



Necessary Sacrifices



NOVICE

Life on the edges of the Empire offers none of the protections enjoyed by people who live within the bounds of civilization. The roads in this wilderness wind through a countryside overrun with terrible monsters, foul

beastmen, and other horrors. Any stand of trees might shelter a band of brigands. The burned-out hulks of farmhouses and abandoned carriages offer testimony to what happens to those who fail to take sufficient precautions when they cross the gloomy countryside. People living on the frontier survive by using whatever is available to them. For some, this means relying on a trusted witch or a few keen-eyed stalwarts armed with sharp swords. Others might depend on something more sinister to protect themselves.

Necessary Sacrifices draws a group of novice characters into a tangled situation in which nothing is quite what it seems. The choices the characters make while embroiled in numerous dangers, even ones made out of kindness and empathy, could have dire repercussions. The characters complete the adventure when they unmask the true threat and destroy it.

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BACKGROUND

In the western lands of the Northern Reach, high, sharp hills cluster north of the Mistwood. In their midst lies a dark and sinister lake known as Deep Waters. Extending from the eastern shore of the lake is the small town of Mournhollow, populated by common folk who have lived in these lands for centuries. The locals fish the lake and get much of their sustenance from it, but their connection to the place goes deeper than that—for they have a diabolical connection to an appalling monster that lives in its depths.

Mournhollow's people believe that a god named Makra sleeps in the lake. To appease the god and ensure healthy livestock, good yields on crops, and peace, the locals offer three of their group as sacrifices to the deity once every ten years. The townsfolk believe that failing to deliver the tribute will result in Makra rising up and destroying them all.

It is now nearly ten years since the last sacrifices, and the time for a new ceremony is at hand. The town holds a secret lottery on the day of the ceremony to determine who is to be sacrificed. Only the burgomaster, the constable, and one other citizen know who is chosen. This time, the third person is Malorie, the owner of the local inn and tavern. The day the lots are drawn is not predetermined, so the ceremony can be conducted at a time when no outside forces threaten to disrupt it.

As the adventure opens, three outside forces are in fact converging on Mournhollow: a band of brigands recently arrived in the area; a monster, displaced by the brigands, that now makes its lair outside town; and an inquisitor on his way to look into rumors of unsavory activities.

THE BRIGANDS

Eight deserters from West Hold, one of the crusader states that forms a bulwark against the Desolation in the north, drifted south for a time and survived by robbery, until recently when they happened upon the outskirts of Mournhollow. Three nights ago, the brigands hit a farm to steal a few pigs, but were caught in the act and ended up killing everyone in the family except for young Jonah. The brigands burned the farm to cover the murders and took the boy with them as a hostage in case anyone came looking for them.

The brigands now hide in a cave overlooking Deep Waters. Unbeknownst to them, a lurk had claimed the cave as its lair. When the monster tried to return, the brigands drove it away.

THE MONSTER

The lurk fled from the hills around Deep Waters after feeling the bite of the brigands' blades and hid in the Grove of the Ancients outside Mournhollow, where it nursed its wounds. Having recovered from its injuries, it sets out each night to hunt prey. So far, it is responsible for the disappearance of two sheep, a dog, and a boy.

THE INQUISITOR

After completing his training, Estren Carabandius recently joined the Swords of Astrid, which sent him into the Northern Reach to scour the lands for corruption and cleanse the darkness wherever he finds it. He has heard rumors concerning ritual sacrifices performed at Mournhollow and so he heads west, along with a cadre of guards, to investigate.

GETTING STARTED

This adventure works well as a continuation of the story begun in *Survival of the Fittest* or *The Slaver's Lash*. Both adventures conclude with characters making their way back to civilization. Simply replace the community they reach at the adventure's end with Mournhollow, and give the characters time to meet some of the locals after they arrive and begin to assess the situation.

No matter what else they might tell the characters, the locals keep the upcoming sacrifices a secret to prevent the possibility of any interference. The people of Mournhollow, though they might appreciate the characters' help with their troubles, urge the characters to deal with the challenges as quickly as possible and then be on their way.

A final piece of advice: Read the entire adventure, and get to know it well, before you introduce the characters into the situation. The plot of *Necessary Sacrifices* is complex, with many parts of the adventure interlinked. The characters' actions might radically change the nature of some events, or when they occur, so you need to be ready for whatever direction the story takes.

MOURNHOLLOW

Centuries ago, settlers founded a small community on the shore of Deep Waters, and the place grew to become a town of modest size largely inhabited by their descendants. Important locations in the town are described below. In addition to those places, the town has about forty wooden buildings on stone foundations with roofs shingled in blue, wooden tiles, most of them used for homes and businesses. Dirt roads wind between the homes, and a couple of tracks

lead off to outlying farms. The town's main road starts near the docks on the shore of the lake, runs through the center of town, and heads off for points east. Several fishing boats are tied off at the docks when not being used.

Mournhollow's one hundred or so permanent residents are all human. Most live in small family units of 1d3 + 2 members (**commoners**), though some elders live alone. The farms surrounding the community are home to 2d6 + 1 people each, also all humans, including family members and hired hands. The locals wear homespun clothing with little adornment. They do not display icons or symbols of religious faith, but most people carry small stones somewhere on their persons. The stones come from the shores of Deep Waters, and the locals believe they ward off evil. The people of Mournhollow speak a dialect of the Common Tongue understandable to anyone who speaks the language.

Although the place is home to only humans, the locals show indifference to visitors of other ancestries. They see travelers of all kinds passing through these lands, and they are close enough to the Mist Wood to have encountered other, stranger peoples in the forest.

IMPORTANT LOCATIONS

In addition to the families in their homes, characters who explore Mournhollow and its environs might visit any of the following locations and encounter the people and creatures that inhabit them. In addition, the various entries provide clues the characters might discover by looking around or speaking to the locals.

