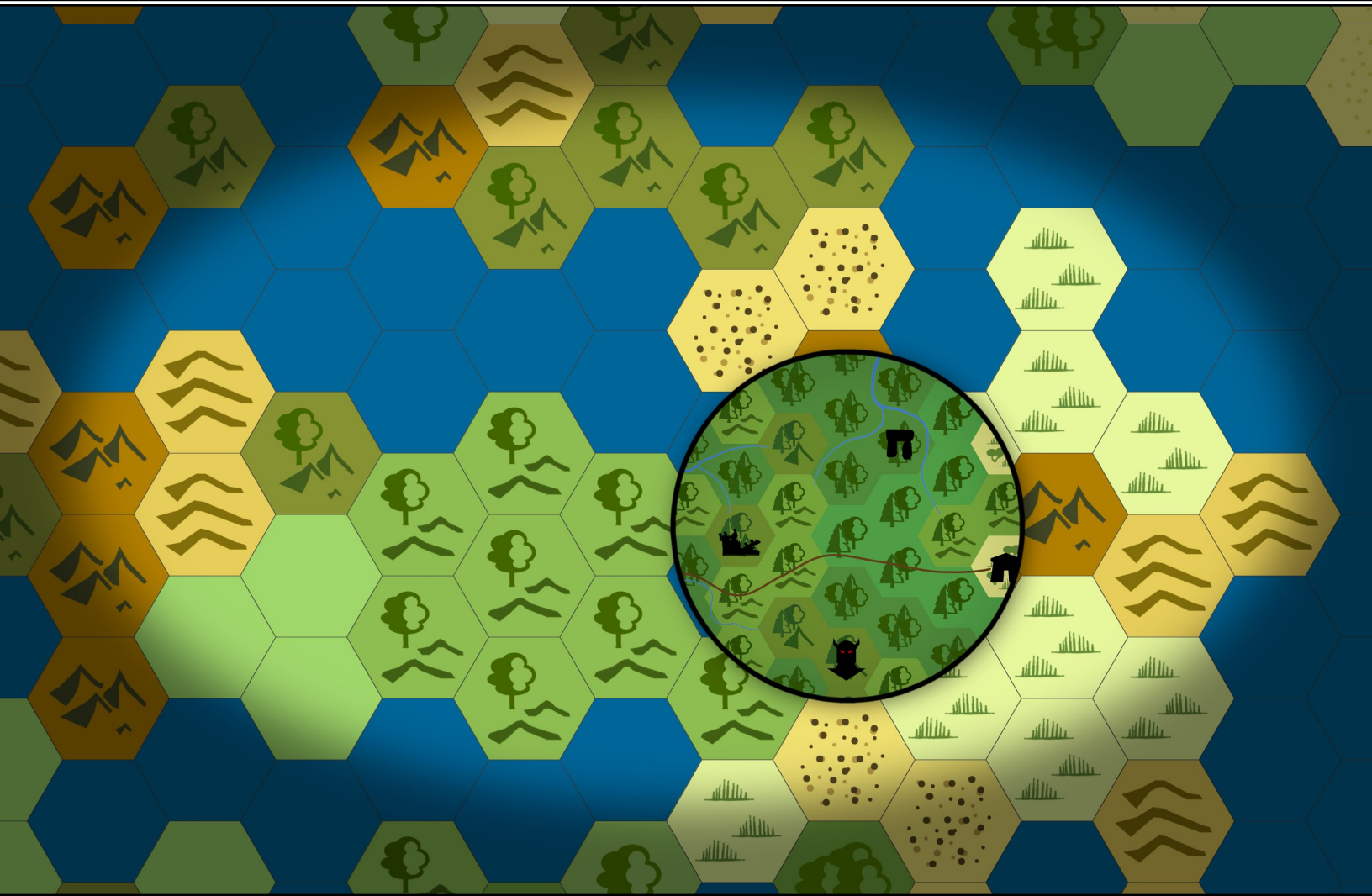


Hexed Places

Bitterblack Forest



Created by Mark A. Thomas





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Bitterblack Forest

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Created by **Mark A. Thomas**

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Artists

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Colin Throm (portrait)

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About Hexed Places

Hexed Places are outdoor locations and encounters based on the classic six-mile hex format and OSR sensibilities. Use these locales as a quick side adventure, to fill a blank spot in your campaign sandbox, or expand upon them to create a multi-session campaign. Each **Hexed Places** includes a regional overview; expanded one-mile per hex maps for players and GMs; encounter tables, treasure information, and rumor lists; and descriptions of locations, encounters, and features within the hex.



