

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

THE CHAINED COFFIN

#83: A LEVEL 5 ADVENTURE
BY MICHAEL CURTIS



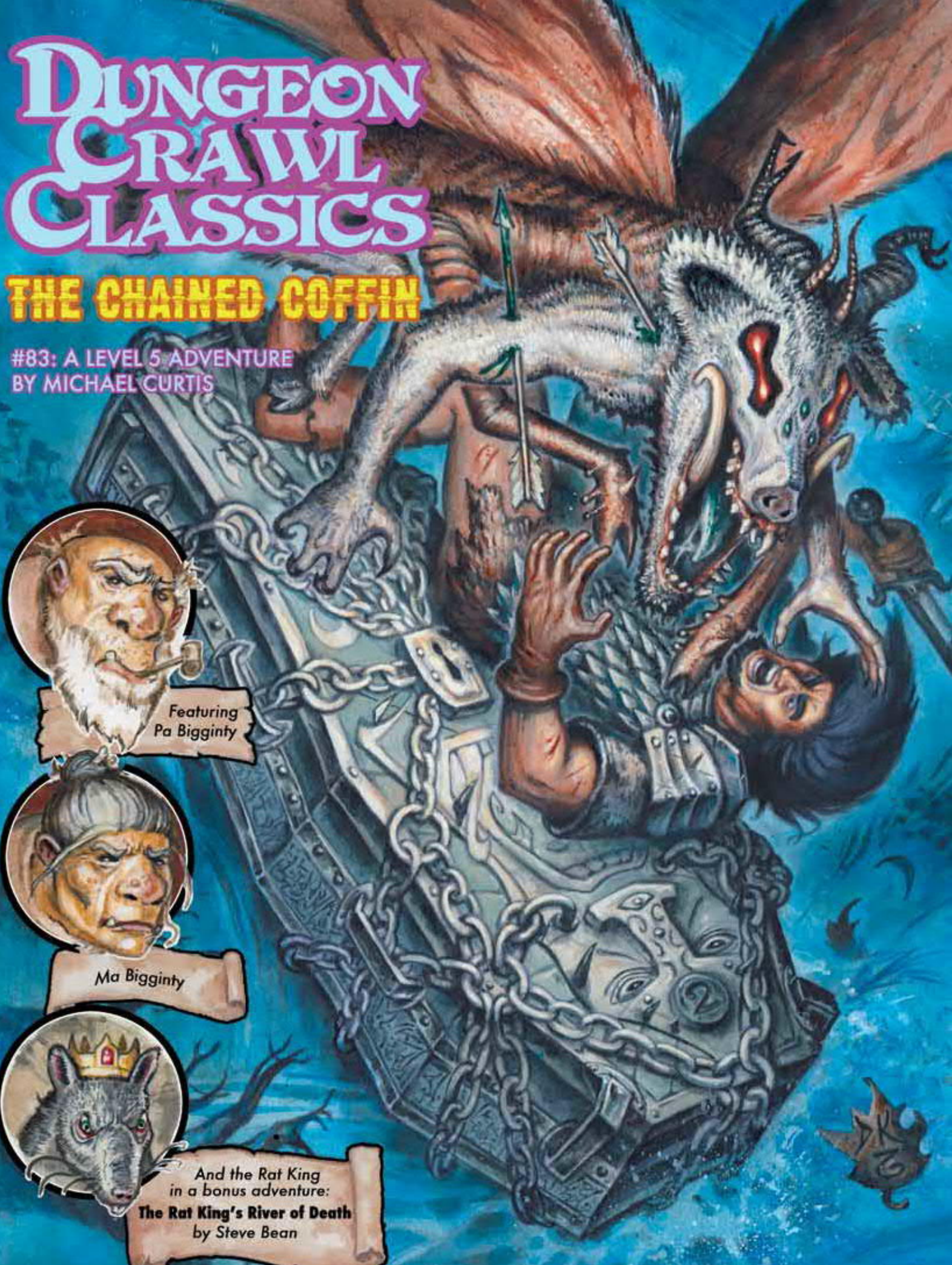
Featuring
Pa Bigginty

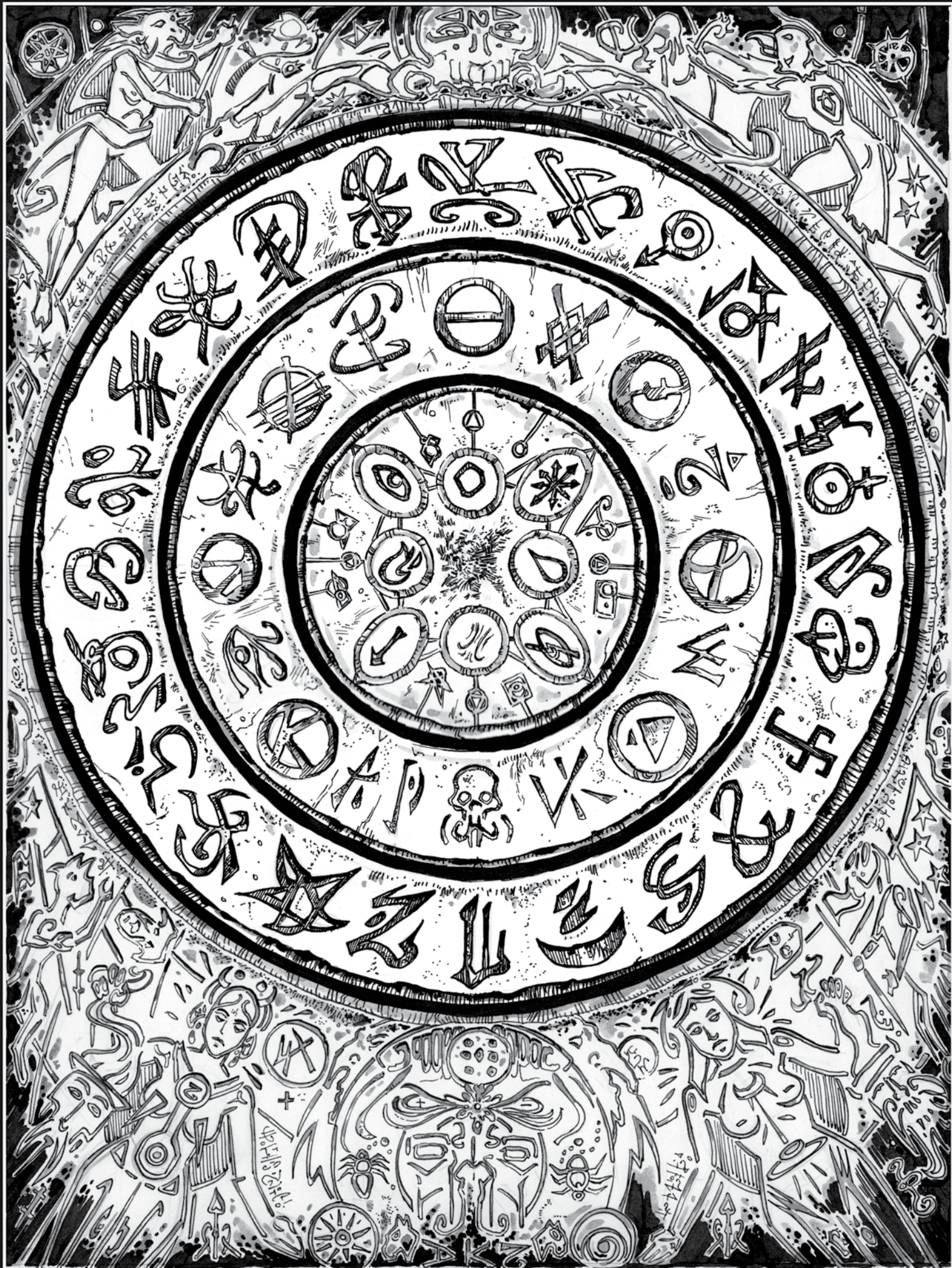


Ma Bigginty



And the Rat King
in a bonus adventure:
The Rat King's River of Death
by Steve Bean





THE CHAINED COFFIN

A LEVEL 5 ADVENTURE

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*Dedicated to Manly Wade Wellman (1903-1986),
who taught us to love and fear the old mountains.*

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INTRODUCTION

The Chained Coffin is a *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG adventure designed for six 5th level characters. At least some of the party should possess enchanted weapons, as several monsters encountered herein are immune to mundane attacks. In this adventure the PCs face a particularly unusual challenge: transporting the imprisoned, yet still sentient, mortal remains of a cleric of Justicia to a mystical conflux to defeat his former ally now aligned with Chaos. The *Chained Coffin* is a mixture of both dungeon exploration and wilderness journey, one that takes the party into the superstition-rife Shudder Mountains. Once there, the PCs will have to range far and wide to locate their destination, and their search will likely bring them into conflict with some of the Shudder Mountains' nastier inhabitants. Assuming they survive their search, an even more dangerous foe awaits them at their destination.

BACKGROUND



Three hundred and thirty-three years ago, two priests of Justicia served their goddess with utter devotion. These two men, Zugun and Boak, were as brothers, united by their faith and friendship. They traveled the lands dispensing justice and mercy, accompanied by Boak's young son, loved by father and informal uncle alike.

During their ministrations, the boy became grievously ill, a victim to one of the strange strains of sickness found in the untamed lands on the outskirts of civilization. The sickness swiftly ran its course and, despite their efforts and prayers, neither man could stem its tide. The boy succumbed to the disease and was buried beneath a rocky cairn amongst the wild hills.



The boy's death had a radically different effect on the men. For Zugun, although saddened by the loss of his "nephew," he understood that divine schemes are seldom comprehensible to mortals and accepted the boy's death as part of Justicia's ineffable whims. Boak, grief-stricken and enraged that the merciful goddess would not save his child, found his faith shattered, replaced by a driving hatred for the goddess he revered. Despite Zugun's efforts to console his erstwhile brother, Boak would not be appeased and broke from both his friend and faith. Feeling abandoned by his deity, he began a search for something — anything — that could appease his anger and suture the ragged hole in his once-merciful heart.

Boak's agonizing cries were met by sultry whispers in the night. The Host of Chaos, knowing the broken tools of Law make the best weapons against their former masters, seduced Boak, promising him the power he desired to extract his revenge and strike down justice and mercy wherever encountered. In addition to this promise the Host revealed secret means by which Boak could transform himself into a champion of Chaos and become an unholy amalgamation of the infernal and the mortal. Boak readily agreed and a bargain was struck.

Years passed as Zugun continued to serve his goddess and Boak undertook the initial steps to spread discord and prepare for his transformation. On the eve before the former priest entered the final stage of transmutation, Boak sought out Zugun. But whether driven by the urge to convert him to the cause of Chaos or to gloat of his forthcoming triumph, none can say.

Zugun attempted to turn Boak aside from his evil path, but without success. The servant of Chaos departed the cleric's presence and journeyed to one of the two sites where eldritch forces commingled to power his transformation. Zugun chased after him and a titanic battle was joined as the two clashed at the site. In the course of the battle, Boak was defeated, his body shattered by Zugun's blows and Justicia's power.

However, Zugun's faith would not allow him to slay his former friend outright and when he stayed his hand from delivering a fatal blow, Boak turned Zugun's offered mercy against the cleric, striking him down to the point of death in a surprise assault.

Although triumphant, Boak paid a heavy toll for his victory. The mighty forces unleashed during the battle destroyed the site, foiling Boak's transformation. Furious at being thwarted yet again (albeit indirectly) by Justicia, Boak enacted a horrific revenge on Zugun. Boak imprisoned the cleric in a coffin of orichalcum and bound the casket with chains of adamantite. The coffin, empowered by Chaos, preserved the dying cleric in a state that was not life, death or un-death, but a weird mixture of all three. Imprisoned and undying, Zugun would have eternity to contemplate the crime Boak believed him guilty of: preventing his rightful revenge. Boak secreted the chained coffin away from the world, satisfied by his triumph over his former friend.

With his enemy imprisoned, Boak again devoted himself to achieving his transformation into a champion of Chaos. While one site necessary for his conversion had been destroyed, another remained—the ancient stellar calculator known as the Luhsaal Wheel. Unfortunately, the next conflux of magic needed to power his assumption of championship was centuries away. Boak entreated with his patrons to preserve his life until that time and the Host graciously agreed—but at great cost to both Boak’s body and already fragile sanity. Boak has bided his time and awaits for when he will shed his mortal form and assume that of something far, far worse.



That time has now arrived and as Boak prepares once more for his transmutation, Justicia is at work to foil his plans. Unknown to the party, the goddess has assigned them a role to play in the events about to occur. To this end, the “tomb” of Zugun has been rediscovered and the imprisoned cleric placed in the adventurers’ path.

ENCOUNTER TABLES

Area	Type	Encounter
1-2	C	2 Barrow Bones
2-4	T	Ol’ Blackcloak
2-6	C	Grizzly Bear
2-6A	C	3 Hill Giants
2-6B	C	Ma and Pa Bigginty (Hill Giants)
2-7	C	8 Hants
2-9	C	The Sin Eater
2-10	C	The Bad Lick Beast
3- 1	C	1 Young Gray-Back Troll
3-2	T	Locked & trapped Door
3-4	C	2 Gray-Back Trolls
Event 3	C	Boak, Malucius the Leper, and 4 Type II Chaos Demons



STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The judge can introduce *The Chained Coffin* in one of three ways. If one of the PCs is a cleric of Justicia, he receives a divine vision of the location of Zugun’s coffin, either in a dream or while in prayer. The cleric feels compelled to seek out the site; failing to do so results in continued visions and perhaps even divine disfavor until he undertakes the goddess-sent pilgrimage.

The second way is to have the PCs learn of the hidden entrance (1-1) via rumors or tavern talk. Local peasantry discovered the entrance while conducting their daily business, but were too superstitious to meddle with what seems a forgotten tomb. Questioning the peasants provides the PCs with a simple map to the site.

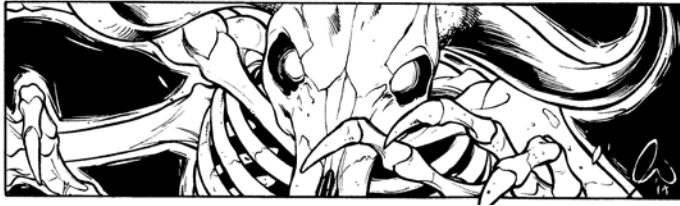
Lastly, the party may simply stumble upon the hidden cave while on an overland journey, either by sheer happenstance or guided by Justicia’s subtle hand. Regardless of how they learn of the cave, its location and the journey to it is as simple or complex as the judge desires. The judge can place the cave wherever he wishes in the campaign world, but an area of rocky hills is assumed in the description below.

THE HIDDEN CAVE

After imprisoning Zugun, Boak interred the chained coffin in a “dead” limestone cavern, a cave whose water source responsible for its creation had long dried up. He then placed two barrow bones, powerful skeletal un-dead, to guard it from trespassers, and finally covered the entrance with a rockslide. Over the last three centuries, natural erosion and other rock falls have cleared away a portion of the cave’s covering, revealing the rough-hewn slab of stone that seals Zugun’s tomb.

Area 1-1 – Cave Entrance: *A hill of rocky earth overgrown with yellow grass rises before you. The southern face of the hill shows evidence of past rockslides. Piles of stones ranging in size from tiny pebbles to man-sized boulders lie heaped at the base of the hill. Despite the mass of haphazard stones, a shallow cavity is visible behind the rocky pile. A slab of stone, obviously worked by tools and in a shape suggesting a door, stands at the back of the depression.*

A dwarf or other character knowledgeable of natural stone easily determines that while the cavity behind the piled stones is a natural one, the slab occupying it is not and has been shaped quickly with poor masonry skill. They also identify the rockslide is an old one, but erosion, weather, and natural forces have taken their toll and uncovered the cavity beyond. Clearing the pile can be accomplished with an hour of strenuous work, no check required. However, the sound of digging alerts the barrow bones in area 1-2 and they prepare to ambush the party.



THE CHAINED COFFIN

Beneath the piled stones is Zugun's prison: a human-sized casket crafted from orichalcum, a rare gold alloy (detectable by dwarven noses), and bound with chains of silvery adamantine. A complex, enchanted lock (DC 40 pick lock check to open and immune to *knock* magic) secures the chains. The surface of the casket is inscribed with profane symbols. Any cleric automatically recognizes the symbols are being used to restrain a Lawful entity, much as holy symbols are used against Chaos and the un-holy. A DC 12 Intelligence check allows non-clerics to make the same deduction. If *detect evil* is cast upon the casket, the symbols, but nothing else (including Zugun within) radiate a malignant aura.

Once cleared, the party sees the cavity is actually a narrow cave mouth sealed by the stone slab that has been inexpertly mortared into place with clay and gravel. The stone door bears no decoration. Moving the slab requires a DC 13 Strength check, and warriors and dwarves add their level to their ability rolls in addition to any Strength modifiers. Moving the door reveals a 7' high, 4' wide tunnel that leads slightly upward into the hillside. The air beyond is stale, but breathable.

Area 1-2 – Tomb Cave: Show the players Handout A, then read or paraphrase the following:

The tunnel beyond leads some 20' into the hill before terminating in a natural cavern roughly 35' in diameter. The stone floor is dusty; the stalactites and stalagmites dry and cracked. A pile of stones, each as flat and wide as a tabletop lie in a precarious heap near the cave's far end. From the gaps between these stones, the gleam of golden metal is visible. Suddenly, the sound of rattling bones is heard as large shapes shamble from the gloom, accompanied by the eerie glow of two pairs of burning eyes!

The shapes are barrow bones advancing to attack. Determine surprise as normal for the party. The two barrow bones have different forms. One is a hulking, four-armed humanoid with an ox-skull head and the second is a bony human torso atop a skeletal, stinger-tipped snake's body.

Ox-Headed Barrow Bones (1): Init +3; Atk bone claws +3 melee (1d4+1) or shard blast +4 (see below); AC 15; HD 5d8; hp 38; MV 20'; Act 4d20; SP shard blast (spray of razor-sharp bone fragments affects all targets in a 15' square area up to 30' away; 2d5 damage, DC 14 Fort save for ½ damage; can create 3 blasts per day), half-damage from piercing and slashing weapons, un-dead traits; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +2; AL C.

Human/Serpent Hybrid Barrow Bones (1): Init +2 (1d16 initiative die); Atk bone pole arm +4 melee (1d10+2) or sting +4 (see below); AC 15; HD 5d8; hp 38; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP sting attack does 1d4+2 damage and acts as *ray of enfeeblement* if successfully hits (+4 to spell check), half-damage from piercing and slashing weapons, un-dead traits; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +2; AL C.

The ox-headed guardian initiates combat with a shard blast while its companion slithers forth to engage the party with its pole arm and tail stinger. The un-dead guardians fight until destroyed, and cannot leave the cave if the party flees the battle.

Once the barrow bones are defeated, the party hears a dry, whispery voice coming from the pile of stones at the rear of the cave. "Is someone there? Have I finally been found after these many years?" the voice asks. "Praise unto Justicia!" the dusty, hoarse voice proclaims.

Six large stones mostly cover the coffin, having been stacked like cordwood atop its lid. The stones can be removed with ten minute's work by anyone with a Strength of 12 or greater.



If the PCs respond to Zugun's call, he thanks them profusely for finding him and dispatching his guards. He introduces himself with the following:

My name is Zugun, a devoted servant of the Lady of Law, Justicia. You find me in this sorrowful condition because I stood fast against the machinations of Chaos...and failed. Long ago, perhaps centuries ago, a fellow priest, a man who was like a brother to me, fell to Chaos' charms. I strove to turn him away from Entropy's crooked path, fighting to thwart his plans to turn his body and soul over the Host of Chaos. To my shame, I did not succeed. My punishment for daring to stand against my former brother, my former friend, Boak, was imprisonment within this gilded casket before you.

Boak hid me away in this place, desiring that I remain...in existence...so that I might witness his plans come to fruition. Since the day of my defeat, I've lain here, taunted by my foe and powerless to stop his scheme to become a Champion of Chaos. At long last, I feel my goddess stirring to aid her devoted servant. Your discovery of me is a sign that Justicia's hand is at work, for the time of Boak's change is once again nigh. I believe you have found me because the goddess deems it necessary to oppose Boak once again and to end his plan for good. I beg of you to become my own champions and to aid me in my battle against Boak and the rise of Chaos' power. Many lives hang in the balance should he succeed in ascending to his Championship.

It is likely that the PCs have additional questions and may be suspicious of Zugun. Use the following as a guide to answer their questions and help allay their suspicions.

What are you? "Once a man, but now I do not know. I should have died long ago, but this coffin is now my prison and my preserver. I hope that I'm whatever goodness remains of a man, once his mortal clay is no more."

Do you wish to be released from the coffin? "I would like nothing more, but alas, I believe doing so would be my end—at least in this world. Before that occurs, I must see Boak defeated."

How do you know Boak is even still alive? “He comes to me, speaking in my mind and taunting me. He’s done so for centuries. Boak and I are somehow linked, but whether by the magic of this prison, our friendship from long ago, or by his own infernal power, I do not know. I can still feel him out there in the world, like the phantom pain of a severed limb. He persists, and his power waxes stronger each day.”

Where is Boak now? “I do not know for certain; our link does not function in that way. I only know he still lives in some manner.”

What do you want from us? “I must go to where Boak will complete his transformation into a Champion of Chaos, a horrid mixture of mortal and the entropic. Only one place remains that has the power to complete his change, an ancient site known as the Luhsaal Wheel. Bring me there and help me defeat Boak. I can fight him if near to him, but I require your physical bodies, skill at arms, and magic to do so.

What is the Luhsaal Wheel? “It was a stellar calculator, an observatory to chart the path of the moon known as Luhsaal, which sages believed broke apart and burned before the beginning of recorded history, destroying the very civilization that constructed the Wheel. Legends say that the Wheel still draws upon that dead moon’s celestial energy, and it is this energy that Boak craves to power his change.”

Where is the Luhsaal Wheel? “Its precise location is unknown, so we must search for it. However, our hunt will not be a completely blind one. It is believed that the Luhsaal Wheel lies in center of the Shudder Mountains, hidden in one of the valleys known by the local people as the Deep Hollows.”

What’s in it for us? “Firstly, should Boak become a Chaos champion, many will die once he unleashes his fury. Perhaps you or those you love will perish as he lays waste to the world he hates. If even one of you believes in the righteousness of Law, you know that Chaos cannot be allowed a firmer grip on the multiverse. For those of you who care little for the Cosmic Struggle, know that it is said a fortune in gemstones was used in the construction of the Luhsaal Wheel. Once Boak is defeated, those jewels will be ripe for the plucking.”

How long before Boak transforms? “Boak last attempted the transformation during the time known as the Black Conflux, a period when the demon-haunted moon of Luhsaal held prominence in the sky. It is likely that this occasion will once again mark the time of this transition. [Note: the exact time remaining before the Black Conflux is dependent on how far away Zugun’s tomb is from the Shudder Mountains, as determined by the judge. The Conflux occurs in a number of days equal to the time required to travel there plus seven days.]

How can we trust you? “I understand your suspicions. I myself would doubt words uttered by a man who should be dead and imprisoned in such a manner. I can only ask that you believe me, for the fate of many lives



hangs in the balance otherwise. However, if you cannot make this leap of faith, my name and my accomplishments in life are on record in the *Annals of the Faithful*, a history of Justicia’s chosen servants. Any major temple dedicated to the goddess will have a copy of those records and can attest that Zugun died—or nearly died—in the service of goodness and Law.”

Hopefully, the PCs accept Zugun’s tale as the truth it is and agree to help defeat Boak. Should they abandon the coffin and its inhabitant, Boak achieves his transformation and his campaign of evil begins. Many lives are lost and it is likely the PCs will have to face Boak, but the details of such a conflict are beyond this adventure. If the PCs decide to confirm Zugun’s mortal identity before accepting, it takes them 1d3 days to locate a temple of Justicia that holds the *Annals*. If they only agree to help Zugun after getting confirmation, deduct the time spent from the number of days remaining before the Black Conflux (see above).

A NOTE ON ZUGUN



Zugun can freely communicate with the PCs from inside the chained coffin, but cannot see events occurring outside of his metal prison, nor move under his own power, making him dependent on the PCs for information and transportation. He gives the party advice as best he can, but Zugun is by no means omniscient and just prone to making mistakes as anyone. Zugun is lawful and a devout priest of Justicia, and the judge should portray him as such. During the journey to confront Boak, Zugun attempts to learn as much as he can about his benefactors, asking them questions regarding their religious beliefs, family, lives prior to adventure, etc. These questions are seemingly innocent conversation, but Zugun is attempting to determine which member of the group will best serve as Justicia’s agent during the final battle (see Event 3 below).

Due to his imprisonment and magical binding, Zugun cannot cast spells to aid the party. However, Zugun believes he may be able to call upon Justicia’s divine aid once—likely at the cost of his own existence—and will do so during the confrontation with Boak.

The judge should make every effort to make Zugun a true member of the party and avoid him becoming just a voice inside a box. Unable to directly assist the party with spells or in combat, it is very easy to forget about the cleric until the adventure’s climax. Zugun should be a memorable NPC, one the PCs and players recall long after their adventures in the Shudder Mountains conclude.



THE JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS



nce the PCs agree to Zugun's request, there is the matter of transporting the Chained Coffin with them. Although the casket appears heavy, orichalcum is a very light metal and Zugun's own desiccated remains do not weigh much. In total, the Coffin weighs 150 lbs. and four people can carry the casket without penalties to their speed. Two PCs can tote the Coffin at a -5' speed penalty.

Although carrying the Coffin is one option, it's best if the PCs make other arrangements to transport it, especially if they plan to travel to the Shudder Mountains on horseback. The Coffin will fit in a cart or wagon, and this is the easiest way to get it to Bent Pine. Once there, however, the roads rapidly degrade in quality, and eventually disappear completely, making it impossible to travel with wheeled conveyances. The Shudfolk of Bent Pine, should they learn of the party's intent to travel into the Deep Hollows with a heavy load, suggest the PCs purchase a sledge, which is typically used to haul heavy loads in the mountains. A sledge in Bent Pine costs 10 gp. The other option is for the PCs to construct a travois out of wood and rope, and drag the Coffin behind a mount. Crafting a travois requires a DC 5 Agility check by any PC with outdoorsman experience.

The PCs are likely to have never visited the Shudder Mountains and may be at a loss as to where to begin their search. A DC 8 Intelligence check recalls that the Deep Hollows lie roughly halfway along the range's northeast by southwest expanse and that the town of Bent Pine is the closest settlement to that mysterious region. Depending on where the judge decides to place Zugun's cave in his campaign world, the journey to Bent Pine may be a matter of days or weeks and can be as eventful or as simple as he desires. Unless the judge wishes to introduce some encounters along the way (random monster attacks, bandits mistaking the Coffin as precious cargo, etc.) the PCs reach Bent Pine without incident and their search for the Luhsaal Wheel begins in earnest. Bent Pine serves as the party's introduction to unique customs of the Shudder Mountains' natives, the Shudfolk, and provides a place to acquire supplies and, most importantly, information about the Deep Hollows.

THE SHUDFOLK



he residents of the Shudder Mountains are a hardy, self-sufficient race of humans. Known as "Shudfolk" both among themselves and by outsiders, the mountain people are a proud, if superstitious breed. Shudfolk in general don't deal much with those who live beyond their secluded valleys, but do occasionally provide timber and regional crafts to outside communities.

The Shudfolk take great pride in their ancestry, and many can trace their family trees back ten or more generations. Due to their isolation, almost all the Shudfolk are related in

some manner, either by blood or marriage, and an outsider who offends one individual might easily find himself unwelcome by others after insulting a "second cousin, twice removed on my mother's side."

Shudfolk have an attitude of cautious friendliness when dealing with newcomers to the mountains. They are always polite, if aloof when first encountered, but that initial reception can easily change depending on the outsider's actions and/or class.

Outsiders who conduct themselves in a courteous manner are quickly welcomed by the Shudfolk. A PC who minds his manners, compliments a farmer on his crops, praises a cook's food, offers to chop wood for the supper fire, or contributes a bit of food to a shared meal will be treated like extended family by the Shudfolk. On the other hand, a rude outsider who condescendingly treats the Shudfolk like backwoods louts will be unwelcome in their homes and communities, likely being strongly encouraged not to "let the sun go down on them around these parts."

Shudfolk are notoriously suspicious of practitioners of magic, who they call "conjure-men" or "witches." Wizards and elves with obvious corruption encounter much cooler responses when dealing with the Shudfolk, and many of the mountain people will throw forked fingers in their direction or sprinkle salt in a wizard's footprints after he passes in an effort to ward off baleful magic.

Lawful (and some neutral) clergy, on the other hand, are greatly respected by the Shudfolk, and are welcomed immediately into their homes and business. A charismatic lawful cleric who vouches for his wizard companion can make the Shudfolk accept the sorcerer, albeit somewhat grudgingly.

BENT PINE



ent Pine is a small trade outpost rather than true village. Erected around a copse of wind-lashed pine trees (from which the settlement gets its name), Bent Pine is comprised of only a dozen buildings, including a smithy, a general store, lumber yard, tavern, and stable, all of log construction and roofed with sod. A plank building, dressed in clapboard and whitewashed, occupies the center of the community. This structure is a temple of the Sovereign.

Bent Pine is almost completely inhabited by Shudfolk, and the settlement serves as a meeting place between their mountain-born culture and traders arriving from outside the region. As such, the residents are used to dealing with outsiders and the PCs arrival in town won't draw much interest—provided Zugun's coffin isn't too obviously displayed when they arrive. Given the superstitious nature of the Shudfolk, arriving in Bent Pine with a bound casket covered in profane symbols won't endear the party to the locals and earns the PCs a cold reception. Unless the party offers a reasonable explanation (perhaps combined with a DC 12 Personality check), the residents hint strongly that they should be on their way posthaste and not return.



Provided they remain in good standing with the Shudfolk, the PCs can provision themselves with food, water, mounts, and other common items in Bent Pine at normal prices. No true inn exists at the outpost, but PCs that endear themselves to the locals with good manners are invited to spend a night or two at the home of one of the residents. A party that doesn't conduct themselves well enough to be invited into a home can still bed down for the night in the stable's hayloft for 1 sp each.

Bent Pine is a prime location to gather information about the Deep Hollows and any PC spending time at the tavern, general store, stable or temple will likely overhear one or more rumors as determined by the judge (see below).

EVENT 1: MUSIC IN THE MOUNTAINS

At some point prior the PCs' entry into the Deep Hollows, whether while visiting the tavern in Bent Pine or while staying or visiting at one of the Shudfolk's homes, the following event occurs:

One of the locals, a sturdy-looking young man dressed in homespun, produces a battered fiddle from a gunny sack. He plucks the strings a few times, bending his ear close to the instrument to gauge its pitch. Satisfied by the results, he draws the bow across the strings, plunging into a song as old as the mountains themselves. He sings in a rich baritone voice.

Lonely Mountain Hearts

*Come meet me, my dear, when the wind shakes the pines,
When the hoot owl screeches and the vanished moon shines.
Far off in the Deep Hollows, a lonely shadow thrown,
I'm a heart-sick stranger in the wilds, all alone.*

*Tarry not by the crossroads where the compacts are made.
Nor pause in the places called home by the shades.
Speak not to the pardoner; unto him give no sins.
I wait for you, darling, where the river's run begins.*

*Like the old bridge above me, our love spans the space.
I dream of your presence, your sweetness, your face.
Leave me not to suffer in the Deep Hollows, alone;
A lost, foot-sore wanderer who craves your love like a home.*

The Shudfolk have a long tradition of music-making and often pass the time playing music and singing. Their songs are traditional ones taught from one generation to the next. Many of these songs' original meanings have been forgotten, but the music and lyrics themselves endure. The singer's song is a traditional Shudfolk tune and, if questioned about it or its lyrics, he can only attest that it's a song passed down to him by his father, who learned it from his daddy, in turn. No one is aware the lyrics hint at the location of the Luhsaal Wheel. PCs who note the song's lyrics



have a greater chance of discovering the ancient site with a minimum of blind wandering in the Deep Hollows.

RUMORS IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

PCs may wish to gather information about the Deep Hollows before venturing into the mountains. They can do this in Bent Pine or when visiting a Shudfolk farm. If the PCs have a good reputation amongst the Shudfolk, each PC automatically learns a random rumor from the list below. Subsequent efforts to learn more about the Deep Hollows will reward additional rumors to each PC making the effort, at the judge's discretion. PCs who've earned the ire of the natives will either be unable to get the Shudfolk to talk to them or must make a DC 15 Personality check to pry a scrap of information from one of the mountain people (judge's choice).

All the following rumors are true, but the judge may add false rumors or slightly obscure the validity of those provided should he desire. However, given the time limit the PCs have to stop Boak, the judge is encouraged to limit such false leads to only one or two known by the party, in total, to prevent too much of a time-killing wild goose chase by the characters.

RUMOR TABLE

d12 Rumor Learned

- 1 There are three valleys in the Deep Hollows: Claw Hollow to the north, Bad Lick Hollow to the west, and Spook Hollow to the south-west. Nobody knows where they got their names.
- 2 The ruins of an old mill mark the start of the Deep Hollows. Once you pass that, you best be wary. There are a lot of things in the Hollows that'll eat you alive or steal your soul!
- 3 Granny Huldah lives in Claw Hollow. Most folk don't truck with her unless they need a healer or a charm, but everyone claims she knows more about the Deep Hollows than anyone living around these parts.
- 4 There are the remains of an old roadway not far from where the three rivers meet in the Deep Hollows. It's mostly worn away and only a few flagstones remain, but you can still see where two roads crossed.
- 5 My great-great-great-great grandfather claimed there's a tremendous stone bridge in the Deep Hollows. It's supposedly ancient and no one knows who built it.
- 6 A clan of giants live in the Deep Hollows, dwelling in a monstrous cabin located up in the southern foothills near Spook Hollow.
- 7 Folks say there a sin eater who lives out in the swamps of Bad Lick Hollow. Conjure-men and witches come to seek him out and he takes away their sins, cleansing their bodies and souls of sorcery's foulness.
- 8 Squire Grady knew more about the Deep Hollows than any man ever born. It's a shame he's been dead these past forty years. He lived in a cabin up along Spook Hollow. Maybe he left something behind that could help?
- 9 Beware of Ol' Blackcloak who walks the Deep Hollows after the sun goes down. He's a devil man looking to claim souls.
- 10 Something evil lives out the Deep Hollows. Nobody knows what it is, but if you hear something big flying overhead in the night or see a pair of burning eyes staring down at you from the pines, you've just met the Bad Lick Beast.
- 11 Years ago, there was a balladeer that walked the Deep Hollows, keeping evil in check. It's said he owned a silver-stringed fiddle capable of putting down evil. The balladeer is buried somewhere in the Deep Hollows.
- 12 There has been troubling signs that trolls are living in the river valleys. Nobody's seen the beasts—and survived, anyway—but hairs, scat, and other evidence have been discovered along the river banks.

THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS



The Shudder Mountains is an ancient range of peaks and forested foothills broken up by river valleys called "hollows" by the Shudfolk. Innumerable creeks wind their way through the deciduous and coniferous forests that grow in the valleys and the whole region is a contrast of heartbreaking beauty and sinister gloom. Travelers venturing through the dark shadows of the forest find their brooding surroundings suddenly broken by a meadow of wildflowers. And the tremendous thunderstorms that plague the region dissolve abruptly to reveal the vista of a spectacular sunset retreating behind the worn mountain tops.



Travelers in the region should not allow this beauty to lull them into a sense of complacency, however, as a number of dangerous creatures prowl the Shudder Mountains. Some of these threats are natural—predatory animals, flash floods, and rockslides await the unwary—but monstrous occupants also pose a threat. While in the Deep Hollows, the judge should check three times every 24 hours to determine if a random encounter occurs. Two rolls are made during daylight hours and a third at night. On a roll of 1-2 on d6, an encounter occurs. Use the table below to determine the nature of the encounter.

SHUDDER MOUNTAIN RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLE

d8 Encounter or Event

- 1 Dire Wolf (1) with 2d6 Common Wolves
- 2 1d2 Hill Giants
- 3 Flash Flood/ Rockslide
- 4 1d4 Hants
- 5 2d6 Wild Razorback Hogs
- 6 1d4 Giant Mountain Rattlers
- 7 1 Gray-Back Troll
- 8 1 Grizzly Bear

RANDOM ENCOUNTER NOTES

Dire Wolf: Init +2; Atk bite +6 melee (1d8+1); AC 14; HD 4d8+2; hp 20; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +2; AL N.

Wolf: Init +2; Atk bite +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +0; AL N.

Hill Giants: See area 2-6A below.

Flash flood/rockslide: Depending on if the party is traveling near one of the Hollow's rivers or in the forested foot-

hills above, a natural hazard afflicts them. Heavy rains at higher elevations cause a flash flood, raising water levels and filling the rivers with dangerous debris, or loose rocks give way as the PCs pass by. Regardless of the catastrophe, each PC must make a Luck check to avoid being caught in the avalanche/enveloped by the cascade. A failed check inflicts 2d6 damage (DC 10 Fort save for ½ damage). If the PC(s) responsible for transporting Zugun's coffin fail the Luck check, the chained casket is swept away by the rush, but comes to rest some distance away. It can be recovered, but doing so delays the party 1d3 hours and reduces the distance they can travel that day by the same number of hexes.

Hants: See area 2-7 below.

Wild Razorback Hogs: Init +0; Atk gore +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

Giant Mountain Rattlers: as per *Giant Viper* (DCC RPG rulebook p. 428). Non-spitting variety.

Gray-Back Trolls: see area 3-4 below.

Grizzly Bear: Init +1; Atk bite +4 melee (1d6+1) or claws +3 melee (1d6); AC 16; HD 4d10; hp 22; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP if both claw attacks strike a target, the bear "hugs" for an additional 2d6 damage; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2; AL N.

THE DEEP HOLLOW

Once the PCs depart Bent Pines, they have seven days to locate the Luhsaal Wheel before the Black Conflux. If they choose to confirm Zugun's identity by locating a temple to Justicia, they have less time to locate the Wheel (deduct the time taken to confirm Zugun's story from the seven days assumed above). PCs may possess a vague idea of what lies in the Deep Hollows from the rumors they've heard, but, barring spells such as *locate object*, they'll have to conduct a search of the valleys to discover the location of the Wheel. This search requires them to explore the Deep Hollows, risking randomly encountered hazards as well as the specifically-located ones.

In general, PCs can cover up to 16 miles (8 hexes) per day, assuming they're mounted on horse or mule. This reduced movement rate accounts for the lack of roads, dense stands of trees, hilly terrain, and the burden of supplies and Zugun's coffin. If circumstances deprive the party of their mounts, their movement is reduced to 12 miles (6 hexes) per day. Forced marches, either on foot or mounted, are possible as per the rules on p. 308 of the DCC RPG rulebook.

The Shudder Mountains themselves are steep and treacherous, and the party is best served by keeping to the river valleys and foothills. If the party insists on crossing into mountain terrain (indicated on the map), every PC must make a Luck check for each hex traveled. A failed check indicates some calamity has occurred. Possible catastrophes include loss of a mount, slipping off a steep trail (DC 12 Ref save or suffer 3d6 damage from a fall), encountering an im-

passible rockslide, or other event of the judge's choosing.

Wise PCs will map as they travel, to avoid becoming lost or to plan their routes. While traveling through the Deep Hollows, the PCs can see every hex adjacent to their position, allowing them to determine the surrounding terrain and spot sites of interest. The party usually (but see areas 2-2 and 2-8 below) notices a site of interest (those indicated on the map and in the descriptions below) when in an adjacent hex, but the details of the site require closer inspection to discern. When spotted from afar, the judge should vaguely describe what they see (a column of rising smoke from a chimney, plots of cultivated land, unnatural straight lines amidst Nature's wildness, or similar hints) and allow the party to investigate further as they desire.

EVENT 2: WIND IN THE NIGHT



This event occurs on either the second night the PCs are camped outdoors in the Deep Hollows or the first time a nightly random encounter occurs.

The sounds of the night suddenly silence as the crickets halt their chorus and a screech owl's cry abruptly quiets. A moment later, a gust of wind blows past you, shaking the pines and rustling the mountain grass like a gale storm. Above the wail of the wind, you faintly hear the sound of great wings beating in the night sky.



This event is the product of the Bad Lick Beast (see area 2-10 below) hunting the night. Its curiosity piqued by the party, it dives low above their camp to investigate the new-comers. Although not yet hungry, it has marked them as potential prey. The Beast remains just out of infravision range, but a successful DC 15 Intelligence check allows a character to get a momentary glimpse of a great winged creature momentarily silhouetted against the moon. It vanishes before further details can be discerned.

