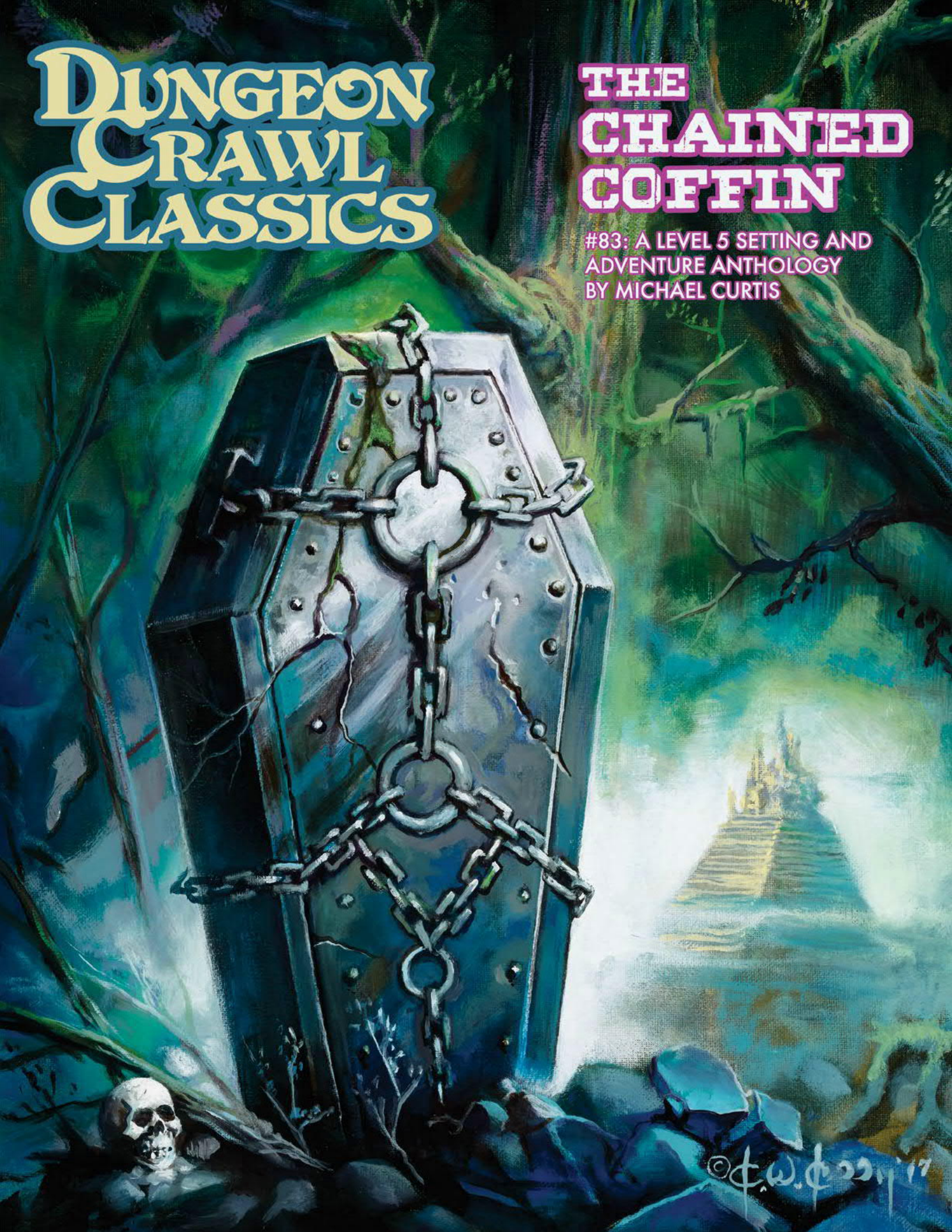


# DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

## THE CHAINED COFFIN

#83: A LEVEL 5 SETTING AND  
ADVENTURE ANTHOLOGY  
BY MICHAEL CURTIS



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# THE CHAINED COFFIN

## A LEVEL 5 SETTING AND ADVENTURE ANTHOLOGY

Writer: Michael Curtis • Cover art: Ken Kelly (color), Doug Kovacs (foil)  
Editor: Rev. Dak J. Ultimak • Interior Art: Chris Arneson, Doug Kovacs,  
Cliff Kurowski, William McAusland, Bradley McDevitt, Peter Mullen, Stefan Poag,  
Mike Wilson • Cartography: Mark Allen, Steve Crompton, Doug Kovacs, Stefan  
Poag • Art direction and layout: Joseph Goodman • Layout: Matt Hildebrand

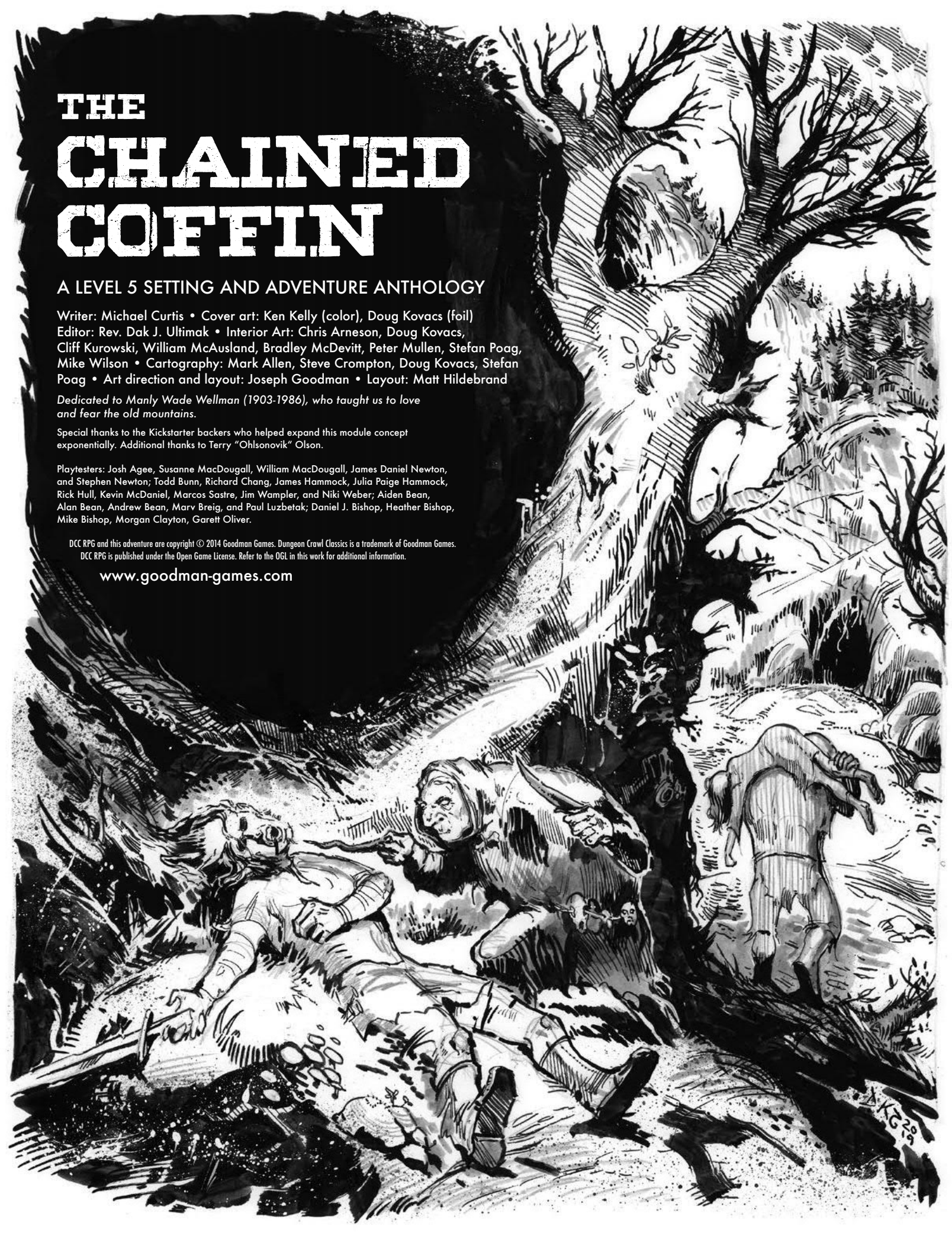
*Dedicated to Manly Wade Wellman (1903-1986), who taught us to love  
and fear the old mountains.*

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Playtesters: Josh Agee, Susanne MacDougall, William MacDougall, James Daniel Newton,  
and Stephen Newton; Todd Bunn, Richard Chang, James Hammock, Julia Paige Hammock,  
Rick Hull, Kevin McDaniel, Marcos Sastre, Jim Wampler, and Niki Weber; Aiden Bean,  
Alan Bean, Andrew Bean, Marv Breig, and Paul Luzbetak; Daniel J. Bishop, Heather Bishop,  
Mike Bishop, Morgan Clayton, Garrett Oliver.

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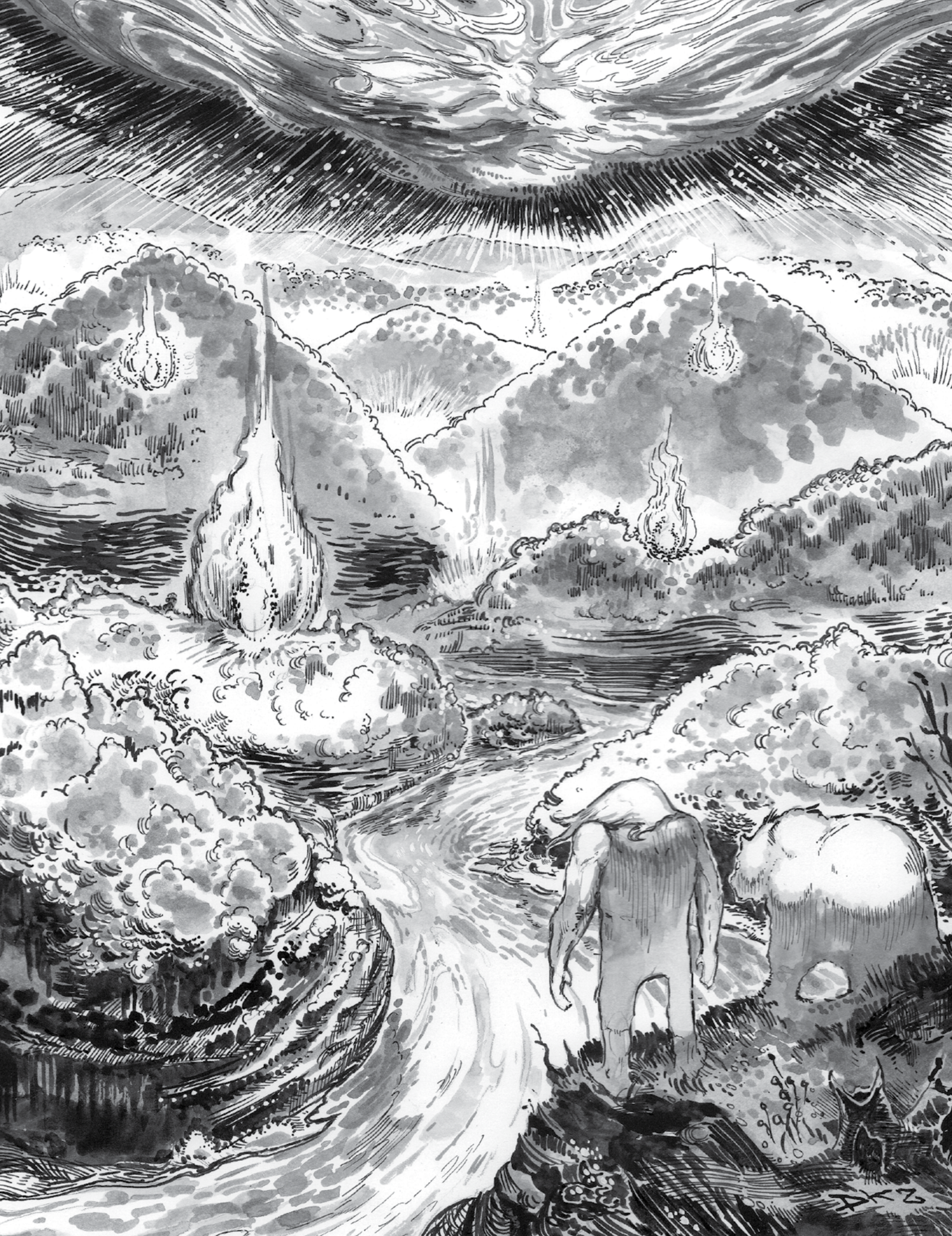




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## CHAPTER ONE

# RETURNING TO THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

*There's something about this place that keeps calling me back.  
I dream of it whenever I'm away.*

*I just wish I could say these dreams were always pleasant...*







# INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAINED COFFIN REPRINT

by Michael Curtis

I cannot escape the mountains.



n fairness, I've never actually tried, because the call of those ancient giants is too powerful to abandon. My soul is never calmer than when I can feel bare rock beneath my feet, see the land vanish into the mist of distance below me, and feel the wind touch my face. The mountains are one of two places that I ever feel truly at home.

Anyone familiar with Manly Wade Wellman's John the Balladeer tales therefore understands why these stories resonate with me. Like the songs that John sings, these stories have their own unique music that speaks to the soul. They depict a land that feels both welcoming and foreboding, much like the mountains themselves; a place of laughter and shadow.

From the first time I read "O, Ugly Bird!" I knew Wellman was a kindred spirit. I've returned many times to the Appalachians he described, wandering along with John, that champion of good, as he confronted everything from conjure-men to demons to vampires, never tiring of either the plots or the way that Wellman paints the landscape with his choice of language. He remains to many the poet laureate of the Appalachians.

Exposure to Wellman's stories spurred me to explore the mountains beyond what he wrote. I acquired various books on Appalachian folklore and history, investigated musical genres native to the region, and studied the people who shaped the mountains—sometimes literally. This newfound knowledge merged with my firsthand experiences in New York's Catskill region, providing me with a vast storehouse of mental images and ideas. As that storehouse swelled, I knew something had to be done with its contents.

Finally, one day, a flash in my brainpan struck. I experienced a crystal clear mental vision of a band of people hauling a mysterious coffin, one bound in chains and inscribed with eldritch symbols, over a mountain ridge as a storm raged. It was from this image, which itself owes something to Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, that all this acquired mountain lore coalesced into a single gestalt concept. And from that concept, *The Chained Coffin* was born.

Luckily for me and for the adventure, *Dungeon Crawl Classics* is a game dedicated to re-exploring the Appendix N origins of fantasy role-playing. Wellman's inclusion on that

list gave me the leverage necessary to pitch the adventure to Joseph Goodman. I had no expectations about how he'd receive the idea of an adventure set in a fantastical version of America instead of the pseudo-Western medieval Europe landscapes that dominate the hobby. Joseph took a shine to the idea, however, and I got to writing.

*The Chained Coffin* remains one of the more memorable and fun adventures I've ever written. Every day saw new ideas percolating in my mental stewpot, more notions than I'd ever manage to squeeze into a 10k word count manuscript. In the emails between Joe and myself, I early on suggested that if *The Chained Coffin* turned out to be a popular module, I had plenty of material for a sequel or three waiting in the wings. And it was a good thing I did.

Shortly after the adventure was submitted, Joseph decided to Kickstart the module to see if people were willing to pay a little more for the spinning wheel puzzle featured in the scenario. Goodman Games had just come off an extremely successful Kickstarter for *Metamorphosis Alpha*, and was looking to test the idea of expanded adventures, modules bigger than the typical DCC release. The concept of a mini campaign in a boxed set was discussed and, as it often happens, I'd serve as the test pilot to see if the idea would stay in the air or not.

It turned out that people loved the idea of the mini campaign setting and that there was something about the Shudder Mountains that appealed to backers. The Kickstarter was a tremendous success, growing from a single adventure with a cool prop to a complete campaign set containing additional adventures, supplements, and a regional map. Some backers also received customized dice and a hip flask, as well.

Readers loved the module and the bonus material. To this day, people approach me at conventions or online to tell me they greatly enjoy the Shudder Mountains and its associated adventures. These people, pillars of humanity one and all, express how different the Shudders feel from your standard DCC RPG setting. That pleases me a great deal. One of the reasons I wrote *The Chained Coffin* was to demonstrate that not every DCC campaign has to be a "gonzo" place filled with blood gods, sorcerous robot villains, soul-chugging swords, and other zaniness. If DCC RPG's default setting is "metal" (something I neither agree with nor enjoy), then the Shudder Mountains are set firmly on "country and blues." The Shudders are the aperitif to cleanse the





palette after consuming too much gonzo, allowing one to savor the more delicate flavors of the game.

I'm greatly proud of this setting and the adventures that call it their home. I regularly rank the Shudder Mountains among the top five things I've produced for the role-playing hobby. People who live or grew up in the Appalachians have told me what a tremendous job I've done presenting something that feels authentic to the mountains while maintaining its uniqueness. And, for a New York boy, that's the highest praise I can ask for. I've always approached the Appalachian people and their culture with respect and tried to steer clear of stereotyping. I believe I've succeeded, allowing the richness of the mountains and the cultures that developed there to speak clearly for themselves.

Now, for the first time, all the Shudder Mountain material to date, plus some new information written especially for this reprint, are collected in one handy volume. For those of you already familiar with the Shudder Mountains and the tales of Manly Wade Wellman, this book is a homecoming, a chance to be among friends (one might even say a *Long Lost Friend*) once more. If this is your first trip to the mountains, Appalachians or Shudders, you're in for a role-playing experience seldom seen before. It is a place as rich as Middle-earth or Hyboria, but entirely its own. Whether you're here for the first time or the fiftieth, welcome to the mountains, my friend. If you're lucky, you won't want to leave either.

— Michael Curtis  
September 28th, 2017



## CHAPTER TWO

# A LAND AND PEOPLE WONDERFUL AND STRANGE

*There is nowhere else like the Shudder Mountains and no other people like the Shudfolk.*

*To know either is to love them, but also to fear them.*





# ALMANAC OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

## INTRODUCTION

*"The mountains are calling and I must go." – John Muir*

**H**idy, traveler. You look tired. Why not pull up a bit of stump for a while before moving on? I've got a few words to say if you're willing to hark to 'em afore we get going.

You're about to take a journey to a place that possesses both heartbreaking beauty and bone-chilling horror. A land filled with some of the kindest, goodly-hearted people you'll ever have the pleasure of meeting as well as the blackest souls to ever wander the earth. A stretch of worn-down hills and pine-shadowed hollows known as the Shudder Mountains.

The Shudder Mountains were born from an eccentric idea I had to pay homage to the works of Appendix N author, Manly Wade Wellman. My goal was to transform the rich culture and folklore of the Appalachian Mountains, so evocatively portrayed by Wellman in his Silver John series of stories, into the sword & sorcery genre. It seemed a wild scheme but Joseph Goodman was both generous and equally crazy enough to grant his permission. The result was DCC #83 *The Chained Coffin*.

I only managed to scratch the surface of the Shudder Mountains in that adventure and I eagerly told Joseph that, if the adventure proved a popular one, I'd be willing to return to the Shudders as there was a lot left unsaid about the place. Luckily for me, I wouldn't have to wait that long. Thanks to the success of *The Chained Coffin* Kickstarter campaign, I was given the opportunity to go back to the mountains and reveal some more of its secrets.

I've spent a lot of time in the Shudder Mountains over the last few months, taking a figurative journey through its hollows and over its peaks. I've sat by the fires of the Shudfolk (after reassuring them I was no conjure-man, of course) and heard their stories. I've seen witches call up their fiendish masters under a horned moon and fled for my life from the

strange things birthed in the pools of tainted lunar magic known as spoils. And all the while I took notes, knowing you kind folks wanted to know more about the Shudders.

Now, in the safety of my home, I've recorded much of what I've learned about the mountains and the strange denizens that dwell there. In the following pages you'll learn all about the Shudfolk, the history of the Shudder Mountains, the odd creatures that prowl its depths, the unusual superstitions and magic that are still taught in the backwoods, and a pair of adventures to get your own Shudder Mountain campaign going. I hope you enjoy what you're about to read as much as I did writing it!

The strange thing is that, despite the additional room to document life in the Shudders, I'm still not done. There's a hundred score more tales to tell, critters to meet, spells to cast, and songs to be sung in the mountains and I simply ran out of room. Perhaps, if you all let Goodman Games kindly know how much you enjoyed the Shudder Mountains, I'll get another chance to return to the hills and hollows and spin a few more yarns.

In the meantime, I leave it up to you to tell your own stories in the Shudders. The following material is enough to get you started, but like the Shudfolk, themselves, you'll also need to have a strong streak of self-reliance to make it in the mountains. If you find yourself lacking a scrap of mountain lore, don't hesitate in weaving your own tale to fill that hole. The Shudder Mountains belong to all of us, Shudfolk and flatlander, designer and player alike. Enjoy its beauty, mystery, and terror during your stay there. I truly hope to meet you all soon up there in the hills and share a tale or two with you about the journey!

Michael Curtis  
August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014





# PART ONE: THE LAND



he land of the Shudder Mountains region has as much character as the individuals who reside within in. From rolling hills, to pine-thick hollows, to stark peaks silhouetted against the sky, travel through the area brings a wayfarer face-to-face with an array of vistas both solemn and beautiful. This chapter discusses both the history of the Shudder Mountains and how the land came to be, and details the unique places of interest lying within its boundaries, awaiting visitors.

## A HISTORY OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS



he Shudder Mountains are one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world. They were formed hundreds of millions of years ago when the earth buckled as tectonic plates collided. Geological forces pushed the earth up from a shallow seabed, creating towering, jagged peaks of naked stone. The rising land drained the sea away, leaving the newly-birthed mountain range in its place. The early Shudder Mountains once soared up to 15,000 feet in height, a chain of stony giants running roughly northeast to southwest for several hundred miles.

The world was warmer in those prehistoric days and the Shudder Mountains were nearly tropic in climate. The hot, humid mountain valleys were an ideal environment for cold-blooded species. Thus, it was the serpent-men who first slithered into the mountains, building their alien cities in the steep-walled valleys and gathering to conduct bizarre rituals in the caverns that honeycombed the earth below. The serpent-men's grip over the mountain chain was absolute, and they waged decimating warfare against all who invaded their territory. Primitive dwarven tribes lusting after the rich mineral resources of the mountains were massacred by the serpentine overlords, and elven nomads drawn to the beautiful forests that filled the valleys could not overcome the serpent-men wizards that opposed them. As a result of the serpent-men's dominance of the mountains, the long-lived demi-human races never established a foothold in the Shudders, leaving no legacy of dwarven holdfasts or elven glades. It would be humanity's task to eventually break the serpent-men's grasp and lay claim to the rugged land for themselves.

As undisputed masters of the mountains for eons, the serpent-men feared no other creature, but it would be the environment that ultimately brought about their downfall. The world began to grow cooler, heralding the first of several ice ages that arose in the ancient epochs. As glaciers pushed down from the north, many species fled the encroaching ice and sought sanctuary in the mountains. Herds of mammoths climbed into the valleys, followed by the Neolithic human tribes that hunted them. The serpent-men fought to defend their lands from these interlopers, but the cooling temperatures hindered the reptilian race, turning them sluggish and muddling their minds. Deprived of their

strength and cunning, the serpent-men, once the apex of civilization in the mountains, found themselves falling beneath the stone spears of primitive humanity. The serpents withdrew from the valleys, abandoning their settlements to seek the protection of the mountain caves, leaving the Neolithic tribes as the Shudders' new dominant species. For generations, the serpent-men continued to try and drive out the victorious human tribes, launching guerrilla strikes against mankind, but ultimately the snakes degenerated in their subterranean holds and abandoned the surface world to Man. The final fate of the serpent-men survivors is unknown, but it is said that the sound of strange drums still resound in the deepest caverns, hinting that the devolved ancestors of the snake-folk endure in the earth. And although the wondrously sinuous cities the serpent-men built in the mountains are long gone, faint traces of their mastery remain. Odd stones and the rare relic persist, awaiting discovery in forgotten corners of the Shudder Mountains.

The primitive tribes held the mountains for many generations, thriving in the bountiful, sheltered valleys. When the glaciers receded, Mankind remained, the haze of myriad campfires joined the morning mist to fill hollows of the Shudders. But like the serpent-men before them, they encountered a threat to their mountainous territory and fell to outside invaders. However, unlike the serpent-men, the enemies of these early human tribes came not from the northern lands, but descended from the sky overhead.

In those primeval days, a second moon rode the night sky. This other moon was a twisted reflection of its mate, a disk of tarnished silver compared to its luminous twin. In scraps of surviving lore left behind by vanished empires, the moon was called "Luhsaal" and it was home to a race of alien sorcerer-kings. This race was the Hsaal, a species of towering humanoids who incorporated magic into their civilization the way other races utilize brick and stone. The Hsaal demonstrated a mastery of magic as yet unknown in the worlds beyond Luhsaal, but for all their sorcery, the lunar race required more mundane materials to maintain their prolonged civilization. Having mined their moon bare of these essential elements, the Hsaal descended to the young world beneath the moon's orbit, establishing colonies in regions where the sought-after resources were abundant. The Shudder Mountains were one such site and amongst the earliest to be colonized by the Hsaal.

When the first Hsaal arrived in the mountains, the human tribes were wonderstruck. Glimpsing the 7' tall race of lithesome humanoids with flesh the color of silvery ash and crested heads, the primitive clans thought the Hsaal to be emissaries of their primordial gods. Wonder soon changed to anger, however, as the Hsaal sought to enslave the tribes as laborers. Mankind, roused to barbaric rage, fought back against the Hsaal, but were no match for the unearthly magic the lunar race commanded. Rather than accept defeat, the human tribes took a lesson from their

serpent-men foes and retreated into the mountain caverns. The Hsaal weighed the cost of rooting the tribes out of the caves and concluded the loss of Hsaalian life would be high. Rather than pry the original human occupants of the mountains from their subterranean refuges, it was more efficient to import slaves from other Hsaalian colony sites, places where the local populace had already been subjugated. It was these imported laborers that the current residents of the mountain, the Shudfolk, would eventually descend from.

Meanwhile, the native human tribes found themselves imprisoned within the caverns they retreated to. Like the serpent-men, attempts were made to continue an insurgency against the Hsaal, but their simple weapons and rudimentary magic was no match for lunar sorcery. The first tribes were pushed to the brink of extinction, but some clans survived in their new troglodytic world, adapting to the darkness. Whether these survivors discovered the descendants of their ancient serpent-men enemies and joined in battle once again is unknown, but explorers of the Shudder Mountain caves have reported encounters with a pale, human-like species of cannibals ideally suited for underground existence. These creatures may be the ancestors of the Shudder's first human occupants, now long devolved.

As the imported slave laborers arrived in the mountains, the Hsaal made subtle alterations to their new workers' bodies and minds, employing magic to optimize the human slaves for their new home and tasks. The sorcery-altered slave bloodlines gave birth to a strain of rugged humanity, well-suited for the hard conditions of both their work and their mountainous home. To ensure the slaves wouldn't seek to escape, the Hsaal overlords implanted a geas in them, creating a desire in each servant to remain within the mountains and eschewing thoughts of what lay beyond the peaks. Once properly conditioned, the Hsaal put the slaves to work, carving out mines in the mountains to extract the minerals the lunar civilization required. These diggings remain to this day, pockmarking the slopes of the Shudders and mystifying both Shudfolk and flatlander visitors alike.

The Hsaal, like those who came before them, controlled the Shudder Mountain region for generations, gradually extracting the necessary resources from the earth and shipping it home to Luhsaal by mystical gates and undreamed of transports. The satraps that ruled the colonies grew rich and decadent. Their slaves were too well-conditioned to revolt and specially-bred overseers, creatures that would be known later as the Abandoned, attended to the day-to-day management of the mines. The Hsaal of the Shudders enjoyed an idyllic life — until their world literally shattered.

The sorcerer-kings of Luhsaal lived and breathed magic, but magic, like an animal, can turn on its master. The Hsaalian wizards pushed their magic too far, setting off a chain reaction that spread like wildfire across the moon. Massive rifts erupted in the lunar surface, cities died in conflagrations, and the magical catastrophe grew to apocalyptic proportions. As the Hsaal of the Shudder Mountains watched in horror, their home moon of Luhsaal tore itself apart in

the sky and plummeted through a titanic rift in time and space. As it vanished from the sky, echoes of the magical disaster rippled down from space, following the mystical ties the Hsaal colonies had with their lunar home. The forces of the magical cataclysm blasted through the transport gates, reverberating across the landscape. Mountain peaks were reduced to rubble and the entire mountain chain rumbled under the power of the blasts. Killing waves of lambent black fire chased their way across the sorcerous ties connecting the Hsaal of the Shudder Mountains, destroying their bodies and spilling their once-restrained magical power across the land. In a matter of moments, the Hsaal colonists were destroyed, leaving their slaves without masters.

Once the aftershocks faded and the mountains grew silent again, the slaves looked out across the devastation, their souls filled with a mixture of abject horror, uncertainty, and — strangely — elation. For the first time in generations, the slaves found themselves free. Their overseers, the Abandoned, lacking orders and bound to their mines by duty and sorcery, cowered in the diggings. Some slaves returned to the mines, uncertain of what else to do and never emerged. A far larger number of the now liberated workers gathered together, and fled from their former workplaces, seeking shelter in the myriad remote hollows of the mountains.

The former slaves, still under the influence of the ancient geas that lay upon their bloodline, remained tied to the mountains. Despite the horrors they endured during their servitude and in the wake of the lunar cataclysm, this strain of man felt a profound peace in the shadow of the mountains. Over time, the refugees fragmented into separate clans and families, building communities across the region. After the passing of untold generations, the former slaves grew from barbarism to learn agriculture and master metal-working, eventually become the Shudfolk who dwell in the mountains to this day.

The Shudfolk remained an isolated society for generations, but ultimately other cultures came into contact with the mountain people. As borders expanded and traders sought new markets, outsiders began climbing into the pine-covered mountains and encountered the reclusive Shudfolk. After a few violent conflicts with the mountain clans, negotiators convinced the outermost families of the benefit of trade between the hillfolk and the flatlanders, establishing trading partnerships and routes that exist even today. For the first time since their ancestors were brought to the mountains, the Shudfolk sampled from the world beyond the Shudder Mountains, gradually becoming familiar with the outside lands. Despite this acclimation, the Shudfolk fiercely maintain their culture's heritage and resist any large scale changes to their way of life. The Shudfolk have benefited from their contact with the outside world, but not so much that they're ready to sell their cultural identity for luxuries from beyond the mountains. This does not mean that life remains constant in the mountains, however.

Six centuries ago, an event occurred that changed the tone of



life in the mountains. Three devils, minor princes in Hell's hierarchy, were drawn to the Shudders. Perhaps it was the Hsaalian taint in the Shudfolk's veins or the spoils that stain the landscape that caught the attention of the infernal entities, calling to them the way the mountains sing to the Shudfolk's souls. The three, Anector, Haade, and Modeca are by no means allies. Instead the devils, known as the Three, are rivals for the souls of all sentient creatures who dwell in the mountains. Each attempts to increase the number of mortal souls pledged to them in servitude, raising their status amongst Hell's hierarchy in the process. The Three constantly contest with one another, using the mortals who pledged their souls as pawns on their mountainous chessboard. In return for service, many witches and conjure-men have been granted—temporarily—great power by their infernal masters. The Three's interest in the Shudders has resulted in a rise in the number of witches who call the mountains home and the Sovereign Church finds itself assailed by dark sorcery from all sides. Given the superstitious nature of the Shudfolk, many of them believe a time of reckoning is coming when the forces of good and evil square off against one another. There is no doubt in their minds that it will be the Shudder Mountains that will serve as the final battleground.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS TODAY



In many ways the Shudder Mountains have stood unchanged since the ancient days of prehistory, remaining a place where nature reigns supreme and its mysteries intact despite eons of occupation. In others, however, it has become nearly unrecognizable.

The largest change to the Shudders is in its topography. The soaring, jagged mountains of the ancient world are long gone, worn down by the unrelenting process of time, erosion, and grinding glaciers. The catastrophic forces unleashed on the land during the destruction of Luhsaal also altered the landscape, leveling mountain peaks and causing titanic earthquakes. It is the memory of these earth tremors, preserved in fragments by the Shudfolk's legends, which give the mountains their name. The once high, saw-toothed mountain peaks, have been replaced by gentle rolling mountains. In their youth, the peaks rose as high as 15,000 feet, but now age has worn the mountains down to half that height.

The geology of the mountains is comprised of limestone, granite, shale, schist, sandstone, and quartz. Running through the stone are veins of iron and zinc, as well as massive deposits of coal. Gold and silver veins remain undiscovered in the mountains, and gemstones such as emeralds, rubies, garnets, aquamarines, sapphires, topaz, amethyst, citrine, moonstone, and peridots can be pried from the ground with patient searching.

The Shudder Mountains are home to a vast river network. Rivulets and streams flow down from the mountain heights, growing into creeks and rivers that carved the numerous valleys throughout the Shudders. The Crowclack, Phophurd,

and Drowning are the largest of these rivers, their banks home to uncounted farmsteads and trading posts.

The flowing waters and natural geological forces gave birth to countless valleys, dells, coves, and vales throughout the mountains, known collectively as "hollows" (or "hollers," depending on the local patois). These low-lying areas, separated from one another by steep mountain slopes or high ridges, form isolated pockets of woodlands where dense groves of trees grow, encouraged by the rich soil deposits that accumulate there.

A wide array of tree species cover the rolling hills and mountain slopes. Consisting of a mixture of deciduous and coniferous trees, one finds oak, hickory, chestnut, spruce, pine, beech, poplar, hemlock, fir, and balsam growing in the Shudders. In the autumn months, the Mountains transform into a vista of bright yellows, oranges, and reds, with stands of dark green and blue conifers breaking up the palette. Wildflowers fill mountain meadows, kudzu spreads its vines along river banks, and ferns and mosses sprout in dark woods and on rocky cliff faces.

Wildlife of the Shudders is even more varied than its plant life, providing both meat for Shudfolk stewpots and sources of terror for travelers. Deer, opossum, raccoon, wild boar, and squirrel are hunted for their meat, while gray wolves, grizzly and black bears, bobcats, and cougars prowl the slopes and woods making life dangerous for hunters that stray too far into the backwoods. Serpents are rife in the Shudders and the Shudfolk have a healthy respect for the rattlesnakes, copperheads, and water moccasins that slither among the stones and nest in caves.

Far more dangerous than these animal species are the monstrous creatures of the mountains. Species of giant serpents slither through the woods and gargantuan salamanders ambush prey from the river rocks. Tribes of hill giants maintain crude holdings in the hollows and moss-back trolls prowl along the mountain slopes. Undead—especially ghost, phantoms, and "hants"—emerge from their resting places after the sun goes down to feed on the life-force of the living. Beneath the ground, earth hounds engage in ghoulish foraging and the twisted descendants of the Shudders' first human occupants wriggle. Isolated and barbaric enclaves of serpent-men may also continue a hellish existence in the deepest caverns of the mountains.



Despite this panoply of horrors, the worst monsters found in the Shudders are unique ones. When the Hsaal were destroyed eons ago, their magic spilled across the land, accumulating in far-flung places. There the magic energy festered, becoming hot spots of malignant sorcery known as spoils (see *The Chained Coffin Companion*, p. 2). The spoils sometimes give birth to hitherto unseen creatures that slink through the hollows in search of a meal or become slaves to the witches and conjure-men who dwell in the Shudders.

## PLACES OF INTEREST IN THE MOUNTAINS



With such a rich and ancient history, the Shudder Mountains contain a large number of interesting (and often dangerous) sites to explore. Some of these places of interest are natural phenomenon, the result of uncounted years of geological and environmental forces at work. Others were erected by the hands of man—or other sentient races—and run the gamut from everyday places of business to hoary ruins containing ancient mysteries forgotten by the modern world. In this section, we'll consider each in turn.

Note that there are a number of locations keyed on the Shudder Mountain regional map accompanying this book that are not described here. It is the author's intent to present the judge with several interesting-sounding locales but allow the judge to create his own content for these sites as required by the campaign. As always, the judge has complete freedom to remove or alter the information provided below to best suit the desires of himself and his players.

### GEOGRAPHICAL SITES

The following locations are detailed on the Shudder Mountain regional map, but this is by no means a complete account of all the natural wonders and places of interest waiting to be found in the Shudders. Uncounted farmsteads dot the river valleys and hollows, for example, and an examination of the Deep Hollows map in *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin* demonstrates how many secrets a handful of hexes can contain. The judge is encouraged to create his own settlements and places of interest as his needs and desires dictate.

**Bald Hill:** This hill is half-covered with trees and scrub plants, with the foliage ending abruptly before it reaches the top of the hillock. Scorched and blasted rocks protrude from the earth, and shallow craters mar the hilltop. This devastation is the result of an abnormally high number of lightning strikes that pound the hill during the fierce thunderstorms that roll through the mountains. Many postulate the lightning strikes are caused by a rich iron deposit located beneath the hill, but others claim supernatural forces are at work. In the hidden lore of witches, it is said that the devil, Haade, the First of the Three, frequents this hilltop. Those wishing to make a compact with the First of the Three should venture up Bald Hill when the weather turns foreboding.

**Bog Hollow:** Several natural springs slowly burble up into this high mountain hollow transforming the vale's bottomland into a marshy bog. Despite a draining stream running down to the Phophurd River, the mountain cove remains marshy year round, even during the worst of the summer droughts. Bog Hollow is an ominous place. Dead swamp cedars stand in the midst of scum-covered pools like skeletal hands reaching towards the sky. The sound of croaking frogs fills the air and, at night, the ghostly glow of foxfire is omnipresent. Most fearsome are the large number of water moccasins and other water snakes that slither through the pools. A forgotten serpent-man temple attracts these snakes, who unknowingly help guard the strange artifacts and ancient treasures secreted within the temple's ruined walls.

**Carrion Peak:** Shudfolk legend has it that this mountain was once home to a great beast, the identity of which varies from tale to tale. Some stories maintain it was a tremendous wyrm or serpent, while others identify it as a creature that fell from the night sky. Legend holds that it rampaged along the mountain's slopes for centuries before perishing at the hands of a Shudfolk hero. As the monster's body rotted beneath the sun, gargantuan scavenger birds were drawn by the stink of putrefying flesh and they picked the carcass clean. The descendants of these giant buzzards still roost on Carrion Peak, soaring on the thermals in search of meals. No one has scaled the mountain since the monster's demise and returned alive and its bones—as well as treasure of old—are believed to still reside near the mountain's peak.

**Ten-Mile Lake:** The largest lake in the mountains, Ten-Mile Lake is a deep, clear body of water fed by creeks flowing down from the surrounding mountains. The lake sustains a bounty of fish and other aquatic animals, feeding the several small Shudfolk communities that stand along the lakeside. The fishing, however, is not always easy, for the lake is home to immense catfish that prowl the depths and sometimes drag anglers to their dooms. The giant mudcats lurk in the deepest part of the lake, where the local Shudfolk claim strange stone structures can be seen half-buried in the lake bottom when the sun is at its zenith. Due to the depth of these ruins and the monstrous catfish that lair within them, no one has successfully plumbed the structures to uncover their secrets.

**Sour Spring Hollow:** Formerly known as "Sweet Spring Hollow" for the natural well located here, this vale acquired a nasty reputation when the Hobb family, a clan of witches and conjure-men, took up residence. Their presence was said to taint the spring, forever changing the dell's name to "Sour Spring Hollow." The Hobbs are long gone and only the overgrown ruins of their cabins remain. Nevertheless, Sour Spring Hollow is avoided by most Shudfolk, although it's believed witch liquor bootleggers may use the secluded and tainted hollow to brew their wares. Further details on this place are found in the "Sour Spring Hollow" adventure accompanying this supplement.



### **Yander Mountain and the Woeful Caverns:**

This mountain overlooks Ridge Road, a once-popular trade route leading from the Shudfolk communities of Hark and Whistler's Knob. A network of natural limestone caves meanders its way beneath the mountain, diving deep into the earth to connect with other subterranean spaces. Over the past several decades, Yander Mountain and the Woeful Caverns, as the caves are known, have acquired a fearsome reputation. Wayfarers traveling along Ridge Road go missing near the mountain and the occupants of several Shudfolk farmsteads close to the peak have been discovered massacred. As a result, few travelers journey on Ridge Road these days and the local Shudfolk fear the mountain. Despite the legends of an evil presence lurking in the caves, some fool-hardy souls have delved into the caverns, drawn by stories of glowing "fetch lights" sighted on the mountain. These lights are believed to appear near undiscovered riches. So far, no one who has entered the Woeful Caverns has emerged alive. For more details on the occupants of the Woeful Caverns and Yander Mountain's secrets, see the adventure "The Woeful Caverns under Yander Mountain" accompanying this book.

**The Deep Hollows:** Fashioned by three creeks flowing down out of the mountains, the Deep Hollows is the name given to a trio of river valleys located near the eastern edge of the Shudder Mountains. The three vales, known as Claw Hollow, Bad Lick Hollow, and Spook Hollow, are said to house a clan of hill giants, the home of the witch, Granny Huldah, and ancient ruins perhaps dating back to the Hsaalian occupation. Additional information on the Deep Hollows can be found in *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin*.

**The Wildwood:** Travelers venturing deep into the depths of the Shudders report that a large forest grows in a long, wide valley surrounded by high peaks. Explorers descending into the woods tend to either not remain long inside its shadowy interior or never emerge again. Unknown to outsiders, the Wildwood is home to a menagerie of bizarre monstrosities warring with one another and devouring anyone who stumbles across their paths. The origin of these beasts is believed to be a titanic spoil festering in the heart of the forest since the Hsaal's destruction. If this is true, it stands to reason that other legacies—in the form of ruins, artifacts, and forgotten lore—may also exist within the Wildwood.

## **TOWNS, HAMLETS, AND SCRAPS OF CIVILIZATION BACK YONDER**

**Bent Pine:** This community is more trade outpost than true village. Consisting of a mere dozen buildings, Bent Pine serves as a common meeting place for flatlander merchants coming to the Shudder Mountains in search of local commodities like timber, handcrafted woodwork, and—increasingly—witch liquor. Bent Pine is likely the last civilized place travelers heading into the Deep Hollows pass through before entering the mountains proper. More information on Bent Pine is found in *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin*.



**Chimbley Rock:** This hamlet is simply a dozen log buildings erected at the base of the high stone outcropping. A narrow cleft rises from the base of the rock to its apex, giving both the outcrop and the adjacent community their names. The residents of Chimbley Rock eke out their living by farming, weaving, and hunting the backwoods, selling their infrequent surplus to traveling merchants that stop at the village three times a year. More frequent visitors to the Rock (as the locals call it) are explorers curious about the odd stone menhir situated atop the outcropping. Anyone enduring the arduous climb up the rock's cleft discovers both a weathered finger of stone erected by unknown hands and a gorgeous view of the surrounding landscape. The purpose of the menhir is unknown, but rumors suggest it may be a landmark and rangefinder leading to a hidden ruin or treasure secreted on a nearby mountain.

**Dead Wolf:** This settlement serves as a common meeting ground for Shudfolk farmers living further up the Crow-clack River Valley. Commodities from Husk downriver make their way up to Dead Wolf by boat or horse trail, brought by enterprising traders looking to trade directly with the mountain folk (and thereby increase their profit margin). It is also the location where Shudfolk bring the wolves they kill in the surrounding mountains. Due to deprivations on Shudfolk livestock, a standing bounty of one piece of silver for male wolves and two silver for females is common in the Shudders. This blood price is paid by a pair of flatlander fur merchants who cater to discriminating markets. In recent months, a particularly large and violent wolf has been preying on livestock and has avoided all attempts to trap and kill it. Stories are beginning to circulate

that the wolf is a supernatural creature, but the tales don't agree if it's a lycanthrope, a spoil-spawned monstrosity, or a witch in animal form. The bounty on this particular predator has grown quite large.

**Devil's Hole:** This tiny hamlet is occupied by a small population of miners eking out their existence by digging coal from underneath the surrounding mountains. Although coal is not an overly valuable commodity, blacksmiths, armorers, and other metal-workers require it to run their forges and the majority of the nearby flatlander metal-smiths rely on Shudder Mountains coal for their work. The miners extract the substance from a number of rich deposits accessed by the natural sinkhole that gives the community its name. Unfortunately for the miners, the main coal seam they are working leads to a particularly large subterranean spoil. In the all too soon future, the unwitting miners will find themselves exposed to the spoil's power with unpredictable effects to follow.

**Husk:** Much like Bent Pine, Husk is more a trading outpost where flatlanders and Shudfolk meet to conduct business than a true Shudfolk village. Husk, as its name suggests, is primarily an agricultural marketplace where Shudfolk farmers sell their surplus corn crop and craftsmen trade their wares for goods unavailable in the mountains. A trio of immense corn cribs dominate the settlement, surrounded by a Sovereign church, stables, trading post, tavern, and a bawdy house staffed by flatlanders. There is a brisk witch liquor market operating out of the bawdy house, one that has survived numerous attempts by the community's constables to stamp out.

**Prosperity:** A collection of poorly-built log cabins and tents, the small hamlet of Prosperity belies its name. The community is home to a few dozen rugged individuals determined to make their fortune mining a meager gold vein that winds through the mountain above. A rough-and-tumble place even by Shudder Mountain standards, death seems to stalk the muddy streets of Prosperity. Miners murder one another over claim ownership, rockslides and flash floods decimate lives and property, and intermittent monster and animal attacks kill solitary prospectors on the mountain slopes. Only the occasional rich strike keeps the desperate miners of Prosperity from abandoning their diggings.

**Thundercrack:** Built in the fork of two rivers, Thundercrack is named for the fierce storms that rage high up in the mountains. These storms inevitably cause flash flooding down the Phophurd River Valley and the first residents of Thundercrack planned accordingly. The entire town is built atop pilings interconnected by wooden walkways and rope bridges. Despite these precautions, the town has lost buildings and lives to flooding in the past, but the resilient spirit of the Shudfolk ensures they rebuild and resume their lives here. Thundercrack's economic base is the mining that occurs in the surrounding mountains, especially the coal coming down from Devil's Hole and the scant products of Prosperity's workings. Poled barges move the ore downriver to flatlander markets, and young Shudfolk looking to experience life beyond the mountains often trav-

el to Thundercrack to seek passage on the barges bound for the outside world.

**Timber Drop:** The town of Timber Drop is the most civilized Shudfolk community by flatlander standards. Perched on the edge of a tumbling cascade that feeds a broad pool below, Timber Drop is the final destination for logs cut further up the Crowclack River Valley. Shudfolk lumberjacks pole the fallen trees downstream, abandoning their charges just before they plummet over the waterfall into the pool beneath. The steady supply of timber and the town's large number of sawyers has resulted in a community comprised of plank buildings rather than the log structures so common in the mountains. There is an ongoing competition amongst the lumberjacks to see who dares ride the logs closest to the waterfall's drop before leaping to safety. More than a few tree cutters have delayed their jump too long and fallen to their deaths. Local legend maintains the timber pool is haunted by the ghosts of these unfortunates, but, if this is true, they don't hinder business in Timber Drop.

**Toad Fork:** Named for the trail that splits near an odd-looking rocky outcrop that resembles a grinning toad, this village serves as a way station for travelers on their way deeper into the mountains. A large stone and timber inn (unusual for the region) named the Hoppytoad House shelters travelers. Impromptu concerts performed by the musically-inclined residents of the village are often held in the clearing behind the general store, and it's said that Old Man Roane knows nearly every song in the Shudders, sawing them out on his battered fiddle. He may be willing to teach an Old Song to a student if the learner can get past his crotchety personality.

**Ugly Bottom:** The first Shudfolk to farm this hollow discovered that, although the soil was rich, the sheer amount of rocks, dead-fall trees, and other natural obstacles that needed clearing before the hollow could be worked was a massive undertaking. In other words, it was ugly work. The name stuck and after generations of toil, Ugly Bottom is now quite picturesque. In high summer, the fields surrounding the log buildings are verdant with corn and the sound of chuckling brooks flowing through the hollow resounds in the mountain air. The residents of Ugly Bottom remain secretive for fear outsiders will come to the hollow and ruin their hard-earned paradise in the mountains. Some old timers in Ugly Bottom say that an elemental spirit dwells within the village and it is this entity that helps ensure the hollow's bounty.

**Yellow Skull:** Located deep in the mountains, Yellow Skull gets its name from a gargantuan and ancient skull unearthed there by Shudfolk farmers long ago. The massive cranium was so large that two grown men could stand within it. Despite a thorough plowing of the land around the skull, no other bones have been found, further increasing the mystery of where it came from. The skull is no longer present in the small village, having been stolen by a conjure-man's fiendish henchmen a century ago. The current whereabouts of the skull and what devious plans the sorcerer had in mind for the bony artifact remain unknown.





## SECRET PLACES AND MYSTERIOUS RUINS

**Luhmaal Wheel:** A relic from the bygone days of Hsaalian occupancy, the Luhmaal Wheel was an observatory and star clock constructed by that lunar race and keyed to the movement of their home world. The sorcerer-kings employed the site in their magical rituals and as one of the gateways to travel back and forth from the demon-haunted moon. When the Hsaal were destroyed, the Wheel was forgotten, sealed behind powerful wards. Although hidden, a series of events currently unfolding makes it likely the Wheel will soon be rediscovered and play an important role in the future (or lack thereof) of the Shudder Mountains. For more information on the Luhmaal Wheel, see *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin*.

**Makepeace Hill:** A century ago, a violent feud raged in the hollows between the Strikeleather and Weaver families. Nearly thirty people from both families perished in the fighting before the surviving members, sick of the bloodshed, made peace with one another. As a symbol of their truce, both families reinterred their deceased loved ones on a low hill near the head of Moon Hollow. The shared burying ground would be a reminder of the senseless violence and a pledge to never feud again. Although the living Strikeleathers and Weavers have maintained the peace, legend has it that the dead are not so quick to forget. Local folklore speaks of angry ghosts rising from their graves each night to continue their battle with one another and woe be unto anyone caught in the graveyard after sundown. Even the Strikeleathers and Weavers avoid Makepeace Hill after dark. The local tales also say that one of casualties of the feud was a witch man and he was unwittingly interred with a potent magical object he owned in life.

**Phantom Hollow:** Travelers in the mountains have sighted this mysterious hollow for centuries. It appears as a narrow vale containing a meandering creek and thick stands of trees. The ruin of a small city, one of odd stone architecture, rises from the valley floor along the banks of the creek. Few have ventured into the hollow and the dell seems to appear and disappear at random, manifesting in different places at different times. Legends suggest the entire hollow and the strange city may be an echo of the earliest days of the Shudder Mountains, a place caught in a repeating loop of time and space. If this is true, the city may

be of Hsaalian construction or even an artifact from the serpent-men's prehistoric dominion over the mountains.

**The Burn:** The site known as "The Burn" is a small meadow filled with scraggly grass and dark, dry soil. The rotten and scorched stubs of six poles protrude from the black earth, relics from a witch burning that occurred here three decades ago. A small clan of witches and conjuremen were rooted out of their remote farm by a Sovereign priest and set alight in this clearing. Despite the passing of thirty years, the clearing hasn't recovered. Some maintain this is a result of the witches' evil essence escaping into the ground as their bodies burned. Although little remains to intrigue visitors, cloaked and hooded figures are sometime glimpsed skulking around The Burn after dark, engaged in unknown purposes. Shudfolk "study witches" believe The Burn has magical properties. Sorcery worked here is amplified by the lingering witches' power. Spells that call upon forces beyond the ken of mankind or summon the attention of devils, demons, and potential patrons are more effective on The Burn.

**The Old Standamish Place:** Nearly eighty years ago, an enterprising flatlander named Halden Standamish built an opulent home in one of the Shudder's many hollows. Unlike the crude log cabins of the Shudfolk, Standamish constructed a fine home of stone, planed planks, and fine glass, all imported from outside the Shudders at great expense. He employed flatlander workers rather than hire local craftsmen, a move that did little to ingratiate himself with the Shudfolk. It was Standamish's hope to build a profitable mining concern in the nearby mountains, and the snooty outsider was not shy in bragging about his knowledge of a hidden mine that would soon make his already sizable fortune even greater. Standamish's dream ended one stormy night when screams and blood filled his mountain palace, and the boastful mogul's body was found turned inside-out on his front porch. The Standamish place has been avoided ever since that fearsome night and even rumors of Halden's fortune hidden within its bloodstained walls isn't enough to lure the superstitious Shudfolk across the sagging ruin's threshold.

**The White Hell:** A large adit emerges from the mountainside, its mouth hastily sealed with fallen timber and rubble. Beyond this crude barricade are the tunnels known

as the White Hell. The mine is of Hsaalian origin and bears all the signs of being the product of hard labor rather than a natural cave system. Curious prospectors discovered the mine a decade ago and ventured deep into its reaches, despite warnings of the strange creatures that defend the ancient diggings. When the explorers spotted no signs of the usual Abandoned guardians, and instead found gleaming deposits of gemstone ripe for mining, they thanked their good fortunes—up until the moment a vast horde of

wrigglers crawled from the darkness and attacked. Most of the prospectors perished in the attack, but a handful of survivors escaped to the sunlit mountainside and sealed the mine as best they could. It is said that the mine gets its name from the pale mass of wrigglers dwelling within, but other contend it was the survivors' stark white hair, abruptly turned snowy with fright, that is responsible for its moniker.

## PART TWO: THE PEOPLE



f the landscape of the Shudder Mountains is the region's body, it is the folks who live there that comprise its soul. The primary and longest-enduring residents of the Shudders are the Shudfolk. These independent people could trace their ancestry back to the dim days of prehistory—if they only knew the truth of their origins. The Shudfolk are like all humanity, comprised of both the good and the evil, and provide no shortage of interesting tales to both swap around the hearth and to explore as judge and players. This section takes a deeper look at the Shudfolk, their daily lives, beliefs, and the superstitions that make them unique. It also examines the few demi-humans who dwell in the Shudders, why they are a rarity in this human land, and how to set up an “all human” Shudder Mountain campaign.

### THE SHUDFOLK



he Shudfolk are the predominant human occupants of the Shudder Mountains and every aspect of their lives was influenced by their long and exclusive occupancy in its hills and hollows. This section explores the various facets of Shudfolk life to assist the judge when running a Shudder Mountains campaign and to give players creating a Shudfolk character a sense of place in the campaign world.

#### ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SHUDFOLK

As chronicled in *A History of the Shudder Mountains*, the Shudfolk are the far-removed descendants of various human tribes imported to the mountains by the Hsaal to serve as slaves in their mining operations. This original slave stock came from across the world, gathered from wherever the Hsaal had established mining colonies and subjugated the local populace. As a result, the Shudfolk arose from a diverse population, one that included nearly every genetic strain of humanity. Their varied ancestral heritage means there is no typical Shudfolk physical appearance. Although the Shudfolk gene pool has homogenized somewhat down the eons through intermarriage, the mountain folk nevertheless display a beautiful mix of skin tones, eye and hair color, and distinctive facial features. The only common traits they share are a hearty stamina and a deep and abiding love for their mountainous homeland. Both of these characteristics are the legacy of sorcerous manipulations

by the Hsaal to create the ideal worker race.

The Shudfolk's ancestors underwent magical conditioning by their overlords, with the Hsaal employing their literally unearthly magic to increase the endurance of their laborers to better toil in the mines, as well as a mental compulsion to remain within the confines of the Shudders to mitigate the desire to escape. The changes to the slave race's bloodline continue to manifest in their descendants. The Shudfolk are a resilient people, able to work long hours and withstand minor illnesses. And though the mental conditioning has faded somewhat done the ages, it remains rare for a Shudfolk to leave the mountains for long. Youths, driven by the normal urges of their age, do depart to see the sights of the flatlands on occasion, but eventually the call of the mountains stirs their blood to return to the region of their birth.

There is a third effect of the Hsaal's magical manipulation of the Shudfolk's bloodline. With traces of Luhsaalian magic in their veins, the Shudfolk possess an odd affinity for magic and, with proper training, can produce minor preternatural effects via the use of charms known as folk magic or *gramaree*, and by playing certain old songs first composed by their Hsaalian manipulators. More information on *gramaree* and the Old Songs is presented in the *Magic of the Mountains* section.

