

UK-S01

CRYPTS THINGS &

Blood of the Dragon

For 4- 6 Characters Levels 1st - 3rd



One of Lord Blackthorn's retainers is missing in the weirdlands of the Spires.
Dare you venture into this bleak land full of horrors in search of the missing
Sorcerer and his potion of immortality?

Compatible with Swords & Wizardry™ and other Old School Level Based Games.

D101
GAMES

BLOOD OF THE DRAGON

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BLOOD OF THE DRAGON

“Under a land shrouded in volcanic ash, punctuated by rocky spires that tear at the sky they say the Great Dragon sleeps. They say Tyanos the Black, Trickster god of the long-dead Hu-Pi people stole the Dragon’s blood and bottled it for his insane delight. As the drink of the gods it confers immortality to mortal man, but at what terrible price?

The very quest for this elixir is insane. A trip into the harsh and unforgiving land of the Spires, a poor and bandit-ridden weirdland, inhabited by the likes of Black Joop, Nigus the Headless and the Mother of Hydras. Names that should send a shiver down your spine. So pick up your sword, down the last of your ale to steady any nerves and stride off towards a great adventure amongst the rocks that defy the sky!”

HONGRA THE HORNY, SEASONED SCOUT AND GUIDE.

WHAT THIS BOOK CONTAINS

Blood of the Dragon is a short introductory adventure set in the ancient and ruined lands of The Spires.

- A Rough Guide to the Spires
- Adventure: The Lair of the Battle Apes
- New Monsters – The fearsome Battle Apes.

USING THIS ADVENTURE WITH OTHER OLD SCHOOL CLASS/LEVEL BASED GAMES

This adventure is broadly compatible with all other editions of the World’s Favourite Fantasy role-playing game, especially the so called “Old School editions” of the 70s-80s. While specifically designed to be played with Crypts and Things (C&T), Blood of the Dragon is playable with Swords and Wizardry (in fact, C&T is a S&W variant) and other comparable retroclone and original editions up to 2nd with minimal conversion.

The following rules and terms are specific to Crypts and Things (C&T). GMs of other systems may need to be aware of them.

- *Crypt Keeper* – the name of referee or Dungeon Master in C&T
- *Sanity System* – C&T has rules for Sanity loss, but this is very much left open to the Crypt Keeper when to use. For other systems, either ignore it when the adventure calls for Sanity checks or use your own favoured system.
- *One Magic System* – C&T gathers all the spell lists into one, gives them a colour- White (Good magic), Grey (Neutral, mainly illusionary magic) and Black (Evil Magic).
- *No class based non-player characters* – C&T keeps to Swords & Wizardry’s (the system it was built on top of) convention that all NPCs are monsters, with Special abilities rather than Classes. So a powerful Necromancer in C&T is a monster with 4 Hit Dice and the Special Abilities of being able to cast Magic Missile, Raise Dead and Curse, rather than a 4 Level Magic User.

THOSE WHO ARE BRAVE!!!

The following is a list of 78 heroes of 108 who contributed to an IndieGoGo.com campaign, that funded this module and the main rule book. They are listed in order of bravery, the first to order to the last to order.

Tim Knight	Pascal Oliet	Aaron Tieger
Charles Thorin	Fred Schiff	Jake Parker
Gary Pennington	Parrier David	Shane Williamson
Robert Saint John	Julian Hayley	A. Verheaghe
Matthias Weeks	Rudy Bowen	Jon Michaels
Steven Douglas Warble	Kevin Donovan	Jed McClure
Thorsten Schubert	John Fletcher	Robert Cook
Rik Kershaw-Moore	Daniel Corwin	Shea 'Chaot' Ryan
Brett Easterbrook	Meredith Watson	Michael Matkin
Ilias Mastrogiorgos	James Patterson	Henrik Landervik
Kreg Mosier	Omer Golan-Joel	Felix Girke
MAUGIS	Anthony Hunter	David Crowell
Jean Fridrici	Pablo Ruiz Muzquiz	Valynda Wells
Curt Meyer	Ray Colina	John Pope
Rich Spainhour	James Roberts	Finn Mac Cuhall
Gordon Richards	Brent Walters	Nathan Frund
Joan A. Fontas	Erik Stiene	Niels Adair
Pascal Saradjian	Blain Neufeld	Justin Woodman
Drance	Stuart Fieldhouse	Jason Verbitsky
Andrew Scott	Shane Gregory	Igor Vinicius Sartorato
Morgan Hazel	David DeRocha	Crowdos
Shannon Lewis	Michael Bowers	Michael Beck
Michael Wolf	Arthur Braune	Eric Fabiaschi
Myles Corcoran	Mike Evans	
Chris Kutalik	Simon Forster	

In addition there are 30 souls who did not want to be named because they are so NINJA!

We respect this but note they are still heroes and are in their debt.

A ROUGH GUIDE TO THE SPIRES

WHAT THE CHARACTERS KNOW ABOUT THE SPIRES

"The Spires is a vast arid wilderness, which gets its name from the tall rock formations that rise up from the featureless Ash Plains. Here Ancient empires have risen and fallen, the last of which was buried by the gods themselves under ash for the sin of hubris. The tombs of the ancients and their monuments dot the landscape and attract treasure hunters from the south. The village of Cragspire, and Fort Boneguard watch the land for monster incursions headed south towards the Free Territories. They are also bases for the adventurous who seek to plunder the ancient ruins."

HISTORY

THE HU-PI AND THE RAISING OF THE SPIRES (O AA)

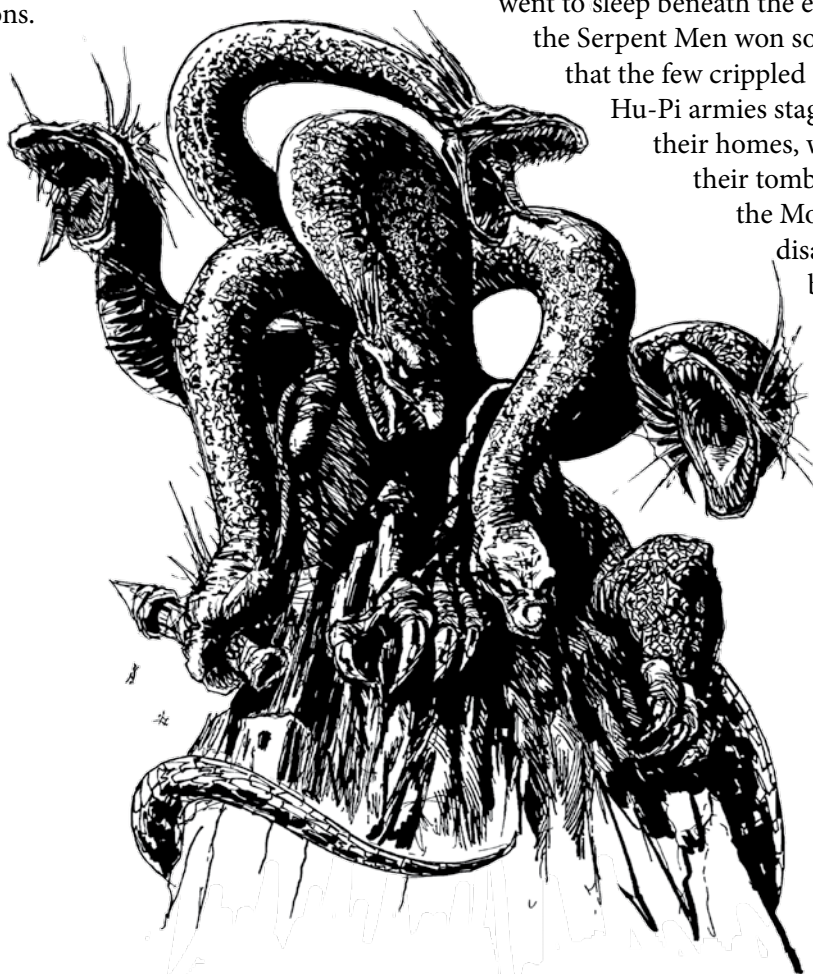
The Hu-Pi were an ancient and cruel race of humans, who came through the Portals from the Doomed Dimensions.

Some sages say that it was their powerful magic that doomed those dimensions in the first place. Upon arrival, the most powerful of the Hu-Pi, Nigus the Starchaser, raised great 'Spires' of rock up towards the skies to protect his people from the predations of nearby Dragons who considered the Hu-Pi's new homeland theirs.

