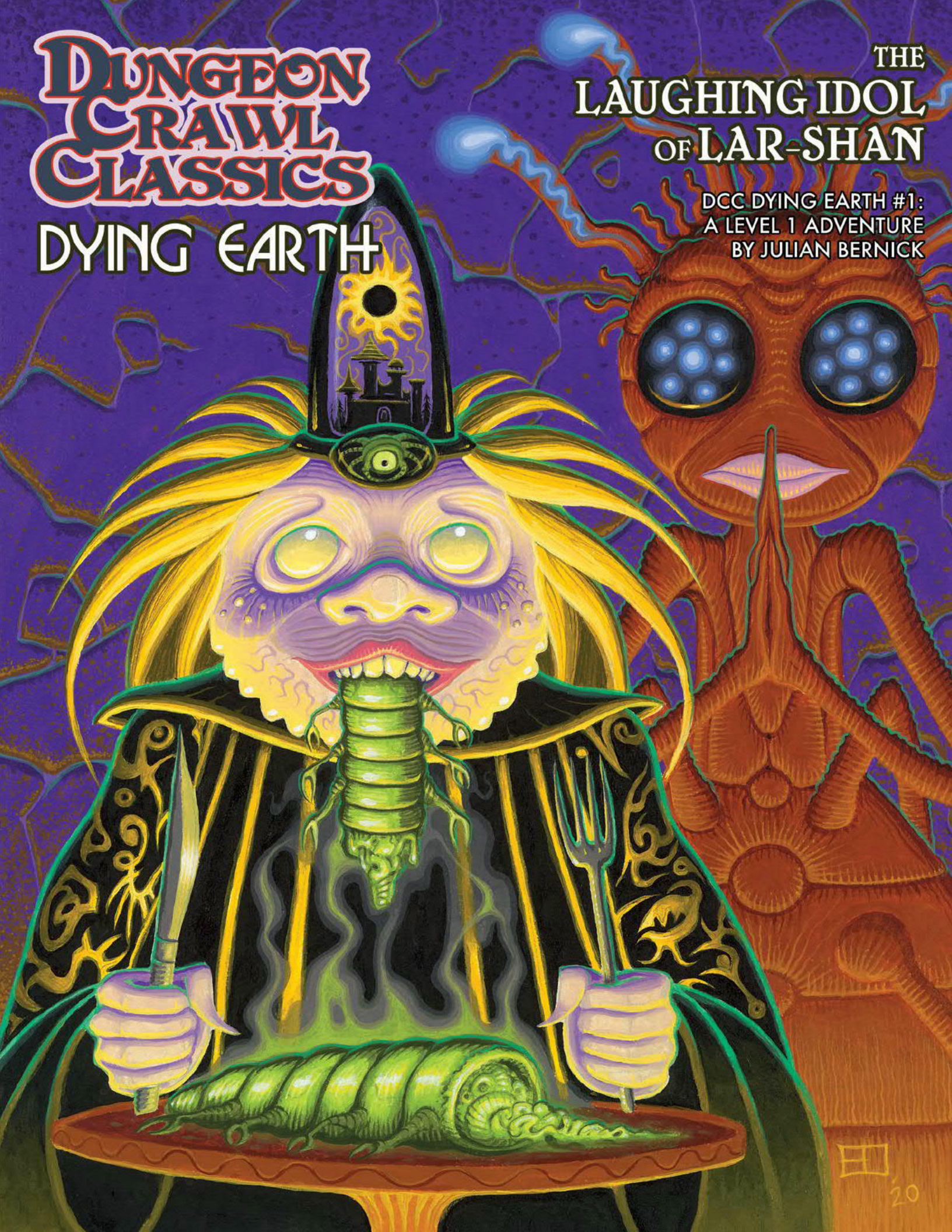


DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

DYING EARTH

THE LAUGHING IDOL OF LAR-SHAN

DCC DYING EARTH #1:
A LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE
BY JULIAN BERNICK



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The Laughing Idol of Lar-Shann

A LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE

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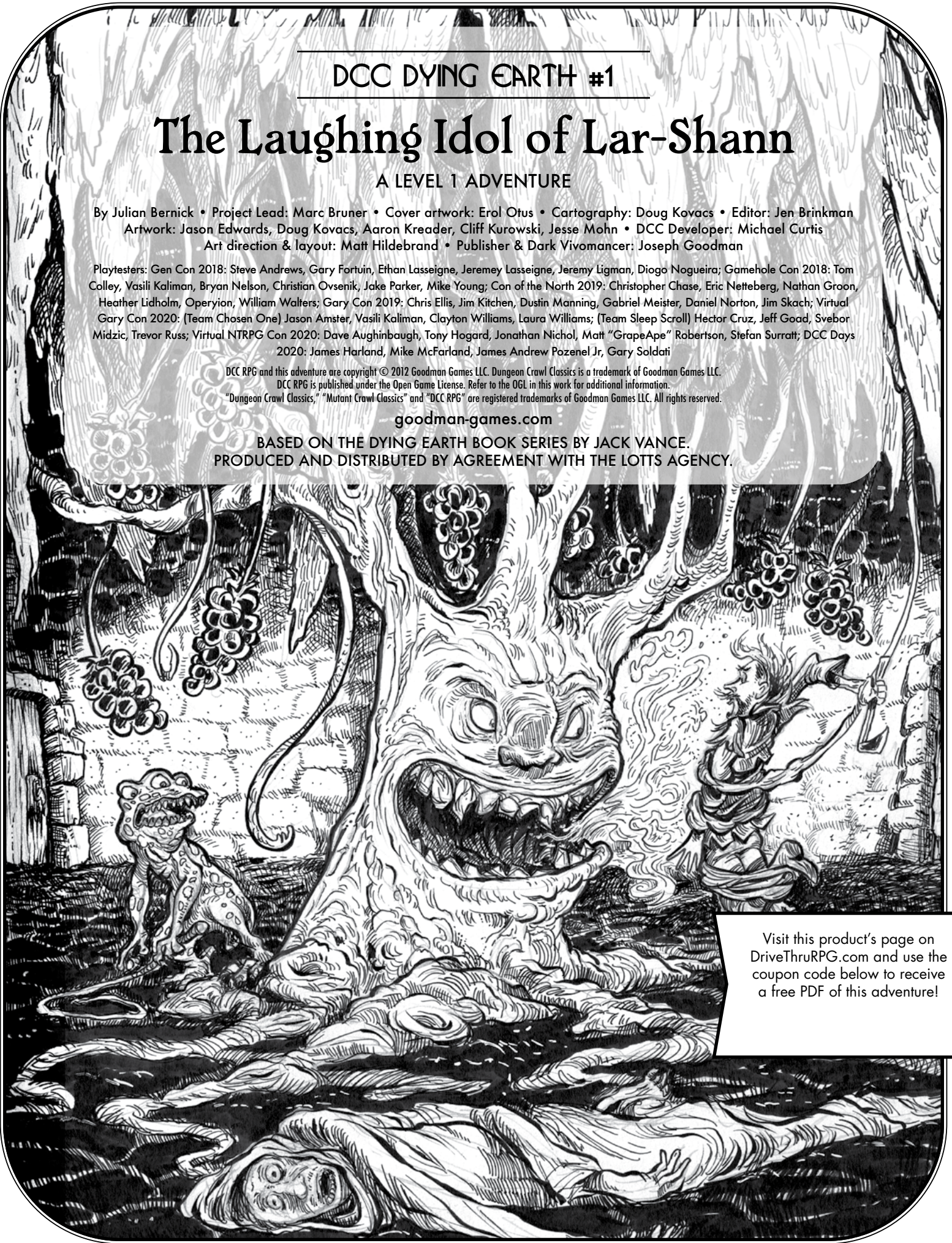
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INTRODUCTION



he *Laughing Idol of Lar-Shann* takes the PCs to the remote village of Pumriel and to the fortified temple that overlooks the town. Ostensibly sent to search for a rare brandy, the PCs will discover an exotic conspiracy perpetrated by the esurient priests upon a village of low sophistication.

This adventure should suit four 1st-level DCC Dying Earth characters and could possibly include one or two 0-level henchmen. For additional PCs, adjust the number of antagonists upward. Though the bravos in the temple are disorganized and far from professional fighting men, their numbers can still pose a threat to incautious adventurers, and the creatures encountered are even more dangerous. A direct assault is not only unwise; it removes the opportunity to foster Vancian banter and resolve conflicts by trickery, bluster, and games of chance.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Entrevus, a magician who bound the demon Lar-Shann and created Elshayne brandy

Lajuq, a wayfarer and leader of bandits who overtook the temple of Lar-Shann

Magavan, the headman of the village of Pumriel

Vortunado, a loquacious denizen of Pumriel

Kayleb, an intoxicated shepherd from Pumriel

Kerrik, a youth condemned as a sacrifice to Lar-Shann

Qrxling, an alien traveler from distant Algol

Smurtrigs, a madling bound as the guardian of Lar-Shann's library

Salimzat, the trapped demon of Lar-Shann

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND



n the late Twentieth Aeon, an ambitious magician known as Entrevus aspired to achieve immortality. Entrevus summoned forth the demon Lar-Shann and then, through a perfectly orchestrated stratagem, succeeded in binding the demon into a magical seed from the distant planet of Fomalhaut.

With a mighty effort, Entrevus planted the unnatural tree in a lightless cavern within a remote hill. The tree bore fruit which, when refined into brandy, imbued its consumers with the protraction of life. But the demon's essence strove to break free of its prison, and could only be assuaged with the regular sacrifice of a youthful spirit. So Entrevus raised a temple above the enchanted tree and built a village within the temple's shadow. Thus, for generations, these villagers have succumbed to the will of Entrevus, sending their sacrifices to the temple each year. Those young lives were converted to the essence that sustained the tree and imbued its alien fruit with the stuff of immortality.