Despite the Shudfolk's long occupancy of the mountains, their own origin remains a mystery to them. The Shudfolk rely on oral history and folktales to remember their past and, despite the amazing ability of their storytellers to recount the tales of long ago, after numerous millennia, some of the details have been forgotten, lost in the haze of history. As far as the Shudfolk are concerned, they've always dwelled in the mountains and will continue to do so until the end of time. The Hsaalian diggings, serpent-men ruins, and other relics from the days of prehistory remain as much of a mystery to the Shudfolk as they do to outsiders. The Shudfolk do, however, seem to possess a subconscious ancestral memory. Shudfolk purposely avoid Hsaalian mines and ruins as if some distant part of their psyches still recalls their ancestors' years of servitude under the sorcerer-kings.

#### LIFE IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

Like most rural areas, the backbone of life in the Shudder Mountains are the farmsteads that dot the hollows and river valleys. The Shudfolk farms largely produce corn and

wheat, the staple crops of mountain life. The growing season allows for two crops a year, the product of which farmers subsist on and sell to feed the small “middle class” of craftsmen that exists among the Shudfolk and to outsiders (called flatlanders by the Shudfolk) for profit. Agriculture is supplemented by animal rearing (cows, sheep, goats, and the omnipresent pig) and hunting, and its unheard of to meet a Shudfolk without at least some hunting skill or proficiency with bow or boar spear.

The Shudfolk are extraordinarily self-sufficient. They make their own clothes from locally produced wool and leather, and these garments are designed to survive the hardscrabble life in the mountains. Shoes and boot, farm implements, pottery, rugs, blankets, weapons, sledges, and all the other objects needed by the Shudfolk are made either on the farm or by the small number of craftsmen dedicated to producing these required items of mountain existence. Trade and barter is the main force behind the Shudfolk economy, and a farmer needing new shoes for his horse is far more likely to swap one of his hogs with the blacksmith than pay in hard coin. Those Shudfolk who live deep in the mountains may have never seen actual minted coins, let alone possess them. Shudfolk living closer to the trade towns on the mountains’ borders use a mixture of coin and barter when conducting business.

Shudfolk communities are largely self-reliant ones. Settlements govern by consensus, with the patriarchs (and sometimes matriarchs) of each family speaking in open forum to decide important issues. Large Shudfolk towns, especially those that are trading posts where mountain folk and flatlanders meet, maintain a constabulary force to maintain law and preserve the peace, but this is exception rather than the rule. Most Shudfolk communities are simply not large enough to require permanent law enforcement officials. When a crime is discovered, a general “hue and cry” goes out with all able-bodied Shudfolk assisting in the apprehending of a suspect. Justice is overseen by either the community elders or the local Sovereign priest. Minor crimes usually impart fines on the guilty party, while more severe breaches of the law can result in banishment, mutilation, or death by hanging (or burning or drowning in the case of convicted sorcerers).



### **CUSTOMS, FAITH, AND SUPERSTITION**

Both their unique origins and hard living have resulted in a number of cultural customs and mores arising amongst the Shudfolk. “Life is different in the mountains,” is a common refrain (and oftentimes warning) heard by newcomers to the area from their Shudfolk hosts.

For such a money-poor people, the Shudfolk are first and foremost a generous culture. There are few inns serving travelers in Shudfolk communities as there’s little need for them. A traveler passing through a Shudfolk settlement will almost always be offered a hot meal and a place to sleep if the visitor demonstrates good manners. Even a boorishly-behaving traveler might be given a gourdful of well water and directed to a relatively safe patch of land to camp on. A Shudfolk in need can almost always rely on his neighbors for assistance—provided he is willing to swal-

## **REMOVING DEMI-HUMANS FROM THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS**

The Shudder Mountains were strongly influenced by the “Silver John” stories of Manly Wade Wellman. These tales, set in the Appalachians of North Carolina during the 1950s and 1960s, are obviously lacking in representatives from European mythology and Professor Tolkien’s imagination. The author has purposely downplayed the demi-human presence in the Shudder Mountains as a nod to Wellman’s stories.

If the judge wishes to run a Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG campaign where the players are strictly human (and thereby continue the tradition of many Appendix N stories), the Shudder Mountains are the ideal place for such a campaign. The Starting Occupations Table accompanying the adventure “Sour Spring Hollow” includes an option for removing racial occupations to ensure all the zero-level PCs are human, and therefor easily conform to a “humans only” Shudder Mountains campaign.



low his pride and ask for it. As generous as the mountain people are, they are also intensely proud, determined to demonstrate they have the gumption and wherewithal to endure and overcome the worst the Shudders can throw at them. Only when dangers are obviously supernatural in origin will a typical Shudfolk unhesitatingly seek help.

This generosity and common courtesy of the Shudfolk is a result of extended family ties throughout the region. As a remote culture, the Shudfolk's bloodlines are intricately intertwined, and most every Shudfolk family shares common ancestors if you go far enough up the family tree. They are a people of a single blood and treat one another as long lost cousins—at least upon first meeting. Like any family, quarrels, disagreements, and hurt feelings occur amongst the Shudfolk and when things turn sour, relations between clans can turn violent. Even flatlanders have heard the tales of mountain feuds where two families nearly decimated themselves, battling for years to regain face after a slight or insult. Most feuds cool down once casualties on both sides begin to mount, but some stubborn mountain clans have fought themselves to extinction over a minor misunderstanding.

The Shudfolk, unlike most cultures outside the mountains, are a monotheistic people, venerating a single deity known as "The Sovereign" (see p. The Chained Coffin Companion, page 24). Although the depth and sincerity of their faith differs from Shudfolk to Shudfolk, the Sovereign Church and its teachings play a vital role in mountain life. The local priest attends to not only the spiritual welfare of the community, but serves as teacher, healer, and magistrate. It is rare to encounter a Shudfolk that does not wear the Sovereign Circle around his or her neck or displays it in a place of prominence at home. One of the prime reasons that the majority of Shudfolk possess such strong faith lies in the fact that the Sovereign Church is the Shudfolk's sole opposition against a multitude of supernatural menaces that lurk in the Shudders. Many a Sovereign cleric or lay priest has driven out vengeful spirits, black-hearted conjure-men, and curse-sowing witches, and these displays of divine power reinforce the faith of the Shudfolk.

Given the fact that the Shudfolk arose from ancestors who'd been magically manipulated on a genetic level, it's unsurprising that the mountain people are suspicious (and perhaps harbor a subconsciously-induced ancestral hatred) of magical practitioners. With the exception of the Sovereign clergy and the occasional "study witch" (a person who knows much about magic but does not practice it), anyone dabbling in sorcery is considered a "witch" or "conjure-man" (or on rare occasions, a "witch man"). Witches and conjure-men are unwelcome in Shudfolk communities unless a respected individual vouches for them and assumes responsibility for their behavior. Even in these cases, the typical Shudfolk generosity isn't quite as warm to the magician, but not so rude as to cause offense. Shudfolk, especially those in the most remote part of the mountains, will deal with witches and conjure-men to acquire healing, protections against evil spirits, and the rare curse on an enemy, but this is a relationship founded more on need than desire.

Despite this distrust of magic, the sorcery-manipulated blood of the Shudfolk continues the flow in their veins, resulting in an unusual aptitude for magical work. This accounts for the abnormally high number of witches and conjure-men who live in the Shudder Mountains. These are almost all individuals who chaffed under the hard life of the mountains and sought an easy route to improve their lives and obtain power. When one of the Three offered to teach them sorcery in return for servitude, they willingly accepted, trading their souls for temporal power and the ability to cow their fellow Shudfolk.

Another form of magic is commonplace in the Shudfolk community, but the mountain people do not view it as witchcraft. Instead, they perceive the numerous small charms and protective gestures that are common to mountain life as a form of anti-witchcraft, a means to use mundane measures to protect against the supernatural. These rites, known as *gramaree*, are covered in more detail in the magic chapter.

There is one final aspect of Shudfolk superstition that merits mentioning: the importance of silver. As any Shudfolk can tell you, silver is an effective weapon against all manner of supernatural menaces and the hillfolk place great stock in the substance. Unfortunately, silver isn't easily acquired in the Shudder Mountains, especially in the backwoods where bartering is the method of business transaction. Most Shudfolk families possess an object or two wrought from silver, anything from a candlestick to a dagger, to protect themselves from the unseen forces at work around them. These precious items are almost always heirlooms passed down from generation to generation, and held in great respect by their owners. Flatlander adventurers will almost never find silver weapons for sale in the mountains. Should they perform a great service to the Shudfolk, they may be rewarded with a single piece of heirloom silver, and the adventurers should accept the gift with the profound honor in which it is intended.

## DEMI-HUMANS IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS



Since the days when the serpent-men were driven out by the first primitive tribes of humanity, the Shudder Mountains has always been a land where mankind was the dominant race. Even during the Hsaalian occupancy of the hills, the number of human slaves far outnumbered both their sorcerous masters and the magically-created overseers that managed the mines. It is only recently demi-humans have ventured into the Shudders and, despite these adventurous souls, it is likely that the Shudder Mountains will remain a bastion of humanity.

With their rich mineral resources and beautiful sylvan vistas, the Shudder Mountains would seem an ideal home for both dwarves and elves. The reality, however, is that there is something about the Mountains that unsettles both those races, a shiver down the spine that instills a sense they are not wanted there.

Dwarven visitors to the Shudder Mountains are at first delighted by the old stone outcroppings, ancient mountains, and the faint aroma of precious metals their keen noses detect. Prospectors venture into the hills, pick and hammer in hand, intent on delving into the ancient stone. Their excitement is short-lived. As they begin to explore the mountains, they discover the prehistoric diggings of the Hsaal and a sense of wrongness grows in their hearts. Whatever the Hsaal extracted from the Shudders forever changed the stone. A dwarf in a Hsaalian delve finds his beard standing on end and gooseflesh breaking out on his brawny arms. He experiences an overwhelming desire to leave for other, cleaner stone far away from the former mine. After experiencing this feeling of unnaturalness in the tainted delves several times, most dwarves move on to other uncorrupted mountains.

Elves suffer a similar experience when traveling the forests and hollows of the Shudder Mountains. They too feel the sense that the land has turned sour. Although the trees in the Shudders stand ancient and tall, an aura of unpleasantness resides in some shadowy thickets and in moss-filled glens. One elven forester described the experience as “a greasy sensation, as if my skin and tongue sweated a slick, foul ooze.” A handful of elves have managed to overcome their odd revulsion and work to discover its origins and

correct the cause, but most move on to other forests to conduct their magical workings.

The exact cause of this mysterious unnerving of dwarven and elven psyches is as yet unknown, but it is possibly the result of the spoils found throughout the Shudders. Demi-human PCs experience a similar sensation when venturing into the Shudders, but, as adventurers, can function in the mountains normally. The judge may wish to utilize this sensation to impart hints whenever the PC approaches a spoil or other area of lingering Hsaalian magic.

Of all the demi-human races, halflings comprise the largest percentage, but even they are a small minority in comparison to the human population. Unlike dwarves and elves, halflings don’t experience a sense of unnaturalness in the Shudder. Instead, it is the rough living and the hard work required to eke out a livelihood in the mountains that keeps their number low. While there is good farming to be had in the hollows of the Shudders, the clearing of the land, unearthing and moving rocks, and cutting planting tiers in the hillside is usually far more labor than a halfling wants to undertake to till the land. A single halfling community known as Greendowns exists in the Shudders, and a few halfling traders visit the hills to purchase Shudfolk crafts. Aside from these groups, it takes an adventurous halfling to ramble through the Shudder Mountains for long.

## INSPIRATIONAL RESOURCES



he Shudder Mountains campaign setting is the product of various outside influences being filtered through the author’s own eccentric mind and further influenced by his time in the Catskill Mountains region of the Appalachian Plateau. To give credit where credit is due and to help stimulate the creativity of other judges about to embark on a campaign set in the Shudders, the following resources are provided.



### PRIMARY INFLUENCES

These works were predominant influences on the Shudder Mountains and are required reading/viewing for judges.

- *Who Fears the Devil?, The Old Gods Waken, After Dark, The Lost and the Lurking, The Hanging Stones, and The Voice of the Mountain* by Manly Wade Wellman
- *The Foxfire Book* edited by Eliot Wigginton
- *Rage Across Appalachia* by Jackie Cassada
- *Pumpkin Head* (1988)

### SECONDARY INFLUENCES

- “Pigeons from Hell,” “Fangs of Gold,” and “The Shadow of the Beast” by Robert E. Howard
- “The Lurking Fear,” “The Man of Stone,” and “The Whisperer in Darkness” by H.P. Lovecraft
- *The Descent* (2005)
- *Emmett Otter’s Jug-Band Christmas* (1977)
- *The Long Lost Friend* by John George Hohman
- “Wildwyck County” series of articles by the author, appearing in *Fight On!* magazine

## CHAPTER THREE

# ANCIENT SECRETS AND SUBTLE MAGICS

*Magic runs wild in the Shudders and strange things lurk in its shadows.*





# THE CHAINED COFFIN COMPANION

## THE MAGIC OF THE MOUNTAINS



he Shudder Mountains are a peculiar place, a region steeped in superstition and unique magical practices seldom seen outside the mountain hollows. The following supplemental material addresses the strange magic and curious mystical customs one finds in the Shudders, providing a firm foundation for the judge running a campaign set in the Shudder Mountains to build upon. Although intended for a Shudder Mountain campaign, this material can be easily inserted in other DCC RPG games.

### SPOILS



hen the moon of Luhsaal was destroyed, the magical backlash of the catastrophe poured down from the heavens, guided by the mystical gateways and sorcerous ties that connected the Hsaal to their native world. The maelstrom of eldritch energy washed over the Hsaal, incinerating them where they stood. With the sorcerer-kings' deaths, the magical power held in check by each Hsaal was also unleashed, contributing to the tidal wave of sorcery pouring across the landscape of the Shudder Mountains. Most of this supernatural energy would dissipate over time, being reabsorbed by ley lines, spilling back across dimensional boundaries, or consumed by odd entities that feed on magical power. A portion of this inundation of energy, however, remained behind, drawn to locations possessing either a natural or artificial affinity for sorcery. In places such as secluded forest glades, crystalline caverns, ancient serpent-men religious sites, or Hsaalian outposts, magical forces pooled like spilled quicksilver on an alchemist's table.

Much as water does when separated from the flowing stream, these reservoirs of sorcerous power stagnated, their energy and potential turning in upon itself. The curdled en-

ergy became unstable, even more unpredictable than magical power typically is. In time, those who discovered these sites began calling them "spoils" for the power there had gone sour.

Spoils exist across the Shudder Mountains, displaying no rhyme or reason for their appearance other than existing in places that perhaps once held mystical importance or magical significance. They can be found in serpent-men ruins and in untouched forests, under the earth or atop high mountain peaks. As a rule, Shudfolk avoid spoils and the dangers they can possess, teaching each generation to keep their distance from such tainted sites with folktales about "haunted glens," "Hell spots," or "bad hollows." However, those Shudfolk who make their living brewing witch liquor for sale outside the Shudders actively seek new spoils and fiercely defend their still sites from trespassers.

There are two forms of spoils in the Shudder Mountains. The first is the common spoil which affects creatures and objects exposed to its power at a slow rate. The second are "hot spots" of tainted magic known as "burn spoils" by the locals. These malignant sites of power are places that cause physical and supernatural alterations in subjects exposed to its power for even a brief time and are by far the most dangerous type of spoil.

Spoils vary in appearance, but the most common form is a writhing patch of black fire that nevertheless illuminates its surroundings. Less typical appearances include pools of rippling green water that seems to vibrate to unheard sounds, crystalline growths with alien visages entrapped within their depths, and groves of twisted trees alive with fluttering shadows. Spoils of both types average from small pockets of radiant magic to vast pools of tainted energy measuring between 20' to 200' in diameter (2d10x10').

Common spoils require exposure to its power for 1d5+3 days before its energy take effect on those subjected to its taint. Even a brief period spent during a 24 hour period counts as a day of exposure when determining if a creature is affected by a spoil's power. At the end of the determined time, living creatures must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be affected by the spoil. The exact changes a spoil produces in subjects bathed in its radiance vary from location to location, and the judge is encouraged to create specific effects for each spoil in his campaign. The above table can be used to randomly determine a spoil's properties and as inspiration for other preternatural effects.

The time a creature spends exposed to a spoil is cumulative. A subject could visit a spoil on four different days over the course of a month and suddenly be affected on the fourth day. However, spoil exposure fades after a prolonged peri-



**TABLE 1-1: SPOIL EFFECT ON LIVING SUBJECTS**

| 1d10 | Spoil's Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Imparts a random form of corruption. Roll 1d6: 1-3) use Table 5-3: Minor Corruption ( <i>DCC RPG</i> p. 116) to determine effect; 4-5) use Table 5-4: Major Corruption ( <i>DCC RPG</i> p. 118) to determine effect; 6) use Table 5-5: Greater Corruption ( <i>DCC RPG</i> p. 119) to determine effect.                   |
| 2    | Causes a sorcerous wasting disease similar to <i>mummy rot</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 3    | Imparts the ability to cast a random 1 <sup>st</sup> -level spell once per day. Subject uses a d16 to determine the spellcheck of this incantation.                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 4    | Drains magical power, turning enchanted objects mundane or stealing spells from a caster's mind                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 5    | Permanently transforms the subject into a monster, either one chosen randomly from the <i>DCC RPG</i> rulebook or other source, or a unique creature of the judge's creation.                                                                                                                                             |
| 6    | Drives the subject insane, warping his mind with malicious thoughts to commit unspeakable crimes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 7    | Creates a communication conduit between the subject and an entity outside the physical world. The party at the other end of this conduit may be pleased to speak with the subject, perhaps even agreeing to act as the affected soul's patron or be angered by such brazen contact and seek the individual's destruction. |
| 8    | Cloaks the subject in a permanent mystical field that amplifies his prowess or protects him from harm. Subject gains a +1 bonus to a randomly determined ability, spell, saving throw, natural armor class, or other characteristic of the judge's choosing.                                                              |
| 9    | Slays the subject outright then revives him as an un-dead creature 1d4 days later unless the body is destroyed.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 10   | Sends the subject to another time and/or place. Possible destinations include the dim past during the height of either the Hsaal or serpent-men's dominance, the Court of Chaos, the time pad in the Vault of Zepes Null-Eleven, or a certain purple planet...                                                            |

**TABLE 1-2: SPOIL EFFECT ON INANIMATE SUBJECTS**

| 1d6 | Spoil's Effect                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | The object's substance changes. Wood become stone, metal becomes lifeless flesh or bone, glass become water, etc.                                                                           |
| 2   | The object becomes ethereal, slipping in between planar boundaries at random.                                                                                                               |
| 3   | The object becomes animated as per the <i>breathe life</i> spell. Determine spell check result using d10+15 for common spoils and d10+20 for burn spoils.                                   |
| 4   | The object becomes fused with the environment surrounding the spoil, embedding itself in stone, wood, soil, or even the unlucky soul holding it!                                            |
| 5   | The object explodes inflicting 4d6 (8d6 if burn spoil) damage to everything in a 20' diameter.                                                                                              |
| 6   | The object becomes charged with magical power. This effect may make the object useful in crafting potent magical items or a force of entropy that causes widespread chaos wherever it goes. |

od away from the curdled energy pool. For each full month a creature remains outside a spoil's area of effect, one day of exposure is nullified.

Once a creature is affected by a spoil, he gains a +1 die bonus to subsequent saving throws against that spoil's effects. In some cases (judge's prerogative) a spoil might affect a creature once and the subject is forever after immune to its power.

Burn spoils are more dangerous than common spoils, searing those exposed to its radiating energy in addition to causing physical changes. Any living creature exposed to a burn spoil for more than one minute must make a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer 2d6 points of damage and be affected by the burn spoil's trasmutative power. The judge

can use the table above to determine the burn spoil's effect or create a unique power of his own devising.

Nonliving creatures (but not including un-dead) and objects are subject to a spoil's power, but exposure affects these targets in a different manner than living creatures. Inanimate objects do not get a saving throw against the spoil's power. The following table includes some possible effects for inanimate objects exposed to a spoil.

The sole exception to inanimate objects exposed to a spoil is witch liquor (see below). The eclectic components that comprise the various witch liquor recipes found in the Shudder Mountain cause a spoil's radiating power to manifest in other ways. These alternate effects are detailed in the witch liquor entry.



## THAT OLD TIME RELIGION

**R**eligious practices in the Shudder Mountains differ from those found in the flatlands. The Shudfolk, unlike many other human cultures, are monotheistic, revering a single deity they address as the Sovereign. According to the Shudfolk, the Sovereign was the first deity, the Great King who created the world and all things in it, including the other gods and goddesses venerated outside of the Shudders. This belief means the Shudfolk are (reasonably) tolerant of other religions, secure in their knowledge that these “lesser gods,” as they consider them, are creations of the Sovereign and should be respected as such. A courteous cleric of another faith will find a warm welcome by the Shudfolk, provided he keeps his evangelizing to a minimum and shows equal religious tolerance towards his hosts.

The central tenet of the Sovereign faith holds that the Great King instills a bright light within the soul of each human (the faith is less specific about demi-humans) upon their birth. It is the sacred duty of all humanity to nurture and feed this soulful illumination during life, amplifying it with good deeds, kindness, charity, and faithful worship. Upon a person’s death, he finds himself in the eternal darkness of the afterlife and only those who kept his divine light lit with good deeds and a pious life can find his way to the Sovereign’s Kingdom, where he will reside in peace and pleasure for eternity. An individual who fails to nurture his divine light in life discovers himself lost in the endless darkness and cold that exists beyond death, potentially becoming a restless spirit or prey for other horrors in the eternal night.

Temples dedicated to the Sovereign in the Shudder Mountains are simple affairs, largely constructed of wood and painted either bright white or yellow to symbolize the Sovereign-granted light within all the congregants. Fire and sunlight are commonly used in religious ceremonies dedicated to the Sovereign. The symbol of the Sovereign is a circle, representing the god’s all-encompassing arms that hold the universe. Shudfolk regularly wear the Sovereign’s Circle around their necks or pinned to clothes, and Shudfolk always fashion their Sovereign’s Circle from the best material they have access to. A rich Shudfolk trader’s Sovereign’s Circle would be made of gold, while a poor farmer would possess one carved from the most pleasant-seeming wood he could find or trade for.

The clergy of the Sovereign, like the Shudfolk themselves, is independent, lacking a strict hierarchy. Each temple is led by one or (more rarely) two priests who attend to the spiritual needs of its congregation. Temples in close proximity to one another occasionally cooperate to observe important holidays, but geographical distance and difficulty of travel throughout the Shudders generally results in a series of self-contained religious districts centered on a single community with the local priest overseeing it.

Sovereign clerics hold the title of “Braar” (males) or “Shuyr” (females), words that translate roughly as “revered prince” or “revered princess” in the forgotten language of the Hsaal

(the origin of these titles is unknown to the Shudfolk). Sovereign priests are Lawful (like their deity) and rely on rustic weapons such as clubs and staves to defend themselves. A 1<sup>st</sup>-level cleric of the Sovereign begins play with the spells *blessing*, *food of the gods*, *holy sanctuary*, and *word of command*. Common higher level spells of Sovereign clerics include *banish*, *cure paralysis*, *divine symbol*, *neutralize poison or disease*, *restore vitality*, *snake charm*, *bolt from the blue*, *exorcise*, *remove cure*, *spiritual weapon*, *sanctify*, *righteous fire*, and *weather control*. Sovereign clerics may never cast *darkness* as it is an affront to the divine light granted by the Great King, and eschew *binding*, *animate dead*, and *speak with dead* as being too close to the practice of witchcraft.

Aside from the clerics of the Sovereign, the faith has a small number of lay priests. These lay priests are not full clerics (as the character class) but something more than simple congregants. Lay priests, due to their devout veneration of the Sovereign, are granted a few clerical abilities, but with much less power than full priests. A lay priest of the Sovereign can *lay on hands* and *turn unholy* as a cleric, but uses a d16 action die (modified by Personality) when attempting these miracles. Some lay priests can also cast a single spell (granted by the judge in the role of the Sovereign) which also uses a d16 to cast. A failed spell check by a lay priest increases his range of disapproval by 2 points rather than 1, and a wise lay priest knows not to press his deity’s patience should his asked-for miracles fail to manifest.

Only individuals of extreme piety can become lay priests. The exact qualifications to achieve this holy state are left to the judge to adjudicate, but regardless of what stipulations the judge chooses to apply, a lay priest cannot possess another character class. The level of faith needed to become a lay priest prevents an individual from pursuing a second PC class. A lay priest who becomes a cleric gains all the benefits of that class, but loses his lay priest abilities. A lay priest who fails to maintain the appropriate level of piety (judge’s discretion) is stripped of his miraculous powers.

## CURSES

**C**urses are a constant fear in the Shudder Mountains. The Shudfolk know that any witch or conjure-man is capable of laying a curse on those who cross them, and have developed a number of superstitions to help defend themselves against becoming accursed (see Folk Magic below). A judge preparing to run a campaign set in the Shudder Mountains should review Appendix C (pp. 438-439 of the *DCC RPG* rulebook).

Witches and conjure-men in the Shudder Mountains can issue a curse as an attack action, requiring the victim to make a DC 16 Will save to resist. These witch curses are covered in Appendix C and below. In addition, conjure-men and witches who have one of The Three (Anector, Haade and Modeca) as a patron gain access to the 2<sup>nd</sup> level cleric spell *curse* as a 2<sup>nd</sup> level wizard spell. As with other clerical spells cast as wizard magic, a result of a natural 1 results in a 50% chance of patron taint or misfire, rolling on either the patron taint or generic table as appropriate.

Although victims of the *curse* spell can suffer Luck and other statistic penalties as per the spell's description, witches often cause a *curse* to manifest in less direct but potentially more devastating ways, usually in a manner that affects the victim's livelihood. The following chart gives alternate results of a *curse* based on the caster's spell check. The judge is free to modify this table or use it as inspiration for new ideas.

### ALTERNATE CURSE MANIFESTATIONS

| Spell check | Result                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 20-21       | A farmer's cow produces no milk for the duration.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 22-25       | The tools of the subject's trade turn against him, breaking or even injuring him when used.                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 26-29       | A family's crop is blighted; a farmstead's well goes dry.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 30-31       | A village spring dries up; a plague of vermin invades the village; all the community's livestock becomes barren.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 32-33       | As above but the misfortune affects a larger community.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 34+         | A single victim is doomed. The <i>curse</i> has no immediate effect, but the victim will die at a random time as determined by the judge. This doom may come as a result of a natural accident or supernatural event. Only breaking the curse by meeting the spell's condition can save the victim. |

The magically-inclined are not the only ones able to impart a curse in the backwoods. On rare occasions, even those Shudfolk without the slightest bit of magical knowledge have cursed their foes when greatly wronged. A mother whose only child died because of another's carelessness, a bride-to-be who lost her fiancé to some cruel man's whims, or a devout soul who watched his temple burned to the ground by heretics, have succeeded in laying a mighty curse on those responsible. Flatlanders traveling in the Shudders are cautioned to treat the Shudfolk with respect and courtesy. For a non-spellcaster to curse another, he or she must first be greatly wronged by the target's actions (judge's discretion) and make a DC 16 Personality check using a d16 action die. If successful, the victim can make a Will save against the check result to avoid the curse. The judge should choose an appropriate curse from Appendix C or create one of his own devising. A non-spellcaster can only invoke such a curse once in his lifetime.

No chapter on curses would be complete without a new one to add to the judge's repertoire. The following new curse is provided to give the judge an example of the types of curses the PCs might encounter in the Shudder Mountains should they cross the wrong person.



### CURSE OF FOREVER WALKING

#### Moderate Curse

*May you wander the hills forever weary,  
Walk through heat, and mud, and weather always dreary.  
Sleep not two nights in the same restful bed,  
Walk and wander until thou art dead.*

This curse carries a -2 Luck penalty and forces the victim to never remain longer than 24 hours in a single location. If the victim stays in a single place for more than 24 hours, he is afflicted by misfortune and outright danger every hour until he departs. The misfortune can range from the irritating (he loses a prized possession) to the deadly (he contracts a disease). He may also find himself the subject of random monster attacks, hostile mobs, or similar threats to life and limb. This curse can be alleviated by finding a community willing to accept the accursed individual despite being aware of the danger that follows him and building a home amongst those kind souls. This is more difficult than it appears, as the victim must get the full acceptance of every member of the community before the curse abates.

### FOLK MAGIC IN THE HILLS



Although the Shudfolk harbor deep suspicion of any magic-using individual aside from their local Sovereign cleric, they themselves are ironically the product of magical manipulation. During their ancestors' years of servitude to the Hsaal, that lunar race regularly employed magic on their slaves to make them more suitable for their tasks. Traces of this ancient sorcery still flows through the Shudfolks' veins.

It is perhaps this lingering mystical taint that allows the Shudfolk to produce supernatural effects through seemingly non-magical rituals intended to ward off the malicious effects of witchcraft. The Shudfolk, steeped in superstitions, regularly enact minor rites intended for protection, good luck, or to combat the supernatural. Although no Shudfolk would deign to acknowledge these superstitious acts as sorcery, they nevertheless do produce seemingly magical results. For the purpose of classification, these superstitious rites are called *folk magic* or *gramaree*.

Most folk magic is handed down orally, passed from one generation to the next, but codices of folk magic lore do exist. These books of folk magic have a number of titles, and knowledgeable Shudfolk can name the most famous (or feared) books: *The Gray Book*, *The Wayward Companion*, and *Little Black Cat*. Each text contains various gramaree rites, herbal recipes, astrological charts showing the proper times to sow and reap crops, and, occasionally, a true magical spell. A number of superstitions have become associated with the books, themselves. Legend has it that *The Gray Book*, for example, cannot be thrown or given away, but if the owner ever wishes to rid himself of the text, he must bury the book and say a funeral prayer over its "grave." Failing to do so results in the book's return, accompanied by unpleasant events that afflict the owner.

Many gramaree rites are performed by the Shudfolk, observed when they feel their path has crossed that of a witch or conjure-man. When performed by those uninitiated into the deeper mastery of the correct methods of enacting the rites, these gestures are simple superstition that have no true power (aside from perhaps making the individual feel a bit safer as a placebo effect). However, those who are schooled in the mastery of the rites create actual preternatural effects.

Theoretically, folk magic can be learned by anyone, but in practice certain restrictions apply. Shudfolk have an easier time understanding the proper means to enact a gramaree ritual due to their mystical blood taint. If a Shudfolk can find a suitable teacher, either a living person or one of the gramaree texts, he undergoes a period of study lasting 1d3 months. Although the rites themselves are simple to perform, they must be enacted with absolutely perfect gestures and mental focus. Learning to focus the mind and repeat the gestures without error takes time. At the end of the study period, the student must make a DC 15 Intelligence check. If successful, he learns the folk magic rite, but failing the check means he cannot master the act and must wait a full year before attempting to learn it again. Non-Shudfolk can learn gramaree with the proper study period, but it is a DC 20 Intelligence check to learn the ritual.

There is a limit to the number of folk magic rites a student can learn. An individual who lacks any additional spellcasting training (all zero-level characters, and PCs of any class other than cleric, wizard, and elf) can master 1 gramaree rite plus 1 per every 2 class levels. Thus a 5<sup>th</sup>-level warrior can know 3 rites (base of one plus one at 2<sup>nd</sup>-level and a third at 4<sup>th</sup>-level). Clerics, wizards, and elves can master 1 folk magic rite plus 1 per every class level. A 5<sup>th</sup>-level wizard could know up to six gramaree rituals—provided he can find a teacher and succeeds in his Intelligence checks.

Lastly, even if a character knows a true gramaree rite, invoking it successfully is not guaranteed. First, performing a true folk magic ritual taxes the body and mind, causing 1 point of temporary Stamina and Intelligence damage. This damage heals normally. Secondly, the individual must make a Personality check with a DC dependent on the rite to succeed. The ability damage is suffered regardless of success. There are no side-effects from failing to invoke a gramaree rite correctly aside from the ability loss. Gramaree never misfires, causes corruption, or divine disfavor.

## FOLK MAGIC RITES

The following are just a sample of the gramaree rituals known in the Shudder Mountains. The judge is encouraged to add his own creations to the list or modify their effects as desired. Unless otherwise specified, performing a gramaree rite counts as an action.

**Ward against the Evil Eye** (DC 14): With a gesture of crossing the index finger of the right hand over the middle finger and snapping his wrist at the suspected conjure-man, this rite imparts a -2 penalty to the target's next spell check.

**Salt the Trail** (DC 12): By pouring a measure of salt into a spellcaster's footprint, the individual gains +2 to his next saving throw against the target's magic.

**Keep the Ghosts at Bay** (DC 14): By locking the door to a room or home with a key made from silver (10 gp cost to make), the individual can prevent non-corporeal undead from entering. Incorporeal un-dead attempting to enter the protected area must make a DC 14 Will save or they cannot attempt to enter until the following evening. Each time the same key is used to invoke this rite, the Will save DC is reduced by 1.

**Nail the Witch's Shadow** (DC 12): This rite involves driving an iron nail into the shadow of a spellcaster. If the rite succeeds, the target suffers 1d4 damage that cannot be prevented by any means. Obviously the target must be casting a shadow for this rite to work.

## OLD AND ANCIENT SONGS



he Hsaal's arcane knowledge was formidable and the long-gone race mastered myriad ways of weaving sorcery into their arts and sciences. Amongst their greatest achievements was the composing of music that produced magical effects. Although the Hsaal are dead, a few of the melodies that once filled the air of their lunar cities still linger in the Shudder Mountains, preserved in the songs of their former slaves, the Shudfolk.

Although the words have changed down the eons, the music itself retains its power—when performed by those who know the proper means of striking the right chords. A person without the correct instruction can play one of these magical musical compositions—commonly referred to as the Old Songs—without incident. In fact, many of the Old Songs are popular pieces performed around the tavern hearth and in the home with the musician being unaware of the hidden power residing in the song's notes. Only Shudfolk can master an Old Song as the songs' magic is a legacy of their blood. Flatlanders and other outsiders hearing an Old Song, played by either a common musician or one who knows the song's secrets, find the music haunting and strange. The songs of the mountains are written in minor keys (a legacy of the alien musical scale used by the Hsaal) and the music sounds strange and lonesome to ears unacquainted with these songs.

Old Songs function like folk magic, requiring an individual to undergo a period of study to learn how to correctly play



the tune to produce the magic hidden amongst its notes. Once the student learns the song, he can perform it at cost to both his body and mind, losing 1 point of Stamina and Intelligence as if enacting a gramaree ritual. Like with folk magic, the singer must make a Personality check with a DC based on the song's power to correctly invoke its effect.

The criteria for learning an Old Song is slightly different than that needed to study folk magic. A PC wishing to learn how to play one of these magical melodies must meet the following qualifications. First, only Shudfolk can play an Old Song in a manner that invokes its magic. The music and magic of the Hsaal is so intricately tied to the Shudfolks' heritage that only they have the proper blood and ancestral memories necessary to play an Old Song properly. The judge may allow a flatlander to learn an Old Song if he uses the alternate Bard class from *Crawl!* #6 or other sources in his campaign, and the outsider is of that class. Secondly, the student must know how to play a musical instrument. Singing an Old Song a cappella cannot produce the proper notes to unleash a Song's power. Musical instrument proficiency usually requires the character to have either the musician or elven musician occupation. A character without those occupations can learn to play an instrument, but doing so requires time, training and possibly expenses at the judge's discretion. Thirdly, the individual must find a teacher to train under. Old Songs can only be taught by personal instruction. Due to the subtleties of the songs' magic, written forms of the music cannot convey the proper means necessary to invoke the tunes' enchantments.

If the would-be student meets these criteria, the process for learning is identical to folk magic. After 1d3 months of study, the student must make a DC 15 Intelligence check. If successful, he learns to properly play the Old Song. If the check fails, the student lacks the necessary discipline to perform the music correctly and must improve his musical skills over the coming year before attempting to learn the Song again. Old Songs never misfire, cause corruption, or incur divine disfavor, but the temporary ability loss occurs regardless of success.

A character is limited to the number of Old Songs he can know. A PC can learn one Old Song plus his Intelligence modifier. If the judge allows bards in his campaign, a bard PC can learn an additional song for each level he possesses. Old Songs do not count against the limit of folk magic rites an individual may know or vice-versa.

### OLD SONGS

These are but a few of the Old Songs known in the Shudder Mountains and the judge is encourage to expand the list with his own creations. The DC of the Song's Personality check and the time necessary to perform the song are given in parenthesis after the Song's title.

**"Tomcat Goes A' Prowlin'"** (DC 12; one minute): Playing the song grants either the performer or a listener of his choosing increased stealth. The next *sneak silently, hide in shadows*, or halfling stealth roll is made with a +1d increase.

**"Under Thine Outstretched Hand"** (DC 14; three minutes): This song helps protect the performer and up to 3+Personality modifier others from the attacks of un-dead creatures. All un-dead suffer a -2 penalty to attack the protected individuals for 1 turn.

**"Mr. Death, I Ain't Ready to Go"** (DC 16; five minutes): This long and difficult song helps stave off death's final grasp. When performed successfully, a single target of the musician's choosing can make two Luck checks when rolling over his body, taking whichever result he prefers. Performing this song is especially draining and the performer suffers 2 points of Stamina damage regardless of success. This piece can only be played once per day.

## SACRED STICKS AND FORGOTTEN SIGILS: MAGIC ITEMS IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

 **ex Signs:** These objects come in two forms: small amulets sized for a person to wear as a charm and large placards used to adorn buildings. In either form, a hex sign is a fragment of old stone bearing strange otherworldly carvings (see the spinning wheel handout from DCC #83 for examples of the types of sigils found on a hex sign). Hex signs are relics left over from the Hsaal, the stones found lost in overgrown hollows or pried from crumbling ruins. Not every scrap of Hsaal writing contains powers, but those that do protect that which bears them.

A hex sign wards against black magic, protecting either the wearer (in the case of smaller hex signs) or structures (larger signs) from baleful sorcery. Both grant a +2 bonus to all saving throws against spells and magical effects. Small hex signs only protect the individuals wearing the symbol, while large signs grant the bonus to any creature or object located inside the structure bearing the hex sign. A large hex symbol not affixed to a building provides no benefit (a person carrying a large hex sign gains no bonus to saving throws). If a spell directly targets a hex sign—for example, a witch using *lightning bolt* on a hex sign—it benefits from its own protective magic.

**Snake Sticks:** This object appears to be a decorative wooden walking cane measuring 3' in length. The wood is carved with extreme skill into the shape of a rattlesnake, its tail serving as the cane's tip and the serpent's head arched to act as the headpiece. Once per day, a snake stick's power can be called upon by the owner, producing an effect identical to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-level clerical spell *snake charm*. The spell takes effect as if cast with a spell check of 14. If owned by a wizard or elf, this effect can be amplified by spellburning, with each point of spellburn increasing the stick's effective spell check by +1. Thus, a wizard who spellburns 3 points while holding the staff causes it to function as if it cast a *snake charm* spell with a spell check of 17.

Serbok (see DCC #77.5), his servants, and serpent-men despise these items and will go to great and lethal lengths to destroy both the snake stick and its owner.



**Sovereign's Circle:** This potent object is a circular holy symbol of the Sovereign, fashioned from old gold. Once the property of an extremely devout cleric of the Great King, this object provides a bonus to turning un-dead. When held by a cleric of the Sovereign, the symbol grants a +4 bonus to turn un-dead attempts. It provides no benefit to *laying on hands*, casting spells, or other clerical class abilities.

**Witch Liquor:** Witch liquor is a strange substance, being not quite a magical elixir but neither is it merely an alcoholic beverage. Witch liquor can be created by anyone who knows one of the correct recipes (and there are many with each version being a closely-guarded secret by the bootlegger who brews it) and locates a spoil (see above) to distill the arcane liquor. When a spoil is found, the bootlegger sets up his still, using his preferred recipe. As the corn mash ferments, the liquor is altered — often in unpredictable ways — by the ambient magical energies of the spoil. The final result is witch liquor.

Witch liquor produces a magical effect when consumed, typically a minor one of little power or practicality (and sometimes embarrassing or even dangerous), but odd enough to reaffirm the drinker has had a brush with the magical world. This perception of “dabbling in sorcery” makes witch liquor highly prized by world-weary pleasure-seekers looking for a new and unique distraction. Witch liquor is in high demand at the banquets and orgies of depraved city-dwellers, and these degenerate souls pay high prices to acquire the unusual whiskey. The majority of the Shudfolk, however, frown on the making of witch liquor and destroy the bootleggers’ stills and inventory whenever discovered. The bootleggers in turn create new ways to hide their wares and smuggle it to the big cities where the witch liquor fetches a premium.

Batches of witch liquor are seldom alike. A bootlegger can brew a batch in the same location, using the same recipe, and discover a completely unknown effect occurs when it is consumed. This gives the judge sizable leeway in creating the effects of witch liquor. The effect of a particular draught of witch liquor lasts for one to four hours, depending on the amount of potable consumed by the drinker. The table below provides a few examples of what witch liquor does to the drinker when consumed.

## 1d6 Witch Liquor Effect

- 1 Drinker sees beyond dimensional boundaries, getting a glimpse at the events and occupants of an alien plane of existence. Not all such visions are pleasant to behold and more than one individual has gone mad with a glimpse.
- 2 Drinker’s sense of touch becomes magnified. Pleasures of the flesh are exquisite, but even the slightest pain becomes excruciating. A moderate injury can even kill the drinker outright from shock.
- 3 Drinker’s flesh breaks out in serpent scales, giving him a sinister appearance. The skin returns to normal once the drink leave his system, but in the meanwhile he’s likely to be mistaken for a serpent-man or dabbler in black magic.
- 4 Drinker exudes ectoplasm from his pores/mouth/ears/other orifice. The plasma-like substance forms strange symbols in the air around the drinker, perhaps portending to events to come.
- 5 Drinker’s aura becomes visible to the naked eye. The colorful nimbus surrounds the partaker, displaying colors related to the drinker’s emotional state. It is difficult for the drinker to conceal falsehoods or otherwise deceive onlookers while the aura is visible.
- 6 Drinker becomes possessed by a minor spirit (ghost, elemental, devil, etc.) who speaks through the drinker’s mouth. Although unable to do more than orate, the spirit may reveal truths the drinker prefers to keep secret.

The above suggestions represent the least dangerous effects witch liquor possibly produces. Both drinking and making witch liquor can be far more hazardous at the judge’s discretion (see “Sour Spring Hollow” for an example of how a drink of witch liquor can make life unpleasant for the consumer). The backwoods are filled with stories of a traveler coming upon a witch liquor bootlegger’s still only to find the brewer massacred by incomprehensible magical forces or to simply have vanished from existence, carried off or utterly consumed by dark powers.





# MODECA



here are infernal forces at work in the backwoods of the Shudder Mountains. A trio of devils are locked in an ongoing game of one-upmanship to gather souls into bondage and increase their standing in the hierarchy of Hell. These devils are Anector, Haade, and Modeca, known collectively as "The Three." Each serves as a patron for a number of witches in the mountains, granting fiendish power in return for eternal bondage. This section provides patron information on Modeca, who appears in *DCC #83: The Chained Coffin* in his guise as "Ol' Blackcloak." Judges can use the following to further detail Anector and Haade in similar fashion.

## MODECA, THE SECOND OF THREE (OL' BLACKCLOAK)



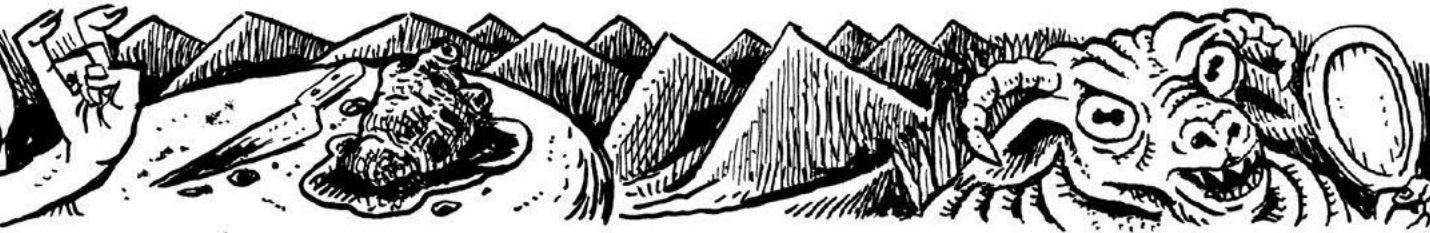
odeca, the Second of the Three, and known locally in the Shudder Mountains as "Ol' Blackcloak" is one of the devilish triumvirate claiming the ancient mountains as part of their worldly domain. Modeca prefers subtly and corruption over brute force, leaving such uncouth pursuits to his two infernal fellows, Haade and Anector. Modeca's sole objective is to bind as many mortal souls into eternal servitude as possible, swelling the numbers obliged to him in Hell. Mortals seeking a *patron bond* with Modeca are required to sign a compact with this devil, swearing their eternal souls to him. Unlike others who contract themselves to Modeca (see *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin* p. 11), these special servants enjoy a prolonged grace period before he claims his due—so long as they endeavor to lure others into infernal bondage. Failing in this matter inevitably causes Modeca to invoke an overlooked loophole in their contracts and claim what is owed to him sooner than expected.

### Invoke Patron check results:

- 12-13 Modeca grants the caster a small fraction of his guile, charm, and presence, raising the character's Personality to 20 (+4 bonus) for 1d6 turns.
- 14-17 Modeca inscribes infernal letters upon the caster's skin, inflicting 1 hp of searing damage. The writing grants the caster a +4 AC bonus for 1d6 turns, fading away when the duration elapses.
- 18-19 Modeca makes the caster *invisible*, allowing him to escape a tough spot. The *invisibility* lasts for 1 turn, breaking if the caster attacks another creature, but requires no concentration on the part of the caster.
- 20-23 Modeca freezes time for all but the caster for one round. During that period, the caster can act normally, but all others are effectively paused in time and space, unable to move or defend themselves. Time returns to normal the following round.
- 24-27 Modeca sends an infernal word, pulled from one of his uncountable contracts, to assist the caster. This word appears in the air before the PC in burning letters reeking of brimstone. The word acts as a *runic alphabet*, *fey* of the judge's choosing with a +20 to its spellcheck. The word appears instantaneously and the caster can choose to "trigger" it against any creature or creatures he can see.
- 28-29 Modeca delivers a blast of hellfire against the caster's enemies. Up to three targets within 50' of the caster suffer 5d6 points of damage (no save).
- 30-31 Modeca sends an Infernal Scrivener (see below) to assist the caster. The demon remains as the caster's assistant for 1 week, but this period of servitude can be extended with successful binding magic, negotiation, infernal contracts or additional *invoke patron* spell checks at the judge's discretion.
- 32+ Modeca freezes time for all but the caster for 2d4 rounds. During that period, the caster can act normally, but all others are effectively paused in time and space, unable to move or defend themselves. Time returns to normal once the duration elapses.

**Infernal Scrivener (type II demon, Modeca):** Init +3; Atk poison pen +6 melee (special); AC 14; HD 6d12; hp 40; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), poison pen (demonic tarantula venom; 1d4+2 plus DC 16 Fort save or take an additional 2d4+2 damage and -3 Strength loss), infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 19-20; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +8; AL C.

The infernal scrivener appears as a ruddy-fleshed human with slightly pointed ears and a devilish beard, dressed in courtly finery. It has impeccable manners and acts as a superb aide-de-camp to its temporary master, serving to the best of its ability its master's whims until the time of servitude ends. Its sole attack is its black iron quill dipped in the infernal venom of devilish spiders. This poison supernaturally replenishes after each attack.



## PATRON TAIN: MODECA

Modeca is a charming and ingratiating devil, but only so long as he is pleased. Failing to stay in Modeca's good graces, either by displaying ineptitude in one's actions or inadequately assisting his goal of ensnaring mortal souls, is likely to cause the devil to reveal his displeasure in the form of supernatural taint.

When a patron taint is indicated, roll 1d6 on the table below. When the caster has acquired all six levels of effect, there is no need to continue rolling any more. On the next patron taint result, Modeca appears to claim his servant's soul, calling the caster's debt due regardless of time remaining in their infernal agreement.

| Roll | Result |
|------|--------|
|------|--------|

- 1 The caster's right leg transforms into that of a goat from the knee down. His now-cloven foot and shin is covered with a thick, wooly black hair. Shudfolk observing the goatish limb shun the PC fiercely, knowing his soul is no longer his own. Finding footwear to cover the change becomes a challenge.
- 2 The caster's flesh assumes a crimson hue, giving him an unnatural ruddiness. This new flesh color trumps all other corruption taints altering the caster's natural skin tone. As above, this taint is recognized by the Shudfolk as a sign of infernal servitude and the caster is treated with abhorrence and occasionally outright violence.
- 3 The caster no longer casts a reflection, true proof he no longer possesses a soul of his own. The caster cannot be seen in any reflective surface, be it a looking glass, still water, or polished metal. As with the above taints, Shudfolk easily identify the caster as a servant of Modeca. In other regions, he may be mistaken for a vampire or other supernatural creature, earning him a stake through the heart and decapitation by frightened locals.
- 4 The caster gains a supernatural intolerance of silver. Simply touching the metal inflicts 1d4 points of damage, and silver weapons striking the caster cause double damage. If a silver object is brandished at the caster by a Lawful individual, he must make a DC 10 Will save or flee the presence of the individual for 1 turn.
- 5 The caster's ability to perform magic is hindered unless he convinces others to sell their soul to Modeca. The caster suffers a cumulative -1 penalty to spell checks for each week he fails to provide his patron with a new servant, either willingly or through manipulation. Successfully leading another into Modeca's debt removes the spell-check penalty, but it begins to accrue again if the caster fails to continue to provide his patron with dupes.
- 6 All writing the caster pens twists and writhes, transforming into demonic script. The unnatural transformation of the written word hinders the caster in the creation of magical scrolls, imparting a -4 penalty to *write magic* spell-checks as the taint wars with the spell's magical energies.



# A BACKWOODS BESTIARY: NEW MONSTERS FROM THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS



The Shudder Mountains are home to several species of creatures found nowhere else in the world. Some of these beasts are natural animals that evolved in the unique mountainous environment of the Shudders, while others are the product of the weird magical forces at work in the hills. This section introduces nine new monsters for use in a Shudder Mountain-based campaign and to inspire the judge to create other unusual monsters for the PCs to encounter in those dark hills and hollows.

## THE ABANDONED

**The Abandoned:** Init +2; Atk claws +4 melee (1d6+2); AC 13; HD 5d8; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP infravision, grapple attack (+6); SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; AL L.

The Hsaal protected their mines and the minerals contained therein with a strange race of magically-created wardens. In the wake of the Hsaal's destruction, these sentinels, now known as the Abandoned, continued to watch over their masters' diggings, protecting the forgotten treasures within from those who would plunder them.

The Abandoned are humanoid in appearance, standing up to 8' tall and covered in taugth skin with corded muscles visible underneath. Their heads are more batrachian than human, possessing a wide mouth and large incandescent eyes, but no nose. Their hands are both webbed and clawed. The Abandoned are intelligent and have lifespans lasting several millennia.

These sentinels attack with their claws, seeking to grapple intruders and drag the unlucky back to their lairs deep within the mines. Abandoned gain a +6 to their grapple attack rolls due to their size and strength. Although they prefer to take trespassers alive, the Abandoned readily fight to kill if facing powerful foes.

Little is known about what befalls those captured by the Abandoned, but at least one account suggests that abducted enemies are subjected to a magical or scientific transformation that blasts the captured foes' sanity and turns them into feral forms of life better suited for life beneath the

earth. The Abandoned never leave the mines they protect and have been known to let intruders who forfeit the treasure they've plundered depart in peace.

## BEARBONES

**Bearbones:** Init +8; Atk bite +10 melee (2d12+3) or claw +8 melee (2d10+3); AC 20; HD 10d12+3; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP immune to non-magical weapons, fearsome aura, stealthy (+15 to stealth-related checks), immune to critical hits, suffers ½ damage from cold and fire; SV Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +10; AL C.

Bearbones is a unique monster, a backwoods boogey-man called up by witches to obtain revenge against wrongdoers. As its name suggests, Bearbones resembles a grizzly bear-sized humanoid creature comprised of aged, mud-covered bones of inhuman origin. It stalks its prey on digitigrade legs, moving quietly through the night. Bearbones' eyes burn with blue-green light and its ribcage holds mottled gray organs of indistinct nature that ooze and pulsate as the creature moves about. It attacks with thick, sharp claws and boar-like tusks that jut from its snout.

Any creature coming within 20' of Bearbones must make a DC 15 Will save or be paralyzed with fear. This fright lasts for 2d4 rounds, persisting even if Bearbones attacks the frightened individual. Despite appearances, Bearbones is not un-dead but a conjured creature. It is said that Bearbones is difficult to kill permanently and if reduced to zero hit points, it dissolves away, its bones returning to its hidden grave located somewhere deep in the backwoods. Only by discovering Bearbones' grave and exposing its bones to the sun can the creature ever be truly destroyed.

## BLACK DOG

**Black Dog:** Init +6; Atk none; AC 10; HD 3d10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP howl (DC 14 Will save or 1d4 Luck loss), immune to non-magical attacks; SV Fort +7, Ref +7, Will +7; AL N.

In the dark of night, travelers sometimes spy a huge dog-





shaped, splotch of shadow moving amidst the gloom. Seen only as a silhouette of darkest black with eerie green glowing eyes against night's shadows, a black dog is an ill omen. Black dogs do not directly attack those they encounter, instead emitting a spine-chilling howl that shakes the hearer's soul for he knows he will soon experience a much worse brush with the supernatural.

Black dogs only appear to persons who are destined to encounter a supernatural menace within the next 24 hours, serving as a harbinger of things to come. A black dog always howls when it appears and those fated to meet what the hound's presence foretells must make a DC 14 Will save or lose 1d4 Luck. This lost Luck cannot be regained (even by thieves and halflings) until the affected individuals encounter and overcomes the subsequent supernatural encounter. If the victims survive the encounter, the lost Luck is immediately restored, but should they fail to triumph, the Luck is lost for good and only restored through normal means at the judge's discretion. For example, the judge knows the party will meet the Bad Lick Beast the following night and foretells the event by having the PCs glimpse a black dog and hear its cry. All fail their saves and lose 2 Luck. The next night the party runs across the Bad Lick Beast and manages to defeat the creature. The PCs immediately regain their lost Luck. Had they failed, forced to flee the encounter for instance, the loss would be permanent barring additional Luck gains later on.

Killing a black dog before it howls not only avoids potential Luck loss, but prevents the foretold supernatural encounter from happening. Black dogs always vanish after howling, disappearing back to whatever otherworldly place they hail from.

Black dogs are seldom encountered randomly, but if they are happened upon by chance, the judge must determine what supernatural hazard the party will experience before 24 hours elapse. The black dog's real threat is the fear it instills, not in the PCs but in the players themselves.

## EARTH HOUND

**Earth Hound:** Init +2; Atk tusks +2 melee (1d5) or bite +1 melee (1d4); AC 11; HD 1d6; MV 30', burrow 10'; Act 1d20; SP keen nose (+10 to detect hidden creatures and can smell dead bodies from 300' away); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

Earth hounds are ghoulish creatures that inhabit burying grounds, especially those near water, and consume the dead. Resembling pig-sized quadrupeds with rat-like fur and a canine-shaped head, earth hounds devour freshly buried corpses, tearing through coffin walls with their tusks. They have an incredibly keen sense of smell and can detect a fresh corpse up to 100 yards away, even if the body is buried and contained inside a casket. Although they prefer dead flesh, earth hounds have been known to attack the living if starving or when an unlucky gravedigger unearths one of their burrows.



## GARDINEL

**Gardinel:** Init -3; Atk tongue tendril +8 melee (grapple); AC 10; HD 20d12; MV none; Act 1d20; SP camouflage, digestive juices (DC 15 Fort save each round or suffer 4d8 damage), immune to most mind-affecting spells (see below); SV Fort +16, Ref N.A., Will -5; AL N.

The gardinel is an odd species of plant distantly related to the Venus flytrap and pitcher plant. A carnivorous plant, the gardinel has evolved to grow to great size and mimic the appearance of a constructed building—usually a log cabin or similar rustic structure. It is nearly indistinguishable from a normal house from the outside, bearing a single open “doorway” flanked by a pair of shuttered “windows.” The doorway and windows are in truth the gardinel's mouth and a pair of primitive organs that provide it with sight and smell. A gardinel usually grows in forlorn locations, but a rare strain of the plant has been known to sprout in towns and even large cities.