THE SERPENT WAR (1500-1800 AA)

The Great Dragon considered the lands of the Hu-Pi to be its territory, and the Hu-Pi to be its vassals. When tribute and sacrifice was not forthcoming from the Hu-Pi, the Great Dragon marched into the Spires at the head of a Serpent Man army. It was opposed by Nigus the

Magnificent with an army of Hu-Pi. Nigus raised the Mother of Hydras to fight the Great Dragon. As the two leviathans clashed, so did the armies of Hu-Pi and Serpent. Although the Mother of Hydras wounded the Great Dragon so grievously it went to sleep beneath the earth of the Spires, the Serpent Men won so convincingly that the few crippled survivors of the Hu-Pi armies staggered back to their homes, which became their tombs. Nigus and the Mother of Hydra disappeared after the battle.



THE DEN OF SNAKES (1800 – 2000 AA)

With the Hu-Pi weakened and banished to their tombs, the Serpent Men made the land their own. It became a venomous place filled with snake-lairs, Vivimancy laboratories and breeding-pits.

Eventually the place became too much of threat to its human neighbours who raised a great army and drove the Serpent Men out of their lairs.

ASH CLOUD DESCENDS (5000 AA)

The human Empire of Ancient days, which formed after the defeat of the Serpent Men of the Spires, offended the Gods themselves, who drowned their lands in fire and ash.

THE GREAT SILENCE (5000 AA - 9500 AA)

After the Rain of Fire, silence reigned over the Plain of Ash for a millennium. If anything remained living, it dared not move for fear of offending the gods during this time. Only the Undead, cursed by the Gods to suffer in their lifeless land, shuffled around.

During the Great Silence, Fort Boneguard was built by the Empire of Myrindor to protect the south against the undead creatures that groaned and moaned in the Spires.

OF JOOP & NINGUS (9500 AA)

The Great Silence came to an end when Nigus the Magnificent returned to the Spires. He raised up the Great Tower of the Four Elements, and summoned the Mother of Hydras to protect it. Then, it was said, that he started the great magical experiment to breathe life back into the Spires by infusing the four elements.

However, in the Garden of Zumos he was betrayed by his mistress, the witch Black Joop, who severed his head and man-parts.

Thus Nigus the Magnificent became Nigus the Headless and disappeared from the world again, his great experiment only partially successful.

THE PRESENT (10,000 AA)

OF LORDS BLACKTHORN AND ULMINSTER.

Out of desperation, refugees from the violence in the Free Territories struck north into the Ash Plains and some found a home in the Spires. Some of them settled in the ruins known as Cragspire. The settlement almost immediately came under the harsh gaze of the present Lord-Commander of Fort Boneguard, Lord Ulminster, who considers Cragspire part of his domain. Fortunately, the area around Cragspire is rich in ancient treasure, so the village has survived every time Ulminster's men have arrived demanding tribute. Eventually Cragspire was seized by its own Tyrant, Lord Blackthorn, who stopped the tribute. With both

men recruiting mercenaries, armed conflict between the two is inevitable.

GAZETTEER

HORNY SPEAKS!

Hongra the Horny is a seasoned Scout and Guide, who gained his nickname from the goat horns that grow out of his head (a Khaos feature). The information in quotes below is available to would-be travellers in the region, but none of it is given out for free. A gnarled and aged hand shoots out and expects at a least 1-10 GP for each snippet of gossip.

THE NEAR SPIRES

"You are best off staying in the Near Spires until you get yer act together. Not sayin' that you can drop your guard but the horrors are smaller here. Take Cragspire for instance, 'bout quarter of the size of Fort Boneguard and as long as you don't upset Lord Blackthorn about a tenth of the danger."

Hongra the Horny

The Near Spires are so-called because they are nearest to the civilised cities of the Free Territories to the south, which are still reached through the choking dust of the Ash Plains. The mesas of the Spires rise up through the dust, and life rudely clings on weakly.

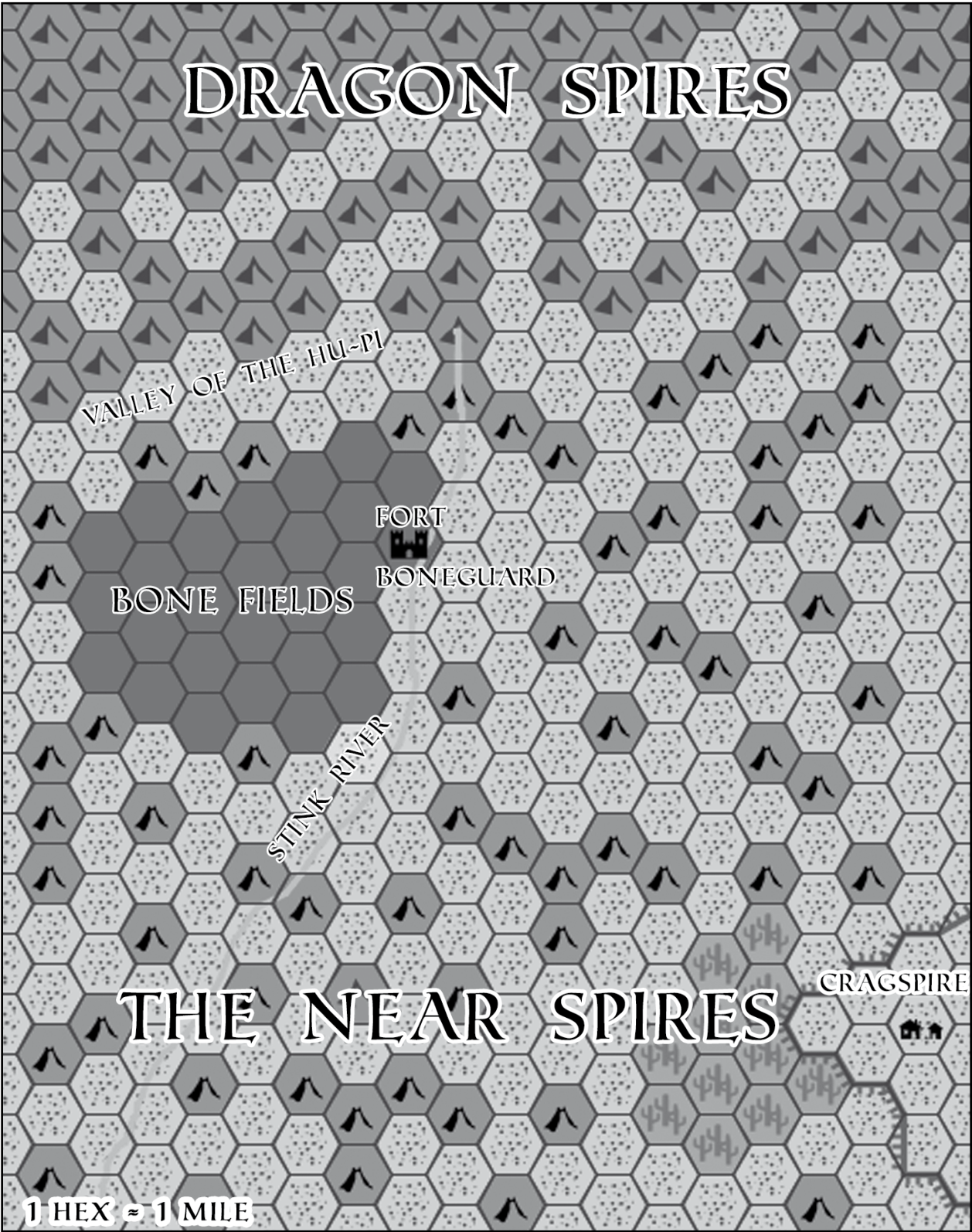
This whole region is detailed in the adventure "The Lair of the Battle Apes", and it is recommended that the Crypt Keeper run that adventure for the players before letting them loose on the rest of the Spires.

CRAGSPIRE

"A shithole of a place. If the weasels who call this place home had any spirit before Blackthorn and his cronies arrived, they've had all of it crushed out of them. Anyone with any sense has moved on to Fort Boneguard ages ago"

Hongra the Horny

Cragspire is the main settlement in the Near Spires. It is a small village of dirt poor peasants, who scour the local area seeking abandoned treasure troves. They do this in the name of their master Lord Blackthorn, a crude tyrant with delusions of grandeur.



CACTUS WOOD

Just outside of Cragspire is a large patch of giant cacti. This patch is about 5 miles across, and in the weird lands of the Near Spires counts as a wood.