Over time, Entrevus populated this temple with loyal priests, the most initiated of which would share in the priceless Elshayne brandy. Atop the temple, a huge bronze idol was constructed to strike awe into the hearts of the peasants who dwelt below. Ironically, Entrevus chose the name and visage of Lar-Shann for the villagers to worship, since the bound demon's power enabled the very profitable sale of the brandy to the richest and most discerning customers.

Below, in the village of Pumriel, the edicts of Entrevus held sway: the villagers must shave their heads, spurn fine foods and wine, and rest only on the 21st day of each month. They are rewarded with the protection of the jolly demon-god, who supposedly declared: *"The many suffer that the few may have excellent spirits, delicate morsels, and an easy life of wisdom, gaiety, and languor."* Through a clever mechanism, the priests

control the pronouncements of the demon, its execrations booming out to the village below.

But the rule of the Dying Earth is unending decay. The veneration of Lar-Shann dwindled to a few jealous priests above, while below, the decrepit ghoulish remnants of the order dwell in the temple's bowels, controlling the idol's mirthful pronouncements. Enter the wayfarer, Lajuq, who played upon the long-festering resentments of the villagers, enticing a crew of their young bravos to throw off the tenets, defy the priests, grow their hair and beards in a most unorthodox fashion, and storm the temple fortress. This simple rogue sought an easy way to a safe box and a few weeks of well-fed comfort. But Lajuq had stumbled upon the secrets below and is entrapped therein, while his gang have no knowledge of how to assuage the idol or make the brandy that the decrepit masters of the lower fortress crave.

Now again the idol demands a life, bellowing out its sinister laughter and disturbing the villagers in its shadow—even though the village has rendered a youth to their wrathful god already, just this week!

A SUMMONS



To give the adventure a Vancian flavor, the author suggests that the PCs be placed at cross-purposes. Each player should be privately given one of the following reasons to find the rare Elshayne brandy.

Should the judge favor a more traditional collaborative style of play, any one of the below parties could hire the entire band of intrepid adventurers:

- The Arch-Duke Ysvault promises 1,000 terces for one bottle of the brandy. Failure means the PCs and their loved ones will be divested of property, cast into the streets, and whipped on special days set aside for the punishment of paupers.
- The magician Tamqazz requires one bottle of the Elshayne brandy to complete his collection of exotic beverages from every station of life, from the depths of abject misery to the apex of human refinement. Success will reward the party with 1,000 terces; in the event of failure, Tamqazz has promised to write a new spell to make each PC personally suffer.
- The Society for the Prevention of Vice in the Last Days requires a bottle of rare Elshayne brandy at nearly any cost, promising to empty their treasury of 1,000 terces in order to prevent this unholy libation from further degrading this decadent world. In the event of failure, the Society's arch-witch, Tamyflora, has promised to strip out every capacity for pleasure that exists in each PC's body, mind, or soul.
- The Order of the Throvodd requires one bottle of the ultra-rare Elshayne brandy in order to prevent any others from acquiring it. The Order will destroy the brandy. Any who seek to thwart this purpose will be set upon by the Order's special assassins, the Throat-Openers.



VANCIAN GLOSSARY

Aphorism: a pithy observation that conceals a greater truth.

Ascetic: a person practicing extreme self-discipline; a monk.

Congevalant: a formerly liquid substance that has congealed into a hard matter.

Eschew: to abstain or avoid.

Fiasco: a round bottom glass flask for wine.

Fungible: indeterminate, interchangeable.

Furfuraceous: covered with scales and dandruff.

Jocose: humorous, playful, jolly.

Obstreperous: noisy, unruly, bad-mannered.

Perspicacious: astute, discerning, alacritous.

Philistine: a person indifferent to the finer things in life or high culture.

Protraction: prolongation, extension.

Quotidian: normal, mundane, everyday.

Recondite: abstruse or mostly unknown.

Redress: remedy or compensation for a grievance.

Supplicant: a humble petitioner to a higher authority or power.

Synod: a gathering of clergy or laity.

ADVENTURE START

I

THE VILLAGE OF PUMRIEL



Pumriel is nestled in a shallow valley beneath a short hill on which the great idol of Lar-Shann is seated. The great bronze structure holds its right hand at its side, index finger pointing down. Its left hand is held up, palm facing front, pinkie and thumb outstretched. The idol is 40 feet tall and situated upon a tall one-story building within the temple's outer wall. Horns, fangs, and a devilish leer complete its demonic visage.

As you approach the village, a loud metallic voice booms out louder than thunder. "WHERE IS THE YOUTH I WAS PROMISED? Your refusal is dire! The hour of reckoning approaches! Soon all is lost, catastrophe befalls us all!" This strange prophecy is followed by a dreadful booming laughter that seems to fill the whole valley, doubtlessly emanating from the idol upon the hill.

The village of Pumriel is remote, the journey several weeks overland from Alмеры. It is composed of roughly thirty hovels of varying sizes, clustered irregularly around a town center with a handful of larger wooden buildings. Small crops are planted about in tidy rows, but the eastern side of the village appears reserved for pasturing sheep and goats.

As the PCs enter the village:

The completely stupefied villagers, wearing homespun and utterly immune to the dictates of fashion, stop and stare at you as you enter the muddy wheel-rutted village center. A rotund man in a checkered caftan stomps out to meet you. Florid, bald, and beardless, he introduces himself as Magavan, the mayor of Pumriel.

Magavan is the headman of the village and a true Vancian character, always looking to eke terces out of the rare visitors they receive. The village has only one rule for visitors, which is that the men should be shaved bald, as was their custom before Lajuq had roused the villagers to violent, hirsute resentments. Magavan insists that the party must be shaved in the village, and happily announces that he himself doubles as the village barber, a duty he performs with an elegant straight razor. A complete haircut and shave are available for only 3 terces per head.

There is one exception to this rule: each PC may pay the "hair-tax" of 3 terces for the privilege of keeping one's hair and or beard while remaining within the village. Barring this, one is free to sleep in the eastern pasture, with the sheep and goats, under the stars. But Magavan warns of a deodand that's been sighted nearby and makes no promises for the safety of anyone outside of the town proper.

The rest of the villagers—communal farmers of lentils, watercress, and radishes—have been cowed for generations by the tyrannical enforcements of the priests and the bellowing idol. They are fascinated by outsiders, but have little to do with the PCs unless it suits the judge's purposes.

RUMORS AND APHORISMS

The single villager more loquacious than Magavan is Vortunado, last of the deposed priests. Considered senile by the villagers, this ancient being lives in the seediest hut on the outskirts of the village, traumatized by his ejection from the temple by Lajuq. Vortunado now walks about the village muttering enigmatic phrases. Even more odd, the old man has shaved the left half of his head, both hair and beard, to an absolute smoothness, but allowed the rest to grow in a most unseemly and unkempt fashion.

Vortunado is happy to have an audience and will graciously share his aphorisms with any who care to listen. Roll 1d8 to determine which aphorism Vortunado presents.

Roll	Wisdom of Vortunado
1	The tiny grape can be more powerful than the elephant.
2	Every way has a second way and many second ways have a third.
3	When the idol laughs, the dead speak.
4	Those with unkempt hair have also unkempt hearts.
5	A gold figure casts a shadow of bronze.
6	He who points down indicates below.
7	The rewards of decadence are eternal decay.
8	With the coming of winter, the Black Goat marries the Moon.*

** This pronouncement is pure nonsense. The others have at least some symbolic semblances of truth.*

Magavan (or any villager) will tell the PCs that every fourth year on the Spring Equinox, Lar-Shann rumbles out his demand: "Send me a youth!" followed by terrible booming laughter. But this year, when the appointed date came, Lajuq's men held the temple.

Note: The youth was sent, but unbeknownst to the villagers, Kerrik the youth (see Area A-8) is unattended in the fortress temple and the bravos have no idea how to offer him up to the Tree of Fomalhaut (see Area B-6). Hence, the idol is not assuaged! Until the soul of a new youth is consecrated to the tree, no more brandy can be produced and the mad priests of the lower level grow increasingly agitated, using the smaller golden idol in Area C-5 to increase the frequency and severity of their demands.

Accordingly, the villagers, and Magavan in particular, will do everything that they can to get the PCs into the temple, believing that the souls of the PCs will assuage the idol. Any mention of brandy or rumor of any other treasure is heartily agreed to in order to get the PCs to go into the temple. Since none of the sacrificed youths have returned to Pumriel, the villagers hardly expect the PCs to return. Though of limited means, they are willing to scrape together 50 terces in order to entice the PCs to the task of rousting out Lajuq's men.

ENTERING THE TEMPLE GROUNDS

At the base of the hill upon which the temple is situated, perspicacious adventurers may find two alternate entrances to the temple:

The Slurry Pond: This foul-smelling pond is clearly the result of centuries of excreted refuse. It is found on any search of the hill's southern side. In the shadowy back of the pond, a shaft barely wide enough for a person can be seen, leading upward. Scaling the slick, repellant shaft is difficult, requiring three DC 15 Climb Sheer Surfaces or Strength checks as well as a DC 12 Fortitude save to endure the smell without retching. Going up two-thirds of the way leads to **Area B-7** on the second level, while the topmost exit from the shaft is in **Area A-3** on the upper level.

The Secret Entrance: This secret aperture (DC 15 Intelligence check to find on an active search) is concealed behind an overgrown thornbush and protected with a heavy wooden door. The door is barred on the inside and it requires a DC 20 Strength check to break the bar or DC 18 Agility check to overcome the bar with a dagger or other improvised tool.

