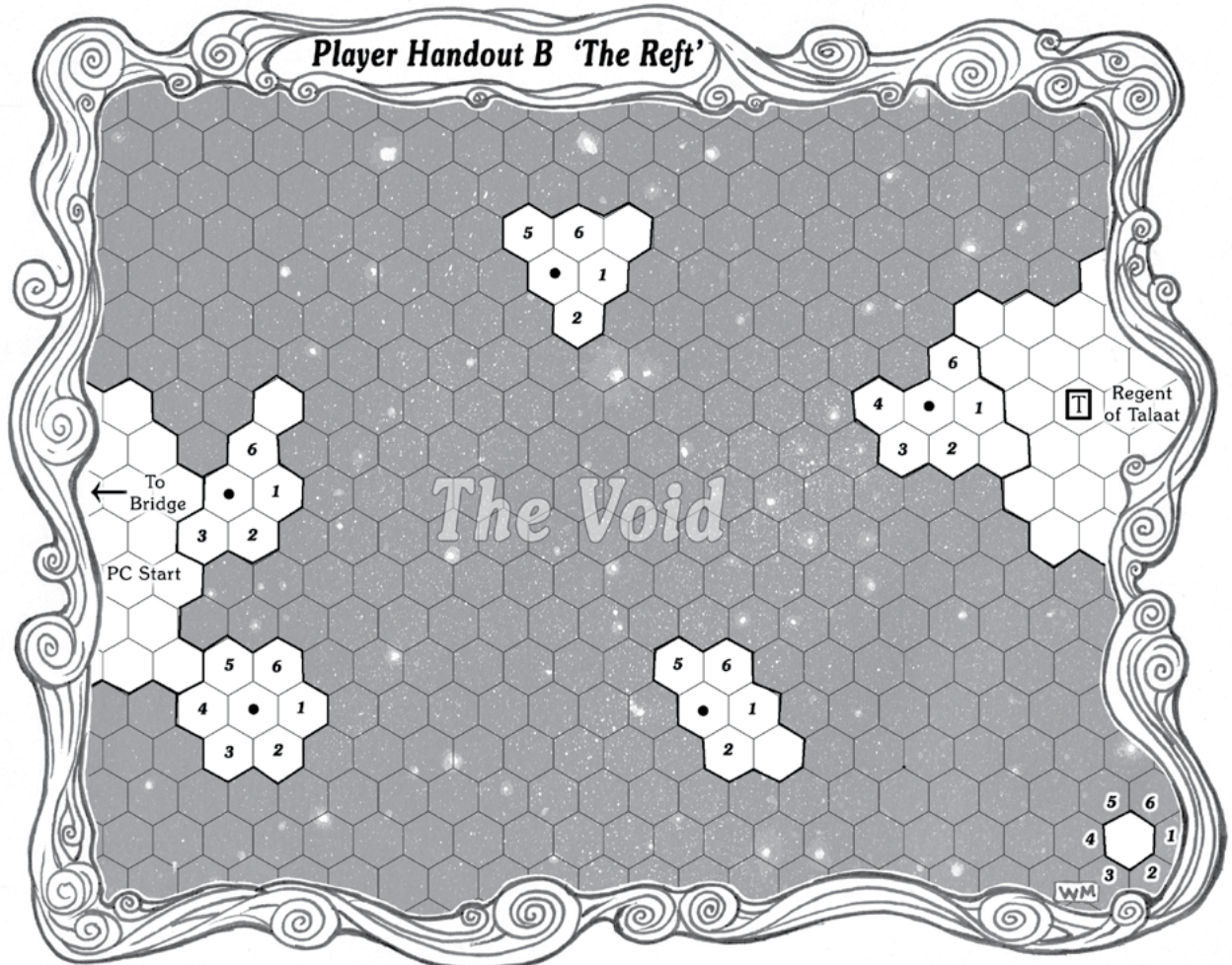
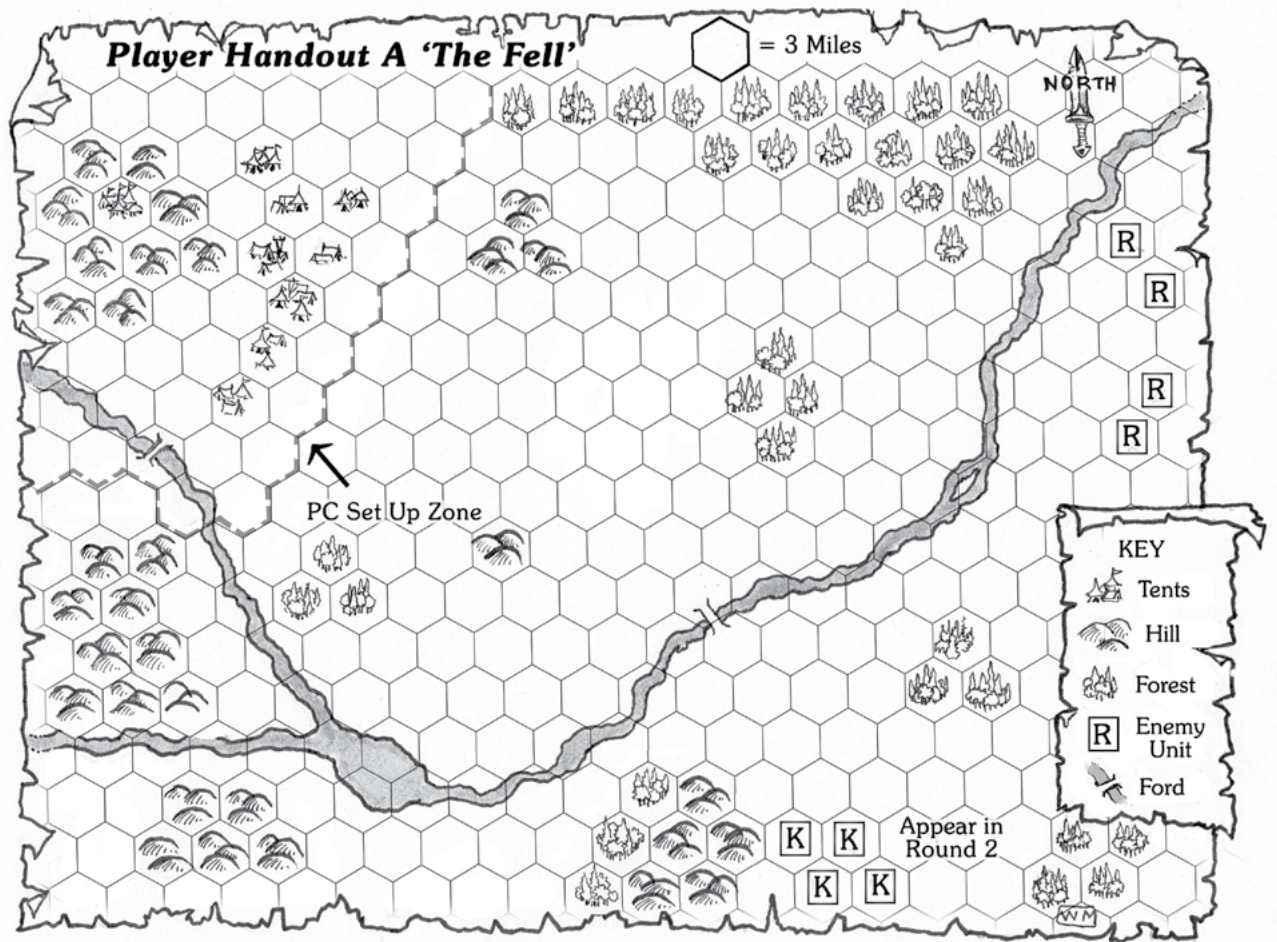
- Warriors and dwarves: Add deed die to unit's attack rolls
- Clerics: May heal units suffering from attrition
- Wizards and elves: May lead magical units and adds spell check modifier to unit spell check
- Thieves and halflings: May spend Luck per normal class rules