Unable to move, the gardinel relies on its camouflage to lure prey inside it. Travelers seeking shelter from inclement weather or a safe refuge to overnight in enter through the plant's open mouth and seldom escape once inside. In dire straits, the gardinel can use its tendril-like “tongue” to grab a meal lingering up to 15' from its doorway. The gardinel is +8 to hit on its initial attack with its tongue and enjoys a +16 modifier to maintain its grapple on subsequent rounds due to its size. The interior of a gardinel is a pink-walled space with a sloping floor littered with the skulls and bones of past meals. Once prey is inside the plant, the “door” closes as a flap of tough fiber folds over the entrance and the “room” (actually the gardinel's stomach) floods with acidic digestive juices that inflict 4d8 damage to all inside (DC 15 Fort save to avoid damage for one round). Victims trapped inside a gardinel can either force the fiber covering on the entrance (DC 20 Strength check) or cut their way free with sharp weapons (required a combined 50 points of damage to one section of the stomach wall). Gardinels are immune to most mind-affecting spells unless the magic specifically targets vegetable life.

It is said that not all gardinels are plants, but that some witches can create another magical version of a living cabin through the use of black magic. These witches' gardinels appear as furnished rustic homes, possessing a cunning intellect and capable of serving their mistresses in limited ways.

## HELLBENDER SALAMANDER

**Hellbender Salamander, Giant:** Init -2; Atk bite +3 melee (2d4); AC 14; HD 2d8; MV 20' or swim 30'; Act 1d20; SP camouflage (+10 to hide attempts); SV Fort +2, Ref -1, Will -2; AL N.

Giant Hellbender Salamanders are 6' long varieties of their much smaller cousin. They dwell among rocks and boulders in fast moving water, dining on fish, turtles, and the occasional mammal that swims past their den. Giant Hellbenders eat smaller prey whole, but will bite larger prey and drag them below the water's surface to drown their victims.

## HIDEBEHIND

**Hidebehind:** Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (2d4); AC 14; HD 4d8; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP backstab (+5 to attack, crit die 1d20/Table II), difficult to see (+20 to hide checks), instantaneous movement (can teleport up to 60' to remain behind its victim at will, interrupting initiative count if necessary), terrifying appearance (DC 15 Will save or observer flees in horror for 1d6 turns and blocks the hidebehind's appearance from his memory); SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +2; AL C.

Few have seen a hidebehind and lived, and those that have are reluctant to describe the terrible thing. As its name suggests, a hidebehind stalks its victim from the rear, using its special movement ability to avoid being seen. It attacks with surprise, gaining the benefit of a thief's *backstab* ability as it leaps onto its chosen victim's back. A hidebehind prefers to feast upon the intestines of its victims once it drags its meal back to its lair. Local folklore maintains that hidebehinds find the smell of alcohol abhorrent and will avoid a creature reeking of the stuff, but the veracity of this rumor is unknown.

## OPOSSUM, GIANT

**Opossum, Giant:** Init +2; Atk bite +1 melee (1d4); AC 12; HD 1d6+1; MV 30' or climb 20'; Act 1d20; SP feign death; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will -2; AL N.

Giant opossums are identical to their smaller kin in all aspects except for size. These large marsupials grow to the size of hound dogs, with some rare specimens reaching even greater proportions. Giant opossums are seldom aggressive, and when confronted by predators, will "play dead." This unconscious response renders the opossum unmoving for 1d4 hours, during which time animal predators are 90% likely to leave the creature alone. An aggressive giant opossum is likely rabid and its bite inflicts an additional 1d4 damage if the victim fails a DC 10 Fort save.

Some giant opossums display significant intelligence, possessing almost manlike intellects. These varieties are commonly found as familiars or animal servants to Lawful wizards, witches, and other backwoods magic practitioners. Giant opossum familiars can handle objects with their forepaws, manipulating them with the same dexterity as human hands.



## WRIGGLER

**Wiggler:** Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (1d8) or claws +2 (1d4); AC 12; HD 4d10; MV 30', climb 20' or leap 10'; Act 2d20; SP crit range 19-20, superior hearing, echolocation, blind, heightened reflexes, uncanny climber (can scale walls and ceilings; +10 to bonus to climb-related actions); SV Fort +3, Ref +6 (but see below), Will +2; AL C.

Wrigglers are pale white, man-sized humanoids with blind eyes and tough, leathery skin. Shredding teeth and fangs, and enlarged, bat-like ears complete their terrifying appearance. Wrigglers move with seemingly unnatural skill through the tight tunnels and soaring caves beneath the Shudder Mountains. Although blind (and immune to spells that affect sight), wrigglers perceive their surroundings with superior hearing and by creating chirps similar to a cricket's song to echolocate. Wrigglers have cat-like reflexes and always make their Reflex saves unless bound, unconscious, or similarly restrained from moving.

Wrigglers were the aboriginal humanoids that dwelled in the Shudder Mountains before the coming of the Hsaal. When that ancient race descended from the dark moon, they attempted to enslave the wrigglers' ancestors, but the native clans retreated into the mountains' caverns. Over time, they adapted to their subterranean environment, becoming a super predator troglafauna species. Their uncanny aptitude for climbing and slithering through small tunnels gave them the name "wrigglers" by the few lucky survivors who first encountered them.

# ADDITIONAL RANDOM ENCOUNTERS FOR THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

**1)** A crude log cabin stands in a secluded glen along the party's path. With bad weather closing in and the prospect of a wet night in the mountains ahead of them, the cabin offers welcome shelter against the coming rain. Unfortunately for the party, the "cabin" is actually a hungry gardinel awaiting its next meal.

**Gardinel (1):** See page 35.

**2)** The sound of splashing water is heard as the party approaches or travels alongside a winding river. As they reach the river or round a bend, they glimpse a trio of large humanoids in rustic dress immersed in the waters close to the riverbank.

These three figures are Bigginty hill giants "noodling" for giant catfish along the riverbank. The river is 6' deep here, but appears deeper due to the giants' crouched posture. Preferring humanoid to fish, the giants attack the party. Two waded out of the river, while the third pulls rocks from the riverbed to hurl at the PCs.

**Hill Giants (3):** See DCC RPG p. 414.

**3)** An overgrown clearing is chanced upon. Old grave stones stand amongst the high grass and meadow flowers and a falling-down pole fence encircles the field. This forgotten burying ground is home to a pack of ghouls, once conjure-men who dabbled in the dark arts and perished with their souls forever tainted. The ghouls choose the party as their next meal, attacking if the PCs enter the burying ground or tracking them to their evening resting place to strike after dark.

**Ghouls (4):** See DCC RPG p. 414.

**4)** A rickety bridge crosses a rushing, boulder-choked river. Fashioned from fallen logs lashed and nailed together, the bridge has seen better days. If more than one PC crosses the span at a time, each character must make a Luck check or plunge through the decaying timbers into the rapids below. The fall does no damage, but a giant hellbender salamander lurks amongst the rocks and seizes upon the abruptly arriving morsel.

**Hellbender Salamander, Giant:** See page 36.

**5)** A winding trail leads down to the bottom of one of the mountain's many hollows. The dell is overgrown with verdant bushes and ancient trees, turning it into a maze of dense vegetation. Hidden among the greenery is an old cabin now home to a massive hive of yellow jacket wasps. Moving too close to the crumbling structure aggravates the wasps, who emerge in a huge stinging swarm to protect their home.

**Insect swarm (1):** See DCC RPG p. 419.

**6)** A great shadow passes over the party as they tramp through the mountains. Looking up, they spy a tremendous buzzard drifting on the thermals and peering down at them with obvious interest. This is one of the giant vultures that roost atop Carrion Peak seeking its next meal. The buzzard doesn't attack if the PCs look hale and hearty, but a party bearing wounds from a previous encounter is likely to be interpreted by the buzzard as an easy meal.

**Giant buzzard (1):** Stats as Pterodactyl (see DCC RPG p. 424).

**7)** A party member feels the hair on the back of his neck stand on end and experiences a dread sensation of being watched. The ambient noise of insects, birds, and other wildlife goes silent as the sound of rusting leaves or snapping twigs is heard off in the distance. The PC has been chosen by a hidebehind as its next meal. The creature continues to stalk its victim, striking when most likely to succeed.

**Hidebehind (1):** See page 36.

**8)** A trio of dilapidated cabins stand secluded in the backwoods, showing signs of neglect and sudden abandonment. No one is about, but careful investigation reveals blood stains and strange collapsed animal tunnels crisscrossing the yard around the homes. The cabins were abandoned when a pack of earth hounds took up residence in the family burying ground. The creatures, lacking steady meals, began preying upon the living. The pack still lairs in the old graveyard and detects the party's arrival. The earth hounds burrow their way to the party and attacks.

**Earth Hound (6):** See page 35.

**9)** A weatherworn spire of rock rises from the earth in a shadowy grove deep in the backwoods. Weird sigils nearly obliterated by time and the elements decorate its face. It is obvious that the stone is not a natural formation and was fashioned by mortal hands long ago. This crude obelisk was the product of the Hsaal and a few of their ancient spirits still linger about the place. If the party stays here past nightfall or desecrates the stone, the "hants" target them for revenge.

**"Hants" (5):** Init +2; Atk touch +6 melee (1d6+frigid touch) or poltergeist thrown object +4 ranged (1d6); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 11 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP frigid touch (1d6 plus DC 10 Fort save or temporarily lose 1d3 points of Strength, Agility or Stamina, target's choice), immune to non-magical weapons, un-dead traits; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

**10)** A deep pond or slow-moving river is discovered by the party. The glint of gold is visible in the shallows of the waters. PCs inspecting the metallic gleam discover gold dust or even small nuggets washed down from a forgotten delve higher up in the mountains. Unfortunately, the water





is home to a giant catfish who must be dealt with before the party can reap their reward. The gold is worth 20 gp, but more can be found if the original vein is located up in the hills.

**Giant Catfish (1):** Init +2; Atk bite +6 melee (2d8+2) or barbels +4 melee (1d6 + poison); AC 15; HD 8d8+5; hp 41; MV 20' or swim 40'; Act 1d20; SP poison barbels (DC 13 Fort save or take an additional 2d6), SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2; AL N.

**11)** The party passes by a long-neglected corn field gone to seed. The field was once that of a witch who enchanted her scarecrows with black magic to serve as her guardians. The witch is long-dead (and perhaps her unburied bones reside nearby), but her animated servants still protect the property from intrusion. They view the party as interlopers and emerge from the wild corn rows to defend the dead witch's crops.

**Animated Scarecrows (4):** Init +0; Atk slam +2 melee (1d4) or pitchfork +2 melee (1d8); AC 12; HD 3d8; hp 14 each; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP suffers double damage from fire, immune to mind-affecting magic; SV Fort +0, Ref +2, Will -; AL C.

**12)** The party chances upon a dim grove of conifers, the smell of pine sap hanging thick in the air. Heaps of fallen needles gather in drifts about the forest floor apparently having collected there over decades. One pile is in truth a primeval pitch slime, an oozy monstrosity that evolved in the deep recess of the Shudders, birthed from a mixture of pine sap and fetid magic. Pine needles naturally affix themselves to the slime's sticky body, providing an excellent disguise for the slow-moving monster to ambush prey. Primeval pitch slime burns if set alight, but the slime takes no damage (and inflicts an additional 1d6 fire damage with a successful attack while burning).

**Primeval Pitch Slime (1):** Init (always last); Atk pseudopod +4 melee (1d4); AC 10; HD 3d8; hp 14; MV 5', climb 5'; Act 3d20; SP camouflage (+10 to hide attempts), sticky, immune to fire, half damage from slicing and piercing weapons; SV Fort +6, Ref -8, Will -6.; AL C.

**13)** While traveling along a high ridge, the party experiences a sense of unease as their flesh literally tingles. This

skin-crawling effect is caused by a band of man-bats having an energetic discussion close by in their subsonic language. The topic: Should they eat the party now or capture them and return them to their roost? Regardless of their decision, the party is soon under attack by the flying demi-humans who descend from the air and engage the party in battle.

**Man-bats (5):** See DCC RPG p. 421.

**14)** A gap in the stony face of a mountain shows signs of being excavated by mortal hands and not by natural forces. Examining the cavity identifies it as one of the secret and ancient mines left behind by the Hsaal. Hidden treasures may lie within, but if the PCs travel too deep under the mountain or plunder what wealth remains (judge's discretion), they come into conflict with a trio of Abandoned who still defend the mine.

**The Abandoned (3):** See page 34.

**15)** The sound of breaking tree boughs and fleeing animals echo through the forest. Something big is heading towards the party. A tree of no small size crashes to the ground near the PCs revealing an extremely large animated skeleton with burning green sparks for eyes. Birthed from the bones of a dead *something* from long ago, the skeletal creature is intent on destroying all life it encounters. Perhaps if it is defeated, clues to what the creature was and where it came from can be discovered amongst its old bones.

**Skeleton of Unknown Origin (1):** Init +1; Atk claws +7 melee (1d6+7 plus 1d6 cold damage); AC 9; HD 8d6; hp 28; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP un-dead, half damage from piercing and slashing weapons, chilling touch; SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +0; AL C.

**16)** The ground thuds to the beat of huge, tromping footsteps, announcing the arrival of a group of ogres. The brutes carry a slain (and partially-eaten — they couldn't wait) grizzly bear hanging from a large pole born on their broad shoulders. The ogres are recently arrived in the mountains, lairing in a cave not far from where the PCs meet them. The band is looking for employment, hoping to get into the good graces of the Biggintys or some evil conjure-man.

**Ogres (4):** See DCC RPG p. 422.







# THE RETURN OF THE WILD: A RISING THREAT IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

by Michael Curtis

**T**he Shudfolk of the mountains are a devout people, raised in the ways of the Sovereign and told to steer clear of witches and conjure-men and the dark forces they serve. It has been this way for as long as the mountain people can remember, and the Shudfolk largely deem this to be as the Sovereign intended.

Now there is something old stirring in the darkest of hollows, an entity long forgotten but rife with untapped power older than the hills that encompass it. This being has existed since the first tree took root in the rising hills, birthed when the first drops of blood fell upon rich, primordial soil. It has persisted throughout the cataclysms and catastrophes that rocked the Shudders and watched hungrily as one race departed and another arrived. A being that challenges not only the Shining Light of the Sovereign, but the Eternal Darkness of the Three: Nengal the Wild One.

What Nengal is remains unknown, even to those who venerate it under the solstice moon. Many believe it was a local deity, the primordial entity worshiped by the original men who dwelled in the mountains before they were forced beneath the hills. Others say Nengal simply is what it is, a reflection of the savagery of Nature perhaps given sentience by the spilled magics of the Hsaal. Whatever its origins, Nengal is undoubtedly a threat to the traditional Shudfolk way of life.

While Nengal may have slumbered in the hills for millennia, it is only recently that its power has returned, restored by the small group of worshippers who've turned their backs on the Sovereign, but likewise rejected the compacts offered by the Three. These men and women instead reached back to the mountain's primordial past and discovered the power that lingers in the stones, trees, storms, and beasts of the hills and pledge themselves to serving that savage majesty.

The followers of Nengal might be called "druids" in some cultures, but that sobriquet isn't completely accurate in the Shudders. Whereas druids in other lands pledge themselves to protecting Nature and serving the Balance between Law and Chaos, the followers of Nengal have no such concerns. Nature can protect itself with tooth, claw, and storm, and Law, Chaos, and Neutrality are human concepts subservient to the wild world. Those pledged to Nengal care only for the rapture granted by the tearing of flesh between the teeth, dancing in the wild rains, and rutting like beasts under the full moon. The restrictions of the Sovereign pale before the freedoms granted by Nengal.

Servants of Nengal gather in the secluded hollows of the mountains, usually under the light of the moon or when the thunderstorms rage in the hills. They are drawn to the old stones that still stand in the places of power, sites sacred to the serpent-folk, the first tribes of men, and the Hsaal alike, drawing inspiration and energy from these locations. Their ways and litanies are taught orally and no knowledge is kept written down by the venerators of Nengal. Rites are held either unclad or dressed in the skins of fierce animals such as wolves and bears.

The oldest and most secret of Nengal's rites are performed deep in the mountains, far from prying eyes. These ceremonies are filled with blood, death, and fire, and woe unto the lost traveler that ventures too close to the wild tabernacles of Nengal on a sacred night. In these secret rites, human lives are offered up to Nengal, either by ritual strangulation in the mountain bogs, the bodies of the dead left to slip beneath tea-dark waters to feed the Wild One's hunger, or burned alive in the great wicker constructions erected and set alight in Nengal's name.

The Shudfolk so far are largely unaware that some of their number have embraced a newer (or far older) faith. Nengal's servants maintain strict secrecy and never speak of their faith where they might be overheard. Those who stumble across the Wild One's hidden ways are either converted or killed in an "accident" that won't jeopardize the faith's secrecy.

Adventurers in the Shudder Mountains can cross paths with the followers of the Wild One in several ways. A friend or ally of the party might be concerned that a family





member is taking curious trips away from home on certain nights and requests the adventurers to follow him and ensure he don't get into trouble. Tailing the family member leads the party into the middle of a Nengal ritual where the faithful will try and kill the PCs lest their secret become known by the local Shudfolk community.

Another and more unusual means of introducing Nengal and its faithful servants is to have the party approached by a witch bound to one of the Three. The followers of Nengal have claimed a spoil once utilized by the witch in her sor-

cery and she wants the mystical site back. Nengal's natural power is a worthy opponent for her devil-granted witchcraft, however, and she seeks formidable allies to partner with—namely the PCs! If they acquiesce, the witch offers to use her magic and the power of the spoil for the party's benefit. If the judge wishes to further muddy the moral waters, one of the witch's innocent kin has been kidnapped and is intended to be sacrificed at the next rite to Nengal. The PCs must weigh the consequences of helping one who delves into black magic against the life of an innocent.

## NENGAL THE WILD ONE



he Wild One is nature personified, but not the docile force of flower, crop, and newborn lamb. Nengal represents Nature, red in tooth and claw, a force grown fat on blood and bones and more feared than honored on the nights when the moon rides high. For centuries, Nengal has dwelled forgotten by the denizens of the Shudders, ignored in favor of the power of the Sovereign, its rightful tribute denied in lieu of devotions to the upstart god of the Shudfolk. But now, some have found their way back to the primordial might and terror of the Oldest of Gods and the Wild One's power rises in the hollows.

### Invoke Patron check results:

- 12-13 The Wild One fills the air with the howl of a hundred famished wolves, bears, coyotes, and other predators. All enemies within 60' of the caster must make a Will save vs. the spell check result or be terrified for 1d3+CL rounds. Terrified creatures suffer a -1 die penalty to all action dice and saving throw rolls and are 50% likely to drop carried items.
- 14-17 Nengal grants its servant the ability to sense the vitality of living creatures. The caster instinctively knows the life strength of all creatures within 100' (approximate number of HD/class levels and whether the creatures' hit points are greater, equal to, or less than the caster's). For the next 1d6+CL rounds, any attack or spell cast at a creature stronger than the caster gains a +1d bonus to damage rolls. This increase affects multiple dice if applicable (e.g. a spell that normally does 3d6 damage would do 3d8 damage).
- 18-19 Modeca makes the caster *invisible*, allowing him to escape a tough spot. The *invisibility* lasts for 1 turn, breaking if the caster attacks another creature, but requires no concentration on the part of the caster.
- 20-23 Nengal rewards the caster unafraid to let his blood flow. All spells cast while the caster is suffering from unstaunched wounds or similar blood flow gain a bonus to their spell check equal to the caster's level. This benefit lasts for 1d10+CL rounds. The bonus ends immediately if the caster's blood ceases to flow.
- 24-27 The Wild One strikes at the caster's foes, delivering a bolt of lightning from the cloudy sky, a tongue

of flame from a nearby fire, or a similar harmful touch of wild nature. The strike inflicts 6d6+CL damage (Reflex save vs. spell check for ½ damage). If the caster desires, he can spilt the strike between two targets, inflicting 3d6+CL damage to each.

- 28-29 Nengal touches the caster with the primordial power of the natural world, enervating his mortal body. The caster gains +20 hit points, a +4 bonus to all attacks and damage, an extra d14 action die, and suffers only half damage from natural sources (as result 18-19 above). While under the effect of the primordial power, the caster cannot cast spells unless they have a connection with nature (judge's discretion). A fire-based spell would be possible, but comprehend language or magic shield would not, for example.
- 30-31 The Wild One connects the caster with the wild world surrounding him, plugging him into the unseen avenues of perception that crisscross the land. The caster perceives the world in a 5 mile diameter as if he were the land himself. He instinctively knows what creatures are present and where, what plants grow there, the locations of natural resources such as clean water, mineral wealth, and similar unrefined treasures, and he detect any hidden creature or foe obscured by camouflage, invisibility, or similar means. The caster can overhear any conversation occurring in the land by concentrating his senses, but doing so mutes his other perceptions while he focuses solely on the spoken exchange. While this effect is ongoing, the caster cannot be surprised by any creature present in the affected area. This effect lasts for (CL)d6+6 turns or whenever the caster choses to end the connection.
- 32+ Nengal directly intervenes on behalf of its servant, laying waste to his enemies. The Wild One manifests as a force of nature, albeit an abnormal one. Its power is unleashed as a surging storm crackling with lightning and blood-red clouds, a horde of savage animals acting in concert, trees and rocks moving with purpose, or a similar form as determined by the judge. This manifestation causes (CL)d20 points of damage to all creatures in a 100' square area directly in front of the caster. The decimation



is sufficient to destroy free-standing structures, uproot crops, smash wagons, and inflict similar destruction. The manifestation lasts only moments, vanishing or returning to normal conditions once the damage has been wrought.

## **PATRON TAINT: NENGAL THE WILD ONE**

When patron taint is indicated for Nengal, roll 1d6 on the table below. When a caster has acquired all six taints at all levels of effect, there is no need to continue rolling any longer.

| Roll | Result                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | The caster's face acquires a scraggly, mossy beard regardless of race or gender. The facial hair is initially sparse, but subsequent acquisitions of patron taint increase its appearance. When this result is rolled a second time, the beard increases in volume and the caster's skin acquires a faint greenish hue. If this taint is rolled a third time, the caster's skin turns forest green and his beard transforms into thick curly moss.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 2    | The caster gains the same allergy to iron as possessed by elves (see DCC RPG core rulebook, p. 57). If the caster is an elf, the allergy increases in severity and he suffers 1 point of damage each hour he is in contact with iron. If this result is rolled a second time, the caster's vulnerability increases and he suffers 1 point of damage for each hour he is in direct contact with iron. If the caster is an elf, he now suffers 1 point of damage for each turn he is in contact with iron. If rolled a third time, the caster suffers 1 point of damage for each turn he is in contact with iron. If an elf, iron weapons now do double damage to the caster on a successful hit. |
| 3    | The caster acquires a taste for raw meat, enjoying it with a greater gusto than even slightly cooked meat. However, he can still consume cooked meat without difficulty. If this result is rolled a second time, the caster can only eat raw meat, but can subsist on other foods such as grains, fruits, and vegetables. If rolled a third time, only raw, bloody meat, preferably from prey slain by the caster himself, will satisfy his hunger and provide sustenance.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 4    | The caster gains an intolerance for clothing, finding it constricting and itchy to wear. He can endure garments when necessary but prefers to shed them whenever possible. If this result is gained a second time, the caster cannot abide to wear clothes for more than an hour. If forced to do so, he suffers a -1 penalty to his action dice, saving throws, skill and spell checks. If this result is rolled a third time, wearing clothes interferes with the caster's connection with the primordial world and he suffers a -1 die penalty to spell checks when clothed.                                                                                                                 |

5 The caster's mere presence causes domesticated animals and herbivores to become nervous and flee his presence if possible. If this result is rolled a second time, the affected animals might harm themselves trying to escape the caster's vicinity, bashing themselves against barriers or otherwise placing escape above their wellbeing. If rolled a third time, the animals are likely to attack the caster in a frenzy if escape proves impossible. This taint at any level is widely considered a sign of witchcraft by the Shudfolk and the mountain folk may prove a bigger concern to the caster's health than any animal.

6 The caster develops an abhorrence for consecrated ground sacred to "civilized" deities. Merely stepping onto such holy ground causes the caster discomfort and he will seek to leave as soon as possible. If this result is rolled a second time, the caster must make a DC 10 Will save to even step onto consecrated ground. If rolled a third time, the caster suffers 1 point of damage for each minute he spends on sacred ground. Note that what deities are considered "civilized" are left to the judge to determine, but gods possessing no direct connection to the natural world are likely to meet the definition. In the Shudder Mountains, the Sovereign would be considered a "civilized" deity and his churches would affect a caster with this taint.

## SPELLBURN: NENGAL THE WILD ONE

The Wild One is a primordial power, a personification of nature at its most savage and dangerous. As such, those casters who take steps to appease Nengal's primeval hungers gain greater benefits when spellburning. When a caster utilizes spellburn, roll 1d4 on the table below or build off these suggestions to create an event specific to your home campaign.

### Roll Result

- 1 Blood must flow for Nengal to respond. The caster gouges at his flesh with his nails or slices into his skin with a ceremonial knife fashioned from bone, tooth, or talon. The resulting damage to muscle and sinew results in attribute loss.
- 2 The caster experiences ravenous hunger that only fresh, bloody meat will appease. He feels compelled to bite into the flesh of another living creature, inflicting 1d3 damage with a successful bite. The damage is added to the spellburn total. If alone, the caster bites and devours his own flesh to amplify his magic.
- 3 Small predators (badgers, foxes, weasels, etc.) appear and swarm the caster, ripping his flesh with their teeth and talons. The spilled blood from the attacks writhes as if alive and merges with the magical forces called up by the caster. The animal-inflicted wounds manifest as attribute loss.

4 Nengal's presence is stronger in the wild and it fuels the caster's magic appropriately. When spellburning in a natural setting untouched by the presence of civilization (judge's discretion), the caster receives 2 points of spellburn for every ability point spent, up to a maximum of ten ability points.

## PATRON SPELLS: NENGAL

Nengal grants the following three unique spells to its faithful servants. Space does not allow full spell descriptions here, but summaries of each spell's effect is provided to guide judges in creating their own.

1st level—*Howl of the Predator*: This spell drives away natural animals, sending them fleeing in a panic. At higher spell check levels, it imparts bravery and physical attack bonuses to the caster's allies.

2nd level—*Call up the Bog-Dead*: This spell awakens the corpses of those ritually-sacrificed to Nengal in the marshes and bogs, granting them a simulacrum of life. The Bog-Dead are not un-dead, but animated corpses given motion and animal intelligence by the beasts and plants that feed on their remains.

3rd—*Awaken the Wicker Man*: This spell can only be cast in concert with the flaming sacrifices of human and animal lives encased in one of the wicker constructions of the Nengal faith. This spell animates the woven man figure, allowing the burning construct to walk abroad and punish those who oppose the will of Nengal.





## CHAPTER FOUR

# A GIANT COMPIENDIUM OF WISDOM

*Giants might be big and lack book-learnin', but there's some schoolin' you can't get from scrolls and tomes.*

*Ignore the wisdom of the backwoods at your own peril.*



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2018

# MA BIGGINTY'S BOOK OF BACKWOODS WISDOM

by Michael Curtis

The author would like to thank Elliot Wigginton, the Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School, and all the editors, contributors, and writers of Foxfire Magazine for their continued work in documenting the culture of the southern Appalachian Mountains and its people. This book would not be possible without their efforts. People interested in learning more about the Foxfire Project and its mission are encouraged to visit [www.foxfire.org](http://www.foxfire.org) for further information.

## PREFACE



reetings to whomever is reading this manuscript. I fear it may be the last I ever pen unless good fortune smiles upon me. My name is Bango Cloverfoot, although I doubt the name means much to you. I am a scholar and scribe of modest repute, well-regarded in some enlightened circles for my treatises on plant and animal lore. It was these such pursuits that led to my current predicament.

I intended a prolonged visit to that secluded but picturesque region known as the Shudder Mountains, a research trip to interview its native residents. Known as the Shudfolk, these quaint people are a close-knit and remote tribe of humanity, dealing with outsiders only when circumstances demand. They are a folk more at home in their remote hollow farms and hamlets than attending to issues beyond their borders. Despite this self-imposed isolation, the Shudfolk are known to possess vast stockpiles of wisdom concerning matters natural, and it was my hope to interview the reticent residents of the Shudders to glean some of that wisdom. Unfortunately for myself and potentially for the enrichment of scholarly lore, my hopes were dashed by circumstances I hadn't accounted for.

Although the Shudfolk proved to be a friendly people to outsiders who mind their manners and contribute to their communal way of life, the mountain folk are not the sole residents of these hills and hollows. While on my way through the Deep Hollows, my guide and I ran afoul of the region's most feared occupants: a family of hill giants known as the Biggintys. We were captured, plopped into rancid smelling sacks and brought back to the giants' den, a ramshackle cabin set far back in the Deep Hollows. My poor guide met his fate on the first night, ending up in the clan's stewpot as their evening meal.

Danger is quick to inspire, it is said, and with my imminent demise staring me in the face, I knew that unless I found a means to preserve my life, I'd soon serve as the giants' next meal. Luckily for me, the Biggintys bound me to a stake within earshot of their filthy hovel and I could hear the clan's matriarch, Ma Bigginty, working in the kitchen. Once the horrible screams of my guide ended abruptly, I overheard the giantess talking to her young. Her words, carried through the window to my pinioned

position, were the typical backwoods superstition I'd heard repeated throughout the Shudders. Her baritone voice reminded her youngest that "Remember when we're et'in this one a'night, that if thar be bubbles in yer bowl, it means unlooked for gold will soon a'come yer way." Her words gave me a faint hope, but faint was better than none.

When Ma Bigginty came out to pour water down my parched gullet the next morning, I fawned over her, exclaiming that I'd never encountered such a treasure trove of wisdom in all my travels! I explained I had no fear in dying and was honored to feed such a ferocious clan of giants, but I lamented the fact that nobody else would every benefit from her vast knowledge. After I explained what "lamented" meant, Ma Bigginty was tremendously pleased. I asked her if she'd ever put down her knowledge onto parchment so that future generations of Biggintys – nay, all the world's peoples! – could be enlightened by her. As I expected, the foreboding woman was unfamiliar with the art of writing. It was then that I sighed and said I'd gladly do it for her, but, alas, I wouldn't live long enough to complete such a masterpiece. After explaining what a "masterpiece" was, Ma Bigginty got a sly look upon her tremendous countenance and vanished back into the house.

What followed was a loud conversation with her mate, Pa Bigginty, the sound of smashing crockery, breaking furniture, and finally silence. Ma Bigginty returned, told me that she'd had sweet talked her mate into postponing my fate for the time being. Instead, I'd be put to work recording all of her acquired wisdom. I was freed from my stake, brought into the reeking cabin (which was far fouler than I had imagined), and chained to the leg of the kitchen table. It is here that I know sit, a makeshift quill and walnut ink serving as writing tools, and a patch of lambskin as my parchment.

My intent is to prolong my existence as long as possible, hoping that an opportunity for escape presents itself. In the meanwhile, I might as well humor my captor and jot down her words for posterity.

## INTRODUCTION



elcome to Ma Bigginty's Book of Backwoods Wisdom, a collection of material suitable for your Shudder Mountain-based Dungeon Crawl Classics campaign. With a little nudging and fine tuning, the information found herein is easily adapted to DCC RPG campaigns set outside the Shudders and for other fantasy role-playing games.

A lot of research went into the writing of DCC #83: The Chained Coffin, research that uncovered more interesting tidbits about the Appalachian Mountains and the people who live there than could ever fit into the adventure – even



when it grew from a single book into a boxed set. More of it turned up in the various digest-sized supplements for the Shudder Mountains campaign setting, as well as Gen Con Program books and now the Chained Coffin reprint. But there is still a whole host of information dwelling in my notes awaiting to escape into your game!

This text is a collection of some of that lore, a hodge-podge of new information and game material about the Shudder Mountains. It introduces new monsters, new magic, new superstitions of the Shudfolk, and more, all of which can be implemented as the judge sees fit. Throughout the book, you'll also find good ol' downhome wisdom culled from the mind of Ma Bigginty. This "color commentary" is provided to both set the tone of the book and to give the judge ideas for game-related material of his or her own devising. But be warned! If you're a player and your reading these words, Ma Bigginty's wisdom isn't always sound. Don't expect surefire results by replicating her advice! In other words, we leave it up to the judge to determine if there's any merit to Ma Bigginty's mountain lore.

So sit back, pour yourself a drink, and get ready to listen to some backwoods lore that will further expand your knowledge of the Shudders' hills and hollows.

## PART ONE: MEDICINE OF THE MOUNTAINS



Illness and accidents are no less common among the Shudfolk than they are to any other culture. Given there are fewer clerics readily available in the Shudder Mountains to magically aid the ill and injured, and those that are may be days away, the Shudfolk have to rely on generations of acquired herbal knowledge and practice to treat disease and wounds. Luckily, the Shudders are not lacking in natural medicines or the knowledge of how to apply them.

### TREATING ILLNESS AND INJURY

The Shudfolk rely on herbal healing when magical assistance isn't available. The acquired wisdom of their ancestors had been passed down through the centuries, instructing each new generation about the properties, both fair and foul, of native plants and how to prepare them for proper medical treatment.

### MAGICAL PROPERTIES

Some of the plants listed below are rumored to have mystical properties ranging from love attraction to the banishment of evil spirits. Ultimately, it is left to the judge to determine the truth of these legends. Whether or not the plant possesses magical powers when used correctly, it's

### MANLY MIKE SAYS...

While the beneficial properties of plants have been observed and used by humanity since before recorded history, caution should always be taken when it comes to gathering and employing natural ingredients for medicinal purposes. Reading this section doesn't make you "wood wise" or grant you a medical degree. Neither I nor Goodman Games takes any responsibility if you use the information presented below for anything other than imaginary use in your role-playing games. In other word, don't be a dumb-ass.

suggested that the judge make the character's preparation check in secret so the player never knows for certain whether a supposedly magical plant fails due to a misstep in preparing it or if it's simply "an old wives' tale."

### FORAGING FOR MEDICINAL PLANTS

Theoretically, anyone can search for herbs. Doing so is an Intelligence check with a DC based on the type of plant sought. As per normal DCC RPG rules for skill checks, characters untrained in the herbal arts or unfamiliar with plants in general roll a d10 when looking for these medicinal plants. Characters with previous occupations related to herbs and plants (such as alchemist, dwarven apothecarist, elven sage, farmer, healer, herbalist, and so forth) roll a d20 when looking for herbs.

Search for herbs is a process that takes up to four hours. The character announces he or she is looking for a particular herb. The judge adjudicates if the local environment possibly allows the plant to be present. If the herb might be found nearby, the character makes his forage check by rolling an Intelligence check with a DC based on the plant. If the check succeeds, the judge rolls 1d4 to determine how many hours are spent seeking the plant before locating it. On a failed forage check, the character expends the full four hours without finding the medicinal plant. The character may attempt again, but doing so requires another full four hours (the judge doesn't roll the 1d4 on a second attempt on the same day).

A successful foraging check turns up enough plants for 1d4 +the searcher's Intelligence modifier uses. Gathered plants retain their potency for 1 week. If prepared for use after this time, the preparation check (described below) suffers a -1d penalty for every seven days or part thereof that have passed beyond that time (plants gathered 18 days ago would suffer a -3d preparation check penalty, for example).

### PREPARING MEDICINAL AND MAGICAL PLANTS

Once found, the medicinal plant must be properly prepared before anyone can receive the benefits from it. The means of preparation vary from plant to plant: some are

steeped into teas which are then consumed, others are ground into a powder and mixed with grease to create an ointment, while others must be dried, burned, and their smoke inhaled. Plants with magical properties require even stranger preparations. These plants are often sewn into sachets along with bones, stones, fingernail parings, and other mystical tokens, or consumed in “potions” that include other – and often weirder – ingredients.

Medicinal plants require an hour to prepare, during which time the preparer must focus solely on the task and cannot be engaged in other activities, including traveling (but a judge may deem that the preparer could ride in a wagon while preparing the herbs) At the end of this period, the person makes a preparation check, which is an Intelligence skill check against a DC determined on the table below. NOTE: When two DC numbers are presented separated by a “/” on the table, the first is the DC for preparing the plant for medicinal use and the second is the DC when trying to call upon the plant’s purported mystical properties.

If the check is successful, a single application of the medicine is created and the recipient of that medicine gains the benefits described in the **Properties of Mountain Plants** section below. The preparer deducts one use from the number of uses found when foraging.

A failed preparation check results in the plant going to waste due to a mishap or incorrect preparation method. No medicine is produced and the preparer subtracts one use from the number of plants found when foraging.

As when foraging for medicinal plants, the preparation check is made using either a d10 or a d20 depending on the preparing character’s occupational background. If the plant is being prepared to take advantage of its purported magical properties, spellcasters of any ilk roll a d20 even if their occupational backgrounds are unrelated to the horticultural arts.

Preparing a plant for magical use requires 1d4 hours minus the preparer’s Intelligence modifier. At the end of that period, the preparer makes her preparation check as noted above. In addition, the person working with the plant must spend 1 point of Luck which doesn’t modify the preparation check, although additional Luck points may be spent as normal to affect the die roll.

A successful preparation check results in one use of the plant’s mystical powers as described below. The preparer deducts one use from the number of uses found when foraging. On a failed check, the preparer suffers a mishap or makes a mistake while working with the plant. The Luck point is lost, and the preparer subtracts one use from the

**TABLE 1-1: MEDICINAL AND MAGICAL PLANTS**

| Herb          | Forage DC | Prepare DC* | Treatment Type                         |
|---------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------------------|
| Angelica      | 12        | 10          | Antidote                               |
| Belladonna    | 12        | 12          | Disease cure/poison                    |
| Buckeye       | 8         | 13          | Good luck charm/poison                 |
| Chamomile     | 8         | 12          | Healing                                |
| Cinnamon      | 12        | 10          | Pain relief                            |
| Clove         | 8         | 12          | Ward against evil                      |
| Coltsfoot     | 8         | 14          | Love charm                             |
| Comfrey       | 10        | 10          | Sets broken bones                      |
| Coxcomb       | 10        | 12/15       | Healing/communication with the dead.   |
| Devil’s Dung  | 12        | 15          | Exorcism                               |
| Holly         | 10        | 15          | Luck charm                             |
| Horehound     | 9         | 12          | Disease cure                           |
| Hounds Tongue | 12        | 10/14       | Bite cure/dog silencer                 |
| Marigold      | 10        | 13          | Dream agent                            |
| Mugwort       | 12        | 11          | Curative enhancer                      |
| Pennyroyal    | 10        | 12          | Healing                                |
| Rue           | 12        | 15          | Protection vs. spells and lycanthropes |
| Valerian      | 9         | 10/13       | Sleep aid/ward vs. lightning           |
| Vervain       | 10        | 10          | Pain relief                            |
| Yarrow        | 8         | 10/13       | Cold cure/courage booster              |

\*Note: When two DC numbers are presented separated by a “/” on the table, the first is the DC for preparing the plant for medicinal use and the second is the DC when trying to call upon the plant’s purported mystical properties.

number of plants found when foraging. The preparer might be unaware that they failed the check until the plant is employed if the judge made their check for them as suggested above.

## PROPERTIES OF MOUNTAIN PLANTS

Each plant presented here has at least one helpful property according to Shudder Mountain lore. These properties are described below. The judge is free to modify, change, or otherwise alter a plant's purported benefits in order to keep the players guessing—especially if they have no in-game knowledge of plants or herb lore.

**Angelica:** Steeped in water to make a tea, angelica grants the drinker a +1d bonus on all Fortitude saves against poison for one hour, or if drunk after becoming poisoned, allows the drinker a second saving throw using the normal die for that type to negate or minimize the poison's effects.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"If ya get snake-bit, jump over a stream a'fore it slithers from sight. This'll keep the poison from killin' ya!"

**Belladonna:** When used as a topical ointment, it helps treat infectious bites such as those from a giant rat or rabid dog. The recipient of the ointment is allowed a second saving throw to avoid infection. Belladonna is poisonous if consumed (DC 12 Fortitude save or 1d6 damage).

**Buckeye:** Poisonous if consumed (DC 8 Fortitude save or 1d4 damage), buckeye is said to grant success. When carried as a charm, it grants to bearer a one-time +1 bonus to any attack, ability or skill check, or saving throw. Once this bonus is used, the charm is powerless and the bearer cannot benefit from the plant until the next full moon has passed.

**Chamomile:** Used as a topical ointment to treat wounds, chamomile restores 1d3 hit points the following morning. Chamomile ointment can only be used once per day. Further applications provide no benefit.

**Cinnamon:** Cinnamon is brewed into tea and consumed to relieve pain. Any character suffering negative modifiers due to pain or injury have those modifiers reduced by 1. If the character is suffering from a reduced die size in the die chain, he instead adds +1 to any roll made with the reduced die to offset some of the reduction. This benefit lasts for 4 hours after the tea is consumed.

**Clove:** Clove was placed around the windows and doors of a house to keep evil from entering. Inherently evil physical creatures (as determined by the judge) must make a DC 8 Willpower save to enter the building. Evil spirits such as ghosts and similar creatures must make a DC 10 Willpower save. This protection lasts for 2d4 days before needing to be renewed.

**Coltsfoot:** When added to food, coltsfoot is said to act as a love potion. The consumer must make a DC 8 Willpower save or become fond of the meal's preparer. This isn't a true charm or love spell, but the consumer will feel friendship towards the preparer so long as he or she is treated with respect, be more open to conversation with them, laugh a little harder at their jokes, and so forth. In time, true love might actually come from this exchange. The effects last for 1d12+12 hours, until the preparer does something boorish or insulting to the consumer, or until magical effects that dispel enchantments are applied to the consumer.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"Throwin' bay leaves into tha fire will bring good luck to yer household. That is, it t'will if the leaves crackle in tha fire. Iffun they don't, that be a sure sign bad luck will be a'visitin ya!"

**Comfrey:** Extract is rendered from the plant and used to create a paste. The paste is applied to the area with the broken bones to promote fast healing. If used daily, broken bones heal in one week rather than one month.

**Coxcomb:** Coxcomb is believed to be a potent plant among the Shudfolk. Medically, it speeds up the healing of wounds, tripling the number of hit points or ability score loss regained through natural rest (see DCC RPG, p. 94). It's also said to call forth the dead. Preparing it to summon the dead is a DC 15 Intelligence check and allows the user to attempt to speak with dead as per the 3rd-level cleric spell if properly prepared. This grants the user a d20 spellcheck die to be used for determining the spell's effect. The spellcheck roll is adjusted by the preparer's (who may not necessarily be the user) Intelligence modifier, and spellburn is not possible. Luck can be employed as normal.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"If a bell strikes three, six, nine, or twelve times when a child's a'born, then that child'll have the power to see ghosts and the Second Sight."

**Devil's Dung:** Also known as asafoetida, this plant is dried and burned in a clay bowl to produce an acrid smoke. If inhaled by a possessed body, the inhabiting spirit must make a DC 10 Willpower save or be driven from the body.

**Holly:** Holly is often carried in a bag placed in a pocket or around the neck. It grants the wearer 1 point of Luck for 1 week.

**Horehound:** If crushed and the powder is strewn around the bed of a sick individual, the ill person gains a +1d bonus on any saving throws to recover from the disease or the illness passes in half the normal time (judge's discretion).

**Hounds Tongue:** Made into a poultice, hounds tongue restores 1d3+1 hit points but only if the injuries are a result of



a bite. Powdered hounds tongue silences dogs for 1 hour if they fail a DC 10 Fortitude save.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"A howlin' dog heard in the night is a sign that Death is on a prowl. Somone is a shure ta die afore the cock crows!"

**Marigold:** Crushed marigold is placed under a pillow. Anyone resting on the pillow will have dreams revealing the identity of the person who stole something from them, as well as the object's location. The guilty party is allowed a DC 10 Willpower save to avoid their identity being revealed.

**Mugwort:** Mugwort is a potent medicinal plant. When combined with other medicinal plants, mugwort increases that plant's efficiency. This manifests either as a +1 increase to the amount of damage or ability loss restored or a +1 bonus to any saving throws granted by the medicine.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"Parsley be an evil weed, belove'd by Ol' Blackcloak and t'other Two. Y'all ken know a witch or murderer a'cause of the parsley that grows around thar home."

**Pennyroyal:** When prepared as a topical ointment, pennyroyal restores 1 lost ability point of Strength, Agility, or Stamina after 1d4 hours. The treated person can do nothing but rest during this time period and no individual can benefit from pennyroyal ointment more than once every three days. Pennyroyal is also poisonous. Ingesting it forces the consumer to make a DC 10 Fortitude save or lose 1d6 hit points.

**Rue:** When worn as a sachet, rue grants the wearer a +1 bonus to saving throws against baleful magic. This bonus is a one-time use and the wearer decides when to apply the bonus. Properly prepared rue is also said to protect the bearer from lycanthropes. Any lycanthrope must first make a DC 8 Willpower save to attack the rue's possessor. If failed, the were-creature cannot attack the bearer until the next dawn, upon which the rue loses its potency.

**Valerian:** Valerian induces sleep if consumed in a drink. The drinker must make a DC 8 Fortitude save or fall into a sound sleep. Loud noises have only a 1 in 6 chance of waking the sleeper, although injury or shaking will rouse them quickly. It is also rumored to protect buildings and people from lightning strikes. A building around which valerian is planted is 50% likely to avoid a lightning strike that would otherwise hit, and a person bearing valerian receives a +1 bonus to saving throws against lightning bolts and other electricity-based magic. Once this bonus is applied, the plant loses this property.

## PART TWO: MOUNTAIN MONSTERS



he Chained Coffin and The Chained Coffin Companion include a menagerie of Shudder Mountain beasts and monsters for use with Dungeon Crawl Classics. Many are inspired from real Appalachian folklore. However, despite the number of monsters present in those works, it's not a comprehensive catalogue of mountain monsters. This section provides the judge with several new beasts to challenge the party and to haunt the hollows of the Shudder Mountains.

### ACHERI

**Acheri:** Init +3; Atk shadow +4 ranged (1d6 plus sickness, 15' range); AC 12; HD 2d6+1; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP death song (DC 14 Will save or be doomed), dance (DC 10 Will save or dance for 1d4 hours and suffer 1 temporary Stamina loss each hour), repelled by red; SV Fort +8, Ref +2, Will +3; AL C.

An acheri appears as a pale gray child, frail and spindly in body. They come down from high mountain peaks where they dwell among the bare rocks and scraggly lichens. Sickness follows in their wake, for the acheri's shadow inflicts plague upon others. The dance and song of the acheri is compelling and also imparts ill-effects on those caught up in it. The acheri gluts itself on the stolen vitality of its victims, then returns to its mountaintop home. Some communities have been plagued by the same acheri for decades on a recurring basis.

An acheri can cast its shadow up to 15' away, causing the shade to elongate beyond natural size. It targets a single creature with its shadow, attacking against the target's base AC of 10 modified by Agility. Armor of any kind provides no protection, but spells such as magic shield do. The target of a successful attack must make a DC 10 Fortitude save or become ill. This sickness does an immediate 1d6 damage and causes 1 temporary Stamina point loss every 12 hours. This Stamina loss cannot be healed until the sickness is cured.

The dance of the acheri hypnotizes those who observe it, causing them to dance wildly for up to four hours. This strenuous dance inflicts 1 point of temporary Stamina loss from exhaustion for each hour the dancer exerts himself. The dance compulsion can be negated with a remove curse spell or by rendering the dancer unconscious.

The last harmful ability of the acheri is its drum and song. The creature plays a thrumming beat on its skin drum while singing a mournful tune. One creature of the acheri's choice hearing the song must make a DC 14 Willpower save or be doomed. A doomed creature will perish from a catastrophe in seven days after hearing the drum. Only a remove curse

spell with a spell check of 22+, slaying the acheri responsible for the song, or finding and destroying its drum averts the creature's doom. An acheri cannot doom more than one creature at a time and must wait for the doom to come to pass before enacting another.

Acheris despise the color red. Any acheri seeing the color red must make a DC 10 Willpower save or flee from the object or person bearing that color. It cannot cause harm to that individual or item for 24 hours. After that time it can repeat the saving throw to try and overcome its protecting power. The acheri can reattempt the saving throw every 24 hours to conquer the repulsion.

## BALL-TAILED CAT

**Ball-tailed Cat:** Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (1d6+3) or claws +1 melee (1d4+1) or ball-tail +2 melee (1d4 or 1d6 and possibly knocked prone); AC 13; HD 3d8; MV 40' or climb 20'; Act 2d20; SP knock prone (a target struck by the cat's tail must make a Strength check with a DC equal to 8 + damage suffered or be knocked prone), two successful claw attacks allow for free rake attack +1 melee (1d6+2), stealthy (+4 bonus to surprise); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

The ball-tailed cat resembles a mountain lion at first glance, sharing the same build and coloration as an ordinary cougar. However, the cat's tail is exceptionally long, measuring up to 8' in length, and ends in a large solid knob-like growth that resembled the head of a morning star. Some species of the cat have rounded growths at the end of their tails (which does 1d4 damage), while other have knobs covered with spikey horns (1d6 damage).

Ball-tailed cats are ambush predators who prefer to strike by leaping out of trees or springing from the underbrush. They use their tails to knock their prey prone, then leap on them to tear out their victims' throats. If faced with multiple opponents, the cat usually chooses one victim to overbear, then wards off others with its tail while feasting on its primary victim.

## CREEPKIN

**Creepkin:** Init +0; Atk grab +1 melee (1d4 physical ability loss); AC 11; HD 3d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP paralyzing touch (target must succeed in a DC 10 Fort save or become paralyzed for 1d6 rounds), takes half-damage from non-silver or non-magical attacks, direct sunlight destroys the creature in 1d4 rounds, must make a DC 10 Will save if confronted with bright light or flee from the area until the next night; SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

The creepkin is the original Thing Under the Bed, an eerie entity made of shadows and cold, cold hands that grip the limbs of anyone unfortunate enough to dangle them out from under the covers, draining their warmth away. A creepkin resembles a humanoid shape with a shadowy body. Its black arms end in a pair of rotting hands festering with decay and deathly cold to the touch. The eyes of a creepkin glow red-hot in the darkness under the bed and are usually the only sign the creature has taken up occupancy there. Scholars fa-

miliar with the creepkin believe the creature is a minion of the Sempstress (see *Dungeon Crawl Classics 2016 Halloween Module: The Sinister Sutures of the Sempstress*), enacting her horrific will out on the physical plane.

A creepkin survives on body warmth and is attracted to the dark under beds where it can lair during the day, safe from the sun. At night, the creature waits until the bed's occupant dangles a foot or hand out from beneath the safety of the covers and then strikes, grasping the appendage with its icy hands. Its grasp drains the victim's warmth, causing a temporary loss of 1d4 points of physical ability loss (Strength, Agility, or Stamina) per round once the creepkin has gripped the target. The character chooses which points are lost. In addition, the coldness seeps into the victim's bones, paralyzing them for 1d6 rounds if they fail a DC 10 Fortitude save. The creepkin automatically keeps its grasp on a paralyzed creature. If the paralyzed target is warmed in any way, including taking fire-based damage, the paralysis is instantly broken.

Creepkin are creatures of shadow and darkness. Exposure to bright light forces them to make a DC 10 Will save or flee from the area. Creepkin can move through shadows, so any patch of darkness allows them to instantly depart an area. If no such shadows exist, the creepkin is trapped and can be dealt with by those wishing to destroy it. Direct sunlight destroys a creepkin in 1d4 rounds with constant exposure.

A bed whose bedpost each bear the circular symbol of the Sovereign is protected against creepkin and one cannot take up residence beneath it. If a bed under which a creepkin currently dwells is decorated with the Sovereign's symbols, they have no effect as the creature has already tainted the bedstead with its presence. Shudfolk typically decorate a newborn's crib with the Sovereign's symbol to protect it from creepkin predation in the night.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"Always peek under yer bed a'fore going to sleep. If ya don't, a creepkin is likely ta be a'waiting under thar and will getcher in the night!"

## DEWAYO

**Dewayo:** Init +2; Atk bite +3 melee (2d4+2) or claws +2 melee (1d6+1), AC 12; HD 2d8; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP howl (DC 12 Will save or be paralyzed in fear for 3 minus HD rounds), pack attack (+1 attack bonus to other dewayo attacking a single target); SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2; AL N.

A dewayo resembles a humanoid wolf. Its features are identical to that of the timber wolf, but it walks on two legs like a man. The creature is slightly shorter than a human and its body appears top-heavy. Despite this appearance, the dewayo can take down prey twice their size by themselves and even larger creatures when working together. Despite their human-like stance and intellect, dewayo do not use tools or wear clothes

A pack of dewayo (three or more of the creatures) can create a terrifying howl that chills the blood of all within 100'. All hearing the howl with 2 or less HD must succeed on a DC 12 Will saving throw or be paralyzed with fear. This paralysis lasts for 3 minus the creature's HD/level round (e.g., a 2 HD creature is paralyzed one round). Creatures with 3 or more HD/levels are unaffected by the howl. Any effect that removes fear ends the paralysis prematurely.

Dewayo are fearsome opponents when acting in concert. Each dewayo attacking a single enemy grants a +1 bonus to attack rolls by other dewayo attacking the same target. For example, if three dewayo are attacking a person, each would gain +2 to their attack rolls. Dewayo never grant themselves a bonus to their attack roll. The number of dewayo capable of attacking a single target depends on their opponent's size. In general, a maximum of three dewayo can attack a man-sized victim at one time.

Dewayo hate snallygasters and vice versa. The two races always fight to the death when they encounter one another.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"Nasty things those dewayo be. A pack o' them killed me pappy when I t'were but a girl-child. They make heap nice coats though if ya get enough of 'em and skin 'em up right."

## SNALLYGASTER

**Snallygaster:** Init +3; Atk claws +4 melee (1d4+2 plus grab) or bite +3 melee (1d6 Stamina drain); AC 13; HD 6d8; MV 30', fly 50'; Act 2d20; SP silent (+10 bonus to stealth checks while gliding), blood drain (automatically drains 1d6 Stamina each round once it has bitten a victim, victim can break free with a DC 11 Strength check), grab (if both claws strike, the victim is grabbed and must make an opposed grapple check to escape; snallygaster has +4 to check), can carry up to 200 lbs. and fly; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +0; AL C.

Snallygasters are horrible hybrids of bird and lizard. Their bodies are thick and soft like that of a salamander, but each has a pair of crow-like wings that allow them to soar on the mountain winds. The creature measures 10' long from its stubby tail to the end of its sharp, tooth-filled beak. The beast has but a single eye set in the center of its forehead.

Snallygasters drink the blood of their victims, preying largely on livestock, but rounding out their diet with lost travelers and unwary farmers working their fields alone. A snallygaster silently glides down, grabbing their victim with their claws and carrying them off to a high place such as a treetop, a barn roof, or a windmill to dine. Folklore holds that snallygasters cannot abide the number seven, and many Shudfolk decorate their homes and outbuildings with seven-pointed stars or two or more pitchforks whose tines add up to seven. Whether this is proof against snallygaster attacks or not is left to the judge's discretion.

The snallygasters' natural enemy is the dewayo. The two species always battle when they encounter one another, ignoring all others until their hated foe is slain.

## TULICULA

**Tulicula:** Init +4; Atk war club +30 melee (8d8+14) or lightning arrow +24 missile fire (10d6 to all in a 15' radius around the target; DC 15 Ref save for ½ damage); AC 25; HD 25d10; MV 60'; Act 4d24; SP crit on 20-24, immune to electrical damage, hideous (DC 12 Will save for all who see them or suffer -4 to all rolls due to repulsion); SV Fort +20, Ref +8, Will +10; AL N.

The tulicula are a reclusive race of giants dwelling in the Shudder Mountains. These immense beings stand as tall as ancient pine trees and sometimes hide themselves among groves of old trees when wishing to remain unobserved. Their eyes are slanted and they have skin the color of dried moss. The hands of the tulicula have seven fingers each and their faces are hideous to behold. A tulicula's voice rumbles as thunder and their appetites are such that they can drink a stream dry and consume a herd of deer in a single sitting. Immune to lightning, the tulicula can store a thunderbolt's energy in their bodies and then discharge this power via specially fabricated arrows.