Contents and Usage

Player and GM Maps

The maps offer a detailed look at the region at a one-mile per hex scale. The player version of the map does not include roads/trails or locale icons.

Introduction and Rumors

This section provides a broad overview of the region, outlining major physical features and obstacles. It also includes a set of rumors that may or may not provide accurate information about the area.

Locations

The major sites in the region are detailed in this section. Each location is referenced by hex coordinates and a name. Locations are ordered by their coordinates, northwest to southeast.

Encounters

This table reflects the typical creature population of the hex. Its primary purpose is to provide wandering monster encounters, but you can use it to fill in blank spaces on the map or as a tool for populating nearby locales.

Extras

The Extras section details any unique creatures, treasures, or magic items mentioned in the text. It also includes any tables referenced in the main document.

Stat Blocks

All creatures and NPCs in Hexed Places include simple stat blocks as a standard frame of reference. Here is a sample:

Orc (5) - AC 6 (13), HD 1, #AT 1, D 1d6, MV 9

Hate the sun. Treasure: 2d6 GP, 2d6 SP each.

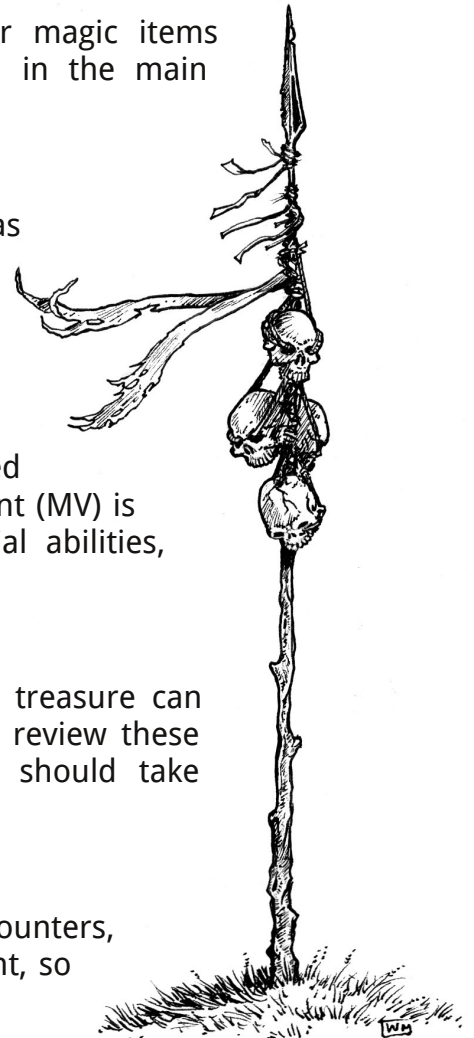
This stat block represents five, one hit-die Orcs. Armor Class (AC) values are given as descending (ascending). An unarmored character is AC 9 (10) and chainmail provides AC 5 (14). Movement (MV) is given in generic units. Unburdened humans are MV 12. Special abilities, class/level, and treasure are appended as needed.

