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Adventure Module M1 Jewel of the Lunar Rift

By Extildepo



Things are not right at Du Sharid Manor. Months ago, a deranged parish priest and his most devout followers formed a heretical cult. These self-proclaimed "Seekers of the White Heart" chose the desolate Wild Hills to practice their secret rites; but the strange goings on at the Wild Hills did not escape the prying eyes of the more pious villagers who set out to confront the cultists. Once there, the villagers witnessed something terrifying and unexpected. Since the events of that night, the cultists have vanished, but the remaining serfs of Du Sharid now live in constant paranoia. Your party has been hired by the local bishop to to learn the truth about what happened at Du Sharid Manor. For use with Swords & Wizardry (or the like) and designed for the experienced Referee, Jewel of the Lunar Rift is a first-level campaign-starter taken from my personal notes and an introduction to my setting, Messoria. Included as a bonus are campaign journals from my own sessions.

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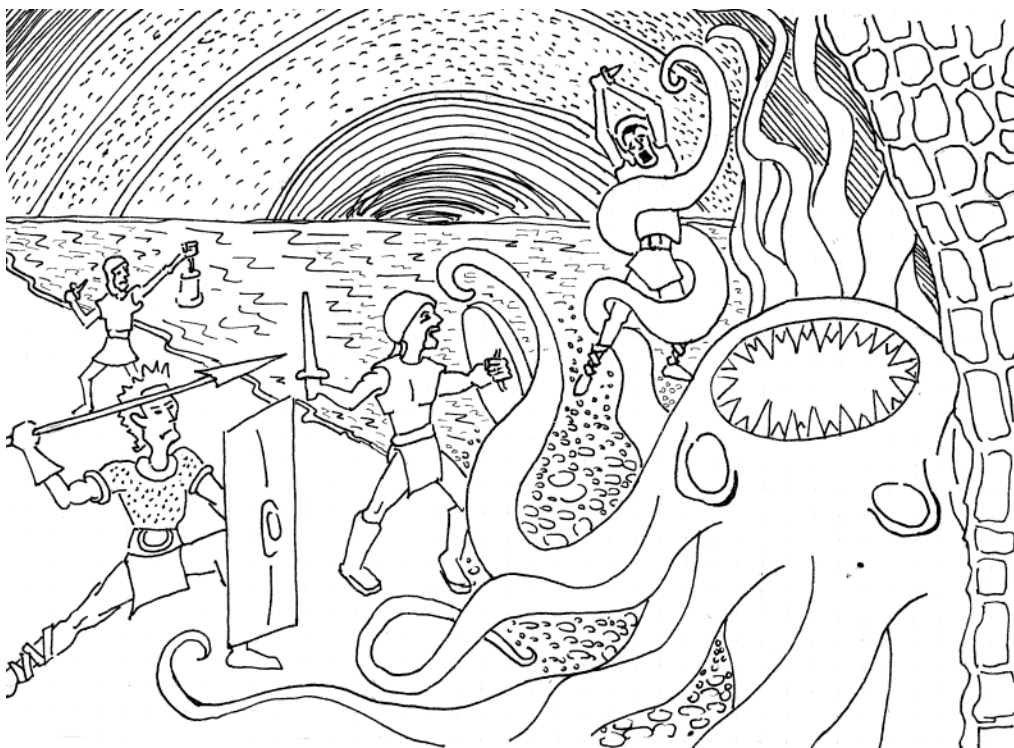


Circling the great moon, Oculus is its gleaming satellite; a small glint the lunar eye called Isus. The Clergy generally regard this small celestial body as secondary for the testaments of the Prophet Asmund make few references to Isus, but there are some within the Church who have come to regard Isus as a sign of the world's slow but inevitable decline towards Final Judgement. They see Isus more as an adulteration, perhaps (among strongly opinionated theologians) an abomination placed there by yet-unseen forces who hope to further tempt Humankind towards chaos - an enemy who lies in slumber, awaiting its earthly minions to awaken it - a soul devourer who is ever-watching and slowly mustering strength. Perhaps this is why those uncommon lunar phases where Isus casts its shadow in the center of a full moon, referred to by some as "the little judgments," is a time to stay indoors and pray for guidance.

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INTRODUCTION

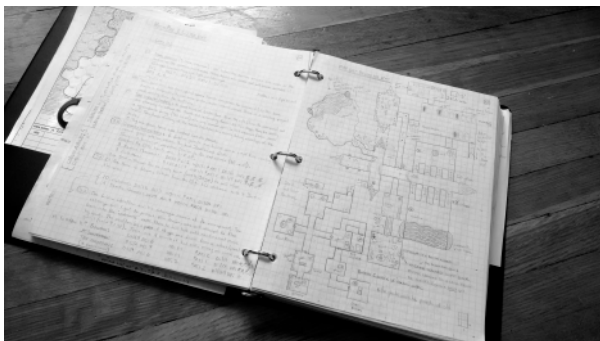
Welcome to **M1: Jewel of the Lunar Rift**, the first in a series of adventure modules set in Messoria, my personal and very idiosyncratic old-school fantasy campaign setting. A skillful Referee might easily fit this adventure and all the information herein into their own milieu; but note that Messoria is a stand-alone setting. This adventure module is meant to be a very cursory introduction to Messoria and I hope to produce a much more detailed sourcebook in the coming months. Think of this adventure module as a small taste of what's to come.

This edition of the Jewel of the Lunar Rift is designed to be used with **Swords & Wizardry** because it most-resembles the Original and "Classic" B/X, editions of the **First Fantasy Role Playing Game**, which is the system I prefer and run my games in. This work is therefore fully compatible with said rules systems, but it is also a wireframe on which you can easily adapt to your favorite edition or simulacrum. I should note here that Swords & Wizardry, S&W, and Mythmere Games are trademarks of Matthew J. Finch. Verisimilitude Society Press and myself are not affiliated with Matthew J. Finch, Mythmere Games™, or Frog God Games.

This module is written for experienced Referees in search of a sandbox-style campaign-starter (or as a source of ideas for their own campaign). For brevity and convenience, monster stats appear at the end of each key description so that you may be easily adjust or convert them to whatever system you are using.

In the old-school tradition I have chosen to take an inside-out approach to this material by presenting only what is necessary to smoothly run this adventure. I have glossed over or outright omitted many high-level historical and geopolitical details about the setting. This approach is meant to simultaneously ease both the Referee and the players into the milieu without too much effort. For this strategy to work the Referee must familiarize themselves with all the material herein (excluding the Appendices which are optional). It will do the Referee well to have a roster of NPCs on hand (farm hands, serfs, manor guardsmen, barmaids, innkeepers, merchants, etc.), for this adventure takes place in a civilized area. In most cases the names and occupations of important NPCs are given but their individual characteristics and or stats are omitted.

Jewel of the Lunar Rift is an adventure module born from my own personal campaign notes. The material presented herein was "completed" (that is, explored to the satisfaction of the players) in four four-hour game sessions. The major campaign-storyline (and details about the wider-world) evolved from these first four sessions. We began at Level 1 using the "3d6 in order" method of generating character abilities. Because I felt it may be of interest, I have included my own campaign journals as an appendix herein. These journals were part of a semi-weekly newsletter I sent out to my players during the course of our campaign.



MODULE BACKGROUND

Recently, several serfs of Du Sharid Manor became involved in a heretical cult which culminated in their rather spectacular demise. It all began when a lowly farmer, Ol' Ed Butterbot, tore out a strange and ancient tree from his orchard. Within the uprooted and tangled roots of petrified wood he stumbled upon a small and utterly grotesque statuette. Fearing he had found something heretical and perhaps dangerous, Ol' Ed took the object to the local parish priest and alderman Atar Lobe Du Sharid ("Atar" is Messorian for Father). Ol' Ed is much wiser than he appears, for the statuette was indeed very dangerous: a conduit to a soul-devouring alien force. The priest was instantly fascinated by the object's theological implications and within weeks became obsessed with it - marveling at it, studying it, and eventually jealously guarding its esoteric secrets. It seems the object had driven him quietly mad and perhaps some kind of demonic possession had indeed taken hold. Over the next month Atar Lobe had convinced a few of his more loyal and trusted acolytes to aid him in "confidential experiments" concerning the object. Over time these experiments began to resemble sacrilegious rites, but Lobe and his followers believed they were onto something. He named their new sect, The Seekers of the White Heart. They chose a desolate area within the manor known as the Wild Hills, upon a feature known as High Crescent Hill, not too far from the Temple but secluded enough as to keep prying ears and eyes away from their moonlit sabbats. Despite the secrecy, some villagers began to sense something was amiss. Lobe certain members of the congregation. Rumors began to circulate about strange events in the Wild Hills. One night a few villagers, venturing forth with pitchforks and torches, decided to take matters into their own hands and to possibly put a stop to these rituals. What they witnessed that night was nothing short of terrifying. Just as Isus met Oculus' center (a sacred duo lunar period known as a Little Judgement) the cult's unspeakable rites ended in a feverish climax that opened, as if by some unseen force, a great rift upon the High Crescent Hill right under them, swallowing all twenty men at once. Fearful of this divine or perhaps demonic phenomenon the villagers ran, vowing never to return to the damned site. Atar Lobe and his acolytes have not been seen since and they are presumed dead. A new priest and manor alderman arrived a few weeks later from Mersey Town: the young Atar Arn Lucas. His first order of business was a public burning of all Lobe's "robes, personal effects and blasphemous notes." Nevertheless, the congregation of Du Sharid Temple now live in constant paranoia for the massive opening still remains and what many believe to be goblins have been spotted in and around the Wild Hills at night. To exasperate matters, some livestock have gone missing.

NOTES FOR THE REFEREE

This module takes place entirely in a small and somewhat cloistered rural area known as Merseyhomm Shire. Merseyhomm Shire is located in the center the Isle of Nirelok (see map N-1 - Isle of Nirelok). Nirelok is a geographically isolated and largely unclaimed portion of the greater continent known as Messoria. Most of the Southern portion of the Nirelok has been colonized into several baronies under the greater mainland kingdom of Turan. This collection of baronies is simply called the province of Nire. Nire remains under the jurisdiction of Turan but is practically politically autonomous and strongly influenced by the Church of the Prophet Asmund (the only sanctioned religion in the kingdom). The mountainous Northern portion of Nirelok is wild and politically unstable. Various humanoid tribes, Brown Elves of the Fin Valley (i.e. gnomes) and the Dwarves of Kroner fight for and lay claim to portions of it. At the Referee's option the players may be shown Map N1 - Isle of Nirelok. This large-scale map (1 hex = 25 miles) does not reveal any information that dwellers of the Isle would not already know.

Smallstone: A Gateway to the Underworld

Unbeknownst to most of the people living there, buried underneath Merseyhomm Shire is a once-great but now forgotten ancient city called Smallstone. The rift exposed an opening to the long-lost city's vast sewer system, secret underground complexes and catacombs. Parts of this complex are connected to the Underworld: a vast and very active sub-setting with its own political structures, spanning most of the continent. An Underworld goblin horde plan to use this newly discovered breach to stealthily raid the Du Sharid Manor. As for Atar Lobe and his followers they were indeed killed but the evil presence that engulfed their lives and possessed their souls has charged them to walk the earth again as undead. The astute reader might ask, but what was the purpose of the Lobe and his cultists' fate? Why would this mysterious idol create the means of their

demise? The answer lies in the secret underground world of Smallstone, for hidden there is an artifact of great power: The White Heart. This sentient and highly willed object acts as a medium between a powerful alien force and the mundane world. The White Heart is bent on being excavated from its current resting place so that it may once again go to work on devising some plan to allow its alien masters entry into this world. To do this it must find the right medium - a cleric or sorcerer of great power and influence - perhaps the Bishop of Merseyhomm, Bishop Saul Fondelle. Lobe was but a pawn and so too (if unwittingly) is our Party of Adventurers for they have been hired by Bishop Saul Fondelle to investigate the rift and to determine the true nature of Atar Lobe's fate.

Merseyhomm Shire

Nestled somewhat in the middle of the Southern portion of Isle of Nirelok well within the Province of Nire is Merseyhomm Shire (total pop. 1094). This normally quiet shire is comprised of four agricultural-ecclesiastical villages, or manors, that surround the old town of Merseyhomm, known simply as "Mersey Town" by the local serfs and farmers. The outer manors are named after the four founding noble families who claim stewardship of the land therein. They are (from NW to SE): Du Sharid, Narnir, Catatu and Lome.

Merseyhomm Shire focuses on the export of grains (such as wheat and barley), wine and spirits (e.g. vineyards and orchards). The Barron-Mayor, Ayeli Egnar (appointed by the Governor of Nire) presides over the entire Shire and resides in Mersey Town. He is counseled by the High Priest, Bishop Saul Fondelle (also based in Mersey Town) and four Aldermen (one for each of the surrounding manors) as well as five councilors elected from the merchant class.

Du Sharid Manor (pop. 150) is named after its lord and founder, "The Great Father" Atar Myles Du Sharid - a legendary cleric-warrior of days past. For the past 20 years his great-great grandson, Atar Lobe Du Sharid was both the parish priest and alderman for the manor - that is, until his recent disappearance. A new parish priest and alderman, Atar Arn Lucas was recently appointed and sent from Mersey Town. This module takes place primarily in Du Sharid Manor and therefore more detail is given to this area.

Town of Merseyhomm or "Mersey Town"

Mersey Town (core population 524) is the major trading center of the shire consisting of the original Barony fortification, many wood and stone buildings and an open market. Players will find most of what they need for adventuring here and will be familiar with the town's basic layout. Places of interest include the First Temple to Asmund (seat of Bishop Fondelle), "Thieves Row," "Sage's Row," The Hollow Log Tavern, The Olde Oak Inn, the Barron's Villa and the Traveler's Open Market Square. The town is beyond the scope of this module and will be detailed in its sequel, M2: Shadowplay in Mersey Town. For now, the Referee may gloss over town details.



