

PER ASPERA AD INFERI

CANTO PRIMO

NO
COUNTRY
FOR

WEAK
MEN

compatible with the *Swords & Wizardry* game

DAWN
2014
RAZOR

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PER ASPERA AD INFERI

CANTO PRIMO

NO COUNTRY FOR WEAK MEN

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Cold Adventuring Party by Claytonian JP

*This PDF is dedicated to all Old School, New School and awesome
DIY Players and GMs out there across the globe.*

Somewhere in Dunkelfrost...

*E*ver since I left that so-called town at the edge of the land of Eternal ice, I've been freezing my butts off! And no trace of that were-whatever-thing we're supposed to hunt down.

Our best scout, Halross, says she's been passing here, into this valley, but I get a bad feeling from all this silence, frost and snow. It's empty here. No animals. No tracks. No nothing, but ice and snow. It's not natural...

And now we're stuck in this cave. The blizzard has lasted two days now, and our supplies are almost gone. Hell, I'd give a sack of gold for a cold ale and a hot wench in my lap right now.

I can smell the fear of the others - die of starvation or disgust here, or freeze to death out there. And some other not so pleasant smells too... Some choice, huh?

Maybe we can roast that gnome's pony? Would have been nice with some food now... Or, we just roast the gnome...

Everyone's on the edge. No sign of the blizzard waning either. I reckon someone will snap soon...

Well, not me. Guess it's time we get moving...

the author says

This is the first episode of a three-part adventure that I speed-wrote for a weekend game with my old gaming buddies because the original GM backed out in the last minute. Despite my fear that the material wouldn't suffice for two full days of gaming, we actually didn't manage more than about half of the adventures. But it was great fun and my hastily thought up sandbox setting now has two regular groups exploring its horrors.

As I have been borrowing online gaming stuff for a long time, now I want to give something back.

Here it is. "No Country for Weak Men" is a traditional dungeon, meant to be played the hard way. Dark, shitty and remorseless. And if the Draugr don't get you the cold or lack of food will...

I think 4-5 level 3-4 PCs would be appropriate, but since I don't balance my games that way anymore, I invite GMs to adjust monsters and adversities to fit their needs. I know you will anyway. So, happy gaming. Stay frosty, and you have a chance to survive...