From below, a winding dark tunnel leads up to the garden at **Area A-2**. There is a pit trap located sixty steps up, concealed beneath an old dusty mat. Falling through the pit trap sends one 20' down onto a bed of jagged stones for 3d6 damage. It will be easily found (DC 6 Intelligence or Find Trap check) by anyone searching carefully along the way.

The upper door to Area A-2 is heavily barred on the fortress side, requiring a DC 20 Strength check to overcome. If the PCs enter this way (from below), the act of opening the door disturbs the coop full of sickly chickens and will summon some curious and hungover bandits if the entrant fails a Luck check.



II THE UPPER TEMPLE

A switchback trail leads up to the top of the hill on which the massive idol sits. The leering bronze demon crouches atop some sort of structure behind a 10-foot-high stone wall. The trail ends at a sturdy wooden gate within this wall. The temple beyond is quiet, with no evidence of guards or watchers on the walls. As you approach, again the idol thunders, "THE TIME IS ALMOST UPON US! ONLY TWO TURNS OF THE HOURGLASS ARE LEFT! ACT NOW OR ANGER ME BEYOND REDRESS! SEND ME THE YOUTH!"

In fact, the wall is unguarded. Lajuq's men, deprived of his leadership, have abandoned themselves to wine and gluttony.

If the PCs climb the wall (DC 10 Climb Sheer Surfaces or Agility check), they see the upper compound as presented on the map, and one of Lajuq's men lying face-down on the ground nearby as if dead (although he is merely inebriated).

GENERAL FEATURES OF THE UPPER LEVEL

The various structures on the upper level are plain stone buildings, well-built and well-kept, at least until the last few months. Generally, they are 10'-12' tall and have dull red tile roofs. The great temple upon which the idol sits has a height of 20', but still is a single story, like the rest of the buildings. The doors on these buildings have no locks.

Area A-1 – Temple Entrance: The gate is sturdy enough to repel brigands and small groups of bandits. Bound with a simple iron bar, it would require a DC 30 Strength check to break in directly through the gate. If multiple PCs attempt such a foolish endeavor, the judge should call for a Strength check from the PC with the highest Strength, with each assisting character adding +1 to the original PC's check.

Kayleb, a hardy shepherd from Pumriel, is lying face down on the stones between the temple and the gate. He's insensibly intoxicated but will shout incoherently at the sight of intruders, potentially rousing the occupants in Area A-4.

Kayleb: Init -2; Atk None; AC 10; HD 1d6; hp 1; MV 15'; Act 1d14; SP none; SV Fort -2, Ref -2, Will -4; AL N; Crit N/A.

Area A-2 – The Garden: This area holds a modest vegetable garden, now picked clean. Against the wall are what remains of the livestock that the priests maintained, now reduced to a few sickly chickens. Behind this stack of crates is a secret door that accesses the fortress's steep escape tunnel. (See The Secret Entrance, above.)

Area A-3 – The Latrine: Tucked behind a 5' stone wall, under the requisite wooden bench, the latrine shaft runs to the bottom of the hill where it exits out into a foul-smelling slurry. (See The Slurry Pond, above.)

Area A-4 – Sleeping Quarters: This stone building is divided into eight non-descript cells. The priests had a strict vow of poverty, so no treasure is to be found here. Lajuq's men have made the place a mess and are generally here,

sleeping past noon, ignoring even the thunderous rancor of the idol. The men here will take 2d3 rounds to respond to a general disturbance on the walls or within the compound.

Bravos (4): Init +2; Atk club +2 melee (1d4); AC 12 (leather); HD 2d4; hp 4 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N; Crit I/d6.

Area A-5 – Storage: Many of the crates, barrels, and boxes here are now exhausted by the wastrel ways of Lajuq’s men. Small amounts of quotidian items might be located here by a PC making a Luck check; otherwise, nothing of interest remains.

Area A-6 – The Local Library: This humble stone structure holds the various texts and logs of the priests down through the ages. Unfortunately, the real treasures are below the temple. This library holds devotional books to Lar-Shann and many accounts of priestly life dedicated to his service, including almanacs and poorly-written chronicles of local history, in which the various personages of Pumriel and its environs prove to be both bumpkins and scoundrels. Hidden on the top shelf in a corner, with its binding facing inward, is an otherwise blank book that contains scrawled notes from a long-dead rogue priest. Much of it concerns ancient personages of no repute, but the final pages, recorded in an increasingly unbalanced scrawl, can provide guidance to the careful adventurer:

ALL IS NOT RIGHT HERE. THE MEN BELOW DO NOT TRULY VENERATE LAR-SHANN, BUT KEEP HIM PRISONER. VOICES IN THE DARK TALK WITH THE MASTER ABOUT BRANDY. I KNOW THEY SHALL PUT ME IN THE LITTLE ROOM TO CURE ME, BUT I WILL LEAVE THIS NOTE HERE IN HOPES OF ONE DAY TOPPLING THIS UNSIGHTLY BELLOWING EDIFICE. A CURSE ON ALL IN THIS PLACE AND THE HIDEOUS POWERS FROM BEYOND THAT BUILT IT

Area A-7 – Priest’s Quarters: This small cottage has one bed, a writing desk and chair, and one wardrobe, along with a small locked wooden chest. The wardrobe has some humble robes piled on the bottom, but also a suit of worn leather armor and jerkins and hose of a decidedly nonascetic cut. There is a key here to the door in Area A-11. On the writing desk is a hastily scrawled diary in a simple cypher which may be decoded with a DC 10 Intelligence or Read Languages check. This is Lajuq’s account of his various travels, mostly terse notations of dates, debts owed, and grudges incurred. The last entry states that he has found a secret door within the temple building and is determined to explore it.

Area A-8 – Dining Hall: Kerrik, the boy last sacrificed, is here. He was turned over by the villagers to Lajuq’s men, but they had no idea how to use Kerrik to assuage the idol (and Lajuq had already disappeared). They promptly forgot about the boy and he has been hiding in the dining hall while he witnesses their debaucheries. Kerrik could be persuaded to join the party as henchman, or could even be a suitable replacement 0-level character.

Kerrik: Init +0; Atk unarmed +1 melee (1d3); AC 10; HD 1d4; hp 3; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N; Crit I/d6.

Area A-9 – The Upper Temple: This roughly square building is built securely of brick, serving as a pedestal for the enormous bronze idol atop its roof. There are pairs of double doors with no visible locks on both the east and west sides of the building. Inside is a bare stone altar, so plain and rough-hewn that it seems to predate the ornate building housing it. There is no statuary within the temple itself, but the curved walls are decorated with leering demonic faces of Lar-Shann. Each garishly red face is about six inches wide, eyes painted white, toothy mouths open.

The altar was used by the priests sporadically and the library in Area A-6 contains several books that describe many rituals supposedly used to placate Lar-Shann—all useless. The judge should invent some eclectic liturgies and humiliating travails if the PCs insist on experimenting.

Area A-10 – Secret Door: A secret door conceals a passage to the lower level (DC 12 Intelligence or Find Trap check to locate). The door must be opened by placing one’s hand in the open mouth of a leering demon-face, and pressing down upon the jaw-hinge therein. If properly triggered, the latch clicks open and the heavy door swings out slowly toward the opener. Beyond is a narrow, unlit spiral staircase cut downward into the floor.

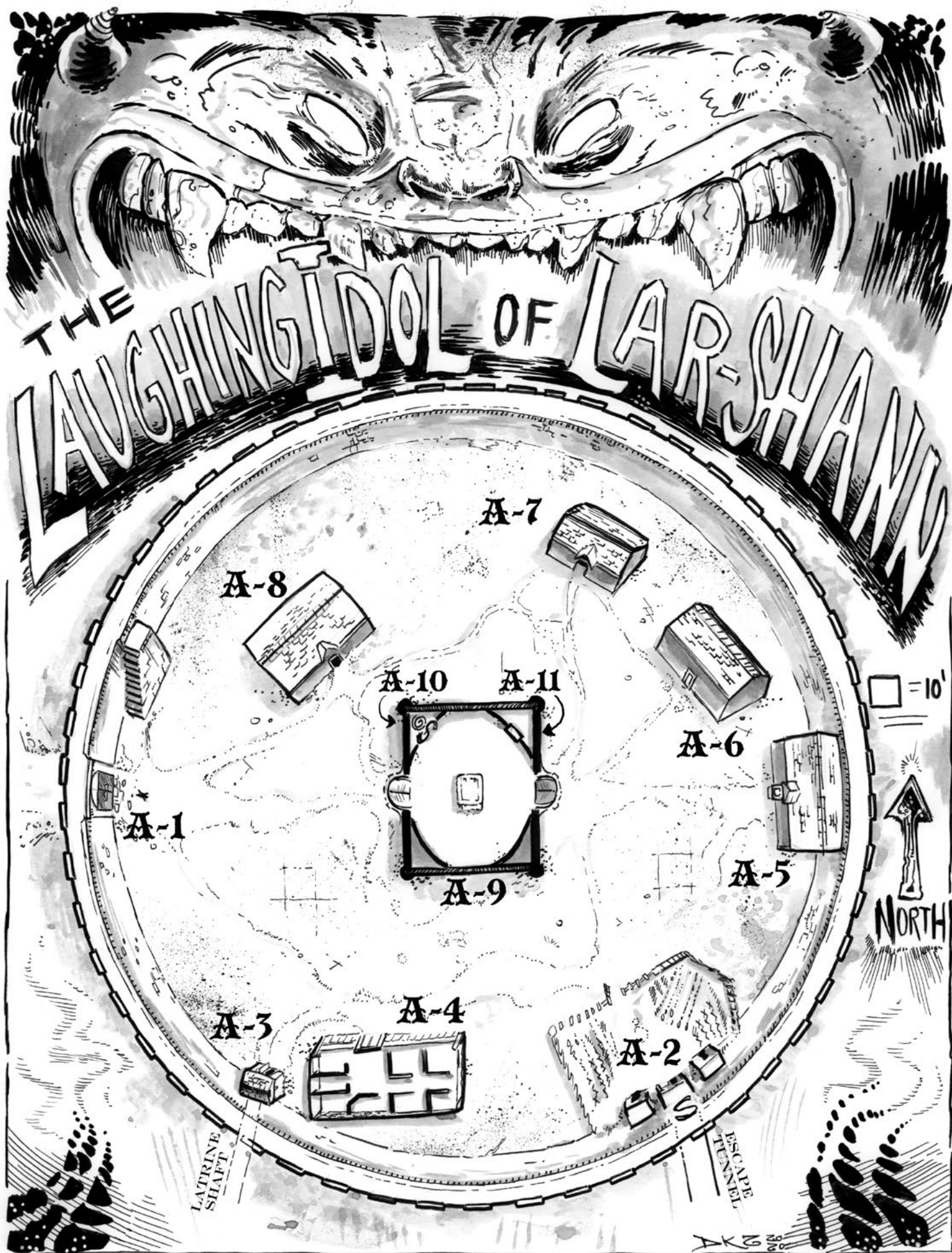
Area A-11 – Alcove of Recondite Enjoinment: A motto is carved into the heavy wooden door, flanked by two leering demon faces: “IN PUNISHMENT, FORGIVENESS”.