THE SERPENT'S TOOTH

This mesa towers above its neighbours and is a focal point for miles around. In caves beneath it is an old Serpent Man lair, from whose labs were spawned the brutal Battle Apes. Long- abandoned it is home to a human Sorcerer who has found the Serpent's old Grimoires and dabbles in their forbidden lore.

THE BONE FIELDS

"When the fire rained from the sky, the river valley civilisation that clustered around the river that flows through the Spires was burnt to a crisp. Every man, woman and child died in the holocaust, and their bleached bones carpeted the ground. Malignant spirits and undead became the main inhabitants of this forsaken land, and the Warlords of the south established Fort Boneguard to prevent its horrors drifting into civilization."

From the Ancient Chronicle

The Bone Fields are a zone of bleak desolation, where nothing grows, and bones stick out of dusty bleak plains of ash. It is a cursed land, where only the groaning spirits of the dead and the restless undead roam. Lord Ulminster is the master of this land in name only.

FORT BONEGUARD

"Home of the Warlord, Lord Ulminster, this fort from the time of the Great Silence is the last bastion of civilisation before the wastes that is the Spires. Here you can eat, drink, rest and entertain. As long as you have the gold to pay."

Hongra the Horny

Fort Boneguard is a dirty and dusty old frontier outpost, which is a shadow of its ancient self. A thick stone wall surrounds an inner keep and a collection of about one hundred flat roofed houses. A small garrison of about fifty mercenaries keeps a belligerent and restless population underneath Lord Ulminster's iron command.

STINK RIVER

"A foul poisonous body of water, inhabited by stink toads, slime eels, and spike pikes. Curiously, the local river folk consider all these animals a delicacy. Tough hunters those River folk. Watch out for the Festering Spots though. That's how I got my horns, see?"

Hongra the Horny

VALLEY OF THE HU-PI

"Dusty and forgotten is the Valley of the Hu-Pi, but you can bet your last copper piece the Hu-Pi have not forgotten about you".

Hongra the Horny, seasoned Scout and Guide.

This is the most bleak and evil place in the Spires. A dried out river cuts through two ridges riddled with the tombs, great and small, of the undead Hu-Pi civilisation.

THE DRAGON SPIRES

"I can say nothing good about this place. In my adventurous youth I ventured there with a group of hard-bitten veterans who knew their stuff and were out for the big haul of gold and treasure. All we found was death. I was lucky to escape with my life. More I will not tell you, lest you be stupid enough to go there."

Hongra the Horny, seasoned Scout and Guide.

To the far north are the Dragon Spires, where the Serpent Men made their home after conquering the region. Here the Great Dragon rests under the mountains.

**"MORE I WILL
NOT TELL
YOU, LEST YOU
BE STUPID
ENOUGH TO
GO THERE."**

THE LAIR OF THE BATTLE APES

This is an introductory adventure for four to six 1st -2nd Level characters.

It is designed as a straight forward introduction to Crypts and Things for both Crypt Keepers and players new to the game and the wonders of Zarth.

PLAYER'S BACKGROUND

The player characters have just started out in their adventuring careers. They have struck out from the Free Territories of the south and have trudged through the inhospitable Ash Plains in search of the long lost treasures of the Ancient civilisations buried when Mount Terror erupted in accordance to the will of the Gods. They are dirt crawlers in the most literal of senses, owning only what they can carry and prepared to dig deep into the volcanic ash in search of forgotten treasures of lost aeons.

Read or paraphrase the following.

"Peaking out of the Plain of Ash are the Spires- pillars of yellow/red rock one hundred foot high, weathered into tapering points by harsh winds that whip around them. Perched on a plateau of rock that rises out of the ash, three miles across, is the dusty and near-deserted village of Cragspire. Your little group comes out of the dust storms to this meagre place, in search of treasure and other rewards...."

CRYPT KEEPER'S BACKGROUND

A mystery from times long-gone awaits them in the Near Spires. Wise players will realise the horror of the treasure at the end of the adventure and quickly leave the area and its buried secrets. Foolhardy players will think that their characters can beat the horrors that are beneath the Spires, and will see their creations quickly succumb.

Our tale starts with a Sorcerer called Aldric. Aldric was a rather nasty piece of work. He grew up in Cragspire, steeped in its tales of ancient Sorcerers such as Nigus the Great, the race of Hu Pi and the inhuman Serpent People. The son of a peasant farmer he dreamt of their magnificent power and cataclysmic end. His teenage years were spent exploring the Spires outside of Cragspire with a group of local lads. On one expedition, which he undertook on his own he discovered the old Serpent Man laboratory under The Great Spire.

Upon coming of age he ran away to the southern city states. There he served a brief and brutal apprenticeship with a low-level sorcerer from Peopolis, who became the first victim of Aldric's savage thirst for power. Aldric returned with his mentor's spell book to the place of his birth. Now with some real magic in his head he felt

strong enough to take control of the Serpent Man lair under the Great Spire which he had found as a youth.

Upon returning to Cragspire he had found his peer group had grown up to be a nasty group of thugs who was ruled by the self styled 'Lord Blackthorn'. Many Elders, Aldric's parents included, had been callously killed by Blackthorn as they terrorised the village. Aldric cared not for vengeance and joined Blackthorn as his 'Court Sorcerer' at the blasted ruin of Castle Cragspire. Eventually, Aldric tired of Blackthorn's games of childish overlordship and took up residence in the Serpent Lair. Here he found an old tome from the time of the Serpent Men, which he called "The Book of Serpents". Within its human skin bound covers he found methods to brew the 'Blood of the Serpent', a magical potion that increases the strength of the drinker at cost of their sanity, and re-create through foul Vivomancy the inhuman race of Battle Apes.

Over the course of a year Aldric set about brewing up the Blood of the Dragon, which gave him a hold over the vain and power hungry Blackthorn. He conducted limited Vivimancy experiments, and was able to create a small crawling corruption out of the body parts of several failed attempts. He chafed under the knowledge that he would need bigger animals, such as apes, to create some of the creatures detailed in the pages of the Book of the Serpent.

Then one day the Circus came to town. It was a troupe of ten performers with a small group of animals- elephants, tigers and apes. On Aldric's order, Blackthorn's men murdered the circus people in their sleep, killed the more problematic animals and sent the apes to Aldric. After gaining access to the primates he used magic to raise their intelligence and create the ideal Battle Ape soldiers. Alas his triumph was short lived. Three months later Aldric was killed in an explosion in his lab (see location 10-11), so his plans for world domination using his Ape troops came to naught. Their ill-treatment at Aldric's hands has taught the Apes a hatred for all men, and a recent ambush of a group of invading men has armed them. Only Aldric's two Chimpanzee assistants feel any remorse for his death.

Now free of Aldric's domination, the Battle Apes decide what their next move should be. Should they try to make a new home under the hated human's doorstep? Or should they strike north to the Dragonspires, in search of the legendary Empire of the Apes?

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF ALDRIC

30 years ago. Born to peasant farmers in Cragspire

29-15 years ago. Childhood in Cragspire, during which time Aldric discovers the Serpent Man lab under the Great Spire.

14 years ago. Runs away to Peopolis and becomes a Sorcerer's Apprentice

12 years ago. Kills his master and starts the long journey home.

11 years ago. Returns home, discovers his old friend Blackthorn is now in control of Cragspire.

10 years ago. Spends a year as Blackthorn's Court Sorcerer.

Nine to two years ago. Takes control of the Serpent Man lair and discovers the Book of the Serpent. Brews Dragon's Blood for Blackthorn who gradually goes insane.

One year ago. A Circus arrives in Cragspire. Its actors are murdered and its simians delivered to Aldric. Aldric continues to supply Blackthorn with Blood of the Dragon while he breeds various variants of Battle apes.

One month ago. Aldric has Blackthorn kidnap the daughter of the village elder for use in his experiments.

Two weeks ago. After an accident in his chambers, Aldric dies. Under the leadership of the Gorillas, the apes take over the complex.

1 week ago. Lord Uliminster becomes curious to know what Aldric is up to and sends some men to investigate. They are torn limb from limb by the apes, who take their arms and armour.

Two days ago. Strained relationships between the guilty Chimpanzees and the unrepentant Gorillas break down. The Gorillas smash up the Potion Laboratory, where the Chimpanzees make their home. Only the intervention of the wise old Orangutan prevents the slaughter of the smaller apes by the Gorillas.

GETTING THE PLAYERS INVOLVED

There are several ways of luring the characters into the old Serpents lair. Here are some suggestions.

