

THE CRYPT IN CADAVER CANYON

BY MARK BISHOP

COMPATIBLE WITH
**DCC
RPG**





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THE CRYPT_{IN} CADAVER CANYON

AN INSTANT ACTION DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS RPG ADVENTURE
FOR 4-8 2ND LEVEL ADVENTURERS

BY MARK BISHOP

Introduction	3
Quick Start	8
Random Encounters, Rumors, and Scuttlebutt	10
Locations in the City of the Cliffs	12
The Disciples of Buldakatak the Burning Warthog	15
The Council of 13	16
Beginning the Journey/Encounter Table	19
Area Map	20
Encounter Descriptions	21-49
Appendix A: Continued Adventures	50
Appendix B: Desert Encounters	51
Appendix C: Judges Notes	53



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THE CRYPT IN CADAVER CANYON

"The blood-soaked sands are my lips. I will hear the music of your dying breath. My nostrils will rejoice in the stench of rotting flesh."

- **Buldakatak the Burning Warthog**

JUDGE'S INTRODUCTION

This Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG adventure is intended for a party of four to six 2nd level adventurers. The party is tasked with saving a hidden desert city, along with its cursed inhabitants, from the wrath of a devious and chaotic god. This module assumes a well-rounded party containing a mix of classes. Since PC's will need to cast a spell from a scroll near the climax of the adventure, having an elf, a wizard, or (at the very least) a thief in the party will prove greatly advantageous.

THE HOOK

Many generations ago, a covenant was forged between a dying desert clan and a chaotic god named **Buldakatak the Burning Warthog**. After two-hundred years of blessing the **City in the Cliffs**, Buldakatak's true intentions have been revealed: all along his desire has been to see the city and its inhabitants thrive and grow until the glorious day when he could finally feast upon their smug and complacent flesh. It will be up to the player's heroes to save the men, women, and children of the city by returning the missing "chosen-one" to the city before the sun has set on the upcoming **Day of the Warthog**, thus quelling the old god's wrath. Returning the candidate will bind the great beast to his word, averting the cataclysmic deaths of two thousand innocent inhabitants of the city!



BACKGROUND

Beyond the **Bleaklands Desert**, hidden from the sun's unrelenting gaze in the shadows of the Crimson Canyon, lies the remarkable wonder known as the **City in the Cliffs**. Here in this otherwise desolate landscape, two-thousand souls thrive in a bustling, robust community alive with commerce, music, and revelry. They truly have been blessed: blessed unnaturally by a long-forged covenant with an unholy creature known as Buldakatak the Burning Warthog.

Two hundred years ago the bond was forged between a dying desert clan—its final thirteen survivors clinging to life in the scorching environment— and the opportunistic desert god. Somewhat desperate himself, and scavenging for followers (for the gods draw power from their prayers), Buldakatak offered the thirteen not only shelter and sustenance, but abundance if they would build statues in his image and offer a sacrifice every thirteen years from the original tribal bloodline. The time of the sacrifice has come to be known as **The Day of the Warthog** and only one who bears the birthmark of the bull horn (which only pure descendants might bear) is fit to hold the honor of being placed on the sacrificial altar that day.

True to his word, Buldakatak prospered the clan and their numbers began to grow inside the Crimson Canyon where the **Deep Scratch River** flows. Soon, a village began to thrive, then grew into a town. Now the City in the Cliffs rivals almost any other community on the continent. The town's ruling council, **The Council of Thirteen**, has insured that the ancient pact is respected, seeing to it that the old god is appeased every thirteen years by way of sacrificing an appropriate "candidate". Unfortunately, of late those marked by the bull horn have become increasingly rare. Unbeknownst to the council, Buldakatak has been marking fewer and fewer candidates before birth, in essence stacking the deck against his followers. The Great Warthog has grown tired of his pact with mortal men, and seeks to see the city "default" on the contract. As chaotic gods are wont to do, he longs for the day when he can completely and utterly destroy by fire his now-glorious creation.

In fact, there has been only one cliff-dweller in recent times marked by the sign of the bull horn: a frequently-caught thief named **Guldava Tick**.





Unfortunately, she was tried and executed six months ago by The Council of Thirteen who, through some clerical error, knew not that she represented the last of the birth-marked candidates. After she was hanged, her body was sent unceremoniously down the Deep Scratch River (like all the dead of the city) to float to her final resting place in an underground cave known to the locals as the **Crypt in Cadaver Canyon**.

The PCs should arrive at the City in the Cliffs on the eve of the Day of the Warthog, the day when the sacrifice ritual must be performed before the sun has fully set. The Council of Thirteen will attempt to enlist the help of the heroes to do what they themselves cannot: to journey down the perilous Deep Scratch River, retrieve the body of the executed thief Guldava Tick, then return her corpse to the Monolith Stone atop the city. There it will be resurrected long enough to be offered as a sacrifice to Buldakatak the Burning Warthog.



The stakes are high, and the chaotic desert god will be working against the party at every step. The first challenge is that the PCs will have no way of knowing at the start of the adventure that Buldakatak has been setting his followers up for generations. Secondly, along with the very unnatural creatures they may encounter throughout the journey, the party will also come face-to-face with Buldakatak's agents, enablers in his long con of "fattening the calf before the slaughter".

Will the PCs be able to find Guldava Tick and preserve the covenant? Let the dice fall where they may!

Judges Notes: Adventuring parties can be a capricious lot. Some days they take the hook and run with it, other days they don't. For one-shot games, most players accept the premise and say, "let's roll some dice!". But if the judge is introducing this adventure thread into an ongoing campaign, it would behoove him or her to use organic plot threads to lead the party to the Bleaklands. Look for elements in your player's histories to motivate them to action beyond the requisite promise of fortune, fame and glory.

- Perhaps the party's thief has been summoned here by their guild to reach the Crypt in Cadaver Canyon not really to save the city, but to retrieve an important ledger sewn into Guldava's coat (perhaps naming corrupt council members and why she was really executed?)
- The party wizard has come to have corruption removed by a reclusive shaman known as **Aragar the Queasyzy3** who lives somewhere down the Deep Scratch River.
- The god of the party cleric has foreseen the brutality to come and has called the cleric to thwart the warthog's nefarious plan, or the party warrior owes a life-debt to someone on the Council of Thirteen.
- The gods are playing chess. The party elf has heard from The King of Elfland (or any other patron who considers themselves to be adversarial to Buldakatak) and sends a disciple to make sure Buldakatak keeps his word to the mortals when the ritual is completed.



QUICK START

The Crypt in Cadaver Canyon is an **Instant Action Adventure** designed to be accessed quickly for a session or two of danger-filled derring-do. If you and your players just want the briefest of summaries and are ready to roll some dice, read the following description to the players and proceed directly to **Beginning the Journey** on **page 19**.

You've arrived at the City in the Cliffs, a magnificent city carved into the canyon walls of the Bleaklands Desert. Every thirteen years, a birth-marked chosen one is sacrificed to a desert god known as Buldakatak the Burning Warthog, so that he will not destroy the city along with the two-thousand men, women, and children who live there. But six months ago, the last known birth-marked candidate was accidentally executed as a thief by the Council of Thirteen, her body unceremoniously sent floating down the Deep Scratch River to the Crypt in Cadaver Canyon. The Council intends to resurrect the thief long enough to sacrifice her to Buldakatak and save the city's two-thousand innocent souls, but first, someone must retrieve the body. You have been tasked with steering a boat down the Deep Scratch River, entering the subterranean crypt to retrieve the body of Guldava Tick, and using a magic scroll to return her to the Monolith Stones before the sun sets on the following day. There is ample gold coin to be won, and the gods will surely favor those who use their might to save the innocent!

CONNECTING TO YOUR CAMPAIGN

The flavor text from the preceding section is all the information your players need to know to begin play. If, on the other hand, you and your players desire a richer environment to host an ongoing campaign, the following sections can provide information that the judge can use to create a deeper connection to the city, its people, and the plight before them.



The PCs may arrive in the Bleaklands Desert by whatever means the judge sees fit within the ongoing campaign. Feel free to set the scene by reading or paraphrasing the following:

The Bleaklands Desert is an unforgiving wasteland. Burning sands and craggy sun-bleached rocks greet your eyes in all directions. The path before you winds down a sheer cliff wall into a canyon that at least offers some shady respite from the oppressive sun. Soon, the reflection of water at the bottom of the canyon catches your eye, but you are simultaneously greeted by the offensive smell of rotted meat. Before you a small boat decorated with small bells is washed up on the shore, bearing burned-out candles and a corpse wrapped in graves clothes. The eyes of the corpse have been picked clean by the crows that vault away at your arrival. Moments after your discovery, another small boat drifts past you downstream carrying a similarly decorated corpse.

*The sound of a voice draws your attention. Upstream you see a sheep herder with his flock drinking at the water's edge. You become aware that you have walked deep into the ravine, as the canyon walls now tower above you. Gazing upward, the **City in the Cliffs** suddenly reveals itself to you. As far as the eye can see, layer after layer of pathways, doors and facades have been carved into the canyon walls, from top to bottom. An entire city of neighborhoods, storefronts, establishments and homes has been created! Every walkway is busy with the hustle and bustle of life. Children play on perilously steep ledges, scurrying from one level to the next. Laundry lines span from one side of the canyon walls to the next. The sounds of commerce fill the air, as beggars, vendors, and city guards pay you no mind. You can scarcely take it all in, such is the size and scale of the City in the Cliffs.*

No doubt your players are arriving at the City in the Cliffs after finishing some other adventure, likely looking to replenish supplies, regroup, and perform other general housekeeping duties. There are taverns, dry goods shops, blacksmiths, inns, and temples for the PCs to explore. Use those interactions as an opportunity to help the players understand the dilemma that the city is facing.



RANDOM ENCOUNTERS, RUMORS & SCUTTLEBUTT TABLE (D12)

As the PCs explore the city, feel free to have the players roll on the following table for information. Alternately, the judge may simply choose to share tidbits of information through organic roleplay.

1. You notice that many doors, walls, and posts are marked with a strange symbol: an eye with rays radiating from top and bottom. Any local will tell you that it represents the all-seeing eye of Buldakatak the Burning Warthog. It was *He* who blessed the city with prosperity long ago.

2. You overhear two city guards talking. Guard 1: *"Rumors are that there is no sacrifice for the Blood Moon tomorrow night. The priests are wailing that Buldakatak's fury will destroy us all."* Guard 2: *"Bah... superstition... the priests are always wailing about some prophecy."*

3. You notice people greeting each other with an unfamiliar gesture. They use both hands to form an eye by touching their index fingers and thumbs together along with a slight bow. Any local will explain that they are forming the symbol of Buldakatak's all-seeing eye as a tribute to the city's deity.

4. At the top-most level of the city, a corpse hangs from a gallows high above the Deep Scratch River. Soon, a well-appointed dwarf walks to the edge of the cliff and cuts the rope. The cadaver plummets over two-hundred feet to the river below and begins to float downstream. Almost immediately, a pair of robed figures fish it from the water, wrap it in burial cloth, place it in a ceremonial canoe-like vessel, and release it again into the water's current.