This door is locked, necessitating a key (found in Area A-7) or a DC 14 Pick Lock check to open, or a DC 18 Strength check to destroy the door. This room was used to subdue recalcitrant priests and make youths docile for their ritual dedication to the tree.

Cold air wafts out when the door is open. Within the small closet-sized room is but a spartan stone bench.

This door locks only from the outside. Anyone so unfortunate as to enter this room and have the door shut behind them is visited by horrible, mind-numbing visions. If the PCs close the door as a precaution against being followed, they should roll a Will save and turn their fate over to the powers of the sub-worlds as noted on the table below.

Will Save	Result
1 or lower	The character’s mind is sucked away to Fomalhaut, there to be tormented in the fruit mines of the Erebla Deserts for all time.
2-19	Victim blacks out; upon awakening, victim suffers a -2d penalty on Will saves for the next 24 hours.
20 or higher	Victim overcomes the visions entirely and is also able to commune for 1d7 rounds with Xim-Rath, the presiding Grand Savant of Fomalhaut’s Synod of Jucose Sublimities. The victim receives a +1d3 bonus to their Intelligence score, but this also results in unpleasant attentions from that august personage. However, the situation of Lar-Shann within the tree is elucidated.



III

THE MIDDLE LEVEL

Depending on the time spent above, judges may want to issue another warning as per the idol's last declamation, with only 1 turn of the glass left.

GENERAL FEATURES

This underground level is well carved and comfortable. The ceilings are 15' high and the sturdy doors are wooden with iron bands. A slightly fruited and humid fragrance permeates the air.

Area B-1 – Living Quarters: *This large room contains four cots and a brazier. Several small but elegant tables are arranged near the beds and a solid chest sits at the foot of each bed. All is silent. There is a slight, musty odor of death here and you can clearly see a still figure on each cot, covered with a bedsheet.*

The senior priests lived here. Some of them moved to and from the upper level; others remained down here, especially as they became older and more decrepit. Each of the four priests had a bed, footlocker, and small table. The furnishings are relatively elegant; the priests here were of a seniority not bound to false vows of poverty.

Lajuq found his way down here and dispatched the priests he discovered, garroting the first and slitting the throats of the rest as they slept. Beneath the sheets, the cots show the bloodstains and rot to be expected after such carnage.

Three of the footlockers were pillaged by Lajuq, though he left some of their treasures intact. Each has 1d100 terces and are otherwise filled as follows:

Chest #1 contains a set of painted ceramic counters used as wagers in the priests' interminable sessions of Skax. The set should fetch 5 terces.

Chest #2 contains an erotically themed and well-thumbed tarot deck, missing one card: The Hanged Man.

Chest #3 contains an indigo silk scarf, smelling faintly of perfume and embroidered with a serene pelgrane, worth 20 terces.

Chest #4 was not opened by Lajuq and requires a DC 15 Pick Lock or Agility check to open. Inside is a black leather pouch embroidered with figures of red devils, containing exactly 66 terces. Also present is a small, flat, hinged wooden case, about the size of a chess set. When opened and laid out flat, a strange tableau appears! Tiny buildings, small people, and even birds, carts, and beasts of burden populate the miniature world so revealed. Around the case's border is a series of carved words in a long-dead language spoken only by the distant Ytans of Lower Gorsh. If this dictate is deciphered (DC 14 Intelligence check) and read aloud while the box is fully open, the speaker is transported into the city-state of Tan-Lyr, there to enjoy the pleasures of a decadent community completely isolated from all other worlds. Thereafter the intruder can only return by seeking out the low wall of black stone that surrounds the city and reciting all the runes

thereon in the same careful order (requiring another DC 14 Intelligence check). The city is vast, pleasant, and has plenty of intrigue of its own, left to the judge's careful devising. Tan-Lyr might even be considered an escape of sorts when the bloated crimson sun of Earth finally flickers and dies out. Also in this chest are a pair of matching daggers inlaid with heron designs on the blades. They are specially weighted, giving a +1d bonus to attack rolls as thrown weapons.

Area B-2 – The Winery: *When the door is opened to this area, the sour-sweet smell of wine wafts out. Inside, the room has several tall oil lamps and various copper stills mounted over braziers, as well as four large barrels and a well-made cabinet decorated with a vineyard motif.*

This room contains various boilers, barrels, siphons, and presses used for making brandy. There are also 13 empty crystal bottles well suited for containing an expensive liqueur. These tall fragile vessels are certainly a challenge to transport but are easily worth 5 terces each. Tastefully made, they bear no labels.

