

IN THE PRISON OF THE SQUID SORCEROR

TWELVE PULP WEIRD ENCOUNTERS
FOR THE DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS ROLEPLAYING GAME



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COMPATIBLE WITH
**DCC
RPG**



IN THE PRISON OF THE SQUID SORCEROR

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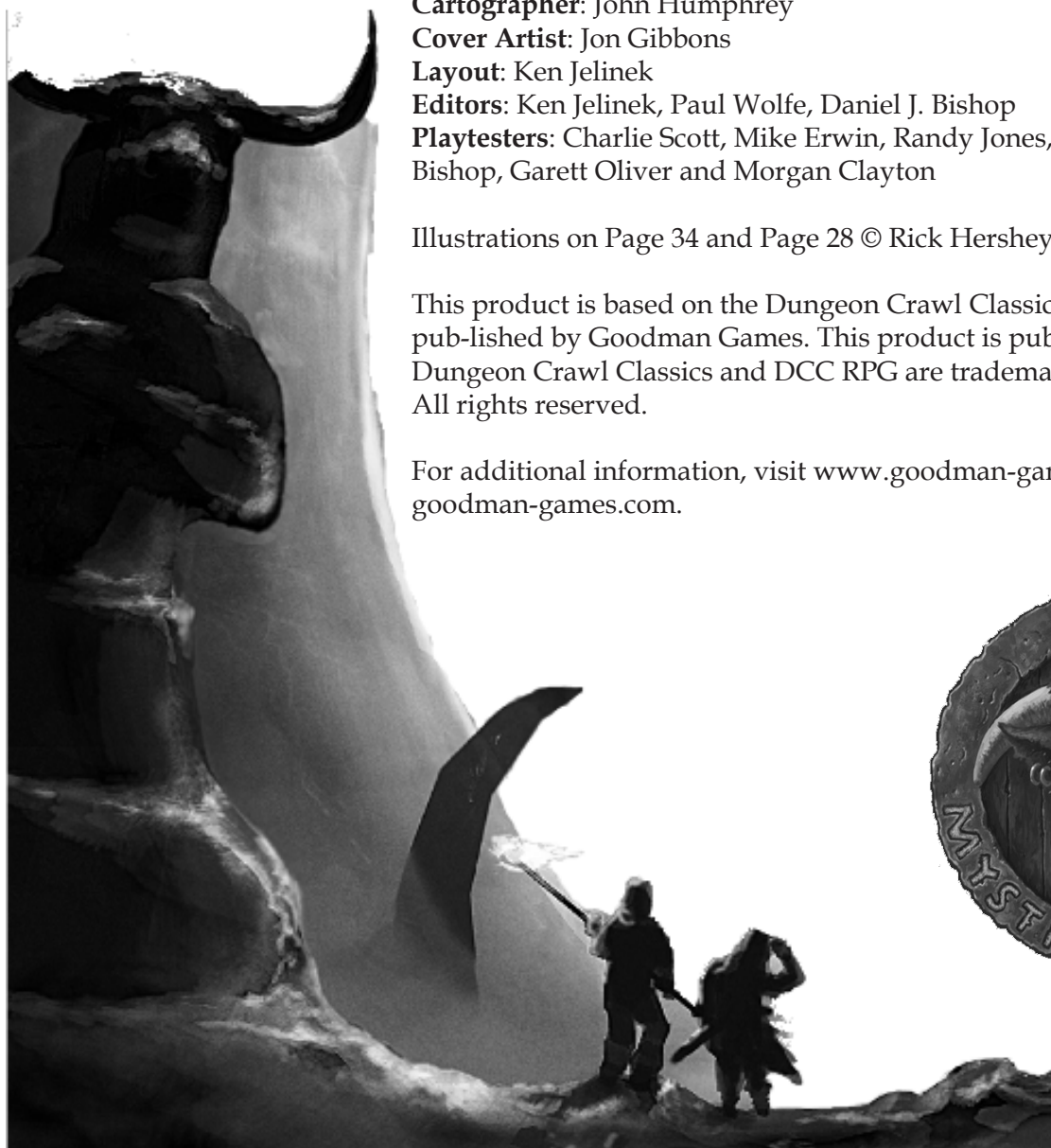


TABLE OF CONTENTS

IN THE PRISON OF THE SQUID SORCEROR	6
MERMAIDS FROM YUGGOTH	11
SHADOWS OF MALAGOK	15
SWINDLED AT THE LAUGHING HARPY	17
SLAVES OF THE VISITANTS	19
SAILS AFLAME!	22
CAVE OF THE ICE MISTRESS	23
THE LONG SLEEP	26
THE CULT OF THE FLICKERING SIGN	29
ANOTHER MAN'S TREASURE	32
THE NAZHGHAD'S INVOCATION	34
ICON OF THE BLOOD GODDESS	37



INTRODUCTION

Judges are curious individuals. Give them a stack of graph paper, a notebook, and a handful of dice, and you can keep them preoccupied for hours—even days or weeks—wrapped up in their own mental worlds. They busy themselves drawing maps of kingdoms, cities, towns, and foul dungeons, filling each with painstaking details and making intricate notes. Judges dream big dreams and plot year-long campaign arcs designed to raise lowly zero-level nobodies into the ranks of heroes. They craft NPCs with personalities, quirks, and picture-perfect physical descriptions until these imaginary folk become just as real as the people they see on the streets. Yes, judges (and I count myself amongst this odd, but august, sub-species of humanity) are a weird bunch, indeed.

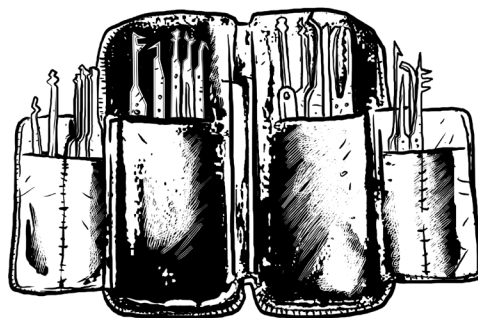
Unfortunately, this grandiose thinking means judges sometimes see the forest while missing the trees. In the pursuit of painting sweeping vistas, they forget the fine details that are the true spark of life to a campaign. A judge can get so wrapped up getting the characters from one elaborately planned location to another realistic locale he forgets that it's often more about the journey than the destination. Luckily, the judges among us (and that should be all of you, because if you're a player and reading this, it means you're in danger of depriving yourself of a lot of fun) can rest easy because *In the Prison of the Squid Sorcerer* is here to save our bacon.

In the following pages you'll find a number of small adventures to help fill in the little details in your campaign world. Most can be completed in a single session, making them perfect to drop into an ongoing campaign between grand adventures or to serve as the small step that leads to world-spanning journeys. Ahead awaits lonely beaches, abandoned houses, forgotten barrows, icy caverns, blood-stained alleys, lonely roadsides, and more to spice up your campaign. Use them sparingly or dump the whole lot into the campaign stewpot. Your players are bound to enjoy the meal you cook up.

If you're thinking to yourself, "I'm not one of those judges Mike's talking about. I use small adventures to add detail to my campaign all the time," don't worry: this book is also filled with *squirrels*.

Every good judge needs a few squirrels in his or her bag of tricks, and I'm not talking about the furry kind that live in trees. In judge-speak, a "squirrel" is a distraction, something to occupy the players when they've decided to do something utterly unexpected and you find yourself stumped as to what happens next. The players decide they want to go to some place you never got around to crafting those wonderful details for? Unleash a squirrel and watch them chase it for a few hours. Hopefully, this will provide some entrainment and keep them busy until the session ends. A good squirrel buys you a week or two to make plans and, when the next game rolls around, it looks like you had everything figured out long ago. The players will marvel at your creativity and forethought. Like the antiperspirant ad says, "Never let them see you sweat." Just make sure they don't see your copy of *In the Prison of the Squid Sorcerer* sticking out of your judge's bag, either.

-Michael Curtis



Abandon all sanity, ye who would dare turn these pages.

Cephalopodal warlocks, sirens from the outer void, otherworldly grifters and far, far worse await those foolhardy souls that would turn, raise blade and torch, and face the darkness from between the stars.

As Judges of the Dungeon Crawl Classic Role Playing Game, we are tasked with inspiring fear in the most experienced of heroes. At some point our boxes of pulp novels are exhausted, the veins of the ancient modules of yore are mined to their bitter end, and even the well of *Appendix N* must run dry. When all sources are spent, where is a Judge to turn for inspiration?

The Squid Sorcerer offers an answer.

Twelve adventures of otherworldly origin with curious puzzles, strange settings, and cunning foes.

Whether serving as brief interludes, seeds to new adventure arcs, or quests for desperate clerics and wizards, the Prison of the Squid Sorcerer and its contents offer an adventure for every company of reavers, heathen-slayers, and tight-lipped warlocks.

Since its inception, the DCC RPG has been fortunate enough to be supported by some of the brightest minds of the OSR. Herein you will find some of those authors – each offering a unique vision of the new pulp frontier.

So don your hauberk and take up your blade: the future has never been so daunting or exciting.

Harley Stroh
Goodman Games



IN THE PRISON OF THE SQUID SORCERER

Low Level -- By Ken Jelinek

Driven ashore by a supernatural storm, the party competes with a pirate and his crew to find the brother of a local noble. They soon find that the brother was imprisoned by a god before he could fully bond himself in the service of Cthulhu!

This adventure is designed for 4-8 1st-level characters and requires a good mix of character types. Because the party must contend with the pirate and his well-equipped crew, this adventure requires careful consideration of timing and resources.

BACKGROUND STORY

The once-peaceful coastal village of Seascapes has endured brutal supernatural storms for the last two months. As their livelihoods suffered, disheartened merchants sought relief from Pelagia, goddess of the sea. The chief priestess, Meria, had a vision that foretold the emergence of a dark opponent in their midst. The omens pointed to the odd sorcerer, Carey Dolan, but the sorcerer was brother to John Dolan, Lord of Seascapes, and he would not hear it. To Lord Dolan, his brother is nothing more harmful than a sage.

While John Dolan was away at Rose Keep, the angry villagers captured Carey in his sleep and brought him before Meria, who invoked the tempestuous fury of Pelagia. Overnight, the goddess of the sea created a coral prison three miles away on the coast, and the peasants deposited him within it. There Carey Dolan is trapped, by Pelagia's fury into something very different, and there he waits for the stars to align and his purpose to be revealed.

Meanwhile, Lord John is due back from Rose Keep, and he will surely be displeased with what's befallen his brother.

RED SKIES IN MORNING

Chartering a boat in Ostmer was easy enough if a bit expensive. Your captain, Ulthur, didn't appear concerned about rumors concerning the storms plaguing Seascapes, but maybe that's the confidence that comes from the coins you paid for the three-day journey. The small caravel, Vengeance, made fast if rocky progress, yet Ulthur's seemed capable so

far. The first two days were completely uneventful.

Ulthur's gruff and unchanging demeanor dissipates as red skies loom at sunrise on the third day. Ulthur barks orders to his crew, battening down the cargo hatches and lashing the masts. In the flurry, a patch of thrashing sea transforms into a massive black-tentacled shape and approaches the ship at great speed. To the northeast, you see another ship apparently on a similar course.

The black-tentacled shape heralds the unnatural storm; it is a corrupted hydra from the elemental Plane of Water. The creature at first appears to be a giant creature approaching under the water, but is actually composed entirely of corrupted water. The huge, crashing waves in its wake are tipped with inky, frothing crests.

Corrupted Elemental Hydra: Init +6; Atk slam +10 melee (2d6); AC 16; HD 12d8 (59 hp); MV swim 80'; Act 1d20 per head; SP engulf and drown, vulnerable to fire and heat, elemental traits; SV Fort +8, Ref +8, Will +8; AL C.

The hydra's "heads" are actually bulbous pseudopods of water that lash out at the ship's hull. The creature attacks the ship almost exclusively (75% chance to strike the ship's hull), though anyone knocked overboard redirects the hydra's ire. Anyone hit by the hydra has a 50% chance of being knocked overboard. **Note:** There are a total of 14 targets on the deck, not counting the PCs. The hydra's slam attack engulfs targets in the water (see page 412 of the core rulebook). The *Vengeance* is a small caravel (75 hp and hardness 3). Once the ship begins to sink, the hydra departs, dragging any dead or dying in the water with it.

The *Vengeance* has three rounds before the hydra can attack. The ship in the distance is within hailing range (using lanterns – visibility is limited as the storm closes), and, if consulted, Ulthur reckons he can reach the second ship with twenty minutes of good wind. He sails for the second ship unless directed otherwise by the party.

If the *Vengeance* is scuttled, the other ship approaches the wreckage once the hydra disappears. The captain,

Merle Pease, offers safe passage aboard the Green Trident to any survivors since he is coincidentally en route to Seascape.

THE GREEN TRIDENT

Climbing aboard the ship, you are greeted with a hearty laugh by its halfling captain. "Welcome aboard the Green Trident! I'm Captain Pease. Glad we were able to help," he says with a smile and a wink. "Where ye to? And make yourselves comfortable with some grog!"

Captain Pease happily provides passage to Seascape, making small talk about the hydra and any other details of Ulthur's derailed journey. He'll pry subtly about the cargo Ulthur carried and the party's purpose in Seascape, but he won't press the issue. The *Green Trident* arrives in Seascape in approximately 6 hours; the trip is uneventful, as the faster ship is able to outrun the worst of the coming storm.

His crew consists of five pirates who know their business and cautiously avoid conversation with the newcomers.

STORMS OVER SEASCAPE

The *Green Trident* arrives in Seascape to the loud ringing of a bell in the village center. As the PCs disembark, they notice that the docks are deserted. Curiosity should eventually drive the party to investigate, where they find closed and locked shops and a mob of villagers on the village green.

Here John Dolan, feudal lord of Seascape, leads the assembly. Returning to find his brother imprisoned without his consent, he still wears an ornate suit of embellished leather armor. He begins speaking when most of the villagers are present.

Attention all! As you must know, I have returned to find my beloved brother and sage, Carey, missing. This will not stand. I have consulted the priestesses of Pelagia, and they have divined that he has been imprisoned nearby along the coast. They also revealed that this unnatural imprisonment must surely be connected to the incessant storms that wrack our coast and our very livelihoods. For you, and for my family, I would end this.

I require the services of any brave men among you. I will pay a handsome sum to any stalwart heroes to assist me in this matter...if you think you have the courage and skill to end our mutual plight. That is all.

The villagers scatter, since several were complicit in

Carey's imprisonment. By the end, only the party and Captain Pease remain. A hushed conversation between Lord Dolan and the captain is already underway, and a successful Luck check (DC 10) reveals that Captain Pease and Lord Dolan are quietly discussing the lord's offer. Noticing that the PCs have remained, Pease quickly ends the conversation and tramps off toward his ship with a hurried nod to the party.

Lord Dolan's offers 100 silver pieces to each surviving party member that maps the supernatural cave where he believes his brother is imprisoned and brings him word of Carey's condition; Meria herself assured him that Carey yet lives, but Lord Dolan wants more details. With this information, he plans a further assault to free Carey. Negotiators may convince Lord Dolan to increase his initial reward to 150 sp each for the map, but he will not budge above that because there is competition. A shrewd negotiator, Captain Pease has already volunteered his crew, and the pirates have a head start before the party's negotiations and terms are even decided.

INTO THE PRISON OF THE SQUID SORCERER

Lord Dolan provided the party with a rough map that leads to the coral-encrusted coastline, about three miles from the village. Though the large blowhole was not marked on Lord Dolan's map, it is easy to spot and appears composed of naturally formed coral. Characters succeeding at a concealed Luck check notice that there is a three-minute interval between the blowhole's geyser-like eruptions. Players who specifically mention waiting or observing the timing of the eruptions determine this easily. Within the blowhole, PCs can easily spot the dry passage (Area 1-1) about 20' down.

Climbing down the blowhole and bypassing the geyser is actually easier than it appears. The coral, though wet, provides solid hand and footholds. Any character with a 10 or more Strength can free-climb down to the passage that leads to the dry passage (1-1) without a check. For others, it's a mere DC 5. Either way, the climb takes 1 round.

