

THE BLIGHTED LAND

Something horrible has happened to the land! An ancient and terrible ritual has been found and cast. The ritual causes the land to grow dark and twisted, poisoning and killing all within and forcing the dead to rise. Worse still, the blight spreads, devouring all life in its path. What could have caused someone to become so desperate as to turn to such magic?

This Threat Pack provides an insidious and frightening adversary which corrupts the land itself and can spread to all parts of the map. It is easy to ignore (or even be unaware of) at the beginning of a campaign, but is certain to force the characters to act eventually. It is a good choice for players interested in adventures far from home who do not mind traveling to the most dangerous of lands.

DURING CHARACTER CREATION

The Blighted Land ritual is a terrifying and dark magic, and only a very desperate soul would turn to it. While they do not yet know it, the characters are only a step or two removed from the wicked sorcerer who has cast the ritual that is now poisoning the land.

The second NPC mentioned during character creation is very closely related to the sorcerer responsible for the blight. This NPC may be the sorcerer's sibling, spouse, child, or rival. Make a note of this NPC so that you can figure out the relationship later.

Furthermore, the ancient ritual was actually discovered within the characters' home village. Choose one of the places the players add to the village map, or make one up yourself. That location contains an ancient, hidden library, probably buried beneath it. Most of the contents are now missing, as the sorcerer has taken them, but there may be a few choice bits remaining, and the empty library may provide clues as to who took the documents and cast the ritual. The proximity of this terrible necromancer's library has haunted the characters' village since their childhood, and the characters have likely experienced hauntings or other disturbing things because of this.

Finally, at least one character should make a roll on the following table as their fourth roll during character creation.

CHARACTER HISTORY

1d6	How did the curse of the Blighted Land affect your childhood?	Gain
1	One night after one of your elderly family members died, you saw him walk again, but shut your eyes tight and told no one.	-1 Str, +1 Wis
2	A battle scarred group of adventurers came to town and were looking for something. You were impressed with them and listened to their tales in the inn.	-1 Wis, Skill: Forbidden Lore
3	Ever since being visited by the dead village elder one night while you slept, you have seen things on the edge of your vision.	-1 Cha, the Second Sight cantrip
4	Despite your parents' warning, you traveled to the forsaken village one evening and saw its dead inhabitants going about their business.	-1 Int, +1 Dex
5	A band of risen skeletons clad in ancient battlegear wandered into the village one evening and set fire to several buildings. You helped the militia drive them into the night but took a grave wound in the process.	-1 Dex, +1 Str
6	When you were a child, several villagers were stricken with a strange plague, rose from their beds on the brink of death, and wandered away, never to be seen again. You contracted the disease and felt a strange compulsion, but stayed put.	-1 Con, +1 Int

ON THE CAMPAIGN MAP

After completing the campaign map, the GM should choose a hex at a far distance from the village to be the center of the Blight. Perhaps this is an inn near the crossroads of two major trade highways, or a hamlet just outside a major city. This was the site of the dark ritual, and the permanent dwelling of its cursed caster. That hex and every adjacent hex is now blighted. The characters should not know the location of the Blight at the beginning of the campaign.

The GM should also place two minor locations on the map. A hex adjacent to the characters' home village will be the site of the Forsaken Village minor location. One hex within the Blight will contain the Dried Lake. Both of these minor locations are described in full below.

THE RITUAL

Perhaps the most insidious thing about the Blighted Land ritual is how easy it is to cast. Anyone schooled in magic can learn the ritual and curse the land itself should he be desperate enough. It would be a truly terrible thing if someone else were to create a second Blight elsewhere on the campaign map.

LEVEL ONE RITUAL

BLIGHTED LAND (Intelligence)

Range: Far

Duration: Instant

Save: no

This terrifying ritual curses the land, slowly killing all within it and causing the dead to rise. All living things within a 10 mile radius begin to wither and die, and all creatures who die within the Blight will rise again as the undead within a week of death. Furthermore, the Blight slowly and erratically spreads over time. It has the potential to swallow the entire world in its sickness.

The material component for this ritual is the caster's life. The mage must sacrifice himself with a butcher's blade upon a rough altar of natural stone. The caster rises again as the Blighted One, but may never again under any circumstances travel more than five miles from the stone altar.