5. (In any conversation) *"You should leave this city traveler... this city is cursed. Every thirteen years a ritual is performed at the Monolith Stones and a horn-marked candidate is sacrificed to the god known as Buldakatak the Burning Warthog. But this year, there is no one who bears the mark. Rumors say that the last to bear the mark was a thief named Guldava Tick and her corpse was sent down the river, along with all our hopes to appease the great one."*



6. You notice many families packing their belongings to join a caravan in the hot desert above. You overhear: *"Better to die in the desert than to face the wrath of the Great Warthog tomorrow night!"*

7. (In any conversation) *"Welcome strangers to our fair city. May the blessings of Buldakatak be with you. And double blessings to you should you bear His birthmark... the mark of a horn. Do you perhaps have such a birthmark?"* (Trying to trick the PCs into revealing that they would be a candidate for sacrifice.)

8. You overhear two merchants whispering. Merchant 1: *"Aye, the Council of Thirteen botched things good. That red-headed thief, Guldava Tick, bore the birthmark but they knew it not until her dead body hit the water."* Merchant 2: *"They are pompous windbags, the whole lot of them. And now our last hope to appease the Great One floats somewhere downstream in that underground crypt. Curse them all."*

9. (In any conversation) *"Have you not noticed the stench? It is the aroma of death. This great city is built upon it. But you are heroes, no? Perhaps you know some way to appease an angry god. If not, you should leave this place my friends."*

10. You overhear two gongfarmers as they cart their wheelbarrows down a steep walkway. Gongfarmer 1: *"Perhaps the last time we shall bear such foul stench, aye? For tomorrow night we will all die."* Gongfarmer 2: *"Have faith dear brother. The Council searches for heroes to navigate the river and to bring back the thief who was marked. We should apply. They offer gold enough that we'd have servants carting our dung should we live to be a hundred!"*

11. Priests with robes adorned with the Eye of Buldakatak pass by as locals shun them. They chant over and over, *"Agragar, beloved of Buldakatak and Master of the Keepers, spare us our deserved fate."*

12. The ground beneath your feet begins to shake as mothers scream and shelter their children from tumbling rocks. The growl of distant thunder sounds eerily like course, mocking laughter. A large eye appears in the sky and moves its gaze about the city. In a moment it is gone as the children begin to weep.



LOCATIONS

The Devil's Demise: A raucous taproom that can be found simply by following the sounds of drunken revelry. Best to keep your hands on your purse in this shadowy gathering place. Owned by **Evana Coor**, a member of the Council of Thirteen. Evana will remember the thief Guldava Tick as a frequent "customer", always looking to pilfer trinkets from unsuspecting marks.

The Iconic Eagle: The more refined may seek comfort and information at this upscale tavern and inn. Renowned for the priceless art collection amassed in its lobby, the Eagle is one of several businesses owned by Council of Thirteen member **Penwhall the Pale**. It costs two gold pieces a night to stay.

Evergood Goods: A fine place for general supplies (see **DCC Rulebook page 73** for available equipment and prices). The store was only recently established by **Chauncey Evergood** who fled the Frost Fang Mountains to escape danger, only to find that he has opened shop to a whole new peril *"If it isn't a castle falling from the sky, it's a giant warthog threatening to rain down fire and brimstone... can an Evergood ever find peace?"*

The Wasp's Tail: Party members can purchase weaponry, armor, and shields from the dwarf **Thal Braank**.

Grok's Hooves and Harnesses: Mounts and custom gear are available from **Grok Gristlebeard**.

The Temple of the Three Sisters: Any cleric can find solace and blessed supplies in this sanctuary.

Alcove Alchemy: Rare and common herbs, unexpected curiosities and alchemical ingredients from distant lands are available. Council member **Ala Leann** opens the doors at midnight for only one hour. She will also provide a map of the river and canyon should the PCs accept the council's proposal.





Deep Scratch Inn: Straw mattresses and dirt floors can be purchased at 5 copper a night. Any PC must make a DC 8 Fort Save on the following morning or wake up swollen and ill-tempered from various insect bites (-2 to Personality checks for 1d6 hours).

The Opulent Opal: Have those rare gems assessed and valued here. Foppish proprietor **Ogden Gourdey** will offer 75% of the value here to party members, saving them the trouble of trying to sell them themselves.

Steadfast Hall: Overlooking the city at its highest point, a gallows hangs high above the Deep Scratch River. Inside, the Council of Thirteen serves not only as city officials, but act as judge, jury and executioners enabled to mete out justice at their whim. Any death sentence can lead to an immediate hanging outside the hall's front doors.

After a few minutes, the deceased is cut loose to fall into the Deep Scratch River far below, where their body will float downstream to the crypt in Cadaver Canyon. There the gods can sort out their own.



THE DISCIPLES OF BULDAKATAK THE BURNING WARTHOG

In the pantheon of gods and patrons, Buldakatak the Burning Warthog would be considered a minor deity at best. His province is limited to the barren wastelands of the Bleaklands Desert mostly because no-one else cares to inhabit such a lifeless landscape. How he came to be or where he first began is long forgotten now, but his power in this desert has grown.

It's true that his first selfless act of aiding a dying desert clan those many generations ago engendered warm feelings from the more lawful gods and goddesses. Thirteen there were in that starving clan, and all have long since died, save one. That one Buldakatak favored the most, bestowing upon him otherworldly knowledge, making him a powerful, enduring shaman. He is now known as **Agragar the Queasy**. Unfortunately, the unnatural magic that has occupied his brain has also corrupted his reason, leading him down the darkest paths. He was driven from the city many years ago because of his reckless dabbling in the most foul aspects of the black arts, all encouraged ceaselessly by his overlord, the great desert warthog.

Agragar, now high priest of Buldakatak, leads the **Keepers of the Crypt** in **Cadaver Canyon**, a subterranean final resting place where the Deep Scratch River flows underground. The Keepers are a race of Deep Earth humans who have lived so long in the darkness and foul magics of the caverns that they are no longer born with eyes. They are tasked with guarding the tomb and carrying the bloated corpses to a furnace at the top of a subterranean tower where smoke unnaturally *descends* down through the tower deep into the earth, offering the dead's decaying flesh to Buldakatak.

Within the City in the Cliffs, priests and disciples offer veneration to Buldakatak daily. Statuary, engravings and tapestries to his likeness can be found across the Crimson Canyon, but few people know the true heart of Buldakatak, and fewer still the depths of his depravity. None of his worshipers know his long game: to fatten the city with prosperity through the long years only to enjoy their apocalyptic destruction... and soon!



CHALLENGING THE PCS TO ACTION!

At some point in their explorations, the PCs should be summoned to Steadfast Hall. News travels fast of the visiting adventurers. If up to this point the PCs have kept a low profile, have 1d6 Bleaklands Bandits (**Appendix B: Desert Encounters, page 51**) surprise the party at the first opportunity. The ruckus will draw the attention of the guards and thus the Council of Thirteen who will see them as worthy candidates to make the expedition down the river to recover Guldava Tick's dead body.

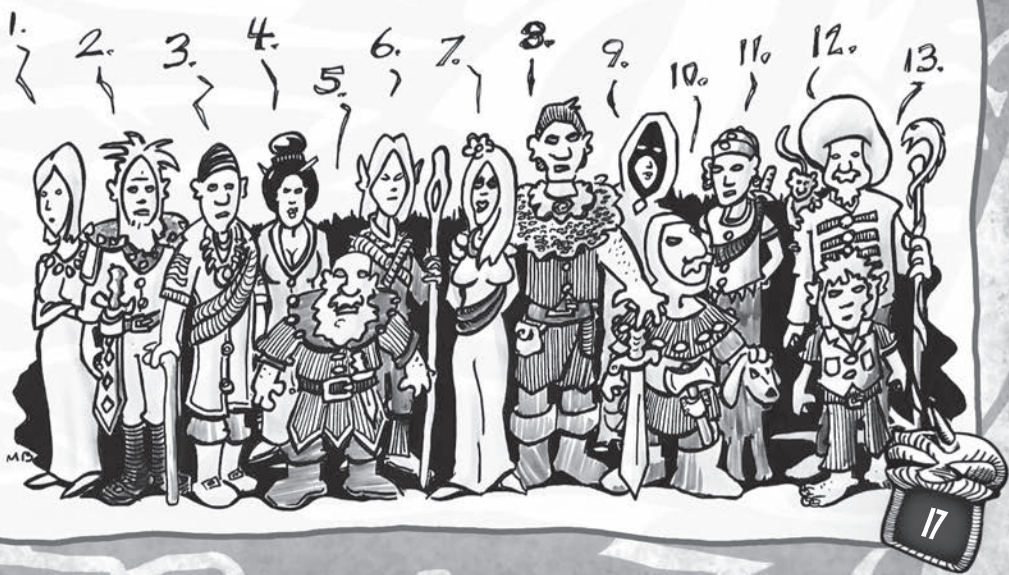
THE COUNCIL OF THIRTEEN

The governing body of the City in the Cliffs is the Council of Thirteen. Members of the council keep the post until they die or voluntarily pass on the position to someone else. The thirteen council members represent the original clan of thirteen survivors found and blessed by Buldakatak generations ago. When news of the PCs' heroic exploits reaches the ears of the council, they will summon the PCs to Steadfast Hall. There they will be asked, begged, blackmailed, bribed, cajoled, or shamed into helping the city recover the body of Guldava Tick before the sun sets on the following night. The council believes that fate has sent the PCs as their one final hope.

1. **Agata Thorne** (human female): *"The blood moon rises tomorrow night and our only chance of appeasing the great Warthog is a bloated corpse adrift somewhere downstream in the underground crypt."*
2. **Bedrich of the Orphan Clan** (human male): *"It's true we acted in haste and executed our only candidate. Who could have known that there wouldn't be another who bore the birthmark of the horn?"*
3. **Penwhall the Pale** (human male): *"She was an unrepentant thief. Her execution was in keeping with our laws. The gods are having their fun with us by providing no more candidates. How can we be blamed, we didn't know she bore the mark of the horn until she was already dead?"*



4. **Tynesia Stroom** (human female): *"That she is dead matters little. Melandrach can make her heart beat once again. She only needs to live long enough for the ceremony to be completed tomorrow night, before the moon reaches it's apex."*
5. **Hagre the Red** (dwarven male): *"Aye, she was a thief. And even though it sounds a harsh fortune to resurrect her only to kill her again, she can at least recover her honor. She died the first time as a criminal; she'll die again as a hero redeemed. I will put up 300 gold for each of you who return her body to us before the sun sets on the morrow."*
6. **Castian Woolhaven** (elven male): *"Strangers, we are subject to the whims of a cruel master, our desert god. It is true that we brought this upon ourselves, but should every innocent man, woman, and child in the city perish for the foolishness of this council? Search your hearts. It is no accident that fate has brought you to us."*
7. **Arun Gulfrock** (half-elf female, expecting child): *"Castian speaks a simple truth... our sins can be addressed once we have done all we can to save the people who have entrusted us to lead. We must save our children... all of them."* (Melodramatically rubs her stomach).
8. **Gore Gulfrock** (human male; husband of Arun): *"I ache to go and do the job that must be done, but I am cursed by a sorcerer who lives downstream and it is he that stands as a guardian*



of the crypt. I need only hear the voice of Agragar the Queasy to fall under his power. I would have no choice but to become his weapon against you."