PCs unlucky enough to be caught in the geyser are slammed against the coral wall (1d6 damage) and then must make a Strength check (DC 12) or be dragged out of the undersea passage to a watery death.

General Features: Unless otherwise noted, the cavern has walls and floor of greenish-grey coral-en-

crusted lava tubes that are slightly damp from intermittent sea spray. The ceilings are approximately 10-12 feet high, and the entire cavern radiates magic for those that can detect it. The only ambient light source comes from the unnatural green flames of the torches in area 1-2.

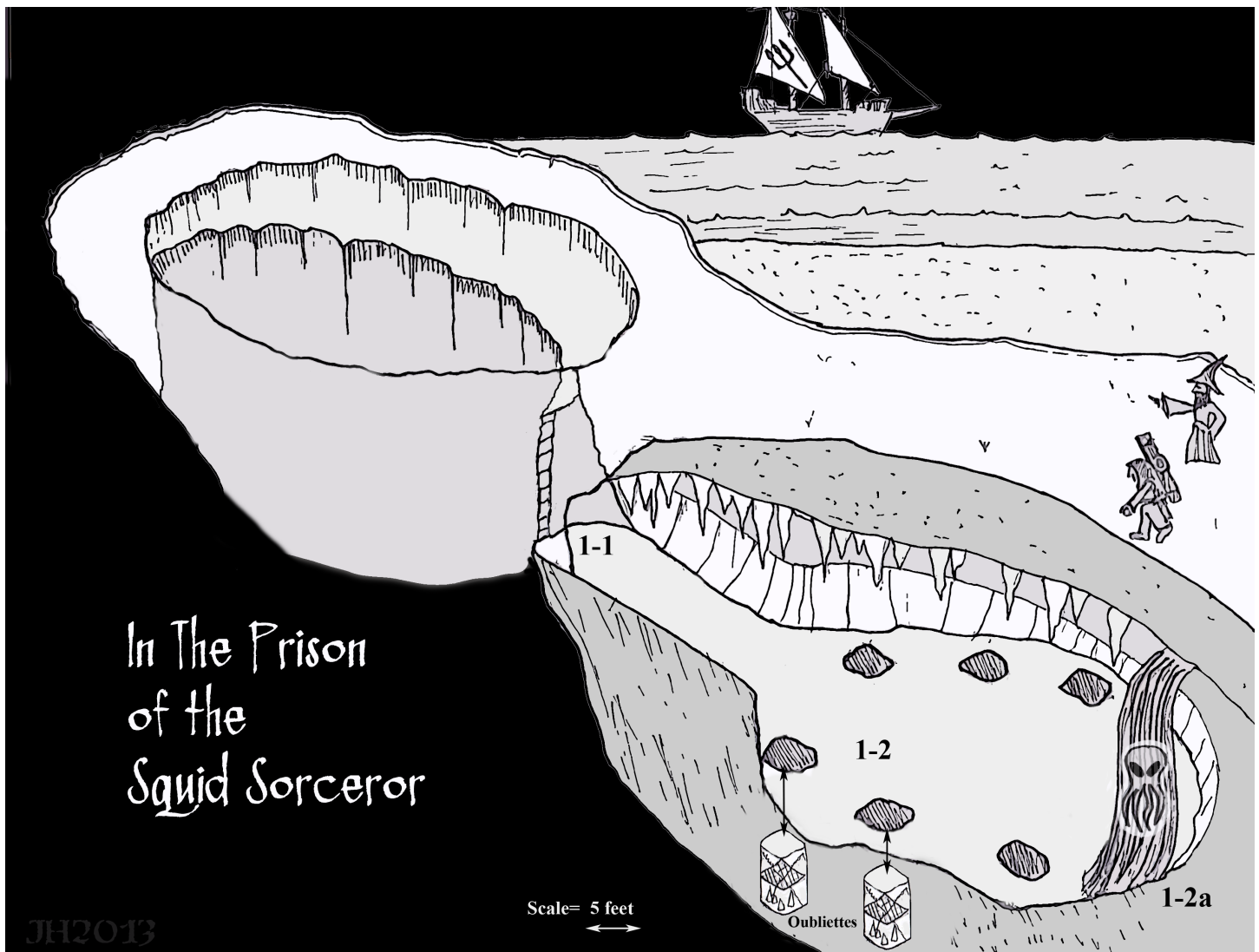
Area 1-1 – Dry Passage: *Climbing down, you can see that parallel tubes must be creating the geyser effect above, because this shaft is relatively dry. The tube descends another 20 feet before your feet can find purchase on coral-encrusted rubble. Here you find coiled a makeshift ladder of knotted rope, a few water-logged torches, and a broken bottle. The tube slopes down towards a sickly green illumination that flickers from within. You cannot see further into the cavern, but you hear the sounds of a skirmish within.*

The tunnel opens up into the Coral Oubliettes (Area 1-2). The green fires of the torches in the prison are faint and provide two-way concealment (25% miss chance for any attacks by or against characters in this entryway). Unless the characters enter the cavern or have some other light source, they see blurred forms

fighting in the center of the prison.

The dim light also obscures five oyster shells half-buried in broken coral in the entryway (Luck check to notice). Anyone with local fishing knowledge would not recognize them as indigenous, as they are from the Elemental Plane of Water, and are colored blue, pink, white, grey, and green respectively. The blue and pink shells are smashed, but the grey and green shells contain a grey and green pearl (respectively) that can be used to free Carey from imprisonment, though with disastrous results (see 1-2a).

Area 1-2 – The Coral Oubliettes: *The echoes of a heated battle break up the crashing of a massive waterfall to the south. In the sputtering green light of torches affixed to the walls of this huge natural chamber, you watch a giant brute of a man swing an oversized, double-headed maul at three men you now recognize as Captain Pease and his crewmates. The creature appears to be winning, and his misshapen maw grins with ferocity as he swings the mighty maul, knocking two men at once into dark pits encircling the cavern floor. You hear their screams amidst the rattling*



of chains from below. Obviously outmatched, Captain Pease recognizes you and his desperate glance begs for aid.

As guardian of the prison, the mauler immediately attacks any who enter.

Hulking Mauler: Init +6; Atk maul +1d6 deed roll +2 melee (1d10 + 1d6 deed roll +2); AC 14; HD 4d12 (34 hp); MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP pushback; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AL C.

Pushback: The mauler is exceptionally adept at pushbacks and attempts to use them every round. On a successful attack and roll of 4 or greater on the deed die, his opponent is knocked back into the nearest oubliette. A PC may attempt a DC 10 Reflex save to grab the edge of the oubliette.

Characters fall ten feet into an oubliette before becoming entangled in nets and strands of barbed chains dealing 1d6 damage. Any attempt to climb out or otherwise move incurs further damage (1d6/round) unless a Reflex save (DC 10) is successful. Surviving victims can free themselves of the chains and climb out in 3 rounds; assistance from above reduces this to 2 rounds.

A character who grabs the edge of an oubliette without falling in must succeed on a DC 10 Strength check to pull himself out of the oubliette, using his action for the round. If his total roll is 5 or less, he falls into the oubliette, as described above. A thief gains his Climb bonus to this check.

If Captain Pease survives the encounter, he beseeches the party to assist in rescuing any fallen crewmates from the oubliettes. Though he appears assist in rescuing any fallen party members, he actually jerks the chains to painfully wound any victims (1d6 damage each round). He does this whether or not his own crew is in the same oubliette, as he can easily replace them. To obfuscate this treachery, Pease avoids any oubliette the party is already assisting with. Observant PC's not otherwise assisting in rescues may make a Luck check to notice that he's not really helping.

If Captain Pease rescues any of his crew (see the Green Trident Crew sidebar for stats), and they outnumber the surviving party members, the pirates attack. He already has a map for Lord Dolan and hopes to bargain for the party's reward as well.

Area 1-2a – The True Prison: *The waterfall crashes from ceiling to floor unnaturally, as the opening in the ceiling could not possibly be large enough for the volume of*



water falling here. Upon closer inspection, a faint, incorporeal image of a man in grey-green robes resides within the waterfall. The visible skin on his hands and arms are covered in suckers, and he has some kind of arcane rune tattooed in murky green on his bald head. Yet, the most horrific feature about him is the writhing mass of squid-like tentacles where his mouth should be.

The symbol on Carey's forehead is that of Pelagia (Intelligence DC 8 for clerics or others with religious backgrounds). Without consulting with Meria, chief priestess of Pelagia, it is improbable that the party can free the Squid Sorcerer. However, if the party starts the ritual by throwing the green and grey pearls (from area 1-1) into the waterfall, Carey Dolan's vengeance is realized.

Trapped between the Elemental Plane of Water and this one, the Squid Sorcerer summons a portal that floods the prison in 1d3 rounds, virtually assuring the deaths of anyone in this chamber. Attempting to swim out requires three checks, at DC 5, 10, and 15. Characters can make multiple attempts, but each failure causes a point of temporary Stamina damage. If a character does not escape before his Stamina reaches 0, he dies.



Lord Dolan rewards the PCs as negotiated. Realizing the extra-dimensional nature of his brother's imprisonment, he requires a week or so to meet with Meria and devise tactics for his brother's rescue. If the PCs reveal that his brother had the symbol of Pelagia inscribed on his forehead, Lord Dolan realizes the priestess' treachery, but he may also be forced to admit what his brother has become.

At that time, he may request further assistance from the PC's, but that is the tale of subsequent adventures. If Corey Dolan escapes, he completes his bonding ritual with Cthulhu, and returns after several weeks to wreak his revenge upon Seascap. The results of these developments are left up to the Judge.

GREEN TRIDENT CREW

Any wounded/trapped crew members have their hit points listed in parenthesis below. The bodies of Kyra and Kilig lie tangled, each, in an oubliette.

Captain Pease, Thief: Init +1; Atk short sword +2 melee (1d6+1), dagger +2 melee (1d4+1) or crossbow +2 missile fire (1d6); AC 13; 12 hp; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP Thief skills; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will -1; AL C.

Equipment: large sack, cloak, thieves' tools, 129 sp, 3 doses giant centipede poison (see p. 446 of core rule-book), prison map

Morvin, Thief: Init +1; Atk short sword +2 melee (1d6+1), dagger +2 melee (1d4+1) or crossbow +2 missile fire (1d6); AC 13; 8 (1) hp; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP Thief skills; SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will -1; AL C.

Equipment: large sack, cloak, thieves' tools, 84 sp.

Narm, Warrior: Init +2; Atk longsword d4+2 melee (1d8 + deed roll +2) or handaxe d4+2 melee (1d6 + deed roll + 2); AC 15; 13 (4) hp; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SP critical threat 19-20; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +1; AL L

Equipment: chainmail, holy symbol (Pelagia), 40 sp.

Kyra, Cleric: (deceased)

Equipment: studded leather, waterskin, 20 sp

Kilig, Wizard: (deceased)

Equipment: cloak, rations (1 day), 160 sp



MERMAIDS FROM YUGGOTH

Low Level -- By Daniel J. Bishop

Wintering in a small village, the characters encounter an ancient evil from beyond their world.

This series of encounters is designed for four to six 3rd-level characters and is intended to extend over several sessions with other adventures interspersed; as a result, the PCs may be 2nd level at the beginning of the series if they gain a level by the climax.

BACKGROUND

Somewhere in the far reaches of this world's solar system, the cold planet Yuggoth swings in its erratic course. The creatures of Yuggoth are scientists and sorcerers who seek to collect and study the brains of sentient creatures. None can determine the ultimate end of this study, but Those Of Yuggoth might wish to understand this world's dominant races to infiltrate their societies and perhaps control them.

Thirty years ago, the village of Dunstane was the site of an invasion from Yuggoth. The hedge mage, Eric Silverjohn, who lorded over the village as though he were far more powerful than he really was, was called on to stop the "flying mermaids." He could not stop them; however, using the Jewel of Phenos, he shunted their attack into the future to buy himself time. The ritual did not take effect immediately, and the Mermaids from Yuggoth collected his brain before being shunted 30 years into the future.

The Old Silverjohn Place has stood empty ever since. Now the Mermaids from Yuggoth are beginning to come through....

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

As the dead of the year approaches and cold nights yield frost upon windows, it is good to have found the small village of Dunstane just off the beaten track. It is luck as well that cedes to you the Old Silverjohn Place to rent for a small fee because local lore claims it is haunted. You haven't seen the slightest indication of a ghost yet, but the cellar does contain a wine rack that inexplicably produces a bottle of excellent vintage from time to time.

TIMELINE

General Features: This encounter is comprised of a series of events that take place during two winter months. The judge is encouraged to intersperse these events with other encounters and/or adventures.

Each of these events includes a follow-up "Villagers Say" section that provides some additional clues and information. This may be scuttlebutt overheard in the local tavern or through more direct interaction with the villagers.

Keep in mind that this series of events is designed to build apprehension. Don't cut the suspense too soon by hurrying events or giving the players information too early! On the other hand, don't use these events to tie your PCs to the house – you can change the timing of events to better work with your campaign.

Event 1-1 – The Old Silverjohn Place

The clock starts ticking when the PCs become acquainted with the Old Silverjohn Place, which has rooms and furniture needed to accommodate the PCs. It is clear that the furnishings have not been touched in decades. There is an excellent (and dusty) bottle of wine in the cellar. The appearance of wine bottles is sporadic, based on the whim of the Judge and only occurs in the cellar. If the wine rack is removed, the bottles smash upon the floor when they appear.

The bottles are actually being shunted from Silverjohn's wine rack 30 years ago along the path of the ritual used to transfer Those Of Yuggoth forward in time. As events draw toward a close, the wine bottles should appear with ever-increasing frequency. Note that, unless a bottle is being shunted at the time the spell is cast, neither the area nor the wine rack is actually magical and will not detect as such.

The exact layout of the house or village is not important to this series of events so the Judge may sketch the place out in whatever manner desired. The only necessary features are the cellar and the well.

When the PCs take possession of the Old Silverjohn

Place, Nettie Hawman, the 15-year-old daughter of Ulbert and Goodwife Hawman, will offer to cook, clean, and “make do” for the characters. She will not, under any circumstances, sleep in the place. *“Everyone hereabouts surely knows this place is haunted.”*

Villagers Say: “It’s sure nice to have someone living in the Old Silverjohn Place again.” “Nothing funny gone on up there, is there?” “Granny says you live in the witch house! You have any strange dreams in the witch house?” “Old Eric Silverjohn wasn’t a witch, but he was a wizard. And he was a good friend to folks hereabouts, before he left us.”

Event 2 – The Burned-Out Jewel

The Judge should choose one PC to whom this event occurs three weeks after Event 1.

Going into the cellar for a bottle of wine, you notice a large gemstone lying upon the floor. It looks like it was once a valuable emerald, but the color of the stone has dimmed, and cracks radiate outward from the shattered and blackened interior. The jewel smokes slightly and is warm to the touch.

This is the Jewel of Phenos, brought forward in time and burnt out from the force of the ritual. A wizard or elf will know that the gem once channeled powerful magic, but a successful detect magic spell shows that it is magical no longer. With the interior blackened and dim, the gem is worthless to a jeweler.

Villagers Say: *“That’s a might bit curious, that is. Where’d you find it?” “Nah, I ain’t never seen nothing like that before.” “Granny says the witch used to have a big green stone, wore it on his neck on a gold chain. You get that stone from the witch?” “Aye, that’s Eric Silverjohn’s jewel. No, I don’t know what he used it for. He never said.”*

Event 3 – Voices in the Well

This event occurs two weeks after Event 2.

Setup: If the PCs hired her, Nettie Hawman comes into the house in a rush one morning, claiming there are voices coming out of the well. “I couldn’t tell what they were saying, but they frightened me.” She will certainly want the braver and more powerful adventurers to come with her before she is willing to drop the bucket into the well to draw water.

If the PCs have not hired Nettie Hawman, they experience the voices first-hand and without warning as they draw their own water.

Susurrus voices echo within the dank stone depths of the



well. You cannot make out what they are saying although they seem both feminine and strangely alien. They have a quality that makes your flesh creep to hear it even if you cannot make out the words. You suddenly hear a man’s voice speaking clearly, “I defy you! I defy you! I defy you!” Then the voices fade away.