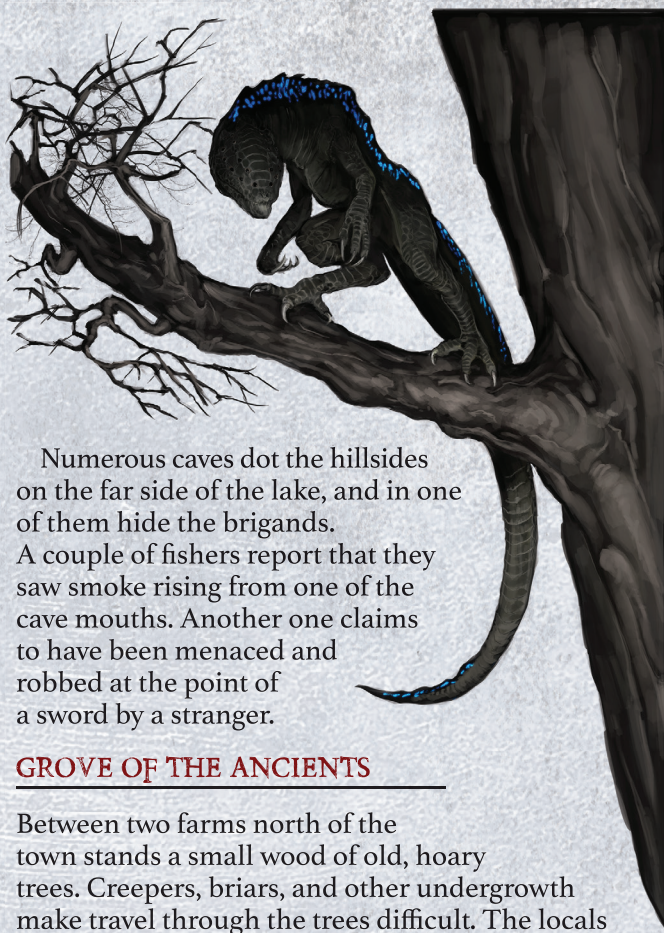
No map of Mournhollow is provided, since the particulars of the town's layout are not important to the adventure. To meet your needs, you can use details in the text to sketch out a rough map that shows where the lake, the town, and other locations are with respect to one another.

OUTLYING SITES

Before the characters enter Mournhollow, or afterward on their explorations, they might (or in some cases certainly will) visit several of the other locations in the vicinity.

DEEP WATERS

The lake known as Deep Waters is nestled among a cluster of low-lying hills on the western edge of town. Although the locals believe the lake, roughly a mile in diameter, to be bottomless, the lake bed actually descends about a half mile. There, a 100-yard-long, 50-yard-wide crack rips across the floor and grants access to an enormous subterranean sea. The waters teem with life, and many locals make their living fishing them.



Numerous caves dot the hillsides on the far side of the lake, and in one of them hide the brigands. A couple of fishers report that they saw smoke rising from one of the cave mouths. Another one claims to have been menaced and robbed at the point of a sword by a stranger.

GROVE OF THE ANCIENTS

Between two farms north of the town stands a small wood of old, hoary trees. Creepers, briars, and other undergrowth make travel through the trees difficult. The locals believe the copse to be holy, a place touched by the Old Gods, though no one ventures inside anymore lest they defile sacred ground. Characters who explore this area can spot tracks on the ground that were left by the **lurk** that hides here.

If the characters enter the grove, they find several larger trees near the center, their trunks carved with male and female faces, presumably images of the Old Gods. An older altar, dark with old blood, stands at the center. The **lurk** desecrated the place with bones and fur and other bits from its victims. It sleeps here by day and hunts at night. Characters who creep up on the monster might take it by surprise by getting successes on Agility attack rolls against the **lurk's** Perception.

If the group succeeds in destroying the **lurk** and then cleanses the grove, thus sanctifying the place to the Old Gods once more, award Fortune to each member of the group involved. In addition, the first time a character affiliated with the Old Faith rests here at the restored site, the character heals all damage and removes 1 Insanity.

THE BURNED FARMHOUSE

The brigands burned this farmhouse, which lies northeast of Mournhollow. What's left consists of a jumble of blackened timbers atop the stone foundation. The barn and other outbuildings are intact, though the livestock have found homes elsewhere.

Someone who sifts through the remains might turn up a few items that somehow survived the fire. Characters who search for at least 10 minutes can find a trap door under the rubble. Opening it reveals a set of steps that descend into a small cellar with a few posts sunk into the earth to support the ceiling overhead. There, on the floor, lies the corpse of one of the family members. Anyone who sees it must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 1 boon or gain 1 Insanity. Someone who inspects the corpse discovers that the boy had his throat cut.

If the characters talk to people on the neighboring farms, they learn that some of those people saw a small group of men and women moving through the area recently. They were armed and had a hard look about them.

NEGLECTED SHRINE

A little more than ten years ago, an itinerant priest happened upon Mournhollow and spent a few weeks trying to convert the locals from their heathen ways. The priest built a shrine dedicated to his faith on the eastern outskirts of town, but all he attracted was disinterest and resentment. The locals ignored the shrine and let it fall into ruin after the priest abruptly disappeared. The small wooden structure holds a modest altar and a triptych that depicts Astrid teaching, her death, and her ascension, all of which are covered in pornographic graffiti.

The priest did not, however, move along as the locals claim. Instead, he was murdered by the locals, who feared his preaching would anger their god. After killing him, they burdened his body with rocks and tossed it into the lake, in the hope that Makra would forgive their short-lived tolerance of a blasphemous priest.

Outraged at his murder, the priest anchored his soul to the world and became a **poltergeist**. He hates the people here and sometimes performs small acts of sabotage against them when he's particularly angry. At night, he manifests to any character who comes to pray at the shrine or who tries to clean it up. He can reveal that the locals murdered him and that he will not rest until the town has paid the ultimate price for that crime.

WINDMILL

A windmill commands a hill overlooking the southern part of town not far from the brewery, and it's here that Samuel Miller, his wife Sarah, and their seven children live. Samuel, well known for his short and violent temper, often terrorizes his family with beatings and insults. Afterward he regrets his anger and the suffering he inflicted, and he always promises to do better, but never follows through.

If the characters visit the Miller home, they find



everyone worried about nine-year-old Randolph. Sarah relates that he ran off two nights ago after one of Samuel's tirades and headed toward town. They have not seen him since. Samuel offers the characters 10 ss if they can bring him home.