9. **Ala Leann** (human female): *"To travel the river in darkness is suicide so you must leave at first light. If you will help us, visit me at my shop at midnight. I can aid you to quickly return Guldava's corpse to the Monolith Stones where the ceremony is performed, once she is recovered."* (Ala Leann will give the PCs a scroll containing the spell *Lesser Planar Step* which will aid the party to immediately travel to the sacrificial altar at the Monolith Stones.)
10. **Thal Braank** (dwarven male): *"We are fools to trust the fates of our women and children to strangers, but Buldakatak has us by our throats. I am reluctant to trust you... but my bones are old, and so, the glory must go to someone else. Remember...we must have her body before the sun fully sets tomorrow or our flesh, and your gold, will be consumed by fire."*
11. **Evana Coor** (human female): *"Here... this is a map. It will show you the way, more or less. Though it cannot show you the dangers along the journey. The girl, Guldava Tick, her hair was red as fire and the birthmark was on her right arm. The left side of her face is tattooed, though it's been months now... who knows what's left of her."*
12. **Melandrach the Mesmerizing** (human male): *"Use the scroll when you have her. I have magic to resurrect her, if only for awhile, but it will be enough. We shall await you at the peak of the Monolith Stones where the scroll will bring you. There Buldakatak the Burning Warthog shall be appeased, and your names will become legend forever. Songs of your exploits will brush the lips of our most fair maidens!"*
13. **Grepin Lambshank** (halfling male): *"I have nothing to offer dear friends but this: Politics are a poor pairing with the sensibilities of the small folk. I wish for none to die. Return with the girl who died a thief and my seat at this table and all that goes with it is one of yours. On my word as a Lambshank, this I do vow."*

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

If the PCs undertake the quest, at midnight Ala Leann will gift a party wizard, elf, or thief with the **Scroll of Lesser Planar Step** needed to quickly return to the Monolith Stones. (Hopefully with the body of Guldava Tick and in time to appease Buldakatak before he razes the city.)

On the following morn, the dwarf Hagre the Red and Evana Coor will meet the party at the Deep Scratch River docks where a keelboat waits well equipped for the party's mission: it contains 100' of strong rope, a long pole for steering and propulsion, two iron harpoons w/25' rope each (d8 damage), a grappling hook, four iron spikes, three wooden buckets, and a day's rations for the party. If Evana Coor has not yet given the players a map, or described Guldava Tick to the PCs (red hair, tattooed left face, birthmark on right arm), let her do so before the party leaves. As the party departs, read or paraphrase the following:

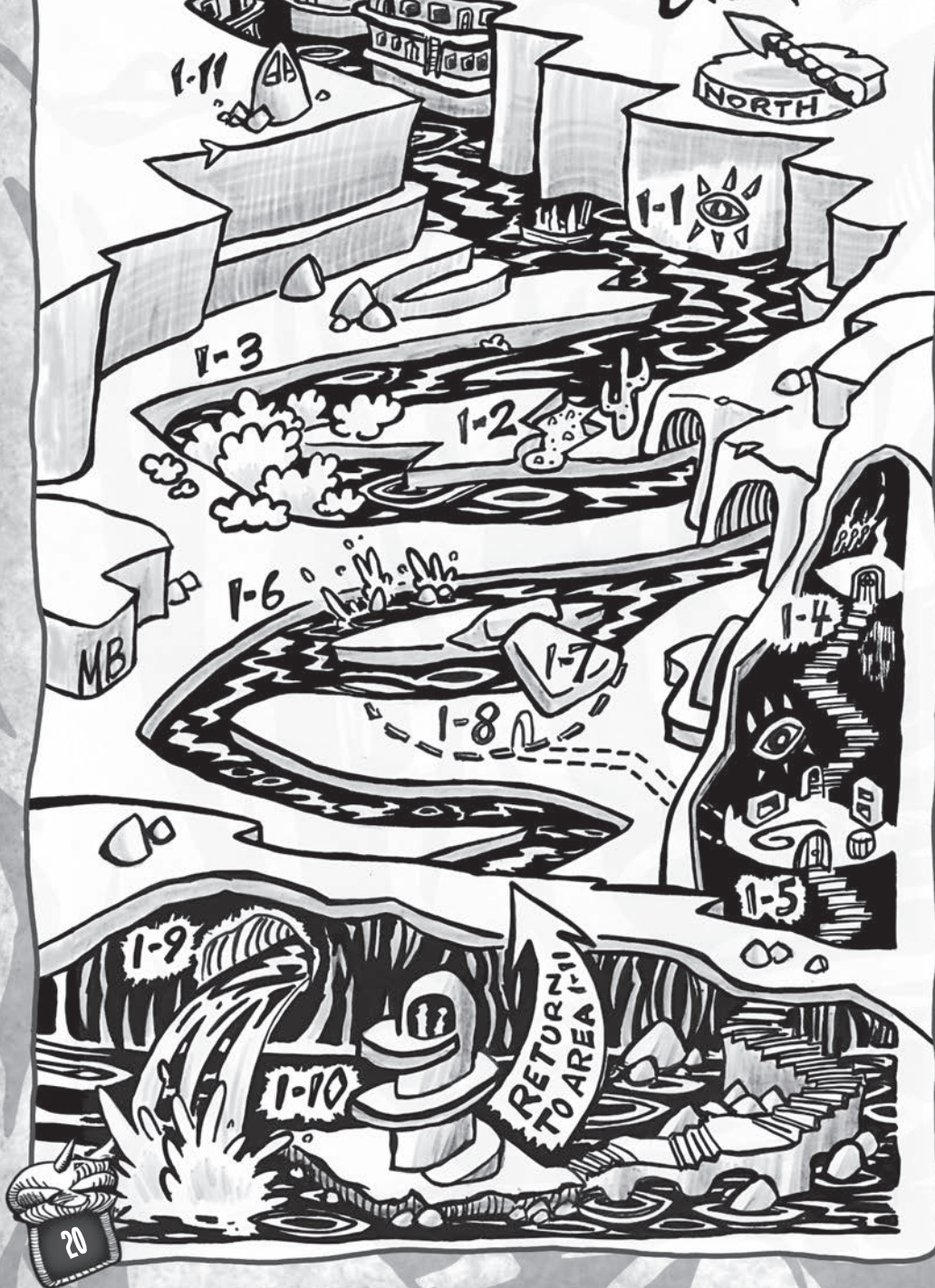
As you push the keelboat from the dock, above you solemn faces stare from every window. An unnatural hush falls across the city as the desperate folk of the city watch from every ledge: all hope is pinned upon your success. A small boy runs down the long canal, waving until the pathway ends at the lapping water's edge. In a few minutes, the city is behind you as the current pulls you forward. Steep canyon walls loom above you on both sides.

ENCOUNTER TABLE

AREA	TYPE	ENCOUNTER
1-1	T	Eyes of Agragar
1-2	C	Cactipus
1-3	C	River Wraiths
1-4	P/T	Door of Seasons
1-5	C	Agragar the Queasy/ Gawk Fiends
1-6	T/C	Rapids/ Mer-rams
1-7	P/C	Mantis Folk/ Hyena Mounts
1-8	C	Divine Intervention
1-9	T	Waterfall
1-10	C	Guldava Tick/The Keepers/ Dead
1-11	C	Hagre the Red/ Red Clan Dwarves



THE CRYPT IN CADAVER CANYON



AREAS OF THE MAP

AREA 1-1: DOWN THE DEEP SCRATCH RIVER

An hour into your journey the noise of the city has fallen far behind you. The river runs smooth and steady. As you drift between the high canyon walls, you see large eyes similar to the symbols you noticed in the city, carved into the cliff walls on either side. The longer you float beneath their stare, the more cloudy your thoughts become. You feel as though you've drifted into a dream.

The shaman **Agragar the Queasy** uses the carved eyes to spy upon the river from his sanctum (**Area 1-5**) and to channel an aberrant form of the cleric spell **Lotus Stare**. Each PC must make a DC13 Will Save or be forced to roll 1d7 on the table below. Wizards, Elves and Clerics may add intelligence modifiers (or personality for clerics) + their level to the roll. The judge should not simply read the results, but rather paraphrase what the PC is seeing as a real experience, not an illusion. Because to them, it will be.

Agragar's Corrupting Eye Table: (1d7)

1. The PC suffers from the illusion that they have been whisked from the boat by a sudden whirlwind carrying them far over the desert to land before the cloven-hooved Buldakatak, large as a sphinx. He commands the PC to kneel before him and offer veneration. If the PC refuses, the warthog will engulf the PC in flames. The PC will awaken on the boat's deck, blistered and burned for 1d4 damage.
2. The PC's allies appear as humanoid warthogs closing in on the character. The PC will immediately make a basic melee attack against the nearest party member before awakening.
3. The PC becomes lost in one of the eye's hypnotic gazes and begins chanting loudly in an ancient unknown tongue, calling forth a very real swarm of flying scorpions that will attack all but the enchanted PC. (See **Bestiary page 51**).



4. The PC's eyes roll back in their head and their body goes limp as they slowly rise to hover two feet above the deck in mid-air. Suddenly a raspy voice issues from their lips, *"I am Agragar! Melter of minds... taster of thoughts! Chosen of Buldakatak the Burning Warthog! Turn back... let Guldava rest in peace..."* Afterwards, the PC will fall to the deck and remember nothing.
5. The PC begins to see snow falling from the sky. Quickly the river appears to freeze over as ice glistens upon the veneer of the boat. The PC sees nothing but a winter landscape for the next 1d4 hours, shivering uncontrollably and going last in any encounter requiring rolled initiative.
6. The PC sees an eye forming on their forearm. When the eye opens and peers at the PC, they begin to scream and gnaw at the aberration, doing 1d4 damage.
7. The PC sees through Agragar's illusion spell and is momentarily linked to the spellcaster, innately knowing the location of Agragar's inner sanctum. Knowing the shaman's name, if the PC is a magic user or a cleric who can call upon divine aid of any useful sort, they may immediately attempt a casting of any useful spell they have against Agragar as though they were in his actual presence. After this event happens, the shaman will immediately break his bond with the Seeing Eyes and "disconnect" from the location.

After the encounter, read or paraphrase the following:

The sun continues to rise as you travel further down the river and beyond the carvings in the cliff walls. An opportunity presents itself. According to the map, you could continue down the river, or you could carry the boat a short distance across a dried-up river bed. It's a shortcut that could save valuable time. Either way leads to Cadaver Canyon, though each path presents its own perils and rewards.

Depending on their decision, proceed to either **Area 1-2** or **Area 1-3**.





AREA 1-2: THE DRIED RIVER BED

Approaching the beach, it would appear that this river bed carries the current only when the river is in flood. Carrying the boat and traversing the short rise should be possible without much trouble. At the summit of the rise, a gleam catches your eyes. A sun-bleached skeleton is caught in the limbs of a large cactus along with a damaged canoe and other debris, perhaps trapped there the last time waters overflowed these banks. A gold tooth glints in the sunlight, as does an amulet around the skeleton's neck. It is the symbol of the all-seeing eye of Buldakatak. The skeleton also wears a short sword in a dry-rotted hilt.