Give the players a chance to digest this and begin discussing its implications. They are interrupted by the male voice from the well, crying aloud “Yuggoth!” in a strangled voice. This is the last voice from the well until Event 6. The well is not changed in any way, and the cold water in its depths remains safe to drink.

Villagers Say: *“Comes from messing around in the Old Silverjohn Place. There might be things sleeping there you don’t want to wake up.” “Yuggoth? That’s funny. I think my grandfather said something about that once, back before he died.” “Granny says they was flying mermaids, back when she was a lady. Maybe them flying mermaids flew down into your well?” “I got nothing to say about that. You should know better than to listen to children’s stories at your age.”*

Event 4 – Shadows in the Cellar:

The Judge should select one PC to whom this event occurs, preferably a different PC than the one chosen for Event 2. This event occurs one week after Event 3.

Going down into the cellar to recover a bottle of wine, you discover not one but three excellent vintages have manifested since your last check. As you are examining the bottles, you notice an old grey cloak hung on a peg between you and

the cellar stairs. And it does not seem now like a cloak, but rather like an actual presence – a thing holding you here, blocking your access to the stairs and the brighter light of the area immediately upstairs. It occurs to you – although surely it is just a fancy – that if that cloak should touch you, you will die. The cloak flutters in a non-existent breeze, then lifts off the peg and drifts towards you!

Whether the PC hits it first or not, the cloak makes a single attack unless it is completely obliterated by magic. The cloak clearly reaches for the PC's head or face. If the player notes that there was no cloak there before, that's fine – it has come forward from 30 years ago and contains the shadow of the intent of one of the mermaids from Yuggoth. It is not actually capable of doing harm. Once it attacks, it ceases to be animated.

Cloak: Init -2; Atk touch -2 melee (0); AC 8; HD n/a; MV fly 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C

Villagers Say: *"It reached for your face, you say? That's passing strange! You know, they say that some thirty years ago, this village was attacked by creatures what tried to take folks' brains. Old Silverjohn sent them off, in that place where you're staying right now, but he lost his life in the doing of it. No, I don't know how he died, or where he sent them things to, or what they were." "If you're scared of staying up there, I can make a space for you in my barn. Cold in there at night, this time of year, but nothing will attack you 'cept maybe a goat or a pig." "Don't be silly. Granny says I don't have to be scared of no clothes nor sheets! You ain't 'fraid of no shadows, are ya?" "It did you no harm, did it? Many's a man in winter be happy to find a cloak in his cellar, didn't know he had. Don't make too much of it."*

Event 5 – Faces Pressed On Glass

This event occurs two weeks after Event 4.

Waking up in the morning, you see someone or something has pressed upon your window and left an impression of its face by melting the frost. What the face is is hard to make out. There is no sign of a mouth or eyes, but it leaves the impression of a face...of a woman's face...of an alien face. Something about it seems vaguely threatening. It feels as though the face is watching you, although as it rapidly melts, that feeling fades with it.

It doesn't matter if the window is on the ground floor or on the second story of a house. Every glass window in the village of Dunstane has had the same face or one very much like it appear on it in the frost. This happens every single night until Event 6. If a window

is watched, the face will not appear on that window while it is watched. During this time, 2d6 bottles of wine appear in the cellar every day, as the past and the future come closer together.

Villagers Say: *"What are you doing in that house? Folks are getting worried and a mite bit scared. You'd best stop it now, afore folks get together with pitchforks and torches!" "We're simple, gods-fearing folk. You leave us alone! (makes a sign to protect from the evil eye)" "Granny said, you come asking around, I should send you up to see her." "Listen, then, and hear me well. The younger folks in this village be plain afraid, and I prayed this would never come again whilst I drew breath. But there you have it. Bad times outrace Death, and they've come again first. On about thirty year back, when I was a young lass, these things descended on the village. Like flying mermaids they were, but they weren't proper ladies above nor proper fish below. And they were taking folks' brains out of their heads, putting them in black cases like bells, why I can't say. Old Eric Silverjohn was sweet on me those days, so I known him better than most. Said they was from some far world called Yuggoth. Said he was going to use his jewel to draw them away from the village, send them somewhere or somewhen. I'm guessing that he sent them as far as he could, and that weren't no farther than here and now. Or here and soon. You'd best be ready. Eric Silverjohn's brain was scooped out of his skull like a nut from its shell."*

Event 6 – The Mermaids Break Through

This event occurs one week after Event 5.

You can see why the villagers called these creatures "mermaids" for they look something like translucent mermaids, although only if such creatures were admixed with the most hideous polyps and fungi. Their torsos are almost girlish, their nearly faceless heads surrounded by radiating starfish-like arms, and great spiny fins sprout from their backs. Instead of terminating in a fish's tail, each "mermaid" terminates in a grub-like fungal protuberance covered with a glowing and writhing jelly-like mass. They radiate a sense of having crossed great gulfs of space, and the gaze of their four tiny black button eyes is both merciless and malevolent.

When the mermaids arrive, three come in through the cellar wall, and three drift up through the well. They are intelligent if alien foes whose mission is to collect brains and escape back to Yuggoth. Any mermaid that successfully gathers a brain automatically phases into the ether as its next action. When phasing into the ether, the mermaid takes half damage from non-magical attacks; afterwards, it is gone along with any brain it carries with it.

A mermaid extracts a brain by striking with its tail polyp. When the polyp strikes, the gelid mass holds the victim fast and requires a DC 20 Strength check to escape. On the next round part of the jelly-like substance hardens into shards of sharp, diamond-like material, which begins to cut through the victim's skull, causing 1d5 Stamina damage per round. If a victim reaches 0 Stamina, its skull is cut open and the brain is extracted. The jelly-like mass forms a hard black bell-shaped shell around the brain over the course of 1d3 rounds, and it is then ready to transport to Yuggoth.

The mermaids only use their other attacks to defend themselves. A strike by their spiny fins cause paralysis for 1d6 turns unless a Fort save (DC 10) is successful, but the chemical poison in the spines ruins the brain for transport, and paralyzed victims are otherwise ignored. The mermaid's "kiss" brings the creature's breathless face close to its victim, which is caressed by the starfish-like tendrils as spores from Yuggoth are puffed into its nose and mouth. These render a target docile (taking no actions) for 1d6 minutes unless a Will save (DC 15) succeeds, but again, the brain is rendered ineligible for transport.

Although the mermaids can phase through walls and solid objects, this slows their flying movement to 10', and they cannot do this swiftly enough to avoid attacks.

Mermaids from Yuggoth (6): Init +3; Atk tail polyp +5 melee (1d5 STA + brain removal) or spined fin slap +2 melee (1d5 + paralysis) or kiss +0 melee (0 + docility); AC 14; HD 5d8; hp 26, 26, 25, 20, 15, 18; MV fly 30'; Act 1d20; SP phase through walls and solid objects, extract brains, paralysis, docility; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +8; AL C

AFTERMATH

Apart from the bottles of fine wine (each valued at 2d20 gp if sold), this scenario offers no direct treasure. The gratitude of the villagers is enormous, however, and any old slights are forgotten. The Old Silverjohn Place is given to the PCs outright (although no more bottles of wine appear), and the PCs discover that they need not pay for normal goods or services for the next 1d4+2 months. What extraordinary services or gear the judge deems available can be gotten by the PCs at a 1d5 x 10% discount.

A PC whose body is reduced to 0 Stamina by Those Of Yuggoth is not dead, even if the brain associated with it has been removed to far Yuggoth. Characters discover that they can still communicate with the fallen,

who tell of the unimaginable cold and darkness they are experiencing, and little else. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to kill and bury the bodies. This is what happened to Eric Silverjohn thirty years ago.

If a character's brain is extracted, but not transported to Yuggoth, the PCs may discover that the character can still control his body so long as the black jar containing his brain is within 5' of it. The inherent disconnect in controlling the body this way permanently reduces the character's Agility by 1d3 points. The black jar can be breached with 50 points of damage, but it is probably beyond the means of the PCs to restore the character's brain to his body, barring direct divine intervention.

It is very likely that the character will spend the rest of his days carrying his brain around with him in its jar.



SHADOWS OF MALAGOK

Mid-Level --By Jon Wilson

At the behest of a god, patron, or other powerful entity, the party seeks a powerful artifact within a dismal swamp. They quickly discover that the swamp conceals a shrine to Malagok, the Creator Beast. This encounter is intended for a mid-level party of average 5th level.

BACKGROUND

When the First Gods were new and Malagok walked the world, the Creator Beast guarded the tomb of the first mortal created, upon that mortal's death. The primal nature of the First Remains makes them a natural repository of immense transcendental power. Such is their potential; the tiniest fraction of these Remains could be employed to change the course of the world forever, in the past, present or future.

Over the eons Malagok has attracted mortal followers. These supplicants call themselves Votaries of the Tomb Eternal and worship the immense power of the Creator Beast. Over generations their devotion warped them into something inhuman and driven them to ruthlessly protect the sanctity of the Tomb Eternal and the many shrines to the Creator Beast.

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

The feral dangers of the swamp are nothing compared to the intense heat, the horror of picking off leeches fat with your blood, and the sheer panic of nodding in a small, defenseless rocking boat. Yet, you see the marker that the old swamp witch told you look out for: the marble head of a one-eyed giant half-buried in the muck at the head of a trail leading away from the quietly lapping bayou. As you and your companions leave the boat and compose yourselves on the shoreline, the water behind you roils and ejects four loathsome humanoids with slick, greenish skin like bloated swamp fish. The barbels on their upper lips writhe as they scream a foreign curse before running across the top of the water to engage you.

THE SWAMP LANDING

General Features: On the spongy, debris-choked ground, characters are limited to half movement, unless a successful Reflex save (DC 9) each round is

made; on a failure, the character cannot move at all for the round and falls prone on a critical failure. Characters standing in the water move $\frac{1}{4}$ speed and cannot effectively move faster without magical means.

Votaries of Malagok are servants so dedicated to protecting his secrets that they have transformed into hideous swamp creatures. This transformation allows them to adapt to swamp life completely. They move unhindered over solid ground, at full speed in up to chest-deep water or when swimming.

Each votary may attempt to redirect any spell cast on itself or its allies. The votary makes a Will save (DC 8+Spell Level) when the foe casts the spell. On a success, that votary takes the full effect of the spell against itself only – even if the spell would normally affect multiple targets. If the spell allows a saving throw versus the effects, the votary receives the save attempt at -2 times the spell level. For instance, if a Votary redirects a 2nd level spell, the save would be made at -4.

Votaries (5): Init +0; Atk fist/kick +5 (1d6 & special), or by weapon; AC 14; HD 2d10; MV 40, Swim 20; Act 1d20; SP swamp adaptation, staggering blow, spell redirection; Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +3; AL N

Staggering Blow: Votaries may inflict a staggering blow upon their target with unarmed attacks. If their attack beats the target's AC by 2 or more, the target must make a Fort Save (DC 10) or lose their next action.

SHRINE OF THE CREATOR BEAST

A mere twenty miles separates the swamp landing from the site of Malagok's shrine, but traversing this tangle requires up to a week of hard travel. The dangers encountered along the way are up to the Judge's devising, though the party should encounter progressively stronger parties of votaries along the way.

You wander the labyrinthine trails and lurking dangers of the swamp for another week. Canted and half-submerged in a foul bog lies an ancient marble shrine bearing the symbol

of an alligator devouring its own tail. Suddenly, ten of the Beast's adherents rise from the muck bearing rusted steel swords, curved and barbed cruelly. Their fishy eyes burn with hatred, and one of the creatures makes a gesture to its compatriots. Immediately, one of the monsters draws a curved knife across its own throat spilling bright red blood onto the surface of the muck.

The final party of votaries includes a Hierophant of the Creator Beast's Mysteries. It has directed its servant to summon the dreaded Shadow of Malagok, a fearsome creature resembling an elephant-sized alligator with a hide that clings to its knobby and distended bones as if its flesh rotted from the inside. The eyes of the creature are light-absorbing pits, and atop its snout protrude boney ridges used to bludgeon and destroy.

The beast emerges from the boiling pool of blood in one round. Upon the appearance of the Shadow of Malagok, any surviving votaries receive 1d4 bonus hit points. The Hierophant, once the summoning commences, fades away into the mists, presumably to defend the true Temple deeper in the swamps.

Shadow of Malagok: Init +2; Atk claw +5 (2d4), bite +4 (2d6+2), horns +4 (1d8+2), plasma +7 (3d5); AC 18; HD 8d8+10; hp: 60 ; MV 30, Swim 50; Act 2d20; SP Plasma Blast, Enfeebling Field; Fort +10, Ref +3, Will +12; AL N

Enfeebling Field: A Shadow of Malagok's eyes slowly absorb life-essence to emit an enfeebling cone in a 15-foot deep, 60-degree cone perpendicularly from either side of the head. Opponents struck by this cone must succeed at a Fort save (DC 14) or lose 1d6 Agility. Leaving and reentering the zone forces another save. Doing this uses two Action Dice.

Plasma Blast: Once every other round, the Shadow of Malagok may generate a ball of greenish-yellow plasma and fling it outward up to a range of 40 feet, burning anyone struck from the inside out. This attack deals 3d5 damage (Reflex DC 14 for half damage) and consumes one action on the part of the Shadow.

AFTERMATH

If the votaries and the Shadow of Malagok are defeated and the shrine explored, the characters find nothing upon a cursory search. Encased in the marble base of the shrine, however, is a plain, black box 2' long and 18" wide. It takes some effort to break apart the marble shrine to get at the box, and likely requires some divine or arcane intervention to even know

that the item is there. There appears to be no way to open the box, and even the material from which it is constructed is indeterminate. Does it contain a sliver of the First Remains? Or is the box itself some clue or artifact to locate the True Tomb of Creation? Or is it a weapon to combat the second coming of the Creator Beast? If the party (or a character) was sent here by a patron, god, or other powerful being, grant them a Luck bonus of +1 for recovering the artifact. Keeping the artifact should not be easy, however. The votaries are attuned to artifacts of the Malagok and hunt down transgressors without prejudice.



SWINDLED AT THE LAUGHING HARPY

Any Level -- By Paul Wolfe

Seeking respite, perhaps at a tavern in a large town or a roadside alehouse in the wilderness, the characters encounter two grifters, brothers, under the control of a strange entity. And it all starts with a simple request.

This encounter is designed for characters of any level, though 0-level characters may have to be convinced to run from the Painted Woman in the only way 0-levels can be convinced to run (by killing them).

BACKGROUND

Two grifters, the brothers Orlun and Farad, have traveled widely for years running a variety of scams on a myriad of dupes. Their specialty was a bait and switch con, which steadily netted them steady income from a worthless bronze statuette. Since becoming entrapped by a strange, otherworldly entity, they now run their cons not for money, but to rope in marks for their mistress, using beautiful, but cursed statuette. The con plays best in a crowded tavern.

THE SWINDLE AND THE WOMAN

The Statue Game: *A broad man in the garb of a workman pushes through the crowd and collapses at the last empty table. Though he looks innocent enough, he appears to be hiding something under his shirt. He calls for a pitcher of ale and a tray of meat. As a waiter comes forward with the ale, the man appears startled. He says something to the waiter, who shakes his head angrily. The patron gestures to what he is holding under his shirt, and the waiter's eyes light up, but still he shakes his head. The two men exchange words before the workman turns to you. "Can you help me? I forgot my poke in my room. Can you hold this table for me while I run and get it?" He pauses for a moment, and then continues, "Just so it doesn't look like I'm sticking you with my bill, I'll leave this." He sets a beautiful porcelain statue of a woman painted in strange colors on the table.*

Orlun asks someone that is obviously trustworthy first -- a cleric of a Lawful god, a warrior in the livery of a noble, etc. Though he seems embarrassed and apprehensive at leaving his treasure with strangers, he also seems honest enough. If specifically asked, Orlun says that he's a regular here, and that he trusts the waiter

who still stands with the pitcher watching the whole scene (and who is brother Farad). Orlun insists that he'll be right back and quickly leaves.

Whoever picks up the statue must deal with a malevolent curse (see statue description at the end of this encounter).

Soon after Orlun leaves, Farad returns with a platter of meat and offers to pay 300 gp for the statue. If the party agrees, Farad tells them that he doesn't carry that amount of money on him and to meet upstairs in his quarters after his shift ends (time period left up to the Judge). He suggests that the party leave the tavern before Orlun comes back.