1. LORD BLACKTHORN WANTS TO SEE YOU

Lord Blackthorn, the local ruler, contacts the player characters when they arrive in the village through one of his men. One of his hirelings, a wizard called Aldric Silvermane, who lives in a remote lair in the wilderness, has not sent his monthly delivery of the magic potion called The Blood of the Dragon that he brews for his liege lord. Also, the delivery wagon that provides raw ingredients has gone missing. Aldric is a valued retainer so Lord Blackthorn would like the player characters to go and find out what has happened to him. He offers a reward of 100 gold pieces each for simple information, rising to 250 gold each for revenge if any harm has come to Aldric. Blackthorn has been driven quite mad by his use of the potion and suffers from extreme megalomania and paranoia (see Lord Blackthorn's rant below). It is highly likely that the insane Blackthorn will double-cross the player characters on their return to claim their reward.

2. FIND MY DAUGHTER, I BEG OF YOU

While in the village, the characters contacted by the poor downtrodden village elder, Gosric. Not only does the insane and mad Lord Blackthorn threaten the village with his military ventures (Lord Uliminster of Fort Boneguard will surely strike back and kill them all!) but his daughter Vana has been kidnapped by Blackthorn, and, unknown to him, given to Aldric for experimentations (see Crypt Key location 4). He can not offer them any payment except his and the villagers eternal thanks.

3. EVERYONE WANTS SOME

The party has heard of the magical potion called The Blood of the Dragon, and are determined to gain it for themselves.

4. ON HIS LORD'S SECRET SERVICE

The characters are agents of Lord Uliminster. They are to spy on Blackthorn, and learn/gain the source of his power. Uliminster is another petty bandit lord who has fifty men under his command. He is the tyrant of Fort Boneguard, a fortified town the other side of the Spires.

THE ADVENTURE

LOCATION FORMAT

Each location in this adventure takes the following format.

Brief overview for the GM who is skimming through the adventure.

A description for the players, that can either be read out as is or paraphrased to reflect any alterations to the situation due to the players' actions in previous encounters.

Expanded notes for the games master.

The action that happens in the location.

Any possibilities leading on from the location.

Any hidden items or secrets.

Any monster stats, which take the form

Monster name: AC Descending [Ascending]; MV ; HD ; hp ; #Att; D ; SR ;CR/XP

Where AC = armour class, MV = Movement rate in feet, HD= Hit dice, hp= Hit points, #Att = number of attacks, D=Damage per attack, SR = a brief note of any special rules (which are usually expanded below the stat block); CR = Challenge Rating , XP = number of experience points awarded for overcoming the creature.

A note about Sanity Checks: Potential checks for Sanity loss are noted in the text. Note, however, they are always optional, and up to the Crypt Keeper to call if he feels the mood is appropriate for one.

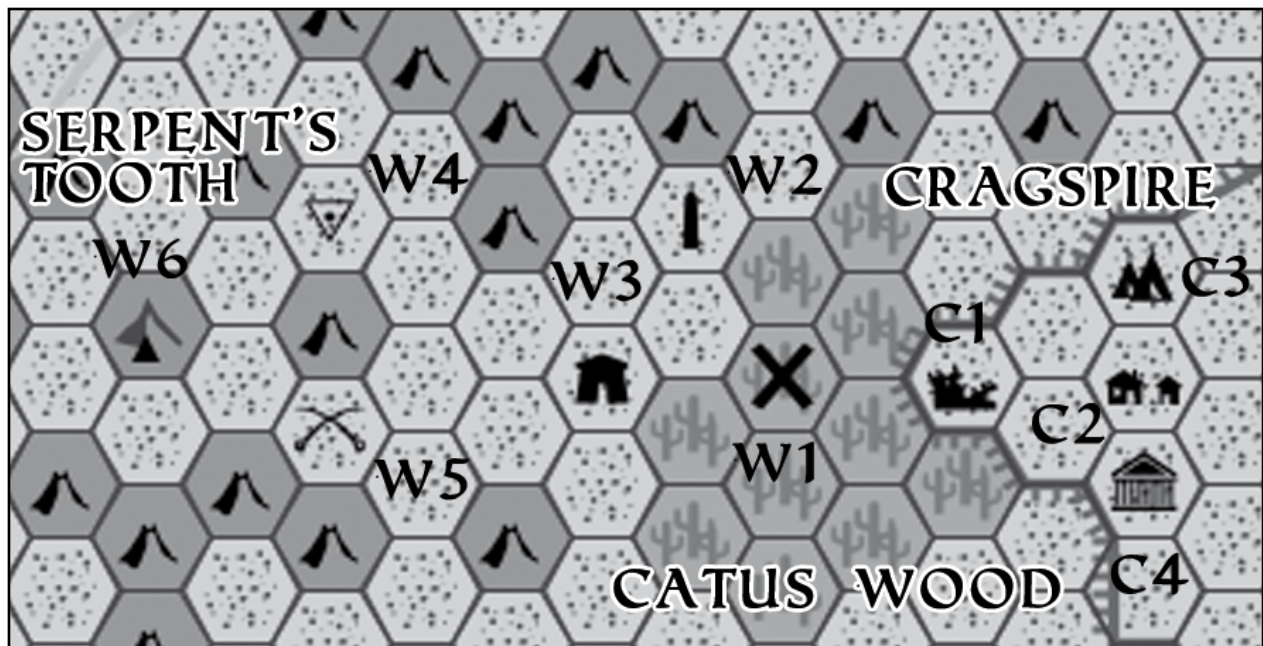
THE VILLAGE OF CRAGSPIRE

Once a military outpost of a long fallen empire, now greatly reduced in size, Cragspire clings on to life as the Plain of Ash gradually chokes it to death.

"Dust clings everywhere, the buildings are half-ruined and the occupants are bent double by years of toiling in poor fields. You can see about twenty flat-roofed houses, in various states of disrepair. Some are ruined, their roofs collapsed and their walls half buried by dust. A handful are lived in, their doors and windows barricaded and shut against the elements. At one end of the village is an old ruined temple. This is a remnant of a grand civilisation long-since disappeared. At the other end, on a large rock outcrop over looking the Spires is an imposing black rock tower surrounded by blocks of similar dark rock. "

The whole village is completely crushed under the yoke of the local tyrant Lord Blackthorn. Blackthorn is a self styled Lord, a local thug who grew up to be a bandit overlord. He and his teenage gang killed most of the elders as part of their coming of age. They then settled into a life of raiding and theft, their numbers gradually swelling as other bad types from the south drifted up the road attracted by Lord Blackthorn's reputation.

Lord Ulminster of Fort Boneguard regards Cragspire as part of his fief, and Lord Blackthorn and his men as a menace. His spies have reported Blackthorn's madness and it is only a matter of time until Ulminster stamps down on Cragspire hard. Blackthorn on his part has delusions of seizing control of Fort Boneguard.



LOCATIONS OF INTEREST

C1. CRAGSPIRE CASTLE.

On a rock outcrop overlooking the Spires stands the remains of an Imperial fortress. Half in ruin, it has been taken over by Lord Blackthorn and his men (bad bandit types who number about 50).

"The remains of the fortress dominates the dust-driven landscape, staring out lonely from a rock out crop across the spires. A single black round tower stands complete amongst ruined walls, upon which perch vigilant black birds and armed guards. They watch the town for signs of odd movement. A single half-ruined gate, decorated with the skulls of those who have opposed the rulers of the castle over the years, is the entrance to this place of ancient menace."

This desolate place is inhabited by Lord Blackthorn and his bandit cronies. Blackthorn also has a 'tame' tiger that he gained from the massacre of the circus people, which is trained to attack upon Blackthorn's command.

50 Bandit guards AC 7 Leather [12]; MV 12 ; HD 1 ; hp 6 ; #Att 1 Short Sword or Short Bow ; D 1d6; Saving Throw 17 ; SR None ; CR/XP 1/15

Lord Blackthorn AC 1 Plate mail + Shield[17] MV 12 ; HD 5 ; hp 35 ; #Att1 Longsword; D 1d8 ; Saving Throw 12; SR Insane immune to mind control magic ; CR 5 / XP 240

Black thorn's Tiger AC 6 [13]; MV 21 ; HD 3; hp 18 ; #Att 2 claws ; D 1d6 ; Saving Throw 14; SR none; CR/XP 3/60

Most of the bandits, 30 or so, laze about in the rough cobbled courtyard of the castle. Ten of them are inside the Tower in Blackthorn's court. The remaining ten patrol the village looking for troublemakers and strangers.