FEATURES OF THE TOWN

Most of the buildings that make up Mournhollow proper are clustered in a loose group. As is typical of small communities, the center of town features a large open area that serves as a gathering place, with an array of streets and buildings radiating outward from that area.

BURGOMASTER

The burgomaster, Saul Tittering, lives in a large house across the community square from the Pig and Bucket. In a fine home filled with finer furnishings and artwork, he enjoys the good life. He's nearly crippled by gout, however, and rarely emerges from his house unless on a litter carried by his four servants.

Tittering most likely recruits the group for help in dealing with the monster. He gives the characters the run of the community and pays them 50 ss to destroy the beast—though once the monster is dead, he encourages them to be on their way (because he fears they will interfere with the sacrifice). If the characters also tackle the brigands, he pays them another 25 ss as a bonus. He knows little about the monster and offers the same information that the constable can reveal.

Enid Tittering: Enid Tittering has caused her father, the burgomaster, no shortage of grief. Wild and uncontrollable, she rejects convention—letting some smelly farmer climb on top of her so she can push out a bunch of even smellier brats is the last thing she wants. Instead, she wants to travel the world, to lay eyes on the Colossus of Dis, see the giant dwarfs of the Freeholds, and, maybe, one day, visit Caecras. She feels trapped in Mournhollow and yearns for a way to leave it behind, but she dares not strike out on her own.

The characters' arrival presents Enid with an opportunity. She watches them and follows them at a distance. Eventually, she approaches the friendliest member of the group and asks about his or her exploits. If the characters befriend her, she asks to leave with them, becoming a companion of the group (or possibly acting as a replacement character if one dies) for as long as she lives.

CONSTABLE'S OFFICE AND JAIL

The town constable lives and works in a small, squat building near the center of town. The interior features an office, sleeping quarters, and a cage for disorderly folk. Constable Ander Melchen (a **mercenary**) has kept the peace in the town for ten years, a task that has involved little actual peril. A man of average height with a belly that hangs over his belt, he enjoys the authority his badge gives him and likes to throw his weight around so people don't forget how important he is. Melchen has six deputies (**patrollers**) that he can call on for extra muscle if needed.

Melchen doesn't trust outsiders. He believes they might threaten the ceremony. He resents the characters' involvement in the mystery about the monster since he believes himself to be more than capable in dealing with whatever is menacing the community. In fact, he can readily explain away all the troubles and refuses to admit anything out of the ordinary is going on—a point with which the burgomaster disagrees.

If the group visits this place, there's a 1 in 6 chance that Red, the town drunk, is locked up inside and sleeping off a bender. For more information about Red, see "Important Characters."

Melchen knows that two sheep and a dog have gone missing recently, as well as a boy from the Miller family (see "Windmill," above), but he does not suspect foul play. Melchen thinks the child ran off because his father is abusive. As for the burned farmhouse, Melchen chalks it up to bad luck for the family. No one has yet sifted through the remains to retrieve the bodies, a task Melchen plans to get around to in a day or so.

THE PIG AND BUCKET

Mournhollow has one public house, a small building with a signboard showing a pig sitting inside a bucket. With passable food, beer from the Deep Waters Brewery, and a few small rooms to let, the Pig and Bucket fills with locals during the evenings, as well as the occasional traveler stopping over for the night. Malorie Ren runs the place, having inherited it from her mother twenty years ago. She has three daughters who work in the common room, while her son and her current lover, Brett, handle the kitchen duties.

Malorie's relationship with Brett has become strained. She has seen him watching her daughters a little too closely. Brett, in truth, is hiding out in the town, having come here a few weeks ago after deserting his post at West Hold. He is willing to kill to keep his secret safe.

Ren's son saw the monster creeping through the streets one night and is now terrified to go outside after dark. If befriended, he can describe the monster to the characters, and he might reveal that he recently found an insignia from Brett's old uniform. Brett had tried to burn his clothing to cover his tracks, but the boy was able to retrieve the badge from the ashes.

Red, the Town Drunk: Red's daughter was one of those given to the lake ten years ago. The loss shattered him, and he began drowning his sorrows at the bottom of a bottle. After a decade of dissolution, he has lost just about everything—his job at the brewery, his friends, and, even, his house. Now he spends his time performing odd jobs for a few bits at a time, which he usually spends on drink. In many ways, he's just waiting to die.

The night before the group arrives in Mournhollow, Red spotted the monster from a short distance away while he was leaning against the wall outside the Pig and Bucket. He shares a description of the beast with anyone who buys him a drink, calling it a large, scaly horror. He says it was there one moment and gone the next.

GENERAL STORE

Mournhollow's general store stands amid a cluster of buildings at the town's center. Founded fifty years ago by Worthheimer Menk, the business is now run by his son. Worthheimer Menk the Second has a calculating mind and a greedy streak that makes him more than a little unpopular in town. Characters can purchase commonly available goods from the store at standard prices. Menk replenishes his wares once every few months from communities east of Mournhollow.

Menk has one son, Keide, who is both cruel and lazy. Keide resents his father's domineering way with him and slacks off whenever he can get away with it, though his father often catches him slouching and gives him a good beating with his cane. Keide might steal items from his father's store on the player characters' behalf, if he is befriended. Keide also spotted the monster carrying off a sheep: "It flickered," he says, "almost as if it warn't real!"

SMITHY

Amie Smith learned her trade from her father, who was taught the art of blacksmithing by his mother. Amie is skilled at the forge, and the items she makes are quite good. She sells most of her product to the general store, though she takes private commissions. In return, she receives her supplies from Menk's store at a steep discount.

Short and well muscled, Amie has good looks and an easy smile. She wears charred and soot-stained leather clothing. She's usually at work here through the day and into the early evening.

The upcoming sacrifice ritual troubles the smith a great deal. Her father was a believer, but she has none of his faith in gods and thinks the act barbaric. Amie briefly tried to convince her neighbors to stop performing the ceremony, but after a few hard stares and harder words directed at her, she's decided to hold her tongue. If the locals go through with the sacrifices again, she thinks she might leave town for good.