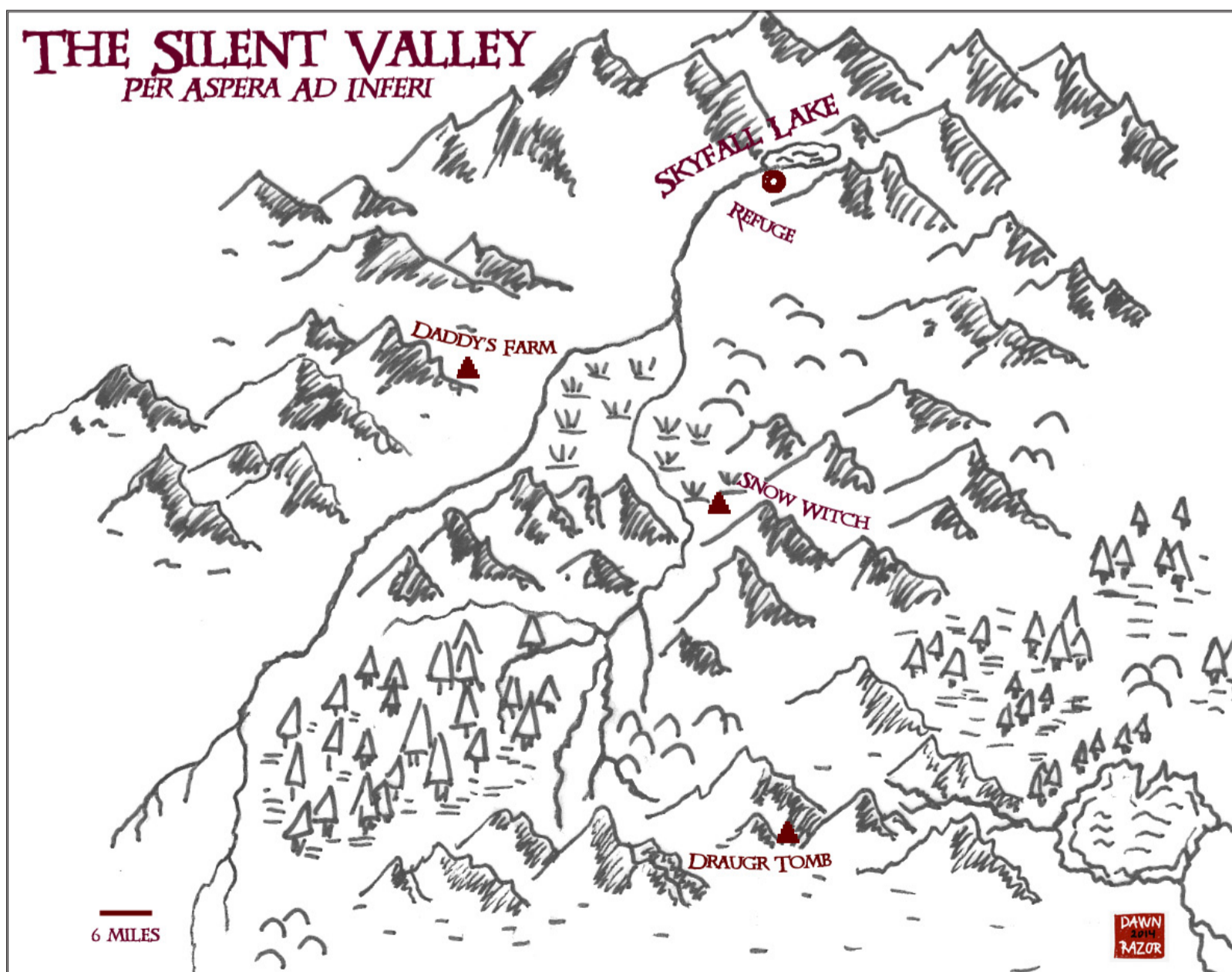


Winter's Walk by Jim Magnusson

The Silent Valley Sandbox

The everwinter lands of Dunkelfrost lies far in the barbarian North. Settlements are far apart and travel is dangerous. The Northmen living there are tough and suspicious of strangers. There is however, one place that even they avoid – The Silent Valley.

The Silent Valley is almost devoid of life. No homesteads or villages dot the countryside. In fact, hardly any signs of life are ever seen or heard here. No people. No animals. Nothing. That's why the Northmen keep well away from the place. Unfortunately for your players, they are there. Use whatever excuse that suits your game. The map below gives a rough idea of the major features of the Valley area. Relative to the map, civilized lands are to the South, and Northmen lands are to the West and Northwest. To the East are just more wilderness for many miles.



The Draugr Tomb

The reason for the unnatural state of the Silent Valley can be found in ancient history. Long before the Northmen came, a cruel and proud people lived here. They were the descendants of the Elder People (Fey Elves). Just like the Fey Elves, they performed great magical experiments, consorted and even interbred with powers from Beyond the Veil. And like the Fey Elves, these experiments eventually brought their doom. In a last attempt to evade fate, the High King wove a spell to ensure his return once the Stars Were Right. Once revived, he would start to rebuild his realm. Unfortunately, the magics only worked in part. That is what happens when you consort with Demons. Instead of coming back to life, the High King and his people return as insane undead horrors — the Draugr.

None of this is mentioned in the history annals of the world's great libraries, and the Northmen don't care about history. The only ones with some knowledge this far back in history are the Blue Mystics of Shamhat in the Hyvaso Mountains and a small monastery of Ice Druids in the Arctic Wall Mountains.

The Dungeon

Level One

General feel: *Dark, cold. Everything is covered in a thin layer of frost. Not disturbed for ages. Faint smell of decay in the stale air. All areas are either cut out of the bedrock or natural caves.*

The doors are made of hard wood and locked or barred. All scribblings are in an archaic form of Old Elvish.

1. The Cave

Natural cave, good protection from the elements. In the back, some well preserved human remains are hidden under a rotten wool blanket (*easy Perception roll*). If examined closer, it's a human red-haired male in archaic northern leather armor. There's a leather strap with a black stone cross pendant around his neck (*average Perception roll*).