Approaching the skeleton awakens the multi-armed **Cactipus**, though it will not turn its one large eye toward them until the most PCs are within its reach. Then, the large leathery tentacles of the Cactipus will rise writhing from the sand. If the PCs were surprised, the creature receives 3 free attacks before initiative is rolled.

Cactipus (1): Init+4; Atk +4 melee (1d4 damage +special) and bite +2 melee (1d8); AC 14; HD 6d10; hp 46; MV 20'; climb 20'; reach 25'; Act 6d20; SV Fort+8; Ref+4; Will+4; AL C.



Special: When a target is successfully attacked, that target is “grabbed” and has the option to use an action to succeed at a DC12 Strength check to escape on their turn. On a failure, the creature tightens its grip immediately for another 1d4 damage (on that PC’s turn). The creature will not use a tentacle that has a PC grabbed to attack again on its initiative, resolving instead to keep the PC held captive. Any PC held on the creature’s turn is vulnerable to its bite attack. The Cactipus can make only one bite attack per round. The attack rolls of entangled PCs are moved one die down the dice chain.

The gold tooth is worth a single gold piece. The pendant itself is worth 10 gp and signifies the wearer is a disciple of Buldakatak. The short sword is silvered and worth 20gp. From this location, the river’s edge can be reached where the party can now skip ahead to **Area 1-4**.

AREA 1-3: THE RIVER WRAITHS

As you pilot the boat away from the cliff walls carved with Seeing Eyes, you feel the temperature begin to drop. The canyon walls seem to disappear behind a shroud of mist as every creak and groan of the vessel echoes strangely around you. Soon, you can scarcely see the front of the boat from the back. You hear scraping from beneath the boat as suddenly the vessel comes to a stop in the middle of the fog-enshrouded river, caught on a dam of twisted branches and limbs.

Inspection reveals that the recently formed dam of twisted branches is grotesquely filled with ceremonially-garbed corpses previously sent down the Deep Scratch River. Dozens of skulls float and bob in the water, staring silently at the adventurers in the boat.

A section of the dam can be broken through after 50 hit points of damage. The dam can be walked upon until it reaches the 10 hp mark, at that time, anyone still standing on it falls into the water and has a 50% chance of losing the weapon they brandish.

When the PCs begin to make an effort to break through the dam, they will hear shrieks and whispers echoing around them in the fog. “Free... free... us... us...free..free...us...us...” but soon after, will hear, “join...join...us...us...join...join...us...us...”



Roll initiative as four wraiths swoop through the mist to attack the party! Theirs are the bodies trapped without absolution in the dam. When the dam is dismantled and the corpses float along downstream with the rest of the debris, the wraiths will re-enter the corpses in search of their final resting place downstream. The gods smile upon this merciful act by bestowing a boon to the Lesser Planar Step Ritual Scroll of an additional +1 (making it now a +5 scroll) and returning up to two points of Luck per PC absorbed by the wraiths with their Chill Touch attack.

River Wraiths (4): Init+2; Atk Chill Touch +2 melee (1d4 damage and drains 1 luck); AC 13; HD 2d10; hp 16; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP undead traits, immune to non-magical, non-silvered or non-mithril weapons; immune to critical hits, poison, cold damage and mental effects spells such as sleep, charm, and paralysis; SV Fort+2; Ref+4; Will+6; AL C.

AREA 1-4: THE RIVER TUNNELS

The desert sun has risen high since you left the city hours before, and the glimmer on the river's surface nearly blinds you. Ahead, the cavern walls close in around the vessel and a cave entrance greets you. The shade offers a welcome respite from the heat and glare. As you enter the tunnel, you hear water sloshing against the tunnel's walls, then suddenly you are engulfed in complete darkness...

If no light source is produced and the party lacks a character that can see in the dark, the boat will drift along the current, eventually exiting the tunnel and continuing on to **Areas 1-6** and **Area 1-7**. If this is the case, read or paraphrase the following:

Soon the current takes your boat through the dark tunnels and back into the sun's oppressive heat. The river forks ahead: the northern river-passage disappearing into a thick mist; the southern route passing beneath a massive stone land-bridge.

Depending on their choices, proceed to **Area 1-6** or **Area 1-7**.





If the PCs produce a source of light, they see an occasional bat hanging on the cave ceiling, eventually spying a series of all-seeing eyes rendered in charcoal on the tunnel walls. An old wooden dock stands beneath an opening to a tunnel tucked into the cave's eastern side. Read or paraphrase the following:

On the eastern wall of the underwater cave, a wooden dock stands beneath a large crevice. Inside, darkness. Above that opening, an all-seeing eye has been carved into the rocks.

If the PCs decide to explore the crevice, they discover a tunnel that leads to a small chamber. Distribute **Handout A-2** and read or paraphrase the following:

In this small chamber, torches line the southern-most wall, seemingly dusted with some strange alchemical powder to glow unnaturally. One torch burns red, one yellow, and the last, blue. A stone altar sits in the middle of the room where three unlit torches are placed in hollowed-out cavities. The altar faces a thick wooden door with three clear crystals deeply embedded into its aged face, as if the sinew of the wood has grown around them. Beneath the dust, the flickering light catches the faint outline of something etched into the altar's face.

If examined closely, the characters etched upon the altar are in Elven script, reading:

*Alight in order, these hues to pass,
The grass, the plum, and pumpkin last.*

This puzzle requires the PCs to light the three torches on the altar to glow (in order from left to right) green, purple and orange. Since the three lit torches are the primary colors of red, yellow and blue, it will require combining two torches to light each altar torch. The PCs must figure out which combinations make which colors.

*Yellow and Blue = Green
Blue and Red = Purple
Red and Yellow = Orange*

If the torches are not lit in the proper order, every flame will be snuffed out and will not re-manifest until the next day at sunrise. If the torches are lit in the proper order, the embedded crystals will "awaken" and glow with their corresponding color. With each

correct lighting, the metallic crack of an iron bolt sliding from within the door will be heard. When the last bolt is thrown, the thick wooden door will creak open, revealing a stairway that descends into further darkness.

Any attempt to remove the embedded gems will cause the crystals to glow purple before crackling to life with brilliant electric energy. Every living creature within 30' must make a DC14 Reflex save or receive necrotic burn damage (1d6 for chaotic PCs; 1d8 for neutral PCs; 1d10 for lawful PCs) and will be struck blind for one turn (10 minutes).

One small block in the chamber walls is marked with the **Eye of Buldakatak** (visible in **Handout A-2**). Should a PC inspect the block they will notice that the mortar is loose. If it is pulled forward, a secret cavity contains a leather dagger frog (a "frog" is an inexpensive way to carry a weapon that is normally sheathed, which can be tailored to better suit the fighter's preferred style of drawing the weapon). This dagger frog is loaded with four ornate mithril throwing daggers and can be worn on the back or across the waist. There is also a small sack that contains a ceramic fish and 1d10 gold coins. The ceramic fish returns one luck point when it is smashed and broken.

When the door is opened, the PCs can proceed to **Area 1-5**.

AREA 1-5: THE SANCTUM OF AGRAGAR THE QUEASY

The stairwell from **Area 1-4** leads down a staircase into darkness. Any light sources glimmer on stone walls hewed in a distant time. If the PCs descend, read or paraphrase the following:

The stone stairwell leads downward into further darkness. Primitive hieroglyphs are painted on the walls, and as you descend and pass the various scenes, the story of Buldakatak and the City in the Cliffs is revealed from the very beginning: a small clan grows into a great city. Funeral-garbed bodies flow down the river. A great horned beast hovers above a sea of dead bodies. Faceless priests carry the bodies to the top of an altar and pitch them into a flaming pit. Every scene is more sickening than the last. When you finally reach the bottom of the stairs, a wafting torch alerts you that you have come to another door.



If the party has taken care to be somewhat stealthy, when they arrive at the locked door (DC 7 to unlock) they will hear chanting from the other side (DC14 Int to recognize the chanting is in Abyssal; DC18 to understand it. Clerics receive a +4 to the check). The source of the chanting is the shaman **Agragar** in his sanctum intoning:

"Oh great one, the hour is at hand. Tonight your city shall weep and burn. Glory to Buldakatak! Awaken thy agents and bid them come to me. Arise soldiers! Arise!"

If a PC was cursed with a "**Seeing Eye of Agragar**" in their forearm in **Area 1-1**, Agragar will know the PCs are outside the door. Otherwise, Agragar will have seen the party and will know they are on their way to thwart Buldakatak's plans, but will not know which way they'll come.

The first two PCs through the door have the advantage of surprise should their actions warrant it. Inside, they'll find Agragar the Queasy, a bald, yellow-toothed shaman surrounded by a thick blue haze, hovering cross-legged in mid-air above candles and skulls laid out in a runic circle. He is surrounded by four newly-manifested bird-headed creatures.

Agragar is the oldest and most loyal disciple of Buldakatak the Burning Warthog, and this is his sanctum, its shelves and tables filled with age-worn scrolls and bones, bottles and mildewed books. Another door exits the room on the side opposite the entrance. If not immediately attacked, Agragar is confident enough in his own power to engage the adventurers in conversation, ever curious and seeking knowledge.



"You are noble. A worthy trait if only the noble died not so poor. Why deny Buldakatak that which he has earned? The city would already be dead if not for his great benevolence. He gave them 200 years of prosperity and peace. These are not your people. Why risk your lives for strangers? Take this with the blessing of Buldakatak and leave while you have breath left to do so!"

With that, Agragar will throw a bag of **50 electrum pieces** (valued at 500 gold) on the floor just in front of the runic circle. It's the party's if they simply return the way they came. Of course, if they do so, the party will not have enough time to reach the crypt to find the body they seek before it's too late to enact the ritual. If the PCs deny Agragar's offer, he will simply intone: *"So be it..."*.

Agragar the Queasy (shaman): Init +3; Atk curse (one use; see special) and Searing Eye Ray +3 missile fire (1d6, +ongoing fire); AC 15 (13 without magic shield); HD 7d8; hp 44; MV 10' fly 20'; Act curse + 1d20 attack; Special- DC12 Will save, all within room, see table on **page 32** for result); SV Fort +4 (+0 without magic shield); Ref+3; Will+5; AL C.

Agragar's Tactics: Agragar's first action will be to utter the chant that will beseech Buldakatak to smite his enemies. Proceeding attacks will focus on ranged missile-fire attacks with the searing ray from his staff.

Gawk Fiends (4): Init +2; Atk claw or bite+3 melee (1d8+1); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 9; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP when the fiend reaches 0 hp, the carcass melts and the rising vapor flies to inhabit the weapon that destroyed it. The weapon is now possessed. (**See Gawk-Possessed Weapons sidebar on the next page**); SV Fort+3; Ref+3; Will+2; AL C.



AGRAGAR'S CURSE TABLE: (DC 15 WILL SAVE)

The PC's Save roll will also act as their result roll on the following table:

1 or lower: The PC will begin to sprout black feathers and turn into a Gawk Fiend. On their turn in the initiative, they must meet a DC 12 Will Save or attack their nearest ally. The effect lasts 1d4 rounds.