If the characters befriend Amie, she can be a source of information if the characters question her about the strange behavior they notice in the locals. She explains about the sacrifices and the legend of the god in the lake, though she is quick to chalk it all up to superstitious nonsense. If the characters appear to share her reservations about the sacrifices and say anything about stopping the ceremony, she offers to help in whatever way the characters need. She believes that the sacrifices waste lives, and she will take risks to put an end to the practice, even if it means fighting her neighbors.

DEEP WATERS BREWERY

The largest industry in Mournhollow, the Deep Waters Brewery occupies a few buildings on the south side of town. The brewery has operated for thirty years with modest success, exporting ale to towns throughout the region. The proprietor, Yuri Renfriss, has been running the business the entire time, and though he is now older and grayer, he remains committed to the business and has no plans to retire.

Renfriss employs six locals to keep the business running. At any time, two of them are away delivering kegs. Renfriss makes the beer with water drawn from Deep Waters, so he opposes any activity that would bring misfortune to the community, such as not going through with the sacrifice.

PHYSICIAN

The town physician, Robben Masterson (a **hired killer**), lives and works out of a small house, much like those in which the rest of the community lives. A deeply religious man, he believes in what the community does and fears what will happen if the people fail to make the offering. He's an experienced healer, surgeon, and physician, and he cares for the entire community. His family—his wife, Lora, and their two girls, Mary and Maryanne—shares his home.

Masterson has so far managed to keep his madness a secret. Always a bit eccentric and easily distracted, he has been experiencing disturbing dreams in which he murders his wife and daughters. He has begun to believe the god of the lake is telling him to kill his family for the good of the community. If the characters talk to him, he might let some of his unhinged musings come through, dropping hints about how the god demands pure blood and that his family is so pure that it hurts his heart.

At any point you like during the adventure, he can begin this grisly work, ideally when the characters happen to be nearby. They might see one of his girls race out the front door, bleeding from a knife wound, or hear screams coming from within the house. If the characters manage to stop or mitigate the murders, Masterson shouts, "The god demands pure blood!"

MURPHREE HOUSE

The only unoccupied house in town, this old building was abandoned several years ago when Old Man Murphree committed suicide. The place has an evil reputation and a menacing presence. Many people have invented all kinds of stories about seeing and hearing strange things in the place. The truth of the matter is this: Old man Murphree hated people so much that his soul clawed free from Hell and returned to the world as a **wraith**.

The house contains two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living area, all buried under a thick layer of dust. The severed rope Murphree used to hang himself still dangles from a beam near the ceiling, left there because no one wanted to touch it. The floorboards below the rope show an old stain from his voided bowels.

The wraith never leaves the house and usually hangs out in the walls during the day to avoid even the slightest contact with sunlight. When night falls, it emerges and moves room to room, muttering. The wraith attacks anyone who enters the building after sunset, though it does not pursue intruders beyond the building. If the characters encounter the wraith, it screeches at them, saying, "The god took my daughter, so I'll take all of them from the god!"

If the characters do not encounter the wraith, he might be moved to exit the house and attack the procession of townsfolk en route to Deep Waters for the ceremony.

MONSTER HUNT

The characters have free run of the community and might learn important clues by interviewing the locals as described in their entries above. The group can also learn more by looking around the town and its surroundings. As the characters explore the town, they can discover the following clues.

The Sheep: Two sheep were carried off, one a night. Examining the ground in and around the pen reveals several clawed footprints. Looking around the area reveals footprints widely scattered and with no obvious trail.

The Dog: Mandel and Marth Fig lost their dog the night before last. Anyone can direct the characters to their house. The couple report that their dog, Gord, was heard barking wildly late that night and then suddenly went silent. When Mandel went out to investigate, there was no sign of the dog, but he did see a weird figure flicker in and out of existence.

The Boy: The Miller's son, Randolph, fled home to escape his father's drunken tirade and ran off to the Grove of the Ancients. The boy's mother saw him run off through the fields toward the wood, but she's sure he wouldn't go in there, since most people avoid the place. The boy did, though, and the lurk found and killed him.

Local Legends: Most townsfolk believe that strange creatures infest the hills around Deep Waters, and people have claimed to see all kinds of odd things there. The most common story people tell concerns a scaly man that appears out of thin air and then disappears again.

FINDING THE MONSTER

Through whatever investigatory methods the characters employ, the group should find the lurk without much trouble. If they don't think to check out the grove, the monster returns to the town each night to snatch a meal for itself. You can let the characters spot the creature on the hunt, but the creature is cunning enough to not let itself be surrounded by superior numbers. Rather, it tries to pick them off, one at a time. If the lurk becomes injured, it flees to the grove, where it makes a stand.

THE BRIGANDS' CAVE

Of the brigands, only seven remain. One was killed fighting the lurk, and another one disappeared while exploring the deeper tunnels connected to the cave in which this group hides. Unsure of what, exactly, hides in the deeper darkness, these men and women keep close to the cave mouth. They had originally planned to stay just a couple of days, but after burning the farm and seeing no trouble arise from it, they've decided to stick around for a few more days to fleece the locals. Once they leave, they'll release their prisoner—the young man from the house they destroyed.

If the characters reach the cave after the brigands go, they find signs of recent habitation that include bits of bone and food scraps, as well as a cold fire, but no signs of where the inhabitants went.

If the characters come before then, they find 4 brigands present. Two watch from the cave mouth and the other two recline inside the cave, and one of those often watches from the darkness at the back. Three are always out hunting, stealing chickens, or robbing fishers of their catch. The brigands at large return at dawn, and another three set out at dusk. You might have the player characters encounter these scavenging brigands before the group comes to investigate the caves, serving as another hook to draw them to this location.

Capen Drent (a brigand with the champion role) leads the band. He's a big man with long, greasy black hair, stubble on his cheeks, and crazy, crazy eyes. He stinks of sour milk and he rules his fellows by terrorizing them.

The captive is a 10-year old boy named Jonah. He grieves for his family and is terrified by the people who killed them, but he has become dependent on the brigands, fearing what will happen to him if he's left alone. Jonah might creep up behind one of his would-be rescuers and stick him or her with a sharp knife (attack roll +0; 1d3 damage). If the group kills the brigands, the boy surrenders and throws himself into the arms of the nearest character, explaining everything that happened to him.



