SECRET SANTICORE

2013

Volume III

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The Iridescent Ballroom of Lost Shagruth, PG 131

SECRET SANTICORE 2013

Volume III

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Special thanks to Jez Gordon and Dak Ultimak for essential guidance

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Circle of Blood, Ring of Stone

by Chris Carpenter
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Dear Santicore, I would like...
An epic evil ritual involving four crystal daggers that my PCs need to disrupt before it causes the end of the world.
Thanks, K.

Overview and Caveats

Obviously this leads to a lot of speculation as to system, level, etc., so I basically winged it by making it as system-neutral as possible, with D&D references for you to make your own time/scale conversions. I also assume the players are of medium-high level, high enough to deal with real end-of-the-world consequences. I have put in some balancing sub-scenarios as suggestions, in case the game goes too hard or too easy. Either way you play it, this should be a big deal, with heroic deaths a distinct possibility, as well as the threat of a new evil god to add to your pantheon. I am not writing the story up to this point, so only you and your players will know if you are ready to turn it up to 11. Regardless, the story, obviously, is yours to do with as you please, changing names and details as you see fit to mesh better with your campaign. Some amount of bookkeeping beforehand is going to necessary to get all of the foes and magic in line with your system, and all of the enemies are assumed to be human unless otherwise stated.

My concocted scenario is thus: through adventuring or rumors, your party has uncovered discord being sown among a series of brutal, Chaos worshiping tribes. Followers of the old Chaos gods, having been repeatedly thrashed by heroes and other do-gooders, decide to bring back the one true bearer of Chaos, Katar. A name whispered only in the darkest shadows of lost temples, Katar was put down in his day; not by the forces of Law, but by the might of his fellow Chaotic deities. Constrained by the combined magics of his peers, he was then transformed into a state of mortal flesh and buried in the blasted wastelands of your world, never to be seen or openly worshipped again. Now, millennia later, a handful of Chaos clerics have assembled the tools to bring Katar back to full awareness, with the hopes of being venerated into his good graces as the world burns with his vengeful wrath.

The key to the resurrection of Katar are four crystal daggers, specially blessed by ancient Katar-worshipers, and possibly parts of his mortal body. The daggers are rare and valuable magical weapons, (see below) and are critical in the Ceremony of the Resurrection. The Ceremony has been carefully researched and the celestial alignment is fast approaching. The ground that the ceremony is to take place on has been painstakingly prepared, and new worshipers have come from far to prove their loyalty to Katar above the rest of the Chaos pantheon. Your party must stop the ritual before it reaches its climax, or there will be nowhere to hide as Katar reshapes the world to reflect his tempestuous psyche.

The Circle

The clerics of Katar have prepared a special sacrificial circle in the middle of a vast, rocky desert. A circle, cleared of stones and about 45 feet in diameter, is the centerpiece. Twelve obsidian pillars ring the circle at cardinal points, each with a red, magical flame burning at the top. The light from the pillars is as bright as day but cool to the touch, and the red color does not drive off creatures normally adverse to such light. Chained to each pillar is a willing sacrifice, drawn from the warriors and zealots that have freely given over to Katar worship. If freed, they will stay and help the clerics finish the ceremony, including attacking the heroes. At the center of the circle are four obsidian slabs, specially prepared to act as sacrificial alters. The tables are arranged in a cross formation, with the head of each victim facing in towards the center. The four virgins chained to these slabs are NOT willing and thrash about as much as they can. If freed, they will attempt to flee.

Outside of the sacrificial circle is a ring of "blood" with land bridges at the four cardinal points. The blood has an unearthly glow, like lava, and is toxic and waist-deep. Any living creature who would enter it will suffer damage as if they were on fire. The land bridges are fifteen feet across and are each guarded by two medium-level Armed Warriors to keep the zealots from entering the circle before the ceremony is complete. Outside of the ring of blood are many low-level worshippers. The worshippers are dregs of other Chaotic gods; they seek a fresh start and hope that they will receive special blessings for witnessing the rebirth of Katar.

The final notable landmark is hundreds of feet from the sacrificial circle: camps of those in attendance. There is little in the way of foliage, but the further you go from the circle, there are scrubby clumps of trees and bushes, and a tent city has sprung up around the area. There is not much in the way of organized law here, but desperate men and women skulk around the camps, sitting around weak fires and looking out for trouble. A small economy has sprung up here, with a traveling blacksmith and several people selling questionable foodstuffs and water.

The final players in our cast are the four Clerics of Katar, and Flintax the Blood Dragon. The four clerics are powerful (mid-level) but have exchanged much of their former deity's spells for the promise of great power at his side. The only powers Katar has been able to grant his new Clerics in his current state are some basic clerical spells and the ability to cast this Resurrection Ritual.

The crystal daggers compensate for this somewhat, but the clerics are still stunted until Katar resumes his immortal form.

Flintax seeks the same goal as the clerics, and is using his new worship of Katar as a path to dominance over other dragons. Unlike the clerics, however, Flintax's magic is arcane and not subject to his standing with other gods. He simply seeks to elevate his position within his own circles. Flintax is equivalent to a juvenile Red Dragon, and enjoys all of the benefits your system would give him.

The Rules of the Mob

There is no one right way to deal with this scenario for your players. To increase dramatic tension, I envision the players infiltrating the tent city, only to hear the ceremony begin off in the desert and watch the worshippers as they move towards the circle in the distance across the broken desert. Your party may be rich or clever enough to have flying mounts, or able to field an army of knights aligned against this abominable act. Whatever your players can do, I can only offer some speed-bumps to keep them from powering over the mob in an un-dramatic fashion without resorting to plot-hammer tactics. Remember: this is supposed to be challenging and fun, as well as forcing the players to deal with the harsh consequences of failure.

The first ring of defense then, is the tent city. People who clearly don't belong will be harassed or chased and attacked. These are low level mooks, though, and have seen many new worshipers over a relatively short period of time. A few new faces won't cause undue trouble.

The second ring is the broken desert from the tent city to just outside the blood ring. This is about 300 feet of difficult terrain, with sharp, dangerous rocks jutting out of the sand. War machines and chariots would simply never make it through. Mounted travel could become more trouble than it is worth.

Note: Once combat starts from the third ring forward, then start the timer on the sacrifices, and keep running it until one side or the other is victorious.

The third ring is the mob of worshippers right outside the circle. They are primed for a bloodletting and their morale is unbreakable. Starting trouble there will result in a quick fight, but they are nothing more than club-wielding rabble with no armor. At least 30 at each cardinal land bridge, they will certainly shift to a different area to kill the heroes. There are drummers posted around the outside of the blood ring, and will not stop drumming for any reason. If a drummer is killed, a new drummer will step up from out of the rabble. This is a red herring, and has nothing to do with successfully completing the ceremony. Any combat that gets the attention of the armed guards, however, will get the fourth ring involved.

The fourth ring is the armed warriors posted at the four cardinal land bridges. They always face the crowd, and are difficult to trick. Approaching them will get you in trouble, and if the crowd hasn't already alerted them to your presence, then they are now. They have everything invested in the return of Katar, and will attack with little provocation. The warriors are backed up by medium-level archers that are halfway between each bridge (inside the blood circle), and can change position to get a better shot. The warriors will NOT leave the bridges to attack the heroes except to stay between the heroes and the clerics!

The final ring is the cleric / dragon combination. If the heroes breach any of the bridges, the dragon will land to intercept them before they can get to the clerics. The dragon is much more of a challenge than the clerics, but there is only one of him and potentially 5 or 6 heroes (plus retainers, hirelings, etc.). Flintax will NOT use his breath weapon if it will disrupt the ceremony or kill the sacrifices out of sequence. Flintax will not get involved in any combat that takes place outside of the circle; he will just continue to slowly spiral over the site, watching and waiting. He WILL immediately attack ANY flying heroes he detects, using his breath weapon and brute force to bring them down.

The clerics are armed for battle, with their vestments warn over their plate armor. They all carry broadswords on their backs, but only bear the crystal dagger, and no shield. They are completely focused on the ceremony, which is long and detailed. A disruption might delay the completion, but the window to finish is open to dramatic interpretation. Once they start killing sacrifices, however, the clock really starts ticking. Each cleric starts in the center of the circle, next to an unwilling sacrifice. They will then move away from the center, towards the willing sacrifices at each cardinal bridge. Chanting the whole time, they cut the throats of the willing victims, and slowly move on in a clockwise formation. After they kill the last willing victim, they return to the center, and, as one, kill the virgin sacrifices. The blood sluices down each of the special obsidian tables towards the head of the victims, ultimately going down a central shaft sunk deep in the earth. If there are less than 4 clerics left, the remaining sacrifices can be killed by the remaining clerics, slowing the process down.

The Countdown

Assuming a 6 second combat round, is takes the (uninterrupted) clerics 20 rounds to "finish" the ceremony.

Round	Action
1, 2	Move to 1st sacrifice
3	Kill 1st sacrifice
4, 5	Move to 2nd sacrifice
6	Kill 2nd sacrifice
7, 8	Move to 3rd sacrifice
9	Kill 3rd sacrifice
10	Move to final sacrifice
11-19	Final invocation of Katar
20	Kill final sacrifice

The Schedule assumes all 4 clerics are in synchronicity, chanting their twisted prayers. If one of the clerics is delayed, the others will wait before moving on. If one of the clerics are killed or incapacitated, the others will keep killing any of the other sacrifices, saving the unwilling ones for last. Given enough time, one cleric could do the entire ceremony by himself, but he still has to take the time as shown above for proper invocation.

If the ceremony goes this far, you should describe the rebirth of Katar in the vilest of manners. He bursts from the ground like a living mountain, a crown of flaming obsidian on his bloody, skeletal head. Any on the ground in the sacrificial circle take massive amounts of damage from falling, and from flying rocks and debris. He stretches his arms out, healing and reforming his flesh before all of the horrified survivors. Taking in the night air, he stomps off in a cloud of debris to ascend to the celestial planes and wreck everything, leaving his puny "clerics" and "worshippers" to witness nothing but their own dwindling mortality.

Disrupting the ceremony can be done in several ways:

a) Kill all the clerics
b) Destroy all the crystal daggers
c) Free the sacrifices.
d) Kill the unwilling sacrifices with something other than the daggers.

The last one is pretty harsh, but it's the end of the world, so, it might come to this.

Speedbumps

Players have a nasty habit of surviving your carefully designed scenarios. If you need to ramp up the challenge of the scenario, here are some suggestions.

a) The circle of blood is alive. If things are looking bad for team Katar, the blood can rise up like a Water Weird and attack. They try to grapple the heroes into the blood.
b) The enemies around the circle that died for any reason start to stir and stagger towards the heroes as basic zombies. The blood ring does not harm them, but slows their movement to half of walking.
c) The highly sanctified area makes casting hero clerical spells more difficult. Roll a D20 for every clerical spell attempted. On a 1 or 2, the spell simply fails. As the ceremony progresses, it gets worse. If they kill the first sacrifices, you fail on a 4 or less. Second sacrifice, you fail on a 6 or less. Third sacrifice, you fail on an 8 or less.
d) Add more armed warriors. Add one more archer for each two warriors.

Helping Hands

As you might imagine, the followers of other deities are not too thrilled about the potential return of Katar, but most either do not know about him or don't believe he can return; the few who do could prove to be beneficial last-minute allies. If the crowd of low level worshippers prove too challenging, have the new allies appear from the back of the crowd, drawing away some of the heat. A friendship forged in this crucible will be one long remembered. Even one of the armed guards could prove to be a double agent who came to the organization early and worked his way to a trusted position.

The tent city draws many looking to make coin from a new market. A familiar rogue NPC could be found who knows a little more about what is going on and is willing to talk.

Suggested Enemy Levels

Assuming a 12th to 15th level D&D 3.5 party, here are some suggested enemy levels.

Clerics 12th level, casts at 3rd level
Armed warriors 10th level, full plate, broadsword
Archers 10th level
Worshippers 1st level
Flintax the Blood Dragon Juvenile Red Dragon

The Crystal Daggers

+3 Unholy Dagger; all damage done converts to temporary HP to the wielder. The dagger can only be damaged by weapons of +3 or better magical enhancement. If the DM feels it is appropriate, a Sonic Attack that does 5 HP of damage to a cleric can shatter a blade.

Circle of Blood, Ring of Stone by Chris Carpenter

Map Legend:

A) Obsidian pillars
SS) Unwilling Sacrifice
X) Center of battlefield

Everything else: various worshipers. With so many potential warriors, stock up on coins, buttons, paper figs, etc.

Dread of the Maleficara

by Joey Lindsey
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http://metalvsskin.blogspot.com

Dear Santicore, I would like...
An adventure in a Victorian/Renaissance era setting where the main goal is to escort a supposed witch to her burning. The adventure should focus on the personality of the witch which will try to tempt the characters to free her instead of bringing her to the bonfire to burn her. Inspiration can be drawn from the first part of the movie "Season of the Witch".
Thanks, V. Q.

This adventure starts with the PCs having captured a witch they must deliver to the Inquisition. A decent session or several can be had getting them there and getting the Witch from the uncooperative town that loves her.

Factions

The King has converted the Kingdom to a new religion to facilitate wooing a foreign bride; magic has been decalred illegal in fitting with this new religion's beliefs, and an Inquisition of the High Clergy convened to judge and execute all Magic Users.

The PCs: I imagine this as a Beyond the Wall or Pendragon adventure run early in the campaign. The PCs are probably youngsters looking to be knighted, or just keep their heads and make some gold. They probably remember witches being ok (even nuns of the old church) in their youth but taught magic = bad for several years now. They have been hired by a local Baron to fetch a witch from an uncooperative village.

The Maleficara are a group of witches organizing a revolution against the King; they have summoned the Shibbolim to punish The Weeds and other witches who would not join them.

The Shibbolim are strange extra dimensional creatures. They can sense healing, potion-making, and other non-combative magics and attempt to swarm the caster and take them to The Maleficara for punishment.

The Weeds are a group hiding and smuggling witches out of the Kingdom; they have a few safe houses along the route and will attempt to smuggle Sister Marwyn out if she can make it to a safe house. Witches hide "in the Weeds". Members of this group are not violent and will not save witches outside their safe houses.

Sister Marwyn (the witch the PCs are "excorting") is a nun of the old church who served as healer and advisor to a local town. The town hid her, but she wanted to be caught by the PCs figuring she can escape from them later. She's using the PCs as an unwitting armed guard against highwaymen, the Maleficara, and the Shibbolim. Her goal is to get to a Weeds safe house. She will not talk about The Weeds or her goals to the PCs even if they help her, fearing they'll reveal the group to the Inquisition.

If the PCs fail to deliver Sister Marwyn to the King's Inquisition, they'll be judged in league with her and their executions ordered. Thus, not only must they not let her escape, they can't let anyone else kill her (or kill her themselves) without becoming outlaws. The Inquisition must judge her while alive to "prove" her transgressions.
When the group gets near a Weeds safe house, Marwyn will attempt to exploit what she has learned about the PCs to escape from them, either through distraction, setting them against each other, or winning one to her side. She is young, beautiful, and fair at getting men and women to believe she might violate her vows for them - though she never would.
She won't tell PCs about The Weeds or lead them to the safe house even if they are aligned with her and defy their King; they are tools to be used and she will not risk the lives of other witches or members of the Weeds.

SISTER MARWYN
5th Lvl Magic User/3rd Lvl Cleric
DEX 13, INT 15, CHA 17, HP 23, AC 12
Charm Person, Cure Light Wounds,
determine the rest randomly or before play.
When other witches are present,
she casts as if one level higher.

Shibbolim Rumors

Marwyn doesn't know what they do exactly. If investigated, here are the rumors. Successes get PC's closer to true rumors.

1	Can't cross running water, including rain (partially true)
2	Sense any Healing Magic or anything related to it and hate life (true)
3	Came from the moon and are vulnerable to it's light
4	Came from the moon and are vulnerable to sunlight
5	Despise mornings (partially true; dew means lots of water around)
6	From another dimension (true)
7	Undead
8	can be bottled (up to the GM)
9	just thieves in weird cloaks
10	Succeed on CHA roll and get one sentence of knowledge from the Shibbolim stats here or the player gets to glimpse the whole entry for 5 seconds; a Maleficara deserter told them whatever info they get.

ENCOUNTERS

The Shibbolim

...appear as a cloud of sooty smoke with vague figures and shapes swirling inside.

What is glimpsed in the Shibbolim?

1	Father beckoning you into the smoke
2	Mother
3	a sibling
4	dead companion
5-6	living friend, beckoning you into the smoke
7-8	a sought after or cherished object just out of reach

The Shibbolim have no knowledge of how they appear to others. This effect is in the viewer's perception.

They take no damage from magical sources, but immediately ignore the person that damaged them (from a magical source). They are meant to seek those who use magic for anything but damage.
~1/2 damage from normal weapons and fire. If defeated without being exposed to water, they reform in 1d6x10 minutes.
~Water of any kind is as fire to them, mist or steam is as acid, strong wind is as Hold Person. They are immune to mind-affecting spells and poison.
~They cannot track by sight or smell. They sense any magic within 100 miles and lock on to the user if a previous target or the magic is being used for anything but damage and destruction. This includes making potions or items (they do not sense the making of magic weapons.) Examples: healing, protection, brewing potions, making herbal cures, divination...even herbal tonics
~Once a target is sensed, the Shibbolim will lock onto the target and attack it and anyone in their way. Again, though, they will ignore anyone using magic to harm them.

No appearing: 2-7
HD: 5
AC: 19, 13 in windy conditions
Attacks: +5 to hit, causes no damage,
1d6 rounds paralysis,
causes wild dreams and visions
Speed: 16 if 12 is human norm in your system;
10 in windy conditions;
same flying but cannot rise more than
20 feet off the ground.

The Shibbolim can carry anyone they have hit and paralyzed, and will carry them off to the Maleficara.

Maleficara Patrol

They are all Magic Users and travel in patrols of 6. Each patrol has 1d4 temporary magical weapons to repel the Shibbolim with. These will be +1 for 1d4 days unless made permanent during that time. The Maleficara focus on spells that immobilize or damage.

What level/HD? roll 1d6

1-3	1st level
4	3rd level
5	5th level
6	8th level

What temporary +1 weapons do they have?
(1d4 per patrol) roll d10

1	spike on a leather strap (1 normal damage + 1 magic damage)
2-4	dagger
5	sling
6-7	whip
8	scourge
9	axe
10	sword

Bandits/King's Guard/Townsfolk

Nothing special about these guys; normal as per your campaign.

Inquisitors

They travel in groups of 3-8.

What classes? 1d6

1-3	devout fighters
4-5	...and one Cleric present
6	...and one Paladin present

They will seek to take anyone acting suspicious, espousing a different religion, or using magic in for questioning and torture.

The Weeds

roll 1d6

1-4	1st level villager with Stealth skills (as Thief or Assassin, but only used for hiding people away or sneaking)
5	3rd level as above
6	...and Magic User of 1d6 level

Random Encounters

1-3	forest: wolfpack, Mountains: tribesmen, plains: peasants, water: pirates, bandits areas: bandits
4-5	bears, if in water strange magical beast
6-7	bandits/pirates
8-9	Inquisition patrol
10-11	Maleficara witch patrol
12-14	Shibbolim
15	Mercenaries
16	King's knights
17	peasants
18	town guard
19	foreigners
20	The Weeds group escorting a hidden witch

Virtues and Vices for OSR games

1	Chaste / Lustful	6
2	Forgiving / Vengeful	7
3	Merciful / Cruel	8
4	Trusting / Suspicious	9
5	Valorous / Cowardly	10

At character creation, Roll 5d10; each die indicates a Virtue or Vice that increases by 1d4. If you get the same result twice, you may roll again if desired or increase the same one twice to a max of 5.

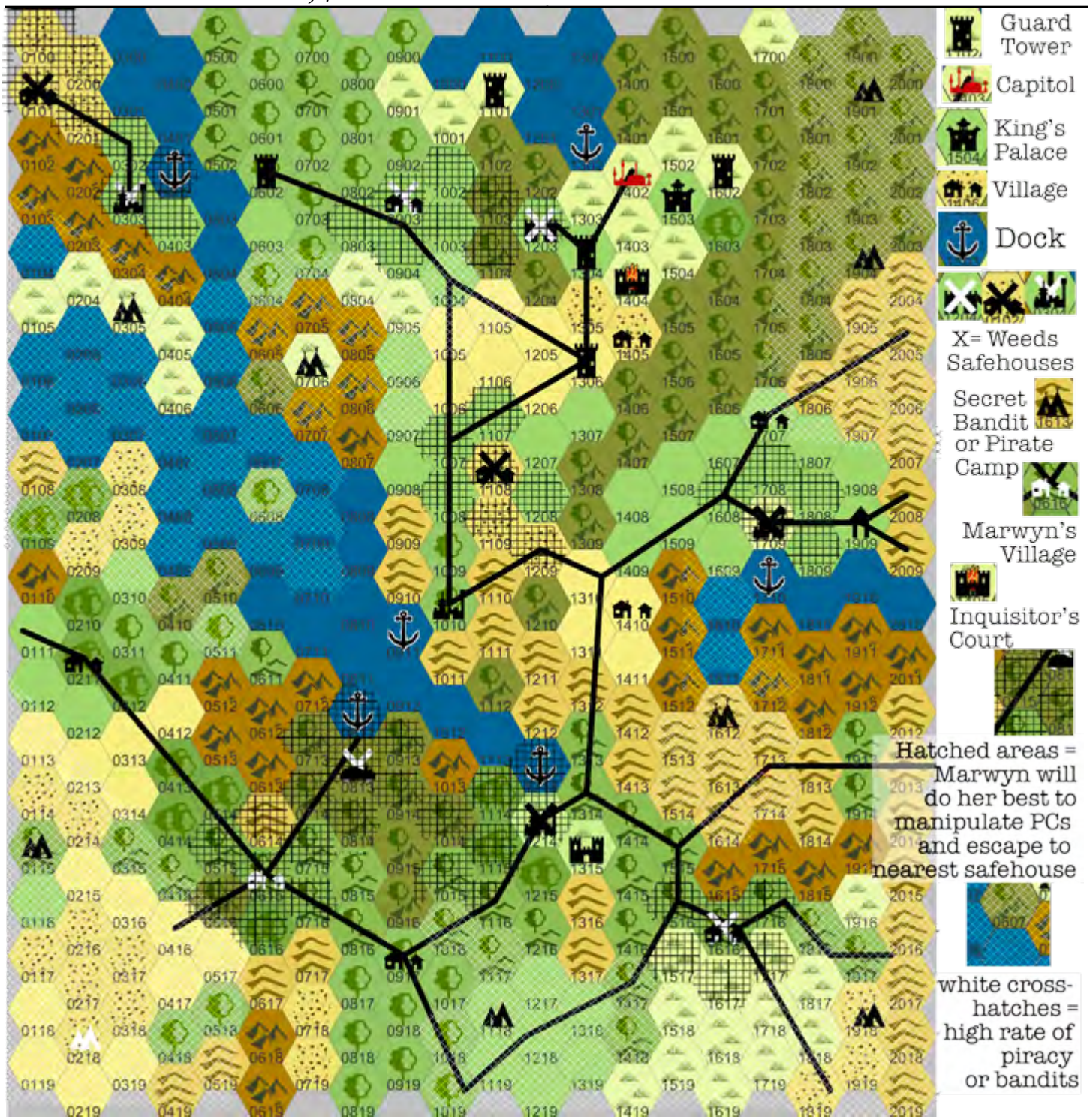
~A player may increase or decrease one Virtue or Vice by one each level, or after being forced to roll the same one 3 times by NPCs or circumstances. Virtues or Vices cannot be increased above 5. If one is decreased, another must be increased.
~If the player can explain why a certain Virtue or Vice would benefit an action requiring a roll, they may attempt to roll the Virtue or Vice's number or lower on a d6; success indicates a +1 or -1 to the other roll as desired by the player.
~Other PCs, NPCs, or situations may appeal to a PCs' Virtue or Vice, as determined by the GM or Player (sometimes it's good to be surprised by your PCs' actions). In this case, the player checks against that Vice or Virtue on d6 to see if the PC succumbs to the other person's appeal.
~Three checks against the same one, whether successful or not, indicate an increase or decrease of 1. If decreased, another must be increased.
~Any PC or NPC may make a WIS check for every day spent with someone to figure out one of their Virtues or Vices.

Marwyn will attempt to figure the PCs out so she can exploit their Virtues and Vices to aid in her escape to a safe house.

Using The Map (next page)

If I were following the letter of the Santicore Request, I'd start the PCs at Marwyn's Village (in white on the lower left of the map, 0616), and give them X days to get her to the Inquisition's Court on the upper right (1405) alive before consequences set in.
If I were running this in a campaign, I'd have the PCs get the order and have to go get her from an uncooperative (but not violent) town.
Spaces shaded by white X crosses are areas where armed bandits and pirates are on the increase. In the upper right of the map, they'll try to kidnap Marwyn and ransom her back to the PCs, having hear of their quest. In the lower left they are open to her buying them off and away from PCs. Everywhere else they'll act like pirates and bandits.
The bandits in the large areas of high risk to the left of the map are in league with the Maleficara, who have a stronghold in 0707.
The Bandits in the upper right are actually an advance force of "Barbarian" raiders from the North, mixed with usual forest outlaws.
Spaces with a black grid over them are near enough to The Weeds safe houses that Marwyn will press especially hard in manipulating PCs to escape, trying to uncover and manipulate their Virtues and Vices. In white x crossed areas with high banditry, she'll want to PCs around her as protection.

The PC's should be able to gain nearly all the information on the map if they investigate properly and succeed in their rolls, but it should not be given to them without their own efforts.



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(this is all repeated from last page)

(Better copies of this DM map, and Player's Maps for PCs to buy in villages, will be available on metalvsskin.blogspot.com on March 26th 2014)

Dread of the Maleficara by Joey Lindsey

Black Cat's Gambit

By Christiaan Gerritsen
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http://weburndowntheinn.blogger.com

Dear Santicore, I would like...
An encounter set in a tavern that isn't a tavern, with innocent harlots and guilty clergy, terrified mercenaries and the unnatural forces lurking behind the facade please.
Thanks, L. K.

This is an adventure with a deck of many things. It is also an adventure that keeps on giving, in the sense that it will derail your campaign. The adventure itself involves characters and a setting, but these are a device to introduce the deck and the game that accompanies it. You can hack it to move the fun with the deck, or introduce it as written. As written it is an "an encounter set in a tavern that isn't a tavern, with innocent harlots and guilty clergy, terrified mercenaries and the unnatural forces lurking behind the facade (the deck)".

For the most interesting running of this adventure you will need to make up a deck of many things, normally 22 cards. I have not provided the effects or composition of the deck as it is fairly easy to find on the SRD or elsewhere. I have however provided some changes to particular cards for the game involved in this encounter. You could use a Harrow Deck of Many Things from Pathfinder if you want, but would make the game longer, and probably not as deadly. This adventure revolves around a non-standard use of the Deck in a ritual devoted to the God of Misfortune and Felicity, should the players survive they will be able to make use of this ritual in the future and will take possession of the Deck of Many Things with a slight magical boon.

This encounter is somewhat complicated, so best read it twice to get the idea of what's going on exactly.

Introducing the Encounter

You receive an invitation to a game of cards most dire, it appears, that Arlf Stonekeeper, the dwarven owner of the Lucky Duchess Inn, has found a deck of many things and wishes to gamble for it. Arlf Stone

Alternative Starts

•Walk in to an inn on a game about to begin, with Arlf looking for another team of players.
•The inn is secluded deep in the woods.
•Arlf Stonekeeper has this game once per year for a chance to win his deck, since he found the deck. Teams are done by audition. The PC's apply, there are always lots of spectators. In this case, the inn never falls down when the ruin card is played, and adjust the game accordingly.

Beginning the Encounter
(Fluff Text and Setting the Scene)

Deep in the heart of the city, in the tumbledown and rebuilt cultural district lies the Lcuky Duchess, once a theatre, it is now an inn, of the most unsavory sort. A monolithic gothic construction it's courtyard tumbles out onto the street, gargoyles leering out atop spires, and the doors shaped as if entering into a Daemon's mouth. Quite why it is called the Lucky Duchess is lost to the passages of time, but the daemonic and grim fascination of the architect who designed it still evident. Outside the theatre, at the end of door chains, burly doormen accepting only the requisite dress standards, preferring patrons who are armed and armoured, and turn away those who are too sober. Beyond them painted girls and boys make the rounds, soliciting themselves upon adventurers. A bard with a voice like a dying drake plays a broken mandolin on a broken pillar outside the inn. The in doors tonight, are bared, for you have been invited to it for a special request. The usual patrons are stopped from entering and linger outside, a barman serving from a cart. Approaching the doors one of the doormen requires you present your invitation.

Entering the inn, you notice the other guests, a group of 5 human mercenaries in freshly oiled splint mail, fronted by their good looking but simple leader (named Harold) who bears an elegant magical looking sword (+2 Longsword), a clergyman (Uther) and his two well armed and armoured bodyguards, and a group of 4 well dressed ladies, initially identifiable as courtesans, fronted by a particularly elegantly, if over made up lady (Amelia). After a brief time for introductions, the Dwarf, Arlf Stonekeeper swoops into the room, clutching a scroll and a wooden box to his chest.

He invites the participants to play an ancient gambling game involving the deck, the winner he says, may claim ownership of the deck. He says that all they need to do to start the game ritual, is ink a specialy drawn pentagram with the blood of all who want to play. Arlf then unrolls a large sheet of parchment, takes some time drawing an esoteric and arcane looking pentagram, and then opens his box, fanning out the deck face down in a circle inside the centre of the pentagram.

The Cleric will say at this point "Ah, the Black Cat's Gambit, surely no one has discovered the Binding Spell in centuries ..."

The courtesan will offer to make drinks for everyone, and they will be far to overly excited to play. "Oooo a game! This sounds terribly fun!"

The mercenary captain will express his distrust, stating that it must be daemon magic, and will articulate the general bad effects of the deck and express his fear of drawing from it, trying to educate the foolish courtesans.

Arlf will then explain that he has learnt the spell of binding to start the game, and has invited everyone here to play with him. He will explain the rules of the game, and then requires those who wish to play to prick their fingers and place a single bloody fingerprint on one corner of the pentragram to form teams, of no more than 5. The winner of the game will claim the deck.

The Rules of Black Cat's Gambit

- Black Cat's Gambit is played in 5 teams. A pentagram is drawn on a table, or on a scroll and Each teams members sit at a point of the pentagram, the team's members must then place some of their blood on the pentagram. (Draw out the pentagram on a large piece of paper for more fun). 5 teams are required to start the game, and a maximum of 5 players per team is allowed.

- Only members who blood the pentagram can draw from the deck or have a card transferred to them by another's draw (more on this later).

- Once a card is drawn from the deck, it is NOT returned as in normal use of the deck and remains face up.

- The cards are shuffled and placed face downand fanned in a circle in the middle of the pentgram. (Use cards as suggested at the beginning of the adventure and actually do this).

- The Spell of Binding is said, and the deck glows blue. All players are now bound to the deck until every card is drawn. Should they leave the area of the game they can still be effected no matter where they are in the world, or universe, and if they are the last remaining member of their team and refuse to draw a card, a card is automatically flipped by the deck and it effects them. Players cannot withdraw from the game, nor can new players join once the spell of binding is said.

- One player from each team then pulls a single card from the circle, keeping it face down to their end of the pentagram, and these cards are all subsequently flipped at the same time. Resolve all effects of these cards on their drawer. These first drawers are referred to as Dealer's from now on.

- After the first round the deck chooses who will go next, as the corner of the pentagram of the team who's turn it is will glow an eerie blue colour whilst it remains there turn. For the first turn of the game the deck selects the team who received the worst card from the deck (GM's discretion), and this can be Arlf even if he is unaffected (see further below)

- In each subsequent round the Dealer from the team who's turn it is must draw a card from the deck. Before they flip the card they state whether or not they wish for the card to effect their team, or another team, if unstated it affects the drawer's team. This card is then placed at the top of the pentagram of the team it will effect. The team it is allocated to, then has up to 1 hour to decide, if a negative effect, who on the team it will effect, or otherwise it effects all of them as if they had all drawn the same card. If positive and an hour elapses then the effect defaults to the drawer, not the allocated team. Dealer's have ultimate say in who a card will effect.

- All effects that happens in a game of Black Cat's Gambit are slightly modified (particularly the daemon ones) . See the card breakdown at the end of this adventure.

- After effects of the card is resolved, the team who received the effect of the card is next to flip a card.