2-5: The PC's arms turn into black wings. Brandishing a weapon incurs a -2 penalty to attacks. The effect lasts 1d4 rounds.

6-9: The PC sees the Gawk Fiends split into two (now appearing as eight instead of four creatures). The effect is an illusion, but the PC has a 50% chance of attacking a Gawk Fiend that isn't there. The effect lasts 1d3 rounds.

10-14: The PC's eyes bulge as those of a bird. Sores and lesions develop on their flesh, causing 1d4-1 damage. The physical changes last 1d8 days. In that time, the PC has dark vision for 30' and incurs no penalty when being attacked from behind.

15 and higher: no effect.

GAWK-POSSESSED WEAPONS

Gawk Fiends are aberrations from the abyssal realms where Buldakatak resides. They cannot truly perish in this realm and so when one is destroyed it will find residence in the weapon that felled it as a penance for its failure. A PC of any alignment can brandish the now-cursed weapon. For Lawful PCs, the imprisoned creature grants an increased chance to deliver a critical hit against undead (range increases by one, e.g. 19-20). For neutral and chaotic PCs, the PC can draw blood from themselves as one action to call upon Buldakatak. He will hear the prayer and increase inflicted damage in the following way: for every hit-point that the PC is willing to sacrifice of their own, they may inflict an additional 1d4 damage on the next successful attack with the weapon.

If a lawfully aligned opponent is killed by the cursed weapon, the Gawk Fiend is freed and will return to the Abyssal Realm.



Inside the sanctum are various items of note. Aside from the 50 Electrum in Agragar's pouch, the PCs may find: a **+4 Scroll of Spiderclimb** (DCC pg. 156), a **+4 Scroll of Magic Shield** (DCC pg. 146), a **book on Elven alchemical lore** (judge's discretion, to learn future spells?), a **mithril longsword**, a **tusked-helmet** in the visage of Buldakatak, **two flasks of oil**, and **Agragar's staff** (judge's discretion; should require questing to master).

An unlocked door in the south wall of the chamber opens to a stairway descending to **Area 1-10** (see judge's map). If the PCs state that they are searching the room for hidden alcoves or other secret doorways, they may discover the painting of a doorway behind a curtain on the western-most wall. Agragar was never able to discern the magic that opens the portal. But if industrious PCs find a way to open it, the tunnel beyond leads to **Area 1-8**. If opened, however, the tunnel will be suddenly filled with rushing waters from the river, immediately flooding the sanctum, bursting the southern door and washing the PCs down the stairs that lead to **Area 1-10** (DC 16 Fort Save or 1d6 damage), and there is a 50% chance that the PCs will lose any treasure they just acquired!



AREA 1-6: THE RAPIDS

As you steer the boat from the tunnels toward the northern passage of the river, you find it no longer necessary to propel yourself with the pole as you begin picking up speed. You need the pole now to steer yourself away from the treacherous rocks and foaming rapids! As the current swings the boat about wildly, you see the river drops just ahead. Suddenly a creature leaps from the turbulent water. It has the head and body of a ram and the tail of a large fish. You're doused in spray as its leap carries it over the boat and back into the water.



Roll initiative! The Mer-Rams will attempt to bull rush the adventurers from their vessel. It will take three rounds for the party's boat to traverse the rapids (use a d3 to count down the rounds). At the top of each new round, have each PC roll a d20 applying their Reflex modifier, checking the results on the following table:

1-4: fall out of the boat.

5-9: fall prone on deck.

10-16: steady-footed.

17 or higher: steady and save any one nearby comrade from falling out of the boat in the same round.

Any PC in the water at the top of each round must make either a Fortitude or Reflex check (DC12) thereafter until either the rapids are traversed or they are back "safely" on the boat. A failed check results in 1d4-1 damage that round.

Climbing back into the boat in the swirling waters requires a DC 14 Strength check. If a drifting PC is willing to hold their action until an ally's turn in the initiative, two PCs can combine their action to make that check.

The Mer-Rams have no motive beyond sport, so the judge should make a morale check after any one of them has met his demise (d20+ Will mod; 11 or higher means the attacks continue). After two creatures are defeated, the rams will definitely break off the attack.

Once the river has calmed and the danger has passed, the judge should proceed to **Area 1-9**.

Mer-Rams (4): Init+2; Atk bull rush +3 melee (1d4+special); AC 12; HD2d6; hp8; MV run/swim 30'; Act 1d20 (special: on a successful attack, target takes damage and must make a DC8 Strength or Agility save or be knocked overboard); SV Fort+3; Ref+2; Will+1; AL N.



AREA 1-7: THE MANTIS-FOLK

Emerging from the tunnels, you notice that the sun is well into its downward trajectory from the sky. The southern branch of the river carries you beneath a stone arch that spans the river. Suddenly you hear a loud warble that echoes around the canyon walls, followed by a chorus of shrill chirps as bug-eyed creatures rise from concealment near the canyon walls. Some of the bipedal insects seem to be astride hyenas, using them as mounts! They race to reach the archway over the river before you pass beneath it.

The Mantis-folk range anywhere from two to three feet tall. Each is equipped with a small primitive bow, a quiver of arrows, and a bone dagger. They communicate by way of clicks and warbles, understanding no tongue but their own. An unfortunate byproduct of Agragar's reckless plundering of ancient magic beneath the open desert skies, the creatures manifested many years ago and hold no allegiance to their creator. Every humanoid they have ever encountered has been adversarial to their existence.

It will take the PCs and their boat 3 rounds to reach the archway where the Mantis-folk will be waiting overhead.

On the first round, three of the mounted insects will send a volley of arrows that will strike the front of the boat and embed in the wood.

Though the PCs won't know it, this serves only as a warning shot. The Mantis-folk will not fire again as long as the party does not respond in kind. **If the PCs return fire, roll initiative.**

On the second round of approach to the archway, the PCs will notice an inscription carved into the stone bridge, chiseled in Elven script. If anyone in the party is capable of reading it, and recites the inscription aloud, proceed immediately to the description in **Area 1-8**. (The judge may prefer to jot down the inscription and pass it to the player who recognizes it. It reads *"I seek audience with the master of the verdant realms. Hear my voice oh king!"*)



On the third round, if the inscription has not been read aloud nor any confrontation with the mantis-folk provoked, the party will float past the watching creatures in tense silence, but no violent altercation will be triggered.

If there is an altercation, the PCs will not escape beyond the creature's arrows until they have survived two rounds beyond the bridge. In a fight, two of the brave mounted mantis-folk will leap with their mounts onto the boat as it passes beneath. If a PC wears the **All-Seeing Eye Pendant** found in **Area 1-2**, they will be targeted first as the mantis-folk have no love for those disciples.

Mantis-folk (8): Init+3; Atk dagger+2 melee (1d4+1) or bow +3 missile fire (1d6-1); AC 11; HD 2d6; hp 7; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SV Fort-1; Ref+3; Will-1; AL N.

Hyena Mounts (2): Init+2 (if mounted, the hyena will attack on the mantis-rider's initiative); Atk bite +1 melee (1d4+1); AC 9; HD 1d6; 4hp; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort+1; Ref+2; Will+1; AL N.

Should the PCs disembark for any reason to search for or visit the mantis-folk camp, they will soon find an encampment near the cliffs holding 1d24+6 additional mantis-folk.

A mud hut in the heart of the village contains treasures obtained in past skirmishes: **two mithril daggers**, a **shield bearing the image of Buldakatak** on its face, **4 Vials of holy water**, a **+4 Scroll of Spider Web** (DCC pg. 196), and an **amber stone** with a single eyeball peering from inside. (An elf or wizard that meets a DC14 Intelligence check will know that the amber stone offers a one-time +3 boon to any single spell check. After that use, the eye will close inside the clear amber and the stone will turn opaque.) The mantis-folk would gladly barter these items for equipment or baubles more useful to their way of life.

Leaving the area by continuing down the river brings the party to **Area 1-9**.



AREA 1-8: DIVINE INTERVENTION

This encounter only happens if someone has recited aloud the bridge inscription in **Area 1-7**. Read or paraphrase the following:

As the inscription is read aloud, the skies grow suddenly dark and the mantis-folk begin to scatter. The waters before you begin to churn as your vessel begins to sink. But instead of the water pouring over the sides of the boat, a bubble of protection forms around you and you descend en masse through the water line. In moments you miraculously comes to rest on a dry cavern floor, the river somehow continuing to flow above you, defying gravity! The sandy chamber is approximately 60' long by 30' wide, about the width of the river. At the far end, on a throne of gnarled branches, an old white-bearded elf leafs through an ancient leather-bound tome that rests upon his lap.

Though it is unlikely the party recognizes him, the old man is a manifestation of the **King of Elfland**. Not usually concerned with the affairs of humankind, he nonetheless has heard the prayers of his devoted followers within the city. He holds no fear nor regard for the minor desert god Buldakatak, but does see the warthog's intended breach of promise as an attack against the cosmos. Though he chooses not to directly intervene (upsetting the balance of nature/anti-nature, etc.), he does see the adventurer's quest as the best chance to "fairly" thwart the Burning Warthog.

The judge may roleplay this interaction as they see fit, even substituting the patron of any of the players to better fit an ongoing campaign. But this interaction will give the judge an opportunity to **A**: bolster the party with some healing, returned luck, and spell check assistance before the final encounters, and **B**: remind the players that the gods are in a constant chess match using mortals as pawns.