The judge may run variations of this event throughout the course of the party's time in the Shudder Mountains. The Beast may fly-by the party again after dark or the PCs might catch a glimpse of a pair of burning orange eyes observing them from high in the trees or atop a mountain ridge. Despite these observations, the party should not encounter the Beast until they either reach the Bad Lick Bridge (area 2-10) or after they defeat Boak and are departing the mountains (should the judge want to challenge them one last time).

Area 2-1 – Shudfolk Farm: *In a large clearing amidst the trees stands a weather-worn log cabin and a handful of smaller outbuildings. Beyond the home are a number of tiered fields carved into the hillside, each containing a growing crop of beans, corn, and wheat.*

This rustic farm is occupied by a fam-



ily of Shudfolk consisting of 2d6 members. They are cautiously polite to the PCs if the party approaches openly, and will warm up to visitors displaying good manners. Polite PCs will be invited to share a meal with the family, allowing them to learn a rumor or two, gain some information about the lay of the land, and be sent off with a packed home-cooked meal. Rude or aggressive PCs will be bluntly asked to leave the property and word of their impoliteness quickly spreads to surrounding farms, making it difficult for them to find respite amongst the settled parts of the Shudder Mountains. If combat occurs, treat the Shudfolk as Peasants (*DCC RPG* rulebook p. 434).

The farmers can serve as replacement PCs should one or more perish during the adventure. Young Shudfolk, having heard of the PCs' presence, seek them out to join their ranks. These replacements may be zero-level PCs, 1st or even 2nd level adventurers, depending on the whims of the judge and the challenge the player(s) want to undertake.

Area 2-2 – The Fiddler's Grave: Due to the small size of the headstone and the surrounding underbrush, a DC 8 Intelligence check is required to spot this site while traveling through the hex. It is impossible to see from adjacent hexes.

A simple slab of limestone is embedded vertically in the ground near the edge of a pleasant mountain meadow. Kudzu is twined around the stone, nearly hiding it from sight. Several words, largely eroded by the rains, are inscribed in the rock.

This is the grave of a solitary balladeer, one who spent his life wandering the Shudder Mountains, learning its secrets and songs, and fighting the forces of evil in the Deep Hollows. When he died, he was laid to rest in the land he loved. The faded inscription on his tombstone reads: "Here lies Japtho of the Fiddle, who died helping the mountain people he loved. Never one to back down from a fight against evil, we Shudfolk owe him more than we can ever repay."



Any PC making a successful Luck check faintly hears soft music playing on the winds, as if a fiddler were playing his instrument far away. A cleric or other character that has proven himself a dedicated foe against Chaos automatically hears the music. In addition, the PC feels a touch on his shoulder, as if a friend had gently placed a supportive hand there. There is no one in sight, but the chosen PC hears a soft, tired voice whisper in his ear, saying, "Go ahead, it's alright. You 'uns need it more than I do now. Use her well."

Any PC who suggests digging up the grave gets an odd feeling as if the occupant wouldn't mind. An hour's work is required to unearth the remains of a pine casket buried in the grave. Inside is the skeleton of a human male wrapped in scraps of decayed shroud and clasping an oilskin-wrapped object in its hands. The bundle contains a finely-made fiddle strung with tarnished silver strings.

The fiddle is magic. Anyone who successfully makes a DC 8 Agility check can play the instrument and invoke its power. The fiddle has the power to cast *banish* with a +5 bonus

(or the player's own, whichever is higher) to the fiddler's spell check once per day when played. The instrument's user need not be a spellcaster to invoke its power. Spellcasters use their normal class spell check die plus modifiers when playing the fiddle; non-spellcasters roll a d10 as per p. 106 in the *DCC RPG* rulebook, and thieves may substitute their *cast spell from a scroll* die if greater than d10. The *banish* power only affects supernatural creatures; mundane ones are unaffected by the fiddle. Also, as a last ditch effort, the fiddle can be used as a club to strike supernatural enemies. When used in this manner, the fiddle is destroyed on a successful strike, but does 1d6 damage and automatically critically hits. The attacker uses his normal critical die, but on Crit Table V, to resolve the strike. Using the fiddle as a weapon does not impart the usual -1 die penalty for using an untrained weapon.

Area 2-3 – Ruined Mill: *The ruined foundation of a long-destroyed building crouches by the river like a beaten dog. Time and floods have carried most of the building's stones away, but judging from the few that remain and its proximity to the river, this was likely once a grist mill.*

Generations ago, the Shudfolk constructed a mill on this site to grind their meal, but the Biggintys of that time laid siege to the building and destroyed it. The ruins now serve only as a marker. West of here begins the Deep Hollows. There is nothing of interest to be found in the ruins.

Area 2-4 – The Crossroads: *A path of large paving stones slowly emerges from the grassy meadows of the valley floor, gradually revealing itself to be the remnants of an ancient roadway. A hundred feet ahead of you, the old road meets another, forming a crossroads of derelict highways deep in the mountain valleys. The four roads seem to have once led roughly east and west, and north and southwest, but now only a short length of each remains.*

Each road only extends roughly a hundred feet in the indicated directions before dissolving into loose paving stones that eventually end, victims of age and flooding. Each road is equally worn and provides no insight as to which hollow may contain the Wheel.

These crossroads are frequented by a demon known as "Ol' Blackcloak" by the Shudfolk. He conducts his infernal business here, trading payment for petitioners' souls. Ol' Blackcloak has a flair for the dramatic and can sense if visitors have arrived seeking him or merely lost their way. If the PCs have come specifically seeking Ol' Blackcloak, they must await nightfall before he appears, stepping out of the darkness onto the crossroads like an actor emerging on stage. If the party has discovered the crossroads by chance and are unaware of its supernatural inhabitant, the PCs suddenly look around to find Ol' Blackcloak standing at the junction at a place that was empty moments ago. With a smile on his devilishly handsome face, the demon asks, "Are you gentles looking for something?"

Ol' Blackcloak appears to be a human male with coal-black hair with a prominent widow's peak and a pointed goatee. His flesh is ruddy, almost red, in color, and his eyebrows meet above the bridge of his nose. He dresses in an elegant

black doublet and hose, and wears a voluminous cloak made from black cat fur over his shoulders. A glance at his feet notices that one of his feet is a human foot encased in a high black boot and the other the cloven hoof of a goat.

The demon politely inquires the party's purpose at the crossroads, keeping a sharp eye out for an opening to propose his business. Ol' Blackcloak has a singular goal: to buy the souls of mortals seeking assistance, power, or riches, and thereby damn the greedy or gullible for eternity. Should the PCs decline to treat with the demon or ignore him, Ol' Blackcloak can preternaturally perceive their desires and suggests he can help them in their search for the Wheel or grant them an advantage over Boak in the upcoming conflict. If the party still refuses to speak with him, Ol' Blackcloak vanishes in a puff of brimstone smoke, but he might return in the future (see below).

However, if the party gives Ol' Blackcloak even the smallest opportunity to make his pitch, he immediately offers to provide any and all the PCs what they desire for the smallest of prices: their souls. If the PCs agree to sell their souls in return for a reward, Ol' Blackcloak produces a parchment contract from within the folds of his cloak and asks the character(s) to sign in blood. Once the deal is completed, the PC receives his request. See the sidebar "The Selling of Souls" for details on this deal.

If Zugun is present, he steadfastly argues that the party not deal with the demon, telling them they cannot risk their mortal souls on any account. Ol' Blackcloak allows the priest his say before turning to the party and shrugging. "You all have a very noisy coffin there, but are you truly going to listen to the dead man in the box? Seems to me a man in that predicament isn't the wisest of folks and shouldn't be giving advice to fine breathing people like yourselves."

THE SELLING OF SOULS



Ol' Blackcloak can call upon infernal powers to grant a mortal nearly any wish he desires within reason. Grandiose desires such as godhood, or those that would make the ultimate collection of the seller's soul difficult (immortality, immunity to all damage, disease, spells, etc.) are not within his power. Aside from these limitations (and any others the judge wishes to impart), Ol' Blackcloak can perform wonders, up to and including increasing a PC's level, boosting a single ability to 18, and the like. Minor requests such as land, magical items, spells, etc. are readily given, as are simple requests such as whisking the petitioner away to the Wheel or revealing its location. In return, the seller agrees to surrender his soul to Ol' Blackcloak at either the time of his death or once thirty years have elapsed, whichever occurs first. However, dealing with demons courts a number of hazards.

The first danger is that, while Ol' Blackcloak is obliged to fulfill the seller's desire, he's only bound by the letter of the law and not its intent. A PC desiring a powerful magical weapon without otherwise specifying the details might be given a sword that only works under certain conditions (at night, underwater, when wielded in the left hand, etc.). Those desiring a boost in an ability score may be granted it, but at the cost of reducing other abilities to cover the increase. A PC wishing to be taken to the Wheel would be transported—alone, leaving him stranded there far from his comrades, who have no idea where to find him. Unless the seller takes painstaking efforts to establish the parameters of what he'll receive, devious judges can have a field day with fulfilling their desires.

The second danger is that the contract the PC signs is of infernal origin and therefore subject to the laws of that place, not the mortal's home world. Some players may be prone to metagaming, thinking nothing of selling their PC's souls as they believe the campaign may not last long enough in game time to cause them concern. These metagamers are in for a shock. A PC who asks to read the contract may make a DC 16 Intelligence check (the contract is very convoluted) to notice that the thirty-year payment clause is subject to passage of time in the Hells, not the material plane. A DC 12 Intelligence check (DC 6 for spellcasters) allows the character to recall that time passes at a much different rate in the Hells and that thirty years there may be much shorter than thirty years on the material plane. In fact, the supposed "thirty years" elapses after only 2d10 weeks on the material plane, after which Ol' Blackcloak and other demonic assistants come calling to collect their due. They won't be denied and, if fought off initially, return again and again in greater numbers until the debtor is slain and his soul collected.

Thirdly, any PC who sells his soul automatically acquires a noticeable form of corruption. The judge should pick or determine randomly a corruption result from the Corruption tables (*DCC RPG* p. 116-119) based on the potency of the gift the seller receives. A small gift (transport to the Wheel or knowledge of its location) would result in a minor form of corruption, while powerful magical items, ability or level increase, or similar rewards would cause greater corruption. NPCs familiar with demonic bargains automatically identify the PC as one who's dealt with devilry if they see this corruption trait present on the character.

Lastly, clergy who serve Lawful or Neutral deities discover their gods are most displeased with them bargaining away the most precious gift they've been given. These clerics suffer a *permanent* -10 penalty to all spell checks. This penalty can only be removed by successfully completing a quest to negate the deal (as determined by the judge) or by renouncing their god and becoming the cleric of a Chaotic power.

Should the PCs attack Ol' Blackcloak, he vanishes from the crossroads on his initiative count. Use the following stats if the PCs get in a few attacks before he disappears or if he reappears at a later date. Attacking the demon earns the party Ol' Blackcloak's enmity and he will seek revenge at a time they least expect it. Despite his regular presence here, he is not bound to the crossroads and can travel freely across the multiverse to pursue his enemies.

Ol' Blackcloak (Type V demon): Init +5; Atk claw +10 melee (1d12+10); AC 23; HD 15d12; hp 80; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP Type V demon traits; stop time, buy soul; SV Fort +15, Ref +12, Will +15; AL C.

Note that if the PCs initially rebuff Ol' Blackcloak's offers, he can return later in the adventure to proposition the party again. He might reappear if the PCs are desperate to locate the Wheel, outnumbered by enemies, or in danger of immediate death. The demon has the power to briefly halt time, freezing events while he makes his pitch, and then restarting time once business is concluded. Thus, a PC knocked from the Bad Lick Bridge and plummeting to his death may find himself paused in mid-air and Ol' Blackcloak standing aloft beside him, asking if he'd like to reconsider a deal.

Area 2-5 – Granny Huldah's Place: *A crude cabin of rough-hewn logs stands in a small, hillside clearing, its wooden sides and split-shingled roof covered with patches of pale green moss. The structure rests atop several 5' high posts, making it proof against dangerous wildlife. A small garden grows beside the cabin. Numerous animal skulls, bleached by the sun and weatherworn, dangle from nearby tree branches or stand impaled on tall stakes around the cabin.*

This is the home of Granny Huldah, Witch of the Shudder Mountains. Generally shunned by the Shudfolk, they only occasionally seek out her services to cure sickness or procure one of her charms.

Granny Huldah notices the PCs' arrival once they reach the clearing, alerted by the skulls that keep watch over her yard. The cabin door opens, revealing a tall, gaunt woman garbed in a shapeless burlap dress. Dark, wooly hair, like that of a ram, covers her arms and legs, and stringy, dirty hair obscures her face. The smell of body odor, strange herbs, and other unidentifiable substances wafts from the open cabin door. A large razorback with startling human-like eyes grunts at Granny Huldah's feet, watching the party.

Granny Huldah: Init -2; Atk claw -2 melee (1d4-1) or curse (DC 16 Will save; see DCC RPG rulebook p. 434) or spell; AC 9; HD 3d6; hp 14; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP hog familiar (see below), curse, spells (+8 spell check); SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +8; AL C.

Spells known: *charm person, chill touch, demon summoning, sleep, ray of enfeeblement, darkness, paralysis, and second sight.*

Anse, Hog Familiar: Init +0; Atk gore +3 melee (1d6+1); AC 14; HD 4d8; hp 20; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +2; AL C

Granny Huldah has walked the Deep Hollows for decades and knows



more of their secrets than any living soul. Ol' Blackcloak is her patron and she is a devoted servant. Her familiar is a wild razorback hog of prodigious size and ferocity that fights to defend the old crone. Should Granny Huldah be slain, her spirit occupies Anse's body and she attempts to flee.

If the PCs befriend Granny Huldah, she proves to be a valuable source of information to assist their search for the Wheel. Although she does not know of its precise location, she knows the location of the bridge in the Deep Hollows (area 2-10) and suspects it will guide the PCs in their explorations. However, winning Granny Huldah over is not a simple task.

Granny Huldah agrees to assist the party in their search if they provide her with a giant's fingernail. She's been brewing potions and desires one or more giant cuticles for her recipes. In return for one, she offers to give them the location of a place that could guide them on their search. If the party agrees, Granny Huldah provides them with directions to the Bigginty's farm, telling them they'll find plenty of giant hands to choose from there.

If the party threatens Granny Huldah or behaves rudely, she pretends to be cowed by their bravado and begs their forgiveness. Apologizing, Huldah tells the PCs that while she can't help them, she knows someone who can. All they need to do is travel to the old crossroads near where the three rivers converge and, after dark, they'll find a man who knows much more than she does. Granny Huldah expects the PCs to get in over their heads dealing with Ol' Blackcloak, or at the very least, appease her patron with more potential clients.

Granny Huldah's cabin contains rudimentary furnishings for both her and her hog, and an eclectic collection of herbs, rocks, animal parts, and other weird substances found in the Shudder Mountain environs. These materials are an important part of her witchcraft and curse-making, but of little use and no value to non-witches (unless the judge decides otherwise).

Area 2-6 – The Bigginty's Farm: Read or paraphrase the following: *A wide, well-trodden trail leads up the hillside, threading its way past many toppled trees before terminating in a large clearing. A tremendous log cabin crafted from trees hundreds of years old occupies the middle of cleared patch. A door twice the size of a man stands at the front of the building, flanked by oversized windows covered with roughly-tanned animal hides. Numerous divots pockmark the clearing and it takes but a moment to realize they are all that remain of large trees yanked brutally from the earth. A scraggly field of corn grows close to the giant cabin.*

This is the ancestral home of the Bigginty Clan, a tribe of hill giants that have lived in the Deep Hollows for centuries. Currently, the clan consists of twelve members, but many of the giants roam the hills and hollows for days before returning home. At the moment, only five are inside.



The Biggintys keep a giant grizzly bear as a “watch dog,” but the elderly animal spends most of its time dozing in the shade behind the cabin. When the PCs first arrive, there is an 85% chance the bear is sleeping. If not asleep, there is a 75% chance it smells the PCs and comes rushing out, growling angrily.

Giant Grizzly Bear: Init +3; Atk bite +6 melee (1d6+3) or claws +5 (1d6+2); AC 17; HD 6d10; hp 34; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP if both claw attacks strike a target, the bear “hugs” for an additional 2d6+3 damage; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +2; AL N.

The cabin itself consists of only two rooms: a main family area that doubles as sleeping quarters for the youngest giants and a smaller room that serves as a bedroom for Pa and Ma Bigginty.

Area 2-6A – Common Room: *The stink of great unwashed bodies, home-brewed liquor, and rotting meat fills this dim room of titanic proportions. A stone hearth, large enough to contain a whole ox, dominates one wall, while roughly-crafted wooden furnishings occupy much of the floor space. A simple bench made from a granite slab perched atop two large rocks resides near the fireplace.*

There are three Bigginty hill giants here, two females and one male, Ohlsonovik Bigginty. Ohlsonovik was the runt of the Bigginty clan, standing a mere 8' tall compared to his larger kin and cursed with poor eyesight to boot. His small size and poor vision made Ohlsonovik the target of abuse from his brothers and sisters, and even his parents were disappointed with his feebleness. Tired of the unending torment from his family, Ohlsonovik recently entered into a contract with Ol' Blackcloak to elevate both his stature and position within the Bigginty clan. Ol' Blackcloak gifted the tiny giant with a pair of infernally-enchanted spectacles. These magical glasses grant two benefits when Ohlsonovik wears them: His vision becomes perfect and he grows to 14' in size, towering over his brethren. However, as a demonic artifact, the spectacles also impart another bizarre transformation to Ohlsonovik, transforming his left arm into a long grasping tendril identical to a giant starfish's arm and possessing massive strength. Ohlsonovik uses his mighty appendage to beat down his bullying brothers and parents, and now enjoys a position of leadership in the clan.

If the PCs arrive at the farm during daylight, the women giants are engaged in domestic chores, while Ohlsonovik is stretched out in one of the chairs, wearing his spectacles and ordering his siblings about. They are alerted to intruders if the bear outside begins growling, and Ohlsonovik grabs a cudgel from beside the door and stalks out into the yard to investigate. Unless conducted quietly, combat in the yard draws the females outside 1d6 rounds after battle begins, and the giants in area 2-6B come to investigate 1d4 rounds after the females do. This could result in a giant free-for-all outside the cabin, one likely very deadly for the party.

Wiser PCs may decide to attack after dark, in which case, the three giants are sleeping in the common room and are easily surprised. At night, Ohlsonovik removes his spec-

tacles before bed and is in his normal, unaltered size and form. Without the magical glasses, Ohlsonovik suffers a -1 die penalty to his attack and Reflex saves due to his near-sightedness.

Hill Giants (2): Init -2; Atk club +15 melee (2d8+8) or hurled stone +6 missile fire (1d8+10, range 100'); AC 16; HD 8d10; hp 35, 31; MV 30'; Act 1d24; SP infravision, crit on 20-24; SV Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +6; AL C.

Ohlsonovik (with spectacles): Init +1; Atk club +18 melee (3d8+10) grapple +18 melee (1d8+10+pinned) or hurled stone +10 missile fire (1d8+10, range 100'); AC 17; HD 10d10; hp 51; MV 40'; Act 1d24; SP infravision, crit on 20-24, +10 to Strength checks when grappling; SV Fort +12, Ref +6, Will +8; AL C.

Ohlsonovik's spectacles can be knocked from his face or broken with a successful Mighty Deed of Arms against AC 14. If successful, he immediately assumes his normal form. Any damage Ohlsonovik has suffered while in enlarged form is applied to his reduced hit point total, possibly slaying him if he's taken sufficient damage.

Ohlsonovik (without spectacles): Init +1; Atk club +10 melee (2d8+4) or hurled stone +3 missile fire (1d8+5, range 50'); AC 15; HD 6d10; hp 30; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP infravision; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +7; AL C.

One of female giants wears a pair of earrings fashioned from raw gold nuggets (100 gp total value). Ohlsonovik's spectacles only function for him and lose their magical enchantment if he is slain. The non-magical spectacles retain some value as a curiosity and are worth 50 gp to the right buyer. They weigh 10 lbs.

There is little of value in this room: rough, dirty giant clothing, a 10 gallon jug of corn liquor, general foodstuffs, and the like. The stone bench near the fire, however, is of interest. On the underside of the bench are three glyphs carved into the stone. These sigils are the proper solution to the Wheel's door lock (see area 3-2 below). The giants found the stone, a relic from the days of the Wheel's construction, in the Deep Hollows and turned it into a seat, oblivious to its real significance. A DC 8 Intelligence check or simply looking under the bench discovers the glyphs.

Area 2-6B – Ma and Pa Bigginty's Room: *A titanic hand-made bed covered by an equally huge quilt occupies most of this room. The remaining floor space contains a battered wardrobe and chest, a chair situated beneath the room's sole window, and a wicker basket containing large balls of yarn and bone needles. A befouled chamber pot resides partially beneath the great bed.*

This bedroom is occupied by Ma and Pa Bigginty, the hill giant clan's erstwhile matriarch and patriarch. If the PCs enter during the daylight and haven't alerted the giants to their presence, both occupants are awake. Pa Bigginty is suffering from the gout and lies prostrate in the bed, occasionally howling orders to his wife and daughters. Ma Bigginty ignores her husband, concentrating on her current sewing work. After dark, the two are in bed, snoring away

PA BIGGINTY KNOCKS THE GHOST OUT OF CROALEISTER THE IMPROBABLE,
WHILE OHLSONOVIR MEETS HIS DOOM AT THE HANDS OF THE BAND!





with wall-shaking exhalations. If awake, and combat occurs in area 2-6A, both parents storm into that area 1d3+1 rounds after the battle begins. Combat in that area occurring while Ma and Pa Bigginty are asleep wakes them, but delays their appearance for 2d4+1 rounds.

Ma and Pa Bigginty, Hill Giants (2): Init -2; Atk club +15 melee (2d8+8) or hurled stone +6 missile fire (1d8+10, range 100'); AC 16; HD 8d10; hp 44, 36; MV 30' for Ma, 20' for Pa; Act 1d24; SP infravision, crit on 20-24, Pa suffers -2 penalty to all rolls; SV Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +6; AL C

Due to his illness, Pa Bigginty suffers a -2 penalty to all rolls and his speed is reduced to 20'.

The wardrobe holds only smelly giant clothes, but the chest contains a dozen raw gold nuggets (50 gp value each) and a human-sized pearl necklace (35 gp value) that Ma Bigginty wears as a bracelet on special occasions.

Area 2-7 – Squire Grady's Cabin: *The ruins of a hard-scrabble mountain cabin stand in the shadow of the mountains, its walls and half-collapsed roof overgrown with kudzu. A plot of farmland close to the home has run wild and a few stalks of untended corn protrude from the underbrush. The front entrance stands open, and a rotting door lies on the porch nearby.*

This cabin was the home of Squire Grady, a stubborn Shudfolk farmer who, despite the warnings of others, laid claim to a cursed plot of land in the Deep Hollows. Squire Grady, cantankerous and unyielding as the mountains themselves, refused to be driven off by the ghosts who haunt the land and even in death refuses to relinquish his claim.

The interior of the cabin is in as poor shape as its exterior. It holds little beside rotting furnishings, an ash-filled hearth, and decayed hooked rugs. A single, sturdy rocking chair has survived time and the elements, and this seat rests close by the cold fire.

PCs investigating the cabin cause Squire Grady, now a lingering spirit, to appear, crotchety as ever and upset that folks are trespassing. A wizened, transparent figure with a long beard and dressed in mountain home-spun manifests in the rocking chair, glaring at the intruders, before asking, "What are you 'uns doing in a man's home? Got no manners, do you? Not even a knock at the door to say you come a'callin?!"

Although cantankerous, Squire Grady's spirit is not dangerous. He continues to berate and threaten the PCs, but takes no direct action. Attacks and spells pass through him without effect, but he can be turned as a 5 HD un-dead. Doing so causes his spirit to disperse, but it reforms the following night.

If the PCs placate Squire Grady with apologies and good manners, he calms down and begrudgingly offers them a roof over their heads. Then he inquires what brings them to the Deep Hollows. If they reveal the object of their search, Grady's spirit turns thoughtful and offers a proposition: "Mayhaps I can help you 'uns out. Old Grady knows a thing or two about these hills and I 'spect I know what you all are lookin' fer. But, one good turn deserves another, heh? If you 'uns help me out, I'll skritch your backs in return."

Grady explains there's spirits ("hants," he calls them), who've been trying to drive him off his land since he first arrived. They hound him even in death, whispering under his eaves and tapping at his walls. If the PCs take care of the spirit's ghost problem, he'll direct them to a secret way in the mountains he suspects leads to the Wheel (area 2-8). Assuming the party agrees, they need only wait until nightfall before the "hants" manifest outside the cabin and begin their nightly campaign of fear. Slaying or turning the "hants" permanently stops them from bothering Squire Grady, earning both his respect and directions to the Wheel's back door.

"Hants" (8): Init +2; Atk touch +6 melee (1d6+special) or poltergeist thrown object +4 ranged (1d6); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 11 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP frigid touch inflicts 1d6 damage and target must make a DC 10 Fort save or temporarily lose 1d3 points of Strength, Agility or Stamina (target's choice), immune to non-magical weapons, un-dead traits; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

Transparent spirits that emit a frigid aura of air, the "Hants" in the Deep Hollows are the un-dead spirits of the original inhabitants of the valleys. Slain in the lunar catastrophe that destroyed Luhsaal and decimated their civilization, some still cling to their homeland in the afterlife, attempting to drive away those who would settle in their wake.

Area 2-8 – Backdoor Trail: If the party has helped Squire Grady, they find this site without difficulty. If they are unaware of its existence, a DC 10 Intelligence check is required to spot the trail.

Near the east edge of the river is a dark mass of stone resembling a sleeping bear. Passing around the stone and leading to the water's edge are a number of large, splayed-toed footprints. The tracks lead to and from the river, vanishing into the undergrowth further up the bank.

These tracks were made by the Gray-Back Trolls living in the lower chambers beneath the Wheel. They come to the river frequently to hunt and drink. Anyone following the tracks uncovers a broad trail has been broken through the underbrush and leads up into the foothills. After two miles, this path leads to 3-1.

Area 2-9 – The Sin-Eater: Show the players Handout B, then read or paraphrase the following:

A dilapidated log cabin squats atop a bare hummock that rises from the surrounding swamp waters. A chorus of frogs croaks from the weedy waters around the low hill and a thin stream of smoke rises from the cabin's stone chimney.

Long ago, the thing now known as the Sin-Eater was a mortal man who loved a sorceress. When her beauty was destroyed by magical corruption, the Sin-Eater embarked on a quest to find the means to restore her lost loveliness, bartering with entities best avoided. He achieved his wish, but doomed himself in the process, becoming a monstrous thing that now feeds on corruption and death. His beloved was his first meal. Since that time, the Sin-Eater has dwelled in the Deep Hollows, dining on afflicted wizards that seek his assistance, unaware of his true form.

The Sin-Eater appears to be a frail-looking man dressed in simple homespun garb. He moves about slowly, leaning on a hawthorn cane. He welcomes travelers with aloof courtesy, inquiring their purpose here. If asked about the bridge, he claims he knows where it lies, but it's a long, convoluted trip there and invites the party to rest the night at his cabin while he draws a detailed map to guide them. This is a lie and he has other plans for the wizards in the group.

If a corrupted wizard is present, he smiles at them knowingly. A DC 15 Intelligence check detects eagerness in the Sin-Eater's dealings with a corrupted individual. He reveals he is the Sin-Eater spoken of by the Shudfolk and offers to help cure the wizard of corruption if he's interested. This service, he explains, is one he must give freely. The gods forbid him to take payment in return.

If a wizard agrees to undergo the cure, the Sin-Eater attempts to separate him from his friends, luring him inside the cabin and instructing the sorcerer to remove his weapons, clothing, armor, and other worn possessions ("It interferes with the ritual, you understand."). Once inside, he closes and bolts the stout cabin door, refusing to allow others inside while undertaking his sin-eating. If the rest of the party insists, he shrugs and tells the wizard he cannot do the rite unless his directions are followed.

Should the wizard be foolish enough to agree to the imposed conditions, the Sin-Eater performs a mummery of pseudo-religious gestures and prayers over the naked wizard for a few minutes. Then, tired of the charade, he reveals his true form and attacks. Those outside the cabin must batter down the barred door (DC 13 Strength check) or otherwise bypass it to join the battle.

Sin-Eater: Init +4; Atk slam +5 melee (1d8) or bite +4 melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 8d8; hp 37; MV 20'; Act 2d20; SP instill fear (DC 12 Will save or suffer -3 penalty to attacks, saves, skill checks, and spell checks), immune to fire, impart corruption; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +8; AL C.

A singular monstrosity, the Sin Eater is a horrific, shambling mass of putrid meat, flailing tendrils, and dog-shaped skulls with gnashing teeth. Its partially extraplanar origins make it immune to fire and its gruesome appearance strikes fear into those glimpsing it, requiring a successful DC 12 Will save to avoid negative modifiers to their actions. Three times per day, the Sin Eater can impart corruption on a target it successfully hits. The victim must make a DC 13 Fort save or gain a random corruption trait from the Greater Corruption Table (DCC RPG, p. 119). This inflicted corrup-

tion can affect all classes, regardless of spell-casting ability.

Once the Sin-Eater is dispatched, a search of the cabin reveals only rustic furnishings and no obvious food. Beneath a threadbare rug on the floor is a trapdoor leading into a shallow, damp root cellar. The cellar contains a midden of humanoid bones, rotting wizard's robes, and two nearly destroyed grimoires. The spells *shatter*, *planar step*, *wizard sense*, and *Hepsoj's fecund fungi* can still be deciphered on their water-damaged pages.

Area 2-10 – The Bad Lick Bridge: Show the players Handout C, then read or paraphrase the following: *A great stone span crosses the high, narrow gorge before you, granting passage from one side of the surging river to the other. The bridge appears of ancient construction, but relatively intact assuming its great age. Several small gaps, created when paving slabs broke loose from their moorings to plummet into the water 100' below, are present in the span's deck. Despite these gaps, it appears that careful travelers may be able cross the bridge safely.*

The 200' long, 20' wide bridge is situated above the PCs, assuming they arrived by traveling along the floor of the hollow. Luckily, a narrow footpath winds up the north side of the gorge, terminating at the north end of the bridge. Once they reach the span, a DC 10 Intelligence check by a dwarf or other PC with stone-working experience identifies the bridge as being several centuries old, but of obvious competent construction. A similar check also determines the bridge is sound and in no danger of collapse.

Unfortunately, the bridge is the lair of the Bad Lick Beast, a supernatural creature that's claimed the Deep Hollows as its hunting grounds. The PCs have likely caught signs of the beast during their travels, but now they must overcome it to reach the main entrance of the Wheel. The Bad Lick Beast lurks beneath the bridge hidden amongst the supports, and cannot be seen from the gorge below or atop the bridge. It flies up to attack any creature intruding on the span.

The Bad Lick Beast: Init +6; Atk claw +5 melee (1d8+2) or head-butt +4 melee (1d6 + DC 10 Fort save or stunned for 1d3 rounds) or spell; AC 17; HD 8d12; hp 50; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* and *scorching ray* (+8 spell check), infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold; SV Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +7; AL C.

The Bad Lick Beast is an awful combination of man, goat, and moth. Goat-like legs extend from a muscular human torso crowned with the head of great ram, and a pair of black, moth-like wings grows from its back. Its eyes burn bright orange in the darkness. The Bad Lick Beast is partially demonic in origin, granting it protection against many attacks. It can cast both *darkness* and *scorching ray*, using those to soften up or inconvenience opponents before closing to melee combat. Overconfident and unchallenged, the Beast fights to the death.

Beneath the bridge and accessible with a DC 15 climb sheer surfaces check is the Beast's lair. Comprised of bones, branches, and rotting skins, the lair contains 267 gp in tattered pouches and an armlet worth 100 gp.

THE LUHSAAL WHEEL

Whether by following the directions granted by various entities in the Shudder Mountains or simple chance, the party eventually stumbles upon the location of the Luhsaal Wheel. This ancient astronomical site will likely prove to be the location of the PCs' confrontation with Boak. Depending on how long their search took before the Wheel was located, the PCs may be able to ambush the former cleric and his allies as they arrive, or reach the ancient site just after Boak's transformation is complete.

There are two possible entrances to the Luhsaal Wheel, both of which take the party through dusty ceremonial chambers situated beneath the Wheel itself. These rooms were hewn from the surrounding stone and the walls, floors and ceilings of each bear the marks of the bronze tools that cut away the stone. Despite the obvious evidence of crude workmanship, time and the passage of many people through the chambers have worn the rooms level and relatively smooth. A DC 20 climb sheer surfaces check is required to ascend walls of the lower chambers.

Area 3-1 - Forgotten Back Door: *A straight, thin crack runs along the mountain face here, nearly imperceptible amongst the clinging lichens and small flowering plants that sprout from crevices in the stone. The narrow fissure extends vertically from the scree-covered ground upwards approximately 8' before terminating abruptly. A draught of horrible pungent air hints at a dark, open space beyond the gap.*

The fissure is a secret back entrance to the Luhsaal Wheel's lower chambers. A few weeks ago, a small band of gray-back trolls discovered the door while on their eternal hunt and claimed the Wheel's lower chambers as their own. Possessing little intelligence, they've left the door partially ajar to allow them to come and go, resulting in the noticeable gap in the cliff face.

Due to the obviousness of a doorway present at this location, discovering the door and the concealed catch that opens it is only a DC 5 Intelligence check. Any character listening at the crack can make a Luck check. If successful, they hear low, rumbling snores beyond the gap. These are from a young troll slumbering in chamber beyond. Opening the massive stone door requires a DC 12 Strength check. If the party fails their initial attempt to open the door, the troll within awakens and quietly waits to ambush intruders.

Past the secret door is a 20' square chamber with rough-hewn walls. A similarly crude staircase winds upward from this room, disappearing into darkness. Filthy, stinking animal pelts are piled in one corner and a collection of gnawed bones are strewn across the floor. A young gray-back troll has split away from the group up above and claimed this area as his own.



Young Gray-Back Troll (1): Init +5; Atk bite +8 melee (2d6+4) or claw +6 melee (2d4); AC 17; HD 6d8+2; hp 31; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP stench, regeneration, immune to critical hits, immune to mind-affecting spells, vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +6 (special); AL C.

Gray-Back trolls are a subspecies of troll indigenous to rocky terrain. Unlike their cousins, gray-back trolls resemble humanoid-shaped piles of stone covered with gray-green lichens and mosses. These growths are the troll's natural, scraggly hair rather than fungus and plants, and are most predominant on the troll's back, giving this species its name and providing natural camouflage in mountainous areas. They are otherwise identical to their rubbery-skinned counterparts (see DCC RPG page 429).

The stairs lead to a winding tunnel of nearly a mile in length through the bowels of the mountains before terminating at area 3-5 below.

Area 3-2 - The Grand Entrance: *Beyond the ancient bridge is a 40' wide, 30' deep ledge that lies perpendicular to a sheer rock face. Set into the rocky cliff at the far side of the ledge stands a great stone archway sealed by an imposing door. Blue bolts of lightning ripple silently across the door's face, hinting at magical wards or seals. In the center of the door are three circular dials set one inside the next. Each dial bears several different symbols, no two of which repeat.*

This door was the main entryway for visitors traveling to the Wheel. Only those granted admission by the observatory's curators or those wise enough to guess correct alignment of symbols to open the door's arcane combination lock could enter. Since the Wheel's abandonment, the doorway has remained sealed. While the flickering electricity is fearsome looking, touching the doorway only results in a tickling sensation that causes no damage (but see below).

The inside front cover of this adventure module shows the three spinning dials. You should photocopy the page three times, then remove the spinning dials and attach them with a pin to create a handout puzzle that your players can solve. The solution is shown on page 22.

Each of the three dials has hand-holds set into them, allowing the disc-shaped plates to spin 360°. To open the door, the three dials must be spun so that the symbols for "Earth," "Shul," and "Luhsaal" are arranged vertically at the top of the lock (see page 22 for solution). A cleric of Shul will recognize the bisected circle is an ancient symbol of his god, but that's the sole marking the PCs have a chance of deciphering. This puzzle requires player knowledge (or blind luck) and not dice rolls to solve. If the proper combination is aligned, there is a three second pause and then the blue bolts of lightning dissipate and the door groans open on hidden hinges. A 1/4-mile long, dark 20'-wide tunnel leading to area 3-3 lies beyond the great valve.

If an incorrect combination of symbols is aligned, after a three second delay, the blue lighting explodes outward with great force. The lightning acts like a *runic alphabet*, *fey*

spell of the *repulse* variety. If a DC 32 Will save is failed (extremely likely!), all creatures standing on the ledge suffer 1d8 points of damage and are pushed back 3d20 feet, possibly forcing them off the 30' wide ledge and into the chasm. The judge should make sure he knows the exact position of each PC during attempts to bypass the door and roll the distance repulsed separately for each PC. Characters standing on the bridge are unaffected by the trap. Once triggered, the ward is reset and activates again if the dials are incorrectly arranged.

The wards can be removed with a *dispel magic* (DC 32 spell check) or bashed in with a successful DC 25 Strength check. Breaking down the door triggers one final lightning blast which must be saved against.

Area 3-3 – Star Chamber: *This large chamber stands beneath a 30' high ceiling held aloft by columns carved from the surrounding mountain rock. The middle of the open room holds a 20' diameter table crafted from black stone. A number of dull crystalline specks are set into the table's surface in seemingly random patterns. In each of the room's four walls stands an open archway leading into darkness beyond. A thick blanket of dust covers the table and floor of the room and a horrendous odor fills the air here. You almost gag at the stench of rotting waste and decay.*

The table is made from a large sheet of glossy obsidian that rests atop a number of 3' high flat stones. The glittering specks set into its surface are small moonstones, affixed with a crude adhesive. The thick dust dims both the table and moonstones' natural sheen. The arrangement of the moonstones depicts constellations visible in the night sky above the Shudder Mountains and can be identified with a successful DC 10 Intelligence check or by a character with the appropriate background (astrologer, for example). A successful check also determines the stellar arrangements on the table are slightly different from the constellation's current position, hinting that whoever crafted this table did so millennia ago. There are a total of 300 moonstones worth 5 gp each. It takes a half hour to pry them all free.

A PC specifically investigating the dusty floor notices a number of large barefooted tracks leading back and forth from the northeast and southeast archways. Unless the party is very quiet and moves directly through this room, they attract the trolls in area 3-4 who attempt to surprise any PC approaching the western archway.

Area 3-4 – Troll Lair: *A number of bronze hooks hang along the top of the arched entry to this room, indicating a curtain or other barrier, now long gone, once separated this area from the main chamber. The 15' wide, 30' deep oval room contains fragments of dry-rotted wood that suggest decayed and ruined furnishing. Rotting animal hides and bones litter the floor beside mounds of black excrement. Complex geometric patterns drawn in flaking ochre adorn the walls of the room. The stench that afflicted the main chamber is even more pungent here, thick and fetid enough to bring tears to your eyes.*

Once a sleeping and prayer chamber for the Wheel's astronomers, this room is now home to a pair of gray-back trolls. If the PCs avoided detection in area 3-3, the trolls are here, stuffing themselves on the filthy stomach and bowels



of a dead catamount. The trolls, incessantly hungry, attack immediately.

Gray-Back Troll (2): Init +5; Atk bite +8 melee (2d6+4) or claw +6 melee (2d4); AC 17; HD 6d8+2; hp 31; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP stench, regeneration, immune to critical hits, immune to mind-affecting spells, vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +6 (special); AL C.

Mixed amongst the debris here is a verdigris-covered bronze astrolabe of surprisingly advanced construction. Although non-magical, this device can be used to plot the best times to call upon supernatural forces for their assistance, granting the user a +2 bonus to his spell check when using *patron bond* and similar spells.

Area 3-5 – Ancient Storeroom: *This dusty, dark chamber contains a number of dry-rotted baskets and collapsed storage chests, each apparently emptied either purposefully or by time and decay. Several bronze spikes have been driven into the rough-hewn stone walls to serve as garment hooks, but these too are bare. Crumbling fragments of punky wood lie beneath an archway in the northeastern wall, suggesting it once held a door. An open archway exits the room to the southwest.*

This room was once a storage space for supplies, tools, and ceremonial vestments, but is now empty of all three. The baskets and rotted chests hold nothing but scraps of sackcloth and a few stone-hard beans. A PC inspecting the dusty floor notices large footprints leading from the southwestern archway to the northeast one. These tracks were left by the trolls coming and going through this area.