Lord Blackthorn is inside the court room inside the tower. He sits on a throne made of human bones, petting his Tiger who sits at his feet.

C2. THE HUNGRY HERON INN.

Here, the locals nurse cups of sour watered-down wine (1 SP a cup) and bemoan their fate. Occasionally a couple of Blackthorn's men turn up looking for a fight.

"In the centre of the village is a simple two story building made out of large blocks of black rock, obviously looted from the black tower's outer wall. The windows are shuttered against the elements and a half faded wooden sign of a monstrous Heron hangs above the entrance, which is a rickety set of double doors. Looking closer you notice the Heron is chasing after small human figures and that some lie crushed under its claws. A peasant stands next to the door. With his face half hidden under a large hat, he belligerently looks at you."

BLACKTHORN'S RANT

Read directly, all in one go, the following to the players. If you need to pause for breath, make odd gargling noises, roll your eyes and rock your head violently to get across the fact that Blackthorn is a barking nutter.

"I want you. YOU YES YOU! I want you to go out into the Spires, leave HOME, LEAVE your dogs, Leave your loved ones, but take some food and water, lots of water, yes water, many a man has died a thirsts in the Spires. The Spires are dry place, avoid cactus patch. Prickly ouch ouch owww! Watch out for the big fisted Wibbly Donk and the Ong Ong Bird! Beaks and claws and beaks and claws. You will then come to a place where eyes will watch you. Terrible Eyes ! They watch me in my sleep, so I cheat them no sleep! Then turn left! Or was it right? Up the stairs that never end. Watch out for big headless Nigus. If you find his head don't stop to converse. Lies is all he has to say. Lies, like those filthy peasants in their sleep. I know I sneak in their houses at night and listen to them. Sometimes they wake up and I slit their throats. Then you will be where you want to be. EXCEPT YOU WON'T WANT TO BE THERE ANYMORE! Which is tough because I want you to be there. It rises up like a two hundred foot penis of the gods! The Great Spire! It humps the sky, but the sky ain't coming. Hee hee. Then down in a hole you will go. Find Aldric. Grab him by he scruff of the neck and say unto him "Lord Blackthorn wants his Blood of the Dragon, have you forgotten about his Blood of the Dragon!" Watch out he is a clever man, very little but very clever. Don't let him say the funny words or drink anything he offers you. If he's not at home leave a note.

That is all, go away I give you ooooooooooooooooooh 100 GP each if you find him for me. And if someone has harmed a hair on his head, bring them to me and I will avenge him and give you errr 250 GP in gratitude and thanks. Oh yes."

Built out of stone taken from the walls of Cragspire castle, this grim tavern was where Blackthorn and the rest of the gang held court in their early days. The bar's wooden floor is scored with axe and blade marks from all the executions that took place here, and the head of anyone that has crossed Blackthorn is pickled in a large jar and placed on the bar with the label "Don't pity this poor fool".

2d6 peasants skulk about in the bar at anyone time, darkly nursing cups of sour wine. The barkeep is hulk of a man called Hansa. He gruffly tends bar and has a large machete behind the bar to deal with trouble makers.

Typical Peasant patron: AC 9 [10]; MV 12; HD 1; hp 4; #Att 1 knife; D 1d4; SR none; CR 1/ 15 XP

Hansa the barman: AC 9 [10]; MV 12; HD 1; hp 8; #Att 1 machete; D 1d6; SR none; CR 1/ 15 XP

C3. THE RUINED TEMPLE.

At the edge of the town, amongst the broken houses, is the once mighty columned temple to some imperious deity.

"The temple has no roof and most of the columns are badly weathered and broken. All that remains of the deity is a plinth, with a name scrubbed out, and a pair of sandal clad feet."

A ruin even when the castle was built, at the Crypt Keepers' discretion there may be a secret entrance to a small crypt, with ancient inhabitants determined by him, near the stone feet.

C4. THE ABANDONED CIRCUS

One day the circus came to town to entertain and earn some money. They were brutally slain in their sleep by Blackthorn's men and their animals taken to Aldric for experiments.

"Half-buried in the dust is a strange group of broken objects, which stand slightly outside the village boundary. It looks like the camp of some nomads, a large communal tent stands in the centre of it fifty foot in diameter. To the left hand side of it are three iron cages on carts. To the other side is a group of five individual tents in various states of repair. At first glance the whole camp seems deserted."

The communal tent is the main big top of the Circus tent which is torn and tattered there are signs of violence, scraps of bloodied clothing and abandoned weapons. There is also a trapeze, a large ornate cannon for the human cannon ball act and a caged ring with the bodies of two slain lions. Behind the big top are a group of

twenty shallow graves, which contains the bodies of the killed circus people.

The iron cages held the lions and tiger that the circus used in their act. Their handler is Mad Majof, a muscular bald man with a large handle bar moustache, who is dressed in a lion skin. He alone survived the carnage and escaped half-mad into the spires. He lost his remaining sanity and returned to rescue his friends using an ancient Bone flute which he found in a cave.

Mad Majof AC 8 [11]; MV 12; HD 2; hp 16; #Att 1 2-h Hammer fist; D 1d10; Saving Throw; SR The Bone Flute (see below); CR3 / 60 XP

Bone Flute: This is a weapon made by the Serpent Men sorcerers to make men go insane. When air is passed into the flute it plays a disturbing and eerie tune. Any character within earshot must make a Saving Throw or lose 1d4 sanity and be confused and shaken for 1d6 rounds, during which time they may not attack or cast magic.

The five individual tents were the homes of the circus people. All of them have been crudely ransacked. Each tent housed five to eight people.

RUMOURS

What the players can find out by digging around town (roll D6 for random rumours)

1. Lord Blackthorn is amassing an army to attack a neighbouring rival, Lord Ulminster. Therefore he doesn't want to use any of his men finding out what has happened with Aldric.
2. Aldric not only makes potions for, but he is paid to conduct other magical research on behalf of Lord Blackthorn.
3. About a year ago a circus was in town, and all its apes were sent off down the track to Aldric's lair.
4. Aldric is an unpleasant sort who grew up in the town, before being apprenticed to a Sorcerer in the far south. He was always cutting up cats and other animals that crossed his path.
5. Aldric lives in an old underground lair about half a day's ride from Town.
6. He is always having trouble with marauding bandits.

THE WEIRD LANDS: THE SPIRES LOCATIONS

W1. THE CACTUS PATCH

One of Ulminster's men who died of his wounds lies among the red/green giant cacti.

"Giant cacti of all shape and manner of breed dot the landscape, which is otherwise rocky and desolate. Ahead of you, in a clearing of sorts, is a man who seems to have managed to have got himself impaled on a particularly large and fearsome cactus."

The dead man is dressed only in a loin cloth and has multiple claw and bite wounds. His face twisted in a look of abject horror. He was part of the raiding party that attacked the Apes, only to be ambushed. He escaped by playing dead, the Apes striped him of armour and after a couple of days of laying amongst the dead, he escaped and almost made it back to civilisation before hunger and thirst over came him here in the cactus patch. While delirious he managed to get himself impaled on the cactus while trying to get water out of it.

W2. THE BLACK NEEDLE

The Black Needle is an ancient monument made of alien black stone.

"A featureless black stone needle stabs upwards at the sky."

The table is an ancient enigma, possibly predating even the Hu-Pi. It glows with unnatural green light at night.

W3. SCOUT CAMP

In a messy group of three hide tents are a group of five of Lord Ulminsters men licking their wounds. They are the survivors of a group of twelve scouts. Most died at the hands of the apes- see location 1 in Crypt key below.

"A higgledy-piggledy group of three tatty hide tents sits in the dust in a small depression about fifty foot across. A group of five armed and armoured men languidly laze about in the hot sun. Most have bandages of some sort and one man is laid on a rug. He is heavily bandaged and groaning in pain."

The scouts are in a bad way, their pride hurting more than their physical wounds. They are grumpy and not very communicative about who or what caused them such a great defeat. Despite their state, they are still a fearsome bunch of fighting men who let their swords do the talking all too quickly.

Scouts AC 7 Leather [12]; MV 12 ; HD 1 ; hp 6 ; #Att 1 Short Sword or Short Bow ; D 1d6; Saving Throw 17 ; SR None ; CR/XP 1/15

Treasure: Stashed in the tents is a bag with 50 GP.

W4. A STONE HEAD

The head is part of a larger statue (see Headless statue below in Wandering Monsters)

A gargantuan stone head, on its left hand side, lies mouth wide open as if gaping in amazement and horror.