MESSORIAN RULES VARIANTS AND PECULIARITIES

Messoria and its principle kingdom, Turan is a socially rigid milieu. It is important that Player Characters are somehow "outside" the normal social order for they will otherwise not have the necessary mobility and social latitude to progress as adventurers. Luckily, this module creates a scenario where this is possible. Before attempting to run this or any other Messoria-based scenario please understand the following:

Clerics and Paladins

Clerics are perhaps the hardest class to play. Players who elect for this class may find the codified and hierarchical nature of the Church difficult and antithetical to the adventuring way of life. Nevertheless, a cleric may make an interesting case, especially if he manages to progress into higher levels (see below). The Church of the Prophet Asmund is an incredibly important institution not only in Nire (where it was founded) but also throughout Messoria and especially in Turan. No other religious view is tolerated by the men of Nire. The Church is ruled by a single Patriarch, "His Holiness," Atar Lunitari V (Level 10) under whom there are 10 Cardinals (Level 9) and 30 or so Bishops (Levels 5 - 8) stationed throughout the lands. There is a limited number of Bishop and Cardinal placements and so a player character cannot advance past 5th level until a position becomes "available" (i.e. someone dies) and are appointed a placement. Atar Lome III is the current Bishop-Cardinal of Nire and is seated in the city of Middetun. The Clergy tend to come from noble families or the upper merchant class and so they do not long for material wealth and are well to do. They often hold political positions, especially as court counselors, aldermen and judges - this is in keeping with the Church's concern with social-political morality. All clergy train for warfare in preparation for, "The Great Judgement."

There is an order within the church called the Aaronites who might make suitable Player Characters. The Aaronite calling requires the cleric to venture forth into the world in search of items of esoteric, spiritual or religious significance. These items are to be given over to the church for further research or destruction (depending on the nature of the artifact). Other Aaronite tasks include leading witch hunts and anti-cabalistic (i.e. anti-magic user) initiatives. Clerics and paladins do not knowingly work with magic users unless they are conspiring to expose and condemn them. In reality, many high-level Clerics are closeted magic users who jealously guard their secret and forbidden knowledge.

Paladins are specialized soldiers funded, trained and controlled by the Church. In a word they are, "crusaders." They serve the Church's dual virtues of upholding morality and maintaining constant vigilance for the Great Judgement. There are several orders of paladin, the most common being the Order of the Redd Kross whose main priority is the hunting of druids, witches, warlocks, sorcerers and other heretics.

Monks (Order of Kuzure Domen)

All monks belong to the Order of Kuzure Domen. This once-heretical sect is now tolerated by the church and possesses its own internal hierarchy codes in parallel with the Church. Not much is known about this secretive organization and the monks are therefore feared by most common men. They are seekers of knowledge and truth - experts in theology, philosophy, cosmology, physics, metaphysics, the psyche and magic or "the arcane" and (of course) martial arts. Please note that the order's interest in magic is purely academic for monks are forbidden to practice magic. All monks can therefore read magic, copy/translate/transcribe scrolls and can identify magical items. There is but a single Lama (i.e. "The Enlightened One") who oversees the order and accepts council from the papal office, Atar Lunitari V; although some would characterize this dialectic as "lip service" on the part of the Lama. The headquarters of the Order of Kuzure Domen remains a guarded secret. Unlike the clergy, the Order tends to recruit from the serfs, commoners, freemen and noblemen alike, seeking out those who have "the natural gifts."

Elves and other Demi Humans

Elves are rare in Nire. Most will be outcasts from Azure (the last known sovereign kingdom of Elves) or "half breeds." Some scholars argue that "pure elves" can no longer be found in this world and that even the Elves of Azure are adulterated with human blood (thus most Azurians live for centuries but are not immortal as legend depicts).

Brown Elves (i.e. Gnomes) are indigenous to the lands around Fin Lake. The gnomes of the Gnom Hills, Gnomvill and Galshill are "civil," settled into an agrarian life and subjects of Turan. The gnomes of the Fin Valley are "wild," although they trade with their "civilized" cousins.

Dwarves are uncommon but tolerated. Most urban dwarves are the descendants of assimilated Kronerians or recent expatriates of Kroner. There are dwarves who have settled in the Han Mountains and other mountain ranges in northern Nirelok centuries ago. These are "outcasts" of Kroner who consider themselves sovereign. There are still conflicts around the Serpent Lake between Kronerians and separatist "tribes." The leaders of Nire choose to remain neutral, not wanting to upset their old enemy or create new ones among the petty warlords. To complicate matters, the mineral-rich Northern mountain ranges are also dominated by warring Orc, Goblin and Giant tribes.

Magic Users and Druids

Both magic users or "sorcerers" and druids or "witches" are feared and reviled by the Church and most of society. They must practice their art (or in the case of druids, their religion) in utmost secrecy for face dire consequences, usually at the hands of the Aaronites. Druids tend to live in isolation and are outsiders who eschew urban settings. They are routinely hunted by the Redd Kross. Magic users tend to be urbanites who work as sages, councilors and scholars by day and practice or research their arcane arts under the cloak of night. Some of these people are pillars of the community. Magic users organize into "cabals," the most prominent being the Guild of the White Hand, their motto being, "through knowledge comes the only true salvation." All members of the Guild are sworn to secrecy by pain of death. A true guildsman will take his own life before divulging the identities of his comrades.

Two Moons

This world has two moons: Isus and Oculus. Oculus resembles our own moon in both size and phases. Orbiting around Oculus is a much smaller sphere named Isus. Isus is only seen half the time (when it is not hidden behind the dark side of Oculus). The most visible aspect of the small moon is the shadow it casts upon the surface of Oculus, often resembling the iris of some great eye. Three to four times a year, Isus meets Oculus' center - these periods are named "Little Judgments." The Little Judgements are marked with great religious significance throughout Turan and Nire.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

There are several ways to start this adventure, the most straightforward being that the adventuring party are residents of Mersey Town hired by Bishop Fondelle to investigate the true fate of Atar Lobe Du Sharid. Obviously, the tale has reached the ears of Fondelle and he is anxious to learn if some demonic force is truly at work in the nearby manor. He has asked one of his trusted Acolytes, a member of the Aaronites, named Atar Lorne Houseal to arrange and oversee an expedition. Lorne has been given generous church funds to complete the task. He will be responsible for recruiting a suitable team of mercenaries and hires for the expedition (i.e. the Party). Lorne is expected to report back with some explanation within a fortnight.

Thieves, rangers, magic users and the like can be locals posing as "general" freemen-for-hire, porters, light bearers, pack handlers, scribes or general mercenary types. Professional soldiers (i.e. fighters) who are not tied to the military are rare in the Shire. Perhaps these characters are outsiders who have arrived with a market caravan and are currently on extended "shore leave" or (for whatever reason) permanently relieved of their duties.

The funds granted to hires for 2 weeks work (upfront) are as follows:

Professional Soldier (Serjeant / Tactical Leader): 5gp for each member in their party

Scribe (Mapmaker / Journal Keeper): 75gp (must have own materials)

General Mercenaries /Sword for Hire: 2gp each + basic lodging

Other Hires (porters, linkboys, etc.): 1gp each + basic lodging

Keep in mind that one night's lodging is typically 2sp per person for a common room and 4sp per person for a private room (note, on Nire 20sp = 1gp). Lodging provided will be in the common room - scribes and professional soldiers are expected to pay for themselves for they will probably prefer private rooms.

Hires are expected to have their own equipment for their respective role. Part of the agreement is that all "treasure" found will be equally split among the members of the expedition. Of course, any objects of "theological significance" (i.e. magic items of an esoteric nature) must be surrendered to the Church (i.e. Lorne) at journey's end (unless kept secret, of course).

At the Referee's whim, the Party may be required to meet Lorne at one of the above-mentioned taverns (responding to ads placed around the Shire) to accept and negotiate terms, or they may meet somewhere in Mersey Town, or the Referee may skip the formalities altogether and assume all Party members are now acquainted, rooms booked at the Bronze Apple, and have set off towards the Rift.

Special note regarding monks in this regard: Brothers and sisters of the Order of Kuzure Domen will, in the eyes of the Bishop, make the most suitable candidates to lead the expedition as this curious and troublesome sect seem naturally attracted to the unknown and dangerous. Unlike Clerics, Monks will actually tolerate the use of magic for as they do view the "vice" with mild trepidation and suspicion they are not in the business of "punishing sinners." They will only report such doings if directly questioned by a superior. Magic users are therefore "safe" to operate around such characters. On the other hand, a cleric may feel compelled to report the sorcerer to the church (or take matters into their own hands on the spot).

The Bronze Apple Public House is adjacent to the Du Sharid Temple compound and Ol' Ed's Orchard. It can provide the Party with room and board, information in the form of rumors and overheard conversation as well as a temporary base of operations. Similarly, the House of Hospitality, a much larger complex further East on Old Hunter's Road near the Gatehouse, could also serve as a home base and rumor mill.

Atar Lorne Houseal: A stout individual (5' 4") with a shaved head and neck beard. Level 2 Cleric, Human, STR:14, INT:12, DEX:12, WIS:15, CON:10, CHR:10, AC: ring mail 6 [13], Attacks: Wooden Club (1d6), Saves: 17, Special: Spells (1 first-level), Move: 12, Align: Law, HP: 12, EQ: robes, high hard boots, holy symbol of Asmund (a small but decorative wooden scepter), belt, 2 large belt pouches, 6 wax candles, tinderbox, 1 week of iron rations

By all accounts the stout and strong Atar Houseal is a very pious man. He will be adamant about such lawful things as staying on schedule, personal hygiene, table manners, routine prayer, etc. He will not tolerate blasphemy in any shape or form. He believes himself a great leader but (sadly) is not and will make several blunders that put the Party in jeopardy (at Referee's discretion, of course). If, for whatever reason, he is injured he will retreat to the Inn and appoint the strongest "most worthy" fighter type the intern leader, who must continue with the expedition and then report back to him. He suffers from vertigo.

KEY TO MAP E1 - DU SHARID MANOR

A) GATEHOUSE

For travelers coming from the northern lands via the East-Side Road, the Gatehouse is the first sign of any civilization for hundreds of miles. This well fortified, three-story fieldstone building sports thick walls, a portcullis, a stable inside the bailey, arrow slits and battlements. Twenty guardsmen are stationed here. The guards are well known to keep a record of and charge tariffs (10% of the estimated value of their goods, real or perceived) or even detain "questionable types" entering the Shire. The guards will not take kindly to being questioned and will keep their knowledge of recent events to themselves perhaps divulging as much as, "strange going on in these parts - can't be too careful when it comes to outsiders," before sending them on their way.

B) HOUSE OF HOSPITALITY (TRAVELLER'S INN AND TAVERN)

The House of Hospitality is a rather large tavern and inn complete with full-service stables. It is run by Ol' Ted Barely his wife, Angela two adult sons Len and Ted Jr., and daughter Mary. The place is frequented by both local folk, folk from neighboring manors and travelers. There are ten private rooms available for rent on a nightly basis as well as a common hostel. The private rooms (4sp per person) range in size, some can accommodate up to 2, others are large enough to accommodate up to 5. The rooms have good beds, chairs and tables as well as a small safety chest (500gp capacity). A key for the safety chest will be happily provided by the staff, free of charge. Of course, Len and Ted Jr. keep skeleton keys and will search their guest's rooms, including the chests, as soon as it is obvious that the Party has set out for the day. This is how they like to keep any "skullduggery" in their establishment at bay. If the Party is in search of more mercenaries to join them this place will be their best bet.

In terms of gleaning information about the incident at the Wild Hills, NPCs will give fragmented accounts of the situation (see MODULE BACKGROUND above). Most NPCs will not be comfortable with the subject and have been told by Atar Lucas (Atar Lobe's successor) to stay quiet on the matter lest they disturb residual evil. Here are some example statements that might be said by select NPCs (at the Referee's discretion):

"T'was a night of a Small Judgement. Atar Lucas says it's best that we keep silent on it for speaking of it opens the heart to evil." Upon further questioning: "Asmund was angered, for the ground shook and opened under the Heretics, swallowing them!" Others will give this NPC side glances, as if to say, "Be quiet!"

"Some say Ol' Ed, the Brewmaster is to blame for all of this." Upon further questioning: "It was under that petrified tree he dug up in his orchard where he found the cursed black idol. It drove Atar Lobe mad." Someone will cut this person off, as if they are saying too much.

"Since the eve of the Small Judgement, horrid little green fey (ed. these are goblins) have been seen lurking around the Wild Hills near the Crescent Riff. Several sheep have gone missing!"

C) BRONZE APPLE PUBLIC HOUSE

Less frequented by travelers this small tavern nevertheless does have two rooms for rent on a fortnight basis. Each room can accommodate up to three (2gp per person per fortnight or 2sp per person per night). Two guardsmen normally stationed at the West end of the Hunter's Trail will frequent the place, choosing to sit in the bay window near the entrance so that they can easily spot and quickly accost any unknowns travelling along the trail. Most patrons are local serfs and guildsmen, including Ol' Ed, the Brewmaster and the Miller. The proprietor, Titus Newberry is a defrocked priest in his late 40's (now married with small children) who is nevertheless on good terms with the locals and the new parish priest, Atar Arn Lucas. He was friendly with Atar Lobe Du Sharid but had a falling out shortly before the "incident." Titus serves as a serjeant in the Shire reserve (fighting with his clerical mace). It is not polite to ask a defrocked priest why and under what circumstances they left the clergy - they are forbidden by law to divulge such information anyway.

Of course, Titus is now a powerful magic user (CL 4/MU 6) and a member of the Guild of the White Hand. Any local magic users would have heard of him by his "Guild Name," Devilchaser. Titus was once lawful good but since having a nervous breakdown that had him defrocked he has become more neutral, sometimes chaotic good. He practices his arcane research in a hidden chamber in the cellar of the Bronze Apple. The nature of his work is dangerous. He is obsessed with the spell Gate, a spell that is still beyond his capacity. Nevertheless, he has obtained 3 scrolls of the spell - one has been rendered ineffective in a botched attempt of at copying the spell into his books. Titus will be willing to share his spells and knowledge for those who hold an anti-church stance.