Area 3-6 – The Luhsaal Wheel: Show the players Handout D, then read or paraphrase the following: *The steep, winding staircase leads hundreds of feet up from the dusty chamber below. As you climb its corkscrewing stairs, the smell of fresh air becomes discernible. Almost unexpectedly, the stairs end at a small landing with an open archway leading outside to the mountains. Beyond the arch is a vast circular bowl surrounded by jagged mountains. The circular floor of the bowl has been planed smooth, but whether by the hands of man or the seemingly endless mountain winds is unknown. Myriad symbols fashioned from glittering stones decorate the bottom of the depression and a tall spire of black granite bearing gleaming white veins of mineral stands in the center of this open air amphitheatre dedicated to the heavens.*

EVENT 3: THE CONFRONTATION



Boak and his forces arrive at the Wheel on the night of the Black Conflux, eschewing a long overland trip by *planar stepping* directly to the site. Moments after the sun drops below the horizon (approx. 7 PM), a black gash writhing with green flames along its edges appears in the air 20' away from the Wheel's obelisk. Boak steps through the hole, accompanied by an obese human male and four ghastly demons, intent on completing his transformation.

Once Boak and his minions appear, the battle commences. If the PCs are lying in ambush, they automatically surprise the former cleric and his allies and may attack unopposed for one round. Initiative is determined as normal the following round. Boak rushes to the obelisk, easily closing the distance and starting the transformation. His troops fan out to engage the party with spells and physical violence.

If the PCs have reached the Wheel before Boak, but are not present at the mountain bowl when he arrives (perhaps expecting him to arrive on foot and lying in wait in the lower chambers or lurking beneath the bridge), they're alerted to his arrival by a clap of thunder and arching tendrils of power writhing about the mountain top. They should realize their enemy has arrived and rush to confront him. Should they fail to take the hint, the judge can drop other clues they've been outmaneuvered (joyous cries of triumph, followed by maniacal laughter, silhouettes of the demons flapping above the bowl, etc.).

It is possible that the PCs do not reach the Wheel in time to prevent Boak's arrival. The judge can handle this development in two ways. He can "fudge" the time required to complete Boak's assumption of championship, extending it by several hours or even days to allow the PCs to challenge him at the Wheel. Or he can have the party encounter Boak in champion form along with his allies as they sweep down from the mountains to begin the campaign of cruelty, starting in the Deep Hollows and then moving out of the Shudder Mountain region. In this case, determine where the PCs are located on the outdoor map and conduct the final conflict there. Boak can still be defeated, but the PCs will have to continue their quest for the Wheel if they wish to profit from their efforts.

Regardless of the site of the battle, once Zugun and Boak are present in the same place, Zugun expends all his power to perform one final act to stop his former friend. Zugun, who has been carefully preparing for this moment, husbanding his dwindled life-force until he confronts Boak, calls upon Justicia for aid. This act is effectively divine intervention and the goddess acquiesces. The chains encircling the coffin shatter and the casket bursts, releasing a ghostly form that streaks towards one of the party members to enact Justicia's Empowerment (see sidebar). The battlefield erupts into chaos as now two titans duel to the death amongst the PCs and Boak's minions.

The Luhsaal Wheel itself rests at the bottom of a natural bowl surrounded by the highest of the Shudder Mountain peaks. Masses of natural, weather-worn rock and scraggly alpine plants surround the perimeter of the bowl, providing possible concealment should the party wish to lie in wait for Boak's arrival.

The glittering stones are all gemstones of various types and number 777 in total. Their combined value is 2,250 gp, an ample reward for the party's efforts should they survive the final confrontation with Boak and his minions.

The granite obelisk stands 20' in height and serves as the center point of the Wheel. Numerous eldritch sigils fashioned from gems surround the spire's base and, once night falls, the white mineral veins that striate its face glow with moonlight. The obelisk focuses the power of the demon-haunted moon, Luhsaal, and Boak need only touch the spire once the sun has set to enact his transformation into a champion of Chaos.

If the party has beaten Boak to the Wheel, they have time to plan, possibly laying traps, developing ambushes, and making other preparations for the final battle. Attempts to destroy the spire, either through magic or physical force, are unsuccessful—Luhsaal's ambient power courses through the rock, protecting it from any harm the party is capable of delivering.



JUSTICIA'S EMPOWERMENT

Zugun, unknown to the PCs, has chosen one of them to be his agent of justice when he finally confronts his foe. The chosen PC is most likely a lawful cleric, but if a PC of another class has demonstrated actions in line with Justicia's beliefs, Zugun may pick that character as his physical host at the judge's discretion.

Once free of the chained coffin, Zugun's spirit merges with the chosen PC, causing a physical transformation that takes one round to complete. The PC's body swells as he grows to the height of 20' and a nimbus of glowing gold light surrounds him. Crackling fire envelops his weapon and he experiences a rush of power and divine purpose. This godly empowerment grants the PC a +6 bonus to attack, damage, and AC. His hit point total increases by +20 and he gains a +4 bonus to all Fortitude saves. In addition, he enjoys a +5 bonus to Willpower saves against spells and magical effects created by evil supernatural creatures (including Chaotic wizards). His weapon receives a +2d6 bonus to damage against the same types of creatures.

There is a single drawback to this change. Due to Zugun's desire to defeat Boak, the PC must make a DC 18 Will save in order to attack an enemy other than Boak. If the save fails, he cannot direct his ire against the preferred foe, but can attack Boak normally.

Assuming the confrontation happens at the Wheel, Boak's first action is to touch the obelisk and begin the championship transformation. As soon as his hand rests against the black stone, the sky overhead changes abruptly. Those present watch in horror and wonder as the sky fills with a massive, never-before-seen celestial body: the long-vanished moon of Luhsaal. Covering nearly a quarter of the sky, the party can see traces of ruined cities across its tarnished silvery face and great chasms tearing the body apart. This vista is a magical hallucination caused by the Wheel's obelisk channeling the destroyed moon's lingering energy and is only visible to those present atop the Wheel during the Black Conflux.

Arcs of lunar energy course down from the phantom moon into the obelisk, passing into Boak's body. His physical form begins the transformation into a champion of Chaos. Read the following to the PCs as this occurs

Energy crackles around the changing Boak, encasing his body in a cocoon of power. His form grows in size, becoming nearly four times the size of a man. The former cleric's body swells as the power of the sundered moon courses through him. Bones burst from his flesh, reforming into plates of protective mail inscribed with the sigils of Chaos. A third eye of luminous crimson emerges from his forehead, causing runnels of blood to transform his face into a gore-streaked visage of terror.

The transformation process takes two rounds to complete. While encased in the energy cocoon, Boak is immune to all spells and spell-like effects, and enjoys a +10 bonus to his AC against physical attacks. After the transformation is complete, the protective casing fades away and Boak, now in his champion form, turns to confront the party, directing his first attacks on the PC empowered by Zugun's prayer.

Boak (5th level warrior, normal form): Init +6 (d16); Atk two-handed sword melee +d7+2 (1d10+d7+2); AC 15 (25); HD 5d12+20; hp 66; MV 25'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP d7 deed die, mighty deed of arms, crit range 18-20, immune to spells & +10 AC bonus when in contact with the Wheel's obelisk; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +3; AL C.

In his mortal form, Boak is a human male who, despite his centuries of life, appears only middle aged. His body is corded with muscles and his face is a tapestry of intricate tattoo-work dedicated to Chaos. He still wears his hair in a clerical tonsure, but his hair is long and matted with dried blood. He wields a great two-handed sword, etched with chaotic symbols, in battle.

Boak (in Chaos Champion form): Init +6 (d16); Atk two-handed sword +d7+8 melee (dmg 2d10+d7+2) or spell; AC 21; HD 5d12+40; hp 86; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP d7 deed die, mighty deed of arms, crit range 18-20, half-damage from fire and cold, spells (+5 to spell check): *magic missile*, *detect good*, *detect invisible*, and *shatter*; SV Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +5 (+10 vs. spells/spell-like effects from lawful entities); AL C.

In his champion form, Boak becomes a hybrid of mortal flesh and Chaotic empowerment. His 20' tall form is cov-



ered with bony plates and a glaring third eye pierces his blood-streaked forehead. As a Chaos champion, Boak's physical prowess is increased, granting him +20 hit points, +6 bonus to attacks, doubling his damage with his sword, and imparting a +5 bonus to Fortitude saves and a +2 bonus to Willpower saves. He also gains an additional +5 bonus to Willpower saves against spells and spell-like effects created by Lawful creatures. As an extra-planar hybrid, fire and cold inflict half-damage against the Chaos champion.

As a champion, Boak can employ the spells *magic missile*, *detect good*, *detect invisible*, and *shatter* with a +5 modifier to his spell check. These enchantments emanate from his third eye, and should he lose vision to that organ via spells or mighty deeds of arms, he loses his spellcasting power until sight returns to the afflicted orb.

Malucius the Leper (5th lvl Wizard): Init +1; Atk sword +2 melee (1d8) or spell; AC 11; HD 5d4+5; hp 22; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP spells; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +4; AL C.

Spells known (+7 spell check): *detect magic*, *feather fall*, *flaming hands*, *invoke patron* (Sezrekan 1/day), *magic missile*, *magic shield*, *patron bond*, *mirror image*, *ray of enfeeblement*, and *planar step*.

As a devoted servant of Chaos and the sorcerous arts, Malucius is a spell-slinger-for-hire, selling his talents to whatever twisted cause can meet his price. Malucius is an obese human male who keeps his corpulent body wrapped in leper's bandages to obscure the mystical diseases and corruption that wrack his body. Loyal to no one but himself, Malucius flees if Boak falls: he attempts to *planar step* or calls upon his patron.

Type II Chaos Demons (4): Init +4; Atk claw +7 melee (1d8) or forked tail +5 melee (1d4+bleed); AC 16; HD 6d8; hp 30 each; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP Type II demon traits, crit range 19-20, bleed attack causes victim to make a DC 14 Fort save or lose 1d3 hp per round (magical healing cures bleed), *choking cloud* (+6 spell check); SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +6; AL C.

These demons resemble rotting, man-sized hyenas with gore-streaked butterfly wings. Ferocious and of bestial intelligence, these demons are provided to Boak by the Host of Chaos as muscle and cannon-fodder to ensure the championship transformation succeeds this time. Boak has no true control over them, but their bloodlust ensures they attack his enemies without hesitation or direction. Like Malucius, they flee the battle if Boak is slain, returning to their native plane.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE



The adventure concludes with the final battle against Boak and his forces. If the PCs are triumphant, the transformed former cleric and his schemes of evil are defeated. It is likely that the PC bearing Justicia's favor lays Boak low, but depending on how swiftly his minions are dispatched, the whole party may contribute to his defeat.

If the final battle occurs on the Wheel, when Boak is defeated, read the following:

Your final strike against the Chaos champion lands true, sending the monstrosity staggering. A flood of gore spills from his wounds as the creature falls backward, its massive feet skidding on the blood-slick gemstones of the Wheel. With a moan, the giant of Chaos falls, impaling itself on the moon-glowing obelisk, speared on the very source of its transformation. With a final shudder, the body lies still. The obelisk's glow fades and the torn moon vanishes from the sky, returning the heavens to their peaceful, nocturnal state. Looking earthward, you see the now-mortal form of Boak, all vestiges of its transformation gone, lying like a shredded rag doll at the base of the black spire.

Should the battle conclude elsewhere, the judge should ad-lib a similar climatic end to Boak.

If Boak is slain, his surviving cohorts flee, leaving the field to the victors. The empowered PC shrinks back to his normal size as Justicia's favor leaves him and the ghostly form of Zugun floats before the party. He bows deeply, saying, "My friends, your bravery and valiant efforts are awe-inspiring, and I cannot thank you enough for the blood you've spilled this night. Know that you've earned the good-will and respect of not only Justicia, but a tired, old man who is proud to call you 'comrades.' My task here is done and I go to my long-delayed reward. I shall not forget you and all that you have done, and I hope when your own worldly toils are complete, we meet again one day in a far, far better place." Zugun's form shimmers and dissipates into golden embers that drift off into the night.

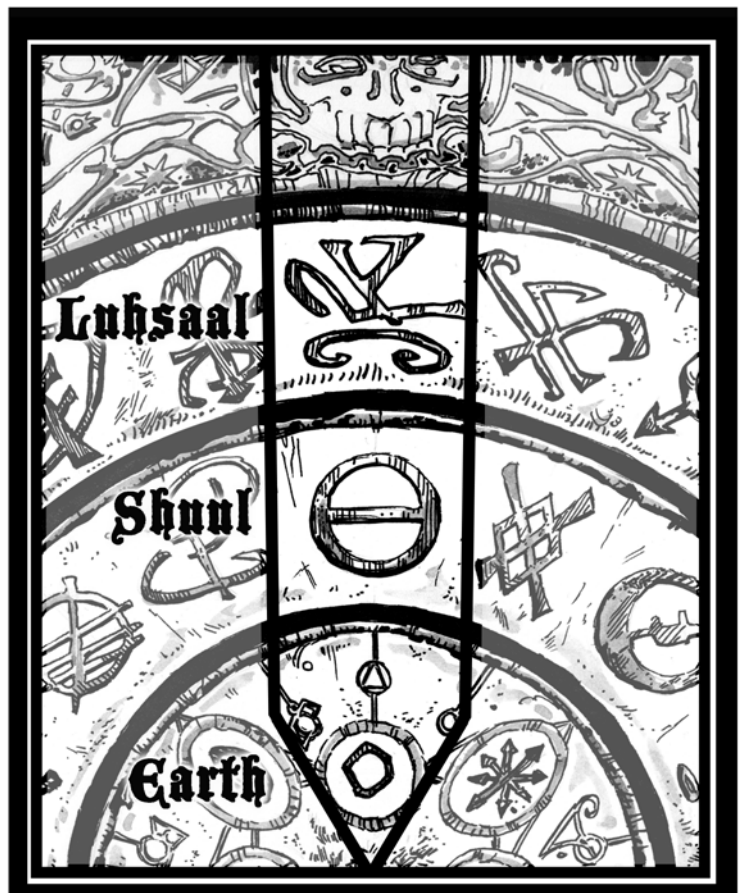
Their victory achieved, the party can now claim their just rewards in the form of the Wheel's many gemstones, but other,

less immediate recompense awaits them. Firstly, for aiding Justicia and saving the innocent from wholesale slaughter, each PC gains +2 Luck. Secondly, the broken remains of the Chained Coffin lay atop the Wheel. Although ruined, the orichalcum and adamantite of its construction is salvageable, and both of these metals can be used in the fabrication of magical arms, armor, and other enchanted items. If the PCs don't think of this on their own, a successful DC 5 Intelligence check by any spellcaster gives them the idea.

While this adventure is now finished, if the players enjoyed their time in the Shudder Mountains, the judge can design his own adventures in the Deep Hollows, creating new sites to discover or threats to be combated. Also, the Luh-saal Wheel may serve to launch new, otherworldly adventures. Perhaps at certain times, the Wheel acts as a gateway to whatever strange dimensions moons go to when they die and the PCs can explore and plunder the ruined cities they glimpse on its surface during the Black Conflux.

One thing is for certain in the world of *Dungeon Crawl Classics*: There's always a new adventure waiting around the corner for those brave enough to risk their lives in the search for it!

WHEEL SOLUTION



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APPENDIX A: TIME TRACKER



The *Chained Coffin* is a timed adventure where the party has (theoretically) seven days to locate the Luhsaal Wheel and confront Boak. To make accounting the passage of time easier, the following time tracker is provided. Simply check-off each day as it passes and use the space provided to record any important or memorable events that occur during the 24-hour period.

Check Box	Adventure Day	Important Events Log
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day Zero	The PCs arrive in Bent Pine if they chose not to confirm Zugun's identity
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day One	PCs confirming Zugun's story may arrive in Bent Pines on this day (as determined by a d3 roll; see p. 5)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day Two	PCs confirming Zugun's story may arrive in Bent Pines on this day (as determined by a d3 roll; see p. 5)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day Three	PCs confirming Zugun's story may arrive in Bent Pines on this day (as determined by a d3 roll; see p. 5)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day Four	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day Five	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day Six	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Day Seven	The Black Conflux begins at sundown. Boak and his minions arrive at the Luhsaal Wheel at 7 PM to begin the transformation.



EXPLORATION REMINDERS

Random Encounters: Check three times per day; twice during daylight and once at night. Encounter has a 2 in 6 chance of happening. See table on p.8 for potential encounters.

Movement: Mounted PC can travel up to 8 hexes (16 miles) per day. Parties traveling on foot move up to 6 hexes (12 miles) per day.

THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS REGION

"THE DEEP HOLLOW"



1 HEX = 2 MILES

N

2013



2-6



CABIN INTERIOR

2-6B

PANTRY

FRONT PORCH

BACK PORCH

2-6A

THE HIDDEN CAVE

1-2

1-1

5'-0"

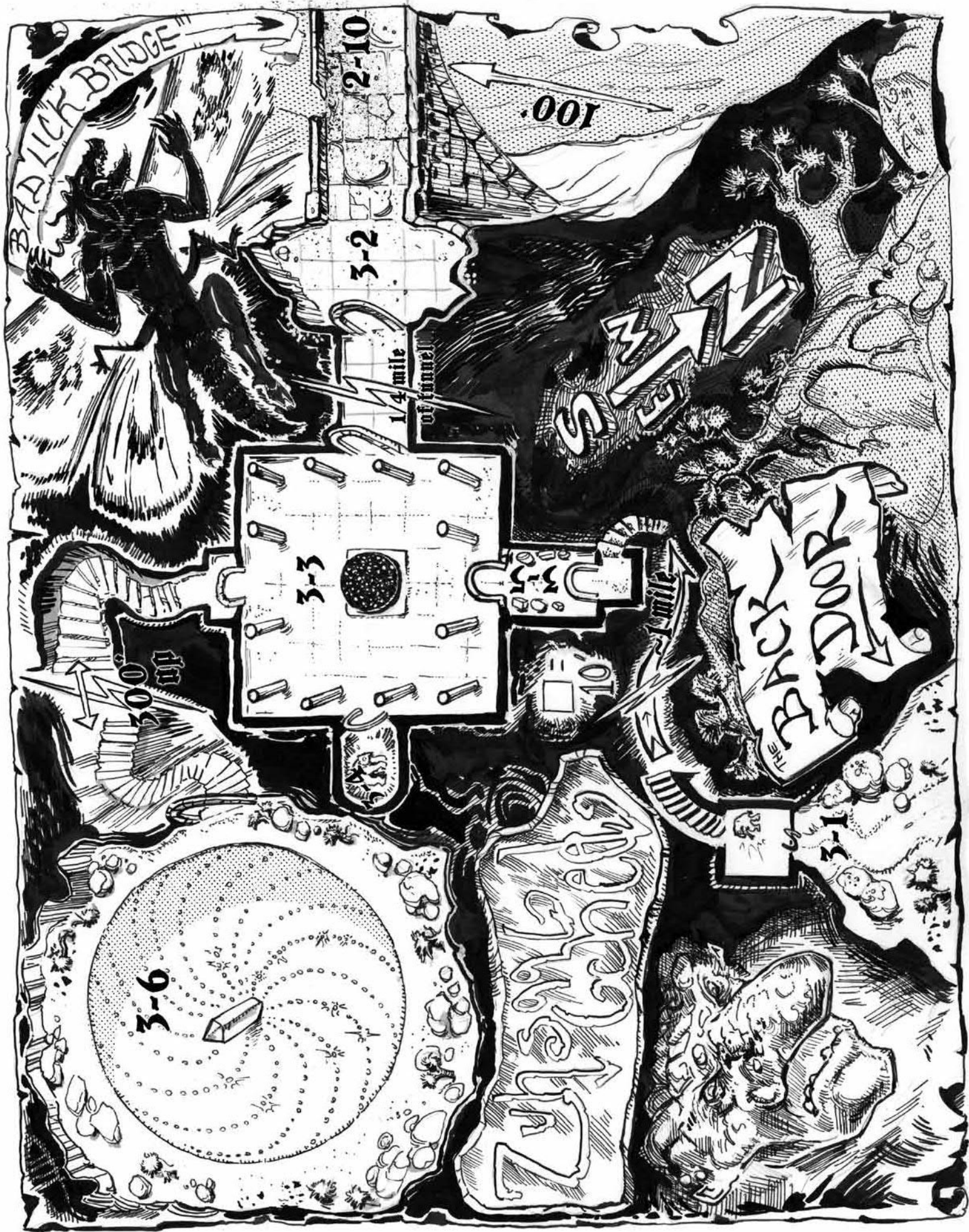
10'

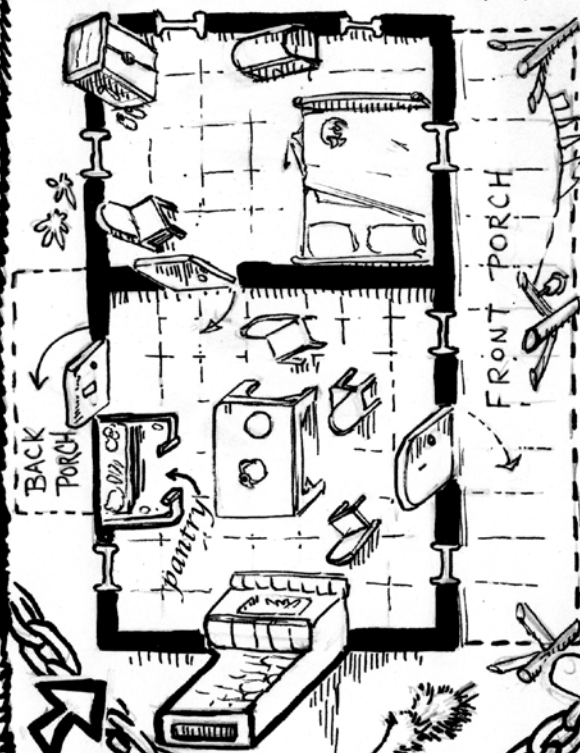
uprooted trees

crops



20'





scarecrow

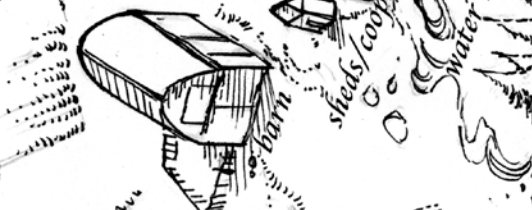
crops

BUILDING

MINI M

TYPICAL SHUDFOLK FARM

ARENSI
21&257



TENANT FARMS
VINEYARDS



HUNTING FOREST

ARGA 2

STABLES

MANOR

ARGA 1

FLAXTON

START

THE CHANEN

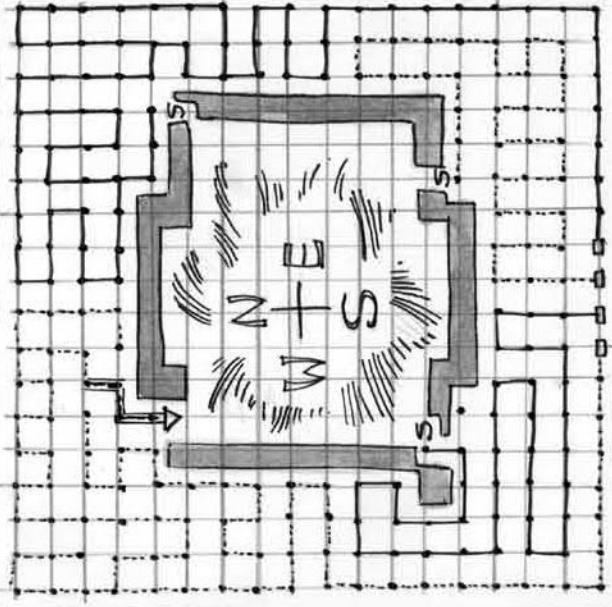
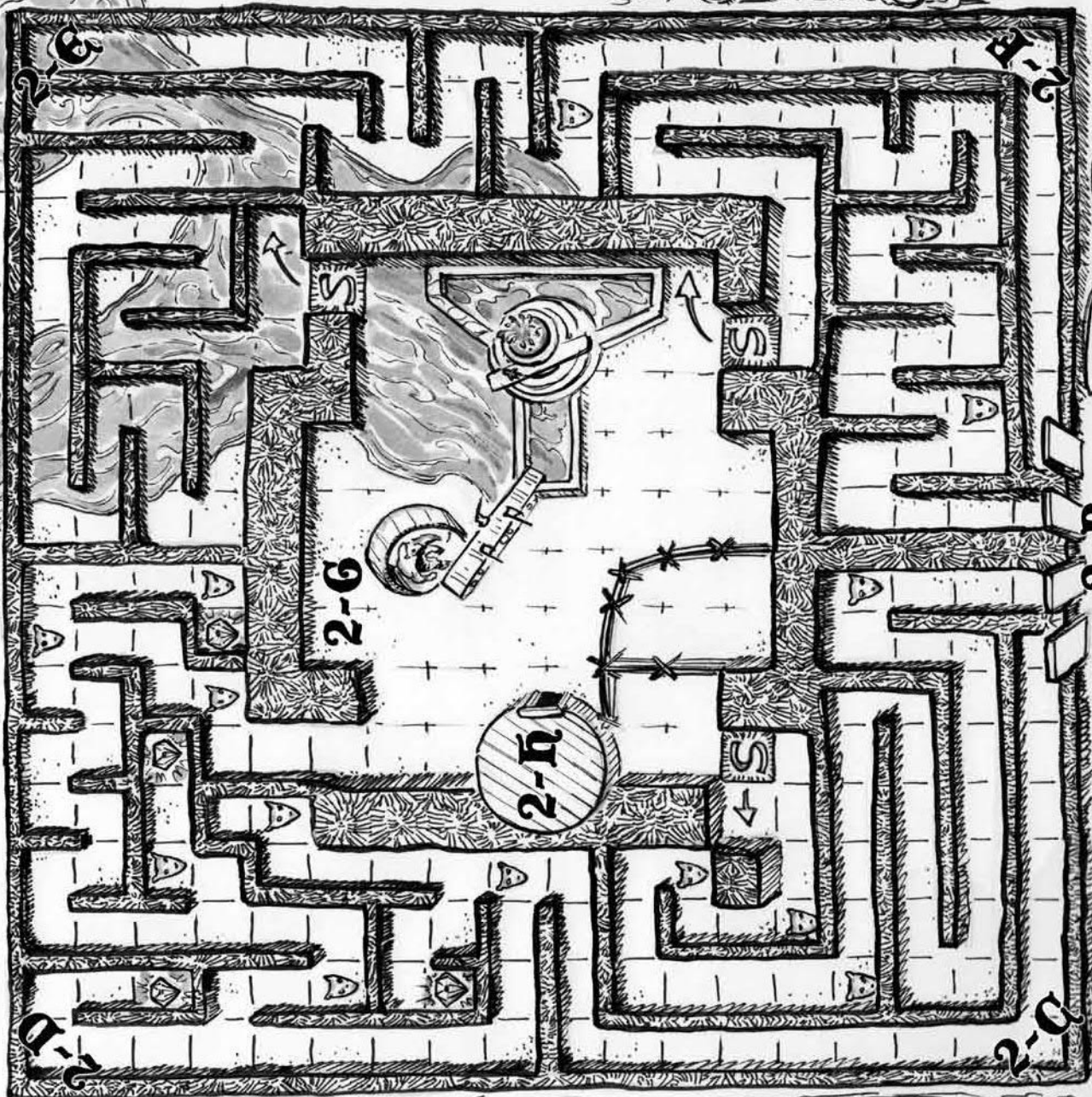
THE RAT'S RING OF DEATH
RIVER OF DEATH



THE RAT KING'S
RIVER OF DEATH



2-B



SINGLE CENTERLINE
MAPPING DIAGRAM

AREA II:
THE HEDGEMAZE

10' = 10'

- SECRET ROLL-AWAY
- SECTION OF HEDGE
- POSSIBLE BILE RAT
- HIDDEN TREASURE

THE RAT KING'S RIVER OF DEATH

A Level 1 Adventure

By Steve Bean • **Editor:** Rev. Dak J. Ultimak • **Playtesters:** Ed Allen, Marie Drennan, George Feldman, Theodin B. Feldman, Eric Kearney, Terry Olson, Brandon Raasch, Jack Swallow, Matt Walkup

BACKGROUND



he "Rat King" - Aaron Gannu - was a wererat crime boss. When his son was killed, the Rat King became consumed with the desire for revenge, but was slain by the very party of adventurers on whom he sought to wreak vengeance.

But that was not the end of the Rat King. His dying curse invoked pact-magic that propelled his soul into an inanimate body cloned from his wizard henchman. He left the scene of his defeat having cheated death. Wearing a new face he proceeded to procure a new persona to go with it. He forged, bribed and extorted his way into the aristocracy and became "Count Lorol Zodra" with all the attendant land, influence and privileges of this title.

However, the Rat King's rebirth was a boon from the chaotic Rat Gods. Deeply in their debt, he is now their devoted servant. Consumed with an intense hatred of humanity borne of the acrid bitterness of previous defeats, he has taken up the Rat Gods' divine cause: the destruction of human civilization.

The Rat King has begun a diabolical experiment in hastening civilization's end and is testing its effects on Flaxton, a farming town just downriver from Count Lorol Zodra's country estate. His Rat God cultists have summoned "Izzuritak the Swarm," a greater rat devil. The cultists cull minor rat fiends from the very body of Izzuritak and subject them to an evil alchemy that transforms them into vessels bloated with an evil bile. These demonic, feculence-filled rats are then butchered and their toxic bodily fluids are dumped into the local water supply, infecting the land with corruptive pollution.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE



hile stopping in Flaxton, the PCs notice that the townsfolk are uniformly despondent. When asked why, the townspeople explain that the noble lord to whom they give fealty has not only failed to protect them but has, in fact, forsaken them. The adventurers are then approached by Nyl'n, a simple village priestess of the same god as one of the clerics in the party or of a god from whom one of the party members receives patronage (ideally lawful in alignment).

Nyl'n explains how several weeks ago, a horrible feculence began running off the western slope of the estate of the local noble, Count Zodra. The Count's servants brought to town stories of horribly transfigured stock and crops. Two more ominous events followed these reports: the feculence began flowing downriver to Flaxton and the Count's servants were no longer seen in town.

Flaxton's free farmers went to speak with the Count who explained that the feculence was the byproduct of a revolutionary new agricultural method. The Count assured them that once his method was perfected he would share it with them and they would all be wealthy men. The farmers left the Count's estate unsatisfied, but as the Count is the legal authority in the region they had no other recourse.

After a few more days of unabated dumping, the pollution began to threaten this year's flax crop and Nyl'n decided to intercede. Yesterday she went to the manor house but found no one there. Something was obviously going on in the estate's hedge maze as a roiling, stinking cloud of vapor hung over the top of it. Upon entering the maze she was confronted by some kind of hulking fiend that reluctantly retreated from her holy symbol. Though brave, Nyl'n is no knight-templar - she knew she needed more help.

Nyl'n implores the party to put a stop to the Count's "experiment" before Flaxton is both despoiled and impoverished. In exchange for their help she offers them a religious token recognizable by other servants of her god. The token can be exchanged for aid at a level the judge deems appropriate, including lore, healing or resurrection.

If the party agrees to help, Nyl'n tells them what she knows about the hedge maze: it is four separate labyrinths, each with its own entrance. Navigating the labyrinths is not difficult (they were designed for children's play and romantic strolls) but only one of the four provides ingress to the central garden.

ENCOUNTER TABLE

Area	Type	Encounter
2-A	T	Feculence overflow channel
2-B	C, T	Hedge maze
2-C	C	Swarming Rat Servitors
2-D	T	Feculent mire
2-E	C	Cultists
2-F	C	Hulking Rat Fiend
2-G	C	Rat-Revenant and Hulking Rat Fiends
2-H	C	Izzuritak, "The Swarm," a weakened Greater Rat Devil

AREAS OF THE MAP

Area 1 – Abandoned Mill: *After rounding a bend, you come upon a mill, solidly built of stone. Beside it, a dam channels water from the small river to the water wheel – or would if a wheel were present. As you get closer a putrid stench hits you. You see that the mill pond is a sickly grey-green color with tissue-like strands of a bruise-colored purple substance floating in it. The pond's surface is covered in an ochre yellow-hued, frothy scum. The smell of it makes you retch.*

The pond is completely polluted and its water is flowing freely through the dam's spillway and down river to Flaxton.

The mill is clean and in good order but its machinery – water wheel and drive train – is missing. The huge grinding stones are still in place. The miller and his family are absent.

From the mill, two streams of feculence can be seen cascading down the estate's western bluff. A larger one pours from a stone spout (the outflow from the hedge maze fountain), creating a waterfall next to a marble footbridge which is now splash-coated a fecal brown. A smaller flow further north erodes its own channel into the slope.

A long flight of marble stairs climbs from the footbridge to the top of the bluff terminating 60' due south of the southwest corner of the hedge maze.

Area 2-A – Overflow Ditch: *A ditch filled with the same frothy, fetid feculence as the pond emerges from the middle of the maze's north side. It seeps slowly through a ditch on its way to the bluff's lip. When the breeze shifts, your nostrils fill with its nigh-unbearable stench.*

A 2' deep ditch channels overflow from the maze's fountain. Where it passes through the hedge it has killed the plant life, leaving twisted, skeletal husks.

This leaves a partially cleared path to the maze's center. Note, if the party wades through the ditch they become exposed to the corruptive properties of the feculence (see Feculent Effects, below). For each consecutive round they're exposed, the save DC increases by 1. This increase is cumulative.

Feculent Effects: Any character exposed to the feculence develops big, round, painful, pus-filled blisters that cause 1d4 damage (DC 14 Fort save for half). Failed saves also result in an ability score being reduced by 1 (Strength, Agility, Stamina or Personality, picked at random). Only magical healing can restore this loss, at 1 point per Hit Die. Characters who are not healed within 72 hours suffer a random minor corruption (See DCC RPG rulebook p. 116).

Area 2-B – The Hedge Maze: *You stand before what was once a magnificent hedge maze 15 feet tall and almost 1/3 of a furlong on each side. What was once verdant evergreen foliage is now brown, desiccated and overgrown with wicked-looking weeds. A large, roiling cloud, of stinking ochre-yellow mist hangs over the center of the maze. The mist has a dampening effect on sound making the surrounding maze eerily quiet.*

There is a row of four latched, but unlocked, ornamental gates in the center of the maze's south side. Each gate leads into an individual labyrinth.

The 4' thick hedge walls leave a 6' wide corridor down the middle. Combat in this narrow space is typically limited to a single PC and the adventurers have to exercise tactical thinking and creative problem solving to work around this limitation.

The ground – previously a meticulously kept lawn – is now a loose mat of torn-up turf, dead foliage, rat droppings and unidentifiable debris layered ½" to 8" thick.

Sound echoes and carries strangely in the maze, making it difficult to track noises to their source.

Navigating the Four Labyrinths: The labyrinths are simple affairs. Only one of them – area 2-D – has any false routes and these are few and short. Furthermore, with the maze being small and its center marked by a cloud of feculent mist, the party can always tell roughly where they are in relation to the maze's outer walls, corners and center. Once the party has negotiated a portion of a labyrinth they are familiar with it and can easily navigate back to any spot they've already traversed.

The judge should describe the labyrinths' twists and turns from the party's perspective using cardinal directions and distances, offering directional choices where they exist.

The Hedge Maze as an Encounter: The maze is an obstacle/puzzle to be overcome but it should not be confused with an underground tunnel with impenetrable, solid stone walls. PCs can put their faces up to the hedge to look through it, though the foliage obscures their view resulting in penalties to perception-type rolls. Prescribed routes can be bypassed by cutting through or climbing over hedges, using magic, etc. However, an additional challenge to reaching the central garden without threading the maze is the 30' tall cloud of feculent mist that starts a foot below the hedge top and covers a roughly 120' x 100' oval over the central area. The mist limits visibility to 5' and it affects characters the same as does the feculent overflow in area 2-A.

Cutting through the Maze: A 2' x 5' "door" can be cut through the hedge (AC 12 to hit) by inflicting 12 hp of damage. However, alchemically mutated vegetation defends the hedge against violence. After any consecutive attack, characters attacking the hedge will be attacked by nearby vegetation.

Thorny Creeper or Scouring Nettle: Init -1; Atk tendril -1 melee (1 hp plus feculent sap); AC 10; HD 1d3; hp 2; MV 0; Act 1d20; SP surprise attack, feculent sap, unaffected by mind-based spells; SV Fort -1, Ref -4, Will +4, AL N.

These animated plants attack with surprise in their first round unless their target makes a DC 14 Intelligence check or the target is warned by a compatriot who succeeds at the same Intelligence check. Any character wounded by these plants must make a DC 12 Fort save or lose one point of Strength or Stamina (determine randomly) which requires magical healing to restore.

Animated vegetation does not attack characters who are interacting with the hedge without causing major damage, e.g., crawling on top of it or looking through it.

Lost Loot: Within the first 30' of maze travel a party member notices something shiny sticking out of the loose turf. It is a small, silver candlestick with the Zodra coat-of-arms inlaid in gold. Accidentally dropped by a cultist, the candlestick is worth 30 gp.

Bloated Bile Rats in the Maze: Bloated Bile Rats are Swarming Rat Servitors (see area 2-G) alchemically transformed into bloated, maggoty versions of themselves. Some escaped into the maze before the transformation, but once bloated cannot move except to burrow into the turf to hide.

At spots on the map marked with a "possible bile rat" there is a 50% chance that a Bile Rat is concealed there. Burrowed Bile Rats can be spotted with a DC 13 Intelligence check. Each PC who steps on a concealed Bile Rat or prods its location with any implement has a 1 in 3 chance of bursting it.

Bloated Bile Rat: Init -3; Atk bite -2 melee (1d3); AC 4; HD 1d3; hp 1 (see feculent burst); MV 0; Act 1d16; SP feculent burst, cannot be turned by clerics; SV Fort -3, Ref -4, Will -3, AL C.

When hit by a weapon it bursts in a 10' diameter spray of feculence. Anything in the area of effect must make a DC 14 Reflex save or be splashed, suffering the same effects as exposure to the feculence in area 2-A.

If the PCs search the remains of a burst Bile Rat they have a 1 in 3 chance of finding a small, valuable item worth 8d10 gp.

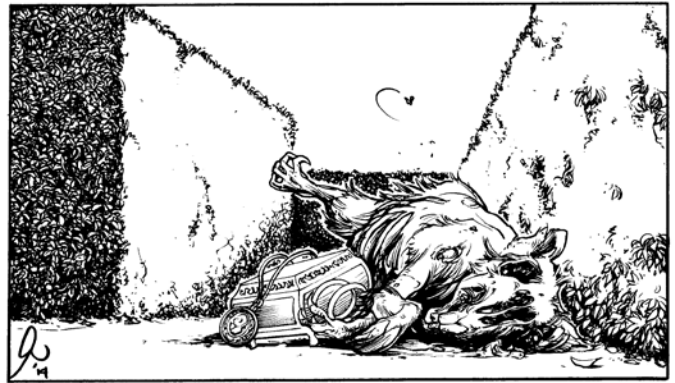
Garden Vestibules: At the end of each labyrinth is a cleverly-designed planter that slides on a track and contains a 10' section of hedge. Opening and closing these planters dictates how many labyrinths provide entrance to the central garden. When closed, the planters act as DC 12 secret doors. The three planters currently closed are secured with bolts and padlocks on the inside of the maze's central area.

Maze Encounters: The creature encounter in each of three labyrinths (areas 2-C, 2-D and 2-E) takes place at a time and specific location within the labyrinth chosen by the judge.

Area 2-C - Southwest Labyrinth: A pack of four Swarming Rat Servitors, that have escaped into the maze, will attack. (These have the same stats as those in area 2-G.)

Area 2-D - Northwest Labyrinth: One Hulking Rat Fiend collects errant Bile Rats and Rat Servitors. (It has the same stats as those in area 2-G.)

Disgorged Valuables in Bile Rat Remains: Escaped Bile Rats sometimes burst and die in the maze. Some of these rats have left behind items of value they had ingested. Searching the locations on the map marked with "hidden treasure!" reveals the remains of a Bile Rat and one item (roll a d4):



d4 Item (Value)

- 1 Heirloom platinum ring set with amber (100 gp)
- 2 Gold, diamond-crusted locket containing an ivory silhouette of a matronly woman (125 gp)
- 3 Set of gold dentures with ivory teeth (85 gp)
- 4 Gold snuff box with mother-of-pearl panels (55 gp)

Area 2-E - Northeast Labyrinth: Most of this labyrinth is flooded with a foot-deep feculent mire that presents the same hazard as the ditch in area 2-A.

Area 2-F - Southeast Labyrinth: Three human Rat God Cultists (see area 2-G for stats), dragging a sledge, are collecting errant Bile Rats. They carry a large bladder of sweet wine that they spray ahead of them. This brings burrowed Bile Rats to the surface in search of a taste. The Cultists do not fight unless cornered. If captured they can be coerced into providing information or acting as guides.