This is part of a living enchanted statue of Nigus The Great, an ancient Hu-Pi Sorcerer. It was a leviathan that would roam the land crushing his enemies and cheering his friends. When Black Noop betrayed him, she cast down the statue severing its head from his body and twisting its form into the mockery it is today.

W5. AMBUSH POINT

The path narrow and passes through a rocky gorge. It's an obvious ambush point.

About fifty feet in front of you the path narrows to one man across and passes through a rocky gorge. The gorge cliffs are twenty feet high with flat tops.

Is anyone lying in wait? Roll a d6 quietly in secret and if it comes up 1-2 , roll another d6 and consult the wandering monster table below.

W6. THE SERPENT'S TOOTH

The largest Spire in the landscape is known as the Serpent's Tooth, and is visible miles away. Under this blue/green rock formation is the Lair of the Battle Apes (see Crypt Key below).

"This spire dominates the landscape and towers over its neighbours. Rather than the red- orange of their other spires, this one is blue streaked against an unnatural green rock. At the base of this high spire is a large cave that opens up like giant's dark mouth."

The Serpent's Tooth is a fearsome land mark, with a reputation of evil sorcery. At the base of the spire is a cavern which leads into the Lair of the Battle Apes (see below).

WANDERING MONSTERS OF THE NEAR SPIRES.

Procedure. Each time a hex is entered roll a d6. If the number rolled is a 1 roll again on the following table.

1. Lord Blackthorn's scout – a wise and hardy type who rides the Spires (Ac 7 Leather HD1 HP 8 Crossbow + Long Sword (1 Waterskin + trail rations).

Scout AC 7 Leather [12]; MV 12 ; HD 1 ; hp 6 ; #Att 1 Long Sword or Short Bow ; D 1d8 or 1d6; Saving Throw 17 ; SR None ; CR/XP 1/15

2. A gang of 2d6 of Lord Blackthorn's men, looking for trouble and a fight.

Lord Blackthorn's Men AC 7 Leather [12]; MV 12 ; HD 1 ; hp 6 ; #Att 1 Short Sword or Short Bow ; D 1d6; Saving Throw 17 ; SR None ; CR/XP 1/15

3. As above but have captured one Ulminster's surviving scouts- see Weird lands location W3- who they are in the process of torturing for information.

4. The Headless Statue, looking for its head (see Weirdlands, location W4 above).

Headless Statue AC 0 [19]; MV 6; HD 8 ; hp 40 ; #Att 2 Fists; D 1d10; Saving Throw 8 ; SR Immune to mind control magic, poison or disease ; CR/XP 9/1100.

5. A pack of 3d6 Man Rats. These are dog-sized fast-moving rat-human hybrids, with vicious claws and bite, scratching around for food. Created by the Serpent-Men during ancient times, they escaped the laboratory under the Serpent's Tooth and now infest the area, living in small burrows.

Man-Rat AC 2 [17]; MV 24; HD 1-1 ; hp 4 ; #Att 2 claws or 1 bite; D 1d4/1d4 or 1d6; Saving Throw 18 ; SR none; CR/XP B/10.

6. An Ash storm. Choking sands quickly whip up, choking anyone caught in them and obscuring vision for 1d12 minutes. Make a Saving Throw or take 1d8 damage from getting a lung full of the sand.

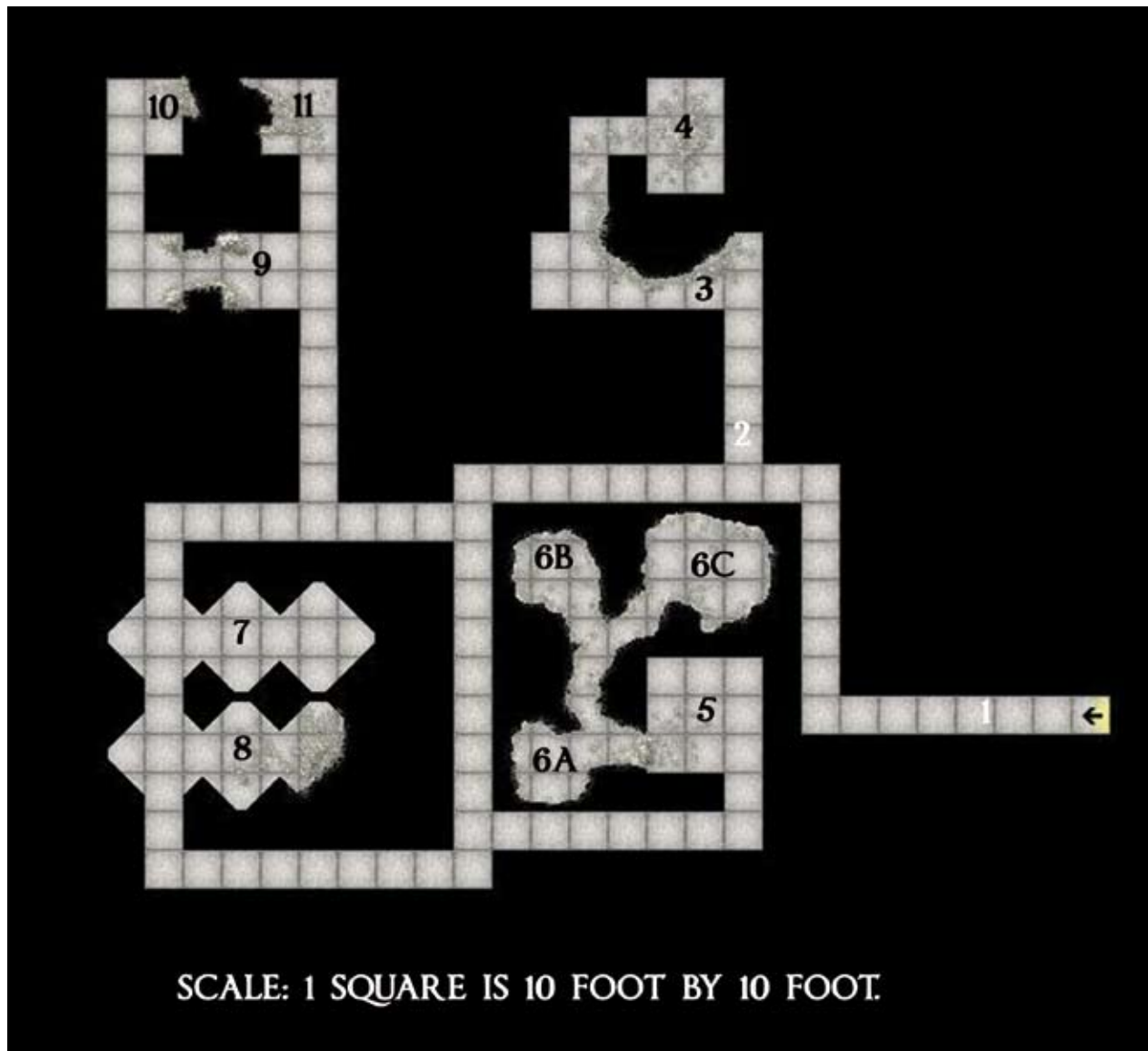


THE LAIR OF THE BATTLE APES

CRYPT KEY

GENERAL FEATURES

Unless noted otherwise, all areas are completely unlit. As part of his experiments Aldric blessed the apes with the ability to see in total darkness, as well as hearing that goes into the range much below that of humans, like dogs. The overall atmosphere in the dungeon is damp and oppressive, with an unpleasant smell of chemicals that come from the smashed potions in room 8.



1. TUNNEL DOWN FROM THE SURFACE

A gently sloping entrance tunnel leads to a grisly discovery.

"The entrance cave is gaping and dark, and leads into a rough stone tunnel, ten foot across by ten foot high, which slopes downwards. The only sound escaping is the slow drip of some distant water. On a closer inspection a you can make out a faint acrid smell"

The passage is rigged with wire traps that ring low-pitched bells that only the apes can hear. Also here is a pile of six dismembered bodies of Lord Ulminster's men (see Weird lands location W3) that have been ripped limb from limb and stripped of armour by the Gorillas, and those not used to the sights of slaughter (most starting characters other than Fighters or Barbarians) should make a Sanity Check.

2. A SLEEPING GORILLA GUARD

The Gorilla with orders to guard this junction has fallen asleep, unless woken by the alarm in location 1.

When the characters are twenty feet away.

"Through the dark gloom you hear thick heavy snoring."