If the party leaves with the statue and does not return, refer to the description of the item at the end of this encounter for further effects. If they wait for Orlun (about 30 minutes), he claims that the waiter offered to buy the statue for 50 sp. It should be clear that Orlun is not a bright man, but offers to share any "profits" with anyone that will help him negotiate a good price for the statue. If the party offers anything over 100 gp for the statue, Orlun agrees, collects the money and leaves.

NOTE: If the party happens to arrive at Farad's room any later than about an hour after his "shift" ends, the room is unoccupied. No one downstairs knows of a waiter that fits Farad's description, and no one remembers seeing Orlun.

Farad's Quarters: *When you arrive upstairs, a thin wooden door to a small room stands open. The waiter sits on his bed inside, head in his hands, clearly weeping. He looks up when he hears you, his eyes red and look hollow.*

Farad begins telling the party that someone has broken into his room and stolen his money, but doesn't get very far before his mistress springs her trap.

The Painted Woman unfolds from the shadows of the ceiling and attacks. Farad (and Orlun if present) shriek and cower in the room or the hallway while the Painted Woman feasts.

THE PAINTED WOMAN

The Painted Woman: Init +3; Atk Talons +6 melee (1d3 STR); AC 15; HD 4d6; hp: 22; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP Semi-corporeal; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +4; AL C

The Painted Woman is a semi-corporeal entity from the Veil of Unlife. A thing vaguely shaped like a shadowy woman over 15' tall, the creature's skin courses with a skein of variegating colors like oil on water. The Painted Woman rips at its victims with long multi-colored talons, which deal no apparent physical wounds; they seem to dig into opponents' very souls, draining them of Strength. Those reduced to 0 Strength fade into the Veil and an eternity of torment. The creature exists between the Veil of Unlife and the corporeal world. In this state, those attacking the entity with normal weapons miss 50% of the time. With weapons made of cold iron or silver, the miss chance is reduced to 20%. Magical weapons or any weapon blessed by a Lawful or Neutral cleric ignore this condition.

THE FIGURE OF THE PAINTED WOMAN

This eight-inch tall porcelain statuette is flawless. Though the underlying surface is bone white, the statuette has been delicately painted with bright colors that masterfully fade into each other. Staring at the figure for more than a few moments, one perceives that the colors are actually moving across the surface of the porcelain like oil on water.

The *Figure of the Painted Woman* is an insidious artifact created by an unknown demon residing in the Veil of Unlife. Those that handle or possess the figure for more than 1d3 turns must make a Will save (DC 10 – rolled secretly by the Judge). On a failure, the bearer feels strongly attached to the statue. He or she may part with it, but at only a great price. The obsession only grows for the cursed; culminating over only a few days with the person willingly sacrificing themselves to protect the figure. On a successful save, the bearer must continue to pass Will saves (DC +1 per hour possessed) or fall into the same trap.

The owner of the statue begins to have troubling dreams. Mildly disturbing at first, over the next few months the nightmares soon disrupt the person's daily life (Fortitude save each night – DC 12 – or -2 to all d20 rolls for the day). Exactly 142 days after possessing the figure, the bearer is visited by an indistinct shadowy entity claiming to be the Countess of the Veil. She demands that the bearer enter her



service (via *Patron Bond*). Those that refuse remain cursed with terrible nightmares, though the *Figure of the Painted Woman*, and the person's obsession with it, dissolves to dust. A duplicate appears in another place and another time. Those that accept are "cured" of both nightmares and obsession, though they now have a powerful master with malevolent aims.



SLAVES OF THE VISITANTS

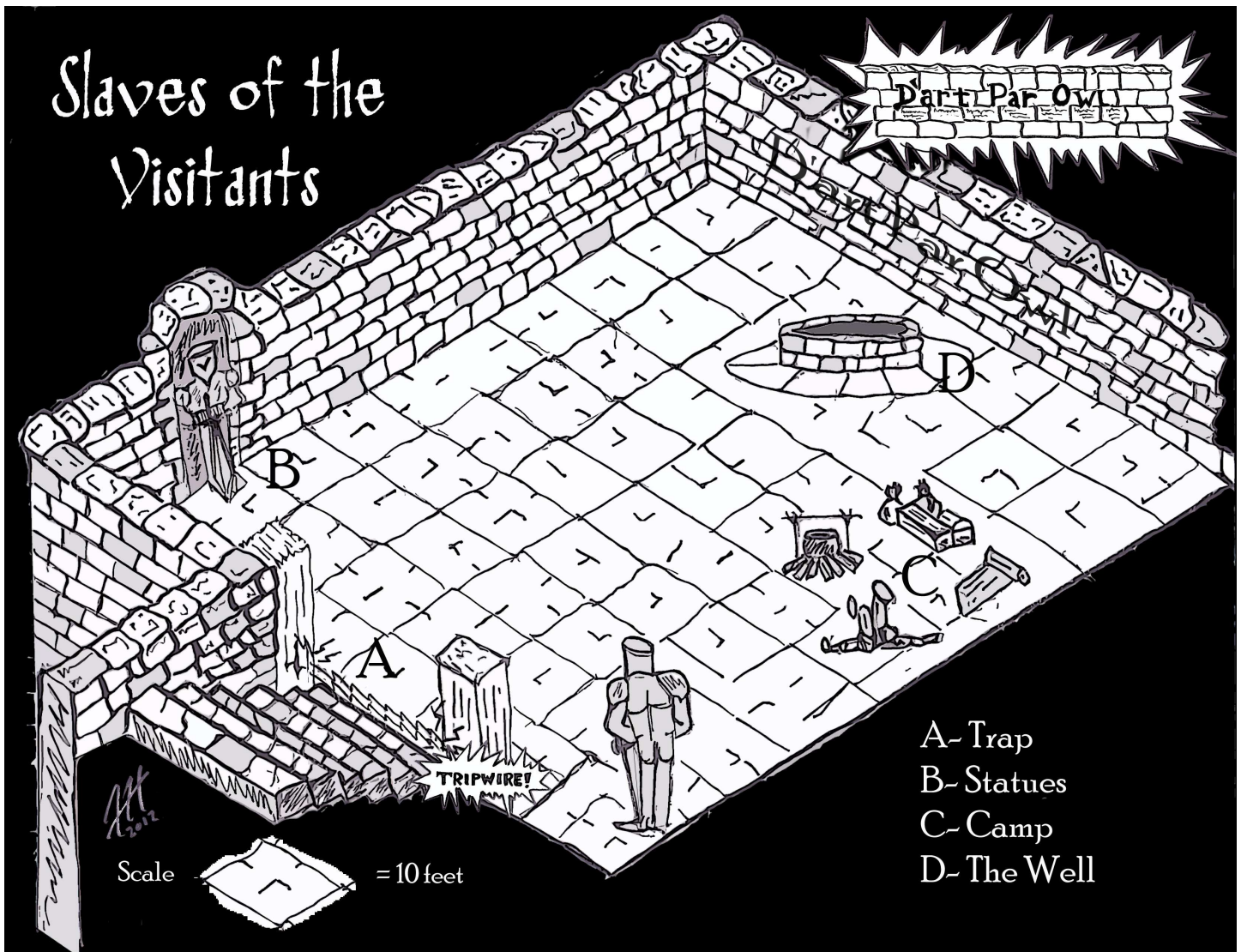
Low Level -- By John Humphrey

The Slaves of the Visitants takes place in a cairn used as hideout for some unfortunate bandits. The place now contains a nexus to another dimension that is being exploited by evil forces from an unknown world. The cairn is best placed near a settlement, as the main hook is one of a bandit problem.

BACKGROUND

Drawn to the rare spots where dual realities overlap, a visitant is the active consciousness of a chaotic being able to project its will between two dimensions. Visitants manifest themselves as amorphous black entities and can possess the very fibers of a particular reality, essentially animating inanimate objects.

When the first visitant reached through just such a nexus, it encountered a rough group of men camping in an ancient cairn. Seeking advantage, the visitant slew the bandits and pulled in a servant. Seeking knowledge and artifacts that might expand the interdimensional nexus, and thus increase their range within this world, the entities have ventured out of the cairn and gruesomely murdered several travelers on a nearby road. The characters may be enlisted to find the group of bandits suspected of perpetrating these horrible acts or may stumble upon the corpse of the visitants' last victim on their own.



THE ROAD

At a bend in the road skirting the southern spur of a large forested hill, the party finds the latest victim of the visitants. The young man's corpse rests in the brush nearby, but his legs are clearly visible to anyone on the road.

Investigating the corpse reveals it to likely be a farmer from a nearby village. Though the body displays horrible wounds, they do not seem to be a result of any weapon familiar to the party. Those that can track (DC 10) do notice two pairs of large, strangely squared, footprints following a trail toward the crest of the hill.

THE CAIRN

As you near the hilltop, you see an earthen tunnel framed in rough stone cutting into the hillside. Just inside the narrow entrance a set of stairs leads down into darkness. A damp, foul stench emits from below.

General Features: The passage into the cairn is only wide enough to enter single-file. The walls, floor, and steps are fitted stone, damp and cold. The 15' high packed earth ceiling is supported by several stone arches that are further supported by wooded beams. The interior is dark.

Area A – Stairs: *A damp foulness tickles your nose and clinging cobwebs itches your skin as you descend a short flight of stone stairs. As you near the bottom you can see the stairs open into a large chamber.*

Across the last stair step, a thin trip rope is stretched between two wall beams that support the stone arch above (easily noticed by a cautious thief; DC 10 INT for others actively watching). When tripped, earth and stone fall on the character in the second rank (DC 15 Reflex to avoid or 3d6 damage). This collapse blocks the passage and requires 1d6 rounds to clear. Unless the characters do something silly like cut the rope, they can easily bypass the trip rope.

Area B – Statues and Bandits: *A pair of ripe corpses in studded leathers, their heads dashed in, slump in a make-shift campsite in the center of this chamber. A small fire pit and bedrolls are obvious as well as numerous sacks, satchels and crates around the area. A pair of grim statues depicting ancient warriors with dull white eyes stands at attention opposite each other in a stone framed recess. Each holds a gigantic stone sword.*

Weeks ago, the visitants possessed the two statues, ambushed the bandits, and slew them. Remaining

within the statues, they've been attacking travelers on the road since. The visitants wait until the party is less vigilant – and preferably dispersed -- before attacking. Anyone investigating the statues' feet sees that they match the footprints found near the road and are, strangely, spattered with mud to the knee.

These visitant-possessed statues fight until destroyed, and then the visitants themselves leap to the bandit corpses. If these are destroyed, the visitants possess any dead PC's. If they have no other options, the creatures flee to the back of the room and down the well. It in this brief window the actual visitant can be attacked. Visitants appear as dark bipedal shapes, often resembling their last host.

Statue (Visitant Possessed): Init +6 (surprise); Atk: Stone Sword +3 melee (1d8+2); AC 16, HD 3d8, hp: 14 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP Surprise 50% of time; SV Fort +4, Ref -2, Will -2; AL N. HP 14 each.

Dead Bandit (Visitant Possessed) Init +2; Atk Sword +3 melee (1d8+2); AC 14; HD 2d8; HP: 11 each, 12; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +1; AL C;

One bandit wields a fine quality battleaxe (75 gp) and has a long curved dagger with a bejeweled pommel (50 gp) on his belt. The second bandit wields a simple iron long sword.

Visitant (2) Init +4, Atk: Nil AC 16, HD 2d8, MV 30' Act 1d20, SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +6 HP 9 each. SP: Inanimate possession, Immune to non-magical attacks.

Inanimate Possession: The visitant can possess and animate any nearby humanoid-shaped inanimate object, however, cannot extend their will beyond about a mile from the edge of a planar nexus.

Area C – The Well: *A stout fieldstone well, 4 feet high and 4 feet in diameter sits at the back of the chamber. No light seems to pierce the darkness inside the well and bloody streaks lead to the stone base at several points. Directly behind the well, a message is scratched on the wall in white chalk: D'ART PAR OWL. Smaller, arcane script is written beneath the strange phrase.*

The well drops 40 feet to cold clear water. Twenty or so feet below the surface, the well connects to a fast flowing underground river. Anyone swimming down into it is hopelessly swept away. More dangerous, however, is the nexus of realities that spawned the visitants. Anyone descending the well has a 1 in 4 chance of being sucked into another reality, the details of which are left up to the Judge.

D'ART PAR OWL is an anagram for the spell *Ward Portal* written here by a wizard at some point who tried and failed to close this portal. *Read Magic* can be used to understand that a spell is written here, but it cannot be decoded until the anagram is solved. If *Ward Portal* is cast on the well, a result of 32+ on the Spell Check temporarily destabilizes the nexus of realities enough to prevent further incursions from the visitants. It is up to the Judge how long this lasts.

Hidden under a flagstone near the well is the bandit's stash: a longbow and 40 arrows wrapped in oilcloth, 435 gp in various coins, several small green gems (worth 78 gp total), a set of sailor's navigational tools (sexton, spyglass, compass, and a leather scrip full of nautical charts and a ship's log for the *Victory* describing a strange attack by a massive fire-spitting beetle (see *Sails Aflame* later in this book).



SAILS AFLAME!

Low Level -- By Jon Wilson

A massive skarajian, or giant flint beetle, attacks the character's ship. Alternatively, the characters could discover the creature's grotesque courtship displays on a lonely stretch of beach. Even with the help of NPC sailors, the skarajian is a difficult creature to slay outright, though its single-minded behavior may save a lower-level party.

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

If the characters are at sea:

A dull thud rocks the entire ship and immediately yells of sailors become screams. The head and carapace of a massive beetle rises above the starboard yardarms, and a foul stench of some gas washes over you. The beetle's scrabbling claws then sink into the deck emitting a bright spark. The gas suddenly ignites in a massive fireball that sets sails and men aflame.

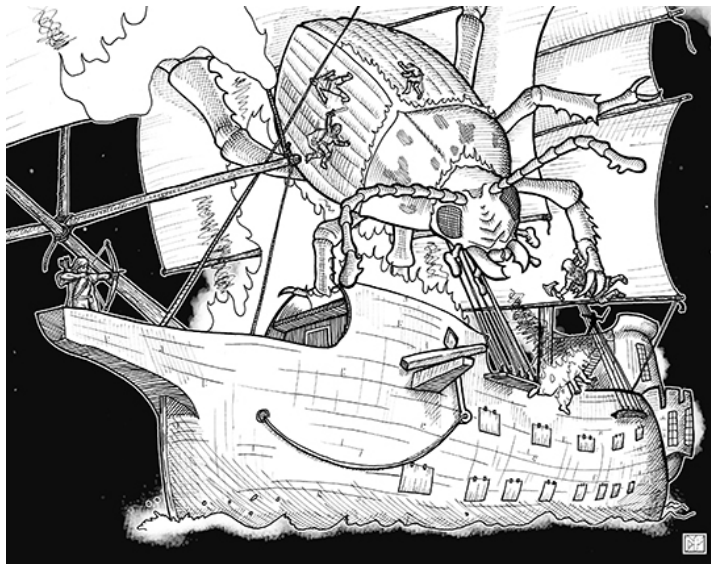
If the characters are on land:

Crashing waves boom from behind the dune that you finally managed to crest. You see a strange conical pile of flotsam above the tide line: an arrangement of driftwood tangled amongst parts of a sailing ship. Within this display are grisly corpses and body parts. Several hundred yards down the beach, you see another similar pile.

ATTACK OF THE SKARAJIAN

At sea, the skarajian collects additional flotsam for its mating display. It attempts to scuttle ships and adhere flotsam and the corpses of drowned sailors' to its back, swimming away to construct its mating displays. To this end, it focuses its attacks on ships and corpse collection, only retaliating after taking 10 hp of damage. Once it harvests flotsam and bodies, the skarajian disengages from combat. If a living creature is somehow adhered to the creature's back, it requires a DC 18 Strength check to break free of the adhesive.

On land, the skarajian typically lurks under the sand near its mating displays. Threatened by trespassers, it rushes out of its hiding place to attack. The creature does not pursue retreating attackers.