Titus has a theory about the incident on the Wild Hill:

"There are Outside forces at work here in the Shire. I don't mean people, but beings who lurk in the netherworld of the shadowlands and perhaps beyond. They are not of this physical realm but seek to gain entry to our world. That black idol that Ed dug up was fashioned by them and left to rest here many centuries ago. It is a conduit or sorts – a link between worlds. Its sole purpose is to corrupt the spirit of a "sensitive" like Lobe, so that he may do their bidding here on Messoria while they cannot, for they are soul devourers and seek to walk this world again! Whatever the pious and misguided people of this parish might think, Lucas included, the opening of the Rift on the Crescent Hill was not the divine work of Asmund. No, it was the work of whatever beings created that idol!"

O! Ed feels that many in the parish secretly hold him responsible for the mysterious happenings in the Manor because he discovered the black idol. He is eager to clear his name and willing to tell his side of the story:

"That tree was a nuisance, black an' twisted it is. Good perch for the sly crow to roost and speak fell things in 'er dark tongue. I never liked the look of it, even as a lad. For more summers than I can count that tree haunted me, haunted me in my dreams too! The thing looks all burnt but fire don't take to it and nothin' grows 'round it. It took some time m' strongest oxen to get it down, but 'ey did it, under the stars. The roots run deep and were all twists and turns. That's when I found it. Lodged between there. The Black Statue. It was horrible to look at, like some insect, and I dare not touch it. I ran to the Temple to tell Lobe. I knew it wasn't natural. Could y' blame me?"

Typical Guardsman: DX 12, HD: 1, AC: ring mail 6 [13], Attacks: Sword (1d8), Saves: 17, Special: None, Move: 12, Align: Any, Moral: 9, Challenge Level/XP: 1/20, HP: 6 each

Titus "Devilchaser" Newberry: Level 4 Cleric/Level 6 Magic-User, Human, STR:13, INT:17, DEX:12, WIS:13, CON:13, CHR:12, AC: no armor 9 [10], Attacks: dagger 1d4, Saves: 10, Special: Spells (4 level-1, 2 level-2, 2 level-3), Move: 12, Align: Neutrality, HP: 12, EQ: robes, high hard boots, belt, 2 large belt pouches, spellbook, 1 week of iron rations

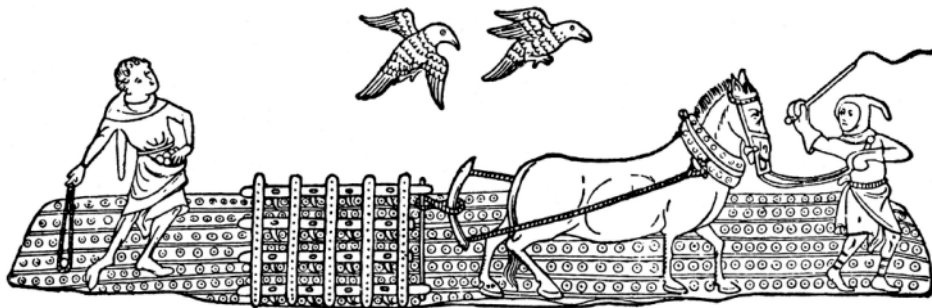
D) TEMPLE AND MANOR HOUSE

The Manor House is a large villa (more like a small castle) complete with heavy doors, portcullis, battlements, arrow slits and a keep, acts as the village millhouse, grain and storage, brewhouse and market area. A few proprietors have sundry shops within the walls. In times of strife the serfs know to retreat to this defensible and well-guarded compound. The keep of the Manor House also houses 30 guardsmen including their Chief, Pete Elmsman (3rd Level Fighter). Pete will only join the expedition (and bring guardsmen along) if he has reason to think the village is in immediate jeopardy.

Pete Elmsman: Level 3 Fighter, Human, STR:17, INT:12, DEX:12, WIS:17, CON:13, CHR:10, AC: ring mail 6 [13], Attacks: Sword (1d8), Saves: 17, Special: None, Move: 12, Align: Law, HP: 20 EQ: robes, high hard boots, belt, 2 large belt pouches, tinderbox, 1 week of iron rations

Typical Guardsman: DX 12, HD: 1, AC: ring mail 6 [13], Attacks: Sword (1d8), Saves: 17, Special: None, Move: 12, Align: Any, Moral: 9, Challenge Level/XP: 1/20, HP: 6 each

The village Temple is typical of small parishes - a large sanctuary, several private rooms and studies and a small dormitory. The village priest is currently Atar Arn Lucas (2nd Level



Cleric). He has rid himself of most of Atar Lobe's "blasphemous" notes, tomes and accoutrements by way of a public burning upon his arrival, much to the relief of his parish. He remembers very little of these things (or chooses not to reveal what he might know). He is friendly and eager to prove himself in the community. He will aid the expedition however he can but will not join it. The basement of the temple is currently off limits to all for it has not been "properly cleansed" of the heresy. The Bishop is expected to pay a visit in the coming months to perform those rites.

E) ED'S FELLED TREE

In the middle of this otherwise pleasant and well-ordered apple orchard there is a large hole where the ancient "black tree" once stood. The tree itself is gone, dragged away and left outside of Ed's farmstead. Nothing of importance can be gleaned here. Of the tree, Ed might say: "It was a nuisance, black and twisted. The wood's hard to cut and fire won't take to it." Ed doesn't know what to do with the tree. At the Referee's discretion, perhaps a large sample of this "tainted" wood can be made into an exceptionally hard club (+1 or more) or even a cursed item.

F) THE LUNAR RIFT / WILD WASTES

Long ago this portion of the Shire was deemed infertile and untillable. Stunted and wind-sculpted evergreens, dry thorn bushes and boulders dot the hilly landscape. There is one particularly large hill (about 60ft high) which seems to be of irregular shape. It's hard to see from below but once climbed, the large hill appears to be split along its ridge so as to create a crescent shaped crevice about 250ft long and 50ft at its widest. The rift appears at least 100ft deep. The upper strata consist of dry powdery dirt followed by pebbles and glacial sediment and then dense clay until about 60ft down where it becomes shale, the bottom appears to be some form of bedrock however once if the Party makes the decent they will find the bottom strata to actually be of ancient (perhaps Elven) construction of tightly fitted cobble stone (known as cyclopean masonry). This is an unearthed portion of the sewers of Smallstone. The crevice floor is about 20ft wide and 30ft in length and is 40ft below sea level (dwarves will sense this). Goblins have pounded metal spikes into the NE face of the rift to allow easy climbing in and out. Their tracks will lead to the concealed door in area 1 on map E2 (see next section "Below the Rift").

KEY TO MAP E2 "BELOW THE RIFT"

LEVEL 1 THE RIFT TO THE ANCIENT CATACOMBS OF THE FIRST AGE

These catacombs and ancient sewers were once part of an ancient Elven city now buried under the shire. Indeed, many of the oldest buildings in Merseyhomm can trace their foundations to this once great city. The sewer level is crawling with giant rats. The goblins use them for their meat and listen to their bustle as means of detecting the presence of more formidable opponents. There is a 1 in 6 chance of encountering 1d4 giant rats per turn.

Giant Rats: DX: 10, HD: 1/2, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: Bite (1d3), Saves: 18, Special: 5% are diseased, Move: 12, Align: Neutrality, Morale: 8, Challenge Level/XP: A/5, HP: 2 each

1. THE RIFT / BODIES OF THE HERETICS

Once the party have made the 100' descent to the bottom of the rift they will notice nine half-skeletonized bodies of the ill-fated cultists scattered around the ancient stone floor. They wear the red and white robes of an acolyte, now soiled and tattered from exposure. These nine bodies are cursed and will become animated if disturbed (i.e. searched, touched or moved in any way). They are mindless and will fight until destroyed. This exposed ancient sewer corridor is now cut off by rubble on both the North and South, however there is a concealed side exit along the East wall. A Ranger might be able to spot goblin tracks towards the sight of the door (see below).

9 Near Skeletons: DX: 12, HD: 1, AC: 8 [11], Attacks: Strike (1d6), Saves: 17, Special: None, Morale: 12, Move: 12, Align: Neutrality, Challenge Level/XP: 1/15, HP: 5 each

2. THE GOBLIN'S SECRET EXIT

This concealed door has been spiked open and can therefore be spotted easily without any checks. Rangers (or thieves, elves and halflings if there are no Rangers in your campaign) can track up to 3 individual Goblins to their nearby camp (area 3A,B and C). Traces include footprints, bone splinters, traces of drool, missing livestock hair/feathers/blood, etc., and the stench of smoke (cooked rat).

3. GOBLIN ENCAMPMENT

A small horde of Goblins, whilst routinely exploring the fringes of the vast Underworld, have discovered the rift and are planning to use the opening in a surprise attack on the Manor and surrounds. At this stage they are merely a reconnaissance party of 30 individuals (among them a minor chieftain). They have made camp in section C. Despite orders to the contrary, members of scouting party could not help themselves and stolen several livestock when exploring the manor surface several nights ago. The chieftain has since put a kibosh on this behavior not wanting to spoil their surprise advantage.

3A. Guards Eating Rats:

Six Goblin guards are huddled over a small coal fire roasting several giant rats on a wooden spit. The guards are armed with javelins and clubs. There is a barrel containing 40 sharpened javelins in the SW corner. Scattered on the floor are remnants of heartier meals (i.e. stolen livestock) and a few small sacks of coal. One of the Javelin throwers has an ivory horn (worth 30gp) that he will blow to alert the rest of the Goblin camp. The other Goblins will have between 1-4gp in their collective pockets.

3 Goblin Javelin Throwers: DX: 16, HD: 1-1, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: javelin 1d6, dagger 1d4, Saves: 18, Special: -1 to hit in sunlight, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9 (7 without Chieftain), Challenge Level/XP: B/10, HP: 3 each

3 Goblin Clubmen: DX: 13, HD: 1-1, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: club 1d4, Saves: 18, Special: -1 to hit in sunlight, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9 (7 without Chieftain), Challenge Level/XP: B/10, HP: 5 each

3B. Ancient Sewers:

If the horn is blown before the Goblin guards are killed, a contingent of Goblins from area 3C (perhaps 10 or 15 assorted, whatever the Referee deems) will be ordered to investigate. This area is like a plateau and the rooms adjacent to it are severely sloped.

3C. The Goblin Campsite:

Here in the ancient sewers of Smallstone, the floor is sloped downwards (towards the North) about 20 degrees. Despite the uneven ground, the Goblins have chosen to make camp here. The Goblin Chieftain and most of his entourage will remain at this encampment unless forced out. If things are going poorly, the Goblins will fight to protect their leader who will attempt to escape the scene back into the Underworld caves in area 9. There he will attempt to hide out but face his enemy, the Mixolodian Ants (see area 9). The Chieftain has a purse containing 15gp and drinks from a silver jeweled goblet (value 90gp). Hidden under the bear skin upon which he likes to lounge there is a small iron strongbox containing up to 100 coins (50pp, 5gp, 45sp). There are 4 barrels of foul smelling Goblin whiskey and 2 barrels of coal and several giant rats being cooked over a large coal fire. In addition, there is a large 5' diameter drainage opening that will certainly spell death to any creature pushed down it. The sides of the hole are covered with a slippery green slime, making it unclimbable, and the drop is at least 100 feet (or whatever you desire it to be).

4 Goblin Javelin Throwers: DX: 16, HD: 1-1, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: javelin 1d6, dagger 1d4, Saves: 18, Special: -1 to hit in sunlight, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9 (7 without Chieftain), Challenge Level/XP: B/10, HP: 3 each

10 Goblin Clubmen: DX: 13, HD: 1-1, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: club 1d4, Saves: 18, Special: -1 to hit in sunlight, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9 (7 without Chieftain), Challenge Level/XP: B/10, HP: 5 each

4 Goblin Bowmen: DX: 17, HD: 1-1, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: bow 1d6, dagger 1d4, Saves: 18, Special: -1 to hit in sunlight, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9 (7 without Chieftain), Challenge Level/XP: B/10, HP: 2 each

5 Goblin Swordsmen: DX: 10, HD: 1-1, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: sword 1d8, Saves: 18, Special: -1 to hit in sunlight, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9 (7 without Chieftain), Challenge Level/XP: B/10, HP: 6 each

The Goblin Chieftain: DX: 15, HD: 3, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: Sword 1d8+1, Saves: 18, Special: -1 to hit in sunlight, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9, Challenge Level/XP: 3/35, (well-hidden within his armor is a key to the strongbox), HP: 15

4. SLUMBERING CREATURE OF THE DEPTHS (CAVE KRAKEN)

The ground is slippery with slimy mold and moisture and severely sloped about 25 degrees towards a large reservoir of black water with a greenish tinge. Despite its murky appearance, the water is not still for it ebbs and flows as if driven by a small tide. There are three rotting partial goblin corpses here that look like they were torn apart. Any character venturing within 5 feet of the water is likely to slip in. This noise will alert the creature which will slyly wait and then pounce on an unsuspecting victim. Perhaps as ancient as the city itself, this blind creature uses its keen sense of hearing to detect and catch its prey by striking them down and wrapping its long tentacles around them. Once caught the Cave Kraken will either strangle or drown its victim, drawing them into the toothy maw located in the center of the body. Fire and other forms of heat will repel the beast. Electrical shock will stun the creature. Otherwise it's thick sandpaper-like hide acts as a natural armor and is hard to cut through (although puncturing/impaling weapons work at a +2 to hit advantage). Each tentacle has its own HP. The creature will retreat if four or more tentacles are "killed" or cut off. There are 10 tentacles. Tentacles grow back or repair themselves at a rate of 1 every 24 hours. Only damage to the body will truly kill it. A silence spell, cast upon the Party, will trick the creature into retreating, given it has not already ensnared a victim.