PCs are never killed when a unit is destroyed. Instead, when a PC-led unit is destroyed, the PC must make a DC 10 Fort save or be considered incapacitated for the rest of the encounter.

Healing: Units suffering from attrition can be returned to full Strength through rest, resupply, or by the aid of magical healing. A cleric can attempt to heal a unit suffering from attrition by making a lay on hands check and comparing the result to the difference between the unit's normal host value and the unit's attrition host value. If the number of hit dice healed is equal to or greater than the difference, the unit recovers and returns to its normal host value. If the number of hit dice healed is less than the difference, the unit continues to suffer from attrition; however, the cleric can attempt to lay on hands in subsequent rounds, tracking the cumulative hit dice healed until the unit is fully healed.

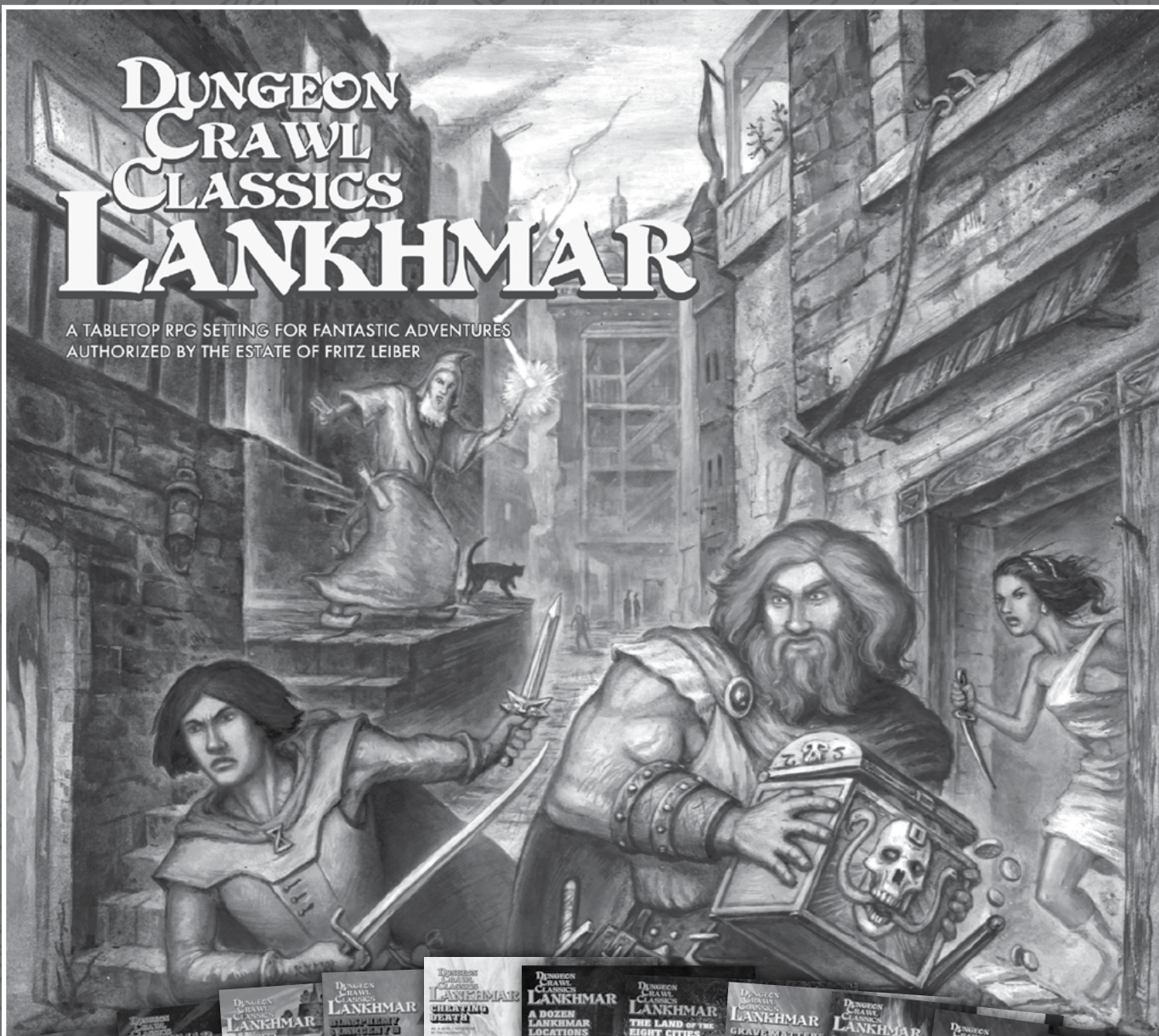
Final note: To keep combat as streamlined as possible, these rules are heavily simplified! If they find these rules useful, judges may wish to expand on them to add additional nuance not covered in this outline as they wish.





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THE PHLOGISTONIC EYE SEES ALL!

