

# Tales <sup>of the</sup> desolation



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# INTRODUCTION

A few months before Winter Fantasy 2016, I was talking with the gang members who help out running demos and games of *Shadow of the Demon Lord*™ locally and at shows about the then as-yet-unreleased *Tales of the Desolation*™ sourcebook. I wanted to do something a bit more organized than the scattershot approach I took during the lead-up to the game's launch. I knew we would run games throughout the show, but I wanted a connected experience, something to encourage people to do more than dip a toe into the horrors spawned by my little game. I want them to dive in all the way. Dave Christ, the man behind Baldman Games, suggested we do a three-part set of interconnected adventures, but the idea of me throwing more words at my desk beyond those I already had on deck was daunting. So I offered the adventure-writing duties to my friends. Andrew, Nat, and Greg stepped up first, and Jerry, excited to be part of things, wanted a piece as well. So rather than do three, we did four. I gave them some broad objectives and let them play in my sandbox for a while.

A few months later, after much discussion, writing, and rewriting, the team delivered a set of four great adventures that zoomed in on the Desolation and showcased all the awful things that land births. I did some polishing, and we carried the set to the show. People responded well to the adventures (not that I was surprised). The town of Esker and its troubles became, for the weekend, theirs to save—or to destroy. As the weekend went on, interest in the game grew until by Saturday we were nearly overwhelmed. I'd call that a success.

Now that Winter Fantasy is over, I feel it would be criminal to keep the experience locked away. Taking what we learned from the show, making changes, and with Jennifer's expert editorial eye, we banged these adventures into shape, prettied them up with art and maps, and released them into the wild where your group can join the horror and hardships of living on the edge of the Desolation.

Robert J. Schwalb  
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# PREPARING THE ADVENTURES

These adventures center on the troubles plaguing a tiny village called Esker, a mere speck of a community standing on the edge of a vast, inhospitable wasteland known as the Desolation. The place would hardly be worth mentioning were it not doomed to become the scene of a terrifying descent into madness and death.

This series of adventures is designed for expert characters, preferably starting at level 2. If the group has already reached level 4 or higher, you can compress the story arc. For three adventures, run **chapter 1** alone, **chapters 2** and **3** together, and **chapter 4** by itself. For two adventures, combine **chapters 1** and **2**, then **chapters 3** and **4**.

Before you start, you need to come up with a reason for the group to be on the edge of the Empire in the first place. You can use the group's story so far to explain the characters' presence here. Perhaps there's someone in Esker with information they need, or a treasure near the town they could be seeking after completing another adventure. Simple hooks work too: the characters are passing through on the way to someplace else, need a place to hole up after a tough adventure, or have to regroup before launching an expedition into the unknown.

## VILLAGE TIES

If you're starting a new campaign, you might have the characters come from Esker. Their starting and novice adventures can use the village as their home base. Doing so helps give the players a sense of ownership over the community and a reason to save it when the villagers start dying.

Establishing the characters as residents requires you to introduce the village, referring to the descriptions of notable locations and townsfolk presented in **chapter 1**. You should work with the players to come up with how their characters fit into the community, using their backgrounds and professions as inspiration. Each member of the group should have at least one connection to a notable inhabitant of Esker. You can use the following tables to determine an appropriate connection and to define the nature of the relationship. A character can have up to three connections if desired but not more until after you start the adventure, at which point the group might befriend additional locals through roleplay. Allow the players to fill in the details and adjust the relationships to fit their character backgrounds.

Townsfolk are human **commoners** or **professionals** unless otherwise noted in their descriptions.

## TOWNSFOLK

| 1d20 | Townsfolk  |
|------|--|
| 1    | <b>Tobias</b> Owner of the Nail and Spice, who seems more concerned with pursuing women than with sales.   |
| 2    | <b>Fari</b> A rumormonger who frequents the Two Stings Inn because she has a crush on the innkeeper.   |
| 3    | <b>Edward</b> The town drunk, often seen sleeping under a potato sack near the well.   |
| 4    | <b>Ella</b> Village <b>apprentice wizard</b> and collector of occult trinkets and tomes.   |
| 5    | <b>Gwilherm</b> Innkeeper of The Two Stings Inn, known for fair prices and honest advice.  |
| 6    | <b>Gabriella</b> Esker's historian, who lives mostly in the past.  |
| 7    | <b>Flick</b> A <b>goblin</b> who defies conventions of his kind, aside from being a known pickpocket.  |
| 8    | <b>Crisella</b> A survivalist who does not fear the Desolation and lives alone in a hut a few miles outside of town.   |
| 9    | <b>Gideon</b> A beet farmer who spends most of his time chasing figments of his own mind.  |
| 10   | <b>Galena</b> Esker's sole prostitute has a seemingly ageless beauty. Some whisper she might be cursed, have faerie blood, or possibly even be a vampire, a rumor strengthened by her tendency to go about at night. |
| 11   | <b>Bardin</b> Esker's only <b>dwarf</b> and resident blacksmith works for Tobias.  |
| 12   | <b>Gwendolyn</b> Serves as one of Esker's <b>patrollers</b> . She was a high-ranking military official of High Watch once but left for the sake of honor.  |
| 13   | <b>Lagby</b> An entertainer who performs nightly at the Two Stings Inn.  |
| 14   | <b>Fereen</b> A <b>salamander</b> woman who works as a mercenary and bounty hunter.  |
| 15   | <b>Benjamin</b> Serves as the temple apprentice, a gloomy and withdrawn fellow.  |
| 16   | <b>Sandra</b> Resident teacher for village youth by day, musician by night.  |
| 17   | <b>Jonathyn</b> Village veteran, elder, and storyteller with a penchant for dark humor.  |
| 18   | <b>Satine</b> Matron of the temple, famous for her confections and treats served during mass.  |
| 19   | <b>Dinust</b> The village's "jack of all, master of none," known for bringing people together.   |
| 20   | <b>Amalia</b> A potter and cobbler who works out of her home.  |

## ESTABLISHED CHARACTERS

Of course, you can also run these adventures using characters the group has dealt with before, using them as an introduction to the wastes. Doing so allows the player characters to explore the region more fully after they choose their master paths, or to spend time roleplaying before they begin the campaign.



## TOWNSFOLK RELATIONSHIPS

| 2d6 | Relationship                      |
|-----|-----------------------------------|
| 2   | Business partner                  |
| 3   | Survived traumatic event together |
| 4   | Old rival                         |
| 5   | Love interest                     |
| 6   | Estranged friend or lover         |
| 7   | Neighbor                          |
| 8   | Close friend                      |
| 9   | Relative                          |
| 10  | Served in the military together   |
| 11  | Share a secret                    |
| 12  | Savior                            |

## RUNNING THE ADVENTURES

*Tales of the Desolation* has four chapters, each comprising one adventure, which are summarized below. It's best to give the adventures a full read-through before you run them. Also, take a few minutes to review the creatures called out in the text so you know how they work. Finally, you should have a copy of *Tombs of the Desolation*. If you don't, you will need to replace the creatures described in that book with ones from the core rules.

**Breathing is a Luxury:** Strange deaths and roving undead send the village into a panic. The characters interact with the locals and explore the community to ascertain who or what is behind the burgeoning evil and put a stop to it.

**Sands through the Hourglass:** Hot on the heels of the undead menace, an outbreak of a strange and terrible disease assails the community. When crusaders from nearby High Watch come to investigate, the characters must discover the source of the plague before the overzealous servants of the New God put the town to the torch.

**Mummy Dust:** After dealing with the crusaders, the characters discover that Father Mayhew, the man working on a cure for the disease, has vanished into the Desolation. The group gives chase to find him and possibly the cure, an expedition that takes them into the deadly wastes where they square off against all manner of horrifying undead.

**Storm of Fate:** Having recovered the ritual needed to undo the curse, the characters return to Esker to find the village in the grip of a deadly dust storm in which roam horrors great and small. To perform the ritual, the characters must gather certain ingredients from the community while facing monsters and other threats stirred by their expedition into the waste. The adventure arc concludes when the characters contend with the ancient vampire whose awakening brought doom to the town.

## THE DRY DEATH

During chapter 2, a vile disease known as the Dry Death strikes Esker's inhabitants and might also infect the characters. Efforts to remove it are unsuccessful due

to a curse that binds the disease to the infected; thus, diseased characters must deal with its effects until the climax of chapter 4. Victims of the disease waste away, the water leached from their bodies until they die and rise up as undead horrors. The Dry Death can be cured only by the *Liturgy of Sodden Fate*, which is recovered in chapter 3 and performed in chapter 4.

## THE DRY DEATH

**Transmission** A living creature that drinks a potion created by Father Mayhew (see chapter 2) or that breathes the air within short range of an infected creature becomes exposed to the disease. When such a creature next completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane. On a success, the creature becomes immune to the Dry Death until it completes a rest. On a failure, the creature suffers the disease's stage 1 effect.

**Cure** The only cure for the Dry Death is the *Liturgy of Sodden Fate*. Characters can suppress the disease's effects with the *cure* or *greater cure* spells. The *cure* spell moves the disease down to the next lower stage, while *greater cure* moves it down two stages (minimum stage 1).

**Stage 1** The creature becomes diseased, feeling feverish and experiencing strange dreams.

**Stage 2** As stage 1. In addition, terrible thirst strikes the creature. No matter how much liquid it consumes, there is no satiation. While the disease is at this stage, the creature is subject to the effects of deprivation, which are summarized here. At the end of each day the creature is afflicted with this unquenchable thirst, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane plus 1 bane for each day thereafter until the disease moves down to stage 1 or the creature is cured. On a failure, the creature becomes fatigued or takes 1d6 damage if already fatigued. The affliction lasts until the disease moves down to a lower stage or the creature is cured.

**Stage 3** As stage 2. In addition, the creature suffers from a constant cough: a dry, coarse hacking as though a layer of dust had settled at the back of the throat. While at this stage, the diseased creature is also impaired.

**Stage 4** As stage 3. In addition, the creature's body starts wasting away as muscles atrophy and skin turns ashen gray or nearly stark white. While at this stage, the creature is also slowed.

**Stage 5** The creature immediately takes damage equal to its Health. After 1d3 hours, it rises up as an undead creature of the GM's choice (**desiccated ones** from *Tombs of the Desolation* are perfect). Player characters might become **revenants** instead if they have a compelling reason to return.

**Recovery** Each time a creature diseased in this way completes a rest, it must make a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane.

- **20 or more:** The disease moves down one stage (minimum stage 1).
- **Success:** No change.
- **Failure:** The disease moves up one stage.
- **0 or less:** The creature takes damage equal to its healing rate, and the disease moves up one stage.

## DEALING WITH DISEASE

Once the characters contract the disease, everything likely becomes harder for them. Being infected creates tension while making challenges more difficult, but the struggle against this invisible killer can lose its charm after an adventure or two. If the players become frustrated, let the disease drop on its own to a lower stage to ensure everyone is having a good time.



# BREATHING IS A LUXURY





## By Jerry LeNeave

In this adventure, the player characters find Esker besieged by a billowing dust storm, a strange disease, and the living dead. The group completes the adventure when they confront a mysterious recluse and put an end to what everyone believes to be the source of the illness.

## ON THE ROAD

The adventure starts with the characters making their way from High Watch, having delivered goods, protected a caravan, completed the training required to move onto their expert paths, or for some other purpose as you decide. Regardless of where they come from, they follow a dusty track across a blighted scrubland that forms the border between the stone plains of the Desolation to the north and the more verdant lands to the south.