A tulicula possesses 2d4 lightning arrows when encountered. It can make a dozen arrows during a lightning storm to replace its spent stock. These arrows are massive missiles, measuring 12' long, and are usable only by the giant (and possibly specially-constructed siege engines). The lightning arrow explodes in a burst of lightning when it strikes, blasting all within a 15' radius of its target with electricity.

Tulicula are intelligent, but solitary. They are never encountered in groups. Tulicula often keep personal diaries recounting their centuries-long existences. These diaries are usually large boulders covered with petroglyphs decipherable only by the giant race. The secrets inscribed in these stones are left to the judge's imagination.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"The tulicula were born a'the sky. Their mammas t'were shootin' stars and their pappies t'were thundercracks. Whut went on in the heavens came t'root in the earth and now a'wanders in the backwoods. Bigger even then us'n, y'all give the tulicula a wide berth, y'hear!"

## WAMPUS CAT

**Wampus Cat:** Init +2; Atk bite +4 melee (1d8 + 1) or claws +2 melee (1d6 + 1); AC 14; HD 5d6; MV 40' or climb 20'; Act 1d20; SP scream 3/day (DC 10 Will save or be paralyzed), two successful claw attacks allow for free rake attack +1 melee (1d6+2), stealthy (+4 bonus to surprise); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.



Legend holds that there was once a witch who possesses a magical cougar skin that allowed her to transform into a mountain lion. She haunted the Shudders, murdering her enemies and making it seem as if they were slain by a wild animal. The witch announced herself just before attacking with a shrill, eerie cry that seemed to be a mixture of a cat screech and a woman's scream. The tales say the witch also mated with the cougar population in the mountains and she gave birth to the first Wampus cats.

The Wampus cat is a long cougar with strangely human facial features and a tail as black as midnight. It is intelligent and a cunning hunter. The Wampus cat often uses trickery and simple traps to herd its prey into a disadvantageous position, such as a box canyon or a boggy mire before attacking. The cry of the Wampus cat is deadly to hear and is said to herald death. Anyone hearing the weird screech of the Wampus cat must make a DC 10 Willpower save or becomes paralyzed with fear for 1d4+1 rounds. If the saving throw is failed due to a natural "1," creatures with two or less Hit Dice die instantly; creatures with 3+ HD suffer 3d6 damage on a "1" result.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"My pappy a'told me there were all kens of Wampus cats in the backwoods. Just a'cause ya think ya know one ken, don't me ya know 'em all. Best be cautious when it a'comes to Wampus critters, I say!"



## PART THREE: MA'S COUNTRY KITCHEN



he Shudders is an isolated and insular region. While some of the communities along the verge of the mountains have truck with outsiders and traders on a regular basis, providing them access to goods not otherwise seen in the more remote hollows, most Shudfolk make do with what the mountains themselves provide. This is especially true in the case of cooking. Their meals are made with what they can raise or hunt themselves. However, this hasn't impeded the mountain folk from developing delicious recipes down the ages, and their strong family ties among one another means that these recipes — with the exception of the a few strongly-guarded "family recipes" — spread from one community to another.

While Shudfolk meals by and large fill the belly and tantalize the taste buds, the weird magic that pools in places in the mountains sometimes affects seemingly commonplace ingredients, leading to unexpected results when used in recipes. Much like witch liquor distilled in or near a spoil has bizarre side effects, the rare mountain-made meal can grant unusual abilities to the consumer. These possible benefits and drawbacks are included with the recipes below so that the judge can surprise the party the next time they sit down to a good ol' home cooked meal in the Shudders.

The following recipes come from Ma Bigginty, who has vast experience making meals for ravenous hill giants. For the convenience of the reader, who is assumed to be much smaller in stature than the Biggintys, ingredient measurements are reduced to more human-sized quantities. Feel free to try your hand at some backwoods cooking and serve the results at your next Shudder Mountains-set DCC RPG game!

### APPLE BEER

Peel apples and dry the peelings either in the sun or by a hot stove. Place the peelings in a crock and add enough boiling water to cover them. Cover the crock and let sit for one or two days until all the flavor is leached from the peelings. Add sugar if desired.

**Magical effect:** Consuming apple beer protects the drinker from snake bites for 1d3 hours. The character gains a +2 bonus to any Fortitude saving throw made against a venomous snake's poison. Saves against poison from other sources are unmodified.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"Yar must always wipe an apple clean a'fore eatin' it. If yar don't, one o' the Three is bound to come a'callin'!"

## APPLE BUTTER

Peel and slice the apples, then immediately place them in a pan of cold, salty water to prevent from browning. Once all the apples have been sliced, rinse the salt out and cook until soft and mushy. Add one cup of sugar to every cup of cooked apples, cinnamon to taste, and cook until thick. Use immediately or put in jars and seal for later use.

**Magical effect:** The pain-relieving properties of the cinnamon is amplified in this recipe. Anyone consuming magically affected apple butter receives a temporary +2 increase to Stamina for 1d3 hours. This enhanced Stamina may result in higher Fortitude saving throw modifiers and additional hit points during this period.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"One apple should always be left on the tree at harvest time. It'll keep Ol' Blackcloak for a'coming 'round yer house and a'creepin' 'round yer door. 'Course, some folks wanna talk to Ol' Blackcloak, so strippin' an apple tree bare will conjure 'im up fer ya."

## CORN CAKES

Beat two eggs, then add 2 cups of corn meal, 1 kitchen spoon of flour, 1 teaspoon of salt, 2 teaspoons of baking powder, and 1 tablespoon of melted butter or lard. Add enough milk to make a thin batter. Pour batter on to a hot griddle or pan and flip to the other side when brown. Good with butter and syrup.

**Magical effect:** Starting the day with magical corn cakes negates the need to eat again until the sun goes down. Water is still required to rehydrate and a second meal must be consumed before sleeping. The character can travel an extra hour during the day as a result and make better time on their journey.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"Puttin' corn cakes and coffee 'neath yar house will keep ghosts from a'comin in!"

## CRACKLIN'

Take the fat trimmed from the entrails, hams, shoulders, etc. of a hog and place in a lard pot outside on a cold night. This will solidify the fat and make it easier to cut up. In the morning, cut the fat into pieces the size of hen's eggs and place in a pot with just enough water to keep it from sticking to the sides when cooked. Place the pot over a fire and allow to cook slowly, stirring often. By evening, the grease will have been boiled out and the water evaporated, leaving a hard residue at the bottom. This is "cracklin'." The cracklin' is saved for making cracklin' bread or as a snack. The grease can be saved for cooking.

**Magical effect:** The eater is avoided by porcine creatures for 1d3 hours after eating. Wild boars, giant hogs, and—depending on the campaign—even orcs steer clear of the character. Treat any random encounter with these creatures as "no encounter." However, if the character goes out of his or her way to confront porcine creatures, the magical effect instantly fades and they no longer benefit from the cracklin'.

## CRACKLIN' BREAD

Ready the corn bread by mixing together 2 cups of corn meal, 2 teaspoons of salt, 1 cup of buttermilk, 1 teaspoon of soda, and ½ teaspoon of baking powder. Mix ½ cup of cracklin' (see above) into the mixture. If the mixture is too dry, add lukewarm water until the proper consistency for corn bread is achieved. Put in the oven and cook until brown.

*Substitution:* If you don't have access to homemade cracklin', store-bought pork rinds may be substituted instead.

**Magical effect:** Cracklin' bread protects the eater from lightning strikes and other electrical-based damage for 1 hour. During this time, the character suffers half damage from electricity-based attacks. If the attack allows a saving throw and the save is successful, the character takes only ¼ damage.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"If bread dough cracks while yar shapin' it, that be a shure sign a funeral is a'happening a'fore long!"

## FRIED OKRA

Take 10 pods of okra and slice into ¼ inch pieces. Beat 1 egg in a bowl, then add the okra. Allow to soak for 5 to 10 minutes. Combine 1 cup of corn meal, ¼ teaspoon of salt, and ¼ teaspoon of black pepper in another bowl. Heat ½ cup of oil or grease in a large skillet. Dredge the okra in the corn meal, making sure it is evenly coated. Fry in skillet, stirring constantly. Cook until golden brown, then drain.

**Magical effect:** Okra fortifies the eater's blood and stamina, granting them +2 temporary hit points. These hit points last for 1 hour and are the first lost if the eater suffers damage. After the hour passes, the hit points fade. No creature can benefit from the magical properties of the okra more than once per day.

## HUSH PUPPIES

Mix together 1 cup of flour, 1 cup of corn meal, and a pinch of salt and baking soda. Add 1 egg and buttermilk until the mixture is the right consistency to hold its shape when formed into a ball. Mix in 1 medium onion chopped up, roll into balls about 1 inch to 2 inches in diameter, and drop into a couple inches of hot fat. Deep fry until they're brown and crispy. Drain onto paper and serve hot.

**Magical effect:** Hush puppies made with spoil-affected ingredients grant the eater a +4 bonus to all sneaking silently attempts. Creatures normally lacking the sneak silently skill can attempt it while under the effects of the hush puppies. This effect lasts for 1 hour after eating.

## MOLASSES CANDY

Combine 1 cup of molasses, 1 cup of water, and a few grains of salt. Boil ingredients over a fire but do not stir. Boil until it has reached a hard ball stage. Remove from the fire and let stand until cool enough to be handled with well-greased hands. Pull for some time until the mixture changes from brown to a yellowish color. Cut into pieces, let cool if necessary, then serve.

**Magical effect:** The eater gains a +1d bonus to all Personality-based ability or skill checks for 1 hour as they sweet talk those around them.

## PICKLED GREEN TOMATOES

Take 8 lbs. of green tomatoes and chop them fine. Add 4 lbs. of brown sugar to water and boil the tomatoes for three hours. Add 1 quart of vinegar, 1 teaspoon of mace, 1 teaspoon of cinnamon, and 1 teaspoon of cloves to the pot and boil an additional 15 minutes. Let cool and then seal in jars.

**Magical effect:** The eater is immune to becoming intoxicated for up to two hours. In addition, they receive a +1 bonus to any saving throws to avoid the effects of witch liquor.

## POSSUM

Although few Shudfolk bother to skin the possum, if this is desired, the traditional method is to scald the possum in boiling water containing a ½ cup of lime or ashes. Scrape the possum until hairless, gut, remove the musk glands under the forearms, and remove either the head or the eyes at the least. Soak the carcass overnight before cooking.

Parboil the possum in water containing salt and red or black pepper to taste. Boil until tender then remove. Place the possum in a well-greased pan surrounded or filled with sweet potatoes. Place in a wood oven and bake until golden brown (usually two hours).

*Alternate Cooking Method:* After skinning, parboil the carcass in salted water until tender. Cut the meat off and dice into pieces. Roll the meat in black and red pepper, then roll in flour. Fry the breaded pieces in fat until golden brown.

**Magical effect:** The eater enjoys increased night vision for up to 1d3+1 hours after eating the magical possum meal. Those with infravision find its range increases by 30'. Those with normal sight see in the dark as if it were twilight rather than nighttime.

**Alternate effect:** Some people in real life might balk at the idea of dining on possum, but life's all about experiences, no? If you serve possum at the gaming table and your players are the type who cringe at the idea of eating it, award the character of any player brave enough to put aside their

prejudices and preconceived notions and sample the dish 1 point of Luck. Any player known for being culinary adventurous or who has eaten possum in the past doesn't receive a Luck point for tasting the meal, but does gain 1 Luck point if he or she convinces another player to try the dish (maximum 1 Luck point regardless of how many minds she opens).

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"Someone who sees ghosts can be freed from glimpsin' them by eatin' a meal a' wolf's meat. That ol' wolf'll get in thar belly and chase them ghosts away!"

## PART FOUR: FORGOTTEN GRAMAREE



*he Chained Coffin Companion* introduced the folk magic practiced by the Shudfolk, a collection of minor rites and hedge magic known as gramaree. While the Shudfolk don't consider these petty castings to be magic, they are nevertheless a form of minor sorcery. Most gramaree rites are related to daily life, protection, good fortune, and love. This section includes some new folk magic to add to your campaign. The rules for learning and casting gramaree magic is covered in *The Chained Coffin Companion*.

**Knife Divination** (DC 10): Used to locate lost personal property, this rite requires the practitioner to place a knife he or she owns down on a flat surface. They then concentrate on the lost object and spin the knife in place. When it comes to rest, the knife's point will align with the location of the lost object. The range of this rite is limited and cannot sense lost objects located beyond a 50' radius. The object must be something personally owned by the practitioner and thus this rite is usually performed to find lost objects around the house or homestead.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"The last person ta die in a village before the year is through becomes the local reaper for Mister Death. Folks destined ta die will a'see that person's spirit in the days a'fore their death."

**Light the Hidden Spirit** (DC 11): This rite requires a lit candle. When properly performed, the rite will determine if a ghost or other spiritual entity is present in a 50' radius around the candle. If the candle's flame turns bright blue, a spirit is nearby. The spirit must make a DC 10 Willpower save or become visible in the candle's eldritch glow. This rite is commonly used to determine if a home is haunted or if someone is possessed by a spirit.



**Quiet the Corpse** (DC 13): This rite prevents a corpse from rising as the un-dead. The rite requires that the corpse's shoes be filled with nettles and that an iron nail be placed in both hands and upon the brow of the body before it is interred in its grave. If the rite is successful, the corpse is protected against transformation into any form of un-dead. Removing any of the nails or the nettles prior to the body's complete decay, however, negates this protection.

**Storm Acorn** (DC 14): The practitioner inscribes the symbol of the Sovereign in the side of an acorn plucked from an oak tree (one gathered from the ground is useless for this rite). Successfully completing this rite causes the acorn to become a ward against being struck by lightning. While carried, the first lightning bolt that would otherwise strike the acorn's bearer misses the target completely if he makes a Luck check. The acorn then loses its mystical properties. The lightning bolt can come from a spell, a natural storm, a magical trap, or similar sources. The acorn provides no protection against electricity-based attacks other than a lightning bolt (grabbing an electrical eel, for example).

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

"Bulls are never troubled by lightnin' strikes. Iffun you get caught outdoors durin' a thunderstorm, the best place ta be in is a bullpen. 'Course, then you got ta worry 'bout the bull! Haw haw haw!!!"

**Water Witching** (DC 12): This rite is done with a Y-shaped stick, traditionally one from a willow tree. The rite is done by holding the stick at the Y end and walking slowly with the branch outstretched. If there is a water source either above or below ground within 200' of the gramaree practitioner, the stick's end "tugs" in the direction of the source. The stick slowly points downward as the "water witch" follows the pull, eventually pointing straight down when the stick's holder is directly over the water source. This rite is commonly used to find spots to place new wells, and those who've mastered the rite are in high demand in the Shudders.

Some say this rite can also be used to locate buried treasure, gold deposits, precious stones, and other valuable substances hidden in the ground. The judge can rule whether this legend is true or not. If it is true, the DC for finding such riches should be at least 15 or even 20.

**Witchball Making** (DC 14): This rite can only be done at a crossroad near a graveyard at night. A fire is lit and weasel blood, rat tail, cat bladder and intestines, buzzard eggs, baby nails, bat brains, toad's foot, and a pinch of myrrh is brought to boil. The congealed mass is then cooled and formed into a sphere the right size for throwing. The creator binds the goo together using his or her own hair. Anyone struck by a thrown witchball (range 5/10/20) must succeed in a DC 10 Willpower save or be afflicted with a minor curse. The curse is determined by the judge, but the witchball's maker can offer suggestions based on their rela-

tionship (if any) with the victim. NOTE: This rite is outside the accepted limits of gramaree. If it becomes known someone practiced this rite by the community at large, they'll be known as a "witch" by the locals and suffer the usual social consequences.

## PART FIVE: OLD SONGS OF THE MOUNTAINS



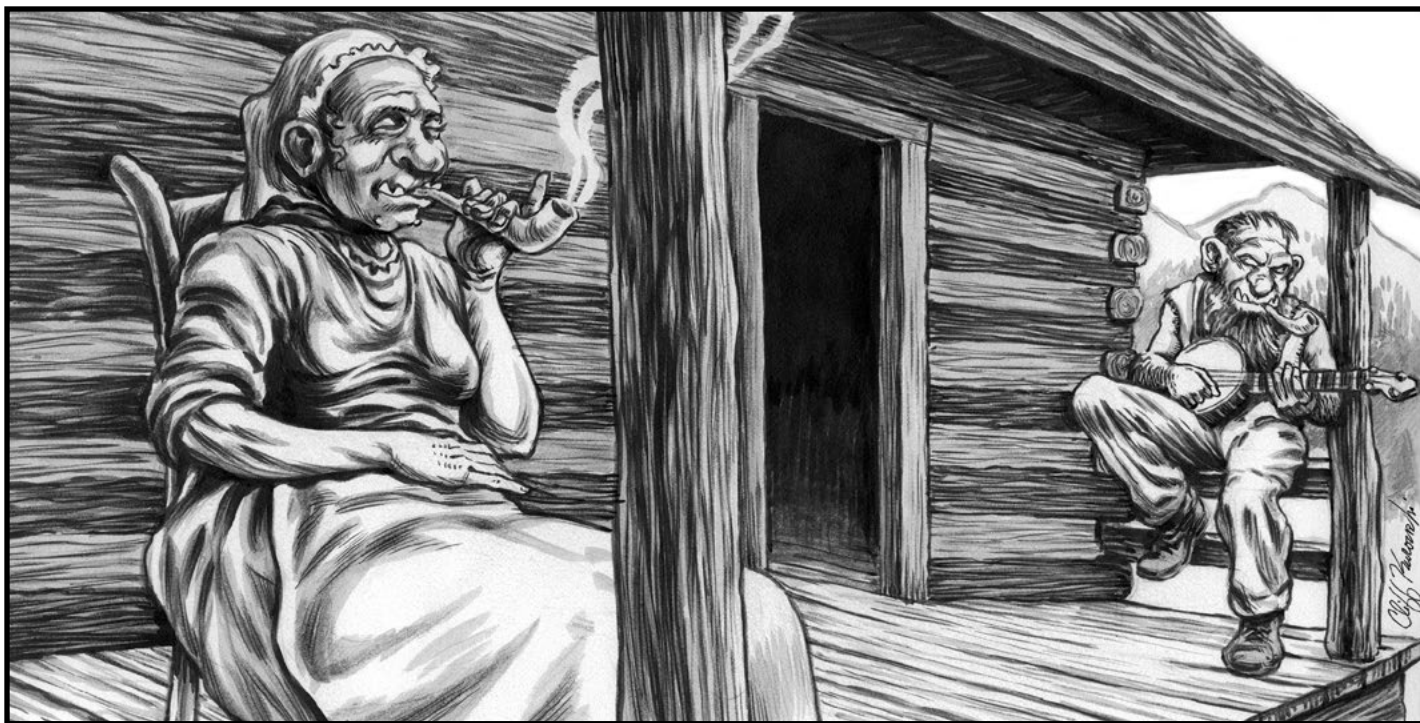
ike gramaree, the mountains are home to another form of magical art largely unknown outside of the Shudders: music capable of producing preternatural effects. These "old songs" are a form of mystical music, a way to produce minor sorcery through the recitation of lyrics and playing of notes containing powerful rhythms. The original meanings of these songs may be long forgotten, but their mystical properties remain. Game mechanics for Old Songs are found in *The Chained Coffin Companion*. These new Old Songs supplement those found in that supplement.

**"The Ballard of Desolation Awnie"** (DC 13, five minute): This long piece recounts the legend of Desolation Awnie, a brave young girl who became lost in the wilderness and was beset by devils over a period of nine nights. Despite their temptations and terrors, Awnie emerged from her trials worn but unscathed. The song rekindles the spirits of the performer and up to 3 +his Personality modifier additional creatures, granting them 1 free re-roll on any die roll they make for the next number of hours equal to the performer's level.

**"By the Grace of the Sovereign, Be"** (DC 12, three minutes): A hymn in praise of the Sovereign, this song imparts a bit of divine fire in those who listen to it. The performer can choose a number of targets (including himself) equal to his Personality modifier. Those targets either gain a +1 spell check bonus to laying on hands, turn unholy, or divine aid checks for a number of hours equal to the song performer's level if they are a cleric, or allows them to turn unholy as if a Lawful cleric for 1 hour. Neither of these benefits can be bestowed upon a Chaotic creature.

**"Green Spirit of the Wood"** (DC 12, four minutes): This song attunes the performer's natural senses and awakens his or her eye to the natural world. The performer receives a +2 bonus to Intelligence rolls made to forage medicinal or magical plants (see Part One above). The bonus lasts for four hours. No creature can benefit from this song's power more than once per day.

**"Horn and Bone, Blood and Stone"** (DC 14, three minutes): This song originated as a religious chant practiced by the followers of Nengal, and celebrates the violent and unforgiving side of nature. Non-followers of the Wild One find the song unnerving and discordant. The song grants the



performer and a number of others equal to his Personality modifier a +1 to attack and damage rolls when using weapons made from natural substances (bone, wood, stone) or natural attacks such as teeth and claws. This bonus persists for 1 hour after the song ends.

### MA BIGGINTY SAYS...

“‘Horn and Bone, Blood and Stone’ be one of me favorites. None o’ that ‘Sovereign be praised!’ nonsense for us Biggintys. We know the power that be in the earth and stones o’ the mountains.”

“**Sweet, Sweet Willow Tree**” (DC 15, four minutes): This song stirs the spirit of a single willow tree and must be sung

in the presence of one. After the song is finished, a wind seems to rustle the leaves of the tree and a voice can be discerned among the rustling. Anyone present who heard the words of the song can ask the willow tree questions. No more than five questions can be asked in total. The tree is limited to information it could conceivably know through either its physical location or its connections with the natural world. Queries such as “Did a man in a bearskin cloak pass this way?” or “Are there giant catfish in this river you drink from?” are acceptable. Questions like “Where can I find the lost crown of the Witch Queen?” would not be—unless the crown happens to be lost among the willow tree’s roots! Certain professions and races might have to succeed in a DC 10 Personality check to get the tree to answer his or her question. Willows are known to hold grudges against woodcutters and dwarves for example.

## AFTERWORD

*There it is: the combined backwoods wisdom of my captor, enshrined as promised for perpetuity. I know not whether there is any truth to this collection of superstitions, folklore, and passed-down knowledge; anyone reading these words should do so with caution. I cannot vouch for anything written in these pages other than the mere act of recording them has kept me alive longer than I would have otherwise remained in the clutches of the Bigginty clan. Tonight, I shall attempt my escape. Know that if this work falls into your possession, it likely means I succeeded in my own liberation and brought this backwoods wisdom out of the mountains with me.*

*My experience in the Shudders has expelled any desire to return here after I make my escape. I will never test the wisdom Ma Bigginty passed on to me during my captivity for myself. I leave that up to those still willing to venture into these ancient mountains and gods-forsaken hollows. If you find errors in this purported*

*knowledge, I beg you to report any inaccuracies to either myself or others. The light of knowledge must always burn away the darkness of superstition if we wish to better ourselves as a civilization after all.*

*The thunderous snoring of my captors has begun. It is time for me to flee. I pray I am successful. With that, I put down my pen and go.*

**Addendum:** The previous pages were discovered in bag of a giant slain by adventurers outside the town of Bent Pine last fall. The fate of Bango Cloverfoot remains unknown. The Herbalists’ Fellowship of Oolvanvar is offering a standing reward of 250 gold coins to anyone able to locate Master Cloverfoot or discern his current condition. Report to the Green House on Ivy Lane in the city’s Wall District for further details.

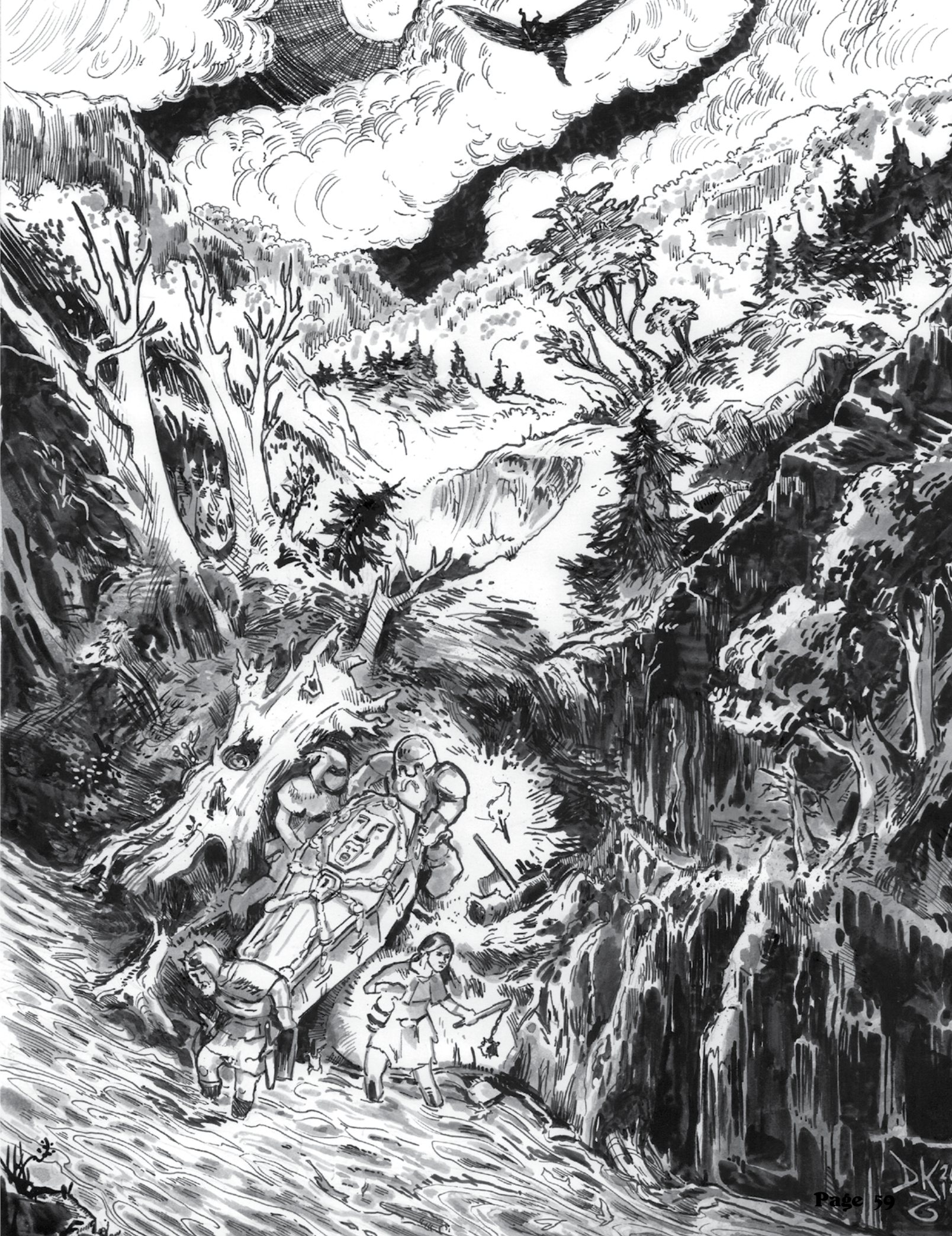
## CHAPTER FIVE

# A PLACE TO REST YOUR FEET FOR A SPELL.

*Mind your manners in the mountains and you'll be treated like family.*

*Act with rudeness and there's no shortage of rope and tree limbs around to show you the error of your ways.*







# The Shudder Mountains





1 HEX = 4 MILES





# BUZZARD HOLLOW: A SAMPLE SHUDFOLK SETTLEMENT

by Michael Curtis



here are countless small Shudfolk hamlets spread throughout the Shudder Mountains. Some of these communities are depicted on the regional map, but many are too small to be noted on the map. This gives the judge considerable leeway in creating her own settlements and “home bases” in her personal campaign.

Buzzard Hollow is a typical Shudfolk settlement and is intended to either be inserted into a Shudder Mountain campaign as needed or to inspire judges to create their own. Game stats are not provided for most of Buzzard Hollow’s residents, allowing the judge to customize them to best fit the campaign and the player characters’ level of experience. If stats are necessary in a pinch, assume most are Peasants with a smattering of Men-at-Arms (and perhaps even a Witch) as described in *Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG*, p. 434.

## BUZZARD HOLLOW

**Population:** About 100 residents

**Local Commodities:** Corn, wheat, wool, lumber, and witch liquor

**Religion:** Sovereign church, possibly secret worship of both the Three and Nengal the Wild One.

**Government:** The Elders, a group of seven men and women led by Dunn Hoppard. The Elders meet at the Sovereign Church every two weeks to address civic business. The Elders also serve as magistrates and convene court as needed.

**Law Enforcement:** There is no standing law enforcement body in the Hollow. The residents rely on the “hue and cry” method of alerting others if a crime is discovered. Big Yon Toothman (see area 11) acts as constable when required by the Elders. He can round up a posse of armed men and women in 1d10+10 minutes in an emergency.

### 1: OAKMAN’S POND

This pool exists due to a wooden dam constructed across the Reedy Creek. The pond serves as a community watering hole for livestock and a swimming hole for local children. Frogs and turtles swim in its muddy waters, but the fishing is mediocre. The pond gets its name from the man who constructed the dam some 100 years ago.

### 2: REEDY CREEK

This slow-flowing brook neatly bisects the hollow. Stands of cattails and water reeds crowd its banks, giving the creek its name. It seldom exceeds 4’ in depth and has a muddy bottom. Three bridges cross it at various points along

the hollow. Legend holds that a conjure-man was once drowned in Reedy Creek below the dam for witch-spelling the locals. The conjure-man’s spirit is believed to live on in a great catfish known as Ogre. Ogre is said to pull men to their deaths if they wade across the creek, and it’s a common dare among children to swim across the Reedy south of the dam. Only a rare child accepts that dare.

### 3: THE SOVEREIGN CHURCH

This white-washed, clapboard building is the domain of Shuyr Eby, a Shudfolk woman in her late forties. Shuyr Eby serves the spiritual needs of the Buzzard Hollow folk, reciting the Sovereign’s Wisdom from the pulpit in a clear, stirring voice. Away from the pulpit, Shuyr Eby is a soft-spoken woman who dispenses her own wisdom—knowledge learned through a rebellious and less-than-pious youth—to those in need of it.

Shuyr Eby is a 2nd-level cleric of the Sovereign and knows *blessing, food of the gods, holy sanctuary, resist cold or heat, and word of command*. Buried beneath the church’s cellar is an iron box inscribed with magical sigils. Inside this box is a human skull with a single blasphemous rune upon its bony brow. Shuyr Eby is the guardian of this malignant object and charged with preventing its evil from escaping into the mountains.

### 4: COMMONS

A stone-sided well stands in the center of this grassy spot, bound on three sides by dirt roads. The well is 15’ deep and draws cool, clear water. The grassy common serves as a meeting spot, farmers’ market, and festival site depending on the day of the year. Traveling minstrels perform here on warm summer nights when passing through the Hollow, making it a good place to learn news from other parts of the Shudders, or the overhear legends about the mountains’ ancient past.

### 5: AUNTY KITTLEBREW

This tiny home has several rough-hewn timber tables and benches outside of it, and a pole standing by the front door. Ivy winds its way up the pole, indicating that beer is served here. Aunty (pronounce “ON-tee”) Kittlebrew is a widow and childless; she makes her living brewing beer and selling it to both travelers and locals. Her home is the closest thing Buzzard Hollow has to a tavern. She doesn’t serve beer during daylight hours on days when services are held at the Sovereign Church. Her beer is quite good and she sells it for 4 cp a tankard, or 1 sp for a pitcher.



## 6: THE CRAYE BROTHERS

A pair of siblings, Jun and Rallan Craye, live on this farm, along with their wives and a total of eight children. The farm was once that of the brothers' father, Willan Craye, a beloved local patriarch. Willan died a few years back while hunting with the boys, apparently falling to his death while pursuing a boar. The court of public opinion holds that Jun and Rallan murdered their father to inherit the farm. As such, the two are disliked and often the target of rumor and slander. While the rumors of patricide may or may not be true, it is a fact that the boys, each now in their late twenties, run a witch liquor still in a nearby dale overgrown with twisted, sinister vegetation. The Craye Brothers have an agreement with Sem Farlow (see area 12) to cart their witch liquor out of Buzzard Hollow and sell it in border communities.

## 7: BYARD WOMLEY'S PLACE

Byard Womley is a scarecrow of a man in his early fifties. Byard was once a vibrant and happy soul, well-liked in the community and courting Sylva Mawks (see area 13). That was before he "saw something," as the local put it. Byard came stumbling back into Buzzard Hollow following a hunting trip in the hills, his hair stark white and his eyes alight with fear. Byard hasn't spoken more than twenty words since that night and keeps lanterns burning in his home throughout the night. If someone — say a brave party of adventurers — could get him to reveal what he saw that night and resolve it, perhaps Byard could sleep untroubled once more.

## 8: COMMON PASTURE

A split rail fence encloses this meadow, making it a secure place to graze livestock. Sheep and cows are often seen browsing the grass or being led to and from the pasture by local children. Larger festivals are celebrated in the open field when the small commons is insufficient to accommodate attendees.

A single, lightning-stuck walnut tree grows at the far end of the pasture. Half of the tree is blackened and split, while the other remains green and thriving. The tree has served as a gallows on more than one occasion in the Hollow's history, and it's said that a ghostly noose sometimes appears in the branches above when a heinous crime is about to be committed in Buzzard Hollow.

## 9: MANYAR HOBBS, BLACKSMITH

A stone-walled building stands beside a typical Shudfolk home on this plot of land. The sound of a hammer ringing on steel echoes from the building during the daylight hours as the hollow's sole blacksmith, a tall, thin man in his early forties, goes about his task. Manyar Hobbs supplies the local residents with all their metalworking needs. He also buys scrap metal items from Shudfolk and travelers alike. Manyar is talkative while working, and knows a great deal about the goings on, both past and present, in the Hollow. When not at the forge, he is prone to silence, however. Those looking to pump Manyar for information will need to keep him busy at the anvil, feeding him a number of jobs — and paying for them too.







## **10: ECHOLS' FARM**

A saddle-roofed cabin surrounded by squalid outbuildings stands here. Naked children and braying beasts run unsupervised around the farmyard. A balding man, Jem Echols, and his rail-thin wife, Rose, pay little attention to either their ten children or their farm. The family barely ekes by each year and a small family cemetery with a handful of tiny grave markers attests that the children take the brunt of the suffering. Rumor in town is that the Echols' are "tainted" by something Jem's grandsire agreed to in his youth and the consequences of that compact continue to plague his descendants.

## **11: BIG YON TOOTHMAN'S PLACE**

A well-tended farm lies here, its boundaries clearly marked by fieldstone walls. Big Yon Toothman, a bearish looking man in his early thirties, lives and works here with his wife, Josephetta, and their six children. Big Yon is well-liked and serves as a de facto constable when the Elders require it. Big Yon has broken up more than one fight at Aunty Kittlebrews with little more than a stern word and a brazenly displayed axe handle. Jem Echols and the Craye Brothers bear half-hidden hatred for Big Yon and wouldn't miss him if something happened to the man.

## **12: SEM FARLOW'S FARM**

Sem Farlow's claim to fame in Buzzard Hollow is the fact he owns six oxen and three wagons, all bought with a windfall he supposedly inherited from a distant relative in Thundercrack. Sem and his four boys (all in their teens) serve as the local teamsters, moving cargo to outlying communities for a small fee or percentage of the sales. Sem is pleasant and charges low rates for this service, making him more of a necessary evil than someone preying on his neighbors. He's treated accordingly by the residents of the Hollow. Sem is in cahoots with the Craye Brothers' witch liquor business, but should anything ever go wrong or the moonshiners operation become exposed, he'd plead ignorant and claim he was unaware of what he was moving for the Brothers.

## **13: SYLVA MAWKS' PLACE**

Cats lounge in the sun around this farm or watch visitors with curious eyes. It seems at least a score of the purring creatures dwell here with their owner, Sylva Mawks. Sylva never married (although she was Byard Womley's sweetheart before he "saw something") and inherited this small farm from her father. She grows enough to support herself and her corn crib is never troubled by rodents thanks to her cadre of furry guardians. Sylva is tolerated due to some old timers' sympathy for her tragic romance and her ability to recommend the right treatment for injuries and sickness, but the stigma of "witch" is never far away from her. The children of Buzzard Hollow, as well as a few adults, believe Sylva can see through her cats' eyes and that she know all the surreptitious goings on in the community.

## **14: DUNN HOPPARD'S FARM**

Dunn Hoppard is the wealthiest man in the Hollow and serves as the head of the Elders, the local governing body. Now in his late 60s, Dunn's farm is tended to by hired hands, leaving him time to attend to civic matters and his sixteen grandchildren. His wife, Bethyl, passed away last year. When not concerned with civic obligations, Dunn plays the harp and the fiddle, and is said to know at least one Old Song he learned in his youth. A person demonstrating an interest in leaning Dunn's musical expertise might be rewarded with instruction if they performed a valuable service to the people of Buzzard Hollow.

## **15: SHUDFOLK FARM**

These farmsteads are unexceptional and left undefined for the judge's convenience. They can serve as the homes for PCs or be stocked with interesting occupants of the judge's creation.

## **16: TEM SAWYER'S PLACE**

Tem Sawyer, his wife, Namaline, and their seven children live on this modest farmstead. The farmyard is littered with woodchips, as Tem, true to his name, has a side business of sawing logs into lumber. He's also an accomplished woodcarver and sells his decorative pieces. The prices of his work range between 5 cp and 2 sp. Tem specializes in owls with polished pebble eyes. He is also the resident axe-throwing champion and can split a log at twenty paces with a hurled double-bitted axe.

## **17: THE THORNE SISTERS**

Six women between the ages of 16 and 24 live on this farm. Their parents both died in a flood when the oldest sister, Eunice, was 14, and she's raised her siblings (Cora, Paige, Karrin, Mimsy, and Heather) ever since. Eunice has sacrificed her own happiness for her sisters' sake, swearing off a betrothal from Big Yon's oldest boy to see that her siblings have good lives. She's determined not to marry until all five are either married off or otherwise secure their futures. This causes some conflict among the siblings as Eunice has chased off more than one suitor for being unworthy of her sisters. Despite this, Eunice's intentions are good and her sisters will likely thank her one day. At least that's what she tells herself.

## **18: THE OLD STONES**

A number of tall, weather-worn and lichen encrusted stones stand in a briar-choked glen outside of the hollow. These stones were erected long ago in honor of Nengal the Wild One, and served as the focus of the bloody rites dedicated to that deity. The coming of the Sovereign faith to the hollow ended the Nengalian cult...or so it is believed. Anyone discovering the old stones notices the overgrowth around some of the 8' tall stones has been cleared away and there are ashes from a recent fire. Bones — animal for now — are mixed in with the ashes. Apparently, the worship of the Wild One has returned to Buzzard Hollow...

# BUZZARD HOLLOW







1 square = 20 feet

SBP



## CHAPTER SIX

# RAMBLING THROUGH THE SHUDDERS

*Adventures start small in the Shudder Mountains.*

*A well-trodden road or even a quiet hamlet might hold unforeseen mysteries and dangers.*



# SOUR SPRING HOLLOW

## A Zero-level Funnel Adventure



*Sour Spring Hollow* is a zero-level funnel adventure for use with *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG. It is written specifically for the judge wishing to begin a new campaign set in the Shudder Mountains and is intended for use with six players running three to four zero-level PCs each. The adventure can be adjusted to accommodate as few as four players and as many as eight simply by increasing or decreasing the power and number of the creatures encountered within.

The adventure sees the party transported to a shunned vale that was once home to a sinister clan of witches, conjure men, and evil-doers. There, the PCs discover they're trapped outside of normal time and space and must decipher clues to banish a lingering evil and return to their normal world. Many are likely to fall by the wayside, but the surviving characters will be ready for further exploits in the Shudder Mountains.

## BACKGROUND

The Hobb clan was a family of conjure-men and witches that lived deep in the backwoods of the Shudder Mountains in a secluded vale known as Sour Spring Hollow. Isolated from their neighbors, the Hobbs clan, led by their patriarch Byard Hobb and his three boys, practiced their dark arts, venerating spirits best left untroubled by mortal men. It was widely known that the Hobbs could witch wells dry, lay a death curse on those who crossed them, and inflict other troubles on the Shudfolk. Greatly feared, the clan was avoided by all.

Twenty years back, Shuyr Rilla, a lay cleric of the Sovereign, took it upon herself to test her faith against the Hobb's evil. With only her hawthorn walking stick and her holy symbol to aid her, Shuyr Rilla set off for Sour Spring Hollow, determined to cast the coven out of the mountains.

Arriving at the Hobb's farm, Shuyr Rilla denounced the family, quoting scripture and brandishing her holy symbol at the assembled witches. The force of her words stung the foul kin, but they swiftly overpowered her, bound her limbs, broke her walking cane, and cast her holy symbol into the spring. Gleefully, the backwoods witches hauled the struggling cleric up to the top of their corn field, lashing her to a scarecrow before slitting her wrists and ankles. As Shuyr

Rilla's blood streamed into the hungry earth beneath her, she called out one final time for her god to cast out the Hobbs and their evil from the mountains.

Denied her holy symbol and plagued with guilt over letting it be stripped from her, Shuyr Rilla's exorcism was not completely successful—although it did achieve a portion of her intent. Her divine invocation cast both the Hobb clan and their farm outside of physical reality, stranding it in an adjacent pocket dimensional space. Her dying words cursed the Hobbs to an existence as restless phantoms, imprisoned in a scrape of time and space outside the real world. Both the Hobbs and a metaphysical reflection of their farm have remained trapped there ever since.

Since the casting out of the Hobb witches, Sour Spring Hollow has been avoided by most of the Shudfolk. Recently, however, witch liquor brewers sought out the hollow, hoping to tap into any lingering magic that might exist in the Hobb's spring to make their enchanted drink. Several jugs of their witch liquor have been distributed to decadent buyers in the flatlands, but one jug inadvertently ended up amongst the potables intended for consumption at a Shudfolk wedding the PCs are attending!

During the celebration, the witch liquor jug makes its rounds amongst the unsuspecting party-goers. All who sample from the receptacle awake the following morning in the pocket dimension, drawn there by the mystical link between the witch brew and Sour Hollow's spring. There, they find themselves imprisoned with the phantoms of the dead witches and other foul things. These castaways must find the means to complete Shuyr Rilla's banishing and return back to their rightful home in the physical world.

## THE Hobb FARM

The farm and surrounding hollow fill a small extra dimensional pocket located adjacent to the physical world. At first glance, it is identical to Sour Spring Hollow at the time of the Hobbs' banishment. Four log cabins surround a common yard in the midst of dense forest. A steep hillside rises from the forest to the west.

The sky over the hollow is sickly yellow in color and bears only a few scant clouds. All the vegetation in and around the farm is parched as if in the grip of a prolonged drought. The air is hot and still without even the slightest hint of a breeze. The cabins are mostly intact, but weathered: their wood turned gray with age and the whitewashed clay chinking is cracked and dirty.

The cabins are built on the same general floor plan common to the Shudfolk (use the "Typical Shudfolk Farm" cabin interior map from *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin* if necessary). Each building contains two rooms, with one area serving as a common living area and kitchen, and the second utilized as a bedroom. A loft for sleeping and/or storage, and accessible by a ladder, is located beneath the roof and above the





bedroom. The cabins' interiors are dusty, filthy, and ill-maintained, and contain an array of typical household goods and furnishings. Each cabin description below also gives a list of possibly useful items and weapons that can be found inside. If the PCs specifically seek an object not listed but one that has a reasonable chance to be inside a farm house, the judge can let the PC make a Luck check to determine if the item is present. For the purposes of time keeping, which is important with the Hobb phantoms' ongoing attacks (see Event One below), searching a cabin takes 2 turns if the party does a quick investigation and four turns if they search the inside top-to-bottom. As per *DCC RPG* p. 76, a combat lasts 1 turn.

Escape from the hollow is impossible by normal means. PCs leaving the farm to try their luck in the woods wander for 2d6 turns before emerging once more at the farm. It is likely they also encounter the Hobb phantoms (see below) while away from the flimsy security of the log cabins, possibly perishing amongst the darkened boles.

## STARTING THE ADVENTURE

*Sour Spring Hollow* begins at a wedding, a joyous event celebrating the new union of two Shudfolk. Each of the players' zero-level characters is an invited guest of the bride and groom. Many of the Shudfolk are interrelated by blood or marriage and it's likely the PCs share family ties with the bride or groom (or both) and potentially each other.

Because the characters are attending a social function, the judge should limit the PCs as to what weapons and equipment they possess at the start of the adventure. Weapons are restricted to belt daggers and perhaps staves in the form of walking sticks. Each PC is allowed only trade goods and equipment that would be suitable to bring to a party, but if the player can come up with a good reason for having an unusual item with them ("I was going to loan this 10' of chain to Pa Coggins to help get that stump out."), the judge should allow it. Weapons will be of little use to the party initially, but they'll have the opportunity to scavenge arms once they arrive at the farm.

Once the party's gear is determined, read the following:

*It was a glorious day in the mountains for a wedding. Ivy Newscombe made a stunning bride dressed in her granddame's white lace dress and Tum Dankers, despite a nervous sweat that puts a hog to shame, spoke of his love for his bride-to-be in a manner than made even the old ladies sigh. When Braar Gajers announced the couple husband and wife in the eyes of the Sovereign, a cheer went up that echoed clear across Hardscrabble Valley.*

*The party afterwards worked hard to outdo the wedding that came a'fore it. Jam Ranson and his three sons reeled out song after song on fiddle, fife, and drum as the guests whirled and stomped on the dance field. Grammy Hopyard gave the newlyweds a good luck quilt sewn from patches donated by all the families in the valley. Son Carver and Clim Wills worked hard dishing out heaps of food for the hungry guests and it wasn't too long before jugs of good, strong stump whiskey started making the rounds. In fact, that's where your current problem might have started.*

*Your last clear thought was taking a swig of particularly potent liquor from an odd-colored jug, a brew that burned hot on its*

*way down and left the taste of ginger in the mouth. Now you find yourself lying face-down in starchy, stiff grass gone yellow from drought. The raucous sounds of the party are nowhere to be heard, and aside from a few groans that tell you you're not the only one suffering from hardy drink, the air is quiet and still. Raising your head, you look about to find yourself in a common yard stretched out before four ramshackle-looking log cabins. Deep woods surround the clearing on three sides and a hillside holding terraced plots of dried, dusty corn rises up to the west. Several other people, their faces familiar from the wedding, lie splayed out on the ground around you, looking about with similar befuddled eyes.*

Only the PCs are present in the yard. Through sheer happenstance, they were the only wedding guests to sample from the spiked jug and be brought here by the witch liquor's taint. Although they feel hung-over, their condition has no debilitating effects—they're in enough trouble already.

Allow the PCs a few moments to get their bearings and to try and reconstruct the events that led them here. If they compare their experiences at the wedding, they'll deduce that each of them drank from a maroon clay jug holding a potent liquor. The judge should describe the surrounding cabins at this point, perhaps sketching a quick map, as the party's about the need to know the locations of possible bastions of safety. When the PCs start to split up or head towards the cabins, Event One occurs.

## EVENT ONE: THE PHANTOMS



he uneasy spirits of the Hobb clan are trapped in *Sour Spring Hollow*, hungry and hateful. They observe the PCs for a few moments, intrigued by their arrival, before hunger overwhelms curiosity and they pounce. Read the following:

*The still air is broken by a peculiar bird cry sounding from the dark forest. A shrill call of "Rack-kak-kak-kaw, rack-kak-kak-kaw" echoes across the clearing followed immediately by the sound of winds rushing through the boles. Strangely, the leaves stand unmoving on their branches. Moments later, intangible figures, swirling like mist, slither from the trees toward you. Pairs of burning green eyes filled with hate, glare at you like emerald cinders.*

The phantoms rush amongst the PCs, attacking those with the worst Luck first. The judge should describe any fatalities occurring during this initial attack with grim details, describing how a slain PC's flesh dries out and cracks like corn husks in a drought, his blood flowing into his slayer and making the phantom momentarily visible.

**Hobb Phantoms** (6): Init +4; Atk death grasp +1 melee (1d5); AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 4 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP immune to normal weapons; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; AL C.

The Hobb phantoms are translucent, bilious patches of mist assuming vaguely humanoid shapes. A pair of brilliant green eyes peers from their otherwise blank visages. They consume the blood of their victims, making their true forms, that of rustic, evil-seeming Shudfolk, visible for a few moments. These un-dead phantoms are immune to normal weapons, but are injured by silver and hawthorn implements. Although the Devil's Thorn sigil (see area 1-2 and sidebar below) served the witches well in life, it repels them in death and they cannot enter a building protected by that sign.

The phantoms attack for three rounds, slaying as many PCs as possible. They don't pursue characters who flee into the cabins (yet), but will circle the buildings briefly, howling and laughing before slinking back into the trees.

The phantoms continue to plague the party throughout their time in the dimensional space, returning with 1d4+1 of their number every 1d6+1 turns. The Hobbs were a large clan and any phantoms destroyed are replaced by other ghostly kinfolk. The phantoms' arrival is always heralded by the weird bird cry, giving the PCs one round of warning before the Hobbs' restless spirits descend upon them. On subsequent attacks, the phantoms will enter areas 1-4 and 1-5 to attack the party, but cannot enter area 1-2 and will not go into area 1-1. They leave the defense of the spring cave in area 1-7 to the deadfall, but if it is slain and the party attempts to hide in the cavern, the phantoms descend the well to attack.

## EVENT TWO: THE DOLLS



his event is ongoing throughout the adventure, starting once the first PC dies. Soon after each death, the party discovers a corn-husk doll propped on a dusty shelf, porch stair, or other innocuous location. These dolls are the creations of Thistle Hobb's (the daughter from area 1-5) restless spirit and are potentially lethal later in the adventure. When first found, read the following:

*A crude doll fashioned from dried corn husks, twine, and corn silk sits seemingly forgotten here. Measuring 8" tall, the doll's rustic form seems to suggest the appearance of [insert slain PC's name] down to the deceased's clothes and hair color. Unlike the rest of the surroundings, the doll is clean and dust-free, hinting at recent manufacture.*

The judge must keep track of the fate of these dolls, as any that are destroyed won't plague the party later, while those PCs carrying them will be the first to be attacked when they animate.

Once the PCs acquire Shuyr Rilla's holy symbol from the well and begin moving through the corn field (area 1-8), each doll becomes possessed by a fragment of Hobb undead energy and they attack the party. Although relatively weak, they band together to kill one or more PCs in turn, using their numbers to overwhelm their victim.

**Animated Corn Husk Doll** (equal to # of slain PCs): Init -3; Atk slashing corn husk limbs +0 melee (1 point of damage); AC 8; HD 1d3; hp 2 each; MV 10' (but see SP); Act 1d20; SP sudden appearance (doll can instantaneously appear adjacent to or even on an opponent for maximum terror), immune to mind-affecting magic, fire inflicts double damage; SV Fort -3, Ref +1, Will -2; AL C.

The corn husk dolls slice their victims with stiff, sharp limbs, using their sudden appearance movement power to manifest around their enemies if left behind. Those carried by a PC automatically surprise their bearer, gaining a free round to attack. A PC carrying a number of these dolls when they animate is in grave danger.

**Area 1-1—The Gardinel:** *A decayed-looking cabin lacking a porch stands at this point overlooking the yard. A pair of shuttered windows flank an open doorway leading into the gloomy interior. The split shake roof and chinked log walls hold a slight green tinge as if moss clings to the exterior.*

This "building" was once Byard Hobb's witch's gardinel, conjured up by black magic. Since the casting out of the farm and Byard's transformation into a restless phantom, the gardinel has devolved into its more primitive form—a mindless, carnivorous plant that mimics a log cabin to catch its prey. PCs trapped inside the plant are doomed.

**Gardinel (1):** Init -3; Atk tongue tendril +8 melee (grapple); AC 10; HD 20d12; hp 130; MV none; Act 1d20; SP camouflage, digestive juices (DC 15 Fort save each round or suffer 4d8 damage), immune to most mind-affecting spells, *fire resistance* (as if spellcheck 20), fails all Reflex saves; SV Fort +16, Ref -, Will -5; AL N.

During the phantoms' initial attack it is possible some of the PCs rush to the gardinel, mistaking it for safe refuge. These unlucky souls flee directly into the plant and it closes its "door" behind them before flooding its stomach with digestive juices. Zero-level PCs are certainly killed immediately and devoured.

If the entire group of PCs decides to seek shelter in the gardinel, the adventure could come to an abrupt end. In this case, allow the first 1d4+1 PCs to enter the gardinel before it closes its mouth, leaving the rest of the party outside while it digests the unlucky. The PCs that avoid this fate can seek shelter elsewhere, but may have to survive another round of phantom attacks to reach safety.

**Area 1-2—Oza's Cabin:** *A slant-roofed log cabin with rough-formed porch looks upon the yard from this place. The roof is saddle-backed with age and the shake roof shingles are split and cracked, but it otherwise seems intact. A hewn-wood door blocks entrance, its exterior face marred by a weird glyph in fading paint.*

This cabin was home to Oza, oldest of Byard Hobb's sons and the second-most powerful conjure man in the clan. Oza regularly dealt with dark spirits in the backwoods and protected his home with an old symbol known as the Devil's Thorn (see sidebar). This special glyph warded off restless spirits during Oza's life, but now stymies the Hobb clan. None of the phantoms can enter this cabin, making it the safest place for the PCs to seek shelter during the initial attack and as they explore the farm.

In the woodpile beside the hearth is a hawthorn walking stick broken in two. It has been sanded smooth and is easily distinguished from the other gathered kindling (DC 5 Intelligence check to notice). While not magical, hawthorn has power against restless spirits and both of the broken pieces inflict damage on the phantoms as clubs. A successful DC 10 Intelligence check allows a PC to recall the purported occult properties of hawthorn wood. The walking stick was owned by Shuyr Rilla and broken by the Hobbs when she was captured. It was meant for the fire, but the casting out occurred before it could be burned.

### Useful/Interesting Items in area 1-2

- Hatchet (as hand axe)
- Frying pan (as club)
- 1d6 Knives (as daggers)
- Clothing
- Lantern and 3 flasks of oil
- Herbs, salt, and corn meal
- 2 hoes and a shovel (as staff)
- Firewood (as club)

**Area 1-3—Burying Ground:** *A number of chiseled stones and rotting posts protrude from the dry soil and rank grass here. The ground is uneven with several oblong depressions in the earth indicating the presence of ancient graves.*

The Hobbs buried their dead in this neglected patch of ground. Although the depressions in the ground are a natural side effect of the rotted caskets below, the party need not know this and wild speculation is encouraged. The real danger here is the trio of extremely hungry earth hounds who've been denied a meal since the hollow's casting out and survive only due to the magical nature of the place. The earth hounds ravenously attack any living creatures entering the burying ground, bursting from the earth to surprise the party.

**Earth Hound (3):** Init +2; Atk tusks +2 melee (1d5) or bite +1 melee (1d4); AC 11; HD 1d6; hp 3; MV 30', burrow 10'; Act 1d20; SP keen nose (+10 to detect hidden creatures and can smell dead bodies from 300' away); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

An inspection of the grave markers discovers most are unadorned and bear only the weatherworn names of long-dead Hobb kin. One wooden marker, however, is inscribed with a faded carving of a Devil's Thorn. This marker affects the Hobb phantoms and can be wielded as a club or brandished at the un-dead spirits to drive them away. If used in this manner, the wielder may turn un-holy as a cleric, but uses a d16+Personality modifier to determine success.

**Area 1-4—Esco's Cabin:** *A cabin in a state of ongoing collapse stands away from the rest. Holes pierce its roof and one of its walls leans ominously, bringing to mind a cringing dog awaiting the next blow. Lacking shutters, ratty, badly tanned hides cover the windows facing the yard and a crumbling stone stoop leads to its closed front door.*

This cabin was home to Esco Hobb, third son of Byard Hobb and a slob even by the backwoods clan's standards. Pallid light shining through the holes in the roof provide illumination, making its interior the brightest of all the cabins.

If the party has not yet encountered the earth hounds in area 1-3 when they enter this cabin, the ghoulish animals smell the PCs next door and seek them out. The party hears scraping coming from beneath the cabin's floorboards and the earth hounds burst through the rotting timbers to attack the following round. This encounter does not occur if the earth hounds have been slain.