Using the Imminence mechanics found on p.17 of *Further Afield*, casting this ritual creates a new Threat

on the campaign map with an Imminence rating of 1 and the activation table provided below. This is an easy Threat to add to an ongoing campaign, as someone can cast the ritual at any time.

THE FORSAKEN VILLAGE

This minor location is in a hex adjacent to the characters' village. It is a completely forsaken place, and has been uninhabited since before the characters were born. The dead roam freely here, and it can make for an excellent site of an early adventure.

A hidden library also exists in this location, much like the one in the characters' home village. Within this library is an account of the Blighted Land ritual described above, though not a full record of how to cast this ritual. It will point to the characters' home village as the site of the full ritual. Also contained here is a necromantic grimoire which might be of interest to a young spellcaster. The book contains the spells Banish Undead, Evade the Dead, and Reanimation.

THE DRIED LAKE

Within the area of the Blight is a lonely, cursed place, a dried lakebed which was once home to a beautiful and caring nymph. This is a minor location either within the same hex as the stone altar or one directly adjacent to it. The nymph has been driven completely mad by the dark magic of the Blight, and wanders near the dried lake, attacking wanderers as the whim takes her. Use the statistics found on p.89 of *Beyond the Wall and Other Adventures*. She could perhaps be healed of her madness and turned into an ally. Because of her strong connection to her lake, this location can be healed within the Blight. To do so requires a skin of pure water from a faerie spring and the casting of the level two ritual Cleansing Ritual.

IMMINENCE AND SCHEMES

The Blight grows slowly, flowing in a nightmarish pattern not visible to mortal eyes. If not stopped, it will eventually cover the entire land, though it will take some time to do so. When the Blight spreads, all affected hexes become part of it and immediately cease to be part of any other region.

When starting a new campaign, have the Blighted Land threat begin with an Imminence rating of 3. If a new

Blight occurs during a campaign, it should begin with an Imminence rating of 1 as described in the text for the ritual above.

The Blighted Land uses the following activation table:

1d8	Threat Effects
1	The Blight does not grow, but becomes stronger. Increase the Blighted Land's Imminence rating by 1.
2	The encounter chance while within the Blight permanently increases by 1. If there is already a 6 in 6 chance of encounter within the Blight, increase its Imminence rating by 1 instead.
3-6	The Blight creeps outward. Choose one random hex on the edge of the Blight; all previously untainted hexes adjacent to it become part of the Blight.
7	Determine a random hex edge. Every hex within the Blight grows one hex in that direction.
8	The Blight spreads very quickly. All adjacent hexes become blighted.

THE BLIGHT

Within the Blight streams run dry, plants wither, and the living grow sick before their deaths. Packs of mindless undead wander, seeking the warmth of the living, and direction becomes strange and meaningless. It is the land of death, and only the foolish wander there. All hexes consumed by the Blight become a part of this region and gain the encounter table below.

At the center of the original blighted hex sits the dark altar used in the ritual. This place, most of all, is characterized by rot and decay, and is held together by spite alone. This is where the caster sacrificed his life, and here, within one of the ruined buildings of the site, the curse must be unmade. Only the Blighted One himself roams here.

Somewhere in this hex is hidden the Blighted One's diary. This could be a literal diary or some other record of the Blighted One's pain, like a poem, a woven tapestry, or even a song written in the cursed region. This diary can give valuable clues to the players as to the identity of the ritual's caster and where they might go for more information.

REGION: THE BLIGHT

This region always counts as difficult terrain, even if on a road. All living creatures traveling in the Blight must make a saving throw vs. poison each day or lose 1 hit point; any creatures who die in this way return as undead and wander the Blight forever. Furthermore, there is no easy sleep in the Blight, and so characters may never recover hit points from rest while within the region.

Hunting and foraging are impossible within the Blight.

Encounter Chance: 3 in 6

1d6	The Blight Encounters
1	Lost! Make a Wisdom check to find the way or lose a day wandering aimlessly.
2-3	The walking dead. Make a Wisdom check to avoid being surprised by a group of 2d8 skeletons or zombies.
4	Rot. Make an Intelligence check or lose half of your rations to rot and mold.
5	Sickness. Make a Wisdom check or lose an animal or hireling.
6	Lost traveler. Make a Charisma check to befriend a desperate traveler trying to find his way out of the Blight.