It should take the characters a few days to reach Esker from the fortress, during which time they might face strange creatures spawned in the wastes (such as a **forsaken** and **1d6 animated corpses**), contend with nasty weather, or other strangeness caused by the Demon Lord's shadow.

On the second day, a storm blows out from the wastes, raining dust south of the stone plains across a region 1d3 miles wide. The storm has largely played itself out in the desert, but its effects slow the group as they travel. Clouds of roiling dust partially obscure everything around the characters and heavily obscure everything beyond short range. The area of the storm counts as difficult terrain.

Toward the end of the day, have everyone in the group make Perception challenge rolls with 2 banes. Those who get failures are surprised when 2 **dust devils** attack, having followed the storm. The dust devils fight until injured and then race back toward the Desolation.

## ESKER

Home to some one hundred souls, Esker is a dried-up little village several miles northeast of High Watch and about a mile south of the Desolation. The ground around it is a mix of dust, sand, and dirt that supports only tough brown grass and thorny weeds. Normally, the people here are friendly and welcoming, but recent events have soured the mood; they have become melancholy and suspicious of one another.

### HAZE

The recent dust storm has caused a haze to settle over the community, making the sun appear red and angry in a brown sky. The haze partially obscures everything beyond medium range and makes breathing difficult. Each living, breathing character must make a Strength

challenge roll each hour spent outside in these conditions. On a failure, the character becomes fatigued until he or she completes a rest. The haze dissipates at dusk the day after the group arrives.

## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

There are twenty buildings in and around the village, the most important of which are described here.

### TEMPLE OF THE NEW GOD

The temple stands at the north end of town, an imposing stone building marred by the harsh weather and the relentless sun. In front, two large wooden doors, reinforced with iron bands, come to a point stretching halfway up the facade. A row of tall stained-glass windows runs along each side of the temple, lighting the chapel with a riot of colors during the day. The southern wing provides accommodations for the priest and the attendant acolytes. A small, gated cemetery overcrowded with makeshift headstones stands behind the temple, strangely left untended and with many of its graves disturbed.

### FATHER MAYHEW

The temple's priest is highly respected in the community for his piety and devotion to his neighbors. He tends to his flock with the help of several acolytes. Father Mayhew is currently sequestered in his apartments, where he is believed to be recovering from an illness, performing research on a matter important to the faith, or fasting—locals relate any of these excuses or invent different ones. He's entrusted the temple and its affairs to his protégé, a young woman named Rose, for the time being.

Father Mayhew plays an important part in **chapter 2**, so he should not make an appearance here. If the characters force the issue, demanding an audience, they find him harried and busy but otherwise healthy. He explains he's researching matters important to the temple and the community.

### ROSE

Speaking with Mayhew's voice, Rose (Size 1/2 **acolyte of the New God**) tends to the temple and to the petitioners who come seeking the blessing of the New God. By all appearances, she's far too young to be entrusted with such responsibility, but she's deeply reverent and has a holy air about her. Rose came to the temple as an orphan, and Mayhew raised her as if she were his own child, so she is devoted to the priest.

### BENJAMIN

A quiet, moody young man, Benjamin helps Rose maintain the temple. He's a new arrival, having



come here from the distant settlement of Crossings, and generally keeps to himself. Gripped by terrible depression and anxiety, he has found he can keep his dark emotions in check only with pain, so he carves up his arms with a knife when he's alone in his cell. He keeps his injuries hidden under the sleeves of his acolyte's habit. Benjamin is worried about the other acolytes, especially Randyll, the only one of their number to befriend him.

### MISSING ACOLYTES

Four other acolytes lived at the temple, but they haven't been seen for over a week. Benjamin, if befriended, reveals they left with Father Mayhew a while back when he went out on a pilgrimage. The priest came back alone with no explanation for what happened to the acolytes.

In truth, the missing acolytes are dead. If Father Mayhew is questioned about them, he claims they went to Crossings for additional training. (Their fate is described in chapter 2.)

### AID FROM THE TEMPLE

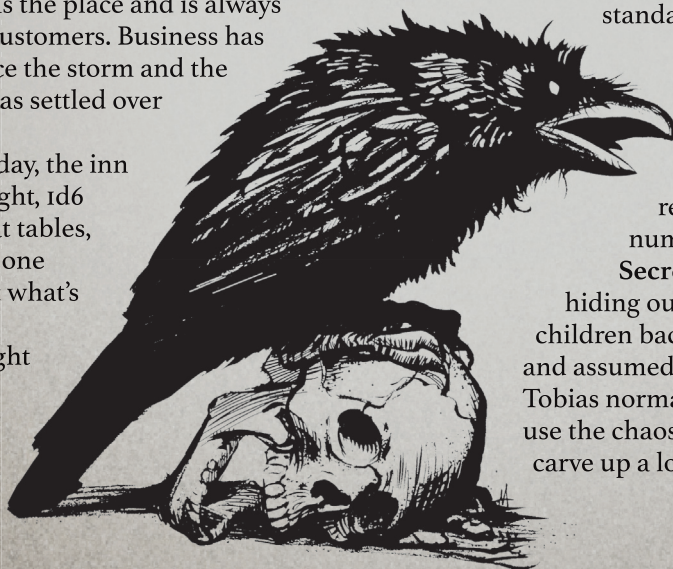
The group might come to the temple for aid during the adventure. Mayhew has amassed a small cache of supplies to protect the town and instructed Rose to share them with any competent, trustworthy sorts who come to help. The supplies include 5 *healing potions*, 2 sets of soft leather armor, 15 arrows, a bow, a lantern, 3 torches, and a flask of whiskey.

**Tainted Potion:** One *healing potion* is tainted with the Dry Death, the disease that will strike the town during the next chapter. A character who imbibes the potion is exposed to the disease (see **The Dry Death** for details).

### THE TWO STINGS INN

This stout, two-story structure of wood and stone stands near the center of town. A large wooden shingle hangs over the door, showing an angry scorpion with two tails. Gwilherm runs the place and is always happy to see customers. Business has been slow since the storm and the malaise that has settled over Esker.

During the day, the inn is empty; at night, 1d6 locals gather at tables, whispering to one another about what's going on. The characters might pick up a few rumors if they spend time here.



## RUMORS

### 1d6 Rumors

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | High Watch has been eliminating small neighboring villages now that their supply lines are stretched thin (false).           |
| 2 | People here have lost their way. This misfortune tests our faith. If we cling to our beliefs, death will pass us by (false). |
| 3 | All the trouble started when that fellow Simon showed up a few weeks ago. Some say he dabbles in the dark arts (false).      |
| 4 | I heard that there are strange people wandering around the old graveyard at night (true).                                    |
| 5 | There used to be six acolytes up at the temple, but now I only see Rose and that odd duck Benjamin (true).                   |
| 6 | A ranger passed through a week ago and claimed some strange beastmen were spotted nearby (true).                             |

### GWILHERM

The inn's owner is a middle-aged man with red hair, a handlebar mustache, and a thick accent. Gwilherm is nervous after hearing about Sarah's death (see event 1) and has suspicions, though he won't readily share them. If the characters befriend or persuade him, he tells them that he believes the trouble might rest at the door of Simon, a recluse newly arrived in Esker. Gwilherm knows Simon practices magic, so he has kept silent, wanting nothing to do with whatever curse his accusations might bring down on his head.

### THE NAIL AND SPICE

This sturdy wooden building stands just south of the well found at the center of town. The Nail and Spice is Esker's general store and stocks goods needed for daily life in the village and for those venturing into the Desolation. Smoke billows out the back while Bardin the blacksmith is at work. Tobias, a handsome man with dark hair and eyes, runs the front of the house, selling basic supplies, armor, ammunition, and weapons for standard prices.

Firearms purchased from the Nail and Spice are expertly crafted and thus cost twice as much as their listed price. If the attack roll with such a weapon results in a misfire, roll a d6. On an odd number, resolve the misfire as normal. On an even number, the result is just a failure.

**Secret:** Tobias is a psychopath (as a hired killer) hiding out in Esker. He murdered his wife and four children back in Crossings, escaped the Brown Cloaks, and assumed a new life here in the middle of nowhere. Tobias normally puts his own safety first, but he might use the chaos created by the sickness and the storm to carve up a local or two.



## THE WELL

At the center of town stands the community well, over 30 yards deep and roughly 1 yard in diameter. The water in the well is safe to drink.

## OLD MANOR

A rotting mansion stands just west of the village's center. The place once belonged to a minor lord with great ambitions who saw a future in the frontier. He was wrong. He died penniless in the moldering ruins of his great house. The manor changed owners many times until it wound up in the hands of a surgeon, Doctor Cotchery, and his family. Aside from a **clockwork** servant named Eadfrith, no one is at the manor during this adventure. The family is away on some matter of importance. This location becomes important in **chapter 4**.

## SIMON'S RESIDENCE

This ramshackle building hunkers in the shadow of the New God's temple. It is currently occupied by a tight-lipped stranger named Simon who drifted in from who knows where. The townsfolk have filled in his silence with rumors and speculation. With no answers forthcoming from the man, the stories have worsened, and many people paint him as a blood-drinking warlock, a madman, or even a demon in human flesh.

## SIMON

Simon (an **apprentice witch**) came to Esker to escape the horrors of his past. He's not the monster people make him out to be; he's just broken, maddened, and grieving. A year ago, his son was killed and eaten by beastmen. He used magic to deal with the monsters and left his old life behind, seeking refuge in the wastes where he could wallow in grief. His festering misery manifests sometimes as madness, in which he mutters to a doll that he has come to see as his lost child.

Simon knows enough about magic to divine that a terrifying plague would strike his adopted home. When several people began to exhibit minor signs of sickness, he set out to gather the ingredients for a remedy, perhaps as a way to apologize for his aloof and strange manner. His self-imposed isolation means no one knows what he's up to or where he goes when he leaves his house. In fact, he's away until after dark (see event 3).

**Occult Research:** A sturdy lock secures the front door while Simon's away. A character can open it with lockpicks or someone can just kick it in. The interior reveals a room given over to the study of the arcane. Occult tomes crowd the bookshelves, while preserved animal remains serve as decorations throughout. Dozens of labeled bottles contain various alchemical, natural, and magical substances.

Of note are several small piles of dust heaped on pieces of parchment lying on the surface of a low table, surrounded by many half-melted candles. Diagrams depict drift stones (see *Tombs of the Desolation*), and drawings show emaciated skeletal figures with long tongues and bloated bellies. Everything else in the place suggests a man living in isolation, troubled by loss and regret. The strangest thing is a child-sized doll seated on a chair.

A search of the place turns up 1d3 enchanted objects of your design and 1 gc worth of assorted coins.





## OTHER BUILDINGS

Homes with meager gardens make up the rest of the town. Each has a similar layout: two small bedrooms, a common room with a hearth, and an eating area. The people living here are simple folk, focused on their jobs and families. Details about these characters are left up to you (the **Townfolk** table can help fill them in). Most stay in their homes, the haze in the air too noxious to tolerate for long, and few answer knocks on their doors for fear of allowing the dust inside their homes.

## THE HIDDEN ENEMY

A **ghoul** lives in a boarded-up house, hiding among the townfolk. Adults assume the place is abandoned and children believe it haunted, so no one goes near it. The ghoul emerges at night, creeps to the cemetery, and digs up the dead to feed. If spotted, it attacks, preferring fresh meat to rotten.