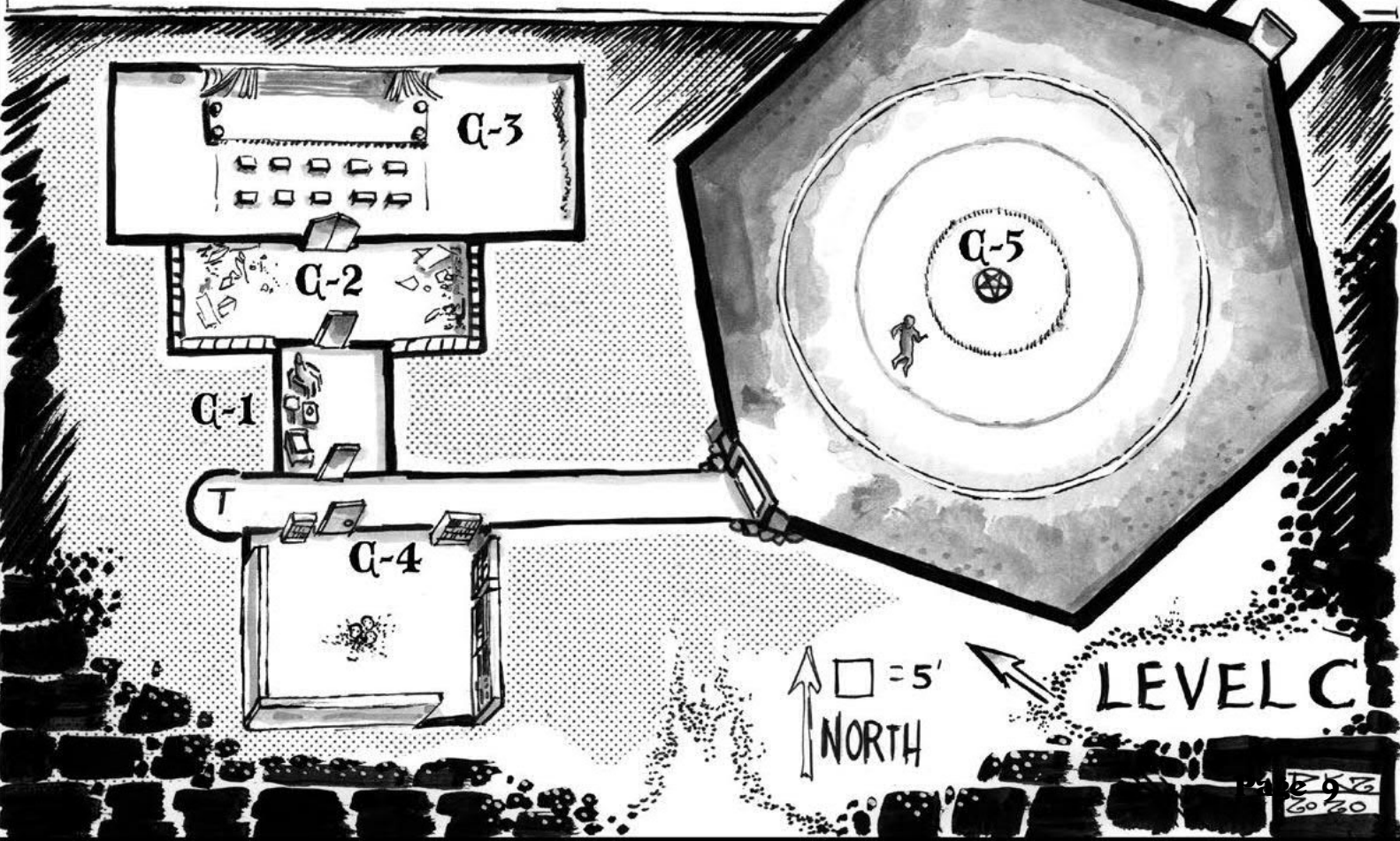
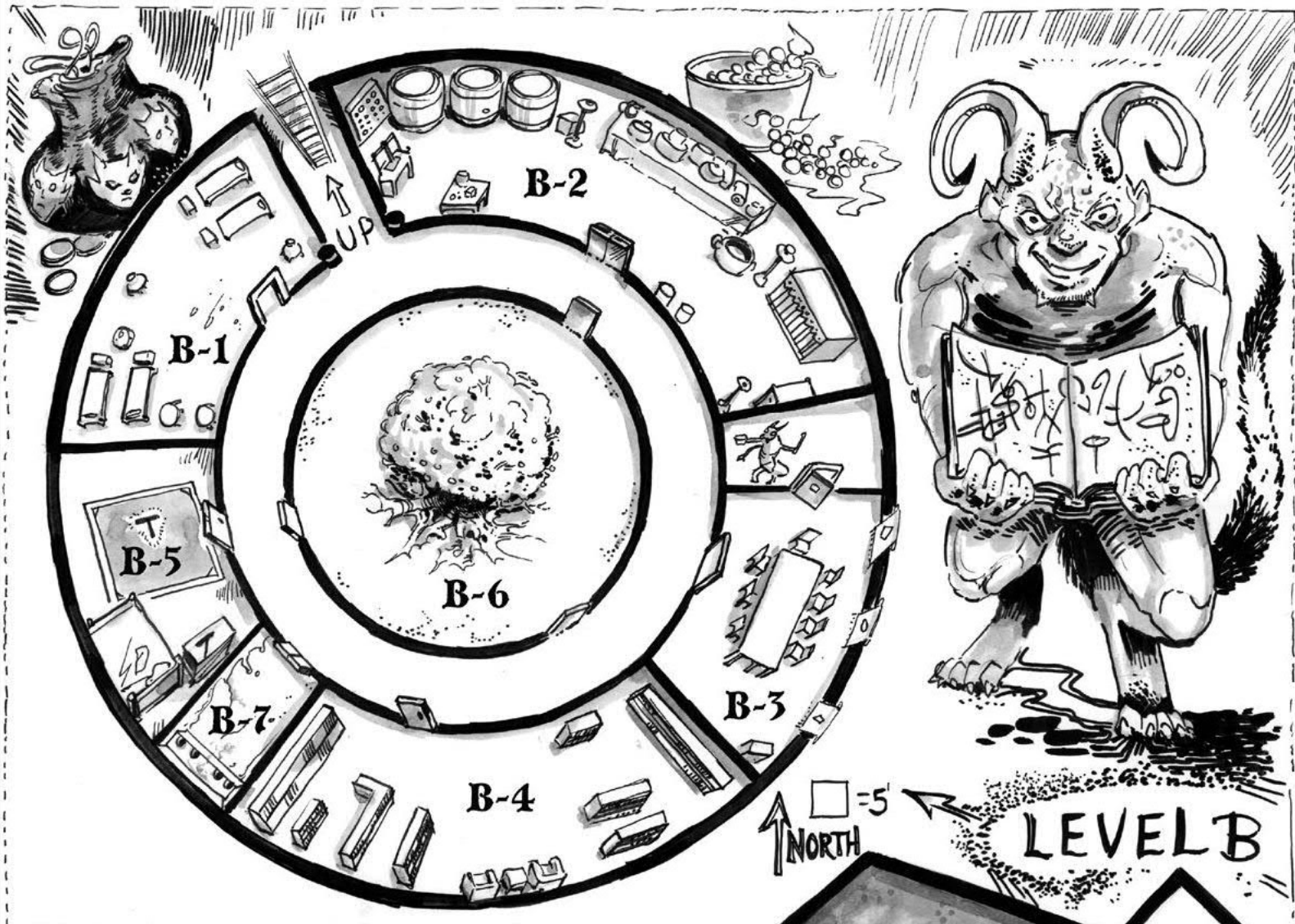
A leather-bound tome is open on a wooden counter by the stills. Within are listed all the ingredients for making the Elshayne brandy, including the ritual that must be successfully cast as the final step. If mundane grapes are used, the ritual produces a wine that is pleasant and confers superior endurance for 1d4 hours, manifesting as +1d3 points of temporary Stamina. The ritual takes 10 minutes to complete. Each time the ritual is completed however, there is a 1% cumulative chance per user of attracting undue attention from Lar-Shann himself. Should he be freed from his bondage in the tree in Area B-6, he'll have a special fury for the one he has "noticed" via the ritual.

Area B-3 – The Dining Hall: *The stone walls of this dining hall are hung with soft drapes. The table is covered with a white lace cloth and full place settings are laid out for 8 diners. An unlit candelabra sits in the middle of the table. A swinging door in the far left wall creaks softly as it moves ever so slightly back and forth.*

While the priests of the upper level ate crude but hardy fare, the senior priests of the lower level were true gourmands. Just through the swinging door is a small kitchen with a small counter to chop vegetables and prepare meats and an oil-fueled stove (the latter is vented by a chimney that spews smoke out on the west side of the hill, a good tenth of a mile from the temple fortress).

In the kitchen is Qrxling, a traveler from distant Algol, whose ant-like species was conquered by their cricket-like enemies. Qrxling thus took his culinary revenge by serving every type of cave-cricket, beetle, and roach to the gourmandish priests who used to populate the middle level. Qrxling is eager for praise and if any character should enter and sit down at the table, he immediately issues forth from the kitchen and offers to serve a delicious repast. Standing by on his back legs, the ant-thing will patiently wait to see if each dish is fully enjoyed; if so, he hurries back to the kitchen to make the next course.

This continues for eight additional courses. PCs who try to keep up with the courses must make an escalating Fortitude



GRXLING OF ALGOL KILLS
SOLARLAE OF THE 13TH VAT
OVER A DISAGREEMENT
REGARDING CRICKET TOAST!





save, starting at DC 5 and increasing by one thereafter to keep down the contents of the last course. If a PC fails or the unique fare is rejected (i.e., if the PC tries to leave before the courses are served and consumed in full), the mortified myrmedrex attacks the ungrateful philistine with a cold-blooded fury that belies his otherwise suppliant demeanor.

Course	Description	Fort Save DC
First	Dried cricket larvae on a bed of weevil-dust	5
Second	White chocolate baby slugs	6
Third	Mushroom salad with spider-legs	7
Fourth	Cricket toast	8
Fifth	Wellbottom fungus on lentils	9
Sixth	Shrew's feet infused with earthworm oils	10
Seventh	Pickled visp eyes in a cockroach puree	11
Eight	Asp eggs fried in centipede butter	12
Ninth	Crisped maggots with candied mud-eel fricassee	13

Qrxling: Init +2; Atk pincers +2 melee (1d5); AC 14 (natural chitin); HD 2d7; hp 9; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP freeze-secretions (see below); SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +2; AL N; Crit I/d6.

Qrxling the myrmedrex is polite and refined though very jealous of his reputation as both a chef and connoisseur. Since most of his century on Earth has been spent in the temple cooking for a very small select group of priests, and since they generally thought his food tasty and good for health, he has rarely been met with negative opinions.

Like most of his people, Qrxling is a bipedal ant-thing with a hairy gray-brown shell and multi-faceted eyes. All six legs have large but thin pincers that can be used for gripping or for walking.

The myrmedrex race hails from Algol, a humid jungle planet where it is imperative to find and preserve non-poisonous food as long as possible. They have thus evolved the strange ability to issue forth a freezing secretion from their mouth onto any target within 5'. If living, the target receives a DC 12 Fortitude save or the affected area is frozen and numbed. The target thus sustains 1d3 points of damage and all actions suffer a -2d penalty for the next 2d6 rounds. The target must make a Luck check; if failed, they are also blinded for the duration.

Qrxling has no money or other goods, nor any use for it, but he does bear around his neck joint a leather thong on which hangs an exquisitely carved wooden ant head. This token will always signify friendship to all myrmedrexi but instant hostility to the cricket people who oppressed them.

The kitchen alcove beyond the swinging door contains only 3 drams of Elshayne brandy (for cooking, in an unmarked bottle), and the various ingredients of his meals, which could be saleable to a truly jaded epicure.

Area B-4 – The Library: *This library houses floor-to-ceiling bookshelves stuffed with thick tomes and slim volumes of every variety. Three large leather chairs beckon you, overseen by three oil-lamps. A cigar box rests on one table between them. Next to the cigar box are a lone book with a blue cloth cover and a crystal bottle of amber liquid. There are no words on the book's cover or binding. A plush rug covers the floor.*

The cigar box holds four truly excellent cheroots, worth 25 terces apiece if retrieved intact. The crystal bottle holds a superb whiskey worth 100 terces.

The book on the table is the key to commanding the imp-sized madling, Smurtrigs, who hops down immediately from his hiding place on the top shelf if the book is picked up. He is 3' tall and indigo-skinned with curly horns and a long furfuraceous tail, though the rest of his body is as smooth as glass.

He bows low and bids anyone holding his book to read it aloud, which takes 2d3 rounds for an average reader. If someone actually reads the book aloud in its entirety, the madling is freed from its servitude immediately and leaves the temple and Pumriel behind forever. If not liberated, Smurtrigs is helpless to disobey the commands of its holder, though he is loath to utter this fact.