Cave Kraken: DX: 18, HD: 3 (body), 1 (tentacles), AC: 7 [12], AC: 3 [16] (body), 7 [12] (tentacles), Attacks: 1d6 (squeeze), 1d4 (hit/scrape), 1d8 (maw), Saves: 12, Special: up to 10 attacks, creature is blind, Move: 3, Align: Chaos, Morale: 7, Challenge Level/XP: 5/300, HP: Body: 11, Ten Tentacles: 3 each

5. SAGE'S ANTEROOM

Eons ago a somewhat benevolent, perhaps neutral, sage and practitioner of magic dwelled herein. This room served as a place to relax and entertain like-minded guests. It was obviously a secret place hidden underground among the catacombs and sewers of Smallstone. There are lavish furnishings made from ancient and dense woods: a bookshelf (with scant tomes), two plush chairs (dusty but otherwise in good condition) and what appears to be a liquor cabinet. The shelves contain the following volumes (all books are in Ancient Elvish):

Red Book, "Book of the Cosmos:" This red leather-bound tome will be of interest to sages who study astronomy and cosmology. It is worth 1500gp to the right sage in Merseyhomm. Of note: The small moon Isus does not appear in the text or diagrams!

Scroll: This is a surveyor's map of the now lost Elvish City with text in Ancient Elvish worth 2000gp to the right sage in Merseyhomm

Blue Book, "Book of Silver Magic:" This blue leather-bound tome, written in silver ink, is an Elven treatise on good magic. It is written in the ancient Elvish tongue. Lawful (Good) Magic Users who spend a week studying it will gain a full level of experience. It will be of no use and therefore not interest Magic Users of neutral or chaotic alignment. Neutral Magic Users take the risk (50%) of becoming permanently Lawful when determining the book's nature. Chaotic Magic Users lose one experience level and take 3d10 damage. Non-magic users who attempt to read the book take 2d10 damage. This book is worth 3000gp to the right sage in Merseyhomm.

The liquor cabinet contains:

Four Silver ornate cups with Ancient Elvish "scryptic" writing worth 100gp each.

Four vials of Ancient Elven Liquor (treat as a Potion of Healing, 1d6+1).

5B. TRAP DOOR

This trap door is triggered by opening the south door. Characters will slip into the cold, black waters below. The slope of the dropped doors is about 35 degrees, but the floor is

wet from humidity/condensation. There's a small chance a Character may cling to the trapdoor long enough to be rescued (for 2 rounds. 50% for Hobbit or Dwarf-sized Characters, 30% for Human/Elf types). The fast current will drag victims into the waters of chamber 4. Shouting will alert/awaken the Cave Kraken (see above).

6. SAGE'S LAB

What remains of the lavish furnishings and equipment in this lab are blackened and burnt. There is broken glass and blackened parchment scattered everywhere. A carbonized skeleton lies in the northwest corner. A large clay statue, an incomplete and unanimated golem, stands in the center of the room. If the room is thoroughly searched a large, partially preserved tome will be found. It is the Sage's journal. The journal contains partial instructions on how to create a Clay Golem. Reading or research will reveal that the fire was caused by an accident in attempts to animate the golem. Spells required to do this are: Raise Dead, Animate Object and Commune (as a 15th level Cleric). There is a small chance (Referee's discretion) that the reader may learn ONE of these 3 spells. There is a Wizard Locked (6th level) secret door on the East wall that requires a Knock spell to open. This door leads to a lower level dungeon (to be designed by the Referee) or alternately may lead to an underground passage to the Underworld. Alternately the Referee may opt to ignore this door altogether or have it lead to a room or corridor on Level 2.

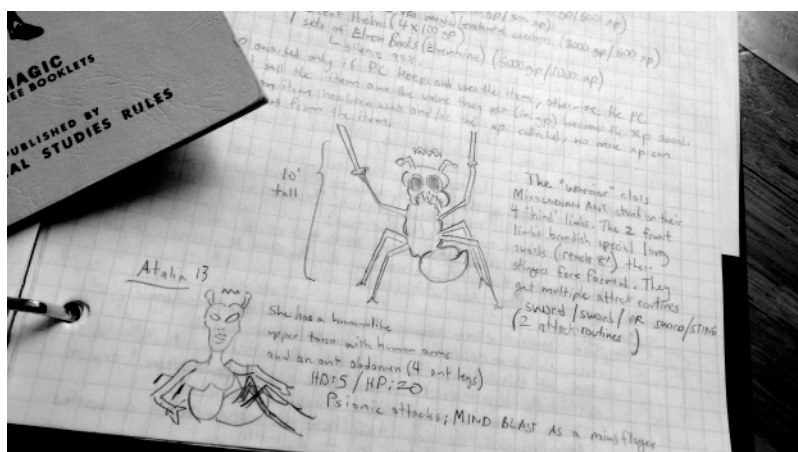
7. CRYPT OF THE FALLEN HEROES OF THE FIRST AGE

This room contains seven stone sarcophagi, four with embalmed corpses intact and three that have been opened and are missing corpses. The sarcophagi are decorated with Ancient Elven script writings such as, "may you be remembered, Stewards of Smallstone." On all the walls an encompassing and colorful mosaic depicts a scene from the ancient Mystic War (albeit biased oppositely) in which legions of regal Azurian Elf Bowmen muster against hordes of Orc Warriors and semi-savage looking Humans. The Men are led by a single Black-Robed Human with a pointed beard and horns. Characters will recognize the figure as a demonized version of the prophet Asmund. This scene is contrary to what most people in Turan and Nire believe about the Mystic War.

8. FORGOTTEN WINE CELLAR

There are several barrels of ancient wine here - most of it still good. There is a skeleton in the southeast corner. There is a small dwarf-sized "hole" or passageway on the East wall, just large enough for a Carrion Creeper to spring out of. The passageway leads to the Creeper's nest. The Creeper will paralyze one victim and then drag him/her (prostrate) backwards into its nest where it will slowly devour him/her. To save a victim from this fate, the Creeper must be pursued by characters small enough to navigate the tunnel or the party must wait for it to reemerge to snatch more victims (3 turns). For every turn spent in the nest with the Creeper, a victim loses one hit point.

Carrion Creeper: DX 17, HD: 2+4, AC: 7 [12], Attacks: Bite (1 hp) and 6 tentacles, Saves: 14, Special: Tentacles cause paralysis, Move: 12, Align: Neutrality, Morale: 9, Challenge Level/XP: 4/240



9. RIVER PASSAGE TO THE UNDERWORLD

This large natural cavern provides access to a vast underground waterway and is part of the Underworld. It is the source of the Goblin horde. There are three rowboats tethered together at the water's edge. This is the Goblin's main means of transportation to and from the ancient underground ruins of Smallstone. What lies beyond the waterway is the subject of subsequent modules. If the party successfully clears this level of the dungeon and destroys the boats, they will delay a full-scale Goblin invasion of the Manor by several months. For now, should they (unwisely) choose to take the boats further into the Underworld river passage they will be met (after several days of meandering the underground river complex) by a deadly Goblin ambush.

Unbeknownst to the goblins, another race is also trying to take advantage of the newly created Lunar Rift. A colony of hyper-intelligent giant mutant ants known as the Ants of Mixolodia (sworn enemy of the Goblins) plan to make a new sub-colony in this area and to raid the yet untouched lands above. Unlike normal giant ants, the warriors walk on their four hind legs and wield duel blades with their front legs. A blue electric arc can be seen traversing the antennae upon their heads which appear strangely anthropomorphic. A small contingent (made up of 5 docile workers, 2 "mutant" warriors and one "mutant" leader warrior caring for a large black queen-egg) will settle in this area, hoping to plant the egg deeper in the sewers once the Goblins have been cleared out. These ants have travelled, submerged inside a web "diving bell" provided by a lobotomized giant water spider, via the same underground riverway as the Goblins. Since the spider can remain submerged at all times the goblins were not aware that they were being followed. Naturally, the ants will want to start their colony in the sewer rooms where the goblins are currently encamped. They will wait patiently as the Party clears the complex of goblins. Alternatively, if the party descends to the second level, the ants will attempt to defeat the goblins themselves. If encountered, the warriors will attempt to subdue and capture the party, for the humans may prove useful to their unborn Princess, who will hatch in the next 48 hours. Once hatched, the princess will remain in neophyte form for one week before suddenly becoming "fully matured." The princess, who is named Princess Atalia, the 13th clone of "Her Worshipfulness" Queen Atalia of Mixolodia, is born with the genetic memory of her royal predecessors and fully understands her mission. She appears as a giant ant-human chimera.

The workers will generally attack only if provoked but will defend the egg to their deaths. The water spider waits, submerged in the waters of area 9, its mindless body completely under the control of the ants.

5 Worker Mixolodian Ants: DX 16, HD: 2, AC: 3 [16], Attacks: Bite (1d6), Saving Throw: 16, Special: None, Move: 18, Align: Neutrality, Morale: 10, Challenge Level/XP: 2/30, HP: 9 each

2 Warrior Mixolodian Ants: DX 18, HD: 3, AC: 3 [16], Attacks: Bite (1d6 + poison), Dual Blades (1d8/1d8), Saves: 14, Special: Poison, Move: 18, Align: Neutrality, Morale: 11, Challenge Level/XP: 4/120, HP: 15 each

2 Warrior Mixolodian Ant Leaders: DX 18, HD: 3, AC: 3 [16], Attacks: Bite (1d6 + poison), Dual Blades (1d8/1d8), Saves: 14, Special: Poison, Move: 18, Align: Neutrality, Morale: 11, Challenge Level/XP: 4/120, HP: 22 each

Princess Atalia Egg: HD:1, HP: 5 (helpless and prone)

Princess Atalia (Newly Hatched): DX 8, HD: 1, Attacks: none, Saves 14, Special: ESP, Telepathy, Telekinesis, Feeble Mind, speaks most languages, Move: 3, Align: Neutrality, Morale: 11, Challenge Level/XP: 5/300, HP: 6

Princess Atalia (Fully Matured): DX 10, HD: 10, AC: 3 [16], Attacks: Bite (1d6), Saves: 5, Special: ESP, Telepathy, Telekinesis, Feeble Mind, Charm Person, speaks most languages, Move: 3, Align: Neutrality, Morale: 12, Challenge Level/XP: 8/1000

It is up to the Referee to time an encounter with these creatures and decide exactly where they will "plant" their egg. The workers will stay behind, tending to the egg as the warriors attempt to "clear" the level.

LEVEL 2: COMPLEX OF THE HERETIC SECT

This complex hewn into the bedrock and hidden under the sewers and catacombs of Smallstone, is an early temple to the prophet Asmund and would have been considered heretical by the ancient authorities that lived here. Before the Mystic War some human

residents living among the Elves practiced their secret religion and new found magic rites and schemed to attack their "Elven Conquerors" from within the walls of this now-forgotten city. Like the mural in room 7, everything about this place is backwards to the current status-quo of the lands and (revisionist) history as understood by leaders and the Church. Here the "Asmund Cult" appears to have unabashedly evil intent. The rites depicted are grotesque and demonic in nature (the sacrifice of children, orgies, the osculum infame, and so forth). This will have detrimental effects on Clerics, who will suffer as if the victim of a confusion spell for the first round of any ensuing melee. Clerics will feel impelled to leave this place (perhaps choosing to forget what they have seen).

Since this level is above an ancient and now decrepit sewer system, the place is damp and dank, foul smelling and the walls sweat a black viscous liquid. Thieves will suffer a 10% penalty when attempting to climb walls. The oily water is actually highly acidic and will cause any climber to suffer a painful rash for 24 hours. This rash will negatively affect the use of melee weapons and the like at a -2 disadvantage until cured.

10. RECEPTION ROOM

The steep stairway from the forgotten cellar leads to a small hewn room 20 ft further down. This room contains a decorative wooden chair that appears to be in fair condition. The chair is actually extensively water damaged and will crumble if sat on by a normal sized creature.

11. WAITING ROOM

This room contains two more similar chairs in similar condition to the one noted above (except they are visibly water damaged)... The stairway to the South slopes 20 feet down. As the party descends the place becomes more damp and dank.

12. SACRAMENTAL POOL

The stone carved pool appears to contain black, stagnate liquid. This is a more concentrated version of the "wall sweat." Direct exposure to the thick black liquid causes 1d4 damage (save versus acid where applicable).

13. FRESCOED DRESSING ROOM

This room is decorated by a nearly monochrome fresco depicting ... The half-rotted tall wardrobe in the southeast corner contains rotted cultist's robes, still hanging. A vicious Ghoul (wearing less-rotted robes of similar type) will attempt to hide among the robes for 1 - 2 turns after which it will leap out (check surprise). Poking or prodding will cause it to leap out. The Ghoul was once one of Lome's acolytes.

Ghoul (undead Parishioner): DX 9, HD: 2, AC: 6 [13], Attacks: 2 claws (1d3), 1 bite (1d4), Saves: 16, Special: Immunities, paralysis, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9, Challenge Level/XP: 3/60, HP: 10, those killed become a ghoul

14. CLERIC'S BEDCHAMBER

This room contains more rotted and nearly collapsed furniture: two beds and a small side table with drawers. The drawers contain 4 unholy symbols (pendants). These are cursed (as a reverse Bless spell) for any good character who wears or carries one.

15. GUARD CHAMBER

Another undead Parishioner dwells here in some state of morose limbo. He will hide around the corner and attempt to surprise the party.