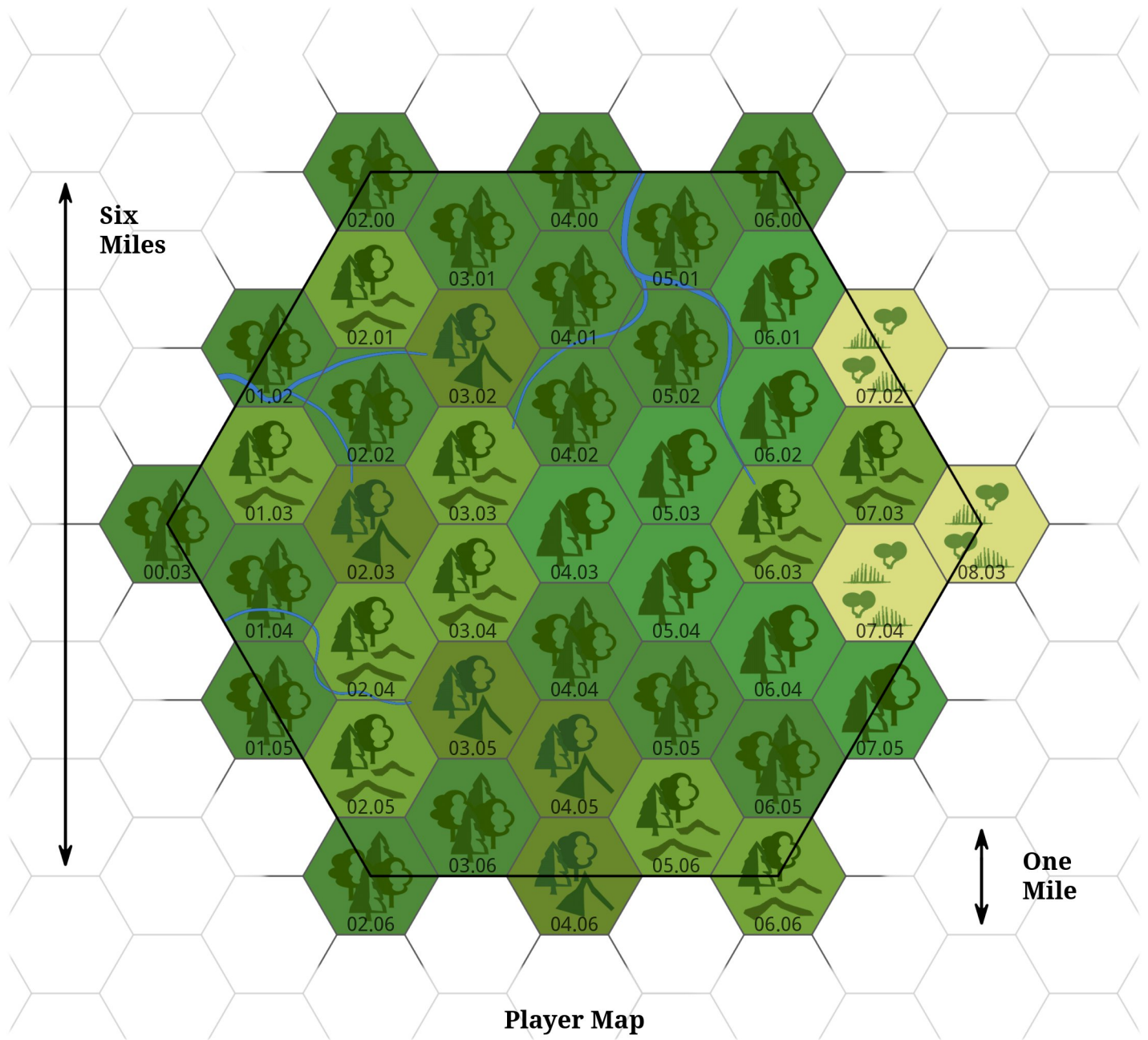
Treasure

Creature and locale descriptions include treasure listings. Since treasure can have a major impact on the campaign, the GM should carefully review these listings and adjust them to suit their game. Intelligent foes should take advantage of any useful treasure they carry.