## EVENTS IN TOWN

The following events occur in order after the group reaches Esker. In between, the characters can explore the community and do whatever they want.

### EVENT 1: HASTY FUNERAL

Upon arriving, the characters see people (their friends and neighbors, if they are from Esker) gathered around the temple of the New God. It's an odd time for such a gathering, since services are normally held in the morning. If they ask, the characters learn that an abrupt funeral service has just finished for a local woman named Sarah, a well-liked seamstress who was known to be kind, even to Simon. She was only in her thirties, fit and healthy, so her death came as a surprise, especially since she complained of a fever only two days ago.

Arlys Morton, Esker's self-appointed mayor, is trying to allay the townfolk's fears. He urges people to pay their respects from a distance and return to their homes until the authorities can sort out what exactly is going on.

Morton spots the characters after the crowd disperses and approaches them if they don't talk to him first. He tells them that two days ago, a couple of people became seriously ill, almost overnight. Since then, more have shown the same symptoms—fevers, coughing, weird dreams. Sarah has been the first and only victim so far.

If the player characters decide to pay their respects, Morton urges them to stay back. If they do, they can make out only that the corpse looks thin and ashen. Anyone who disregards Morton's recommendation and moves closer sees the corpse is completely emaciated, the flesh drawn tight, the corners of the mouth torn, and eyes sunk deep into the skull.

Make note of each character who examined the body closely, either by touching it or coming within short range of it. These characters are exposed to the disease and might become infected.

### EVENT 2: MORE DEAD

The first character to search out a local connection finds that person dead in his or her home. The corpse resembles that of Sarah in event 1. The shock of the discovery forces the character to make a Will challenge roll, gaining 1 **Insanity** on a failure. Anyone handling the corpse or coming within short range of it is exposed to the disease.

### EVENT 3: NIGHT FALLS

At some point after the characters bed down for the night, either in their own homes or at the Two Stings for free in return for their help, 5 **desiccated ones** enter the village and stalk its streets. They feed on the few people who have not yet taken shelter, starting their hunt at the well, moving to the temple, and then assaulting the inn.

Any characters who are awake hear the screams when the attack begins. If they are sleeping, the character with the highest Perception score wakes first. Each round thereafter, the character with the next highest Perception wakes up (resolve ties with rolls of a d6). Characters going out to investigate spot the undead attacking random villagers. You can roll on the **Townfolk** table to determine each victim or just choose someone.

Be sure to modify the statistics of the desiccated ones for any people they managed to kill. If the undead are not stopped, they move off after killing a few townfolk to harry another village. Anyone examining dead victims is exposed to the disease.

Villagers slain by the desiccated ones rise up as new desiccated ones 1d6 hours later.

### EVENT 4: INVESTIGATION

Dawn brings panic to Esker when it becomes clear what happened during the night. The people gather at the temple, demanding answers from Morton, Rose, and Benjamin, as well as any player characters in leadership roles. If the characters don't act on their own, Morton presses them for help, urging them to find the source of the trouble. Characters talking to the locals can pick up clues, through roleplaying or with challenge rolls. See the **Rumors** table for things investigating characters might hear, though it should soon become clear that everyone in Esker blames Simon.

### SIMON

Simon returned to Esker before sunrise and has spent the morning brewing a potion he believes will prevent people from becoming sick or contracting the foretold disease when it strikes. Unfortunately, he has been



infected with the Dry Death for some time, and it's taken its toll. Worse, he encountered one of the undead on the way back to his house. He escaped but not before suffering a mortal wound.

If the characters go to confront him in his home, they find the door open. Listening reveals heavy, raspy wheezing that grows more labored with each breath. Inside they find Simon lying on his bed, his body pocked with circular wounds. Though he's obviously dead, his chest still heaves violently. Then a long tube-like tongue emerges from his lacerated mouth and slithers down his chest, and he rises up as a **dread desiccated one**.

## DREAD DESICCATED ONE

DIFFICULTY 25

### Size 1 horrifying undead

**Perception** 10 (+0); darksight

**Defense** 10; **Health** 40

**Strength** 13 (+3), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 9 (-1), **Will** 15 (+5)

**Speed** 10

**Immune** damage from cold, disease, and poison; gaining Insanity; asleep, diseased, fatigued, poisoned

**Fire Vulnerability** A desiccated one takes double damage from fire

### ATTACK OPTIONS

**Claws** (melee) +3 with 3 boons (2d6 + 2, plus the target is grabbed on attack roll 20+)

### SPECIAL ATTACKS

**Desiccate** The dread desiccated one makes a Strength attack roll against the Strength of one target living creature it has grabbed. On a success, the desiccated one gains a cumulative +1d6 bonus to Health for 1 minute and the target takes 3d6 damage and becomes fatigued for 1 minute. If the target is already fatigued in this way, it takes 3d6 extra damage.

While the desiccated one has this bonus to Health, it takes a -4 penalty to Speed and cannot take fast turns.

When the characters start fighting the undead monster, the ghost of Simon's child slithers free from the doll's mouth at the end of the first round, joining the fight as a **shadow**. If it's destroyed, the shadow re-forms in the doll when the sun next sets. It won't leave the house during the day.

## CONCLUSION

After the characters dispatch Simon, they can search his home if they have not done so already. Searching the house exposes characters to the disease. Simon documented his research in a small journal he keeps on his person. His investigation revealed that the disease is no ordinary illness but has a magical origin, known as the Dry Death to the ancient Men of Gog. The concoctions, drawings, and notes should be more than enough evidence to convince the characters—wrongly—that he was the cause of the sickness and that they have ended the threat. None of the concoctions are effective at combating the disease.

If the group does not investigate the disease or deal with the undead in Esker, they might encounter similar threats elsewhere, pointing back to the village as the origin and leading to the other adventures in this book. However, abandoning the community wrecks the characters' reputation in the village and imposes 1 bane on attack rolls made to socially interact with the locals. As well, the dread desiccated one that was Simon eventually breaks free from the house, killing 1d6 townsfolk before it's destroyed. The shadow remains in the house, however, and might trouble the characters during future adventures here.

## Exposure

Throughout the adventure, the player characters have had several chances to become exposed to the Dry Death. When the adventure ends, have each living character make the challenge rolls as described in **The Dry Death** on page 3, noting failures and describing the effects of the sickness's stage 1 effects.





# sands through the hourglass



**By Andrew Follett**

Dark days have come to Esker, as a plague holds the community in a lethal grip. The disease spreads from house to house, proof against all efforts to cure or contain it. As the sickness grows, it has become clear that Simon, who was at first suspected of loosing the horror on the town, was in fact innocent.

To make matters worse, soldiers from nearby High Watch, having heard about the plague, have come to establish a cordon around the community. If they do, they will prevent anyone from entering or leaving. The characters, caught in the quarantine and possibly afflicted with the Dry Death themselves, are drawn more deeply into the story as they try to save their homes from the disease and the cruel soldiers who would burn them and everyone inside. Their investigation leads to a secret project undertaken by the village's trusted priest, Father Mayhew. The characters complete the adventure when they locate and read Father Mayhew's journal.

## FATHER MAYHEW'S DARK SECRET

The person responsible for bringing the plague to Esker is none other than Father Mayhew, the town's most respected member and devout priest of the New God. A short time ago, Mayhew woke from a feverish dream in which he saw Esker, along with all of the Northern Reach, swallowed by the wastes. He also dreamed that somewhere in the Desolation he would be given aid from the heavens to prevent the apocalypse. The next morning he left the temple in the care of Rose and headed into the wastes in the company of four acolytes.

In the sweltering desert, the party wandered for many days before spotting an ancient pair of drift stones floating in the sky, each bristling with ancient buildings. As they stared, the stones fell to the earth. Mayhew believed this was the sign foretold. He entered the first dusty building he encountered, and there touched a jewel discovered on the wall. The contact filled his mind with strange words, instructions he believed would help him protect the lands he loved. But before he could



receive the complete message, a shadow spilled out of the darkness, its mad laughter echoing all around. He fled for his life. His companions were not so lucky.

When the priest finally returned home, he locked himself in his temple and prayed for guidance about how to translate the words. His prayers were answered by a vision. That night, before retiring, he performed the ritual as he understood it over a barrel of water to sanctify it, using the water to create *healing potions* and to anoint the townsfolk. In doing so, he believed he was protecting them from the end he had dreamed. This, unfortunately, had the opposite effect. His incomplete translation loosed the Dry Death on the community, and it has grown worse by the day, claiming more and more lives.

## THE CRUSADERS MARCH

News of the plague quickly reached the nearest citadel, High Watch. Rumors about the disease's lethality and resilience to conventional and magical methods of treatment gave cause for great concern, so Commander Edgar Gentry dispatched his best and brightest, Captain Matthias Reems, along with a cadre of soldiers to investigate the matter. Gentry entrusted his favored captain with the full authority of the citadel to handle the situation in whatever manner he sees fit, even if it means condemning everyone in Esker to death.

## THREE DAYS TO DIE

The adventure unfolds over the span of three days, the major events and activities of which are described below.

### DAY ONE

The adventure starts once the characters seek out magical healing for the disease that is likely afflicting one or more of them. Most of the townsfolk stand in line to see Father Mayhew at the temple of the New God. The characters have been in line for a while and are now near the front, with only a few people ahead of them. They can see the priest bestowing the temple's protection on everyone who comes forward. He dips his fingers into a small bowl of water, traces a symbol on the person's forehead, and mumbles a few holy words. Father Mayhew attempts to protect everyone in the line. If a character refuses, Mayhew politely asks again, "for the sake of all the townsfolk," though he presses no further.

Once Father Mayhew completes his work, he asks the group for their help in containing the disease. He explains that some infected did not come forward to receive his blessing and will undoubtedly succumb to the illness unless helped. In particular, he needs the group to check on the Bittle family. He saw them a few days ago, but they were not here today. If the group seems reluctant, he reminds those who are native to Esker of their birthplace and plays on their loyalty.

He might even pull out some tales of their youth, like a doting mother, trying to convince them through guilt. Once the characters agree, or as an incentive, Father Mayhew gives each of them 2 *healing potions*. He also offers free healing services to them while they help with the victims.

Anyone who receives Father Mayhew's blessing or consumes a *healing potion* he creates is exposed to the Dry Death. His potions otherwise function normally.

### THE BITTLES

The Bittles are an old family of weavers, tracing their line back to the village's founding. They live and work in a modest house at the north edge of town. It has three rooms downstairs: a family room, a kitchen, and at the front of the home, a workshop-storefront. The upstairs consists of three bedrooms: one for Ma and Pa Bittle and two others for their four children, two girls and two boys ranging in age from seven to seventeen.

The group can find the house without much trouble. Knocking on the door brings no answer; going into the storefront reveals the place is quiet and empty. When they investigate upstairs, the characters find the entire family dead, all in their beds except for one. Ma Bittle lies on the floor in front of the youngest child's bed, her head toward the door, as though leaving the child when she fell. If the characters make any noise or disturb anything, the corpses rise up as 6 **desiccated ones**. They attack the intruders, fighting to the death.

Searching the house and remains reveals a too-large leather thong around the neck of the youngest child, from which hangs the symbol of the New God. There is a scrawled work order for a new robe for Father Mayhew on the sewing table.