Area 2-G - Center of the Maze: Show the players Hand-out E and read the following:

You emerge into a 90' x 60' garden patio with two prominent features: a large fountain and a cluster of heavy machinery. Within the patio enclosure the maze's eerie silence is replaced by a cacophony of sound - loud creaks and groans from machinery, heavy, rhythmic, dull thuds, gushing water and high-pitched, animal squeals of terror.

Before you an unholy alchemy unfolds. Peasants in rags and covered in rash-like boils are overseen by a handful of stern, scourge-wielding figures in threadbare robes of faded crimson. An 8' tall hulking, humanoid rat menaces both peasants and overseers alike.

The peasants herd devil-eared, vaguely reptilian giant rats into a muddy enclosure where they are force-fed chunks of macerated flesh. Within minutes, they undergo a tortured transformation. Rapidly bloating with liquid, their skin stretches and takes on a maggot-like quality.

These bile-filled rats are heaved onto a conveyor belt where they are crudely butchered by mechanized cleavers and then dumped into the fountain. Peasants strain the solid chunks out of the fountain and stuff them into the cannibal mouths of newly-arrived rats, repeating the grisly cycle.

Atop a scaffold straddling the fountain's second-tier basin is a

sinister, gnome-sized figure shrouded in a deep-hooded, burlap-like cloak stitched together with human sinew. The figure gesticulates with an exotic, wavy-bladed dagger and chants aloud with an agonizing, evil dissonance.

The Hulking Rat Fiends actively defend the abattoir and fountain. Given the opportunity they will throw opponents into the fountain to suffer the negative effects of feculence (see area 2-A) or on to the conveyor belt to be sent under the axe-cleavers. A PC thrown on the conveyor must make a DC 12 Reflex save (automatic fail if stunned) or be struck by a cleaver for 2d4 hp of damage. They will also throw adventurers into the Rat Servitor pen to be swarmed.

The workers are a few of the Count's tenant farmers who have been kept alive as slave labor. During combat, the cultists herd them to the southeast corner of the patio and keep them cowed. If the cultists believe their side is losing the fight they will unlock a sliding planter and flee into the maze.

The cloaked figure is a Rat-Revenant – the human head, right arm and left hand of the deceased Aaron Gannu stitched on to the corpse of a Swarming Rat Servitor. A revenant is un-dead, raised to perform a specific task with singular focus – in this case the feculence creating ritual. It will only turn its attention to the PCs if they interrupt feculence production or attack.

Abattoir: The missing mill wheel has been mounted upright on wooden pilings. A Hulking Rat Fiend – an ogre-sized, humanoid rat-devil with sutured skin, glowing red eyes and a pustule-ridden body – trudges steadily on the wheel's inner rim powering the 25' long conveyor belt and several immense, trip hammer-driven, axe-like cleavers that line it.

Fountain: The 12' high marble fountain has three bowl-shaped tiers and two adjoining fish ponds. Geysering out of the top is the same scummy, viscera-laden feculence the party has encountered everywhere. It overflows the fountain, forming a huge, stinking puddle.

Rat Pens: Peasants can be seen leading 4' long, vaguely reptilian devil-rats, clearly possessed of an impish malevolence and animal cunning, out of the tunnel entrance in area 2-H to a crude split-rail enclosure. These are Swarming Rat Servitors and any character who enters the pen will be savagely set upon by 1d3+1 of them.

Rat God Cultists (6): Init -1; Atk scourge -1 melee (1d4); AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 3; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref 0, Will +1; AL C.

Each cultist has 1d3 valuables (e.g. a silver teapot or small painting) worth 1d6 gp secretly looted from the estate hidden on his or her person.

Hulking Rat Fiend (2): Init +3; Atk bite +4 melee (1d6) or two claws +2 melee (1d3+1); AC 14; HD 4d8+4; hp 22, MV 20'; Act 2d20 (or 4d16, see below); SP unholy creature, grounded defense, throw, pustules; SV Fort +6, Ref 0, Will 0, AL C.

If a Hulking Rat Fiend hits a single opponent with both claw attacks, it can opt to grab and throw its opponent instead of inflicting claw damage. It can throw a man-sized creature up to 20'. Thrown characters take 1d4 additional damage and must make a DC 12 Reflex save or be stunned for one round. A Hulking Rat Fiend may choose to employ a grounded defense against multiple opponents, falling on to its back and fighting with all four claw-tipped paws. Each attack is made with at -1 die (d16) with no melee bonus. Anytime a Hulking Rat Fiend is hit by a weapon, any character engaged in melee with it must make a DC 15 Ref save or be splashed with pus for 1d3 hp of damage.

Rat-Revenant (1): Init +2; Atk dagger, +2 melee (1d4); AC 13; HD 3d8+4; hp 20; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead traits, cannot be turned by clerics, piercing and edged weapons do ½ damage; SV Fort +2, Ref 0, Will +6, AL C.

The Rat-Revenant wields *Pestis*, +2 empathic enchanted dagger whose purpose is to destroy the world's kingdoms one by one. It allows the Rat-Revenant to cast *choking cloud* using a spell check base score of 15 to which the result of a d12 roll is added. (If the PCs obtain *Pestis* the judge should create a complete weapon profile using sword magic from DCC RPG rulebook, p. 360.) The Rat-Revenant is immune to the feculence so it can attack characters in melee by splashing feculence in a 5' radius, producing the same effects as bursting a Bloated Bile Rat (See area 2-B).

The Rat-Revenant will not communicate with the PCs. At the moment of its destruction its soulless husk will maniacally cackle "The Rat King is everywhere!!!"

The Rat-Revenant carries a hammered copper sheet engraved with an *invoke patron* spell attuned to the Rat Gods, and the ritual and alchemical formula required to create the feculence. An alchemist working with a cleric could use the sheet's lore to create a potion that cures the physical effects of corruption.

Swarming Rat Servitor (12): Init +3; Atk bite +2 melee (1d4+1); AC 14; HD 1d4+2; hp 5; MV 40', climb 30', leap 20' (10' vertical); Act 1d20; SP *death throes, unholy creature*; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +2, AL C.

If a Servitor has not yet attacked in the round in which it is reduced to 0 hp, it makes one final attack with no attack bonus before dying, giving targeting priority to the individual who dealt it the death blow.

Area 2-H – Beneath the Gazebo: A 3' tall, 20' diameter marble foundation is all that remains of a once ornate gazebo. On its east side, a timber-framed mine entrance leads to a 40' downward sloped earthen tunnel. At the end of the tunnel is a 30' oval "burrow" (read or paraphrase the following):

In the dim light you see a giant rat's nest constructed out of a hodge-podge of hedge branches, shreds of rich fabrics and human bones. In it lies a huge, demonic creature, easily 14' tall. The folds of the creature's corpulent body seem to undulate from an invisible force until closer observation reveals that its entire body is a

swarm of huge reptilian rats. Where the creature's forearms and hands should be writhe tangles of prehensile rat tails. A mounded, eyeless mass lumped directly on its shoulders is dominated by a circular, gaping hole. This maw is studded with pickaxe-sized, splintered, decayed rat teeth arranged radially in ever-receding, shark-like rows. From the depths of this maw emanates a strange glow the color of which could only come from one of the many pits of Hell.

The giant creature is Izzuritak "The Swarm," a greater rat-devil summoned to provide the Swarming Rat Servitors that are a key ingredient for the feculence. Izzuritak is weakened from having Servitors constantly culled from his form. Unable to rise or engage directly in combat, he can only defend himself by shedding Rat Servitors from his body – up to two per round. Each Rat Servitor shed reduces Izzuritak's hit point total by 6. If, after sending six Servitors, he expects defeat, Izzuritak explodes outward in a mini-swarm of five Rat Servitors. These immediately charge, then *all* the Servitors that Izzuritak has sent against the party vaporize in a burst of smoke and brimstone. When the air clears, Izzuritak will have vanished back to his home dimension.

Izzuritak "The Swarm" (weakened Type IV Demon): Init +2; Atk (see SP); AC 18; HD 10d12; hp currently 50 (max

80); MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP fiend swarm, type III demon traits (due to its weakened state); SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +10; AL C.

Clerics who observe Izzuritak's departure receive a permanent +1 on their ability to turn demons. Wizards who observe it and then spend 36 hours doing further research may roll an attempt to learn the 3rd level Wizard spell *demon summoning*.

If the party searches through Izzuritak's "nest" they discover 4d3 portable valuables worth 8d12 gp each, all items from the Count's Manor house.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the alchemical ritual is ended the river will cleanse itself in a few days; this can be accelerated through spells that purify or bless. The manor is empty except for one room—the well-appointed parlor in which the Count received the townsfolk. But what of Count Zodra himself? Is he alive or dead? Was he a collaborator in the plot or a victim of it? Since the Count is, in actuality, the Rat King, investigating his fate can lead the party to more run-ins with this vicious, cunning villain.

HANDOUT E, FOR RAT KING'S RIVER OF DEATH



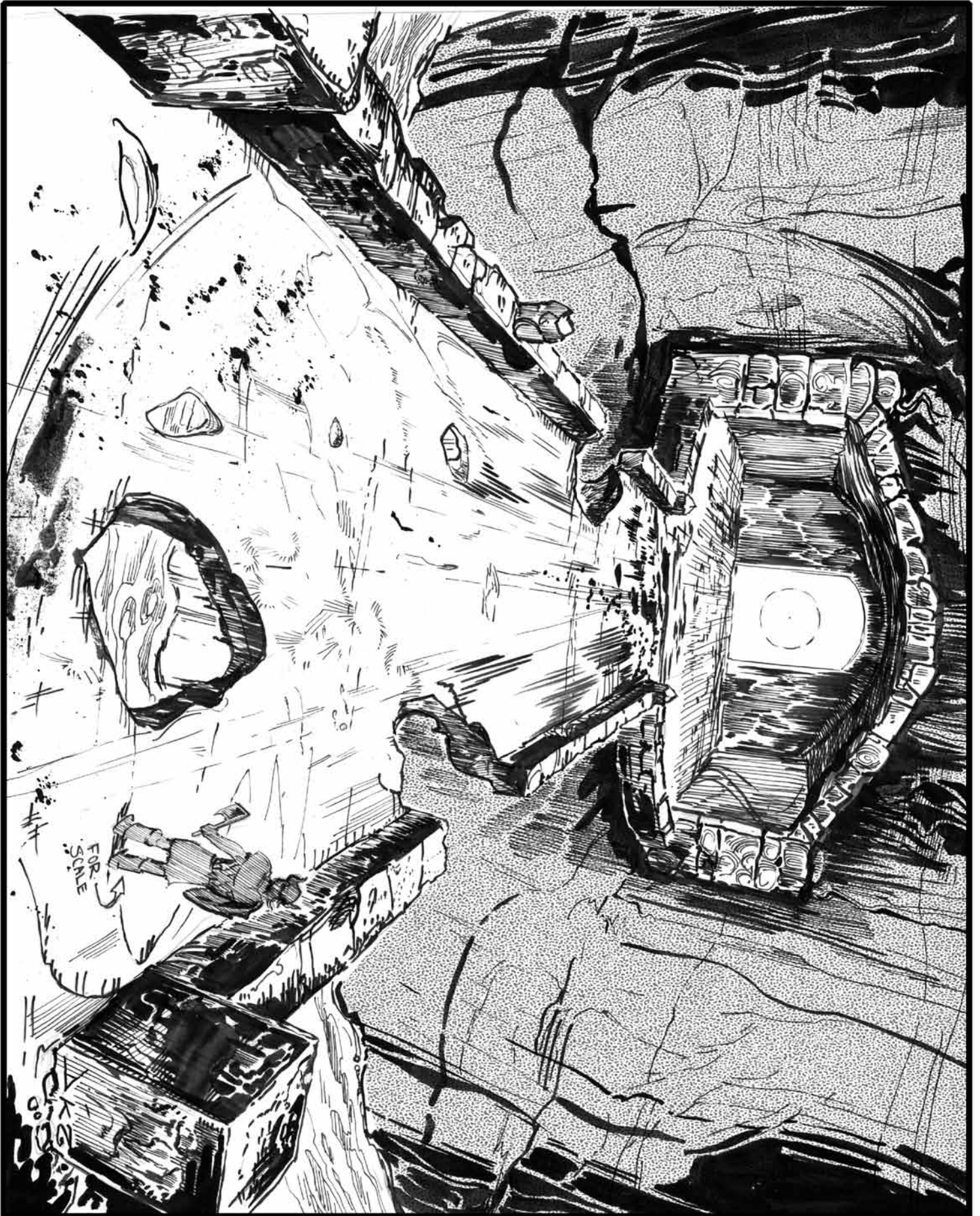
HANDOUT A, FOR CHAINED COFFIN



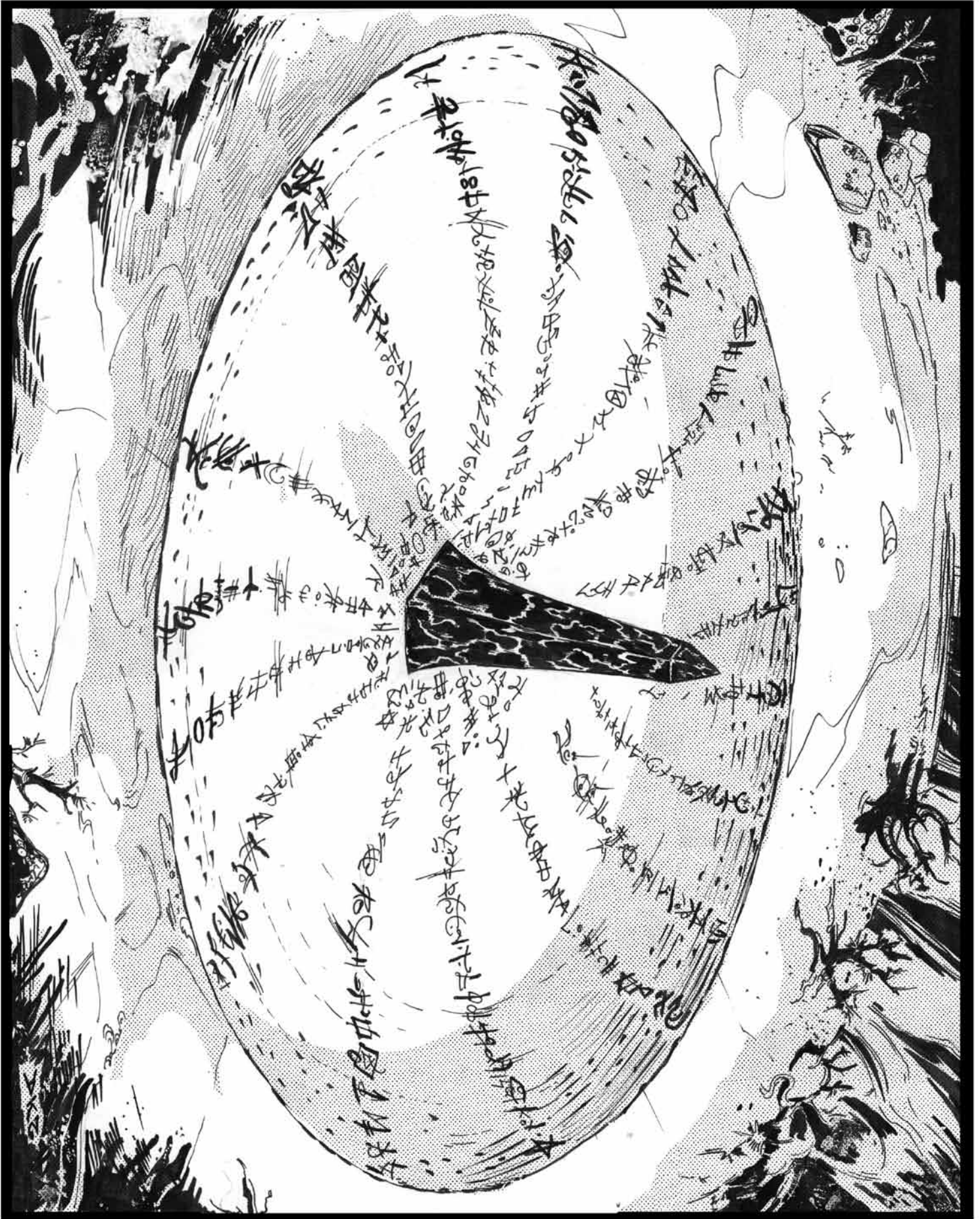
HANDOUT B. FOR CHAINED COFFIN



HANDOUT C, FOR CHAINED COFFIN



HANDOUT D, FOR CHAINED COFFIN



FIVE ADDITIONAL USES FOR THE SPINNING WHEEL PUZZLE



The *Chained Coffin* introduces a combination puzzle to stymie the PCs (and their players), forcing them to rely on either knowledge encountered during their exploration of the Deep Hollows or blind luck to solve. A mock-up of this puzzle is included with the adventure, but once solved, might seem to lack purpose outside of replaying the adventure at a later date. This isn't the case, however. The judge can reuse the spinning wheel puzzle in his campaign, utilizing the suggestions provided below.

The most obvious way to recycle the wheel is as another combination lock, either within the environs of the Shudder Mountains or elsewhere in the campaign world. The judge need only decide on a new combination of proper symbols, designate what happens if the PCs fail to align the right runes, and the wheel is ready for reuse. But combination locks are just one possibility. Five more alternate uses for the puzzle appear below.

Multiplanar Amulet: Consisting of three movable discs, this amulet allows the wearer to transport himself (and possibly those in close contact with the owner) to a multitude of other worlds. To employ the amulet, the wearer must align the proper symbols keyed to each world or dimension, much like punching in the correct digits on a telephone connects one with a specific person. Once the designated dimensional sigils are aligned, the owner merely speaks a command word and is whisked away to the keyed plane of existence or alien world. Unfortunately, the amulet does not come with a key listing the correct symbol alignments, forcing the wearer to conduct research to learn them or trust in blind luck not to end up on a world inimical to mortal life.

Talisman of Monstrous Summonings: This talisman conjures up various monstrous creatures and otherworldly entities when the symbols on its three dials are set in the proper alignment. The owner places the device where he wishes the monster to appear, turns the dials so that the symbols keyed to a specific creature are in the proper order, and then invokes the talisman's power. The creature appears the following round, willing to obey the talisman's owner – usually. Not every alignment of symbols summons a creature. Some have no effect, while other combinations call up a monstrous being, but does not compel service from the creature. The talisman is seldom discovered with proper annotation, leaving it to the new owner to discover what combinations work via trial and error.

Orrery of Fortuitous Evocation: This device acts as a reference tool for wizards, allowing them to determine the

time and place a certain spell would be most effective. The symbols on the innermost ring are tied to planetary movement, while those on the center dial indicate certain locations throughout the multiverse. The outmost ring's symbols each represent a different spell, known and unknown. When the owner wishes to determine the best place and time to cast a specific spell, he touches the symbol representing the spell to be cast and then aligns the other disks. When the proper time and place are aligned with the spell, the runes glow a coppery-green color, alerting the wizard to the correct combination. If the wizard casts the spell at the location indicated during the time period stipulated, he gains a +5 bonus to his spellcheck. Note, however, that some of these orreries are faulty, and may lead the caster to the worst possible place and time to perform his incantations.

Construct Activation Code: The PCs discover a motionless artificial creature (golem, robot, or similar being) with three overlapping discs set into its chest or other body part. Turning the discs so that the correct symbols are aligned causes the creature to come to life, rousing from its stupor. Using the proper "start-up code" compels the constructed life-form to obey the PC activating it, granting the party a useful (and likely powerful) ally. Using the wrong combination has no effect at best or, at worst, brings the creature to life with an intense desire to kill the person who entered the incorrect code!

Catastrophe Timer: Three massive discs stand in the center of an ancient ruin, optimally at the site where the party encounters a sorcerous mastermind, evil warlord, or vile priest. As the PC and their adversary battle, the spinning wheels turn, moving a randomly-determined number of stops on their dials every round. The judge chooses three symbols on the wheels that will trigger a great catastrophe (spell explosion, volcanic eruption, rise of the cursed undead army, etc.) when they align. Each round during the battle, the judge rolls a d6, d16, and d24 (for the innermost, middle, and outermost wheels, respectively) to determine the number of increments each wheel moves. When two of the chosen symbols turn adjacent to each other, those runes glow and the sigils' wheels locks in place. The third disc continues its revolution until the last symbol aligns with the immobile, shining runes. At that point, the last sign illuminates and the catastrophe occurs. Due to the random nature of the wheels' progress each round and the party not knowing which signs are important, the catastrophe timer adds an additional level of fear and uncertainty to the battle. Even the judge doesn't know when the disaster will occur!

BAD LICK BEAST ALTERNATES



The Bad Lick Beast (see area 2-10) is a product of two real-world legends – both of which have their roots in the Appalachian region – mixed together and "DCC RPGized." Readers familiar with the Pope Lick Monster and the famed Mothman might see the resemblance if they squint their eyes a bit. These two fabled monsters are

not the only things said to stalk the night back in the hills, however. Judges seeking to introduce another foe to challenge (and hopefully frighten) the PCs, whether in the Deep Hollows or in other parts of the Shudder Mountains, might consider one of the following critters, each of which is another branch off the Bad Lick's family tree of real-world leg-

ends. Like the Bad Lick Beast, these critters are all of partial infernal origin, owing their existence to pools of spoiled magic found deep in the Shudder Mountains.

The Flatwoods Terror: Init +5; Atk claw +10 melee (1d10+3) or spell; AC 18; HD 10d12; hp 80; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* and *choking cloud* (+10 spell check), infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 18-20; SV Fort +10, Ref +9, Will +10; AL C.

This grotesque abomination stands 10' tall and possesses a black, teardrop-shaped head. Two luminous eyes burn from its otherwise blank face and the creature emits a ghastly stench. Spindly, but surprisingly strong arms terminating in clawed hands dangle near its wasp-thin waist. The Flatwoods Terror appears to have no legs, its body a wedge of dark flesh below the waist. It moves by flying through the air, propelled by no visible means.

The Bog Hollow Ripper: Init +6; Atk claw +6 melee (1d8+3) or bite +5 melee (2d5+3) or horn impale +8 melee (1d6+3); AC 17; HD 7d12; hp 60; MV 30' or jump 50' (100' if moves 10' before leap); Act 2d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), ability drain (DC 14 Fort save or permanently lose 1d5 Strength); infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 19-20; SV Fort +8, Ref +11, Will +6; AL C.

The Bog Hollow Ripper has reptilian features, possessing a leathery, textured skin. Three ridges of short, sharp scales line its hunched back and it bears clawed, webbed hands and feet. A small horn protrudes from above its black, oval-shaped eyes. Its mouth is wide, lipless, and froglike, but bears four rows of jagged, tearing teeth. It can leap an astounding 50' from a standing position and twice that distance with a running start.

The Hollows Hulk: Init +3; Atk club +10 melee (1d10+6) or torso mouth bite +8 (1d8+6) or head bite +5 melee (1d6+6 + poison); AC 18; HD 8d12; hp 70; MV body 20', head flies at 40'; Act 3d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), poisonous saliva (1d3 Stamina loss, plus DC 16 Fort save or death) infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 19-20; SV Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +6; AL C.

A brutish humanoid standing 9' tall, the Hollows Hulk's skin is pale gray and sleek like a seal's coat. No head sits atop its broad shoulders. Instead, the creature carries its detached head tucked under one arm, gripping a gnarled club in the other. A second, and far larger mouth gapes from the beast's massive torso. The Hollows Hulk's head can move independently, floating through the air to bite victims with a maw filled with venomous slobber.

The Thunder Notch Buzzard: Init +3; Atk claw +7 melee (2d6+3) or beak +5 melee (1d10+3) or spell; AC 14; HD 8d12; hp 68; MV 20' or fly 50'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* and *scorching ray* (+8 spell check), infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 18-20; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +6; AL C.

This creature resembles a massive buzzard with a wingspan

measuring 35' long. Scaly, leprous skin covers its bare head, and its dark feathers are mangy with mites and age. Burning orange eyes, positioned forward looking like a man's, peer down at its prey and causes flesh to blister and burn with their glare (as per *scorching ray*). The Thunder Notch Buzzard is an excellent mimic, capable of reproducing any noise or voice it hears and using this ability with a vindictive malevolence to confuse, dispirit, and lure victims to their doom.

The White Fright: Init +3; Atk claw +6 melee (1d8+2 plus infection) or bite +5 melee (1d10+2); AC 15; HD 8d12; hp 70; MV 20' or 40' (all fours); Act 2d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), infection (as mummy rot, DCC RPG p. 422); infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 19-20; SV Fort +9, Ref +6, Will +5; AL C.

The size of a grizzly bear, this variant is covered with coarse, shaggy hair, dirty white in color. A long, snaggle-tooth snout juts from its equine face, bristling with oversized fangs. Claws, filthy and bloodstained, tip its shovel-like hands. This creature moves about mostly on two legs, but can drop to all fours to run with astonishing speed.

The Sawtooth Ridge Screecher: Init +4; Atk bite +9 melee (2d8+4) or constricting tentacle +6 melee (1d6+4 each round); AC 14; HD 7d12; hp 65; MV fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), terrorizing screech (affects all within 30'; DC 14 Will save or flee in panic for 1d6+1 rounds); infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 18-20, repelled by seven-pointed star; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +7; AL C.

Resembling a huge bipedal creature bearing both reptilian features and avian plumage, this variant has a single eye set dead center in its head above a metal beak lined with razor sharp teeth. A pair of 10' tentacles extend from its body, trailing along behind the creature as it soars through the night sky. This beast screams with a sizzling cry similar to a steam whistle, and its screech instills horror in those unfortunate enough to hear it. The Screecher abhors the sign of a seven-pointed star, unable to attack any creature bearing such a symbol.

The Backwoods Devil: Init +6; Atk bite +7 melee (1d12+2) or sting +6 melee (1d6+2 plus poison); AC 13; HD 8d12; hp 68; MV 20' or fly 50'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), droning wings (affects all within 40'; DC 10 Will save or paralyzed for 2d6 rounds), poison (1d6 plus DC 17 Fort save or take an additional 4d6 dmg) infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 18-20; SV Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +6; AL C.

The buzz of this 15' long waspish creature heralds its approach. Seeming a mixture of both yellow jacket wasp and praying mantis, the beat of the Backwoods Devil's wings tears leaves from trees, blows small opponents prone, and creates a hypnotizing drone. Prey incapacitated by the sound of its wings are cut in half by the Backwoods Devil's fearsomely large mandibles. It also bears a venomous sting capable of killing creatures much larger than itself.



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ALMANAC OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

BY MICHAEL CURTIS



ALMANAC OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

by Michael Curtis • Editor: Reverend Dak • Art: Doug Kovacs, Michael Wilson • Layout / Art Direction: Joseph Goodman
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INTRODUCTION

"The mountains are calling and I must go." - John Muir

Hidy, traveler. You look tired. Why not pull up a bit of stump for a while before moving on? I've got a few words to say if you're willing to hark to 'em afore we get going.

You're about to take a journey to a place that possesses both heartbreaking beauty and bone-chilling horror. A land filled with some of the kindest, goodly-hearted people you'll ever have the pleasure of meeting as well as the blackest souls to ever wander the earth. A stretch of worn-down hills and pine-shadowed hollows known as the Shudder Mountains.

The Shudder Mountains were born from an eccentric idea I had to pay homage to the works of Appendix N author, Manly Wade Wellman. My goal was to transform the rich culture and folklore of the Appalachian Mountains, so evocatively portrayed by Wellman in his Silver John series of stories, into the sword & sorcery genre. It seemed a wild scheme but Joseph Goodman was both generous and equally crazy enough to grant his permission. The result was DCC #83 *The Chained Coffin*.

I only managed to scratch the surface of the Shudder Mountains in that adventure and I eagerly told Joseph that, if the adventure proved a popular one, I'd be willing to return to the Shudders as there was a lot left unsaid about the place. Luckily for me, I wouldn't have to wait that long. Thanks to the success of *The Chained Coffin* Kickstarter campaign, I was given the opportunity to go back to the mountains and reveal some more of its secrets.

I've spent a lot of time in the Shudder Mountains over the last few months, taking a figurative journey through its hollows and over its peaks. I've sat by the fires of the Shudfolk (after reassuring them I was no conjure-man, of course) and heard their stories. I've seen witches call up their fiendish masters under a horned moon and fled for my life from the strange

things birthed in the pools of tainted lunar magic known as spoils. And all the while I took notes, knowing you kind folks wanted to know more about the Shudders.

Now, in the safety of my home, I've recorded much of what I've learned about the mountains and the strange denizens that dwell there. In the following pages you'll learn all about the Shudfolk, the history of the Shudder Mountains, the odd creatures that prowl its depths, the unusual superstitions and magic that are still taught in the backwoods, and a pair of adventures to get your own Shudder Mountain campaign going. I hope you enjoy what you're about to read as much as I did writing it!

The strange thing is that, despite the additional room to document life in the Shudders, I'm still not done. There's a hundred score more tales to tell, critters to meet, spells to cast, and songs to be sung in the mountains and I simply ran out of room. Perhaps, if you all let Goodman Games kindly know how much you enjoyed the Shudder Mountains, I'll get another chance to return to the hills and hollows and spin a few more yarns.

In the meantime, I leave it up to you to tell your own stories in the Shudders. The following material is enough to get you started, but like the Shudfolk, themselves, you'll also need to have a strong streak of self-reliance to make it in the mountains. If you find yourself lacking a scrap of mountain lore, don't hesitate in weaving your own tale to fill that hole. The Shudder Mountains belong to all of us, Shudfolk and flatlander, designer and player alike. Enjoy its beauty, mystery, and terror during your stay there. I truly hope to meet you all soon up there in the hills and share a tale or two with you about the journey!

Michael Curtis
August 24th, 2014



PART ONE: THE LAND



he land of the Shudder Mountains region has as much character as the individuals who reside within it. From rolling hills, to pine-thick hollows, to stark peaks silhouetted against the sky, travel through the area brings a wayfarer face-to-face with an array of vistas both solemn and beautiful. This chapter discusses both the history of the Shudder Mountains and how the land came to be, and details the unique places of interest lying within its boundaries, awaiting visitors.

A HISTORY OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS



he Shudder Mountains are one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world. They were formed hundreds of millions of years ago when the earth buckled as tectonic plates collided. Geological forces pushed the earth up from a shallow seabed, creating towering, jagged peaks of naked stone. The rising land drained the sea away, leaving the newly-birthing mountain range in its place. The early Shudder Mountains once soared up to 15,000 feet in height, a chain of stony giants running roughly northeast to southwest for several hundred miles.

The world was warmer in those prehistoric days and the Shudder Mountains were nearly tropic in climate. The hot, humid mountain valleys were an ideal environment for cold-blooded species. Thus, it was the serpent-men who first slithered into the mountains, building their alien cities in the steep-walled valleys and gathering to conduct bizarre rituals in the caverns that honeycombed the earth below. The serpent-men's grip over the mountain chain was absolute, and they waged decimating warfare against all who invaded their territory. Primitive dwarven tribes lusting after the rich mineral resources of the mountains were massacred by the serpentine overlords, and elven nomads drawn to the beautiful forests that filled the valleys could not overcome the serpent-men wizards that opposed them. As a result of the serpent-men's dominance of the mountains, the long-lived demi-human races never established a foothold in the Shudders, leaving no legacy of dwarven holdfasts or elven glades. It would be humanity's task to eventually break the serpent-men's grasp and lay claim to the rugged land for themselves.

As undisputed masters of the mountains for eons, the serpent-men feared no other creature, but it would be the environment that ultimately brought about their downfall. The world began to grow cooler, heralding the first of several ice ages that arose in the ancient epochs. As glaciers pushed down from the north, many species fled the encroaching ice and sought sanctuary in the mountains. Herds of mammoths climbed into the valleys, followed by the Neolithic human tribes that hunted them. The serpent-men fought to defend their lands from these interlopers, but the cooling temperatures hindered the reptilian race, turning them sluggish and muddling their minds. Deprived of their strength and cunning, the serpent-men, once the apex of civilization in the mountains, found themselves falling beneath the stone spears of primitive humanity. The serpents withdrew from the valleys, abandoning their settlements to seek the protection of the mountain caves, leaving

the Neolithic tribes as the Shudders' new dominant species. For generations, the serpent-men continued to try and drive out the victorious human tribes, launching guerrilla strikes against mankind, but ultimately the snakes degenerated in their subterranean holds and abandoned the surface world to Man. The final fate of the serpent-men survivors is unknown, but it is said that the sound of strange drums still resound in the deepest caverns, hinting that the devolved ancestors of the snake-folk endure in the earth. And although the wondrously sinuous cities the serpent-men built in the mountains are long gone, faint traces of their mastery remain. Odd stones and the rare relic persist, awaiting discovery in forgotten corners of the Shudder Mountains.

The primitive tribes held the mountains for many generations, thriving in the bountiful, sheltered valleys. When the glaciers receded, Mankind remained, the haze of myriad campfires joined the morning mist to fill hollows of the Shudders. But like the serpent-men before them, they encountered a threat to their mountainous territory and fell to outside invaders. However, unlike the serpent-men, the enemies of these early human tribes came not from the northern lands, but descended from the sky overhead.

In those primeval days, a second moon rode the night sky. This other moon was a twisted reflection of its mate, a disk of tarnished silver compared to its luminous twin. In scraps of surviving lore left behind by vanished empires, the moon was called "Luhsaal" and it was home to a race of alien sorcerers. This race was the Hsaal, a species of towering humanoids who incorporated magic into their civilization the way other races utilize brick and stone. The Hsaal demonstrated a mastery of magic as yet unknown in the worlds beyond Luhsaal, but for all their sorcery, the lunar race required more mundane materials to maintain their prolonged civilization. Having mined their moon bare of these essential elements, the Hsaal descended to the young world beneath the moon's orbit, establishing colonies in regions where the sought-after resources were abundant. The Shudder Mountains were one such site and amongst the earliest to be colonized by the Hsaal.

When the first Hsaal arrived in the mountains, the human tribes were wonderstruck. Glimpsing the 7' tall race of lithe-some humanoids with flesh the color of silvery ash and crested heads, the primitive clans thought the Hsaal to be emissaries of their primordial gods. Wonder soon changed to anger, however, as the Hsaal sought to enslave the tribes as laborers. Mankind, roused to barbaric rage, fought back against the Hsaal, but were no match for the unearthly magic the lunar race commanded. Rather than accept defeat, the human tribes took a lesson from their serpent-men foes and retreated into the mountain caverns. The Hsaal weighed the cost of rooting the tribes out of the caves and concluded the loss of Hsaalian life would be high. Rather than pry the original human occupants of the mountains from their subterranean refuges, it was more efficient to import slaves from other Hsaalian colony sites, places where the local populace had already been subjugated. It was these imported laborers that the current residents of the mountain, the Shudfolk, would eventually descend from.

Meanwhile, the native human tribes found themselves imprisoned within the caverns they retreated to. Like the serpent-men, attempts were made to continue an insurgency against the Hsaal, but their simple weapons and rudimentary magic was no match for lunar sorcery. The first tribes were pushed to the brink of extinction, but some clans survived in their new troglodytic world, adapting to the darkness. Whether these survivors discovered the descendants of their ancient serpent-men enemies and joined in battle once again is unknown, but explorers of the Shudder Mountain caves have reported encounters with a pale, human-like species of cannibals ideally suited for underground existence. These creatures may be the ancestors of the Shudder's first human occupants, now long devolved.

As the imported slave laborers arrived in the mountains, the Hsaal made subtle alterations to their new workers' bodies and minds, employing magic to optimize the human slaves for their new home and tasks. The sorcery-altered slave bloodlines gave birth to a strain of rugged humanity, well-suited for the hard conditions of both their work and their mountainous home. To ensure the slaves wouldn't seek to escape, the Hsaal overlords implanted a geas in them, creating a desire in each servant to remain within the mountains and eschewing thoughts of what lay beyond the peaks. Once properly conditioned, the Hsaal put the slaves to work, carving out mines in the mountains to extract the minerals the lunar civilization required. These diggings remain to this day, pockmarking the slopes of the Shudders and mystifying both Shudfolk and flatlander visitors alike.

The Hsaal, like those who came before them, controlled the Shudder Mountain region for generations, gradually extracting the necessary resources from the earth and shipping it home to Luhsaal by mystical gates and undreamed of transports. The satraps that ruled the colonies grew rich and decadent. Their slaves were too well-conditioned to revolt and specially-bred overseers, creatures that would be known later as the Abandoned, attended to the day-to-day management of the mines. The Hsaal of the Shudders enjoyed an idyllic life—until their world literally shattered.

The sorcerer-kings of Luhsaal lived and breathed magic, but magic, like an animal, can turn on its master. The Hsaalian wizards pushed their magic too far, setting off a chain reaction that spread like wildfire across the moon. Massive rifts erupted in the lunar surface, cities died in conflagrations, and the magical catastrophe grew to apocalyptic proportions. As the Hsaal of the Shudder Mountains watched in horror, their home moon of Luhsaal tore itself apart in the sky and plummeted through a titanic rift in time and space. As it vanished from the sky, echoes of the magical disaster rippled down from space, following the mystical ties the Hsaal colonies had with their lunar home. The forces of the magical cataclysm blasted through the transport gates, reverberating across the landscape. Mountain peaks were reduced to rubble and the entire mountain chain rumbled under the power of the blasts. Killing waves of lambent black fire chased their way across the sorcerous ties connecting the Hsaal of the Shudder Mountains, destroying their bodies and spilling their once-restrained magical power across the land. In a matter of moments, the Hsaal colonists were destroyed, leaving their slaves without masters.

Once the aftershocks faded and the mountains grew silent again, the slaves looked out across the devastation, their

souls filled with a mixture of abject horror, uncertainty, and—strangely—elation. For the first time in generations, the slaves found themselves free. Their overseers, the Abandoned, lacking orders and bound to their mines by duty and sorcery, cowered in the diggings. Some slaves returned to the mines, uncertain of what else to do and never emerged. A far larger number of the now liberated workers gathered together, and fled from their former workplaces, seeking shelter in the myriad remote hollows of the mountains.

The former slaves, still under the influence of the ancient geas that lay upon their bloodline, remained tied to the mountains. Despite the horrors they endured during their servitude and in the wake of the lunar cataclysm, this strain of man felt a profound peace in the shadow of the mountains. Over time, the refugees fragmented into separate clans and families, building communities across the region. After the passing of untold generations, the former slaves grew from barbarism to learn agriculture and master metal-working, eventually become the Shudfolk who dwell in the mountains to this day.

The Shudfolk remained an isolated society for generations, but ultimately other cultures came into contact with the mountain people. As borders expanded and traders sought new markets, outsiders began climbing into the pine-covered mountains and encountered the reclusive Shudfolk. After a few violent conflicts with the mountain clans, negotiators convinced the outermost families of the benefit of trade between the hillfolk and the flatlanders, establishing trading partnerships and routes that exist even today. For the first time since their ancestors were brought to the mountains, the Shudfolk sampled from the world beyond the Shudder Mountains, gradually becoming familiar with the outside lands. Despite this acclimation, the Shudfolk fiercely maintain their culture's heritage and resist any large scale changes to their way of life. The Shudfolk have benefited from their contact with the outside world, but not so much that they're ready to sell their cultural identity for luxuries from beyond the mountains. This does not mean that life remains constant in the mountains, however.

Six centuries ago, an event occurred that changed the tone of life in the mountains. Three devils, minor princes in Hell's hierarchy, were drawn to the Shudders. Perhaps it was the Hsaalian taint in the Shudfolk's veins or the spoils that stain the landscape that caught the attention of the infernal entities, calling to them the way the mountains sing to the Shudfolk's souls. The three, Anector, Haade, and Modeca are by no means allies. Instead the devils, known as the Three, are rivals for the souls of all sentient creatures who dwell in the mountains. Each attempts to increase the number of mortal souls pledged to them in servitude, raising their status amongst Hell's hierarchy in the process. The Three constantly contest with one another, using the mortals who pledged their souls as pawns on their mountainous chessboard. In return for service, many witches and conjure-men have been granted—temporarily—great power by their infernal masters. The Three's interest in the Shudders has resulted in a rise in the number of witches who call the mountains home and the Sovereign Church finds itself assailed by dark sorcery from all sides. Given the superstitious nature of the Shudfolk, many of them believe a time of reckoning is coming when the forces of good and evil square off against one another. There is no doubt in their minds that it will be the Shudder Mountains that will serve as the final battleground.

OVERVIEW OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS TODAY



In many ways the Shudder Mountains have stood unchanged since the ancient days of prehistory, remaining a place where nature reigns supreme and its mysteries intact despite eons of occupation. In others, however, it has become nearly unrecognizable.