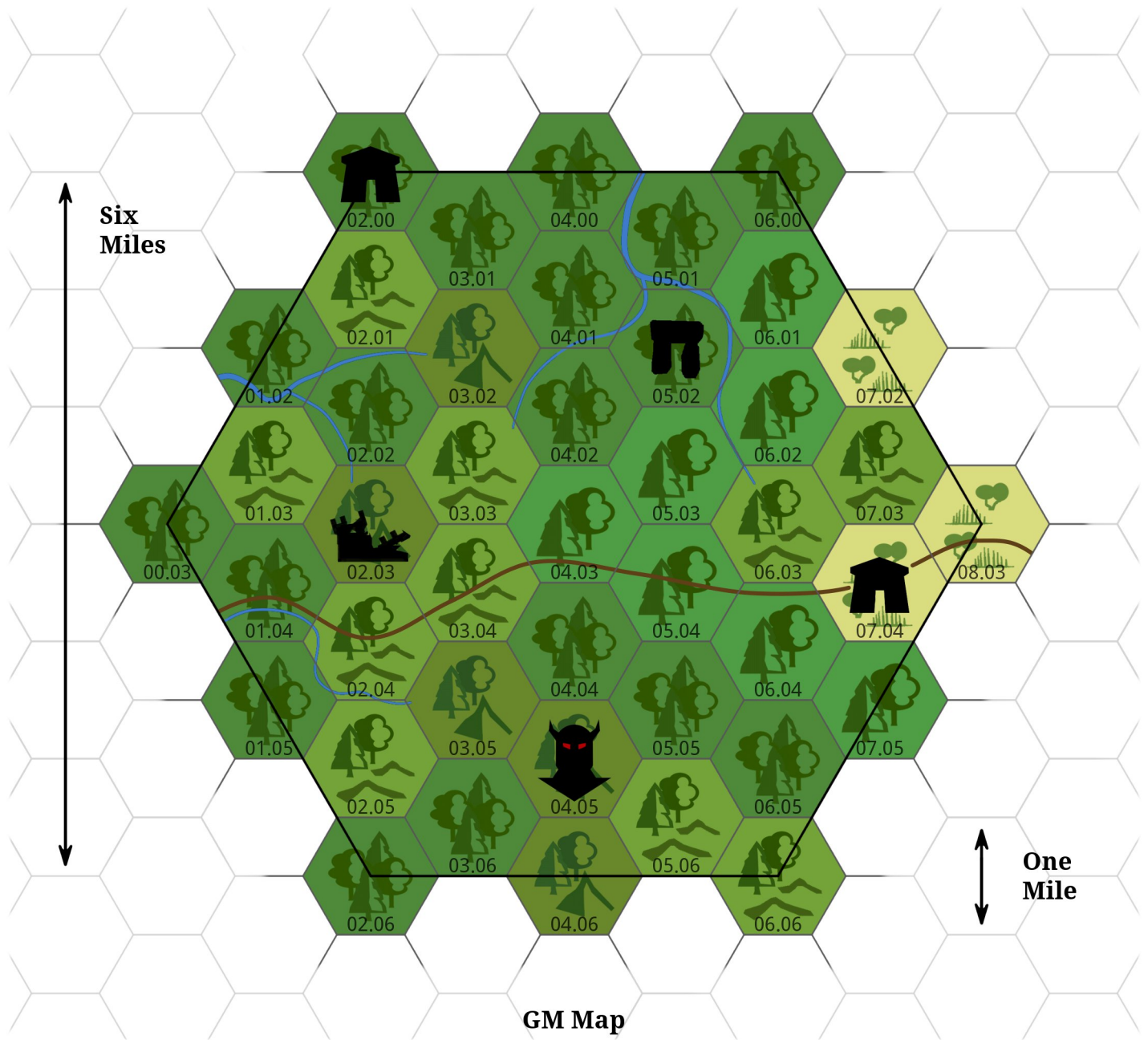
Experience

Hexed Places does not provide experience point values for encounters, foes, or treasure. Experience is very system- and group-dependent, so it's left in the hands of the GM.





Notes:



Notes:

Bitterblack Forest

The narrow road that leads through the rugged Bitterblack Forest is a convenient but dangerous shortcut. Though the **Ranger Camp (Hex 07.04)** serves as a safe haven for travelers, the ruin of **Broken Ridge Tower (Hex 02.03)**, perched on a mountainside overlooking the road, is a grim reminder of the hazards the forest contains. The folk that maintain the Ranger Camp warn travelers to stay on the road. Too far north and they will find themselves in the lands of **Kablican the Summoner (Hex 02.00)**, while the mountainous southern forest hides an unknown threat that occasionally attacks passing caravans.

The mountain range that runs north to south through the Bitterblack Forest has steep and heavily forested slopes, but it is not impassible. The road winds through a mile-wide pass between taller peaks. Several small rain- and snow-fed streams wind through the forest, and one of these, **Whiterock Stream**, parallels the west end of the road as it leaves the region.

Rumors

Kablican's creations, twisted creatures of vine and wood, guard the paths that lead to his hidden camp.

There is a secret place in the northern woods where the brave (or foolhardy) can meet and trade with **Kablican**.

Broken Ridge Tower guarded a small mining settlement. The mine collapsed, destroying part of the tower and killing many inhabitants.

Before it collapsed, the mine produced huge quantities of gold and silver ore.