### THE WORSENING PLAGUE

The plague spreads rapidly throughout Esker. You should emphasize the importance of finding a cure, noting the rising numbers of sick and dead. By the end of the third day of the adventure, most people in the village are diseased, and three-quarters or more of the population are at stage 3 and 4, with more dying each day. Keep track of which player characters are diseased and the stage of the disease they have attained. Describing each symptom in detail should drive home the need to help the village and themselves.

### QUESTIONING THE PRIEST

If the characters ask Father Mayhew about these items, he says he visited the family a few days ago. He gave the child the holy symbol on the necklace and commissioned a set of new robes since his were becoming ragged. (In truth, they were ripped apart by



the ravaging winds encountered during his flight from the Desolation.) He does not know about desiccated ones—he was sequestered when they appeared last. Learning about such creatures deeply affects him.

### OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The characters are free to do whatever they want for the rest of the day. Any character who spends time helping the locals receives Fortune. Other families could have also have turned already, so the characters might encounter additional desiccated ones or other undead creatures—animated corpses for example.

## DAY TWO

Before dawn, ten crusaders under the command of Captain Matthias Reems enter the village and take up residence in the Two Stings Inn, sparking rumors about the reason for their arrival. Some think they have come to cure the plague, while others say they intend to venture off into the Desolation. A few fear the crusaders have come to destroy Esker and kill its citizens to prevent the plague from spreading.

Sadly for the village, the pessimists are correct. Captain Reems intends to purge the town of its inhabitants and burn everything to the ground. At first, though, he takes no hostile action and simply watches. Only as the plague worsens does his true intent become clear.

### CRUSADERS

The ten crusaders (**veterans**) wear black coats and plague masks as they move about town. They are a cold and emotionless bunch, without mercy or regret for what they are about to do. Keep track of their numbers as events progress, since the characters are likely to face them at the end of the adventure if not before.

### CAPTAIN MATTHIAS REEMS

Born to a prominent trade family in Crossings, Matthias Reems was destined for a life of luxury and power but chose a different path. He felt called to serve the public good, so he set aside his birthright to join the Brown Cloaks. His good heart and sense of justice had no place in the corrupt watch, though, and he found himself fighting his fellows as much as he did the criminals on the streets. In disgust, he resigned to seek nobler work.

The crusaders at High Watch were glad to have him. There he fought in numerous raids against undead hordes, protected the surrounding towns, and managed to survive insurmountable odds against the horrors birthed from the Desolation. Among his fellow crusaders, he realized his true calling: he was always meant to hunt and destroy the living dead. He worked tirelessly to slaughter the enemy, and when not fighting

the zombies and horrors of the wastes, he rooted out corruption in the crusaders' ranks. He even had a hand in toppling Inman Schultz, once High Watch's commander.

Reems might have led an unimpeachable life, but the mad gods of fate cast him down and saddled him with a terrible curse. One night, he and his companions chased down and fought a vampire and her brood, having tracked them to an ancient ruin surrounded by black sands. He hoped to take the bloodsuckers by surprise; instead, he found them waiting and ready. One by one the vampires picked off his soldiers, leaving him for last. Held in the grip of the undead's charm, Reems was powerless to stop the slaughter. As the horror grew, his mind finally snapped and darkness settled over him.

When he awoke the next morning, he found himself unscathed, naked, and clutching the *Blade of Djed*, a relic granting him unnatural inner strength and courage in the face of the undead—at a terrible price. Without the periodic sacrifice of an innocent, Reems once again becomes that frail, helpless victim left alone on the black sand.

Reems is a tall, imposing man of six feet, with a stout, muscular body and chiseled features. To all, he seems a paragon of light and good. But he bears many scars from his forays against the walking dead, his hair has gone to gray, and dark circles ring his eyes. Anyone encountering Reems in Esker comes away with the impression of a confident man, a stark contrast to his inner self.

### MATTHIAS REEMS

### DIFFICULTY 50

#### Size 1 human

**Perception** 11 (+1)

**Defense** 18 (full plate); **Health** 42; **Insanity** 4; **Corruption** 2

**Strength** 15 (+5), **Agility** 12 (+2), **Intellect** 11 (+1), **Will** 13 (+3)

**Speed** 8 (in armor)

**Blood Curse** Matthias is immune to the frightened affliction and takes half damage from weapons.

#### ATTACK OPTIONS

**Sword** (melee) +5 with 2 boons (3d6 + 2)

**Blade of Djed** (melee) +5 with 2 boons (2d6 + 2)

#### SPECIAL ATTACKS

**Savage Assault** Matthias moves up to half his Speed and attacks once with his sword and once with the *Blade of Djed* during this movement.

### NEW RELIC: THE BLADE OF DJED

This ancient long knife, forged before the rise of the Witch King, features a serpentine blade acid-etched with Dark Speech words that speak of stability, strength, and the slaying of innocent victims. Ornate carvings on the handle resemble columns holding up a large structure.

**Blood Curse** The *Blade of Djed* carries a curse that fills its bearer with crippling doubt and fear, imposing 3 banes on the bearer's attack rolls and challenge rolls. If the bearer kills a living innocent (a sentient being with 0 Corruption) with the blade, the curse is lifted for 1d3 weeks, but the bearer gains 1 Corruption for feeding the blade in this way. While the curse is lifted in this way, the bearer cannot be frightened and takes half damage from weapon attacks.



## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

There are plenty of things to keep the group occupied during the day; some suggestions follow. You can choose appropriate encounters or roll a d6 to determine the result randomly. Use as many or as few as you want, but the characters must at least encounter Father Mayhew.

### DAY TWO DEVELOPMENTS

| Roll | Result        |
|------|---------------|
| 1    | Townsfolk     |
| 2    | Crusaders     |
| 3    | Defense       |
| 4    | Victims       |
| 5    | Father Mayhew |
| 6    | Captain Reems |

**Townsfolk:** The group can help sick and dying villagers by bringing them water, easing their pains, and destroying undead.

**Crusaders:** A group of 1d3 crusaders question the townsfolk. It could be simple interviews or forceful interrogation, as you decide. You should drop hints in the crusaders' talk about what their captain intends.

**Defense:** A group of 1d3 crusaders fights 8 zombies shuffling toward town. The characters might recognize some as people who have been missing for several days (one, Randyll, was part of Father Mayhew's company that went into the Desolation) and might even encounter relatives.

**Victims:** The group comes across a group of 2d6 plague victims huddled in a stable. They belong to up to two families the characters recognize or to whom they are related, and are in their final throes (some dead and others dying). Even if the characters try to help, they are too late; the sick succumb to the plague and rise as desiccated ones. Any character witnessing the transformation must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1 Insanity. If a loved one is among the changed, the character makes the roll with 3 banes.

**Father Mayhew:** Decide whether the priest has met the crusader captain, as this fact affects how an encounter with the priest plays out. If he hasn't, Father Mayhew knows little about why the crusaders are here, but he remains adamant about helping the plague victims and cooperating with Captain Reems.

If the characters encounter Mayhew after he met with Reems, the priest seems anxious and worried. He is having trouble reconciling a recent vision with what's happening in town. He insists the crusaders have come only to observe and report to High Watch, but he learned two things while being questioned by Reems. A success on a Perception challenge roll reveals the priest is holding something back.

In fact, Father Mayhew knows Reems is going to destroy the town if the plague does not subside. More upsetting to him, as he stared into the cold blue eyes of Reems, the priest experienced a vision that showed he himself was responsible for spreading the plague through his blessings and prayers. Mayhew plans to return to the desert in hopes of finding a way to stop the plague before the crusaders destroy Esker. He asks the group to tend to the victims and warns them not to interfere with or provoke the crusaders.

Once night falls, Father Mayhew sneaks out of town. If the characters have him under surveillance, Mayhew has his acolyte Rose devise a distraction—such as lighting something on fire or sounding an alarm—so he can escape.

**Captain Reems:** The crusader captain comes across as cold and unfeeling. He interrogates the characters about their understanding of and involvement in the plague, especially if they participated in prior events. He pays particular attention to any characters who show symptoms of sickness.

## DAY THREE

By the third day, nearly everyone in the town has been infected. Three-quarters of the population are at stage 4 of the disease, with the rest dead or fled. The group frequently encounters the plague's suffering victims.

As with the previous day, there are several possible developments. You can choose or roll a d6 to determine the result randomly, using as many or as few as you want until night falls.

### DAY THREE DEVELOPMENTS

| Roll | Result                |
|------|-----------------------|
| 1    | Crusaders             |
| 2    | Undead                |
| 3    | Funeral pyre          |
| 4    | Quarantine            |
| 5    | Looting               |
| 6    | Missing Father Mayhew |

**Crusaders:** A group of 1d3 crusaders, including Matthias Reems, inspect homes and villagers for plague symptoms. They mark homes of the infected with large red Xs on the doors, as well as the number of dead found inside.

**Undead:** Roaming the streets, 2d6 desiccated ones (from up to two families that the characters recognize or are related to) emerge from neighboring homes and attack. In addition, small groups of crusaders might be fighting bands of 1d6 + 3 desiccated ones.

**Funeral Pyre:** A group of 1d3 crusaders carry the bodies of deceased victims to the center of town to be burnt. After they are consigned to the pyre, 1d3 desiccated ones rise from the flames, ablaze. This





gruesome scene is especially disturbing since the characters know or are related to these people; each character witnessing this event must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1d3 Insanity.

**Quarantine:** A group of 1d3 crusaders corral villagers (the characters' friends and families) into a quarantine zone.

**Looting:** A group of 1d3 crusaders ransack the abandoned homes of deceased victims.

**Missing Father Mayhew:** If the characters search for Father Mayhew, they can't find him anywhere. Rose claims he is tending to the sick in town, but a success on a Perception challenge roll with 1 bane reveals she is lying. As well, the emaciated townsfolk say they have not seen him all day. If the group decides to investigate the temple, Rose does what she can to dissuade them. However, if they persist they find that he is not there—he left the previous night.

## NIGHTFALL

Reems orders his crusaders to raze the town except for the temple to the New God. His crusaders attempt to burn every building and kill every man, woman, and child, throwing their bodies on a communal pyre. The characters encounter various small groups of 1d3 crusaders in the act and likely fight to save their town.

## THE TEMPLE OF THE NEW GOD

Captain Reems is in Mayhew's study within the temple. He sits behind a desk, reading the priest's hastily scrawled journal. In the center of the floor is Rose's corpse lying in a pool of blood, throat cut. Reems explains that the journal proves Mayhew's diabolical plot to curse the village and turn its inhabitants into undead monsters. It is now his duty to purge Esker of all plague victims. Everyone exposed, including the characters, must die for the good of High Watch. He attacks, fortified by the blood of the innocent Rose.

If the characters read the journal, they realize Mayhew did in fact spread the plague. His notes describe the visions of impending doom, the journey into the Desolation, the drift stones, and locating the ritual needed to save his community. Also within its pages they find a crude, hand-drawn map showing his path through the Desolation to the ruins, as well as what he saw when staring into the eyes of Captain Reems. The last page of the journal explains that Mayhew must return to where he found the ritual and seek a true cure. (This should lead the characters into **chapter 3**, "Mummy Dust.")

If the characters defeat Captain Reems, they find two untainted *healing potions* and keys to a room in the Two Stings on his body. In his room are 2 gc, 12 sp, 3 cp and 6 untainted *healing potions* as well as 4 *panacea potions*.



# mummy dust

**By Nat Webb**

Father Mayhew has disappeared from the village of Esker, and his journal suggests that he returned to the ruins he discovered in the Desolation. Over the course of this adventure, the player characters must brave the dangers of the Desolation, enter the ruins that Mayhew found, and uncover the secret of the plague the priest brought to the people of Esker.