If their numbers are reduced to two or if Drent dies, the remaining brigands surrender. Brigands taken to town are jailed, given a brief trial, and are then given to Makra. In addition to their gear, the brigands have 7 ss and 23 cp.

THE CAVE SYSTEM

At the back of the cave, a narrow tunnel burrows into the hill. Wide enough to permit the passage of a Size 1 creature, it twists and turns for some 15 yards before opening up into a larger chamber—the first of a small complex of caves. Although the cave system does not directly tie into the troubles affecting Mournhollow, groups who explore these places can learn more about the area and might have an opportunity to confront the “god” before the night of the ceremony.

All locations in the complex are dark. The air is cool, stale, and still.

On the Trail: While the characters move through the caves, they attract the attention of an ooze. This vile monster follows along and attacks anyone who lags behind.

A. OILY POOL

Black liquid spreads across the floor in the center of this cave, surrounded on all sides by sharp stalagmites. Above, hanging like teeth, stalactites bristle from the ceiling. Wide cracks in the walls lead

to descending tunnels. A foul smell hangs in the air, reeking of mildew. Oily droplets fall from the ceiling to plunk into the pool, which drains slowly through a crack in the floor.

The liquid is flammable. Lighting the fluid causes the pool to burn for 1d6 + 3 hours and fills the cave with thick smoke that spills out from the opening and fills the tunnel leading back to the brigands’ cave. Each round, a creature in this cave that breathes in the smoke must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or take 1d6 damage and become fatigued until it spends at least 1 minute breathing clean air.

Characters who have a suitable container can scoop up a few flasks’ worth of the fluid to use in their lanterns.

B. DEAD GUY ON THE FLOOR

Loose rock covers the floor of this dry cave. The gravel slips underfoot, forcing creatures that walk or run here to make Agility challenge rolls with 1 bane or fall prone. A few paces in from the fissure in the wall that grants access to this cave, lies the body of the brigand who died while exploring.

Inspecting the body reveals two bloody sockets where its eyes should be and an expression of horror frozen on the man’s face. His flesh appears warped and lumpy in places, as if tumors were growing just under the skin. On the corpse, characters can find

three torches, flint and steel, a sword, a crossbow, a case with 4 bolts, and a pouch containing 6 bits.

At the opposite side of the cave lie six shattered bolts, smears of blood, and what appear to be eyeballs. On the ceiling, 10 **lash crawlers** watch for intruders. They blast the characters with their warping gaze a few rounds after anyone enters, or sooner if any character decides to look up.

C. MIRROR CHAMBER

The tunnel widens a bit in this area to form a narrow chamber. Strange paintings cover the walls on the sides. An old silver mirror in a black wooden frame leans against the back wall. In the light, the mirror distorts the characters' reflections, making them appear strange and monstrous.

The paintings on the walls show an expert hand in the detail and likenesses they capture. They depict spindly humanoids with a variety of physical forms slaughtering humans dressed in high helmets and armed with spears and tall shields. One figure stands out from the rest—a robed being who floats above the carnage, eyes blazing red, hands extended as if reaching for the dead.

The Demon Lord's stain on the world has warped the mirror, and an **oculus** lurks inside. When light touches the mirror, the oculus begins to slide out from the bottom of the mirror, dribbling forth like the yolk oozing out from a cracked egg. It takes one round for the monster to emerge from the mirror, after which time it attacks the group. The monster fights until it kills a creature and then slithers off to digest its meal, though it continues to fight if attacked. If the group flees, the monster gives chase until it has killed at least one creature of any sort.

D. HALL OF THE FALLEN ONES

Eight black stone statues, each a few feet apart, surround a 3-yard-diameter circle chiseled into the floor. The statues, all of which are humanoid in appearance, are posed as if dancing. Most have odd features; some have the heads of birds, others have bodies covered in feathers, and one has eyes in the palms of its hands. The circle on the floor is magical, and anyone inspecting it with the *arcane sight* Arcana spell can see that it has threads of demonic and faerie energy mixed with Protection magic.

Any physical contact with a statue causes the magic binding it to its statue form to unravel, freeing the fallen one embedded within it. The first one freed screams out "the Betrayer!" in Elfish and then moves to touch as many statues as it can to free the other fallen ones from their stasis. Freed fallen ones attack any humans they find and then flee the caves to

return to the surface, where they begin the work of slaughtering humans as they did in ancient times.

If the fallen ones get out of the caves, they descend on Mournhollow that night, moving from house to house, killing anyone they find within. How this plays out is up to you, but unless the characters intervene, the community suffers terrible casualties at the hands of these dark faeries. Such a slaughter disrupts the ceremony if it hasn't happened yet, which causes trouble for the town with their dark god.

FALLEN ONE

DIFFICULTY 10

Size 1 frightening faerie

Perception 13 (+3); shadowsight

Defense 14; **Health** 25; **Insanity** 5; **Corruption** 6

Strength 10 (+0), **Agility** 14 (+4), **Intellect** 12 (+2), **Will** 12 (+2)

Speed 12

Immune damage from disease; charmed, diseased

Spell Defense A fallen one takes half damage from spells and makes any challenge roll to resist a spell with 1 boon. A creature attacking a fallen one with a spell makes the attack roll with 1 bane.

Iron Vulnerability A fallen one is impaired while it is in contact with iron.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Claws (melee) +4 with 1 boon (1d6 + 2 plus Maddening Taint)

Maddening Taint A creature must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1 Insanity. If the creature goes insane as a result of gaining Insanity from this source, it also gains 1 Corruption.

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Blinding Blot The fallen one flings a blot of roiling shadows at one creature within short range. The fallen one makes an Intellect attack roll with 1 boon against the target's Agility. On a success, the target becomes blinded. At the end of each round, a target blinded in this way can make a Will challenge roll. On a failure, the target gains 1 Insanity. On a success, the target removes the blinded affliction. Once a fallen one uses Blinding Blot, it cannot do so again until it completes a rest.

If a character other than a fallen one enters the circle, magical darkness (as a rank 6 spell) floods the circle's interior, and the creature triggering the event must make a Will challenge roll. A human makes the roll with 3 banes. On a failure, the creature gains Insanity equal to its Will score. Any creature that enters the darkness is similarly at risk.