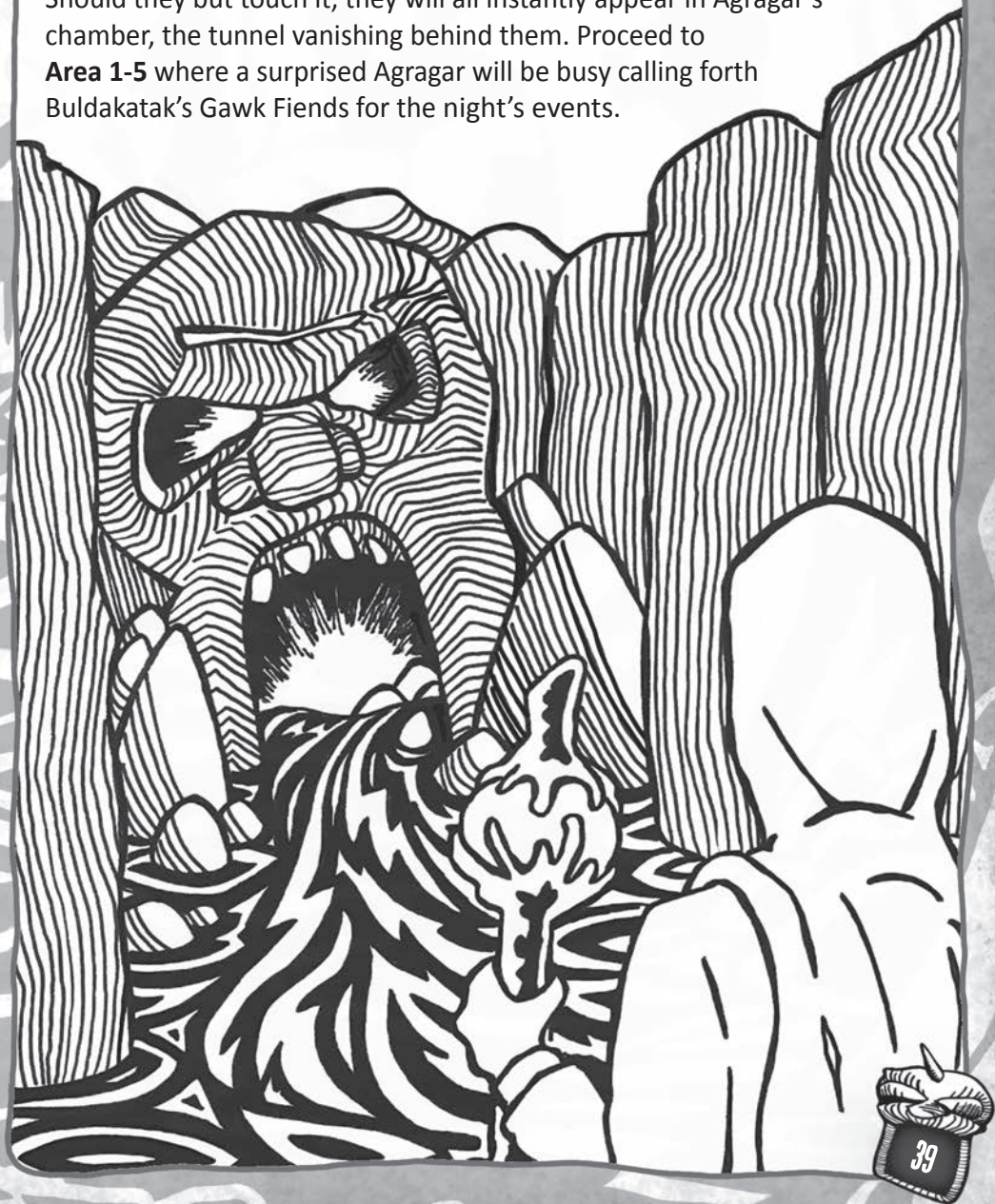
The King of Elfland may make one or more of the following offers:

- "I shall place fortune's winds upon your back." (1d4 Luck returned)
- "Thy wounds be touched by the mists of Elfland." (1HD hp returned)
- "May this laurel aid thy incantations made in service to Elfland." (A twig-woven wreath to be worn on the head of a spell caster that adds +2 to a spell check, one-time use).



Should the judge use the patron of any party member in this encounter, that PC may also receive a bonus of +2 to any patron spell for the remainder of the adventure.

An open tunnel on the south-eastern wall leads to the sanctum of Agragar the Queasy in **Area 1-5**. As the party traverses the tunnel, the stone will form solidly behind them and they will hear the river rushing to fill the previous chamber. At the end of the tunnel they reach a red curtain. Should they but touch it, they will all instantly appear in Agragar's chamber, the tunnel vanishing behind them. Proceed to **Area 1-5** where a surprised Agragar will be busy calling forth Buldakatak's Gawk Fiends for the night's events.



AREA 1-9: THE RIVER ENDS

Just ahead, the river disappears, swallowed by an enormous gaping stone mouth carved to look like a tormented face in the cavern wall. The boat continues to pick up speed, and you hear the roar and rush of breaking water ahead in the darkness.

Once beyond the mouth, the river spills 60' down into an enormous underground lake. If the PCs fashion a preemptive attempt to avoid the drop, the judge may allow them to lasso or steer toward a stone landing near the river's edge. A steep, damp, and narrow stairway descends from here to the subterranean lake's edge. If they take no such precautions and ride the boat over the falls, the drop will require a DC14 Fort Save or the PC will receive 2d6 damage and will be rendered unconscious for 1d6 rounds. Any unconscious PC left in the water for more than three rounds is drowned. The boat will be destroyed in the fall.

Proceed to **Area 1-10** for a description of the underground lake.

AREA 1-10: THE CRYPT IN CADAVER CANYON

The PCs can arrive at the underground crypt in two different ways. If they enter through the river inlet via **Area 1-9**, they will most likely have descended the narrow stairway or spilled over the falls. Or they may have descended the stairway from **Area 1-5**. In either case, when the party arrives at the subterranean lake, read or paraphrase the following:

Murky waters lap at algae-covered walls for as far as the eye can see. Above, the Deep Scratch River spills into the enormous underground lake set before you. When your eyes finally adjust to the dim light, you recoil as you realize that what at first seemed to be swells on the surface of the lake are in reality a veritable sea of bloated cadavers bobbing in the wormy ink. In the center of the lake a coarse stone platform rises as an island some 60' square. In the center of the artificial island a tower of smooth black onyx rises 40' above the platform, a sloped walkway winding around the ominous spire up to an open doorway near the tower's peak. From your vantage, you see robed figures moving on both the island platform and the sloped walkway.



If the PCs have the means to take a closer look or decide to approach the island, read or paraphrase the following:

The robed figures are human in size, some carrying golden censers wafting incense; others carry or drag corpses up the smooth ramp before disappearing into the darkness of the open doorway at the top of the tower. Each carries a twisted wooden staff capped by an enormous moving eyeball, either in their hands if possible, or on their backs. Each robed figure seems intent upon their part in this solemn and gruesome ritual, murmuring to themselves as they go about their work.

The underground lake varies in depth from 5' to 20' deep. The Deep Scratch River finds its way out of the chamber via smaller ducts and crannies on the southern-most walls. The island platform is 60' square, rising mere inches above the lake's waters in most places,

but never more than a couple of feet. The robed "Keepers" may or may not notice the party, depending upon the PC's actions.





They are busy “feeding” Buldakatak the unclaimed souls by carrying the bloated worm-infested cadavers up the tower ramp and dumping them into the furnace. When the players have a good sense of the scene before them, read or paraphrase the following:

As one of the robed figures emerges from the top of the tower, she is revealed as a woman when she lowers her hood to uncover an unruly mop of red hair. The left side of her face is covered in tattoos. After she wipes the sweat from her brow, she lifts the hood to cover her head once more, and begins the trek back down the tower ramp.

Players will hopefully discern that the robed figure matches the description of **Guldava Tick**, very much alive and working alongside the Keepers. Although it isn’t immediately apparent, she bears the scars around her neck from being hanged, along with the birthmark of a bull’s horn on her right arm. If the PCs wait for a more opportune time to make their move to grab her, she will eventually walk to the water’s edge to retrieve a corpse for the trek back up the tower ramp.

How Guldava came to join the Keepers is quite simple; assumed to be dead, her body was cut loose to fall into the river running through the city. There, her body was intercepted by priests, dressed in graves clothes, and sent down the river as is customary. When found by the Keepers, they alerted Agragar the Queasy when they discovered that she was not only (barely) alive, but marked with the bull horn! Agragar has promised her that she may go free (a promise he may or may not keep) or even become his apprentice if she agrees to stay with the Keepers until after the Day of the Warthog ritual has passed and Buldakatak has freed himself from his covenant.

Should the PCs engage Guldava Tick in conversation, her responses should show her utter disdain for the people that condemned and “put her to death”.

- *“I am the thief you seek, shamed and executed. Why should I return to save the city that tried to murder me?”*
- *“Perhaps the Great Warthog is correct? The City in the Cliffs is overdue for a great purging. It’s a shame that so many innocents must die, but all great reincarnations come at some cost.”*

- *“Let Buldakatak destroy the city... they deserve no less! Join us! When the people have been burned and the city razed, we can scour the ashes for all their precious gold and jeweled treasures.”*

Should the PCs decide to fulfill the original quest and overpower her to take her back to save the city, Guldava will call for (and receive) the aid of the Keepers to help her resist. All melee damage inflicted upon Guldava may be considered subdual if the PCs wish to take her back alive. **The ritual scroll Lesser Planar Step can be used on Guldava at any point in the conflict, though if she is conscious, she receives a Will Save vs. the spell check to resist.**

Guldava Tick: Init+1; Atk necrotic staff +3 melee (1d6+poison) or scorching eye beam +3 missile fire (1d6+ongoing fire damage); AC 12; SP necrotic poison DC10 Fort save or ongoing 1d4 damage; HD 3d6; hp 14; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2; Ref +1; Will +3; AL C.

Guldava's Tactics: If she is near the water, Guldava will touch the eye of the staff to the surface and resurrect 1d6 cadavers to fight for her. If she can, she will fire scorching eye beams from a distance and retreat to the top of the tower ramp with each movement.

The Keepers (6): Init -1; Atk necrotic staff +3 melee (1d6+poison) or scorching eye beam +3 missile fire (1d6+ongoing fire damage); AC 11; SP necrotic poison DC10 Fort save or ongoing 1d4 damage; HD 3d6; hp 12; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1; Ref -1; Will +4; AL C.

Keeper Tactics: Any Keepers near the water's edge may also dip the surface with a staff to resurrect 1d6 cadavers, who will arrive on the Keeper's turn in the initiative on the following round. Any PC attempting to use a Keeper's staff will learn that it is powered by fervent devotion to Buldakatak with secrets only unlocked after proving oneself to be a dedicated disciple.

Resurrected Cadavers: Init -3; Atk bite +1 melee (1d4); AC 8; HD 1d6; hp 3; MV 15'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2; Ref -3; Will -2; AL C.



LESSER PLANAR STEP: (+4 RITUAL SCROLL)

Range: target(s) chosen by the caster with various ranges are transferred to predetermined destinations (the Monolith Ritual Site).

Duration: Permanent transfer of location.

Casting time: 1 round (effect happens on caster's initiative on the next round)

Save: unwilling targets receive a Will Save vs. spell check DC

General: a one-time use scroll that when incanted, will burst into flame. As the smoke rises, so too will the target(s) evaporate into smoke and reappear at the Monolith Stones Ritual Altar at the top of the City in the Cliffs. Any magic user who has cast "Read Magic" on the scroll and succeeded at any level receives another +3 (along with any other modifiers) to the roll.

Corruption: Roll 1d4: (1) caster's appearance ages nearly 100 years. Body does not suffer any degenerative effects but appears wrinkled and ancient for 1d6 weeks. (2) caster is unhinged from the material plane, flickering out of existence for 1d4 rounds, returning with no memory of where they have been, smelling of sulfur and cabbage. (3) Caster suddenly develops a tattoo of an hourglass on the back of their hand, the ink moving as though the hourglass is counting down. In 1d4 days, the hourglass will disappear and an actual eyeball will appear. (4) Arcane energy surges through the caster's body, turning all hair bright white. Caster receives immediate and permanent additional 1d4hp then immediately receives 1d6 damage.

Misfire: (1) caster and 1d4 of intended targets are accidentally transported to Agragar's inner sanctum in Area 1-6. (2) the caster disappears for 1 round and reappears next round on initiative covered in snow, suffering 1d4 frostbite. (3) The caster doubles in size each round over the next 1d4 rounds before returning to normal. With each "spurt", the caster's AC gains an additional +2. (4) Caster's arm catches fire (1d4 damage).



RESULTS

1: (natural) Failure, misfire, and corruption.

2-6: Failure and corruption.

7-10: Phlogiston disturbance slows time for the caster. Roll again next round.