Ghoul (undead Parishioner): DX 9, HD: 2, AC: 6 [13], Attacks: 2 claws (1d3), 1 bite (1d4), Saves: 16, Special: Immunities, paralysis, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 9, Challenge Level/XP: 3/60, HP: 10, those killed become a ghoul

16. EVIL CHAPEL

The domed ceiling and walls of this place are painted blood red. There is a black pillar in each corner of the room (a character of 17 Strength or higher may be able to shatter a pillar, causing the room to collapse). The floor is decorated with a black and red tile

mosaic depicting the symbol of the cult just in front of a blood-stained altar. The West wall is covered with a horrific tapestry depicting a dark, cloudy and barren landscape with unidentifiable shambling silhouetted forms hold aloft a struggling elf warrior. A grey sky is torn by wisps of purple clouds around a bloody moon with Isus in the center. The mad priest, Altar Lobe has been hiding here. He looks starved and half-crazed (perhaps he is already dead) and he will fight until destroyed.

"Father" Atar Lobe (Wight): DX: 10, HD: 3, AC: 5 [14], Attacks: Claw (level drain), Saves: 14, Special: Level drain (1 level) with hit, can only be hit by magical or silver weapons, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 12, Challenge Level/XP: 5/240, HP: 15, those killed become a Wight.

17. STUDY

On the half-rotted shelves of this once great library there are several (1d4) nearly intact and still-legible spell books for evil Clerics written in an archaic form of Common (the Human tongue). Thus, Clerics reading the book will have a -10% to know each spell listed. All reversible spells will be their evil "counterpart" and will be of no use to good Clerics. The referee may decide the spells or randomly determine them. A character must read the spell (one hour per level) before determining what the spell is.

18. THE WHITE ROOM

This room is architecturally identical to the Evil Chapel except that the walls and pillars have been painted white. Even without a light source this room will seem unusually bright for on the altar rests a large fist-sized glowing white gem - the White Heart. As soon as the jewel is disturbed there will be a sudden, short but intense tremor. This is the sound of another two rifts opening somewhere in the Manor (the subject of Modules E2 and E3). The disturbance will cause a number of pillars (1d4) will crack severely enough to fall. Characters must save versus Death Ray or suffer falling debris (1d6 damage). The gem will otherwise "behave." Any jeweler, thief, or politico (including clergy) will covet the gem upon setting eyes upon it and will do anything within their means to stealthily acquire it (as a Geas spell). Other classes will not be affected.

The White Heart: This artifact appears to be a large, fist-sized diamond that, in dark conditions, appears to emit a ghostly white light. The jewel is much heavier than its size would dictate. The powers of this sentient alien object are numerous and unknown. It has a strong ego and will "speak" to whoever holds by means of alien telepathy, giving instruction in the form of images, strong intuitions, and drives but not linguistically. The stone also has the powers of ESP, and clairvoyance (as a level-12 magic user). A character who possess the White Heart must make a savings throw vs spell or magic (whichever the Referee decides) to resist the Stone's urgings. It seeks to be given over to the person of greatest power by any means necessary.

Note: *This adventure is designed for low-level characters and so placing a powerful artifact within the reach of nascent players or characters might seem like folly to you, the wise and experienced Referee. Remember however that the White Heart has its own strong motivation to get into the hands of the most powerful people in the realm. The White Heart will begin by seeking out the most powerful/influential member of the Party but will soon favor the next powerful/influential NPC or monster the carrier of the Jewel encounters. This would include higher level priests, monks, aldermen, and even the Mixolodian Princess. The Jewel must eventually get away from the Party and into the "wrong hands" so that it may become a plot point for future adventures.*

APPENDIX A: PERSONAE DRAMATIS

Here is a list of all the important NPCs you may want to flesh out in preparation for running this module:

Ol' Ed Butterbot (Local Brewmaster, funder of the idol) STR:9, INT:11, DEX:11, WIS:14, CON:12, CHR:12, AC: no armor 9 [10], Attacks: dagger 1d4, Saves: 10, Special: none, Align: Law, HP: 4, EQ: robes, boots, belt, 2 large belt pouches, 40sp on his person

Atar Lobe Du Sharid (Parish Priest of Du Sharid Manor, cult leader, presumed dead, now a Wight): DX: 10, HD: 3, AC: 5 [14], Attacks: Claw (level drain), Saves: 14, Special: Level drain (1 level) with hit, can only be hit by magical or silver weapons, Move: 9, Align: Chaos, Morale: 12, Challenge Level/XP: 5/240, HP: 15, those killed become a Wight

Atar Arn Lucas (Parish Priest of Du Sharid Manor, Lobe's successor) Level 2 Cleric, Human, STR:9, INT:12, DEX:10, WIS:15, CON:9, CHR:10, AC: none 9 [10], Attacks: Wooden Club (1d6), Saves: 17, Special: Spells (1 first-level) usually cure light wounds, Move: 12, Align: Law, Align: Law, HP: 8, EQ: priest's robes, boots, holy symbol of Asmund (a small but decorative wooden scepter), belt, 2 large belt pouches, 30sp

Atar Lorne Houseal (Local Aoronite Priest, de facto party leader and liaison to Bishop Saul Fondelle) A stout individual (5' 4") with a shaved head and neck beard. Level 2 Cleric, Human, STR:14, INT:12, DEX:12, WIS:15, CON:10, CHR:10, AC: ring mail 6 [13], Attacks: Wooden Club (1d6), Saves: 17, Special: Spells (1 first-level), Move: 12, Align: Law, Align: Law, HP: 12, EQ: robes, high hard boots, holy symbol of Asmund (a small but decorative wooden scepter), belt, 2 large belt pouches, 6 wax candles, tinderbox, 1 week of iron rations

Ol' Ted Barely (Local proprietor, owner of the House of Hospitality INN) STR:13, INT:10, DEX:9, WIS:14, CON:12, CHR:12, AC: no armor 9 [10], Attacks: dagger 1d4, Saves: 10, Special: none, Align: Neutral, HP: 6, EQ: 10gp, 40sp on his person

Angela Barely (Ted's wife, co-owner of the House of Hospitality INN) STR:9, INT:12, DEX:9, WIS:10, CON:12, CHR:17, AC: no armor 9 [10], Attacks: dagger 1d4, Saves: 10, Special: none, Align: Neutral, HP: 6, EQ: 22sp on her person

Len Barely (Ted's son, worker at the House of Hospitality INN) STR:15, INT:11, DEX:13, WIS:14, CON:14, CHR:12, AC: no armor 9 [10], Attacks: dagger 1d4, Saves: 10, Special: none, Align: Law, HP: 4, EQ: boots, belt, 2 large belt pouches, 50sp on his person

Ted Barely Jr. (Ted's son, worker at the House of Hospitality INN) STR:12, INT:16, DEX:13, WIS:14, CON:14, CHR:12, AC: no armor 9 [10], Attacks: dagger 1d4, Saves: 10, Special: none, Align: Law, HP: 4, EQ: boots, belt, 2 large belt pouches, 2gp, 50sp on his person

Mary Barely (Ted's daughter, worker at the House of Hospitality INN) Level 0 Thief, STR:12, INT:16, DEX:15, WIS:14, CON:17, CHR:17, AC: no armor 9 [10], Attacks: dagger 1d4, Saves: 10, Special: thieves' abilities, Align: Neutral, HP: 8, EQ: boots, belt, 2 large belt pouches, 30gp 50sp on her person (would make a good party member, if asked)

Titus "Devilchaser" Newberry (Local proprietor, Owner of the Bronze Apple PUB, possible ally) Level 4 Cleric/Level 6 Magic User, Human, STR:13, INT:17, DEX:12, WIS:13, CON:13, CHR:12, AC: no armor 9 [10], Attacks: dagger 1d4, Saves: 10, Special: Spells (4 level-1, 2 level-2, 2 level-3), Move: 12, Align: Neutrality, HP: 12, EQ: robes, high hard boots, belt, 2 large belt pouches, spellbook, 1 week of iron rations

Guard's Chief, Pete Elmsman (Captain of the Guard in at Du Sharid Manor, possible ally) Level 3 Fighter, Human, STR:17, INT:12, DEX:12, WIS:17, CON:13, CHR:10, AC: ring mail 6 [13], Attacks: Sword (1d8), Saves: 17, Special: None, Move: 12, Align: Law, HP: 20 EQ: robes, high hard boots, belt, 2 large belt pouches, tinderbox, 1 week of iron rations

Princess Atalia (the 13th clone of "Her Worshipfulness" Queen Atalia of Mixolodia) INT: 18, DX 10, HD: 10, AC: 3 [16], Attacks: Bite (1d6), Saves: 5, Special: ESP, Telepathy, Telekinesis, Feeble Mind, Charm Person, speaks most languages, Move: 3, Align: Neutrality, Morale: 12, Challenge Level/XP: 8/1000

The following NPCs will be beyond the reach of the characters at this stage, and therefore remain "offscreen," but may come into play if you develop a campaign in Messoria:

Barron-Mayor, Ayeli Egnar (Barron-Mayor of Merseyhomm Shire and the Four Manors)

Bishop Saul Fondelle (Spiritual Leader of Merseyhomm Shire, the party's employer)

APPENDIX B: MORE ABOUT THE CONTINENT OF MESSORIA

Messoria is roughly twice the size of the United Kingdom or may fit into Germany. It can be geographically divided into four regions: the northwest Isle of Nirelok, the southwest Breakage, the northeast Crown and the Middle Lands. Politically, there are five divisions: The Province of Nire, North Nirelok, Azure, Turan and the Free Lands.

The Southern portion of the Isle of Nirelok, where this adventure takes place, is called the Province of Nire, while the Northern portion is still unsettled although some believe the Dwarves of Kroner may keep a strong presence there. Most of the Northeast Crown is claimed by the Dwarves of Kroner while the Northern portion of the Southwest Breakage remains the forested and ancient Kingdom of Azure, known as Luintaurre by the Elves that rule there. The Southern portion of the Breakage is still ruled by men of Turan (being the seat of once great and ancient Empire of Messoria). The remaining and vast majority of the landmass is free and wild.

APPENDIX C: MORE ABOUT THE PROVINCE OF NIRE

The province of Nire remains under the jurisdiction of Turan on paper but is practically politically autonomous and strongly influenced by the Church of the Prophet Asmund and its Patriarch Cardinal Atar Lome III, who is seated in the holy city of Middetun. Lord Mayor John Hatcher of Middetun, whose ancestry can be traced by to the first Lord Mayor appointed by reigning King of Turan, is officially the Governor of the province of Nire. The day-to-day politics of Nire is both hierarchical and bureaucratic for representatives from most levels of society, to different degrees, as well as the Church are included in the process. In return for virtual sovereignty and military protection, Nire is still taxed by the Turan, but not too heavily, for the Monarchy has ample respect for the "Holy Colony," indeed many of the faithful "Mainlanders" make the pilgrimage to the Great Temple there, where they may gaze upon the most holy of relics, the "Eye of the Prophet Asmund." Middetun is not only blessed by spiritual importance, but is also a center of knowledge, for a most famous learned college also thrives there. Centuries old and simply known as "The College," this great university remains a source of pride for Nire and attracts all manner of scholar from mainland Turan and even some stranger folk from beyond. Yet, there are some politicos, mostly those with close ties to the Church, who would like nothing more than to see the College closed down, for they believe the College unwittingly, or even clandestinely, fosters an environment that aids and abets those power-hungry undesirables who practice "the forbidden arts," tucked away in their "experimental labs" within their "guarded ivory towers." Others claim that the "cabal problem" would exist regardless of the College, prompting one courageous Alderman to state: "wherever there is civility there are books, and wherever there are books and men of books there will always be sorcery, Temples not excluded." This "cabal problem" remains a constant source of debate within the council halls of Middetun for all politicos publicly agree that magic, sorcery, witchcraft, heresy or whatever you choose to name it ought to be abolished and punished.

APPENDIX D: HOW IT PLAYED OUT - OUR CAMPAIGN JOURNALS

The following is a record of the first four sessions in which I introduced my players to Messoria by way of this module, Jewel of the Lunar Rift. This record takes the form of session synopses (or campaign journals) written by me to my players in the form of a semi-weekly email newsletter called, The Black Pawn. This newsletter was both a record of in-game events, as well as a forum to discuss and organize play. The "back and forth" correspondence between me and my players has been omitted here. At the time this module consisted entirely of hand-written notes and maps kept in my three-hole-ring binder.

The journal writing was done hastily, usually the same night as the session and it shows. I have not edited them beyond fixing a few glaring typos, so the awkward and terse style (a mix of the past and present tenses) remains intact. I hope other Referees will find these journals both enlightening and entertaining.

***** THE BLACK PAWN INN NEWSLETTER *****

Issue #1 ~ Volume: 2 ~ August 2014

Hello All,

First meetup (this Friday) will be at Betty (Liz) and Andrea's:

XXX YYYY St. PHx (The White Mansion)

Here's Betty's directions (I quote):

"The first challenge of the evening will be getting into the building. You have two options. The first is to call me when you arrive, and I will come and retrieve you from the front gate, 416-XXX-XXXX. If you're feeling courageous, you may try the second option:

Use the path on the right of the building to access PHx. When you reach the metal gate, use the electronic gate control to scroll through the list of names until you reach "Dxxxxx, X." Press the Call button to gain entrance. Once through the metal gate, continue straight along the path past doors on your left until you reach a door labeled PHx. Use the electronic door control to scroll through again to "Dxxxxx, X." Press the Call button to gain entrance. Once inside, follow the stairs to the top. Use the door on your right to begin your adventure. Good luck."

Betty, I'll be arriving at 7PM to set up. Game starts at 7:30.

"Without this playing with fantasy no creative work has ever yet come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of the imagination is incalculable." ~ Carl Jung

"In response to the call the hero undertakes a journey, usually a dangerous journey to an unknown region full of both promise and danger. Often the journey is a descent." ~ Donald Kalsched and Alan Jones (C.G. Jung Foundation)

"(This) is a world. Of course, this world is not complete. It needs organizers and adventurers to order and explore it. It needs you!" ~ Gary Gygax (AD&D Player's Handbook)

And now for some background:

Circling the great moon, Oculus is its gleaming satellite; a small glint the lunar eye called Isus. The Clergy generally regard this small celestial body as secondary for the testaments of the Prophet Asmund make few references to Isus, but there are some within the Church who have come to regard Isus as a sign of the world's slow but inevitable decline towards Final Judgement. They see Isus more as an adulteration, perhaps (among strongly opinionated theologians) an abomination placed there by yet-unseen forces who hope to further tempt Humankind towards chaos - an enemy who lies in slumber, awaiting its earthly minions to awaken it - a soul devourer who is ever-watching and slowly mustering strength. Perhaps this is why those uncommon lunar phases where Isus casts its shadow in the center of a full moon, referred to by some as "the little judgments," is a time to stay indoors and pray for guidance.