The darkness lingers for 1d6 minutes and then recedes, leaving behind a smear of tarry wetness on the floor that reeks of rotten fish. If a creature enters the circle again, the darkness returns as above, dissipating after a similar period. If the darkness is triggered three times, the blackness coalesces into a **huge demon** with three random talents that then steps out of the circle to destroy everything it can. The demon, a servant of the Betrayer bound to the world, digs its way free from the tunnels and begins a campaign of destruction until someone or something puts it down.

ORIGIN OF THE FALLEN ONES

When the Edene invaded the continent, they conquered the First People and waged war against the faeries. While many of the fair folk withdrew and took refuge in their hidden kingdoms, some stayed behind to drive off the bellicose host. Leading these rebellious faeries was the son of the Faerie Queen, an elf remembered only as the Betrayer, a moniker he gained after using dark magic to fight the Edene. The faeries who sided with him became corrupted and twisted into evil, hateful things, many of which found places in Hell. A few, however, remained in the world as fallen. They nurse their old hatreds against humanity, killing them whenever they can.

The fallen ones featured in this adventure were sealed in the statues by ancient magic used by the people who lived in these lands before it was settled by the folks who established Mournhollow.

E. APPALLING ORGY

The stench from this cave spills into the neighboring tunnels, filling the stale air with the reek of rotten fish. Curls of mist rise from the glistening bodies of **1 medium monster**, **5 small monsters**, and **7 tiny monsters** writhing and rutting on the floor. Anyone who enters the chamber and sees this orgy in progress must succeed on a Will challenge roll with 1 bane or gain 1 Insanity.

No two monsters look the same; each is an abomination in its own right, combining human and bestial forms in an unlikely and appalling configuration. Thoroughly absorbed in their efforts, the creatures can be taken by surprise unless the characters make a lot of noise. If attacked, the monsters withdraw their slick organs from each other and turn on the intruders, chasing them through the caves until they have torn them all to pieces.

If the characters clear out the inhabitants, they can find amid the pools of glistening slime and excrement numerous treasures left behind by the fallen ones. The valuables include 2 random enchanted objects, 12 gc, 43 ss, and 76 cp.

F. THE WAY OUT?

One of the tunnels leading out from the cavern occupied by the monsters leads away from the network of caves. This tunnel could extend a mile or so, twisting and turning, before the passage emerges into the side of a farmer's well not far from Mournhollow. Or, the tunnel could lead down into the earth to horrors and dangers of your design.

G. BETRAYER

A 10-foot-tall statue of black stone commands the center of this cave, the menace radiating from it palpable. Carved to depict the Betrayer, the

outcast scion of the Faerie Queen, it appears to be a humanoid draped in billowing black robes standing atop a pile of suffering humans. The statue holds out one clawed hand and grips a black sword in the other. Although the sword appears to be carved from the same material as the statue, it can be removed, but doing so bestows a terrible curse on the creature that does. The blade radiates Death magic (see *Demon Lord's Companion*).

SWORD OF THE BETRAYER

One of humankind's greatest foes, the Betrayer led the faeries on a campaign of hatred and destruction against the tide of humanity that spilled into the continent long ago. Although they savaged the Edene conquerors terribly, their numbers were too few to drive the humans back whence they came, and thus the Betrayer and his surviving followers fled into the darkness to bide their time. The Betrayer's fate is unknown, though most presume him dead, but many of his relics have survived, carried off and hidden by devoted servants until such time as the Betrayer returns.

The *Sword of the Betrayer* is a 6-foot length of obsidian that sighs when the blade is swept through the air. The handle features a grip wrapped in human skin and a pommel carved to look like a screaming skull.

Curse of the Betrayer If you are not a faerie and you touch the relic, you must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 2 banes or become cursed (as if by a rank 6 spell). While cursed in this way, whenever you complete a rest during an adventure, you must get a success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane or take a -1d3 penalty to Health. The penalty remains until the curse is lifted.

Enchanted Greatsword When you attack with the relic, you make the attack roll with 1 boon and the attack deals 1d6 extra damage.

Implement of Endings If you make the relic your implement, you discover the Death tradition (see *Demon Lord's Companion*).

Soul Destroyer When you attack a living, mortal creature with the relic and the total of your attack roll is 20 or higher and exceeds the target number by at least 5, the target of your attack must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 3 banes or gain 1 Corruption. If the target's Corruption total reaches 9 from gaining Corruption this way, the target takes damage equal to its Health and its soul is dragged screaming into Hell.

H. SUBTERRANEAN LAKE

Dark waters lap against a stony beach stretched across the middle of this cave. A waterfall spills down from near the ceiling, causing the water to bubble and froth. Small white fish dart around in the pool.

The lake connects to a larger subterranean sea that spreads beneath the lands above. Characters who enter the water and swim into the depths find themselves in a dark abyss. While swimming, characters might encounter as many as 1d6 **small monsters** or 1d3 **medium monsters**, all of which have the aquatic trait.

Each hour the group spends in this area, roll a d6. On a roll of 1, Makra (see below) emerges from the depths, drawn by the noise and light. The monster fights until it becomes injured, at which point it withdraws into the depths once more.

I. PAINTED ROOM

A stream of water emerges from the south wall and drains out through the western opening to feed the pool in area H. Weird paintings decorate the walls, showing humans or humanlike people drowning children in a great pool of water as others look on or prostrate themselves before the lake. The floor here is covered with brittle bones, bits of rock, broken crockery, and other remnants of the debased people who lived here during the time of the First People. At your option, characters who search through the rubble can find one random enchanted object here.

THE FAREWELL FEAST

The people of Mournhollow throw a great feast and celebration for the player characters if they are successful in dealing with the lurk, and they pull out all the stops if the characters deal with the brigands and rescue Jonah. The locals set up tables in the town's central plaza and provide food, drink, and entertainment.

After honoring the characters for their efforts, the community leaders want the characters to be on their way, so that they leave town before the ceremony takes place in a few days. They throw the celebration as a sendoff and urge the group to be on its way come morning.