- A card cannot be allocated to a team who no longer has any living / playable members, teams which are killed off are removed from play and the deck will not allow new entries to the game. As a player dies, their bloody fingerprint is absorbed by the deck, and their likeness will be absorbed into the painting of the card that killed them, forever becoming part of the deck. If a Dealer is killed or becomes unplayable, then the team must select a new dealer, who is indicated to the deck by being the next person to flip a card for that team.

- The game ends when all cards of the deck are face up, and have had their effects resolved. The winner of the game is either the last team standing, or the team with the least amount of cards in front of them.

- There are no other restrictions on the game. (Don't state this, but murder, assassination, magic, mind control, coercion are all okay.)

Proceeding with the Gambit

The cleric will ask to bless the inn before they proceed, and will make a prayer which a smart religious character will realise is slightly wrong (for whichever setting appropriate deity he belongs to). He is in fact using a high level clerical ability to rig the deck / give himself prescience to know the result of the next d6 cards in the deck, and this is or isn't noticeable at the GM's discretion.

The Harlot's are at this stage still excited. The Mercenary will further grumble his mistrust, and Arlf, the

Cleric and the Harlots will try and convince them to play. The Mercenary just wants to live, and is not very concerned with the power to be gained. He will need to be convinced to play the game. If they other teams, including the PC's are unable to convince him to play, he will try to leave. If this happens then Arlf Stonekeeper however will force the Mercenaries hand, and state that if he plays he will clear the mercenaries gambling debts, and the merc will grudgingly take a seat at the game.

Arlf has previously pulled a card from the deck, and made wish to receive protection from the negative effects of the deck. This won't save him except for in the first round of the game as after the first round of the game Arlf becomes sick and will leave the game. If Arlf is the next to draw after the first round, then he will allocate to the Cleric, draw the card and flick it down and then stagger off. In a few moments his finger print will fade from the pentagram indicating his death. He is found dead in his room after the game, or during the game if someone goes to investigate. The Cleric will blame the harlots stating their immorality and criminality. The Mercenary, by now quite high strung and terrified, will join in on this. They will both wax lyrical about 'poison is a woman's weapon' and how the Harlot's 'made the drinks'. In fact it was the cleric who poisoned the innkeeper with a slow acting poison the previous day.

The clergyman may try to kill the others if he thinks he can pull it off with his guards or spells.

There is a strong chance that the mercenary will try and leave the game after the death of Arlf, saying that he just wants to live to see his wife and children again. The other mercenaries are suitably suspicious of the game, the cleric and the Harlot's too. The Harlots will tease the mercenaries for being cowards, and will explain that it doesn't matter now because they are bound to the deck and must finish the game. This will heighten his suspicions of the harlots. The Cleric will try and inflame the mercenaries into killing the Harlots. The PC's can side either way and kill the mercenaries or the the harlots, or sue for peace. Let it play out and see what happens.

Otherwise run with the game, and keeping making every party draw cards until it is done. In the circumstances that require combat don't bother to roll out combat unless it involves the the party. Assume that the the Mercenaries will win any combat against the Cleric or Harlots, and the Cleric will beat the Harlots. If a NPC gets sucked into the pentagram for the Skull card automatically kill them unless it is the Mercenary or the Cleric.

Explanations of Intrigue and Expanding the Adventure

The clergyman is in fact a cultist of an Elder God of Luck, Accidents and Misfortune, and will try to recover the deck. It is the rightful property of his cult, who have resided hidden in the city among the local clergy for centuries, since the time when the inn was in fact a temple to this elder god. The temple was burnt down and rebuilt as a theatre (the outer decor hasn't changed dramatically). The Dwarf discovered the deck in the fane to this god below his basement after making some renovations to expand his drinks cellar. The true history of the cult is in fact that it was created by the deck. The original drawer drew the Throne Card, and received a temple and following from it. Styling herself as a deity of luck and fortune she lost the deck in a game of chance, and tried to have the deck recovered and developed the Binding Spell and the Black Cat's Gambit Ritual to mitigate the misfortunate effects of the deck. At some point the deck was recovered, though after her death. The first card drawn from it was the Ruin card, hence the fall of the cult into ruin.

The players can find the remains to this temple underneath the inn. At the very least this could have some scrolls or inscriptions to give them a bit of an idea of what's going on. You could also use this to run a full blown dungeon if you want, simply have a key 'shaped like the gem on the deck of many things' on the cleric's body, which will allow access to the dungeon below. The dungeon below should be heavy in card and coin designs and have lots of luck based, and perhaps deck based puzzles.

The Effects of Winning Black Cat's Gambit

At the conclusion of the game the deck will glow blue, shuffle itself and repack itself into its box. The pentagram will remain, but the bloody prints will vanish.

All of the winning team of Black Cat's Gambit have their capacity to draw from the deck refreshed as if it was a new Deck of Many Things. The team's Dealer is magically infused and receives a special ability called 'The Right of the Deck'. This gives them the capacity to initiate the ritual of Black Cat's Gambit with the requisite pentagram and the Spell of Binding. The Dealer's use of the deck is also refreshed, and for any 1 draw from the deck (themselves, friend or foe) they may use their 'Right of the Deck' to add an extra card to the draw, and then discard one card of their choice. This right of the Deck refreshes should they win and are dealer for a subsequent game of Black Cat's Gambit.

Deck Composition and Special Effects for the Gambit

Unless stated these effects replaced the normal effects of the deck whilst playing Black Cat's Gambit.

Balance - You swap to another random team, unless you are the Dealer of your Team in which case a random member of another team is swapped to your team.
Comet - If you survive the game you gain a level.
Donjon - You are removed from the game and are imprisoned inside the Deck. If your team wins the game you are returned to reality. If not they must win a subse-

quent game of Black Cat's Gambit with the same deck to release you.

Euryal - From now on you suffer the negative effects of any card allocated to a member of your team regardless of who your team chooses to be affected (though this allows for you to help them fight the Wraith). If Flames occurs and affects your team then there are two fiends.

The Fates - No change from the normal effect, additionally the remaining cards are reshuffled and respread out as the deck shuffles itself.

Flames - If there are any unfilled teams on the Pentagram then a powerful outsider will manifest and take control of that team and begin to play. They will play to make you lose rather than trying to win. At the conclusion of the game they will disappear. If there are no free pentagram points then a single lesser daemon will join a random enemy to team to help them beat you.

Fool - When you drawing again then effected player must personally draw 1 card again and takes the effects of the card, card stays flipped at their team's point as per rules of the game.

Gem - You can move an already spent card from your team for another team to change the score. If you have no cards then a small crystal appears at your teams end which counts as -1 cards for score, and remains permanently after the game and is worth the normal amount of gp for the Gem card.

Idiot - The effect of the potential subsequent draw you make as part of this card (a single card in this instance) may be allocated to another team, essentially allowing you to draw two cards in your turn. This additional card does not affect who's turn it is. If the Idiot's effect was allocated to another team rather than the team who drew it then they receive the chance to draw again. In this circumstance before drawing twice the Dealer allocates to which team the next turn will go to.

Jester - You must make 2 more draws from the deck in this instance. They are resolved as in the Idiot card above. The essential effect is that this card allocates 3 draws, rather than 1 in the next turn to whoever it effects. That teams Dealer must choose the receiver of one of the draws to have the next turn before drawing.

Key - You can choose either the normal effect (though this weapon vanishes at the end of the game) or look at a single card in the circle and then replace it.

Knight - This card is modified to effect an up to 5th level character who is part of the game but a member of another team. The Cleric is higher level than this so cannot be effected. This page may then 'officially change teams' if desired. The effect can remain secret if the player wishes. Thought the page won't have any special instruction in this situation.

Note: Clever players will use this to switch the mercenary onto their service, or one of the cleric's warriors. The Cleric will use this on the mercenary to bring him onto their side. The Harlot's will try and a grab PC or one of the Cleric's guards with this card (if poisoning accusations have flown already the harlot will use the mercenary or guard to attempt to kill the cleric. This card allows the chosen page to 'officially' switch teams, and move to the team of their 'employer' for effects and draws.

Moon - For this game, you receive 1 wish + (5- total people on your team) to a maximum of 5 wishes if you are the only member. These wishes may not have effects dramatic effects outside of the game, and must effect the game in someway. The wish cannot be used to end the game, or win the game, but can be used to draw or allocated additional cards at 1 per wish. It can be used to move as many cards as the wisher desires (so long as the move is one lot of cards, in one direction, or a swap) per wish. It can be used to kill or resurrect 1 person in the game per wish.

Rogue - This friend must be a member of your Team if possible, and may 'official switch teams' if so. If you have no team member, then lucky you.

Ruin - Instead of losing all your equipment the affected team, not player, is removed from the game, making for instantaneous loss. Sucks to be you.

Skull -The player who must defeat the wraith is sucked into the deck and the battle takes place instantaneously. If they survive they rematerialise where they were standing, with any effects of the battle. If they fail then they don't return from their journey into the deck.

Star - Instead of the ability score bonus, for your next draw you get to look at the card you draw before allocating.

Sun - If you survive the game you gain the experience. The item you gain vanishes at the end of the game.

Talons - Your magic items vanish to return at the end of the game.

Throne - You can become Dealer for your team, or for another team, even an enemy team or a team that has lost all its players. Enemies are under no obligations to obey you even if you are their dealer.

Vizier - no change

The Void - This player is removed from the game, and cannot be effected by further cards or continue to play the game. They do not have their uses refreshed if their team wins the game. Their soul is furthermore, trapped inside the deck and if their team can win this game, or if not a subsequent game of Black Cat's Gambit with the deck, it will be returned to them.

By Matrox Lusch
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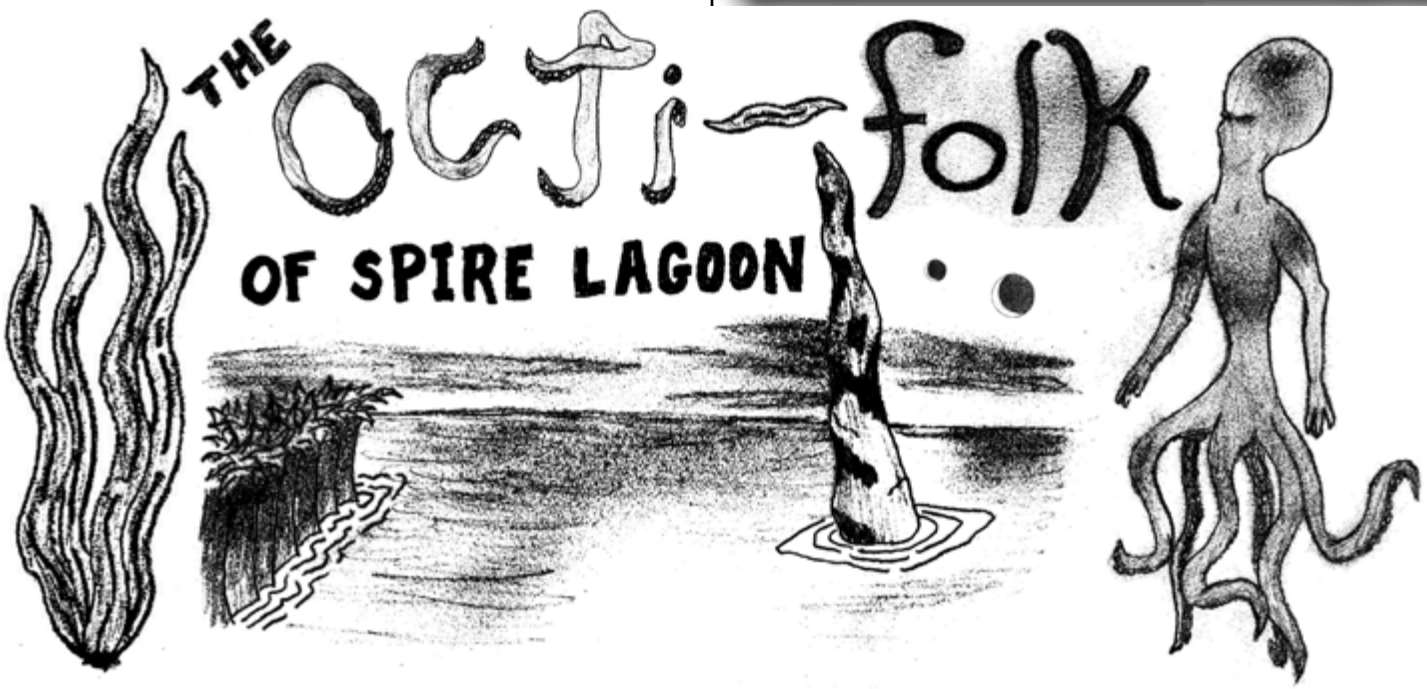
http://www.direbane.com

Dear Santicore, I would like...
Pictures of octopus folk warriors or a short dungeon featuring them.
Thanks, C. T.



The Octi-Folk of Spire Lagoon By Matrox Lusch

Between the enlightened boreal kingdoms *and the aureole region of magma, riches and forbidden knowledge extends a treacherous voyage through surges and reefs of the western ocean. Bordered by that ocean and hidden from prying eyes by leafy boscage, savage nations coexist with perverse brutes in a frolic of primitiveness.*

Recently in the far lands of basalt *a Champion of Paladin Ethos suffered defeat extrema and no amount of the sisters' invocation from that infidelic domain could coax her soul back from beatitude. The ship returning said mortal chaff to righteous soil, just days from reaching civility and in tempest's midst, overturned on dark shoal. Anxious that the vessel would break apart on the reef, crew and passengers fled ashore to weather the storm. Dawn broke a halcyon expanse with craft intact, so the company boarded to right the boat and sail next high tide. Astonished, they soon discovered the entirety of wealth, a fortune earned by virtue of months crusading in fields of lava, had vanished. Along with the opulence had also disappeared the Great Paladin Champion's uttermost maximum supreme magic - Plate Mail of Etherealness and Holy Avenger bastard sword!*

News of the formerly foundered group's *port arrival in this rainy seaside city of the most southern boreal kingdom. accompanied by the strange report of removed treasure, provoked your interest due an anecdote ascertained at a grog house not far south of of here.*

A destitute wanderer spoke of a similar wreck *also mere few days down the secluded west coast. This band scarcely escaped when the entire ship was dashed on the reef and flotsam on the surf. Making their way seeking refuge the troop observed a rounded lagoon marked by a bone-like spire extending more than fifty feet above the ocean. Astonished, they spied through sparkling, azure water the casks of treasures from their wreck spread through the sea grass a hundred feet beneath the water. Strangely, the sorcery of their caster failed to function within the vicinity of the lagoon, so a half dozen of the heartiest sailors took wine-skins filled with air and, with their longest ropes trailing in the water, proceeded to dive down into the depths to retrieve what wealth they could. Within moments strange, tentacled creatures swarmed the divers. The water became cloudy with blackness. Soon those on the surface saw an abundant amount of blood rise from the deep when a maelstrom formed in the lagoon, drinking up the sea. When the scene was again clear both men and treasure had vanished, sea grass only remained on the bottom.*

From the wanderer's tale danger's of the lagoon are harsh, but the potential reward (Armor of Etherealness and a Holy Avenger) might provoke a quest. Seekers must act quickly.

(Note: Mechanics below use ascending AC)

SPIRE LAGOON is roughly 3 days journey by boat or 12 days overland through the forest (horses will not help as there are no coastal roads through the brush and trees).

THE SPIRE: Upon arrival the ivory-like spire is easily seen. The spire's total length is 150', with the uppermost extending 50' above the water. SPIRE EMITS A 100' RADIUS ANTIMAGIC FIELD FROM ALONG ITS ENTIRE LENGTH. The inanimate spire is merely AC 6, but 30 hardness and 200 hit points. It may only be damaged by bludgeoning attacks. The spire is impervious to piercing and slashing weapons as well as energy attacks.

SEA GRASS: During daylight & clear weather normal vision can see to the ocean floor of the lagoon 100' below the water's surface. The lagoon's bottom is covered with golden treasure (including a sword & plate mail) among clumps of sea grass. The 6'-10' fronds are semi-metallic with AC 10, but a hardness of 5. 1 HP damage will sever a frond. Fronds edges are razor sharp. Unanimated the fronds will cause 1-4 HP damage to any unprotected flesh that rubs along the frond's edges (1 HP damage will cut through normal cloth). When blood is in the water within 3' of sea grass groups of fronds will animate in 1-3 rounds, spinning wildly in unison. 4 groups will occupy a 10' area. Each group attacks 1/round, +4 base attack bonus, 5d4 damage.

OCTI-FOLK: These anthropomorphic octopi collect treasure from wrecked ships to deposit in the lagoon. When people are lured by the treasure swim down, the octi-folk attack wielding daggers or, if they successfully grapple with their tentacles, octi-folk will bite with the beak below their tentacles and paralyze with poisoned saliva unless a save is made. Octi-folk can also emit a 10' diameter cloud of jet-black ink which provides total concealment and also masks the blood-sensing of the sea grass.

Octi-folk will arrange bloodied folk masked by clouds of ink so that when the clouds dissipate the bloodied folk are sacrificed by the sea grass. Octi-folk camouflage at a 110% chance of being unseen. Octi-folk communicate via subtle expressions and changes in skin hue. 40 octi-folk hide in lagoon rocks, 120 octi-folk are in their lair. Cave entrances to the octi-lair are 2' wide, octi-folk can contort to fit in.

Octi-folk: 5 HD; AC 16; low-light vision;
swim 30', full round jet 200' straight line (land 20');
reach 5'; saves fort +5, ref +7, will +2; +5 BAB;
1 att./round, dagger or tentacle (tentacle +10 grapple
automatic bite with beak/1d4 DC 18 fort vs. poison or
paralyzed 4d10 min.);
10' diam. ink 1/minute (free action);
17 DEX; CR 4.

PLANAR ANEMONE: The spire and sea grass are in actuality part of a colossal creature at the lagoon's bottom, the planar anemone. The creature occupies the entirety of lagoon beneath the sea grass. The bulk of the anemone remains dormant unless the sea grass becomes sufficiently animated or if the spire is damaged. Once at least 20 groups of fronds have animated (50' area) there is a 1% per group cumulative chance each round the anemone's maw will open. Once the maw begins to open all octi-folk in the area will jet to the cave entrances of their lair. The maw opens completely in 3 rounds: #1 a 75' diam. circular 20' depression forms in the center of the sea grass; #2 a 20' diam. iris opens in the center of the depression, sea water rushes through at 30'/round; #3 iris opens to 75', sea water rushes through at 200'/round forming a maelstrom up to the surface reaching to the shores of the lagoon. The periphery of the maelstrom spins at 90'/round. Any non-magical being or item passing through the maw travels through an interplanar portal to a metal-deficient tropical planet where no stars exist in the sky. All magical beings or items cannot pass through and are trapped within the maw until they are secreted through the anemone's skin in a translucent orb. If the spire is damaged the anemone loses it's interplanar ability and rises up to rampage with 11 huge tentacles 5' diam., 300' long extend from shifting sand. The maw, opened, breaths a vast cloud of superheated steam 300' long, 100' wide, and 50' in height.

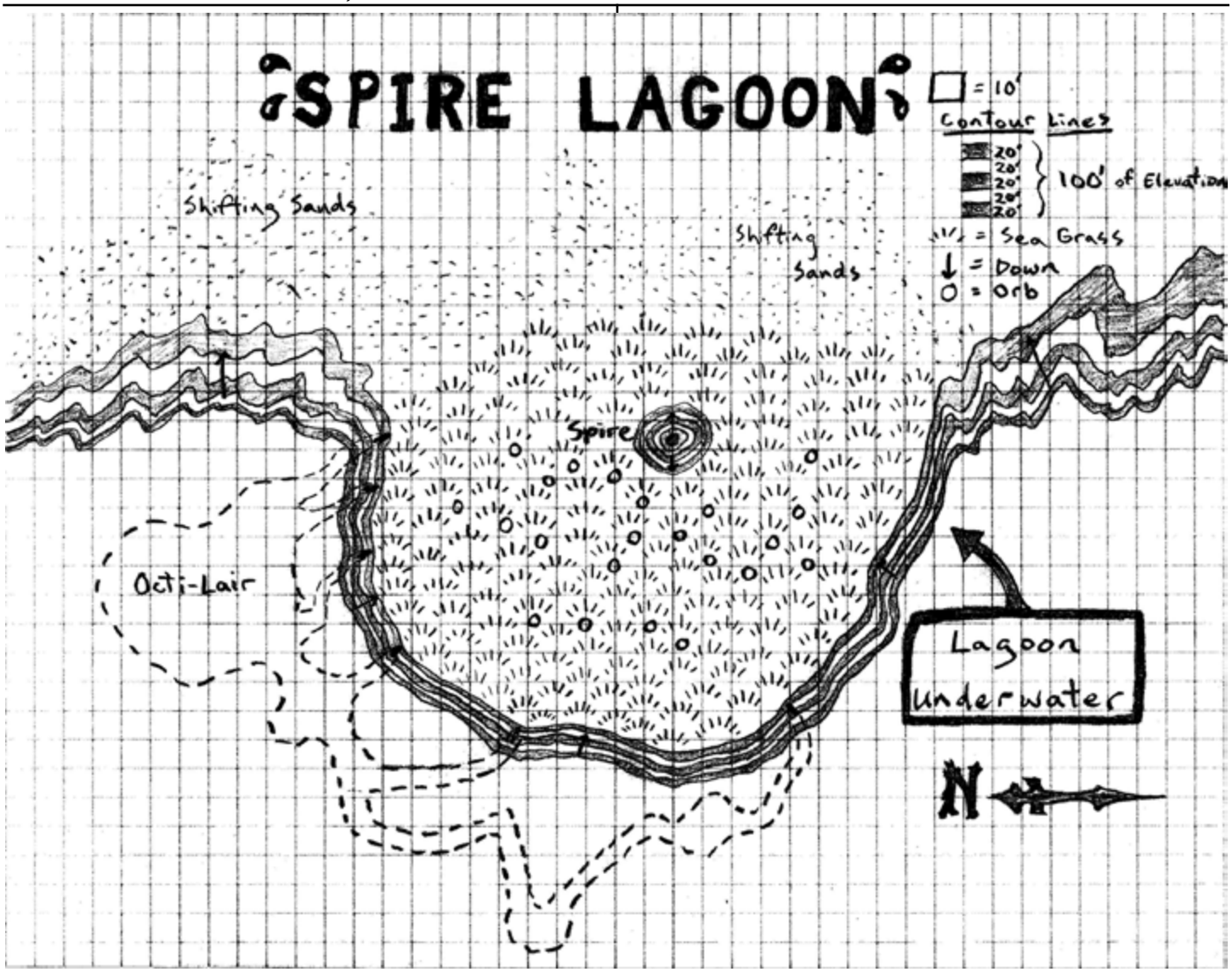
Planar Anemone: 58 HD; AC 16 (body),
AC 20 (tentacles); tremorsense vision; move 90';
saves fort +30, ref +20, will +25; +58 BAB;
11 att./round (7 if moving), tentacle 8d12;
steam breath special attack 30d6;
15 DEX; CR 20.

ORBS: Translucent orbs contain magical items unable to pass through the planar maw. They secrete through the anemone's sea grass skin in 3-12 days (no air inside). Roll for contents on any random magic item table. The orb is solid around its contents, so breaking its stone-like substance could damage fragile items.

TREASURE: Scattered amongst the sea grass, in addition to the Plate Mail of Etherealness and Holy Avenger bastard sword, there are 22 orbs of varying size, 5,000 platinum pieces, 30,000 gold pieces, 80,000 silver pieces, and 3,000 random gems.

OCTI-LAIR: Inside the main chamber of the octi-lair is the only object to pass from the maw to this plane, a 20'x10' crystalline ovoid swathed in slime. Shadows inside occasionally move...

(Map on next page)



The Octi-Folk of Spire Lagoon By Matrox Lusch

Lair of the Huntress Hag

By Matt Maranda
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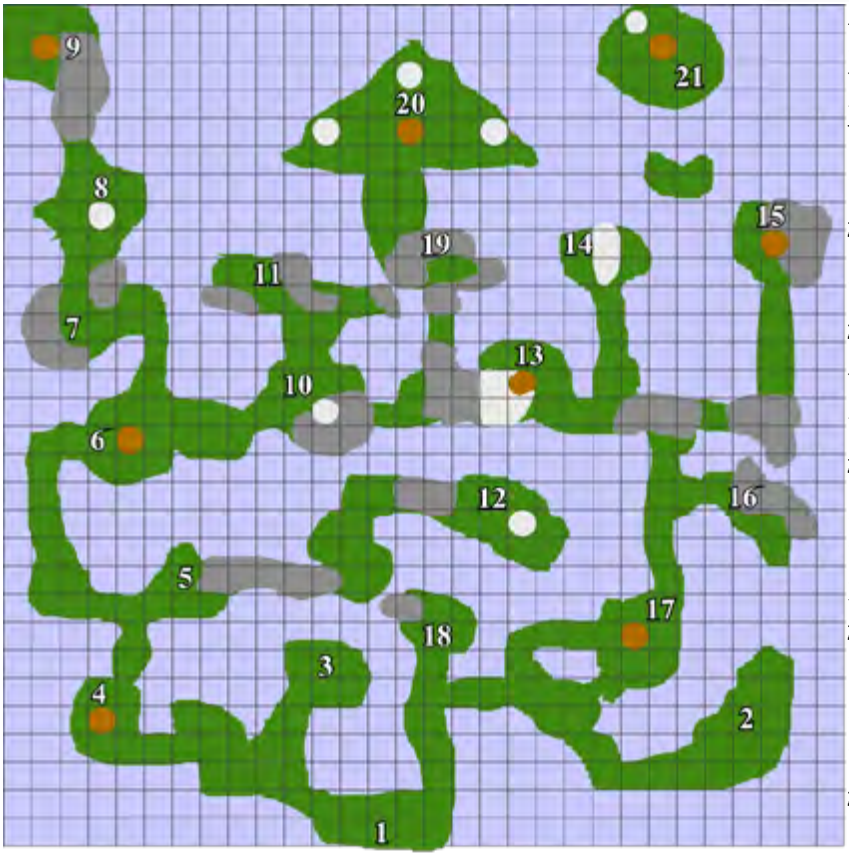
Dear Santicore, I would like...
A map of the lair of the Huntress Hag of the Blackwater Swamp, an ancient witch who can use swamp water to create portals into swamps on other planes. She is a cultivator of a variety of magic mushrooms and a mistress of both nature magic and black magic. A map of the lair of the Huntress Hag of the Blackwater Swamp, an ancient witch who can use swamp water to create portals into swamps on other planes. She is a cultivator of a variety of magic mushrooms and a mistress of both nature magic and black magic.
Thanks, A. S.



Overview: The Huntress Hag of the Blackwater Swamp, an ancient witch who can use swamp water to create portals into swamps on other planes. She is a cultivator of a variety of magic mushrooms and a mistress of both nature magic and black magic.

Clear Terrain..... This terrain is solid underfoot and relatively safe to tread on.

Difficult Swamp.... These areas are hampering to move through with chances of deep pits and other hazards likely.

Portal Swamp..... These portals lead to swamps on other planes are can be used by the Huntress Hag to travel quickly through her home and escape if necessary.

Witch Light..... The burning fires of swamp gas burn malignantly and through them the Hag can see and begin summoning fiends from the portal swamps nearby.

Open Water..... The open water around the Blackwater Swamp is rumored to be poisonous, which is only partially true, in actuality it full of spores from one of the Hag's experiments making extended exposure to the water very lethal.

Map Key

1	Entry: Guarded by a lesser fiend the Hag bound to this strip of land.
2	Insect Mounds: Large, intelligent and dangerous insects live in the mounds here. Corrupted by the Hag they are another defense that will range all over the lair.
3	Mushrooms Beds: Here grow dozens of mushroom varieties. Anyone appropriately trained can tell usually which are beneficial or poisonous.
4	Flickering Witchlight: This Witchlight does not burn consistently like the other, however it sometimes flares up, treat this as a large fire trap.
5	Boneyard: The dead who have disturbed the Hag are left here and put to use rising up to defend the lair.
6	Astral Witchlight: This Witchlight burns with a ghostly translucent flame; through it the Hag can see invisible enemies and even those on the astral plane.
7	Grasper's Lair: A large abomination dwells around this spit of land and reaches up with sinuous and barbed tentacles to claim anything moving as its dinner.
8	Fungal Experiments: One several large mushrooms and a few rotted tables are the remains of several experiments to create new deadly mushrooms breeds.
9	Altar to the Dark Arts: Here under the constant view of the Hag is her den to the dark arts where she propitiates herself and her victims to vile entities.
10	Portal to the Batrachian Bog: The swamp portal here leads to a bog full of deadly and intelligent frogs and frogmen.

11	Batrachian Guards' Lair: Some of the habitants of the Batrachian Bog have been brought forth by the Hag and they dwell in the much here.
12	Portal to the Swale of Slithering Serpents: This portal leads to a swamp teeming with slither snakes and other beasts man was not meant to see.
13	Swamp Portal Experiment: This swamp portal was the first the Hag attempted to create big enough for larger creatures it continues to grow slowly.
14	Large Portal for the Quacking Quagmire of Quarth: This large portal has proven more stable but the swamp it leads to is anything but it is a part near Pandemonium and sometimes permits creatures through without the Hag's knowledge.
15	Sinking Witchlight: The land here is being consumed by the swamp the Witchlight boils the water around it creating a pervasive living fog.
16	Slime Fens: Slimes and oozes of all colors pool in depressions throughout the swampland. Slugs of great size and other like beasts are attracted here as well.
17	Blackfire Witchlight: This Witchlight burns with a black flame that stinks of death. It allows the Hag to tell what is alive and how close it is to death. Anyone touching the flame will lose 1d4 levels.
18	Blackwater Mushrooms: Here grows hundreds of black mushrooms right down to the waterline. Some larger mushrooms here are animate and tend as well as defend their cousins. The inanimate mushrooms are the same that have spread and polluted the swamp disturb them at your own risk.
19	Pit Trap Swamp: This swampy area is highly dangerous and patrolled by poisonous snakes that will strike out at anything that flounders in the muck.
20	The Hag's Lair: A witchlight always burns here so she can know if anyone would disturb her sanctum. Three swamp portals provide her escape routes should her enemies prove too powerful. However, anyone not knowing of her talents with swamp water will be surprised to find themselves transported elsewhere as well.
21	Magical Mushroom Island: Here under the Witchelight's constant eye are the mushroom experiments that the witch wishes to let thrive without any natural predations. The powers these mushrooms could unlock for an apothecary are numerous but not without danger.

The Fleshy Palace of the Mechanical-Organic Horrors

by Mike Evans
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The Fleshy Palace of the Mechanical-Organic Horrors

(This adventure location uses Dungeon Crawl Classics stat blocks)

Twenty years ago the wizard and alchemist Jabbles the Monstrous lived in the village of Haunted Abbey and was constantly teased by the villagers for his hideous hunchback and twisted face. No one in the village took his talents seriously and Jabbles was forced to live in mediocrity. Eventually Jabbles grew tired of being mocked for his deformities and sought a remedy for his afflictions. After years of experimenting with arcane energies and potions, he was no closer at finding a cure for his disfigurements and his hatred of the villagers consumed him like a wildfire.

After yet another failed attempt to find a cure, Jabbles the Monstrous realized the problem not lie with himself, but with all the inferior filthy creatures of Haunted Abbey. Jabbles then set to work to create a potion that would bring villagers into his fold. Jabbles took to abducting people as they made their way home and began experimenting on their flesh. After several sleepless and intense nights, Jabbles successfully made the first leap toward what he considered purity of the flesh. Knowing his formula a success, he dumped the concoction into the village water supply, transforming all into grotesque mutants.

Twenty years have passed and Jabbles continues his experiments and has begun to grafting pieces of metal and machinery to the flesh of his loyal mutants, creating truly horrific monstrosities. Over the course of time Haunted Abbey has been transformed into a stronghold built from the flesh of victims captured during raids of outlying outposts and villages. Two gigantic metallic arms reach toward the heavens. These arms have full range of motion and are used to defend the palace from invading forces. The Twisted Spire, the throne and laboratory of Jabbles the Monstrous, lies in the center of the palace and is heavily fortified by cannons, buzzsaws, automated hammers, and a group of elite mutant cyborg guards.

Jabbles will not rest until he has corrupted the entire world to fit into what he considers the perfect melding of flesh and machine.

Dear Santicore, I would like...
A small adventure location for basic D&D featuring either mutants or cyborgs, or mutant cyborgs.
Thanks, M. F.