PLAYER ACTIONS

While clever and powerful mages and woodsmen might keep the Blight at bay for a while with powerful rituals of healing and protection, the only way to stop it is to undo the horrible ritual that created it. The characters must then hope that the ritual never passes mortal lips again.

If the players find the ritual, this will give them the knowledge of how to break it. To do so, they must bring the Blighted One to the stone altar at which it first cast the dark ritual. There and only there can the Blighted One be killed forever and his curse be ended. However, strength of arms is not enough to reverse the powers of the ritual, as the Blighted One simply rises again if "slain." The gamemaster must determine precisely how the ritual can be reversed. Since the Blight was brought about by hatred and death, let forgiveness, healing, creation, and new life be key to its unmaking. Perhaps the Blighted One must be convinced to seek forgiveness, or a new life must enter the world at the time of the Blighted One's passing.

Finding a way to reverse the ritual allows the Blight to heal, and lets the plants, animals, and people it has consumed return to their natural state. It does not restore life, but new life will move in with time. Songs will be sung about the brave farmers and woodsmen who restore the land for far longer than those songs of the heroes who defeated it.

Some spells or magical items may have an effect on the Blight and help ease the land. The Druid's Touch cantrip can save a single plant through continuous care; doing so gives the caster a -10 to the cantrip roll. The Cleansing Ritual and Full Restoration rituals can heal effects of the Blighted One's touch upon living survivors (see below). The Perfect Health Ritual can fully cure one hex, though nothing prevents the Blight from spreading there again in the future.

The Break Enchantment and Resurrection rituals may be able to restore the Blighted One to life, thus ending the curse completely.

The Dispel Magic ritual has no effect whatsoever upon the Blight or the Blighted One. Likewise, the Witch's Blessing ritual cannot help the Blight.

Other magical items or NPCs may be able to affect the Blight in similar ways, though they will *not* be able to cure it completely. It is possible that the PCs can gain allies throughout the land who can give them magical spring water to assist in their fight, or perhaps convince a group of simple halfling farmers to help cultivate the wounded lands which will not grow under ordinary circumstances.

NPCs AND MONSTERS

THE BLIGHTED ONE

This is the accursed individual who cast the dark ritual and caused the Blight. Our default Blighted One presented here was a third level mage when he cast the ritual, and so has 3 hit dice. Your Blighted One may have more or less depending on the concerns of your campaign.

Hit Dice: 3d8 (13 HP)

AC: 16

Attack: +3 to hit, 1d8 (sword) or touch (see below)

Alignment: Nothing But Hatred Remains

XP: 500

Notes: *Blighted Touch* (anyone touched by the Blighted One must make a save vs. Poison or lose a point of Constitution; if a victim's Constitution falls below 3 in this manner it returns as a zombie), *Eternal* (the Blighted One never sleeps, has no need of rest, is undead, and is immune to sleep and charm effects), *Immortal* (the Blighted One is immortal, and will reform from the artifact that binds him the night after his destruction), *Magic* (the Blighted One is a level 3 mage and may cast three spells a day and rituals up to level three; his favorite spells are the Howling, Mystical Shield, and Reanimation, and he is particularly fond of the Call Storm and Minor Animation rituals), *True Name* (the Blighted One has a true name from before this horror began, and which gives his foes power over him)

BLIGHTED PLANTS

These undead plants have grown to the warmth of a far more sinister sun than ours. Plants returned from death by the Blight appear as sickly but still living examples of their kind, and sometimes grow to enormous sizes despite their dead state. These statistics can also be used to represent inanimate things within the Blight that now have a dark sentience, like floorboards which now crash around people or doorways that collapse and grab at trespassers.

Hit Dice: 2d8 (9 HP)

AC: 12

Attack: +0 to hit, 1d8 (bash)

Alignment: Neutral

XP: 40

BLACK PUDDING

Hurt only by fire or magic, these slimy messes ooze about at the center of the Blight, enveloping and digesting any organic matter they come across. Formless and eyeless, they are pulled towards living prey by scent and an unnatural taste for flesh.