If attacked, Smurtrigs fights back; if clearly overmatched, he flies away from combat but cannot move more than 50' away from the blue book.

Smurtrigs has been here for centuries, serving as a guardian for the library's books. He cannot allow any of them, including the tome which frees him, to be taken from the library. The books cover a great many subjects and are by no means limited to monastic endeavors or obscure philosophies. Any genre of mundane tome that a PC wishes to find may be located here with 1d3 rounds of searching and a successful Luck check.

During his tenure, Smurtrigs wagered with Salimzat in Area B-6 that he would be freed before his rival. He desperately wants to be freed so he can collect his winnings (a favor due in the bleakest section of the sub-world) and most importantly, to taunt Salimzat mercilessly. Thus he will advise the PCs not to take the whip from Salimzat, even while pressuring them to read the slim blue book aloud.

Smurtrigs knows that there is a lower level and has some idea that there are degenerate priests down there, but he is very coy with this information unless negotiating to be freed. He also knows that a dark-haired, fox-faced vagabond came through several weeks ago and slew the priests who used to occupy this level. He claims to either have been bored by the silence since then, or relieved by it, depending on his interactions with the PCs thus far.

Smurtrigs also knows about a spell, *Phandaal's Critique of the Chill*, hidden in an unmarked tome with a gray-feathered binding on the top shelf of the western wall. He may be willing to bargain the spell away in exchange for his freedom, but only if confident that his partner bargains in good faith.

Smurtrigs: Init +2; Atk bite +1 melee (1d3 plus poison); AC 12; HD 2d5; hp 7; MV 20' or fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP bite inflicts poison (DC 12 Will save, see below), planar travel; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +2; AL N; Crit I/d6.

Smurtrigs bites with a poison that dulls the wits of hits victims, resulting in a -1d penalty on all mental tasks for 1d3 turns. If released from his binding, he is able to return at will to the sub-world from which he came (though, unless in great danger, he goes to Area B-6 to taunt Salimzat before leaving).

Area B-5 – Head-Priest's Quarters: *This door has one of the few locks you have seen in all the temple grounds so far. The elegantly furnished chamber within holds a low wide bed with coverlet and pillows of the softest cotton. It also has an elegantly carved desk, chair, and wardrobe. A square-patterned brown-and-gold rug covers the floor. Despite the lavish furnishings, the reek of death lingers here.*

This is the chamber of the mad priests' true leader, Hest. Hest was ambushed and killed by Lajuq, and Hest's body was hastily hidden under the bed.

Upon the desk is an open book. A quick inspection finds a reference to the *Protocols of the Most High Lar-Shann*, containing the *Principles of Severe Paramountcy*:

1. Do not harm the tree.
2. Do not listen to the tree.
3. Only the priests below have the *Scroll of Three Ways*.
4. The priests below must be assuaged with the brandy.
5. Do not read the thin blue book aloud.
6. Do not take the whip into your hand.
7. Above all else, ensure that the ritual to bind a youth to the tree is performed each year, else all is lost.

The wardrobe is trapped: when either door is opened, a dart shoots from the back of the wardrobe on the respective side. A PC may avoid the missile with a DC 12 Reflex save, otherwise they take 1d3 points of damage. Black congealant coats the darts, but though the wood and tip are stained, the poison long ago lost its efficacy.

Within is a rack of nondescript robes of simple brown homespun (made in Pumriel, of course) but hanging on hooks on the inside left door are three long black cloaks, the cowls of which are attached to leering, horned masks in the style of the idol's face. These robes may be used to traverse the lower level with minimal interference (if the players are smart or lucky).

Beneath the rug is a trap door that leads to the lowest level.

Area B-6 – The Tree: *The cloying smell of fruit suddenly gets stronger as you open this door and you see within the circular room a softly glowing radiant tree. Its roots radiate over the stone of the floor. Small golden grape-like fruits depend from the many branches, hanging between five and six feet above the floor. Something moves on the tree's trunk – and you suddenly realize you are staring at the idol's face within the tree! Glassy eyes are opening*

and the mouth rasps out at you, "Time... it is almost time..." Near the door, a small scaled biped turns to look at you with three eyes. It bears a whip in its right hand. A bundle of blankets is huddled on the floor against the far wall.

Unlike the other rooms on this level, the ceiling is 30' tall, allowing for the full height of the glowing tree.

Trapped within the tree grown from the seed of Fomalhaut is the demon Lar-Shann.

The scaled creature is Salimzat. This unfortunate has been bound to the whip to remain here and supervise the village's sacrifice, who is bound in turn to pick the grapes from the tree, even as its radiance harvests the victim's vitality. An ideal guardian, Salimzat is immune to the tree's effects.

Salimzat arrests the entry of people to the room as much as possible, ignoring the tree and trying to find a way to make one take the whip from him. If a PC does take the whip, Salimzat immediately leaves the room and goes to the library (Area B-4) to taunt Smurtrigs before disappearing into the aethers of the sub-world.

Salimzat: Init +2; Atk whip +2 melee (1d5); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 9; MV 30' or run 60'; Act 1d20; SP *Whip of the Grandmaster* (see below), planar travel; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +4; AL C; Crit M/d6.

This three-eyed madling, about 3' tall, is utterly naked and covered in small green scales. Salimzat is extremely agile and can bound on all fours like a dog at twice human speed. In addition, like Smurtrigs, once released from the item that binds him, the imp-sized creature is able to revert at will back to the sub-world from which he came.

The *Whip of the Grandmaster* is a powerful artifact: the wielder can attack with the whip for 1d5 damage, and the target must make a Will save vs. the attack roll or cower and obey the wielder for 1d3 rounds (until whipped again, presumably). Unfortunately for Salimzat – and any other wielder – anyone taking hold of the whip is cursed to unquestioningly obey the whip's creator, the Grandmaster (now subsumed within the thing known as the Grandcestors; see Area C-4). If the Grandcestors is slain, the whip has no master but retains its other powers.

Salimzat warns PCs against reading the blue book that unbinds Smurtrigs, having no desire to lose his wager with that impertinent entity.

Sensing that the time of his freedom is near, Lar-Shann is happy to slay any PCs who might prevent the imminent expiration of his bondage. He will lie and prevaricate about his predicament and seek to lure the PCs inward where the tree can grapple and destroy them with its branches. Most of all, he seeks revenge on Entrevus but it has only a dim awareness of the doings on the lowest level. If freed from the tree, Lar-Shann's essence is transferred to the bronze idol above and it animates to go upon a murderous rampage; only the most obsequious of petitioners would be spared his wrath.

The Tree of Fomalhaut (Lar-Shann): Init +2; Atk grab +2 melee; AC 14; HD 3d8+5; hp 20; MV none; Act 1d20; SP

spore-swarm (DC 12 Fort save or lose 1d3 hit points and 1d4 points of Stamina), pale glowing skin, elongated eyes, flaking skin; SV Fort +10, Ref N/A, Will +6; AL C; Crit M/d10.

The tree attempts to entangle intruders within 10' using a branch, then forces a spore-swarm onto the victim. A targeted PC must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or begin to transform into the vitality-sapped ghoulish immortals such as the mad priests (see Area C-1), suffering 1d3 damage and temporarily losing 1d4 points of Stamina (recovers normally). Once affected, the PC receives two additional saving throws on the following days to throw off the curse. If all three are missed, the corruption is permanent.

If the tree is attacked, only the trunk can be damaged. If reduced to 0 hp, it explodes and floods the entire chamber with a spore release (same effects as above). The grapes on the tree immediately wither and are spoiled for any brandy-making. With the tree dead, the ritual can no longer be performed and the demon will be freed in 2d3 turns.

The bundle of rags in the corner is the body of Humult, the last village youth vouchsafed to the priests of Lar-Shann. He died of "natural causes", his vitality sapped by several years of picking the grapes. Physically, he appears to have been a man of 90, but was only 18 years old at the time of his passing. Humult holds no treasure and is wrapped in simple decaying robes. Ten feet away from him are 22 baskets of Elshayne grapes; 1d6 are fresh enough to be made into 1d3 bottles of brandy per the process elucidated by the tome in Area B-2.

Area B-7 – The Latrine: *This rank but familiar smell reveals at once what this room contains: a latrine with a simple wooden bench over a hole in the stone floor.*

This shaft is joined by the latrine shaft from Area A-3.

IV THE LOWER LEVEL GENERAL FEATURES

This area is the oldest part of the structure and feels closer and damper than the other parts of the fortress. The ceilings are only 10' tall and the doors are finely carved wood, though far beyond their best days. Everything perishable in this area that has been here for more than three days is covered with a fuzzy blue mold, odious in texture but completely innocuous. The denizens here require no light and generally eschew illumination except when consciously imitating the ways of those above, such as in their theater.

TIMING ON THE LOWER LEVEL

Assuming the tree is not already destroyed or assuaged with a new sacrifice (see Area B-6), time is of the essence! Punctilious judges should start the clock at 30 rounds and count down from there, with the whole hill quaking perilously every 5 rounds. Even a cursory search takes 1d2 rounds. Using the *Scroll of Three Ways* takes another 3 rounds: one round to bypass each ring.

After 30 rounds elapse, the demon is freed from the Tree of Fomalhaut and will possess the bronze idol, rampaging down the hill to destroy Pumriel, unless the PCs have offended him greatly enough to be his foremost target.

A judge favoring a blithe and unfettered style of play may take a looser grip on time and use the perilous quaking and dimly heard bellows from above to urge the PCs along and maintain momentum as needed.