Rumors/Adventure Hooks

1) It is whispered that Jabbles sleeps on a bed made of the flesh of a hundred child oracles. They whisper to him as he sleeps, exposing the weaknesses of his enemies and guiding him ever closer to victory.
2) A mutated cyborg elephant and 2d20 mutant cyborgs have been spotted 2d100 miles away from The Fleshy Palace of the Mechanical-Organic Horrors. It is believed that the force is heading towards one of the key position forts of the kingdom.
3) Several villages have been suffering waves of debilitating sickness that have resulted in several people mutating into mindless savage beasts. The local nobility believe this is a precursor to invasion by Jabbles armies.
4) A blind cleric of the God of healing claims he was granted a vision of how to defeat Jabbles. The evil wizard removed his heart long ago and hid it under the Statue of the Goddess of the Midnight Sky, protected by mutant cyborgs and deadly spells. If the heart is purified and destroyed, Jabbles will be mortal and can be killed.

Table of Mutant Cyborg Goodies

d12	Mutation	Cybery Stuff
1	Three Eyes- +2 to notice type checks.	Drill Arm- 1d6 dmg. Crit reduces targets armor by damage amount
3	Four Arms- two additional attacks.	Breathing Apparatus- ability to breathe underwater or in toxic gases indefinitely.
4	Overlarge Body- +4 to strength, -2 AC.	Compound Eye- immune to back attacks and being snuck up on.
5	Elongated Arms- +10' reach.	Mechanical Arm- +2 Strength and 1d4 damage.
6	Rubbery Bones- +4 to escaping bindings.	Flame Thrower Arm- can shoot a burst of flame in 15' cone once every 3 rounds for 3d6 dmg. Ref Save DC 14 for half damage.
7	Thickened Skin- gain DR of 2.	Jet Pack- can fly at rate of 90' a round.
8	Engorged Spitting Glad- spit acid, d4 dmg.	Iron Jaw- bite attack 1d4 damage.
9	Two Hearts- +2 endurance type rolls.	Metallic Skin- +4 AC

10	Chameleon Skin- +4 to hiding rolls.	Shooting Grapple Arm- 50' reach, +2 to grapple type rolls, 1d6 dmg.
11	Patagium (Flying Squirrel)- you can glide at 25' per round.	Spiked Flesh- +2 AC, targets that are grappled take 1d4 dmg/rnd.
12	Mandibles- can bite for 1d4 damage. Also able to gnaw through metal, given enough time.	Smoke Screen- Can belch out a smoke screen once every three rounds that blankets 15' radius. Visibility reduced to ff. Missile attacks automatically miss while in the area.

Sample Enemies

Mechno-Ooze

Init +0; Atk Pseudo-pod +1 melee (1d6), acid eats 1d4 AC, mechanic peg-leg +2 melee (1d6+1), mechanic peg-leg +2 ranged, as ball and powder musket (2d8 damage); AC 12; HD 3d8; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +0; AL C; Items- Mechno peg-leg (+1 to attack and damage).
Special: Normal attacks do fi damage. Electrical damage will destroy mechno peg-leg.

Mutant

Init +2; Atk claws +2 (1d6+2 dmg); AC 14; HD 2d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will -2; AL C; Items- sack of rotten meat, chipped sword, whistle, 3d10 gp
Special: *Extra arm (gains additional attack at -4), *Gills (can breathe underwater)

Mutant Cyborg

Init +4; Atk *tentacle arm +4 (1d6+4 dmg), *buzzsaw hand +4 (1d6+4 dmg); AC 16; HD 3d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +0; AL C; Items-
Special: *tentacle arm (see above), *buzzsaw hand (see above), *jaunt (once per day can teleport up to 120' away)

Mutated Cyborg Elephant

Init +3; Atk trample +3 (3d8 dmg), tusks +3 (2d6); AC 20 (course skin +4); HD 4d10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +6, Ref +0, Will +3; AL C; Items- NA
Special: *vomits maggots from trunk (anything in 15' radius must make Ref Save DC 14 or fall prone), *tusks with baby heads (baby heads can cry once per 1d4 rounds, Will Save DC 14 or run in fear until successful save), *laser cannon on head (+6 to attack, front arc, 3d8 damage, operated by rider), *course skin (see above)
*= mutations and cybernetics not listed so as to keep it fresh and unused.

The Crypt of the Treant Vampire

by Dan
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Dear Santicore, I would like...
The lair of the vampiric treant with the goblins that made him their god.
Thanks, H. W.

Deep in the swamps stands a lone mausoleum, its features so broken and cracked that the fearsome visages which once guarded it are now lost forever. It is forever shaded by a monstrous tree with no leaves and a rotting trunk. However, from its branches hang plump red fruits the size of a dwarf's fist. When picked they emit a sickening sweet smell and begin to ooze a viscous syrupy juice. Any adventurer foolish enough to eat this fruit will suffer one of the following side effects. Detect spells will reveal there is something dangerous about the fruit. The tree currently has 1d4 fruit hanging from it.

1	The consumer begins to hallucinate nightmarish visions and flees for 1d6 hours. After which time the consumer is exhausted and lost. If cornered or confronted during this time, the consumer will fight their way out in a panic induced rage.
2	The consumer's skin permanently glows in the dark with the intensity of a candle.
3	The consumer suffers terrible gas for 1d6 hours (treat as though the consumer is the center of a Stinking Cloud spell).
4	The consumer learns 1 random spell (roll on a random scroll table). The spell is lost forever when cast. Magic Users can expend the spell to add it to their spellbook.
5	The consumer's tongue is replaced by a fleshy eyestalk. 1% chance this eyestalk has random ray ability as a beholder.
6	The consumer gets violently ill for 2d6 minutes.
7	The consumer is permanently effected by an Enlarge Person spell.
8	The consumer's skeleton slowly begins to dissolve over 3d6 weeks. Their features become more malleable and their appearance "melts" or "droops" over time. At the end of the allotted time they become a sack of intelligent ooze.
9	The consumer falls into a trance and experiences the fate of he last creature to be sacrificed to the Vampire Treant first hand.
10	The consumer gets the irresistible urge to eat all the Bloodfruits he can see!

The inside of the mausoleum is wrecked and large crack in the far wall clearly reveals what used to be a hidden passage. Beyond it are a set of stairs which spiral down. At the base of the stairs, the party can see two passages. One passage is caved in, it would take at least a day of traditional excavation to remove enough rubble to squeeze through (area 1 on the map). The other passage extends strait ahead through an open door and into darkness.

Rooms 2-4: These rooms are living quarters for a small tribe of goblins. There is a 30% chance that 1d6 goblins are in any given room. Many of these goblins are grossly deformed in some way, but are no more dangerous than normal goblins (some may have huge claws they use instead of swords, some have massive jaws, some glow in the dark, some have 6 arms, etc). A fight in these rooms will attract the six goblins from Room 6.

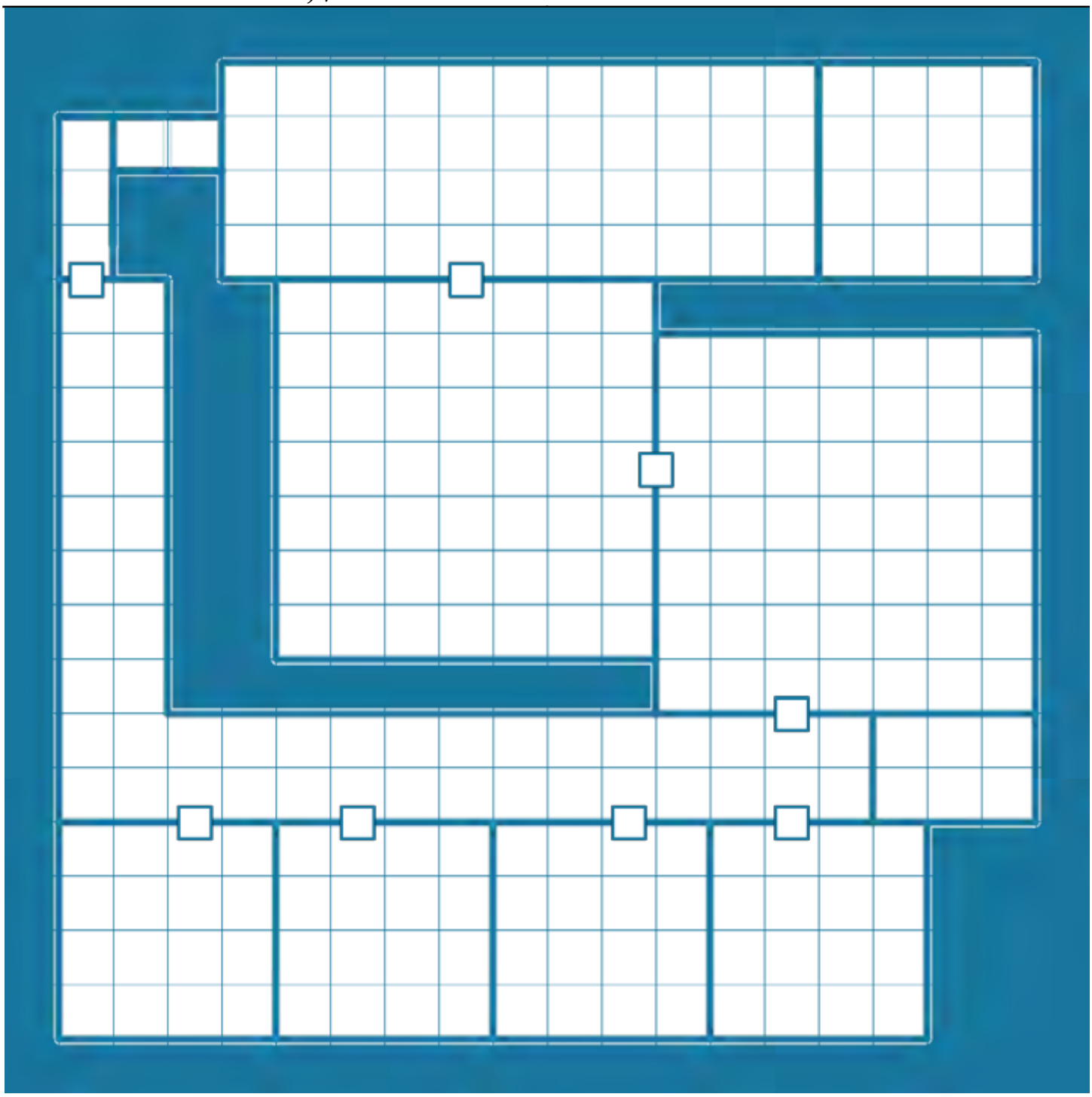
Room 5: This room belong to the Goblin Tribe Elder. Within there are an abundance of alchemical agents and instruments, including a large number of Bloodfruit kept in baskets labeled in goblin hieroglyphics. For characters that can read Goblin, each basket indicates a different kind of creature (ex. Dwarf, Goblin, Dog, Lizard, Human, Ogre). Some vials of thick green and black sludge sit on the table with labels. For characters that can read Goblin, there are two potions of healing, three potions of enlarge, one potion of noxious fumes (like fire-breathing but the imbibers blasts their enemies sickening fumes), and a vial of bat guano.

Room 6: This room is a common area for the goblins. They eat, play, and do whatever else goblins do in this room. There are 6 goblins in this room, plus an additional 1d6 goblins if none were encountered in rooms 2-4. Again, most of these goblins will have hideous mutations. The south wall of the room appears to have been built with rubble by the goblins at a time after the crypt was built. Knocking this wall down will reveal Room 7.

Room 7: Actually just a walled off portion of Room 6; Room 7 contains a Gelatinous Cube the goblins walled in for their own safety.

Room 8: The door from Room 7 opens up into a natural cave. Thick roots hang from the ceiling and the Goblin Tribe Elder stands in the middle over a makeshift alter wet with the blood of a dead worg. The Goblin Tribe Elder has been lost in Bloodfruit induced hallucinations and will not have heard any commotion caused by the adventurers up to this point. The Goblin Tribe Elder has an eyestalk coming out of his mouth that shoots a Scorching Ray. He will do his best to stay at range and blast enemies with his eye-ray. He also acts as if effected by a permanent spider-climb spell.

To make matters worse, each round 1d4 roots will animate and lash out at any character who is missing at least 1hp. These are the roots of the Bloodfruit Tree searching for their next meal. On a hit, the tree deals 1d4 damage and grapples.



The Crypt of the Treant Vampire by Dan

Hybris

by Paolo Greco
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Laertes was a noble man, rich and fair. He fought with mettle for our city, both on the battlefield against invaders and in the agora' against those interested in politics for personal gain. All changed last summer, during a grandiose banquet in his country estate. Laertes indulged in fine food and wine and bragged in front of everybody, growing more and more boisterous as the night went by. And when he said that that very banquet was worthy of the Olympian gods, guests started to warn him, and as he continued bragging they all left, leaving him alone with his servants. Last time you heard about him, his crops were ruined and died in the fields, and now you've seen him around the city asking for help.
You have no obligations toward him, but he's a dear friend of your families. The least you can do is check what's wrong with his farm.

Yes, it all starts with read-out-loud text. Sorry. You can paraphrase.

Hybris is an incredibly important concept in Greek civilization. Hybris is pride and arrogance so extreme it deserves Nemesis, divine retribution. As for rules, I suggest either S&W Whitebox (available here: http://www.swordsandwizardry.com/whitebox.htm) or Adventure Fantasy Game (the free edition of the rules are available here: http://adventurefantasygame.com/). Disclaimer: I wrote AFG. I'm suggesting to use it because it's easy and, most importantly, parents wrote me they are playing it with their kids, and the kids seem to "get it" easily. But maybe my hybris deserves retribution too.

Asking Laertes: Laertes is mortified and, at the moment, almost reduced to begging for food. All his fortune is gone, his grain fields withered and olive trees and vines bearing no fruit. If inquired about why this happened, Laertes will say that the stream he used to irrigate the fields went dry. He then went to make an offer to the naiad Polyadne, the spirit of the stream, but harpies stopped him from getting there and ate all the offerings. He believes that the Gods are angry with him because After he sought refuge in his house, the harpies followed suit and kept on harassing him day and night until he left. He's been missing from his house ever since. He will be extremely grateful to the PCS if they made his house safe, got rid of the harpies and brought an offer to the nymph to bring the stream back to life.

Dear Santicore, I would like...
a micro (like a 2 hour session) adventure for straight-up stripped-down OD&D/BX/whatever suitable for kids who are way into Greek mythology so I can entertain my niece and nephew over the holidays.
Thanks, J. S.

Keeping this for kids: offer to naiads involved drowning animals in their stream. A cleric PC will know this, but if the party lacks a cleric they can easily get to a temple and ask. If this concerns you, a food offering will do, either left on the altar or dropped in the source.

Mapping & Navigation: there's no map for this adventure. Encourage the kids to draw a map. Maybe start with drawing the City and tell them they are there, or let them choose miniatures for their PCs and to start with put them on the city. Then as you narrate the travel to Laertes's home, tell them to add the road, then the olive trees and the dilapidated vines, and then the house, and in due time the source. As they navigate the house, tell them about how many doors are in a given room, and try to wiggle the narrative into the space they make. Chances are they will get hooked up, write

The Fields & the Source: The reason why the fields failed is that Zeus took offense at Laertes's bragging. Being the way he is he sent harpies to destroy his fortune. The harpies started by harassing and wounding the naiad Polyadne. The stream dried up, and when Laertes went to the source to give her an offer they harassed him out of his estate. Then they proceeded to eat all the grapes and ruin all the olives. The harpies are now back in a small wood close to the source of the stream.

6 x Harpies: LVL 2, DEF 7 [12],
ATK claws (1d6), Special: flying.
Harpies are not brave and will not fight to the death: when a harpy is reduced to half of its hits it will fly away, never to return. Similarly, they will not follow retreating characters. If harassed with missile fire they will hide in the woods.

Polyadne will not fight, but once the harpy menace is gone and an offering is done, she will come back, thank the adventurers and merrily let the stream flow again.

The House: Laertes's house is though occupied by some thieves, which are hiding after stealing some votive statues (200 gp) from the temple of Athena. Athena cursed them with a monstrous face, so that nobody will be friendly with them, and with big white eyes, so that direct sunlight will blind them. The curse will be lifted if the statues are brought back, but the bandits are not aware of this: if the statues are brought back, award 400XPs for the deed.

The house has 5 rooms: the entrance door opens on a corridor. The corridor has two doors on the right, leading to two bedrooms (1 bandit is hiding in each bedroom). The two doors on the left lead to the living room (2 bandits) and a kitchen (1 bandit). Kitchen and living room are linked by a door.

5 x Bandits: LVL 1, DEF 7 [12], ATK clubs (1d4), thrown stones (1d3) Special: Cursed Visage, Cursed Eyes.

Classic Greece and the D&D Cleric Problem: D&D clerics perform exorcisms, turning undead. If you want a more "classic" approach, drop weapons restrictions and replace Turn Undead with the following powers. A priest of a given god can use the god's power once a day:

- Zeus's Lightning: lightning can be called from the sky, dealing 1d6 damage on an opponent.

- Hera's Revenge: if the cleric is wounded, the same amount of damage is dealt to the attacker. This power can be used instantly and during the opponent's turn.

- Aphrodite's Looks: charm person.

- Poseidon's Spawn: a small horrible monster (2HD, ATK bite 1d6) appears and fights the enemies of the priest.

- Athena's Wit: the priest comes up with a plan that can either win initiative or gain automatic surprise.

- Demeter's Care: cure light wounds.

- Apollo's Scrying: augury.

- Artemis's Arrow: the cleric can use a bow. an arrow hits automatically.

- Hephaestus's Forge: for the rest of the combat the party's weapons become so sharp all opponents have ac 9 [10].

- Ares's Hand: after the cleric hits, the damage dealt can be doubled.

- Hermes's Speed: the priest can outrun a group of opponents.

- Dionysus's Wine: an opponent will stop doing whatever they are doing and dance for 1d6 rounds, no save. If attacked they will stop dancing.

- Hades's Shroud: invisibility self for 6 rounds.

Bandits!

by Paul Gorman
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http://quicklyquietlycarefully.blogspot.com/

Dear Santicore, I would like...
a bandit stronghold in the mountains with an adventure hook (i.e., why would anybody walk into the lion's den??)
Thanks, G.

The term bandit comes from the early Germanic bannan, the outlawing of criminals. The practice continued under the Holy Roman Empire, where those under imperial ban forfeited all property, rights, and legal protections of church or state—anyone could kill or rob them with impunity.

A group of bandits totals 3d8 times 10 in number, although it would be unusual to encounter more than 2d6 bandits outside their primary lair. 1d6 times 10% of the total band are liable to be in the primary lair at any given time; the others will out on patrols or raids, or resident in secondary lairs.

Larger groups of bandits have lieutenants with class levels.

No. of Bandits	Lieutenants
30	4th level Fighting-Man
50	As above + 6th level
100	As above + 8th level Fighting-Man
140	As above + 10th level Magic-User
160	As above + 8th level Cleric
190	As above + additional M-U
220+	As above + additional M-U and Cleric

Each lieutenant has a 1 in 6 chance of having a magic item. Fighting-men have a sword, shield, or armor; magic-users have a ring, wand, or miscellaneous magic item; clerics have armor, shield, or a miscellaneous magic weapon.

"What is a band of robbers but a little kingdom? Its men are citizens of the band, ruled over by a prince, bound together by a social pact, and enriched by booty divided according to agreed laws."
– Saint Augustine of Hippo

Most bandits wear leather armor with shields, and carry swords. A minority are armed with light crossbows or short bows. Lieutenants wear chainmail or better.

Bandits have a main base, and one or more small outpost bases. Bandits protect their bases with rudimentary traps and alarms (e.g.—pit traps, sprint pole snares, trip wires with bells, etc.). Depending on terrain, raiding parties may ride light horses.

Main Base

1–3	Tent camp
4–6	Mountain caves
7	Hamlet (either a mock/temporary hamlet constructed new by the bandits, or an existing hamlet taken over by the bandits—with or without the consent of the original residents)
8	Castle or keep
9	Tree houses
10	Neolithic stonework complex
11	"Haunted" house
12	Extraterrestrial facility (crashed spaceship, undersea or underground base, via teleport to space station or moon base, etc.)

Leader Social Origin

1–3	Commoner
4–6	Nobility

Leader Class

1–2	Fighting-Man
3–4	Magic-User
5–6	Cleric

Reason for Leader's Ban (Nobility)

1	Refused military support for ruler
2	Murdered his high-ranking uncle
3	Rebellion against ruler
4	Seized lands from ruler
5	Murdered ruler's uncle or nephew
6	Sheltered or aided flight of a bandit or rebel
7	Robbery
8	Kidnapping
9	Heretical beliefs
10	Supported wrong side in local war

Reason for Leader's Ban (Commoner)

1	Kidnapping
2	Robbery
3	Heretical beliefs
4	Hedge wizardry
5	Cattle rustling
6	Smuggling
7	Blasphemy
8	Slander
9	Disobedience
10	Impersonating a noble

Name of Bandit Group (A + B + C)

Part A

1–3	The
4–6	Leader full name (Robin Hood's), last name (McHale's), or nom de l'épée

Part B

1	Merry
2	Bloody
3	Vile
4	Place name (roll twice)
5	Silent
6	Lawless
7	Righteous
8	Mystery

1.	Thorn	-hurst
2.	Hinder	-dale
3.	Stains	-wood
4.	Murk	-caslte
5.	Witch	-field
6.	Barrow	-more
7.	Nettle	-by
8.	Fen	-fax
9.	Burn	-thorpe
10.	Scars	-wick
11.	Boos	-well
12.	Chop	-knole

Part C

1	Men
2	Boys
3	Scoundrels
4	Rebels
5	Curs
6	Raiders
7	Outlaws
8	Bandits
9	Saints
10	Lurkers
11	Gang
12	Devils

Current Entertainment of Bandits

1	"Trial" of tax collector
2	Redistribution of wealth (coppers) to local villagers
3	Archery contest
4	Captures knights forced to joust mounted on pigs
5	Preparing effigy of local ruler for incineration at public event
6	Bandit follies. Elaborate costumes, bawdy musical numbers, and questionable "ladies". Local personalities portrayed.
7	Bandit propagandist debates captive noble before jeering audience.
8	Sampling drugs from captured caravan

Bandits are a powerful local force, and are bound to come into conflict or forge alliances with other factions, even in the most desolate mountains or forbidding forests. Pick an enemy and ally faction for the bandits (tribe of humanoid cannibals, clan of hill giants, tentacled cave abomination, etc.) or roll against your wandering monster list for the area.

The relationship the bandits cultivate (or fail to cultivate) with local villagers will also play a big roll in how easily the players locate the bandit base and how much warning the bandits get of their approach.

"A captured pirate was brought before Alexander the Great. 'How dare you molest the sea?' asked Alexander. 'How dare you molest the whole world?' the pirate replied, and continued: 'Because I do it with a little ship only, I am called a thief; you, doing it with a great navy, are called an emperor.'"

– Noam Chomsky

(final table on next page)

Bait for Hapless Characters (i.e—adventure hooks)

1	Investigate rumors of travelers disappearing
2	Earn reward for capture of bandit leader
3	Deliver treaty proposal from much harassed local ruler
4	Pay bribe for safe passage of rich merchant caravan
5	Rescue captive noble
6	Secret map to ancient treasure leads to territory controlled by bandits
7	Seek refuge from local lord the PC's crossed
8	Magical nuke fell into the bandits' hands. They plan to use it against establishment target, or they may be eager to get rid of something they know is too hot for them to handle.
9	Escort disguised recently banned noble (and entourage) to join up with old ally, the bandit leader. Soldiers and bounty hunters in pursuit.
10	Bandits mysteriously unaffected by disease ravaging local population
11	Visiting big game hunter seeks local knowledge about fearsome beast (which the bandits are eager to be rid of)
12	Magic-user frantic to recover magical component of value only to him on caravan waylaid by bandits

Caverns of Engelbrekt Mountain

by Björn Wärmedal
bjorn.warmedal@gmail.com

Dear Santicore, I would like...
A dungeon for a horror and gonzo Lord of the Ringsesque sandbox old-school D&D game.
Thanks, A. H. B.

A dungeon for a horror and gonzo Lord of the Ringsesque sandbox old-school D&D game."
- Santicore's request

*"So you got a simple request and went apes**t with it."*
- Comment from user at an RPG forum

Words from the Author

The two quotes on the front page pretty much summarises the contents of this document. I've never made a dungeon before, being quite new to the OSR scene still, but I thought I should give it a try. Maybe I overdid it. Maybe I put a lot of work on the wrong aspects of a dungeon. Maybe it's barely playable.
Maybe it's a whole lot of fun.
I really have no idea, but I had a good time going crazy about this request and I got to try out quite a few new things.
All content in this document is original and created by me for the purpose of the Secret Santicore event anno 2013. That said I believe that sharing is caring and that there's likely to be a whole lot of possible improvements in it. Therefore I chose to release it under the Creative Commons Attributions 3.0 Unported license. That really means you're allowed to use everything in here – in whole or parts – for anything (even sell it for fun and profit!) as long as you give me credit and don't claim that I endorse your project (unless I actually do).
Send me a mail at bjorn.warmedal@gmail.com if you have suggestions, questions, comments or would like all the material produced for this in original formats. I'd be happy to oblige.
- Björn Wärmedal, Umeå, October 26th 2013

Engelbrekt Mountain

Like a big black tumour the mountain Engelbrekt stands from an otherwise flat and fertile land. The valley surrounding it is peaceful, though the people who live there are suspicious of strangers. All, that is, except the bartender at the Midnight Valley Inn. He speaks to everyone about everything and is especially fond of telling the old folk tales about the mountain and what goes on in the depths beneath it.

Sornack and the Marnog

A long time ago the Midnight Valley and all its surrounding lands were under the harsh and horrible rule of the priesthood of Sornack. They enforced their god's will and rites all around, making sure that torture and cannibalism was everyday occurrences that everyone feared and took part in alike. The Marnog – a demonic incarnation of Sornack himself – was used as a weapon unleashed on the populace for the entertainment of the priesthood.
Eventually they were defeated and took their escapes to the Engelbrekt Mountain. The cave systems have formed over millenia to the whims of the now godless Marnog and its ever-increasing lonesome madness. It confines itself in the depths, unable to escape now the world it allows itself is so small. A cult of followers worship it still and await the day the Marnog's mood changes. They hope the beast will once again reconnect with Sornack and bring them all to deathly, gastly glory.
The Cult inhabits most of the northern parts of the dungeon.

Engelbrekt Mystical Society

Other factions have taken room in the darkness below over the last couple of centuries, much to the chagrin of the Cult of Sornack and each other. One such faction is a society of introvert knowledge-seekers and wizards. They are backed up financially by a rich wizard academy in far away lands, but spend their time here thinking that there are mysteries to solve in the depths. They attempt to read arcane and mundane knowledge from the skins of snakes.
The magic they study is almost exclusively utility spells and illusions, although they have learned to make creative use of them in combat against the cult or other inhabitants of the caverns. They also surround themselves with loyal guards, mostly human or elf.
The Engelbrekt Mystical Society inhabits most of the eastern parts of the dungeon.

The Orc Tribe

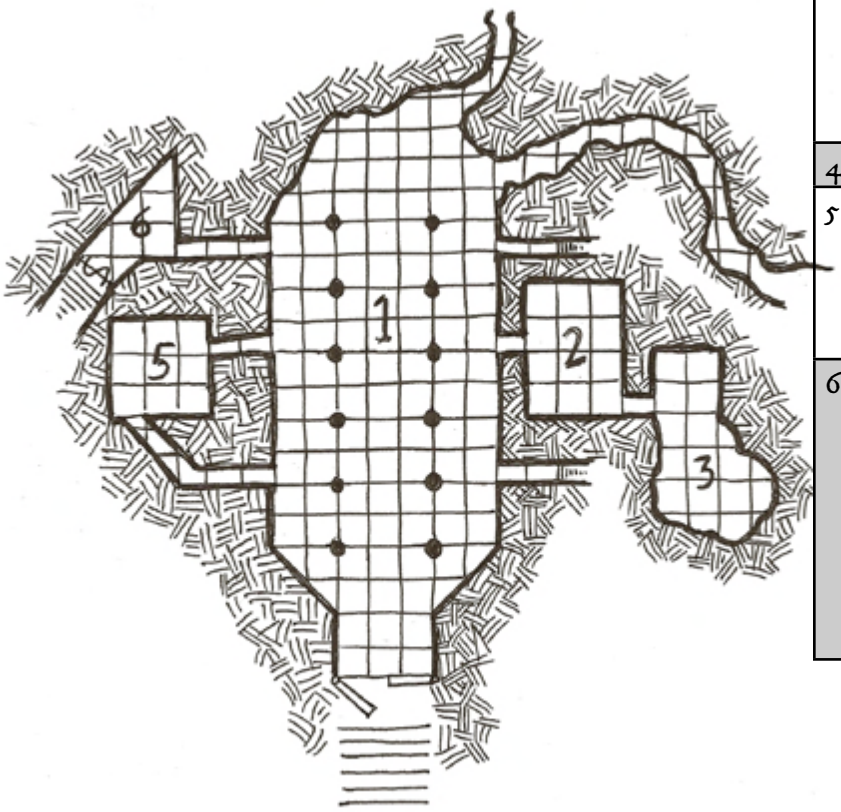
The third faction of interest is an ord tribe of substantial size that have claimed the west and southern parts of the dungeon as theirs. They make a living plundering the surrounding lands and other factions in the mountain equally, finding that nobody dares follow them into the depths.

Using this document

Only four key areas of the dungeon are detailed out in this document. The rest can be generated through tables in the Tables chapter, either before hand (recommended) or during a session. When rolling for a new room in the dungeon, first roll on the Dungeon Rooms table, either once and take a row or roll once for each column. Then roll once on the table corresponding to the territory the room is located in (for the moment – the territorial boundaries are constantly in movement and are quite irregular). Using this method there are 240,000 possible combinations of rooms (yeah, it's stupidly excessive and they would get awfully repetitive if you used all). Remember that the results you get are meant as an inspiration, not a limitation.

When moving from one room to another, check the compass. If you're going in the direction of another territory there is a 1 in 6 chance you enter it now.

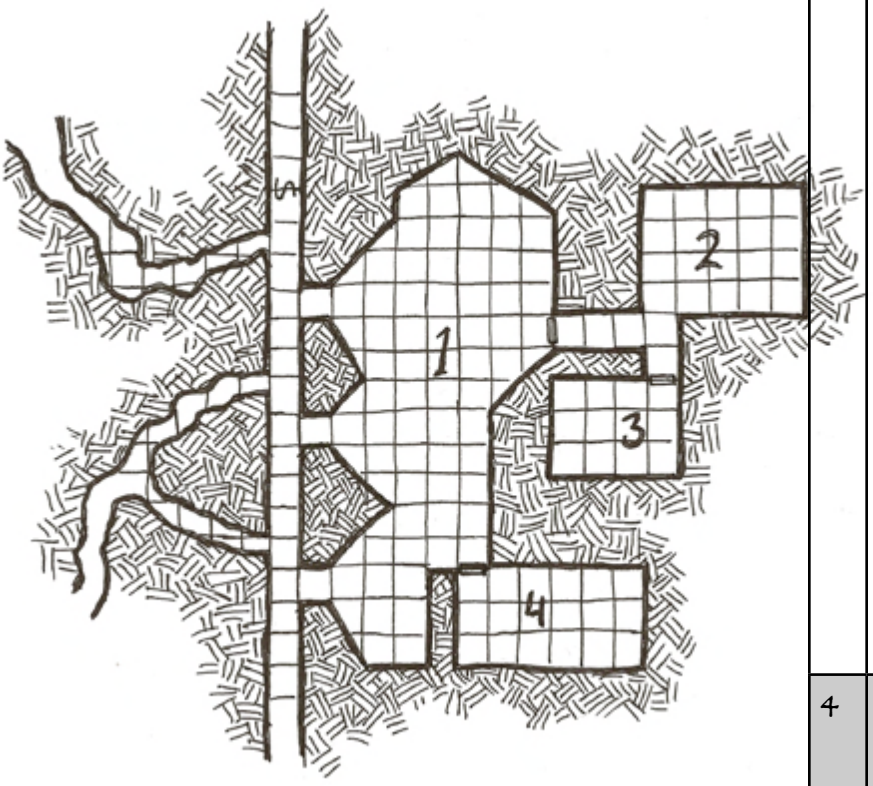
Entry Hall



The main door into the mountain is a bronze construction of immense size. It's incredibly heavy, but one half is ajar already (more or less stuck that way). A broad staircase leads all the way up to the door from the nearest road. It's a long and strenuous climb.
Also, room 4 is probably in a different dimension or something, because it certainly isn't on the map. Sorry about that.