Close to the corpse, there's a small triangular opening in the stone wall, leading into the depths of the rock (*average Perception roll*). Only one PC at a time can crawl through. Backpacks and bulky gear must be dropped to fit into the crawlspace. Some 15 feet in, the crawlspace height increases to about 6 feet, and comes to an end at a flat stone wall with a magic secret door.

Draugr Tomb



Careful examination (*average Perception roll*) will reveal a cross-shaped depression in the wall at chest height. Placing the black stone cross pendant from the corpse in the depression will automatically open the door (inwards). Removing the cross will close the door (no depression on the inner side, so removing the cross will lock you in the tomb).

2. Entrance

On the eastern wall there's a bronze lever with three settings: center, up and down. It's in the center position. Moving it up or down will result in scraping sounds from area 4. To the south there is a dark opening. To the west is a secret door in a niche. It feels even colder in here. As you enter a cold draft passes.

3. Secret entrance & Guard Room

This room has some old viking-style round shields and spears leaning against the north wall. A 2-quart [2 liter] ceramic urn filled with some semi-frozen liquid (lamp oil) stands next to the arms. There is a second secret door in the western wall, leading to a narrow crevasse going to the valley outside. Opening the out-

er door will trigger a massive stone fall hitting everyone in the room. Also, this entrance will now be unusable.

Trap: Save (Dex mod) for half damage. Full damage: 6d6. Normal chance to detect (Use Perception roll).

4. Sanctum to the Lords of the Void

The Sanctum walls are extremely smooth and bronze torch holders are placed every 2 yards in the octagonal as well as the corridor area. A colorful circular and seemingly random stone pattern is set in the floor of the octagonal room. It seems to be constructed of a series of concentric circles. A successful *Perception roll (average)* will discern that this is a puzzle (if the PCs haven't noticed before). There's two levers (center position) in the octagonal room: one on the eastern and one on the western wall. Moving them will reveal that each lever controls one of the concentric circles, and the three positions move the circle in different directions. Aligning the circles correctly will reveal the star pattern and opens a small iris ring in the center of the star, under which a cross-shaped depression are hidden. Placing the black stone

cross pendant in the depression will automatically open a large trapdoor in the floor (iris valve). The stone cross pendant will slide away with the rest of the mechanism, but will still be reachable from room 4. Removing the pendant will of course close the trap door again (open/close cycle takes about 10 sec).

The correct lever "code" is: Room 2: up; Room 4 (east): center; Room 4 (west): down; Room 5d: down.

In the southern wall is a small niche (2×2×2 feet) containing a small but heavy golden statuette resembling an octopus with wings, arms and legs (Value: 2000 gp; Weight: 10 lb [5 kg]).

Touching or removing the statue will awaken 1d4 Memento Moris, who will materialize out of the walls in the corridor section of the room. The Memento Moris will attack all intruders, and will follow the PCs to Level 2, unless they manage to close the floor trapdoor in Room 4.

Memento Mori: HD 4; AC 3 [16]; ATK 1 claw (1d8+4); Move 12; Save 13; AL Neutral (N); CL/XP 6/400; Special – Immune to illusions and mind-affecting spells (Sleep, Hold Person etc); Bound Spirit – Can't be turned. Ho-

wever, Dispel Magic causes the Memento Mori to dissipate; it returns in 1d4 rounds; Weapon resistance – ectoplasmic (mundane weapons deal half damage, silver and magic weapons do full damage); Creeping Chills – Gains strength as it fights; each round after it damages an opponent it gains an additional 1d8 damage die.

5a. Empty

5b. Empty

5c. Ancient Warriors

There are 5 skeletons in Norse style rotting armor here. They have been carefully placed on a raised wooden dais. The armor and weapons are not usable anymore (25% of breaking every time used). These guys are dead - for now. However, touching them will awaken them to their task of defending the Tomb. This will take 3 turns.

Also, if the PCs have manipulated any of the levers in the complex, they will be awake and attack when someone opens the door to Room 5c. These warriors aren't very

clever, so they can't open the door by themselves, but after 10 turns they will have forced the doors open and begun patrolling all the rooms of the upper complex. The Warriors will stay on Level 1 until the PCs have taken the sword in Room 14, after which they will move to Room 14 to protect the High King.