## THE VENGEFUL SORCERER

Father Mayhew was unlucky enough to stumble upon an ancient evil. In the distant past, Xerras the Night Drinker, vampire sorcerer of Gog, failed his death lord master and was entombed alongside many of his followers in a structure built on the side of a drift stone. Recently the magic holding the stone aloft failed, and it fell to the ground, waking Xerras from centuries of slumber.

As the undead sorcerer rose from his sleep, he found his home had been invaded by the holy men and women led by Father Mayhew. The enraged Xerras sent his minions to eradicate them all. He spared only the priest, whom he released to carry the plague dust Xerras uses to create his desiccated ones back to the lands of the living.

### REALIZING THE DESOLATION

The Desolation is bleak, blisteringly hot, and dry—a landscape starved of life. It is rife with peril: legendary vampires, blackened tombs stabbing up from the shifting sands, magical horrors, and lethal dust storms. Stark reminders of death are never too far away, so be sure to emphasize these aspects as you describe the world to your players.

## INTO THE SANDS

The adventure begins with the group making its way from Esker through the Desolation to Xerras's compound. The map Mayhew made as he originally followed his vision into the wilderness is not pictured here, but it provides a clear route to the destination. Although having it ensures the group won't become lost, crossing the Desolation is dangerous in the best of times.

## TRAVEL IN THE DESOLATION

Travelers in the wastes are bound to encounter many awful things, but the environment itself is the deadliest threat of all. The overland travel rules in *Shadow of the Demon Lord* model the challenges of travel through the Desolation and are summarized here.

### TRAVEL RATES

The exact details of the path taken aren't as important as how long the characters are exposed to the elements and the plague that has no doubt infected some or all of them. Thus, travel times (in hours) are given rather than distances, assuming the group moves at a walking pace. If they are cautious, travel times are doubled, and the characters make Perception challenge rolls with 1 boon. If they wish to jog, travel times are cut in half, and Perception challenge rolls are made with 1 bane.

If the characters choose to force march so they can travel more than 8 hours per day, they are at risk of exhaustion. At the end of each hour of travel beyond 8, each traveling character must get a success on a Strength challenge roll (with 1 bane if jogging) or take 1d6 damage and become fatigued until he or she completes a rest.

### Exposure

Living creatures traveling through the Desolation are at risk of exposure during the hottest hours of the day. Once each hour from 11:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon that a living creature travels, it must make a Strength challenge roll. On a failure, the creature becomes fatigued. If it is already fatigued, it instead takes a cumulative -1d6 penalty to Health. This penalty remains until the creature is no longer fatigued and no longer subject to exposure. A creature that takes this penalty also gains 1 Insanity, due to the Desolation's maddening heat. A creature fatigued from exposure removes this affliction when it completes a rest in a comfortable environment.

A group traveling at night does not run the risk of exposure to heat but is more likely to encounter dangerous creatures (see below).

### RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

Every 4 hours the group travels, roll a d6. A random encounter occurs on a roll of 1 during the day, and 1 or 2 during the night. If an encounter happens, roll a d6 and find the result on the table below for a random encounter or consult the description of the area through which the group travels to tailor an encounter. (Consult *Tombs of the Desolation* for these creatures.) Feel free to adjust the encounters as necessary, especially if the same result comes up multiple times, to keep things interesting.



## DESOLATION ENCOUNTERS

| Roll | Encounter  |
|------|--|
| 1    | <b>1d6 severed</b> (from the same body) crawl forth.   |
| 2    | <b>1d3 sand mite swarms</b> tunnel up around the party.  |
| 3    | <b>1d6 whisper cacti</b> border a shallow, muddy pool of water.  |
| 4    | <b>1d6 salamanders</b> are separated from a warband and willing to parley. They know only Firespeak but are intelligent enough to communicate via gestures and drawings in the sand. They seek geographical information about the region, ideally a map, and can warn the characters about one upcoming area the group hasn't entered yet. |
| 5    | <b>1d3 desiccated ones</b> rise from the sands.  |
| 6    | <b>1 great horned beetle</b> feasts on the corpses of an adventuring party.  |

## MAYHEW'S MAP

The following sections represent general areas along the path shown on the map.

## 1. STONE PLAINS (4 HOURS)

The stone plains marking the entrance to the Desolation are unnervingly barren and mercifully easy to travel. After passing through this area, the party can choose to continue through either the bone fields (area 2) or the ash wastes (area 3).

## 2. BONE FIELDS (6 HOURS)

Marked by skulls on Mayhew's map, this region of heaped humanoid and animal bones is difficult to traverse and contains many dangers. If a random encounter is rolled here, roll 1d6 to determine if it is with **1d6 boneguards** (1–4) or a **bone machine** (5–6), rather than using the **Desolation Encounters** table.

Bone fields count as difficult terrain (already accounted for in the travel time). After crossing the area, the group ends up at the oasis (area 4).

## 3. ASH WASTES (3 HOURS)

Marked with the legend "Randyll was buried here" on Mayhew's map, the ash wastes are coated with thick, clinging dust that longs to swallow all who pass through. At the end of each hour a living creature travels through ash wastes, it must make a Strength challenge roll. On a failure, the creature takes a –1d6 penalty to Health and becomes fatigued. If the creature is already fatigued, the penalty worsens by 1d6. The penalty and the affliction last for 1d3 days; however, both are removed by any effect that removes the diseased affliction. After crossing the area, the group ends up at the oasis (area 4).

Any search for Randyll's grave is unsuccessful; the dead man rose up as a zombie and shuffled back to town.

## 4. OASIS

The oasis is clearly marked on Mayhew's map, a welcome respite for travelers in the Desolation. Water and shade are plentiful, and any number of creatures can rest comfortably here. However, a **giant scorpion**, attracted by the high number of tasty things passing through the area, attacks if at any point all members of the group are asleep. If only one character is awake and on guard, the scorpion might still be emboldened, attacking on a roll of 1 on a d6. Otherwise, characters on guard only hear the beast rustling around in the darkness all night. No other encounters happen here.

Continuing from the oasis leads the party into the wandering dunes (area 5).

## 5. WANDERING DUNES (2 HOURS)

This patch of desert features wind-driven heaps of moving sand and is quickly traversed. After passing through this area, the party can choose to either detour through the Dogshead Canyons (area 6) or continue through a larger region of the wandering dunes (area 7). Either choice ultimately brings the characters to Xerras's ruined citadel (area 8).

## 6. DOGSHEAD CANYONS (4 HOURS)

The wind through these mazy canyons sounds like a howling animal, a feature the beastmen who haunt this area exploit to disguise their hunting calls. A pack of **6 anubin** fire upon travelers in the canyons from long range. Any successful ranged attack against the pack scatters them in fear for half an hour. Serious efforts to engage them at close quarters cause the anubin to flee into the surrounding dunes. Failed attempts at either are met with derisive hooting (and more bowshots). If the party simply flees, the anubin keep pace and continue a steady stream of mockery but do not attack.

## 7. MORE WANDERING DUNES (6 HOURS)

This part of the dunes is haunted by dust devils. If a random encounter is rolled here, the party must deal with **1d3 dust devils** instead of rolling on the **Desolation Encounters** table.

8. THE CITADEL OF XERRAS  
THE NIGHT DRINKER

Though the ruined citadel contains multiple buildings, Mayhew's map and his recent tracks lead directly to one: the Black Chapel.



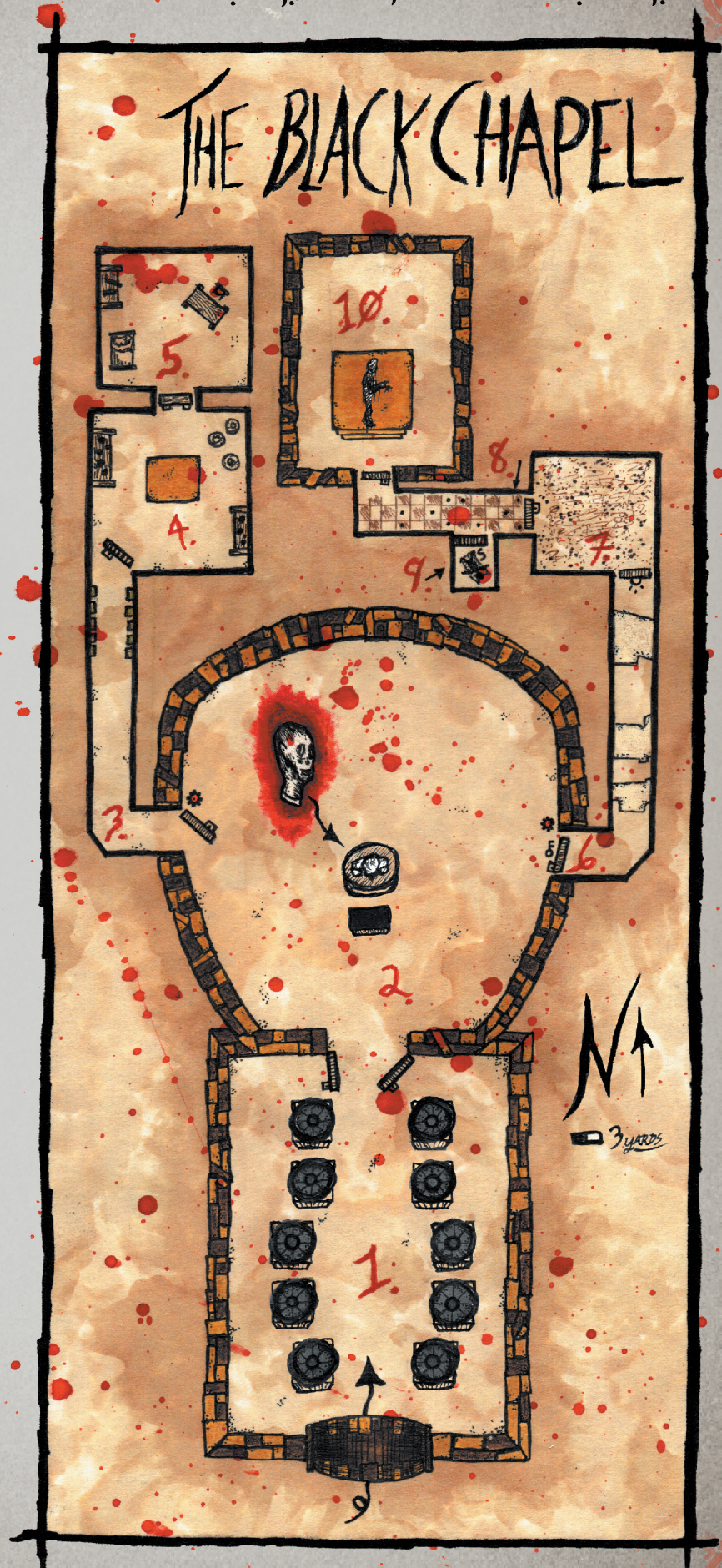
Entries for the areas of the Black Chapel follow. Some contain a section titled “On Return.” This text describes any changes to the area that occur after the characters face the final confrontation and try to make their way out of the Black Chapel. Getting to the ritual chamber is all too easy, but leaving it is much harder.