1	Large hall with pillars in two rows. Wild animals make their escape here now and then, though none has a permanent dwelling here. Sounds of movement can heard now and then, and things shying away in the shadows can be spotted by the perceptive. There are no dangers in this room normally, however. The two cave tunnels to the north lead straight into orc lands. The two corridors to the east have stairs leading down and into the territories of the cult of Sornack.
2	Iron chains and shackles are spread about the room. Walls are covered in messages of hatred and threats, most written in blood. The rib cage of a humanoid is on the floor in a corner, gnawed bare by some beast.
3	Used to be a square room, but a couple of walls have been hacked out for more space. That part of the room cannot be lit up; it's almost like a dark lense dims the light. Hissing can be heard and the glimmer from two big eyes seen. A huge anaconda has somehow found its way here in its final days of life. It lies dying the darkness and will at most muster a couple of fairly weak attacks before giving up its breath.
4	omitted by author
5	The room has apparently been used as resting place fairly recently. A trip wire with a fire trap is set in the east entrance. There is a broken and empty backpack in one corner, and a small pile of ashes in another.
6	The northwest wall is a large mirror, only dead things have a reflection in it. That is, clothes and equipment, but not the PCs themselves. The southwest wall is a secret door; that cannot be seen in the reflection either. In the reflection you will see the stairs behind it. The door opens only when the name 'Engelbrekt' is spoken. The stairs lead into the areas controlled by the Engelbrekt Mystical Society.

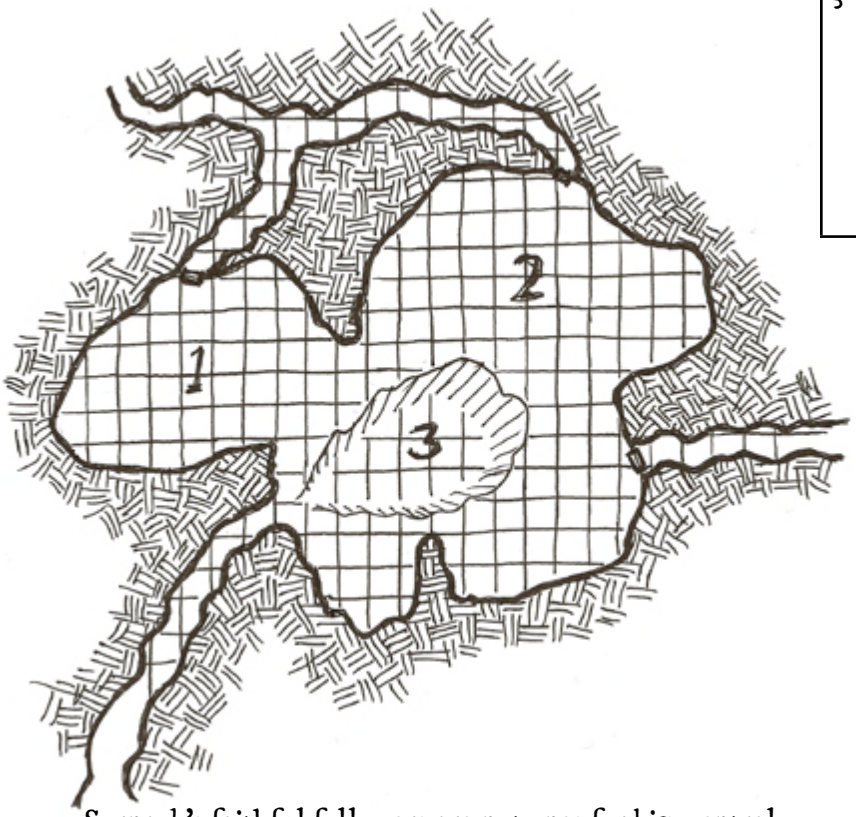
Engelbrekt Mystical Society



The Engelbrekt Mystical Society's main hall is mostly used for rituals - mundane and magical alike. It's a dangerous place for outsiders to be, not least for all the protective spells ingrained in the walls.

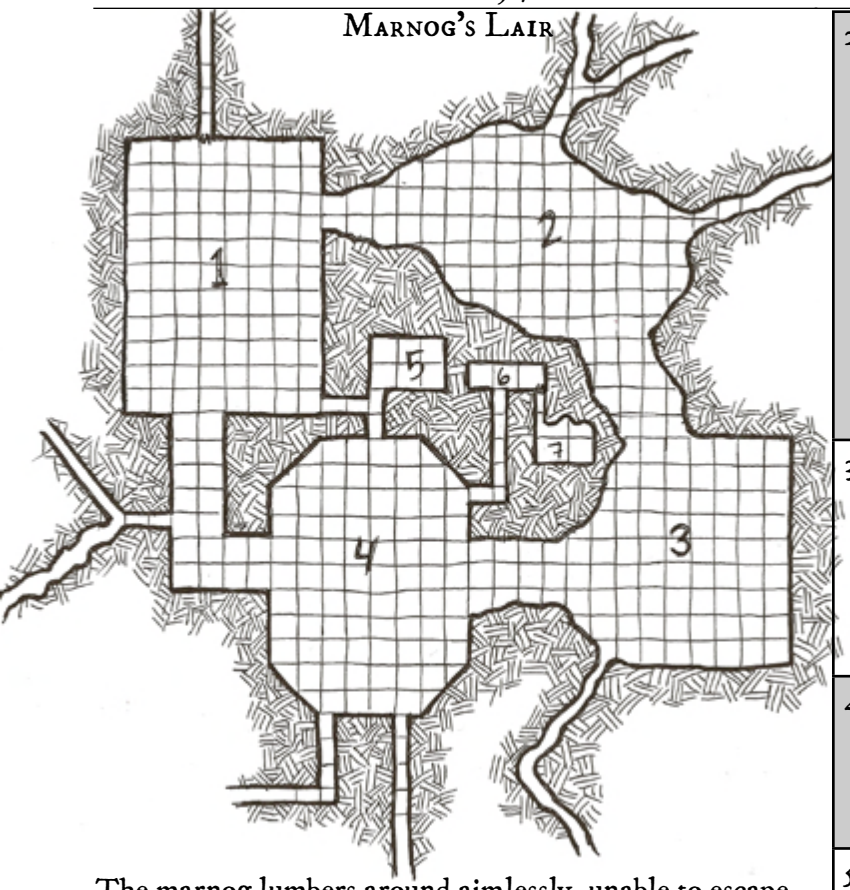
1	Room of visions. Walls, ceiling and floor are all made of mirrors here. Pillars, pyramid-shaped protrusion and altars all made of mirrors make it stupidly confusing. The door to the east is a locked wooden door. The door to the south is a glass door. Through it you see into a brightly lit room where a big black dragon with dark green stripes is lightly asleep. The dragon is just an illusion, but it looks real enough and the view of it is reflected all around like everything else.
2	Office and library. Several desks, lots of writing material and lots of shelves with books. Books are mostly written in ancient dialects of common or elfish. Many are poetic or about snakes. Others are history, geography or arcane knowledge. There are always wizards in this room. Most of them high level.
3	Room with several glass sheets stretching from floor to ceiling. Everyone who enter must save vs spells. Whenever someone fails the door will close and be impossible to open. The glass sheets will swiftly move to try to enclose everyone in the room between two sheets each. Roll DEX to avoid. Once everyone has either avoided or been caught the door will once again open. Those caught between glass sheets (the sheets shape to enclose them like shrink wrap) appear to be in stasis. Their bodies are indeed in stasis, but they find themselves teleported to (in reality as illusions) somewhere else entirely. They will spend 10 rounds there. If they survive they disappear from that area and wake up in the glass sheet room again, released. If they die their bodies are teleported from the glass sheet room to that area, where they will lay dead. Roll d20 to find where they appear; 1-4: corresponding room in the Marnog's Lair (the Marnog is next to them), 5-20: corresponding result from the dungeon room table (roll random encounter from cultist or orc area).
4	There isn't really a dragon in here. When the glass door is opened it reveals a training ground for the society's guards. There is a drugged orc berzerker chained to the floor in the middle of the room. All must save vs spell; those who fail will find themselves controlled by the orc's twisted and tortured mind. They will attack their friends. The berzerker will lose control if killed, unconscious or freed from the influence of drugs. He is protected by spells, however, and only takes 1/4 damage from non-magical weapons.

Cult of Sornack Temple



Sornack's faithful followers are not ones for big, centralized sermons, but when it happens it involves insense, chanting and human (or at least humanoid) sacrifice. Preferably with torture and cannibalism involved.
Their temple room works very much like an auditorium, because the south entrance is fairly low set and the floor in the north and northwest areas is much higher. This, coupled with the very high ceiling bring great acoustics to the room.

1	When rituals begin prisoners are brought in from the south entrance and brought to this area to be tortured. There are lots of weapons and strange tools here, and place reeks of fear and suffering. Constant moans of pain course through the air, seemingly from nowhere and everywhere. The north door is locked and prepped with a fire trap. When the fire trap springs it burns off a wire that disables an poison trap set a step in behind the door. Therefore, if the fire trap is defused the poison trap may spring instead. Save vs Poison or death; a failed save means death while a successful save means d4 of damage.
2	The north and east doors both have fire traps. This area is used for chanting. Prisoners are often forced to fight each other. They will all die eventually, however, and be tossed into the pit that is 3.
3	This pit has hundreds of spears sticking out of the ground. Dozens of rotting corpses - mostly undeads - are pierced and stuck in the pit. Anyone who falls down will suffer d8 damage from the spears unless they make a DEX roll. Regardless they will be surrounded by zombies trying to kill them. The zombies have limited movement, reducing their To Hit roll by 5.



The marnog lumbers around aimlessly, unable to escape the large halls it is confined to. It usually moves about one room per turn, but could easily run all around its lair in a matter of minutes.
When the characters arrive at the lair, regardless of their way in, roll d4 to decide which of the large rooms the marnog is currently in. The creature is very perceptive, and very aggressive. It never sleeps. If the characters make obvious sounds it will go to where they are.
It's way too large and cumbersome to use any passages smaller than the four main ones. The passage from hall 1 to hall 2 is almost too small for it to pass through; the marnog will mainly use it when in a hurry (escaping or attacking, that is). All the four big halls have ceilings so high that torchlight will not reach it. The halls and rooms are as follow:

1	The room is littered with broken pillars, each one with the diameter of a yard or so. Over the years the marnog has torn them all down. Sometimes in anger, other times to pursue prey hiding amongst them or just generally making more room for itself. They are now only a hindrance to smaller creatures (such as the characters) that want to make headway fast through this room. They block vision and passage; sprinting is impossible in here. Amazingly the ceiling has not caved in, perhaps held up only by some dark force of will. The north wall is entirely made of bricks, whereas the other walls are some sort of dark marble. The door to the north is hidden. It opens when a brick by the floor is pushed in (the brick in question is actually made of iron, and its rusty red is slightly different to the others - visible upon inspection).
2	This place would be homely, if you had the same standards as its inhabitant. There are bones and dung piles scattered about. A large pile of bodies-armored warriors, orcs, halflings, other humanoids and critters alike - random objects and skeletons leans against the wall just south of the west entrance. For every round spent searching through the pile there's a 1 in 2 chance of finding a random object of interest, and a 1 in 3 chance that 1-2 bodies will come to life and attack. In the center of the room is a large pool of stinking marnog piss. Anyone falling in will have to save vs acid or lose d4 HP.
3	The living room! Or, well, at least this room is somewhat lit up. Death-defying cultists of Sornack regularly refill braziers standing in the southeast corner. There is a sacrificial spot here. It's a circle drawn on the floor, where metallic rings are also firmly attached to the ground. The cult ties victims here to sacrifice them to the Marnog.
4	Statues are standing against all walls, depicting gods of old. They are all gods and saints of chaos and will cause unease in any lawful characters. Lawful clerics cannot turn undead in this room. A decrepit undead dire boar walks about in here.
5	A very spartan room. There is a sarcophagus in the middle, decorated with beautifully handcrafted jewels and gold worth 1000 gp. The sarcophagus has an acid trap: when opened a spray of acid will fill the room (unless found and defused). D6 of damage, save vs breath for half. The sarcophagus contains the angry mummy of a Sornack high priest - some say the first one. He carries a black amulet. There is a scroll with a random 5th level spell on it too.
6	Completely bare room. A very old dead body lies on the floor, seemingly died in its sleep. It has a note in its hand that reads "I will never escape this place. May someone bless my soul, that it may find its way to the afterlife." in old common. There is a rune pattern on the north wall, clearly of Sornack cult origins. The secret door to room 7 will open when the amulet worn by the mummy in room 5 is pressed to the center of the rune pattern, or when the deceased is blessed (the soul will do the characters a favour before going to its final resting place).
7	In the middle of the room is a small stone table with a thick book on it. The book is written in code. Spend d4 months studying it and roll against INT to decipher. It's a book about the chaotic pantheon, it's divine rules and history. It contains valuable secrets for several of the old chaotic religious institutions. The right buyer will surely pay a heap for it.

Tables

Random Objects in Pile of Remains in Hall 2 of Marnog Lair

1	Gold ring with strange elfish inscription. Glimmers interestingly in torchlight. Wearer has +2 CHA.
2	Piece of plate armour. Roll d4; 1 chest, 2 arms, 3 legs, 4 helmet. Aside from AC mod, it looks awesome.
3	Fresh food, 2d10 rations.
4	A shield with known heraldic symbol. A roll for WIS will let PCs recognize it. Reward if family is informed.
5	Staff, clearly belonging to a wizard. Will cast Light when commanded.
6	Potions of minor healing, d6 doses.
7	Fur from exotic animal. Not in great shape, but could bring in d3 x 50 gp
8	Pocket belt with thief tools.
9	d4 doses of lethal poison.
10	Large axe, inlaid with gold.
11	A bracelet with gems, worth 300 gp.
12	Boots, reduces wearer's encumbrance effect on movement by 25%.
13	Diary of a noble who's been sleeping around a lot. Lots of juicy secrets about nobility one generation ago.
14	A map of some part of the dungeon the PCs have yet to visit.
15	Gloves, increases wearer's chances to succeed in lock-picking, pick-pocketing and other fine finger arts.
16	Flute. Sound cannot be heard by beings with alignment chaotic.
17	Three bottles of fine wine.
18	A list of old and current members of the Engelbrekt Mystical Society, along with their ranks.
19	Crystal pendulum that sparkles sligthly. Lights up blue when near hidden doors; the nearer the lighter.
20	Scroll with hymns to well-known lawful deity. Previously unknown, but very poetic and gripping.

Dungeon Rooms

1	Square room	2 old cots, a table with silver cutlery on	goat, eating something
2	Cave, irregular	cave paintings of Sornack tormenting people	spears standing to one wall, adorned with gems
3 *	Rectangular	torture equipment lying about, blood stains	body strung up to the ceiling, skinned
4	Corridor, 50"	dead body in chains in alcove (undead?)	whispers are heard randomly, sobs also
5	Stairs down	alcoves with urns along the wall	invisible hands tuck at clothes from behind
6	Stairs up	bones litter the floors; tread carefully	check DEX or crush bones beneath feet
7	Circular, small	d10 urns with ashes along the walls, altar	belt, expensive knife and red cloak on hanger
8 *	Tunnel, 30"	torches on walls, amulets hanging on hooks	voices of warning heard, mostly elfish
9	Large hall	dining tables, large altar, black candelabra	food, semi-fresh, and d4 pigs
10	Vast cave	Stalagtites, stalagmites; short line of sight	difficult to navigate, roll INT or become lost
11	Auditorium	bottomless well; pierces lower levels as well	old armoured body, speaks, but only in riddles
12	High ceiling	eerie glow; all sound muted to a whisper	wooden box, plays when opened
13	Tunnel down	pit trap	glow worms on walls
14	Tunnel up	remains of a fight; old	tracks of large snakes on ground
15 *	Large cave	fresh remains of a fight; some still alive, barely	uneven floor, some parts elevated
16	Starshaped	way out of the mountain; into crevace or crack	tracks of wild animals
17	Tiny	bookshelf, reading chair, small table, lamp	books; mostly heroic fiction
18	L-shaped	brazier, table with alchemy equipment	scrolls with alchemical recipes in shelf
19	Circular, large	queen size bed, closet with black cloaks	fire pit, and chimney-like hole in ceiling
20	Low ceiling	rack with missile weapons	signs warning intruders, orcish

*Room has Boulder Bugs

Engelbrekt Mystical Society Area (and Random Encounters)

1	underground river, 1 in 3 chance of anacondas	wizard, lvl 5
2	violin music can be heard out of nowhere	d4 wizards, lvl 2
3	pillar of water in center, several anacondas	d6 guards (as fighters, lvl 2)
4	room houses indoor garden; well-lit from floating orbs	patrol with dog; 2 fighters, lvl 2, one dog
5	wall is reflective like mirror; reflections have life of their own	trained monkey (as fighter, lvl 1, w/ 2 attacks)
6	someone is holding a seminar in the next room	d4 orcs, scout party (as fighter, lvl 3, chainmail)
7	shed skin from snakes of different sizes hang from ceiling	d10 orcs (as fighter, lvl 4, plate mail)
8	shelves and shelves of writing material, tables and chairs	d6 cultists (as fighter, lvl 2) fighting d4 wizards
9	a large ceramic disc with inscription, perhaps calendar of sorts	d10 wizards, lvl 3, with d6 guards
10	wine cellar, also boxes with incense and euphoric drugs	d6 guards with d4 prisoners (cultists or orcs)

Orc Tribe Area (and Random Encounters)

1	spears with skulls on, mostly human	d4 orcs (as fighters, lvl 3) with d6 dogs/wolves
2	drums heard from distant room	d8 berzerkers (as fighter, lvl 6, chainmail, 2 att)
3	furs lying about; obvious sleeping area	four old blind orc women, telling fortunes
4	cage with large lizards	orc hunting party, looking for edible prey
5	a flock of hens, pucking about	an orc shaman; he knows things about PCs
6	leather workshop; skins, fur, leather and tools aplenty	patrol of d6 orcs (as fighters, lvl 3, plate mail)
7	barrels of strong ale and liqour	d8 wolves
8	toys made from human bones	d6+1 cultists (fighters, lvl 3, anti-cleric, lvl 4)
9	a blacksmith (smoke goes into hole in ceiling to floor above)	d4 slaves, working at something, 1 slave driver
10	cage for keeping prisoners; might be occupied.	d4 zombies

Cult of Sornack Area (and Random Encounters)

1	black tapestry hangs from ceiling, 1 in 3 will attack	d6 cultists (as fighters, lvl 3)
2	walls covered in dried blood and black goo	cultist priest (as anti-cleric, lvl 4)
3	hymns to Sornack written on walls	high priest and d6 priests (anti-clerics, lvl 6, 3)
4	shackles and torture tools on floor, injured prisoners	d10 zombies
5	painting tools; brushes and canvases	d20 zombies w/priest (anti-cleric, lvl 8)
6	scrolls with anti-clerical spells, mostly low-level	d6 slave orcs
7	shelf with potions and poisons	undead dire boar
8	cage with small animals; rats, lizards	ghost; will answer one question from each PC
9	flower arrangements; different red flowers, leaves blackened	Result 3 from Mystical Society table
10	sharp weapons in excessive amounts	Result 4 from Mystical Society table

Monsters

The Marnog

Number Encountered: 1
Alignment: Chaotic
Movement: 150'
Armor Class: -1
Hit Dice: 16
Attacks: 4
Damage: 2d12, 2d12, 1d20, 2d8
Save: F16
Morale: 12
XP: 1500

Huge and dangerous. The Marnog will attack with fists or feet as well as its horn and whipping, sharp tail. The horn deals 2d8 damage and the tail 1d20. Feet and fists deal 2d12. It's around 100' high and terrifying. Once per combat its roar can invoke paralysing fear in its enemies; save vs paralysis or be paralysed for 1d4 rounds.

Sornack High Priest Mummy

Number Encountered: 1
Alignment: Chaotic
Movement: 70'
Armor Class: 1
Hit Dice: 7
Attacks: 2
Damage: 1d10, 1d10
Save: C7
Morale: 12
XP: 600

Once every fourth round the High Priest can make a mental fear strike against one opponent. Save vs paralysis or get d12 damage and be paralysed for 2 rounds.

Undead Dire Boar
Number Encountered: 1
Alignment: Chaotic
Movement: 90'
Armor Class: 5
Hit Dice: 6
Attacks: 1 (tusk)
Damage: 2d6
Save: F6
Morale: none
XP: 250
The decrepit old variant in the Marnog's lair is one hit die less. The size of these beasts are around 35' long.

Boulder Bugs

Number Encountered: 1d10
Alignment: Chaotic
Movement: 60'
Armor Class: 5
Hit Dice: 4
Attacks: 1
Damage: 2d6
Save: F4
Morale: none
XP: 250
These insect-like creatures look exactly like boulders. They will not reveal themselves as living creatures until they are either attacked or can pounce their unsuspecting opponents. Their only weapon lies in their weight; they are around 4' tall and weigh as much as a rock of that size.

Possessed Tapestry
Number Encountered: 1d10
Alignment: Chaotic
Movement: none
Armor Class: 9
Hit Dice: 3
Attacks: 1
Damage: 1d6
Save: F3
Morale: none
XP: 150
These black pieces of garment hang from the ceiling among common tapestry that looks the same. They will attack and attempt to constrict any passer-by that is not a cultist of Sornack. If an attack succeeds it means they get a grip and will keep dealing damage every round until grip is lost.

Anaconda
Number Encountered: 1d4
Alignment: Neutral
Movement: 90'
Armor Class: 5
Hit Dice: 6
Attacks: 2 (bite, constrict)
Damage: 1d6/2d10
Save: M4
Morale: 10
XP: 400
The anacondas are pets of the wizards in the Engelbrekt Mystical Society. The wizards keep them appeased and attempt to read knowledge and see the future in the skins shed by these beasts. An anaconda will attack with a bite. If successful it will follow up with a constriction attack that will deal damage every round until its grip is released.

The Quest

by Shoe Skogen
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Dear Santicore, I would like...
An outline for a quest (searching for relics, part of an artefact, etc.) that can be slotted into different campaigns. Some NPCs, encounters, tables would be cool, but flavour and story is the important thing.
Thanks, I. J.

In the best and brightest part of the Kingdom - or Empire, or Galaxy - lies the domain of the Lady A. Rich, influential, ambitious, Lady A is unquestionably an up-and-coming mover from a proud and powerful dynasty. A patron, a noble, a granter of favours, Lady A is a munificent and generous friend, and a terrifying enemy. She commands a a small army, employs hundreds, and her enormous wealth is turned to various projects across the land. The pies perforated by her industrious fingers are many and far-flung. Yet there are always projects can't be done in-house - that would lead to too many questions. So on rare occasions, Lady A hires people that aren't 'her people'. Freelance individuals of various skillsets come in handy to any rich, powerful person with a certain image to uphold, and Lady A is no exception. In this case, the freelancers hired are the party of PCs.

MISSION: My first goal in this task was to provide a loose framework of a story, with maximum flexibility. I wanted to make a story that could exist in as many settings and genres as possible, and be adaptable to nearly any campaign - yet also stand alone. To that rather ambitious end, the various story elements can be worked into the following genres: space opera, gritty sci-fi, noir, high fantasy, historical, modern. Post-apocalyptic or strait-up horror might be a stretch, but could work with a bit of hammering. The plot is the barest skeleton of a story, the flesh and skin provided by people, places, and the actions of the PCs themselves.

ON THE MISSING PLOT: Build a nice shiny set of rails, and the players will gleefully jump the tracks to go cavorting up the mountainside. Every. Damn. Time. Therefore, instead of writing a planned series of events, I've given the barest skeleton of the plot - a mission and a twist - but populated it with NPCs, each with their own personalities and desires. There are also a series of locations and setpieces for the plot, and a list of suggestions,, twists, and complications that could be thrown in, more or less in any order one likes. Hopefully, the various goals and desires of the NPCs will add meat to the skeleton provided, so that the resulting beastie takes whatever shape the GM and players give it. The skeleton is a fairly simple and well-used story, so hopefully it's a sturdy one.

ON NAMES: Characters are referred to by a single letter: the first letter of their name. This is so their actual name can be chosen to fit the setting you're using. Futuristic, fantasy, medieval, classical, evocative of any time and place! Choose from the list, or make up whatever your heart desires.

ON TIME: The passing of messages and the sending of letters could easily factor into this storyline in an important way. Best luck would be had by adjusting the way time passes in your story to account for the technology of communication. If a fantasy story where the primary message-sending is by bird or courier, expect that the characters are given days or weeks in each location. If a sci-fi or otherwise technologically connected world where communication is instant or fairly rapid, it could easily all happen within a few days. Almost every location is provided with some way to 'pass time', if the characters are required to wait there for any reason.

ON LOCATION: Each location here is hopefully flexible enough to take the shape of whatever fits your world. A castle could be a stately cruise ship, or a luxury star cruiser. A bandit's lair could be a crumbling keep, a series of catacombs, or a junky spaceship. To this end, I have tried to give each location a specific style. Instead of describing the layout, I've give a description of the location's furnishings and atmosphere, which can be amended according to the wealth, dwelling size, and status markers of the world in which the quest takes place.

THE PLOT (such as there is)

I. THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

In the very first scene, the party is given a message asking them to make their way to Lady A's domain. The message can be delivered by bird, courier, holo-message, anything that fits the setting. Time ought be taken beforehand, if possible, to establish Lady A as a person of some importance - a valuable ally, a terrible enemy - so that the party actually heeds her summons and accepts her assignment.

After being shown into her domain, the characters to not meet Lady A right away. Instead they are served refreshments, catered to by one of her many servants or staff. One wants to build the impression that this is a very busy, driven individual, with fingers in all sorts of pies. She spares no expense in hospitality, but she's a bit short on personal attention. Give the party a little time to wander about the meeting place, looking at tapestries or paintings, what-have-you. If narratively appropriate - if they have just come off a hard march, of if there are injuries - one could even have them shown to lavish guest rooms for the night, to rest before an early morning meeting. This is a great time to throw in a few tidbits about the powerful dynasties, factions, or groups in your world, and some background about the history of your setting. You could even hint at future plot, in the form of an incoming holo-vid or forgotten letter, or servants overheard talking.

After not too long a wait, a servant comes along and introduces the Lady. She makes pleasant conversation for a socially required period, then gets right to business: her intended husband, Prince J, has been kidnapped. She would like to party to retrieve him. At the very least, she wants his definite location discovered, and at the most, she would like those who took him delivered to her hands. She will take a while to answer any questions the party has, but although she is not impolite, she clearly has other places to be. If asked what she has planned for her fiancé's kidnappers, she makes a vague gesture and says something about 'the wheels of justice'. She promises to provide what resources she can to the party - within reason - and assures them that they will be exceedingly well-rewarded. The impression should be that she will do absolutely just as she says. To that end, she gives the party a generous advance, and offers her hospitality as they rest and prepare for their journey.

LOCATION: The domain of Lady A.
This can be a palace, an enormous mansion, a lush oasis, a skyscraper, an airship: whatever makes sense for the setting. It is lavish and luxurious, very pleasing to all the senses, with no expense spared. The theme seems to be stately, opulent furnishings without being tacky about it. Clearly there's scads of money put into creating rich and pleasing surroundings, but it's all more elegant than ostentatious. There are rich furnishings, tapestries hanging on the walls, soft music playing in nearly every room, bits of nature (fountains and little trees) brought in to refresh the senses. The smell is appropriate for the setting: perhaps fresh flowers or a bracing rainfall scent, or heady incense and spices. The meals served here are of the highest quality, prepared by a true master. To spend time here is to exist in a state of near-constant sensual delight. Describe the effect this place has on all the senses, and the care obviously taken in putting it all together. Take time also to show the social atmosphere of the court. The place is full of social and political intrigue, dominated by ambitious, sometimes ruthless movers who will do near anything to climb the next rung on the ladder.

OH PAYMENT: The rest of the story does depend on the character's accepting the task, so do make sure to present it as a thing the characters will want to accept! This means that for some groups, the promise of generous monetary reward may not be what they want most. They might be more motivated by clemency for a party member or someone close to them. Perhaps legal aid or political support is more valuable, perhaps a powerful artefact the characters been seeking, perhaps martial support for one of their endeavours. Either way, make sure that Lady A offers - or is willing to offer - something the characters are willing to work for.

2. DIGGING DEEPER

In the hours or days that follow - depending on the chronological speed of your campaign - the party has access to wonderful meals, any medical attention they reqire, new clothes both court-appropriate and field-functional, and entertainment and relaxation provided by the court. Their patron should give the impression of someone who has lots of money to throw at problems, but not a lot of time or attention to devote to the party, other than assigning a châtelaine to take care of them. They also have access to her massive library - another good way to drop in bits of history or setting information. If Counsillor X can be convinced to open access to the Archives, there is that as well. This is a good time to introduce or develop any subplots you have hanging about. Overheard conversations, talk over dinner, visiting dignitaries, all of them can be used to give news about what's going on in the setting. Let the characters prepare for the journey as much as they like, though if they tarry too long, they'll be politely but firmly reminded of their purpose. Lady A will ensure the party is outfitted with basic supplies, but a sound logical argument or a charismatic character could persuade her to outfit the party with upgraded equipment. This is also the time to introduce several NPCs, given more detail below. If your players find interest in a game of social intrigue, there are plenty of romantic entanglements going as well, each with some insight into the characters and their situation.
M: Introduce M as the one assigned to look after the party. She is happy to hear of their exploits and will listen to them talk on and on, subtly pumping for more information. It shouldn't be noticed, at first, that she gives much less information than she receives. She is clearly the most well-informed person around.
C: Put him in the characters' path by having some element of his art - a verse of a song, something in a painting - personal or meaningful to the characters. It can be implied that he has some version of the Bard's Tongue or the Sight, or he could just be (through M) exceedingly well-informed.
K: Should be presented as interesting due to his/her cultural ties to the Bandits the characters are after. Extended conversation, however, should reveal a great deal of insight into Lady A and the politics of her court.
X: Council Member X comes into play if the characters spend time in the Archives or the Library. If the characters seem to be political rabble-rousers, X will also seek them out with vague warnings or subtle encouragement. X will also show up if the characters contemplate turning on the lady, seemingly prescient to any threat against her. This can be presented as magical, psionic, or simple intuition, depending on the setting. As loyal as they are to to Lady A, it should be just as obvious that the Councillor is also keeping things from her.

ON CLUES: It's a good idea to modulate the amount of information Lady A has about the kidnappers, based on how much your players enjoy an investigation. When given the job, the characters could be told exactly who the kidnappers are and their general location, or Lady A could simply point the party in a vague direction, expecting them to figure it out from there. Either way, the clues to the basic identity and location of the kidnap-

pers - a group of Bandits, making their hideout on the border between this principality and the next - are all in her domain, waiting to be found. If the players turn out less interested in clue-hunting than was expected, use the NPCs to drop details. M could tease them about how little they know, C can drop a significant detail in a song or poem, or Councillor X might beckon the characters away, explaining to them what they need to know. Make sure the Archives will provide what they need, with a bit of research.

ON MAPS: Maps of the road to the Bandit are provided by Lady A. They are serviceable, but not detailed. Better maps can be found in the Archives (as allowed by Councillor X) or provided by M, for a hefty price. Any gained by these advanced methods are more accurate and more detailed, showing the locations of bridges and good places to rest. The best maps possible are drawn by Tall K. They are the most accurate and detailed - if M sold expensive maps to the party, Tall K may be where she got them. However, if the characters have built up a positive relationship with Tall K, the maps are not only detailed and accurate, but also covered in various helpful notes. There are notations on good places to get across obstacles, and various hazards both environmental and otherwise. For example, if an overland trip, the better maps would show where to ford rivers and where there are trading posts. If a space voyage, the better star maps would show how best to avoid pirates and where the fairest fueling stations are, and include things like asteroids and small moons.

3. THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

Treat this as one would any journey. Fill it will just enough action to keep the players invested, but let time and distance pass when it makes sense they should. Some ideas:

Tolls and Taxes: Throw some pressure on your party. If you have it set up that Lady A's domain is one spot of wealth in a sea of poverty, this is a great time to drive that home. If the empire is prosperous and doing well, show any bandits the party encounters as bored kids out for a thrill. If your setting is corrupt and totalitarian, inflict steep polls on the party, administered by harried, faceless workers. Use the journey to flesh out your world, and show how things are outside the palaces of the wealthy, especially if your characters haven't seen life on the ground in awhile.

Random Encounters: Monster attacks are never a bad thing! Introduce your party to the various flora and fauna of the land - or space - they travel through.