Ancient Warrior (skeleton draugr):
HD 1; AC 4 [15]; ATK Longsword (1d8) or 2 claws (1d4); Move 12; Save 17; AL Neutral (N); CL/XP 2/30; Special – Immune to illusions and mind-affecting spells; Weapon resistance (edged and piercing - half damage).

5d. Lever Room

On the Northern wall is a lever construction akin to the others in Room 2 and 4. Only, the lever is missing, so the mechanism can't be used. The lever is hidden in the rib cage of one of the ancient warriors in room 5c.

Level Two

General feel: *Warmer than level 1. Everything is covered in dampness. Slippery floors and walls.*

6. Central Corridor

The trapdoor in the floor (Room 4) opens up to a small irregular room, from which a narrow stairway (cut from the bedrock) meander down to level 2. The stairway exits into a corridor with an opening in the far end and a door in the north wall.

7. Partly collapsed room

Lots of stone rubble. The north-eastern wall has caved in.

8a. Dark corridor

Beyond, there's a rough corridor with occasional natural steps going down into the dark.

8b. Pool of acid

This pool of liquid might be mistaken for water, but it's acid! Anyone within 5 feet of the acid must make a save (Dex mod.) or take 1d3 damage from inhaling the corrosive fumes. Falling into the acid deals 10d6 damage/round (no save). The acid will continue to deal damage 8 rounds or until removed, preferably by washing with copious amounts of water.

All items on the immersed PC must also

roll item saves or be damaged by the acid. Acid damaged gear has a 1 in 6 chance of breaking when used.

9. The Fire Trap Room

After descending the corridor from 8a, the PCs end up at a small underground pond filled with dark and sluggish water (1-2 feet deep). A pedestal sits in the center of the pond, with a statue resembling the one in room 4 placed on top. This statue is bigger, and of pure gold. Of course, it is a trap. The statue keeps a trigger plate depressed and removing it will result in a loud click, after which a vile mix of sodium and yellow phosphorous chunks will fall from hidden chutes in the cave roof. The sodium will ignite as it hits the water, turning the pool into a blazing hell. The phosphorous will react with the hot air and start burning and also react with the water to produce poisonous phosphine gas. If the PCs haven't noticed that the pool in 8b is acid, burning PCs might run there to put out the flames...

Trap: Save (Dex mod.) for half fire damage. Full fire damage: 6d6. Save (Dex mod) to avoid breathing in the poisonous gas. If inhaled, 1d6 Consti-

tution damage per round. New save each round the PCs remain in the blaze/gas.

Normal chance to detect (Use Perception). Very hard to disarm (Mechanical skill).

10. Central Corridor

The central corridor from Room 6 continues. There's two doors, in the south west and north east walls.

11. Resting Place of the Carls

In this room, 5 imposing Norse-style Carls are resting on a large stone platform together with their longswords. Spears and shields are arranged along the south west wall. They were placed here to defend their King in the afterlife.

Ancient Carl (exploding draugr): HD 3+2; AC 7 [12]; ATK Longsword (1d8) or 2 claws (1d6); Move 8; Save 14; AL Neutral (N); CL/XP 5/300; Special – Immune to illusions and mind-affecting spells; Weapon resistance (edged and piercing - half damage); Explode 30' radius – When these draugr die, they go out with a boom. They literally explode, show-

ering everyone within 30 feet with vile substances. Anyone hit by the gore can avoid consequences by making a save (Con mod). A failed save means that the PC will suffer from sickness, nausea and violent vomiting for 1 full turn. All actions are at -2. Furthermore, no spell casting, turning or missile attacks are allowed.

12. Another Carl Resting Place

This room is as Room 11, with 5 more Carls.