On a shelf in the main bedroom is a leather-bound book, its cover stained with sweat and blood, and a tattered ribbon sewn to the binding as a bookmark. The book's title, *The Wayward Companion*, is written on the cover in worn gilt lettering. This witch book contains the formula for a random 1<sup>st</sup> level wizard's spell, the spell *patron bond*, and two grama-ree rituals (see *The Chained Coffin Companion*, page 24) of the judge's choosing.

#### Useful/Interesting Items in area 1-4

- 50' rope
- Short bow and 12 arrows
- 1d4 Knives (as daggers)
- Clothing
- Lantern and 2 flasks of oil
- Dried meat and pickled vegetables in crockery jars
- Tarot deck
- 1 sp, 8 cp
- Firewood (as club)

**Area 1-5—Burel's Cabin:** *Another weather-beaten log cabin occupies this end of the common yard. A roofed porch spans the front of the cabin, granting some protection against the sun and the rain. The front door hangs askew on a single hinge and a crudely-fashioned child's rocking horse stands beside the short flight of log steps leading to the portico.*

The loft of this cabin was the bedroom of Thistle Hobb, Burel's 6-year-old daughter. The pitched ceiling of the loft is covered with childish pictures drawn in colored clay dust, mud, and (unsettlingly) blood. In addition to crude illustrations of various black magic rites conducted by the Hobbs, there is a se-

## THE DEVIL'S THORN

The symbol known in the Shudders as "The Devil's Thorn" is a series of five intersecting lines that form a vaguely dagger-shaped sigil (see illustration). According to mountain lore, the Devil's Thorn is a bit of backwoods grama-ree that provides protection against evil spirits and it is commonly found carved on talismans worn by the superstitious. Like most Shudfolk magic, it provides true protection only when drawn by a master of grama-ree. The Devil's Thorn functions similarly to a hex sign (see *The Chained Coffin Companion*, p. 7), but is a product of grama-ree and not Hsaalian sorcery.

The Devil's Thorn painted on the door of Ozra's Cabin (area 1-2) prevents the Hobb phantoms from entering the building, but only so long as the door is closed and attached to the cabin. Once the party deduces the defense capability of the symbol, they may be inclined to remove the door and carry the Thorn-inscribed portal with them as a shield. Unfortunately, the door-drawn Devil's Thorn grants no supernatural protection when removed from the cabin proper. In fact, removing the door allows the phantoms to freely enter area 1-2 until the door is reattached and closed once more.

In addition to being drawn to protect a structure, a Devil's Thorn can be inscribed on a smaller object, making the item an effective defense that can be carried about. The old grave post (see area 1-3) adorned with the Devil's Thorn is an example of the Thorn's power when decorating an item.







ries of pictures showing the arrival of Shuyr Rilla to the farm and her subsequent capture, the breaking of her walking stick, Byard Hobb throwing her holy symbol down the well, and her death as a sacrificial victim tied to the scarecrow pole at the top of the corn field. The PCs may find these illustration useful in determining the way to escape the pocket dimension and return home before they fall victim to the phantoms.

#### Useful/Interesting Items in area 1-5

- Hatchet (as hand axe)
- Crossbow and 12 quarrels
- 1d5 Knives (as daggers)
- Clothing
- Lantern and 4 flasks of oil
- Corn meal and dried meat
- Clay jug of liquor (normal alcohol)
- Out-of-tune fiddle
- Firewood (as club)

**Area 1-6—The Well:** A low wall of fieldstones mortared together with cracked clay indicates the presence of a well at this location. The well is a simple affair lacking roof, cover, or winch, and stands open to the sallow sky. A tin bucket with a severed strand of rope lies beside it.

The well's wall is 3' high and in poor condition. Pushing hard against the stones cause the clay mortar to crumble, pitching the rocks down the shaft. The well shaft measures 20' long and pierces the ceiling of the spring cave below (total distance of 30' to water's surface). The rope tied to the bucket is only 1' long and the bucket has holes, making it useless for drawing water.

**Area 1-7—Spring Cave:** The quiet murmur of flowing water echoes in this limestone cave. The pool of clear water fills most of the cavern, flowing out of the space through a narrow point at the east end. A raised, irregular patch of stone is littered with dried branches and other debris, seemingly washed here by floods and long-ago rains.

A natural spring flows up from the ground, eroding the surrounding rock to form this cave. Once the spring was known as "Sweet Spring" but the name changed to "Sour Spring" after the Hobbs took possession of the hollow, tainting the place with their presence.

The mass of branches and debris is inhabited by one of the Hobb's life force and can manifest as a 7' tall humanoid-shaped monstrosity known as a deadfall. The deadfall defends the spring cave against intruders seeking to recover the holy symbol cast here long ago. As a physical creature, the deadfall is subject to harm by normal weapons, but some types are more effective than others.

**Deadfall (1):** Init +1; Atk slashing branches +2 melee (1d6); AC 12; HD 3d8; hp 14; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP blunt and piercing weapons inflict half damage; slashing weapons cause double damage; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +1; AL N.

The spring pool is 4' deep and contains a thin layer of sand, stones, and other debris on the bottom. Buried in the sand is Shuyr Rilla's silver holy symbol. Locating it requires a DC 5 Intelligence check and 1 turn of searching. The symbol is worth 10 gp, but is far more valuable if returned to its owner (see area 1-8).

**Area 1-8—Corn Fields:** Five terraces are carved into the steep hillside and reinforced with fallen logs against erosion. Like a ladder, these plots ascend some 30' feet up the embankment. Each plot is filled with dense stands of tired-looking corn stalks, their ears shriveled and their husks like parchment from long drought. A ragged looking scarecrow peers over the heads of the dried stalks at the uppermost tier, looking down on the farm like a forgotten god.

Like many Shudfolk, the Hobbs relied on their corn crop as their staple food. Unlike their distant neighbors, however, the witches watered their fields with the blood of innocents, binding these sacrifices to the scarecrow post and letting their blood into the soil. It was here that Shuyr Rilla met her death and called down the exorcism that cast the hollow out of place. Her bones lie at the base of the scarecrow at the topmost field.

The hill is steep and PCs suffer a -5' move penalty as they scale the embankment. Although the corn is parched and dry, firebug PCs attempting to set the field ablaze discover the stalks burn poorly, producing only lambent green flames that quickly extinguish without doing damage to the crops. If climbing the terraces before they acquire the holy symbol in area 1-7, the party reaches the top without incident. If they have found the discarded symbol, however, the phantoms sense the end may soon be upon them and animate the corn husk dolls (see Event Two). These magical terrors strike as the PCs begin their ascent, using the dried corn and their sudden appearance movement ability to strike with surprise. The dolls gain a +10 bonus to hide attempts while in the corn field. They continue to attack the PCs until all are destroyed.

PCs reaching the topmost plot find the scarecrow to be a collection of bloodstained rags and ropes tied to a 10' high post. A Golgotha of old bones litter the ground beneath the post, stained with age and half-buried in the dry ground. One skeleton, although dried and dirty, seems more recent than

the rest. These are the remains of Shuyr Rilla. Her clerical vestments are torn and bloodstained, but recognizable as religious garb, and one of her bony hands is raised aloft, its fingers half-curved as if grasping for something. Should the PCs place her holy symbol in her hand, her exorcism is completed, bringing about its full effect.

Returning the holy symbol to Shuyr Rilla causes a blast of thunder to echo across the hollow. Rain-laden thunderheads appear in the yellow sky above and cleansing rain pours down from the heavens. As the rain falls, the PCs see that the cabins, well, and corn stalks begin to dissolve into nothingness, washed away by the divine-born rain. The Hobb phantoms, seeing their existence at an end, make one final foray against the PCs. Six of the phantoms race towards the PCs, attempting to slay them before they succumb to the exorcism. If the PCs can survive three rounds of combat, the Hobb phantoms ultimately are washed away, vanishing as if dipped in acid. The party has triumphed over the un-dead spirits!

## CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

When the last Hobb phantom is exorcised, either by being destroyed by the party or cleansed by the rain, the PCs find themselves back in the physical world. Read the following:

*The rains wash away the last of the accursed farm, leaving you standing in a verdant glen under a stormy sky. The smell of fresh rain and clean forest fills the air as a cool breeze rustles the green leaves in the trees. Looking about you, you spy the ruins of several tumbled log homes now overgrown with kudzu. The terraced fields are muddy and filled with newly-sprouted stalks of corn. There is no sign of the foul phantoms who so recently plagued you. At last, you are home.*

The surviving PCs should have enough experience points to advance to 1<sup>st</sup> level following their adventure on the Hobb farm. They've survived just the first of many terrors and wonders awaiting them in the Shudder Mountains, and their experiences in the pocket dimension will serve them well as they explore the pine-haunted hills and hollows of the backwoods.

Depending on how the judge wishes to proceed, he can begin the next phase of the campaign by playing through the party's journey from Sour Spring Hollow to safe ground or skip ahead to a time where the PCs are now trained and equipped, and ready for their next sojourn into the Shudder Mountains. The party's next adventure might see them searching for the witch liquor bootleggers whose wares sent them to the Hobb farm (either to learn their secrets or extract revenge) or perhaps using the magics found in *The Wayward Companion* to contact a patron who will inevitably have tasks for his new servants to perform. Regardless of where their adventures lead, a wealth of excitement, horror, and danger awaits the party in a *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG campaign set in the Shudder Mountains!

## APPENDIX: SHUDDER MOUNTAIN OCCUPATIONS

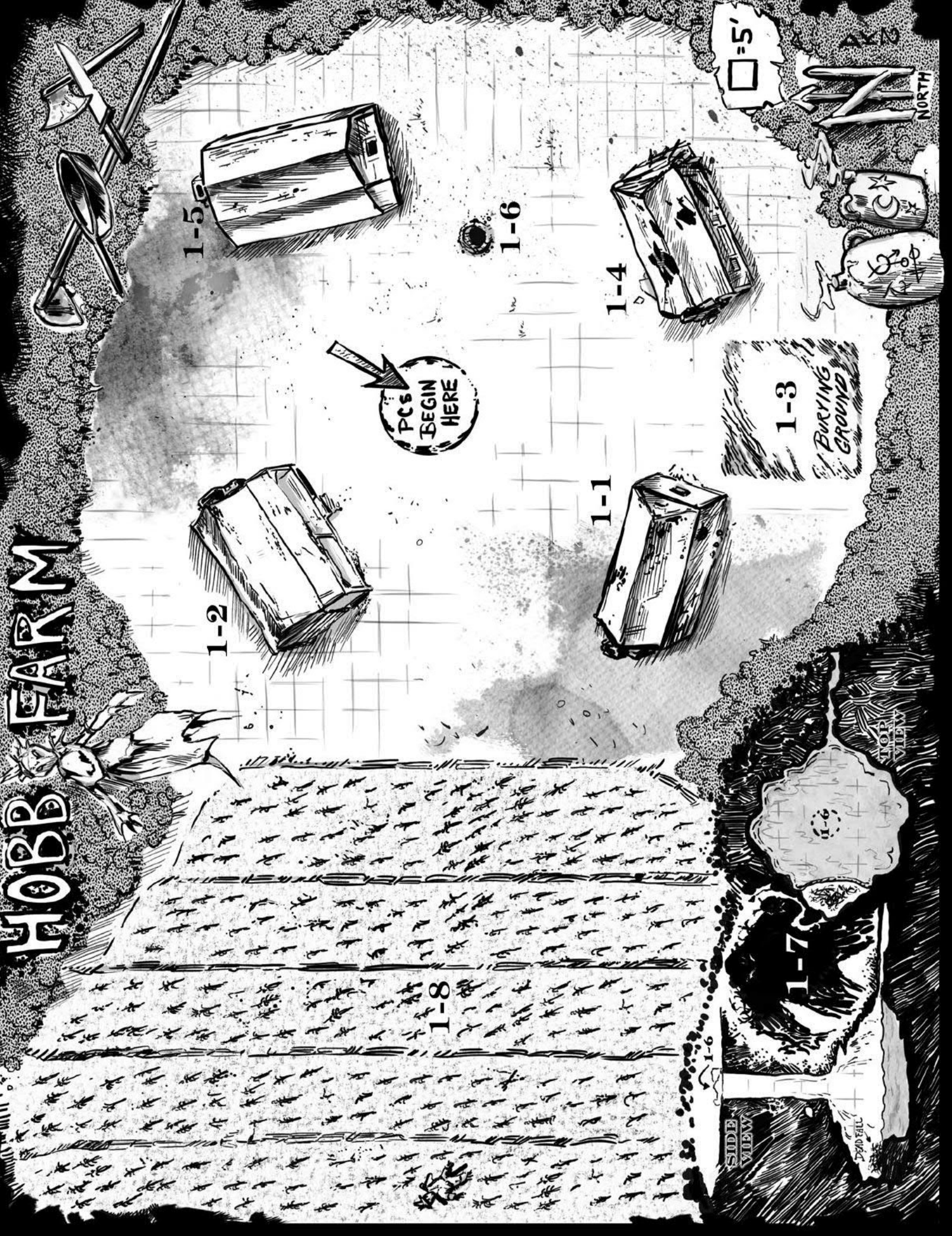


Life in the Shudder Mountains is rustic and the residents are largely self-reliant. As such, PCs starting in the backwoods have access to a limited variety of occupations. A judge beginning a Shudder Mountain campaign should have each PC roll on the following table to determine his zero-level occupation.

| Roll  | Occupation                          | Trained Weapon       | Trade Goods             |
|-------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 01    | Astrologer                          | Staff                | Oil, 1 flask            |
| 02    | Blacksmith                          | Hammer (as club)     | Steel tongs             |
| 03    | Bounty hunter                       | Longsword            | Hide armor              |
| 04    | Butcher                             | Cleaver (as axe)     | Side of pork            |
| 05-06 | Carpenter                           | Hammer (as club)     | Wood, 10 lbs.           |
| 07    | Cobbler                             | Awl (as dagger)      | Shoehorn                |
| 08    | Deputy constable                    | Longsword            | Steel helmet            |
| 09-10 | Dwarven blacksmith <sup>#</sup>     | Hammer (as club)     | Iron, 10 lbs.           |
| 11-15 | Dwarven prospector <sup>#</sup>     | Pick (as club)       | Lantern                 |
| 16-18 | Dwarven stonemason <sup>#</sup>     | Hammer               | Fine stone, 10 lbs.     |
| 19-21 | Elven forester <sup>#</sup>         | Staff                | Herbs, 1 lb.            |
| 22-25 | Elven musician <sup>#</sup>         | Dagger               | Flute                   |
| 26-28 | Elven sage <sup>#</sup>             | Dagger               | Parchment and quill pen |
| 29-46 | Farmer                              | Pitchfork (as spear) | Hen                     |
| 47-49 | Halfling brewer <sup>#</sup>        | Dagger               | Barrel                  |
| 50-54 | Halfling farmer <sup>#</sup>        | Pitchfork (as spear) | Hen                     |
| 55-56 | Halfling trader <sup>#</sup>        | Short sword          | 20 sp                   |
| 57    | Healer                              | Club                 | Holy water, 1 oz.       |
| 58-59 | Herbalist                           | Club                 | Herbs, 1 lb.            |
| 60-61 | Herder                              | Staff                | Herding dog             |
| 62-65 | Hunter                              | Shortbow             | Deer pelt               |
| 66    | Lay clergy                          | Staff                | Holy water, 1 oz.       |
| 67-68 | Merchant                            | Dagger               | 4 gp, 14 sp, 27 cp      |
| 69-70 | Miller/baker                        | Club                 | Flour, 1 lb.            |
| 71-74 | Musician                            | Dagger               | Fiddle                  |
| 75-76 | Orphan                              | Club                 | Rag doll                |
| 77    | Ostler                              | Staff                | Bridle                  |
| 78    | Outlaw                              | Short sword          | Leather armor           |
| 79-81 | Potter                              | Club                 | Clay, 1 lb.             |
| 82-84 | Prospector                          | Shovel (as staff)    | Sifting basket          |
| 85    | Rope maker                          | Knife (as dagger)    | Rope, 100'              |
| 86    | Smuggler/bootlegger                 | Sling                | Waterproof sack         |
| 87-88 | Tanner                              | Staff                | Cow hide                |
| 89    | Wainwright                          | Club                 | Pushcart                |
| 90    | Witch's apprentice                  | Dagger               | Black grimoire          |
| 91-92 | Witch liquor bootlegger's assistant | Club                 | Clay jug                |
| 93-96 | Woodcutter                          | Handaxe              | Bundle of wood          |
| 97-00 | Woodworker                          | Chisel (as dagger)   | Wood, 10 lbs.           |

<sup>#</sup> If the judge wishes to run a strictly human PC campaign, simply remove the racial description of these occupations (e.g. "Halfling brewer" becomes "Brewer").

# HOBBS FARM



1-5

1-6

1-4

1-3

1-2

1-1

1-8

1-7

SIDE VIEW

TOP VIEW

NORTH

5'

BURYING GROUND

PCs BEGIN HERE



# MOONRICKET BRIDGE

FOR LEVEL 1 CHARACTERS



# MOONRICKET BRIDGE

FOR LEVEL 1 CHARACTERS

## THE TALE

*"There's an old legend of a covered bridge out over Lost Creek, and the legend tells it's a haunted place. The old folks say that a traveler, bound to meet his sweetheart over in the next hollow, met a gang of robbers on that bridge. The robbers cut the traveler's throat, stole all he had, and threw his body in the creek. Now, that poor man's restless soul haunts the bridge, terrifying anyone unlucky enough to try and cross it after dark. Those that do, see him appear, pointing angrily at them as he is 'bout to take misplaced revenge on them for his death. I hear some locals once posted a reward for anyone who could drive the ghost off, but nobody ever claimed it."*

## BACKGROUND

Much of the tale is true: Moonricket Bridge is a covered span that crosses Lost Creek, a rushing rivulet that pours down from a rocky ridge. A traveler did indeed meet his death at the hands of bandits there some fifty years back, but the robbers didn't steal everything of value he carried. The traveler was on his way to propose marriage to his sweetheart and carried a gold wedding ring, an old family heirloom, with him. Fearing he'd lose it, the traveler sewed the golden band into the hem of his shirt and it was overlooked by the robbers. When they dumped his body into the fast creek under the bridge, the ring went with it.

The ghost of that traveler haunts the bridge, doomed to remain unable to move on to the afterlife until the ring is returned to him and he can present it to his sweetheart. The circumstances of his death trap him at the bridge and he cannot travel downstream to where his bones and the tattered remains of his shirt—which still holds the ring—now lie.

Contrary to the tale, the traveler's ghost doesn't point vengefully at anyone attempting to cross the covered bridge at night, but is instead gesturing despondently downstream to where the ring can be found, hoping someone might seek out his bones and return the wedding band to him. Until someone recovers the ring and presents it to him, his spirit is doomed to haunt the bridge.

Note: Neither the ghost nor his bride-to-be appearing in this tale are given names. This both represents the vagueness of certain old mountain tales where names and places change with the telling, and allows the judge to personalize this scenario to best fit his campaign and its residents.

## MOONRICKET BRIDGE

Moonricket Bridge is a covered bridge that crosses a wild mountain stream. The clapboard-sided and split-shingled roofed bridge was once painted red with white trim, but the paint is long faded and the bare wood beneath is visible in many places. The bridge is 40' long and 20' wide, and stands 4' above the creek below. The creek is steep-sided

and littered with river rocks; white water crashes down the creek, filling the air with noise.

During the daytime, the bridge is unassuming in appearance, but travelers crossing it are susceptible to feelings of uneasiness as if someone is lurking nearby. Particularly sensitive individuals (those with Personality scores of 14 or better) often feel a cold line across their throat, as if a naked knife blade was pressed there. Wayfarers seldom spend a moment longer than necessary at Moonricket Bridge.

When night falls, the bridge grows even more unnerving. Shadows collect in the eaves of the bridge, the cries of hoot owls echo through the bridge's empty interior, and the creek sounds become sinister, sounding almost like a wild animal growling in the darkness. Travelers crossing the bridge after dark have a 75% chance of witnessing the ghost's appearance. Anyone purposely waiting at the bridge automatically see the ghost.

## THE GHOST

The Ghost of Moonricket Bridge forms at a point two-thirds of the way across the bridge, appearing like a shaft of moonlight trapped inside the span. The ghost manifests as a glowing, yet solid-seeming human male in his early twenties. The ghost is washed of all color, making it impossible to determine the color of his skin, hair, or clothes in life. A jagged wound crosses the ghost's throat, weeping watery blood that drifts about the spirit's head like a gruesome halo.

Anyone witnessing the ghost's appearance must make a DC 10 Will save or flee the bridge for 2d4 minutes. A second DC 12 Will save allows them to return to the span once this time elapses. Those unshaken by the ghost see it extend its right hand, raising it slowly with index finger outstretched. The ghost points at the downstream interior wall of the covered bridge, then slowly turns its arm towards the group. It then opens its hand, palm up, and turns its arm back downstream.

The injury that killed the ghost in life has echoes in his death: he cannot speak with his slit throat and his monomania about recovering the ring limits his miming to imparting clues to its whereabouts. The ghost becomes frustrated if the party attempts prolonged conversations or if they taunt or mock his restless existence. In this event, his features turn dark and malicious as his un-dead nature gets the best of his lingering humanity. The ghost immediately attacks.

**The Ghost of Moonricket Bridge:** Init +2; Atk paralyzing touch +6 melee (DC 14 Fort save or paralyzed for 1d4 hours) or draining touch +6 melee (1d4 random physical ability point damage); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 16; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead traits, immune to non-magical weapons, turn invisible; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL N (C when angered).

The ghost, if reduced to zero hit points or turned by a cleric, vanishes immediately. He re-coalesces the following eve-



# Moonricket Bridge

Tale# 2  
Map







ning. Only by returning the lost ring to him can he be permanently put to rest.

## THE HELLBENDER CAVE

PCs who deduce the intent behind the ghost's gesture might embark on a search of the creek to see if there's anything of interest in its rushing waters or on its steeped banks. The creek winds for several miles before meeting a larger river, but a dedicated search of its twists and turns (and a DC 12 Intelligence check) notices a pile of water-borne debris collected on a stony ledge along one of the creek's many bends. PCs actually in the water notice the debris automatically.

A closer inspection of the old branches and reeds reveals that the pile partially obscures the mouth of a riverbank cave leading deeper into the rocky bank. The cave mouth has a low 2' high ceiling, but a 4' wide mouth. A slimy stony tunnel leads into darkness. Any PC making a DC 14 Intelligence check notices a single 12" long footprint with long, spindly toes partway down the tunnel. It is the track of one of the giant hellbenders that lair in area 1-1.

**Area 1-1 - Hellbender Den:** *A rocky, muddied-floor cave lies buried in the riverbank a short distance from the rushing creek. The air is damp and smells of river mud and slimy flesh. A trio of log-sized shapes squirm about the roughly 20' square space, their stubby legs moving their striped red and black bodies to face you. Gaping mouths open wide in anticipation of a new meal.*

This cave is home to a trio of giant hellbender salamanders. The three massive amphibians normally rest during the day in the shady, muddy cave, but the arrival of the adventurers has stirred both them and their appetites up. They fight to defend their den, but will flee if seriously injured (less than 5 hp remaining).

**Giant Hellbender Salamanders (3):** Init -2; Atk bite +3 melee (2d4); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 16, 14, 10; MV 20' or swim 30'; Act 1d20; SP camouflage (+10 to hide attempts); SV Fort +2, Ref -1, Will -2; AL N.

The den has a low 4' ceiling, making actions difficult for

any race other than dwarves or halflings. Tall PCs suffer a -1d penalty to attack rolls and the salamanders gain a +2 bonus to melee attacks against those characters.

The muddy cave contains only old animal bones, driftwood, and similar water-borne debris. An examination of the walls reveals high water marks, indicating the space floods from time to time. At the rear of the cave is another small tunnel leading 5' further into another, smaller cave.

**Area 1-2 - Old Bones:** *At the end of the short tunnel is a small cave measuring about 10' square. The entire floor of the grotto is covered in thick, wet mud. Judging from the ends of the fallen branches you see sticking out of the stinking stuff, the layer is a few feet deep.*

River mud measuring 3' deep fills this cave. Buried in the soupy mess are branches, drifted leaves, and the old bones of the slain traveler whose ghost haunts the Moonricket Bridge. The bones are found with a successful DC 12 Intelligence check or simply a prolonged prodding and poking of the mud with a long pole.

The skeleton is only partially intact, missing its skull and right leg. Mud- and aged-stiffened old traveling garments hold the rest of the bones together. An examination of the spinal column notices score marks along its top, evidence of the violent knife strokes that cut the traveler's throat. Anyone searching the crumbling old clothes detects a hard object sewn into the hem of the shirt. Cutting open the cloth reveals a golden ring of antique style worth 25 gp. It is the lost wedding ring that keeps the ghost from moving on.

## ENDING THE TALE

A party that located the traveler's mortal remains and recovered the ring have the power to resolve the bonds keeping him from his rest. They might also display callowness and avarice, and choose to keep the ring for themselves. Both actions have the consequences.

A party that chooses greed over compassion, keeping the ring for its value, suffer from a fearsome nightmare the next time they sleep. In the nightmare, each PC is alone in

an autumn corn field, their vision obscured by the dried, standing stalks which rustle in a chill wind. The howl of dogs rings out and the PC flees through the corn, pursued by hounds he is unwilling to face. A rumbling voice echoes these words through the corn:

*Your heart beats so quickly,  
But Death's hounds run more swiftly.  
No boundary between life and death,  
No second chance when breath has left.  
Your life shall not be saved from the grip of the grave.*

As the unseen pursuers snap at his heels, the character stumbles and feels cold shapes pounce on him. He awakens in terror.

For their greed, each PC is now under the effects of a curse: the Curse of Death's Dogs. Because they've offended one who straddles the border between life and death, the cursed PC finds it impossible to cling to that same thin boundary. Death's hounds constantly shadow the character, waiting to strike.

The curse carries a -2 Luck penalty and leaves the character feeling hunted. The curse automatically kills the PC when he is reduced to zero hit points. The character does not bleed out nor is he allowed a Luck check to see if he wasn't actually killed. Like a 0-level PC, reaching zero hit points is an automatic death sentence as the character's soul is dragged off to the afterlife by Death's tireless dogs.

This is a moderate curse and it can only be remedied by making restitutions to the unquiet dead. Merely returning the ring to the ghost of Moonricket Bridge is insufficient, however. Since the curse was born by greed, the PCs must spend at least 100 gp in a gesture to acknowledge the memory of the traveler and his would-be bride. Possible solutions include building a monument, refurbishing Moonricket Bridge, restoring the would-be bride's cabin (see below), or similar actions.

Assuming the PCs have a shred of decency and they return the ring, a much different ending awaits them. The ghost takes the ring from the party, his face transformed by a beatific smile. He bows his head to the PCs, holds the ring to his heart, and walks out of Moonricket Bridge, following the road. The party can easily keep pace with the spirit.

The ghost walks for a few miles down the winding mountain road. The trees crowd the road, but seem more like watchful sentinels than oppressive lurkers. The moon shines on it, turning it into a ribbon of silver in the dark mountain night. Eventually, the spirit reaches an old cabin by the side of the road. The roof has collapsed, the front door fallen in, and kudzu is slowly reclaiming the structure. The ghost walks past the ruin without stopping, taking a narrow trail that leads behind the cabin and ends in a small family graveyard twenty yards beyond.

In the cemetery, next to a worn stone marker, stands another ghostly figure. This second spirit is of an elderly woman dressed in a colorless homemade dress. Her hair is thin and her face is wrinkled by a lifetime of sorrow. She seems

oblivious to her surroundings. As the traveler's ghost steps into the graveyard, the woman's spirit looks up and gazes upon him, a look of shocked wonder on her face. The traveler gets down on bended knee, his mouth moving in unheard words. He extends his hand, displaying the ring to her and she is suddenly no longer an old woman. Instead, the woman's form has become that of a carefree young woman in her late teens with a coronet of woven wildflowers on her brow. She clasps the traveler's hand, lifting him to his feet before embracing him. Glistening, spectral tears stream down both their faces.

The two ghosts stare into each other's eyes for a moment longer, before they both turn to the PCs. They stand together, holding hands and waving farewell at the party. The spectres fade away and there is the soft sound of a heavy ring falling onto the dried grass that carpets the graveyard.

Each PC gains 1 Luck point for reuniting the lovers. A quick search of the graveyard discovers the dropped wedding ring, left behind by the departed ghosts. Its purpose served, the PCs can take the ring without ill effects.

No ghost is ever seen on Moonricket Bridge again, but some say young lovers walking the road nearby at night sometimes see warm, welcoming lights burning in the ruined cabin and hear the sound of laughter drifting in the night air. But that's another mountain tale...



# MOON-EYES AND FIRE FLIES

## FOR LEVEL 1-2 CHARACTERS

### THE TALE

*Moon-Eyes and Fire Flies* is an adventure for *Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG* set in the Shudder Mountains. It is intended for 4-6 1st or 2nd-level PCs and can be completed in a single gaming session. In the course of this adventure, the party witnesses a swarm of fireflies set fire to a Shudfolk home and are drawn into a feud between the current occupants of the Shudders and a race with a much older claim to the land.

### BACKGROUND

The Shudder Mountains have been home to a number of races down the eons: serpent men, primitive human tribes, invaders from Hsaal, and the slaves they imported to toil in their mines. One race is often overlooked, however, due to their unusual life cycle—the Moon-Eyed Ones.

These curious creatures are small humanoids with saucer-sized eyes that lend them their name. They've dwelt in the mountains longer than anyone can imagine, living a solitary existence close to the land itself. The Moon-Eyed Ones are a nocturnal race who live largely under the earth, venturing out after dark to hunt and gather. They also go into states of long hibernation, sometimes for centuries, sleeping in curious cocoons beneath the Shudders and only reemerging when their weird biology determines it's the proper time.

One tribe of Moon-Eyed Ones has slumbered in an ancient Hsaalian mine for almost two centuries. When they laid down to sleep, the hollow below their hilltop home was a natural glade, containing only one of the curious stone circles they erect for their religious rites. Recently, the tribe has awakened to discover a Shudfolk hamlet now stands in their sacred glade. To make matters worse, their stone circle has been torn down and their moot space is now a farmer's field.

The Moon-Eyed Ones, furious at the desecration, use their natural magic to summon up a swarm of fireflies—albeit ones unlike any have seen before. The swarm is dispatched to burn down the home and barn now occupying their sacred ground. This magical assault occurs the same night a party of adventurers is spending the evening with the offending farmer...

### STARTING THE ADVENTURE

*Moon-Eyes and Fire Flies* begins with the party spending the night at the home of Dode Groves, a Shudfolk farmer who owns a patch of land on the outskirts of a small village in Standing Stone Hollow. Dode may be a friend of one of the PCs and the party is present for an evening of jaw-wagging and blockade whiskey, or they could be passing through

the area and Dode is giving them a place to sleep due to their good manners. The circumstances are left to the judge to arrange.

As Dode and the party lounges on his front porch, they witness an uncanny and catastrophic event:

*The early summer air is warm and pleasant as you sit around the porch of Dode Groves, a grizzly-bearded but friendly farmer living on the edge of Standing Stone Hollow. The stump whiskey you've been sharing has put an even warmer glow in your bellies as twilight has enveloped the hollow. A scrape of sky is just visible behind the high hills and cricket song sounds from the trees surrounding the plowed fields. Dode's home, his ramshackle barn gone gray with age, the fieldstone walls surrounding his property, and his stone-lipped water well are the only signs that man has intruded upon this pastoral spot in the Shudder Mountains.*

*As you just finish telling Dode about one of your thrilling adventures in the Shudders—naturally embellishing it with a few white lies as is expected here in the mountains—the old farmer's attention is attracted to the fields behind you.*

*"Well, lookie thar! Have you ever a'seen something like that a'for?" he asks.*

*Turning to look, you see what your first assume to be a swarm of fireflies blinking in the twilight. But these insects lack the yellow-green glow you'd expect. Instead, motes of fiery red and orange drift through the air. Hundreds of them.*

*The bugs flitter hypnotically as they advance through the sky before congregating on Dode's barn. Suddenly, one wall of the weather-beaten structure catches fire as tongues of flame begin running across the old boards! Dode swears fiercely and rushes off the porch in the direction of his burning outbuilding. What do you do?*

### FIGHTING FIRE FLIES

The insect swarm are fire flies, a form of common firefly imbued with elemental power by the Moon-Eyed Ones' natural magic. They've been dispatched to burn down Dode's house and barn. Luckily for the farmer, the barn was closer. The barn is 30' long, by 20' wide with a pair of double doors at the entrance and an interior hayloft 10' above the ground. Dode's horse, Huckleberry, and his mule, Elba, are quartered in the barn. Outside, on one side, is a filled water trough.

The fire flies linger on and around the barn for five rounds before moving on to Dode's house. It takes one round to reach the barn from the porch (30' distance).

**Fire Fly Swarm (2):** Init -2; Atk special; AC 10; HD 2d10; hp 10, 7; MV 10', fly 30'; Act 1d20; SP burning aura (all creatures within a 10' x 10' x 10' space must make a DC 10 Fort save or suffer 1d4 damage from heat), half-damage from non-area of effect attacks, immune to fire, suffers 1d3 damage from water if DC 10 Fort save is failed; SV Fort -2, Ref +3, Will -2; AL N.

Fire flies resemble normal lightning bugs, but produce both a fiery glow and a burning aura. Any creature within



# MOON-EYES and Fire Flies



a swarm of fire flies potentially suffers damage each round. Splashing water on the creatures forces them to make a DC 10 Fortitude save or suffer 1d4 damage as their living heat is diminished.

The barn has a cumulative 20% chance of being engulfed in flames each round. Anyone spending their action fighting the fire in some way prevents the chance from increasing that round (e.g. if the barn had been on fire for 2 round for a 40% chance, fighting the fire on the third round would keep it at 40% rather than increase to 60%).

PCs can scoop water from the trough if they have a container to hold it (a helmet will suffice) or draw water from the well. If two or more PCs work the well, the party can fight the fire every round. Otherwise, it takes a single PC one round to draw water from the well and a second round to rush from it to the fire and douse the flames.

If the fire fly swarms are destroyed or driven away before a building is engulfed in flames, the fire can be doused and the building and its contents saved. This process takes 2d10+10 rounds minus 1 round per each person helping fight the fire.

If the party destroys one swarm, the remaining fire fly swarm flees, heading into the trees at the edge of Dode's field. Dode begs the PCs to help him douse any fires still burning. Once his barn and/or home is saved, he asks the PCs if they would investigate what's behind the swarm ("Those t'weren't no nat'ral critters. I smell witchcraft afoot!").

The fire flies move fast, but even after extinguishing the flames at the farm, the PCs can spot the swarm's flashing fiery light up on the hillside overlooking Dode's farm. The characters can find their way up to the Hsaalian Mine quite easily despite the darkness by following the fire flies until they disappear back into the mine. Parties waiting until the morning to investigate will have to stumble through the thickets and undergrowth for a while, but eventually come across the Moon-Eyed Ones' lair.

## THE HSAALIAN MINE

Following the fire fly swarm in the evening or trekking up the hillside and hacking through the underbrush during the daytime eventually leads the party to an ancient mine cut in the side of the hill near the rise's apex. Vegetation and partial landslides over the centuries had hidden the excavation from the Shudfolk, but the Moon-Eyed Ones have since cleared away the debris after their recent reawakening. The entrance to the former mine is now visible to all who climb the hill.

**Area 1-1—The Mine Exterior:** *A wall of boulders and shelf-like strata of sedimentary stone protrudes from the side of a high hill surrounded by shadowy pines. Set into the cliff is an opening that is clearly not of natural making. A tall open archway with a triangular lintel pierces the cliff, leading into the hillside. A small clearing littered with piles of loose dirt and pieces of fallen stone stands before the archway. A waist-high boulder*

## SECRETS IN STONE

Although unnecessary for the party to succeed in the adventure, the judge can foreshadow the reason behind the fire fly attack. Should any PC walk along the fieldstone walls that surround Dode's farm or inquire about where the name "Standing Stone Hollow" originated, their attentions are drawn to a number of curious stones mixed among the fieldstones.

These stones were clearly once pieces of larger stones, but now lie broken and assimilated into the walls. The stone fragments are decorated with petroglyphs depicting small creatures with humongous round eyes. Circular glyphs and symbols are present as well (*comprehend languages* reveals them to be simple religious invocations to the moons and stars). If Dode is asked about them, he admits they once stood where his corn field is and that he had the stones torn down and broken when he settled on the property. He knows nothing more about the stones, their origins, or purpose.

*crowned with an angled piece of verdigris-encrusted bronze faces the entrance.*

Anyone examining the ground discovers numerous small footprints in the soil. They are roughly halfling sized and appear to be wearing simple shoes or moccasins. The tracks come and go from the archway entrance.

The archway leads to area 1-2 within. The verdigris-covered piece of bronze was once a highly polished mirror that reflected sunlight inside the mine for illumination purposes. Now, it is gray-green with age and no longer reflects the sun. If the verdigris is cleaned away, the mine's Stygian darkness becomes gloomy illumination in area 1-2 (and perhaps further areas as well). The bronze is worth 25 gp if removed, but it is strongly bolted into the stone and requires both tools and a successful DC 15 Strength check to free from its mount.

The lintel is inscribed with unusual symbols (in a style similar to that found on the spinning dial puzzle from *DCC #83 The Chained Coffin*) of small size. The symbols possess a mostly-harmless magical residue of Hsaalian sorcery and any non-dwarf passing through the archway feels a slight tingling of the flesh, but no other effect.

Dwarves feel a sense of unease as they approach the archway, similar to the apprehension a person might feel upon entering a quarantine zone. A dwarf experiences an almost-psychoic sensation that the stone beyond the entrance is "sick," but cannot express it more clearly than that. A dwarf entering through the archway must succeed in a DC 10 Willpower save or suffer a -1d penalty to all attack rolls in the first combat he participates in inside the mine. After that fight ends, he shakes off his nervousness and can fight

normally, but still feels as if the stone is tainted. A  *blessing*  spell will also remove this penalty as well as provide its normal benefits.

**Area 1-2—Badger Den:** *This chamber is of rough-hewn stone and appears to have been carved with tools rather than naturally created. A litter of windblown debris—leaves, twigs, branches, pine needles and cones—lines the floor in drifts. A stone with another shard of verdigris-encrusted bronze atop it stands in the center of the chamber. A carved mural depicting humanoid figures decorate the northwest wall.*

The Moon-Eyed Ones have a curious control over animals and use them as guardians and agents. A pair of badgers serve the clan as watch creatures and call this cave their home. They are hidden under the drift of leaves and rush out to attack any creature approaching the mural or the boulder.

**Badger (2):** Init +1; Atk bite +3 melee (1d3+1) or claws +1 melee (1d4+1); AC 13; HD 2d6; hp 7, 5; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP fearless (never fail morale checks and enjoy +1 die bonus to saves vs. fear effects); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will -2; AL N.

The mural depicts three tall, slender humanoids with noticeable crests atop their heads. They're dressed in a mixture of robes and fluted armor, and are overseeing a mob of brutish-looking humans toiling. The human works appear to be excavating a mine and hauling away ore.

The bronze sun reflector is identical to the one outside in area 1-1. If it is cleared away, the corridor to area 1-3 also becomes gloomily illuminated.

**Area 1-3—Sun Reflector:** *A 3' tall stone pedestal stands in the center of a four-way intersection. Atop the pedestal is a dirty piece of sackcloth. It appears to cover something the size of a small barrel.*

The sackcloth covers a piece of quartz-like crystal about 3' cubed in size. This crystal absorbs and amplifies the sunlight directed into mine by the bronze mirrors in areas 1-1 and 1-2. It then reflects the strengthened illumination throughout the rest of the complex. The crystal radiates magic if detected for. If the sack is removed during daylight hours and the bronze reflectors are functioning, read the following:

*The crystal glows brightly, illuminating the intersection. Four rays of sunlight shine from the crystal down each of the corridors.*

When the crystal and reflectors are working properly, all areas except 1-8, 1-11 and 1-12 become dimly illuminated. This change in light alerts the Moon-Eyed Ones in 1-10 and they send five of their number to investigate.

Like the mirrors, the crystal is firmly attached to the pedestal and requires both tools and a successful DC 15 Strength check to remove it. Doing so plunges the mine into blackness if the reflectors are working, restoring the darkness of the mine.

Shards of the crystal can be chipped off with a blunt weapon if the wielder succeeds in a DC 12 Strength check. A shard of the crystal amplifies ray-based magic spells if used in conjunction with a spell check. The caster gains a +2 bonus to the spell check for *color spray*, *ray of enfeeblement*, and *scorching ray*. Once used in spellcasting, the shard turns milky gray and is effectively "burned out." It no longer grants a bonus. A total of 1d20+10 shards can be broken off before the crystal no longer fractures. However, continued smashing of the reflector attracts the attentions of the bear in area 1-6 who is drawn to the noise and attacks.

**Area 1-4—Foray Room:** *The walls of this small cave are decorated with carvings depicting circles and curved lines in some esoteric arrangement with one another. Some of these carvings are blocked by a number of small leather cloaks and robes hanging from the walls. A stone table stands to one side, its surface covered with carefully arranged items including a trowel, a horseshoe, a pipe, a brush, and other everyday objects.*

The Moon-Eyed Ones are a nocturnal race and prefer not to venture outdoors during daylight. When daytime activity is required, they wear hooded robes and cloaks to protect their eyes and skin from the sun. These articles of clothing are stored here.

The items on the table were stolen from the surrounding farms by the Moon-Eyed Ones. They're trying to learn more about their new neighbors by studying their culture and tools like anthropologists. There is a horseshoe, a hair brush, a carved wooden pipe, a masonry trowel, a hatchet, a watering pail, and a pair of scissors on the table.

The carvings on the wall are astronomical depictions of the world being orbited by its moons. Characters with the astrologer occupation identify the carvings immediately. Other PCs recognize the carvings' meaning with a DC 15 Intelligence check. Anyone identifying the carvings may be perplexed as there is one more moon than there should be. The additional satellite is the lost moon of Hsaal (see DCC #83 *The Chained Coffin* for more details on the fate of Hsaal).

**Area 1-5—Fire Fly Nest:** *This small cave has clearly been dug out of the surrounding stone with tools at some ancient date. The rough-hewn walls, floor, and ceiling bear many tool marks but no decoration.*

If a fire fly swarm made it back to the mine after the attack on Dode's farm, the insects are found here. Add the following to the above description:

*Despite the lack of decoration, the walls and the very air of the cave is alive with crawling insects. The tiny creatures' abdomens burn with fiery glows, heating the cave to an almost uncomfortable degree.*

If present, the fire flies ignore the party, but anyone entering the cave must be exposed to the swarm's burning aura and must make a DC 10 Fortitude save or suffer 1d4 damage from heat.

The cave is otherwise empty.



**Area 1-6—Sharda's Cave:** *There is a musty, earthy smell to this cave. Clumps of long grasses and wildflowers litter the floor along with bones and steaming piles of scat. There is a glint of silver among the vegetation, but it is too obscured to determine the source. Something large and furry lumbers in the gloom, moving towards you with thumping steps...*

The Moon-Eyed Ones have always venerated the bear as a powerful and wise creature. Most clans have at least one as a guardian and honored guest. The diminutive creatures often use their natural magic to gift these respected beasts unusual powers. This den is the home of Sharda, a black bear with the ability to roar fire.

**Sharda the Black Bear (1):** Init +0; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4+1) or claws +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 3d10; hp 15; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP if both claw attacks strike a target, the bear "hugs" for an additional 1d6 damage, roar fire 2/day (15' range, can strike up to three adjacent targets; DC 10 Ref save or suffer 2d6 damage); SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +2; AL N.

Sharda's first action is to stand on his hind legs and roar threateningly at intruders. If they fail to back off, the bear unleashes a gout of flames at the party before attacking with claws and teeth the following rounds. If the party backs away from the beast and appears to be sufficiently cowed by the threat display, Sharda lumbers back into his cave and leaves them alone.

Despite his best intentions, Sharda is a slave to his stomach and might be lured away by the prospect of food. Honey or fish are especially effective. If the party produce some food for the bear, Sharda must make a DC 10 Willpower save (-1d penalty if it's honey or fish being offered) or follow the food until he can eat it. This allows a crafty party to slip into the cave and examine the glittering object without fighting the formidable guardian.

The glittering object is a chrome steel peg inscribed with the same curious symbols seen over the mine's entrance. It measures 6" long and is surprisingly light in weight. This object activates the control panel in area 1-8.

**Area 1-7—Locked Door:** *The passageway terminates here. Set into the left-hand side of the corridor is a large stone block with a Y-shaped indentation in its center.*

This block is in truth the locked door to the chamber beyond. It radiates magic if divined for. The door is sealed with Hsaalian magic and can only be opened with the clear key found in area 1-11 or a knock spell with a spell check of 22+.

**Area 1-8—Stasis Chamber:** *Three naked human forms appear to dangle in the air on the far side of this chamber. One is ghoulish, more skeletal than flesh, while the other two appear healthy and virile, but seem unconscious. A ring of carved symbols is set into the floor directly beneath each of the floating figures. A plinth, bare but showing three divots in its top, stands closer to the chamber's entrance. Dust is present everywhere.*

The primitive (by Hsaalian standards) human tribes that inhabited the Shudder Mountains when the lunar race arrived fled from their weird conquerors, going underground to escape enslavement and decimation. Some were captured for experimentation and exploitation, however, and these three were among those unlucky souls. Kept in a state of stasis for storage until Hsaal scientists could utilize them, the three were abandoned when the catastrophe doomed the Hsaal.

The stasis magic generated by the floor sigils kept them encased in solid and impervious, albeit transparent, protective energy fields and two of the three escaped the effects of time. A crack in the third's stasis field resulted in the other's death and decay. The preserved humans are still alive and reawaken if their fields are shut down. The preserved humans are as follows:

|                 | Status            | Name      | Gender |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|--------|
| Leftmost Divot  | Dead              | Marglar   | Male   |
| Center Divot    | Alive & Preserved | Shematook | Male   |
| Rightmost Divot | Alive & Preserved | Ciba      | Female |

Placing the chrome steel peg (see area 1-6) into any of the three divots set into the plinth deactivates the stasis field of one of the specimens, causing it to slowly descend to the ground with a low humming noise. The specimen, if one of the living humans, stands stock-still and reawakens in 2d4 rounds. The dead human collapses in a heap of bones and dried flesh. Once the steel peg is inserted into a divot, it cannot be removed by any means. Only one stasis field can be turned off by the PCs during this adventure.

The two surviving humans are a man and a woman, each with black hair, bronze-colored skin, and dark eyes. They were enslaved centuries ago and awake confused and speak in incomprehensible tongues. Only a *comprehend languages* spell can facilitate true communication, but miming simple activities are likely to be understood by the two.

Shematook or Ciba will initially be fearful of the party and seek to flee at the first opportunity. They can be calmed with a successful Personality check (DC 15 if the party is communicating via gestures or DC 10 if verbal communication is established). If their fears are allayed, Shematook or Ciba will cautiously accompany the PCs, showing great interest and wonder in any "advanced" technology (metalwork and simple machines such as crossbows). Treat them as Men-At-Arms (see DCC RPG rulebook, p. 434) for combat purposes, but they are AC 11 and unarmed unless given gear by the party.

Although they are merely interesting NPCs for now, the judge can use Shematook or Ciba to introduce more adventuring possibilities into the campaign should they survive the mine (see below).

**Area 1-9—The Excavation Pit:** *You stand on the edge of a large chamber, positioned on a narrow ledge overlooking the space. This area has been excavated, the rock dug away to form a deep pit with many steps and rocky inclined planes connecting them. The pit is easily 30' deep and twice as broad. Bats flutter about like the ancient memories of whoever dug this pit long ago.*

The Hsaal used slave labor to dig out the rare minerals their culture required from beneath the Shudder Mountains. This site housed a vein of that ore and the lunar culture stripped it clean, leaving this chamber in their wake. Common bats moved in much later.

The Moon-Eyed Ones have infused the bats with elemental power, turning them into living bug zappers. The bats also act as a line of defense against intruders into the clan's living quarters and council area. PCs entering this chamber are soon dive-bombed by the weird aerial assailants. They either bite or brush up against their opponents to discharge a damaging electrical shock.

**Lightning Bats (4):** Init +3; Atk static discharge +2 melee (1d4+1) or bite +1 melee (1d3 plus disease); AC 15; HD 1d6+1; hp 7, 7, 5, 4; MV 10', fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP sonar (can see in total darkness; magical silence blinds them) diseased bite (DC 8 Fort save or half movement and -2 penalty to all rolls for 2 days or until cured); SV Fort +0, Ref +8, Will -2; AL L.

Examination of the chamber shows ancient signs of mining but the identity of whatever ore was excavated in a mystery. Dwarves feel almost nauseous in this room; the overwhelming sense of a sickness to the stone is strongest here. Despite the intensity, dwarves suffer no penalties while in this area, but desire to leave as soon as possible.

Combat in this area alerts the Moon-Eyed Ones in 1-10. These creatures surreptitiously investigate the combat and may either hide, attack, or seek to alert the council in area 1-12 depending on the PCs' perceived formidability.

**Area 1-10—Hibernation Cave:** *A litter of tools so ancient they are almost entirely rust and the last remnants of ancient wood are piled to one side of this chamber. The walls are rough-hewn stone discolored with niter. Clinging to the walls and floor are a number of curious objects. Resembling pea pods made from an emerald-colored, chitinous substance, each object measures 3' in length and 2' wide. Cracks in the hard casing reveal them to be both hollow and empty. A group of intact clay jars with lids rests near the north wall.*

There may be a group of up to 10 Moon-Eyed Ones present here depending on the PCs' actions in areas 1-3 and 1-9. If so, add the following to the above area description:

*Several small humanoid creatures crouch here, staring at you with saucer-sized eyes that reflect light like a cat's. Their skin is mossy green in color and long, stringy beards cover their chins and cheeks. Each is dressed in buckskin leggings and moccasins, and they hold a collection of clubs and knives in their hands.*

**Moon-Eyed Ones (up to 10):** Init +1; Atk club or dagger +1 melee (1d4+1) or elemental blast +2 ranged (1d6, 20' range); AC 13; HD 1d6+1; hp 5 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP infravision 120', summon elemental blast, impart elemental power, immune to sleep, -2d penalty to all rolls when exposed to bright light (sunlight or better); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL N.

The Moon-Eyed Ones are an ancient species with an innate connection to the natural world. This allows them to summon a spark of elemental power to blast their enemies. This blast can be of fire, lightning, or cold as the Moon-Eyed One desires. Groups of 10 or more Moon-Eyed Ones can also impart elemental powers into creatures with animal level intelligence and of natural origin (no magical monsters, undead, etc.). These imparted elemental powers vary wildly and the judge is encouraged to create his own Moon-Eyed One-altered beasts to suit the campaign as desired.

Although nocturnal, Moon-Eyed Ones are active 24 hours a day. After 1d3x100 years of activity, they succumb to extended periods of sleep lasting for 1d3+1 centuries. Moon-Eyed Ones have lifespans of up to a millennium if not killed by violence or disease.

If present, the Moon-Eyed Ones brandish their weapons at the party and demand they depart in stilted, archaic Common. A party that attempts to parley instead of attacking is commanded to drop their weapons and accompany the Moon-Eyed Ones to area 1-12 under heavy guard. Any attempt to deceive the Moon-Eyed Ones will be met with immediate violence.



The Moon-Eyed Ones hibernate in cocoon-like pods they make from a mixture of Shudder Mountain sorcery and masticated vegetable matter. They then seal themselves inside while it hardens and sleep for centuries as their life-cycle demands. These are the used hibernation pods of this clan of Moon-Eyed Ones.

The clay jars contain foodstuff ranging from preserved deer meat, wild berries, gathered tubers, and other natural produce. There is enough here to feed 20 people for four days.

**Area 1-11—Spoil Dump:** *The entrance to this cave is a high ledge overlooking a deep pit. The bottom of the pit is filled with broken stones ranging in size from apples to large boulders. The debris appears to have been dumped here rather than from a collapse or cave-in. Bits of golden flakes are visible within the stones.*

This debris is the spoil from the mine in area 1-9, the left over rubble once the rare ores the Hsaal desired was extracted. A dwarf present in this area automatically smells gold from the debris below.

The debris pile is 20' below the entrance ledge. Climbing down requires either ropes or a DC 10 Strength or *climb sheer surfaces* check. Once down into the spoil dump, however, PCs learn they aren't alone.

A handful of miners perished while dumping spoil, falling into the pit and being crushed by the rocks. The Hsaal cared little for their minions and the bodies of the unfortunates were left to rot among the stones, buried beneath impromptu cairns of added debris. There, in the darkness, their spirits have lingered, growing ever hateful. Anyone meddling in their domain attracts the spirits who reanimate their desiccated remains. The gruesome mortal forms crawl from beneath the stones to attack.

**Ancient Zombies (3):** Init -3; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4); AC 9; HD 3d6; hp 12, 9, 7; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead; SV Fort +4, Ref -4, Will +2; AL C.

Once aroused from their rocky graves, the ancient zombies do not rest and will pursue interlopers out of the dump. Only destroying their physical forms ends their assault. They carry no treasure.

Traces of gold are present in the spoil, however. A prolonged (and noisy) extraction of the gold from the stones requires some mining tools such as picks and hammers, but will ultimately recover gold ore worth 200 gp once refined.

Anyone evaluating the gold-bearing spoil can attempt a DC 10 Intelligence check (elves gain their secret doors bonus to the check). A successful check uncovers a clear 1' long rod made from an unknown transparent material similar to Plexiglas. It is crowned with a Y-shaped head that fits the door to area 1-7 perfectly.

**Area 1-12—Moot Chamber:** As the party approaches this area, allow them to make DC 10 Luck checks. If successful, they hear hushed discussion by many voices echoing down the passageway from area 1-12. If they advance, read the following:

*Carved buttresses depicting lithe humanoids with crested skulls support the walls of this chamber. Their outstretched arms support the rocky roof, which has been smoothed and adorned with glittering blue gems. Water leaks from the eyes of one carved support, leaving runnels eroded over the centuries down its stony face. A pool of clear water resides at the buttress' base. A number of stone pylons adorned with carved sigils are arranged around the pool. Situated about the chamber, perched on ledges and outcrops facing the pool are a crowd of small, humanoid creatures with eyes as large as saucers. Scraggly beards hang from their moss-colored faces and they're dressed in simple trousers and moccasins of aged buckskin.*

The creatures are the Moon-Eyed Ones, gathered here to discuss the problem of the Shudfolk incursion on their sacred lands. There are at least 10 creatures present. If the Moon-Eyed Ones from area 1-10 decided to flee here, add that number of creatures to the total present.

**Moon-Eyed Ones (10 to 20):** Init +1; Atk club or dagger +1 melee (1d4+1) or elemental blast +2 ranged (1d6, 20' range); AC 13; HD 1d6+1; hp 5 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP infravision 120', summon elemental blast, impart elemental power, immune to sleep, -2d penalty to all rolls when exposed to bright light (sunlight or better); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL N.

The Moon-Eyed Ones don't immediately attack unless the party starts combat. If the party attempts to communicate with the Moon-Eyed Ones, they discover the diminutive race speaks a stilted, much older form of Common (do your best Shakespearian English filled with "thous" and "whilsts"). The Moon-Eyed Ones are demonstratively angry—especially if the PCs have killed some of their clan or Sharda the bear—but do not start a fight.

The Moon-Eyed Ones don't initially distinguish the PCs from the Shudfolk of Standing Stone Hollow, thinking them one and the same. They demand to know why the party has defiled their sacred land and torn down their holy stones, only to show further audacity by trespassing in the clan's home. A party that takes this opportunity to learn more about the Moon-Eyed Ones and the reason behind the assault on Dode's farm can open the path to a peaceful settlement of the feud (see "Resolving the Adventure" below).

If the PC respond with violence, the Moon-Eyed Ones pull no punches and seek to utterly wipe out the invaders.

The statues are all of Hsaalian manufacture and possess no strange properties. The pool is likewise simply clean, potable water. There are nine stone pylons carved with symbols identical to those on the broken stones now part of Dode's boundary fence. These are sub-par replacement stones currently used by the Moon-Eyed Ones in their rites.