Travelers often find giant footprints crossing the road, but whoever or whatever makes them is never seen, at least not by anyone that lives to tell the tale.

Lord Dorain Ridge, the owner of the mine and tower, went mad when the mine collapsed. He killed his entire family and himself in the tower ruins.

Kablican the Summoner was one of the original inhabitants of the mining settlement near Broken Ridge Tower.

Some members of Lord Ridge's family survived the massacre.

Bandits and treasure hunters have taken over **Broken Ridge Tower** and use it as a base of operations to search for the lost gold and silver.

Kablican took the mine's hidden gold and silver and uses it to fund his magical research.

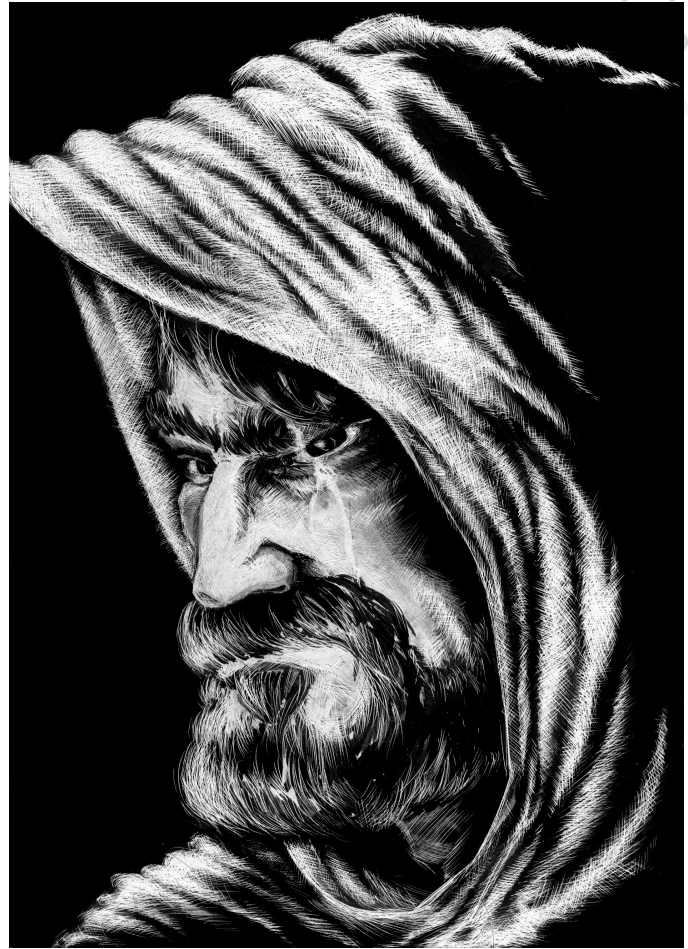


Locations

Hex 02.00 - Kablican's Camp

Kablican has a reputation as a summoner, but he's not. He is a necromancer who imbues dead trees and plant constructs with the essence of the risen dead from **Broken Ridge Tower (Hex 02.03)**. He lives inside the **Abomination**, a huge mound of deadwood animated by his magic. Several **wood walkers** and **root worms**, tree zombies and burrowing roots brought to unlife by the same type of magic, patrol the surrounding area.

Kablican is home 75% of the time. He dislikes being interrupted while he is working but won't automatically attack those who seek him out. Instead, he will try to get rid of them as quickly as possible. Should violence erupt, he will flee to the safety of the Abomination and let his minions deal with the intruders, taking a direct role only if it appears his research, stored inside the Abomination, is threatened. Kablican possesses the **Soul Rod** (see **Extras**) and uses several unique spells to take advantage of its capabilities.



Kablican bears **Nazora** and the other inhabitants of the **Ranger Camp (Hex 07.04)** no ill will. They keep people out of his part of the forest and offer some protection against wandering monsters. Should something pose a significant threat to the rangers, Kablican will likely lend his assistance to the defense of the camp.

Kablican (1) AC 5 (14), HD 9, #AT 1, D staff, MV 12

Level 9 magic-user. Unstable experimenter.

Treasure: Soul Rod, bracers of protection (AC 5), potion of healing (2 doses)

Abomination (1) AC 3 (16), HD 14, #AT 6 3 log slam/3 vine lash, D 2d8/1d6, MV 0

Flammable. Natural appearance. Crushing blows. Constricting vines. Long reach.