Area C-1 – The Reading Room: *This room appears to be a mockery of a well-appointed room for genteel lovers of literature. Two comfortable chairs reside with a tall lamp between them. A low table holds three tumblers and an empty bottle. In the chair furthest from the door is a robed man with chalk-white skin. He is mostly bald with black gums and pale lips. His skin – even his eyelids – are covered with a light blue film.*

This is one of the mad priests. This one succumbed to the brandy over a century ago and now lives only to extend his life in this buried hell of stone and scum. If the PCs are wearing the masked cloaks from Area B-5, he is at first courteous and asks if there is more brandy available. His lust for the life-prolonging liquid is paramount, and if answered in the negative or if he detects subterfuge, he flies into an apoplectic furor and attacks.

There are two additional mad priests crouched, spiderlike, on the ceiling to the right and left of the door, completely hidden unless PCs think to actively look there. They attack when their peer does, likely with the benefit of surprise.

All three mad priests are furious at first, but quickly cowed if faced with prowess. If staunchly resisted, they will back up into Area C-2 or C-4, whichever is closer. If the PCs retreat, the mad priests attempt to drive opponents toward the Grandcestors' quarters, having no doubt that this creature will annihilate the intruders.

Mad priests (3): Init +2; Atk claws +2 melee (1d5 plus corruption); AC 12; HD 2d4; hp 10; MV 30' or climb 30'; Act 1d20; SP corrupting touch (DC 13 Fort save or each touch ages victim by 3d4+5 years), vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +4; AL N; Crit U/d6.

The mad priests are pale, gaunt creatures in the penultimate stage of rot and despair. They have lost almost all of their humanity and now exist only to consume the brandy that the senior priests above have procured for them. They are tormented by memories of the sun and the stars, but haven't seen these things in over a hundred years and are in fact terrified by the thought of leaving their prison and home. They dimly remember how to do things that "normal" people do, but are unable to enjoy such things and this failing only increments their fury to ever higher levels. They are no longer sane enough to make the brandy that they so desperately require.

Their robes – and indeed, even their moist, papery skin – tears away at the first hint of violence, though they don't seem bothered by this. The mad priests are not un-dead, but are rather preserved in hellish life (just barely) by the Elshayne brandy. The touch of these corrupted creatures ages a creature 3d4+5 years irreparably, and creates a horrible pale withered area on the body.

The mad priests engage only in fevered nonsense discussions, flying into a violent frenzy if their pattern of delirious non sequiturs is challenged or questioned. A concerted effort to light the creatures on fire will inflict 2d5 points of damage if successful and the attacker may make a Luck check to see if the mad priest ignites and takes ongoing damage of 1d5 per round. Though they have lost all sense of time, the mad priests' brandy-corrupted bodies and souls are finely tuned to the pact of Entrevus and they sense its imminent expiration, hence their use of the golden idol to urge the villagers to renew the pact.

If inspected, the mad priest's book is a volume of poetry that's been defaced past any salvation. The pages have been inscribed with threats and pleas to Lar-Shann in a spidery black hand:

"SAVE US!" "GIVE IT TO USS!" "WEE ONLIE WANT IT TO SURVE YOU"

Area C-2 – The Disused Library: *This large room is full of splintered wooden furniture and piles of books that have been haphazardly ripped and torn apart, paper heaped in moldy piles. On the far side of the room is a grand wooden double door engraved with two masked faces side by side: one with a tragic frown, the other with a comedic grin.*

If the mad priests have fled into this room, they'll scurry along the ceiling to the theater and escape into that room as quickly as possible.

The papers and wood, filmed with fine blue mold, are all that remain of the once-priceless library housed in this room. If a comprehensive search is performed, the PCs making a Luck check locate a mostly intact, scum-stained copy of Qran-dulin's *Field Guide to Esoteric Creatures of the Overworld*, easily worth 250 terces to a discriminating scholar who can afford the price. There is nothing else of value in this room.

Area C-3 – The Theater: *The floor in this room slopes down into a cavernous chamber that has four rows of chairs facing a raised platform with curtains on either side. Four tall lamps rest on the platform, each in outer corners. Objects seem to be chaotically strewn about the platform, and many papers and destroyed books also litter the floor. Shadowy man-like figures are lined up against the right wall.*

Built centuries ago, this room served as a theater when more of the priests lived here and still retained their wits. There are sixteen chairs, some bearing the marks of having been used as bludgeons or carved with obscene graffiti. The papers littering the floor are the remnants of old scripts and books that were used as fodder for increasingly diabolic rewrites of time-honored plays as the mad priests sank ever lower into degeneracy.

The stage is strewn with the remnants of costumes, masks, and props, some of them quite elaborate. PCs who take the time to carefully explore and make a successful Luck check might find one outfit that would allow for a future disguise, or one convenient fake object.

In the back of the room, on a 4'-tall stand, is a flat console with dials and buttons. Once this controlled the lamps,

curtains, and noise machines in the small theater. It also controlled the manikins ranged against the right wall, using ancient technologies stolen from long-neglected cities. The console can still be activated with a DC 15 Intelligence check. However, activating the theater's mechanisms has several risks:

- The operating PC must make a Luck check immediately; if failed, the front left lamp explodes, causing 1d5 points of damage to anyone standing in the front half of the stage area, unless they pass a DC 8 Reflex save.
- At least one loud thunderclap will issue from the room, requiring a DC 10 Fortitude save. Failing that, PCs will be deafened for 1d3 rounds.
- The manikins will jerk and start, beginning their mad dance of violence. Each PC in this area must make a Luck check. If unsuccessful, a manikin has singled them out as a target; programmed to treat all targets also as manikins, they pull no punches.
- A huge lamp is built into the wall behind the stage. When activated, a red, swollen sun-like light slowly rises in an artificial yet striking simulacrum of the dying Earth's own solar eminence.

Manikins (4): Init +0; Atk club +0 slam (1d3); AC 11; HD 1d4; hp 2 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will N/A; AL N; Crit M/d4.

Area C-4 – The Grandcestors' Quarters: *This room's walls are lined with shelves full of books and scrolls, but no other furnishings are evident in the room. On the worn, filthy, blue-filmed rug is a huge pile of ash, dust, and bone, with several crooked skulls leering out at you. To your horror, this heap of filth starts to shuffle forward, the skulls' jaws clacking and gouts of dust puffing upward as it hisses at you. "The brandy...!"*

Many generations came and went in Pumriel while the priests made their brandy. Entrevus founded the temple and indulged in the vivifying liqueur so long that a spark of life remained in him even when the rest of his body finally fell away into dust and bones. Over time, the remnants of other ancient priests joined his mass of shuffling animated decay. Now beyond life or death, it exists only to claim more of the life-giving brandy.

Whatever glimmer of intelligence still animates the assemblage will hesitate to attack those cloaked and masked, hoping that they are there to deliver more brandy. It will not allow any strangers, masked or un-masked, to touch its scrolls and books, as they are the province only of the under-dwellers (i.e., the mad priests.) If no brandy is provided after 1d3 rounds, the thing loses its patience and attacks intruders no matter how they are attired.

The Grandcestors: Init +3; Atk bone appendages +2 melee (1d5); AC 15; HD 3d8; hp 20; MV 5'; Act 3d20; SP mass absorption (if hit twice in the same round, target must make a DC 10 Fort save); SV Fort +4, Ref -2, Will +5; AL C; Crit M/d10.

The conglomeration known as the Grandcestors attacks with bone-chain appendages ending in sharpened bone hooks. If a target is hit twice in the same round, the victim is pulled in

and engulfed in the mass of the ash, bone, and dust, suffering 1d3 points of choking damage per round until breaking free with a DC 10 Strength check.

The books here are a trove of ancient occult tomes. In a purple velvet casing, there is a gold cylinder engraved with by-now familiar Lar-Shann faces. This container houses the rolled-up *Scroll of Three Ways*, which has the incantations needed to bypass the various circles and approach the golden idol of Lar-Shann in Area C-5.

The other books here, though intact, have been largely destroyed by the blue mold. However, any PC making a Luck check can successfully locate one book which contains three intact spells: *The Excellent Prismatic Spray*, *Houlart's Visceral Pang*, and *Phandaal's Gyrator* (see Chapter V of *Primer of Practical Magic*). Lastly, there is a tome here containing the ritual for re-binding the demon into the tree. This takes 3 rounds, a young human sacrifice to bind to the tree as a life-force, and a DC 18 or higher spell check to successfully cast. There is nothing else of value in the room.

Area C-5 – Chamber of the Golden Idol: *The corridor opens into a hexagonal chamber with a golden replica of the Lar-Shann idol in the center of three concentric circles painted upon the floor. The rings are all 10 feet wide. The outer ring is painted white. The middle ring is painted gray. The innermost ring is painted gold.*

The golden idol is roughly the size of a large coffin, standing upright and facing you. It is exquisitely fashioned with lapis lazuli eyes and fangs of diamond-encrusted ivory. There is a seam running upward along its body on the right side, and the front part of the idol appears to be open – it is hollow inside!

Slumped over on his side and facing away from you, within the second ring, is a man with shaggy black hair wearing one of the priest's cloaks with mask. Shadows and darkness obscure the other side of the room.

The golden idol is the mechanism by which the priests have sent their instructions booming down upon the village of

Pumriel, accompanied by maniacal laughter. The idol can only be approached while reading the *Scroll of Three Ways*, secreted in the Grandcestors' quarters (Area C-4). Use of the scroll can transport multiple characters at once across the ringed wards.

Entering the circle without the scroll has the noted consequences:

The white ring (abasement): Without the *Scroll of Three Ways*, PCs must make a DC 12 Will save or kneel face down, helpless to take any other action until rescued or until death by thirst and starvation.