The largest change to the Shudders is in its topography. The soaring, jagged mountains of the ancient world are long gone, worn down by the unrelenting process of time, erosion, and grinding glaciers. The catastrophic forces unleashed on the land during the destruction of Luhsaal also altered the landscape, leveling mountain peaks and causing titanic earthquakes. It is the memory of these earth tremors, preserved in fragments by the Shudfolk's legends, which give the mountains their name. The once high, saw-toothed mountain peaks, have been replaced by gentle rolling mountains. In their youth, the peaks rose as high as 15,000 feet, but now age has worn the mountains down to half that height.

The geology of the mountains is comprised of limestone, granite, shale, schist, sandstone, and quartz. Running through the stone are veins of iron and zinc, as well as massive deposits of coal. Gold and silver veins remain undiscovered in the mountains, and gemstones such as emeralds, rubies, garnets, aquamarines, sapphires, topaz, amethyst, citrine, moonstone, and peridots can be pried from the ground with patient searching.

The Shudder Mountains are home to a vast river network. Rivulets and streams flow down from the mountain heights, growing into creeks and rivers that carved the numerous valleys throughout the Shudders. The Crowclack, Phophurd, and Drowning are the largest of these rivers, their banks home to uncounted farmsteads and trading posts.

The flowing waters and natural geological forces gave birth to countless valleys, dells, coves, and vales throughout the mountains, known collectively as "hollows" (or "hollers," depending on the local patois). These low-lying areas, separated from one another by steep mountain slopes or high ridges, form isolated pockets of woodlands where dense groves of trees grow, encouraged by the rich soil deposits that accumulate there.

A wide array of tree species cover the rolling hills and mountain slopes. Consisting of a mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees, one finds oak, hickory, chestnut, spruce, pine, beech, poplar, hemlock, fir, and balsam growing in the Shudders. In the autumn months, the Mountains transform into a vista of bright yellows, oranges, and reds, with stands of dark green and blue conifers breaking up the palette. Wildflowers fill mountain meadows, kudzu spreads its vines along river banks, and ferns and mosses sprout in dark woods and on rocky cliff faces.

Wildlife of the Shudders is even more varied than its plant life, providing both meat for Shudfolk stewpots and sources of terror for travelers. Deer, opossum, raccoon, wild boar, and squirrel are hunted for their meat, while gray wolves, grizzly and black bears, bobcats, and cougars prowl the slopes and woods making life dangerous for hunters that stray too far into the backwoods. Serpents are rife in the Shudders and the Shud-

folk have a healthy respect for the rattlesnakes, copperheads, and water moccasins that slither among the stones and nest in caves.

Far more dangerous than these animal species are the monstrous creatures of the mountains. Species of giant serpents slither through the woods and gargantuan salamanders ambush prey from the river rocks. Tribes of hill giants maintain crude holdings in the hollows and mossback trolls prowl along the mountain slopes. Undead—especially ghost, phantoms, and "hants"—emerge from their resting places after the sun goes down to feed on the life-force of the living. Beneath the ground, earth hounds engage in ghoulish foraging and the twisted descendants of the Shudders' first human occupants wriggle. Isolated and barbaric enclaves of serpent-men may also continue a hellish existence in the deepest caverns of the mountains.

Despite this panoply of horrors, the worst monsters found in the Shudders are unique ones. When the Hsaal were destroyed eons ago, their magic spilled across the land, accumulating in far-flung places. There the magic energy festered, becoming hot spots of malignant sorcery known as spoils (see *The Chained Coffin Companion*, p. 2). The spoils sometimes give birth to hitherto unseen creatures that slink through the hollows in search of a meal or become slaves to the witches and conjure-men who dwell in the Shudders.

PLACES OF INTEREST IN THE MOUNTAINS



With such a rich and ancient history, the Shudder Mountains contain a large number of interesting (and often dangerous) sites to explore. Some of these places of interest are natural phenomenon, the result of uncounted years of geological and environmental forces at work. Others were erected by the hands of man—or other sentient races—and run the gamut from everyday places of business to hoary ruins containing ancient mysteries forgotten by the modern world. In this section, we'll consider each in turn.

Note that there are a number of locations keyed on the Shudder Mountain regional map accompanying this book that are not described here. It is the author's intent to present the judge with several interesting-sounding locales but allow the judge to create his own content for these sites as required by the campaign. As always, the judge has complete freedom to remove or alter the information provided below to best suit the desires of himself and his players.



Geographical Sites

The following locations are detailed on the Shudder Mountain regional map, but this is by no means a complete account of all the natural wonders and places of interest waiting to be found in the Shudders. Uncounted farmsteads dot the river valleys and hollows, for example, and an examination of the Deep Hollows map in *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin* demonstrates how many secrets a handful of hexes can contain. The judge is encouraged to create his own settlements and places of interest as his needs and desires dictate.

Bald Hill: This hill is half-covered with trees and scrub plants, with the foliage ending abruptly before it reaches the top of the hillock. Scorched and blasted rocks protrude from the earth, and shallow craters mar the hilltop. This devastation is the result of an abnormally high number of lightning strikes that pound the hill during the fierce thunderstorms that roll through the mountains. Many postulate the lightning strikes are caused by a rich iron deposit located beneath the hill, but others claim supernatural forces are at work. In the hidden lore of witches, it is said that the devil, Haade, the First of the Three, frequents this hilltop. Those wishing to make a compact with the First of the Three should venture up Bald Hill when the weather turns foreboding.

Bog Hollow: Several natural springs slowly burble up into this high mountain hollow transforming the vale's bottomland into a marshy bog. Despite a draining stream running down to the Phophurd River, the mountain cove remains marshy year round, even during the worst of the summer droughts. Bog Hollow is an ominous place. Dead swamp cedars stand in the midst of scum-covered pools like skeletal hands reaching towards the sky. The sound of croaking frogs fills the air and, at night, the ghostly glow of foxfire is omnipresent. Most fearsome are the large number of water moccasins and other water snakes that slither through the pools. A forgotten serpent-man temple attracts these snakes, who unknowingly help guard the strange artifacts and ancient treasures secreted within the temple's ruined walls.

Carrion Peak: Shudfolk legend has it that this mountain was once home to a great beast, the identity of which varies from tale to tale. Some stories maintain it was a tremendous wyrm or serpent, while others identify it as a creature that fell from the night sky. Legend holds that it rampaged along the mountain's slopes for centuries before perishing at the hands of a Shudfolk hero. As the monster's body rotted beneath the sun, gargantuan scavenger birds were drawn by the stink of putrefying flesh and they picked the carcass clean. The descendants of these giant buzzards still roost on Carrion Peak, soaring on the thermals in search of meals. No one has scaled the mountain since the monster's demise and returned alive and its bones—as well as treasure of old—are believed to still reside near the mountain's peak.

Ten-Mile Lake: The largest lake in the mountains, Ten-Mile Lake is a deep, clear body of water fed by creeks flowing down from the surrounding mountains. The lake sustains a bounty of fish and other aquatic animals, feeding the several small Shudfolk communities that stand along the lakeside. The fishing, however, is not always easy, for the lake is home to immense catfish that prowl the depths and sometimes drag anglers to their dooms. The giant mudcats lurk in the deepest part of the

lake, where the local Shudfolk claim strange stone structures can be seen half-buried in the lake bottom when the sun is at its zenith. Due to the depth of these ruins and the monstrous catfish that lair within them, no one has successfully plumbed the structures to uncover their secrets.

Sour Spring Hollow: Formerly known as "Sweet Spring Hollow" for the natural well located here, this vale acquired a nasty reputation when the Hobb family, a clan of witches and conjure-men, took up residence. Their presence was said to taint the spring, forever changing the dell's name to "Sour Spring Hollow." The Hobbs are long gone and only the overgrown ruins of their cabins remain. Nevertheless, Sour Spring Hollow is avoided by most Shudfolk, although it's believed witch liquor bootleggers may use the secluded and tainted hollow to brew their wares. Further details on this place are found in the "Sour Spring Hollow" adventure accompanying this supplement.

Yander Mountain and the Woeful Caverns: This mountain overlooks Ridge Road, a once-popular trade route leading from the Shudfolk communities of Hark and Whistler's Knob. A network of natural limestone caves meanders its way beneath the mountain, diving deep into the earth to connect with other subterranean spaces. Over the past several decades, Yander Mountain and the Woeful Caverns, as the caves are known, have acquired a fearsome reputation. Wayfarers traveling along Ridge Road go missing near the mountain and the occupants of several Shudfolk farmsteads close to the peak have been discovered massacred. As a result, few travelers journey on Ridge Road these days and the local Shudfolk fear the mountain. Despite the legends of an evil presence lurking in the caves, some fool-hardy souls have delved into the caverns, drawn by stories of glowing "fetch lights" sighted on the mountain. These lights are believed to appear near undiscovered riches. So far, no one who has entered the Woeful Caverns has emerged alive. For more details on the occupants of the Woeful Caverns and Yander Mountain's secrets, see the adventure "The Woeful Caverns under Yander Mountain" accompanying this book.

The Deep Hollows: Fashioned by three creeks flowing down out of the mountains, the Deep Hollows is the name given to a trio of river valleys located near the eastern edge of the Shudder Mountains. The three vales, known as Claw Hollow, Bad Lick Hollow, and Spook Hollow, are said to house a clan of hill giants, the home of the witch, Granny Huldah, and ancient ruins perhaps dating back to the Hsaalian occupation. Additional information on the Deep Hollows can be found in *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin*.

The Wildwood: Travelers venturing deep into the depths of the Shudders report that a large forest grows in a long, wide valley surrounded by high peaks. Explorers descending into the woods tend to either not remain long inside its shadowy interior or never emerge again. Unknown to outsiders, the Wildwood is home to a menagerie of bizarre monstrosities warring with one another and devouring anyone who stumbles across their paths. The origin of these beasts is believed to be a titanic spoil festering in the heart of the forest since the Hsaal's destruction. If this is true, it stands to reason that other legacies—in the form of ruins, artifacts, and forgotten lore—may also exist within the Wildwood.

Towns, Hamlets, and Scraps of Civilization Back Yonder

Bent Pine: This community is more trade outpost than true village. Consisting of a mere dozen buildings, Bent Pine serves as a common meeting place for flatlander merchants coming to the Shudder Mountains in search of local commodities like timber, handcrafted woodwork, and – increasingly – witch liquor. Bent Pine is likely the last civilized place travelers heading into the Deep Hollows pass through before entering the mountains proper. More information on Bent Pine is found in *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin*.

Chimbley Rock: This hamlet is simply a dozen log buildings erected at the base of the high stone outcropping. A narrow cleft rises from the base of the rock to its apex, giving both the outcrop and the adjacent community their names. The residents of Chimbley Rock eke out their living by farming, weaving, and hunting the backwoods, selling their infrequent surplus to traveling merchants that stop at the village three times a year. More frequent visitors to the Rock (as the locals call it) are explorers curious about the odd stone menhir situated atop the outcropping. Anyone enduring the arduous climb up the rock's cleft discovers both a weathered finger of stone erected by unknown hands and a gorgeous view of the surrounding landscape. The purpose of the menhir is unknown, but rumors suggest it may be a landmark and rangefinder leading to a hidden ruin or treasure secreted on a nearby mountain.

Dead Wolf: This settlement serves as a common meeting ground for Shudfolk farmers living further up the Crowclack River Valley. Commodities from Husk downriver make their way up to Dead Wolf by boat or horse trail, brought by enterprising traders looking to trade directly with the mountain folk (and thereby increase their profit margin). It is also the location where Shudfolk bring the wolves they kill in the surrounding mountains. Due to deprivations on Shudfolk livestock, a standing bounty of one piece of silver for male wolves and two silver for females is common in the Shudders. This blood price is paid by a pair of flatlander fur merchants who cater to discriminating markets. In recent months, a particularly large and violent wolf has been preying on livestock and has avoided all attempts to trap and kill it. Stories are beginning to circulate that the wolf is a supernatural creature, but the tales don't agree if it's a lycanthrope, a spoil-spawned monstrosity, or a witch in animal form. The bounty on this particular predator has grown quite large.

Devil's Hole: This tiny hamlet is occupied by a small population of miners eking out their existence by digging coal from underneath the surrounding mountains. Although coal is not an overly valuable commodity, blacksmiths, armorers, and other metal-workers require it to run their forges and the majority of the nearby flatlander metalsmiths rely on Shudder Mountains coal for their work. The miners extract the substance from a number of rich deposits accessed by the natural sinkhole that gives the community its name. Unfortunately for the miners, the main coal seam they are working leads to a particularly large subterranean spoil. In the all too soon future, the unwitting miners will find themselves exposed to the spoil's power with unpredictable effects to follow.

Husk: Much like Bent Pine, Husk is more a trading outpost where flatlanders and Shudfolk meet to conduct business than



a true Shudfolk village. Husk, as its name suggests, is primarily an agricultural marketplace where Shudfolk farmers sell their surplus corn crop and craftsmen trade their wares for goods unavailable in the mountains. A trio of immense corn cribs dominate the settlement, surrounded by a Sovereign church, stables, trading post, tavern, and a bawdy house staffed by flatlanders. There is a brisk witch liquor market operating out of the bawdy house, one that has survived numerous attempts by the community's constables to stamp out.

Prosperity: A collection of poorly-built log cabins and tents, the small hamlet of Prosperity belies its name. The community is home to a few dozen rugged individuals determined to make their fortune mining a meager gold vein that winds through the mountain above. A rough-and-tumble place even by Shudder Mountain standards, death seems to stalk the muddy streets of Prosperity. Miners murder one another over claim ownership, rockslides and flash floods decimate lives and property, and intermittent monster and animal attacks kill solitary prospectors on the mountain slopes. Only the occasional rich strike keeps the desperate miners of Prosperity from abandoning their diggings.

Thundercrack: Built in the fork of two rivers, Thundercrack is named for the fierce storms that rage high up in the mountains. These storms inevitably cause flash flooding down the Phophurd River Valley and the first residents of Thundercrack planned accordingly. The entire town is built atop pilings interconnected by wooden walkways and rope bridges. Despite these precautions, the town has lost buildings and lives to flooding in the past, but the resilient spirit of the Shudfolk ensures they rebuild and resume their lives here. Thundercrack's economic base is the mining that occurs in the surrounding mountains, especially the coal coming down from

Devil's Hole and the scant products of Prosperity's workings. Poled barges move the ore downriver to flatlander markets, and young Shudfolk looking to experience life beyond the mountains often travel to Thundercrack to seek passage on the barges bound for the outside world.

Timber Drop: The town of Timber Drop is the most civilized Shudfolk community by flatlander standards. Perched on the edge of a tumbling cascade that feeds a broad pool below, Timber Drop is the final destination for logs cut further up the Crowclack River Valley. Shudfolk lumberjacks pole the fallen trees downstream, abandoning their charges just before they plummet over the waterfall into the pool beneath. The steady supply of timber and the town's large number of sawyers has resulted in a community comprised of plank buildings rather than the log structures so common in the mountains. There is an ongoing competition amongst the lumberjacks to see who dares ride the logs closest to the waterfall's drop before leaping to safety. More than a few tree cutters have delayed their jump too long and fallen to their deaths. Local legend maintains the timber pool is haunted by the ghosts of these unfortunates, but, if this is true, they don't hinder business in Timber Drop.

Toad Fork: Named for the trail that splits near an odd-looking rocky outcrop that resembles a grinning toad, this village serves as a way station for travelers on their way deeper into the mountains. A large stone and timber inn (unusual for the region) named the Hoppytoad House shelters travelers. Impromptu concerts performed by the musically-inclined residents of the village are often held in the clearing behind the general store, and it's said that Old Man Roane knows nearly every song in the Shudders, sawing them out on his battered fiddle. He may be willing to teach an Old Song to a student if the learner can get past his crotchety personality.

Ugly Bottom: The first Shudfolk to farm this hollow discovered that, although the soil was rich, the sheer amount of rocks, dead-fall trees, and other natural obstacles that needed clearing before the hollow could be worked was a massive undertaking. In other words, it was ugly work. The name stuck and after generations of toil, Ugly Bottom is now quite picturesque. In high summer, the fields surrounding the log buildings are verdant with corn and the sound of chuckling brooks flowing through the hollow resounds in the mountain air. The residents of Ugly Bottom remain secretive for fear outsiders will come to the hollow and ruin their hard-earned paradise in the mountains. Some old timers in Ugly Bottom say that an elemental spirit dwells within the village and it is this entity that helps ensure the hollow's bounty.

Yellow Skull: Located deep in the mountains, Yellow Skull gets its name from a gargantuan and ancient skull unearthed there by Shudfolk farmers long ago. The massive cranium was so large that two grown men could stand within it. Despite a thorough plowing of the land around the skull, no other bones have been found, further increasing the mystery of where it came from. The skull is no longer present in the small village, having been stolen by a conjure-man's fiendish henchmen a century ago. The current whereabouts of the skull and what devious plans the sorcerer had in mind for the bony artifact remain unknown.

Secret Places and Mysterious Ruins

Luhhaal Wheel: A relic from the bygone days of Hsaalian occupancy, the Luhhaal Wheel was an observatory and star clock constructed by that lunar race and keyed to the movement of their home world. The sorcerer-kings employed the site in their magical rituals and as one of the gateways to travel back and forth from the demon-haunted moon. When the Hsaal were destroyed, the Wheel was forgotten, sealed behind powerful wards. Although hidden, a series of events currently unfolding makes it likely the Wheel will soon be rediscovered and play an important role in the future (or lack thereof) of the Shudder Mountains. For more information on the Luhhaal Wheel, see *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin*.

Makepeace Hill: A century ago, a violent feud raged in the hollows between the Strikeleather and Weaver families. Nearly thirty people from both families perished in the fighting before the surviving members, sick of the bloodshed, made peace with one another. As a symbol of their truce, both families reinterred their deceased loved ones on a low hill near the head of Moon Hollow. The shared burying ground would be a reminder of the senseless violence and a pledge to never feud again. Although the living Strikeleathers and Weavers have maintained the peace, legend has it that the dead are not so quick to forget. Local folklore speaks of angry ghosts rising from their graves each night to continue their battle with one another and woe be unto anyone caught in the graveyard after sundown. Even the Strikeleathers and Weavers avoid Makepeace Hill after dark. The local tales also say that one of casualties of the feud was a witch man and he was unwittingly interred with a potent magical object he owned in life.

Phantom Hollow: Travelers in the mountains have sighted this mysterious hollow for centuries. It appears as a narrow vale containing a meandering creek and thick stands of trees. The ruin of a small city, one of odd stone architecture, rises from the valley floor along the banks of the creek. Few have ventured into the hollow and the dell seems to appear and disappear at random, manifesting in different places at different times. Legends suggest the entire hollow and the strange city may be an echo of the earliest days of the Shudder Mountains, a place caught in a repeating loop of time and space. If this is true, the city may be of Hsaalian construction or even an artifact from the serpent-men's prehistoric dominion over the mountains.

The Burn: The site known as "The Burn" is a small meadow filled with scraggly grass and dark, dry soil. The rotten and scorched stubs of six poles protrude from the black earth, relics from a witch burning that occurred here three decades ago. A small clan of witches and conjure-men were rooted out of their remote farm by a Sovereign priest and set alight in this clearing. Despite the passing of thirty years, the clearing hasn't recovered. Some maintain this is a result of the witches' evil essence escaping into the ground as their bodies burned. Although little remains to intrigue visitors, cloaked and hooded figures are sometime glimpsed skulking around The Burn after dark, engaged in unknown purposes. Shudfolk "study witches" believe The Burn has magical properties. Sorcery worked here is amplified by the lingering witches' power. Spells that call upon forces beyond the ken of mankind or summon the attention of devils, demons, and potential patrons are more effective on The Burn.



The Old Standamish Place: Nearly eighty years ago, an enterprising flatlander named Halden Standamish built an opulent home in one of the Shudder's many hollows. Unlike the crude log cabins of the Shudfolk, Standamish constructed a fine home of stone, planed planks, and fine glass, all imported from outside the Shudders at great expense. He employed flatlander workers rather than hire local craftsmen, a move that did little to ingratiate himself with the Shudfolk. It was Standamish's hope to build a profitable mining concern in the nearby mountains, and the snooty outsider was not shy in bragging about his knowledge of a hidden mine that would soon make his already sizable fortune even greater. Standamish's dream ended one stormy night when screams and blood filled his mountain palace, and the boastful mogul's body was found turned inside-out on his front porch. The Standamish place has been avoided ever since that fearsome night and even rumors of Halden's fortune hidden within its bloodstained walls isn't enough to lure the superstitious Shudfolk across the sagging ruin's threshold.

The White Hell: A large adit emerges from the mountainside, its mouth hastily sealed with fallen timber and rubble. Beyond this crude barricade are the tunnels known as the White Hell. The mine is of Hsaalian origin and bears all the signs of being the product of hard labor rather than a natural cave system. Curious prospectors discovered the mine a decade ago and ventured deep into its reaches, despite warnings of the strange creatures that defend the ancient diggings. When the explorers spotted no signs of the usual Abandoned guardians, and instead found gleaming deposits of gemstone ripe for mining, they thanked their good fortunes — up until the moment a vast horde of wrigglers crawled from the darkness and attacked. Most of the prospectors perished in the attack, but a handful of survivors escaped to the sunlit mountainside and sealed the mine as best they could. It is said that the mine gets its name from the pale mass of wrigglers dwelling within, but other contend it was the survivors' stark white hair, abruptly turned snowy with fright, that is responsible for its moniker.

PART TWO: THE PEOPLE

If the landscape of the Shudder Mountains is the region's body, it is the folks who live there that comprise its soul. The primary and longest-enduring residents of the Shudders are the Shudfolk. These independent people could trace their ancestry back to the dim days of prehistory — if they only knew the truth of their origins. The Shudfolk are like all humanity, comprised of both the good and the evil, and provide no shortage of interesting tales to both swap around the hearth and to explore as judge and players. This section takes a deeper look at the Shudfolk, their daily lives, beliefs, and the superstitions that make them unique. It also examines the few demi-humans who dwell in the Shudders, why they are a rarity in this human land, and how to set up an "all human" Shudder Mountain campaign.

THE SHUDFOLK

The Shudfolk are the predominant human occupants of the Shudder Mountains and every aspect of their lives was influenced by their long and reclusive occupancy in its hills and hollows. This section explores the various facets of Shudfolk life to assist the judge when running a Shudder Mountains campaign and to give players creating a Shudfolk character as a sense of place in the campaign world.

Origins and Characteristics of the Shudfolk

As chronicled in *A History of the Shudder Mountains*, the Shudfolk are the far-removed descendants of various human tribes imported to the mountains by the Hsaal to serve as slaves in their mining operations. This original slave stock came from across the world, gathered from wherever the Hsaal had established mining colonies and subjugated the local populace. As a result, the Shudfolk arose from a diverse population, one that included nearly every genetic strain of humanity. Their varied ancestral heritage means there is no typical Shudfolk physical appearance. Although the Shudfolk gene pool has homogenized somewhat down the eons through intermarriage, the mountain folk nevertheless display a beautiful mix of skin tones, eye and hair color, and distinctive facial features. The only common traits they share are a hearty stamina and a deep and abiding love for their mountainous homeland. Both of these characteristics are the legacy of sorcerous manipulations by the Hsaal to create the ideal worker race.

The Shudfolk's ancestors underwent magical conditioning by their overlords, with the Hsaal employing their literally unearthly magic to increase the endurance of their laborers to better toil in the mines, as well as a mental compulsion to re-

Life in the Shudder Mountains

Like most rural areas, the backbone of life in the Shudder Mountains are the farmsteads that dot the hollows and river valleys. The Shudfolk farms largely produce corn and wheat, the staple crops of mountain life. The growing season allows for two crops a year, the product of which farmers subsist on and sell to feed the small "middle class" of craftsmen that exists among the Shudfolk and to outsiders (called flatlanders by the Shudfolk) for profit. Agriculture is supplemented by animal rearing (cows, sheep, goats, and the omnipresent pig) and hunting, and its unheard of to meet a Shudfolk without at least some hunting skill or proficiency with bow or boar spear.

The Shudfolk are extraordinarily self-sufficient. They make their own clothes from locally produced wool and leather, and these garments are designed to survive the hardscrabble life in the mountains. Shoes and boot, farm implements, pottery, rugs, blankets, weapons, sledges, and all the other objects needed by the Shudfolk are made either on the farm or by the small number of craftsmen dedicated to producing these required items of mountain existence. Trade and barter is the main force behind the Shudfolk economy, and a farmer needing new shoes for his horse is far more likely to swap one of his hogs with the blacksmith than pay in hard coin. Those Shudfolk who live deep in the mountains may have never seen actual minted coins, let alone possess them. Shudfolk living closer to the trade towns on the mountains' borders use a mixture of coin and barter when conducting business.

Shudfolk communities are largely self-reliant ones. Settlements govern by consensus, with the patriarchs (and sometimes matriarchs) of each family speaking in open forum to decide important issues. Large Shudfolk towns, especially those that are trading posts where mountain folk and flatlanders meet, maintain a constabulary force to maintain law and preserve the peace, but this is exception rather than the rule. Most Shudfolk communities are simply not large enough to require permanent law enforcement officials. When a crime is discovered, a general "hue and cry" goes out with all able-bodied Shudfolk assisting in the apprehending of a suspect. Justice is overseen by either the community elders or the local Sovereign priest. Minor crimes usually impart fines on the guilty party, while more severe breaches of the law can result in banishment, mutilation, or death by hanging (or burning or drowning in the case of convicted sorcerers).

Customs, Faith, and Superstition

Both their unique origins and hard living have resulted in a number of cultural customs and mores arising amongst the Shudfolk. "Life is different in the mountains," is a common refrain (and oftentimes warning) heard by newcomers to the area from their Shudfolk hosts.

For such a money-poor people, the Shudfolk are first and foremost a generous culture. There are few inns serving travelers in Shudfolk communities as there's little need for them. A traveler passing through a Shudfolk settlement will almost always be offered a hot meal and a place to sleep if the visitor demonstrates good manners. Even a boorishly-behaving traveler might be given a gourdful of well water and directed to a relatively safe patch of land to camp on. A Shudfolk in need can almost always rely on his neighbors for assistance – provided



main within the confines of the Shudders to mitigate the desire to escape. The changes to the slave race's bloodline continue to manifest in their descendants. The Shudfolk are a resilient people, able to work long hours and withstand minor illnesses. And though the mental conditioning has faded somewhat done the ages, it remains rare for a Shudfolk to leave the mountains for long. Youths, driven by the normal urges of their age, do depart to see the sights of the flatlands on occasion, but eventually the call of the mountains stirs their blood to return to the region of their birth.

There is a third effect of the Hsaal's magical manipulation of the Shudfolk's bloodline. With traces of Luhsalian magic in their veins, the Shudfolk possess an odd affinity for magic and, with proper training, can produce minor preternatural effects via the use of charms known as folk magic or *gramaree*, and by playing certain old songs first composed by their Hsaalian manipulators. More information on *gramaree* and the Old Songs is presented in the *Magic of the Mountains* section.

Despite the Shudfolk's long occupancy of the mountains, their own origin remains a mystery to them. The Shudfolk rely on oral history and folktales to remember their past and, despite the amazing ability of their storytellers to recount the tales of long ago, after numerous millennia, some of the details have been forgotten, lost in the haze of history. As far as the Shudfolk are concerned, they've always dwelled in the mountains and will continue to do so until the end of time. The Hsaalian diggings, serpent-men ruins, and other relics from the days of prehistory remain as much of a mystery to the Shudfolk as they do to outsiders. The Shudfolk do, however, seem to possess a subconscious ancestral memory. Shudfolk purposely avoid Hsaalian mines and ruins as if some distant part of their psyches still recalls their ancestors' years of servitude under the sorcerer-kings.

he is willing to swallow his pride and ask for it. As generous as the mountain people are, they are also intensely proud, determined to demonstrate they have the gumption and where-withal to endure and overcome the worst the Shudders can throw at them. Only when dangers are obviously supernatural in origin will a typical Shudfolk unhesitatingly seek help.

This generosity and common courtesy of the Shudfolk is a result of extended family ties throughout the region. As a remote culture, the Shudfolk's bloodlines are intricately intertwined, and most every Shudfolk family shares common ancestors if you go far enough up the family tree. They are a people of a single blood and treat one another as long lost cousins—at least upon first meeting. Like any family, quarrels, disagreements, and hurt feelings occur amongst the Shudfolk and when things turn sour, relations between clans can turn violent. Even flatlanders have heard the tales of mountain feuds where two families nearly decimated themselves, battling for years to regain face after a slight or insult. Most feuds cool down once casualties on both sides begin to mount, but some stubborn mountain clans have fought themselves to extinction over a minor misunderstanding.

The Shudfolk, unlike most cultures outside the mountains, are a monotheistic people, venerating a single deity known as "The Sovereign" (see p. The Chained Coffin Companion, page 4). Although the depth and sincerity of their faith differs from Shudfolk to Shudfolk, the Sovereign Church and its teachings play a vital role in mountain life. The local priest attends to not only the spiritual welfare of the community, but serves as teacher, healer, and magistrate. It is rare to encounter a Shudfolk that does not wear the Sovereign Circle around his or her neck or displays it in a place of prominence at home. One of the prime reasons that the majority of Shudfolk possess such strong faith lies in the fact that the Sovereign Church is the Shudfolk's sole opposition against a multitude of supernatural menaces that lurk in the Shudders. Many a Sovereign cleric or lay priest has driven out vengeful spirits, black-hearted conjure-men, and curse-sowing witches, and these displays of divine power reinforce the faith of the Shudfolk.

Given the fact that the Shudfolk arose from ancestors who'd been magically manipulated on a genetic level, it's unsurprising that the mountain people are suspicious (and perhaps harbor a subconsciously-induced ancestral hatred) of magical practitioners. With the exception of the Sovereign clergy and the occasional "study witch" (a person who knows much about magic but does not practice it), anyone dabbling in sor-

cery is considered a "witch" or "conjure-man" (or on rare occasions, a "witch man"). Witches and conjure-men are unwelcome in Shudfolk communities unless a respected individual vouches for them and assumes responsibility for their behavior. Even in these cases, the typical Shudfolk generosity isn't quite as warm to the magician, but not so rude as to cause offense. Shudfolk, especially those in the most remote part of the mountains, will deal with witches and conjure-men to acquire healing, protections against evil spirits, and the rare curse on an enemy, but this is a relationship founded more on need than desire.

Despite this distrust of magic, the sorcery-manipulated blood of the Shudfolk continues the flow in their veins, resulting in an unusual aptitude for magical work. This accounts for the abnormally high number of witches and conjure-men who live in the Shudder Mountains. These are almost all individuals who chafed under the hard life of the mountains and sought an easy route to improve their lives and obtain power. When one of the Three offered to teach them sorcery in return for servitude, they willingly accepted, trading their souls for temporal power and the ability to cow their fellow Shudfolk.

Another form of magic is commonplace in the Shudfolk community, but the mountain people do not view it as witchcraft. Instead, they perceive the numerous small charms and protective gestures that are common to mountain life as a form of anti-witchcraft, a means to use mundane measures to protect against the supernatural. These rites, known as *gramaree*, are covered in more detail in the magic chapter.

There is one final aspect of Shudfolk superstition that merits mentioning: the importance of silver. As any Shudfolk can tell you, silver is an effective weapon against all manner of supernatural menaces and the hillfolk place great stock in the substance. Unfortunately, silver isn't easily acquired in the Shudder Mountains, especially in the backwoods where bartering is the method of business transaction. Most Shudfolk families possess an object or two wrought from silver, anything from a candlestick to a dagger, to protect themselves from the unseen forces at work around them. These precious items are almost always heirlooms passed down from generation to generation, and held in great respect by their owners. Flatlander adventurers will almost never find silver weapons for sale in the mountains. Should they perform a great service to the Shudfolk, they may be rewarded with a single piece of heirloom silver, and the adventurers should accept the gift with the profound honor in which it is intended.

REMOVING DEMI-HUMANS FROM THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

The Shudder Mountains were strongly influenced by the "Silver John" stories of Manly Wade Wellman. These tales, set in the Appalachians of North Carolina during the 1950s and 1960s, are obviously lacking in representatives from European mythology and Professor Tolkien's imagination. The author has purposely downplayed the demi-human presence in the Shudder Mountains as a nod to Wellman's stories.

If the judge wishes to run a Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG campaign where the players are strictly human (and thereby continue the tradition of many Appendix N stories), the Shudder Mountains are the ideal place for such a campaign. The Starting Occupations Table accompanying the adventure "Sour Spring Hollow" includes an option for removing racial occupations to ensure all the zero-level PCs are human, and therefor easily conform to a "humans only" Shudder Mountains campaign.

DEMI-HUMANS IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS



Since the days when the serpent-men were driven out by the first primitive tribes of humanity, the Shudder Mountains has always been a land where mankind was the dominant race. Even during the Hsaalian occupancy of the hills, the number of human slaves far outnumbered both their sorcerous masters and the magically-created overseers that managed the mines. It is only recently demi-humans have ventured into the Shudders and, despite these adventurous souls, it is likely that the Shudder Mountains will remain a bastion of humanity.

With their rich mineral resources and beautiful sylvan vistas, the Shudder Mountains would seem an ideal home for both dwarves and elves. The reality, however, is that there is something about the Mountains that unsettles both those races, a shiver down the spine that instills a sense they are not wanted there.

Dwarven visitors to the Shudder Mountains are at first delighted by the old stone outcroppings, ancient mountains, and the faint aroma of precious metals their keen noses detect. Prospectors venture into the hills, pick and hammer in hand, intent on delving into the ancient stone. Their excitement is short-lived. As they begin to explore the mountains, they discover the prehistoric diggings of the Hsaal and a sense of wrongness grows in their hearts. Whatever the Hsaal extracted from the Shudders forever changed the stone. A dwarf in a Hsaalian delve finds his beard standing on end and gooseflesh breaking out on his brawny arms. He experiences an overwhelming desire to leave for other, cleaner stone far away from the former mine. After experiencing this feeling of unnaturalness in the tainted delves several times, most dwarves move on to other uncorrupted mountains.

Elves suffer a similar experience when traveling the forests and hollows of the Shudder Mountains. They too feel the sense that the land has turned sour. Although the trees in the Shudders stand ancient and tall, an aura of unpleasantness resides in some shadowy thickets and in moss-filled glens. One elven forester described the experience as “a greasy sensation, as if my skin and tongue sweated a slick, foul ooze.” A handful of elves have managed to overcome their odd revulsion and work to discover its origins and correct the cause, but most move on to other forests to conduct their magical workings.

The exact cause of this mysterious unnerving of dwarven and elven psyches is as yet unknown, but it is possibly the result of the spoils found throughout the Shudders. Demi-human PCs experience a similar sensation when venturing into the Shudders, but, as adventurers, can function in the mountains normally. The judge may wish to utilize this sensation to impart hints whenever the PC approaches a spoil or other area of lingering Hsaalian magic.

Of all the demi-human races, halflings comprise the largest percentage, but even they are a small minority in comparison to the human population. Unlike dwarves and elves, halflings don't experience a sense of unnaturalness in the Shudder. Instead, it is the rough living and the hard work required to eke out a livelihood in the mountains that keeps their number low. While there is good farming to be had in the hollows of the Shudders, the clearing of the land, unearthing and moving rocks, and cutting planting tiers in the hillside is usually far more labor than a halfling wants to undertake to till the land. A single halfling community known as Greendowns exists in the Shudders, and a few halfling traders visit the hills to purchase Shudfolk crafts. Aside from these groups, it takes an adventurous halfling to ramble through the Shudder Mountains for long.

INSPIRATIONAL RESOURCES



The Shudder Mountains campaign setting is the product of various outside influences being filtered through the author's own eccentric mind and further influenced by his time in the Catskill Mountains region of the Appalachian Plateau. To give credit where credit is due and to help stimulate the creativity of other judges about to embark on a campaign set in the Shudders, the following resources are provided.

Primary Influences

These works were predominant influences on the Shudder Mountains and are required reading/viewing for judges.

- *Who Fears the Devil?, The Old Gods Waken, After Dark, The Lost and the Lurking, The Hanging Stones, and The Voice of the Mountain* by Manly Wade Wellman
- *The Foxfire Book* edited by Eliot Wigginton
- *Rage Across Appalachia* by Jackie Cassada
- *Pumpkin Head* (1988)

Secondary Influences

- “Pigeons from Hell,” “Fangs of Gold,” and “The Shadow of the Beast” by Robert E. Howard
- “The Lurking Fear,” “The Man of Stone,” and “The Whisperer in Darkness” by H.P. Lovecraft
- *The Descent* (2005)
- *Emmett Otter's Jug-Band Christmas* (1977)
- *The Long Lost Friend* by John George Hohman
- “Wildwyck County” series of articles by the author, appearing in *Fight On!* magazine

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

THE CHAINED COFFIN COMPANION

BY MICHAEL CURTIS



THE CHAINED COFFIN COMPANION

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THE MAGIC OF THE MOUNTAINS



The Shudder Mountains are a peculiar place, a region steeped in superstition and unique magical practices seldom seen outside the mountain hollows. The following supplemental material addresses the strange magic and curious mystical customs one finds in the Shudders, providing a firm foundation for the judge running a campaign set in the Shudder Mountains to build upon. Although intended for a Shudder Mountain campaign, this material can be easily inserted in other DCC RPG games.

SPOILS



When the moon of Luhsaal was destroyed, the magical backlash of the catastrophe poured down from the heavens, guided by the mystical gateways and sorcerous ties that connected the Hsaal to their native world. The maelstrom of eldritch energy washed over the Hsaal, incinerating them where they stood. With the sorcerer-kings' deaths, the magical power held in check by each Hsaal was also unleashed, contributing to the tidal wave of sorcery pouring across the landscape of the Shudder Mountains. Most of this supernatural energy would dissipate over time, being reabsorbed by ley lines, spilling back across dimensional boundaries, or consumed by odd entities that feed on magical power. A portion of this inundation of energy, however, remained behind, drawn to locations possessing either a natural or artificial affinity for sorcery. In places such as secluded forest glades, crystalline caverns, ancient serpent-men religious sites, or Hsaalian outposts, magical forces pooled like spilled quicksilver on an alchemist's table.

Much as water does when separated from the flowing stream, these reservoirs of sorcerous power stagnated, their energy and potential turning in upon itself. The curdled energy became unstable, even more unpredictable than magical power typically is. In time, those who discovered these sites began calling them "spoils" for the power there had gone sour.

Spoils exist across the Shudder Mountains, displaying no rhyme or reason for their appearance other than existing in places that perhaps once held mystical importance or magical significance. They can be found in serpent-men ru-

ins and in untouched forests, under the earth or atop high mountain peaks. As a rule, Shudfolk avoid spoils and the dangers they can possess, teaching each generation to keep their distance from such tainted sites with folktales about "haunted glens," "Hell spots," or "bad hollows." However, those Shudfolk who make their living brewing witch liquor for sale outside the Shudders actively seek new spoils and fiercely defend their still sites from trespassers.

There are two forms of spoils in the Shudder Mountains. The first is the common spoil which affects creatures and objects exposed to its power at a slow rate. The second are "hot spots" of tainted magic known as "burn spoils" by the locals. These malignant sites of power are places that cause physical and supernatural alterations in subjects exposed to its power for even a brief time and are by far the most dangerous type of spoil.

Spoils vary in appearance, but the most common form is a writhing patch of black fire that nevertheless illuminates its surroundings. Less typical appearances include pools of rippling green water that seems to vibrate to unheard sounds, crystalline growths with alien visages entrapped within their depths, and groves of twisted trees alive with fluttering shadows. Spoils of both types average from small pockets of radiant magic to vast pools of tainted energy measuring between 20' to 200' in diameter (2d10x10').

Common spoils require exposure to its power for 1d5+3 days before its energy take effect on those subjected to its taint. Even a brief period spent during a 24 hour period counts as a day of exposure when determining if a creature is affected by a spoil's power. At the end of the determined time, living creatures must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be affected by the spoil. The exact changes a spoil produces in subjects bathed in its radiance vary from location to location, and the judge is encouraged to create specific effects for each spoil in his campaign. The above table can be used to randomly determine a spoil's properties and as inspiration for other preternatural effects.