N: Depending on the actions of the characters before they left the Court, this is a good time to introduce consequences of those actions, including N. If they angered anyone, plotted against anyone, or stole anything, this is when N shows up to deliver a message. If not, N can be introduced to give more information or raise the stakes. Either way, N is your tool to guide the players back when they have lost their way, to deliver any information they need, or to provide dramatic rescue, if needed.

4. THE BANDITS

Every journey must come to an end, and this is where the road leads for the party. It's also the part most up in the air. The manner of the characters' introduction to the bandits depends rather heavily upon their actions up to that point. If they have somehow managed to get word to the bandits ahead of time - or if they've been especially reckless in their approach - the Bandits will be prepared. Their reception depends greatly on the nature of their approach. If they somehow manage to convince the bandits that they're no harm - or even trying to help - then they will get a very warm welcome, albeit with a few narrowed eyes and pointed questions. If the Bandits are aware of their coming and don't want them there, the hideout will be near-impossible to find. If neither of these are the case, however, the characters should find it with a bit of searching and stealth. Aggressive attack results in capture, not murder, though the bandits will defend themselves and one another. Present the bandits as reasonable people, not mindless antagonists. They are often cold and hungry, but generous with hospitality. They are violent brigands, but show great loyalty and compassion - at least to one another.

LOCATION: The Bandit Hideout

The bandit hideout can be, like everything else, whatever fits your setting. A junked spaceship floating in the black, a shantytown, a tree-city in a dense forest, a twisting series of tunnels under the earth, or the catacombs of a forgotten city. Either way, it should be presented as a contrast to the domain of Lady A in every way possible. While the Court was all about understated elegance, the place where the bandits live is exactly the opposite. Signs of conspicuous wealth are everywhere, layered over hard living. It's over the top, it's tacky, it's layers of bling draped over ragged surroundings. Where Lady A's domain conveyed taking wealth for granted, the Bandit's hideout should convey those used to poverty and hard living, who have gained a bit of sudden wealth. They are conspicuous about it, they highly value the baubles they have stolen and boast about how much they have. They want to show it off. They are often in a cycle of feast and famine, spending all their money as fast as they make it. Play up this contrast: fine silver used to eat meagre meals, or very rich desserts served in rough wooden bowls. Show bandits in fine velvets and furs, but boots falling apart. There are gold chains and gems scattered about, but the roof is leaking. At the same time, remember to show the sense of joy and family the bandits have, and their loyalty to one another. Provide a contrast between this, and the vicious social climbing amidst the finery of lady A's court.

5. THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

Given the chance to actually talk with the NPCs, the truth of the situation comes out rather quickly. J was not kidnapped at all, but left willingly. The 'kidnapping' - such as it was - was staged. J has been living with the bandits since then, though it's quite clear that their lifestyle is quite an adjustment for him. At the same time,

it's clear that R - the leader of the bandits - is trying valiantly to provide him with the lifestyle to which he is accustomed, with rather hilarious results. R has filled his hideout with expensive furnishings after J came to stay there, and if his taste is a quite tacky, his desire to impress J is immense. The two clearly adore one another, and did well before the 'kidnapping' took place. Eventually, it becomes clear that neither of them really thought about the possible consequences when they embarked on the 'kidnapping' idea. It's also clear that they're both quite happy with one another, and seem to be making a good go of it. L is aware of J's identity, and is also aware of R's worry over the matter.
R: Introduce the bandit lord as dramatically as possible. Make it impressive, perhaps with some daring rescue or bombastic speech. Make it obvious right away that this is a grand, larger-than-life individual, show him as every bit the towering personality the stories say he his.
L: If possible, introduce L in a way that drives home that he or she is the other side of the coin. Perhaps L interrupts R during one of those speeches with some correction or pertinent detail, or assists the characters at some crucial moment, when R is busy boasting. Either way, present the two as contrasts, but tightly linked.
J: Twist expectations by giving the very person the characters have been seeking a very casual, everyday introduction. Introduce him in as low-key a way as possible, as just part of the scenery until he speaks up. The characters might come upon him reading or playing something, or he could wander in while they're talking to R or J, to ask a random question.

ON NEED TO KNOW: How much the rest of the band knows, and their feelings on it is up to the GM. If they already know J's identity, it gives them even more rebellious charm, and a chance to show how layered the situation really is. If they don't, it gives a perfect chance to up the ante when the PCseither tell them, or work to keep them from finding out. Then, there's the inevitable drama and confrontation when they do. Will they have an eye to the bounty? Will they support their leader, or save their own skins? What will they do if R won't budge? Will they forgive him if he does? In the end, this might depend on simply how much time you have left to wrap up the story.

6. ON THE JOB

Optional. If the party chooses to stay with the bandits long, this is a good chance to introduce some of the day-to-day reality of a bandit's life. That is, going out and sacking various transports, whether spaceships or caravans or armoured cars. Let the party get invited to go out with the bandits if they like - if they haven't made the bandits hate them - for some rousing robbery and mayhem.

7. WHAT NOW?

Where things go from here is entirely up to the party. What now? Will the situation resolve peacefully somehow, or will everything explode into violence and tragedy - if it hasn't already? This is the time for characters to make some hard choices. Give full weight to those choices, and don't hold back. If the characters sell others out, let it lay on them heavily. If they decide to go against the order or make a stand, make sure it means something. Above all, let all the characters be fully realised and sympathetic, in both great moments and low.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Lady A - the Patron

Charismatic, Uncompromising, Ambitious
Titles: Princess, Queen, Electress, Chairwoman, Comtess, First Officer
Names: Ajqéja, Althea, Abniga, Alisabet, Agrivane, Araxi, A'yazir, Adabegano, Alizarin, Aylswych
Lady A is a powerful, confident woman, ambitious and driven. A princess, if that makes sense in your world. If not, she's the heir of a powerful mercantile or industrial family - either way, she's born to power and greatness. She's a shrewd businesswoman and diplomat, with the insights and acuity to navigate the world of powerful people and end up getting exactly what she wants. Due to this, she tends to take getting what she wants for granted. She has the self-awareness to keep from looking like a spoilt brat - at least when anyone's watching -, but she does get impatient with the failure of anyone around her to produce her desired results. If the characters have a chance to see her frustrated or blocked in some way, they will see her resort to veiled threats, spiteful jabs and other such nastiness fairly quickly.
She is highly intelligent, highly charismatic, in excellent physical condition. She has enjoyed the best education money can buy, but is entirely lacking any sort of 'hard knocks' or streets knowledge. She's well-trained in various forms of combat - and talented in them - but for all her training in tactics, she has never seen actual war up close. Her power lies in her keen mind, political power, loads of money, and lots of people she can command.
+: Educated, intelligent, athletic, confident, self-assured, charismatic, powerful, filthy rich, ambitious, driven
-: Privileged, sheltered, occasionally overconfident, ruthless, manipulative, underestimates those 'below' her
Desires: to recover Prince J, to see the marriage off without a hitch, heirs for her family line, to keep her holdings running in good order, to increase her holdings and power.
Fears: war, being tricked, loss of political might

M - the Maid

Lady A's serving-woman.
Knowing, Wicked, Wise
Names: Micha, Mabega, Molly, Mara, Mirov, Mercater, Maryam, Malika, Mardis
Part of the old tradition of Zanni - clever servants - going all the way back to Greek comedies, M is an shrewd, smirking, devilishly clever serving-maid working for Lady M. Depending on the setting she could be lower

class, serving class, or a lower noblewoman serving as Lady in Waiting. Either way, there is significant class difference between the two. They are friends, at least to first impression, and share a multitude of inside jokes and secrets with one another. M is a master of court gossip: she seems to know everything that's going on, everywhere, with everyone. She's self-aware, almost winking at the audience about all the things happening around her. M can be used to break the forth wall if desired, making ironic comments on the characters and their situation. She's horribly bored by life in Lady A's court, and will snap up any bit of entertainment or amusement she can get, even if - especially if - it's at someone else's expense. M is fond of C, in her way, but she's aware that their perception of the relationship is quite different. She's putting off thinking about it, determined to enjoy the fun while it lasts. She likes K, but looks down on such open sincerity. She adores verbal wordplay, and will joyfully exchange banter or riddles with any especially clever characters. M should be presented as a master of social manipulation, and the character most adept in games of intrigue. If angered or scorned, she is a formidable social opponent, quite spiteful and vindictive. She will not turn against her Lady in any serious way, or knowingly allow harm to come to her, but she may work against her Lady's interests if it's profitable or entertaining.
+: shrewd, clever, self-aware, well-informed, observant, physically hardy
-: selfish, spiteful, bored, fickle, impulsive
Desires: to keep things interesting, to entertain herself, to keep her Lady in a good mood, to arrange further security for herself
Fears: Losing her position, a life of drudgery, marriage (see previous)

C - the Artist

Lady A's kept poet/bard/painter
Emotional, Gregarious, Romantic
Names: Cadme, Christoph, Chancery, Carmine, Caecilius, Cross
C is a fellow in the employ of Lady A, kept to produce all manner of creativity as befits her station. A status symbol, more or less. He's aware of this, and while constraints on his creative efforts sometimes chafe, he's rather invested in his position and the financial security it provides. "Beats the life of a traveling player, a wastrel", he'll say. He spends much of his time working on various creative projects for Lady A, but finds plenty of time to amuse himself by playing the matchmaker whenever he possibly can. He is utterly smitten with M, and would likely follow her to the ends of the earth. She has him wrapped around her little finger, and he's somewhat aware of this, but is too much a romantic to mind it. C should be played as flowery and a bit ridiculous at first meeting, with dramatic body language and overwrought speech. If the GM has a penchant for high-fantasy talk, this would be the time to indulge it. When spoken to outside his court persona, his speech is simpler, his manner melancholy. He knows a great deal about the various intrigues of Lady A's court, and while he doesn't know as much as M, he will more easily share what he knows. He's especially fond of gossiping about various romantic entanglements. If there is any sexual tension or unspoken affection among the party, you can be sure he'll try to meddle.
+: Creative, poetic, charming, talented, physically attractive, creatively gifted, eloquent, genteel
-: Neurotic, prone to melancholy, moody, invested, hopelessly romantic, self-deluding
Desires: Creative freedom, admiration and acclaim, to marry M and spirit her away to the country, (which requires) financial security, to complete a masterwork that will preserve his name
Fears: His Lady's temper, losing M's interest, being poor and raggedy again, selling out

Tall K - the Quiet

Loyal, Insightful, Steady
Names: Kaobad, Kars, Kemnebi, Klaus, Kuulunin, Kenshin, Kim, Khaba, or Kerri, Kiafa, Khethiwe, Kirsten, Kamina, Kimya, Kavi, Konnor
K is, as his or her moniker suggests, is tall - at least a head taller than most others. K is hearty and strong, made that way by lucky genetics, labour, and wholesome living. Tall K is, among all those of the court, the most honest and straightforward and will share what information he or she has without expectation of repayment. K can be either a high-ranking servant or a courtier, depending on how the social strata of the setting. K is from some another region, brought here by his or her parents who were either servants or slaves to Lady K's parents. Due to this, K is somewhat of an outsider to the court, but also somewhat of a curiosity. Perhaps this is why Tall K is afforded both perks and allowances others are not. Then again, this may be due to having the special favour of the Lady. It is an open secret in the Court that Tall K and the Lady A are dear to one another, though how much of this relationship is revealed depends on what sort of gossip the characters seek out and from whom. Most NPCs of the court, if asked about them, will convey that there is *something* going on as subtly or directly as is in their nature. Tall K should be played as simple of speech but not of mind, staunchly good-hearted, and incredibly insightful. K is unique in having little interest in the political intrigue of the court, but makes do with charm and good nature. Tall K is from the same area as R the bandit, and is the best source in that court for information about that area's culture, dress, and ways.
+: Loyal, generous, moral, honest, diligent, physically and emotionally strong, athletic, trained in combat
-: an outsider, politically outmatched, credulous, moral
Desires: to be happy, to keep A happy, to enjoy life at the court, to send money home
Fears: the end of Lady A's affections, a life of drudgery, drunken violence

Council-Member X

Astute, Reserved, Serene
Names: Xhatos, Xenia, Xerxes, Xiaohan, Xe'varan, Xe, Xolani
Serene, soft-spoken, genderless and inscrutable, X is part of the Old Guard attached to Lady A's court. They were an advisor to her father, and her grandmother before that. X has seen many things come and go and is dedicated primarily to the stability of the Lady's House. To that end X will cross just about anyone, even sacrificing themselves if need be. They will go against the immediate desires of Lady A - in the short term - as well, to ensure her long-term survival and power. They take the long view always, sacrificing a pawn here and there to ensure the game is won in the end. X has keen insight into the motivations of others, and can see through most deceptions. They also control access to the Archives, a huge repository of lore, maps, and census information. The impression given by this NPC should be that of an enigmatic elder with sometimes obscure designs. X could be some sort of immortal, if it fits the setting. X is most useful to introduce red herrings or to make the characters doubt whatever path they have chosen, as well as provide more information about the history of the setting. X usually makes their desires known through quiet statements, never raising their voice. Whenever possible, they will act through intermediaries - such as N - when taking more direct action.
+: keen, reserved, insightful, wise, a brilliant strategist, politically aware, intelligent, very highly educated.
-: unscrupulous, physically fragile, unsympathetic, manipulative
Desires: To see Lady A prosper and her people thrive.
Fears: War, the unpredictable, political upheaval

N - the Spy

Clever, Sly, Tenacious
Names: Nattapong, Nakisa, Navid, Nanahatlu, Nadia, Niklaus, Natalie, Nassir, Neshi, Nesrin, Nataniel, Nakemi, Nefirtari
N can be presented to the party as an antagonist, a helper, or even first one and then the other. N is silent and stealthy, with an expert poker face and well-hidden intentions. If encountered, N should presented as a daunting opponent in mental games, gifted in deception and intrigue. When it comes to combat, he or she depends on the element of surprise. With that, this spy and assassin presents quite a threat. Without it, they may lack the pure martial power to overcome adversaries.
N is utterly mercenary, working for whomever can pay. Once on a job, however, N shows dogged commitment to completing the job to the best of his or her ability. This comes not from any loyalty or emotion, but an incredible commitment to professionalism. If this comes up, N will actually expound on the subject, holding forth upon the importance of professionalism and bemoaning how rare it is. Otherwise, N tends to speak in a short, to-the-point style. N can appreciate beauty, however, and may at some point stop to observe the falling of a flower, or a splash of blood on snow. N should be presented as cold, unwavering, but logical and capable of reconsidering all options. N is also a bit off-kilter with the world, *quietly eccentric. Of all the characters, N has the least stake in how things finally shake out in the end, and thus makes a wonderful wild card.
+: Sly, stealthy, intelligent, well-read, analytical, well-trained, experienced, highly observant, a consummate professional
-: Cold, unscrupulous, workaholic, unemotional, secretive, compulsively deceptive, ruthless
Desires: to do the job right, to get paid
Fears: Nothing! ...maybe fish. Fish are horrid.

J - the Prize

Gracious, Quiet, Poetic
Titles: Prince, Heir-elect, Vis-Graf, Count, Marquis, Duke, Scion
Names: Jaajin, Josha, Jibade, Jasper, Jazeera, Jonatan, Janwu, Jaleel, Jixou, Jojani, Jeshuin, Jack
The Prince is the last scion of a crumbling dynasty, and is forever keenly aware of this. His family is old and respected, possibly a founding family of that area, or the rulers of a very old, once-powerful business. They have fallen upon hard times, having lost the great wealth they used to command, but they still have their name. He clings to that, even as he feels weighed down by all that name represents. The marriage to Lady A was arranged by his parents when he was much younger, and at the time, he agreed. He has no quarrel with A - he hardly knows her. J is the most inoffensive character, and has the most rarefied manners. He has a poet's soul, and is easily moved to laughter or tears, to passion or pity. He is sensitive, poetic, a true romantic. He isn't used to any hardship, and so the feast-to-famine nature of Bandit life has been hard on him. Lessons from L have helped, and he's greatly comforted by the steadying presence of R's Second in Command. Besides L, however, the rest of the bandits make him a bit unsure and uneasy. They're just so rough and different, and while he likes the singing and dancing and carousing, sometimes they party too hard for him. The Prince should be played as guileless, straightforward and good, as well as incredibly sheltered. He is someone who had a stable, pleasant life, who was usually kept away from anything upsetting. He had been quite happy to follow the path laid out for him, but when shown an alternative, took it without thought of the consequences. Speaking to him will reveal that leaving with R was one of the first impulsive, self-driven things he's ever done. If shown the possible fallout, he will react with great alarm and dismay. It should become clear through talking to J that he hadn't really thought about the consequences of running away, and the danger R is in because of it has been kept from him as well. He is devoted to R and misses his family, and would have a very hard time choosing between the two.
+: Inspired, optimistic, meditative, musically gifted, highly educated, sensitive
-: distracted, sensitive, naive, absent-minded, sheltered
Desires: a happy life with R, to reconcile with his family
Fears: his choices hurting others, getting R killed, Lady A's wrath, political upheaval.

R - the Bandit

Bold, Passionate, Uncompromising
Names: Rolf, Rameses, Ruinous, Ridya, Ringyeane, Rory, Rameses, Richert
R the Bandit is an outlaw, come from the neighbouring region to ply his trade at the boundaries of this one. He could be a space pirate in a banged-up spaceship, a highwayman with a camp in the wood, even another species. Either way, he and K share the same culture and region of birth. He is the greatest fighter of all the characters, without A's equipment and training, but with natural aptitude and years of experience. He takes great pride in his fighting ability, and will take any chance to boast about his exploits. It's not complete bravado; he can back up his boasts. He can be a bit of a ridiculous character, full of bragadoccio and walking with a swagger, drinking too much and calling for songs to be sung about him. Yes, there are songs about him, and he insists that all new friends hear them. When things are to the wire, however, he becomes deadly serious. He is a fierce defender, a skilled tactician, a terrifying opponent. He is utterly enamoured with J and would never turn against him, but at the same time realises that his 'kidnapping' endangered many people - including both of them. He is also secretly unsure of J's affections, worrying that at some point, the enormous class difference would spell an end to them. He is prepared to fight to the end to keep J happy and safe, but if offered a way out that prevents his band being wiped out, he'd likely take it. He should be played with both commitment and resignation, as a man who made a rash decision and will stick by it, but who has at the same time come to a terrible awareness of just how hopeless his situation really is. How much he shows this will depend on the moment - he tends more toward swagger than melancholy - but hints of it should show. L is the only one of his band who knows how conflicted he is. L is also the one whose word he will trust absolutely, and weigh most heavily. He knows L will stick with him to the bitter end - a thing he has mixed feelings about - but isn't entirely sure about the rest of his band. Despite misgivings, R is quite close with the members of his band, and committed to them. They aren't just his crew- they're his friends, his home, his family.
+: strong, bold, athletic, highly trained, passionate, witty, shrewd, intimidating, cunning, persuasive
-: impulsive, reckless, moody, secretive, emotional
Desires: to keep J, a good life, an epic death, to keep his band happy and provided for
Fears: a shameful death, a loveless life, endangering his band, the noose

L - the Right Hand

Solid, Sensible, Confident
Names: Lassim, Lako'ne, Lydia, Lukas, Lancell, Li, Leofsige, Laluli'ke, Lancre, Leo, Lara, Lolamana
L is R's second-in-command. The two are best friends and working partners, absolutely committed to one another and to the success of the band. They work together very well, and it's easy to see why: each perfectly complements the other. While R is flashy and full of bravado, L is a tower of quiet strength and confidence. While R is emotional, L is calm and steady. It should be obvious how much they love and care for one another, even if they disagree on things or argue. While R is very obviously the face and leader of the band, L does much of the planning and strategy behind the scenes, and makes most of the important decisions. R takes his or her counsel seriously, often deferring to the other's pragmatism and good sense. L also has charge of the band's resources and food distribution, which carries quite a bit of responsibility and power. The impression should be of two people who have known one another a long time, and have developed a very solid relationship, each supporting the other. L is unsure what do do about the situation with J. There is anger at R for being so impulsive and selfish, but also great joy at seeing R so happy and fulfilled. L likes J, but thinks him soft and silly, too thin-skinned to really flourish in a bandit's lair. This is shown, usually, with a sort of amused exasperation. L helps J adjust as best he or she can, often taking the time to give little lessons in trick and trade. In the end, L hopes that having J around will bring a bit of civility and grace to the hideout and their little band. Deep down, L would like to be made 'honest' someday, with a steady, legal trade and a safe life. He or she dreams of home and family, but is pragmatic enough to realise that at least at present, those dreams are unrealistic. L also realises how unlikely it is that someone like R could flourish in a safe, stable life - R is, after all, practically made to be a King of Rogues. In a quiet moment, this would be cause for some melancholy, but L is usually happy to introduce just a little order to the bandit's chaotic life, and hope that someday, things will work out.
+: solid, steady, pragmatic, a gifted strategist and tactician, organised, sensible, skilled, good at maths
-: dismissive of emotion, high standards, unforgiving, reserved, judgemental
Desires: to keep R safe and happy, to support the Band, to elevate their lifestyle. Someday, a stable home, honest trade, and a family.
Fears: Losing R, the Band falling apart, R being sold out

There it is. A quest that can be dropped - hopefully! - into any campaign, or run as a one-shot adventure. I hope you like it very much!

The Jewel of the Silver Line
by Pearce Shea

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All hail the Pilot, brave innovator, great conciliator, Elf-father, Prince of the coal-black Hell, Dynamo of our Future! He brought us the Brothers Steel and Coal, Sister Diesel, Mother Steam. From his dreams and from the bodies of his children, he has fashioned the great Maw of Mammon, the Jewel of the Silver Line, running from Nouveau Paris across The Polish Catholic Empire, the Change Wastes of Lost Russia, over the Sea of Sorrows and to the Jewel of America, the Pilot's own City of Hope, Abaddon. The tracks are paved with the ways of the past and the Myths of Yesteryear; with each jostle you feel the strange knobby bones of Baba Yaga settle under the tracks or else the cracking and further reduction into powder the mummified corpse of Sleeping Beauty.

The Jewel of the Silver Line

The train is a reeling, chugging, Victorian nightmare spread across two rows of tracks, each car either spanning both sets of track (as it is in the wealthier, comfortable front of the train) or being a combination of two older, decommissioned cars bolted together by a ragged lattice of metal bars (as it is in the back end of the train), and each car is at least two floors tall. The train runs ever East, against the sun, moon and stars and a thousand upon a thousand roads and rail lines feed into it, like veins to a turgid, cantankerous, sclerotic artery. The engine is three floors tall and is packed with engineers, cokeboys (coal golems), coal imps and overseen by the enormous, mustachioed demon, The Pilot. Along its undercarriage roil greasekids (oil golems) and down its halls stalk untold numbers of passengers, diplomats, schemers, thieves and staff, the poorest and the wealthiest, all races, creeds, all embroiled in their own fantasies, intrigues and plots.

Elves

Are children of the Atom split by the Pilot, born of the great bombs of the Last War, either Red (the hot Electron of fire) or Black (the cool Proton of Coal). They're not immune to charm but are immune to sources of radiological damage and affect. Furthermore, at level 4, an elf may deal damage at range by emitted wave of irradiation once/day as a magic missile cast by a Magic-User three levels lower. Elves are extremely rare, a pair of soul-bound identical brother-sister husband-wives crawling out of the rare catastrophic blasts that still occasionally rock the Change Wastes as some of the Pilot's abandoned warmachines collapses and explodes

Dear Santicore, I would like...
A short adventure based in a Victorian/steampunk/gaslight/dieselpunk setting, involving a [SOMETHING HAPPENING] on a steam engine that is traveling from one city to another.
SOMETHING HAPPENING can be things like a murder where everyone is the suspect (or has motives), or bandits try to board a moving train to steal something, or something else exciting you can think of!
This request can take any form: a bare bones outline or a fully written out module, or anything in between, your choice. System specifics not required, but ideally done for the Dreaming in Gears setting, if you're familiar with it. D&D (any edition), Pathfinder, Savage Worlds stats (or system-independent) also acceptable.
Thanks, A. H.

Dwarves

Have closed the borders of Switzerland and have not been seen abroad since the arrival of the Pilot, letting their geartech soldiers (warforged) serve as emissaries and border patrols. In the distance, the spider-legged domes of the great Gear Cities can still be seen to dance across the Swiss plains.

Halflings

are the ruling class of Great Britain. Hail Britannia, hail Victoria!

These things happen to the train while you're doing something else (1 in 6 chance, roughly 3-4 chances of happening in a week of travel)

1 to 20	The train stops, there's been a mechanical failure. They're paying willing souls to go out and help run guard duty during the d4 days of repair (GM rolls, don't tell players length of repair... still roll for other things happening).
21 to 40	Danger threatens the Compartment Coaches! (see: Dangers to the Train)
41 to 50	Danger threatens Steerage! (see: Dangers to the Train)
51 to 65	Danger threatens the Quality Section! (see: Dangers to the Train)
66 to 74	Train stops, there's something on the tracks/wrong with the tracks. They're paying willing souls to go out and help run guard duty for 2d4 days (GM rolls, don't tell players length of repair... still roll for other things happening). There is a 1 in 10 chance this is a ruse and someone has paid off the Order to stop the train so that they can have someone go out on guard duty and kill them in relative privacy and secrecy. The party will be paid hush money unless, of course, it's someone in the party that's the target.
74 to 79	A Person of Quality has been robbed and/or assaulted! (see notes)
79 to 81	A Passenger has been robbed and/or assaulted. (see notes)
82 to 84	A child has gone missing and the parents are desperate for help. Determine which Section the kid's from. (see notes)

85 to 87	Plague (determine which section). The guard needs help with the quarantine and the Doctor could use help with a vaccine to keep it out of the rest of the train.
88 to 90	Danger threatens the Party! (see: Danger Stalks the Coaches!)
91	Murder! Determine in which Section the body is found and (separate roll) the victim was staying. (see entries 97-99)
92	Robbery! Something quite expensive and valuable has been stolen. Determine from which Section as in the notes below, but replace "Steerage" with "the Party."
93	Strange, veiled merchants from far Araby have set up shop in a back-section Compartment Coach, and sell exotic, hallucinogenic spices, mutagenic powders and other items of wicked, cursed might. The Order will want you to watch them closely, but not closely enough to see who from Quality might be frequenting their markets. No doubt someone will steal something they shouldn't or else snort something that leaves them frozen solid, their mouth a portal for things from the far stars.
94	A Person of Quality calls for you. They fear for their lives (leads to something from Danger Stalks the Coaches!)
95 or 96	A Passenger fears for her life and begs you for assistance (or his). (leads to something from Danger Stalks the Coaches!)
97	The Party has been robbed, swindled or otherwise hoodwinked by a penniless Person of Quality. The Order doesn't care and will actively work against the Party if they pursue the issue. It will be the most valuable-seeming item they have.
98	A Passenger has been murdered! (1 in 8 chance each: Traveling Merchant, Senior Guildmember, Servant to a Person of Quality, Inventor, Famed Magician, Minor Politician, College Student, Young Professional)
99	A Person of Quality has been found dead! (1 in 6 chance each: Royal Bastard, Estranged Noble, Artist "Companion," Gentry with Unsavory Connections, Royal Trueblood or Foreign Dignitary) (see NPCs for Dignitaries)
100	The Wards are failing! Perhaps the result of the Pilot's corrupting influence, internecine intrigues between the Catholic and Protestants keeping the Wards intact or simply a mistake of one or the other, but the Wards sealing the Pilot have weakened and He sends cokeboys and smog ravens (oily, smokey ravens the size of eagles with a banshee's cry) to petition the party for aid. He doesn't want to be freed, just wants a certain item and a certain person brought to him.

a few notes

*There are Persons of Quality (peers, tycoons, aristocrats, heirs and heiress as well as their entourages and hangers-on); Passengers (everyone well off enough to avoid Steerage); Steerage (both a people, the poorest passengers, and a section of the train); and Staff (train employees or other officials). To determine where someone/thing is from/is happening: (1 in 6 chance it's in Quality, 2 in 6 it's the Compartments and 3 in 6 it's Steerage)

*There are the Quality Coaches (ranging from comfortable and private to opulent and sprawling), the Compartment Cars (modest, often a bit shabby and stinking of tobacco and sleep), Officer's Quarters (where the Staff live), a Brig, Cargo Coaches and Steerage (where the Poorest live on rough wood-plank benches).

*Boilertech vents are throughout the train at regular intervals, at least several to a car, with each room in the Quality Coaches having its own vent. Access is free. Recharging steam-powered stuff takes an hour/charge and each vent can recharge a single item at a time.

*Generally, the Order prefers any matters concerning a Person of Quality be handled with tact, speed and discretion and will likely take responsibility for "managing" the response – ie, they'll farm the gruntwork out to the party, but that's it. Passengers will get some help from the Order, but mostly the Order will file the paperwork and look for someone to do all the actual work; you'll be paid a stipend and possibly deputized. If something happens in Steerage, it's only a concern if it threatens the rest of the train, don't expect much help from the Order, much less recognition or pay.

Also

The Constabulary Order of the Silver Line want to keep the train safe and on time. Passenger safety is important insofar as it keeps the Line Running, but if a passenger threatens the train, then the passenger must be removed by any means necessary. A Catholic Order with a devotion to Mary, Queen of Steam and the Brass Heart. The Line Must Run.

Some NPCs are

Cpt. Makepeace Tall, pale, with the cropped black hair of a soldier but with the manner of a noblewoman. Leader of Order. Paladin, level d4+3. She has 9 flasks of holy machine oil, a suit of Ivory Boilerplate (only worn in battle), a zweihander, a steam baton holy implement, and a black chaplet of Marian prayers; and

Lt. Dumas Four mechanical arms in place of two human, of mixed blood and noble Gallic heritage. Paladin, level 4. 4-wields rapiers with no penalty to hit. He has Ivory lamellar armor(as chain), 3 flasks of holy machine oil, holy implement, each rapier is a +1 sword, +2 versus Englishmen. Of those in the Order, most likely to go out of his way to help passengers.

Also Officers of the Order are level d3 Paladins (2 in 6 chance) or level d6 Clerics (4 in 6 chance) accompanied by d4 (2d4 in the case of the Cpt.) level d6 Fighters. None carry money as they are granted the services of the train gratis.

Some Items

Armors

boilerplate Treat as Plate, adds +2 to melee attacks and ignores the first d6 of elemental damage. Requires steam-powered actuators be charged to able to move at all. Standard is 1 charge & charging takes 8 hours at a boiltertech vent. Costs as Plate times 4. Veteran plate has two charges and costs as plate time 12. May one-hand two-handed weapons without penalty; certain items designed for use with boilerplate.

Miss Pym's Combat Corsets & Dresses The latest fashions in treated cloths, leathers and hidden plates. As leather or chain, costs two times as much (or more, if more fashionable)

Weapons

Goblintech Bombs. Treat as flaming oil, sans torch. Highly unstable and explode when jostled or treated roughly (1 in 6 chance).

Steam-heated Batons. Treat as maces with +2 damage, but need to be recharged after battle at a boilertech vent to restore bonus damage.

Steel scepter of Mary, Queen of Steam and the Brass Heart. Treat as Steam Batons, may be used as Holy Implements by Paladins and Clerics of the Constabulary Order of the Silver Line

Holy Machine Oil. Essentially holy water + oil; smoke and flame damage undead and demons as holy water. Nearly impossible to find outside of begging for some from the Order.

Holdout Pistol.. Treat as a crossbow.

The Queen's Torch. An enormous lantern with a goblinbramble filament, twice blessed, affixed to boilerplate, capable of casting light as if day. Can be discharged to belch a 15' cone of hot flame for two rounds. Wick must be replaced afterward. Made to be mounted on boilerplate.

Swords hidden in walking sticks, canes, umbrellas Treat as short swords

Boilerplate Melee Weapons. Treat these huge weapons as two-handed weapons, twice the cost of normal weapons (or approximate to cost of similar two-handed weapon)

Miscellaneous

Wright Elevators. A polished brass backpack weighing approximately 80 lbs fully charged, comes with 3 charges and can be manipulated to blast jets of pressurized heat, propelling the wearing upwards as if under the affect of levitate cast by a level 10 Magic-User; each charge provides a single Turn of use. Costs 100 gp.

Wright Liberators. A polished brass backpack weighing approximately 80 lbs fully charged, comes with 3 charges and it's various switches, knobs and buttons can be used to manipulate its wood and cloth wings and baffles to propel its user as if under the affect of fly cast by a level 10 Magic-User; each charge provides a single Turn of use. Costs 250 gp. Better bring goggles.

Geist Lenses Nikola Tesla's first and most popular invention, they permit ghostly vision through solid matter (but for lead). Each use permits vision through six inches of matter, with the use lasting a round. More recent models can be tuned to "see" as deep as some of stationary models, with each additional six inches of sight counting as an additional "use." No charges, but each use has a 4 in 6 chance of doing either d4 damage or a minor mutation (50/50 chance). Elves, being radiologically-charged beings, are immune to both affects.