The Isle of Nirelok is an isolated and still largely unclaimed portion of the greater continent known as MESSORIA. Most of the southern portion of the isle has been colonized into several baronies under the greater mainland kingdom of Turan. This collection of baronies is simply called the Province of Nire. Nire remains under the jurisdiction of Turan but is (practically) politically autonomous and strongly influenced by the Church of the Prophet Asmund via Cardinal Atar Lome III who is seated in the holy city of Middelton and answers only to "His Holiness" the Patriarch Atar Lunitar V (seated in Turan). The mountainous northern portion of the isle is wild and politically unstable. Various humanoid (i.e. goblin, orc, giant, etc.) tribes, Brown Elves of the Fin Valley (i.e. gnomes) and the dwarves of Kroner continually fight and lay claim to portions of it.

Also, I should mention the monks of The Order of Kuzure Domen. This once-heretical sect is now officially tolerated by the Church and possesses its own internal hierarchy and codes in parallel with the Church. Not much is known about this secretive sect and the monks are therefore feared by most common folk. Their Lama, "the Enlightened One" is known to accept council from His Holiness, Atar Lunitar V although some more cynical

types characterize this dialectic as "lip service" on the part of the Lama. While the Church focuses on social-political morality and law, the Order tends to focus on pure knowledge (both mundane and esoteric) and truth.

Both magic users or "sorcerers" and druids or "witches" are feared and reviled by the Church and most of society. They must practice their art (or religion) in secrecy or face dire consequences, usually at the hands of the Church. Druids tend to live in isolation and are outsiders who eschew urban settings. They are routinely hunted by the Paladins of the Redd Kross. Magic users tend to be urban folk who work as sages and scholars (some well-respected) by day and practice/research their arcane arts under the cloak of darkness. Magic users organize into "cabals," the most prominent being the Guild of the White Hand.

CHARACTER CLASSES IN THE MILIEU

The easiest, most prone to adventuring, class to play in this milieu is the thief. Not all thieves are "thieves" or robbers in the traditional sense (although some are). Most are just "outsider-types" attempting to make a living by wit and cunning. For example, Conan the Barbarian could be classified as a thief more than a fighter. Thieves usually work as low-level mercenaries if they find work at all.

Fighters (who are not tied down to an army or liege) are usually true mercenaries or professional soldiers for hire. They differ from thieves in that they specialize in combat only but can also be "outsider" types. Rangers make good (and moralistic) outsider-types who are keen to side with the greater good (whoever they interpret that to be). Robin Hood was more of a Ranger than a thief. Tolkien's Strider is the archetype.

Clerics are somewhat problematic to play. There is an order within the Church - the Aronites - who specialize in witch hunts, revealing cabals and retrieving artifacts of "theological importance." Paladins always work for the church and are problematic as player characters.

As I already mentioned, magic users need to have a "cover" for their vocation - usually something academic or clerical (such as a scribe, sage or cartographer). In an adventuring party they usually assume the role of map-maker or light bearer, keeping out of physical trouble.

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Attached is a map of the Isle of Nirelok with shire and town names - all common knowledge to those who dwell there.

The DM likes a nice Shiraz or a Cab.

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**\*\*\* THE BLACK PAWN INN NEWSLETTER \*\*\***

Issue #2 ~ Volume: 2 ~ Aug-Sept 2014

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NEXT MEETUP:

We need to find a Friday in September where we are all free. The 12th is best for me.

SESSION SYNOPSIS:

Early Autumn, Year 1550

Having been hired by a town priest (Father "Atar" Lorne) to accompany him on an expedition to a nearby village (Du Sharid Manor) to investigate apparent "occult" activity involving the local parish priest (Father "Atar" Lobe) and some 20 of his acolytes our party comes to lodge at the local tavern, The Bronze Apple.

Speaking with the local guard and an orchard farmer named Ol' Ed, our party is retold the tale of how Atar Lobe and his followers would go out to the Wild Hills to perform bizarre, frightening and clearly heretical rituals and how one night the villagers decided

to spy on them and maybe stop them. That night, under the eerie light of a "small judgement" bi-lunar phase, they watched in horror as a giant rift, as if by divine intervention, opened up under the heretics; swallowing all 20 men, including Lobe....In the retelling our party discovers the apparent cause of Lobe's decent into heretical "madness" - a black and demented "insect-like" statuette found under an ancient and seemingly petrified (possibly cursed) tree which Lobe became "obsessed" with. Our party, without the consent or knowledge of Lorne, go off into the rainy night with Ol' Ed to take a look at and sample this "black tree."

When our party return to their lodging they are confronted by an angry Atar Lorne, nevertheless he decides to have a look at this tree first thing the next morning rather than go straight to the mysterious rift that "divinely opened" and swallowed Lobe and his followers. Lorne also takes a sample from the tree but on their way to the rift the party stumbles upon the site where the evil-looking tree was pulled up. An excavation begins, with the aid of Ed's farm hands, and before long, within the mottled hole, maybe 6ft down, an underground structure is discovered.

The structure appears to be part of an ancient building and a loose stone allows entry. Inside there's a small stone room with a concealed door leading to a steep stone stairway plunging further underground. At the bottom of the stairway another secret door leads to an apparent ancient sewer system. Lorne informs our party that buried ancient sewers like these are known in Mersey Town itself, but it is unusual to find one this far outside of the town limits. Our party begins to explore the sewer but are swarmed by 6 huge rats. The priest is severely wounded and, after slaying the rats, our party retreats to the surface. Everyone is rushed to the local church for healing.

The next morning our party set off for the mysterious rift. They discover that others have been exploring the rift as well for there are ropes to climb down and spikes nailed into the sides of the crevice. As our party descends to the bottom of the 100ft-deep rift, Atar Lorne slips and falls to his death. At the bottom of the rift they discover more ancient stone work, the remnants of many corpses (presumably the heretics) and a concealed door that has been spiked open. Despite Atar Lorne's death our party decides to enter through the concealed door into the depths below (and they take his 20 gold).

Once inside they discover similar stonework to the sewers discovered below Ol' Ed's orchard. They find a long passageway and another concealed door. Behind the door they find a narrow stairway leading to a large and cavernous ancient Elvish crypt: "the Stewards of Smallstone." There are seven ornate stone sarcophagi - two of which have been desecrated. Moments later 3 goblins emerge from another concealed door, one with a sword and two with spears, sniffing for intruders. The human thief, having remained in the darkness of the stairway with hooded lantern, managed to surprise back stab one of the spear-wielding goblins, killing him but not before the elf and half-elf were subdued by the 2 remaining goblins. The human thief fought gallantly against the two remaining goblins but was eventually subdued as well.

Will our unconscious party wake up the captors of the goblins? I think so...

**FIGHT ON!**

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### **\*\*\* THE BLACK PAWN INN NEWSLETTER \*\*\***

Issue #3 ~ Volume: 2 ~ Sept 2014

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**NEXT SESSION**

Possible dates for me are: (Saturday) Sept 20, Friday Oct 3, 10 or 17 ... let's make plans!

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

Since everyone survived this second session, I think it's about time you named your characters - that is if everyone is happy with them at this point. We are at a point in the game where new characters can be introduced, so if anyone has doubts about theirs

we can roll up a new one for next session (and you can hand your current PC over to me). Go ahead and roll one up using the "4 dice -1 in order, six times" method and I'll look it over before we start next session.

## GUESTS?

Also, Session 3 might be an appropriate time to bring in some "cameo" guests - one or two invites to join the group for one session (as hirelings of the party, perhaps). My brother Pete, for example would probably want to join for one session (resigning his character to me afterwards). Anybody know anyone who might be interested?

## VENUE

I'm perfectly happy playing at Liz and Andrea's (it's an amazing set up and thanks for your graciousness) and I think the next session should be there again, but I've always wanted to play D&D in a pub or other such setting. There are 4 "game cafes" in Toronto I know of: Snakes and Lattes at Bloor and Bathurst, Snakes and Lagers on College, Castle on Spadina and College, and Roll Play Cafe at Young and Dundas. For a future session would anyone be interested in playing at one of these places? Just a thought....

## SESSION 2 SYNOPSIS:

Early Autumn, Year 1550

### Day 3 Continued ...

Our party awake prisoners of the Goblins, their hands and feet tied up! There are well over 20 (maybe 30) rank and foul-mouthed goblins in a dark cavernous room, drinking goblin spirits and feasting around a large fire (cooking and eating rat, as well as the flesh of their own fallen). A huge goblin chief is arguing with his strongest warriors about which prisoner to toss down a large (and presumably endless) pit first. The chief is curious about the "new earthquake rift" and "all the dead priests in it." He wants to interrogate our party, but "not before killing one first." Andrea is chosen as the first casualty, just as he notices his hand bindings are loose enough to slip out of...suddenly, two more goblins burst in coming from the SW, shouting "the Ants of Mixolodia are here, below us!" The two goblins report that there may be as many as five of these ants. This news upsets the chief who decides to "take care of them," straight away, "we can't let them start a sub-colony here." He orders the two drunkest goblins to stay behind to "watch the prisoners and the food," and he orders the remaining goblins to follow him "down below." All the goblins march through a concealed door, just to the left of our bound party who are piled up against the N wall. As the last of them exit the room, disappearing out of sight and sound, Andrea unties his hands and then proceeds to untie Skodt's hands, who in turn unties Betty's hands. The two goblins are too drunk to really notice until our party attempt to untie their feet. Andrea and Betty manage to free themselves but Skodt is unable to and the two drunk goblins, wielding short bows are suddenly upon them. However, the drunken goblins are poor shots and abandon their bows for daggers. The PCs get the jump on the goblins but not before Betty is knocked out. Finally, after several rounds of melee, the two goblins are killed. There is a cache of sub-par goblin weapons, spears and clubs which our party make use of.

Hearing sounds down from the concealed door, the party hide in the shadows behind three massive pillars in the seemingly huge room. The goblin chief and two archers (wielding our party's own stolen weaponry) burst in, severely wounded and shaken. "To the boats, the boats! Let's get out of this forsaken sewer," orders the goblin chief as they head in the direction of our party. A melee ensues, and our party has taken the wounded goblins by surprise. With much effort, our party slay the goblin chief and one of the archers, but the third archer, who attempts to flee, is taken prisoner. The goblin prisoner proves to be belligerent and tight lipped about the location of the boats, "you're better off slitting my throat," he says. Our party let the wounded goblin loose and decide to investigate the rest of the huge cavern, Andrea using a piece of ember as a torch. Andrea also takes the goblin chief's heavy strongbox. They discover an underground waterway, a black river with a seemingly strong current flowing East, but something seems to be moving under the waters and (with Betty nearly slipping in) they decide to leave the water's edge. Just then they hear something coming from the bonfire area.

A giant ant, with a bizarre blue electrical arc between its antennae, skillfully opens the concealed door and begins to slowly squeeze through the opening into the large room. Seeing an opportunity our party using a lit arrow attempt to explode a whiskey barrel near the ant, but they fail. Nevertheless, the ant seems to take no notice of them and our party flee the area (back to the water area). The giant ant finally fully emerges from the small passageway and presumably murders the one remaining goblin and searches the campsite (neatly rearranging and ordering the weapons cache and other camp contents by type and size) and then disappears through the concealed door. Betty and Andrea recover their ranged weapons from the goblin chief's archers (who had taken them for their own use) and Skodt begrudgingly picks up the chief's sword. Taking the goblin chief's strongbox our party decide to head SW to explore the area. They find several cul-de-sacs where the sewers have caved in and a second abandoned goblin camp. They come across a well-kept locked wooden door. They spend over an hour attempting to quietly pick the door lock (knowing there are rats nearby) and finally succeed. The passage beyond the door leads back out to the bottom of the rift. It is dusk.

Our party, using the ropes there, lift themselves, the body of Atar Lorne, and the strongbox out of the rift. Attempts at picking the lock on the goblin strongbox and even attempts to forcibly break it open prove fruitless. They bury the box near the rift, marking it with the goblin sword. They carry Atar Lorne's body in the night, through the sleeping village to the nearby temple of Du Sharid. They knock on the door and explain their story to the priest there. The priest (his name is Atar Arn Lucas, BTW) believes them, receives Atar Lorne's body and heals their wounds as best he can. Our exhausted and penniless party return to their lodgings at the Bronze Apple Tavern. With 12 days left of lodging already paid for by Atar Lorne, our party (presumably the next morning) strike a deal with the proprietor, Titus Newberry to strike 2 days off, making it 10 days of lodging in return for meager meals while they stay there.

It is now the morning of the 4th day and our party is having a small breakfast in the pub of the Tavern.

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### **\*\*\* THE BLACK PAWN INN NEWSLETTER \*\*\***

Issue #4 ~ Volume: 2 ~ November 2014

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#### **NEXT MEETUP:**

Let's plan a Friday night meetup for late-November / Early December!

Congrats to Skodt/Rohanan for surviving the night!

BTW, can I have your current XP score for my records

#### **SESSION SYNOPSIS:**

Regarding the date:

Last session I told you it was year Sept 5, 996AD, when in my older notes I see year 1550AD ... If it's all the same to you, I'd like to make it 996AD! I've gone over the history of the region in my notes and found the more accurate year for this campaign.

Ok, here we go. It's all a bit foggy. Correct me where I'm wrong!