When they are closer

"Your illumination brings out a head in the gloom. Initially, you think it's just floating there without a body, until it emerges from the darkness. A large humanoid ape stands in leather armour, leaning against a spear. Eyes closed, it is the source of the terrible snoring."



The Gorilla is fully asleep, standing up and leaning against spear. It can be crept past or ruthlessly slain in its sleep. Either way, the character engaging in such activity must make an appropriate sneak test.

Gorilla Guard AC 7 [12]; MV 14; HD 1 ; hp 6 ; #Att 1 Spear; D 1d6; Saving Throw 18 ; SR Berserker +2 to hit and damage; CR /XP 1/15.

3. COLLAPSED CORRIDOR

Here the characters can squeeze past a ruined section of corridor that is in danger of falling in.

"Here the corridor has collapsed into a rude mess of stone blocks and earth."

Upon closer inspection, characters will be able to see that it is possible to squeeze past the rubble, via a one foot gap. However anyone doing so must make a Saving Throw or lose 1d6 HP from falling rubble.

It takes an hour to dig a safe passage through. Roll for wandering monsters at least 2 times.

4. VIVISECTION ROOM

This dark squalid room used to be Aldric's 'cutting room' where he followed the instructions in the Book of the Serpents (see below) to create the Battle Apes and other abominations.

"A four foot high 6 foot square solid stone slab table, covered in blood, with manacles at the corners dominates this thirty foot square room. On the slab is the naked body of a headless woman In the North West corner is a slimy glass jar, about 2 foot high and 1 foot in diameter, with a broken lid lying nearby. In another glass jar of the same dimensions, suspended in preserving fluid is a gorilla's head. In a third jar is the head of a young woman with bleached blonde hair, mouth agape as if screaming. "

The head in the third jar is that of Vana (the Village Elder's daughter).

The whole scene is quite horrific, and all characters should make a Sanity Check.

An amorphous blob of chaotic mess clings to the ceiling in the north west corner. If drops on any living creature that comes near it. If the characters take their time examining the table and the jars it quietly crawls into position over the characters before dropping on them.

Lesser Crawling Corruption AC 2 [17]; MV 12; HD 4 ; hp 20 ; #Att 1 bite; D 1d8; Saving Throw 13 ; SR Immune to mind control magics, poison or disease ; CR/XP 4/120.

In the table in a secret compartment is a set of silver surgical tools worth 200 GP.

5. GORILLA DEN

Six Gorilla warriors make this large and comfortable cave their home.

"The stench is almost over bearing. It smells of wild powerful animals that have marked their dominion in the straw that covers the floor and the rough stone walls of this twenty foot square cave. Sitting on the floor in a rough circle are six large apes dressed in leather armour."

Gorilla warrior AC 7 [12]; MV 14; HD 1 ; hp 6 ; #Att 1 Spear; D 1d6; Saving Throw 18 ; SR Berserker +2 to hit and damage; CR /XP 1/15.

6 SLEEPING CAVES

These small caves, with straw on the floor are the homes of the following simians.

6a .One Orang-utan

Hospiti, Orang-utan Priest AC 6 [13]; MV 14; HD 4 ; hp 20 ; #Att 1 Mace; D 1d6; Saving Throw 13 ; SR Knows Cure Light Wounds, Protection from Evil and Curse ; CR /XP 5/240.

In his stash by his sleeping pile is an old scroll which tells the history of the Battle Apes from their proud and overblown perspective.

6b. Female apes

Gorilla females AC 7 [12]; MV 14; HD 1 ; hp 6 ; #Att 1 club; D 1d6; Saving Throw 18 ; SR Berserker +2 to hit and damage ; CR /XP 1/15.

6c. Silverback Gorilla leader

Ragra, Silverback Gorilla AC 5 [14]; MV 14; HD 3 ; hp 20 ; #Att 1 Battle Axe; D 1d8; Saving Throw 14 ; SR Berserker +3 to hit and damage; CR /XP 3/60.

7. CONSTRUCTION LAB

In this abandoned workshop, there are lots of pieces of hollowed-out stone statue. A complete statue is on a work bench at the far end of the room.

"This room is made up of three diamond-shaped chambers. There is a ten foot long corridor that runs through the bottom of the left hand cell. Everything is clean and well-presented. In each of the three diamond-shaped areas, there is a stone table. Laid out on each table is a stone statue of a warrior, broken up into hollow pieces."

One of the statues in the furthest chamber is complete

and is charged with protecting the room.

Animated Stone Statue AC 0 [19]; MV 10 ; HD 3 ; hp 20 ; #Att 1 fist; D 1d8; Saving Throw 14 ; SR None ; CR /XP 3/60.

Treasure: 200 Gp worth of Gold wiring & cogs in the hollow statues.

8. POTION BREWERY

This is the ruined remains of Aldric's Potion laboratory. His two chimpanzee assistants cower in terror hidden behind a patch of yellow mist.

"Bits of burnt wood and smashed glass vessels litter this room, which is made up of diamond shaped sub-rooms. The furthest sub-room shows signs of collapse, a pile of rubble and earth shows up underneath the strange yellow mist."

Two Chimpanzee Assistants cower in the shattered remains of the lab, which was destroyed by the raging Gorillas after Aldric's death. They are scared of the Gorillas, to the point that they are too scared to move from this room. Running low on water and food, they are in desperate state of mind.

Rimpi and Stimpi, Two Chimpanzee Assistants

AC 9 [10]; MV 14; HD 1 ; hp 6 ; #Att 1 dagger; D 1d4; Saving Throw 17 ; SR Rimpi knows Charm Person while Stimpi knows Sleep ; CR /XP 1/15.

The yellow mist hides the chimps, and is made in a large bronze incense burner that sits out spewing the gas in the corner. The chimps have enough yellow powder to cover a 30 x 30 area for five hours.

The chimps saved a box of 3 healing potions + 1 one unidentified (Blood of the Dragon), which is hidden in the rubble.

9. CREEPING DEATH.

Protecting Aldric's personal chambers are Entangling Vines, that attack any passers by.

"The corridor continues until suddenly there is a great green mass of creeping vines on both the north and south walls for a ten foot stretch. The vines narrow the passageway to five foot. How such a luxuriant growth of vegetation prospers in the pitch dark of the corridor is a mystery."

The vines of course are a strange alien plant from another world, which require only the blood of living creatures to survive. The ancient Serpent Men sorcerers discovered them in one of their many explorations

through the Shroud, and correctly assessed that they would make an ideal guardian for their complex. After the Serpent Men's disappearance from the complex, the vines where withered and dormant for years. Then Aldric arrived and revitalised them with fresh blood.

Entangling Vines AC 9 [10]; MV 0 ; HD 3 ; hp 18 ; #Att 6 stabbing shoots; D 1d4; Saving Throw 14 ; SR Entangle, as well as its standard attack it can shoot out a mass of vines that entangle a victim on a failed saving throw. Once entangled it does 1d4 strangling damage per round. A trapped victim may break free by rolling under his Strength on 3d6 ; CR /XP 4/120.

10. SORCERER'S LAB PT1

This area is part of the Sorcerer's lab, which is cut in half by collapsed ceiling. Here is found the shattered top half of Aldric's body.

"This room is half strewn with rubble from a collapsed ceiling. In the other half is a stone table with strangely shaped glass bottles, with weirdly coloured liquids, smeared liquid and smashed glass covers the rest of the floor. By the table is a copper brazier which has been knocked to the floor, spilling cold coals everywhere.

Lying partially under the rubble is the body of a man in a yellow robe. His young bearded face screams in horror and is covered with shards of glass which stick into his flesh. His hand clutches the neck of a glass bottle."

If the shattered glass bottles are examined there is signs that they have exploded with much force.

If the player's examine Aldric's body. They can find out the following:

"He is clutching the remains of a large globular glass potion bottle, which seems to have had a bitter tasting black liquid in it."

If pulled free of the rubble, the characters will find it is only the top half of the body. Guts and entrails flow out of the served torso. A sanity check is appropriate.

11. SORCERER'S LAB PT2

Here is the other half of the Sorcerer's lab, containing the lower half of Aldric's body and his spell book, which explains his actions.

"One half of the room is in ruin. The ceiling has collapsed, and rubble half obscures a pair of boots that poke out of the debris. Untouched against the wall furthest from the door you enter in is a small rude bed. On the bed is a large leather bound book."

If the characters search the room they will find the following

The book on is bed is Aldric's Journal (see below).

Under the bed is a small chest made out of black lacquered wood. The lock is trapped with a needle trap (make a Saving Throw or take 2d6 damage from poison). Within the chest is a book bound in human skin, see the Book of the Serpents below, and 100 GP.