## 1. ENTRY HALL

This long, high chamber contains two rows of imposing columns leading toward a massive double door at the far end of the room. The door is open, and bloody red light spills out from beyond. **Columns:** Abstract designs carved into the columns confuse and upset the mind. Anyone examining them must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 1 boon or gain 1 Insanity.

## ON RETURN

**Three revenants**, identical triplets in matching black form-fitting outfits, wait here to stop the party in Xerras's name. They are his most faithful servants and are named X, Y, and Z. If defeated and interrogated, they tell the group that Xerras is heading for Esker with a legion of undead.







## 2. CHAMBER OF THE CELEBRATION

In the center of this large circular chamber is a 20-foot-tall statue carved from obsidian that depicts a thin, robed man with arms outstretched. Veins of red in the stone emit a lurid glow. A low altar sits at the feet of the statue, a humanoid shape crumpled over it. The walls are covered with relief carvings. There are doors to the east and west.

**Dead Land:** This area is built in a roughly circular area of dead land, which suppresses magic. Creatures in this chamber take a -3 penalty to Power (minimum 0).

**Statue:** This is a representation of Xerras. There is something unnatural about the man's features, a gaunt, hungry look. Nevertheless, he exudes a sense of immense, ancient power.

**Altar:** The altar is a plain block of obsidian. The shape atop it is a desiccated corpse wearing the stained robes of an acolyte of the New God.

**West Door:** This door leads to area 3 and stands slightly open.

**East Door:** This closed door leads to area 6 and is locked. It can be unlocked with a success on an Agility challenge roll with 1 bane by a character with an appropriate profession; there is also a key to it in area 5.

**Carvings:** Detailed carvings on the walls show a robed figure, clearly the same man represented by the statue.

Across multiple scenes, he undertakes the steps of a ritual that ends with the creation of a desiccated one. At the climax of the ritual, he is shown blowing some sort of dust into the face of his victim. The final scene shows multiple desiccated ones attacking a group of humans.

## 3. WEST HALLWAY

A long hall stretches to the north, ending at a slightly ajar door. One wall is inset with ten jade carvings of the same robed figure in various formulations such as "the Night Drinker," "the Giver of Liturgy," and "Father of the Thirsty." They can be pried from the walls and are worth 1 gc each. The pattern of carvings reveals the trapped floor tiles in the north hallway (area 8). See the illustration for details.

## 4. PREPARATORY ROOM

This small room is clearly used to prepare corpses for mummification. Surrounding a low sandstone slab are shelves of jars in all sizes. Linen wrappings lie discarded on the

floor. Three large vats sit in one corner. There is a closed door to the north.

**Jars:** Most of these containers hold fragile bones and unguents long since turned to dust, but a few on the nearest shelf contain fresh organs in brine. Characters not trained in medicine who see these must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 1 boon or gain 1 Insanity.

**Linens:** These strips are all fresh and look like scraps recently cut from a longer roll.

**Vats:** Two are empty, but one is still damp and has about an inch of oil at the bottom.

**Door:** This heavy wooden door hasn't been opened in centuries. It is stuck shut, requiring a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 boon to open it. The wood creaks and complains noisily as the door swings open. It leads to area 5.



## 5. HIGH PRIEST'S CHAMBERS

This spartan room contains a low cot, a small writing desk, and racks of scrolls along two walls. A thick layer of dust covers everything.

**Desk:** The top of the desk is empty, but there is a single locked drawer, which contains a key to the door leading to the east hallway (area 6). An appropriately trained character can unlock the drawer with a success on an Agility challenge roll, or it can be forced open by a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane, making a lot of noise.

**Scroll Racks:** These tall, honeycomb racks are full of ancient scrolls. Anyone with Perception 13 or higher or who gets a success on a Perception challenge roll notes that the rack against the left-hand wall seems wobbly. Inspection reveals that it accords closed to reveal a barely visible secret door leading outside.

Some scrolls crumble to dust at a touch, some are paeans to the greatness and magical prowess of someone named Xerras, and some contain instructions on the creation of mummies.

## 6. EAST HALLWAY

This long hall leads north to a closed stone door with something glittering in its center. The floor has a multicolored appearance.

Below this hallway is a huge pit full of **desiccated ones**. They are generally in a state of torpor but rouse if provoked, or after Mayhew is defeated (see area 10).

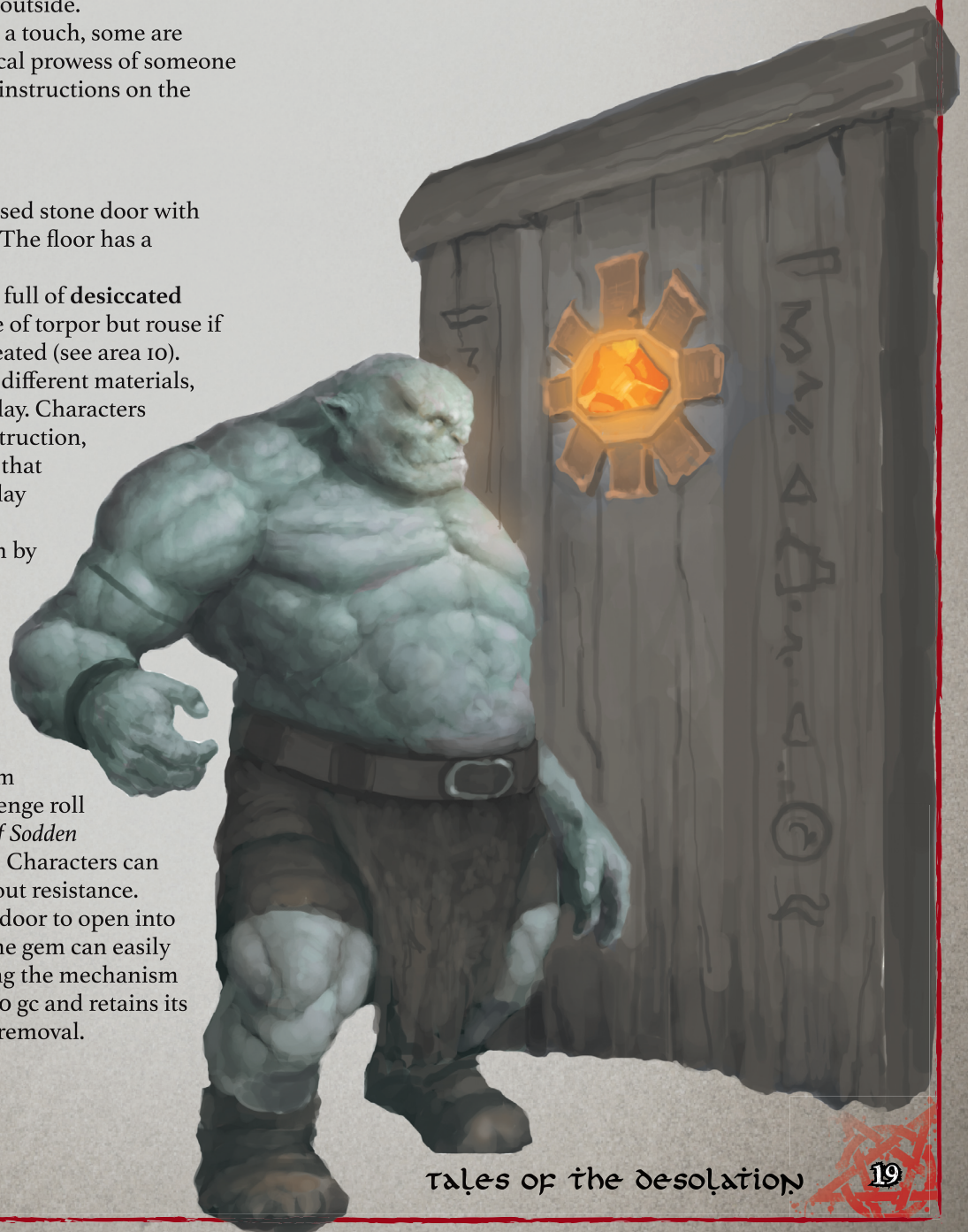
**Floor:** The floor is made of two different materials, sandstone and a lighter-colored clay. Characters with a profession relevant to construction, repair, mining, or the like can tell that the floor has been patched with clay recently, and that these areas of patching could be broken through by a determined creature.

**Door:** The otherwise plain stone door holds a fist-sized black-and-orange gemstone in a bent, rusted setting at roughly eye height for a human. It is badly cracked and chipped. Anyone closely examining the gem must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 2 banes or have the *Liturgy of Sudden Fate* imprinted in his or her mind. Characters can choose to accept the *Liturgy* without resistance.

Pressing on the gem causes the door to open into the Chamber of Purity (area 7). The gem can easily be pried out of its setting, revealing the mechanism for opening the door. It is worth 20 gc and retains its ability to impart the *Liturgy* after removal.

If the characters destroy the gem, knowledge of the ritual might be lost (in which case Esker is doomed), or you might have Father Mayhew reveal the *Liturgy* to the group during the encounter in the ritual chamber (area 10).

**Liturgy of Sudden Fate:** A deep male voice intones in the Dark Speech, the old language of Gog, within the mind of any who receive the *Liturgy*. The message dictates a ritual to remove the plague caused by Xerras's dust, but it is garbled and missing information in places. Characters who carry the *Liturgy* in their minds can recite what they know of it even if they don't understand Dark Speech, though they cannot translate or comprehend it in that case. The *Liturgy* is a key part of chapter 4.





## ON RETURN

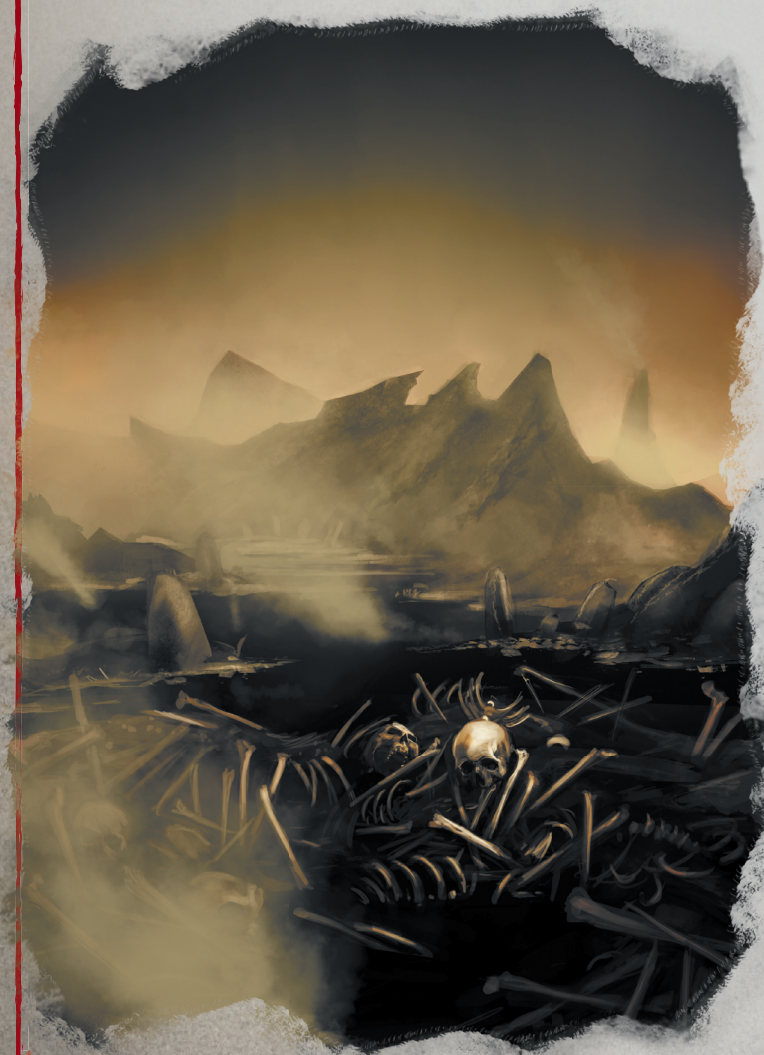
Once most or all of the group are in the hallway, 4 **desiccated ones** from the pit below burst up through the weak spots in the floor. The others in the pit are slowly waking up as well, and can be used as you see fit to harry the characters throughout the rest of this adventure.