It is the morning of Sept 5, 996AD and Our Party (quite tired and beleaguered from the previous day) are having a meager breakfast in the common room of the Bronze Apple when two travelers enter - a very strong looking female Half-Elf and a Halfling - a strange looking pair. All discussion about the current predicament among Our Party ("What are we going to do now that Atar Lorne is dead," "What about the Goblin strongbox we hid in on the edge of that wasteland known as the 'Wild Hills'," etc.) is quickly hushed, but Thief Andy remarks, "that one there, the tall one, looks like she could open the box." The strangers hail from the city of Middetun, some 50 miles southwest of Merseyhomm Shire.



Soon the strangers are dining with Our Party, and they are also eager to see what's inside the box. So, our new party consists of:

Thief Andy

Half Elf Fighter/Thief Elmora (???)

Elven Fighter/Thief Rohanan

Halfling Thief Ronan

Half Elf Fighter Thief Theodora

Our party make their way south in the morning's mist through Ol' Ed's Orchard towards the edge of the Wild Hills and under the shadow of the Crescent Hill (the ominous site of the Rift). While passing through the orchard they talk about their previous mission under the now deceased Atar Lorne, the Black Tree and the excavation they made there (a side-expedition that nearly cost them their lives). The hole there, where the Black Tree once stood, leads to an ancient underground complex apparently as vast as the shire itself, for the same tunnels are known to exist under the Rift and under Merseytown as well (nearly 1/2 mile away) but many of the passageways are caved in and thus unexplored. It is believed to be the buried remains of a once great Elven city, they explain.

Our Party reach the site of the buried strongbox, marked by a goblin short sword. Surprisingly, the Halfling has no problem picking the lock and the box is opened. Inside they find an ornate chalice, an ivory horn and over 50 pounds of platinum, gold and silver coins (over 50 ppl!). Ronan blows the ivory horn, spooking nearby birds and alerting Ol' Ed to Our Party's presence. He informs them that one of his sheep is mysteriously missing as if it was "plucked" from the pasture in the wee hours of the morning. Ol' Ed promises a satisfying meal if they can get to the bottom of it. Ol' Ed doesn't notice the scant trail of blood near the road.

Ronan (or was it Rohanon?) follows the trail of blood along the road, leading East off the road towards the Crescent Hill. The party eventually follows the thickening trail to the Rift itself. To the original party, things look very different looking down at the bottom of the crevice, yet the pattern is familiar. The rotted remains of the cultists have been neatly piled and there are new, neatly arranged piles of rubble. Their ropes (surprisingly) are still there and so they climb down. Rohanan slips and narrowly escapes Atar Lorne's previous fate. Once at the bottom Our Party notice that the once-concealed stonework entrance to the Elven Catacombs is now a rough gaping hole over 10 feet wide! They dither for some time, exploring the entrance, wondering about what to do next when suddenly they hear a strange scurrying noise.

Running to their ropes they see, to their horror, some kind of an abomination of an ant, or rather an ant-like creature - thinner than the giant ant they encountered the previous night, but still standing over 10 feet tall. Strangely, it walks "upright" on its four hind limbs, its thorax is vertical, and its abdomen somehow contorted to face forward with a fibrous and dripping (no doubt poisonous) stinger facing out. It's two front legs seem to function like two enormous arms - each brandishing a 7-foot steel blade. Above its strangely sentient eyes are two antennae and between them a blue-green electrical arc that seems to pulsate with each monstrous thought inside the creature's bulbous head. Theodora slips and falls to the ground. "Surrender!" rings loudly in her head and in the heads of her companions and they realize with horror that the creature is speaking telepathically! She complies. "The princess will know what to do with you!" says the Warrior Ant. Theodora is led into the gaping hole and they disappear.

The rest of Our Party reach the surface and (deciding to reequip and buy supplies for the task of rescuing Theodora) make their way to Mersey Town. By the time they return, many hours have passed, and night has fallen. They descend into the gaping hole. The ancient Elven tunnels, they explain to the newcomer Halfling, have been dug out and widened, probably by the Ants of Mixolodia. Where ancient stonework once lined the walls now there is raw earth, rubble and clay. Our Party take the untouched stairway leading down to the cavernous "crypt of the Stewards of Smallstone" (see Black Pawn Inn #3). Although the architecture and mural are intact the crypt appears to be completely ransacked, each sarcophagus opened and emptied. After spending some time mapping the room Our Party hear the approach of another ant. It turns out to be a

"normal looking" Mixolodian Ant pushing its way through a concealed door on the south wall. The massive ant has trouble fitting through the 5-foot passageway quickly and our party make short work of it.

Our Party choose to investigate the concealed door in the SE corner. Upon opening it they feel a rush of dank, chilly air. They find a steep and narrow stairway going down and follow it to a dank, black stained, dripping wet and slippery complex of rooms and staircases (see your maps). In the first room they discover a rotted chair (crushed by the Halfling) and more rotted chairs in a subsequent room, but the Halfling thinks he can hear a faint "moaning" through the constant dripping of black water and they push onward.

Beyond a door at the bottom of a staircase they find a small dry red room containing a wardrobe. A ghoul suddenly jumps out the wardrobe and takes Our Party by surprise, but they make quick work of it with arrows. Like the skeletons in the Rift, this hideously deformed undead corpse wears the red and white robes of an Acolyte of The Church. One of Atar Lobe's cult followers? The Black and Red robes in the ancient wardrobe, however, have rotted with age. Our Party takes the ghoul's robes for later use.

Leaving the red room, our party explores another room beyond a rotted door up the stairs and across the way. The room contains a large pool of what appears to be a highly corrosive black acid. When they exit the pool room they hear the scurrying of what another ant or mutant ant could be. They run back to the red room with the wardrobe and into an adjacent room, also painted red, where they encounter and slay a second ghoul. The scurrying sounds of what is unquestionably a mutant Warrior Ant pushes Our Party deeper and further into unexplored red corridors - all the time they can each hear something eerily "murmuring and whispering" in their heads.

At the end of a winding staircase they find a mysterious white door. After much dithering about who does what (and oiling the hinges) they have no problem opening the door beyond which a stream of bright white light emerges. Inside a white room radiates an extremely large white diamond-like jewel. It seems to whisper to each of them, beckoning them forward. Both Elmora and Rohanan fall under some sort of spell that compels them to want and take the jewel for themselves. Unaffected, Ronan takes the jewel and wraps it in the Ghoul's robes. Once it's out of sight, the spell on Elmora and Rohanan wears off (it takes about 30 min). Knowing they have found something of great value Our Party make their way up, out of the red corridors and are suddenly confronted by a Warrior Ant. A battle ensues and both the brave Ronan and Elmora as well as Thief Andy are slain beyond repair (the halfling is cut in half!). The Warrior Ant orders Rohanan to surrender.

Rohanan fakes a surrender, dropping his weapon but slyly grabbing the jewel from his severed halfling companion. He runs for his life and is chased down by the Warrior Ant into the room with the acid pool. Rohanan dangles the Jewel over the acid pool and the Warrior Ant stops in its tracks. "No!" it barks. The Ant seems to know what Rohanan is holding and is willing to parley for it. But Rohanan, being a rogue with all his companions either dead or missing, drops it in the pool anyway. "Noooooooo, you fool!"

The acid reacts violently to the jewel. It starts to bubble and overflow. Rohanan runs at the Warrior Ant (who must be taken aback for it is slow to react) he slides between the Ant's legs. The Ant tries to skewer him with its blades but misses as he slides down a staircase behind it, the wooden door breaking his descent. Meanwhile the Ant leaves, going up the stairs, perhaps fleeing the acid which is starting to flow into the hallway. Rohanan is able to leave the underground complex without further molestation. Where did the Ant go? Why was he not hunted down?

Sensing the urgency of the situation (Theodora is still down there with the Ants!) Rohanan returns to the village temple to wake Atar Lucas. He explains that if they do not do something quick, the village (and perhaps the entire shire) will be overrun by these killer Mixolodian Ants. Lucas takes Rohanan to the Manor house to summon the village guard. By torchlight Rohanan, Atar Lucas and 10 guardsmen (among them a sergeant) make their way to the Rift!

Meanwhile ...

what has happened to the amazingly large white jewel? Did it melt in the acid? does it rest near at the bottom of the acid pool? Or does it simply rest near the pool somewhere? Why was the Warrior Ant so concerned about the jewel? Where did the ant go?

what has happened to Theodora (Liz's new character)??? Is she dead? Liz and I will have to do some Play by Mail to determine what happened in the 8 hours since the moment of her capture to the point of Rohanan's escape! Let's hope you don't have to roll up a third character!

meanwhile...meanwhile...I have a bunch of guardsmen NPCs to roll up!

Here's to the start of a fun (and brutal) old-school campaign! FIGHT ON!

\*\*\*\*\*

## **\*\*\* THE BLACK PAWN INN NEWSLETTER \*\*\***

Issue #5 ~ Volume: 2 ~ December 2014

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### **NEXT MEETUP:**

Sometime after Christmas! Maybe early Jan? Congratulations All on completing the first Messoria Campaign module: "Jewel of the Lunar Rift" in only 4 sessions!!!! Please note: The following XP was awarded at the end of the session:

Octavia: 170 base + 900 for treasure

Rohanan: 170 base + 1600 for treasure

Peter: 170 base + 1400 for treasure

OVERLOOKED XP!!!!

I've overlooked some bonus XP some due to high prime requisite scores (the 10% bonus): Rohanan, add 10% to the thief-side of your character's XP for having 17 DEX!!! Not sure if the two Rangers qualify for this (you need over 15 STR and over 15 INT and over 15 WIS).

### **SESSION SYNOPSIS:**

Forgive me if my memory hazy. I've been ill lately!

It is 1 AM, September 6, 996 (the fifth day since the start of the adventure).

Rohanan has woken the priest, Atar Lucas who in turn wakes the captain of the guard, Pete at the Manor House. Pete musters 8 footmen from the Manor House barracks but seeks two more of his "best" men, Drek and Moldvay, who are apparently still drinking at the Bronze Apple. There they meet a new character, a female half-elf ranger from the Northern border town of Galshill by the name of Octavia. Now a party of 13, the adventurers make their way to the Rift.

At the rift, 2 footmen die attempting to descend the cliffs. A time-consuming but much safer plan is devised using more rope to lower the weak down first. Now Our Party (of 11) make it down safely.

Our Party reenter the underground complex and after some debate about where to go and what to do next they are suddenly attacked by a Mixolodian Ant Warrior! Moldvay, the spear-wielding footman is killed but Our Party manage to slay it.

Quickly, our party go back to the crypt of the "Stewards of Smallstone." After much tracking and searching they note that some struggle had recently occurred there in their absence. Suddenly they are attacked by another Mixolodian Ant Warrior. Another footman is lost (!) but the Ant is defeated.

Our party decide to recover the Jewel before attempting to locate Theodora. They

locate the secret door leading to the stairwell and descend down into the "secret temple" quarters of the underground complex to find the acid pool where Rohanan dropped the White Jewel.

It looked like things had settled down there. The black acid was no longer bubbling, but it coated the floor in the corridor leading to the acid pool room and the entire floor of the acid pool room. Rohanan and Octavia descend the second stairwell and brave the acid to retrieve the Jewel (sacrificing their boots and parts of their cloaks). What they find, in place of the Jewel, does not look the same. The "Jewel" now appears to be a small black rectangular obelisk of semi-precious nature. Rohanan and Octavia are forced to take the boots of dead companions after retrieving the obelisk (later they will send a footman down to fetch a lantern and more flask of oil, as their oil supply was running low).

Exiting the secret temple up to the crypt they decide to ascend back up to the main passageway, where the ants seem to originate from. They take the large south tunnel and after much mapping and exploring they find a natural cave "stairway" that leads them to a massive cave with a flowing underground river and goblin boats tethered together by the river's bank. Here they face Princess Atalia, the 13th clone of "Her Worshipfulness" Queen Atalia of Mixolodia. She appears to be a half-human half ant mutant with striking beauty and telepathic powers. Standing on either side of the Princess are two giant Mixolodian Ants. Behind them, a huge (and highly organized) horde of treasure (probably taken from the crypt).

The Princess seems willing to negotiate with Our Party. She wants the Jewel in return for the horde (and will spare their lives). Rohanan starts to make a gesture, as if they accept, but Our party suddenly bolts up the passage. They are quickly followed by an Ant. They make short work of the Ant, but it is followed by the second Ant. Meanwhile the Princess casts some sort of magic spell that immobilizes 3 footmen, "like a dream where you wish to scream but cannot." By some stroke of luck (and many arrows) the Ant is felled before it kills the prone soldiers.

The Princess attempts to cast another spell, but Octavia fires an arrow and disrupts it. Perhaps knowing that she is defeated, the Princess turns around to face the waters and summons from therein a gigantic water spider - the creature is massive, over 20 feet tall, but appears to have no will of its own, for half its head is concave where a brain would be. Our party quickly kill her and the spider, having no command, does nothing.