The gemstones on the ceiling are ornamental blue quartz. There are 40 stones (10 gp value each)





## RESOLVING THE ADVENTURE

It is possible for the PCs to succeed in this adventure without massacring everything inside the ancient mine. The Moon-Eyed Ones are not an evil race, nor are they unreasonably angry towards the Shudfolk. A party can negotiate a peaceful solution between the Moon-Eyed Ones and the Shudfolk if they choose discussion over violence when they encounter them in area 1-12.

To do so, they'll either need to bring Dode Groves to the Moon-Eyed Ones' lair or Moon-Eyed representatives to the farm to discuss terms. The PCs may choose to negotiate for Dode and the Shudfolk, but unless granted authority to do so, the farmer and his fellows are under no obligation to honor any agreement the party might make with the Moon-Eyed Ones.

The Moon-Eyed Ones are upset that their sacred stones have been knocked down and broken, and that their holy ground has become a farmer's field. Optimally, they want Dode to leave his farm, for the stones to be raised back up or replaced, and for the Shudfolk to leave them and their ritual ground alone.

Dode, who considers himself both an aggrieved party whose property was unlawfully attacked and the de facto representative of Shudfolk, believes the Moon-Eyed Ones relinquished any claim they had when they "stopped paying attention and didn't say a mublin' word when we Shudfolk first moved onto the land." He's unwilling to give up his property and move away.

If the PCs want to resolve this feud without further bloodshed or damage, they must mediate a compromise from both sides. This can be accomplished with a mixture of role-playing and Personality checks.

## NEGOTIATING A COMPROMISE

The judge plays the part of both the Moon-Eyed Ones and Dode, keeping in mind their goals mentioned above. The party must convince both sides to make concessions in the other group's favor. Getting either side to agree to a concession requires the party to succeed on a Personality check with a DC dependent on the severity of the concession asked for. A small concession, one that requires no or little sacrifice by a side is a DC 8 Personality check. Getting them to agree to a modest concession is DC 13, while one that requires the side to make a major sacrifice would be DC 18.

The party will likely have one or more PCs acting as mediator. The Personality check should be made by the PC most involved in the negotiations. If more than one PC is equally involved, the players decide who makes the check. Other characters who involve themselves in a lesser degree apply their Personality modifier to the primary negotiator's die roll—even if this modifier is negative! Sometimes one lout can severely impact a delicate negotiation with an ill-timed word or insulting comment.

The die roll is further modified by circumstances leading up to the negotiation. Use these modifiers:

- Dode's barn burned down: -1d penalty to Personality checks made to convince Dode.
- Both Dode's barn and home burned down: -2d penalty to Personality checks made to convince Dode.
- The PCs killed Sharda the bear: -1d penalty to Personality checks made to convince the Moon-Eyed Ones.
- The PCs killed Moon-Eyed Ones during their exploration of the excavation: -1d penalty to Personality checks made to convince the Moon-Eyed Ones.

- The PCs killed both Sharda and Moon-Eyed Ones: -2d penalty to Personality checks made to convince the Moon-Eyed Ones.

The judge is strongly encouraged to further modify the check either positively or negatively depending on the player's roleplaying efforts.

A result of a natural "1" means the side the party is attempting to influence flat out refuses to make any more concessions and will negotiate no further. Magical compulsion or physical threats might get them back to the bargaining table, but the judge is free to impart further negative modifiers to the party's Personality checks.

## CONCLUDING NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations are concluded if the party can get each side to make three minor concessions, two moderate concessions, or one large concession (or a combination of the three) in the other group's favor. For example, if the party managed to get Dode to agree to rebuild the standing stones and to allocate a section of his field to the Moon-Eyed Ones' use (two moderate concessions) and convinced the Moon-Eyed Ones to give Dode the raw gold from the spoil stones, help him harvest his crop in the fall, and keep an eye out over his property whenever he is away (three minor concessions), both groups walk away satisfied and the feud is at an end.

If the party fails to reach an accord with either side, negotiations break down as both groups refuse to have further dealings with the other. Although the Moon-Eyes don't immediately attack Dode, they nevertheless will continue to make life difficult for him and his fellow Shudfolk. Dode

and his neighbors, if they know the location of the Moon-Eyed Ones' lair, will prepare to attack the mine and drive the Moon-Eyes from the land. The PCs can either choose a side or walk away and let the conflict resolve itself. Sometimes there are no easy choices in the mountains.

## ENDING THE ADVENTURE

A party that successfully negotiates a truce between the Moon-Eyed Ones and the Shudfolk each receives 1 Luck point for their efforts. At the judge's discretion, both the Moon-Eyed Ones and Dode might reward the party with a small reward (50 to 100 gp) for their help. The party might also negotiate their own payment as part of the agreement between both sides.

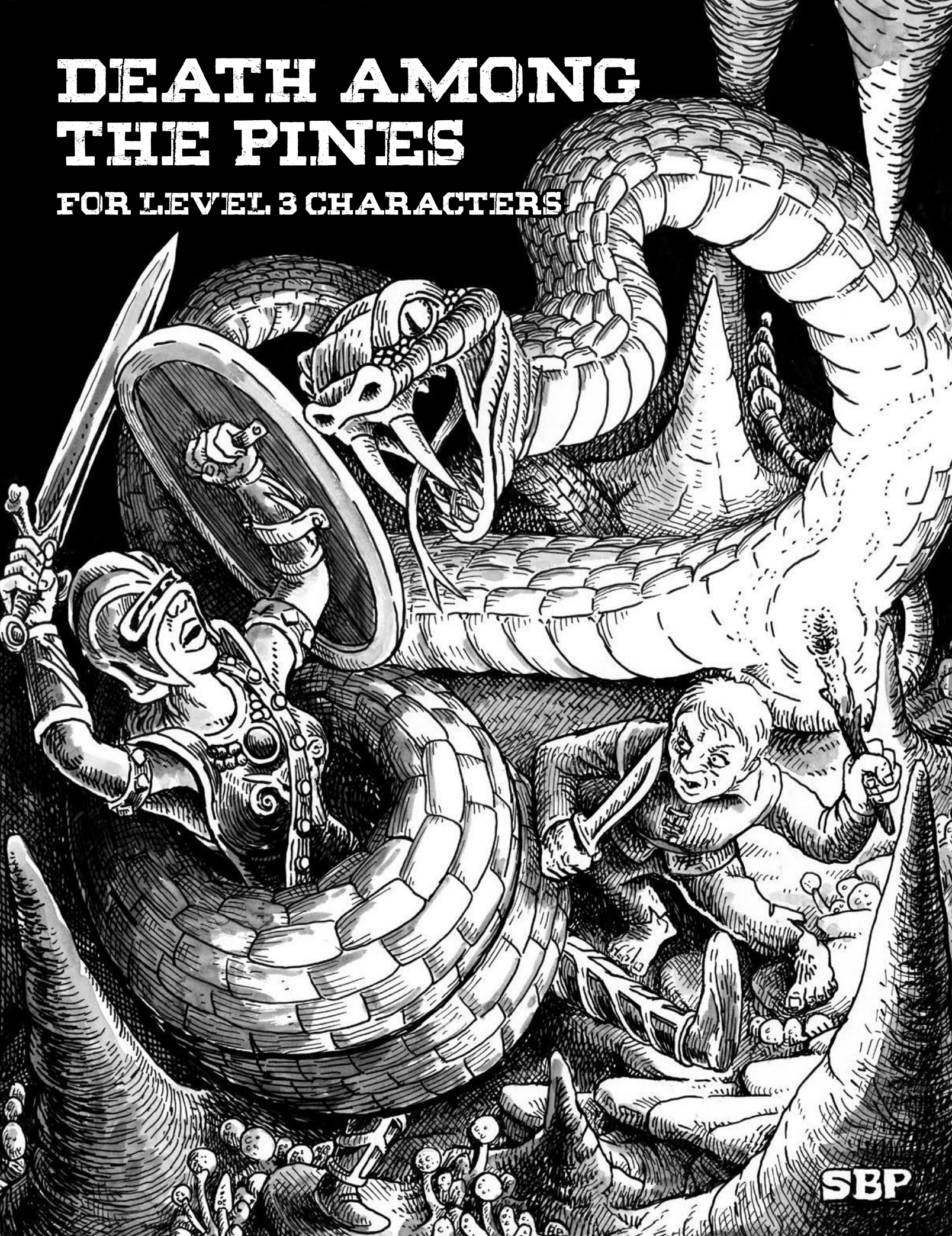
If the party resolves the feud by wiping out the Moon-Eyes, they are awarded no Luck but can take what treasure they wish from the old mine.

It is possible that the PCs also rescued either Shematook or Ciba from their stasis fields and now have a strange new ally. Both hail from a time long ago and may know many ancient secrets about the Shudder Mountains the judge can use as seeds and hooks for new adventures exploring the long history of the region. Since only one of the two will be freed, the rescued NPC will seek to similarly liberate his or her friend. This could lead to either Shematook or Ciba pleading with the party to search out other Hsaalian ruins in the mountains in order to find a second metal peg capable of shutting down the second stasis field. This search could in turn lead to other, darker secrets that still haunt the ancient hills and hollows of the Shudders...



# DEATH AMONG THE PINES

FOR LEVEL 3 CHARACTERS



SBP



# DEATH AMONG THE PINES

FOR LEVEL 3 CHARACTERS

## INTRODUCTION



*Death Among the Pines* is a DCC RPG adventure set in the Shudder Mountains and is intended for four to six 3<sup>rd</sup>-level PCs. The characters can either be outsiders adventuring in the ancient hills or native Shudfolk seeking excitement and riches. Parties possessing one or more clerics with access to the *neutralize poison* or *disease* and/or *restore vitality* spells may fare better than those lacking them.

*Death Among the Pines* is centered on a small farming community situated in the hills northeast of Thundercrack. It was once a thriving Shudfolk hamlet, but it has since become a nexus for evil growing in the mountains. Serpent-men from deep under the hills have slowly infiltrated the village and now almost completely dominate Holler Hollow. The serpent-men's arrival has stirred up the restless spirit of a murdered woman whose ghost was well-known by the Shudfolk of the hollow and her unusual antics have been misinterpreted as attacks, leading the few surviving human residents to seek help in defeating the spirit. An investigation into the aggravated hauntings uncovers the serpent-men's schemes, but is it too late for the Shudfolk of Holler Hollow?

## BACKGROUND



Sixty years ago, Wade and Pansy Roane ran the grist mill in Holler Hollow, grinding corn and wheat for the locals. Wade, however, often rubbed folks the wrong way and the farmers started using other, more distant millers, rather than deal with Wade. When his business began to fail, Wade became desperate, convinced that he'd be perceived as a failure by his fellow Shudfolk.

Desperation is opportunity to the serpent-men who dwell under the mountains, and it wasn't long before one of these scaly humanoids sensed opportunity in Wade. A deal was struck: the serpent-men would reward Wade with riches if he'd grant them use of his cellars as a meeting place for their sinister cult. Wade agreed and the serpent-men established a foothold in Holler Hollow.

In time, the serpent-men's demands grew and ultimately Pansy and her unborn child paid the price for Wade's pride and avarice. The serpent-men's hold on Wade tightened as they continued to watch the surface world from their hidden temple under the mill, planning for a time to dominate the sunlit lands once again. Wade vanished at some point as their power waxed, either slain himself or fleeing the site of his foul crimes to take up his life elsewhere.

The serpent-men maintained surveillance on Holler Hollow for decades, waiting for the time to strike. Just recently, the wellspring under the mill dried up, opening a new av-

enue of access to the mountain vale from the subterranean world. The serpent-men have taken this as an omen and their infiltration of Holler Hollow has begun in earnest. These sinister creatures are kidnapping and replacing the inhabitants of the hollow, gradually transforming the tiny community into a serpent-men stronghold. Soon, they'll control the entire vale and then they'll press forth to further infiltrate the upper world of the Shudder Mountains.

A single, unexpected sentinel stands between the serpent-men and their dominance of Holler Hollow: the ghost of Pansy Roane. As the serpent-men activity has increased in her former home, the restless spirit of Pansy has ventured forth from the area around the old mill in an attempt to alert the last few human residents of Holler Hollow. So far, her wails and cries have been in vain. Unless someone stops the serpent-men before they complete their takeover of Holler Hollow, the tiny settlement—and perhaps the Shudder Mountains at large—are doomed...

## SHUDDER MOUNTAIN SERPENT-MEN

The serpent-men of the Shudder Mountains are a separate strain that evolved along a different path in the black caves under the hills. Their ability to disguise themselves in human and demi-human form exceeds the simple illusion of their brethren. Instead of merely being able to disguise their ophidian heads with an illusionary human appearance, Shudder Mountain serpent-men can cloak their entire bodies in illusionary disguises, allowing them to mimic the appearance of anything from small children to ancient elves to fat halflings. This otherwise acts as described in the serpent-men entry on p. 425 of the DCC RPG rulebook.

Additionally, Shudder Mountain serpent-men can produce a false skin over their scaly flesh to further disguise their true form. This human-like skin is warm to the touch, bears minute hairs, and is otherwise indistinguishable from the real thing. Because this artificial flesh is true matter, it cannot be detected by magic that banishes illusions and other enchanted disguises. Such spells and magical effects have only a 25% chance of noticing that something is amiss regardless of their normal spell check results.

## BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

*Death Among the Pines* begins with the party on a long overland journey, ostensibly bound for the busy town of Thundercrack. The purpose of their journey is unimportant; it is only necessary that they come across Holler Hollow near the end of their traveling day and need a place to rest for the night. They'll soon find themselves dragged into the events that plague the community. Read the following as they come across Holler Hollow:

*The sun is slowly sinking behind the hills as you walk along the narrow footpath leading to the town of Thundercrack. You've been on the road for several days, heading towards that large settlement in search of work and excitement, sleeping in the pine-shaded hollows of the Shudder Mountains, and basking in the natural beauty of these ancient hills.*

*As you cross a ridge, you see a wide dale spread out below you, the footpath leading directly down into it. From your vantage point, you espy a handful of log cabins laid out in the gloaming and a bright white temple of the Sovereign catching the last of the fading light. Corn fields bound by snake-rail fences stretch away into the distance on both sides of the road and a creek winds its way through the vale on the far side of the hollow. An old grist mill is barely visible among the willows that crowd the banks of the creek. The sound of an axe splitting timber rings through the evening air and you can see a burly Shudfolk man chopping firewood in the yard of the nearest cabin.*

*This must be Holler Hollow, one of the small hamlets on the path to Thundercrack. The thoughts of a soft hay bed in a barn and a meal of homemade stew – maybe with a draught of good stump whiskey – fills your head as you gaze upon the tiny community. If you mind your manners, you can easily find both before continuing on your journey.*

## EVENT ONE: MEETING THE MASHBURNS



As the PCs descend into the hollow, Chase Mashburn, the man chopping wood, notices their arrival. He leans his axe against his splitting stump, wipes his brow with a handkerchief, and approaches the roadside fence. He gives the party a wide grin and a hearty welcome, asking them their names and making their acquaintance.

Chase is a 5' 11" tall male with shaggy brown hair that brushes his shoulders and a close-cropped beard showing the first touches of gray. He appears in his mid-thirties. Chase's eyes are pale blue, which sparkle in contrast to his berry-brown tanned skin. He wears homespun wool tunic and trousers and buckskin boots. His smile and soft chuckle are ingratiating.

Chase is in truth a serpent-man, a doppelganger of the real Chase Mashburn who has been abducted, thought-robbed, and transformed into a horrible new shape (see area 1-9 below). Serpent-man Chase's task is to watch for outsiders and keep a close eye on Trill and Nollie Mashburn. "Chase" wants to discover the PCs' purpose in town. To this end, he plays the part of friendly farmer and, assuming the PCs don't go out of their way to antagonize him, invites them to join him and his family for dinner. He hints that he might be able to find sleeping space in front of his hearth if they behave themselves and don't mind crowding together.

He leads the party into his home (use the average Shudfolk home map from *DCC #83: The Chained Coffin*), calling out to his wife as he opens the front door. A young Shudfolk woman cradling a four-month old baby on her hip as she prepares dinner turns and greets her unexpected guests with down-home hospitality. She introduces herself as Trill and her baby girl as Nollie.



Trill is a Shudfolk female in her mid-twenties. Her skin is dusky, her hair is a mass of dark curls held in place by a green scarf, and she dresses in a homespun linen dress of soft rose. A slightly stained house apron protects the dress against spills and the occasional spit-up from baby Nollie. Trill is polite if a bit exasperated, at first, but warms quickly to the party if they mind their manners and pitch in to help. Nollie shares all the best qualities of mother and (natural) father, and is simply as cute as a button.

## EVENT TWO: THE PREACHER



As the group is setting plates for dinner, there is a knock on the door. Chase opens it to see the local Sovereign priest, Braar Obray standing on the front porch. Braar Obray is a (seemingly) Shudfolk male in his late-fifties, dressed in a white frock coat and trousers, a golden circle dangling on a chain around his neck. His face is lined with sun wrinkles and clean shaven, and he has a soft, but powerful voice. Braar Obray's dark eyes dart about constantly as if uncertain where to look. Like Chase, Braar Obray is actually a serpent-man infiltrator and de facto leader of the serpent-men doppelgangers.

Chase welcomes the preacher warmly, inviting him in. Braar Obray says he saw the party arrive in the hollow from his temple and, when they didn't emerge from the Mashburn's house, came by to check up on the couple. He introduces himself to the group and the Mashburns add another setting to the table.

When dinner is served, Braar Obray invites the party's cleric to say a blessing over the food if there is one and the PC is also a Sovereign priest. Otherwise, Braar Obray does the blessing, seeming to stumble a bit near the end but quickly recovering. He then asks his own questions about the party, sizing them up like Chase to get an impression of their potential threat to the serpent-men's plans.

Midway through the meal, Trill Mashburn suggests modestly to Braar Obray that maybe the PCs—being adventuring types—might have some insight into the hollow's problem with Pansy Roane. Braar Obray and Chase exchange a meaningful look. A DC 10 Personality check notices the glance seems to be embarrassment mixed with some fear. Chase tries to downplay the comment with a *"Let's not trouble our guests, Mother."* If the PCs persist in asking for further details, Trill tells them the story of Pansy Roane (see sidebar).

Assuming the party agrees to help, Trill suggests they pay a visit to the old grist mill and the Pigsaw Creek in the morning. Both Chase and Braar Obray seem relieved, but they are in truth angry that the PCs might prove problematic just when the serpent-men are close to completing their dominance of the hollow. If Braar Obray is asked to accompany the party or if he could help them, he states that he's already attempted to lay the ghost to rest the night she stood outside the temple, but his efforts had no effect. He sighs and says guiltily that perhaps his faith wasn't strong enough to be rewarded by the Sovereign and he's had many a restless night struggling with this very issue. He wishes the party the best and says he'll pray for their success tonight before bed and during the day tomorrow while they investigate the mill and creek.

Eventually, Braar Obray departs and the Mashburns help the party get settled in. What the party does not know is that Braar Obray travels to the serpent-men fane beneath the Grist Mill to warn his comrades and prepare an ambush to meet the party the next morning.

## EVENT THREE: THE GHOST



That night, the spirit of Pansy Roane walks the hollow again, appearing at the Mashburn's gate and wailing. This unearthly cry automatically awakens any sleeping PCs. Anyone looking outside sees a translucent figure, its belly swollen with child and its hair bedraggled and bearing clumps of mud, standing in front of the house. It stretches out one arm towards the home, hand extended palm up with fingers twisted and claw-like.

### THE LEGEND OF PANSY ROANE

This is the tale of Pansy and Wade Roane as Trill Mashburn tells it:

Back in my Granny's time, there t'was a couple that ran the grist mill on Pigsaw Creek. They t'were Pansy and Wade Roane, happy a pair as you ken. Pansy t'was kindling a young 'en, tis said, and ol' Wade t'was happy as a hog in slop at the thought of being a proud poppa. But tragedy, as it t'will do here in the hills, well it paid a visit to 'em.

The spring thaw swelled the creeks and rivers that year, and the Pigsaw overflowed its banks. Pansy t'was coming back to the mill from temple and it's said she misstepped along the creek banks and fell into the swollen waters. No one saw Pansy go in, but they a'heard her screams all the way back in town. That t'was the last time anyone heard from Pansy... alive anyway.

After Pansy drowned, ol' Wade tried to make a go of things and kept the mill running, but t'is said his heart t'was broken and he just sort of drifted away one year, leaving the hollow for good. Wade might be a'gone, but Pansy's still here. Folks see her walking along the creek near the old mill from time to time, weeping and holding her belly as if cradling the young 'en she'll never have. Used to be Pansy's ghost never bothered no'un, but that time's past.

Last handful of months, Pansy's ghost has taken to walking down the main road of the hollow after dark, keeping folks awake with her wailing. At first, she only came a patch down the road, but as time a'went rolling along, she came further and further down the way. She since passed the church, the Coster's homestead, and even the Pebbly Stream bridge. Just last night, I heard her a'wailing and weepin' right at our front gate. To be honest, I'm a'scared for us. Something's changed with Pansy and I think it don't mean us well.

Would you all be willin' to try and see what can be done with Pansy?

The restless spirit cannot communicate directly with the living to warn them and, in its frustration, it attempts manifest as banshee-like screams. If anyone leaves the house and approaches the spirit, its wail increases in volume and ferocity, and all within 100' suffer 1d4 sonic damage and must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or be deafened for 1d4 hours. The spirit then departs, fading into the moonlight that illuminates the road. If slain or turned before it can deliver its wail, it fades away but will re-manifest in the mill where noted.



# THE OLD GRIST MILL



he mill slouches besides Pigsaw Creek, crumbling and disused. The waterwheel still turns, wobbling on its axis, but the sound of the mill stone grinding is absent. Holes in its shake roof gape like open mouths awaiting the rain and the rib-like rafters are visible. A timber door still stands in the entrance, but it is askew and hangs on a single hinge.

**Area 1-1—Mill Floor:** *The interior of the grist mill is dim and cool, dappled with rays of sunlight filled with motes of dust. The grindstones stand motionless, but the sound of slowly turning gears is faintly discernible beneath the wooden floor. The upper floor of the mill has fallen, leaving piles of rotted planks scattered about the lower floor and jagged rafters overhead. A door to the south stands closed. A half-collapsed staircase once lead up to the former second floor, but now ends in midair.*

The mill looks empty, but a quartet of serpents are lurking among the fallen timbers. These snakes have been lured to the area by Braar Obray and entranced to attack whoever enters. One snake is coiled in the rafters above and drops on the PC with the worst Luck, gaining a +2 bonus to hit.

**Rattlesnakes (4):** Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus poison); AC 15; HD 1d6; hp 4 each; MV 15' or climb 15'; Act 1d20; SP poison (DC 10 Fort save; 1d6 Stamina on failure, 1 Stamina on success; this damage heals naturally), scent; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AL N.

The room contains nothing of interest or value. Thumping the floor or a DC 6 Intelligence check reveals that there is likely a room beneath this one.

**Area 1-2—Storage and Cellar Access:** *This small room holds the remains of fallen shelves, broken crockery, staved-in barrels, and rotted leather and cloth. Leaning against one wall is a battered guitar, a pair of strings still entwined around its string posts and bridge. A closed trap door is set into the wooden floor.*

The room contains only debris from various supplies needed to operate the mill and household when Pansy and Wade Roane still lived. There is nothing of value among the litter.

The guitar belonged to Pansy and her ghost still maintains a connection to the instrument from beyond the grave. A few moments after the PCs enter the room, the guitar gives a sharp twang and one of the two remaining strings snaps. The note seems to hang in the air overlong as if sustained by some unnatural presence.

Anyone handling the guitar feels a sharp pain and the coolness of steel slide into their abdomen. The pain is enough to make them drop the guitar and clutch their stomach. If the guitar is handled again, the sensation does not repeat. If the party brings the guitar with them, it reacts one last time just before they enter area 1-5.

## INVESTIGATING HOLLER HOLLOW

PCs may wish to try and question other residents of Holler Hollow prior to their explorations of the grist mill. There are approximately fifteen residents living in the various farms in the vale, most of whom are serpent-men doppelgangers. These false humans will do their best to verbally guide the party to the mill where an ambush awaits them. Their stories of encounters with the ghost of Pansy Roane are nearly identical to that described by Trill Mashburn the previous night.

If the party decides to pay a visit to Braar Obray, the faux preacher meets them outside of the temple, apparently seeing them coming down the path. He does not allow them to enter the temple for fear of the adventurers seeing the blasphemous décor that adorns the former Sovereign fane. Although reluctant to do so, if the party attempts to force their way into the church, Braar Obray uses his serpent-man abilities to combat them and can summon 1d4+2 additional serpent-men with a hue and cry to come to his aid.

The trapdoor is wedged shut with age and dirt and it is obvious the no one has used it in some time (Braar Obray and the rest of the serpent folk come and go via area 1-10). Opening the trapdoor requires a DC 10 Strength check or bashing it in with axes and pry bars. A fumble on the Strength check indicated the floor gives way beneath the PC(s) attempting to open it, dropping them 10' into the cellar below.

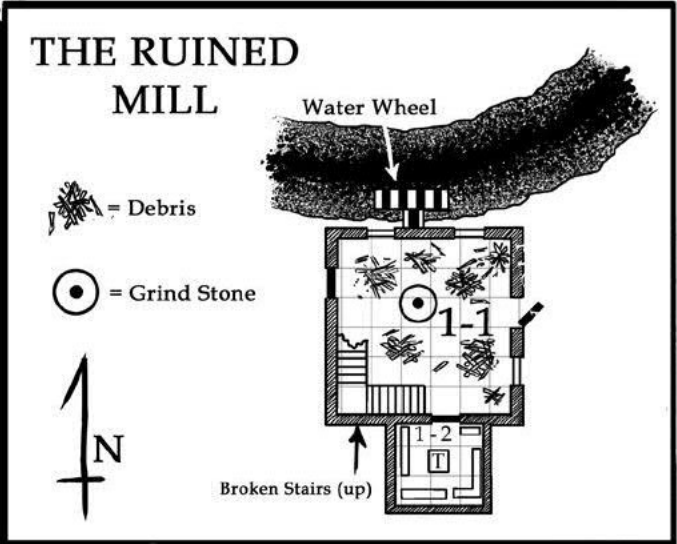
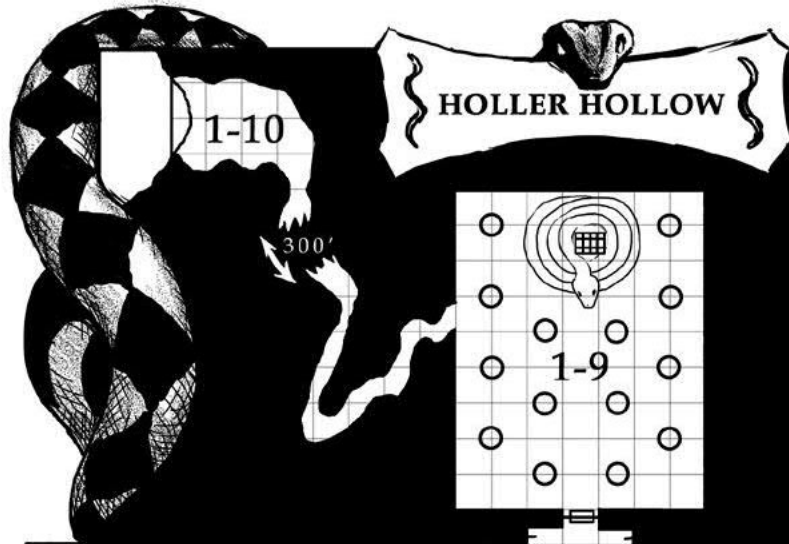
A rickety ladder beneath the trapdoor leads down to the cellar.

**Area 1-3—Cellar:** *A rectangular, gloomy and musty cellar lies beneath the mill. The walls are lined with stone grown fuzzy with mold. Towards the northern end of the room is the drive shaft and gears of the grist mill, slowly grinding away in the darkness. One drive shaft vanishes into the northern wall, presumably connected to the waterwheel outside. The hum of Pigsaw Creek and the slow turning of the waterwheel echoes mutedly through the cellar.*

The gears and drive shafts are in poor repair and are nearly rusted together. An examination of the machinery reveals the drive shaft connected to the grindstone above has corroded entirely and no longer turns the millstones. The floor is dirt and stinks of stagnant water and rot.

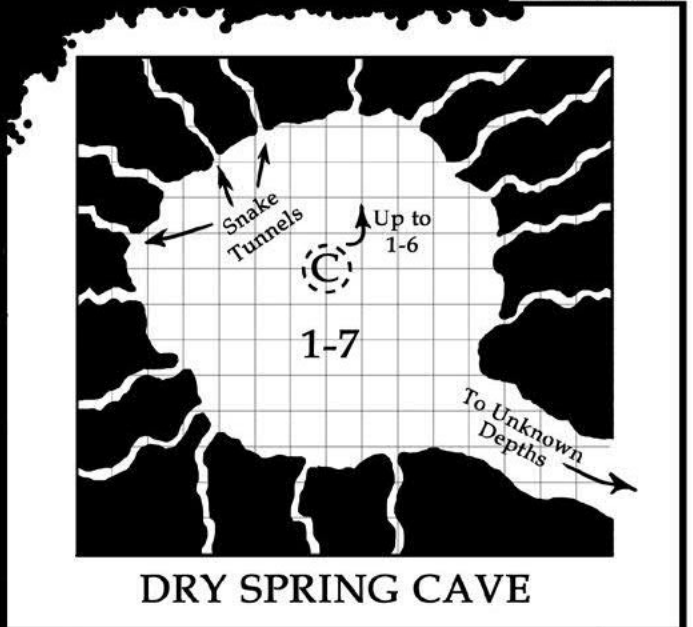
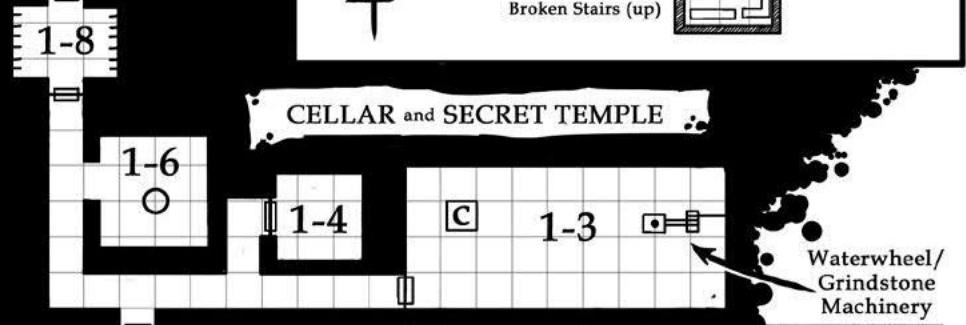
The mold is dangerous if inhaled. Scraping away the black-green growths requires a DC 10 Fortitude save unless the PC covers his mouth with cloth or other filter. If the check fails, he takes 1 Stamina point of damage. Oil instantaneously dissolves the mold.

A door in the southern wall is covered with the mold. Scraping it away automatically reveals the portal, as does a DC 5 Intelligence check. An old lock secures the door (requires either a DC 5 pick locks check or 10 points of damage from a slashing or blunt weapon).



### MAP KEY

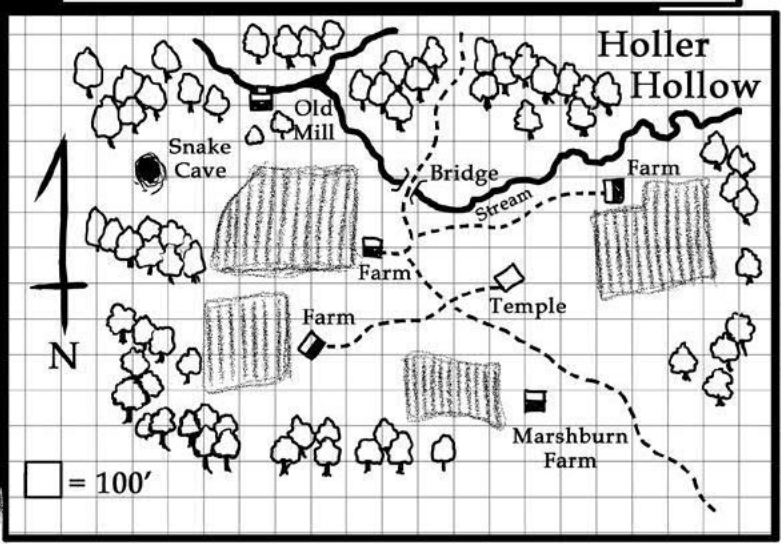
|              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| = 5'         | = Trap Door         |
| = Window     | = Ceiling Shaft     |
| = Door       | = Ceiling Shaft     |
| = Shelves    | = Bricked-Up Cavity |
| = Wall Niche | = Grate/Covered Pit |
| = Well       |                     |



### TEMPLE of the SOVEREIGN

Dias w/Altar

• = Pillar    BO = Braar Oblay  
T = Trill  
C = Chase  
S = Serpent Man



**Area 1-4—Fake Prisoners:** The door to this room is locked with new lock that smells of oil. A DC 10 pick locks check opens the lock. Anyone listening at the door automatically hears the sound of muffled cries coming from beyond the door. If the door is opened, they see the following:

*This small chamber is unlit and walled with stone. Five small figures wriggle on the earthen floor, their limbs bound with rope and their mouths muffled by gags. They are all young children, none older than 12 years of age. Their homespun clothes identifies them as Shudfolk. They look at you with a mixture of terror tinged slightly with hope.*

This chamber is normally used to hold captives until their thoughts can be stolen and their identities assumed. When Braar Obray alerted his allies in the temple to expect the PCs, they concocted a cunning plan. The “children” are in truth serpent-men using their illusion-generation power to appear as helpless captives. Treat the illusion as a spell check 30 for purposes of disbelieving or dispelling. They use their hypnotic power on whoever attempts to rescue them (the judge should make the PC’s saving throw roll secretly). If successful, they compel the affected PC(s) to take them to area 1-9 where they say more children are being held captive. If others PCs see through the compulsion, the serpent-men instruct the charmed characters to attack their friends, allowing the entranced heroes another Willpower save to break the hypnosis. The serpent-men then reveal their true forms and attack.

**Serpent-men (5):** Init +1; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus poison); AC 12; HD 1d10+2; hp 9 each; MV 20; Act 1d20; SP poison (DC 14 Fort save; 1d6 Strength loss on failure, 1 Stamina on success; this damage heals naturally), illusion 1/day, hypnotic gaze (+6 to spell check, Will save to avoid or 1d4 hours charm); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL L.

**Area 1-5—Root Cellar and Secret Grave:** Before the PCs open this door, the guitar, if they have it, snaps its last string, sending a final sharp note that sustains just a bit too long, through the air. This is Pansy’s ghost responding to the nearness of her grave.

*This narrow room has free-standing shelves pushed up against each of its walls. Glass jars containing indistinct objects suspended in cloudy liquid, ceramic jugs, and pottery bowls line many of the dry-rotted shelves.*

When Wade Roane killed his wife, he concealed her body in this root cellar, walling up the corpse behind the old stone walls. Interred in this crude grave, Pansy’s ghost has been unable to rest and only the discovery of its body and subsequent burial in a churchyard will end its un-dead existence.

Entering this room causes Pansy’s ghost to manifest, forming gradually in mid-air like frost on a window pane. Once its translucent form is fully present, the ghost opens its mouth to speak and blasts the room with its banshee wail, damaging all present. The following round it attempts to strike a character (a female PC if one is present; otherwise determine randomly) in order to possess one of the party. If it successfully possesses a subject, the ghost uses the target’s



vocal chords to relate its tale, but the voice is so unearthly, all who hear it (except the possessed PC) must make a DC 8 Fortitude save or have their hair turn white from the experience. After speaking her story (see Appendix A handout), the ghost releases the subject from possession and points towards the southern wall. It then vanishes.

If the possession fails either due to a missed attack or a successful save, the ghost rages again and uses its scream. The following round it once again attempts to possess a PC. This process repeats until the spirit has failed three attempts to possess a victim and it has used all its hourly screams. It then disappears, but can re-manifest after an hour has passed.

**Ghost of Pansy Roane (1):** Init +2; Atk possession touch +6 melee (DC 12 Will save or be possessed); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 15; MV 40' fly; Act 1d20; SP un-dead traits, immune to



non-magical weapons, critical hits, disease, and poison, banshee scream (1d4 sonic damage; DC 12 Fort save or deafened for 1d4 hours); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

The shelves hold canned fruits, vegetables, and similar stored foodstuffs, many of which have turned. If the south shelves are moved and the stone wall behind it examined, it's evident that several of them have been mortared together relatively more recently than the rest. Breaking through the stonework reveals a shallow cavity excavated into the earth behind it. Concealed in the cavity, its bones still wrapped in a faded homespun dress, are the mortal remains of Pansy Roane. Once the bones are uncovered, a ghostly sigh, heavy with relief, sounds through the cellar.

PCs examining the bones notice that, despite her pregnant state when she was murdered, there is no sign of the bones of an infant amongst Pansy's remains. The child's bones were interred in area 1-8 after grisly rites were performed.

**Area 1-6—The Well Room:** *This chamber lacks a door allowing you to easily see inside. A modest sized well stands in the center of the room, a rusty pulley set into a rotting wooden frame set above the well's mouth. There is no sign of a rope or bucket and the smell of water is noticeably absent. Instead, the dry stench of snake hangs in the air. Several rough-hewn timber posts are wedged between floor and ceiling, providing support to the limestone slabs that cover the chamber's roof.*

When the spring that once fed this well dried up, it left a deep dry cave behind. This room and the cave tunnels below have become the primary avenue of travel between the serpentine underworld and Holler Hollow. A DC 15 Intelligence check detects the tracks of many scaled feet and slithering bodies coming and going from the well.

The ceiling is in poor repair, compromised by the yearly spring floods which have eroded away the earth above the stone ceiling slabs. A DC 10 Intelligence check or anyone with stoneworking or mining experience notes that the timber supports are the only things keeping the roof from caving in. Knocking out a support has a cumulative 25% chance of causing a cave-in (4d6 damage, DC 10 Reflex save reduces the damage by half). A cave-in has the unexpected benefit of sealing the well shaft and (temporarily) preventing the serpent-men and their allies from emerging in Holler Hollow.

The well is 5' wide and 45' deep. The stones lining the shaft are loose and have many handholds. It can be scaled with a DC 10 Agility or climb sheer surfaces check. Note that if a character secures a rope to one of the supports, he must make a Luck check. If the check fails, the support comes loose when he puts his weight on it, potentially dropping the character down the shaft (5d6 damage) and possibly triggering a cave-in as noted above.

**Area 1-7—Dry Cave:** *A wide, dry cave, with walls stained by old water marks, lies at the bottom of the well's shaft. The limestone is dark and the cave stinks of snakes. A 20' wide tunnel exits the cave to the northeast and many, many smaller tunnels, most no larger than rat holes, honeycomb the cavern at floor level.*

This cave once held a spring-fed pool, but it has dried up. The former watercourse now connects with a cave system that is home to a tribe of serpent-men and the great beast they venerate like a god made flesh. This creature, the Slithering Shadow, is a 50' long, 8' diameter rattlesnake, with scales of brown, yellow, and black. Entering this cave attracts the great serpent, arriving 1d3 rounds after the first PC steps onto the cavern floor. It emerges from the large tunnel and attacks.

**The Slithering Shadow (1):** Init +5; Atk bite +6 melee (2d4 plus poison); AC 14; HD 4d8; hp 30; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP poison (DC 12 Fort save; 1d4 Stamina loss on failure, 1 Stamina on success; this damage heals naturally); SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +2; AL N.

The serpent can slither up the well shaft, constricting its body to wriggle up the narrow tube. It pursues its prey into the cellars above unless the well is somehow sealed (such as by causing a cave-in in area 1-6).

The large tunnel leads deep into the caves under the Shudder Mountains, the ancestral home to the serpent-men and other horrible things. The wonders and horrors found therein are beyond the scope of this adventure, but the judge may elaborate on them to expand this scenario if so desired.

**Area 1-8—Fane Antechamber:** *A small antechamber stands between the door just opened and another larger and more imposing-looking valve set opposite it across the room. The door is decorated with a relief carving of an open-mouthed snake. The lintel and posts of the door frame are adorned with a knot work of entwined serpents. The walls to the left and right each contain a dozen small tiles that protrude from the stone. There is also a small dark niche among the tiles in the right wall.*

The door to area 1-9 is trapped. A close examination of the door handle or a DC 10 find traps check notices that the handle bears a scaly pattern embossed into the bronze. A roll of 15+ on the find traps check also detects that the snake carved on the door has minute stone flaps set inside the serpent's nostrils.

Unless the door handle is turned by a hand with scaly flesh, the nostril flaps open and a blast of toxic gas billows into the room. All inside the antechamber must make a DC 12 Fortitude save or suffer 1d6 Strength loss. The next round, a DC 6 Fortitude save must also be made by affected PCs to avoid losing an additional 1d6 Strength. The gas then disperses. Serpent-men are immune to the gas' effects. Setting off the trap alerts the occupants in area 1-9 and they open the doors to attack the party.

The 24 wall tiles are actually stone panels covering small niches set into the wall behind them. Each cavity contains a small wooden box the size of an infant's cradle. Inside these plain, crude containers are the skeletal remains of a human infants between 4 and 6 months of age. Numerous small serpent skeletons are entwined among the tiny human bones. These are the victims of the serpent-men's foul rites. The open niche contains a wooden box filled with a

dozen infant rattlesnakes. This box will hold Nollie Mashburn's corpse if the serpent-men's final rite is completed (see Event Four below).

**Area 1-9—Serpent-men Fane:** *Beyond the serpent-faced door is a vaulted, low-ceilinged chamber. Sinuous columns carved to resemble snakeskin hold up the 7' tall ceiling and obscure sight across the chamber. In between the pillar, you glimpse a strange altar, rounded and curving across the back of the room. The smell of odiferous incense barely obscures the stench of serpents.*

The serpent-men are lying in wait for the party, alerted by Braar Obray of their imminent arrival. If the party triggered the door trap, half throw the door open, while the other half fires their envenomed arrows at the intruders. Otherwise, the serpent-men strike once the party has entered the chamber, springing an ambush from among the pillars.

**Serpent-men (6):** Init +1; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus poison) or short sword +3 melee (1d6) or short bow +3 ranged (1d6 plus poison); AC 12; HD 1d10+2; hp 10 each; MV 20; Act 1d20; SP bite poison (Fort DC 14; 1d6 Strength loss on failure, 1 Stamina on success; this damage heals naturally), envenomed arrows (DC 14 Fort save or additional 1d6 damage); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL L.

The altar is carved to resemble an albino rattlesnake, coiled to strike. Its head serves as the altar proper and is adorned with a trio of candlesticks carved from garnet (each worth 50 gp), a snakeskin altar cloth (worth 100 gp as a curiosity), and a strange musical instrument resembling a clarinet.

The instrument summons serpents as the spell *snake charm* with a spell check result of 26-29. However, if played by a non-serpent-man, the musician must make a Luck check. If successful, the snakes obey his commands. If failed, the serpents attack their summoner. The instrument can be played once per day.

In the center of the altar's coils, obscured by its stony body, is a 16' deep pit, its mouth covered by a barred gate. Inside the pit slither a dozen grotesque creatures—6' long serpents with bodies as big around as stovepipes. A human head crowns the body of each serpent. Two of the heads are immediately recognizable to the party: Chase Mashburn's and Braar Obray's! The serpent-men use fell magics granted by their horrid religion to rob the memories from their captives and, once this interrogation is completed, enjoy transforming the replicated prisoner into horrible man-snake forms. The cursed victims are left to go mad in the pit.

The human-headed serpents wail if light shines into their cage. Pitiful, crazed whispers and mutterings spill from their mouths. The human-snakes cry, "Not us. Not our bodies. Kill us. Save them" before descending into animalistic hissing and tail rattling, their minds finally snapped. If anyone enters the pit, they attack. The magically transmogrified creatures can be returned to their true forms with a *remove curse* with a spell check of 27+ or a *dispel magic* with a spell check of 32+. There may be alternate ways to return the transformed Shudfolk to their natural forms if the judge so desires.



**Men-snakes (12):** Init +1; Atk bite +1 melee (1d3); AC 15; HD 1d6; hp 4 each; MV 15'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -2; AL N.

**Area 1-10—Snake Cave:** *A low-ceiling limestone cave is set into the hillside, its mouth leading back above ground. The cave floor is covered by a litter of sticks and leaves. Numerous scaly forms slither about the debris, forming a twisted skein of rattling serpents.*

A dozen rattlesnakes dwell in the cave, lured and compelled to remain here as guardians by the serpent-men. They attack any non-serpent-men entering the cave either from the outside or via the tunnel connecting to area 1-9.

**Rattlesnakes (12):** Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus poison); AC 15; HD 1d6; hp 4 each; MV 15' or climb 15'; Act 1d20; SP poison (DC 10 Fort save; 1d6 Stamina on failure, 1 Stamina on success; this damage heals naturally), scent; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AL N.

# EVENT FOUR: THE RITUAL

**H**opefully the PCs will discover the serpent-men's plot and understand that at least Braar Obray and Chase Mashburn are not what they appear to be. If so, they may rightfully surmise that Trill and Nollie Mashburn are in danger and race back to the Mashburn's home to save mother and child. In the meanwhile, Braar Obray has deemed that the PCs' presence is too much a risk to delay the final stage of the serpent-men's infiltration of Holler Hollow. He, Chase, and a handful of other serpent-men drag Trill and Nollie to the former temple of the Sovereign to perform one last dreadful sacrifice to their scaly gods.

As the party heads toward the house, a piercing scream is heard from the Sovereign temple: the terrified cry of Trill Mashburn! The serpent-men are performing their final unholy rite and preparing to sacrifice baby Nollie to the Serpents of the Earth. Sibilant chanting and the shaking of rattles sounds from inside the white-washed building. PCs rushing inside or peering through the windows see the following:

*The interior of the temple has been decorated in blasphemy. Gone are the trappings of the Sovereign faith, their absence replaced by the regalia of an older and fouler religion. Instead of the Unbroken Circle of the Sovereign hanging over the altar, a skeletal ouroboros, its bones stained rust-red with gore, is affixed to the back wall. Green, stinking candles burn pungently on the altar, now draped with the shed skin of a tremendous serpent. Smaller snakeskins and bare bones litter the church's floor.*

*Beside the altar is Trill Mashburn, her arms pinned behind her by the brawn of her husband, Chase. However, even in the smoky interior of the church, it is evident that Chase is no human spouse. His beard is half-sloughed off, revealing scales of yellow and green beneath, his true guise of abhorrent man/serpent hybrid. Trill wails in terror, struggling against her false husband's grip.*

*Standing at the altar, his scaly arm pinning the tiny form of Nollie to the serpent-skin covered surface, is Braar Obray. Like Chase, his human guise has slipped revealing the true ophidian form beneath. His other arm, covered with tattered human flesh, holds a dagger fashion from a tremendous serpent's fang aloft, ready to plunge it into the small body of his intended victim.*

*The nave of the church holds a handful of other beings that share snake and human features. Each is dressed in the simple garb of the Shudfolk. The congregation chants and shakes gourd rattles as the foul ritual reaches its crescendo.*

**Braar Obray, Serpent-man (1):** Init +1; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus poison) or dagger +3 melee (1d4); AC 12; HD 1d10+2; hp 10; MV 20; Act 1d20; SP poison (DC 14 Fort save; 1d6 Strength loss on failure, 1 Stamina on success; this damage heals naturally), illusion 1/day, hypnotic gaze (+6 to spell check, Will save to avoid or 1d4 hours charm), spit magical venom (30' range, caustic substance causes 1d8

damage the first round, 1d6 the second, and 1d4 the third; DC 12 Reflex save avoids), innate *snake charm* (+6 to spell check); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL L.

**Chase Mashburn, Serpent-man (1):** Init +1; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus poison); AC 12; HD 1d10+2; hp 12; MV 20; Act 1d20; SP poison (DC 14 Fort save; blinded on a failed save until magically healed), illusion 1/day, hypnotic gaze (+6 to spell check, Will save to avoid or 1d4 hours charm); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL L.

**Serpent-men (5):** Init +1; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus poison); AC 12; HD 1d10+2; hp 7 each; MV 20; Act 1d20; SP poison (DC 14 Fort save or additional 1d6 damage); SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +2; AL L.

Unless stopped or distracted, Braar Obray completes the sacrifice on the third round of combat, filling the temple with Trill's horrified screams. "Chase" kills his wife the following round unless he himself is stopped. Braar Obray and Chase then turn their attentions on the party, aiding their fellow serpent-men.

**Optional:** If the PC are demonstrating an easy time defeating the serpent-men and it hasn't been slain or trapped by a cave-in, the judge may decree that the Slithering Shadow (see area 1-7) is attracted by the rite and bursts through the church floorboards at a climactic moment. Everyone inside the temple must make a DC 8 Reflex check or be knocked prone. Anyone rolling a "1" falls into the hole, suffering 1d6 damage.

If the serpent-men are defeated and the corrupted temple is searched, a wooden chest is discovered underneath the altar. The chest contains the worldly riches once owned by the impersonated Shudfolk of the hollow. Inside is a mixture of silverware, personal jewelry, coins, and other household treasures worth 250 gp in total.

## ENDING THE ADVENTURE

**A**lthough the final serpent-men ritual has no demonstrable supernatural effect, if it succeeds, the last of Holler Hollow's human residents are swiftly overcome by the divinely-inspired serpent-men infiltrators and the settlement falls utterly under their sinister dominance. Conversely, saving Trill and Nollie Mashburn, slaying Braar Obray, and discovering the serpent-men fane under the mill causes the subterranean race to abandon their plans for Holler Hollow and to pursue their schemes elsewhere. After several years, the few remaining human residents rebuild and reclaim their community and life goes on as it always has in the Shudders.

If the bones of Pansy Roane are buried in the churchyard or otherwise properly interred, her spirit goes on to its final



rest and all the PCs gain 1 point of Luck for restoring the proper balance between life and death.

Judges wishing to build upon the events of *Death Among the Pines* may do so in several ways. The PCs might wish to continue their crusade against the serpent-men, perhaps by leading a counter-raid into their subterranean home via the tunnel in area 1-7 or similar means. The PCs might also become sentinels against serpent-men infiltration into the surface world, investigating other small communities throughout the Shudders for signs of the serpents' sinister schemes. Lastly, the fate of Wade Roane has been left undetermined. He may still live, granted long life by the serpent-men's magical gifts, or be long dead, but with a horrific legacy left behind to trouble others. In any event, there never a lack for adventure in the Shudder Mountains or on the other worlds of *Dungeon Crawl Classics*!

## APPENDIX A: PANSY'S STORY

The judge should give the following handout to whomever becomes possessed by the ghost of Pansy Roane.



You are possessed. The ghost of Pansy Roane has taken control of you, using your body to pass on a desperate message to the living. Read the below in your best scary, ghostly, and/or disturbing voice and the judge will reward you with two points of Luck.

*Breath. Breath. At long last, I have breath to speak. Breath to tell my tale and utter the secrets my husband wished hidden. Breath to declare his shame and his blasphemy. Breath to warn the living of a horror that lurks among them unnoticed.*

*Wade was a petty man, a cowardly man. He concerned himself more with what strangers thought of his fortunes than what I, his own wife, did. When the mill began to fail, Wade grew frantic, fearful he'd be seen as a failure by the people of Holler Hollow. That is what doomed him...and me.*

*Something met with Wade in the old caves under our lands. A creature from another, older time. A thing that should have crawled, yet walked like a man. That creature promised Wade a fortune in return for unspeakable service. My craven husband agreed all too readily, sealing the fate of both his wife and unborn child. He murdered me at the behest of that creature and sealed my bones in the root cellar's wall.*

*I watched from beyond the Pale Shroud as that creature and others like it built their unholy chapel beneath my home and called up foul things from the eternal night under the earth. They plot and scheme and dream of a time when they once again shall walk beneath the sun and moon and twist the minds of men to serve them. Their time is almost here...but my efforts to warn those who live in the Hollow have been in vain. Please, save me and save those who still live in the hollow.*

*Long have I awaited the day my bones would be found and the tale of my husband's crime told. Look for me behind the wall and lay my bones to rest in the churchyard. Only when this is done and Holler Hollow is safe may I at long last sleep.*

You are no longer possessed.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# SIGHTS TO SEEK AND TERRORS TO BEHOLD

*Sometimes the worst thing that can happen when you go seeking adventure is that you find it.*





# THE WOEFUL CAVES UNDER YANDER MOUNTAIN

## A Level 3 Adventure



*The Woeful Caves under Yander Mountain* is an adventure for DCC RPG designed for use with four to six 3<sup>rd</sup>-level PCs. Set in the Shudder Mountains, the adventure is a short dungeon crawl involving an immortal blood-drinker who preys upon travelers in the region. *The Woeful Caves under Yander Mountain* attempts to put a new spin on the vampire, changing that type of un-dead foe from an aristocratic monster from Transylvania to something more at home in the backwoods. The adventure can be completed in a single session, but despite its brevity, it can have later consequences in a Shudder Mountains-set campaign.

### BACKGROUND

Forty years ago, Shange the Blighted descended upon the Shudder Mountains region in search of plunder and blood. A sellsword and bandit, Shange heard the tales of hidden mines and lost treasures in the forgotten hollows of the mountains and sought to claim a share of that wealth as his own. His campaign of bloodshed, highway robbery, and wanton violence did little to enrich his fortunes, but utterly changed his very existence.

Shange has the misfortune of choosing a traveling conjureman as a victim, springing from ambush to drive three feet of steel through the sorcerer's gut. As the witch man's life blood ran from his veins, he laid a terrible curse upon the murderous bandit. If bloodshed is what Shange lived for, than that would be the sole thing that would sustain him. Forever cast adrift from the natural world and the pure elements of fire, air, water, and earth, Shange would walk the land forever, finding no comfort from the pleasures of wine or women, and doomed to sup on warm blood until he could stand the coppery taste no longer. With the warlock's last breath, Shange's doom was sealed.

The warrior reveled in his new state at first, finding himself immune to the most common ravages of battle. Fire left his skin unsinged and iron swords hewed his flesh but he withstood steel's deadly kiss. Alas, he also found himself, now a creature of supernatural evil, weaker when under the gaze of the clean, living sun. Like the loathsome thing he was, Shange sought a place to hide during the day, eventually discovering a series of caves snaking through the peak known as Yander Mountain. Exploring the twisting tunnels, he encountered a cavern awash with black fire. This place was a spoil, one of the lingering deposits of Hsaalian magic. Intrigued by the strange magic of the spoil and the security of the caverns, he claimed the place as his mountain fastness.

Shange's occupancy brought him into contact with a tribe of wrigglers, a devolved race of troglodytic humanoids descended from the Shudder Mountains' original inhabit-

ants. He swiftly taught the degenerate creatures to respect his claim on the upper caverns with his axe and his strange powers, powers which were further increased by the spoil's ancient magic. Shange remains enthralled by the spoil and its properties, venturing out only to ambush and feed on travelers who pass near his mountainous redoubt.

Over the decades a number of fearful legends have sprung up about Yander Mountain and the road that passes beneath its shadow. Many of the legends hint of a hungry evil that lurks within the mountains' caverns, grottoes known as the Woeful Caves, but other tales speak of strange lights sighted near the caves after dark. These ghostly lights, known as "fetch lights" by the Shudfolk, are believed to appear near the locations of untapped gold veins or hidden treasures. And while nearby Shudfolk avoid the mountain, the caves, and the road that passes beneath them, there is no shortage of fools drawn to venture into the caverns in search of legendary gold veins.

### STARTING THE ADVENTURE

The PCs can be lured into exploring the Woeful Caves either by avarice or through the desire to accomplish good deeds. If the luster of undiscovered treasure is enough to drive the PCs to exploration, the judge need only have the rumor of the "fetch lights," that are regularly sighted dancing near the caves, reach the PCs' ears. It is a common belief amongst the Shudfolk (including PCs native to the region) that "fetch lights," softly glowing orbs of light that appear after nightfall, mark the location of concealed gold and other treasure. A greedy party will soon be on their way up the mountain to see what treasure lies there for the taking.

PCs motivated by the desire to perform good deeds and help their neighbors may be enticed to venture up the mountain by the "curse of Ridge Road." Ridge Road is a neglected wayfare that leads along the northern slope of Yander Mountain. Although the most direct route to nearby settlements, Ridge Road has seen reduced use over the years as travelers go missing near Yander Mountain and the occupants of nearby farmsteads are occasionally found massacred (the results of both Shange's thirst and wriggler hunting bands). The residents of nearby Hark would gladly pay whoever puts an end to the unknown terrors within the Woeful Caves a modest reward (a few bent gold coins or perhaps a cherished silver family heirloom).