The time a creature spends exposed to a spoil is cumulative. A subject could visit a spoil on four different days over the course of a month and suddenly be affected on the fourth day. However, spoil exposure fades after a prolonged period away from the curdled energy pool. For each full month

Table 1-1: Spoil Effect on Living Subjects

1d10	Spoil's Effect
1	Imparts a random form of corruption. Roll 1d6: 1-3) use Table 5-3: Minor Corruption (<i>DCC RPG</i> p. 116) to determine effect; 4-5) use Table 5-4: Major Corruption (<i>DCC RPG</i> p. 118) to determine effect; 6) use Table 5-5: Greater Corruption (<i>DCC RPG</i> p. 119) to determine effect.
2	Causes a sorcerous wasting disease similar to <i>mummy rot</i> .
3	Imparts the ability to cast a random 1 st -level spell once per day. Subject uses a d16 to determine the spellcheck of this incantation.
4	Drains magical power, turning enchanted objects mundane or stealing spells from a caster's mind
5	Permanently transforms the subject into a monster, either one chosen randomly from the <i>DCC RPG</i> rulebook or other source, or a unique creature of the judge's creation.
6	Drives the subject insane, warping his mind with malicious thoughts to commit unspeakable crimes.
7	Creates a communication conduit between the subject and an entity outside the physical world. The party at the other end of this conduit may be pleased to speak with the subject, perhaps even agreeing to act as the affected soul's patron or be angered by such brazen contact and seek the individual's destruction.
8	Cloaks the subject in a permanent mystical field that amplifies his prowess or protects him from harm. Subject gains a +1 bonus to a randomly determined ability, spell, saving throw, natural armor class, or other characteristic of the judge's choosing.
9	Slays the subject outright then revives him as an un-dead creature 1d4 days later unless the body is destroyed.
10	Sends the subject to another time and/or place. Possible destinations include the dim past during the height of either the Hsaal or serpent-men's dominance, the Court of Chaos, the time pad in the Vault of Zepes Null-Eleven, or a certain purple planet...

Table 1-2: Spoil Effect on Inanimate Subjects

1d6	Spoil's Effect
1	The object's substance changes. Wood become stone, metal becomes lifeless flesh or bone, glass become water, etc.
2	The object becomes ethereal, slipping in between planar boundaries at random.
3	The object becomes animated as per the <i>breathe life</i> spell. Determine spell check result using d10+15 for common spoils and d10+20 for burn spoils.
4	The object becomes fused with the environment surrounding the spoil, embedding itself in stone, wood, soil, or even the unlucky soul holding it!
5	The object explodes inflicting 4d6 (8d6 if burn spoil) damage to everything in a 20' diameter.
6	The object becomes charged with magical power. This effect may make the object useful in crafting potent magical items or a force of entropy that causes widespread chaos wherever it goes.

a creature remains outside a spoil's area of effect, one day of exposure is nullified.

Once a creature is affected by a spoil, he gains a +1 die bonus to subsequent saving throws against that spoil's effects. In some cases (judge's prerogative) a spoil might affect a creature once and the subject is forever after immune to its power.

Burn spoils are more dangerous than common spoils, searing those exposed to its radiating energy in addition to causing physical changes. Any living creature exposed to a burn spoil for more than one minute must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer 2d6 points of damage and be affected by the burn spoil's transmutative power. The judge can use the table above to determine the burn spoil's effect

or create a unique power of his own devising.

Nonliving creatures (but not including un-dead) and objects are subject to a spoil's power, but exposure affects these targets in a different manner than living creatures. Inanimate objects do not get a saving throw against the spoil's power. The following table includes some possible effects for inanimate objects exposed to a spoil.

The sole exception to inanimate objects exposed to a spoil is witch liquor (see below). The eclectic components that comprise the various witch liquor recipes found in the Shudder Mountain cause a spoil's radiating power to manifest in other ways. These alternate effects are detailed in the witch liquor entry.

THAT OLD TIME RELIGION



Religious practices in the Shudder Mountains differ from those found in the flatlands. The Shudfolk, unlike many other human cultures, are monotheistic, revering a single deity they address as the Sovereign. According to the Shudfolk, the Sovereign was the first deity, the Great King who created the world and all things in it, including the other gods and goddesses venerated outside of the Shudders. This belief means the Shudfolk are (reasonably) tolerant of other religions, secure in their knowledge that these “lesser gods,” as they consider them, are creations of the Sovereign and should be respected as such. A courteous cleric of another faith will find a warm welcome by the Shudfolk, provided he keeps his evangelizing to a minimum and shows equal religious tolerance towards his hosts.

The central tenet of the Sovereign faith holds that the Great King instills a bright light within the soul of each human (the faith is less specific about demi-humans) upon their birth. It is the sacred duty of all humanity to nurture and feed this soulful illumination during life, amplifying it with good deeds, kindness, charity, and faithful worship. Upon a person’s death, he finds himself in the eternal darkness of the afterlife and only those who kept his divine light lit with good deeds and a pious life can find his way to the Sovereign’s Kingdom, where he will reside in peace and pleasure for eternity. An individual who fails to nurture his divine light in life discovers himself lost in the endless darkness and cold that exists beyond death, potentially becoming a restless spirit or prey for other horrors in the eternal night.

Temples dedicated to the Sovereign in the Shudder Mountains are simple affairs, largely constructed of wood and painted either bright white or yellow to symbolize the Sovereign-granted light within all the congregants. Fire and sunlight are commonly used in religious ceremonies dedicated to the Sovereign. The symbol of the Sovereign is a circle, representing the god’s all-encompassing arms that hold the universe. Shudfolk regularly wear the Sovereign’s Circle around their necks or pinned to clothes, and Shudfolk always fashion their Sovereign’s Circle from the best material they have access to. A rich Shudfolk trader’s Sovereign’s Circle would be made of gold, while a poor farmer would possess one carved from the most pleasant-seeming wood he could find or trade for.

The clergy of the Sovereign, like the Shudfolk themselves, is independent, lacking a strict hierarchy. Each temple is led by one or (more rarely) two priests who attend to the spiritual needs of its congregation. Temples in close proximity to one another occasionally cooperate to observe important holidays, but geographical distance and difficulty of travel throughout the Shudders generally results in a series of self-contained religious districts centered on a single community with the local priest overseeing it.

Sovereign clerics hold the title of “Braar” (males) or “Shuyr” (females), words that translate roughly as “revered prince” or “revered princess” in the forgotten language of the Hsaal

(the origin of these titles is unknown to the Shudfolk). Sovereign priests are Lawful (like their deity) and rely on rustic weapons such as clubs and staves to defend themselves. A 1st-level cleric of the Sovereign begins play with the spells *blessing*, *food of the gods*, *holy sanctuary*, and *word of command*. Common higher level spells of Sovereign clerics include *banish*, *cure paralysis*, *divine symbol*, *neutralize poison or disease*, *restore vitality*, *snake charm*, *bolt from the blue*, *exorcise*, *remove cure*, *spiritual weapon*, *sanctify*, *righteous fire*, and *weather control*. Sovereign clerics may never cast *darkness* as it is an affront to the divine light granted by the Great King, and eschew *binding*, *animate dead*, and *speak with dead* as being too close to the practice of witchcraft.

Aside from the clerics of the Sovereign, the faith has a small number of lay priests. These lay priests are not full clerics (as the character class) but something more than simple congregants. Lay priests, due to their devout veneration of the Sovereign, are granted a few clerical abilities, but with much less power than full priests. A lay priest of the Sovereign can *lay on hands* and *turn unholy* as a cleric, but uses a d16 action die (modified by Personality) when attempting these miracles. Some lay priests can also cast a single spell (granted by the judge in the role of the Sovereign) which also uses a d16 to cast. A failed spell check by a lay priest increases his range of disapproval by 2 points rather than 1, and a wise lay priest knows not to press his deity’s patience should his asked-for miracles fail to manifest.

Only individuals of extreme piety can become lay priests. The exact qualifications to achieve this holy state are left to the judge to adjudicate, but regardless of what stipulations the judge chooses to apply, a lay priest cannot possess another character class. The level of faith needed to become a lay priest prevents an individual from pursuing a second PC class. A lay priest who becomes a cleric gains all the benefits of that class, but loses his lay priest abilities. A lay priest who fails to maintain the appropriate level of piety (judge’s discretion) is stripped of his miraculous powers.

CURSES



urses are a constant fear in the Shudder Mountains. The Shudfolk know that any witch or conjure-man is capable of laying a curse on those who cross them, and have developed a number of superstitions to help defend themselves against becoming accursed (see Folk Magic below). A judge preparing to run a campaign set in the Shudder Mountains should review Appendix C (pp. 438-439 of the *DCC RPG* rulebook).

Witches and conjure-men in the Shudder Mountains can issue a curse as an attack action, requiring the victim to make a DC 16 Will save to resist. These witch curses are covered in Appendix C and below. In addition, conjure-men and witches who have one of The Three (Anector, Haade and Modeca) as a patron gain access to the 2nd level cleric spell *curse* as a 2nd level wizard spell. As with other clerical spells cast as wizard magic, a result of a natural 1 results in a 50% chance of patron taint or misfire, rolling on either the patron taint or generic table as appropriate.

Although victims of the *curse* spell can suffer Luck and other statistic penalties as per the spell's description, witches often cause a *curse* to manifest in less direct but potentially more devastating ways, usually in a manner that affects the victim's livelihood. The following chart gives alternate results of a *curse* based on the caster's spell check. The judge is free to modify this table or use it as inspiration for new ideas.

Alternate Curse Manifestations

Spell check	Result
20-21	A farmer's cow produces no milk for the duration.
22-25	The tools of the subject's trade turn against him, breaking or even injuring him when used.
26-29	A family's crop is blighted; a farmstead's well goes dry.
30-31	A village spring dries up; a plague of vermin invades the village; all the community's livestock becomes barren.
32-33	As above but the misfortune affects a larger community.
34+	A single victim is doomed. The <i>curse</i> has no immediate effect, but the victim will die at a random time as determined by the judge. This doom may come as a result of a natural accident or supernatural event. Only breaking the curse by meeting the spell's condition can save the victim.

The magically-inclined are not the only ones able to impart a curse in the backwoods. On rare occasions, even those Shudfolk without the slightest bit of magical knowledge have cursed their foes when greatly wronged. A mother whose only child died because of another's carelessness, a bride-to-be who lost her fiancé to some cruel man's whims, or a devout soul who watched his temple burned to the ground by heretics, have succeeded in laying a mighty curse on those responsible. Flatlanders traveling in the Shudders are cautioned to treat the Shudfolk with respect and courtesy. For a non-spellcaster to curse another, he or she must first be greatly wronged by the target's actions (judge's discretion) and make a DC 16 Personality check using a d16 action die. If successful, the victim can make a Will save against the check result to avoid the curse. The judge should choose an appropriate curse from Appendix C or create one of his own devising. A non-spellcaster can only invoke such a curse once in his lifetime.

No chapter on curses would be complete without a new one to add to the judge's repertoire. The following new curse is provided to give the judge an example of the types of curses the PCs might encounter in the Shudder Mountains should they cross the wrong person.



Curse of Forever Walking

Moderate Curse

*May you wander the hills forever weary,
Walk through heat, and mud, and weather always dreary.
Sleep not two nights in the same restful bed,
Walk and wander until thou art dead.*

This curse carries a -2 Luck penalty and forces the victim to never remain longer than 24 hours in a single location. If the victim stays in a single place for more than 24 hours, he is afflicted by misfortune and outright danger every hour until he departs. The misfortune can range from the irritating (he loses a prized possession) to the deadly (he contracts a disease). He may also find himself the subject of random monster attacks, hostile mobs, or similar threats to life and limb. This curse can be alleviated by finding a community willing to accept the accursed individual despite being aware of the danger that follows him and building a home amongst those kind souls. This is more difficult that it appears, as the victim must get the full acceptance of every member of the community before the curse abates.

FOLK MAGIC IN THE HILLS

Although the Shudfolk harbor deep suspicion of any magic-using individual aside from their local Sovereign cleric, they themselves are ironically the product of magical manipulation. During their ancestors' years of servitude to the Hsaal, that lunar race regularly employed magic on their slaves to make them more suitable for their tasks. Traces of this ancient sorcery still flows through the Shudfolks' veins.

It is perhaps this lingering mystical taint that allows the Shudfolk to produce supernatural effects through seemingly non-magical rituals intended to ward off the malicious effects of witchcraft. The Shudfolk, steeped in superstitions, regularly enact minor rites intended for protection, good luck, or to combat the supernatural. Although no Shudfolk would deign to acknowledge these superstitious acts as sorcery, they nevertheless do produce seemingly magical results. For the purpose of classification, these superstitious rites are called *folk magic* or *gramaree*.

Most folk magic is handed down orally, passed from one generation to the next, but codices of folk magic lore do exist. These books of folk magic have a number of titles, and knowledgeable Shudfolk can name the most famous (or feared) books: *The Gray Book*, *The Wayward Companion*, and *Little Black Cat*. Each text contains various gramaree rites, herbal recipes, astrological charts showing the proper times to sow and reap crops, and, occasionally, a true magical spell. A number of superstitions have become associated with the books, themselves. Legend has it that *The Gray Book*, for example, cannot be thrown or given away, but if the owner ever wishes to rid himself of the text, he must bury the book and say a funeral prayer over its "grave." Failing to do so results in the book's return, accompanied by unpleasant events that afflict the owner.

Many gramaree rites are performed by the Shudfolk, observed when they feel their path has crossed that of a witch or conjure-man. When performed by those uninitiated into the deeper mastery of the correct methods of enacting the rites, these gestures are simple superstition that have no true power (aside from perhaps making the individual feel a bit safer as a placebo effect). However, those who are schooled in the mastery of the rites create actual preternatural effects.

Theoretically, folk magic can be learned by anyone, but in practice certain restrictions apply. Shudfolk have an easier time understanding the proper means to enact a gramaree ritual due to their mystical blood taint. If a Shudfolk can find a suitable teacher, either a living person or one of the gramaree texts, he undergoes a period of study lasting 1d3 months. Although the rites themselves are simple to perform, they must be enacted with absolutely perfect gestures and mental focus. Learning to focus the mind and repeat the gestures without error takes time. At the end of the study period, the student must make a DC 15 Intelligence check. If successful, he learns the folk magic rite, but failing the check means he cannot master the act and must wait a full year before attempting to learn it again. Non-Shudfolk can learn gramaree with the proper study period, but it is a DC 20 Intelligence check to learn the ritual.

There is a limit to the number of folk magic rites a student can learn. An individual who lacks any additional spell-casting training (all zero-level characters, and PCs of any class other than cleric, wizard, and elf) can master 1 gramaree rite plus 1 per every 2 class levels. Thus a 5th-level warrior can know 3 rites (base of one plus one at 2nd-level and a third at 4th-level). Clerics, wizards, and elves can master 1 folk magic rite plus 1 per every class level. A 5th-level wizard could know up to six gramaree rituals—provided he can find a teacher and succeeds in his Intelligence checks.

Lastly, even if a character knows a true gramaree rite, invoking it successfully is not guaranteed. First, performing a true folk magic ritual taxes the body and mind, causing 1 point of temporary Stamina and Intelligence damage. This damage heals normally. Secondly, the individual must make a Personality check with a DC dependent on the rite to succeed. The ability damage is suffered regardless of success. There are no side-effects from failing to invoke a gramaree rite correctly aside from the ability loss. Gramaree never misfires, causes corruption, or divine disfavor.

Folk Magic Rites

The following are just a sample of the gramaree rituals known in the Shudder Mountains. The judge is encouraged to add his own creations to the list or modify their effects as desired. Unless otherwise specified, performing a gramaree rite counts as an action.

Ward against the Evil Eye (DC 14): With a gesture of crossing the index finger of the right hand over the middle finger and snapping his wrist at the suspected conjure-man, this rite imparts a -2 penalty to the target's next spell check.

Salt the Trail (DC 12): By pouring a measure of salt into a spellcaster's footprint, the individual gains +2 to his next saving throw against the target's magic.

Keep the Ghosts at Bay (DC 14): By locking the door to a room or home with a key made from silver (10 gp cost to make), the individual can prevent non-corporeal undead from entering. Incorporeal un-dead attempting to enter the protected area must make a DC 14 Will save or they cannot attempt to enter until the following evening. Each time the same key is used to invoke this rite, the Will save DC is reduced by 1.

Nail the Witch's Shadow (DC 12): This rite involves driving an iron nail into the shadow of a spellcaster. If the rite succeeds, the target suffers 1d4 damage that cannot be prevented by any means. Obviously the target must be casting a shadow for this rite to work.

OLD AND ANCIENT SONGS



The Hsaal's arcane knowledge was formidable and the long-gone race mastered myriad ways of weaving sorcery into their arts and sciences. Amongst their greatest achievements was the composing of music that produced magical effects. Although the Hsaal are dead, a few of the melodies that once filled the air of their lunar cities still linger in the Shudder Mountains, preserved in the songs of their former slaves, the Shudfolk.

Although the words have changed down the eons, the music itself retains its power—when performed by those who know the proper means of striking the right chords. A person without the correct instruction can play one of these magical musical compositions—commonly referred to as the Old Songs—without incident. In fact, many of the Old Songs are popular pieces performed around the tavern hearth and in the home with the musician being unaware of the hidden power residing in the song's notes. Only Shudfolk can master an Old Song as the songs' magic is a legacy of their blood. Flatlanders and other outsiders hearing an Old Song, played by either a common musician or one who knows the song's secrets, find the music haunting and strange. The songs of the mountains are written in minor keys (a legacy of the alien musical scale used by the Hsaal) and the music sounds strange and lonesome to ears unacquainted with these songs.

Old Songs function like folk magic, requiring an individual to undergo a period of study to learn how to correctly play

the tune to produce the magic hidden amongst its notes. Once the student learns the song, he can perform it at cost to both his body and mind, losing 1 point of Stamina and Intelligence as if enacting a gramaree ritual. Like with folk magic, the singer must make a Personality check with a DC based on the song's power to correctly invoke its effect.

The criteria for learning an Old Song is slightly different than that needed to study folk magic. A PC wishing to learn how to play one of these magical melodies must meet the following qualifications. First, only Shudfolk can play an Old Song in a manner that invokes its magic. The music and magic of the Hsaal is so intricately tied to the Shudfolks' heritage that only they have the proper blood and ancestral memories necessary to play an Old Song properly. The judge may allow a flatlander to learn an Old Song if he uses the alternate Bard class from *Crawl! #6* or other sources in his campaign, and the outsider is of that class. Secondly, the student must know how to play a musical instrument. Singing an Old Song a cappella cannot produce the proper notes to unleash a Song's power. Musical instrument proficiency usually requires the character to have either the musician or elven musician occupation. A character without those occupations can learn to play an instrument, but doing so requires time, training and possibly expenses at the judge's discretion. Thirdly, the individual must find a teacher to train under. Old Songs can only be taught by personal instruction. Due to the subtleties of the songs' magic, written forms of the music cannot convey the proper means necessary to invoke the tunes' enchantments.

If the would-be student meets these criteria, the process for learning is identical to folk magic. After 1d3 months of study, the student must make a DC 15 Intelligence check. If successful, he learns to properly play the Old Song. If the check fails, the student lacks the necessary discipline to perform the music correctly and must improve his musical skills over the coming year before attempting to learn the Song again. Old Songs never misfire, cause corruption, or incur divine disfavor, but the temporary ability loss occurs regardless of success.

A character is limited to the number of Old Songs he can know. A PC can learn one Old Song plus his Intelligence modifier. If the judge allows bards in his campaign, a bard PC can learn an additional song for each level he possesses. Old Songs do not count against the limit of folk magic rites an individual may know or vice-versa.

Old Songs

These are but a few of the Old Songs known in the Shudder Mountains and the judge is encourage to expand the list with his own creations. The DC of the Song's Personality check and the time necessary to perform the song are given in parenthesis after the Song's title.

"Tomcat Goes A' Prowlin'" (DC 12; one minute): Playing the song grants either the performer or a listener of his choosing increased stealth. The next *sneak silently, hide in shadows*, or halfling stealth roll is made with a +1d increase.

"Under Thine Outstretched Hand" (DC 14; three minutes): This song helps protect the performer and up to 3+Personality modifier others from the attacks of un-dead creatures. All un-dead suffer a -2 penalty to attack the protected individuals for 1 turn.

"Mr. Death, I Ain't Ready to Go" (DC 16; five minutes): This long and difficult song helps stave off death's final grasp. When performed successfully, a single target of the musician's choosing can make two Luck checks when rolling over his body, taking whichever result he prefers. Performing this song is especially draining and the performer suffers 2 points of Stamina damage regardless of success. This piece can only be played once per day.

SACRED STICKS AND FORGOTTEN SIGILS: MAGIC ITEMS IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

Hex Signs: These objects come in two forms: small amulets sized for a person to wear as a charm and large placards used to adorn buildings. In either form, a hex sign is a fragment of old stone bearing strange otherworldly carvings (see the spinning wheel handout from *DCC #83* for examples of the types of sigils found on a hex sign). Hex signs are relics left over from the Hsaal, the stones found lost in overgrown hollows or pried from crumbling ruins. Not every scrap of Hsaal writing contains powers, but those that do protect that which bears them.

A hex sign wards against black magic, protecting either the wearer (in the case of smaller hex signs) or structures (larger signs) from baleful sorcery. Both grant a +2 bonus to all saving throws against spells and magical effects. Small hex signs only protect the individuals wearing the symbol, while large signs grant the bonus to any creature or object located inside the structure bearing the hex sign. A large hex symbol not affixed to a building provides no benefit (a person carrying a large hex sign gains no bonus to saving throws). If a spell directly targets a hex sign—for example, a witch using *lightning bolt* on a hex sign—it benefits from its own protective magic.

Snake Sticks: This object appears to be a decorative wooden walking cane measuring 3' in length. The wood is carved with extreme skill into the shape of a rattlesnake, its tail serving as the cane's tip and the serpent's head arched to act as the headpiece. Once per day, a snake stick's power can be called upon by the owner, producing an effect identical to the 2nd-level clerical spell *snake charm*. The spell takes effect as if cast with a spell check of 14. If owned by a wizard or elf, this effect can be amplified by spellburning, with each point of spellburn increasing the stick's effective spell check by +1. Thus, a wizard who spellburns 3 points while holding the staff causes it to function as if it cast a *snake charm* spell with a spell check of 17.

Serbok (see *DCC #77.5*), his servants, and serpent-men despise these items and will go to great and lethal lengths to destroy both the snake stick and its owner.



Sovereign's Circle: This potent object is a circular holy symbol of the Sovereign, fashioned from old gold. Once the property of an extremely devout cleric of the Great King, this object provides a bonus to turning un-dead. When held by a cleric of the Sovereign, the symbol grants a +4 bonus to turn un-dead attempts. It provides no benefit to *laying on hands*, casting spells, or other clerical class abilities.

Witch Liquor: Witch liquor is a strange substance, being not quite a magical elixir but neither is it merely an alcoholic beverage. Witch liquor can be created by anyone who knows one of the correct recipes (and there are many with each version being a closely-guarded secret by the bootlegger who brews it) and locates a spoil (see above) to distill the arcane liquor. When a spoil is found, the bootlegger sets up his still, using his preferred recipe. As the corn mash ferments, the liquor is altered – often in unpredictable ways – by the ambient magical energies of the spoil. The final result is witch liquor.

Witch liquor produces a magical effect when consumed, typically a minor one of little power or practicality (and sometimes embarrassing or even dangerous), but odd enough to reaffirm the drinker has had a brush with the magical world. This perception of “dabbling in sorcery” makes witch liquor highly prized by world-weary pleasure-seekers looking for a new and unique distraction. Witch liquor is in high demand at the banquets and orgies of depraved city-dwellers, and these degenerate souls pay high prices to acquire the unusual whiskey. The majority of the Shudfolk, however, frown on the making of witch liquor and destroy the bootleggers’ stills and inventory whenever discovered. The bootleggers in turn create new ways to hide their wares and smuggle it to the big cities where the witch liquor fetches a premium.

Batches of witch liquor are seldom alike. A bootlegger can brew a batch in the same location, using the same recipe, and discover a completely unknown effect occurs when it is consumed. This gives the judge sizable leeway in creating the effects of witch liquor. The effect of a particular draught of witch liquor lasts for one to four hours, depending on the amount of potable consumed by the drinker. The table below provides a few examples of what witch liquor does to the drinker when consumed.


1d6 Witch Liquor Effect

- 1 Drinker sees beyond dimensional boundaries, getting a glimpse at the events and occupants of an alien plane of existence. Not all such visions are pleasant to behold and more than one individual has gone mad with a glimpse.
- 2 Drinker’s sense of touch becomes magnified. Pleasures of the flesh are exquisite, but even the slightest pain becomes excruciating. A moderate injury can even kill the drinker outright from shock.
- 3 Drinker’s flesh breaks out in serpent scales, giving him a sinister appearance. The skin returns to normal once the drink leave his system, but in the meanwhile he’s likely to be mistaken for a serpent-man or dabbler in black magic.
- 4 Drinker exudes ectoplasm from his pores/mouth/ears/other orifice. The plasma-like substance forms strange symbols in the air around the drinker, perhaps portending to events to come.
- 5 Drinker’s aura becomes visible to the naked eye. The colorful nimbus surrounds the partaker, displaying colors related to the drinker’s emotional state. It is difficult for the drinker to conceal falsehoods or otherwise deceive onlookers while the aura is visible.
- 6 Drinker becomes possessed by a minor spirit (ghost, elemental, devil, etc.) who speaks through the drinker’s mouth. Although unable to do more than orate, the spirit may reveal truths the drinker prefers to keep secret.

The above suggestions represent the least dangerous effects witch liquor possibly produces. Both drinking and making witch liquor can be far more hazardous at the judge’s discretion (see “Sour Spring Hollow” for an example of how a drink of witch liquor can make life unpleasant for the consumer). The backwoods are filled with stories of a traveler coming upon a witch liquor bootlegger’s still only to find the brewer massacred by incomprehensible magical forces or to simply have vanished from existence, carried off or utterly consumed by dark powers.



MODECA



There are infernal forces at work in the backwoods of the Shudder Mountains. A trio of devils are locked in an ongoing game of one-upmanship to gather souls into bondage and increase their standing in the hierarchy of Hell. These devils are Anector, Haade, and Modeca, known collectively as “The Three.” Each serves as a patron for a number of witches in the mountains, granting fiendish power in return for eternal bondage. This section provides patron information on Modeca, who appears in *DCC #83: The Chained Coffin* in his guise as “Ol’ Blackcloak.” Judges can use the following to further detail Anector and Haade in similar fashion.

MODECA, THE SECOND OF THREE (OL’ BLACKCLOAK)


Modeca, the Second of the Three, and known locally in the Shudder Mountains as “Ol’ Blackcloak” is one of the devilish triumvirate claiming the ancient mountains as part of their worldly domain. Modeca prefers subtly and corruption over brute force, leaving such uncouth pursuits to his two infernal fellows, Haade and Anector. Modeca’s sole objective is to bind as many mortal souls into eternal servitude as possible, swelling the numbers obliged to him in Hell. Mortals seeking a *patron bond* with Modeca are required to sign a compact with this devil, swearing their eternal souls to him. Unlike others who contract themselves to Modeca (see *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin* p. 11), these special servants enjoy a prolonged grace period before he claims his due – so long as they endeavor to lure others into infernal bondage. Failing in this matter inevitably causes Modeca to invoke an overlooked loophole in their contracts and claim what is owed to him sooner than expected.

Invoke Patron check results:

- 12-13 Modeca grants the caster a small fraction of his guile, charm, and presence, raising the character’s Personality to 20 (+4 bonus) for 1d6 turns.
- 14-17 Modeca inscribes infernal letters upon the caster’s skin, inflicting 1 hp of searing damage. The writing grants the caster a +4 AC bonus for 1d6 turns, fading away when the duration elapses.
- 18-19 Modeca makes the caster *invisible*, allowing him to escape a tough spot. The *invisibility* lasts for 1 turn, breaking if the caster attacks another creature, but requires no concentration on the part of the caster.
- 20-23 Modeca freezes time for all but the caster for one round. During that period, the caster can act normally, but all others are effectively paused in time and space, unable to move or defend themselves. Time returns to normal the following round.
- 24-27 Modeca sends an infernal word, pulled from one of his uncountable contracts, to assist the caster. This word appears in the air before the PC in burning letters reeking of brimstone. The word acts as a *runic alphabet*, *fey* of the judge’s choosing with a +20 to its spellcheck. The word appears instantaneously and the caster can choose to “trigger” it against any creature or creatures he can see.
- 28-29 Modeca delivers a blast of hellfire against the caster’s enemies. Up to three targets within 50’ of the caster suffer 5d6 points of damage (no save).
- 30-31 Modeca sends an Infernal Scrivener (see below) to assist the caster. The demon remains as the caster’s assistant for 1 week, but this period of servitude can be extended with successful binding magic, negotiation, infernal contracts or additional *invoke patron* spell checks at the judge’s discretion.
- 32+ Modeca freezes time for all but the caster for 2d4 rounds. During that period, the caster can act normally, but all others are effectively paused in time and space, unable to move or defend themselves. Time returns to normal once the duration elapses.

Infernal Scrivener (type II demon, Modeca): Init +3; Atk poison pen +6 melee (special); AC 14; HD 6d12; hp 40; MV 30’; Act 1d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), poison pen (demonic tarantula venom; 1d4+2 plus DC 16 Fort save or take an additional 2d4+2 damage and -3 Strength loss), infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 19-20; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +8; AL C.

The infernal scrivener appears as a ruddy-fleshed human with slightly pointed ears and a devilish beard, dressed in courtly finery. It has impeccable manners and acts as a superb aide-de-camp to its temporary master, serving to the best of its ability its master’s whims until the time of servitude ends. Its sole attack is its black iron quill dipped in the infernal venom of devilish spiders. This poison supernaturally replenishes after each attack.



A BACKWOODS BESTIARY: NEW MONSTERS FROM THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS



The Shudder Mountains are home to several species of creatures found nowhere else in the world. Some of these beasts are natural animals that evolved in the unique mountainous environment of the Shudders, while others are the product of the weird magical forces at work in the hills. This section introduces nine new monsters for use in a Shudder Mountain-based campaign and to inspire the judge to create other unusual monsters for the PCs to encounter in those dark hills and hollows.

THE ABANDONED

The Abandoned: Init +2; Atk claws +4 melee (1d6+2); AC 13; HD 5d8; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP infravision, grapple attack (+6); SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; AL L.

The Hsaal protected their mines and the minerals contained therein with a strange race of magically-created wardens. In the wake of the Hsaal's destruction, these sentinels, now known as the Abandoned, continued to watch over their masters' diggings, protecting the forgotten treasures within from those who would plunder them.

The Abandoned are humanoid in appearance, standing up to 8' tall and covered in taught skin with corded muscles visible underneath. Their heads are more batrachian than human, possessing a wide mouth and large incandescent eyes, but no nose. Their hands are both webbed and clawed. The Abandoned are intelligent and have lifespans lasting several millennia.

These sentinels attack with their claws, seeking to grapple intruders and drag the unlucky back to their lairs deep within the mines. Abandoned gain a +6 to their grapple attack rolls due to their size and strength. Although they prefer to take trespassers alive, the Abandoned readily fight to kill if facing powerful foes.

Little is known about what befalls those captured by the Abandoned, but at least one account suggests that abducted enemies are subjected to a magical or scientific transformation that blasts the captured foes' sanity and turns them into feral forms of life better suited for life beneath

the earth. The Abandoned never leave the mines they protect and have been known to let intruders who forfeit the treasure they've plundered depart in peace.

BEARBONES

Bearbones: Init +8; Atk bite +10 melee (2d12+3) or claw +8 melee (2d10+3); AC 20; HD 10d12+3; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP immune to non-magical weapons, fearsome aura, stealthy (+15 to stealth-related checks), immune to critical hits, suffers ½ damage from cold and fire; SV Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +10; AL C.

Bearbones is a unique monster, a backwoods boogey-man called up by witches to obtain revenge against wrongdoers. As its name suggests, Bearbones resembles a grizzly bear-sized humanoid creature comprised of aged, mud-covered bones of inhuman origin. It stalks its prey on digitigrade legs, moving quietly through the night. Bearbones' eyes burn with blue-green light and its ribcage holds mottled gray organs of indistinct nature that ooze and pulsate as the creature moves about. It attacks with thick, sharp claws and boar-like tusks that jut from its snout.

Any creature coming within 20' of Bearbones must make a DC 15 Will save or be paralyzed with fear. This fright lasts for 2d4 rounds, persisting even if Bearbones attacks the frightened individual. Despite appearances, Bearbones is not un-dead but a conjured creature. It is said that Bearbones is difficult to kill permanently and if reduced to zero hit points, it dissolves away, its bones returning to its hidden grave located somewhere deep in the backwoods. Only by discovering Bearbones' grave and exposing its bones to the sun can the creature ever be truly destroyed.

BLACK DOG

Black Dog: Init +6; Atk none; AC 10; HD 3d10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP howl (DC 14 Will save or 1d4 Luck loss), immune to non-magical attacks; SV Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +7; AL N.

In the dark of night, travelers sometimes spy a huge dog-



shaped, splotch of shadow moving amidst the gloom. Seen only as a silhouette of darkest black with eerie green glowing eyes against night's shadows, a black dog is an ill omen. Black dogs do not directly attack those they encounter, instead emitting a spine-chilling howl that shakes the hearer's soul for he knows he will soon experience a much worse brush with the supernatural.

Black dogs only appear to persons who are destined to encounter a supernatural menace within the next 24 hours, serving as a harbinger of things to come. A black dog always howls when it appears and those fated to meet what the hound's presence foretells must make a DC 14 Will save or lose 1d4 Luck. This lost Luck cannot be regained (even by thieves and halflings) until the affected individuals encounter and overcomes the subsequent supernatural encounter. If the victims survive the encounter, the lost Luck is immediately restored, but should they fail to triumph, the Luck is lost for good and only restored through normal means at the judge's discretion. For example, the judge knows the party will meet the Bad Lick Beast the following night and foretells the event by having the PCs glimpse a black dog and hear its cry. All fail their saves and lose 2 Luck. The next night the party runs across the Bad Lick Beast and manages to defeat the creature. The PCs immediately regain their lost Luck. Had they failed, forced to flee the encounter for instance, the loss would be permanent barring additional Luck gains later on.

Killing a black dog before it howls not only avoids potential Luck loss, but prevents the foretold supernatural encounter from happening. Black dogs always vanish after howling, disappearing back to whatever otherworldly place they hail from.

Black dogs are seldom encountered randomly, but if they are happened upon by chance, the judge must determine what supernatural hazard the party will experience before 24 hours elapse. The black dog's real threat is the fear it instills, not in the PCs but in the players themselves.

EARTH HOUND

Earth Hound: Init +2; Atk tusks +2 melee (1d5) or bite +1 melee (1d4); AC 11; HD 1d6; MV 30', burrow 10'; Act 1d20; SP keen nose (+10 to detect hidden creatures and can smell dead bodies from 300' away); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

Earth hounds are ghoulish creatures that inhabit burying grounds, especially those near water, and consume the dead. Resembling pig-sized quadrupeds with rat-like fur and a canine-shaped head, earth hounds devour freshly buried corpses, tearing through coffin walls with their tusks. They have an incredibly keen sense of smell and can detect a fresh corpse up to 100 yards away, even if the body is buried and contained inside a casket. Although they prefer dead flesh, earth hounds have been known to attack the living if starving or when an unlucky gravedigger unearths one of their burrows.



GARDINEL

Gardinel: Init -3; Atk tongue tendril +8 melee (grapple); AC 10; HD 20d12; MV none; Act 1d20; SP camouflage, digestive juices (DC 15 Fort save each round or suffer 4d8 damage), immune to most mind-affecting spells (see below); SV Fort +16, Ref N.A., Will -5; AL N.

The gardinel is an odd species of plant distantly related to the Venus flytrap and pitcher plant. A carnivorous plant, the gardinel has evolved to grow to great size and mimic the appearance of a constructed building—usually a log cabin or similar rustic structure. It is nearly indistinguishable from a normal house from the outside, bearing a single open “doorway” flanked by a pair of shuttered “windows.” The doorway and windows are in truth the gardinel's mouth and a pair of primitive organs that provide it with sight and smell. A gardinel usually grows in forlorn locations, but a rare strain of the plant has been known to sprout in towns and even large cities.

Unable to move, the gardinel relies on its camouflage to lure prey inside it. Travelers seeking shelter from inclement weather or a safe refuge to overnight in enter through the plant's open mouth and seldom escape once inside. In dire straits, the gardinel can use its tendril-like “tongue” to grab a meal lingering up to 15' from its doorway. The gardinel is +8 to hit on its initial attack with its tongue and enjoys a +16 modifier to maintain its grapple on subsequent rounds due to its size. The interior of a gardinel is a pink-walled space with a sloping floor littered with the skulls and bones of past meals. Once prey is inside the plant, the “door” closes as a flap of tough fiber folds over the entrance and the “room” (actually the gardinel's stomach) floods with acidic digestive juices that inflict 4d8 damage to all inside (DC 15 Fort save to avoid damage for one round). Victims trapped inside a gardinel can either force the fiber covering on the entrance (DC 20 Strength check) or cut their way free with sharp weapons (required a combined 50 points of damage to one section of the stomach wall). Gardinels are immune to most mind-affecting spells unless the magic specifically targets vegetable life.

It is said that not all gardinels are plants, but that some witches can create another magical version of a living cabin through the use of black magic. These witches' gardinels appear as furnished rustic homes, possessing a cunning intellect and capable of serving their mistresses in limited ways.

HELLBENDER SALAMANDER

Hellbender Salamander, Giant: Init -2; Atk bite +3 melee (2d4); AC 14; HD 2d8; MV 20' or swim 30'; Act 1d20; SP camouflage (+10 to hide attempts); SV Fort +2, Ref -1, Will -2; AL N.

Giant Hellbender Salamanders are 6' long varieties of their much smaller cousin. They dwell among rocks and boulders in fast moving water, dining on fish, turtles, and the occasional mammal that swims past their den. Giant Hellbenders eat smaller prey whole, but will bite larger prey and drag them below the water's surface to drown their victims.

HIDEBEHIND

Hidebehind: Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (2d4); AC 14; HD 4d8; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP backstab (+5 to attack, crit die 1d20/Table II), difficult to see (+20 to hide checks), instantaneous movement (can teleport up to 60' to remain behind its victim at will, interrupting initiative count if necessary), terrifying appearance (DC 15 Will save or observer flees in horror for 1d6 turns and blocks the hidebehind's appearance from his memory); SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2; AL C.

Few have seen a hidebehind and lived, and those that have are reluctant to describe the terrible thing. As its name suggests, a hidebehind stalks its victim from the rear, using its special movement ability to avoid being seen. It attacks with surprise, gaining the benefit of a thief's *backstab* ability as it leaps onto its chosen victim's back. A hidebehind prefers to feast upon the intestines of its victims once it drags its meal back to its lair. Local folklore maintains that hidebehinds find the smell of alcohol abhorrent and will avoid a creature reeking of the stuff, but the veracity of this rumor is unknown.

OPOSSUM, GIANT

Opossum, Giant: Init +2; Atk bite +1 melee (1d4); AC 12; HD 1d6+1; MV 30' or climb 20'; Act 1d20; SP feign death; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will -2; AL N.

Giant opossums are identical to their smaller kin in all aspects except for size. These large marsupials grow to the size of hound dogs, with some rare specimens reaching even greater proportions. Giant opossums are seldom aggressive, and when confronted by predators, will "play dead." This unconscious response renders the opossum unmoving for 1d4 hours, during which time animal predators are 90% likely to leave the creature alone. An aggressive giant opossum is likely rabid and its bite inflicts an additional 1d4 damage if the victim fails a DC 10 Fort save.

Some giant opossums display significant intelligence, possessing almost manlike intellects. These varieties are commonly found as familiars or animal servants to Lawful wizards, witches, and other backwoods magic practitioners. Giant opossum familiars can handle objects with their forepaws, manipulating them with the same dexterity as human hands.



WRIGGLER

Wiggler: Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (1d8) or claws +2 (1d4); AC 12; HD 4d10; MV 30', climb 20' or leap 10'; Act 2d20; SP crit range 19-20, superior hearing, echolocation, blind, heightened reflexes, uncanny climber (can scale walls and ceilings; +10 to bonus to climb-related actions); SV Fort +3, Ref +6 (but see below), Will +2; AL C.

Wrigglers are pale white, man-sized humanoids with blind eyes and tough, leathery skin. Shredding teeth and fangs, and enlarged, bat-like ears complete their terrifying appearance. Wrigglers move with seemingly unnatural skill through the tight tunnels and soaring caves beneath the Shudder Mountains. Although blind (and immune to spells that affect sight), wrigglers perceive their surroundings with superior hearing and by creating chirps similar to a cricket's song to echolocate. Wrigglers have cat-like reflexes and always make their Reflex saves unless bound, unconscious, or similarly restrained from moving.

Wrigglers were the aboriginal humanoids that dwelled in the Shudder Mountains before the coming of the Hsaal. When that ancient race descended from the dark moon, they attempted to enslave the wrigglers' ancestors, but the native clans retreated into the mountains' caverns. Over time, they adapted to their subterranean environment, becoming a super predator troglafauna species. Their uncanny aptitude for climbing and slithering through small tunnels gave them the name "wrigglers" by the few lucky survivors who first encountered them.