The boots are attached to Aldric's legs.

THE BOOK OF THE SERPENTS

This tome, bound in human skin, details the practical consideration of creating what it calls "the Gruesome Zoo", which is basically a Vivimancy Laboratory. As well as the Spells Charm Person and Magic Missile (or Zoo Keeper's Tools as it refers to them), it details the gruesome and long procedures for creating Battle Apes, Crawling Corruption and other unspeakable Hybrids (let your imagination run wild here). A whole chapter is dedicated to the process of extracting a substance from sacred places where the Great Dragon's broken body was buried after the Serpent War, then brewing the Blood of the Dragon. Written in the obscure and near dead tongue of the Serpent Men, the book is full of Black Magic and merely reading it requires a Sanity saving throw.

The book is of immeasurable worth to surviving Serpent Men who will pursue the holder relentlessly, should they discover that its existence.

ALDRIC'S JOURNAL

This book doubled as a spell book and journal of Aldric's notes. Amongst the scrawls is a journal of the events leading up to his death.

ENTRY 1 : ARRIVAL (11 YEARS AGO)

I have returned. I have completed my 'apprenticeship' under that buffoon Jermis (Gods be praised the day I slit his throat) in that hell hole they call Peoplolis. Upon my return to Cragspire, I find my old childhood gang have taken over. They hold court in the Hungry Heron Inn and run a kangaroo court where anyone who looks at them funny ends up being sentenced to death. I believe my parents met their end this way. Tredo is their leader- or "Lord Blackthorn" as he insists being called. The others were all up for killing me, but I proved my magic by frying one of them with a bolt of magical force. Blackthorn wanted me as their 'court' sorcerer after that. Seeing as it is the only job in town, and I could do with the protection, I accepted. But what bleak work, terrorising and torturing the poor unfortunates who cling to sad life here. I shall leave soon for greater things.

ENTRY 2: FEEDING BLACKTHORN THE ELIXIR OF THE GODS (9 YEARS AGO)

Thank the gods I found the old lair that I discovered when I was a boy. After a morning of playing hide and seek with my old childhood friends, a terrifying game, where bows and arrows were employed, I eventually won out and gave them the slip in the ambush point. Under the Great Spire it was, mysterious as ever and as I stepped into the dark maw of oblivion I sensed destiny calling. Through the dark corridors I proceeded until I reached the place I had ventured many years ago. My younger self ran in terror from it, but older and wiser I embraced it: The Book bound in human skin. Trembling I opened the black lacquered lid of the box that contains it and behold there it was in all its dark glory! The Book of the Serpent, the guidebook to the Gruesome Zoo!

In the dark I researched its contents and after reopening the 'potion laboratory' my labours were rewarded. From the ingredients I found in the laboratory, I made a slickly black, almost toxic tar-like liquid. I bottled some of it and made my way out of the bowels of the earth towards the surface.

I returned to Cragspire. Blackthorn was livid and wanted to cut my head off, but one look at the vial of black liquid stayed his hand.

"Your tribute Lord, the BLOOD OF THE DRAGON!" I proclaimed to a crowd of cheering bandits."

ENTRY 3: EARLY EXPERIMENTS (7 YEARS AGO)

Blackthorn is completely insane now they say. I care not. Feeding him the Blood keeps him preoccupied and out of my way. I continue my experiments with little animals his men give me. I created mewling, pathetic things which singularly could not survive. Fortunately, I found a way of moulding them all together, into a foul blasphemous crawling thing that I have mentally commanded to protect the main vivimancy laboratory.

ENTRY 4: THE APES (1 YEAR AGO)

Ha ha haha aahahahahaa ahah ahaa! Success! Victory is mine! Finally, the secrets of the Gruesome Zoo have unfolded before me and Blackthorn has provided me with subjects truly worthy of my talents. A Travelling Circus came to Cragspire and as result fine specimens of Apehood have been delivered to me. I am performing the transformation that will give them intelligence on par with ours.

ENTRY 5: THE KIDNAPPING OF THE VILLAGE ELDAR'S DAUGHTER (1 MONTH AGO)

<After a good page of unintelligible scrawl, the following two lines leap out of the page >

I had Blackthorn's thugs bring me my beloved Vana. I have given her a new head, which will teach her to reject my affections. Ha HA!

NEW MONSTER: BATTLE APES

"Growling and howling, they charged at us. As their line reached ours, too late I saw that they were not the usual savage apes we were used to fighting in this hellish Jungle. In their hands were swords and maces, and they wore leather or scale armour. On the hill I espied a 'command group' that through the use of horns was coordinating their attack. I shouted a warning to our troops, but too late. We underestimated our enemy and lost the battle."

Born from the same Vivimancy experiments that produced the other species of giant apes, the Battle Apes were the pinnacle of the Serpent Men attempt to create troops to suppress the rebellion of man. It is said the experiment failed as the Battle Apes turned against their masters, accelerating the downfall of the Serpent Man Empire.

Battle Apes hold mankind in contempt, and attempt to dominate and enslave them wherever possible. The Battle Apes have legends, initially implanted in their culture by the devious Serpent Men, of the 'threat of man' and how they came from another world as an invading force, and if left unchecked will spread like a disease across the face of Zarth. Therefore man is to be subdued, any magicians killed, his 'civilisation' destroyed and his numbers kept down by periodic culls. Should a Battle Ape Empire ever emerge from the scattered and isolated groups that exist today, mankind would immediately be under threat from the Apes as they pursue this creed.

Battle Apes consist of three subspecies that act as three castes.



GORILLA

This subspecies is the warrior caste of the Battle Apes, arrogant, proud and aggressive. If not kept in check by the Orang-utans, they bully and dominate the weaker Chimpanzees and immediately put Ape Society on a war footing with any local humans.

YOUNG GORILLA

These inexperienced apes form the majority of the Battle Ape army.

Type: Ape

Armour Class: 7 [12]

Hit Dice 1

Attacks: 1 Scimitar (1d8)

Saving Throw: 17

Special: Berserker rage, +2 to hit and to damage.

Move: 14

Challenge Level/XP : 1/15 XP

SILVERBACK GORILLA

Silverbacks are veteran gorillas whose fur takes on a silvery tone. These Alpha males command the younger gorillas.

Type: Ape

Armour Class: 5 [14]

Hit Dice 3

Attacks: 1 Scimitar (1d8)

Saving Throw: 14

Special: Berserker rage, +3 to hit and to damage.

Move: 14

Challenge Level/XP : 3/60 XP

CHIMPANZEE

More timid and curious about life than their Gorilla kin, the Chimpanzees naturally form the magician and scholar caste of the Battle Apes. Where Gorillas dominate Battle Ape society, Chimpanzees are often reduced to the level of menial labourers, such is the contempt that the Gorillas hold for their weaker cousins.

Type: Ape

Armour Class: 9 [10]

Hit Dice 1

Attacks: 1 Dagger (1d4)

Saving Throw: 17

Special: Knows 1-2 first level spells (typically Sleep or Charm Person)

Move: 14

Challenge Level: 1/15 XP

ORANG-UTAN

The wise old men of the woods, the Orang-utans are the priest caste, and guard Battle Ape society from the awful truth about humans.

Type: Ape

Armour Class: 6 [13]

Hit Dice 4

Attacks: 1 Dagger (1d4)

Saving Throw: 13

Special: Knows 2 first level spells (typically Cure Light Wounds, Protection from Evil and Curse)

Move: 14

Challenge Level: 5/240

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Blood of the Dragon

By Newt Newport

“Under a land shrouded in volcanic ash punctuated by rocky spires that tear at the sky they say the Great Dragon sleeps. Tyanos the Black, Trickster god of the long dead Hu-Pi people stole their blood and bottled it for his insane delight. As drink of the gods it confers immortality to mortal man, but at what terrible price?

The very quest for this elixir is insane. A trip into a harsh and unforgiving land of the Spires, a poor and bandit ridden weirdland, inhabited by the likes of Black Joop, Nigus the Headless and the Mother of Hydra. Names that should send a shiver down your spine. So pick up your sword, down the last of your ale to steady any nerves and stride off towards a great adventure amongst the rocks that defy the sky.”

Hongra the Horny, seasoned Scout and Guide.

Blood of the Dragon is a short introductory adventure set in the ancient and ruined lands of The Spires.

- ✦ A Rough Guide to the Spires
- ✦ Adventures: The Lair of the Battle Apes
- ✦ New Monsters – The fearsome Battle Apes.