The gray ring (fascination): Without the *Scroll of Three Ways*, PCs must make a DC 12 Will save or gaze in total fascination at the idol. Again, the PC will remain in fascinated bliss until rescued or dead.

Lajuq is here, unconscious due to dehydration. If revived, he is utterly untrustworthy and almost unable to tell the truth. He will seek to escape as expeditiously as possible. Beneath the cloak, he is armed with a rapier, a dagger, and a garrote.

Lajuq the Wayfarer: Init +3; Atk rapier +3 melee (1d7); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 1; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +3; AL C; Crit II/d8.

The gold ring (greed): Without the *Scroll of Three Ways*, the PCs must make a DC 12 Will save or turn to gold, falling to the ground to shatter in brittle fragments of gold plating (worth 1d4×20 terces).

Sitting inside the idol's hollow interior is a withered, corpse-like mad priest. His blue lips are pressed to a tube by which he booms out commands through the bronze idol above. The last strength of his atrophied, spindly body is used to exhort the villagers to send the youth to the fortress, followed by a gasping cackle each time. This is the source of the thunderous threats and bellowing laughter. The mad priest may be easily pulled out of his hiding place, and is beyond any sort of physical movement or threat, though he will continue to

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mumble the idol's obstreperous provocations for the rest of his miserable existence.

As noted, the golden idol is hollow and can be entered. Within, there is a handle to pull the idol's "door" shut, after which the idol melds tightly around the person inside. Non-spellcasters can make a DC 10 Intelligence check to manipulate the simple voice mechanism of the bronze idol above; but any spellcaster inside may attempt to commune with—or even control—the giant idol, by making a spell check as per their level and adding their Luck modifier to the roll. Consult the table below.

The possessed and animated idols have the following statistics:

Small golden idol: Init as possessor; Atk bash +0 melee (1d7); AC 20; HD 5d10; hp 50; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +10, Ref -5, Will N/A; AL N; Crit M/d10.

Large bronze idol: Init as possessor; Atk bash +5 melee (2d4); AC 30; HD 15d10; hp 150; MV 50'; Act 1d30+1d20; SP none; SV Fort +15, Ref -10, Will N/A; AL N; Crit G/d7.

Unless animated as above, the golden idol is fixed in place. Its eyes and fangs can be carefully detached, though such defiling of the idol takes 2d3 rounds for each item. Each round, the PCs engaged in this pursuit must make a Luck check. When three checks are failed, Lar-Shann is angered by the insolence of these mortals! The stones above start to tremble and the PCs will have only one turn to exit the hill-top before the fortress and temple collapse inward, destroying the idols, the tree and all hope of making more brandy forever.

Behind the idol is a small unobtrusive closet, not easily spotted unless one takes the time to circumnavigate the entire chamber. Within this closet are many empty bottles and shards of broken glass, and no brandy. Hidden behind a panel in the rear of the closet (DC 15 Intelligence check to notice,

DC 5 if searching) is one last bottle of the Elshayne brandy. One of the mad priests had secreted it here from his brethren and then forgot it in his downward spiral of violent dementia.

Once seeing the liquid's perfect amber color within the bottle, the PC will feel a great compulsion to drink the brandy, requiring a DC 14 Will save to resist. The brandy is stored in a 2'-tall narrow crystal fiasco crafted carefully into the shape of a swan's neck and head. It is so delicate that will easily break if two or more parties are scrambling to take hold of it. All PCs in such a situation must make a Luck check to prevent it from shattering and the brandy from being lost.

If the bottle is opened and its scent is inhaled with its hints of quince, tamarind, and wasp's honey, a PC will be compelled to drink the entire bottle. This will increase the PC's longevity 1d4 years and give them just the slightest pale, withered countenance. Then, for the next 2d100 nights, the PC dreams of nothing but the brandy.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE



In the event that the PCs survive, recover the brandy, and manage not to drink it, they ought to have a harrowing return to their employers, waylaid by Mortenz the tax collector, who leads an officious band of banditos in the forests of Northern Almetry. Mortenz and his associates will insist on a careful itemized inventory of all the adventurers' possessions and may decide what taxes to levy in a highly improvised manner, depending on what they discover.

Whether Mortenz succeeds or not, this will probably lead to grudges, hard feelings, reversals of fortune, and a total waste of the last priceless bottle of brandy—a testament to the fickleness of fate and the futility of greed in the last days of a slowly dying world.

Result	Spell check to possess idol of Lar-Shann
1 or less	The PC's mind is sucked away to Fomalhaut, there to be tormented in the fruit mines of the Erebla Deserts for all time.
2-11	The PC's mind is trapped in the idol until their body is removed <i>and</i> someone else enters and makes a successful spell check (12 or higher).
12-14	The PC may speak through the large bronze idol. (If the idol is possessed by Lar-Shann already, he will know the PC's location and sense their identity.)
15-17	The PC may possess the smaller golden idol and walk freely out of the circle. Duration is 1d6 + the caster's Personality score in rounds. At the end of the duration, they must exit the idol or be trapped therein until the idol can be opened from without (requires someone else to succeed in a DC 20 Intelligence check).
18-21	The PC may possess the large bronze idol for 1d6 + Personality rounds. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the idol is already possessed by Lar-Shann, the PC must make a DC 20 Will save to eject the demon's consciousness for the duration. • Failure indicates the PC will be summoned to Fomalhaut to attend the Synod of Jocose Sublimities, there to be assigned various missions on Lar-Shann's behalf—or, if refusing this generous boon, having their atoms dispersed far and wide across the interstellar byways.
22+	The PC may possess the large bronze idol indefinitely. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the idol is already possessed by Lar-Shann, see result 18-21 above. • If this idol is successfully possessed by a PC, after one hour of possession, the PC must make a DC 15 Will save to tear his mind from the idol's form. Each hour thereafter, the DC increases by one.



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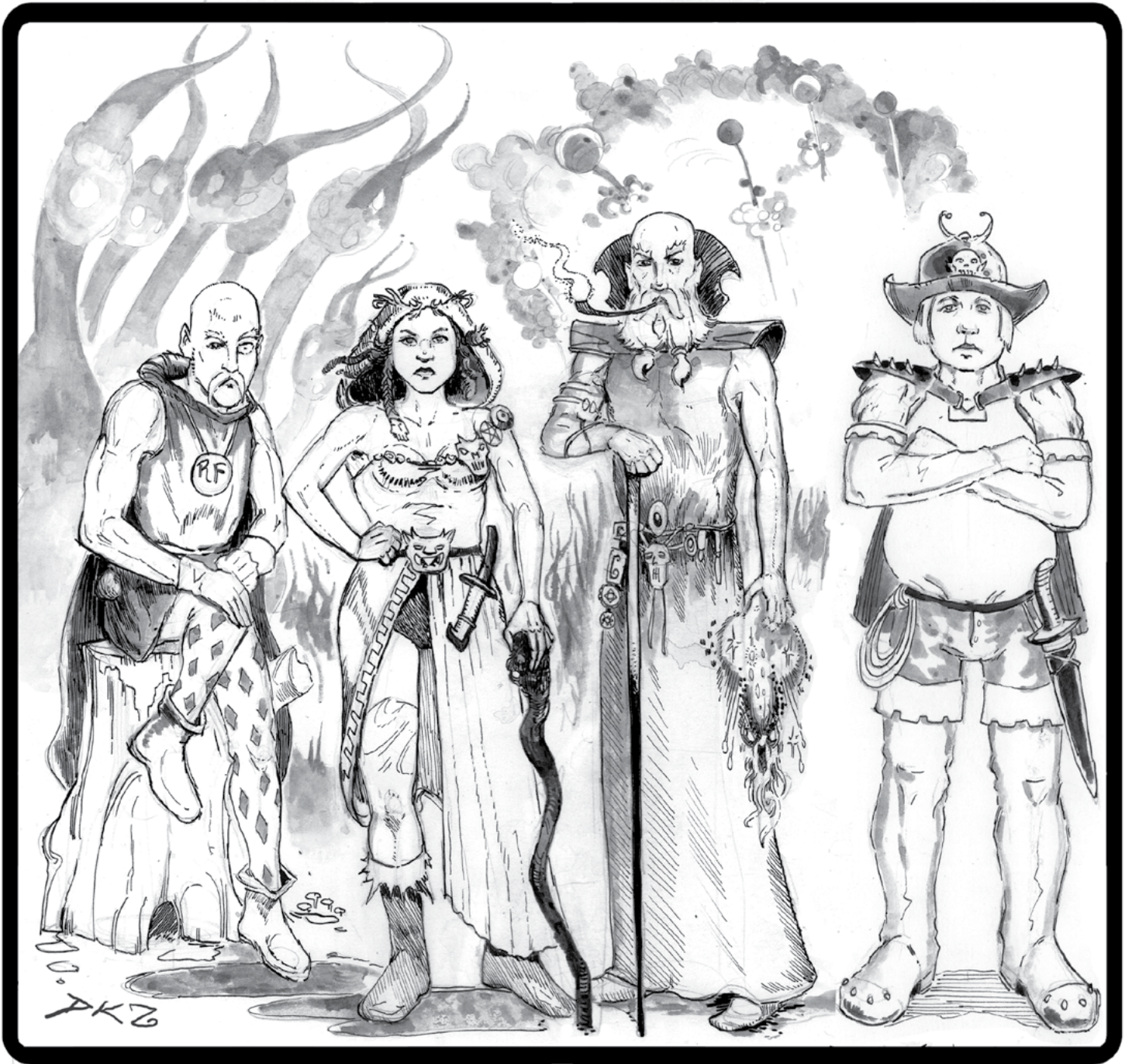
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