Skarajian: Init -2; Atk claws +3 melee (1d10+5), mandibles +1 (2d10); AC 18; HD 6d8; hp 37; MV 30' swim 60'; Act 2d20; SP Stealth, Nauseating gas, Burst of Fire, Fire Resistance; SV Fort +6, Ref +0, Will +5; AL N

Stealth: When at sea, the skarajian moves underwater until striking its target. On land, it stays buried under the sand until it detects intruders that threaten its mating displays. In either situation, the creature surprises prey on a 5 in 7 chance.

Nauseating Gas: Those within 10' of the skarajian must make a DC 13 Fortitude save or become nauseated (-2 to all rolls) by the gas emanating from the creature's carapace.

Burst of Fire: Whenever the skarajian hits with its massive claws, a burst of fire occurs if the die roll is an even number. The igniting cloud of odious gas deals 3d12 damage to all within a 20' radius. A Reflex save (DC 14) results in half damage, though there is a 20% chance that anything combustible worn by the character catches fire.

Fire Resistance: The skarajian is immune to 36 points of fire damage per event.

CAVE OF THE ICE MISTRESS

Mid-Level -- by Ken Jelinek

Rescuing a maiden imprisoned by bizarre, other-worldly arachnids leads to a deadly game of cat and mouse with the Ice Mistress. The characters must avoid her crystalline spider pets and her terrible gaze that will turn them into statues of ice!

This encounter is designed for 4-8 5th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

Millennia ago, the Ice Mistress ruled another glacial world with a frozen iron fist. Known for her lack of compassion, the sorceress-queen's sadistic punishments kept her ice giant generals and frost dragon stable compliant. All feared her predilection to freeze her enemies into statues of ice. The Ice Mistress would then delight in watching the statues melt slowly, only to be replaced by others who displeased her.

Recently, she was thrust through a portal into this world against her will. Despite her furious desire to return and avenge this insolence, she created a small lair while she focused her studies on her return. The cave, nestled in the Valley of Frozen Despair, is easy to find and easier to avoid, assuming interlopers can ignore a cry for help...

CAVE OF THE ICE MISTRESS

Days of travel through the unceasing blizzard have rendered you all weary and almost snow-blind. As darkness falls, you make out a cave entrance through the blowing snow. The flickering flames within promise light, warmth, and perhaps some hospitality for a night. Before you can fully consider camping here, you hear a scream and a cry for help from within the cave.

General Features: Unless otherwise noted, the cave's ceiling is approximately 40' high, and the walls are naturally-shaped and encased in crystal-clear ice. The ambient temperature is slightly below freezing.

Area 1-1 – Cave Entrance: *Turning the corner to follow the light source, you see the shadowy form of a beautiful woman. She's bound to the wall at the end of the tunnel, and her cries and sobs clearly sound like the ones you heard outside.*

The woman is encased from the waist down in strands of ice splayed in web-like patterns. The icy bonds also restrain her wrists and forehead, obscuring her face.

Application of a torch or other small flame melts the bonds in one round. Freed, the woman introduces herself as Magera, a lost traveler abducted while en route through the Valley. She remembers a huge, monstrous demon coming out of the cave and plucking her from her caravan. She recalls nothing else while being held prisoner here for at least a few days. Blindsided by the attack, she cannot describe the demon except to say it was big enough to pull her off her horse. She has not heard or seen the demon since. She is appropriately grateful for rescue.

The "ice demon" was General Urd, the last surviving ice giant who passed into this plane with the Ice Mistress. Luckily, he does not figure into this encounter (although the judge is encouraged to make use of this dangling thread).

As the blizzard worsens outside, it should become clear to the characters that they can either attempt to survive the night here, or go out into the blizzard and die. In addition to keeping themselves alive, they must consider Magera, who is AC 11 with 3 hp and a +1 bonus to Reflex and Will saves. She has already taken 2 points of damage from the icy web she was trapped in.

Area 1-2 – Statuary: *The passage opens into what must have been the caldera of a long-dormant volcano. The large, circular chamber reveals snowfall and the night sky some 200' above. Six statues, bedecked in armor, encircle a huge bonfire in the center of the room. Just north of the bonfire is the crystalline statue of a giant! There is another tunnel entrance in the north wall of the caldera.*

This is the Ice Mistress's trophy room. She used her gaze attack to freeze these 7 victims, but not before having the ice giant build the bonfire first. Turned to ice, the statues are melting an inch or so each round and cannot be saved; however, their armor and supplies are still usable. The statues are wearing chainmail, studded leather, banded mail, and two sets of leather armor. Two of the statues are wearing



backpacks containing 10 torches each, 1 week worth of rations, a flint and steel, and two hand-sized mirrors. The ice giant is oddly without armor, weapons, or clothing. Magera screams when she sees the giant, mistaking him for the “demon” who abducted her.

Area 1-3 – The Ice Mistress’s Playground:

The short tunnel twists and turns, opening up into a large, dark cavern. You hear the echoes of your own footsteps as you approach.

Characters illuminating the entrance of the cavern see that sheets of strange metal hang here and there from the ceiling. They are apparently encased in ice, and they form twisting and turning corridors through the cavern.

As soon as a light source enters the room, six crystalline spiders attack. The Ice Mistress, hiding behind one of the metal sheets, watches for a round or two and looks for spellcasters before entering battle. She attacks spellcasters first, but will always attempt to use her gaze on a trapped foe before engaging a free

opponent. Whenever she successfully freezes or lances an opponent, she cackles and taunts the party before retreating to surprise from another direction the next round, using the strange metal hangings as cover. The Ice Mistress fights to the death but will not pursue the party outside of the cave.

Clever characters may look for the Ice Mistress via reflections in the icy sheets. Engaging in combat using reflections to avoid her gaze incurs a -4 attack penalty.

Crystalline Spider: Init +1, Atk web +3 ranged (1d6); AC 16; HD 2d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP immune to cold effects, spider climb, ice web; SV Fort +5, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N

Crystalline spiders resemble tarantulas with 1-foot leg spans. Instead of hair, their bodies are covered with a translucent crystalline material similar to pure ice. They produce webbing made of ice with strands ending in icy sharp spicules.

Cold Immunity: Crystalline spiders take no damage

from cold- or ice-based spell effects.

Spider Climb: Crystalline spiders climb walls and ceilings at their normal movement rate.

Ice Web: Crystalline spiders can shoot barbed webs of ice up to 30' to entrap their foes. These webs require a DC 20 STR check to break, but melt in a round if a heat source is placed near them. Entrapped characters take an additional 1d4 points of damage from the barbs by trying to break free. Melting the webs causes no additional damage.

The Ice Mistress: Init +4; Atk claw +3 melee (dmg 1d6+2); AC 18; HD 6d4; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP gaze, ice spears, summon crystalline spiders (1/day); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +3; AL C

The Ice Mistress appears as a woman with serpentine skin. Her lower torso is a 15' length of serpentine tail segmented like a caterpillar. She has 4 arms, two of which are vestigial and useless besides grasping. She has similar vestigial arms as a crown atop her head, with bizarre, ever-open eyes in the wrists.

Icy Gaze: The Ice Mistress gazes on her opponent, forcing him or her to make a DC 16 Fort save to avoid being turned into a translucent statue of ice. Equipment is unaffected, and the Ice Mistress must gaze into the eyes of her opponent directly.

Ice Spear: The Ice Mistress can shoot barbed spears of ice to impale and immobilize her opponent once per round. The summoned spears do 1d10 points of damage and pin their opponent to the ground or wall. These spears require a DC 20 STR check to break, but they will melt in a round if a heat source is placed near them. Entrapped characters take an additional 1d8 points of damage from the barbs by trying to break free. Melting the spears causes no additional damage.

Summon Crystalline Spiders: The Ice Mistress can summon 2d4 crystalline spiders once per day. The spiders return from whence they came 2 days later.



THE LONG SLEEP

Low-Level -- by Ken Jelinek

Seeking either the village undertaker or perhaps a lost item among the dead, the characters investigate a mausoleum only to discover that a would-be necromancer has very recently taken up residence during his year-long arcane sabbatical to achieve necromantic affinity (See the Arcane Affinity spell in the core rules).

This encounter is designed for 8-12 0-level characters or 4-6 1st-level ones. The necromancer's "familiar" can be problematic for 0-level characters, but they can be circumvented.

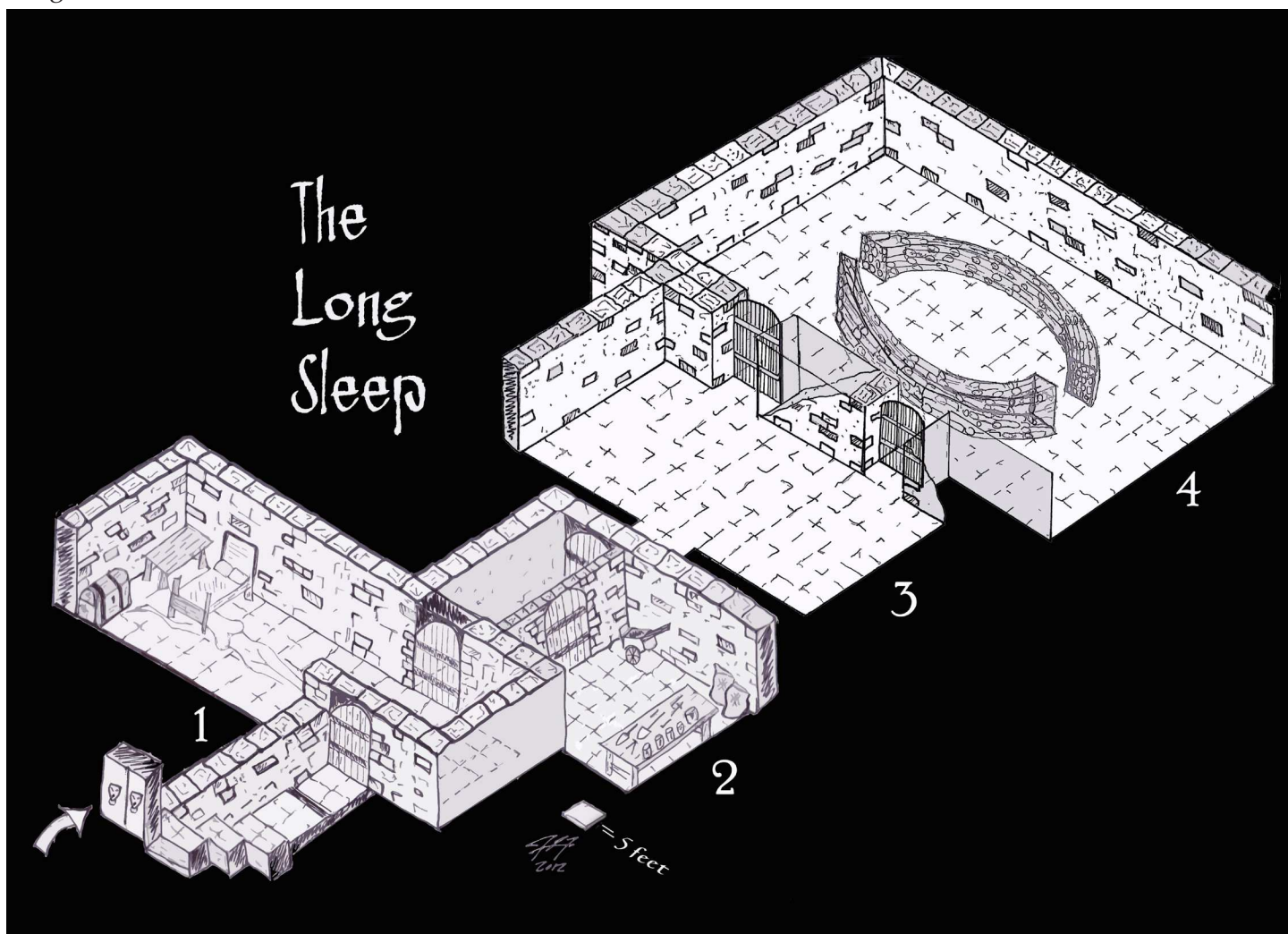
BACKGROUND

The ruins of a long-defunct shrine to a long-forgotten god became the massive mausoleum for over 300

dead. Now the villagers have their respective funeral rites, but they've grown accustomed to storing their dead in rows along the walls of the mausoleum. Still, the undertaker has gone missing, and strange odors have begun wafting from the cracks of the mausoleum door.

THE MAUSOLEUM

You stand at the top of the crypt entrance. The heavy stone door is slightly ajar, and its hinges glisten with oil, an apparent sign of excellent care by the missing undertaker. Through the crack, you can see the flickering of candlelight emanating out into the stairwell before you. As crypts go, this one is more inviting than most.



General Features: Unless otherwise noted, candles in sconces illuminate the crypt along the interior walls every 5 feet or so. All interior doors are wooden, banded with iron, and unlocked. Each door can be locked from the inside with a sturdy wooden beam through two iron rings that hang from the door.

Area 1 – Antechamber: *The well-swept floor is covered in a tile mosaic depicting a young woman in bright yellow robes with outstretched hands. The mosaic obviously covers the entire floor of the room, but a simple wooden bed, table, and chest obscure the face of the woman in the western corner of the room.*

The undertaker lived here. The bed is disheveled, and a log of burials lies on the bedside table. Studious characters discover that the burials go back 30 years. On average, 30-40 people die each year, more in winter.

The unlocked chest contains a clean, bleached human skull that is faintly glowing with a yellow gem inside. The skull is the undertaker's, and the yellow citrine inside possesses a unique magical property. Scavengers and eaters of the dead flee from it and cower in its presence. The budding necromancer created it as a safeguard against his minions turning on him. The citrine is worth 20 gp as a gem, perhaps more to someone like an undertaker.

Area 2 – Workroom: *On the floor, swaths of what look like rusty paint lead through the doorway into this room. Darker grey stains on the grey floor of this chamber surround a large worktable. Trowels, baskets, jars, and shovels lay precisely on the worktable. Large sacks, a broom and mop hang neatly on hooks on the walls, and a rickety wheelbarrow rests in the northwest corner.*

The tools and table are fastidiously clean. The sacks contain 8 wineskins filled with water, and several days' worth of food (dried strips of goat meat, turnips, carrots and potatoes). The baskets and jars contain remnants of dried blood. The stains on the floor are also old blood stains consistent with bodies being dragged to and from this room.

The wheelbarrow holds more than it appears: Anyone may move up to three times his or her carrying capacity with a cumulative 5' reduction in movement. Contents heavier than about 350 pounds break the axle.

Area 3 – Boneyard: *As soon as the door opens, the scent of decayed flesh permeates your senses. The decapitated body of a man lies sprawled on the floor, his shabby clothes in bloodstained tatters, and his right hand still clutching a piece of white chalk. A smudged message*

scrawled on the floor near his hand reads: "STAY AWA". The remaining letters trail away.

A pile of clean bones, 15' around and 6' high, rests in the center of this chamber. Corpses are stacked three and four bodies high along the east wall. Closed doors lead to the south and southeast, while a hallway exits in the northwest corner.

The body belongs to the undertaker, and his note reveals the last warning of a dying man. While characters may assume the note was a warning to "stay away", the undertaker's actual warning was to "stay awake" to avoid being flayed by the fleshrenders in room 4.

The fleshrenders picked these bones clean and carefully stacked them here for the necromancer's dark purposes. Characters examining the corpse stacks, however, discover that they are all female humans. The Necromancer plans to animate a bride once he hones his craft.

Area 4 – The Chamber of Sleep: *Bones rattle, falling from a small pile as the door swings open. This room is filled with the corpses of the villagers. Stacked four to six bodies high, the undertaker clearly was precise in his work. You cannot see much inside the wall of bodies encircling the center of the room, but you hear skittering feet, the cackling of birds, and the maniacal shriek of someone within.*

The bone pile by the door alerts the fleshrenders and the Necromancer hidden behind the grisly wall of bodies. Initiative proceeds normally, as opponents must circumnavigate the wall of bodies to actually engage each other. The Necromancer appears as a tainted wizard with an elongated crooked neck and the head of a vulture. He can only cackle, screech, and caw.