Corpse King by Claytonian JP

13. Tomb of the Ancient King

A majestic figure sits slumping on a stone throne. In his lap, a massive black sword of unknown design is resting, and there's a similar dagger sitting in its scabbard. Along the walls are clay and brass urns filled with decaying food and drink as well as 600 gp and an urn filled with gems of various colors and sizes (1d00 gems, value 1-50 gp each). At the far eastern end, there's a few steps up to a raised platform, where a stone fount is placed. Along the edges of the fount are carvings and text in an archaic script, faintly resembling some form of Old Elvish. The insides of the fount is filled with a black, viscous fluid that radiates magic. This is the Blood Well, and it's piping goes Beyond the Veil.

Blood Well effects:

If ingested: Save (Con mod). Successful save regain 1d10 hp. Failed save— roll on Mutation table of choice (for example in TotGaD I, p.81)

If smeared on the skin: Draugr (and maybe other undead also) can't sense you. Everyone else can smell you from a mile away, though. You stink!

The Black Goo is probably also quite valuable for a wizard.

The sword and dagger are from Beyond the Void and will damage any creature. However, taking the weapons out of the chamber will trigger the ancient curse that awakens the undead Ancient King as well as his Draugr vassals. None of this will be immediately evident to the PCs, as the process will take about 10 turns.

The Ancient King will want his weapons back, as his undying soul is bound to the dagger. Without them, it will take time to gain an earthly form, and he will instead roam the world as an evil spirit, possessing other dead to be able to interact with the world. He will hunt the PCs wherever they go in order to retrieve the dagger. He will also start to awaken his people with the ultimate goal to create an undead army that will attack and retake neighboring lands in the future.

The immediate consequences for the PCs are that all the undead in the Tomb will awaken and move to protect their King (will take $1d10+3$ rounds). The creatures from Level 1 will also come if the trapdoor in Room 4 is open.

Graverobber backpack contents:

Graverobber 1: Bag of teeth, Flask of shortmead, Wooden holy symbol, Froofy undergarments.

Graverobber 2: Two beetroots, Mushrooms (poisonous), Empty vial, Horsewhip.

Graverobber 3: Mess of cobwebs jammed into a bag, Jar of pickled herrings, Dagger, 5 apples.

14. Dead Grave Robbers

Moving the fount in Room 14 will reveal a crawlspace going down. After a short passage, a cave opens up. Here the desiccated corpses of three grave robbers can be found. One of them has the key for the secret door in Area 15 (Use *average Perception roll* if the PCs search the bodies and backpacks).

If the PCs have taken the sword and dagger the corpses will animate and attack within $1d6$ rounds. All other undead in the complex will also home in on the Black Sword of the Void, arriving in Room 14 within $1d10+3$ rounds. The PCs now have a small window of time to run down the stony corridor to Area 15, in order to get out of the Tomb. The pool before Area 15 is ordinary water, but given the PCs earlier encounter with pools in this complex, it may detain them in their escape.

Animated Grave Robbers (zombie draugr): HD 2; AC 8 [11]; ATK Slam (1d6); Move 8; Save 16; AL Neutral (N); CL/XP 3/60; Special – Immune to illusions and mind-affecting spells; Weapon resistance (blunt weapons - half damage); Slow – either attack or move in a round, not both.

15. Exit

The exit is blocked by a Secret door covered in Old Elvish runes. It must be opened using the key found on the dead grave robbers or using one of the cross-shaped pendants from earlier.



Conclusion

Once out, the Draugr won't follow the PCs. Yet.

Their steeds, and most of their gear (unless they specifically said that they were bringing it all into the Tomb) will however still be in or near the cave at Room 1, so now they're lost in the Land of Everlasting Frost with minimum gear. If they sneak back to get the stuff, they see undead coming out of the woods, congregating around the cave. The people have come to hail their King...



Option: If you want the Ancient King to wake up and have a "boss fight" that is also an option. The future undead conflict is from my own house campaign.

The Ancient King is basically like a Skeleton Warrior, with added psionics-like powers.

In my campaign he's an evil spirit for a week or so, before regaining enough strength to possess another body and take up the hunt for the sneaky thieves.