Wood Walker (1d3) AC 2 (17), HD 4, #AT 2 pummeling branches, D 2d4+2, MV 12

Flammable. Natural appearance. Command lesser plants.

Root Worm (1d3) AC 5 (14), HD 2, #AT 1 spiny lash, D 1d6, MV 6 / 3 burrowing

Natural appearance. Entangling. Parasitic Seeds (see Extras).

Kablican's treasure is in the Abomination, inside a portable hole. In addition to the Soul Rod and his spellbook, he has a scroll of 4 druid spells, a chest of 3,000 GP worth of mixed coins and gems, and two jeweled rings worth 1,200 GP each. Contrary to rumor, he does not possess the lost treasure of **Broken Ridge Tower (Hex 02.03)**, although the two rings in his hoard once belonged to **Lord Dorain Ridge**.

Locations (continued)

Hex 02.03 - Broken Ridge Tower

The tower ruin is little more than a shell. The burned timbers and heaped rubble of the upper walls and floors fill most of the tower's cellar. The fortification guards the mouth of a narrow valley that leads to the ruins of a half-dozen huts and a great hall, all made of wood. The mouth of the collapsed mine leads a short way into the nearby mountainside.

During the day, the entire area appears normal, although the observant will note there are no birds or small animals in the surrounding trees. At night, the **risen dead** emerge and roam the ridge near the tower, the ruined village, and the mine.

Risen Dead (1d6, 32 total) AC 5 (14), HD 3, #AT 2, D 1d6/1d6, MV 12

Silver weapons required. Noncorporeal. Fear aura. Slowing touch.

The risen dead are the souls of the miners and their families, who died in the collapse of the mine and the slaughter, instigated by **Lord Dorain Ridge**, that followed. While these creatures can be slain, doing so only destroys them for one night. Finding and removing the remains of Lord Ridge (buried in the tower debris), and consecrating the tower, village ruin, and mine will lay these unfortunate creatures to rest once and for all.

While the rumors about the vast hoard of gold and silver hidden in the tower are greatly exaggerated, there is a cache of raw gold worth 500 GP hidden in a secret compartment buried in the tower cellar and several barrels of silver ore worth 1,000 GP in a rubble-filled mine storeroom. Recovering either treasure will take a significant amount of pick and shovel work. Digging in the mine will draw the attention of the risen dead, who can appear in its shadowed depths at any time.

Hex 04.05 - Ettin Lair

Three **ettins** inhabit a deep cave on the south side of this hex. These dull creatures are terrifying foes who actively hunt humans and other sentient beings as prey. Luckily, they are also lazy and prefer hunting in the easy-to-reach lands south of the mountains. Ettins prefer their food fresh. They will subdue their victims and bring them back to their den, still alive.

The ettin cave is a foul place. Gnawed bones and filth cover the floor, and crude mats made of twigs and leaves and wrapped in uncured hides serve as beds for the enormous creatures. There are two natural tunnels at the back of the complex. One leads to a cave with a spring-fed pool that serves as a water source. The other ends in a crude but sturdy wall of wooden bars that blocks off the end of the tunnel. There is a 25% chance the ettins will have prisoners here.

Ettin (1d3) AC 3 (16), HD 10, #AT 2, D 2d8/3d8, MV 12

Dim-witted. Always hungry. Prefer fresh meat.

Prisoner (1d3) AC 9 (10), HD 1, #AT 1, D 1d4, MV 9

Feeble and starved.

Each ettin has a private stash of 2d6 x 500 GP worth of coins and gems that it carries in a filthy hide sack. A careful search of the debris on the cave floor will turn up a +2 suit of chainmail, a ring of flying, and a scroll of 4 magic-user spells in a warded case. If all three ettins aren't here, there is a 25% chance per turn one will return from hunting.

Hex 05.02 - The Stump

There is a small clearing in the northeast corner of this hex. A huge, petrified stump covered in carved runes and symbols sits in the center of this open area. **Kablican (Hex 02.00)** and the occupants of the **Ranger Camp (Hex 07.04)** treat this spot as neutral ground and meet here when the need arises.

Ranger scouts visit the clearing daily and inform their leader immediately if Kablican is here. The rangers will, reluctantly, guide a group seeking an audience with Kablican to the Stump. Kablican uses his undead plant minions to watch for ranger activity and will arrive in 1d4 hours if he believes a meeting is worth his time.