## 7. CHAMBER OF PURITY

This small, square chamber has an open door on the western wall. Dust hangs shimmering in the air.

**Door:** The door opens easily and leads to area 8.

**Dust:** This is the dust used in Xerras's wicked rituals; all who approach the ritual chamber must cleanse themselves spiritually by breathing it in. Characters entering who have not yet contracted the Dry Death risk infection by the plague. Xerras's more learned priests were able to cure themselves as necessary by allowing the *Liturgy of Sodden Fate* to enter their minds via the gem in area 6.



## 8. NORTH HALLWAY

This short passage leads to a closed stone door at the far end. A withered corpse lies on the floor about halfway down the hall. The floor is tiled with nine rows of alternating brown and tan sandstone squares, each 1 yard across.

**Corpse:** The corpse faces the northern wall of the hallway. Its right hand is outstretched and just barely touches the wall. Pushing on the area the corpse is indicating causes a panel to slide away, revealing a hidden treasure chamber (area 9).

**Stone Door:** This door opens easily into area 10.

**Walls:** There are finger-sized holes at about chest height all along both walls.

**Floor:** Ten floor tiles, placed more or less randomly along the hallway, trigger traps that shoot arrows from the walls. The arrangement of these trapped tiles matches the pattern of the jade carvings inset in the walls of area 3. Any character stepping on such a tile must get a success on an Agility challenge roll or be struck by an arrow, taking 2d6 damage.

## 9. TREASURE CHAMBER

This closet-sized room contains the remains of a humanoid, clearly a few weeks old. It lies upon a jumble of golden chalices and tapestries.

**Corpse:** Examination suggests that the body belongs to one of the acolytes who accompanied Mayhew during his expedition. The person apparently died of an infected arrow wound.

**Chalices:** These six golden cups are worth 3 gc each.

**Tapestries:** Three small but fine tapestries are worth 1 gc each.

## 10. RITUAL CHAMBER

A huge sandstone slab dominates this chamber. A **mummy** lies upon it. Around the slab are three withered corpses in various attitudes of death. Crude paintings with an ancient look cover the unfinished walls. The smell of oil hangs heavy in the air, and the only sound is a slow drip from the mummy's oil-soaked bandages. When someone enters the room, the mummy rises from the slab with a sudden lurch and attacks!

**Mummy:** This is (or was) Father Mayhew, recently mummified by Xerras. His still-wet bandages slough off during the fight, revealing the corpse of the priest beneath. Once the mummy has taken 70 damage or more without being destroyed, he stops fighting and shakes his head in confusion, regaining some measure of free will. If the group spares him, the former Mayhew reveals how he played the patsy in Xerras's wicked scheme. He truly believed he was helping the people of Esker until Xerras captured him and tortured information about Esker and High Watch out of him. He thinks the vampire sorcerer is headed for Esker now. Ultimately, Mayhew begs for the sweet release of death.



# STORM OF FATE

**By Greg Marks**

Rushing back from the Black Chapel, possible cure for the plague in hand, the characters arrive in Esker just as a sandstorm strikes. With townsfolk hiding in their homes and undead stalking the streets, they must piece together the mysterious *Liturgy*, find all its components, and perform the ritual before it's too late. The characters complete the adventure when they finish the ritual and purify the village.

## LITURGY OF SODDEN FATE

All magic can be undone, but the cost is sometimes high. So it is with the magical disease called the Dry Death that Father Mayhew inadvertently loosed on Esker. Xerras entombed the knowledge to undo the plague inside the Black Chapel in the event his followers should ever need it. However, time has garbled the details of the ritual, so the characters, having recovered it, do not entirely know how to perform it.

**If the Characters Don't Know Dark Speech:** They deduce that the ritual can suppress or undo the curse affecting Esker's people, but only someone who understands Dark Speech can determine what they need to do to perform the ritual.

**If the Characters Do Know Dark Speech:** Reviewing the ritual reveals that the following items are needed to undo the cursed disease: a large quantity of oil (approximately one hundred flasks), a large barrel or tub big enough to dunk a person, a handful of anise seeds, a handful of bay leaves, a barrel of water, and about five pounds of salt. After creating a circle of salt around a tub filled with the herbs and oil, each of the infected must be submerged within while a ritual phrase is chanted. Once all have been so "baptized," they must each drink a cup of water as one person speaks aloud a final incantation, which takes 6 rounds to complete. The exact effects of the ritual are lost, but completing it should cure the disease.

**What the Characters Don't Know:** Completing the ritual causes all the water lost over the course of the disease to return instantly, possibly killing the unfortunate victims even as they are cured.

## GETTING STARTED

The adventure begins with the characters returning to Esker. Have those who were not present during the preceding adventure join the others on the road.

As the group approaches the village, they are overtaken by a vicious sandstorm. Characters can make Perception challenge rolls to note the storm does

not seem normal and appears to be following them. Characters with *sense magic* or similar abilities are able to confirm that the storm is unnatural. It settles over Esker for the duration of the adventure.

**Sandstorm Effects:** Though violent dust storms race across the Desolation, this sandstorm is not as dangerous. The area is heavily obscured, and creatures moving through it treat the area as difficult terrain. Each time a character enters the storm, and at the end of each hour exposed to it, that character must get a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane or take 1 damage and become blinded until he or she leaves the storm. Ranged attacks within the area are made with 2 banes at short range and are impossible beyond that distance.

### PRIOR DEVELOPMENTS

The crusaders might have started burning down the community at the end of **chapter 2** if not stopped by the player characters. In that event, the villagers were able to rally together, fight off the crusaders, and save some of the buildings, though most homes were destroyed. Each of the following locations are as written but scorched by flames and heavily damaged.

## DEATH IN THE STREETS

The characters enter the village at dusk, by which time the storm has overtaken them and forced them to look for shelter. They hear a call for help and see the form of a villager moving toward them, details obscured by the storm and cries barely heard above the winds. Characters who get a success on a Perception challenge roll with 3 banes can tell that that the person is female, has an unrecognizable accent, and has blood on her clothing.

The "villager" is actually Viessa, a **vampire brood** and one of Xerras's followers, turned to undeath shortly before he and his minions were entombed on the drift stone. She was sent to Esker to prepare her master's way and keep the townsfolk in their homes until the disease transforms them. However, she is not entirely able to control her urges, and seeing mortals on the street, she has decided she could use a meal. She tries to lure someone forward to talk, while **4 desiccated ones** lie in wait to attack the rest of the group from behind. If her ruse is discovered before she can get close, or if she is in danger of dying, Viessa flees into the storm while taunting the survivors about her master's impending arrival. She leaves the desiccated ones to be destroyed. There will be more soon enough.



## A REFUGE FROM THE STORM

Once the party deals with Viessa or drives her away, a light shines from the open door of a nearby home. Arlys Morton, Esker's mayor, waves to the party, offering them a safe haven from the storm and the roving bands of the dead.

Morton is a kind soul who is deeply worried about the turn things have taken since the characters left Esker. He ushers them into his home, half of which doubles as a workspace and shop. Candles, wax, string, and dyes fill the place, as do a number of huddled townsfolk. The mayor's wife Sofianne, his mother Gerta, and his infant son Hab are also present. Sofianne frets over Hab, but it is clear he is in the final stages of the disease and likely won't last the night. A neighbor, Imanie, and her teenage son Simmond have also sought shelter in the store. Imanie is frantic as she does not know what has happened to her husband, Wimark, who went to check on the family's horse when the storm started.

Mumbling in a corner, Gerta is beginning to show signs of the Dry Death, though she's trying to hide it. She is dehydrated and incoherent, trying only to curl up in the corner. Anyone who looks after Gerta or tries to interact with her can make an Intellect challenge roll to understand her delirious speech. She is repeating, *"Come to me, Master. I shall be reborn to you as a servant of the Night Drinker before the next sun."*

Morton can impart the following useful information:

- Since the characters left, more townsfolk have died from the plague, rising up as undead monsters. They are barely more than skeletons with dried, salt-encrusted flesh clinging to their bones. Each of them has a long tube-like tongue it injects into its victims to suck them dry.
- The plague has spread to the crusaders maintaining the cordon, and their losses are as severe as those in the village.
- He and his family were about to get out of Esker when this horrible sandstorm rose up, seemingly with no warning. Since then, bands of undead creatures and an unknown woman have been prowling the streets. They seem content to let alone those who stay inside but prey on any who try to leave their homes.
- Many ran to the temple of the New God when the storm started. It is a stout building that should withstand the wind and can be easily defended. It's one of the few places besides the inn that can hold a large number of people.

- Morton can make suggestions where to find the following items if asked:
  - **Oil:** Both the Two Stings Inn and the temple are often lit by lamps, so they likely have oil. It might also be possible to scrounge some oil from surviving homes.
  - **Large Barrel or Tub:** The Two Stings offers travelers a bath for 2 bits. The inn has a large copper tub that is brought to the bather's room.
  - **Anise Seeds:** Doctor Cotchery is known to have many different herbs. (He recently returned to Esker and can be found in the old manor.)
  - **Bay Leaves:** Sofianne has some bay leaves she uses for cooking and is more than willing to hand them over. The Nail and Spice might also be a possibility.
  - **Water:** There is a well in the center of town. The Nail and Spice also has barrels of water for those traveling into the Desolation.
  - **Salt:** The Nail and Spice carries salt among its stores. It might also be possible to scrounge enough salt from surviving homes.
  - **Someone who speaks Dark Speech:** Doctor Cotchery is a well-respected scholar known to be able to read the writings of ancient Gog.

## ESKER

As the characters move about the village to gather up supplies for the ritual and locate any missing townsfolk, they are fighting against time. Xerras is on his way, and the characters need to cure the townsfolk and themselves before they succumb to the Dry Death. You should make sure to keep up the tension of the ticking clock.

## NOTABLE LOCATIONS

For details on the community, including a map, see **chapter 1**. The various locations that still stand are as described there, except for any developments noted in this section.

### THE NAIL AND SPICE

When the characters arrive at the store, it is dark and the door is locked, requiring lockpicks or a good stout kick to break down. All the windows have been shuttered and barred.

A character can find salt and barrels of water by spending a minute searching. Bay leaves can be discovered among the stock of herbs, but there are no anise seeds. There are also ten flasks of oil—only a fraction of what is needed.

There are a number of barrels in the place. None are large enough for the ritual, but a character with carpentry or a similar profession can gather tools from the shelves and rig an acceptable tub from the materials.



## THE WELL

The well in the center of town is completely exposed to the storm, so gathering enough fresh water is next to impossible. Each bucket hauled up contains more sandy mud than water. Smart players might try straining the water with cloth or otherwise purify it; such ingenuity should be rewarded with success. If the characters spend a lot of time fetching water, a random encounter might occur here (see the **Encounters in the Storm** table).