Ancient King of the North

Medium Undead, Chaotic (CE), High Intelligence; Unique

HD 12
AC -1 [20]
ATK +1 longsword (1d8+1)
Move 12
Save 3
CL/XP 12/2600

This thing was once the High King of the North. Now it's totally insane and unpredictable, with just one thing in mind: to retake his former lands and restore his Kingdom. To this end he will reanimate as many dead as possible, and as their liege, they will obey and follow him into war against the living. Of course, the war will also serve to fill his army's ranks. His soul is coupled to the black dagger found on his corpse, and he will follow the sneaky thieves to the end of the world to get it back.

Special Qualities: +1 or better weapon to hit, Immune to clerical turning, magic resistance 60%, aura of fear (all creatures unde 5HD must roll a save or be affected as from a Fear spell).

Spell like powers: 3/day: Mind thrust, Dominate, Empathic projection; 1/day: Psionic blast*

**See new spells, p. 21.*



Corpse King by Claytonian JP

Meet Da Monsta

Ancient Carl (exploding draugr)¹

Medium Undead, Neutral (N), Average intelligence; Patrol (1d12)

HD 3+2
AC 7 [12]
ATK Longsword (1d8) or 2 claws (1d6)
Move 8
Save 14
CL/XP 5/300

Ancient Carls were once the elite warriors of the King. Now they protect him after death. They are better preserved than ordinary zombies, and their skin have a leathery composition, making them harder to damage.

Special Qualities: Immune to illusions and mind-affecting spells; Weapon resistance (edged and piercing - half damage); Explode 30' radius —When these draugr die, they go out with a boom. They literally explode, showering everyone within 30 feet with vile substances. Anyone hit by the gore can avoid consequences by making a save (Con mod). A failed save means that the PC will suffer from sickness, nausea and violent vomiting for 1 full turn. All actions are at -2. Furthermore, no spell casting, turning or missile attacks are allowed.

Ancient Warrior (skeleton draugr)

Medium Undead, Neutral (N), Low intelligence; Patrol (1d20)

HD 1
AC 4 [15]
ATK Longsword (1d8) or 2 claws (1d4)
Move 12
Save 17
CL/XP 2/30

Skeleton draugr are as normal skeletons, only armed with Norse style weaponry and armor.

Special Qualities: Immune to illusions and mind-affecting spells; Weapon resistance (edged and piercing - half damage).

¹The Exploding Draugr was inspired by the **Bloated Zombie** from *The Savage Sword of Scadgrad*:

<http://savageswordofscadgrad.blogspot.se/2012/03/pdf-for-20-zombies-now-available.html>

Animated Grave Robbers (zombie draugr)

Medium Undead, Neutral (N), Animal intelligence; Shuffle (1d12)

HD 2
AC 7 [11]
ATK Slam (1d6)
Move 8
Save 16
CL/XP 3/60

These are ordinary zombies, only with glowing blue eyes.

Special Qualities: Immune to illusions and mind-affecting spells; Weapon resistance (blunt weapons - half damage); Slow — either attack or move in a round, not both.

Memento Mori²

Medium Undead, Neutral (N), Average intelligence; Solitary

HD 4
AC 3 [16]
ATK 1 claw (1d8+4)
Move 12
Save 13
CL/XP 6/400

Memento Moris are undead spirits bound to a location. They are summoned from the Void to guard something, and appear as spectral skeletons dripping with ectoplasm.

Special Qualities: Immune to illusions and mind-affecting spells (Sleep, Hold Person etc); Bound Spirit — Can't be turned. However, Dispel Magic causes the Memento Mori to dissipate; it returns in 1d4 rounds; Weapon resistance — ectoplasmic (mundane weapons deal half damage, silver and magic weapons do full damage); Creeping Chills — Gains strength as it fights; each round after it damages an opponent it gains an additional 1d8 damage die.

²The **Memento Mori** is from *Tales of the Grotesque and Dungeonesque II*:

<http://talesofthegrotesqueanddungeonesque.blogspot.se/>

Things of magick

Blood Well Black Goo

The viscous black substance flowing from the Blood Well in the Ancient King's room is an at this time unknown substance. It was used by the Elder People to fuel their most magic energy craving rituals. The substance comes directly from Beyond and is in essence condensed pure magic power. However, even the greatest wizards in the world would not know how to use the full power of the stuff without years of combined research. As it is so magical, it also emits Magical Radiation, upsetting the natural flow of ley lines and attracting magical beasties as well. The Radiation is also highly corruptive, and can cause physical as well as psychological mutations. In my game, the goo represents something akin to warpstone.