ADDITIONAL RANDOM ENCOUNTERS FOR THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

1) A crude log cabin stands in a secluded glen along the party's path. With bad weather closing in and the prospect of a wet night in the mountains ahead of them, the cabin offers welcome shelter against the coming rain. Unfortunately for the party, the "cabin" is actually a hungry gardinel awaiting its next meal.

Gardinel (1): See page 13.

2) The sound of splashing water is heard as the party approaches or travels alongside a winding river. As they reach the river or round a bend, they glimpse a trio of large humanoids in rustic dress immersed in the waters close to the riverbank.

These three figures are Bigginty hill giants "noodling" for giant catfish along the riverbank. The river is 6' deep here, but appears deeper due to the giants' crouched posture. Preferring humanoid to fish, the giants attack the party. Two wade out of the river, while the third pulls rocks from the riverbed to hurl at the PCs.

Hill Giants (3): See DCC RPG p. 414.

3) An overgrown clearing is chanced upon. Old grave stones stand amongst the high grass and meadow flowers and a falling-down pole fence encircles the field. This forgotten burying ground is home to a pack of ghouls, once conjure-men who dabbled in the dark arts and perished with their souls forever tainted. The ghouls choose the party as their next meal, attacking if the PCs enter the burying ground or tracking them to their evening resting place to strike after dark.

Ghouls (4): See DCC RPG p. 414.

4) A rickety bridge crosses a rushing, boulder-choked river. Fashioned from fallen logs lashed and nailed together, the bridge has seen better days. If more than one PC crosses the span at a time, each character must make a Luck check or plunge through the decaying timbers into the rapids below. The fall does no damage, but a giant hellbender salamander lurks amongst the rocks and seizes upon the abruptly arriving morsel.

Hellbender Salamander, Giant: See page 14.

5) A winding trail leads down to the bottom of one of the mountain's many hollows. The dell is overgrown with verdant bushes and ancient trees, turning it into a maze of dense vegetation. Hidden among the greenery is an old cabin now home to a massive hive of yellow jacket wasps. Moving too close to the crumbling structure aggravates the wasps, who emerge in a huge stinging swarm to protect their home.

Insect swarm (1): See DCC RPG p. 419.

6) A great shadow passes over the party as they tramp through the mountains. Looking up, they spy a tremendous buzzard drifting on the thermals and peering down at them with obvious interest. This is one of the giant vultures that roost atop Carrion Peak seeking its next meal. The buzzard doesn't attack if the PCs look hale and hearty, but a party bearing wounds from a previous encounter is likely to be interpreted by the buzzard as an easy meal.

Giant buzzard (1): Stats as Pterodactyl (see DCC RPG p. 424).

7) A party member feels the hair on the back of his neck stand on end and experiences a dread sensation of being watched. The ambient noise of insects, birds, and other wildlife goes silent as the sound of rusting leaves or snapping twigs is heard off in the distance. The PC has been chosen by a hidebehind as its next meal. The creature continues to stalk its victim, striking when most likely to succeed.

Hidebehind (1): See page 14.

8) A trio of dilapidated cabins stand secluded in the backwoods, showing signs of neglect and sudden abandonment. No one is about, but careful investigation reveals blood stains and strange collapsed animal tunnels crisscrossing the yard around the homes. The cabins were abandoned when a pack of earth hounds took up residence in the family burying ground. The creatures, lacking steady meals, began preying upon the living. The pack still lairs in the old graveyard and detects the party's arrival. The earth hounds burrow their way to the party and attacks.

Earth Hound (6): See page 13.

9) A weatherworn spire of rock rises from the earth in a shadowy grove deep in the backwoods. Weird sigils nearly obliterated by time and the elements decorate its face. It is obvious that the stone is not a natural formation and was fashioned by mortal hands long ago. This crude obelisk was the product of the Hsaal and a few of their ancient spirits still linger about the place. If the party stays here past nightfall or desecrates the stone, the "hants" target them for revenge.

"Hants" (5): Init +2; Atk touch +6 melee (1d6+frigid touch) or poltergeist thrown object +4 ranged (1d6); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 11 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP frigid touch (1d6 plus DC 10 Fort save or temporarily lose 1d3 points of Strength, Agility or Stamina, target's choice), immune to non-magical weapons, un-dead traits; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

10) A deep pond or slow-moving river is discovered by the party. The glint of gold is visible in the shallows of the waters. PCs inspecting the metallic gleam discover gold dust or even small nuggets washed down from a forgotten delve higher up in the mountains. Unfortunately, the water



is home to a giant catfish who must be dealt with before the party can reap their reward. The gold is worth 20 gp, but more can be found if the original vein is located up in the hills.

Giant Catfish (1): Init +2; Atk bite +6 melee (2d8+2) or barbels +4 melee (1d6 + poison); AC 15; HD 8d8+5; hp 41; MV 20' or swim 40'; Act 1d20; SP poison barbels (DC 13 Fort save or take an additional 2d6), SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2; AL N.

11) The party passes by a long-neglected corn field gone to seed. The field was once that of a witch who enchanted her scarecrows with black magic to serve as her guardians. The witch is long-dead (and perhaps her unburied bones reside nearby), but her animated servants still protect the property from intrusion. They view the party as interlopers and emerge from the wild corn rows to defend the dead witch's crops.

Animated Scarecrows (4): Init +0; Atk slam +2 melee (1d4) or pitchfork +2 melee (1d8); AC 12; HD 3d8; hp 14 each; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP suffers double damage from fire, immune to mind-affecting magic; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will -; AL C.

12) The party chances upon a dim grove of conifers, the smell of pine sap hanging thick in the air. Heaps of fallen needles gather in drifts about the forest floor apparently having collected there over decades. One pile is in truth a primeval pitch slime, an oozy monstrosity that evolved in the deep recess of the Shudders, birthed from a mixture of pine sap and fetid magic. Pine needles naturally affix themselves to the slime's sticky body, providing an excellent disguise for the slow-moving monster to ambush prey. Primeval pitch slime burns if set alight, but the slime takes no damage (and inflicts an additional 1d6 fire damage with a successful attack while burning).

Primeval Pitch Slime (1): Init (always last); Atk pseudopod +4 melee (1d4); AC 10; HD 3d8; hp 14; MV 5', climb 5'; Act 3d20; SP camouflage (+10 to hide attempts), sticky, immune to fire, half damage from slicing and piercing weapons; SV Fort +6, Ref -8, Will -6.; AL C.

13) While traveling along a high ridge, the party experiences a sense of unease as their flesh literally tingles. This

skin-crawling effect is caused by a band of man-bats having an energetic discussion close by in their subsonic language. The topic: Should they eat the party now or capture them and return them to their roost? Regardless of their decision, the party is soon under attack by the flying demi-humans who descend from the air and engage the party in battle.

Man-bats (5): See DCC RPG p. 421.

14) A gap in the stony face of a mountain shows signs of being excavated by mortal hands and not by natural forces. Examining the cavity identifies it as one of the secret and ancient mines left behind by the Hsaal. Hidden treasures may lie within, but if the PCs travel too deep under the mountain or plunder what wealth remains (judge's discretion), they come into conflict with a trio of Abandoned who still defend the mine.

The Abandoned (3): See page 12.

15) The sound of breaking tree boughs and fleeing animals echo through the forest. Something big is heading towards the party. A tree of no small size crashes to the ground near the PCs revealing an extremely large animated skeleton with burning green sparks for eyes. Birthed from the bones of a dead *something* from long ago, the skeletal creature is intent on destroying all life it encounters. Perhaps if it is defeated, clues to what the creature was and where it came from can be discovered amongst its old bones.

Skeleton of Unknown Origin (1): Init +1; Atk claws +7 melee (1d6+7 plus 1d6 cold damage); AC 9; HD 8d6; hp 28; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP un-dead, half damage from piercing and slashing weapons, chilling touch; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +0; AL C.

16) The ground thuds to the beat of huge, tromping footsteps, announcing the arrival of a group of ogres. The brutes carry a slain (and partially-eaten — they couldn't wait) grizzly bear hanging from a large pole born on their broad shoulders. The ogres are recently arrived in the mountains, lairing in a cave not far from where the PCs meet them. The band is looking for employment, hoping to get into the good graces of the Biggintys or some evil conjure-man.

Ogres (4): See DCC RPG p. 422.

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

SOUL SPRING HOLLOW

#83A: A LEVEL 0 ADVENTURE
BY MICHAEL CURTIS



SOUR SPRING HOLLOW

A Zero-level Funnel Adventure

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Sour Spring Hollow is a zero-level funnel adventure for use with *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG. It is written specifically for the judge wishing to begin a new campaign set in the Shudder Mountains and is intended for use with six players running three to four zero-level PCs each. The adventure can be adjusted to accommodate as few as four players and as many as eight simply by increasing or decreasing the power and number of the creatures encountered within.

The adventure sees the party transported to a shunned vale that was once home to a sinister clan of witches, conjure men, and evil-doers. There, the PCs discover they're trapped outside of normal time and space and must decipher clues to banish a lingering evil and return to their normal world. Many are likely to fall by the wayside, but the surviving characters will be ready for further exploits in the Shudder Mountains.

BACKGROUND

The Hobb clan was a family of conjure-men and witches that lived deep in the backwoods of the Shudder Mountains in a secluded vale known as Sour Spring Hollow. Isolated from their neighbors, the Hobbs clan, led by their patriarch Byard Hobb and his three boys, practiced their dark arts, venerating spirits best left untroubled by mortal men. It was widely known that the Hobbs could witch wells dry, lay a death curse on those who crossed them, and inflict other troubles on the Shudfolk. Greatly feared, the clan was avoided by all.

Twenty years back, Shuyr Rilla, a lay cleric of the Sovereign, took it upon herself to test her faith against the Hobb's evil. With only her hawthorn walking stick and her holy symbol to aid her, Shuyr Rilla set off for Sour Spring Hollow, determined to cast the coven out of the mountains.

Arriving at the Hobb's farm, Shuyr Rilla denounced the family, quoting scripture and brandishing her holy symbol at the assembled witches. The force of her words stung the foul kin, but they swiftly overpowered her, bound her limbs, broke her walking cane, and cast her holy symbol into the spring. Gleefully, the backwoods witches hauled the struggling cleric up to the top of their corn field, lashing her to a scarecrow before slitting her wrists and ankles. As Shuyr Rilla's blood streamed into the hungry earth beneath her, she called out one final time for her god to cast out the Hobbs and their evil from the mountains.

Denied her holy symbol and plagued with guilt over letting it be stripped from her, Shuyr Rilla's exorcism was not completely successful—although it did achieve a portion of her intent. Her divine invocation cast both the Hobb clan and their farm outside of physical reality, stranding it in an adjacent pocket dimensional space. Her dying words cursed

the Hobbs to an existence as restless phantoms, imprisoned in a scrape of time and space outside the real world. Both the Hobbs and a metaphysical reflection of their farm have remained trapped there ever since.

Since the casting out of the Hobb witches, Sour Spring Hollow has been avoided by most of the Shudfolk. Recently, however, witch liquor brewers sought out the hollow, hoping to tap into any lingering magic that might exist in the Hobb's spring to make their enchanted drink. Several jugs of their witch liquor have been distributed to decadent buyers in the flatlands, but one jug inadvertently ended up amongst the potables intended for consumption at a Shudfolk wedding the PCs are attending!

During the celebration, the witch liquor jug makes its rounds amongst the unsuspecting party-goers. All who sample from the receptacle awake the following morning in the pocket dimension, drawn there by the mystical link between the witch brew and Sour Hollow's spring. There, they find themselves imprisoned with the phantoms of the dead witches and other foul things. These castaways must find the means to complete Shuyr Rilla's banishing and return back to their rightful home in the physical world.

THE Hobb FARM

The farm and surrounding hollow fill a small extra dimensional pocket located adjacent to the physical world. At first glance, it is identical to Sour Spring Hollow at the time of the Hobbs' banishment. Four log cabins surround a common yard in the midst of dense forest. A steep hillside rises from the forest to the west.

The sky over the hollow is sickly yellow in color and bears only a few scant clouds. All the vegetation in and around the farm is parched as if in the grip of a prolonged drought. The air is hot and still without even the slightest hint of a breeze. The cabins are mostly intact, but weathered: their wood turned gray with age and the whitewashed clay chinking is cracked and dirty.

The cabins are built on the same general floor plan common to the Shudfolk (use the "Typical Shudfolk Farm" cabin interior map from *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin* if necessary). Each building contains two rooms, with one area serving as a common living area and kitchen, and the second utilized as a bedroom. A loft for sleeping and/or storage, and accessible by a ladder, is located beneath the roof and above the bedroom. The cabins' interiors are dusty, filthy, and ill-maintained, and contain an array of typical household goods and furnishings. Each cabin description below also gives a list of possibly useful items and weapons that can be found inside. If the PCs specifically seek an object not listed but one that has a reasonable chance to be inside a farm house, the judge

can let the PC make a Luck check to determine if the item is present. For the purposes of time keeping, which is important with the Hobb phantoms' ongoing attacks (see Event One below), searching a cabin takes 2 turns if the party does a quick investigation and four turns if they search the inside top-to-bottom. As per *DCC RPG* p. 76, a combat lasts 1 turn.

Escape from the hollow is impossible by normal means. PCs leaving the farm to try their luck in the woods wander for 2d6 turns before emerging once more at the farm. It is likely they also encounter the Hobb phantoms (see below) while away from the flimsy security of the log cabins, possibly perishing amongst the darkened boles.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Sour Spring Hollow begins at a wedding, a joyous event celebrating the new union of two Shudfolk. Each of the players' zero-level characters is an invited guest of the bride and groom. Many of the Shudfolk are interrelated by blood or marriage and it's likely the PCs share family ties with the bride or groom (or both) and potentially each other.

Because the characters are attending a social function, the judge should limit the PCs as to what weapons and equipment they possess at the start of the adventure. Weapons are restricted to belt daggers and perhaps staves in the form of walking sticks. Each PC is allowed only trade goods and equipment that would be suitable to bring to a party, but if the player can come up with a good reason for having an unusual item with them ("I was going to loan this 10' of chain to Pa Coggins to help get that stump out."), the judge should allow it. Weapons will be of little use to the party initially, but they'll have the opportunity to scavenge arms once they arrive at the farm.

Once the party's gear is determined, read the following:

It was a glorious day in the mountains for a wedding. Ivy Newscombe made a stunning bride dressed in her granddame's white lace dress and Tum Dankers, despite a nervous sweat that puts a hog to shame, spoke of his love for his bride-to-be in a manner than made even the old ladies sigh. When Braar Gajers announced the couple husband and wife in the eyes of the Sovereign, a cheer went up that echoed clear across Hardscrabble Valley.

The party afterwards worked hard to outdo the wedding that came a'fore it. Jam Ranson and his three sons reeled out song after song on fiddle, fife, and drum as the guests whirled and stomped on the dance field. Grammy Hopyard gave the newlyweds a good luck quilt sewn from patches donated by all the families in the valley. Son Carver and Clim Wills worked hard dishing out heaps of food for the hungry guests and it wasn't too long before jugs of good, strong stump whiskey started making the rounds. In fact, that's where your current problem might have started.

Your last clear thought was taking a swig of particularly potent liquor from an odd-colored jug, a brew that burned hot on its way down and left the taste of ginger in the mouth. Now you find yourself lying face-down in starchy, stiff grass gone yellow from drought. The raucous sounds of the party are nowhere to be heard, and aside from a few groans that tell you you're not the only one suffering from hardy drink, the air is quiet and still. Raising your

head, you look about to find yourself in a common yard stretched out before four ramshackle-looking log cabins. Deep woods surround the clearing on three sides and a hillside holding terraced plots of dried, dusty corn rises up to the west. Several other people, their faces familiar from the wedding, lie splayed out on the ground around you, looking about with similar befuddled eyes.

Only the PCs are present in the yard. Through sheer happenstance, they were the only wedding guests to sample from the spiked jug and be brought here by the witch liquor's taint. Although they feel hung-over, their condition has no debilitating effects — they're in enough trouble already.

Allow the PCs a few moments to get their bearings and to try and reconstruct the events that led them here. If they compare their experiences at the wedding, they'll deduce that each of them drank from a maroon clay jug holding a potent liquor. The judge should describe the surrounding cabins at this point, perhaps sketching a quick map, as the party's about the need to know the locations of possible bastions of safety. When the PCs start to split up or head towards the cabins, Event One occurs.

EVENT ONE: THE PHANTOMS



The uneasy spirits of the Hobb clan are trapped in *Sour Spring Hollow*, hungry and hateful. They observe the PCs for a few moments, intrigued by their arrival, before hunger overwhelms curiosity and they pounce. Read the following:

The still air is broken by a peculiar bird cry sounding from the dark forest. A shrill call of "Rack-kak-kak-kaw, rack-kak-kak-kaw" echoes across the clearing followed immediately by the sound of winds rushing through the boles. Strangely, the leaves stand unmoving on their branches. Moments later, intangible figures, swirling like mist, slither from the trees toward you. Pairs of burning green eyes filled with hate, glare at you like emerald cinders.

The phantoms rush amongst the PCs, attacking those with the worst Luck first. The judge should describe any fatalities occurring during this initial attack with grim details, describing how a slain PC's flesh dries out and cracks like corn husks in a drought, his blood flowing into his slayer and making the phantom momentarily visible.

Hobb Phantoms (6): Init +4; Atk death grasp +1 melee (1d5); AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 4 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP immune to normal weapons; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; AL C.

The Hobb phantoms are translucent, bilious patches of mist assuming vaguely humanoid shapes. A pair of brilliant green eyes peers from their otherwise blank visages. They consume the blood of their victims, making their true forms, that of rustic, evil-seeming Shudfolk, visible for a few moments. These un-dead phantoms are immune to normal weapons, but are injured by silver and hawthorn implements. Although the Devil's Thorn sigil (see area 1-2 and sidebar below) served the witches well in life, it repels them in death and they cannot enter a building protected by that sign.

The phantoms attack for three rounds, slaying as many PCs as possible. They don't pursue characters who flee into the cabins (yet), but will circle the buildings briefly, howling and laughing before slinking back into the trees.

The phantoms continue to plague the party throughout their time in the dimensional space, returning with 1d4+1 of their number every 1d6+1 turns. The Hobbs were a large clan and any phantoms destroyed are replaced by other ghostly kinfolk. The phantoms' arrival is always heralded by the weird bird cry, giving the PCs one round of warning before the Hobbs' restless spirits descend upon them. On subsequent attacks, the phantoms will enter areas 1-4 and 1-5 to attack the party, but cannot enter area 1-2 and will not go into area 1-1. They leave the defense of the spring cave in area 1-7 to the deadfall, but if it is slain and the party attempts to hide in the cavern, the phantoms descend the well to attack.

EVENT TWO: THE DOLLS



This event is ongoing throughout the adventure, starting once the first PC dies. Soon after each death, the party discovers a corn-husk doll propped on a dusty shelf, porch stair, or other innocuous location. These dolls are the creations of Thistle Hobb's (the daughter from area 1-5) restless spirit and are potentially lethal later in the adventure. When first found, read the following:

A crude doll fashioned from dried corn husks, twine, and corn silk sits seemingly forgotten here. Measuring 8" tall, the doll's rustic form seems to suggest the appearance of [insert slain PC's name] down to the deceased's clothes and hair color. Unlike the rest of the surroundings, the doll is clean and dust-free, hinting at recent manufacture.

The judge must keep track of the fate of these dolls, as any that are destroyed won't plague the party later, while those PCs carrying them will be the first to be attacked when they animate.

Once the PCs acquire Shuyr Rilla's holy symbol from the well and begin moving through the corn field (area 1-8), each doll becomes possessed by a fragment of Hobb undead energy and they attack the party. Although relatively weak, they band together to kill one or more PCs in turn, using their numbers to overwhelm their victim.

Animated Corn Husk Doll (equal to # of slain PCs): Init -3; Atk slashing corn husk limbs +0 melee (1 point of damage); AC 8; HD 1d3; hp 2 each; MV 10' (but see SP); Act 1d20; SP sudden appearance (doll can instantaneously appear adjacent to or even on an opponent for maximum terror), immune to mind-affecting magic, fire inflicts double damage; SV Fort -3, Ref +1, Will -2; AL C.

The corn husk dolls slice their victims with stiff, sharp limbs, using their sudden appearance movement power to manifest around their enemies if left behind. Those carried by a PC automatically surprise their bearer, gaining a free round to attack. A PC carrying a number of these dolls when they animate is in grave danger.

Area 1-1—The Gardinel: *A decayed-looking cabin lacking a porch stands at this point overlooking the yard. A pair of shuttered windows flank an open doorway leading into the gloomy interior. The split shake roof and chinked log walls hold a slight green tinge as if moss clings to the exterior.*

This "building" was once Byard Hobb's witch's gardinel, conjured up by black magic. Since the casting out of the farm

and Byard's transformation into a restless phantom, the gardinel has devolved into its more primitive form—a mindless, carnivorous plant that mimics a log cabin to catch its prey. PCs trapped inside the plant are doomed.

Gardinel (1): Init -3; Atk tongue tendril +8 melee (grapple); AC 10; HD 20d12; hp 130; MV none; Act 1d20; SP camouflage, digestive juices (DC 15 Fort save each round or suffer 4d8 damage), immune to most mind-affecting spells, *fire resistance* (as if spellcheck 20), fails all Reflex saves; SV Fort +16, Ref -, Will -5; AL N.

During the phantoms' initial attack it is possible some of the PCs rush to the gardinel, mistaking it for safe refuge. These unlucky souls flee directly into the plant and it closes its "door" behind them before flooding its stomach with digestive juices. Zero-level PCs are certainly killed immediately and devoured.

If the entire group of PCs decides to seek shelter in the gardinel, the adventure could come to an abrupt end. In this case, allow the first 1d4+1 PCs to enter the gardinel before it closes its mouth, leaving the rest of the party outside while it digests the unlucky. The PCs that avoid this fate can seek shelter elsewhere, but may have to survive another round of phantom attacks to reach safety.

Area 1-2—Oza's Cabin: *A slant-roofed log cabin with rough-formed porch looks upon the yard from this place. The roof is saddle-backed with age and the shake roof shingles are split and cracked, but it otherwise seems intact. A hewn-wood door blocks entrance, its exterior face marred by a weird glyph in fading paint.*

This cabin was home to Oza, oldest of Byard Hobb's sons and the second-most powerful conjure man in the clan. Oza regularly dealt with dark spirits in the backwoods and protected his home with an old symbol known as the Devil's Thorn (see sidebar). This special glyph warded off restless spirits during Oza's life, but now stymies the Hobb clan. None of the phantoms can enter this cabin, making it the safest place for the PCs to seek shelter during the initial attack and as they explore the farm.

In the woodpile beside the hearth is a hawthorn walking stick broken in two. It has been sanded smooth and is easily distinguished from the other gathered kindling (DC 5 Intelligence check to notice). While not magical, hawthorn has power against restless spirits and both of the broken pieces inflict damage on the phantoms as clubs. A successful DC 10 Intelligence check allows a PC to recall the purported occult properties of hawthorn wood. The walking stick was owned by Shuyr Rilla and broken by the Hobbs when she was captured. It was meant for the fire, but the casting out occurred before it could be burned.

Useful/Interesting Items in area 1-2

- Hatchet (as hand axe)
- Frying pan (as club)
- 1d6 Knives (as daggers)
- Clothing
- Lantern and 3 flasks of oil
- Herbs, salt, and corn meal
- 2 hoes and a shovel (as staff)
- Firewood (as club)

Area 1-3—Burying Ground: *A number of chiseled stones and rotting posts protrude from the dry soil and rank grass here. The ground is uneven with several oblong depressions in the earth indicating the presence of ancient graves.*

The Hobbs buried their dead in this neglected patch of ground. Although the depressions in the ground are a natural side effect of the rotted caskets below, the party need not know this and wild speculation is encouraged. The real danger here is the trio of extremely hungry earth hounds who've been denied a meal since the hollow's casting out and survive only due to the magical nature of the place. The earth hounds ravenously attack any living creatures entering the burying ground, bursting from the earth to surprise the party.

Earth Hound (3): Init +2; Atk tusks +2 melee (1d5) or bite +1 melee (1d4); AC 11; HD 1d6; hp 3; MV 30', burrow 10'; Act 1d20; SP keen nose (+10 to detect hidden creatures and can smell dead bodies from 300' away); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

An inspection of the grave markers discovers most are unadorned and bear only the weatherworn names of long-dead Hobb kin. One wooden marker, however, is inscribed with a faded carving of a Devil's Thorn. This marker affects the Hobb phantoms and can be wielded as a club or brandished at the un-dead spirits to drive them away. If used in this manner, the wielder may turn un-holy as a cleric, but uses a d16+Personality modifier to determine success.

Area 1-4—Esco's Cabin: *A cabin in a state of ongoing collapse stands away from the rest. Holes pierce its roof and one of its walls leans ominously, bringing to mind a cringing dog awaiting the next blow. Lacking shutters, ratty, badly tanned hides cover the windows facing the yard and a crumbling stone stoop leads to its closed front door.*

This cabin was home to Esco Hobb, third son of Byard Hobb and a slob even by the backwoods clan's standards. Pallid light shining through the holes in the roof provide illumination, making its interior the brightest of all the cabins.

If the party has not yet encountered the earth hounds in area 1-3 when they enter this cabin, the ghoulish animals smell the PCs next door and seek them out. The party hears scraping coming from beneath the cabin's floorboards and the earth hounds burst through the rotting timbers to attack the following round. This encounter does not occur if the earth hounds have been slain.

On a shelf in the main bedroom is a leather-bound book, its cover stained with sweat and blood, and a tattered ribbon sewn to the binding as a bookmark. The book's title, *The Wayward Companion*, is written on the cover in worn gilt lettering. This witch book contains the formula for a random 1st level wizard's spell, the spell *patron bond*, and two grama-ree rituals (see *The Chained Coffin Companion*, page 6) of the judge's choosing.

Useful/Interesting Items in area 1-4

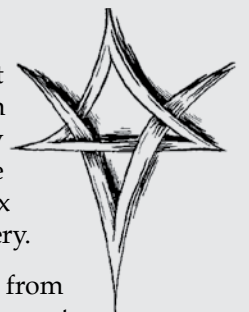
- 50' rope
- Short bow and 12 arrows
- 1d4 Knives (as daggers)
- Clothing
- Lantern and 2 flasks of oil
- Dried meat and pickled vegetables in crockery jars
- Tarot deck
- 1 sp, 8 cp
- Firewood (as club)

Area 1-5—Burel's Cabin: *Another weather-beaten log cabin occupies this end of the common yard. A roofed porch spans the front of the cabin, granting some protection against the sun and the rain. The front door hangs askew on a single hinge and a crudely-fashioned child's rocking horse stands beside the short flight of log steps leading to the portico.*

The loft of this cabin was the bedroom of Thistle Hobb, Burel's 6-year-old daughter. The pitched ceiling of the loft is covered with childish pictures drawn in colored clay dust, mud, and (unsettlingly) blood. In addition to crude illustrations of various black magic rites conducted by the Hobbs, there is

THE DEVIL'S THORN

The symbol known in the Shudders as "The Devil's Thorn" is a series of five intersecting lines that form a vaguely dagger-shaped sigil (see illustration). According to mountain lore, the Devil's Thorn is a bit of backwoods grama-ree that provides protection against evil spirits and it is commonly found carved on talismans worn by the superstitious. Like most Shudfolk magic, it provides true protection only when drawn by a master of grama-ree. The Devil's Thorn functions similarly to a hex sign (see *The Chained Coffin Companion*, p. 7), but is a product of grama-ree and not Hsaalian sorcery.



The Devil's Thorn painted on the door of Ozra's Cabin (area 1-2) prevents the Hobb phantoms from entering the building, but only so long as the door is closed and attached to the cabin. Once the party deduces the defense capability of the symbol, they may be inclined to remove the door and carry the Thorn-inscribed portal with them as a shield. Unfortunately, the door-drawn Devil's Thorn grants no supernatural protection when removed from the cabin proper. In fact, removing the door allows the phantoms to freely enter area 1-2 until the door is reattached and closed once more.

In addition to being drawn to protect a structure, a Devil's Thorn can be inscribed on a smaller object, making the item an effective defense that can be carried about. The old grave post (see area 1-3) adorned with the Devil's Thorn is an example of the Thorn's power when decorating an item.



a series of pictures showing the arrival of Shuyr Rilla to the farm and her subsequent capture, the breaking of her walking stick, Byard Hobb throwing her holy symbol down the well, and her death as a sacrificial victim tied to the scarecrow pole at the top of the corn field. The PCs may find these illustration useful in determining the way to escape the pocket dimension and return home before they fall victim to the phantoms.

Useful/Interesting Items in area 1-5

- Hatchet (as hand axe)
- Crossbow and 12 quarrels
- 1d5 Knives (as daggers)
- Clothing
- Lantern and 4 flasks of oil
- Corn meal and dried meat
- Clay jug of liquor (normal alcohol)
- Out-of-tune fiddle
- Firewood (as club)

Area 1-6—The Well: *A low wall of fieldstones mortared together with cracked clay indicates the presence of a well at this location. The well is a simple affair lacking roof, cover, or winch, and stands open to the sallow sky. A tin bucket with a severed strand of rope lies beside it.*

The well's wall is 3' high and in poor condition. Pushing hard against the stones cause the clay mortar to crumble, pitching the rocks down the shaft. The well shaft measures 20' long and pierces the ceiling of the spring cave below (total distance of 30' to water's surface). The rope tied to the bucket is only 1' long and the bucket has holes, making it useless for drawing water.

Area 1-7—Spring Cave: *The quiet murmur of flowing water echoes in this limestone cave. The pool of clear water fills most of the cavern, flowing out of the space through a narrow point at the east end. A raised, irregular patch of stone is littered with dried branches and other debris, seemingly washed here by floods and long-ago rains.*

A natural spring flows up from the ground, eroding the surrounding rock to form this cave. Once the spring was known as "Sweet Spring" but the name changed to "Sour Spring"

after the Hobbs took possession of the hollow, tainting the place with their presence.

The mass of branches and debris is inhabited by one of the Hobb's life force and can manifest as a 7' tall humanoid-shaped monstrosity known as a deadfall. The deadfall defends the spring cave against intruders seeking to recover the holy symbol cast here long ago. As a physical creature, the deadfall is subject to harm by normal weapons, but some types are more effective than others.

Deadfall (1): Init +1; Atk slashing branches +2 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 3d8; hp 14; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP blunt and piercing weapons inflict half damage; slashing weapons cause double damage; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +1; AL N.

The spring pool is 4' deep and contains a thin layer of sand, stones, and other debris on the bottom. Buried in the sand is Shuyr Rilla's silver holy symbol. Locating it requires a DC 5 Intelligence check and 1 turn of searching. The symbol is worth 10 gp, but is far more valuable if returned to its owner (see area 1-8).

Area 1-8—Corn Fields: *Five terraces are carved into the steep hillside and reinforced with fallen logs against erosion. Like a ladder, these plots ascend some 30' feet up the embankment. Each plot is filled with dense stands of tired-looking corn stalks, their ears shriveled and their husks like parchment from long drought. A ragged looking scarecrow peers over the heads of the dried stalks at the uppermost tier, looking down on the farm like a forgotten god.*

Like many Shudfolk, the Hobbs relied on their corn crop as their staple food. Unlike their distant neighbors, however, the witches watered their fields with the blood of innocents, binding these sacrifices to the scarecrow post and letting their blood into the soil. It was here that Shuyr Rilla met her death and called down the exorcism that cast the hollow out of place. Her bones lie at the base of the scarecrow at the topmost field.

The hill is steep and PCs suffer a -5' move penalty as they scale the embankment. Although the corn is parched and dry, firebug PCs attempting to set the field ablaze discover the stalks burn poorly, producing only lambent green flames that quickly extinguish without doing damage to the crops. If climbing the terraces before they acquire the holy symbol in area 1-7, the party reaches the top without incident. If they have found the discarded symbol, however, the phantoms sense the end may soon be upon them and animate the corn husk dolls (see Event Two). These magical terrors strike as the PCs begin their ascent, using the dried corn and their sudden appearance movement ability to strike with surprise. The dolls gain a +10 bonus to hide attempts while in the corn field. They continue to attack the PCs until all are destroyed.

PCs reaching the topmost plot find the scarecrow to be a collection of bloodstained rags and ropes tied to a 10' high post. A Golgotha of old bones litter the ground beneath the post, stained with age and half-buried in the dry ground. One skeleton, although dried and dirty, seems more recent than the rest. These are the remains of Shuyr Rilla. Her clerical vestments are torn and bloodstained, but recognizable

as religious garb, and one of her bony hands is raised aloft, its fingers half-curved as if grasping for something. Should the PCs place her holy symbol in her hand, her exorcism is completed, bringing about its full effect.

Returning the holy symbol to Shuyr Rilla causes a blast of thunder to echo across the hollow. Rain-laden thunderheads appear in the yellow sky above and cleansing rain pours down from the heavens. As the rain falls, the PCs see that the cabins, well, and corn stalks begin to dissolve into nothingness, washed away by the divine-born rain. The Hobb phantoms, seeing their existence at an end, make one final foray against the PCs. Six of the phantoms race towards the PCs, attempting to slay them before they succumb to the exorcism. If the PCs can survive three rounds of combat, the Hobb phantoms ultimately are washed away, vanishing as if dipped in acid. The party has triumphed over the un-dead spirits!

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

When the last Hobb phantom is exorcised, either by being destroyed by the party or cleansed by the rain, the PCs find themselves back in the physical world. Read the following:

The rains wash away the last of the accursed farm, leaving you standing in a verdant glen under a stormy sky. The smell of fresh rain and clean forest fills the air as a cool breeze rustles the green leaves in the trees. Looking about you, you spy the ruins of several tumbled log homes now overgrown with kudzu. The terraced fields are muddy and filled with newly-sprouted stalks of corn. There is no sign of the foul phantoms who so recently plagued you. At last, you are home.

The surviving PCs should have enough experience points to advance to 1st level following their adventure on the Hobb farm. They've survived just the first of many terrors and wonders awaiting them in the Shudder Mountains, and their experiences in the pocket dimension will serve them well as they explore the pine-haunted hills and hollows of the backwoods.

Depending on how the judge wishes to proceed, he can begin the next phase of the campaign by playing through the party's journey from Sour Spring Hollow to safe ground or skip ahead to a time where the PCs are now trained and equipped, and ready for their next sojourn into the Shudder Mountains. The party's next adventure might see them searching for the witch liquor bootleggers whose wares sent them to the Hobb farm (either to learn their secrets or extract revenge) or perhaps using the magics found in *The Wayward Companion* to contact a patron who will inevitably have tasks for his new servants to perform. Regardless of where their adventures lead, a wealth of excitement, horror, and danger awaits the party in a *Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG* campaign set in the Shudder Mountains!

APPENDIX: SHUDDER MOUNTAIN OCCUPATIONS

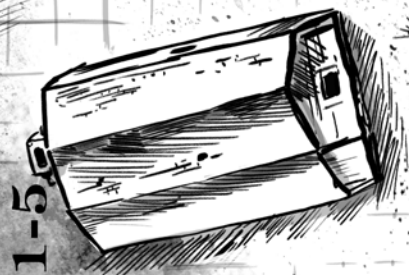
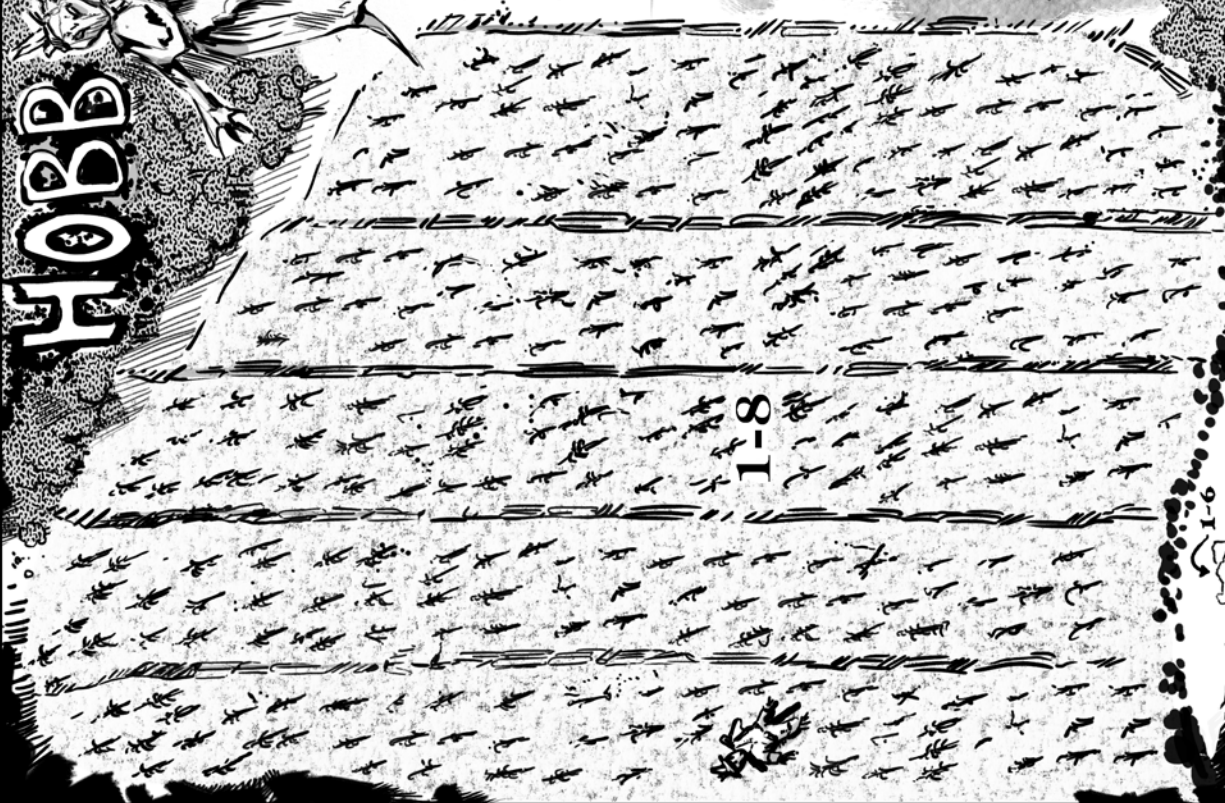


Life in the Shudder Mountains is rustic and the residents are largely self-reliant. As such, PCs starting in the backwoods have access to a limited variety of occupations. A judge beginning a Shudder Mountain campaign should have each PC roll on the following table to determine his zero-level occupation.

Roll	Occupation	Trained Weapon	Trade Goods
01	Astrologer	Staff	Oil, 1 flask
02	Blacksmith	Hammer (as club)	Steel tongs
03	Bounty hunter	Longsword	Hide armor
04	Butcher	Cleaver (as axe)	Side of pork
05-06	Carpenter	Hammer (as club)	Wood, 10 lbs.
07	Cobbler	Awl (as dagger)	Shoehorn
08	Deputy constable	Longsword	Steel helmet
09-10	Dwarven blacksmith [#]	Hammer (as club)	Iron, 10 lbs.
11-15	Dwarven prospector [#]	Pick (as club)	Lantern
16-18	Dwarven stonemason [#]	Hammer	Fine stone, 10 lbs.
19-21	Elven forester [#]	Staff	Herbs, 1 lb.
22-25	Elven musician [#]	Dagger	Flute
26-28	Elven sage [#]	Dagger	Parchment and quill pen
29-46	Farmer	Pitchfork (as spear)	Hen
47-49	Halfling brewer [#]	Dagger	Barrel
50-54	Halfling farmer [#]	Pitchfork (as spear)	Hen
55-56	Halfling trader [#]	Short sword	20 sp
57	Healer	Club	Holy water, 1 oz.
58-59	Herbalist	Club	Herbs, 1 lb.
60-61	Herder	Staff	Herding dog
62-65	Hunter	Shortbow	Deer pelt
66	Lay clergy	Staff	Holy water, 1 oz.
67-68	Merchant	Dagger	4 gp, 14 sp, 27 cp
69-70	Miller/baker	Club	Flour, 1 lb.
71-74	Musician	Dagger	Fiddle
75-76	Orphan	Club	Rag doll
77	Ostler	Staff	Bridle
78	Outlaw	Short sword	Leather armor
79-81	Potter	Club	Clay, 1 lb.
82-84	Prospector	Shovel (as staff)	Sifting basket
85	Rope maker	Knife (as dagger)	Rope, 100'
86	Smuggler/bootlegger	Sling	Waterproof sack
87-88	Tanner	Staff	Cow hide
89	Wainwright	Club	Pushcart
90	Witch's apprentice	Dagger	Black grimoire
91-92	Witch liquor bootlegger's assistant	Club	Clay jug
93-96	Woodcutter	Handaxe	Bundle of wood
97-00	Woodworker	Chisel (as dagger)	Wood, 10 lbs.