Hex 06.03 - Crystal Song Springs

Several natural springs feed a small stream that flows over a series of boulders and ledges and fills the air with the sound of falling water. One of the springs is magical. Bathing in its icy waters has a 50% chance of removing curses. **Nazora**, the leader of the **Ranger Camp (Hex 07.04)** knows about the spring and its effects.

Hex 07.04 - Ranger Camp

This palisade-protected compound sits atop a low hill next to the road and serves as a base of operations for the rangers who protect travelers passing through Bitterblack Forest. **Nazora**, a short woman with tanned features, runs the camp. She is friendly and greets new arrivals personally, both to welcome them, and to ensure the safety of her followers and other visitors. The camp itself is a simple affair. Several simple cabins and a small stable shelter the residents, guests, and their mounts. A spacious hall serves as a communal dining room, kitchen, and storage area. There is a small shrine to a local forest deity in a secluded corner of the camp. The offering box near the entrance gives travelers who use the camp a means of repaying their hosts.

Nazora (1) AC 4 (15) HD 9, #AT 2, D long sword/dagger or bow, MV 12

Level 9 ranger. Woodwise. A force for good. Tactical master. Treasure: +2 long sword, +3 studded leather, ring of animal control, 3d10 GP

Senior Scout (3) AC 7 (12), HD 3, #AT 1, D long sword or bow, MV 12

Level 3 ranger. Woods wise. Loyal to Nazora. Trustworthy guide. Treasure: 3d10 GP

Scout (6) AC 7 (12), HD 1, #AT 1, D long sword or bow, MV 12

Woods wise. Trustworthy guide. Loyal to Nazora. Treasure: 2d10 GP

Camp Worker (4) AC 9 (10), HD 1, #AT 1, D dagger, MV 12

Friendly host. Loyal to Nazora. Treasure: 1d10 GP

Nazora believes **Kablican (Hex 02.00)** is a tolerable, but not particularly desirable, neighbor. She views his undead plants as a perversion of the natural order, but she does not believe she can win a confrontation with the powerful magician and his minions.



Encounters (roll 1d20)

1-6 Ranger Party

A group of rangers on patrol or hunting game. They move through the forest in a spread formation that covers quite a bit of ground and are ready for action. There is a 25% chance **Nazora** will be with the group. See **Ranger Camp (Hex 07.04)**.

Senior Scout (1) AC 7 (12), HD 3, #AT 1, D long sword or bow, MV 12

Level 3 ranger. Woods wise. Loyal to Nazora. Trustworthy guide. Treasure: 3d10 GP

Scout (3) AC 7 (12), HD 1, #AT 1, D long sword or bow, MV 12

Woods wise. Trustworthy guide. Loyal to Nazora. Treasure: 2d10 GP

Rangers will assist those they encounter in the woods if necessary and report all activity to Nazora when they return to the ranger camp.

7 Ettins

Ettins from the **Ettin Lair (Hex 04.05)** looking for prey. They attack anything they encounter without hesitation.

Ettins (1d2) AC 3 (16), HD 10, #AT 2, D 2d8/3d8, MV 12

Dim-witted. Always hungry. Prefer fresh meat. Treasure: See lair

8-10 Wood Walkers

These undead plants are keeping watch for **Kablican** and attempt to avoid contact, commanding lesser plants to entangle anyone who attempts to follow them. If pressed they fight until destroyed.

Wood Walker (1d3) AC 2 (17), HD 4, #AT 2 pummeling branches, D 2d4+2, MV 12

Flammable. Natural appearance. Command lesser plants.

11 Kablican

The necromancer makes regular trips to **Broken Ridge Tower (Hex 02.03)** to recharge the **Soul Rod**. He is usually accompanied by wood walkers

Kablican (1) AC 5 (14), HD 8, #AT 1, D staff, MV 12

Level 9 magic-user. Unstable experimenter.

Treasure: Soul Rod, bracers of protection (AC 5), potion of healing (2 doses)

Wood Walker (1d3) AC 2 (17), HD 4, #AT 2 pummeling branches, D 2d4+2, MV 12

Flammable. Natural appearance. Command lesser plants.