The event gives the players opportunities to interact with the locals and, possibly, get a hint at what's to come. If the group hasn't yet dealt with the bandits, they can learn from the locals that strange smoke has been rising from the hills around the lake, though no one has been able to find the source. Also, locals might bring up missing chickens, being robbed by strangers, or spotting dangerous-looking men and women moving around at night and always heading back to the hills.

THE NEW GOD'S WRATH

Drawn by rumors of demon-worship, the inquisitor Estren Carabandius reaches Mournhollow in the hour before dawn a day or two after the Farewell Feast. If the characters make preparations to leave town right after the feast, have the inquisitor show up before they go. If the characters head off to deal with the brigands, the inquisitor should be in town waiting for them when they return.

Carabandius and his force of 16 mercenaries move through the community looking for clues. When the sun rises and the people emerge from their homes, they find the inquisitor seated in a high-backed chair at the center of town, surrounded by eight of his guards. The other eight are divided into groups of two, and each pair patrols the edges of town to watch out for anyone trying to escape. Estren wears the black robes of his office, a symbol of his faith on a chain around his neck, and a skull mask commonly worn by inquisitors when doing the work of the New God.

ESTREN CARABANDIUS

DIFFICULTY 25

Size 1 human

Perception 14 (+4)

Defense 10; **Health** 36; **Insanity** 4; **Corruption** 1

Strength 11 (+1), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 13 (+3), **Will** 13 (+3)

Speed 10

Immune frightened

Ear for Truth Estren always knows when a creature speaks an untruth.

Fury of the New God For 1 minute after Estren casts a Theurgy spell, he makes attack rolls with 1 boon and his attacks deal 1d6 extra damage.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Sword (melee) +1 (1d6 + 2)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Voice of the New God Estren can use an action, or a triggered action on his turn, to speak with the voice of the New God. Each creature he chooses within short range must get a success on a Will challenge roll with 1 bane or gain 1 Insanity. A creature that gains this Insanity falls prone and becomes immobilized until it is no longer frightened from the insanity gain. Once Estren uses this special attack, he must wait 1 minute before he can use it again.

MAGIC

Power 1

Theurgy *denounce* (3), *censure* (2)

As the crowd gathers, the burgomaster comes forward. The inquisitor tells him that the town is under the law of the New God while the Cult conducts an investigation into allegations of demon-worship. Unwilling to endanger any citizens, the burgomaster bows to the inquisitor's demands and urges everyone to cooperate.



The investigation lasts all day, with everyone, including the player characters (if they're present), interviewed. The interviews take place in the constable's office in the presence of two guards. The other mercenaries patrol the town to ensure that no one runs off. At one point, a mercenary with a crossbow shoots a man trying to flee. He leaves the corpse where it falls as a warning to others.

If the characters don't interfere, the inquisitor decides that Enid Tittering is in league with dark forces and puts her to the question, using torture to break her. If the characters still don't interfere, she does confess—though she's innocent—and desperately names a few other people as her confederates in hopes of putting an end to her suffering. Satisfied with the outcome, the inquisitor orders the townsfolk to build a pyre and then consigns Enid and three other young adults to the flames. Once this happens, the inquisitor and his henchmen quit the town.

INVOLVING THE GROUP

If the characters are no longer in Mournhollow or choose not to involve themselves, the events involving the inquisitor happen as described above. If the characters are present, however, they might be moved to take matters into their own hands. Given the complexity of a scene involving an entire town, you can use the following overviews to help you run through this sequence.

SIDING WITH THE INQUISITOR

Characters with a strong religious affiliation to the Cult of the New God might be moved to side with the inquisitor. If so, he involves the characters in accordance with their abilities, with warriors joining his cadre of soldiers, rogues and priests aiding him in the questioning, and magicians kept isolated until their purity can be determined. Characters who side with the inquisitor make enemies of everyone in the town and are asked to leave once the "witches" are burned at the stake.

FIGHTING THE INQUISITOR

The characters might (understandably) object to the inquisitor's tactics and see it as their responsibility to fight him and his cronies. A stand-up fight between the group and the inquisitor is not likely to end well for the characters, though with luck, the group might triumph. A better tactic for them would be to pick off the henchmen a few at a time, eventually isolating and then neutralizing the inquisitor.

If the characters kill or capture the inquisitor, the mercenaries fight to free him if they number eight or more, or otherwise they withdraw.

The inquisitor won't sacrifice himself, however. If he loses half his mercenaries, he flees from Mournhollow, seeking refuge in one of the Crusader States to the north (see "Conclusion" for more information).

RESCUING PRISONERS

Rather than confronting the inquisitor, the characters might try to rescue those he has deemed guilty of corruption. The characters might pull off such a stunt by creating a distraction, using their powers of persuasion to convince the inquisitor to delay the burnings until the night of the ceremony (but only if the group has uncovered the truth about the sacrifices), or doing anything else you deem reasonable.

The characters should have plenty of places where they can hide the refugees—the Grove of the Ancients or the Brigands' Cave are good places. If the accused go missing, the inquisitor vents his wrath on the townsfolk until the accused return to face justice. He starts with public beatings and destroying property, but as his frustration grows, he becomes erratic and might start executing townsfolk, claiming all of them are complicit in the foul acts and are responsible for endangering the world with their evil practices. Naturally, his erratic actions could draw the group back to confront him, but even if they lay low, the deaths of innocents will surely enrage the locals enough that they rise up against the inquisitor and his henchmen on their own. Amie Smith likely leads the resistance, or could be convinced to do so if the characters have befriended her and press her for a commitment.

If the townsfolk rise up against the inquisitor, a pitched battle unfolds, which you can simply describe to the players if their characters don't participate. If they do, you might have the characters fight a few mercenaries before they face off against the inquisitor to end his reign of terror once and for all.

NECESSARY SACRIFICES

The day of sacrifice arrives after the inquisitor is driven out or killed. An hour before nightfall, the community leaders come together to select their sacrifices. They can choose anyone you like, but Red, the town drunk, should be one of them. A captured inquisitor could be another good choice, as would be any characters the group has befriended. Once the selections have been made, people don hooded black robes and strong men and women go to collect the sacrifices, which is the first time these poor folks discover their fates. To ease their fears, the community doses the chosen with special tinctures. The offerings join a procession of townsfolk that makes its way from the center of town to Deep Waters

to the accompaniment of shrill piping played by the children. When the people reach the shore, they chant strange words and phrases as they await the setting sun.