Geist Coils Run from any large powersource (boilerplate, batterypack), these handheld Tesla Coils are tuned to the Astral and Spirit Realms, permitting manipulation of spirits so long as the flow of current is steady. Can be used to extend streams of force into the Beyond to punch, pull, grab and otherwise manipulate ghosts.

Dangers to the Train

1 to 10 in the Change Wastes; occurs nowhere else	Miasmic winds of mutation ripple over the foam-rock plains and the earth seizes. Aid the Priests of Cathay in their Mantras or the Dominicans in their Scholastic Refractive Ablutions or else man the shield walls against whatever may slither, scrape or scale its way aboard.
1 to 10 over the Sea of Sorrows; occurs nowhere else	The Spouts of the Servants of Leviathan are seen on the horizon. Every day hence is spent in tense watch, waiting for an attack of sea beasts too strange and monstrous to contemplate, succubi of the waves, beautiful, twisted sirens too large to exist above the waves for long (every day of travel after this roll d6. On a 5+ the Servants stay where they are, on anything else they move closer. On the third, "closer" they attack). Each servant is as a Dragon Turtle and looks like an enormous squiddy-woman with translucent skin and lamprey mouths. They may attack the moorings of the bridge over which the train passes for the long to bury all of humanity beneath the waves. Only the Pilot can keep them in check. Aid him, the Priests helping him or keep mad, ecstatic passengers from leaping to their death.
11 to 15 in the Change Wastes, 1 to 3 elsewhere	A horde of sacramental mutants, beastmen, barbarians, Chaos Catholics and True Protestants bearing relics of the True Cross, or even a Holy Grail assault the train in great numbers. Man the artillery or else fight toe-to-toe along the tracks, or see to the wounded, or fire potshots from the windows, etc, etc
16 to 20 in the Change Wastes, 4 to 6 elsewhere	Boilers are shot, wheels are choked with too much grit for the oilkids, tracks are fucked up, boilervents or clogged or the lines are gone sludgey, trains got to stop. Everyone is anxious, riots possible. Help fix things, keep the peace, investigate the cause of the problems, etc.
7 to 12	100-300 Brigands attack the train. They'll be led by a name-level villain. Dress, manner, means of attack and approach determined by train location. Will likely have shock troops in Wright Liberators or boilerplate or personal dirigibles or gliders with goblintech bombs, or driving some creature out of the Myths of Yesteryear using a team of handlers equipped with Geist gear.
13 to 15	Rangers from the Mutinous Democratic Legion of France cited! Soon, the train will be beset by 50-150 bald-headed Democrats (treat as Brigands) in their red-white-and-blue uniforms. They'll be ill-armed and likely have little tech with them but all fight with a frenzy as if possessed for they will bring with them a Relic of their Hero ensconced in a glass and silver-filigree bubble, buried in the chest of a child. The Relic is alive which acts as a general. While the Relic is present, all in the army are granted +1 AC and to hit, get a bonus of 2 against clerical magic cast by the Lawful and do not check Morale. They may be appeased with the blood of all the Persons of Quality on the train or a "tax" of at least fifty of the poor, which they will "liberate" and train.
16	A dinosaur crawls from a nearby tarpit and attacks the train!
17	Romantics in steambuggies, addled with laudnum and dreamspit debauch and commit atrocities alongside the train in order to shock the passengers. Shoo them away with any non-violent means possible.
18	The Pilot's influence is changing the train into something more organic. Corridors fuse, rugs feel like hair or like hungry, clutching cilia. Steerage is sweating acid, gesturing to a future state as a stomach. The Protestant clergy don't care, but the Order and the Catholic clergy on board are likely to reward any help in resolving this crisis.
19	One of the Pilot's brother has diverted the train off course on tracks leading straight down into Hell. Find the agents of Hell on board the train and stop them or face off against a Prince of Hell him/herself.
20	The young outlaw Sigmeund Freud (Illus 6) and his gang of Analysts (Fighters or Illus, level d3) have placed id bombs (waves of catastrophic energy doing 1 point of Wis and Int damage a turn to all within radius) on the train and demand a ransom. Find the gang or the bombs as Quality is refusing to bow to the will of terrorists. Danger Stalks the Coaches!

Danger Stalks the Coaches!

1	Romanians perform secret acts of deviancy and scratch strange star charts in less-trafficked parts of the train and the nights become colder, longer. Children may disappear, passengers will lose time, wander aimlessly, and Clerics will feel the will of their God/Saints, otherwise everpresent, to falter and fail. A child of a cold alien star will be born in one weeks time and the child will be terrible and even the Princes of Hell fears its coming. The Pilot will try to warn as many as he/she can.
2	Persons of Quality are wearing strange talismans, medallions of obscure orders and begin to form cliques whose dealings become increasingly violent. If one clique can maintain order over Quality, they'll start to manipulate the Passengers into bullying (and eventually much, much worse) everyone in Steerage. The Order won't care much as the Captain is certain to be involved in whatever clique winds up controlling Quality.
3	Kraken children hide their gills under high collars and their almost translucent skin; they stalk the halls at night and stare upward endlessly and take too long in the baths. Something has them spooked (can be anything, or roll again on a Danger table), and they're already nervous as they've secreted an Earthcracker WMD in a luggage car. They intend to set off the Earthcracker in California, driving the state below the waves. If threatened, they will call Servants of the Leviathan while the train is over the Sea.
4	A missionary company of geartech are fleeing Swiss oppression and desperately seek help. They never leave their compartments, sending one of the two aid workers (a young, married halfling couple) for oil, spare parts. Swiss gearhunters have boarded at the last stop and are methodically searching the train. The geartech can't offer much in the way of money and the aid workers are virtually penniless, but both parties will be indebted to you forever.
5	Someone is murdering people (50/50: Male/Female; Adults/Children; Protestant/Catholic) in horrible manners and the Order is "making inquiries" but won't do much until someone in Quality is hurt (and no one in Quality will be hurt, "curiously"). Passengers are offering a reward for information, and protection.
6	A gang of Vampire toughs carrying letters of authority from the Queen of New York is making trouble in Steerage and the Order wants someone to sort it out. The gang isn't really making any serious trouble (acting rowdy) but they are (semi-secretly) hauling a bunch of Catholic relics for desecration and destruction and the Order would love to get their hands on the relics but fear being directly implicated in an "incident" with international repercussions. The Order likely won't let any information drop about the relics unless they have to.
7	#3 above is also true but Salt Water Baptists plot as well to take the locomotive and use its hellflame to evaporate the Sea of Sorrows and drive the Leviathan and his serpents from gods creation. The Kraken's Children will seek your help and defense, but will be less than forthcoming about the Earthcracker and their own machinations.
8	Your own little hell; #2 comes to pass, as does #18 from Dangers to the Train

A Tale of Sixteen Piglets

by Logan Knight
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Dear Santicore, I would like...
A random encounter which includes an ogre, a maiden and a standing stone.
Thanks, T. S.

The next time you're in a town near some woods, or in a town near a town near some woods, you start hearing things.

The main thing to take away from all this talk is that High-Father Flagellus, a priest of your chosen important religion, is missing his daughter. He claims she was taken from her room during the night a week ago, and the weak-minded fools of the town will do nothing to help. He has reason to believe she was taken to the woods, but when he tried to go there himself was turned back not only by the animals dwelling there but by the very woods themselves.

In payment for returning his daughter he will pay a handsome sum siphoned from the tithing box, as well as a massive IOU from the church.

The Talk About Town

1	I do a bit of bird watching in my spare time, relaxes the soul you see. But this last week I swear they've been flying from all directions in a steady line straight into those woods, it's the damndest thing I ever saw.
2	That crazy old woman that lives up by the woods keeps complaining she can hear screams echoing out at night. I told her that's just age catching up with her and she just tuts and shoos me away from the house. I love winding her up!
3	Old Otis Bronte swore he'd dealt with his rat problem but three days ago a swarm of the furry brutes poured out of his grain silo. They let the other farms alone and ran into the woods though so no harm done I guess. Strange thing though, every now and then you'll see little packs of vermin coming in from the countryside, straight towards the woods..
4	There's a grave in them woods with no name. Y'see years ago a woodcutter's wife carried on with a merchant that used to pass through, and every time he came he'd bring her a new trinket. Golden necklaces that would serve as well as a breastplate, rings cut from solid ruby, earrings made of the bones of saints! Well one day the woodcutter finds these treasures hidden beneath the stair, and he knows he's been dishonoured, and he spits and he waits. He waits until the next time the merchant passes through, who comes to meet the wife as usual, in the woods when the moon is full, and when their lips meet the trees themselves shake and all the trinkets rain down from the branches above their heads. Well the wife looks back up in time to see the woodcutter step out of the dark and bury his axe sternum-deep through her lover's head, and when she tries to run finds herself caught up in a snare with a slit throat. The woodcutter he buries them right there with all their pretties, and marks the spot with a bit o' half-buried sawn-off log. Folks say they never did see him again, and to the best o' my knowledge he'd still be in them woods, still full o' bloodlust after all these years; only reason I haven't sought out the grave meself y'see.
5	Don't tell anyone I told you but Marcy over at the dairy? Well butter ain't the only thing she gets paid to churn if you know what I mean.
6	Virgil's sow had a litter of 16 piglets, the biggest litter we've ever seen. Well he was proud as punch as you might expect but a few nights back someone done stole them. Questions have been made about town of course but everyone's come up squeaky clean.
7	High-Father Flagellus claims his daughter Meredith was taken from her room during the night one week ago, he claims he heard noises trailing off towards the woods and he couldn't catch up with them. No one has helped him thus far because it's more likely Meredith ran away to get out from under that calloused thumb of his. Silly old sod made a big song and dance of going into the woods himself though and came out screaming that the woods were possessed, says the animals forced him out!
8	There's little men what live in the woods, guardians of it they are! You just mind not to scare them off if you go traipsing about in there.

9	I heard the Father's daughter ran away with a farm boy to live a life of sin, but not into no woods that's for certain! Old Flagellus just can't handle the fact his precious little girl's turned harlot.
10	I was once chased out of those woods by a giant stag of smouldering coal, with burning yellow eyes and the bodies of children hanging from its antlers. Mark my words High-Father Flagellus isn't crazy, there's evil in those woods, and I wouldn't face it again for the world.

Once the players decide to enter the woods, finding the clearing at the centre won't prove too hard if they follow the rat packs and other animals running purposely through them, or keep track of birds flying overhead.

The woods are pretty big though.

Random Encounters in the Woods

1	A rope trap that yanks you feet-first up between the branches of a tree, bumping into a hornet's nest as you go.
2	A veritable plague of rats swarms around your feet in the same direction, uninterested in you for now but if they're attacked or stepped on that will soon change.
3	A soft ethereal singing floats through the woods, it sounds like all that is pure and good.
4	A huge female bear rears up and roars behind the players, showering them in spittle. Blood is on her claws but she actually just wants the players to get out of the way and if they do so quickly enough she'll pass by without attacking, followed by three adorable cubs of decreasing sizes.
5	A small group of rats run straight over a patch of brown leaves that is actually a pit trap full of hallucinogenic puffball mushrooms. Any player that falls in spends the next d10 Turns believing they're a mole with a furious need to dig.
6	A one-eyed owl hoots mournfully from an overhead branch and flies off in the direction everything else has been going. Expect a Gnoblin ambush in the form of disembodied insults, thrown stones, and fresh defecation lying along your path.
7	You momentarily see a strange furry little face off to your right, but whatever it was quickly scatters off through the undergrowth.
8	You find a piece of half-buried sawn-off log. That crazy townie was right! Well, maybe: 1. You dig into a large chamber of a jumping bull ant colony. 2. There's just bones here. Child bones. 3. You find strange looking charms and totems, real voodoo shit, as well as a note in a bottle pronouncing a curse upon the black heart of you who would seek to disturb the dead. 4. He was totally right.
9	A line trap that triggers drawn-back bramble bushes to slap everyone square in the face, giving you lots of nasty little cuts.
10	Branches break nearby and you see a deranged looking woodsman with a twig-strewn beard and wild eyes wielding an axe. He isn't the murderous woodcutter from the story though just a poor man that lives near the woods. Unfortunately, he can't speak very well and has an extremely nervous disposition that is likely to be mistaken for aggression.

CIRCLE OF PROTECTION

Just outside the clearing the players will be faced with a ring of vermin and woodland creatures 10' deep blocking their path. How they get past this is a matter for themselves.

For their part the animals will start trying to scare the players away once they get within 30', becoming violent if necessary, but will not pursue the players if they make it into the clearing.

The Ring of Woodland Critters

Within immediate reach of the players there will be:

d100/2 rats
d20 Bunnies
d20 Squirrels
d10 Foxes
d8 Owls
d6 Deer + 1 Stag
d4 Badgers

As well as various finches, sparrows, and other birds and tiny animals that are really cute. Voles and shit.

THE CLEARING

In the centre of the clearing is a ring of four standing stones surrounding a boulder, all faintly inscribed with what appears to be an obscure, ancient, and absurd language. Imagine symbols carved by a dyslexic bird with its beak; like that.

But before any of that, what the players will notice is the ogre.

Misshapen and grotesque, its teeth are large and overly-numerous, crowding each other out from its jaw. Its gnarled limbs look as if it matured while confined to a box; joints veer off at awful angles and horrendous knots bulge from its muscles, a stunted degenerate third hand protrudes from its humped shoulder and the hands it does have are marred by stiff, useless extra digits near

to its wrists..

Oh and it's suspended over the boulder, its arms and legs tied to the standing stones as if it were about to be drawn and quartered. Infected-looking welts and gashes criss-cross its stained yellow skin and streaks through the dirt around its eyes make it look as if it has been weeping.

THE CAST

The Ogre

Has no name because it has never had need of one. It has learnt rudimentary language from overheard conversations around campfires and the pleading of wayward travellers before it eats them. It will weep and sob and beg the players to free it, all it knows is that it was tricked and trapped by the nasty furry goblins and dragged here, where the lady brings it pain every night.

Meredith, the Maiden

Meredith has tired of the strict life she is forced to lead under her father's roof, she wants something more. Goddess of the woods would do for now, and after that we'll see about the rest of this wretched land. Meredith plans to raise the ancient Boar God of the Wood when the celestial alignment is right, using the ogre as womb and being the first living being present, for the Great Boar to imprint on as mother.

Of course she won't tell the players this, thank heavens they're here! She'll tell them she was kidnapped by this terrible ogre and she only just escaped thanks to the help of these friendly little forest folk, who then tied the ogre up to prevent it from harming anyone further. She would very much appreciate it if the players could go find some men to deal with the ogre, she'll wait here until they return to make sure it doesn't escape.

If the players leave she'll send a group of Gnoblins to kill them before they reach town, if pressed to leave with them she will assent but set a Gnoblin ambush, and if they try to kill the ogre then and there it is on, she needs that thing.

The Gnoblins

Funny furry little man-things of the woods, no higher than your knee, mystical beings somewhere between a Gnome and a Goblin. They live in burrows beneath the clearing, accessible by openings between the roots of a mighty oak at its perimeter.

The Gnoblins first set eyes on Meredith on one of her walks by the woods, one of the few liberties allowed by her father. They took her seeming innocence and fondness for the woods as a sign that she was to be the mother of the Great Boar, due so soon to be reborn. Of course when they appeared to her and spoke of all this the fair Meredith managed to convince them of a "better" way.

The players probably won't even realise the Gnoblins can speak; Meredith warned them not to talk to any strangers and for the most part they'll just sit around and stare, unless Meredith tells them to do something or the players try to free the ogre. If Meredith isn't around though and you're really funny the Gnoblins will tell you everything you could ever want to know about the Boar God.

The Gnoblins aren't evil, they just want to see the Great Boar reborn so that the woods can live on, and Meredith is ever so convincing.

Of course, when you make them angry is when the teeth come out.

THE BIRTH

Every day when the sun begins to dip Meredith takes out her bramble whip and sings softly as she begins to flay the ogre with it, invariably building up in ferocity until the moon reaches its peak and she screams at it, "Squeal! Squeal like a stuck pig!".

In a small cavern directly beneath the standing stones the Gnoblins have piled the still-squeaking sixteen stolen piglets. When the celestial alignment is right and the ogre lets out its thunderous squeal into the night, the lifeforce of the piglets will be drawn up through the glowing standing stones and into its belly which will swell and tear and release the fully-grown majesty of the Great Boar once more into the woods.

What Time Is It?

From midnight to morning Meredith sleeps in the burrows with the Gnoblins, with only a few sleepy looking Gnoblins on watch.

In the middle of the day she's probably off picking berries and other wholesome activities.

In the afternoon she sometimes likes to dance around the sobbing ogre with the Gnoblins. They form a ring and wear flowers in their hair.

In the evening she cuts a fresh bramble whip for the night's torture training.

When the players arrive the celestial alignment is due to occur that night, what are the odds?

The Consequences of Your Actions

If the Great Boar imprints on Meredith as its mother she will use its divine power and influence to extend the woods and, in time, lead an army of murderous woodland creatures across the countryside.

If the Great Boar is reborn but Meredith is not around, all will be well. The Gnoblins will rejoice at the return of their king and the woods will remain at peace with the surrounding settlements. Although they'll probably still be pretty mad if you killed Meredith.

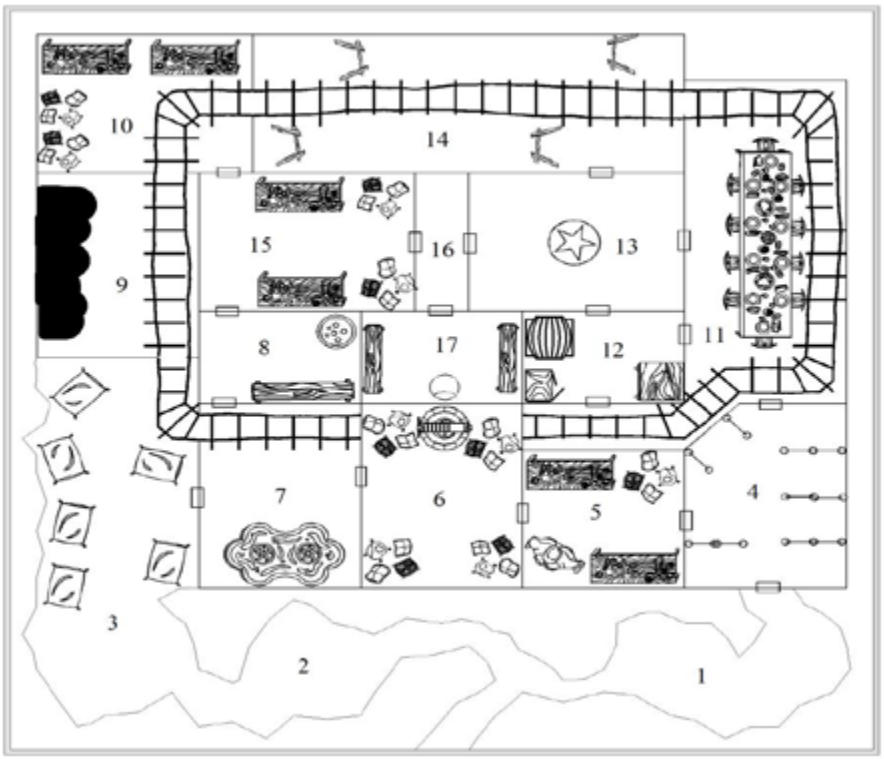
If the Great Boar is not reborn at all the forest will wither and die at an alarming rate, followed by streams of feral starving animals pouring into the surrounding towns.

If nothing else, Virgil would be really happy if you brought his piglets back alive.

Santa's Workshop

by Thorbjørn Steen
therubberduckmail@gmail.com

Dear Santicore, I would like...
A dangerous one page dungeon that utilizes the following: Santa and his elves, Krampus, Belsnickel, Knecht Ruprecht and sprinkled with other Christmas themed pop culture (misfit toys, snowmen, etc...); something I can run for my sick in the head friends at the special time of the year.
Thanks, S. A.



The Rooms. Santa's workshop is a magical place, so the interior size of the rooms do not necessarily match the Euclidean map above.

The Train. A small railroad runs through the workshop, with a toy-land sized train on it. The elves ride the train, and will toss things at the party as the pass at great speed. The train is large enough that an adventurer would be able to stand on the roof, and ride it around the workshop

The Elves. The elves are treacherous faery creatures held in servitude by the magical snowglobe that Santa possesses. They enjoy tricks, pranks and the suffering of others, and will do their very best to make the lives of any intruders hell.

Wandering Encounters (2-6 chance for every room entered)	
1.	Elves looking for a good time
2.	Elves looking for someone else's bad time
3.	Elves fighting over a bauble
4.	Krampus on the prowl

1 – The Snow Golem Cave. Icy cavern guarded by two snow golems, Jack and Frost.

2 – The Yeti's Den. A yeti inhabits this cavern. He likes riddles.

3 – The Sleeping Quarters. To the north and east, the rough ice of the cave is replaced with the walls of the workshop. Piles of sleeping furs lie against the walls, and at any one time 1d6 elves will be taking time off in this room.

4 – The Stables. This room smells of hay and dung, and houses Santa's nine reindeer. They will ignore a nice party, and attack a naughty one. Rudolph is able to cast *light* and *flaming sphere* at will.

5 – Workshop, dolls & plushies. The workbenches here are filled with partially complete dolls and stuffed animals. A group of elves flee, cackling, through the opposite door when the party enters. A ten foot tall animated teddy bear and countless smaller animated dolls and stuffed animals (unicorn, owlbear, etc.) will attack anyone attempting to pass through the room.

6 – The Giftwrapper. This room holds countless gifts, as well as the mechanical monstrosity that is The Giftwrapper. It will attack interlopers for massive damage with a touch of decorative bondage. Santa's bag of holding is in the corner.

7 – Workshop, candycanes & gumdrops. The room is filled with brightly colored machinery pumping out candy. The elven workmen in this room have access to various alchemical concoctions.

8 – Sauna. The tremendous heat of the sauna will soak 1d6 hp from anyone passing through. However, if one takes the time to relax, and really soak in the stream, 2d6 hp will be restored.

9 – Coal Room. This room has all the facilities for filling coal and water on the train. Zwarte Piet sleeps in the coal mountain, unless disturbed by the adventurers. Zwarte Piet will be jovial towards any party, whether naughty or nice, but will respond to violence with his mastery of the magics of fire and darkness.

10 – Workshop, wood carvings. The workbenches here are filled with various toys; wood trains, toy horses, carved games. The elven workmen are very skilled with their carving knives, whether for crafting or killing.

11 – The Feast Hall. A marvelous Christmas feast has been arrayed on this long table. The pièce de résistance is a gelatinous cube masquerading as a giant pudding.

12 – The kitchen. In this small cramped room, the party will encounter Knecht Ruprecht, Santa's loyal right hand man. An assassin without compare, Ruprecht masquerades as a simple manservant, while trying to determine the party's intention towards the big boss.

13 – The Christmas Tree. This room has been liberally decked with holly and other decorations. A crackling fireplace lights a beautiful Christmas tree in the center of the room. If anyone attempts to approach the western door, the Christmas tree becomes a rotating topiary of doom, pursuing intruders with razor-sharp needles while hurling explosive Christmas balls.

14 – The Snowball fight. This enormous room has a floor covered in snow, and walls and ceiling painted to look like the outside. Numerous snow forts are scattered throughout the room. The resident elves like to pack their snowballs with rocks or crushed ice.

15 – Workshop, weaponry. Everything from pop-guns over a wooden halberd to a "child-safe" cannon fills this room. The elven workmen are masters at making lethal use of the supposedly safe toys.

16 – Santa's Entrance. At the northern end of this corridor hangs a mirror through which one can make a (one-way) trip to any chimney in the lands. At the southern end is a pair of impressive double doors.

17 – Santa's Sanctum. The walls of this spacious room are filled with bookcases filled with books denoting who have been naughty and who have been nice. Santa himself will reward a nice party and call upon Krampus to handle one which has been naughty (if the party did not already take Krampus down). Santa is nigh invincible in his own sanctum, and is likely to be a near insurmountable challenge if the party attempts to fight him. However, near the southern wall is a large snowglobe on a pedestal. This is the artifact with which Santa controls the elves. If Santa is busy fighting the party, elves will sneak inside the sanctum and attempt to topple the globe. The party can also do this. Once the globe has been smashed, Santa has no power over the elves, and they will fall upon him.

Cookie Cutter Run

by Chance
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Dear Santicore, I would like...
A 1 - 2 page adventure introducing new players to Shadowrun. It should highlight how the matrix and the astral plane combine with the real world to make Shadowrun a unique setting.
Thanks, S. D.

For Shadowrun , First edition although it is adaptable to later ones easily enough.

(unless otherwise listed all NPCs are using stock archetypes to keep your job easy)

The runner's Fixer , Ms Gone contacts the runners to find out if they are interested in a quick prep run on a lightly defended target for good cash.

Gone leaves word via various personal contacts the PCs have. She instructs a meet at The P-Zone club, where she has a few tests of her own for the PCs. The P-Zone is a retro 2020s club, with 3 floors, each littered with mosh pitts, raised platforms, hanging cages with nude dancers, holovid projectors, and booths encircling the walls in half moon patterns. The door fee is steep - 50 nuyen or a "special" pass (street etiquette roll TN 5 Threshold 2 to already have one.) All clips and magazines as well as firearms are checked at the door, hand weapons are still allowed.

Test 1

"Be cool ", Several of Gone's operatives (gangers or corp types , depending on the group mix) hassle the PCs before they can get in, it's a social combat, success determined by coolness. Use opposed street ettiquette TN 4, or good roleplaying (depending on your group's RP desires)

Pass: Get by without loosing face or fighting

Test 2

"Under the Gun", a Street Samurai calls out one of the PCs while on the floor. The Sam is a razorgirl named Saki, a green haired human female who Gone has hired to test how the muscle of the group is at keeping control. He doesn't want a bunch of idiots blowing up the factory.

Pass: Killing the Samurai without killing any bystanders or wrecking the bar.

Test 3

"Nice Ice Baby" When the team meets with Ms Gone she requests their runner penetrate the local security of the Zone , and erase the footage from the security system of the runner's own entry to the club. This test will clear them for the job itself.

Ms Gone is a lanky neo-gothic who wears synthsilk with ink black shift tac hair implants (color change on command) and ash white skin, flanked by Mutt and JD a pair of dwarven street samurai, and Mr Ash , a white suited southern dandy and magical bodyguard who has a bound air elemental , force 5 with 5 services on hand. Once the group gets to her she will invite them to sit and hear her proposition if they pass tests 1 and 2 . She offers them a penetration run, provided they have a good decker , (offering test 3 at this time) . Assuming they succeed (the club has a Barrier 6 gaurding it's access) against Sweet Sara Dade's Cookie factory. Yes , a cookie factory. To steal a datacard with the newest Sweet Teez no-fat, no-calorie, super sugar cookie recipe, and a sample of both the cookie dough, baked cookie, and sweetener mix. The sweetener is a new product, stumbled upon days ago and hasn't yet been relayed to the home office's databanks owing to the secure databurst information transfer the companies protocol demands. Data is uploaded to the home office on secure burst once every 48 hours. The sweetener formula will be transferred in 19 hours. The paycheck is good, 35-65k each(depending on how well they negotiate 10k per success above Gone's. Gone has 6 Dice of Negotiation and a Street Etiquette of 6/8) plus 50k in incidentals for the group purchased from his stock and 50k in free medical work when they get back as needed. He has an insider at the plant, a staff caterer who is more than willing to sell the Company out. The run is to be as bloodless as possible, with as close to 0 residual presence as possible. The Caterer is Bill Meyers , who who can infiltrate up to 3 of them as catering staff if asked. Bill is a reedy little orc , who is sick of the crap he has had to put up with , and is getting 20k and a new ID for doing the job.

The plant's security is mostly robotic, with a rigger and elven decker. The facility itself is located above the old Kresner Waterworks (a hydroelectric plant, closed in the late 2000s for safety violations. The new facility is built on the grounds above it. The Kresner Waterworks were buried in an avalanche of rubble when Mt Rainier blew her stack. That is the best way in. The site has 10 regular guards (6 human 4 orc), as well as several bodyguards who work protecting the individual scientists and corporates (1 per staffer). Magically speaking the place has light defenses with a Hermetic Seal and Circle around the facility itself (Force 1) and has a bio-engineered poison ivy growing all around the plant's grounds (Awakened Ivy Dual Natured , potency 7).

There are 5 flying drone guards controlled by the Rigger that patrol the site, 2 of which are armed with twin narcojets and dazzlers, 3 of which are armed with twin LMGs . The site has a sizeable greenhouse and grow vats as well as a miniature production line, used for testing products. There are 35 human and metahuman staff working the plant at any time. (10 R&D techs(2 dwarves, 5 humans , a troll, 2 orcs), 3 intern gophers(1

dwarf and 2 humans), 2 secretaries (human), 3 corporate sararimen (all human), 7 cleanup crew (a mix of Aztlaner orcs and a dwarf), and 10 plant operators who work in the garden and factory as needed (4 elven , 5 human, 1 orc.) The decker is a mid level hack named Marcellus DuVain (use Decker archetype with an attack -5) , and the rigger is an old flyer named Kylie Renalto, who is a cripple (Paulinson's Plague back in 2030 don't ya know). The plant's Supervising Executive is Alaina DeBritt a very tall elven corporate with curly brown hair and zeiss orbit grown optics, who has a private tower office, and who has the chip. She also has 3 Swiss Dwarven Bodyguards one of whom is a physical adept.

The computer layout of the plant

node 1a green4 running access 6 --- node 2a orange 4 running barrier 3 ICE
>---node 3a orange 6 (12 slave modules)
>------node 4a orange 4
>----node 5a blue 4
>----node 6a green 3
>--- node 7b blue 4
>--- node 8b red 6
>---node 9b red 8 (CPU)
>--- node 10b green 6

Node 1 a :Public access to factory controls outgoing orders , fire and police alarms,shipping and recieving. Access 6.

Node 2 a : appearing as a shimming wall of glacial ice this barrier protects access to the rest of the system. It is antiquated and should have been scrapped years ago. Barrier 3.

Node 3a : The 12 slave modules running the various plant activities

1 Elevator controls
2 Air Conditioning and filtration
3 external ground floor cameras
4 external roof cameras
5 internal factory cameras ground floor
6 internal factory cameras 2nd floor
7 internal factory cameras 3rd floor
8 test kitchens
9 light systems
10 power
11 green house
12 grow vats

Node 4 : Orange 4 Trace and report 6 (called housecall a techie style ambulance fleet). A successful trace will result in a lonestar team arriving in 1-6 minutes

Node 5a - Blue 4 datastore , has full physical and security plans of plant and the schedules of the data bursts . That database is 100 mp

Node 6a green 3 running Killer 4 (a program called fire naga) and leads into Alaina's private systems

Node 7b overrides all node 3 controls from Alaina's terminal

Node 8b the decker's security terminal accesses from the I/O which a protected by a killer -5 (razor rats) ICE

Node 9b Alaina's CPU running Red-8 Black IC 4 (zombie) that controls the whole plant's computer

Node 10b : master records for plant , controls secure uplink 300 MP datastore

The run is actually being sponsored by Soryama Buisness Consortium, another UP company, that has hacked Sweet Sara's database. After the runners "steal" the formula, Soryama will turn the data over to another UP subsidiary PYN. Then claim the Sara people stole the formula from them.. This will result in Soryama getting the Corp Patent (after some wrangling) and a much needed jump for the bottom line. As well as allowing SBC's VP of R&D Sun-Yat Sin , to get enough stock to get onto the board of Soryama, and in so doing join UP's upper crust of executives.

Additionals for the run:

in the database at 10b
55,000 nuyen in 100 files (recipes)
Accounts codes worth 30,000
Shipping schedules and manifests worth 10,000
in the building that can be found on most terminals

A cyberdeck (left by a scientist earlier that day) Fuchi-4, with 30,000 in info on it. The deck is worth 55,000 after removing the tagged MPCP. The deck belongs to Dr Pavel the Troll R&D tech

Computer-Controller card for robotic repair units (might come in handy)

Karma Award

1 for going on the run
2 for completing the run with fatalities
5 for completing the run bloodlessly
+1 for every negotiation success above Gone's
1 for handling the tests well
2 for being properly paranoid
1 for figuring out that the run is being sponsored by the company itself

Incidently, both companies are owned by Universal Products.