11-12: Caster appears alone in the predetermined destination for 1d3 rounds as an ethereal projection while the corporal body remains behind. In this time, the PC is unable to defend their corporal body or interact with the environment. The spell cannot be attempted again until the caster returns.

13-14: Caster and 1d4 targets appear in predetermined destination.

15-18: Caster and 1d6 targets appear in predetermined destination.

19-22: Caster and up to eight chosen targets within 50' of the caster appear in the predetermined destination.

23-27: Caster and up to ten chosen targets within 75' of the caster appear in the predetermined destination.

28+: Caster and up to twelve chosen targets within 100' of the caster appear in the predetermined destination and an open portal remains between the two locations for 1d6 days thereafter.

JUDGE'S NOTE

While this spell can fail, misfire and cause corruption to the caster, **it cannot be lost**. Since this spell is integral to the completion of the quest, the PCs need to be able to attempt castings from the scroll until achieving some sort of activation, be that weak or strong. The scroll is a +4 magic reading of an already prepared spell. Wizards and elves will add their intelligence modifiers and caster levels to that roll. Thieves may roll a d10 or a d12 to attempt a casting and add their more copious luck (see **Appendix C: Judge's Notes, page 53**). Haflings may lend double the Luck; magic-users may spell burn. There are many ways that the adventurers may work together to see that the phlogistical energies of the universe conspire in their favor. Help the players understand how critical this roll is, and they should naturally take these steps!



When the spell is cast, those favored by the cosmos will appear in smoke back at the Monolith Stones and ritual altar. There the Council of Thirteen, bedecked in ceremonial robes, await their fate: either the flames of death, or the hoped-for return of their birth-marked sacrifice. The sun is setting! The hour of Buldakatak's grim return is at hand!

AREA I-II: THE NIGHT OF THE WARTHOG

The author of this adventure makes no assumptions about the whims of an adventuring party. The PCs may have arrived at any number of possible decisions by journey's end. In the immortal words of Paul McCartney, the judge must "let it be". The PCs may have decided to claim the Council's gold by returning Guldava Tick, just as they promised. They may have decided to take Agragar's offer to abandon the quest. Or the PCs may decide that the City in the Cliffs really does deserve its fate and may side with Guldava Tick in the end.

If the PCs fail to deliver Guldava Tick for whatever reason, within the hour, the skies will grow black as unnatural clouds twist and writhe in the twilight above the desert city. The earth will quake and the Deep Scratch River will burst into flame. The **Great Warthog** will breathe fire that completely fills the chasm, two-thousand souls will perish, and a new war will begin between the gods of light and darkness. The loss of so many innocents will not go unheeded. Depending on the PC's alignments, and the nature of their gods and patrons, the character's roles in the city's apocalypse will be duly noted.

If the PCs return Guldava, they will arrive at the Monolith Stones as the sun sets, without a moment to lose. The Council of Thirteen will be waiting amidst lightning flashes and howling desert winds. Armed guards of the **Red Dwarf Clan** will seize Guldava from the party and wrestle her to the stone altar. As the impossibly large face of Buldakatak appears in the turbulent clouds above, Council of Thirteen member Hagre the Red will raise the ceremonial dagger high to run Guldava through...



PLOT TWIST!

With Hagre the Red's arm raised high to strike, his sleeve slips down suddenly, revealing that he too bears the birthmark of the bull horn! The Red Clan dwarf has been a viable candidate all along!

The PCs will need to make a swift decision: they can remain silent, allowing Guldava to be sacrificed so they can collect their reward, or they can challenge Hagre the Red, the Red Clan dwarves and the Council of Thirteen for their deceit.

Judge's Note: The PCs should be given a moment to assess the situation, then give them a surprise round to initiate any actions if they choose to set a plan in motion. Hagre the Red will be guarded by four Red Clan Dwarves. Regardless of how the party acts, the moment of ultimate annihilation is upon everyone. Buldakatak will begin his terrible scourge in one minute, or six rounds. **At that time, if neither Guldava Tick nor Hagre the Red have been sacrificed upon the altar, the covenant is broken and the city is doomed.**

If triggered, Buldakatak's fiery assault will last for four rounds. Each round a character is in the blast area they must make a successful DC24 Fort Save or they suffer 3d6 damage. A desperate plunge into the river far below requires a DC18 Fort Save to escape 4d6 damage. The PC must then remain submerged for the remaining rounds, requiring a DC10 Fort Save each round (suffering 1d4 damage with each failure).

Hagre the Red: Init +1; Atk ceremonial dagger +3 melee (1d4+3); AC 14; HD 3d10; hp 18; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3; Ref +1; Will +2; AL N.

Red Clan Dwarves (4): Init +0; Atk spear +2 melee (1d8); AC 12; HD 2d10; hp 12; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1; Ref +0; Will +0; AL N.

Should the PCs draw any other council NPCs into the fight, the following stats will help the judge handle things on the fly...

Human foe: Init +0; Atk short sword +2 melee (1d8); AC 12; HD 2d6; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1; Ref +0; Will +1; AL L.



CONFRONTING BULDAKATAK THE BURNING WARTHOG

Attempting to challenge and harm the ancient desert god is largely an act of futility. Any direct attack on his person would be met with the coarse thundering laughter of a god that would shake the very heavens above the city. Though he is immune to anything the party can throw at him, if the PCs do make such overtures, Buldakatak will be impressed by the party's moxie, dispatching four eldritch lions to test the party's faith in their own might. Should the PCs prevail, Buldakatak may in the end decide to decimate the entire Council of Thirteen and install the PCs as the new leadership of the city!

Eldritch Lions (4): Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (2d6) or claw +4 melee (1d6+2) and mind roar +4 missile fire (1d8 damage and DC12 Fort Save or fall unconscious for 1d6 rounds); AC 15; HD 3d8; hp 18; MV 35'; Act 2d20; SV Fort +3; Ref +3; Will +5; AL C.

In the end, regardless if the party faces catastrophic defeat, or triumphant victory, whether the City in the Cliffs survives, or is destroyed in a baptism of flames, the party has played a key role in a mighty tale. The lore masters of the desert will record and retell the deeds of those who faced grave perils within the Crypt in Cadaver Canyon!



APPENDIX A: CONTINUED ADVENTURES

To connect this adventure to the 0-level funnel **Nebin Pendlebrook's Perilous Pantry**, and the 1st level adventure **The Frost Fang Expedition**, consider the following plot threads linking those adventures to the desert setting in The Crypt in Cadaver Canyon.

- If any PC possesses the whispering stick from NPPP, the stick may begin to whisper a new phrase, "save us... the City in the cliffs... save us..." Evanna Coor has manipulated its weak magic from afar.
- Anyone lost in the "Realm Beyond the Mirror" in NPPP may suddenly emerge from one of the underground tunnels in the Bleaklands desert, unaware of where they are, having experienced terrible dreams of a giant warthog!
- If the PCs appropriated the flying castle from Dagon in TFFE, their journey could carry them over the Bleaklands Desert. There the skies will grow dark, grounding the earth mote by the will of Buldakatak until the Day of the Warthog has passed.
- If any PC formed a patron bond with Malotoch in TFFE, she may command them in dreams to find the desert city in order to aid a fellow servant, Evanna Coor. By merely reaching Evanna, Malotoch rewards the follower with complete renewed Luck and a +3 bonus to one Invoke Patron roll during the quest (**pages 110-111 in *The Frost Fang Expedition***).
- The Ugnoid captive Thilas Evergood in TFFE asks you to return him to his childhood home before he dies... a place in the Bleaklands Desert called the City in the Cliffs.



APPENDIX B: DESERT ENCOUNTERS

For the judge's convenience, here are a few adversaries and creatures the PCs may encounter in the Bleaklands Desert.

Bleaklands Bandits: Init +3; Atk scimitar +3 (1d8+2) or dagger(2) +3 missile fire (1d4+2); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 11; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +1; AL C.

Bleaklands Bandits are outcasts who prey upon any who wander too far from the safety of the city, ever watching the roads and the river for unwary travelers. They too fear the impending wrath of Buldakatak upon all desert dwellers, which might be exploited by the party.

Phlogi-snails: Init -4; Atk acidic touch +3 melee (1d4 ongoing; DC14 Fort Save ends) or mind warp +4 missile fire (see SP); AC 13; HD 2d6; hp 9; MV 10'; Act 1d20; SP dream haze causes PC to see the snail as the person they love the most. PC will use their full move speed to embrace the snail on their next turn; DC 16 Will save ends.; SV Fort +4; Ref -5; Will +6; AL C.

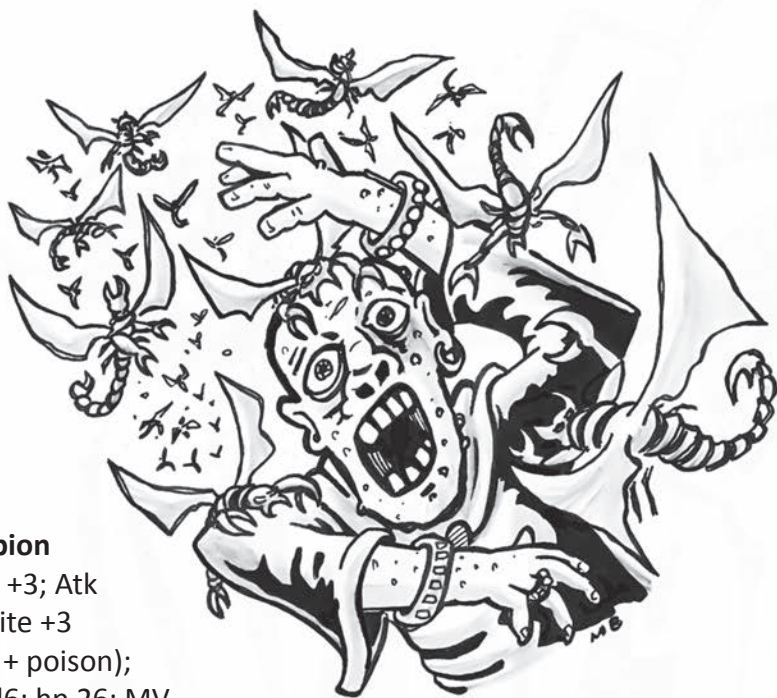
Phlogi-snails dwell in the underground caverns that weave throughout the Bleaklands and the Deep Scratch River. They can grow to the size of full-grown pigs, and by some strange mechanism possess the ability to absorb the residue of the deep earth's elemental energies.



Giant Pangolin: Init +0; Atk claw +4 melee (1d6+4); AC 16; HD 2d10; hp 16; MV 35'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +6; Ref +2; Will +0; AL N.

The burrow of a giant pangolin looks like another desert cave. Giant pangolins are ambush predators, waiting for unwary PCs to explore their tunnels. When the moment is right, they curl into large armored balls and roll down their tunnels to squash their quarry in the confined space. (Similar to a peril faced by a somewhat famous big screen adventuring archaeologist!) A DC14 Reflex save is required to avoid 1d10 damage.