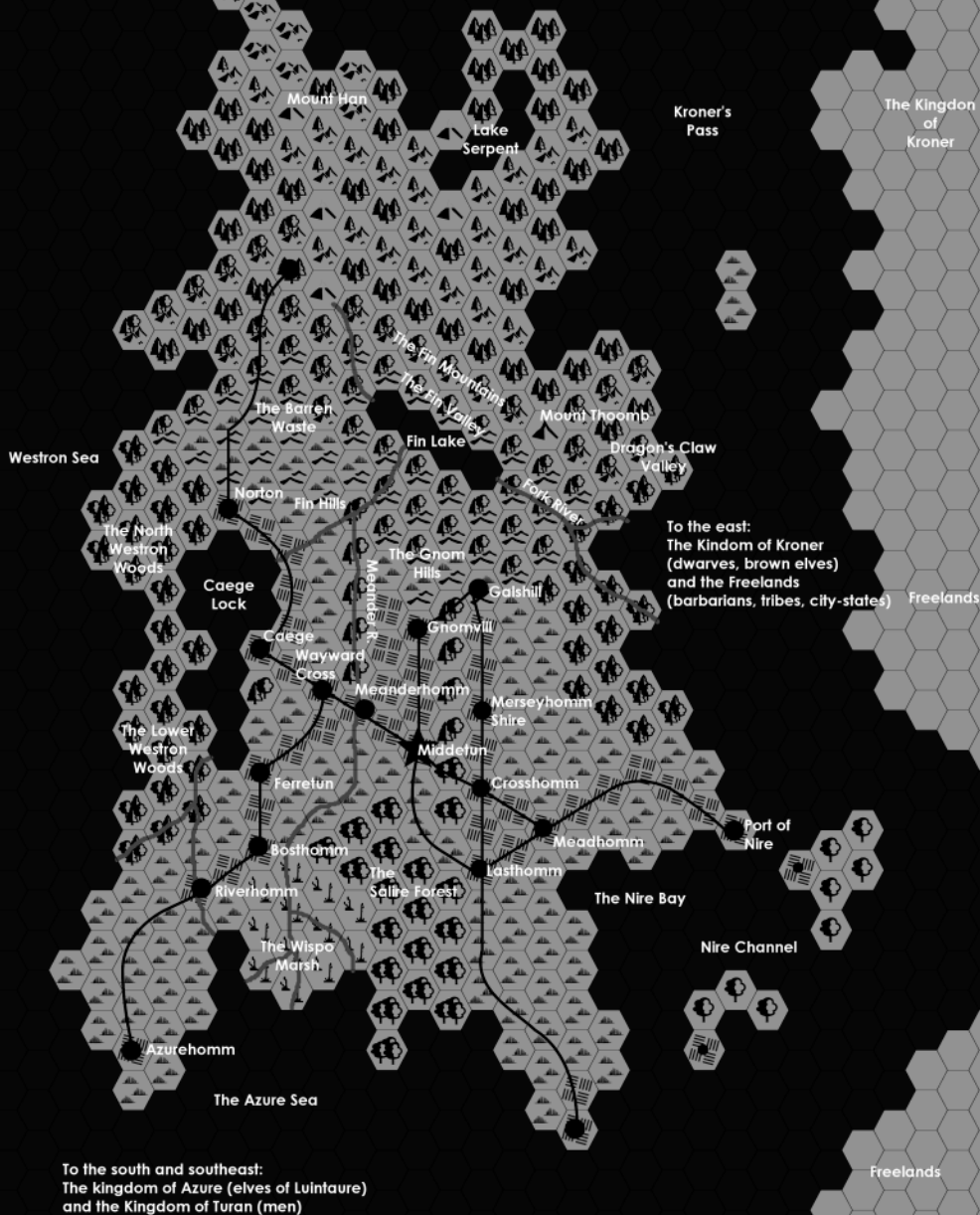
The treasure horde is split among the party members. They find, in the horde, many useful and enchanted weapons and armor, ancient ceremonial helms and chalices as well as some objects of unknown nature, including several books and vials of liquid.

They exit the Rift. It is dawn. Perhaps they go back to the Bronze Apple Inn, exhausted and in need of rest and food.

Where will they travel to next? Our party wants to learn about the nature of the Jewel/Obelisk. Perhaps they take it to the Church authorities? What would they do? Or maybe they should seek out the Elves themselves since the sewers and crypt are of ancient Elven origin. But which Elves? The high Elves of the Forest kingdom of Azure, far away on the main continent, or the more local Elves of the Westron Forests of Nirelok?

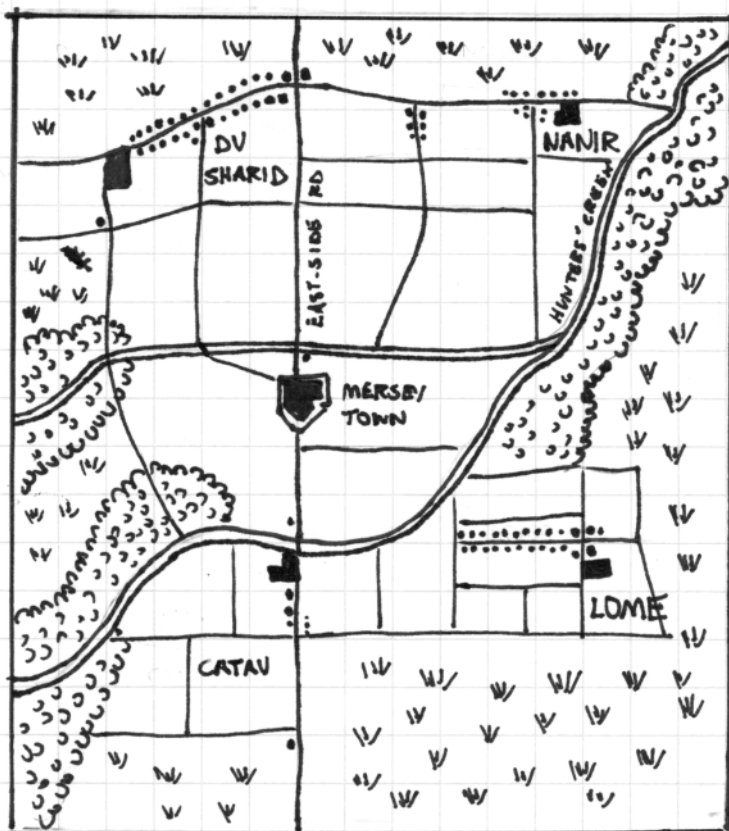
Until our next session!

# Map N1: The Isle of Nirelok (Province of Nire)





## THE FOUR MANORS OF MERSEYHOMM SHIRE



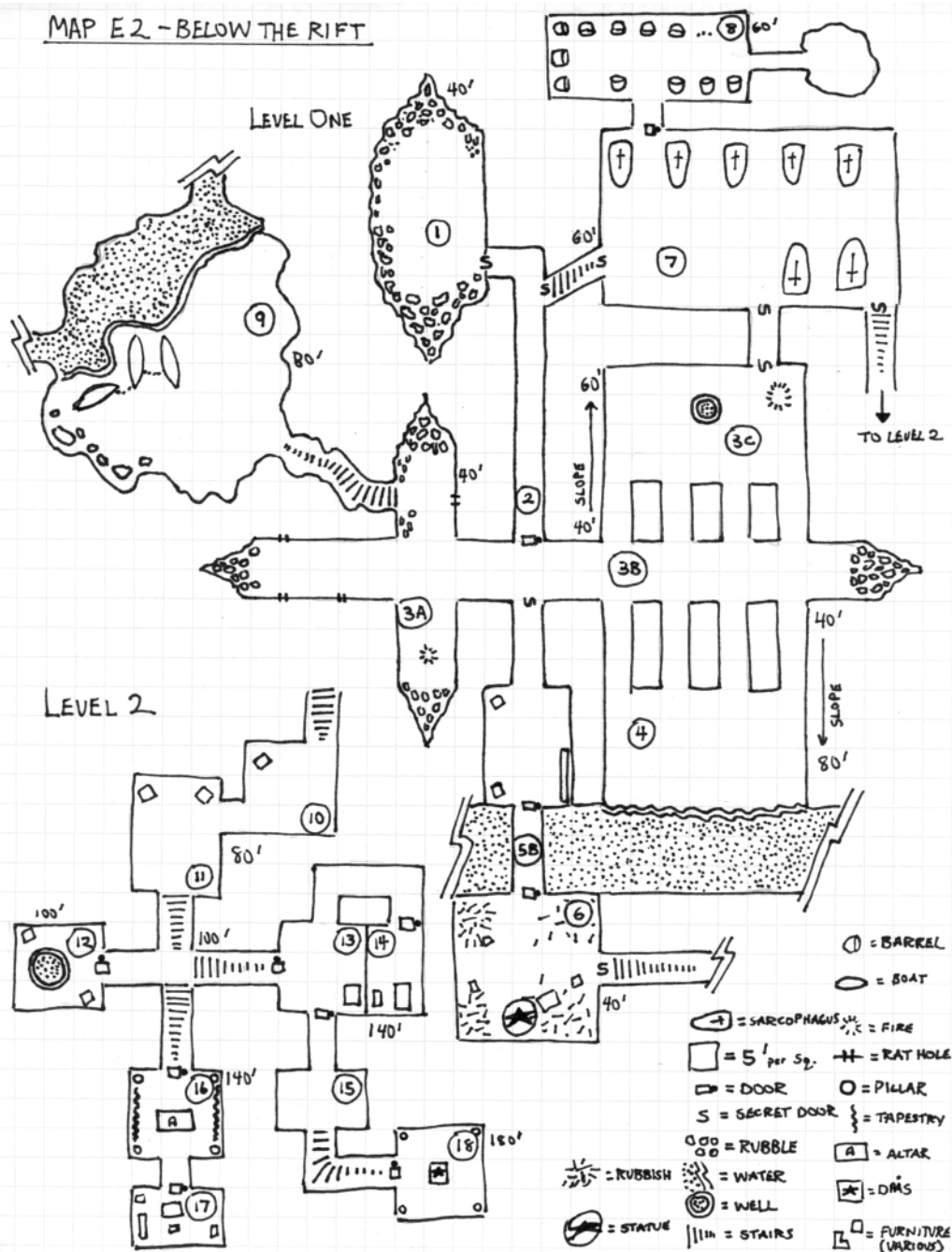
This map is an early sketch of the Shire taken from my campaign notes.

MAP E1: Du Sharid Manor

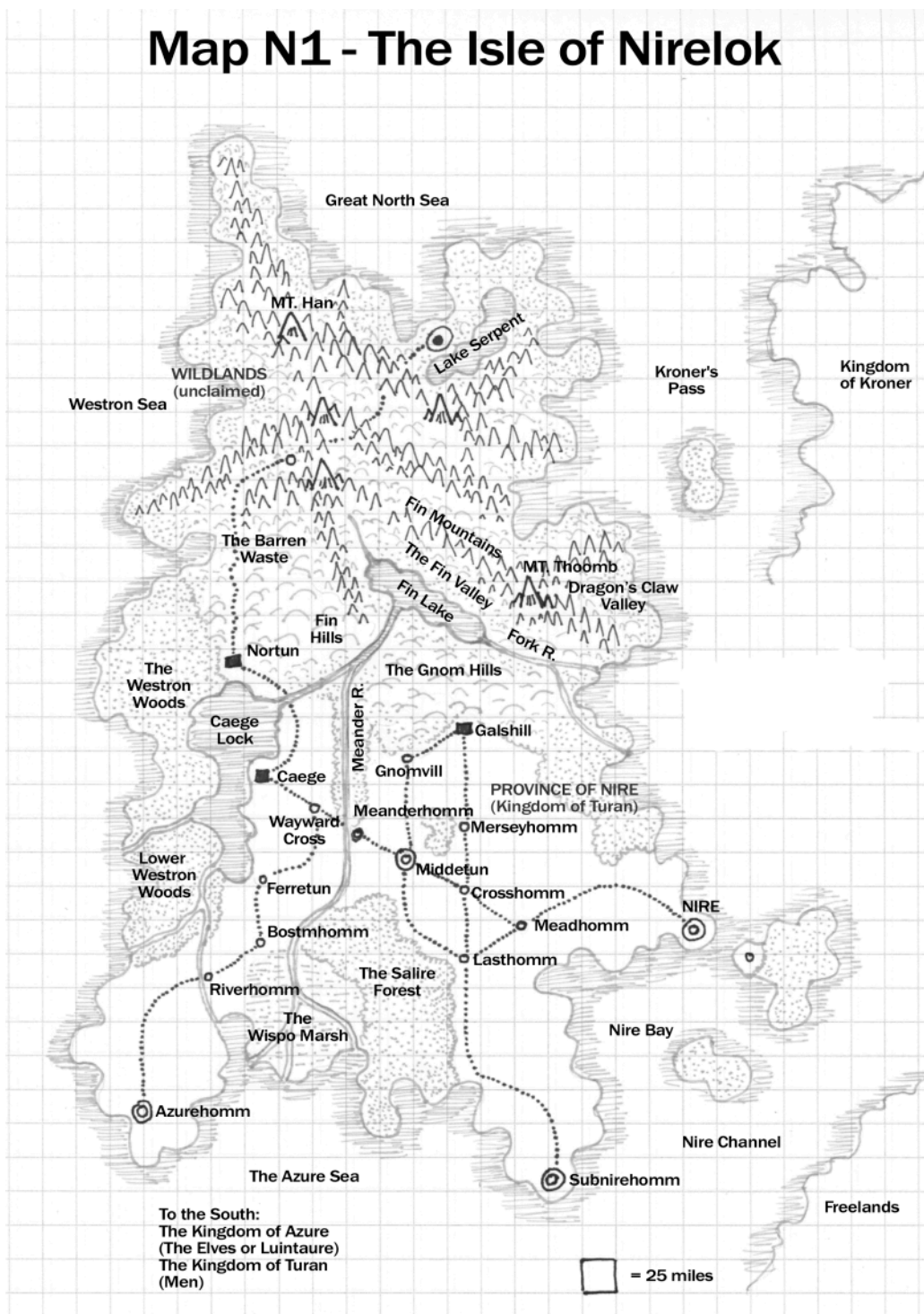
 = 100 ft.



# MAP E2 - BELOW THE RIFT



# Map N1 - The Isle of Nirelok



My original map of Nirelock

**Credit:**

Design by Extildepo

Cover illustration, all photographs, all maps, and layout by Extildepo

“Goblin” on page 4 taken from *Les songes drolatiques de Pantagruel* by Francois Rabelais published by Richard Breton, 1565 (public domain)

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Inspired by the works of E. Gary Gygax, Dave Arneson, Robert Kuntz. Brian Blume, Tim Kask, James M. Ward, John Eric Holmes, Tom Moldvay, David Cook, and Frank Mentzer.

**Coming Soon ...**

*M2: Shadowplay in Mersey Town* – another mini module by VSP full of intrigue and details on the Shire Manors, Mersey Town, the buried city of Smallstone, and the surrounding area.



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