Blood Well effects:

If ingested: Save (Con mod.). Successful save regain 1d10 hp. Failed save— roll on Mutation table of choice (for example in Tales of the Grotesque and Dungeonesque I, p.81)

If smeared on the skin: Draugr (and maybe other undead also) can't sense you. Everyone else can smell you from a mile away, though. You stink!

The Black Goo is probably also quite valuable for a wizard.

Black Sword of Chuul

In the Elder times, this sword was forged Beyond for the Fey Elf High King. After their demise, the sword found its way to the Elder People, where it became the King's sword. This sword does not convey any to-hit or damage bonuses, but will hit any creature, regardless of form. As will become evident over time, the sword will also emphatically implant its evil will into its owner, slowly convincing him to perform evil deeds. Each time the PC draws the sword, roll a save (Wis mod). If failed, the GM may implant some evil suggestions. A fumble (natural 1) might lead to rage attacks against the enemy or even friends trying to restrain the wielder.

Black Dagger of Chuul

This dagger came paired with the Black sword. The Ancient High King used it as a receptacle for his undying soul, in order to live forever. Naturally, he will want it back from the PCs, and will not stop hunting them until it is back in his possession. The dagger can also hit any creature (+1 to hit and damage), and is quite intelligent. However, it may also communicate telepathically with the owner when it is in skin contact (held without gloves or gauntlets). The dagger will try to manipulate its current owner to set up a confrontation with its real master — the Ancient Draugr King. Use the same mechanics as above, but all saves are at -2.

New spells

Dominate

Spell level: Magic-User, 5th level

Range: 30 feet

Duration: Until dispelled

You establish a mental link with a humanoid, and by this you can give the person commands that will be obeyed. The spell can be resisted with a saving throw (Int mod). The dominated person will carry out your command and only stop to perform activities necessary for survival. Self destructive commands will not be obeyed and commands that goes directly against the person's beliefs will render a new save with a +2 bonus. After the initial link is established range is unlimited and the commanded person will continue following orders even if you leave.

Empathic projection

Spell level: Magic-User, 2nd level

Range: 60 feet

Duration: 2 hours

You project powerful emotions in a subject (sorrow, anger, joy etc). The consequences of this must be determined by the GM in play. The spell cannot penetrate more than 2 feet of stone.

Mind Thrust

Spell level: Magic-User, 1st level

Range: 30 feet

Duration: Instantaneous

You instantly deliver a massive assault on the mind of any one creature, dealing 1d8 points of damage.

Psionic blast

Spell level: Magic-User, 3rd level

Range: Cone, 30 feet length, 15 feet width

Duration: Instantaneous

You instantly deliver a massive assault on the mind of any one creature. The creature gets a Save with a +4 modifier. If unsuccessful, the recipient collapses with 0 hp left. If successful it takes 3d6 damage.

The Silent Valley area map

larger version at <http://nerdomancerofdork.wordpress.com>



About the Swords & Wizardry compatible version

This is a Swords & Wizardry compatible version of the Blood & Treasure adventure "No Country For Weak Men" and it is written with the S&W Complete rules in mind. It was originally written for Labyrinth Lord/AEC, then published as a Blood & Treasure adventure and now also exist in the Swords & Wizardry world, closing the circle.

Although Blood & Treasure is my weapon of choice for old school gaming, I recognize that most old school gamers probably use some other version of the game, and in order to broaden the usability and exposition of this adventure module I therefore decided to make a version that is more congruent with older systems.

There is some new stuff however:

-I have added an optional task resolution system (see link below) but of course you can use your standard method instead. The task descriptions are broad enough to be translated to any system on the fly.

-There is also an optional Save system where different abilities are used to modify different saves. For example a Save to evade a trap would be a Save modified by Dex. Just disregard if this is not your cup of tea.