Astute characters may use the undertaker's skull in area 1 to cause the fleshrenders to flee the room; however, the Necromancer focuses attacks and spells on anyone wielding the skull. The fleshrenders pursue those that flee but can be outrun. The necromancer fights to the death but cannot break or otherwise open barred doors.

Fleshrenders (8): see sidebar.

The Necromancer: Init +0; Atk dagger -1 melee (1d4-1) or harmful spell (see below); AC 10; HD 3d4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP fear, sleep 3/day; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +4; AL C

Fear: As an action, the Necromancer targets one

opponent and instills cowering fear, appearing to them as a giant bone-gnashing ghoul. The target must make a DC 12 Will save or flee if possible, for 1d6 rounds. If flight is not possible, the target cowers furthest from the Necromancer. This effect does not incapacitate the victim (See the fleshrenders' flay ability).

Sleep: The Necromancer casts *sleep* (p. 155 of core rulebook – Spell Check +4), but these casts are never lost due to a spell failure.

FLESHRENDERS

Fleshrender: Init -2; Atk bite-2 melee (1d3); AC 13; HD 3d8; MV jump 20' or fly 10'; Act 1d20; SP flay (1d5 and 1 Str); SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will -1, AL C

The carapace and insectoid legs of the skittering creature belies some kind of cockroach, but the front torso and paunch reveal the gangly head, neck, and belly of a well-fed vulture. Its sickly eyes stare vacantly as if the aberration awaits either food or instruction. Its membranous wings are tattered and unable to sustain true flight.

Wizards in the service of certain demons create these abominable scavengers. Fleshrenders are slothful and generally cowardly, but once a victim is incapacitated, they leap to flay living flesh from bone.

Flay: Fleshrenders flay the flesh from any incapacitated opponent, dealing 1d5 damage and 1 Strength point per round as they strip muscle from bone. The Strength damage cannot be healed naturally.



THE CULT OF THE FLICKERING SIGN

Level 3 -- by Paul Wolfe

Discovering a grisly murder in a back alley, the characters are drawn into investigating a strange symbol that shifts and changes depending on the viewer. This encounter is designed for a party of 3rd level characters. Though it can be adapted to any level party, parties below 3rd may be overmatched if they stand and fight.

BACKGROUND

The Flickering Sign is a magical symbol created by the followers of Jalianos, called the Fluid Forms, a demonic patron that grants its followers shape shifting powers. Although the cult led by Emeron, a local artist, is not officially bound to the Fluid Forms, they revere the Sign and have set up a shrine nearby in the hopes of gaining the attention and patronage of Jalianos. Seeking a sacrifice, they unknowingly ambushed and killed a servant of the Fluid Forms, with dire consequences.

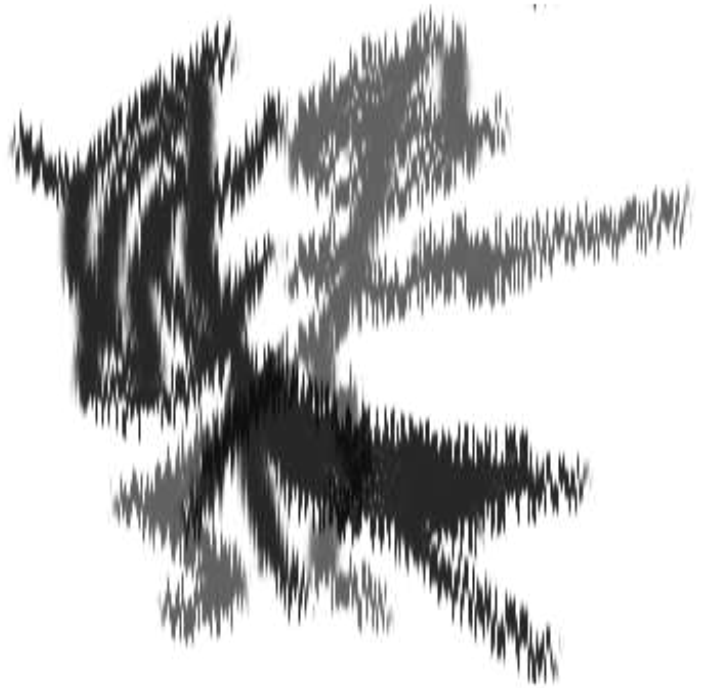
PLAYER INTRODUCTION

The contact said that a buyer would be in this alleyway, but as you twist through the stinking piles of refuse and offal, you realize you've probably been had. At the alley's dead end, you see the splayed body of a young man – presumably a noble from what's left of his doublet. Within the bloody cavity that was once his trunk, you see that the man's organs have been removed and the empty torso stuffed with wads of fur or hair. Above the corpse, a symbol is carved into the stone wall of the crumbling building that blocks the alley. Focusing on the symbol, you realize that it shifts its appearance moment to moment into various stylized forms of animals, people, and something in between.

THE BLOODY ALLEY

General Features: The alley is cluttered with rubbish. One of the piles hides a secret door that leads to the cult's shrine (DC 12; Door is locked: DC 10 to open).

There are a few clues in the alley. Several bloody footprints (human, halfling and dwarf – all barefoot) surround the body, though they don't seem to lead anywhere. Examining the corpse reveals that it still



wears a silver ring with the symbol of a well-known local noble. Further examination determines that the man was likely a servant rather than an actual nobleman (work worn hands, above average but not extravagant clothing).

The sign itself is inscrutable. Magical investigation reveals that it is an enchantment meant to be obfuscated and that no two images appear more than once. Additionally, everyone viewing the symbol sees a different image. Those that have had dealings with Jalianos in the past instantly know that it is a symbol used by his bound followers to retain shape shifting forms for future use.

Reporting the discovery to the authorities essentially ends the encounter. The watch has the body gathered and, if given the silver ring, returns both to the nobleman. Devious Judges can have the party under suspicion for the murder or devise other hooks.



THE FLUID FORMS

Beyond the concealed door, a short flight of steps descends into a low-ceilinged and cramped basement space that reeks of rotting meat. Along the back wall is a small raised wooden platform stacked with several clay jars sealed with wax. Above the platform is a wooden plaque carved with a strange symbol in the same style as the one seen in the alley, though this symbol is static. Three hooded and robed figures crouch before the shrine, raising bloody jars to their mouths.

All three figures stand and turn when the party enters. One of the figures, Tessan the halfling, shrieks and drops her jar. A side door opens and Emeron and Eira emerge after one round, the former with a bloody knife still in his hand. None of the cultists are eager to fight, though Emeron initially appears aggressive.

The shrine is used by the cult of the Flickering Sign. This particular branch consists of five young artists that believe enacting certain rituals near the site of a Flickering Sign allows them to shape shift – if they could just get the rituals right. One among their group, Emeron, is a very persuasive psychopath and has convinced the others that consuming the organs of their sacrifices will gain them the attention of Jalianos, who will then accept them into its service. Unfortu-

nately for Emeron and his gullible friends, half of that belief is true.

The young man killed by Emeron and his friends was actually a servant of the Fluid Forms. Their victim had drawn the Flickering Sign a few nights ago as he prepared to assassinate the nobleman into whose service he entered months ago. When the young man came to assume a new form, the cult ambushed him, believing the Flickering Sign to be sent by Jalianos as a guide to their actions. Instead, Jalianos sends one of its servants to deal with those that would interfere with its aims.

One round after the characters are confronted by Emeron and the cult, the symbol on the wall bursts with an intense blue light and then begins shifting in the manner seen in the alleyway. The cult is transfixed by this display, ignoring all but attacks from the party. The flickering demon steps out of the Sign 1d3 rounds later and attacks everyone in the room until slain. Emeron stands and accepts the demon with exaltation, though his companions flee screaming.

Emeron (male human): Init -1; Atk dagger +1 melee (1d4); AC 12; HD 1d6; hp 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref -1, Will +1; AL C

Cultists: Init +0; Atk club +0 melee (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d4; hp 3, 2, 2, 1; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +0; AL N

Cultists: Tessan (female halfling), Eira (female human), Paelu (male human), Kars (male dwarf)

Flickering Demon: Init +4; Atk jagged bone appendages, viscera and tentacles +3 melee (1d6+4); AC 16; HD 4d10; hp 28 MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP Constrict, Spatial Reality, immunities; SV Fort +3, Ref +8, Will +4; AL C

A mind-bending Gordian knot of tentacles, viscera and jagged bones flows across the floor. Though no more than 3' tall, the flickering demon's form changes as it moves and fights – striking out with jagged bone appendages, wrapping stinking viscera around its victim, and smashing with thick, serpentine tentacles. If the creature hits a victim with a roll of 18 or higher, that victim is entangled in the flowing form of the demon and takes 1d8+4 damage per round. The victim can make an opposed Strength check to escape. The demon has a +5 bonus this check.

The demon changes the space around it and is able to seemingly move objects (animate or inanimate) closer or farther away up to 10' (can shift 1d3 objects per round and still attack once). It cannot move walls, mounted doors, or any other object that's otherwise secured, but it can move people and other living things.

The demon is immune to damage from fire, cold, acid and mundane weapons. Silver and cold iron weapons deal normal damage, as does any weapon blessed by a Lawful or Neutral cleric.



ANOTHER MAN'S TREASURE

Any Level -- by Ken Jelinek

Discovering an abandoned treasure hoard, the characters get more than free riches when their luck subtly changes. Finding the cursed coin amid the easy money is the first challenge; identifying the exact nature of the curse may be harder!

The treasure hoard is an item-based encounter that can occur absolutely anywhere loot is found. The coin's curse is potentially lethal to 0-level characters depending on how long they're afflicted.

BACKGROUND

The mad witch Calcia gained infamy, even amongst the covens, for her ability to hold a grudge and to form particularly inventive curses. When a master thief and his gang of thugs blackmailed her into predicting their fate and then demanded monthly extortion payments of gold and gems, the celestials record only one payment ever being made. Calcia cursed one of the gold coins with the ability to gradually increase the bearer's luck at the expense the bearer's compatriots. The witch included the coin in the first payment. The long-forgotten thief died in less than a month when his gang slew him.

The coin changed hands many times over the years, yet only the celestials and demons know its true nature. The Coin of Calcia currently lies in the abandoned back office of a dead loan shark, but the coin can be located in any pile of treasure at the Judge's discretion.

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

The adventure begins when the characters come across the lifeless shop of the loan shark. Whether by accident or as part of another agenda, the characters should arrive at the front entrance to find it apparently vacant.

Eager to conclude your business with Krogan the Mean, you enter the loan shark's office. The dry clay floor of the main room is cracked with age, scattered with piles of clothing, tools, and other household items. A simple desk and chair sit opposite the entrance, and a wooden door behind the chair is ajar.

Though the room looks ransacked, it is not. Krogan was just a slob and the items were kept as collateral for his many loans. By the looks of it, he had fifty or so loans outstanding by the time of his demise.

The bare desk and chair are covered in dust. Even casual inspection of the door to the back office reveals that its lock was pried open.

Krogan's Back Office: The door meets soft resistance as you try to push it open. Candlelight radiating from room reveals an arm and hand with gnarled fingers lying on the floor. Behind the door, you discover the corpse of Krogan the Mean, a bloody hammer held in his other hand.

Krogan's was clearly killed by several blunt blows to the head and body. Still, he managed to drive off the unlucky assailant because the back room still contains all of his valuables.

Shelves packed with more random junk line the walls. Copper, silver, and even gold coins sit in columns beside an assayer's scale on the table in the center of the room. Gems of various sizes glitter in the light of a lone candle in a brass candelabrum on the table's center.

The shelves hold clothes, a few laborers' tools, and more flotsam. There are a total of 83 gp, 126 sp, and 219 cp on the table, along with a small garnet (200 gp), a banded agate, and a chalcedony (40 gp each). The coins are an eclectic mix of currencies from several different lands.

One of the gold coins is the Coin of Calcia (see sidebar). If one character loots all the coins, that character is the primary target of the Coin's effects. If the characters divvy up the loot while in the room, roll a die to determine which character picks up the Coin of Calcia.

If the characters leave the scene or otherwise do not take the treasure, devious Judges can still salvage the encounter by having the party summoned back to the scene as witness or suspect. In that case, the investigator or watchman that takes the coin benefits while

the entire party ends up cursed by their “ally’s” good fortune.

THE COIN OF CALCIA

The Coin of Calcia affects the character that keeps the coin and all party members, including hirelings or retainers, and any neutral parties present when the coin is taken. Hostile or attacking parties are excluded from the effect. As soon as the new owner stores the coin, he or she receives a cumulative +1 Luck modifier bonus, each day. Conversely, all of the character’s allies receive a cumulative -1 Luck modifier penalty each day. Judges are advised not to reveal these modifiers to players; rather, slowly introduce descriptions of their respective good and bad fortune. They must have somehow inadvertently pleased or displeased the deities!

From that point forward, the Coin is always the last gold coin to be traded or spent by the bearer. Its dark magic is constantly aware of all its owner’s coins and their values and subtly migrates away from fingertips, clings to sack seams, and otherwise delays its extraction until all other coins are removed first. Its owner can retrieve it effortlessly if it truly is the last gold coin he or she is carrying.

Eventually (and especially if the characters ignore their change in fortune), Calcia’s curse drains the bearer’s allies of Luck, causing them to die in unfortunate calamities. Eventually, the party may blame their ex-

tra-lucky ally for their misfortune. Either way, Calcia’s bitterness is perpetuated over the decades.

There are only four known ways that the curse’s effect ends:

- The owner dies (thus resetting the cycle).
- The owner gives away his or her last gold coin.
- The owner beseeches Calcia herself, wherever she is, to remove the curse.
- Divine or patron intervention, per the Judge’s discretion

The last two options are excellent hooks for further adventures, but judges are advised to make them short (if difficult) to avoid Calcia’s victory by modifier attrition.



THE NAZHGHAD'S INVOCATION

Mid-Level -- by Paul Wolfe

While traveling through the wilderness, the party discovers a savage wizard and his men-at-arms attempting to capture a vile creature. As they attempt to intervene, an enchantress arrives bent on releasing the creature and killing the wizard. This encounter has the potential to get out of control quickly, taxing even a higher-level party.

BACKGROUND

The alien patron, A'Kas, has bid his savage adherents to track down the descendants of its ancient prisoners, biological horrors spawned in a galaxy-spanning war. Ingara the Enchantress, an adherent to the Nazhghad (and opposed to A'Kas) also seeks these descendants. But her purpose is to lead the horrors to a new age of destruction.

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

Shouts and the clang of metal mingled with unearthly howls and the shriek of arcane words pierce the quiet of the wilderness. Below you, in a dim hollow, you can see stark silhouettes of fighting men, a large humanoid in a flowing cape and a thrashing serpentine horror in the staccato of flashing magic.

THE HORROR IN THE HOLLOW

Umbo, the ape-man witch, and his three men-at-arms fight the Slinking Horror in a shaded hollow about 300 yards from the main road. When the party enters the area, they realize that it is not just the trees that block the light, but some sort of unnatural shadow (20% miss chance on any attack in this area).

Umbo is attempting to manipulate a magical force cage while the men-at-arms use their spears to keep the creature hemmed in. Upon noticing the party, Umbo bellows for any obvious wizards in the party to help capture the creature. Any wizard can add his or her successful Spell Check (12 or higher) to Umbo's to successfully deploy the force cage. If any wizard rolls a 1 on the spell check, the force cage slices through a random combatant in the fray dealing 2d6+CL damage. On a total spell check of 24, the force cage encircles the creature and binds it, thrashing to the ground.

1d4 rounds after the creature is secured, Ingara the Enchantress enters the hollow. Though she initially attempts to appear neutral and concerned, once she realizes that Umbo bears the symbol of his patron, A'kas, she invokes the Nazhghad and attacks with a vengeance.

Umbo, the ape-man witch: Init +0; Atk weapon +3 ceremonial dagger (1d4), AC 12; HD 6d6; MV 30', 40' brachiate; Act 1d20; SP (Spell Check +6) Force Cage, Hand of A'Kas; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +4; AL N

Force Cage (SC 24): This artifact of A'Kas appears as a small iron cage that fits in the caster's hand. To trap a being, the caster must make a Spell Check equal to 10+HD and Will bonus of the creature to be captured. On a success, the creature is bound and immobilized by a shimmering net of force. Once trapped, the victim weighs next to nothing at the caster's touch, and may be pushed along easily, hovering inches above the ground.