## THE TWO STINGS INN

A wooden shingle depicting a two-tailed scorpion swings wildly in the wind, clapping loudly against the side of the building. Thin shafts of light flicker through the shutters and chinks in the walls, clearly showing that the inn is inhabited. Gwilherm the innkeeper barred the door and shuttered the windows when the trouble began, hoping to protect his customers. Unfortunately, since then several of them have succumbed to the disease. Now **6 desiccated ones** prowl the common room while Gwilherm and five other townsfolk hide in the cellar. All of the survivors are sick and disoriented, not sure what to do. If the characters pound on the door or call out, they can make out cries for help over the noise of the storm with a success on a Perception challenge roll with 3 banes. Once the characters deal with the undead, Gwilherm happily rewards them with his copper bathtub and all the oil or ale they can carry.

## OLD MANOR

The largest building in Esker after the Temple of the New God, the manor has its own wall and a stout gate, making it more defensible than other homes in the village. If the characters overcome the defenses and arrive on the doorstep, the clockwork servant Eadfrith tells them that Doctor Cotchery is not receiving visitors. Eadfrith is clearly worried and agitated. If the characters press, the clockwork confides that the doctor's mind has become unhinged. Eadfrith worries for the rest of the family: Livia (wife), Antia (teenage daughter), and Canus (toddler son). The servant allows the characters to enter if they offer to help.

Inside the house the characters can find the doctor's laboratory, containing many wall shelves full of herbs, scrolls, and curios recovered from the Desolation. One shelf holds a jar of anise seeds.

The laboratory has far more disturbing contents, though. The doctor watched his family turn but so far has not caught the plague himself, so he has become madly convinced that somehow his blood has curative properties. He is conducting horrible experiments on his family, which he sees no problem with, convinced he is on the right track. Livia is strapped to an operating table, partially vivisected; she has succumbed to the disease and turned into a **desiccated one**. Both the children are delirious and chained to the floor. The family dog lies cut open on a nearby table, and the cat floats in a jar of

salt water. Anyone seeing the chamber of horrors must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1 Insanity.

If he is not attacked, **Doctor Cotchery** addresses the group quite calmly, telling the characters he is too busy to help and asking them to leave. If the characters bring up the *Liturgy* or the writings of ancient Gog, he becomes obsessed with studying the ritual. He is very willing to help perform it, seeing a chance to help his family—indeed, he can even lead it as long as his family is “saved” first.

The doctor refuses to believe his wife is already beyond help. He becomes hostile if the characters try to stop him from continuing his ghastly experiments, and if combat ensues, he orders Eadfrith to defend him. The clockwork fights only if he fears his master will be slain instead of restrained or incapacitated.

### DOCTOR COTCHERY

DIFFICULTY 100

Size 1 human

Perception 15 (+5)

Defense 12; Health 43

Strength 11 (+1), Agility 12 (+2), Intellect 15 (+5), Will 13 (+3)

Speed 10

**Mad Certainty** When Doctor Cotchery makes an attack roll or challenge roll, he can make the roll with 1 boon. On a failure, he takes 1d6 damage.

### ATTACK OPTIONS

**Long Knife** (melee) +2 with 2 boons (2d6)

### SPECIAL ACTIONS

**Spell Recovery** Doctor Cotchery can use an action to heal 10 damage and regain one casting he expended of a spell he has learned. Once he uses this talent, he cannot use it again until after he completes a rest.

**Counterspell** When a creature Doctor Cotchery can see attacks him with a spell, he can use a triggered action to counter it. The triggering creature makes the attack roll with 1 bane and Doctor Cotchery makes the challenge roll to resist it with 1 boon.

### MAGIC

Power 3

**Alchemy\*** *identify substance* (4), *brew remedy* (2), *acid darts* (1), *brew wondrous concoction* (1)

**Life** *life sense* (4)

**Technomancy** *jury-rig* (4)

\*See *Demon Lord's Companion*™

### END OF THE ROUND

**Epic Recovery** Doctor Cotchery removes one affliction from himself.

**Epic Adversary** Roll 1d3 + 1 to determine how many actions Doctor Cotchery can use during the next round. He can use these actions during any turn and can do so before his enemies act. Each time he uses an action, he can move up to his Speed before or after the action.

## HOMES

There are ten other relatively intact homes scattered throughout the village. Three have families huddled inside, all of whom show signs of sickness. Between undead monsters in the streets and crusaders who tried to burn the infected, all of the villagers are afraid to open their doors. If the characters enter and search any of the homes, they can find either 2 flasks of oil or half a pound of salt per home searched.



### TEMPLE OF THE NEW GOD

More than a dozen townsfolk take refuge in the temple, fearful of the storm, the undead, and the plague. The temple is large enough to hold the entire village and so makes a good place to perform the ritual.

There is more than enough oil in the basement for the ritual. However, a **vampire brood** also hides there, feasting on the remains of the missing villager Wimark. If it is not dealt with before the final scene, the vampire brood comes up the stairs in the rectory and enters the temple proper near the altar. Like the other undead, it is intent on disrupting the ritual.

### RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

As the characters move about the village, roll a d6 and consult the **Encounters in the Storm** table to determine what they find on the streets. If time is short, you might forgo rolling and simply choose something appropriate that can be resolved quickly.

#### ENCOUNTERS IN THE STORM

| Roll | Result   |
|------|--|
| 1    | A villager whose family has all died loads a mule with supplies, hoping to escape to High Watch. He has either the water or salt that the characters need.   |
| 2    | A villager has collapsed unconscious in the lee of a building, half buried in sand, and will die if left behind.   |
| 3    | Ignoring the weather, Doctor Cotchery's clockwork servant, Eadfrith, has ventured out into the storm in search of salt for the doctor's dinner. The servant is heading to the Nail and Spice and is concerned about the doctor's increasingly erratic behavior.                    |
| 4    | A <b>medium demon</b> (Health 80) prowls the town, attracted by all the death and dark magic and eager to add to the carnage. If the characters are carrying barrels, sacks, or other large items that seem important, the demon specifically targets those items for destruction. |
| 5    | A <b>wind genie</b> summoned by Xerras is ordered to sweep the streets of Esker clean of those who might try to escape. It attacks immediately.  |
| 6    | Viessa (or another <b>vampire brood</b> if she has been slain) and <b>4 desiccated ones</b> are taunting a family barricaded in their home. If the undead see the characters, they attack.   |

## STANDOFF AT THE TEMPLE

Once the characters gather the ingredients and rally as many of the sick townsfolk as possible, they can enact the *Liturgy*. As the time comes for the final incantation, the undead attack in an attempt to disrupt the ritual. Anyone who is looking outside can see shambling human-like shapes gathering in the dark, out of range.

Xerras does not attack right away but sends in his minions first. During the first round, he commands a **vampire brood** (Viessa if she still lives) and **1d3 desiccated ones** to assault the building, while he observes the response.

In the second round, the **vampire brood** in the basement (if it has not been destroyed) sneaks upstairs and attacks whoever is leading the ritual.

Only then do Xerras and an additional **1d6 + 1 desiccated ones** move forward. They try to take advantage of any breaches in the temple walls or weakness in the defenses.

Whether the characters are able to complete the ritual or not, Xerras does not call off his assault. A band of vampire brood is just as useful to him as a legion of desiccated ones.

### CURING THE PLAGUE

If the characters complete the incantation, the infected immediately regain all the water that was lost over the course of the disease. Each infected person must make a Strength challenge roll, taking  $2d6 + 2$  damage per stage of the disease attained on a failure, or half the damage on a success. If a creature becomes incapacitated by this damage, it dies instantly and explodes, splashing everything within short range with gore.

Each creature that witnesses the explosion must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1 **Insanity**. A creature that was splashed by the gore makes the roll with 1 **bane**.





**XERRAS THE NIGHT DRINKER** DIFFICULTY 250**Size 1 horrifying undead****Perception** 16 (+6); darksight**Defense** 20; **Health** 120**Strength** 14 (+4), **Agility** 15 (+5), **Intellect** 14 (+4), **Will** 16 (+6)  
**Speed** 14**Immune** damage from cold, disease, poison; gaining  
Insanity; asleep, diseased, fatigued, immobilized,  
poisoned, slowed**Resilience** Xerras takes half damage from weapons**Celestial Vulnerability** Xerras takes double damage  
from Celestial spells and makes challenge rolls to  
resist Celestial spells with 1 bane.**Fear of the Gods** Xerras makes attack rolls with 1  
bane against a creature wearing or wielding a  
holy symbol.**Pass for Human** Xerras appears human until  
he takes damage or makes an attack roll, at  
which point his features contort to assume  
a monstrous appearance. He retains this  
appearance until he uses an action to resume  
his human appearance. While Xerras appears  
human, he loses his horrifying trait.**ATTACK OPTIONS****Claws** (melee) +5 with 3 boons (2d6 plus the  
target is grabbed on attack roll 20+)**Fangs** (melee) +5 with 1 boon (3d6)**SPECIAL ATTACKS****Blood Drain** Xerras makes a Strength attack roll  
against the Strength of one target living creature  
of flesh and blood that he has grabbed. On a  
success, the target takes 3d6 damage and  
becomes fatigued until it completes a rest. Xerras  
heals the same amount of damage. If the target is  
already fatigued this way, it must get a success  
on a Will challenge roll or become charmed  
until it completes a rest.**Double Attack** Xerras attacks twice with his  
claws.**SPECIAL ACTIONS****Flowing Mist** When Xerras takes damage,  
he can use a triggered action to turn his  
body into mist, fly up to his Speed, and then  
resume his normal form. While in mist form,  
Xerras is immune to all damage, his movement  
does not trigger free attacks, and he can move  
through openings wide enough to permit the  
passage of air and through spaces occupied by other  
creatures.**MAGIC****Power** 4**Death\*** *killing touch* (5), *injure* (2), *life drain* (2), *poisonous  
breath* (1), *death fog* (1)**Divination** *vision* (1)**Necromancy** *spectral grasp* (5), *grave grasp* (2), *harvest  
soul* (2), *shrieking skull* (2), *well of dark power* (1)\*See *Demon Lord's Companion***END OF THE ROUND****Burned by Sunlight** Xerras takes 2d6 damage if he is an  
area lit by sunlight.**Epic Recovery** Xerras removes one affliction from himself.**Epic Adversary** Roll 1d3 + 1 to determine how many actions  
Xerras can use during the next round. Xerras can use  
these actions during any turn and can do so before his  
enemies act. Each time Xerras uses an action, he can  
move up to his Speed before or after the action.

fricofgren



# TOMBS <sup>OF</sup> the desolation



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# THE SHADOW OF THE WASTES

Although the village of Esker stands on the edge of a vast and blighted landscape, the people living there have relied on the crusaders to keep them safe from the horrors spawned in the wastes, confident in their arms and will to drive back the dead that sometimes emerge from the roiling dust clouds. Yet even as the people watch the north with fearful eyes, none imagined that doom would come from within their community.

Tales of the Desolation™ collects the four adventures revealed at Winter Fantasy 2016 and presents them as a mini-campaign for expert characters. Faced with horrific undead, disease, rampaging bands of beastmen, and the deadly environment of the Desolation, groups will find themselves tested at every turn to survive.

To use this product, you'll need the Shadow of the Demon Lord™ core rules and the Tombs of the Desolation™ supplement.



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