When night falls, the three chosen citizens are told to walk out into the water, which, thanks to the effect of the tincture, they do without resistance. After a few steps, the water is deep enough that the three must swim. One by one, as they travel farther from shore, they are pulled under the water by something unseen and do not reemerge. Makra has fed, and the people of Mournhollow can rest easy for ten more years.

INVOLVING THE GROUP

Again, the player characters might become involved in this ceremony depending on where they are and what has happened so far. The townsfolk want the characters out of town to avoid any interference with their customs. However, if the characters stick around, they might be moved to step in.

Two deputies (**patrollers**) collect each sacrifice from his or her home and then lead them to the procession. (If any deputies have been slain, replace them with **commoners**.) The characters can try to overpower the escorts before they rejoin the procession. If one or more sacrifices don't reach the lake, the townsfolk offer up the sacrifices that have arrived, though any number less than three is insufficient to quell the monster's wrath (see *Makra Rises* below).

The procession consists of about 80 townsfolk (**commoners**) along with the 6 escorts (**patrollers**). An attack against the entire group is likely more than the characters can handle. If they try, consider grouping the townsfolk into mobs (*Shadow*, page 264). If the characters defeat half the townsfolk, the others relent and abort the sacrifices.

Unless that happens, arguments against the practice fall on deaf ears. The locals fear the "dark god" more than they fear the characters. They offer sympathetic nods, but they tell the characters that "This is the way it is" and "This is the way it has always been."

MAKRA RISES

If Makra does not receive three living sacrifices before midnight, it rises up from the lake to kill anything it finds.

An appalling abomination, the monster drags its heaving bulk across the ground by flailing with its squirming tentacles. Thick, veined eyestalks sprout from its body, each topped with a luminescent, bulging red eye. As it moves, weird whistling and



whistling noises sound from the many orifices in its hide. If its flesh is cut, the body secretes a yellow, gelatinous substance that reeks of filth, and the monster keens, filling the minds of all that hear it with visions so horrific that their sanity is tested.

Unless it is stopped, the monster takes about an hour to reach town. It kills whatever it comes upon along the way. There, the characters and any friends they might have made in the community can take a stand against the monster. Most people do not participate in the fight, however, and some even offer themselves up as sacrifices in hopes of placating the god. In any event, Makra gorges itself, feeding on those mortals who failed to uphold the ancient bargain. If it becomes injured, the monster retreats to the lake, where it bides its time for a few weeks until it can emerge once more and destroy the town. If the characters head into the Brigands' Cave after this development, Makra rises from the waters in area H and attacks. If prevented from fleeing, Makra fights to the death.

MAKRA

DIFFICULTY 100

Size 6 horrifying monster

Perception 14 (+4); darksight
Defense 14; **Health** 100; **Insanity** —; **Corruption** 6
Strength 15 (+5), **Agility** 12 (+2), **Intellect** 9 (–1), **Will** 13 (+3)
Speed 12; swimmer
Immune gaining Insanity
Maddening Wail The first time Makra takes damage in a round, it looses a horrific noise from its many mouths. Each creature within medium range of it must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1 Insanity.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Tentacles (melee) +5 with 1 boon (1d6 + 2)
Teeth (melee; reach 3) +5 with 1 boon (3d6)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Tentacle Slam Makra attacks one creature with its tentacles, and the attack deals 1d6 extra damage. A creature that takes damage from tentacle slam must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or fall prone.
Tentacle Flurry Makra attacks up to four creatures it can reach with its tentacles.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Heaving Bulk When a creature gets a success on an attack roll against Makra, the monster can use a triggered action to move up to half its Speed or attack with its tentacles.

MAKRA DOESN'T RISE

It's possible that the characters dealt with Makra in advance of the ceremony by killing the monster in area H. If so, the townsfolk become terrified, thinking that the dark times will return and that their god has forsaken them. The townsfolk might kill the sacrifices themselves to draw forth their god, but nothing they do works, and the waters remain undisturbed.

CONCLUSION

The adventure is designed to conclude when the characters deal with Makra, thereby putting an end to the sacrifices the locals make to it. Some other outcomes are possible, however, based on the success or failure of the characters' investigation.

The Monster: If the characters fail to kill the lurk, it continues to give the locals trouble until it eventually loses interest and moves on.

The Brigands: If the characters fail to deal with the brigands, they move on to greener pastures after a few days. They wander through the countryside for several weeks, adding more to their numbers, until they become a significant threat to the western lands of the Northern Reach. The government of one town or another might hire the characters to deal with these criminals once and for all.

The Inquisition: The Inquisition could cause a great deal of trouble for the characters. As noted earlier, if left to their own devices, the inquisitor and his guards torture and execute a few people before the inquisitor becomes satisfied that he has done the New God's work and moves on. If the characters interfered and the inquisitor lives, he decides the characters are at least supporting the local heathens or, at worst, responsible for the community's decline into corruption.

If the inquisitor flees, he returns at the head of a force of **100 mercenaries** recruited from High Watch (a Crusader State to the north) to raze the town.

If the group has already moved on, the inquisitor, or allies sympathetic to his extremist cause, might seek out the characters for questioning, torture, and execution. Even if the characters kill the inquisitor, other agents of the Cult look into his death or disappearance, which leads them to Mournhollow and, possibly, on the group's trail.

The God in the Lake: Makra is no slouch in battle and could be more than the group can handle. If the monster survives, it returns to the lake, where it rests until time for the next sacrifice.

Mournhollow: The events in this adventure leave the town changed. The deaths among the townsfolk combined with the town's new troubles with the Cult of the New God make many people question whether they should stay here. Several families pack up and head out for some other outpost of civilization where they hope to begin again. If the characters destroyed Makra, many more join the departing folk, some because they fear the dark god will return in a new form and others out of guilt for their complicity in past sacrifices. Although it's possible for Mournhollow to bounce back after this adventure, it's more likely that the town will join the countless other settlements that have been emptied of people, destroyed by Cult purging or beastmen raids, or beset by other catastrophes that herald the Demon Lord's inexorable approach.