Flying Scorpion

Swarm: Init +3; Atk swarming bite +3 melee (1d4 + poison); AC 9; HD 5d6; hp 26; MV 40'; Act special; SP bite all targets within a 20'x20' space; half damage from non-area attacks; double damage from area attacks; poison- DC 10 Fort save each of 1d4 more rounds or 1d4 more damage; SV Fort +1; Ref +3; Will -2; AL N.

Flying scorpion swarms move quickly across the Bleaklands, most often in the early morning and at dusk when they can more easily see the movement of their intended prey. With poor eyesight, the swarm can be fooled simply by standing still. (A PC with desert lore would know this).

Burrowing Baboon: Init +2; Atk claw +3 melee (1d6) or bite +3 melee (1d6+1) or poo sling +4 missile fire (target blinded for 1d4 rounds); AC 10; HD 2d6; hp 9; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP infravision 30'; SV Fort +0; Ref +2; Will -1; AL N.

These crafty creatures reside beneath the desert's many rock formations and outcroppings, adept at burrowing beneath the Bleakland's shifting sands. Standard tactics are to distract the party by aggressively flinging their own filth, while other burrowing baboons pilfer the party's untended campsite!

APPENDIX C: JUDGE'S NOTES

The Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG is by design a rules-light game system, harkening back to the “good-ol’-days” of gaming. This makes judging DCC adventures an exercise in creative, seat-of-the-pants game mastering. Embrace the madness, have fun, and roll with it. Keep the following in mind as you run this adventure.

- **Magic casting from scrolls:** PCs other than wizards and elves may attempt to cast magic from a scroll, albeit with less natural ability. A 2nd level thief of lawful and chaotic alignment uses a $d10 + \text{Int modifier} + \text{the scrolls built-in modifier}$ to attempt the casting. A neutral thief may use a $d12$ dice to do the same. Other untrained classes will use a $d10$ with no other modifiers other than the scrolls built-in modifier, unless they are burning luck. Depending on the character’s race/class, other options to modify spell-casting rolls also exist, such as sharing Luck, and spellburn for magic-users. There are also several opportunities throughout the adventure for the players to add other bonus modifiers to the roll. In a desperate situation, the party will need them!
- **The Plot Twist:** Many adventuring parties will consider the matter closed as they return Guldava Tick to the Council of Thirteen. Experienced players are often adept at sensing the close of an adventure, and tend to push the limits of their abilities by expending points of Luck or Spellburning on what they perceive as the final encounter. (This may be especially true in one-shot games like in a convention setting or game store demo.)

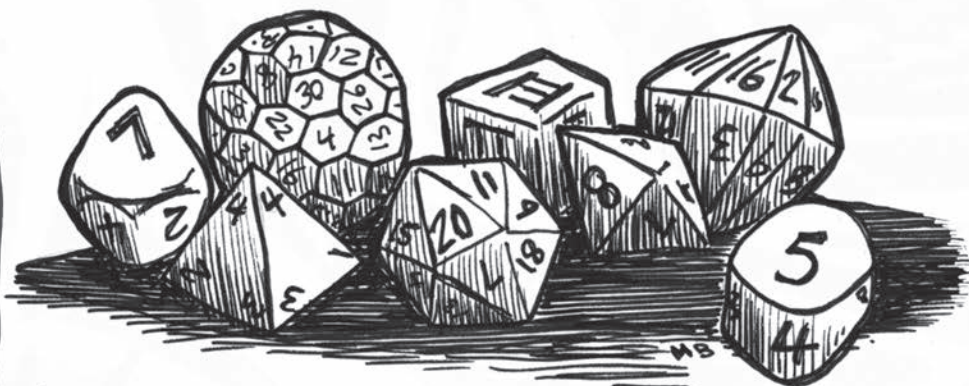
Your players may get that sense from the climactic battle with Guldava Tick and the Keepers of the Crypt. Great! Let them burn those points! Just make sure you have left plenty of time to play out the final sacrifice ritual back at the City in the Cliffs and the reveal that Hagre the Red could have saved the city all along. He and the Red Clan will not go down without a fight and could provide an intense challenge to a depleted party.



- **Make failure interesting:** Players will whiff rolls at important times. Remember in these situations that your game doesn't have to collapse, in fact it has likely just become a whole lot more interesting! Allow the failure to move the game forward in an unexpected direction. Epic moments don't just happen on critical hits; they happen on fumbles too.

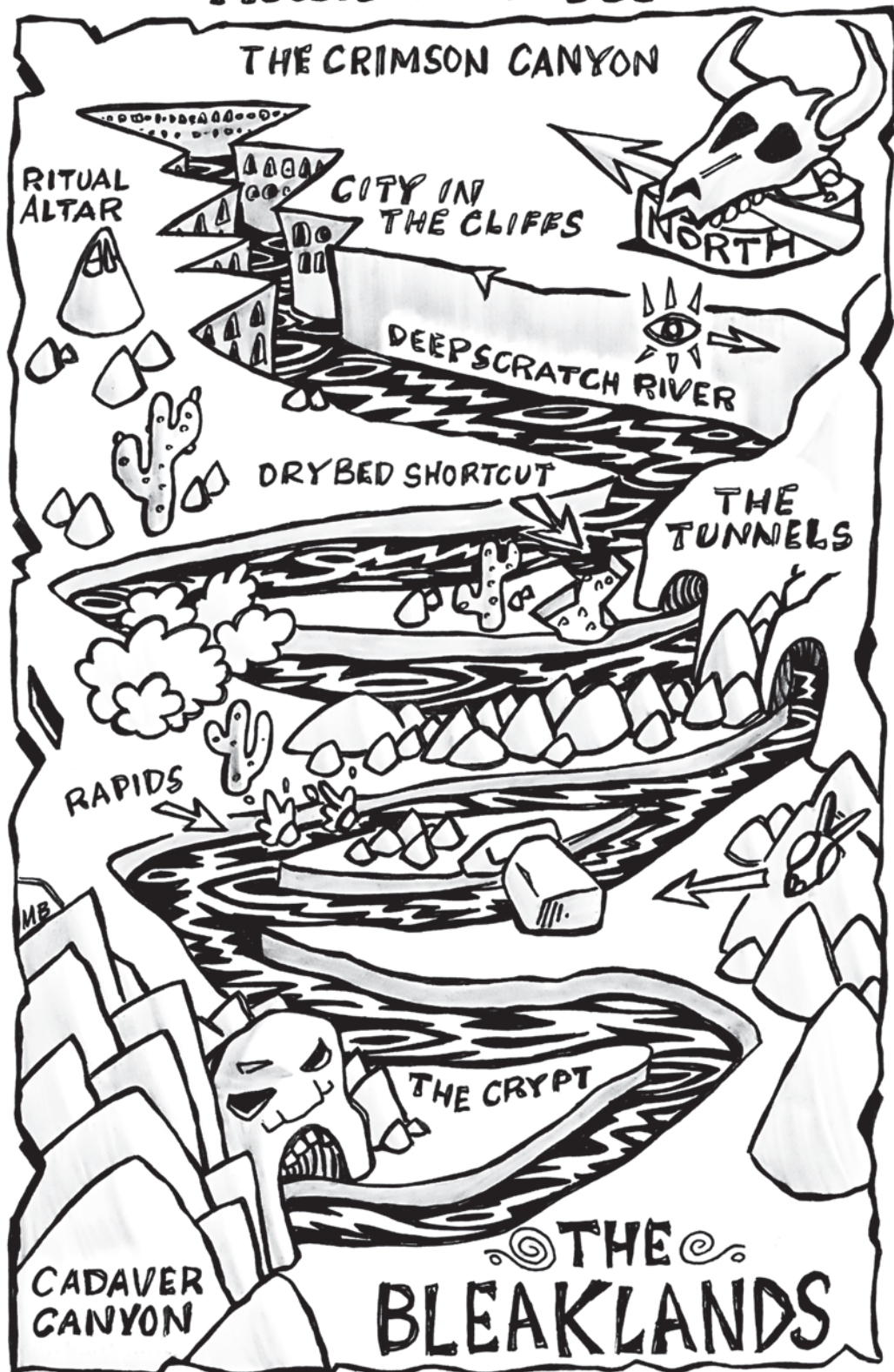
- **If you need a four-hour game:** This module has enough background material and encounter areas to easily fill a couple of sessions or more in your home campaign. For a store demo or convention slot game, hit the ground running by beginning at the Quick Start section. **Run the encounter areas that most appeal to you until you reach the one-hour/one-and-a-half-hour mark, then proceed to the subterranean crypt.** This should allow you to complete the adventure in the time available: ending with a bang instead of a whimper!

- **Adjust this module to your players:** No two groups beginning this adventure will be alike so feel free to adjust difficulty levels to fit your party's play style and power. Seasoned players may cruise through the encounters while newcomers to the game might forget the abilities available to them and have a rougher time. The stats in this module have been play-tested to fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. **In the end, the legend of the Crypt in Cadaver Canyon is no-one's story but the one told at your table.**



HANDOUT A-1

THE CRIMSON CANYON



YELLOW

BLUE

LESSER PLANAR STEP: (+4 RITUAL SCROLL)

Range: target(s) are transferred to predetermined location (Monolith Stones Ritual Altar).

Duration: Permanent transfer of location.

Casting time: 1 round (effect happens on caster's initiative on the next round)

Save: unwilling targets receive a Will Save vs. spell check DC

General: a one-time use scroll that when incanted, will burst into flame. As the smoke rises, so too will the target(s) evaporate into smoke and reappear at the Monolith Stones Ritual Altar at the top of the City in the Cliffs. Any magic user who has cast "Read Magic" on the scroll and succeeded at any level receives another +3 (along with any other modifiers) to the roll.

Corruption: Roll 1d4: (1) caster's appearance ages nearly 100 years. Body does not suffer any degenerative effects but appears wrinkled and ancient for 1d6 weeks. (2) caster is unhinged from the material plane, flickering out of existence for 1d4 rounds, returning with no memory of where they have been, smelling of sulfur and cabbage. (3) Caster suddenly develops a tattoo of an hourglass on the back of their hand, the ink moving as though the hourglass is counting down. In 1d4 days, the hourglass will disappear and an actual eyeball will appear. (4) Arcane energy surges through the caster's body, turning all hair bright white. Caster receives immediate and permanent additional 1d4hp then immediately receives 1d6 damage.

Misfire: (1) caster and 1d4 of intended targets are accidentally transported to Agragar's inner sanctum in Area 1-6. (2) the caster disappears for 1 round and reappears next round on initiative covered in snow, suffering 1d4 frostbite. (3) The caster doubles in size each round over the next 1d4 rounds before returning to normal. With each "spurt", the caster's AC gains an additional +2. (4) Caster's arm catches fire (1d4 damage).

RESULTS

1: (natural) Failure, misfire, and corruption.

2-6: Failure and corruption.

7-10: Phlogiston disturbance slows time for the caster. Roll again next round.

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DO YOU DARE CHALLENGE A DEVIOUS AND CHAOTIC GOD?

The Crypt in Cadaver Canyon charges 2nd level adventurers to save a hidden desert city (and its cursed inhabitants) from the wrath of a devious and chaotic god.

Its pages are packed with dangerous environments, exotic threats, and a world-shaking finale with thousands of lives on the line!

The deadly desert awaits...