[#] If the judge wishes to run a strictly human PC campaign, simply remove the racial description of these occupations (e.g. "Halfling brewer" becomes "Brewer").

HOBB FARM



1-5



1-2



PCS
BEGIN
HERE



1-6



1-1



1-4



1-3



1-5



1-7

SIDE
VIEW

DEAD
END



AXES

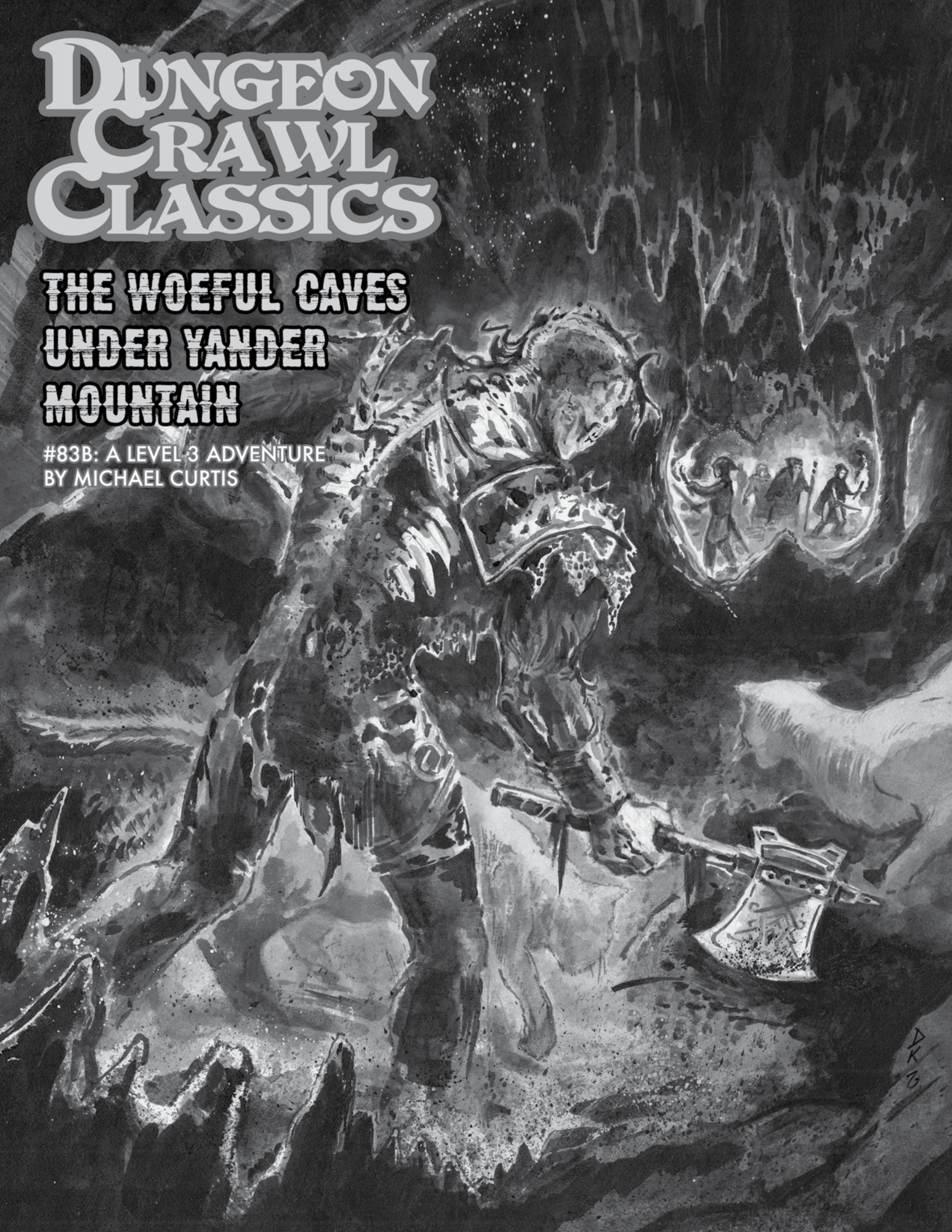
NORTH

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DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

THE WOEFUL CAVES UNDER YANDER MOUNTAIN

#83B: A LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE
BY MICHAEL CURTIS



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THE WOEFUL CAVES UNDER YANDER MOUNTAIN

A Level 3 Adventure

by Michael Curtis • Editor: Reverend Dak • Art: Doug Kovacs, Stefan Poag • Layout / Art Direction: Joseph Goodman • Playtesters: Jeremy Lasseigne, Jeremy Ligman, Roy "Judge Luukaas the Mad" Snyder, Bill Tennyson, (The Alpha Gamers), Steve Andrews, John Jones, Chad Martin, and Rafael Moreno. Copyright 2014 © Goodman Games. Published under the OGL as defined in DCC #83: *The Chained Coffin*.



The Woeful Caves under Yander Mountain is an adventure for DCC RPG designed for use with four to six 3rd-level PCs. Set in the Shudder Mountains, the adventure is a short dungeon crawl involving an immortal blood-drinker who preys upon travelers in the region. *The Woeful Caves under Yander Mountain* attempts to put a new spin on the vampire, changing that type of un-dead foe from an aristocratic monster from Transylvania to something more at home in the backwoods. The adventure can be completed in a single session, but despite its brevity, it can have later consequences in a Shudder Mountains-set campaign.

BACKGROUND

Forty years ago, Shange the Blighted descended upon the Shudder Mountains region in search of plunder and blood. A sellsword and bandit, Shange heard the tales of hidden mines and lost treasures in the forgotten hollows of the mountains and sought to claim a share of that wealth as his own. His campaign of bloodshed, highway robbery, and wanton violence did little to enrich his fortunes, but utterly changed his very existence.

Shange has the misfortune of choosing a traveling conjureman as a victim, springing from ambush to drive three feet of steel through the sorcerer's gut. As the witch man's life blood ran from his veins, he laid a terrible curse upon the murderous bandit. If bloodshed is what Shange lived for, than that would be the sole thing that would sustain him. Forever cast adrift from the natural world and the pure elements of fire, air, water, and earth, Shange would walk the land forever, finding no comfort from the pleasures of wine or women, and doomed to sup on warm blood until he could stand the copy taste no longer. With the warlock's last breath, Shange's doom was sealed.

The warrior reveled in his new state at first, finding himself immune to the most common ravages of battle. Fire left his skin unsinged and iron swords hewed his flesh but he withstood steel's deadly kiss. Alas, he also found himself, now a creature of supernatural evil, weaker when under the gaze of the clean, living sun. Like the loathsome thing he was, Shange sought a place to hide during the day, eventually discovering a series of caves snaking through the peak known as Yander Mountain. Exploring the twisting tunnels, he encountered a cavern awash with black fire. This place was a spoil, one of the lingering deposits of Hsaalian magic. Intrigued by the strange magic of the spoil and the security of the caverns, he claimed the place as his mountain fastness.

Shange's occupancy brought him into contact with a tribe of wrigglers, a devolved race of troglodytic humanoids descended from the Shudder Mountains' original inhabitants. He swiftly taught the degenerate creatures to respect his claim

on the upper caverns with his axe and his strange powers, powers which were further increased by the spoil's ancient magic. Shange remains enthralled by the spoil and its properties, venturing out only to ambush and feed on travelers who pass near his mountainous redoubt.

Over the decades a number of fearful legends have sprung up about Yander Mountain and the road that passes beneath its shadow. Many of the legends hint of a hungry evil that lurks within the mountains' caverns, grottoes known as the Woeful Caves, but other tales speak of strange lights sighted near the caves after dark. These ghostly lights, known as "fetch lights" by the Shudfolk, are believed to appear near the locations of untapped gold veins or hidden treasures. And while nearby Shudfolk avoid the mountain, the caves, and the road that passes beneath them, there is no shortage of fools drawn to venture into the caverns in search of legendary gold veins.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The PCs can be lured into exploring the Woeful Caves either by avarice or through the desire to accomplish good deeds. If the luster of undiscovered treasure is enough to drive the PCs to exploration, the judge need only have the rumor of the "fetch lights," that are regularly sighted dancing near the caves, reach the PCs' ears. It is a common belief amongst the Shudfolk (including PCs native to the region) that "fetch lights," softly glowing orbs of light that appear after nightfall, mark the location of concealed gold and other treasure. A greedy party will soon be on their way up the mountain to see what treasure lies there for the taking.

PCs motivated by the desire to perform good deeds and help their neighbors may be enticed to venture up the mountain by the "curse of Ridge Road." Ridge Road is a neglected wayfare that leads along the northern slope of Yander Mountain. Although the most direct route to nearby settlements, Ridge Road has seen reduced use over the years as travelers go missing near Yander Mountain and the occupants of nearby farmsteads are occasionally found massacred (the results of both Shange's thirst and wriggler hunting bands). The residents of nearby Hark would gladly pay whoever puts an end to the unknown terrors within the Woeful Caves a modest reward (a few bent gold coins or perhaps a cherished silver family heirloom).

THE WOEFUL CAVES

The journey to Yander Mountain is short, a mere two hour's walk from the nearest Shudfolk community of Hark. A corduroy road of logs and packed dirt climbs up the side of the mountain, gradually becoming a simple dirt road winding between the rocks and trees that crowd the mountain's slopes. Once on the dirt trail, the party sees a pair of caves overlook-

ing the road from 60' up the mountainside. Read the following

A pair of dark caves pierces the side of Yander Mountain further up the slope. These caves are staggered, set in a diagonal line across the rocky face of the peak. The first cave is located some 60' above you on the mountain side, nestled in a slight niche in the mountain. The second cave stands 40' away from the second and is situated 20' higher up the mountain face. Nothing can be seen within the caves from your position on the road and it is impossible to determine how deep into the mountain they may run.

If they continue around a bend in the road, they spot a third cave on the far side of a rocky promontory.

The Woeful Caves are natural limestone caverns filled with the subterranean flora and fauna found in such environments. Bats, birds, and insects live in the caves, frequently darting about just beyond the glow of the party's light source. The sound of dripping water, tumbling stones, squeaking bats and chittering insects, and other, less easily identifiable noises echo through the caverns as the party explores. Mud, stagnant water, and rubble makes moving difficult, and there is little light beyond the entrance caves. The judge should use all these elements to instill a sense of unease into the players as they explore the caves, making their later pursuit, should it occur, (see Shange's Strategy below) an exercise in terror.

SHANGE'S STRATEGY

Shange becomes aware of the party's presence in the caves if they engage in battle in areas 1-1, 1-3, 1-5, or 1-9. Other loud noises also alert the blood-drinker. Once he is aware of intruders, he leaves his lair and seeks out the party, changing into owl or moonlight form to stalk them. Due to his familiarity with the caves and his improved stealth when in these forms, only a DC 15 Intelligence check by a PC detects something untoward shadowing them. The PC that makes the check glimpses a patch of dim light or hears the sound of rustling wings in the dark, but does not see Shange. The judge can use these hints several times to build tension.

Once Shange has spied upon the party, he allows them to explore the caverns unhindered, but prepares to engage in a deadly cat-and-mouse game as soon as the party moves to leave. Once the party heads towards the exit, Shange attacks, attempting to slay one or two PCs and force the rest to flee. If successful, he changes into owl form and flies ahead of the party by the fastest route possible before ambushing them again. He continues this process until the party is slain or the survivors of his assaults escape the caves. Shange then drinks the blood of his victims or deposits the bodies in the spoil in area 1-9 and waits to see what happens.

If the PCs find his lair (area 1-10) before they attempt to leave the caves, Shange emerges from the darkness to slay the interlopers who found his resting place.

Area 1-1 - Cougar Cave: *This cavern serves as a crossroad of tunnels. To the northeast and northwest, passages exit to the surface, bringing drafts of fresh air down their lengths. In the south and southeast, rocky corridors plunge deeper into the heart of Yander Mountain. The floor is uneven, cluttered with broken stalagmites and fallen rock. It slopes slightly downwards towards the northwest.*

A cougar crouches in the southern tunnel (see map for position), watching the PCs as they enter the cave. Under the sway of Shange, the large feline serves as an early warning alarm against trespassers. The cat pounces on any creature approaching the southern tunnel or one who turns its back to that passageway. As it leaps, it roars its snarling cry which echoes down the tunnels, alerting Shange of trespassers. PCs failing a DC 15 Intelligence check are surprised by the cougar.

Cougar: Init +2; Atk bite +3 melee (1d6+3) or claws +1 (1d3+1); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 15; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP two successful claw attacks allows for automatic rake attack that does 1d6+2 damage, stealthy (+4 bonus to surprise); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

If the PCs approach the cougar from area 1-4, the cat detects them on a 4 in 6 chance and it acts as above, springing from the darkness to attack. Otherwise it is surprised.

SPELUNKING IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

With the exception of the old Hsaal diggings, the caves of the Shudder Mountains are natural caverns formed by flowing water. As such, they are uneven spaces within the earth filled with stalagmites, stalactites, low ceilings, slanted floors, and other subterranean features. As modern cavers know, it's very easy to injure oneself while spelunking and misfortune can strike at any time.

If the judge wishes to introduce the real-life hazards of cave exploration while the party explores the Woeful Caves, have a randomly determined PC make a Luck check every six turns while inside the cave. If the check fails, the PC sustains a minor injury (cracks his head against a low-hanging stalactite, slips in a pool of mud, scrapes exposed flesh badly on a jagged rock, etc.) and suffers 1 point of damage. PCs that roll a natural 20 on their Luck checks hurt themselves severely; taking 1d3 points of damage and suffering a minor complication (knocking themselves out for 10 minutes unless roused with first aid and a DC 5 Intelligence check or twisting an ankle and having their speed reduced by -5'). Dwarves are less likely to injure themselves in caves and add their level to their Luck score for the purpose of their checks.

Several areas of the caves consist of tight passages or low ceilings, as shown on the map. Human-sized PCs moving through these areas must either crawl or sidle along, slowing their movement rate to half normal and causing them to lose any beneficial AC adjustment due to Agility modifiers. The judge may also rule that certain long weapons (longswords, battle axes, pole arms, etc.) cannot be used efficiently while in these tight conditions and impart a -1 or even -2 die penalty to attack rolls when so hampered.

Area 1-2 – Bear Bones Cave: *Cave moths flutter about your light sources as you penetrate this small cavern, throwing winged shadows across the walls. Stands of stalactites hang pendulously from the ceiling above, mirrored by scattered groves of stalagmites on the cave floor. A high ledge rests 15' atop a stone drapery formation to the west. Drifted leaves and small sticks litter the ground, and a pile of brown bones lies in an untidy pile near the west wall.*

The piled bones are that of a medium-sized grizzly and are old and dry. Close examination of the bones reveals that they bear the signs of gnawing and many are cracked to devour the marrow. The bear dwelled in this cave briefly until slain and eaten by the wrigglers.

The cave moths are harmless, normal insects. The sticks and leaf debris have accumulated here over many years, blown inside the cave by storm winds. PCs pausing to listen hear the soft sound of cricket chirps coming from the southern tunnel (actually the wrigglers in area 1-5).

Area 1-3 – Soul Owl Roost: *A soft green illumination fills this cavern and the gentle sound of rustling feathers drifts through the air. Arranged on staggered ledges along the cave walls are more than a dozen ghostly barn owls. The avian spirits are translucent and shine with a pale jade light as they peer down at you from their roosts with wide, unblinking eyes.*

These owls are soul fragments of Shange's victims, trapped between life and death by the mixed power of the blood-drinker's curse and the lingering magic of the spoil in area 1-9. Doomed to a fragmented state, the soul owls fly out from the caverns each night in an aimless search for eternal rest. It is sightings of these glowing birds which are responsible for the legends of the "fetch lights" seen around the cave.

Soul Owls (15): Init +1; Atk talons +4 melee (1d3); AC 14; HD 2d6; hp 8 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP possession (see below), un-dead traits, immune to normal weapons, affected by magic and silver weapons; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +4; AL N.

If the PCs enter the cave, one owl for each PC alights from its perch and attempts to settle on each character's shoulder. If an attack roll succeeds against a PC, the owl grips his shoulder with its talons, causing 1d3 points of damage and forcing the character to make a DC 12 Will save. If the save fails, the owl-affixed PC's will is overtaken by the soul fragment and the PC becomes possessed by an angry, vengeful mind. While under the owl's control, the PC succumbs to blood lust and attacks all those around him in a berserk rage (gaining +1 to attack rolls and +2 to damage). A PC who succeeds must continue to make a Will save each round he has an owl perched on his shoulder. Only a number of owls equal to the party's membership attack; the rest observe the encounter but do not attempt to dominate a PC...for now. If the party passes through this cave again, they must run the soul owl gauntlet once more.

The possession can be ended by either slaying or turning the soul owl, casting *remove curse* on the victim, or killing the PC (a PC reduced to zero hit points but who makes the Luck check when his body is rolled over is no longer under owl control). A possessed PC who survives the mental domination emerges with a mental vision of a horribly scarred man with blood-stained mouth and teeth lunging from the darkness and attacking him. This was the soul owl's last experience before its mortal death and the terror of that event imprints itself on the possessed adventurer's psyche.

Area 1-4 – Cave Paintings: *The rocky walls of this cavern are stained with pigments, transforming the stone into a canvas upon which images are depicted. Primitive representations of wolves, deer, bears, and other native wildlife are shown being hunted by men. Other odd symbols are interspersed within the hunting imagery.*

The paintings were done by the wrigglers' ancestors before the aboriginal people devolved into their present state. Most of the images are hunting scenes, but other imagery can be identified on the walls. One scene shows the hunters fleeing into caves, pursued by larger man-shaped forms with heads bearing crested ridges. If the party has encountered any mortal remains or images of the Hsaal, the crested-headed race is identifiable as such.

Another image depicts three symbols set in an upside-down triangle. Two glyphs appear to float above a third. These symbols (see *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin* p. 22) are those for "Earth" (bottom symbol), "Shul" (upper left symbol), and "Luhsaal" (upper right symbol), arranged to represent their celestial positions. The sigils mean nothing now, but a note-taking party who copies down the symbols may find a use for them should they play through *The Chained Coffin*.

A narrow tunnel exits this cave to the west, but it is clogged with fallen rocks. This passage connects to the surface, but due to its size and obstruction, it cannot be traversed by the PCs. Shange can pass through the tunnel in his moonlight form as necessary to flee the party or to get ahead of them in the cave system.

Area 1-5 – Wiggler Midden: *Mounds of animal bones are piled into waist-high heaps in this cavern, nearly covering the entire floor. Stalagmites protrude from the morbid debris like islands in a bone sea. The chirping of crickets sounds softly in the cavern and another tunnel exits the cave from the opposite side.*

Seven wrigglers secret themselves amongst the bones, their pale flesh blending in with the carnage. They detect the PCs presence regardless of the party's avenue of approach and emerge from the bone piles to attack the adventurers. Have the PC with the worst Luck make a Luck check. If it fails, the party is surprised.

Wrigglers (7): Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (1d8) or claws +2 (1d4); AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 22 each; MV 30', climb 20' or leap 10'; Act 2d20; SP crit range 19-20, superior hearing, echolocation, blind, heightened reflexes, uncanny climber (can scale walls and ceilings; +10 to bonus to climb-related actions); SV Fort +3, Ref +6 (auto save; see monster description), Will +2; AL C.

There is a 4' wide hole in the cave floor that connects to the tunnel between areas 1-2 and 1-3. If the party travels that tunnel, they are attacked from above as the wrigglers drop 8' down atop them (gaining a +2 bonus to hit). If a wriggler kills or incapacitates a PC, it hauls the body back up through the hole to this area.

Most of the bones are animal, but a number of human skeletons are mixed into the piles as well. A prolonged search (3 turns or more) accompanied by a DC 10 Intelligence check discovers a trio of old treasures: a silver ring (10 gp value) still wrapped around a bony human finger, a well-made flute carved from hawthorn wood (15 gp value and causes 1d3 damage if used as a club), and an ornamental walking stick shaped into the form of a serpent (a *snake stick*, see *The Chained Coffin Companion* p. 7).

Area 1-6 – Spider Cave: *The ceiling slopes upward, becoming lost among the gloom and stalactites towards the northern end of this narrow cavern. Odd, feathery lumps bearing white thread-like wrappings lie unmoving about the floor.*

The lumps are web-wrapped birds, drained dry by the giant scaffold web spider that dwells at the highest point of the cave. The creature thrives on the birds and bats that regularly flutter through the cave system. Numerous thin lines of webbing crisscross the cave and are only noticeable with a DC 10 Intelligence or *find traps* check. Failing to detect the sticky webs indicates the first two PCs entering the cave walk into the webs and must make a DC 14 Reflex save or become entangled. This alerts the spider of a new meal and it descends to dine.

Giant Scaffold Web Spider (1): Init +2; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus venom) or web +4 ranged (entangle); AC 12; HD 3d6; hp 12; MV 30' or climb 35'; Act 1d20; SP poisonous (1d4 plus DC 12 Fort save or 3d4+1 Strength loss), entangling webs (DC 14 Ref save or become entangled; DC 13 Strength check to break free); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AL N.

The spider bears an uncanny resemblance to an albino black widow spider measuring 5' from forelegs to hind legs. It lacks the unique hourglass-shaped marking on its abdomen, but this missing feature is easily overlooked in the cavern's gloom.

Area 1-7 – False Dawn: *A pale green light equal to failing moonlight illuminates this T-intersection of passages. A low-ceilinged, sloping tunnel descends to the east, while the main artery continues on ahead. The light appears to come from the walls themselves as if the living stone produces the ghostly radiance.*

The stone walls contain phosphorus deposits which produce the dim green light. Although eerie, the light has no harmful effects, but it is nearly identical in color and luminance as Shangé's moonlight form. PCs catching a glimpse of the blood-drinker in this shape may easily misidentify the glow as another phosphorus deposit until it is too late.

Dwarves attempting to smell gold automatically succeed in this area, detecting a strong scent of it coming from the south tunnel (this is the gold vein in area 1-8).

Area 1-8 – Gold Vein: *The walls of this cavern glitter with quartz, transforming the drab stone into dazzling edifices sparkling with facets. Beyond the cramped tunnel that enters the cavern, the ceiling rises, allowing even the tallest of you to stand upright once more. As the shadows from your light sources play upon the walls, a gleam of gold breaks through the gloom, catching your eye.*

A small gold vein runs along the south wall of this chamber, reflecting the party's light. Any dwarf in the cave automatically sniffs out the delicious odor of the precious metal. PCs inspecting the southern wall easily sees thin strands of gold ore winding its way through the stone and quartz crystals. They also notice the wall bears signs of tool marks, indicating someone has previously attempted to mine the gold (the dwarves in area 1-9 before they met their demise) but stopped before they made much headway.

The gold requires a great deal of effort to extract. If the PCs work the vein, each day of mining the gold produces 1d6x200 lbs. of ore. When refined, the ore yields gold worth 5 gp per 100 lbs. of ore extracted. The seam is exhausted after 6000 lbs. of ore is removed.



Unfortunately for the PCs, the gold vein isn't the windfall they hope for. The narrow tunnel entering this cave from the southwest dives deep into the earth, leading to the forgotten caverns that are home to the wriggler tribe. Even if the party destroys Shangé the Blighted and the rest of the threats in the upper caverns, the wrigglers constantly pass through this area on their way to exit the caves for their nocturnal hunting trips. The sound of mining also attracts them. Every hour the PCs work the vein, there is a 75% chance 2d10 wrigglers enter the area and attack the party. The only way to safely mine the ore is to descend into the wriggler home territory and dispatch the entire tribe (an undertaking far beyond the scope of this adventure).

A narrow, low-ceilinged tunnel exits this area to the east and leads to area 1-9. Because of the cramped confines of the tunnel, even halflings must crawl down its length, imparting penalties to their actions (see "Spelunking in the Shudder Mountains" sidebar above). In addition, man-sized PC must make a DC 5 Agility check (modified by armor penalty) to avoid becoming stuck in the passage. A stuck PC can be extricated by another PC making a DC 12 Strength check.

If the PC choose to crawl down this passage, a single wriggler slinks from the southwest tunnel and attacks the last party member scrambling through the tunnel from behind. This attack, given the tight confines and impossibility of assistance from his comrades, may prove to be a terrifying and perhaps lethal encounter for the unlucky adventurer!

Area 1-9 – The Spoil: *Ebon fire crawls across the walls and ceiling of this cave, throwing a cascade of black, yet somehow glowing, light across the cavern. The fire limns numerous fossils of prehistoric life embedded in the surrounding stone with grim auras. The hair on your neck and arms stands up, affected by the static charge of unseen power. Six grim dwarves dressed in tattered leathers stand stock still in the cavern, their eyes black as the fire on the walls and their weapons aglow with dark light.*

This cave is a spoil, one of the residual deposits of Hsaalian magic that survived the destruction of the Luhsaal (see *The Chained Coffin Companion* p. 2). The decaying lunar sorcery has strange effects on persons and objects exposed to its radiance, and the dwarves here are no exception.

Originally a band of prospectors, these six dwarves found the gold vein in area 1-8, but were discovered in turn by Shange before they could make much progress mining it. Shange, still seeking to understand the spoil's power, killed the dwarves but restrained himself from drinking their blood. Instead he left their corpses inside the spoil and was amused when they arose with a semblance of life. They've remained here ever since serving as unwitting guardians of the spoil.

Spoiled Dwarves (6): Init +1; Atk pick/hammer +4 melee (1d5+1) or bone-breaker strike +1 melee (1d3+1 plus broken bone); AC 13; HD 3d6+2; hp 15 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead traits, bone breaking; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

Haggard-seeming dwarves with ebon eyes and gaunt appearance, spoiled dwarves bear the wounds that killed them. Animated in a grim semblance of life by the spoil, these un-dead miners can strike with their tools to break the limbs of opponents. The bone-breaking attack is less likely to hit, but if it does connect, the target suffers either a (50% chance) broken arm (1-2 left; 3-4 right) or (50% chance) broken leg (1-2 left; 3-4 right). A PC with a single broken leg suffers a -10' penalty to speed, while a PC with both legs broken can only crawl at a rate of 5'. In the case of broken arms, the PC suffers a -2 to attacks if wielding a weapon with his non-dominant arm and a -2 penalty to all spell checks. A PC with both arms broken cannot attack or cast spells. Broken limbs can be healed with *laying on hands* (see *DCC RPG rulebook* p. 30).

The spoil's magic maintains the un-dead dwarves' animated state and they cannot move more than 50' away from area 1-9. If slain and searched, the dwarves has a total of 100 lbs. of

unrefined gold ore on them (see area 1-8 for further details), 27 sp, 12 gp, and a gold bracer worth 40 gp.

The fossils are natural remains of extinct creatures (trilobites, fish, and other aquatic creatures of the dim past). They have no innate powers or threats, but if carefully extracted (requiring a DC 14 Agility check), a fossil may fetch up to 10 gp if sold or have special uses in the crafting of magic items or similar magical wonder-working (judge's discretion). There are a dozen fossils in total.

Area 1-10 - Shange's Lair: *Crude but macabre furnishings transform this cavern into a living space. A table fashioned from a casket lid stands near a raised pallet piled high with blood-stained furs. A goblet encrusted with gore and fashioned from an upturned skull rests atop the table. A pair of packing crates, likewise marked with old blood, rest in a shadowy corner of the cave. A gnawed upon deer carcass lies to one side, with swarms of black flies buzzing about the spoiling meat.*

This cavern is Shange's main place of occupancy, but it is likely the blood-drinker is not at home when the PCs chance upon it (see "Shange's Strategy" above). Two cougars are found here, however, hiding in the shadows and waiting to spring on intruders.

Cougars (2): Init +2; Atk bite +3 melee (1d6+3) or claws +1 (1d3+1); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 15 each; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP two successful claw attacks allows for automatic rake attack that does 1d6+2 damage, stealthy (+4 bonus to surprise); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

THE WOEFUL CAVES SPOIL

The spoil in area 1-9 is a common spoil (see *The Chained Coffin Companion* p. 2). Its power only affects subjects exposed to its tainted radiation over prolonged periods. The PCs can examine the spoil cave safely without worrying about manifesting spoil-born changes during their initial exploration of the Woeful Caves. If they return here many times over a short period, however, they may find themselves subject to its power.

This spoil's magic produces two effects, one on living flesh and one on dead tissue. If a living creature is exposed to the spoil long enough to be affected by it, he must make a DC 12 Fortitude save. On a failed save, the PC undergoes one of following changes:

D4 Spoil-Born Change

- 1 PC gains the ability to transform himself into a great horned owl once per day for up to one hour. See Shange's description on p. 7 for details on this shape's abilities.
- 2 PC transforms into moonlight and cannot return to solid form. Unless subject to a *remove curse* spell within 48 hours, the PC's body dissipates, killing him.
- 3 The PC gains the power to command a single cougar as a faithful pet. When confronting a wild mountain lion, a successful DC 10 Personality check by the PC causes the animal to instantly become his loyal companion and the cat serves the PC until its death. The PC can only have a single cougar pet at one time.
- 4 The PC bursts into black flame, suffering 3d6 damage each round until extinguished. If the PC survives the conflagration, he gains a permanent +2 to saving throws against fire.

Dead tissue exposed to the spoil's power animates, becoming a bizarre and unique form of undead creature. The judge should create an appropriate menace, using the spoiled dwarves above as inspiration. The undead creature cannot venture more than 50' away from the cave.

A subject, either living or dead, exposed to the spoil's power can only be affected once. Subsequent bathing in its radiant magic produce no effect.

If Shange is not present when the PCs battle the cougars, he arrives 1d3+1 rounds later, drawn by the sound of combat. He appears from the opposite tunnel from which the group entered, his horrible visage emerging from the shadows with wicked battle axe in hand. He snarls with a crimson-stained mouth, spinning his axe in lazy, confident circles as he enters. In a soft, evil voice, Shange says, "Welcome to the feasting hall, fools. 'Tis time to die and me to dine." He then attacks with axe and fangs flashing.

Shange the Blighted, Backwoods Blood-Drinker (1): Init +4; Atk *reaver axe* +1+1d5 deed die melee (1d10+1+1d5 deed die) or bite +1+1d5 deed die melee (1d4+1+1d5 damage plus 1 Stamina point), critical special with *reaver axe* (see magic weapon description below); AC 13; HD 3d12+6 (3rd level warrior); hp 35; MV 30' or 40' fly (owl or moonlight form); Act 1d20; SP crit range 19-20, mighty deeds, suffers ½ damage from wooden (non-hawthorn wood) weapons, immune to normal metal weapons, immune to elemental (fire, water, air, and earth-based) damage, sunlight weakness, infravision 60', command cougars, assume owl shape and moonlight form; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +2; AL C.

Shange appears as a hulking 6'5" human male. His age is difficult to determine as his body is horribly scarred with old wounds. His nose has been sliced away, his scalp torn and scarred, his arms and legs crisscrossed by a score of gruesome gouges. Shange's teeth are sharp and permanently stained with blood, as is his chin and fingers. He dresses in a mixture of leather and chain armor, worn and rusted from long use. He wields a magical axe known as the *reaver axe* (see below) in battle and can bite to drain blood.

Between the blood curse that afflicts him and prolonged exposure to the spoil, Shange has several unusual powers. He can command up to 12 HD of cougars or other large felines. They obey his spoken command without question. He can also transform himself into a black-feathered great horned owl, granting him the ability to fly. His AC, saving throws, and special properties remain unchanged in this state, but he can only attack with his talons (1d3+1+deed die; 1d3+1+deed dmg). Any held or worn possessions are absorbed into his body when he changes shape. Shange can also transform himself into a patch of pallid light identical to moonlight. In this form, he resembles a human-sized, but indistinct cloud of light. Shange cannot attack in this form, but can fly at a speed of 40' and pass through small openings with ease. While in moonlight form, Shange is insubstantial and can only be injured by magic weapons and spells. As when in owl shape, his possessions transform with him.

Shange cannot be killed by any of the four elements, including iron and steel weapons made from earthly minerals. Wooden weapons inflict half damage, but hawthorn wood weapons do normal damage to the supernatural fiend. The blood-drinker must consume the blood of 4 HD worth of creatures each week or lose 1d6 hit points. Although sunlight does not damage Shange, he is weakened when exposed to it, suffering a -1 die penalty on all rolls. Despite his curse and near immortality, Shange is not un-dead and is unaffected by turning or holy objects.

If encountered here, Shange fights until reduced to 5 hp. He then assumes either owl or moonlight shape before streaking off into the caverns in an attempt to escape the party. His pre-

ferred avenues of escape are the tunnel leading down to the wriggler warrens (area 1-8) or the rock-choked tunnel leading to the surface in area 1-4). Should Shange escape, he'll seek revenge at a later date (see *Concluding the Adventure* below).

The furnishings in the cave are unremarkable aside from their crude construction. The goblet is indeed crafted from the cranium of one of Shange's victims and is worth 5 gp to collectors of the macabre. The two packing crates hold an array of clothing (mostly blood-stained) taken from the blood-drinker's meals, 97 cp, 74 sp, 36 gp, a fine wool cap (6 gp value), an empty arrow quiver of exquisitely tooled leather (10 gp value), a gold torc (25 gp value), and a pair of boots with a hollow heel containing a raw sapphire (50 gp value).

Reaver Axe (Magical Weapon): The reaver axe is a bearded axe with curved handle, resembling a cross between a scythe and a battle axe. The enchantment on the axe grants it two special properties. First, when used in battle its wielder uses a d20 for initiative and not the normal d16 for a two-handed weapon. Secondly, once per day the axe can be used by a warrior or dwarf to critically hit an opponent. The wielder must succeed in a mighty deed of arms against his foe, and if successful, the attack is automatically a critical hit. If the mighty deed fails, the axe's power is not lost for the day and can be attempted again on subsequent attacks. If the result of the mighty deed results in a natural critical hit, the wielder rolls twice on the critical hit table, taking whichever result he prefers.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

The Woeful Caves under Yander Mountain ends with Shange's death, should the PCs accomplish that feat. If the immortal blood-drinker meets his demise at the party's hands, they stand to gain a potent magical weapon, one that will be useful in their adventuring careers (and against certain foes appearing in the *The Chained Coffin*). They may also discover a clue that will aid them in that adventure if they record or remember the strange cave paintings found in area 1-4 of the Woeful Caves.

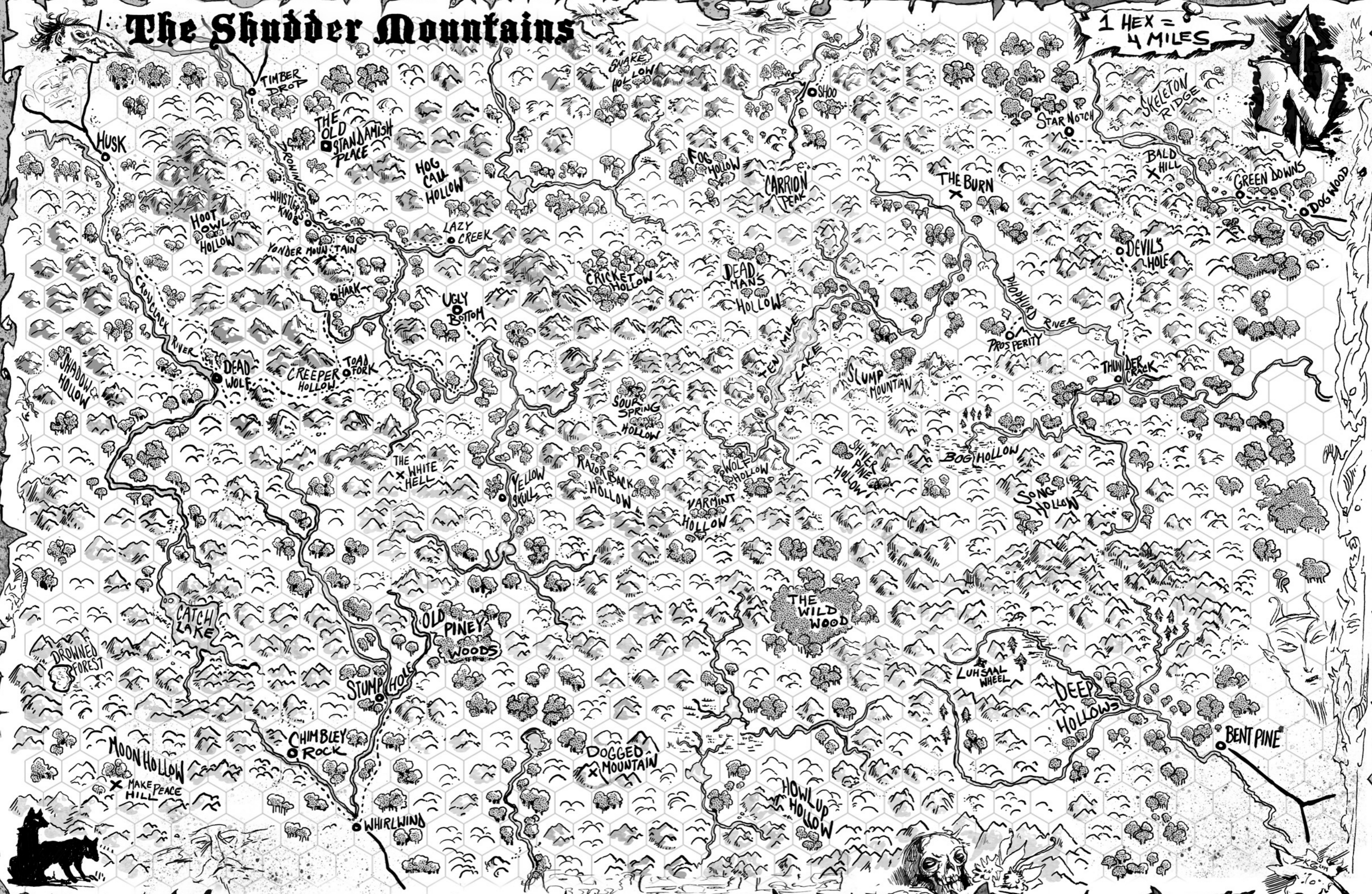
Alternatively, if Shange escapes, the events of this adventure can have long-lasting ramifications. Shange, thwarted by lowly mortals, vows a blood vendetta on the party. He first finds a new redoubt to shelter himself away in, but then begins a campaign of vengeance on the party. Shange strikes the party's friends, family, and allies first, before going for the proverbial jugular by attacking the party directly. Should the judge wish, this campaign of vengeance can stretch on for months, with Shange becoming an ongoing foe of the party. As the PCs gain power, so does Shange. His experience with the spoil in Woeful Caves has taught him the power of such sites and he seeks out other spoils throughout the Shudders, bathing in their radiant magic and gaining new and unholy attributes as a result (to be determined by the judge). The party may gain insight into Shange's plans when witch liquor bootleggers are found drained of their blood at their still sites, a sure sign Shange still lurks in the Shudder Mountains. Only when the blood-drinker is destroyed for good will the party find a modicum of peace and can continue their adventuring careers in the world of *Dungeon Crawl Classics* without nervous eyes cast over their shoulders.



KZ
2014

The Shudder Mountains

1 HEX = 4 MILES



HUSK

TIMBER DROP

THE OLD STANDISH PLACE

HOG CALL HOLLOW

LAZY CREEK

UGLY BOTTOM

THE WHITE HELL

YELLOW SKULL

RAZOR BACK HOLLOW

VARMINT HOLLOW

WOLF HOLLOW

THE WILD WOOD

LUHSAAL WHEEL

DEEP HOLLOW

BENT PINE

DOGGED MOUNTAIN

HOWLUP HOLLOW

WHIRLWIND

CHIMBLEY ROCK

MOON HOLLOW

MAKE PEACE HILL

CATCH LAKE

OLD PINEY WOODS

STUMP HOLE

DROWNED FOREST

DEAD WOLF

CREEPER HOLLOW

TOAD FORK

SOUP SPRING HOLLOW

CRICKET HOLLOW

DEAD MAN'S HOLLOW

SLUMP MOUNTAIN

BOG HOLLOW

SONG HOLLOW

THUNDER CRACK

PROSPERITY

DIAMOND RIVER

THE BURN

CARRION PEAK

FOG HOLLOW

SNAKE HOLLOW

SHOO

STAR NOTCH

BALD HILL

GREEN DOWNS

DOG WOOD

DEVILS HOLE

HOOT OWL HOLLOW

YONDER MOUNTAIN

WHISTLE KNOTS

CROW CRACK RIVER

SHADOW HOLLOW