Task resolution system used in the adventure

<https://app.box.com/s/vg2sww4nep5uw8u7efum> (PDF)

<http://nerdomancerofdork.wordpress.com/2014/09/20/skills-in-old-school-games/> (blog post discussing this and other task resolution variants)

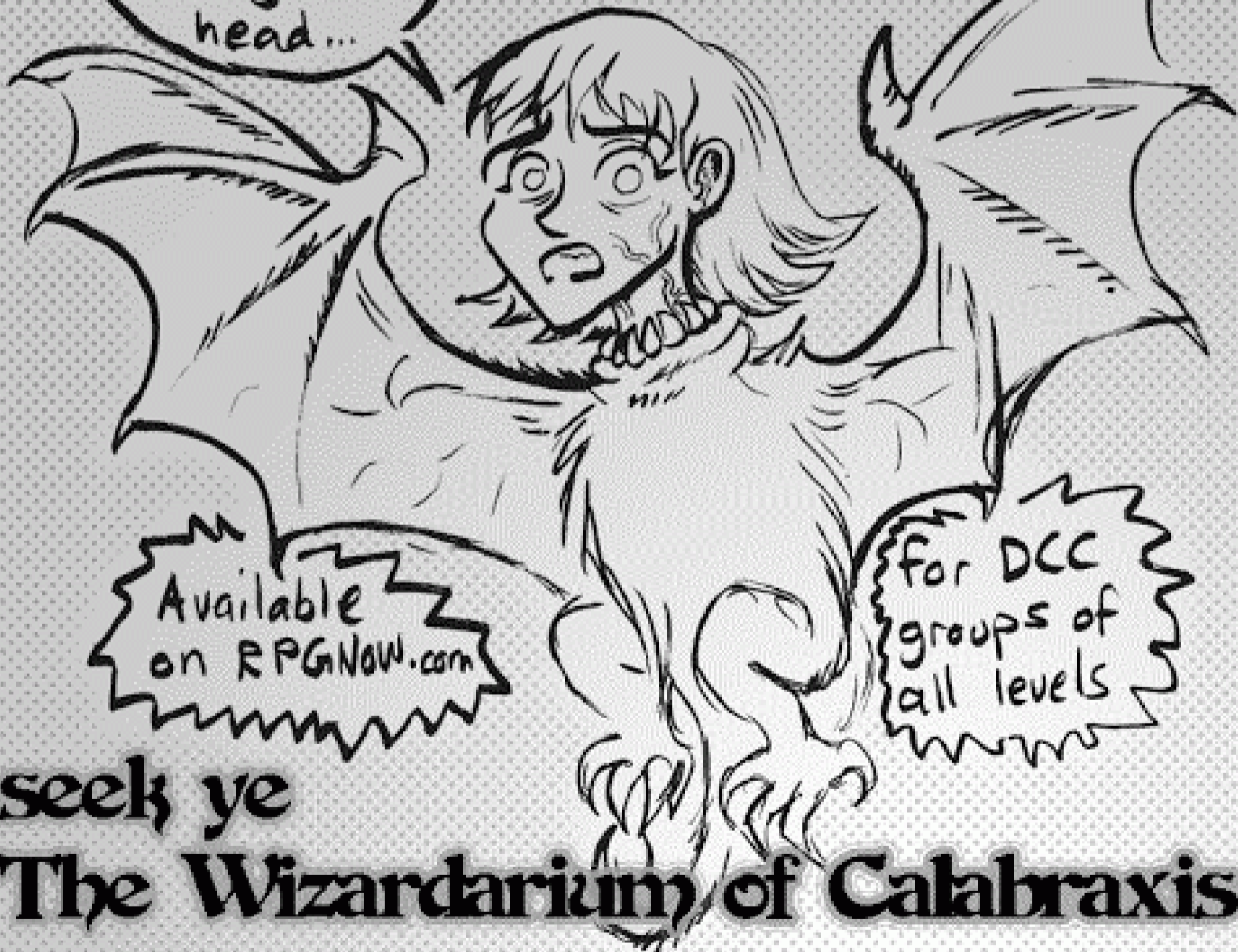
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Oh yeah

I lied earlier

The Silent Valley is not
entirely devoid of life

In a quiet little valley further up north
there's a pastoral farm inhabited by
inbred evil bastard mutant cannibals

Daddy's Farm

Coming soon:

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CANTO SECUNDO

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