Hand of A'Kas (SC 15): Umbo may make a Spell Check once per round to invoke A'Kas. On a success, Umbo projects a near invisible wave of destructive energy dealing 1d6+6 damage to all in a 30' line. Umbo may redirect this attack for 1d3+6 rounds. On a failed check, Umbo cannot invoke A'Kas for 1d3+4 rounds. On a natural 1, Umbo loses this power.

Men-at-Arms (3): Init +2; Atk Spear +3 melee (1d8+1); AC 16; HD 3d8; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP Gang Up; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +2; AL N

Gang Up: Each man-at-arms receives a +1 to attack for every ally attacking the same target. They also receive +1 damage for every two allies attacking the same target.

Ingara, Enchantress of the Nazhghad: Init +2; Atk weapon +1 melee (longsword 1d8-1); AC 13; HD 8d4; hp: 28; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP (Spell Check +9), Mystic Armor, Summon Aptera, Unbound; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +5; AL C

Mystic Armor (SC 14): Ingara summons a shimmer-

ing force that surrounds her like armor, granting a +4 to AC for 1d7+8 rounds.

Summon Aptera (SC 16): Ingara summons 1d3+4 flea-demon servants of the Nazhghad, which serve her until destroyed.

Unbound (SC 18): This spell frees bound creatures. When cast upon herself, Ingara is protected from any spell or effect that prevents her free movement for 1d3+8 rounds.

Aptera (1d3+4): Init +4; Atk Grab +3 melee (none), Bite (1d6, infestation); AC 16; HD 3d8; MV 20' Jump 100'; Act 1d20; SP Infestation; SV Fort +4, Ref +8, Will +2; AL C

Aptera are demonic flea-like creatures the size of a halfling. In combat, they leap great distances, grabbing and then adhering to their prey before delivering a painful bite. If an aptera hits with its grab, the victim can attempt to break free (Aptera receive +4 to hold their victims), otherwise, the creature delivers its bite on the next and subsequent rounds. Each bite may cause infestation in the victim.

Infestation: The aptera injects thousands of larva into its victim with every bite. On a successful Forti-

tude save (DC 14), the affected creature feels nauseous for 1d4 days (-2 to all Action Dice). On a failure, the victim suffers from nausea (as above), and also takes 1d4+3 damage per day – if killed, the victim is consumed by the larva, which quickly disperse. The condition may be cured as a disease, but requires 4 “dice” on a cleric’s Spell Check.

The Slinking Horror: Init +4; Atk Bite +9 melee (1d8+3, Constriction), AC 16; HD 8d8; MV 50' Swim 60'; Act 1d20; SP Constriction, Darkness; SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +4; AL C

The slinking horror is a 10' long eel-like creature, armored with thick white chitin plates. Their heads are cobra-like, though they lack visible eyes and have mouths crowded with small but sharp teeth. In combat, the Slinking Horror exudes an unnatural darkness that dims sight (20% miss chance) in a 50' radius. On a successful bite, the creature constricts its slimy body around the victim. The victim may attempt to escape the constriction, otherwise the creature deals 1d6+3 damage the next and subsequent rounds, as well as administering a free bite. The slinking horror has a +8 for all checks to oppose escape.



SPELL DUEL: UMBO VS. INGARA

When the two wizards attack each other, they use the table below. With a successful Spell Check (DC 12 or higher), a party wizard can add his or her Spell Check result -10 to either combatant's result.

Spell Check Difference (DC 12 or higher)	0	1-2	3-4	5+
Ingara	PD	Biting Flies	Claw Strike	Controlling Infestation
Umbo	PD	Disruption	Hand of A'Kas	Force Cage

PD: As per Phlogiston Disturbance in the Core Rules.

NOTE: On a failed check, either wizard loses a random power for 1d3+4 rounds. On a natural 1, the wizard loses a random power for a day. Should the opposed wizard roll a successful check in this instance, that wizard may choose the effect from those listed below.

INGARA'S ATTACKS

Biting Flies: Umbo is surrounded by a distracting swarm of biting flies that cause a -2 to all d20 rolls. He may spend a full round dispelling the swarm with a DC 12 Spell Check. Multiple effects are cumulative.

Claw Strike: Ingara's arms transform into chitin claws, striking with a +4 and dealing 1d6 damage each. This mutation remains for 1d3 turns.

Controlling Infestation: Ingara's claws inject otherworldly larva into Umbo's system. On a failed Fortitude save (DC 14), the ape-witch is under the control of Nazhghad's enchantress, permanently.

UMBO'S ATTACKS

Disruption: A flash of electricity disrupts Ingara's concentration, dealing a -2 penalty to all d20 rolls. She may spend a full round regaining her concentration. Multiple effects are cumulative.

Hand of A'Kas: As power description above, but lasts one round.

Force Cage: As item description above, but the Slinking Horror is released.

ICON OF THE BLOOD GODDESS

Mid-Level -- by Daniel J. Bishop

Within the back alleys of a metropolitan area, an icon of an emaciated goddess has broken through ancient brickwork. As the Blood Goddess gains worshippers, she becomes more difficult to defeat. Worse, some of the PCs may inadvertently become worshippers, and what may have seemed benevolent at first becomes a curse....

This series of encounters is designed to span several gaming sessions. Judges may wish to insert these strange and horrific happenings into any adventure or as interludes when characters return to town. With this in mind, the early encounters are suitable for parties of level 0 or 1, and the encounters quickly become more difficult. Characters should be at least level 3 for the final encounter. This may necessitate extending the timeline of the Blood Goddess' return to power, depending on the level of the starting party. Any time after the Surplus of Rats encounter, characters may investigate the temple and put a (temporary) end to the Blood Goddess.

As these events are designed to take place in any Judge's milieu, details about the city and characters therein are kept relatively generic.

BACKGROUND

The nameless Blood Goddess is a Chaotic deity that appealed to the poor and disenfranchised. Devotees give their own blood to the goddess as well as feed her with the blood of the rich. Memory of the Blood Goddess has faded; she is a very ancient deity. When her emaciated clay image emerges through the old bricks, it seeks worshippers once more.

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

Passing through the back alleys of the city, you come across an idol of a goddess inset into a wall. She appears to be a naked emaciated woman formed from the purest white clay. Several candles have been placed before her, many lit, but some unlit. The scattered bricks on the ground and the way the wall around the idol is broken suggest the wall has burst outward around her. The idol is about 2 feet high.

This is the Icon of the Blood Goddess. Any PC who

lights a candle and places it before the icon gains a +1 bonus to Luck as long as he or she does not oppose the Blood Goddess. Thereafter, the PC is bound to the goddess. The immediate effect of this binding is that the character's wounds no longer bleed – the blood that would be lost goes to strengthen the goddess. This condition has no effect in game mechanics until the goddess gains strength (see below). Worshippers of gods or servants of patrons that oppose the goddess receive no effect for lighting a candle.

TIMELINE

A timeline of events occur as the Blood Goddess grows stronger. As the goddess' power builds, each event is sequential, and occurs in the weeks following the appearance of the icon. "Worshippers" describes any effects that occur to PCs as a result of worshipping or being bound to the Blood Goddess (see the Player Introduction). "Icon" describes the changes in



appearance of the *Icon of the Blood Goddess* and includes combat statistics (if applicable).

The Thirsty Beggar (1 Week): About a week after the appearance of the icon, a beggar asking alms along a thoroughfare attacks someone. The characters may hear about this, they may witness it, or they may be the subject of the attack.

Peggy John, a thin, malnourished, and peg-legged beggar, asks for “a few coins ta gets me summat to drink.” He attacks any who refuse by attempting to rip open the victim’s neck with his little knife and drink their blood. If the PCs give the beggar a few coppers, he does not attack; however, later Peggy John attacks and kills William Stoddart, a fat merchant, before being slain by the guards. Oddly, Peggy John’s wounds don’t bleed, and his body is dry as dust when he is slain. If the PC’s are not involved in an altercation with Peggy John, they hear the story after he’s killed.

Worshippers: No effect.

Icon: The emaciated Icon of the Blood Goddess turns deathly pale (for a human skin tone), but not as pure white as it had been and grows to 3 feet tall. More candles appear daily. If smashed, the idol reforms in 1d3 weeks.

Peggy John: Init +0; Atk small knife +0 melee (1d2); AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 3; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref -2, Will +4; AL N.

Stray Cat Slither (5 Weeks): Folks notice that the city seems devoid of stray cats while many realize the cat population has decreased in just a few weeks. This encounter could occur when a PC must travel the city late at night, or it might be something the PCs only hear about. In any event, it is one of several such encounters in the city, most of which involve ordinary folk, and not all of which end well.

As you walk through the darkness, you hear a hissing noise at the edge of the ring of torchlight. Looking up, you can see a pied orange and black cat upon a low wall, its eyes gleaming yellow-green in the light. With an odd croak, it slithers along the wall in a most un-feline fashion, almost like a lizard. As it hisses again, you see a black forked tongue lick out past thick ropes of pale greenish saliva. Only then do you realize that this “cat” is not alone – if strays have gone missing over the past few weeks, at least a dozen of the creatures are here now, slinking just outside the light. A nearby beggar screams and flees. Not far down the lane, you can see dozens of feline shapes leap upon him, clawing and rending.

As his cries for aid and mercy die in the night, dark shapes move in on you.

Without some form of light, the PC’s find it difficult to count and track opponents, though it is clear that they are many.

Nearby buildings are shuttered and locked for the night, but locks can be picked (DC 10) and door or windows smashed open (STR DC 15). Either way, the slinking cat things follow.

PC’s suffer up to three attacks by these cats each round. The combat lasts until one of these conditions is met: 10 rounds have passed, 20 cats are slain, the characters reach an indoor and secured location for 6 rounds, or a character dies. In the first three cases, the remaining cats flee. In the final case, the remaining characters gain an opportunity to flee while the cats spend the next 1d6 minutes devouring the body. Wounded cats do not bleed. Any slain cat examined has so little blood that it is almost mummified. After one night, the cat-things are seen no more.

Worshippers: No effect.

Icon: The Icon of the Blood Goddess grows to 4 feet tall, and many candles burn in her honor. She appears as a healthy young woman with a rosy skin tone. If smashed, the idol reforms in 1d5 days, and those that smashed the Icon gain a permanent -1 to their Luck scores.

Almost-mummified cat-things: Init +4; Atk bite +0 melee (1d2); AC 12; HD 1 hp each; MV 40'; Act 1d16; SV Fort +0, Ref +6, Will +2; AL C.

A Surplus of Rats (7 Weeks): Without cats hunting them, the rat population in the city explodes. Emboldened by hunger, rats lurk everywhere day or night. Everything seems to be polluted with feces and urine (sheets or meals in inns, character backpacks, etc.). The very old and young are attacked in their beds. From this point forward, so long as the Blood Goddess is active in the city, this surplus of rats is an ongoing problem. **Note:** Statistics for Rat Swarms are found on page 424 of the Core Rulebook.

The worst is not the rats, however, but the evil fleas that they carry. Their constant attacks leave folk feeling weak and, literally, drained of energy. If somehow examined closely, the faces of the fleas resemble those of beautiful women. Those who have seen the Icon of the Blood Goddess recognize the features as hers.

Worshippers: Any time a worshiper takes damage from a sharp object – including any piercing or slashing weapon – he or she feels soft lips drawing on the wound and takes 1 additional point of damage from each wound.

Icon: The icon appears as a 5' tall bloated woman with a clearly reddish cast to its skin. The idol requires 20 points of bludgeoning force to destroy, though it can be pulled off of the wall with a DC 15 Strength check. Once removed, a 3' wide, 5' tall crack can be seen that, if entered, leads to the Temple of the Blood Goddess. (See **Temple of the Blood Goddess - A** below)

Evil fleas: Anyone in an area of infestation must make a DC 5 Fort save each day or take 1 point of Strength or Stamina damage (50% chance of each); this damage only recovers at the standard rate of 1 point per day if the save is successful on the following day. The Judge should decide whether the characters' living arrangements necessitate a check, though all public houses in the city are infested.

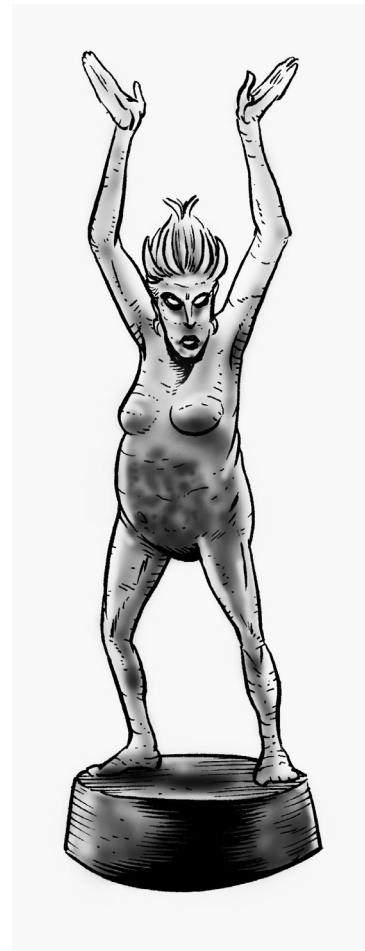
Murder in High Places (10 Weeks): The Lady Highdrake discovers Lord Orlon Highdrake's bloodless body ripped apart in their home. Watch patrols intensify, and everyone is scrutinized at the gates. The city offers a 100 sp reward for capture of the murderer.

Worshippers: All worshippers gain a +1 Luck bonus, but each time they receive a bleeding wound, they now feel lips and teeth sucking at the wound and lose an extra 2 hp.

Icon: The icon appears as a grossly bloated, blood-red woman over 6 feet tall. A crowd of candles surrounds the area and spills over into nearby alleys or streets. Both the wall and paving stones of the alley seep blood. Those attempting to smash the icon find that it comes alive and defends itself. When it leaves the wall to fight, the crack described in A Surplus of Rats is clearly seen. The idol shatters into shards of fragile clay when destroyed and reappears on the wall 24 hours later.

Icon of the Blood Goddess: Init +0; Atk fist +0 melee (1d3); AC 12; HD 2d6; hp 10; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +6; AL C.

Bloody Conviction (12 Weeks): Udolpho "the Vampire," a haberdasher on the Low Street, is found with a brooch that is recognized as one belonging to the late Lord Highdrake. Although he protests (truthfully) that he received it in for payment on an especially



magnificent tiara for Lady Highdrake, he is beheaded in the city square. Blood spurts out as the headsman's axe strikes, but it disappears into thin air to the astonishment of the fearful crowd. A reward of 100 gp is now offered to any who can solve the city's problems.

Worshippers: All worshippers gain another +1 Luck bonus, but each time they are wounded in a way that would bleed, they feel lips and teeth sucking at the wound, and lose an extra 3 hp.

Icon: The 7 foot tall icon glistens with the red-tinged black of a fresh scab. Not only does the Icon come alive to defend itself, but a group of 12 devotees of the Blood Goddess also materialize from doorways and alleys to defend their Goddess from defilers real or perceived. The idol reforms after 12 hours of being destroyed. Behind it is a crack that leads to the Temple of the Blood Goddess, as above.

Icon of the Blood Goddess: Init +1; Atk fist +1 melee (1d5); AC 14; HD 3d6; hp 14; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP half damage from non-magical weapons; SV Fort +6, Ref +2, Will +8; AL C.

Devotees (12): Init +2; Atk club +0 melee (1d4); AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 2 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

Blood of the Rich (14 Weeks): Rich people are now murdered every night by bands of roving worshippers if they venture outside at night. In some cases, the devotees of the Blood Goddess even smash into homes to slay the rich...or the "richer than me." The PCs could be the target of such attacks if the Judge so desires. The typical group of devotees is 1d6+6 members.

Worshippers: All worshippers gain a further +1 Luck bonus as the Blood Goddess grows in power, but they also permanently lose 1 point of Stamina to sustain her. Though the sucking of wounds ceases, devotees hear the steady thrum of a great heart constantly.