Hit Dice: 10d8 (45 HP)

AC: 3

Attack: +10 to hit, 3d8 (enveloping touch)

Alignment: Neutral

XP: 1,750

Notes: *Invulnerable* (the pudding may only be damaged by fire, magical weapons, or spells)

THE BLIGHTED LAND

IMMINENCE

THREAT EFFECTS

- 1 The Blight does not grow, but becomes stronger. Increase the Blighted Land's Imminence rating by 1.
- 2 The encounter chance while within the Blight permanently increases by 1. If there is already a 6 in 6 chance of encounter within the Blight, increase its Imminence rating by 1 instead.
- 3-6 The Blight creeps outward. Choose one random hex on the edge of the Blight; all previously untainted hexes adjacent to it become part of the Blight.
- 7 Determine a random direction. Every hex within the Blight grows one hex in that direction.
- 8 The Blight spreads very quickly. All adjacent hexes become blighted.

ENCOUNTERS —/6

- 1 Lost! Make a Wisdom check to find the way or lose a day hopelessly circling.
- 2-3 The walking dead. Make a Wisdom check to avoid being surprised by a group of 2d8 skeletons and zombies.
- 4 Rot. Make an Intelligence check or lose half of your rations to rot and mold.
- 5 Sickness. Make a Wisdom check or lose an animal or hireling.
- 6 Lost traveler. Make a Charisma check to befriend a desperate traveler trying to find his way out of the Blight.

EFFECTS OF THE BLIGHT

- Each day, while traveling in the Blight, make a saving throw versus poison or lose 1 Hit Point. *(those who die this way return as undead)*
- No healing occurs from rest taken in the Blight.
- No safe water may be found in the Blight *(-1 to all rolls for each day spent without water)*

SPELLS AGAINST THE BLIGHT

- Druid's Touch (Cantrip) - *Save a single plant through continuous care and a -10 cantrip roll.*
- Cleansing Ritual (2), Full Restoration (6) - *Heal Blighted Touch effects on living survivors.*
- Perfect Health (9) - *Cure one hex.*
- Break Enchantment (10), Resurrection (10) - *Restore the Blighted One to life, dispelling the artifact.*

CLUES LIST

- ☐ FORGOTTEN VILLAGE
- ☐ HAUNTED LIBRARY
- ☐ FOLK TALE
- ☐ THIS BLIGHTED ONE'S STORY
- ☐ BLIGHTING RITUAL
- ☐ THE ARTIFACT AT THE CENTER

DENIZENS OF THE BLIGHT

THE BLIGHTED ONE

Hit Dice: 3d8 (13 HP)

AC: 16

Attack: +3 to hit, 1d8 (sword) or Blighted Touch.

Alignment: Nothing But Hatred Remains

XP: 500

Blighted Touch: save vs Poison or lose 1 CON.

If CON < 3, die and become a zombie.

Immortal: If destroyed, reforms at the artifact.

Unliving: Immune to sleep and charm.

Blight Rituals: Can cast at will (given time): Minor Animation (level 3) & Contagion (level 6)

True Name: +5 against it when uttered

BLIGHTED PLANTS

Hit Dice: 3d8 (14 HP)

AC: 12

Attack: +0 to hit, 1d8 (bash)

Alignment: Neutral

XP: 35

SKELETON

Hit Dice: 1d8 (4 HP)

AC: 13

Attack: +1 to hit, 1d8 (sword)

Alignment: Neutral

XP: 20

Notes: immune to sleep and charm effects

ZOMBIE

Hit Dice: 1d6 (4 HP)

AC: 10

Attack: +0 to hit, 1d6 damage (claw)

Alignment: Neutral

XP: 15

Notes: zombies are immune to sleep and charm effects

BLACK PUDDING

Hit Dice: 10d8 (45 HP)

AC: 3

Attack: +10 to hit, 3d8 (enveloping touch)

Alignment: Neutral

XP: 1750

Notes: *Invulnerable* (may only be damaged by fire, magical weapons, or spells)

GHOUL

Hit Dice: 2d8 (9 HP)

AC: 14

Attack: +3 to hit, 1d4 damage (claw)

Alignment: Chaotic

XP: 25

Notes:

Deadly Touch: save versus paralysis or frozen for 1d4 rounds; targets killed by a ghoul's claws return as ghouls themselves