### THE WOEFUL CAVES

The journey to Yander Mountain is short, a mere two hour's walk from the nearest Shudfolk community of Hark. A corduroy road of logs and packed dirt climbs up the side of the mountain, gradually becoming a simple dirt road wind-

ing between the rocks and trees that crowd the mountain's slopes. Once on the dirt trail, the party sees a pair of caves overlooking the road from 60' up the mountainside. Read the following

*A pair of dark caves pierces the side of Yander Mountain further up the slope. These caves are staggered, set in a diagonal line across the rocky face of the peak. The first cave is located some 60' above you on the mountain side, nestled in a slight niche in the mountain. The second cave stands 40' away from the second and is situated 20' higher up the mountain face. Nothing can be seen within the caves from your position on the road and it is impossible to determine how deep into the mountain they may run.*

If they continue around a bend in the road, they spot a third cave on the far side of a rocky promontory.

The Woeful Caves are natural limestone caverns filled with the subterranean flora and fauna found in such environments. Bats, birds, and insects live in the caves, frequently darting about just beyond the glow of the party's light source. The sound of dripping water, tumbling stones, squeaking bats and chittering insects, and other, less easily identifiable noises echo through the caverns as the party explores. Mud, stagnant water, and rubble makes moving difficult, and there is little light beyond the entrance caves. The judge should use all these elements to instill a sense of unease into the players as they explore the caves, making their later pursuit, should it occur, (see Shange's Strategy below) an exercise in terror.

## SHANGE'S STRATEGY

Shange becomes aware of the party's presence in the caves if they engage in battle in areas 1-1, 1-3, 1-5, or 1-9. Other loud noises also alert the blood-drinker. Once he is aware of intruders, he leaves his lair and seeks out the party, changing into owl or moonlight form to stalk them. Due to his familiarity with the caves and his improved stealth when in

these forms, only a DC 15 Intelligence check by a PC detects something untoward shadowing them. The PC that makes the check glimpses a patch of dim light or hears the sound of rustling wings in the dark, but does not see Shange. The judge can use these hints several times to build tension.

Once Shange has spied upon the party, he allows them to explore the caverns unhindered, but prepares to engage in a deadly cat-and-mouse game as soon as the party moves to leave. Once the party heads towards the exit, Shange attacks, attempting to slay one or two PCs and force the rest to flee. If successful, he changes into owl form and flies ahead of the party by the fastest route possible before ambushing them again. He continues this process until the party is slain or the survivors of his assaults escape the caves. Shange then drinks the blood of his victims or deposits the bodies in the spoil in area 1-9 and waits to see what happens.

If the PCs find his lair (area 1-10) before they attempt to leave the caves, Shange emerges from the darkness to slay the interlopers who found his resting place.

**Area 1-1 - Cougar Cave:** *This cavern serves as a cross-road of tunnels. To the northeast and northwest, passages exit to the surface, bringing drafts of fresh air down their lengths. In the south and southeast, rocky corridors plunge deeper into the heart of Yander Mountain. The floor is uneven, cluttered with broken stalagmites and fallen rock. It slopes slightly downwards towards the northwest.*

A cougar crouches in the southern tunnel (see map for position), watching the PCs as they enter the cave. Under the sway of Shange, the large feline serves as an early warning alarm against trespassers. The cat pounces on any creature approaching the southern tunnel or one who turns its back to that passageway. As it leaps, it roars its snarling cry which echoes down the tunnels, alerting Shange of trespassers. PCs failing a DC 15 Intelligence check are surprised by the cougar.

## SPELUNKING IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

With the exception of the old Hsaal diggings, the caves of the Shudder Mountains are natural caverns formed by flowing water. As such, they are uneven spaces within the earth filled with stalagmites, stalactites, low ceilings, slanted floors, and other subterranean features. As modern cavers known, it's very easy to injure oneself while spelunking and misfortune can strike at any time.

If the judge wishes to introduce the real-life hazards of cave exploration while the party explores the Woeful Caves, have a randomly determined PC make a Luck check every six turns while inside the cave. If the check fails, the PC sustains a minor injury (cracks his head against a low-hanging stalactite, slips in a pool of mud, scrapes exposed flesh badly on a jagged rock, etc.) and suffers 1 point of damage. PCs that roll a natural 20 on their Luck checks hurt themselves severely; taking 1d3 points of damage and suffering a minor complication (knocking themselves out for 10 minutes unless roused with first aid and a DC 5 Intelligence check or twisting an ankle and having their speed reduced by -5'). Dwarves are less likely to injure themselves in caves and add their level to their Luck score for the purpose of their checks.

Several areas of the caves consist of tight passages or low ceilings, as shown on the map. Human-sized PCs moving through these areas must either crawl or sidle along, slowing their movement rate to half normal and causing them to lose any beneficial AC adjustment due to Agility modifiers. The judge may also rule that certain long weapons (longswords, battle axes, pole arms, etc.) cannot be used efficiently while in these tight conditions and impart a -1 or even -2 die penalty to attack rolls when so hampered.

**Cougar:** Init +2; Atk bite +3 melee (1d6+3) or claws +1 (1d3+1); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 15; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP two successful claw attacks allows for automatic rake attack that does 1d6+2 damage, stealthy (+4 bonus to surprise); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

If the PCs approach the cougar from area 1-4, the cat detects them on a 4 in 6 chance and it acts as above, springing from the darkness to attack. Otherwise it is surprised.

**Area 1-2 – Bear Bones Cave:** *Cave moths flutter about your light sources as you penetrate this small cavern, throwing winged shadows across the walls. Stands of stalactites hang pendulously from the ceiling above, mirrored by scattered groves of stalagmites on the cave floor. A high ledge rests 15' atop a stone drapery formation to the west. Drifted leaves and small sticks litter the ground, and a pile of brown bones lies in an untidy pile near the west wall.*

The piled bones are that of a medium-sized grizzly and are old and dry. Close examination of the bones reveals that they bear the signs of gnawing and many are cracked to devour the marrow. The bear dwelled in this cave briefly until slain and eaten by the wrigglers.

The cave moths are harmless, normal insects. The sticks and leaf debris have accumulated here over many years, blown inside the cave by storm winds. PCs pausing to listen hear the soft sound of cricket chirps coming from the southern tunnel (actually the wrigglers in area 1-5).

**Area 1-3 – Soul Owl Roost:** *A soft green illumination fills this cavern and the gentle sound of rustling feathers drifts through the air. Arranged on staggered ledges along the cave walls are more than a dozen ghostly barn owls. The avian spirits are translucent and shine with a pale jade light as they peer down at you from their roosts with wide, unblinking eyes.*

These owls are soul fragments of Shange's victims, trapped between life and death by the mixed power of the blood-drinker's curse and the lingering magic of the spoil in area 1-9. Doomed to a fragmented state, the soul owls fly out from the caverns each night in an aimless search for eternal rest. It is sightings of these glowing birds which are responsible for the legends of the "fetch lights" seen around the cave.

**Soul Owls (15):** Init +1; Atk talons +4 melee (1d3); AC 14; HD 2d6; hp 8 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP possession (see below), un-dead traits, immune to normal weapons, affected by magic and silver weapons; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +4; AL N.

If the PCs enter the cave, one owl for each PC alights from its perch and attempts to settle on each character's shoulder. If an attack roll succeeds against a PC, the owl grips his shoulder with its talons, causing 1d3 points of damage and forcing the character to make a DC 12 Will save. If the save fails, the owl-affixed PC's will is overtaken by the soul fragment and the PC becomes possessed by an angry, vengeful mind. While under the owl's control, the PC succumbs to blood lust and attacks all those around him in a berserk rage (gaining +1 to attack rolls and +2 to damage). A PC who succeeds must continue to make a Will save each round he has an owl perched on his shoulder. Only a number of owls equal to the party's membership attack; the rest observe the encounter

but do not attempt to dominate a PC...for now. If the party passes through this cave again, they must run the soul owl gauntlet once more.

The possession can be ended by either slaying or turning the soul owl, casting *remove curse* on the victim, or killing the PC (a PC reduced to zero hit points but who makes the Luck check when his body is rolled over is no longer under owl control). A possessed PC who survives the mental domination emerges with a mental vision of a horribly scarred man with blood-stained mouth and teeth lunging from the darkness and attacking him. This was the soul owl's last experience before its mortal death and the terror of that event imprints itself on the possessed adventurer's psyche.

**Area 1-4 – Cave Paintings:** *The rocky walls of this cavern are stained with pigments, transforming the stone into a canvas upon which images are depicted. Primitive representations of wolves, deer, bears, and other native wildlife are shown being hunted by men. Other odd symbols are interspersed within the hunting imagery.*

The paintings were done by the wrigglers' ancestors before the aboriginal people devolved into their present state. Most of the images are hunting scenes, but other imagery can be identified on the walls. One scene shows the hunters fleeing into caves, pursued by larger man-shaped forms with heads bearing crested ridges. If the party has encountered any mortal remains or images of the Hsaal, the crested-headed race is identifiable as such.

Another image depicts three symbols set in an upside-down triangle. Two glyphs appear to float above a third. These symbols (see DCC #83 *The Chained Coffin* p. 22) are those for "Earth" (bottom symbol), "Shul" (upper left symbol), and "Luhsaal" (upper right symbol), arranged to represent their celestial positions. The sigils mean nothing now, but a note-taking party who copies down the symbols may find a use for them should they play through *The Chained Coffin*.

A narrow tunnel exits this cave to the west, but it is clogged with fallen rocks. This passage connects to the surface, but due to its size and obstruction, it cannot be traversed by the PCs. Shange can pass through the tunnel in his moonlight form as necessary to flee the party or to get ahead of them in the cave system.

**Area 1-5 – Wiggler Midden:** *Mounds of animal bones are piled into waist-high heaps in this cavern, nearly covering the entire floor. Stalagmites protrude from the morbid debris like islands in a bone sea. The chirping of crickets sounds softly in the cavern and another tunnel exits the cave from the opposite side.*

Seven wrigglers secret themselves amongst the bones, their pale flesh blending in with the carnage. They detect the PCs presence regardless of the party's avenue of approach and emerge from the bone piles to attack the adventurers. Have the PC with the worst Luck make a Luck check. If it fails, the party is surprised.

**Wrigglers (7):** Init +3; Atk bite +3 melee (1d8) or claws +2 (1d4); AC 12; HD 4d10; hp 22 each; MV 30', climb 20' or leap 10'; Act 2d20; SP crit range 19-20, superior hearing, echolocation, blind, heightened reflexes, uncanny climber (can scale



walls and ceilings; +10 to bonus to climb-related actions); SV Fort +3, Ref +6 (auto save; see monster description), Will +2; AL C.

There is a 4' wide hole in the cave floor that connects to the tunnel between areas 1-2 and 1-3. If the party travels that tunnel, they are attacked from above as the wrigglers drop 8' down atop them (gaining a +2 bonus to hit). If a wriggler kills or incapacitates a PC, it hauls the body back up through the hole to this area.

Most of the bones are animal, but a number of human skeletons are mixed into the piles as well. A prolonged search (3 turns or more) accompanied by a DC 10 Intelligence check discovers a trio of old treasures: a silver ring (10 gp value) still wrapped around a bony human finger, a well-made flute carved from hawthorn wood (15 gp value and causes 1d3 damage if used as a club), and an ornamental walking stick shaped into the form of a serpent (a *snake stick*, see The Chained Coffin Companion p. 7).

**Area 1-6 – Spider Cave:** *The ceiling slopes upward, becoming lost among the gloom and stalactites towards the northern end of this narrow cavern. Odd, feathery lumps bearing white thread-like wrappings lie unmoving about the floor.*

The lumps are web-wrapped birds, drained dry by the giant scaffold web spider that dwells at the highest point of the cave. The creature thrives on the birds and bats that regularly flutter through the cave system. Numerous thin lines of webbing crisscross the cave and are only noticeable with a DC 10 Intelligence or *find traps* check. Failing to detect the sticky webs indicates the first two PCs entering the cave walk into the webs and must make a DC 14 Reflex save or become entangled. This alerts the spider of a new meal and it descends to dine.

**Giant Scaffold Web Spider (1):** Init +2; Atk bite +3 melee (1d4 plus venom) or web +4 ranged (entangle); AC 12; HD 3d6; hp 12; MV 30' or climb 35'; Act 1d20; SP poisonous (1d4 plus DC 12 Fort save or 3d4+1 Strength loss), entangling webs (DC 14 Ref save or become entangled; DC 13 Strength check to break free); SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +1; AL N.

The spider bears an uncanny resemblance to an albino black widow spider measuring 5' from forelegs to hind legs. It lacks the unique hourglass-shaped marking on its abdomen, but this missing feature is easily overlooked in the cavern's gloom.

**Area 1-7 – False Dawn:** *A pale green light equal to failing moonlight illuminates this T-intersection of passages. A low-ceilinged, sloping tunnel descends to the east, while the main artery continues on ahead. The light appears to come from the walls themselves as if the living stone produces the ghostly radiance.*

The stone walls contain phosphorus deposits which produce the dim green light. Although eerie, the light has no harmful effects, but it is nearly identical in color and luminance as Shange's moonlight form. PCs catching a glimpse of the blood-drinker in this shape may easily misidentify the glow as another phosphorus deposit until it is too late.

Dwarves attempting to smell gold automatically succeed in this area, detecting a strong scent of it coming from the south tunnel (this is the gold vein in area 1-8).



**Area 1-8 – Gold Vein:** *The walls of this cavern glitter with quartz, transforming the drab stone into dazzling edifices sparkling with facets. Beyond the cramped tunnel that enters the cavern, the ceiling rises, allowing even the tallest of you to stand upright once more. As the shadows from your light sources play upon the walls, a gleam of gold breaks through the gloom, catching your eye.*

A small gold vein runs along the south wall of this chamber, reflecting the party's light. Any dwarf in the cave automatically sniffs out the delicious odor of the precious metal. PCs inspecting the southern wall easily see thin strands of gold ore winding its way through the stone and quartz crystals. They also notice the wall bears signs of tool marks, indicating someone has previously attempted to mine the gold (the dwarves in area 1-9 before they met their demise) but stopped before they made much headway.

The gold requires a great deal of effort to extract. If the PCs work the vein, each day of mining the gold produces 1d6x200 lbs. of ore. When refined, the ore yields gold worth 5 gp per 100 lbs. of ore extracted. The seam is exhausted after 6000 lbs. of ore is removed.

Unfortunately for the PCs, the gold vein isn't the windfall they hope for. The narrow tunnel entering this cave from the southwest dives deep into the earth, leading to the forgotten caverns that are home to the wriggler tribe. Even if the party destroys Shange the Blighted and the rest of the threats in the upper caverns, the wrigglers constantly pass through this area on their way to exit the caves for their nocturnal hunting trips. The sound of mining also attracts them. Every hour the PCs work the vein, there is a 75% chance 2d10 wrigglers enter the area and attack the party. The only way to safely mine the ore is to descend into the wriggler home territory and dispatch the entire tribe (an undertaking far beyond the scope of this adventure).

A narrow, low-ceilinged tunnel exits this area to the east and leads to area 1-9. Because of the cramped confines of the tunnel, even halflings must crawl down its length, imparting penalties to their actions (see "Spelunking in the Shudder Mountains" sidebar above). In addition, man-sized PC must make a DC 5 Agility check (modified by armor penalty) to

avoid becoming stuck in the passage. A stuck PC can be extricated by another PC making a DC 12 Strength check.

If the PC choose to crawl down this passage, a single wriggler slinks from the southwest tunnel and attacks the last party member scrambling through the tunnel from behind. This attack, given the tight confines and impossibility of assistance from his comrades, may prove to be a terrifying and perhaps lethal encounter for the unlucky adventurer!

**Area 1-9 – The Spoil:** *Ebon fire crawls across the walls and ceiling of this cave, throwing a cascade of black, yet somehow glowing, light across the cavern. The fire limns numerous fossils of prehistoric life embedded in the surrounding stone with grim auras. The hair on your neck and arms stands up, affected by the static charge of unseen power. Six grim dwarves dressed in tattered leathers stand stock still in the cavern, their eyes black as the fire on the walls and their weapons aglow with dark light.*

This cave is a spoil, one of the residual deposits of Hsaalian magic that survived the destruction of the Luhsaal (see *The Chained Coffin Companion* p. 2). The decaying lunar sorcery has strange effects on persons and objects exposed to its radiance, and the dwarves here are no exception.

Originally a band of prospectors, these six dwarves found the gold vein in area 1-8, but were discovered in turn by Shange before they could make much progress mining it. Shange, still seeking to understand the spoil's power, killed the dwarves but restrained himself from drinking their blood.

Instead he left their corpses inside the spoil and was amused when they arose with a semblance of life. They've remained here ever since serving as unwitting guardians of the spoil.

**Spoiled Dwarves (6):** Init +1; Atk pick/hammer +4 melee (1d5+1) or bone-breaker strike +1 melee (1d3+1 plus broken bone); AC 13; HD 3d6+2; hp 15 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP undead traits, bone breaking; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

Haggard-seeming dwarves with ebon eyes and gaunt appearance, spoiled dwarves bear the wounds that killed them. Animated in a grim semblance of life by the spoil, these undead miners can strike with their tools to break the limbs of opponents. The bone-breaking attack is less likely to hit, but if it does connect, the target suffers either a (50% chance) broken arm (1-2 left; 3-4 right) or (50% chance) broken leg (1-2 left; 3-4 right). A PC with a single broken leg suffers a -10' penalty to speed, while a PC with both legs broken can only crawl at a rate of 5'. In the case of broken arms, the PC suffers a -2 to attacks if wielding a weapon with his non-dominant arm and a -2 penalty to all spell checks. A PC with both arms broken cannot attack or cast spells. Broken limbs can be healed with *laying on hands* (see *DCC RPG rulebook* p. 30).

The spoil's magic maintains the un-dead dwarves' animated state and they cannot move more than 50' away from area 1-9. If slain and searched, the dwarves has a total of 100 lbs. of unrefined gold ore on them (see area 1-8 for further details), 27 sp, 12 gp, and a gold bracer worth 40 gp.

## THE WOEFUL CAVES SPOIL

The spoil in area 1-9 is a common spoil (see *The Chained Coffin Companion* p. 2). Its power only affects subjects exposed to its tainted radiation over prolonged periods. The PCs can examine the spoil cave safely without worrying about manifesting spoil-born changes during their initial exploration of the Woeful Caves. If they return here many times over a short period, however, they may find themselves subject to its power.

This spoil's magic produces two effects, one on living flesh and one on dead tissue. If a living creature is exposed to the spoil long enough to be affected by it, he must make a DC 12 Fortitude save. On a failed save, the PC undergoes one of following changes:

### D4 Spoil-Born Change

- 1 PC gains the ability to transform himself into a great horned owl once per day for up to one hour. See Shange's description on p. 7 for details on this shape's abilities.
- 2 PC transforms into moonlight and cannot return to solid form. Unless subject to a *remove curse* spell within 48 hours, the PC's body dissipates, killing him.
- 3 The PC gains the power to command a single cougar as a faithful pet. When confronting a wild mountain lion, a successful DC 10 Personality check by the PC causes the animal to instantly become his loyal companion and the cat serves the PC until its death. The PC can only have a single cougar pet at one time.
- 4 The PC bursts into black flame, suffering 3d6 damage each round until extinguished. If the PC survives the conflagration, he gains a permanent +2 to saving throws against fire.

Dead tissue exposed to the spoil's power animates, becoming a bizarre and unique form of undead creature. The judge should create an appropriate menace, using the spoiled dwarves above as inspiration. The undead creature cannot venture more than 50' away from the cave.

A subject, either living or dead, exposed to the spoil's power can only be affected once. Subsequent bathing in its radiant magic produce no effect.

The fossils are natural remains of extinct creatures (trilobites, fish, and other aquatic creatures of the dim past). They have no innate powers or threats, but if carefully extracted (requiring a DC 14 Agility check), a fossil may fetch up to 10 gp if sold or have special uses in the crafting of magic items or similar magical wonder-working (judge's discretion). There are a dozen fossils in total.

**Area 1-10 – Shange's Lair:** *Crude but macabre furnishings transform this cavern into a living space. A table fashioned from a casket lid stands near a raised pallet piled high with blood-stained furs. A goblet encrusted with gore and fashioned from an upturned skull rests atop the table. A pair of packing crates, likewise marked with old blood, rest in a shadowy corner of the cave. A gnawed upon deer carcass lies to one side, with swarms of black flies buzzing about the spoiling meat.*

This cavern is Shange's main place of occupancy, but it is likely the blood-drinker is not at home when the PCs chance upon it (see "Shange's Strategy" above). Two cougars are found here, however, hiding in the shadows and waiting to spring on intruders.

**Cougars (2):** Init +2; Atk bite +3 melee (1d6+3) or claws +1 (1d3+1); AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 15 each; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP two successful claw attacks allows for automatic rake attack that does 1d6+2 damage, stealthy (+4 bonus to surprise); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

If Shange is not present when the PCs battle the cougars, he arrives 1d3+1 rounds later, drawn by the sound of combat. He appears from the opposite tunnel from which the group entered, his horrible visage emerging from the shadows with wicked battle axe in hand. He snarls with a crimson-stained mouth, spinning his axe in lazy, confident circles as he enters. In a soft, evil voice, Shange says, "Welcome to the feasting hall, fools. 'Tis time to die and me to dine." He then attacks with axe and fangs flashing.

**Shange the Blighted, Backwoods Blood-Drinker (1):** Init +4; Atk *reaver axe* +1+1d5 deed die melee (1d10+1+1d5 deed die) or bite +1+1d5 deed die melee (1d4+1+1d5 damage plus 1 Stamina point), critical special with *reaver axe* (see magic weapon description below); AC 13; HD 3d12+6 (3rd level warrior); hp 35; MV 30' or 40' fly (owl or moonlight form); Act 1d20; SP crit range 19-20, mighty deeds, suffers ½ damage from wooden (non-hawthorn wood) weapons, immune to normal metal weapons, immune to elemental (fire, water, air, and earth-based) damage, sunlight weakness, infravision 60', command cougars, assume owl shape and moonlight form; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +2; AL C.

Shange appears as a hulking 6'5" human male. His age is difficult to determine as his body is horribly scarred with old wounds. His nose has been sliced away, his scalp torn and scarred, his arms and legs crisscrossed by a score of gruesome gouges. Shange's teeth are sharp and permanently stained with blood, as is his chin and fingers. He dresses in a mixture of leather and chain armor, worn and rusted from long use. He wields a magical axe known as the *reaver axe* (see below) in battle and can bite to drain blood.

Between the blood curse that afflicts him and prolonged exposure to the spoil, Shange has several unusual powers. He can command up to 12 HD of cougars or other large felines. They obey his spoken command without question. He can also transform himself into a black-feathered great horned owl, granting him the ability to fly. His AC, saving throws, and special properties remain unchanged in this state, but he can only attack with his talons (1d3+1+deed die; 1d3+1+deed dmg). Any held or worn possessions are absorbed into his body when he changes shape. Shange can also transform himself into a patch of pallid light identical to moonlight. In this form, he resembles a human-sized, but indistinct cloud of light. Shange cannot attack in this form, but can fly at a speed of 40' and pass through small openings with ease. While in moonlight form, Shange is insubstantial and can only be injured by magic weapons and spells. As when in owl shape, his possessions transform with him.

Shange cannot be killed by any of the four elements, including iron and steel weapons made from earthly minerals. Wooden weapons inflict half damage, but hawthorn wood weapons do normal damage to the supernatural fiend. The blood-drinker must consume the blood of 4 HD worth of creatures each week or lose 1d6 hit points. Although sunlight does not damage Shange, he is weakened when exposed to it, suffering a -1 die penalty on all rolls. Despite his curse and near immortality, Shange is not un-dead and is unaffected by turning or holy objects.

If encountered here, Shange fights until reduced to 5 hp. He then assumes either owl or moonlight shape before streaking off into the caverns in an attempt to escape the party. His preferred avenues of escape are the tunnel leading down to the wriggler warrens (area 1-8) or the rock-choked tunnel leading to the surface in area 1-4). Should Shange escape, he'll seek revenge at a later date (see *Concluding the Adventure* below).

The furnishings in the cave are unremarkable aside from their crude construction. The goblet is indeed crafted from the cranium of one of Shange's victims and is worth 5 gp to collectors of the macabre. The two packing crates hold an array of clothing (mostly blood-stained) taken from the blood-drinker's meals, 97 cp, 74 sp, 36 gp, a fine wool cap (6 gp value), an empty arrow quiver of exquisitely tooled leather (10 gp value), a gold torc (25 gp value), and a pair of boots with a hollow heel containing a raw sapphire (50 gp value).

**Reaver Axe (Magical Weapon):** The reaver axe is a bearded axe with curved handle, resembling a cross between a scythe and a battle axe. The enchantment on the axe grants it two special properties. First, when used in battle its wielder uses a d20 for initiative and not the normal d16 for a two-handed weapon. Secondly, once per day the axe can be used by a warrior or dwarf to critically hit an opponent. The wielder must succeed in a mighty deed of arms against his foe, and if successful, the attack is automatically a critical hit. If the mighty deed fails, the axe's power is not lost for the day and can be attempted again on subsequent attacks. If the result of the mighty deed results in a natural critical hit, the wielder rolls twice on the critical hit table, taking whichever result he prefers.





ELEVATION  
+10'

□ =  
5'



ELEVATION  
+15'

DOWN TO ROAD

LOW  
CEILING

SLOPE  
DOWN

ELEVATION  
+10'

THE  
WOEFUL  
CAVES

1-1

1-2

1-4

1-5

1-7

1-3

1-6

1-9

1-8

1-10

TO?

AK  
2014

## CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

*The Woeful Caves under Yander Mountain* ends with Shange's death, should the PCs accomplish that feat. If the immortal blood-drinker meets his demise at the party's hands, they stand to gain a potent magical weapon, one that will be useful in their adventuring careers (and against certain foes appearing in the *The Chained Coffin*). They may also discover a clue that will aid them in that adventure if they record or remember the strange cave paintings found in area 1-4 of the Woeful Caves.

Alternatively, if Shange escapes, the events of this adventure can have long-lasting ramifications. Shange, thwarted by lowly mortals, vows a blood vendetta on the party. He first finds a new redoubt to shelter himself away in, but then begins a campaign of vengeance on the party. Shange strikes the party's friends, family, and allies first, before

going for the proverbial jugular by attacking the party directly. Should the judge wish, this campaign of vengeance can stretch on for months, with Shange becoming an ongoing foe of the party. As the PCs gain power, so does Shange. His experience with the spoil in Woeful Caves has taught him the power of such sites and he seeks out other spoils throughout the Shudders, bathing in their radiant magic and gaining new and unholy attributes as a result (to be determined by the judge). The party may gain insight into Shange's plans when witch liquor bootleggers are found drained of their blood at their still sites, a sure sign Shange still lurks in the Shudder Mountains. Only when the blood-drinker is destroyed for good will the party find a modicum of peace and can continue their adventuring careers in the world of *Dungeon Crawl Classics* without nervous eyes cast over their shoulders.



# THE GRAVE POOL

FOR LEVEL 4 CHARACTERS

## THE TALE

*"My grandfather told me that when he was a lad, a neighbor-man who lived in the backwoods died while felling trees. A big ol' hickory snapped and toppled on the man. When they pulled him out from under 'er, his skull was broken like a dried gourd. Granddad told me that the man's wife went to a witcher-woman out on Skeleton Ridge and she told the wife how to bring him back to life.*

*As the story goes, there's a deep pool out in one of the hollows, a pond surrounded by beech trees with water that glows cornflower blue in the moonlight. The witcher-woman said that if the wife sank her husband's corpse into the pool under the half moon, he'd come up again, full of life. The wife did what the witcher-woman said and, sure 'nough, her man came out of that pool sputterin' and cussin', full of spit and vinegar.*

*Grandpa said he never heard what became of the man and his wife. They moved away not long after he was reborn on account of the locals not wanting to truck with a former corpse. But, if you're willing to look for it and do what needs doing, maybe you can find that pool for yourself."*

## BACKGROUND



The Grave Pool, as some Shudfolk call it, does exist, located in a distant and unvisited hollow deep in the mountains. It is actually a spoil, one that formed at the bottom of a rocky depression, now long filled with water. The spoil's power permeates the waters of the pool and a corpse sunk beneath its surface is subject to its unusual properties. Of course, not all is what it appears in the Shudders, and despite what the tale might promise, the Grave Pool doesn't always revive the dead perfectly.

Complicating matters, the Grave Pool is surrounded by a grove of sinister trees. Many a Shudfolk has remarked that there are trees in the mountains that seem to turn mean after dark, demonstrating both a hatred for humanity and a thirst for raw, bloodied flesh. A cluster of these "night-trees" prowl the grove when the sun goes down.

A party visiting the Grave Pool by day isn't safe either. Lately, the hollow has become the lair for a backwoods lycanthrope, a nasty wereboar that heads a sounder of equally ill-tempered boars. Any party wishing to avail themselves of the Grave Pool's questionable power must overcome both dangers.

## FINDING THE GRAVE POOL

A pool that potentially raises the dead is one of the great secrets of the Shudders. Those that know where to find it don't share its location readily. After all, who's to say the magic of the Grave Pool isn't finite and that you might, one sad day, need to restore a loved one back to the land of the living? Adventurers looking for the pool will have to either work to learn its location or rely on pure happenstance.

As the tale alludes, there is (or was) a witch living on Skeleton Ridge that could tell folks how to find the Grave Pool. The tales doesn't say what she might desire in return for revealing this knowledge, but the price for raising the dead can't be cheap. Assuming the witch or one of her descendants is still on Skeleton Ridge and the party can find her, the adventurers might have to slay a formidable monster and return with a choice body part, cut a deal with one of the Three, or perform any other vile or dangerous service the judge can dream up. If the party is lucky, the witch will fulfill her part of the bargain and provide directions to the Pool.

Alternately, the judge might simply have the party stumble across the Grave Pool as they travel the backwoods of the Shudders. If the party discovers the spoil in this manner, they are unlikely to know its properties and instead treat it as another hazard haunting the hollows of the mountains. At a later time, perhaps after a PC has died, the party might hear the tale of the Grave Pool and put two and two together to realize they know precisely where it is.

## THE GRAVE POOL

*The surrounding foothills slope down to form a secluded tree-filled hollow. An old trail, partially overgrown with witch-hazel and ivy, winds down the hillside and vanishes into the trees. A number of white stones the size of a child's fist appear irregularly along the side of the path, serving as guides. A lone crow cackles in the distance.*

During the daytime, the hollow is a quiet place. An animal might disturb the branches above or a soft breeze may rustle the beech leaves, but otherwise a hush hangs about the thicket-filled vale. The floor of the wood is thick with fallen leaves and beechnuts, and curious swaths of disturbed debris crisscross the forest floor. These trails are made by the beech trees moving at night.

The wereboar and his hog-kin patrol the interior of the thicket during the day, but make certain they are outside of the woods before the sun goes down. A party entering the woods during daylight is automatically detected by the lycanthrope unless all the PCs make successful checks to avoid detection (DC 15 Agility, Sneak Silently, or Stealth) and are downwind of the boars (judge's determination). If detected, the hogs rush towards the party with the sound of snorting, crashing underbrush, and a hideous, almost human-like screaming.

**Coy Hogg, Wereboar:** Init +1; Atk gore +3 melee (1d8+1); AC 15; HD 6d8; hp 40; MV 40'; Act 2d20; SP immune to damage from normal weapons, lycanthropy (see below); SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2; AL C.

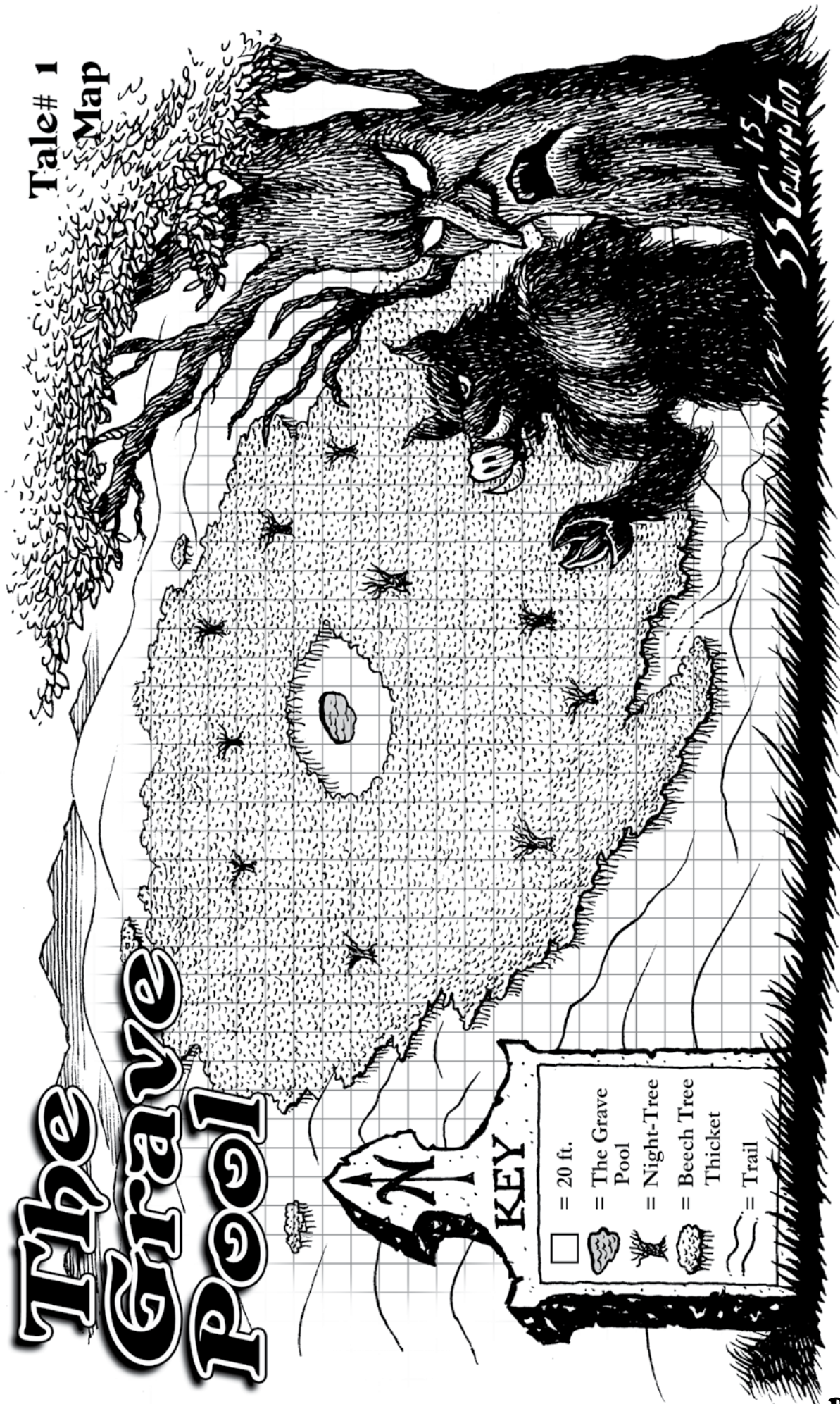
**Wild Razorback Hogs (2 per PC):** Init +0; Atk gore +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

Anyone injured by the wereboar's gore attack might contract lycanthropy. At the end of the combat, all PCs injured by Coy must make a Fort save vs. a DC of 5 + # of hit points lost to the wereboar's attack. If the saving throw fails, the



# The Grave Pool

Tale# 1  
Map





PC contracts lycanthropy and becomes a wereboar at the next full moon. Wereboar PCs become chaotic (if not already) 1d4 months after contracting the curse and eschew the company of men. Such characters become NPCs and are removed from the campaign. Lycanthropy can be cured by a *remove curse* spell or certain esoteric means of the judge's creation.

## THE THICKET AFTER DARK

*"It minded me of how I'd heard, when I was a chap, about day-trees and night-trees, they weren't the same things at all; and the night-trees can crowd all around a house they don't like, pound the shingles off the roof, burst in the window glass and the door panels; and that's the sort of night you'd better never set your foot outside..."*

-*"The Little Black Train"* by Manly Wade Wellman

The woods become even more dangerous once the sun goes down, which is also the only time the Grave Pool's magic functions. Those wishing to utilize its power must either evade or destroy the hollow's nocturnal guardians—the night-trees.

As soon as the sun creeps beneath the mountains, the woods become alive with the sound of rustling leaves, cracking branches, and the noise of *something* big crashing through the underbrush. These big forms reveal themselves to be large beech trees with whipping branches and gaping bole-

hole mouths craving flesh. The night-trees, detecting the PCs' body heat, advance to their location with the intent to feed.

**Night-trees (10):** Init +0; Atk branch slam +3 melee (1d6), tendril grab +7 grapple attempts only (see below), or bite +6 melee (1d10); AC 12, HD 6d10; hp 35 each; MV 20'; Act 4d20; SP nocturnal, infravision 120', vulnerable to fire, immune to piercing weapons, immune to mind-affecting spells (*charm*, *sleep*, etc.); SV Fort +5, Ref -2, Will N/A; AL C.

Night-trees are malicious versions of normal trees, the Mr. Hyde to their daytime Dr. Jekyll. Night-trees become active once the sun goes down, prowling the forests to crush and devour. These vile trees supplement their meals of sun, soil, and rain with fresh meat and blood. Night-trees attack with their branches, some of which are actually tendrils they use to grab prey. Grappled foes are hauled to the tree's mouth, which appears as an ordinary bole-hole during the day, and devoured. Each branch has a reach of 15' and 6 hit points. Reducing a branch to zero hit points with slashing or bashing damage breaks the branch. Each tree has up to six branches they can attack with.

If the night-trees are defeated and their bole-hole mouths examined, each reveals a hollow, fleshy space within the tree's trunk. Each of these stomachs contains 2d20 cp, 1d10 sp, and 1d4 gp left by previous unlucky meals.



## THE POOL

At the center of the wooded thicket is an open glade. The grass covering the clearing is strangely colored, appearing as alternating blades of washed-out gray and dark, shadowy black. The clearing's center contains a natural pool of roughly oval shape, its banks bare of reeds or other vegetation. A thin strand of gravel encircles the pool.

The pool is a "burn spoil," and anyone spending more than a minute within the clearing must make a DC 10 Fort save or suffer 2d6 damage from the searing field of eldritch energy that emanates from the still waters. After this initial exposure, contact with the spoil does no additional damage for the next 24 hours, but the save must be repeated if the Grave Pool is visited again in the future.

The Grave Pool's water appears normal during most of the month, but for three nights around the date of the half moon, the waters seem to burn with an incandescent blue fire. This light throws odd, dancing shadows around the clearing, shadows that sometimes seem to assume human shape. While the waters burn, a single corpse sunk into the Grave Pool potentially returns to life (see "Raising the Dead," below).

The water's magic is finite and can take decades to replenish once exhausted. The judge can simply determine that the pool works X number of times, with X being equal to whatever he feels appropriate to his campaign. Once exhausted, the Grave Pool will never function again in the campaign's lifetime.

Alternately, for judges enjoying an element of chance, the Grave Pool has a cumulative 1 in 6 chance of being exhausted each time it is used. Thus, the first time a corpse is resurrected, the judge rolls 1d6 and on a result of a 1, the Grave Pool is exhausted. The next time increases the chance to 2 in 6, the third to 3 in 6, etc. Once exhausted, the Grave Pool requires 1d100+10 years to recharge, during which time the burn spoil lies dormant.

## RAISING THE DEAD

Any humanoid corpse immersed in the Grave Pool has a chance of returning to life. The base chance of a successful resurrection is 100%, but this chance is reduced by 5% for every 24 hours that has passed since the corpse's demise. After 21 days, the pool is incapable of restoring life to a corpse.

If the Grave Pool successfully works its magic, the character restored to life makes a Luck check. Depending on whether the check succeeds or fails, there is a chance the former corpse comes back to life...changed. A successful Luck check means it is less likely for a serious side effect to accompany the resurrection, while a failed check almost ensures something has gone wrong. Creatures failing their Luck check are automatically *grave weary* (see result #1 on table 1-1), cumulative with any additional side effect determined by a roll on table 1-2.

Table 1-1: Successful Luck Check

| d10  | Resurrection Side Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-3  | Grave Weary. The creature permanently loses 1 point of Stamina and 1 point of Personality as a result of the strain on body and soul to return to life.                                                                                                      |
| 4-5  | Troubled Sleep. The creature suffers horrible nightmares for the rest of its (newly returned) life. The creature only recovers 1 hit point for a full day of bed rest and no hit points if he spends the day adventuring (see DCC RPG core rulebook, p. 94). |
| 6-10 | No side effects. Creature returns to life unchanged by its demise.                                                                                                                                                                                           |

Table 1-2: Failed Luck Check

| d10  | Resurrection Side Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Spiritual Hitchhiker. The creature returns, but another soul has stowed away within his body. This other soul is evil and seeks to pursue a malicious purpose now that it's returned to the physical world. The second soul can take control of the creature's body for short periods of time. This effect is identical to a spellcheck result of 24-26 of the <i>transference</i> spell (DCC RPG, p. 232). Treat the stowaway soul as if CL 6 for the purpose of duration and the DC for Will saves is 20. |
| 2    | Altered Species. The creature returns in a body not his own. He might return as an elf, dwarf, or halfling if formerly human, or even as a serpent-man, orc, man-bat, or other humanoid creature of roughly man-size. The exact body type and any advantages or disadvantages of that shape are left to the judge to determine.                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 3    | Forever Changed. The creature is restored to life, but changed physically in a horrible manner. The judge rolls or chooses an appropriate physical appearance from Table 9-5: Physical Appearance of Un-Dead (DCC RPG, p. 381). The creature suffers a loss of 1d4+1 Personality points as a result.                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 4    | Path of Darkness. The creature is restored to life, but his alignment takes a dark turn. Lawful creatures are now neutral, while neutral creatures become chaotic. If the creature was already chaotic, he suffers no side effect.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 5    | Touch of the Grave. Although technically alive, the creature bears some taint of undeath. He is affected by clerical turning (if the priest affects un-dead), suffers damage from holy water, and may not be able to enter sanctified spaces at the judge's discretion.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 6-10 | No additional side effects.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |



# THE WITCH- MAN OF DARKWEATHER MOUNTAIN

FOR LEVEL 5 CHARACTERS

## THE TALE

*"Gather 'round, children, if you 'uns want to hear about Darkweather Mountain and the strange fruits that grows a'top 'er. Long ago, back before your great-great-great-great-grandfathers were born, the folks in Frog Hollow found a witch 'mongst them. The Shudfolk banded together, taking up swords and pitchforks and torches, and drove the witch-woman out of the hollow. They chased her up the side of Darkweather Mountain, her arm bleeding from a sword scratch.*

*As the witch clawed her way up the mountain, a storm began to brew something fierce. Lightning and thunder crackled and rumbled, and big ol' raindrops fell like a waterfall. Still, the goodly folk of Frog Hollow pursued that witch until they trapped her atop the mountain. As they moved in to put an end to her evil, a big ol' thunderbolt came down and struck her smack dab on top of her head. That old witch twitched and danced, and her arms writhed, throwing blood from her wounds across the bare stone. When the lightning flash cleared away, the folks of Frog Hollow saw the witch was dead, but everywhere her blood landed, weird bushes sprang up, laden with berries as black as coal and smelling like brimstone. The folks of Frog Hollow wanted nothing to do with such evil and fled the mountain, leaving the witch's bones to the vultures.*

*Today, 'mongst them that know, it's whispered that the berries still grow on Darkweather Mountain and witch-women and conjure-men steal up there to sample the fruit. Some say the strange fruit gives their sorcery an extra wallop and that no living man can withstand the spells of a witch who has supped atop Darkweather Mountain."*

## BACKGROUND

The details of the tale are surprisingly correct, albeit missing some pertinent details. The witch of Frog Hollow was a servant of Haade, one of the Three who vie for control of the souls of the Shudder Mountains. Although not an especially powerful sorceress, she had learned several esoteric rites from Haade and was calling upon that power atop Darkweather Mountain. As her magic coalesced about her, priming itself to blast the folk of Frog Hollow from the face of the earth, an errant lightning bolt fell from the sky, striking the witch. This freak mixture of magical and natural forces produced a unique, never-before-seen act of spontaneous mystical genesis. The witch's blood, empowered by nature's potent energy, manifested into the famed berry bushes of Darkweather Mountain. Each bush holds a portion of the dead witch's power, granting anyone who consumes the dark berries a magical amplification of their own sorcery.

The properties of the berries are known only to a handful of spellcasters who've either learned their secrets from one of the Shudder's study-witches (Shudfolk who study but do not practice magic) or sampled the fruit themselves. Those who know the truth keep quiet lest others strip the shrubs of the potent food. This silence has ensured that a more recent development on Darkweather Mountain remains unknown by the inhabitants of the Shudder Mountains.

Two years ago, a flatlander sorcerer named Zhru the Calamitous learned of the berries on Darkweather Mountain and journeyed to the Shudders to taste them firsthand. Awed by their effect on his magic, Zhru took up residence on the mountain, claiming the mystical fruit as his own. Those who have climbed the mountain since his investiture have been slain, their bodies turned into lightning-born monstrosities called thunderstrucks, charged with guarding the bushes and defending their master. Zhru dwells easy atop the mountain, confident that between his empowered magic and his magical guardians, no one has a hope of unseating him. He may even be correct.

## LEARNING OF AND LOCATING DARKWEATHER MOUNTAIN

Darkweather Mountain can exist anywhere in the Shudder Mountains the judge desires. One possible location is north of Dogged Mountain, centered in between Old Piney Woods and the Wild Wood (see The Shudder Mountain Overland Map), but any suitably secluded spot will suffice.

The party can hear the tale concerning the witch and the fruit of Darkweather Mountain at any Shudfolk gathering or, if a PC is both a spellcaster and a native Shudfolk (or has earned the trust of one), be told it by their mentor or ally. The storyteller also can confirm that the berries of Darkweather Mountain do indeed amplify a spellcaster's magic. This should hopefully be enough to set the party on the path to Darkweather Mountain.

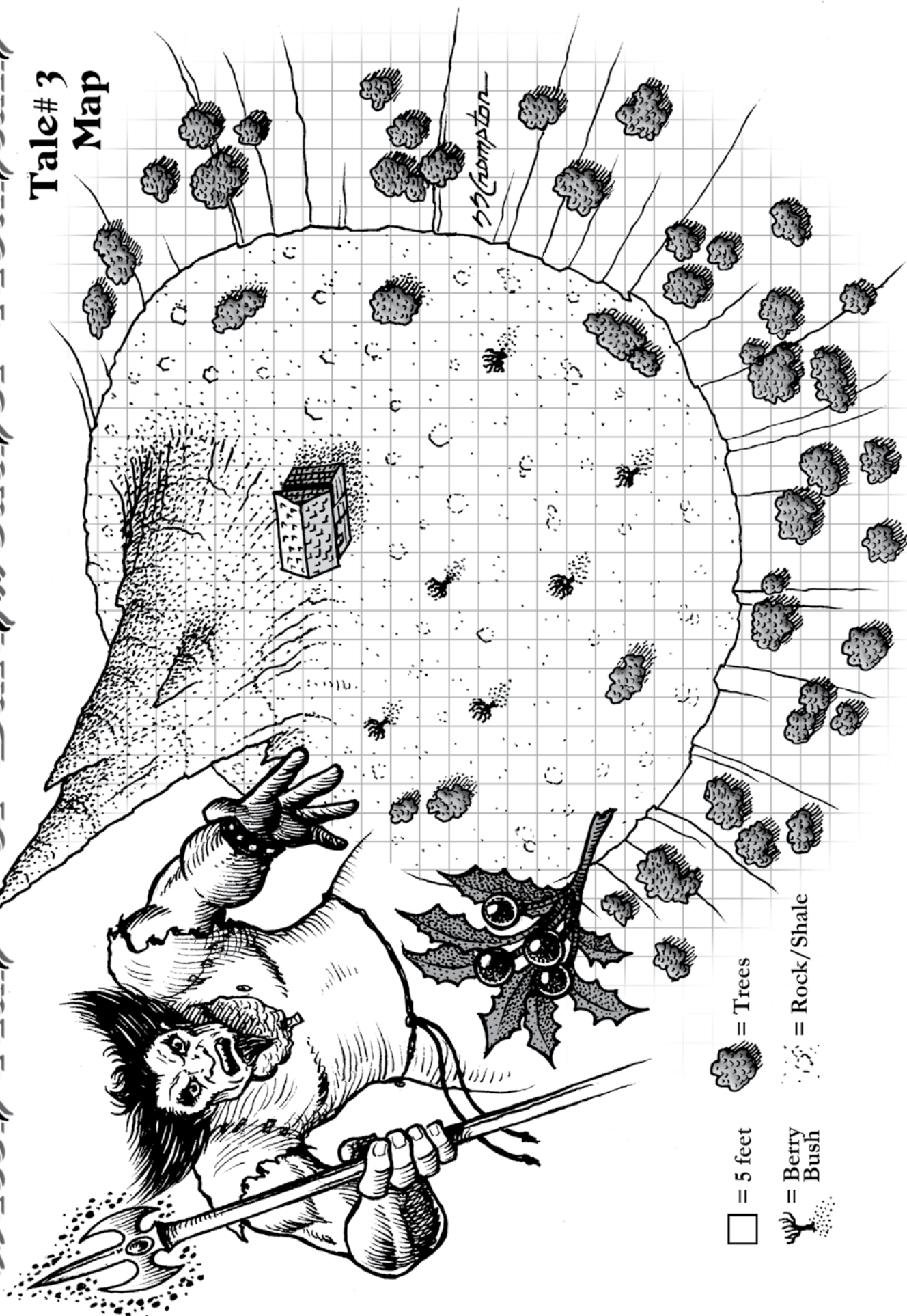
If the party requires a more noble reason to scale the mountain, a Shudfolk friend might seek them out and request their help: A friendly study-witch went up Darkweather Mountain recently and hasn't been seen since. Could the party please investigate the mountain and learn what became of her?

## THE MOUNTAIN

Darkweather Mountain is one of the taller peaks in the Shudders, measuring just over 7,000 feet high. Despite its grandeur, three of the mountain's sides have shallow slopes and are covered with a thick blanket of oak, beech, and poplar trees that give way to spruce and pine in the upper extents of the peak. The fourth side is nearly sheer, a craggy face that plunges to the ground in a series of jagged steps. Darkweather's peak is off-center and is a spire of bare stone adjacent to the mountain's craggy slope. A somewhat-level shelf of rock lies beneath the spire, and it is on this flat space that both the berry bushes of Darkweather Mountain and Zhru the Calamitous can be found.

# Witch-Man of Darkweather Mountain

Tale# 3  
Map



Climbing the mountain on any of its sloped sides is possible for even the most unskilled mountaineer. Adventurers climbing the slopes of the mountain can do so without danger, although the judge should feel free to add encounters with some of the Shudder's more dangerous animal and monstrous inhabitants to spice up the trip if so inclined. The fourth sheer face requires many DC 15 Strength or Climb Sheer Surfaces checks to scale, with failed checks resulting in (1d6)d6 points of damage from a fall.



Once the party ascends more the three-quarters of the way up Darkweather Mountain, have each PC make a DC 14 Intelligence check. If successful, they feel they are being watched, but are unable to spot their observers. They instead see a shadow move in the depths of the woods, hear the sound of a tumbling stone kicked loose on the slope, or — more puzzling — smell the fresh scent of ozone drifting on the mountain breeze.

These unsettling occurrences are the result of the thunderstruck shadowing the party. The magical guardians are under orders to watch anyone approaching the mountain top, but to remain hidden until it becomes clear that intruders intend to climb the peak. The thunderstruck ambush the party when they close to within 300 feet of the mountain's top ledge or if they decide to camp for the evening on the mountain. If no PC succeeded in the earlier Intelligence check, the party is automatically surprised; otherwise, they are alerted to the advancing thunderstruck with a DC 12 Intelligence check.

**Thunderstruck (1 per PC):** Init +3; Atk shocking touch +3 melee (2d4+1) or lightning strike +4 ranged (3d6); AC 14; HD 4d8; hp 20 each; MV 30' or fly 20'; Act 1d20; SP immune to electrical damage, throw lightning strike (once every 3 rounds; 60' range), vulnerable to water (water-based attacks inflict double damage; normal water inflicts 1d4 damage per pint of volume); SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +0; AL C.

Thunderstruck are the electrocuted mortal remains of humans granted magical animation via ensorcelled lightning. They have scorched skin and clothes, singed hair, and black fingernails. Blue sparks crackle in their empty eye sockets and electricity writhes along their arms and legs. Thunderstruck can fly when required, born aloft on sizzling bolts of lightning as they pursue their quarry. Possessing animal intelligence, thunderstruck carry out their orders to defend Darkweather Mountain to the best of their ability, but can be fooled or misdirected by smarter foes.

## THE BERRY PATCH

The trees thin as the top of the mountain approaches, finally leaving just isolated thickets of pines scattered about. Beyond these small groves, the mountain abruptly levels, leaving a broad, flat ledge of rock lying beneath an 80' high spire of bare stone. Five large cracks mar the spire's face, making it appear as if black scorch marks discolor the naked mountain stone.

At the base of the spire is a crude log cabin, chinked with dirt and bearing tattered clothes and blankets sewn together as both door and window shutters. On the ledge outside

the cabin, growing intermittently among the piles of broken stone and fallen scree, are six verdant bushes. Each bush is roughly six feet in diameter and has rusty red leaves. Clusters of ebony berries bearing purple-crimson highlights grow on the bushes. When an errant mountain breeze rustles the bushes, the sharp smell of sulphur taints the air.

Any PC stepping onto the ledge is immediately detected by the five thunderstruck concealed in the cracks along the spire's face unless invisible or otherwise magically obscured (there is no cover to hide behind aside from the bushes and cabin). Thunder rumbles as the lightning-born sentinels emerge from their hiding places and descend upon the intruders. The thunder alerts Zhru, who is inside the cabin. The sorcerer observes the battle from a hole in the blanket door, determining which PCs might prove the most difficult opponents. He also scoops up an extra handful of Darkweather berries to use as necessary. He then casts both *magic shield* and *fire resistance* on himself in preparation for battle.

If the PCs destroy two or more thunderstruck, Zhru emerges from the cabin. He hurls spells at the party, cursing them for trespassing on his land and attempting to steal his "rightful crop of conquest." Given his prolonged usage of the Darkweather berries, Zhru will die without a constant supply of the ensorcelled fruit and fights to the death to keep the berry bushes under his control. Should any of the bushes be either purposely or accidentally destroyed, the sorcerer goes berserk, gaining an extra 1d16 action die for the rest of the combat.

**Thunderstruck (5):** Init +3; Atk shocking touch +3 melee (2d4+1) or lightning strike +4 ranged (3d6); AC 14; HD 4d8; hp 20 each; MV 30' or fly 20'; Act 1d20; SP immune to electrical damage, throw lightning strike (once every 3 rounds; 60' range), vulnerable to water (water-based attacks inflict double damage; normal water inflicts 1d4 damage per pint of volume); SV Fort +2, Ref +5, Will +0; AL C.

**Zhru the Calamitous:** Init +1; Atk sickle +3 melee (1d5), wizard staff +4 melee (1d4+6), or spell (special); AC 12 (plus *magic shield*); HD 5d4+5; hp 20; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP 5th-level wizard (+7 spell check: *charm person*, *color spray*, *detect magic*, *magic missile*, *magic shield*, *read magic*, *sleep*, *fire resistance*, *wizard staff*, *gust of wind*, *lightning bolt*, and *make potion*), wizard staff (see below), +1d16 Act if berserk, weird sorcery pool (see sidebar); SV Fort +4, Ref +5, Will +7; AL C.

Zhru the Calamitous is a large human male with black hair swept up in outlandish "wings" extending out from the



sides of his head. His goatee is speckled with the dark juice of the eldritch berries and he bears a gnarled wooden staff and iron sickle in his hands.

His staff is a *wizard staff* that acts as a +1 weapon and inflicts 1d4+6 damage on a successful strike. It provides a +2 spell check bonus when casting *magic shield* and a +2 bonus to saving throws (factored into Zhru's stats above). If destroyed, Zhru takes 4d4 points of damage.