Star Wars Edge of Empire Scruffy Random Mission Generator

by Noah Stevens
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Imagine, if you will, a galaxy far, far away, in which the future of free peoples everywhere is decided by a scruffy nerfherder, a walking carpet, and a couple of wide-eyed tagalongs. No midichlorians, no Sith apprentices, and relatively little boring intrigue. But lots of samurai chase/gunslinger shootout/laser swordfight action. If you aren't strong with the Force, and the future is difficult to see, then roll your trusty d100 three times and do away with the Bantha poodoo. The last thing you want is any interference from the Empire.

	Action	Subject	Effect/Place/Object
1-3	Attack	...an ewok/a band of ewok refugees	At/to Bakura
4-7	Defend	...a guild of (filthy/cute) Jawas	For a modest fee (raised to a Hutt's ransom for successes, lowered to a double cross with failures)
8-10	Seek out	...an elderly gentleman/ mystic	In the Outer Rim
11-14	Infiltrate	...these Vulture droids	On/To Hoth
15-17	Escort	...this young woman	On/To Dagobah
18-20	Chase	...this racing pod	Above/Across Tattooine
23-25	Find	...a spare part for this broken machine	Across/Through Dantooine
26-28	Warn	...that village of Sandpeople/ noble Tuskens	In that wretched hive of scum and villainy
29-31	Assist	...this Bantha	In/To Mos Eisley
32-34	Consult	...the Oracle	In/To Cloud City
35-37	Sell	... this load of Death-sticks	On/In Coruscant
38-41	Buy	... a moisture converter	With d100x100 fake Galactic Credits

Dear Santicore, this year I would like some great adventure ideas for Star Wars: Edge of the Empire.
Edge of the Empire focuses specifically NOT on the rebellion against the Empire, but on the seedy underbelly of the Empire; the smugglers, fringers, bounty hunters and other scum carving out a living, or possibly a fortune, by creatively applying their morality and resources. Great stuff for an RPG of course, but how do I make it unmistakably Star Wars, rather than Generic SF RPG?
Thanks, M.

42-45	Offer	...a Rancor	This unsuspecting victim
46-49	Maintain	...relations with	This bounty hunter
50-53	Unload	...d100 moisture evaporators	In/To the Jawa fortress
54-57	Hide	...d100 astromech droid motivators	In/To the Hutt's dune skiff
58-61	Confiscate	...a twitchy etiquette droid	From a moisture farmer
62-64	Knock Around/ Rough Up	...a small time fence	For d100 Nova crystals
65-67	A shootout between	...a drunken off-duty Storm-trooper and a suspected Rebel	...ends badly for everyone.
68-72	Collect extortion pay from	...a weak/ strong Hutt	Before that person completes the Kessel Run
73-76	Offer tribute pay to	...a Red Sun operative	And reduce your personal obligation
77-79	Give protection money to	...Rebel agitators	And increase your personal obligation
80-83	Rob	...a Gamorian gangster	And gain a small minion group
84-87	Hijack	...a Sandcrawler/other transport	Before it delivers its package
88-91	Blow up	...this bridge/ transport tube	In the knick of time!
92-95	Swindle	...some Mon Calamari	And attract Rebel attention!
96-98	Investigate	...a possible Jedi operative	And gain the notice of the Red Sun!
99-100	Follow	...a figure in a black cloak	Come to the Jedi Council's attention/ Become noticed by the Sith Lords

I've tried to take some cues from Spaghetti Westerns, Samurai Flicks, the old Gangbusters game by TSR, and also my favorite game about seedy space criminals: Necromunda. Allow the character with the highest personal obligation to roll the d100 first. The results could be raised or lowered on the chart within the d10 range if a skill a character has pertains to the flavor of the mission and if it would generate space combat or entanglements with Sith Lords (or whatever), as necessary. Use your feelings. The other dice may inform you. May the Force Be With You, Always.

The 21 Pseudo-Sentient Oozes of Sutoyar the Mad

by Jeremy Duncan
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Dear Santicore, I would like...
The 21 Pseudo-Sentient Oozes of Sutoyar the Mad.
(Encounter table w/brief descriptions - stats definitely optional, one or more illustrations for the uber-win.)
Thanks, R. O.

We have no reliable evidence for the physical existence of Sutoyar the Mad, much less the salient facts of his life and by now considerable legend. Most modern scholars and savants consider him a composite figure of several (many far better attested) eccentrics and magicians of the late XXXIIIrd Aeon, given name and form solely to provide a convenient scapegoat for the teeming horde of prodigies and monstrosities that continue to infest the towns, villages, and countryside in the vicinity of the ruins of his reputed manse. Of these, he seems to have been particularly fond of oozes, slimes, and molds of all sorts, of which twenty-one varieties have been catalogued and attributed. While not every such entity is inimical by nature, the traveler is advised to acquaint themselves with their appearances, known properties, and general demeanor.

1. Concubinal Jelly

In its inert form, this jelly is of a pale golden color and smells faintly of orange blossom. It is seldom encountered in unpopulated areas as it seems to prefer large towns and cities to which it is drawn by some mindless longing. It retains its inert form when there are two or more sentient beings present, but upon encountering a lone individual it will almost instantly assume the form of that person's ideal sexual partner. It can speak, though its vocabulary is limited to any words spoken to it by the person it has fixated on, and it will speak gibberish phrases comprised of these words in a soothing cadence with no understanding of their import. The jelly-simulacrum will respond instinctively to the mental suggestions of its subject in so far as it is able, but is not capable of independent thought or action, and will dissipate into its inert form after 24 hours have elapsed, or it is burned by fire. There is no known means by which it can be destroyed, and it is unknown how many "batches" exist. It is thought that Concubinal Jelly was one of Sutoyar's earliest creations, as its design is in many ways crude and half-finished. It was perhaps intended by the famously aloof and misanthropic Sutoyar to serve as a sort of companion or helpmeet .

2. Sapropel of Logoporphyria.

This translucent purple fluid gives off a strong vapor with an accompanying odor of lavender. If a sufficient quantity is inhaled by a being capable of speech, they find themselves unable to phrase anything in an efficient and practical manner. Simple, direct statements will blossom with ornate orthographical filigree upon utterance, and may develop into overstuffed treatises of towering pomposity and a seemingly endless string of clauses unless the subject is physically restrained. The effect lasts approximately 24 hours, and is transmissible through saliva while active.

3. Doom Sludge

Pitch-black, with burnt-umber and dull silver mottling, this tar-like ooze feeds exclusively on carrion. Any metallic objects picked up along with the corpse are incorporated into its body, but are not broken down or digested, and can be recovered intact if the creature is slain. The sludge absorbs all sound within a 100 ft. radius, excreting a rumbling, churning, drone that can be heard over a mile away.

4. Pyrocryonic Emulsion

Combining the essences of fire and ice, this viscous liquid mass oscillates in a spectrum from red to blue, and assumes one or the other of its attributes in direct, inverse response to the presence of extreme heat and cold. Left to its own devices, it will bubble happily in the most tepid, neutral environment it can find, but will freeze into a chilly solid if prodded with a torch and take on the properties of lava if confronted with a block of ice. It will resume its inert state if and when the external stimulus is consumed or extinguished.

5. Carnelian Mustard

Highly prized by gourmands, this piquant mustard is particularly fine and sharp, described by Leukostos of Mruz in his A Tainted Feast as "one of those gorgeously vicious mustards that pierce the tongue like a regiment of lancers."* The mustard is (thankfully) not capable of independent locomotion, but each grain is caked with powerful psychic residue, and eaters report being overwhelmed with feelings of nostalgia to the point of tears.

6. Jale Pudding

this ooze, when collected in a mass, appears as a creeping blob in a particularly vivid shade of jale. It is most often encountered, however, suspended from archways and portals, where it forms an almost perfectly translucent membrane bordered by sticky jale "anchors." Each pudding is part of a matched pair, and acts as a portal to the other-- wherever and whenever it happens to have anchored itself. They feed by absorbing a small amount of life-energy from any organic being passing through the membrane. This is almost never enough to cause death or serious injury, and most travelers report merely feelings of nausea or lightheadedness for some hours after passing through.

7. Ooze of Origh-Tal

This ooze has a sharp astringent smell and is vermillion in color. It possesses remarkable healing properties, but

feeds by psychic vampirism, and will temporarily drain the intellectual faculties of its victim/beneficiary in proportion to the injuries repaired. Most travelers encountering the ooze report a full recovery after approximately a week.

8. Slime-Sphere
A constantly rolling ball of semitranslucent puce slime. It can expand and contract from 8 feet in diameter to 4 feet. It feeds exclusively on plant matter and will immediately dissolve any weeds, shrubs, moss, or wood it encounters, leaving behind a sticky, pine-scented residue.

9. Martyrmud
Encountered in the most dismal of swamps and bogs, this dark, reddish-brown muck is particularly tenacious in clinging to the clothes, boots, etc., of passing travelers. After an hour or two, individuals with a significant quantity of the mud on their persons often find themselves troubled by thoughts of higher purposes and noble self-sacrifice in the name of some vague ideal. It takes a supreme effort of will for individuals so afflicted to keep themselves out of harm's way, particularly if by doing so they intercept some harm meant for a companion.

10. Mucous of Zhaa
Harvested from the thousand striated orifices of Zhaa the Feculent, an embyonic demon-princeling allegedly summoned and bound by Sutoyar, this mucous oozes and flows under its own power when not carefully sealed in jars or beakers specifically warded for the purpose. It is drawn to the sound of lies, and will attempt to bond itself to particularly egregious liars at the first possible opportunity, hurling itself forward as a semi-solid glob and attempting to enter its host through the nose and mouth. Once installed, it will seek to protect its charge at all cost, neutralizing the effects of any foreign substances (from deadly poisons to the intoxicating effects of alcohol) entering the bloodstream. If its host goes more than 48 hours without telling a single falsehood, it will grow restless and seek out another, more fitting host, which it will attempt to bond with in a similar fashion.

11. Glamgunk
This shimmering indigo slime seeks out living flesh, which it will attempt to devour by breaking it down with powerful acids which it secretes when feeding. As it dissolves meat from bone it simultaneously excretes a coating of sparkling, brilliantly-hued carbuncles which can easily be mistaken at a distance for the glint of gold, silver and precious stones. The carbuncles themselves are of little value, save as a curiosity.

12. Exegetic Putty
the color of verdigris, with dull orange mottling. This putty, when laid across a printed text, can be peeled away to display, not the original text, but a detailed (and highly prejudiced) critical interpretation of the text. This interpretation will be rendered in the language of the original. Subsequent uses of the putty on the same text will result in wildly conflicting interpretations each time, often overtly hostile to the argument of the previous one. The putty is often found clinging to the underside of lecterns, chairs, and reading -desks in well-stocked libraries and scriptoria.

13. Miremaid
This creature is primarily found in swamps and marshy areas, and appears to travelers as a young woman struggling in vain to extricate herself from a treacherous slough. She will appear to be completely covered in mud and silt, with only the eyes visible beneath this covering. These are the eyes of the creature's last victim, which it finds indigestible. It's body comprises the whole of the bog in which the "maiden" -- a specialized tongue-like organ -- protrudes. Once a target has approached close enough, the "maiden" will attempt to engulf the target, dragging it below the surface of the mire where it commences to feed. The "maiden" will be deployed again some 48 hours after the Miremaid has digested its previous victim.

14. Gunge of Daredd
This vibrant green slime tends to collect on ceilings and archways, and seems particularly drawn to the sound of a human voice. It will lose cohesion and drop on the nearest speaking target it can locate. If presented with a cluster of speaking targets, it will drop on the loudest. It will coat the subject from head to foot in a frictionless covering of slime, but will have no other effect. It can be removed quite easily by immersion in hot water.

15. Alluvium of Temporal Consistency
Like oatmeal in consistency, this creature takes on the coloration of the ruins in which it makes its home. An unfortunate byproduct of the destruction of an edifice by magic, the alluvium becomes agitated when it senses the presence of anything born or generated after the time of its home's destruction. Anything it touches will age until it is the same age as the surrounding structure, at which point, the alluvium will flow away to collect in a pool at the structure's base.

16. War-Custard
Hardened, gelatinous, cream- colored, hovering pucks some four to six inches in diameter. They are known to travel in packs of up to six, and attack by hurling themselves at their prey before ricocheting off in another direction to prepare for another strike. Each successful strike splashes their prey with a sweet-smelling sap of a color, consistency, and flavor not wholly unlike liquid caramel. The sap acts as a powerful attractant to predators and can be scented up to 5 miles away. War custards are scavengers, and feed on the carrion left behind by the predators they attract, attempting to drive away competitors with a series of high-pitched bubbling and squeaking noises.

17. Fungal Nomad
This vibrantly colored colony of molds and fungal growths drags itself about on thousands of tiny pesudopods which constantly sprout, die, and regenerate as it searches its immediate environment for freshly-dead organisms. Upon finding a suitable host, it will immediately attempt to colonize, spreading over the corpse and entering through whatever channels it can locate. Eyes and other sensory organs will be immediately evicted and replaced with a riot of fruiting fungus, and the whole of the organism will rise once more, immediately seeking out other corpses in which to reproduce and colonize. Though it prefers recently-dead tissue, it will also attack seriously wounded targets with little hesitation, and the reproductive process inevitably produces a small cloud of spores, which will cling to the nearest available surface.

18. The Final Aspic
Appears as a seven foot tall column of translucent gelatin creeping slowly and seemingly without purpose on millions of tiny cilia at the base. Eight such aspics are known to exist. In each are preserved the heads of Sutoyar's former rivals, entombed in the aspic just before the moment of death. Each head is fully conscious, and, as they have remained so for at least 6,000 years, completely insane. The protective wards holding each column in place have long since crumbled to dust, and each head is capable of speech, which mostly seems to consist of muffled screams, dire threats, uncontrollable laughter, and fragments of half-remembered spells.

19. "The Piper"
This slow-moving yellow ooze hunts by excreting a number of large, floating bubbles from its lolling crown of irregular fluted spikes which quest about in search of living prey. Upon contact, the bubble will attempt to enclose prey with itself, whereupon it will adhere to the nearest surface it happens to come in contact with, suffocating its catch. Some days or weeks later, the Piper itself, which seems to prefer rancid meat, will make its way to one of its hunter-bubbles, bursting it open with a fluted spike before devouring the contents.

20. The Black Cheese
According to Leukostos of Mruz in his *A Tainted Feast*:
This cheese is exceedingly runny in consistency, and of a particular shade of black which reflects not the light of the sun , moon, or stars, but achieves a remarkable iridescence when observed by the light of a candle rendered from the fat of a blind puppy. It smells of ripening meat and hot iron and sweet grasses. There is some dispute as to its taste, but it is generally agreed upon to be repulsive in the extreme upon initial ingestion, though the taster will find themselves unable to vomit and indeed compelled with each bite to devour more and more, which squirms in eager rivulets across the tongue and down the throat until not a scrap remains. The cheese is never expelled from the body by the usual method, but clings tenaciously to the lining of the stomach, spreading outward through the body as more is ingested over time, so that habitual eaters can be identified by a blackening of the fingertips, toes, lips, tongue, teeth, genitals and all bodily fluids. The eaters' sweat is exceedingly pungent and has the color of well-used dishwater. Consumption of the cheese brings on phantasmagoric dreams of mastery and barbaric splendor in which the eater is free to act on every desire and whim without consequence. Eventually, the eaters' own surroundings grow to resemble the strange country of their dreams. Jagged towers sprout from cornfields, the sooty windows of crowded tenements yield visions of throngs of masked revelers tripping a stately measure through cobbled streets the color of dried blood, and friends and lovers leer at them with the faces of bottom-dwelling fish. The cheese is consumed as a sacrament by the Cult of Nugashripahl Whose Eye is the Second Moon. The cultists believe their patron to be imprisoned somewhere within this dream-city and convene often to compare notes, draw up maps, and work in concert toward his release.

21. Luminous Pudding
This vivid mauve pudding glows as bright as torchlight, and can be found lining the walls, floors and ceilings wherever there is moist, decaying stonework. It does not attack directly, but adheres readily to any surface it has even slight contact with, leaving behind a luminous residue for some 6 hours after the pudding itself has been removed. It has the curious property of imparting a certain bioluminescence to those eating it, so that the eater's internal organs can plainly be observed glowing through the skin for some 24 hours after ingestion. The pudding is often consumed as a novelty at gatherings of some of the more whimsical aristocrats for this reason.

*Apologies to Vivian Stanshell (1943-1995).

The 21 Pseudo-Sentient Oozes of Sutoyar the Mad by Jeremy Duncan

Dungeon Faeries

by Jason Sholtis
http://rollidi2.blogspot.com

Dear Santicore, I would like...
Fae are some of the coolest things to put in any game. I don't mean the cutesy sparkly kind, I mean old school, proper scary faeries. I should like either a set of Fae NPCs, or a set of Faerie blessings and curses! As intricate, intense, strange, and surreal as can be. All the old stories tell of the terrifying entities guarding this well or that mountain, and there are even more stories about the strange things fae do to the lives of the hapless mortals around them. Let's have some new awesome stuff to put into games! :D
Thanks, S. S.

Fae creatures and NPCs for use in D&D-type underworlds

1. PITMINDER
These malevolent entities dwell in deep pit bottoms, waiting for unfortunate explorers to drop in. Pitminders feed immediately upon the spirits of those killed on impact but greatly prefer the opportunity to whisper incessantly to the wounded or trapped, methodically revealing horrifying truths about the world. Invisible at will, Pitminders may appear as terrifying angels of death, emaciated and hideously shriveled man-shapes, or as little girls with sweet speaking voices and mouths full of razor-sharp teeth. To ensure prolonged lessons, Pitminders may conceal his victim under magical darkness and silence.

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2. BOGGART, SWORD COLLECTING
Sword collecting boggarts are creatures of general human-shape, heavily muscled and only 2-4 feet in height, like miniature Conans with shaggy, square-cut black manes and dark gray skin crisscrossed with scars. These highly acquisitive beings slip invisibly from their bunker colonies in subterranean chasms to collect armaments, seek out well-armed fighters and stalk their prey from the shadows. When the warrior perishes or succumbs to fatigue, the boggarts sneak in and make off with whatever sharp and shiny implements they can steal. These boggarts covet magic weapons above all else and can sense any within thirty feet. Thrice daily, boggarts can expel great gouts of scintillant powder from their lungs in a ten foot cloud, causing paralysis to any mortal within range. Fae of this type commemorate the great battles of earthly and faerie history with noisy reenactments, often heard in the distance by dungeon delvers but rarely witnessed.

3. GRETA GLUTTONBELLY
Greta Gluttonbelly appears as a grotesquely bloated mermaid with a perpetual stream of foul black bile flowing from eyes and mouth. She haunts a particularly fetid and reeking dungeon pool in the company of her progeny, a vast school of black-scaled piranha-like fish bound to her will. Gluttonbelly must feed upon her children when prey is scarce and can only lay a new clutch of eggs after a human meal. To look into her eyes is to fall helplessly under mental control, only those of iron will and discipline can hope to resist her discordant song of beckoning. Gluttonbelly considers herself a masterful player of chess and will frequently demand games of her prey before commencing to dine, sometimes allowing particularly clever players to live on so long as they can provide a challenge.

4. THE FAERIE GENERAL
After successfully abducting scads of extremely elderly humans, The Faerie General now commands an army of these fae-magic enhanced oldsters, tirelessly drilling in the depths. The General stands head and shoulders above normal human height, clad in shimmering parade armor, bearing the impossibly-long Sword of Reversal. His doddering soldiery, for all appearances feeble and shambling, fights with astonishing strength and ceaseless enthusiasm. When the stars are right, the General will go on the march, ascending to the surface to launch a campaign of extermination against humanity, a festering blight on the earth. The sins of fathers shall be visited upon the sons and every city will burn.

5. THUNDERSCAMPER
A paleogean spirit in miniature ceratopsian form, long intertwining horns festooned with fern fronds, glittering with crystalline scales and gem-stone eyes, Thunderscamper stalks the material world, disdainful of the mortals and spirits of modernity. This being guards the fossilized remains of extinct reptile fae from the dawn of time, trampling and goring those who desecrate sacred resting places. Thunderscamper's vigil keeps him on the move, visiting various underworld locations where foolish men and dwarfs have cut their mines and tunnels into fossil-rich sites. Human beings of truly pure heart and noble intentions may sometimes be addressed by the mournful spirit and given due warming before vengeful stampeding begins.

6. THE OOZE PRINCE
Borne on an ever-shifting litter of animate slime, the surprisingly elegant Ooze Prince strokes his lap-paramecium and contemplates the placement of his beloved puddings, jellies, slimes and oozes throughout the underworld. The prince decants embryonic ooze creatures from an ever-full black pitcher in a joyous ceremony featuring the alien bleatings and ululations of ooze-kind.

7. FAERIE, TRAP-OBSESSED
Trap-obsessed faeries consider it their civic duty to set and maintain the deathtraps so closely associated with the dungeon environment, priding themselves on both honoring tradition (there's nothing better than a well-concealed pit full of poisoned spikes) and design innovations to keep things interesting for new generations of dungeon explorers. Trap-obsessed faeries appear as bald, diminutive humans with tiny mole-like eyes and fine gray fur, naked but for their heavy tool belts. They flee from encounters with humans but make sure to issue taunts, insults and mocking laughter before scampering off toward the nearest pit.

8. BATRIDER
A lone spirit in permanent mourning, Batrider flits through the underworld atop a thick swarm of normal bats, accosts interlopers who disturb the peace and reports any and all suspicious activity to dungeon authorities. Alternately, Batrider may zoom off to a nearby monster lair, coax the beast into aggression and then lead it toward adventurers. Batrider wears a coat of bat-fur, black leather leggings and shoes with long wickedly pointed toes.

9. CURATOR PIXIES
These fae creatures nest around ancient statuary, dedicating their existence to protecting these art objects from philistine interlopers. Their fae magic allows them to project group hallucinations to induce fear and panic, most frequently used to depict statues coming to life and roaring out fierce speeches intended to dissuade looting. Should these provocations lead the adventurers to physically attack the statues, the pixies spring into action, taking on stone-like material shapes with teeth like broken glass.

10. FAERIE, SOMNAMBULATING
When fae lords and ladies dream, they sometimes involuntarily project aspects of themselves back into the material plane as somnambulating faeries. When adventuring parties attempt to rest in the underworld they run the risk of attracting these gentle nightgown-clad entities. Somnambulating faeries sleepily approach sentries, radiating an almost irresistible magical drowsiness ten feet in all directions. They then curl up with the sleeping adventurers for a prolonged cuddle, heedless of whatever monsters may wander on to the scene until, of course, it is far too late.

11. PORTAL FAE
Mere inches in height, hideous portal fae parade en masse from dungeon door to portcullis to gate, locking one here, jamming the next, opening another to release an otherwise trapped monster, and so on. If caught out in the open portal fae instantly amalgamate into a single troll-shape and bludgeon their way to safety with surprising strength and ferocity.

12. HORDAK HALF-MORTAL
Born in fairyland to a human mother, Hordak occupies both realms simultaneously but, unlike so many others in his uncomfortable position, rejects both and has instead dedicated himself to the science of dungeon ecology and monster husbandry. Hordak assists nature in the breeding of dungeon creatures and sees to their logical placement throughout the underworld, making certain to provide sources of appropriate prey and fodder and intervening as necessary to sustain the ecosystem .When Hordak comes across a wounded beast his power of succor sets thing right. When he witnesses parties of adventurers hacking their way through the underworld he issues an impassioned ecological speech before commanding his personal guard (mindless abominations of every stripe) to attack.

Jungle Encounters

by Jasper Polane
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http://weirdopera.blogspot.nl/

Dear Santicore, I would like...
5 low level jungle encounters. PC's will begin play as shipwrecked slaves without gear and will move inland or up-river during play. I'd like for the encounters to be tactically or environmentally exciting
Thanks, N.

Traveling through the jungle is a real ordeal. The air is hot, humid, and foul-smelling, and makes for difficult breathing. Travelers are continuously attacked by mosquitoes and other insects, and soon their arms and legs are bleeding by the countless insect bites. Because of the heavy vegetation speed is limited to a minimum. Then there's the inhabitants...

Jungle Conditions

Disease: In the jungle, PCs are constantly exposed to fungi and bacteria. Each character has a 20% chance per day to fall ill. Stricken characters have a fever , feel dizzy and weak, have difficulty concentrating , have diarrhea , etc. This gives the victim a -1 on all dice rolls (or a -5 % on percentile rolls) until he's cured. If the referee wants, he can reduce certain ability scores of sick characters or give them diseases out of the DMG, but that's probably a bit harsh for low- level characters. The *Cure Disease* spell gets rid of all diseases and makes the cured character immune for 1d8 days .

Food: There can be found many fruits, nuts and edible roots for the characters to eat, and there are many pools of water to drink from. PCs should use the spell purify food and drink before eating, or else must make an extra roll to check for infection.

Weapons: The PCs begin their trek through the jungle without equipment , but impromptu weapons are easily made. Sticks and stones can be found easily. Branches can be used as clubs, and stones can be used to throw as projectile weapons. All improvised weapons do 1d6 damage .

Encounters

The following encounters can take place in any order.

1. Dinosaurs Attack

As they move inland, the PCs come to a thickly overgrown area amongst the trees, with waist-high shrubs and ferns of a meter wide. The thick vegetation here makes it difficult to move (half movement) and hides the ground from sight. Hidden among the plants are six comsognathi, small (1 fi ') bipedal carnivorous dinosaurs.

Comsognathi (6): AL N; MV 10; AC 5; HD 1d6 hp; hp 4 each; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (bite); M 5; XP 6.

The comsognathi surprise the PCs on 1-3 on 1d6. Because the dinosaurs are hiding and moving under the foliage, the PCS must reroll for surprise at the start of each round. If a PC is surprised he can still act in that round, but he acts last and suffers a -2 on his attack roll.

2. Grippli Ambush

Here the trees are covered with moss, flowers, and fruits: mangos and bananas hang under the foliage of larger trees. Between the colorful flowers are hidden four grippli: small, intelligent, humanoid tree frogs. They attack the PCs once they are within reach of their darts.

Grippli (4): AL N; MV 9, climb 15; AC 9; HD 1; hp 6, 6, 5, 4; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (darts); M 6; XP 16.
Because grippli are very well camouflaged, the PCs get a -2 to their surprise checks.

Normally, grippli are peaceful creatures, but their Tribe Mother and its mate are under the influence of the mage in their village. The grippli attacking the party are hunters, ordered to bring meat for the mage, and believe the PCs would make a good meal. If the gripplis are losing the fight, they throw down their weapons and explain the situation. They ask the PCs to help them get rid of the mage. If the PCs agree, the grippli bring them to their village.

3. Grippli Village

The grippli village consists of 5 small huts and one larger cabin, standing in a roughly oval shape. Between the huts is an open space where the vegetation is cut. In the middle is a circular sinkhole filled with water. In the sinkhole swim the tribe's tadpoles, and the water is used as drinking water. Half of the huts are built high up in the tree branches, the rest on the ground. All are made of bamboo, leaves, and dried grass. The perimeter of the village is guarded by three guards. These watchmen are charmed by the mage and will bring the PCs to the big hut if asked to do so, or will attack when threatened.

The mage Voder Gaak came to the village two days ago, after he and his friends were attacked by carnivorous plants. He has charmed the tribe mother, her mate, and about half of the gripplis in the village with his rod or captivation. Since then he has lived in the big hut, waiting for rescue, feeding on the fruits and vegetables the grippli collect for him.

How this encounter develops depends on how the PCs approach the situation. If the PCs have come to liberate the grippli from the mage by force, Gaak will hide behind the charmed grippli, who are all prepared to fight for their new friend. However, if the PCs want to negotiate, he will prove friendlier. Gaak wants nothing more than to leave this "hellhole", and is willing to join

the party if he believes this will improve his chance to get out of the jungle.

Tribe Mother: AL N; MV 9, Climb 15; AC 7; HD 3; hp 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6+1 (claws); M 7; XP 65.

Mate: AL N; MV 9, Climb 15; AC 9; HD 2; hp 8; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4+poison (claws); M 8; XP 38.

Grippli (10): AL N; MV 9, Climb 15; AC 9; HD 1; hp 6, 6, 5, 4; #AT 1; Dmg poison (darts); M 9; XP 16.

Voder Gaak: AL N; MV 12; AC 9 (none); MU 3; hp 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger) or by weapon; S 8, D 10, C 13, I 16, W 12, Ch 11; M 10; XP 80.

Spells: web. Gaak has lost his spellbook, and only has one 1st-level spell left. The spellbook can be found in area # 5.

Item: rod of captivation. The rod has as many charges left as the referee wants to allow into his campaign. If the rod has more than one charge left, Voder Gaak will use it in a fight with the PCs, either to have them fight the grippli, or to have them fight each other.

Treasure: In the big hut is a makeshift bag Gaak made from his shirt. In it is the treasure of the tribe: 12 gems worth 10 gp (x2), 50 gp (x2), 100 gp (x4), 500 gp (x3), 1,000 gp (x1). If the mage joins the party, he'll try to take the treasure with him without anyone else noticing.

4. Snake

This lightly wooded area is easier to move through, but the tightly woven branches and leaves overhead permit little light through from above, making the area dark and gloomy. A venomous snake makes this area its home.

Venomous Snake: AL 1; MV 15; AC 5; HD 2; hp 9; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 + poison (bite); M 7; XP 29.

Anyone bitten by the snake must make a saving throw vs. poison or die.

5. Yellow Musk Zombies.

The PCs come to a small clearing and see three humans approaching them. These are Voder Gaak's former friends, now under control of the yellow musk creeper that grows on the far edge of the clearing. If Gaak is with the party he'll try to hail his friends, but he gets no reaction.

The yellow musk zombies will try to push PCs towards the plant so it can eat their brains. If one character becomes a serious threat to the plant, they will focus on that PC.

Yellow Musk Creeper: AL N; MV 0; AC 7; HD 3; hp 16; #AT 6; Dmg 0; Special: musk, intelligence drain; M n/a; XP 80.

If a PC comes within 10 feet of the creeper, it will spray hypnotic musk into his face. The yellow musk creeper has six flowers, and it can attack six characters at the same time. A hit character by its attack must save vs. poison or fall under a hypnotic spell. He will then walk directly into the middle of the plant, where the creeper's tendrils will wrap around his head and drain 1d4 points of Intelligence each round. If the victim's Int drops to 1 or 2 he becomes a yellow musk zombie under the influence of the creeper. If Int drops to 0, the character dies.

Yellow Musk Zombies (3): AL N; MV 12; AC 6; HD 2; hp 7 each; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (weapon); M n/a; XP 29.

If the creeper is slain and both a neutralize poison and a heal spell are cast upon the zombie, it will be freed and its own memory and personality comes back.

Equipment: Two of the zombies carry swords, the third one has a mace. One has leather armor, the other two suits of chain mails. A thorough search of the area yields a single backpack with two flasks of warm, but clean, water, rations for two or three days, and thieves' tools. Voder Gaak's spellbook can also be found.

Spellbook: Due to the moisture in the jungle the pages are rotting, but most of them are still readable. Spells in the book include detect magic, floating disc, shield, and web.

Plain of Skulls

by Ray Otus
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A random encounter table and bestiary for use in a horror-fantasy game. Stats are for Labyrinth Lord.

In the wasted valley north of Goldenhills Hall lies the Plain of Skulls, where thousands of refugees from doomed Eldgrinsetr died of starvation and thirst.
The plain is a vast, dry land of rock and sand, with the occasional patch of tall yellow grass. To the northwest the plain is filled with weathered towers or reddish rock and a ring of mountains to the far north marks the end of the plain. Very little, if any water is to be found in this region today, though it was once a more fertile area. The strange fate of Eldgrinsetr seems to have infected the whole plain, giving rise to unspeakable horrors and leeching it of any redeeming features. Because of the evil in the land, the King of Goldenhills Hall has decreed that no one is to enter the land and has ordered all the old roads leading to Eldgrinsetr to be destroyed. Even so, foolhardy adventurers still occasionally venture into the Plain of Skulls looking for the lost city and the fabled treasures that are said to have been left behind when its people were driven forth to wander the plain in madness. Skeletons of these wanderers litter the plain, and give the area the name it bears today. It was once called the Vale of Eldgrinsetr, but no one utters the name of that fated town anymore without making the sign to ward off evil.

The Encounter Table

Roll 3d6. Whenever you roll, cross out the entry you land on. If you roll an entry that is already crossed out, add 1 to your roll (and keep adding) until you hit an entry that has not been crossed out.