12-13 Risen Dead (night only, treat at ranger patrol during the day)

The risen dead sometimes wander quite a distance from **Broken Ridge Tower (Hex 02.03)**. They attack any living creature they encounter.

Risen Dead (1d3) AC 5 (14), HD 3, #AT 2, D 1d6/1d6, MV 12

Silver weapons required. Noncorporeal. Fear aura. Slowing touch.

Encounters (continued)

14-15 Treasure Hunters

Most of the treasure hunters that come to Bitterblack Forest are little more than bandits looking for an easy score. They'll take advantage of any situation if it's profitable.

Treasure Hunters (1d4+1) AC 7 (12), HD 1+1, #AT 1, D short sword or crossbow, MV 9
Sneaky and untrustworthy. Treasure: weapons, 10 GP, 10 SP each.

16-17 Travelers

Those who pass through the forest do so in groups, with chance determining who travels with whom.

Hunter / Trapper (1d2) AC 7 (12), HD 1+1, #AT 1, D spear or long bow, MV 12
Woodwise. Stealthy. Treasure: weapons, 5 GP, 10 SP each.

Merchant (1d2) AC 7 (12), HD 1, #AT 1, D short sword, MV 12
Road-wise traveler. Clever negotiator. Treasure: 15 GP, 10 SP, 50 GP in minor jewelry

Mercenary (1d4) AC 5 (14), HD 1+1, #AT 1, D long sword or crossbow, MV 12
Road-wise traveler. Skilled combatant. Treasure: 5 GP, 10 SP each

18 Grizzly Bear

While the rangers keep most large predators away, wandering bears pass through the area from time to time.

Grizzly Bear (1) AC 6 (13) HD 6+6, #AT 3, D 1d8/1d8/1d12, MV 12
Hug attack. Aggressive. Overbearing charge.

19 Giant Tree Spider

One can find these elusive predators throughout Bitterblack Forest.

Giant Tree Spider (1) AC 6 (13), HD 4+4, #AT 1, D 2d6, MV 12 / 6 climbing
Poison bite. Long distance jumper. Camouflaged. Silken snare.

20 GM Choice

Choose from the entries above, add an encounter of your own, or use something from an adjacent locale.

Notes:

Extras

Kablican's Spells

Undead Reconstruction

Kablican discovered a method of healing any undead creature, including the plant constructs he creates using Animate Plant. This 2nd level spell permanently repairs 1d6+1 hit points of damage suffered by any undead.

Unnatural Enhancement

This permanent 3rd level spell strengthens an undead plant created by the Animate Plant spell. It can improve base AC or HD, enhance attacks, or add special abilities. Each casting affects one undead plant and uses an essence charge from the Soul Rod.

Animate Plant

This permanent 4th level spell turns one or more dead plants or parts of plants into undead constructs. Each casting animates plant matter with hit dice equal to the caster's level. Most animated plants are flammable and hard to see in natural settings due to their coloration and appearance. Each casting of this spell requires an essence charge from the Soul Rod. Typical animated plants:

- Vines and shrubs: AC 5 (14), HD 1-2, #AT 1, D 1d4, MV 6
- Small trees: AC 4 (15), HD 3-4, #AT 2, D 1d6/1d6 MV 9
- Large trees: AC 3 (16), HD 5+, #AT 2, D 1d8+2/1d8+2 MV 9

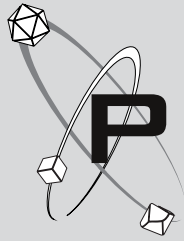
Parasitic Seeds

Kablican's Root Worm minions inject a seed into anyone they hit with their spiny attacks. If the victim fails to make a saving throw versus disease, the seed germinates and slowly spreads its roots throughout the creature's body, a process that takes 3d4 days and inflicts 2d6 damage per day. Eventually, the roots will slay the victim and, after 1d4 more days, sprout 1d3 new Root Worms. Cure disease removes the infestation.

The Soul Rod

This ornate rod of carved onyx, bone, and wood with a black crystal tip has two powers. It creates a circle of protection from undead 10 feet in diameter when held. It can also absorb the animating essence of any intelligent undead creature that fails its saving throw versus magic. The remains of any trapped being fall lifeless, and the trapped essence can be destroyed or used for other purposes according to the wielder's whim. The absorption power of the soul rod may be used twice per day, and the item may hold up to five trapped essences.





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