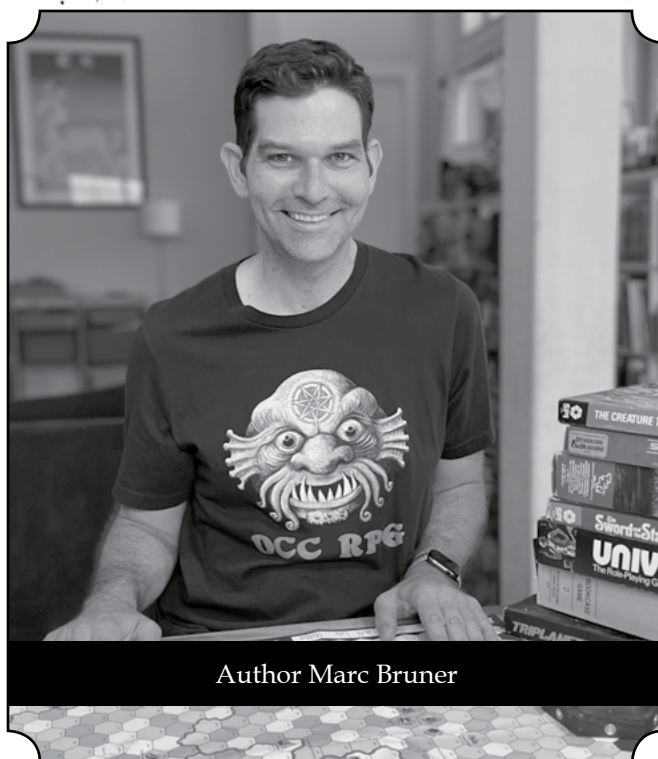
Behold! The Phlogistic Eye turns its gaze once more across the multiverse, peeking into the hearts and minds of all who dwell across its expanse! It now pierces the mind of Marc Bruner to perceive his thoughts about writing DCC 102: Dweller Between the Worlds.

Readers of a certain affinity (or age!) may readily recognize one of the sources of inspiration for *Dweller Between the Worlds*, namely the types of strategic board games prevalent in the early days of wargaming that used markers – variously referred to as counters, tactical playing pieces, or even chits – to represent units of infantry and armor. Produced by legendary companies like Simulations Publications, Inc., Avalon Hill, and Games Designers' Workshop, they helped popularize the style of games that allowed players to simulate conflicts on a vast scale through rules and accessories that were lightweight and easy to produce.

My personal experience playing wargames overlaps when I was also beginning to immerse myself into creating campaigns for my role playing friends, reading my *Expert Set* and *Dungeon Master's Guide* rules on designing keeps and siege engines and envisioning the epic battles that our high-level characters would someday take part in as they grew out of adventuring and turned to the minutia of collecting taxes and the upkeep of fielding armies – offering an oddly pleasing aesthetic for players of a certain orderly frame of mind.

Consequently, I found my own preferences bent toward fantasy- and science fiction-themed versions of these games, where instead of marshaling epic armies recreating a historical Napoleonic or WW2 battle, the forces represented wizards and elves, dragons and goblins, or even fleets of starships, moving counters to besiege castles or outmaneuver an entrenched enemy. My role playing friends and I spent hours playing games like *Sorcerer*, *The Sword and the Stars*, and, a particular favorite for the title alone, *The Creature That Ate Sheboygan* as a fun diversion from rolling dice and adventuring, which feeds my continuing love of board games today. We had similar experiences playing science fiction-themed RPGs like *Star Frontiers*, which neatly blended tactical space battles with role playing, as well as the original TSR *Battlesystem* published as a supplement to the first edition AD&D.

With *Dweller Between the Worlds*, I wanted to incorporate aspects of these types of wargames within *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG, making small adjustments to the rules to allow for playing out large-scale conflicts, partially as an experiment, partially as an homage to a well-loved childhood experience. This is not intended to be a complete rule set by any means, nor should players



Author Marc Bruner

and judges expect any complicated tactical situations to occur within the framework that is presented. Rather, it is a chance to break out your old counters, battle creatures, and toss energy bolts across multicolored hexes in a DCC-themed sandbox. I hope it offers a fun diversion for your own tables.

Impressive! The Phlogistic Eye is also steeped in the art of warfare (but the less said about that right now, the better). Perhaps there are other would-be warlords in the multiverse who might try their hands at warfare? If so, the Phlogistic Eye welcomes your feeble efforts, for it is always looking for challengers to defeat!

*Know this! As the moons crawl across a thousand skies, the time of the Great Gathering will soon be upon us. Countless tribes will cross the land, bound for the arena in which a hundred-score battles shall be waged. That place: Indianapolis. That event: Gen Con 2022. The Phlogistic Eye will gaze across the carnage, seeking those who proclaim their allegiance to the greatest role playing game known to the multiverse: *Dungeon Crawl Classics*! Will you be recognized as worthy and withstand its glare? Or will the Eye perceive you to be false and cast you into the Pits of Shame to dwell among the offal and worms below? The Eye cannot be deceived, so choose your allegiance wisely. Until the Phlogistic Eye looks your way again, keep your own eyes open for the next *Dungeon Crawl Classics* adventure!*



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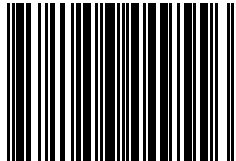
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