3	Hantu
4	Ogre Magi
5	Vjinn
6	Gibilu (pair)
7	Wractus (1d3)
8	Giant Tiger Beetle (1d3)
9	Locust Swarms (1d3)
10	Agra (1d3)
11	Wakak (1d4+1)
12	Asang (1 if day, 1d4+1 if night)
13	Kapu
14	Tarantella (d2)
15	Giant Eagle (1d4)
16	Gibilu (hunting party, 1d4+2; 1 in 6 have a shaman)
17	Magul
18	Bone Golem
19	Krazul
20	Eldgrinsetr

Dear Santicore, I would like...
In the wasted valley north of Goldenhills Hall lies the Plain of Skulls, where thousands of refugees from doomed Eldgrinsetr died of starvation and thirst. This year, dear Santicore, I would like an (at least) 20-entry random encounter table for the Plain of Skulls, for use in a D&D-based horror-fantasy game.
Thanks, J. M.

The Creatures

Agra - a tall, thin quasi-intelligent humanoid with a dry, cracked, black hide. Agras are silent, but are preceded by the faint smell of smoke. They are generally not violent, unless attacked, but will warn those entering the PoS to go back by silently pointing and, when pressed, making long, low hooting sounds. They can be quite insistent and annoying about warning travelers away. Sometimes standing in their path and kicking dirt into their campfires to put them out. Some say they are what remains when a human is drained by Aswangs. Others say they were children when Eldgrinsetr fell and so retained some of their sanity, though they were scarred black by whatever catastrophe that befell the city and grew up wild in the plains. Scholars reject both theories thinking Agras a species on their own; though they are at a loss to explain the Agras' behavior. (LL Note. Agra are not much of a challenge to kill and are largely ineffectual combatants. Your goal as LL is to make them annoying and then pathetic, so that adventurers are tempted to kill them and then feel guilty about it.)

AL C, MV 90' (30'), AC 4, HD 1, #AT 1, DG 1d3, SV F1, ML 5, HC -, XP 10

Asang - a ghoulish were-dog. By day the Aswang can take on the shape of a human with a long face and bloodshot eyes. As such they are usually shy and elusive. They will try to avoid adventurers while still tracking them. If confronted they will act as if they are mute. At night the Aswang transforms into a large dog- like creature with a long tube-like nose and scythe-like front claws. With its nose the Aswang sucks the liquids from its victims, after chasing them down and eviscerating them with its claws. Aswangs often hunt in packs. They can smell even trace amounts of blood for miles. Once a victim is reduced to HP 0 by attacks, the Asang drains them of blood in 4 rounds, if not driven off. (LL Note. If a combat has been particularly unsatisfying or too easy, you can have the Asang follow a group in a large pack and harry them, drawn by the smell of blood from the previous combat.)

AL N, MV 180' (60'), AC 7, HD 2 + 2, #AT 1 (claw), DG 1d6, SV F1, ML 8, HC -, XP 35

Bone Golem - a massive, many-limbed 'thing' made entirely of hundreds of bleached bones. The bone golem attacks with 'arms' consisting of fused clubs of bone. No one knows what animates these beings, but they are assuredly made of the corpses of those who fled Eldgrinsetr. (LL Note. Don't make the golem appear humanoid. Make it a giant rolling ball of bones or a creeping 'ooze' of bones. You can even have it filter up out of a pile of dirt, sand, or gravel. You can also vary the number of attacks each turn between 3, 4, and 5 to give the impression that limbs are unforming and reforming.)

AL N, MV 120' (40'), AC 2, HD 8, #AT 4, DG 1d8/1d8/1d8/1d8, SV F4, ML 12, HC -, XP 2,065

Eldgrinsetr - the ruins of a city with strange spires still reaching to the sky. The city appears to be made of knobby, ringed stucco structures. This is how Eldgrinsetr appears, but in fact the city is a living thing, a colonial animal with most of its connecting bulk lying hidden underground. The mages who raised Eldgrinsetr toyed with forces beyond their understanding, creating structures out of raw magic and the coarse sand of the region. What the mages didn't know was that the PoS is an ancient sea bed, and on the site they raised Eldgrinsetr there was once a city populated by an elder race of giant krakens with a unfathomable yet assuredly evil intelligence. The sand is in part the disintegrated shells of that race, which retained some form of crystalized, racial memory of the krakens that was stirred by the magical admixture the mages used.The city of Eldgrinsetr stood for several centuries, a hub of trade and a power within the region, before Eldgrinsetr fully awakened and drove everyone out. Currently, Eldgrinsetr lies in an uneasy sleep, but can be re-awakened if the right confluence of stimuli occur. The spires of Eldgrinsetr are warm to the touch, even in the chilly nights. And touching one's ear to the spires produces a funny buzzing feeling in your brain. What happened to the inhabitants? What drove them out to wander mindlessly upon the plains until they died? What will Eldgrinsetr do if awakened? What treasures were left behind by the mages? All this and more is ready to be discovered. (LL Note. Make it obvious there is something weird/different about the city. You can contrast the odd towers with more man-made structures of stone or mud brick. The air can be heavy with silence and a pressure that causes the players headaches and/or make their teeth hurt. Etc.)
No stats! Eldgrinsetr is virtually unkillable and is capable of what the LL says it is capable of. It's like a minor deity. It would be best not to wake it!

Giant Eagle - golden feathered eagles that soar over the PoS. The eagles may attack any adventurers that strike deep into the heart of the PoS, assuming them to be evil. The eagles are lawful good and consider themselves guardians of the PoS, keeping its unnatural and horrific creatures from leaving the plain in numbers and infecting the surrounding mountains. (LL Note. The eagles can be negotiated with and if the motives of the adventurers seem reasonable and unlikely to stir the evil in the plain, the eagles will leave them alone. The eagles will not be used as pack animals or mounts for any reason and will be insulted at the suggestion.)

AL L, MV 30' (10') fly 480' (120'), AC 7, HD 4, #AT 3 (2 claws, 1 bite), DG 1d6/1d6/2d6, SV F4, ML 8, HC XI, XXII (no coins), XP 80

Giant Tiger Beetle - fast, moving beetles the size of a pony with iridescent, striped shells and iridescent compound eyes. Tiger Beetles have a high animal intelligence. They will strike fast and are merciless, but the minute they realize a prey is too much for them, they will withdraw and watch for a better opportunity. (LL Note. Like the Asang, Tiger Beetles can be used to harry the adventurers.

Their shells make good bits of armor.)
AL N, MV 150' (50'), AC 3, HD 3+1, #AT 1 (bite), DG 2d6, SV F1, ML 9, HC VI, XP 65

Gibilu - large intelligent creatures with the head and torso of a human, the body of a lion, and the tail of a scorpion. They speak in a strange clicking tongue, but 1 in 20 can speak common. They are fierce fighters, using bladed and hooked weapons set at the end of short poles (taroks). Their sting is poisonous, causing temporary paralysis, and they will often strike with it while an opponent is busily engaged defending against their tarok. Gibilu shaman are said to be able to call upon swarms of scorpions or desert locusts. (LL Note. The Gibilu are the enemy of the eagles. They rule the plain and have learned how to deal with all of the other horrors there, though they give the ogre magi a wide berth. Gibilu may enslave the adventurers, if possible, forcing them to work in one of their villages. Gibilu villages are usually a series of caves in the weathered rock towers of the badlands or at the base of the northern mountains. These caves are fitted with trapezoid-shaped openings of sun-baked brick. The Gibilu are decent, if lackluster builders and have very little real culture. The only evidence of the latter will be in the tools they make and use, mostly weapons, and the strange glyphs carved into the low temples of their shaman. The shaman wear a strange amulet of carved black stone that is effective against Vjinn.)

AL C, MV 180' (60'), AC 5, HD 4, #AT 2 (weapon + sting), 1d8 (tarok) 1d4 + paralysis, Save F4, ML 8, HC XXII, XP 80

Hantu - a spirit that seeks to possess any human it happens upon. By day, the spirit appears only as a wavy disturbance in the air and at night as a thin mist. Hantus will try to sneak up on travelers from behind and possess them. If not driven out, the Hantu will eventually drive its host insane and then eat its soul, taking the soul's

place in the body and continuing to animate it until another likely victim is found. Hantu are undead, unaffected by sleep or charm spells. Each time a Hantu hits its victim with an attack, the victim must save vs. petrify/paralysis or be possessed. Once possessed, the victim gets a new saving throw at each sunrise and will maintain some vestige of awareness of itself and that it is possessed by an evil spirit, though the victim may at times act at the will of the spirit instead of their own. If the save throw is successful, the Hantu is expelled and will leave for good. If unsuccessful, a -1 (cumulative) penalty is applied to the next dawn's saving throw. Once it becomes impossible for the victim to actually succeed at a saving throw, what remains of his or her own personality is gone and the victim simply becomes a Hantu in a corporeal body. (LL Note. Hantu may be the remans of the mages of Eldgrinsetr. If so, the Hantu may still have some intelligence and motives beyond draining new victims. They may cause the adventurer-victim to speak in strange tongues or do strange and alarming things. Play it to the hilt to freak the other players out.)

AL C, MV 90' (30'), AC 4, HD 3, #AT 1, DG special, SV F3, ML 12, HC -, XP 110

Kapu - small, tortoise-shelled humanoids with stringy, long hair. Kapu do not like to be messed with. They will try to avoid travelers, often disappearing behind a rock or dune after a short chase. If molested, they fight fiercely and have an uncanny strength. If possible, they climb on an opponent's back and lock their legs around the neck of the individual, strangling him or her. Kapu are said to never wander far from their homes, small huts of mud, skin, and/or bone, and to keep treasure buried nearby in a dried bladder. (LL Note. On the first hit, have the Kapu scramble up the adventurer instead of doing damage, if it seems likely. That is, if the Kapu is not being kept at bay by a pole-arm or something.)

AL N, MV 120' (40'), AC 6, HD 4, #AT 1 (hit or throttle), DG 1d8, SV F2, ML 10, HC VII, XP 80

Krazul - an elemental in lizard-like form, reaching 12' to 16' in length. Krazul only appear with the violent storms that sweep over the PoS, and rarely even then. The Krazul has a skin of black or midnight blue with bright yellow streaks. It can magically levitate and 'swim' through the air, and in fact it has webbed fingers and a flap of skin between its front and back legs. Every round roll a d4. On a 1, the Krazul is the focus of a lightning strike. All creatures within 20' susceptible to electricity receive 1d8 hit points of damage and may be stunned for 2d4 turns as well (save vs. paralysis or suffer a -2 penalty to all logical rolls for the duration). Krazul may not be harmed by non-magical weapons and are unaffected by sleep or charm spells. (LL Note. Storms are when Krazul feed, so they will likely be aggressive, though they are not picky about what they eat and can be distracted by offering an alternative.)

AL N, MV 120' (40'), AC 2, HD 8, #AT 3 (2 claws, 1 bite), DG 1d4/1d4/1d8, SV F8, ML 8, HC XVII, XP 2,060

Locust Swarm - black cloud of locusts. These insects live in the PoS, except when the harvests in nearby regions are ready. While in the PoS, they are voracious. (LL Note. Any figure within a swarm is fighting virtually blind. You may want to apply a penalty and, if it seems logical, warn the adventurers that they can be a danger to each other when striking blind in close quarters. If an adventurer is incapacitated, the locusts can strip them to the bone in about 10 rounds.)

AL N, 30' (10') fly 60' (20'), AC 7, HD 3, #AT1, DG 2 HP, SV 0 level human, ML 11, HC -, XP 65

Magul - appears as a female human, with bat-like wings often hidden beneath a cloak. Magul can separate their top half from their bottom half, flying off in search of victims. If Magul are caught with their top and bottom halves separated by day, they turn to ash. Otherwise they are hard to kill, as they are a type of undead. Magul are very comely and often lure individuals (male or female) away from any companions with a haunting song that only that person can hear; they have *Charm Person* as a once/day magical ability. Once the Magul has a person under a spell of enchantment, it will feed on them in vampiric fashion. Magul have a long, barbed tongue that pierces skin and draws in the victim's blood through tiny tubes. (LL Note. Enchanted victims will willingly submit to the feeding. The sensation of being drained by a Magul is not unpleasant to an enchanted victim, though somewhere in the back of their minds a voice may be screaming at them to get away. Magul will sometimes first appear to an adventurer in their dreams, calling seductively to the adventurer.)

AL C, MV 120' (40') / Fly 180' (60'), AC 2, HD 6, #AT 1, DG 1d8, SV F7, ML 11, HC XVII, XP 3,150

Ogre Magi - 10's tall, monstrous humanoids with skins of light green or blue. Ogre Magi are one of the only successful humanoid creatures to survive in the PoS. They live here in as ascetics, studying the desolation and recovering relics. Ogre Magi can fly for 12 turns and when in a conflict usually rely on their spells. At will: Darkness 10' Radius, Invisibility, Polymorph Self (from 4' to 12' tall). Once/ day: *Charm Person, Gaseous Form, Sleep, Cone of Cold* (as Wand of Ice for 8d6 damage). Ogre Magi regenerate 1 HP per round. They speak common, ogre, troll, and their alignment tongue. (LL Note. The Magi are lawful evil, but they will bargain for selfish reasons. Adventurers may appear to them as an opportunity for sport and spell practice, or as a threat in the hunt for relics of old Eldgrinsetr.)

AL L, MV 90' (30') fly 150' (50'), AC 4, HD 5+2, #AT 1, DG 1d12, SV M5, ML 9, HC IX, XVII, XP 660.

Tarantella - a hairy spider with a body the size of a beer barrel. Victims of the tarantula's bite must save vs. poison or begin to spasm horribly in a macabre dance. The poison victim suffers a -4 on attack rolls and others get a +4 to hit him or her. The effect lasts for 1d6+3 rounds, the victim falls to the ground after 3 rounds (if he or she hasn't already) paralyzed and helpless. The poison is magical. Anyone witnessing the dance must save vs. poison or being to dance themselves for 1d6 turns (but not resulting in paralysis). The poison and this magical side-effect can be countered with Dispel Magic. (LL Note. Since the poison is magical in nature, rather than chemical, spells or potions that cure poison are usually ineffectual against Tarantella bites; it's your choice depending on how tough the encounter needs to be. After the poison runs its course, the victim can return to its feet but will be shaky for a while. The Tarantella's hunting method is to pounce, bite, and then wait for its victim to fall down before delivering a killing bite to the neck.)

AL N, MV 120' (40'), AC 5, HD 4, #AT 1 (bite), DG 1d8 + poison, SV F2, ML 8, HC VI, XP 135

Vjinn - a massive, swirling funnel of wind and dust in which the semblance of a giant face appears and disappears, speaking cryptic messages in booming tones. Creatures of 2HD or less caught in the Vjinn are born aloft and torn apart unless they save vs. death. Vjinn are 30-40' feet in height and 6-8' in diameter. Other creatures suffer listed attack damage. (LL Note. Vjinn attack by simply moving into the space of an adventurer. You may want to have adventurers save vs. breath attacks or be forced to cover their ears against the loud and unholy things the Vjinn is uttering, especially adventurers of a lawful good and/or religious nature. Vjinn can be distracted/pacified with the right amulet. The Gibilu know how to make these amulets and their shaman always carry them.)

AL N, MV fly 360' (120'), AC 0, HD 12, #AT touch, DG 2d8, SV F12, ML 10, HC -, XP 2,800

Wakak - degenerate harpies with dusty black plumage and an incredibly foul stench. They are carrion eaters, but will happily "hurry along" any interlopers on the PoS who appear weak. Wakak have an innate magical resistance and get a +2 saving throw bonus on all save rolls. (LL Note. The harpies live in hollows at the top of the weathered rock towers. Their nests are foul and filled with feces and half-rotted flesh. The Wakak like to kill and then let their victims' flesh ripen before eating it.)

AL C, MV 60' (20') fly 150' (50'), AC 7, HD 3, #AT 2 (2 claws), 1d4/1d4, SV F3, ML 7, HC XX, XP 80

Wractus - towering 12'+ tall gray cactus-like plants. Holes in the Wractus produce strange, haunting notes when the wind blows through them. When a creature gets within 10' of a Wither Cactus it emits a sharp stench of rotting flesh and fires a cloud of needles outward. Creatures within 10' must save vs. poison or rot into a corpse within 1d4 rounds. A Cure Disease spell will negate the effect. The cactus feeds on any flesh that falls near its crawling roots. Among these roots can be found the treasures of those who did not escape its barrage of needles. (LL Note. The lure of messing with Wracti is obvious, the treasure is quite visible from close range. But Wractus will prove hard to burn or otherwise harm by most normal means, they are tough plants, and messing with them typically produces the shower of needles in any case.)

AL N, MV -, AC 7, HD 5, #AT special, DG poison, SV F3, ML 8, HC VI, XP 80

Lovecraftian Monsters in the City

by Anonymous

Author's note: rather than guess at a particular system, I've tried to outline each creature enough that you can build the stat block for your system of choice. I've also added some s stand- alone systems for any special-abilities or related checks.

Horror: Crespex

Also known as: Consumer, Maw of Tartarus

Description: The crespex starts small, about the size of a cockroach. It's body is cigar shaped, covered in hair-like segmented legs for forward locomotion; the creature can not, physically, move backward. The crespex is shielded by interlocking chitinous plates, ending in an iris-like maw of rotary jaws. These jaws make short work of stone, metal, or other impediments. The consumed debris passes through the crespex in a matter of moments; it is leeched for metals and silica which are used in the hardening of its chitin plates.

For sustenance, the crespex will readily consume most organic matter. This will induce rapid growth: the creature will shed it's carapace, expand, and regrow its chitin armor to accommodate the increased mass. This will continue until it is too heavy to be moved on the dozens of tiny legs, or when it is otherwise entrapped and cannot obtain organic matter for a period of more than a few hours. Starvation induces a spawning cycle, in which thousands of dormant larvae awaken within the parent and consume it.

Signs

A hatching of crespex larvae is typically reduced to a single individual within a few hours, as they voraciously consume each other. The surviving creature, several times it's starting size and now an 'adult', will then venture in search of additional food. The routine shedding of the carapace leaves behind tell-tale chitin plates, and inorganic matter will result in bleached porous materials like stones and bone. No aural communication has been observed, although they emit a rhythmic clicking due to their dozens of short locomotive 'legs'. Seeing a crespex will be horrifying in proportion to it's size; a failed sanity check will result in a modifier, to be used to determine the extent of the trauma. Details are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

Dear Santicore, I would like...
Some Lovecraftian monsters that live in the city.
Thanks, M. L.

Table 1: Crespex scale and sanity effects

Size	Sanity Check (d100, roll under)	Failure Modifier (roll on Table 2)
Insect	95	+0
Dog	75	+3
Horse	3	+5
Freight car	10	+10
747 fuselage	5	+15

Table 2: General sanity failure effects

Roll (d20 + modifier)	Effect
1	Adenraline surge, reroll next check/attack, take better result
2-5	Dumbstruck, cannot speak for 1d6 rounds
6-10	Cower in fear, all combat actions against 6-10 fear source are rolled twice, take worse
11-14	Never the same, reduce a mental stat one step
15-16	Scarred, character obtains a phobia related 15-16 to the source, and a visible sign (white hair, shaking hands, etc.)
17-19	Madness, character takes on a severe delusion related to the source
20+	Heart attack, save or die.

Domain

The crespex shuns bright lights, and prefers damp environs, and is therefore likely to be found in sewers. It can tunnel readily through most materials, and does not appear to claim territory. Crespex are solitary, as the largest individual would attempt (and likely succeed) to consume any other organic matter within range of it's jaws.

Artifact

Mundane weapons can do damage to the creature, assuming they can pierce its armor. Bright lights are known to deter the creature briefly, but unlikely to keep it at bay once hunger sets in (note: it's always hungry). It is significantly more vulnerable during a shed, before it's

armor has reformed (armor will reform in xd6 minutes after a shed, where x is the unit of size – see Table 1). Crespex chitin plates may hold interesting properties. Tales of ancient alchemical experiments suggest that feeding a crespex a diet of particular metals can result in uniquely strong and light alloys for use in the manufacture of weapons and armor, see Table 3. Of course, the same tales generally end with the crespex consuming the alchemists in question.

Table 3: Alchemical properties of crespex chitin

Material 1	Material 2	Properties
Gold	Silver	When powdered and inhaled, induces prophetic visions
Lead	Tin	Ingested shavings will temporarily shrink the user by ~30%, if unexpected, make sanity check on Table 2.
Nickel	Chromium	Use in armor will result in 50% reduction in acid or other corrosive attack damage
Iron	Antimony	Can be extracted into strong alcohol to make a potent antitoxin
Copper	Tungsten	Provides limited range (10 m) clairvoyance (specifically remote viewing) when burned and the vapors inhaled.

Horror: Kyshept

Also known as: The Hooked, Hate-Weavers

Description: In their native plane, these demonic creatures are gargantuan entities, capable of swallowing worlds whole. When they enter this realm, they manifest as lumps of grey-blue metallic material weighing a few ounces, immobile and seemingly innocuous. In fact, these insidious creatures are capable of influencing the subconscious or sleeping minds of those exposed to them. The creature will provide subliminal suggestions that appear logical, but lead to dangerous misunderstandings (note: in practical terms, the GM will roll d100 behind the screen whenever a targeted PC makes a 'mental' or 'social' based-check, based on proximity, per Table 4. On failure, the PC will be given the interpretation desired by the Kyshept, which is to say a terrible, terrible interpretation). The kyshept's goal is not to dominate an individual, but rather to create chaos.

Example: Ray the investigator has agreed to meet Peter the black marketeer at his guarded warehouse. Ray does not know if he can trust Peter, so he attempts to sense motive while shaking hands. In addition to the sense motive roll, the DM rolls on table 4, as a metallic blue lump is being used as a paperweight in the guard's office, and is about 3 meters away. Roll d100; 73, failure. Ray is informed that while Peter appears trustworthy, his hands are overly sweaty, and his guards seem nervous, as if they're planning something. Chaos ensues.

Table 4: Effects of close proximity to Kyshept

Distance	D100 target	Properties
100 m	95	Mildly bad advice: ex: a 'shortcut' that gets you lost across town.
50 m	75	Increased distrust of strangers.
10 m	50	Will induce a false prophetic dream in 1/6 nights. Advice is bad, but typically not violent.
2 m	10	Induces strong false impressions, particularly of potential violence against the affected individual.
Contact	no save	Regular prophetic dreams, all tests call into question loyalty of allies and friends.

Signs

The species leave no tracks or spore and makes no audible sounds. They do however smell faintly of jasmine or honeysuckle, which may be their means of communication. Their grey-blue metallic surfaces are not easily marred by tools, but can be worked at high temperature into fine weapons or jewelry, although this should only be attempted once the individual creature is deceased. Kyshept are most likely noticed by the discord they create; it is not unusual for these misunderstandings to create noticeable levels of havoc.

Domain: Kyshept 'stones' might appear in collections, museums, and jewelry stores. They cannot move, and thus may be carried. The stones do not directly 'call' to the bearer to carry them, instead choosing to affect any who happen nearby.

Artifact

Kyshept can only be harmed by being first frozen at extreme temperatures, then shattered. The resulting shards can be reformed into any number of shapes using traditional metalworking techniques. Wearing items made from deceased Kyshept will provide the bearer with truesight, able to see most entities as they really are; while this may provide certain advantages, prolonged use may have profound negative effects on their sanity, as the world is laid bare.

Horror: D'vaan

Also known as: The Author, Mist of Untruth

Description: D'vaan are a species of barely-intelligent black mist-creatures. They move quickly, and attempt to fill any available space with an expanding cloud of noxious gas. The gas acts as a potent toxin, simultaneously enhancing senses and decreasing motor function, until the victim collapses (Table 5).

Table 5: Exposure to D'vaan Gas

Time	Effect
1 - 10 sec	Enhanced senses, Sanity Check at -1
10 sec - 1 min	Impaired mobility and initiative, agility checks fail on 1 in 6, SAN check at +2
1 – 3 mins	Overwhelming sense perception, concentration/intelligence checks fail at 1:3
4 – 5 mins	Organ failure, general paralysis

Fortunately, it is unlikely to be observed while living. D'vaan are essentially invulnerable to mundane weapons in their living mist-like form, but even incidental contact with copper metal or alloys lacerates the demon, causing it to rapidly 'bleed' an inky fluid until it dies. This was not a problem until the modern world, where copper wires and plumbing pervade. A handful of pennies (especially pre-1983) thrown through the mist will kill the entity within seconds.

Signs

In urban areas, d'vaan are often only observed as oily slicks of their blood in alleys, following their sudden demise. Those exposed to living d'vaan will exhibit highly acute senses, typically taste and hearing, for many days after contact. This can be falsely identified as paranoid delusions among homeless who come into contact with D'vaan blood.

Domain

In urban areas, few spaces are large enough to safely contain a D'vaan for more than a few hours before it contacts copper and begins to die. Some longer-lived individuals are possible, particularly if worshipers of the entity steal copper from buildings to provide it a safe haven.

Artifact

D'vaan blood is a sought after component in ritual magics, and is routinely used as an ink in the construction of empowered scrolls and other magical writ. However, contact with the liquid 'ink' results in the afflicted seeing a hidden message within the words of any document written with d'vaan ink. This text will be interpreted to have particular benefit to the afflicted reader, as per Table 6. In reality, this hidden spell is a dark ritual to summon a new d'vaan, which will then attempt to consume their patrons in a cloud of swirling black gas.

Table 6: Typical D'vaan blood afflictions

Afflicted	D'vaan ink text 'secret' message
Physician	Spell for a cure for a common magical malady
Scientist	Arcane instructions to design a new apparatus to repel dangerous extraplanar entities
Soldier	A weapon enchantment to thwart a particularly relevant species of undead
Historian	The location of an ancient text detailing a successful battle against the forces of darkness
Politician	A spell to determine the loyalties of political adversaries to evil deities

Horror: Syltanus

Also Known As: Bushmen, Illweed

Description: Syltani are a rapid growing species of minor demon, which appear in this plane as something closely akin to an ivy plant. They're tendrils can rapidly entrap prey, such as unsuspecting investigators (as Entangle, ADnD). Syltani are not particularly durable, and can be repelled easily with bladed weapons, fire, or even excessive heat, but are invulnerable to crushing attacks. Those caught in these vines will rarely take damage; however any skin contact with Syltani is potentially deadly. The effects of contact with Syltani are described in Table 7.

Table 7: Syltani spore infection effects post contact

Time	Symptom	Effect
0-3 hours	Purple spots at point of contact	No itch or pain, just visible welts
3-72 hours	None	The
3-7 days	Hair follicles harden into hooked thorns	Can automatically grapple during combat, disarm attempts are effective 1/3
8-14 days	Greenish cast to skin	The investigator is now infectious to anyone he contacts; they must save (25% chance of success) or become infected
15-21 days	Sprouting leaves	Investigator will become ill when they consume plant matter; must spend 6+ hours in daylight or equivalent, or suffer fatigue.
22+ days	Flowering	Character death, new syltanus is born.

Signs

The species is dormant under most conditions, and harmless. Most will appear as common ivy or other vines. However, contact with human blood will awaken the plant; it will rapidly begin growing. It can readily crush small animals, but larger prey are typically too

strong to be consumed in this manner, and will escape to suffer a worse fate. Syltani will flower and fruit only once in their lifetime, typically after a particularly large feed.

Domain

Syltani come from a plane that is warmer and moister than most places on earth; as a result, they are most likely observed in private greenhouses of unsuspecting collectors. If conditions are suitable, the 'plant' can grow in the open, but will remain dormant until exposed to human blood.

Artifact

Although the adult plants are quite dangerous, the fruit of a syltanus is said to be a panacea for various magical ailments and one of the few known ways to cure an infection. However, it induces startling visions and convulsions, those consuming the fruit must make a SAN check (70% success) and on failure roll Table 2, at +5 modifier.

Horror: Veglacum

Also known as: Fear-wisp, Shadowkind

Description: Veglaca are typically present on the edges of this plane, attempting to find a point of entry. While trapped in this limbo, the species is effectively invisible, only noted as warm breezes as they pass by, or shadowy distortions (observing such distortions results in a SAN check, with failures rolled on Table 2. For examples, see Table 8). In this state, the creature can only interact with objects that emit or reflect light: mirrors, lamps, LCD displays. The creature's goal is to instill fear in it's victims with these 'harmless' presentations.

Veglaca feed on the fear of their victims, and use it to build a 'bridge' to bring them into this plane. If the effective fear rating exceeds 5 (see third column of Table 8) they can complete the bridge and manifest. Once within our world, the creature exemplifies that which horrifies its victims; generally, it's all about teeth and tentacles, but will often select a form more fitting to the phobias of it's targets (I leave that representation of the creature as an exercise to the DM).

Table 8: Example Veglacum observables and their effects on sanity

Observed	SAN target number/ modifier on failure	Effective fear rating on failure
Unusual 'warm' spot	10/0	1
light flickers, dimming	20/-2	2
mirror distortions	40/+1	3
computer text changes	50/+2	4
ghosting' on monitors	5/-4	1

Signs

Veglaca are often misidentified by unfamiliar investigators as ghosts or other restless spirits haunting an area. However, Veglaca are unlikely to be accompanied by other evidence typically observed in the case of such hauntings. Any investigative tools used to detect ghosts will fail to trigger a response from a veglacum, although it is possible they will harass the investigator via any lights or displays on the tool.

Domain

Veglaca are drawn to superstitious places, as it makes their relatively weak form of interaction more likely to be successful. They will most likely manifest around children, typically in schools or amusement parks, although there is evidence they also are drawn to hospitals, or sports arenas, where superstitious rituals are more commonplace.

Artifact

Veglaca are best dealt with by removing their modes of entry. If an investigator can destroy the object they are manipulating, e.g., break the mirror they are actively distorting, it will disrupt the creature significantly (in game terms, reduce the fear rating by 1). Once in this plane, veglaca can be harmed using mundane weapons, although the are rather hardy and quite dangerous. One of the most effective strategies involves an injection of benzodiazepine, or other anti-anxiety drugs, which appears to severely limit the mobility and strength of the beast in it's physical incarnations.

Horror: Gel'setis

Also known as: The False Praetor, Star of Hunger

Description: When summoned into this plane from his native dimension of thirst and agony, Gel'setis manifests initially as a disc-shaped mound, about 30 meters across, and about a quarter that high in the center. The mound is composed of a dark material, not unlike wet leather, that emits a greenish yellow glow from veins beneath the surface. The surface is pocked with dozens of pupil-less eyes the size of grapefruits, which watch in all directions. These eyes do not swivel or focus, and are hard like granite.

Gel'setis does not speak, and emits no sound. He communicates with his thralls through the pulsing green-yellow lights, providing simple commands and desires. His primary desire is to induce slumber; he uses this as an opportunity to feed on the souls of the pure. The absorption process is slow (days), and results in the 'death' of an individual, but the resulting soulless husk will arise as a thrall to serve it's dark god. These thralls remain

vaguely human in appearance, but are their skin is ashen, and they neither speak nor exhibit significant independent intelligence.

Physical contact with Gel'setis is of no direct threat, although sight of the creature is quite disturbing (SAN check vs. 35, Failure +8 on Table 2). It's thralls can be quite dangerous, but generally attempt to knock victims unconscious rather than kill them, so as to feed their god.

Signs

Gel'setis is usually accompanied by a widespread pandemic of a sleeping ailment. This may affect everyone within a few blocks, or as the power of the creature grows, entire cities. Table 9 details the range of his lethargy-induction as a function of his power, and Table 10 outlines the mechanical effects of this fatigue.

Table 9: Range of Gel'setis' touch

# of Souls consumed	Range	Effect
0-100	City block	Investigators within range will take 1 fatigue per 1d100 hours
100-500	Square mile	Investigators in range will take 1 fatigue per 24 hours
500-10000	10 mile radius hooked thorns	Investigators within range will take 1 fatigue every 1d12 hours
10000+	100 mile radius	Investigators will take 1 fatigue every 1d4 hours.

Table 10: Gel'Setis fatigue effects on investigators (effects are cumulative)

Fatigue	SAN save modifiers	Effect
Less than 3	No Effect	Half encumbrance
3-5	Reduce target number 5	Pace/Movement halved
5-8	Reduce target 10	Mental skill checks auto fail on 1 in 4.
9++	Reduce target 20	Will Save to stay awake every hour.

Domains

Gel'setis is most likely to be found near a heat source, such as a forge, powerplant, or incinerator. This most closely resembles the dry heat of it's home plane. If it is located elsewhere, it is likely to instruct thralls to construct fires or furnaces to keep it toasty.

Artifacts

No known methods to dispel Gel'setis have been discovered in the ancient texts, but it's immobility and it's fear of cold may be of use. Good luck, investigators.

THE END!

I hope you've enjoyed Secret Santicore 2013, and that my efforts at compliation make it a valuable tool for everyone.