Icon: Black as night, the icon has grown to over 8 feet tall. It no longer appears as human -great tusks jut from its lips, an extra pair of arms and legs wave about its head, and human skulls hang from chains at its naked waist and neck. The Icon of the Blood Goddess animates to defend itself, and a group of 20 fanatical devotees is always present for its defense. Behind the Icon is a crack that leads to the Temple of the Blood Goddess.

Icon of the Blood Goddess: Init +1; Atk fist +2 melee (1d5) or bite +0 melee (1d7); AC 16; HD 4d6; hp 22;



MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP half damage from non-magical weapons; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +10; AL C.

Fanatical devotees (20): Init +4; Atk club +1 melee (1d4); AC 8; HD 1d6; hp 4 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +6; AL C.

City of Gore (15 Weeks): At this point, the Blood Goddess becomes fully manifest. Her fanatical devotees outnumber normal citizens, who are captured and bled on makeshift altars. The city stinks of running blood and roasting flesh, as the bodies are burned in great bonfires. The manifestation of the Blood Goddess is 10 feet tall, and can move anywhere within the city. The portal to her temple is closed, unless she wills it open. Forty fanatical devotees are in the area, and 2d6 arrive each round to protect her shrine. The PCs will be lucky to escape with their lives.

Worshippers: All worshippers take 1d3 points of Personality damage each day, as the Blood Goddess seeks to drown the individual selves and make each a mindless slave. The only way to prevent this damage is to flee to at least 100 miles from the city or to seek the intervention of another deity. Should a worshipper be reduced to 0 Personality, he or she becomes fanatically devoted to the Blood Goddess, doing her bidding so long as she is manifest upon this plane. PC's becomes NPCs immediately.

Particularly kind (or cruel!) Judges may have the icon appear in other cities in the campaign milieu, repeating the process until the characters either stop the incursion or fall prey to the Blood Goddess. In this case, characters which became fanatical devotees may yet be recovered as Player Characters.

Manifestation of the Blood Goddess: Init +5; Atk fist +4 melee (1d5) or bite +2 melee (1d7); AC 16; HD 8d6; hp 25; MV 40'; Act 4d20; SP half damage from non-magical weapons, critical hits as giant; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +16; AL C.

Fanatical devotees (40): Init +4; Atk club +1 melee (1d4); AC 8; HD 1d6; hp 4 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +6; AL C.

TEMPLE OF THE BLOOD GODDESS

A – The Crack in the Wall: Behind the icon, you see a narrow crack in the bricks of the wall. The crack is just large enough for a man or dwarf to squeeze through. The crack does not look straight, for you can see only a short distance therein.

This crack springs into existence after the events described in A Surplus of Rats and beyond.

The crack opens into a twisting passage seemingly over 300 feet long. Within this passage the characters move into the Blood Goddess' plane where her temple lies. Anyone travelling through this crack realizes that they should have emerged into a building or street after a few feet at most.

B – The Blood-Red Plane: A red light seeps through the twisting passage ahead of you. It is not the flickering light of a torch, nor is it steady – it seems to pulse with a regular beat. The iron tang of blood assaults the senses. The crack opens out at last to reveal a strange rolling vista under a murky, blood-red sky. Heavy, branching purple roots

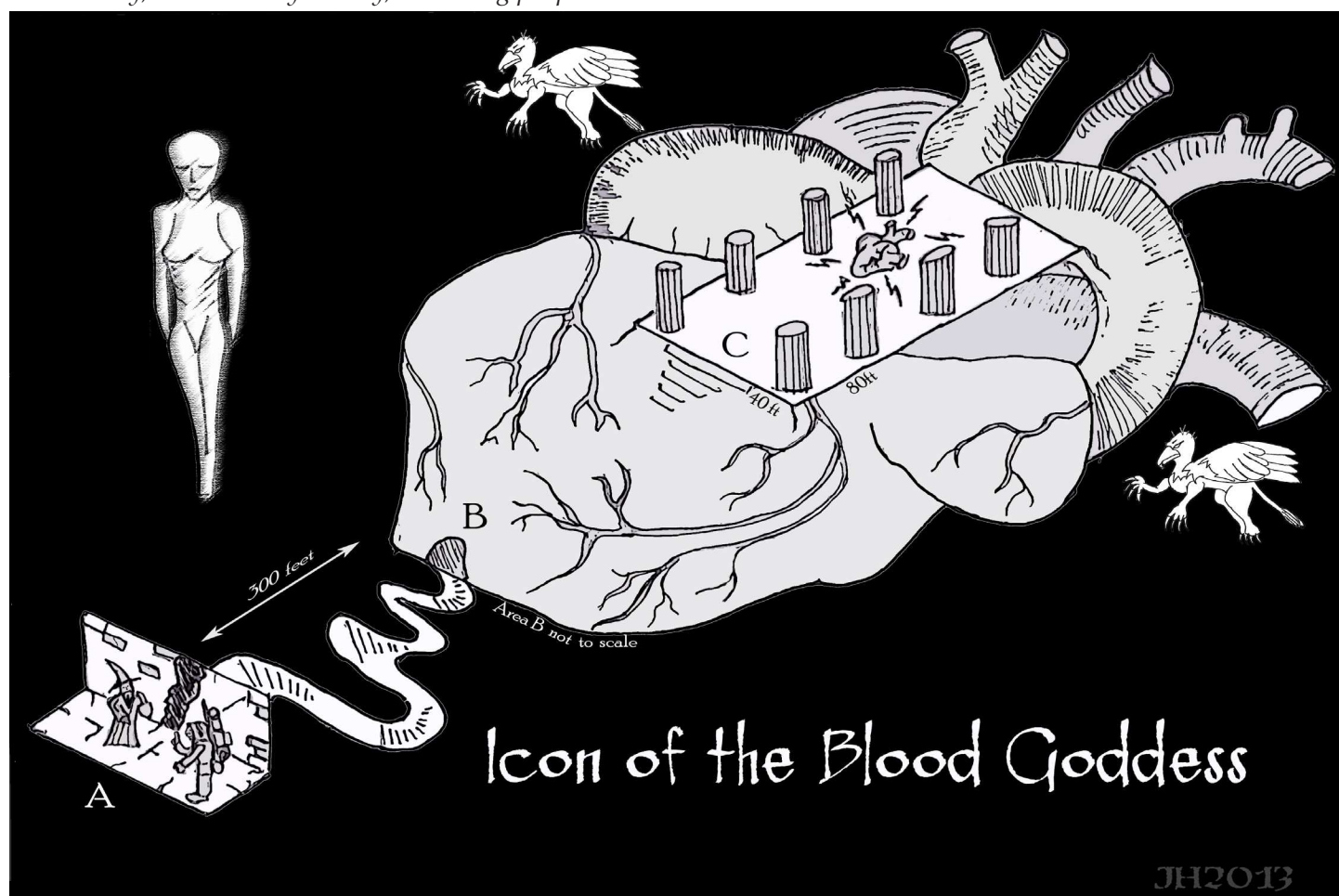
and deep red moss-like growth cover the ground, which rises to a gentle hill where a black building sits at its pinnacle. The structure has no visible walls, but black pillars support a peaked black roof. As you emerge from the passage, you see that the whole area is ringed by frowning black cliffs half a mile high and is no more than 300 yards across.

This is the plane of the Blood Goddess. No matter how long the characters remain here, no time passes in the outside world. The ground shifts underfoot every few seconds like a gigantic, beating heart, and the sky throbs with the same pulse. There is no sun or moon visible; the entire sky is itself lit a gory red light.

When a spell is cast here, there may be a side effect, depending upon the original Spell Check result. Consult the Spellcasting Side Effects chart at the end of this adventure to determine effects.

Exploration of the cliffs may reveal other cracks, leading to other cities and/or other planes where the Blood Goddess is growing her strength. This is an easy way to throw the characters into a completely new adventure; the crack they exit by is not the same as the one they entered through.

Once the characters move 40 feet or more away from





the cliff walls, two enormous lions with the wings and heads of vultures emerge from behind the temple on the hill. They attack with sharp beaks or leonine fore-paws, and their wings count as extra limbs to resist being knocked prone. The creatures are 10 feet tall and have a 30-foot wingspan.

The leonine parts of the vulture-griffons are composed of the corpses of hundreds of living cats sewn together by some foul magic. Any Mighty Deed success can be used to weaken this stitching – doing so effectively does double normal Deed die damage. When a vulture-griffon is slain, the undead cats scramble, some still stitched together and flee yowling for the cliffs.

A vulture-griffon that spends one round gaining altitude can use all of its actions on the next round to plummet down, striking at a single character with a claw attack. This attack gains a +4 bonus to hit and does twice normal damage. A vulture-griffon that succeeds in slaying a creature spends the next 2d6 rounds consuming it unless it is attacked during this time.

Vulture-griffons (2): Init +0; Atk bite +4 melee (1d8) or claw +2 melee (1d4); AC 12; HD 8d6; hp 33, 24; MV 40' or fly 60'; Act 1d20; SP plummet; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +4; AL C.

C – Fane of the Blood Goddess: *The temple is 80 feet long by 40 feet wide and built classically with two steps up to the main area. Black marble columns support the twenty-foot high ceiling. On a black plinth in the center of the temple rests a beating crimson heart at least 8 feet in diameter. The shuddering beats of ground and sky keep time with this heart's enormous pulse.*

This is the Heart of the Blood Goddess. It cannot attack, but destroying it is the only way to undo the damage wrought by the Goddess. If the beating Heart is destroyed, the entire plane shudders and will collapse in 2d4+2 minutes. Though it is easy enough to strike the Heart, it is tough to damage (AC 14, Hp:40).

Whenever a wound is dealt to the Heart, rifts appear on the ground and the sky. The rifts on the ground create great chasms that must be leapt or otherwise traversed to reach the cliffs. PC's may leap the chasms (DC 8) and failure causes the hapless adventurer to fall into the wound (1d6 damage per round until 1d4 successful Climb checks are rolled – DC 5). Once the characters become aware that the wounds they do to the Heart are reflected on the plane itself, it is relatively easy to attack away from the direction in which the characters must travel.

Six giant vampiric fleas, each about 2½ feet long, hide in the shadows of the temple ceiling, attacking when the Heart is damaged. They are completely black with faces like beautiful women. If a flea succeeds in its bite attack, it latches to its victim automatically draining 1d4 hit points of blood each round. It also pumps a paralyzing agent into the wound causing the victim to lose his or her actions for the round (DC 8 Fortitude save to avoid each round). The vampiric fleas can be removed with a DC 10 Strength check. The fleas regenerate 1 hit point each round while the Heart remains alive. This regeneration can bring them back from death.

Giant vampiric fleas (6): Init +5; Atk bite +3 melee (1); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 5 each; MV 10' or leap 50'; Act 1d20; SP blood drain, paralyzing agent, regeneration; SV Fort +0, Ref +6, Will +4; AL C.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

When the heart is slain, any remaining giant fleas or vulture-griffons fall writhing in anguish as the plane of the Blood Goddess implodes. Read or paraphrase the following:

The ground and sky convulse as the mighty heart beats its last. The red sky rips like paper to reveal a black void behind it. Stones shaped like glittering blood drops patter from the ebony expanse, striking the convulsing red moss-covered ground. As one lands near you, you see that it is a large ruby. With the darkened sky, the heaving earth, and the blood-red moss, it is clear that, although many are falling, they will not be easily gathered.

Characters can recover 1d3-1 rubies with each minute of searching. Remember that the entire plane will collapse in 2d4+2 minutes. Assume that it takes a full minute to dash across the heaving ground to any of the ringing cliffs and another minute to locate a crack and escape. If there is not enough time for either, a character may still roll under his Luck to escape, by thrusting himself through a crack that comes to him as the plane crumples up like paper, though the hapless PC will likely find him or herself in another world. When the characters have only three minutes left, read or paraphrase the following:

With a crack like thunder, the cliffs begin to crumble all around you. The ground convulses again, and then begins to crumple like paper being wadded up in a monstrous fist.

Further movement requires a DC 12 Reflex save each round. Searching for 1d2-1 rubies is still possible only with a successful Luck check. Linger now is suicidal. No creature still on this plane survives when the final collapse comes.

Each ruby is worth 50 gp, but the rubies are themselves cursed and bring bad luck to their owners. Each ruby carried confers a -1 Luck penalty so long as it is possessed, with a maximum total penalty of -5 Luck. Over many centuries, these gems grow, until each becomes an enormous heart in the center of its own plane, sending tendrils out in search of mortals to bleed in the name of the Blood Goddess....



SPELLCASTING SIDE EFFECTS

Check	Side Effect
1-11	No side effect.
12-13	The caster sweats blood, making him damp, sticky, and gory.
14-17	Invisible lips press against both target and caster, causing each 1d3 damage from blood drain. Hit points lost in this manner fortify the Blood Goddess's Heart in Area C below.
18-19	As 14-17 above, but the marks of hundreds of tiny sharp teeth appear. The target and caster take 1d5 points of damage from the invisible blood drain.
20-23	The ground convulses, and all creatures within 100 feet of the spell target must make a DC 15 Reflex save or fall prone. Creatures with more than two feet gain a +2 bonus to this save for every extra pair of feet they have.
24-27	As 20-23, above, except that the whole plane convulses (Reflex DC 20).
28-29	The spell cast manifests as a blood-based effect, instead of its normal effect. Damaging spells do 1 point of damage less per die to a minimum of 0 damage. The Judge determines changes to all spell effects, including manifestation and subsequent corruption, if any.
30-31	In addition to whatever damage the target takes normally, it loses 1d4 points of Stamina through blood loss becoming shriveled and mummified. In the case of creatures without a listed Stamina score, 1d3 hit points are lost per Hit Die. Every hit point lost is gained by the Blood Goddess' Heart in Area C, and every point of Stamina lost grants the Blood Goddess' Heart 10 hit points.
32+	Hundreds of thin, leech-like tendrils erupt from the ground, converging on the target. They attack at +8 and cause 4d6 points of damage collectively by blood loss each round (Fort DC 10 for half), in addition to the normal effects of the spell. This lasts as long as the target lives or until it can break free with a DC 15 Strength check.

SPELLBURN SIDE EFFECTS

If a character attempts Spellburn while in this plane, roll 1d4 to determine what occurs.

1d4	Spellburn Result
1	The caster may spill his own blood to gain power (expressed as Strength, Agility, or Stamina loss), but each point of Spellburn increases the hit points of the Blood Goddess's Heart (Area C) by 10 points. The caster is not aware of this secondary effect.
2	Roll on the standard Spellburn Activities chart (page 109 of the core rulebook). If the result would cause the wizard to bleed, the Blood Goddess's Heart in Area C gains 10 hit points per point of Spellburn.
3	The caster hears the voice of the Blood Goddess. She offers up to 10 points of Spellburn for free if the caster but sacrifices a companion. If the caster accepts the offer, the sacrifice must be selected before gaining the benefits of Spellburn. That companion immediately takes 1d6 points damage from blood drain per point of Spellburn, and the lost hit points increase the hit points of the Blood Goddess's Heart in Area C.
4	Spellburn is impossible for the caster this round.

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THE MERMAIDS FROM YUGGOTH ATTACK!

YOUR PLAYERS HAVE RANSACKED DUNGEONS AND SLAIN MIGHTY BEASTS,
RESCUED THE HELPLESS AND THWARTED THE SINISTER PLANS OF DEMONS.

BUT THEY HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THE STRANGE ITEMS,
BLASPHEMOUS RITUALS, OR HORRORS THAT AWAIT WITHIN THESE PAGES.

LURKING HEREIN ARE TWELVE SHORT ENCOUNTERS ANY JUDGE CAN
INSERT INTO ANY SCENARIO AS ONE-OFF'S OR AS JUMPING-OFF POINTS
TO FURTHER WIERD PULP ADVENTURES.

EACH ENCOUNTER INCLUDES A UNIQUE MONSTER,
AND THE BOOK IS PACKED WITH TREACHERY,
NOVEL TWISTS, AND HORRIBLE PREDICAMENTS.

WHETHER IT'S THE SQUID SORCERER, UMBO THE APE WITCH,
OR MALAGOK THE CREATOR BEAST, THESE ENCOUNTERS RECALL
A TRADITION PRE-DATING ORCS AND ELVES
WHEN THE FANTASY REALMS WERE JUST WEIRD.