## THE CABIN

Zhru's cabin is a small, single room affair. It contains a simple pallet, chair, hearth, and a worktable laden with earthenware jars and bowls, wicker baskets, and various sorcerous tools. One basket holds 1d10 Darkweather berries.

The table also bears the supplies necessary to fashion magic potions. With these supplies, a wizard can create a single potion without expending the required money (DCC RPG, p. 223). He must still acquire any special ingredients needed for the potion type, however.

Beneath a flagstone in the hearth, covered by a layer of ashes, is an iron box (DC 10 Intelligence to notice, but only if the ashes are swept aside). The chest is unlocked and contains 112 cp, 67 sp, and 23 gp. There are also a *potion of giant strength* and a *potion of un-dead control* inside.

## THE DARKWEATHER BERRIES

The black, witch-born fruit of Darkweather Mountain is a potent substance, but its effects can be highly unpredictable. Some people react badly to consuming the berries, becoming tainted by the witch's evil or simply dying from a lethal allergy to the Darkweather fruit.

The first time a spellcaster eats one of the Darkweather berries, he must make a Luck check. Chaotic creatures make the Luck check using a d16; all other creatures make the check normally. If the check is successful, the caster's metabolism accepts the berry and he need not make the Luck check ever again when eating the fruit. If the Luck check fails, the caster's body is malignantly affected by the Darkweather berries and he gains no benefit from eating them. Also, he must roll 1d12 on the table below to determine the consequences of the ill reaction. The die roll is modified by the creature's Luck modifier, if applicable.

**Table 1-1: Darkweather Berry Negative Effects**

| d12 Result | Berry Consumption Effect                                                                |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 or less  | DC 20 Fortitude save or die.                                                            |
| 2-6        | The creature gains a random greater corruption effect.                                  |
| 7-9        | The creature gains a random major corruption effect.                                    |
| 10-11      | The creature gains a random minor corruption effect.                                    |
| 12+        | The creature suffers 1d10 points of temporary ability damage to a random ability score. |

## WEIRD SORCERY POOL

Zhru's constant diet of magical fruit has granted him phenomenal abilities with his magic. He can expend some of this consumed energy to increase his magical talent and to avoid the consequences of magic gone awry. By spending one point from his weird sorcery pool, Zhru can enact one of the following effects each round at the cost of an action:

- Increase his action die for spell checks by +1d.
- Negate the effects of a failed spell check, resulting in no lost spell, misfire, corruption, etc.
- Gain a +1d bonus to any saving throw vs. a magical effect (spell, magical item, etc.).
- Reroll a failed saving throw vs. a magical effect.

When Zhru joins the battle, he has 10 points in his weird sorcery pool. At any time during the battle, so long he can move freely, Zhru can consume the handful of berries he grabbed before leaving the cabin. Doing so is an action that rejuvenates his weird sorcery pool by 1d5+1 points (up to a maximum of 10 points).

Note that these effects are different from those given below. This is because Zhru has consumed the berries daily for over two years and the witch-born fruit has had an irrevocable effect on his metabolism. Should he ever cease to regularly consume the fruit, Zhru would become wracked by horrible physical pain (-3 die penalty to all actions) and die in 3d6 days.

A creature who fails the Luck check must make another check each time he consumes a Darkweather berry. Each subsequent Luck check is made at a +1d penalty, and each failure results in another roll on table 1-1. Once a creature has succeeded in the Luck check, his body has acclimated to the fruit and he never has to make another Luck check again when eating the berries.

Any spellcaster whose body accepts the Darkweather berries gains a +1d bonus to spell checks each day he consumes one of the fruits. The effect wears off after 24 hours or once the caster invokes a number of spells equal to his caster level. Consuming multiple berries during a 24-hour period has no effect. The berries remain fresh for 1d7 days after picking and each bush holds 3d30 berries when first discovered. Picked berries regrow at a rate of 1 per week.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE STORY OF THE CHAINED COFFIN

*Pull up a chair, my friend.*

*I've a story to tell about a mysterious coffin bound in fetters and the outsiders who bore it with them.*

*It's become a legend in these parts, full of terror and delight and things long sleeping that stir anew.*





# INTRODUCTION

*The Chained Coffin* is a *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG adventure designed for six 5<sup>th</sup> level characters. At least some of the party should possess enchanted weapons, as several monsters encountered herein are immune to mundane attacks. In this adventure the PCs face a particularly unusual challenge: transporting the imprisoned, yet still sentient, mortal remains of a cleric of Justicia to a mystical conflux to defeat his former ally now aligned with Chaos. The *Chained Coffin* is a mixture of both dungeon exploration and wilderness journey, one that takes the party into the superstition-rife Shudder Mountains. Once there, the PCs will have to range far and wide to locate their destination, and their search will likely bring them into conflict with some of the Shudder Mountains' nastier inhabitants. Assuming they survive their search, an even more dangerous foe awaits them at their destination.

## BACKGROUND



Three hundred and thirty-three years ago, two priests of Justicia served their goddess with utter devotion. These two men, Zugun and Boak, were as brothers, united by their faith and friendship. They traveled the lands dispensing justice and mercy, accompanied by Boak's young son, loved by father and informal uncle alike.

During their ministrations, the boy became grievously ill, a victim to one of the strange strains of sickness found in the untamed lands on the outskirts of civilization. The sickness swiftly ran its course and, despite their efforts and prayers, neither man could stem its tide. The boy succumbed to the disease and was buried beneath a rocky cairn amongst the wild hills.



The boy's death had a radically different effect on the men. For Zugun, although saddened by the loss of his "nephew," he understood that divine schemes are seldom comprehensible to mortals and accepted the boy's death as part of Justicia's ineffable whims. Boak, grief-stricken and enraged that the merciful goddess would not save his child, found his faith shattered, replaced by a driving hatred for the goddess he revered. Despite Zugun's efforts to console his erstwhile brother, Boak would not be appeased and broke from both his friend and faith. Feeling abandoned by his deity, he began a search for something — anything — that could appease his anger and suture the ragged hole in his once-merciful heart.

Boak's agonizing cries were met by sultry whispers in the night. The Host of Chaos, knowing the broken tools of Law make the best weapons against their former masters, seduced Boak, promising him the power he desired to extract his revenge and strike down justice and mercy wherever encountered. In addition to this promise the Host revealed secret means by which Boak could transform himself into a champion of Chaos and become an unholy amalgamation of the infernal and the mortal. Boak readily agreed and a bargain was struck.

Years passed as Zugun continued to serve his goddess and Boak undertook the initial steps to spread discord and prepare for his transformation. On the eve before the former priest entered the final stage of transmutation, Boak sought out Zugun. But whether driven by the urge to convert him to the cause of Chaos or to gloat of his forthcoming triumph, none can say.

Zugun attempted to turn Boak aside from his evil path, but without success. The servant of Chaos departed the cleric's presence and journeyed to one of the two sites where eldritch forces commingled to power his transformation. Zugun chased after him and a titanic battle was joined as the two clashed at the site. In the course of the battle, Boak was defeated, his body shattered by Zugun's blows and Justicia's power.

However, Zugun's faith would not allow him to slay his former friend outright and when he stayed his hand from delivering a fatal blow, Boak turned Zugun's offered mercy against the cleric, striking him down to the point of death in a surprise assault.

Although triumphant, Boak paid a heavy toll for his victory. The mighty forces unleashed during the battle destroyed the site, foiling Boak's transformation. Furious at being thwarted yet again (albeit indirectly) by Justicia, Boak enacted a horrific revenge on Zugun. Boak imprisoned the cleric in a coffin of orichalcum and bound the casket with chains of adamantine. The coffin, empowered by Chaos, preserved the dying cleric in a state that was not life, death or un-death, but a weird mixture of all three. Imprisoned and undying, Zugun would have eternity to contemplate the crime Boak believed him guilty of: preventing his rightful revenge. Boak secreted the chained coffin away from the world, satisfied by his triumph over his former friend.

With his enemy imprisoned, Boak again devoted himself to achieving his transformation into a champion of Chaos. While one site necessary for his conversion had been destroyed, another remained—the ancient stellar calculator known as the Luhsaal Wheel. Unfortunately, the next conflux of magic needed to power his assumption of championship was centuries away. Boak entreated with his patrons to preserve his life until that time and the Host graciously agreed—but at great cost to both Boak’s body and already fragile sanity. Boak has bided his time and awaits for when he will shed his mortal form and assume that of something far, far worse.



That time has now arrived and as Boak prepares once more for his transmutation, Justicia is at work to foil his plans. Unknown to the party, the goddess has assigned them a role to play in the events about to occur. To this end, the “tomb” of Zugun has been rediscovered and the imprisoned cleric placed in the adventurers’ path.

## ENCOUNTER TABLES

| Area    | Type | Encounter                                            |
|---------|------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-2     | C    | 2 Barrow Bones                                       |
| 2-4     | T    | Ol’ Blackcloak                                       |
| 2-6     | C    | Grizzly Bear                                         |
| 2-6A    | C    | 3 Hill Giants                                        |
| 2-6B    | C    | Ma and Pa Bigginty (Hill Giants)                     |
| 2-7     | C    | 8 Hants                                              |
| 2-9     | C    | The Sin Eater                                        |
| 2-10    | C    | The Bad Lick Beast                                   |
| 3-1     | C    | 1 Young Gray-Back Troll                              |
| 3-2     | T    | Locked & trapped Door                                |
| 3-4     | C    | 2 Gray-Back Trolls                                   |
| Event 3 | C    | Boak, Malucius the Leper, and 4 Type II Chaos Demons |



# STARTING THE ADVENTURE



he judge can introduce *The Chained Coffin* in one of three ways. If one of the PCs is a cleric of Justicia, he receives a divine vision of the location of Zugun’s coffin, either in a dream or while in prayer. The cleric feels compelled to seek out the site; failing to do so results in continued visions and perhaps even divine disfavor until he undertakes the goddess-sent pilgrimage.

The second way is to have the PCs learn of the hidden entrance (1-1) via rumors or tavern talk. Local peasantry discovered the entrance while conducting their daily business, but were too superstitious to meddle with what seems a forgotten tomb. Questioning the peasants provides the PCs with a simple map to the site.

Lastly, the party may simply stumble upon the hidden cave while on an overland journey, either by sheer happenstance or guided by Justicia’s subtle hand. Regardless of how they learn of the cave, its location and the journey to it is as simple or complex as the judge desires. The judge can place the cave wherever he wishes in the campaign world, but an area of rocky hills is assumed in the description below.

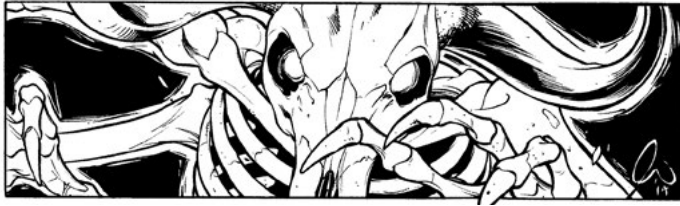
## THE HIDDEN CAVE



fter imprisoning Zugun, Boak interred the chained coffin in a “dead” limestone cavern, a cave whose water source responsible for its creation had long dried up. He then placed two barrow bones, powerful skeletal un-dead, to guard it from trespassers, and finally covered the entrance with a rockslide. Over the last three centuries, natural erosion and other rock falls have cleared away a portion of the cave’s covering, revealing the rough-hewn slab of stone that seals Zugun’s tomb.

**Area 1-1 – Cave Entrance:** *A hill of rocky earth overgrown with yellow grass rises before you. The southern face of the hill shows evidence of past rockslides. Piles of stones ranging in size from tiny pebbles to man-sized boulders lie heaped at the base of the hill. Despite the mass of haphazard stones, a shallow cavity is visible behind the rocky pile. A slab of stone, obviously worked by tools and in a shape suggesting a door, stands at the back of the depression.*

A dwarf or other character knowledgeable of natural stone easily determines that while the cavity behind the piled stones is a natural one, the slab occupying it is not and has been shaped quickly with poor masonry skill. They also identify the rockslide is an old one, but erosion, weather, and natural forces have taken their toll and uncovered the cavity beyond. Clearing the pile can be accomplished with an hour of strenuous work, no check required. However, the sound of digging alerts the barrow bones in area 1-2 and they prepare to ambush the party.



## THE CHAINED COFFIN

**B**eneath the piled stones is Zugun's prison: a human-sized casket crafted from orichalcum, a rare gold alloy (detectable by dwarven noses), and bound with chains of silvery adamantine. A complex, enchanted lock (DC 40 pick lock check to open and immune to *knock* magic) secures the chains. The surface of the casket is inscribed with profane symbols. Any cleric automatically recognizes the symbols are being used to restrain a Lawful entity, much as holy symbols are used against Chaos and the un-holy. A DC 12 Intelligence check allows non-clerics to make the same deduction. If *detect evil* is cast upon the casket, the symbols, but nothing else (including Zugun within) radiate a malignant aura.

Six large stones mostly cover the coffin, having been stacked like cordwood atop its lid. The stones can be removed with ten minute's work by anyone with a Strength of 12 or greater.



If the PCs respond to Zugun's call, he thanks them profusely for finding him and dispatching his guards. He introduces himself with the following:

*My name is Zugun, a devoted servant of the Lady of Law, Justicia. You find me in this sorrowful condition because I stood fast against the machinations of Chaos...and failed. Long ago, perhaps centuries ago, a fellow priest, a man who was like a brother to me, fell to Chaos' charms. I strove to turn him away from Entropy's crooked path, fighting to thwart his plans to turn his body and soul over to the Host of Chaos. To my shame, I did not succeed. My punishment for daring to stand against my former brother, my former friend, Boak, was imprisonment within this gilded casket before you.*

*Boak hid me away in this place, desiring that I remain...in existence...so that I might witness his plans come to fruition. Since the day of my defeat, I've lain here, taunted by my foe and powerless to stop his scheme to become a Champion of Chaos. At long last, I feel my goddess stirring to aid her devoted servant. Your discovery of me is a sign that Justicia's hand is at work, for the time of Boak's change is once again nigh. I believe you have found me because the goddess deems it necessary to oppose Boak once again and to end his plan for good. I beg of you to become my own champions and to aid me in my battle against Boak and the rise of Chaos' power. Many lives hang in the balance should he succeed in ascending to his Championship.*

It is likely that the PCs have additional questions and may be suspicious of Zugun. Use the following as a guide to answer their questions and help allay their suspicions.

**What are you?** "Once a man, but now I do not know. I should have died long ago, but this coffin is now my prison and my preserver. I hope that I'm whatever goodness remains of a man, once his mortal clay is no more."

**Do you wish to be released from the coffin?** "I would like nothing more, but alas, I believe doing so would be my end—at least in this world. Before that occurs, I must see Boak defeated."

Once cleared, the party sees the cavity is actually a narrow cave mouth sealed by the stone slab that has been inexpertly mortared into place with clay and gravel. The stone door bears no decoration. Moving the slab requires a DC 13 Strength check, and warriors and dwarves add their level to their ability rolls in addition to any Strength modifiers. Moving the door reveals a 7' high, 4' wide tunnel that leads slightly upward into the hillside. The air beyond is stale, but breathable.

**Area 1-2 – Tomb Cave:** Show the players Handout A, then read or paraphrase the following:

*The tunnel beyond leads some 20' into the hill before terminating in a natural cavern roughly 35' in diameter. The stone floor is dusty; the stalactites and stalagmites dry and cracked. A pile of stones, each as flat and wide as a tabletop lie in a precarious heap near the cave's far end. From the gaps between these stones, the gleam of golden metal is visible. Suddenly, the sound of rattling bones is heard as large shapes shamble from the gloom, accompanied by the eerie glow of two pairs of burning eyes!*

The shapes are barrow bones advancing to attack. Determine surprise as normal for the party. The two barrow bones have different forms. One is a hulking, four-armed humanoid with an ox-skull head and the second is a bony human torso atop a skeletal, stinger-tipped snake's body.

**Ox-Headed Barrow Bones** (1): Init +3; Atk bone claws +3 melee (1d4+1) or shard blast +4 (see below); AC 15; HD 5d8; hp 38; MV 20'; Act 4d20; SP shard blast (spray of razor-sharp bone fragments affects all targets in a 15' square area up to 30' away; 2d5 damage, DC 14 Fort save for ½ damage; can create 3 blasts per day), half-damage from piercing and slashing weapons, un-dead traits; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +2; AL C.

**Human/Serpent Hybrid Barrow Bones** (1): Init +2 (1d16 initiative die); Atk bone pole arm +4 melee (1d10+2) or sting +4 (see below); AC 15; HD 5d8; hp 38; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP sting attack does 1d4+2 damage and acts as *ray of enfeeblement* if successfully hits (+4 to spell check), half-damage from piercing and slashing weapons, un-dead traits; SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +2; AL C.

The ox-headed guardian initiates combat with a shard blast while its companion slithers forth to engage the party with its pole arm and tail stinger. The un-dead guardians fight until destroyed, and cannot leave the cave if the party flees the battle.

Once the barrow bones are defeated, the party hears a dry, whispery voice coming from the pile of stones at the rear of the cave. "Is someone there? Have I finally been found after these many years?" the voice asks. "Praise unto Justicia!" the dusty, hoarse voice proclaims.



**How do you know Boak is even still alive?** “He comes to me, speaking in my mind and taunting me. He’s done so for centuries. Boak and I are somehow linked, but whether by the magic of this prison, our friendship from long ago, or by his own infernal power, I do not know. I can still feel him out there in the world, like the phantom pain of a severed limb. He persists, and his power waxes stronger each day.”

**Where is Boak now?** “I do not know for certain; our link does not function in that way. I only know he still lives in some manner.”

**What do you want from us?** “I must go to where Boak will complete his transformation into a Champion of Chaos, a horrid mixture of mortal and the entropic. Only one place remains that has the power to complete his change, an ancient site known as the Luhsaal Wheel. Bring me there and help me defeat Boak. I can fight him if near to him, but I require your physical bodies, skill at arms, and magic to do so.

**What is the Luhsaal Wheel?** “It was a stellar calculator, an observatory to chart the path of the moon known as Luhsaal, which sages believed broke apart and burned before the beginning of recorded history, destroying the very civilization that constructed the Wheel. Legends say that the Wheel still draws upon that dead moon’s celestial energy, and it is this energy that Boak craves to power his change.”

**Where is the Luhsaal Wheel?** “Its precise location is unknown, so we must search for it. However, our hunt will not be a completely blind one. It is believed that the Luhsaal Wheel lies in center of the Shudder Mountains, hidden in one of the valleys known by the local people as the Deep Hollows.”

**What’s in it for us?** “Firstly, should Boak become a Chaos champion, many will die once he unleashes his fury. Perhaps you or those you love will perish as he lays waste to the world he hates. If even one of you believes in the righteousness of Law, you know that Chaos cannot be allowed a firmer grip on the multiverse. For those of you who care little for the Cosmic Struggle, know that it is said a fortune in gemstones was used in the construction of the Luhsaal Wheel. Once Boak is defeated, those jewels will be ripe for the plucking.”

**How long before Boak transforms?** “Boak last attempted the transformation during the time known as the Black Conflux, a period when the demon-haunted moon of Luhsaal held prominence in the sky. It is likely that this occasion will once again mark the time of this transition. [Note: the exact time remaining before the Black Conflux is dependent on how far away Zugun’s tomb is from the Shudder Mountains, as determined by the judge. The Conflux occurs in a number of days equal to the time required to travel there plus seven days.]

**How can we trust you?** “I understand your suspicions. I myself would doubt words uttered by a man who should be dead and imprisoned in such a manner. I



can only ask that you believe me, for the fate of many lives hangs in the balance otherwise. However, if you cannot make this leap of faith, my name and my accomplishments in life are on record in the *Annals of the Faithful*, a history of Justicia’s chosen servants. Any major temple dedicated to the goddess will have a copy of those records and can attest that Zugun died—or nearly died—in the service of goodness and Law.”

Hopefully, the PCs accept Zugun’s tale as the truth it is and agree to help defeat Boak. Should they abandon the coffin and its inhabitant, Boak achieves his transformation and his campaign of evil begins. Many lives are lost and it is likely the PCs will have to face Boak, but the details of such a conflict are beyond this adventure. If the PCs decide to confirm Zugun’s mortal identity before accepting, it takes them 1d3 days to locate a temple of Justicia that holds the *Annals*. If they only agree to help Zugun after getting confirmation, deduct the time spent from the number of days remaining before the Black Conflux (see above).

## A NOTE ON ZUGUN



Zugun can freely communicate with the PCs from inside the chained coffin, but cannot see events occurring outside of his metal prison, nor move under his own power, making him dependent on the PCs for information and transportation. He gives the party advice as best he can, but Zugun is by no means omniscient and just prone to making mistakes as anyone. Zugun is lawful and a devout priest of Justicia, and the judge should portray him as such. During the journey to confront Boak, Zugun attempts to learn as much as he can about his benefactors, asking them questions regarding their religious beliefs, family, lives prior to adventure, etc. These questions are seemingly innocent conversation, but Zugun is attempting to determine which member of the group will best serve as Justicia’s agent during the final battle (see Event 3 below).

Due to his imprisonment and magical binding, Zugun cannot cast spells to aid the party. However, Zugun believes he may be able to call upon Justicia’s divine aid once—likely at the cost of his own existence—and will do so during the confrontation with Boak.

The judge should make every effort to make Zugun a true member of the party and avoid him becoming just a voice inside a box. Unable to directly assist the party with spells or in combat, it is very easy to forget about the cleric until the adventure’s climax. Zugun should be a memorable NPC, one the PCs and players recall long after their adventures in the Shudder Mountains conclude.



# THE JOURNEY TO THE MOUNTAINS



nce the PCs agree to Zugun's request, there is the matter of transporting the Chained Coffin with them. Although the casket appears heavy, orichalcum is a very light metal and Zugun's own desiccated remains do not weigh much. In total, the Coffin weighs 150 lbs. and four people can carry the casket without penalties to their speed. Two PCs can tote the Coffin at a -5' speed penalty.

Although carrying the Coffin is one option, it's best if the PCs make other arrangements to transport it, especially if they plan to travel to the Shudder Mountains on horseback. The Coffin will fit in a cart or wagon, and this is the easiest way to get it to Bent Pine. Once there, however, the roads rapidly degrade in quality, and eventually disappear completely, making it impossible to travel with wheeled conveyances. The Shudfolk of Bent Pine, should they learn of the party's intent to travel into the Deep Hollows with a heavy load, suggest the PCs purchase a sledge, which is typically used to haul heavy loads in the mountains. A sledge in Bent Pine costs 10 gp. The other option is for the PCs to construct a travois out of wood and rope, and drag the Coffin behind a mount. Crafting a travois requires a DC 5 Agility check by any PC with outdoorsman experience.

The PCs are likely to have never visited the Shudder Mountains and may be at a loss as to where to begin their search. A DC 8 Intelligence check recalls that the Deep Hollows lie roughly halfway along the range's northeast by southwest expanse and that the town of Bent Pine is the closest settlement to that mysterious region. Depending on where the judge decides to place Zugun's cave in his campaign world, the journey to Bent Pine may be a matter of days or weeks and can be as eventful or as simple as he desires. Unless the judge wishes to introduce some encounters along the way (random monster attacks, bandits mistaking the Coffin as precious cargo, etc.) the PCs reach Bent Pine without incident and their search for the Luhsaal Wheel begins in earnest. Bent Pine serves as the party's introduction to unique customs of the Shudder Mountains' natives, the Shudfolk, and provides a place to acquire supplies and, most importantly, information about the Deep Hollows.

## THE SHUDFOLK



he residents of the Shudder Mountains are a hardy, self-sufficient race of humans. Known as "Shudfolk" both among themselves and by outsiders, the mountain people are a proud, if superstitious breed. Shudfolk in general don't deal much with those who live beyond their secluded valleys, but do occasionally provide timber and regional crafts to outside communities.

The Shudfolk take great pride in their ancestry, and many can trace their family trees back ten or more generations. Due to their isolation, almost all the Shudfolk are related in

some manner, either by blood or marriage, and an outsider who offends one individual might easily find himself unwelcome by others after insulting a "second cousin, twice removed on my mother's side."

Shudfolk have an attitude of cautious friendliness when dealing with newcomers to the mountains. They are always polite, if aloof when first encountered, but that initial reception can easily change depending on the outsider's actions and/or class.

Outsiders who conduct themselves in a courteous manner are quickly welcomed by the Shudfolk. A PC who minds his manners, compliments a farmer on his crops, praises a cook's food, offers to chop wood for the supper fire, or contributes a bit of food to a shared meal will be treated like extended family by the Shudfolk. On the other hand, a rude outsider who condescendingly treats the Shudfolk like backwoods louts will be unwelcome in their homes and communities, likely being strongly encouraged not to "let the sun go down on them around these parts."

Shudfolk are notoriously suspicious of practitioners of magic, who they call "conjure-men" or "witches." Wizards and elves with obvious corruption encounter much cooler responses when dealing with the Shudfolk, and many of the mountain people will throw forked fingers in their direction or sprinkle salt in a wizard's footprints after he passes in an effort to ward off baleful magic.

Lawful (and some neutral) clergy, on the other hand, are greatly respected by the Shudfolk, and are welcomed immediately into their homes and business. A charismatic lawful cleric who vouches for his wizard companion can make the Shudfolk accept the sorcerer, albeit somewhat grudgingly.

## BENT PINE



ent Pine is a small trade outpost rather than true village. Erected around a copse of wind-lashed pine trees (from which the settlement gets its name), Bent Pine is comprised of only a dozen buildings, including a smithy, a general store, lumber yard, tavern, and stable, all of log construction and roofed with sod. A plank building, dressed in clapboard and whitewashed, occupies the center of the community. This structure is a temple of the Sovereign.

Bent Pine is almost completely inhabited by Shudfolk, and the settlement serves as a meeting place between their mountain-born culture and traders arriving from outside the region. As such, the residents are used to dealing with outsiders and the PCs arrival in town won't draw much interest—provided Zugun's coffin isn't too obviously displayed when they arrive. Given the superstitious nature of the Shudfolk, arriving in Bent Pine with a bound casket covered in profane symbols won't endear the party to the locals and earns the PCs a cold reception. Unless the party offers a reasonable explanation (perhaps combined with a

DC 12 Personality check), the residents hint strongly that they should be on their way posthaste and not return.



Provided they remain in good standing with the Shudfolk, the PCs can provision themselves with food, water, mounts, and other common items in Bent Pine at normal prices. No true inn exists at the outpost, but PCs that endear themselves to the locals with good manners are invited to spend a night or two at the home of one of the residents. A party that doesn't conduct themselves well enough to be invited into a home can still bed down for the night in the stable's hayloft for 1 sp each.

Bent Pine is a prime location to gather information about the Deep Hollows and any PC spending time at the tavern, general store, stable or temple will likely overhear one or more rumors as determined by the judge (see below).

## EVENT 1: MUSIC IN THE MOUNTAINS

**A**t some point prior the PCs' entry into the Deep Hollows, whether while visiting the tavern in Bent Pine or while staying or visiting at one of the Shudfolk's homes, the following event occurs:

*One of the locals, a sturdy-looking young man dressed in homespun, produces a battered fiddle from a gunny sack. He plucks the strings a few times, bending his ear close to the instrument to gauge its pitch. Satisfied by the results, he draws the bow across the strings, plunging into a song as old as the mountains themselves. He sings in a rich baritone voice.*

### **Lonely Mountain Hearts**

*Come meet me, my dear, when the wind shakes the pines,  
When the hoot owl screeches and the vanished moon shines.  
Far off in the Deep Hollows, a lonely shadow thrown,  
I'm a heart-sick stranger in the wilds, all alone.*

*Tarry not by the crossroads where the compacts are made.  
Nor pause in the places called home by the shades.  
Speak not to the pardoner; unto him give no sins.  
I wait for you, darling, where the river's run begins.*

*Like the old bridge above me, our love spans the space.  
I dream of your presence, your sweetness, your face.  
Leave me not to suffer in the Deep Hollows, alone;  
A lost, foot-sore wanderer who craves your love like a home.*

The Shudfolk have a long tradition of music-making and often pass the time playing music and singing. Their songs are traditional ones taught from one generation to the next. Many of these songs' original meanings have been forgotten, but the music and lyrics themselves endure. The singer's song is a traditional Shudfolk tune and, if questioned about it or its lyrics, he can only attest that it's a song passed down to him by his father, who learned it from his daddy, in turn. No one is aware the lyrics hint at the location of the Luhsaal Wheel. PCs who note the song's lyrics



have a greater chance of discovering the ancient site with a minimum of blind wandering in the Deep Hollows.

## RUMORS IN THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS

PCs may wish to gather information about the Deep Hollows before venturing into the mountains. They can do this in Bent Pine or when visiting a Shudfolk farm. If the PCs have a good reputation amongst the Shudfolk, each PC automatically learns a random rumor from the list below. Subsequent efforts to learn more about the Deep Hollows will reward additional rumors to each PC making the effort, at the judge's discretion. PCs who've earned the ire of the natives will either be unable to get the Shudfolk to talk to them or must make a DC 15 Personality check to pry a scrap of information from one of the mountain people (judge's choice).

All the following rumors are true, but the judge may add false rumors or slightly obscure the validity of those provided should he desire. However, given the time limit the PCs have to stop Boak, the judge is encouraged to limit such false leads to only one or two known by the party, in total, to prevent too much of a time-killing wild goose chase by the characters.



## RUMOR TABLE

### d12 Rumor Learned

- 1 There are three valleys in the Deep Hollows: Claw Hollow to the north, Bad Lick Hollow to the west, and Spook Hollow to the south-west. Nobody knows where they got their names.
- 2 The ruins of an old mill mark the start of the Deep Hollows. Once you pass that, you best be wary. There are a lot of things in the Hollows that'll eat you alive or steal your soul!
- 3 Granny Huldah lives in Claw Hollow. Most folk don't truck with her unless they need a healer or a charm, but everyone claims she knows more about the Deep Hollows than anyone living around these parts.
- 4 There are the remains of an old roadway not far from where the three rivers meet in the Deep Hollows. It's mostly worn away and only a few flagstones remain, but you can still see where two roads crossed.
- 5 My great-great-great-great grandfather claimed there's a tremendous stone bridge in the Deep Hollows. It's supposedly ancient and no one knows who built it.
- 6 A clan of giants live in the Deep Hollows, dwelling in a monstrous cabin located up in the southern foothills near Spook Hollow.
- 7 Folks say there a sin eater who lives out in the swamps of Bad Lick Hollow. Conjure-men and witches come to seek him out and he takes away their sins, cleansing their bodies and souls of sorcery's foulness.
- 8 Squire Grady knew more about the Deep Hollows than any man ever born. It's a shame he's been dead these past forty years. He lived in a cabin up along Spook Hollow. Maybe he left something behind that could help?
- 9 Beware of Ol' Blackcloak who walks the Deep Hollows after the sun goes down. He's a devil man looking to claim souls.
- 10 Something evil lives out the Deep Hollows. Nobody knows what it is, but if you hear something big flying overhead in the night or see a pair of burning eyes staring down at you from the pines, you've just met the Bad Lick Beast.
- 11 Years ago, there was a balladeer that walked the Deep Hollows, keeping evil in check. It's said he owned a silver-stringed fiddle capable of putting down evil. The balladeer is buried somewhere in the Deep Hollows.
- 12 There has been troubling signs that trolls are living in the river valleys. Nobody's seen the beasts—and survived, anyway—but hairs, scat, and other evidence have been discovered along the river banks.

## THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS



he Shudder Mountains is an ancient range of peaks and forested foothills broken up by river valleys called "hollows" by the Shudfolk. Innumerable creeks wind their way through the deciduous and coniferous forests that grow in the valleys and the whole region is a contrast of heartbreaking beauty and sinister gloom. Travelers venturing through the dark shadows of the forest find their brooding surroundings suddenly broken by a meadow of wildflowers. And the tremendous thunderstorms that plague the region dissolve abruptly to reveal the vista of a spectacular sunset retreating behind the worn mountain tops.



Travelers in the region should not allow this beauty to lull them into a sense of complacency, however, as a number of dangerous creatures prowl the Shudder Mountains. Some of these threats are natural—predatory animals, flash floods, and rockslides await the unwary—but monstrous occupants also pose a threat. While in the Deep Hollows, the judge should check three times every 24 hours to determine if a random encounter occurs. Two rolls are made during daylight hours and a third at night. On a roll of 1-2 on d6, an encounter occurs. Use the table below to determine the nature of the encounter.

### SHUDDER MOUNTAIN RANDOM ENCOUNTER TABLE

#### d8 Encounter or Event

- 1 Dire Wolf (1) with 2d6 Common Wolves
- 2 1d2 Hill Giants
- 3 Flash Flood/ Rockslide
- 4 1d4 Hants
- 5 2d6 Wild Razorback Hogs
- 6 1d4 Giant Mountain Rattlers
- 7 1 Gray-Back Troll
- 8 1 Grizzly Bear

### RANDOM ENCOUNTER NOTES

**Dire Wolf:** Init +2; Atk bite +6 melee (1d8+1); AC 14; HD 4d8+2; hp 20; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +2; AL N.

**Wolf:** Init +2; Atk bite +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +0; AL N.

**Hill Giants:** See area 2-6A below.

**Flash flood/rockslide:** Depending on if the party is travel-

ing near one of the Hollow's rivers or in the forested foothills above, a natural hazard afflicts them. Heavy rains at higher elevations cause a flash flood, raising water levels and filling the rivers with dangerous debris, or loose rocks give way as the PCs pass by. Regardless of the catastrophe, each PC must make a Luck check to avoid being caught in the avalanche/enveloped by the cascade. A failed check inflicts 2d6 damage (DC 10 Fort save for ½ damage). If the PC(s) responsible for transporting Zugun's coffin fail the Luck check, the chained casket is swept away by the rush, but comes to rest some distance away. It can be recovered, but doing so delays the party 1d3 hours and reduces the distance they can travel that day by the same number of hexes.

**Hants:** See area 2-7 below.

**Wild Razorback Hogs:** Init +0; Atk gore +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP none; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; AL N.

**Giant Mountain Rattlers:** as per *Giant Viper* (DCC RPG rulebook p. 428). Non-spitting variety.

**Gray-Back Trolls:** see area 3-4 below.

**Grizzly Bear:** Init +1; Atk bite +4 melee (1d6+1) or claws +3 melee (1d6); AC 16; HD 4d10; hp 22; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP if both claw attacks strike a target, the bear "hugs" for an additional 2d6 damage; SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2; AL N.

## THE DEEP HOLLOW

Once the PCs depart Bent Pines, they have seven days to locate the Luhsaal Wheel before the Black Conflux. If they choose to confirm Zugun's identity by locating a temple to Justicia, they have less time to locate the Wheel (deduct the time taken to confirm Zugun's story from the seven days assumed above). PCs may possess a vague idea of what lies in the Deep Hollows from the rumors they've heard, but, barring spells such as *locate object*, they'll have to conduct a search of the valleys to discover the location of the Wheel. This search requires them to explore the Deep Hollows, risking randomly encountered hazards as well as the specifically-located ones.

In general, PCs can cover up to 16 miles (8 hexes) per day, assuming they're mounted on horse or mule. This reduced movement rate accounts for the lack of roads, dense stands of trees, hilly terrain, and the burden of supplies and Zugun's coffin. If circumstances deprive the party of their mounts, their movement is reduced to 12 miles (6 hexes) per day. Forced marches, either on foot or mounted, are possible as per the rules on p. 308 of the DCC RPG rulebook.

The Shudder Mountains themselves are steep and treacherous, and the party is best served by keeping to the river valleys and foothills. If the party insists on crossing into mountain terrain (indicated on the map), every PC must make a Luck check for each hex traveled. A failed check indicates some calamity has occurred. Possible catastrophes include loss of a mount, slipping off a steep trail (DC 12 Ref

save or suffer 3d6 damage from a fall), encountering an impassible rockslide, or other event of the judge's choosing.

Wise PCs will map as they travel, to avoid becoming lost or to plan their routes. While traveling through the Deep Hollows, the PCs can see every hex adjacent to their position, allowing them to determine the surrounding terrain and spot sites of interest. The party usually (but see areas 2-2 and 2-8 below) notices a site of interest (those indicated on the map and in the descriptions below) when in an adjacent hex, but the details of the site require closer inspection to discern. When spotted from afar, the judge should vaguely describe what they see (a column of rising smoke from a chimney, plots of cultivated land, unnatural straight lines amidst Nature's wildness, or similar hints) and allow the party to investigate further as they desire.

## EVENT 2: WIND IN THE NIGHT



his event occurs on either the second night the PCs are camped outdoors in the Deep Hollows or the first time a nightly random encounter occurs.

*The sounds of the night suddenly silence as the crickets halt their chorus and a screech owl's cry abruptly quiets. A moment later, a gust of wind blows past you, shaking the pines and rustling the mountain grass like a gale storm. Above the wail of the wind, you faintly hear the sound of great wings beating in the night sky.*



This event is the product of the Bad Lick Beast (see area 2-10 below) hunting the night. Its curiosity piqued by the party, it dives low above their camp to investigate the new-comers. Although not yet hungry, it has marked them as potential prey. The Beast remains just out of infravision range, but a successful DC 15 Intelligence check allows a character to get a momentary glimpse of a great winged creature momentarily silhouetted against the moon. It vanishes before further details can be discerned.

The judge may run variations of this event throughout the course of the party's time in the Shudder Mountains. The Beast may fly-by the party again after dark or the PCs might catch a glimpse of a pair of burning orange eyes observing them from high in the trees or atop a mountain ridge. Despite these observations, the party should not encounter the Beast until they either reach the Bad Lick Bridge (area 2-10) or after they defeat Boak and are departing the mountains (should the judge want to challenge them one last time).

**Area 2-1 - Shudfolk Farm:** In a large clearing amidst the trees stands a weather-worn log cabin and a handful of smaller outbuildings. Beyond the home are a number of tiered fields carved into the hillside, each containing a growing crop of beans, corn, and wheat.



This rustic farm is occupied by a family of Shudfolk consisting of 2d6 members. They are cautiously polite to the PCs if the party approaches openly, and will warm up to visitors displaying good manners. Polite PCs will be invited to share a meal with the family, allowing them to learn a rumor or two, gain some information about the lay of the land, and be sent off with a packed home-cooked meal. Rude or aggressive PCs will be bluntly asked to leave the property and word of their impoliteness quickly spreads to surrounding farms, making it difficult for them to find respite amongst the settled parts of the Shudder Mountains. If combat occurs, treat the Shudfolk as Peasants (*DCC RPG* rulebook p. 434).

The farmers can serve as replacement PCs should one or more perish during the adventure. Young Shudfolk, having heard of the PCs' presence, seek them out to join their ranks. These replacements may be zero-level PCs, 1<sup>st</sup> or even 2<sup>nd</sup> level adventurers, depending on the whims of the judge and the challenge the player(s) want to undertake.

**Area 2-2 - The Fiddler's Grave:** Due to the small size of the headstone and the surrounding underbrush, a DC 8 Intelligence check is required to spot this site while traveling through the hex. It is impossible to see from adjacent hexes.

*A simple slab of limestone is embedded vertically in the ground near the edge of a pleasant mountain meadow. Kudzu is twined around the stone, nearly hiding it from sight. Several words, largely eroded by the rains, are inscribed in the rock.*

This is the grave of a solitary balladeer, one who spent his life wandering the Shudder Mountains, learning its secrets and songs, and fighting the forces of evil in the Deep Hollows. When he died, he was laid to rest in the land he loved. The faded inscription on his tombstone reads: "Here lies Japthion of the Fiddle, who died helping the mountain people he loved. Never one to back down from a fight against evil, we Shudfolk owe him more than we can ever repay."



Any PC making a successful Luck check faintly hears soft music playing on the winds, as if a fiddler were playing his instrument far away. A cleric or other character that has proven himself a dedicated foe against Chaos automatically hears the music. In addition, the PC feels a touch on his shoulder, as if a friend had gently placed a supportive hand there. There is no one in sight, but the chosen PC hears a soft, tired voice whisper in his ear, saying, "Go ahead, it's alright. You 'uns need it more than I do now. Use her well."

Any PC who suggests digging up the grave gets an odd feeling as if the occupant wouldn't mind. An hour's work is required to unearth the remains of a pine casket buried in the grave. Inside is the skeleton of a human male wrapped in scraps of decayed shroud and clasping an oilskin-wrapped object in its hands. The bundle contains a finely-made fiddle strung with tarnished silver strings.

The fiddle is magic. Anyone who successfully makes a DC 8 Agility check can play the instrument and invoke its pow-

er. The fiddle has the power to cast *banish* with a +5 bonus (or the player's own, whichever is higher) to the fiddler's spell check once per day when played. The instrument's user need not be a spellcaster to invoke its power. Spellcasters use their normal class spell check die plus modifiers when playing the fiddle; non-spellcasters roll a d10 as per p. 106 in the *DCC RPG* rulebook, and thieves may substitute their *cast spell from a scroll* die if greater than d10. The *banish* power only affects supernatural creatures; mundane ones are unaffected by the fiddle. Also, as a last ditch effort, the fiddle can be used as a club to strike supernatural enemies. When used in this manner, the fiddle is destroyed on a successful strike, but does 1d6 damage and automatically critically hits. The attacker uses his normal critical die, but on Crit Table V, to resolve the strike. Using the fiddle as a weapon does not impart the usual -1 die penalty for using an untrained weapon.

**Area 2-3 - Ruined Mill:** *The ruined foundation of a long-destroyed building crouches by the river like a beaten dog. Time and floods have carried most of the building's stones away, but judging from the few that remain and its proximity to the river, this was likely once a grist mill.*

Generations ago, the Shudfolk constructed a mill on this site to grind their meal, but the Biggintys of that time laid siege to the building and destroyed it. The ruins now serve only as a marker. West of here begins the Deep Hollows. There is nothing of interest to be found in the ruins.

**Area 2-4 - The Crossroads:** *A path of large paving stones slowly emerges from the grassy meadows of the valley floor, gradually revealing itself to be the remnants of an ancient roadway. A hundred feet ahead of you, the old road meets another, forming a crossroads of derelict highways deep in the mountain valleys. The four roads seem to have once led roughly east and west, and north and southwest, but now only a short length of each remains.*

Each road only extends roughly a hundred feet in the indicated directions before dissolving into loose paving stones that eventually end, victims of age and flooding. Each road is equally worn and provides no insight as to which hollow may contain the Wheel.

These crossroads are frequented by a demon known as "Ol' Blackcloak" by the Shudfolk. He conducts his infernal business here, trading payment for petitioners' souls. Ol' Blackcloak has a flair for the dramatic and can sense if visitors have arrived seeking him or merely lost their way. If the PCs have come specifically seeking Ol' Blackcloak, they must await nightfall before he appears, stepping out of the darkness onto the crossroads like an actor emerging on stage. If the party has discovered the crossroads by chance and are unaware of its supernatural inhabitant, the PCs suddenly look around to find Ol' Blackcloak standing at the junction at a place that was empty moments ago. With a smile on his devilishly handsome face, the demon asks, "Are you gentles looking for something?"

Ol' Blackcloak appears to be a human male with coal-black hair with a prominent widow's peak and a pointed goatee. His flesh is ruddy, almost red, in color, and his eyebrows



meet above the bridge of his nose. He dresses in an elegant black doublet and hose, and wears a voluminous cloak made from black cat fur over his shoulders. A glance at his feet notices that one of his feet is a human foot encased in a high black boot and the other the cloven hoof of a goat.

The demon politely inquires the party's purpose at the crossroads, keeping a sharp eye out for an opening to propose his business. Ol' Blackcloak has a singular goal: to buy the souls of mortals seeking assistance, power, or riches, and thereby damn the greedy or gullible for eternity. Should the PCs decline to treat with the demon or ignore him, Ol' Blackcloak can preternaturally perceive their desires and suggests he can help them in their search for the Wheel or grant them an advantage over Boak in the upcoming conflict. If the party still refuses to speak with him, Ol' Blackcloak vanishes in a puff of brimstone smoke, but he might return in the future (see below).

However, if the party gives Ol' Blackcloak even the smallest opportunity to make his pitch, he immediately offers to provide any and all the PCs what they desire for the smallest of prices: their souls. If the PCs agree to sell their souls in return for a reward, Ol' Blackcloak produces a parchment contract from within the folds of his cloak and asks the character(s) to sign in blood. Once the deal is completed, the PC receives his request. See the sidebar "The Selling of Souls" for details on this deal.

If Zugun is present, he steadfastly argues that the party not deal with the demon, telling them they cannot risk their mortal souls on any account. Ol' Blackcloak allows the priest his say before turning to the party and shrugging. "You all have a very noisy coffin there, but are you truly going to listen to the dead man in the box? Seems to me a man in that predicament isn't the wisest of folks and shouldn't be giving advice to fine breathing people like yourselves."

## THE SELLING OF SOULS



Ol' Blackcloak can call upon infernal powers to grant a mortal nearly any wish he desires within reason. Grandiose desires such as godhood, or those that would make the ultimate collection of the seller's soul difficult (immortality, immunity to all damage, disease, spells, etc.) are not within his power. Aside from these limitations (and any others the judge wishes to impart), Ol' Blackcloak can perform wonders, up to and including increasing a PC's level, boosting a single ability to 18, and the like. Minor requests such as land, magical items, spells, etc. are readily given, as are simple requests such as whisking the petitioner away to the Wheel or revealing its location. In return, the seller agrees to surrender his soul to Ol' Blackcloak at either the time of his death or once thirty years have elapsed, whichever occurs first. However, dealing with demons courts a number of hazards.

The first danger is that, while Ol' Blackcloak is obliged to fulfill the seller's desire, he's only bound by the letter of the law and not its intent. A PC desiring a powerful magical weapon without otherwise specifying the details might be given a sword that only works under certain conditions (at night, underwater, when wielded in the left hand, etc.). Those desiring a boost in an ability score may be granted it, but at the cost of reducing other abilities to cover the increase. A PC wishing to be taken to the Wheel would be transported—alone, leaving him stranded there far from his comrades, who have no idea where to find him. Unless the seller takes painstaking efforts to establish the parameters of what he'll receive, devious judges can have a field day with fulfilling their desires.

The second danger is that the contract the PC signs is of infernal origin and therefore subject to the laws of that place, not the mortal's home world. Some players may be prone to metagaming, thinking nothing of selling their PC's souls as they believe the campaign may not last long enough in game time to cause them concern. These metagamers are in for a shock. A PC who asks to read the contract may make a DC 16 Intelligence check (the contract is very convoluted) to notice that the thirty-year payment clause is subject to passage of time in the Hells, not the material plane. A DC 12 Intelligence check (DC 6 for spellcasters) allows the character to recall that time passes at a much different rate in the Hells and that thirty years there may be much shorter than thirty years on the material plane. In fact, the supposed "thirty years" elapses after only 2d10 weeks on the material plane, after which Ol' Blackcloak and other demonic assistants come calling to collect their due. They won't be denied and, if fought off initially, return again and again in greater numbers until the debtor is slain and his soul collected.

Thirdly, any PC who sells his soul automatically acquires a noticeable form of corruption. The judge should pick or determine randomly a corruption result from the Corruption tables (*DCC RPG* p. 116-119) based on the potency of the gift the seller receives. A small gift (transport to the Wheel or knowledge of its location) would result in a minor form of corruption, while powerful magical items, ability or level increase, or similar rewards would cause greater corruption. NPCs familiar with demonic bargains automatically identify the PC as one who's dealt with devilry if they see this corruption trait present on the character.

Lastly, clergy who serve Lawful or Neutral deities discover their gods are most displeased with them bargaining away the most precious gift they've been given. These clerics suffer a *permanent* -10 penalty to all spell checks. This penalty can only be removed by successfully completing a quest to negate the deal (as determined by the judge) or by renouncing their god and becoming the cleric of a Chaotic power.

Should the PCs attack Ol' Blackcloak, he vanishes from the crossroads on his initiative count. Use the following stats if the PCs get in a few attacks before he disappears or if he reappears at a later date. Attacking the demon earns the party Ol' Blackcloak's enmity and he will seek revenge at a time they least expect it. Despite his regular presence here, he is not bound to the crossroads and can travel freely across the multiverse to pursue his enemies.

**Ol' Blackcloak (Type V demon):** Init +5; Atk claw +10 melee (1d12+10); AC 23; HD 15d12; hp 80; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP Type V demon traits; stop time, buy soul; SV Fort +15, Ref +12, Will +15; AL C.

Note that if the PCs initially rebuff Ol' Blackcloak's offers, he can return later in the adventure to proposition the party again. He might reappear if the PCs are desperate to locate the Wheel, outnumbered by enemies, or in danger of immediate death. The demon has the power to briefly halt time, freezing events while he makes his pitch, and then restarting time once business is concluded. Thus, a PC knocked from the Bad Lick Bridge and plummeting to his death may find himself paused in mid-air and Ol' Blackcloak standing aloft beside him, asking if he'd like to reconsider a deal.

**Area 2-5 - Granny Huldah's Place:** *A crude cabin of rough-hewn logs stands in a small, hillside clearing, its wooden sides and split-shingled roof covered with patches of pale green moss. The structure rests atop several 5' high posts, making it proof against dangerous wildlife. A small garden grows beside the cabin. Numerous animal skulls, bleached by the sun and weatherworn, dangle from nearby tree branches or stand impaled on tall stakes around the cabin.*

This is the home of Granny Huldah, Witch of the Shudder Mountains. Generally shunned by the Shudfolk, they only occasionally seek out her services to cure sickness or procure one of her charms.

Granny Huldah notices the PCs' arrival once they reach the clearing, alerted by the skulls that keep watch over her yard. The cabin door opens, revealing a tall, gaunt woman garbed in a shapeless burlap dress. Dark, wooly hair, like that of a ram, covers her arms and legs, and stringy, dirty hair obscures her face. The smell of body odor, strange herbs, and other unidentifiable substances wafts from the open cabin door. A large razorback with startling human-like eyes grunts at Granny Huldah's feet, watching the party.

**Granny Huldah:** Init -2; Atk claw -2 melee (1d4-1) or curse (DC 16 Will save; see DCC RPG rulebook p. 434) or spell; AC 9; HD 3d6; hp 14; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP hog familiar (see below), curse, spells (+8 spell check) ; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +8; AL C.

Spells known: *charm person, chill touch, demon summoning, sleep, ray of enfeeblement, darkness, paralysis, and second sight.*

**Anse, Hog Familiar:** Init +0; Atk gore +3 melee (1d6+1); AC 14; HD 4d8; hp 20; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +5, Ref +2, Will +2; AL C

Granny Huldah has walked the Deep Hollows for decades and knows more



of their secrets than any living soul. Ol' Blackcloak is her patron and she is a devoted servant. Her familiar is a wild razorback hog of prodigious size and ferocity that fights to defend the old crone. Should Granny Huldah be slain, her spirit occupies Anse's body and she attempts to flee.

If the PCs befriend Granny Huldah, she proves to be a valuable source of information to assist their search for the Wheel. Although she does not know of its precise location, she knows the location of the bridge in the Deep Hollows (area 2-10) and suspects it will guide the PCs in their explorations. However, winning Granny Huldah over is not a simple task.

Granny Huldah agrees to assist the party in their search if they provide her with a giant's fingernail. She's been brewing potions and desires one or more giant cuticles for her recipes. In return for one, she offers to give them the location of a place that could guide them on their search. If the party agrees, Granny Huldah provides them with directions to the Bigginty's farm, telling them they'll find plenty of giant hands to choose from there.

If the party threatens Granny Huldah or behaves rudely, she pretends to be cowed by their bravado and begs their forgiveness. Apologizing, Huldah tells the PCs that while she can't help them, she knows someone who can. All they need to do is travel to the old crossroads near where the three rivers converge and, after dark, they'll find a man who knows much more than she does. Granny Huldah expects the PCs to get in over their heads dealing with Ol' Blackcloak, or at the very least, appease her patron with more potential clients.

Granny Huldah's cabin contains rudimentary furnishings for both her and her hog, and an eclectic collection of herbs, rocks, animal parts, and other weird substances found in the Shudder Mountain environs. These materials are an important part of her witchcraft and curse-making, but of little use and no value to non-witches (unless the judge decides otherwise).

**Area 2-6 - The Bigginty's Farm:** *Read or paraphrase the following: A wide, well-trodden trail leads up the hillside, threading its way past many toppled trees before terminating in a large clearing. A tremendous log cabin crafted from trees hundreds of years old occupies the middle of cleared patch. A door twice the size of a man stands at the front of the building, flanked by oversized windows covered with roughly-tanned animal hides. Numerous divots pockmark the clearing and it takes but a moment to realize they are all that remain of large trees yanked brutally from the earth. A scraggly field of corn grows close to the giant cabin.*

This is the ancestral home of the Bigginty Clan, a tribe of hill giants that have lived in the Deep Hollows for centuries. Currently, the clan consists of twelve members, but many of the giants roam the hills and hollows for days before returning home. At the moment, only five are inside.





The Biggintys keep a giant grizzly bear as a “watch dog,” but the elderly animal spends most of its time dozing in the shade behind the cabin. When the PCs first arrive, there is an 85% chance the bear is sleeping. If not asleep, there is a 75% chance it smells the PCs and comes rushing out, growling angrily.

**Giant Grizzly Bear:** Init +3; Atk bite +6 melee (1d6+3) or claws +5 (1d6+2); AC 17; HD 6d10; hp 34; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP if both claw attacks strike a target, the bear “hugs” for an additional 2d6+3 damage; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +2; AL N.

The cabin itself consists of only two rooms: a main family area that doubles as sleeping quarters for the youngest giants and a smaller room that serves as a bedroom for Pa and Ma Bigginty.

**Area 2-6A – Common Room:** *The stink of great unwashed bodies, home-brewed liquor, and rotting meat fills this dim room of titanic proportions. A stone hearth, large enough to contain a whole ox, dominates one wall, while roughly-crafted wooden furnishings occupy much of the floor space. A simple bench made from a granite slab perched atop two large rocks resides near the fireplace.*

There are three Bigginty hill giants here, two females and one male, Ohlsonovik Bigginty. Ohlsonovik was the runt of the Bigginty clan, standing a mere 8' tall compared to his larger kin and cursed with poor eyesight to boot. His small size and poor vision made Ohlsonovik the target of abuse from his brothers and sisters, and even his parents were disappointed with his feebleness. Tired of the unending torment from his family, Ohlsonovik recently entered into a contract with Ol' Blackcloak to elevate both his stature and position within the Bigginty clan. Ol' Blackcloak gifted the tiny giant with a pair of infernally-enchanted spectacles. These magical glasses grant two benefits when Ohlsonovik wears them: His vision becomes perfect and he grows to 14' in size, towering over his brethren. However, as a demonic artifact, the spectacles also impart another bizarre transformation to Ohlsonovik, transforming his left arm into a long grasping tendril identical to a giant starfish's arm and possessing massive strength. Ohlsonovik uses his mighty appendage to beat down his bullying brothers and parents, and now enjoys a position of leadership in the clan.

If the PCs arrive at the farm during daylight, the women giants are engaged in domestic chores, while Ohlsonovik is stretched out in one of the chairs, wearing his spectacles and ordering his siblings about. They are alerted to intruders if the bear outside begins growling, and Ohlsonovik grabs a cudgel from beside the door and stalks out into the yard to investigate. Unless conducted quietly, combat in the yard draws the females outside 1d6 rounds after battle begins, and the giants in area 2-6B come to investigate 1d4 rounds after the females do. This could result in a giant free-for-all outside the cabin, one likely very deadly for the party.

Wiser PCs may decide to attack after dark, in which case, the three giants are sleeping in the common room and are easily surprised. At night, Ohlsonovik removes his spec-

tacles before bed and is in his normal, unaltered size and form. Without the magical glasses, Ohlsonovik suffers a -1 die penalty to his attack and Reflex saves due to his near-sightedness.

**Hill Giants (2):** Init -2; Atk club +15 melee (2d8+8) or hurled stone +6 missile fire (1d8+10, range 100'); AC 16; HD 8d10; hp 35, 31; MV 30'; Act 1d24; SP infravision, crit on 20-24; SV Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +6; AL C.

**Ohlsonovik (with spectacles):** Init +1; Atk club +18 melee (3d8+10) grapple +18 melee (1d8+10+pinned) or hurled stone +10 missile fire (1d8+10, range 100'); AC 17; HD 10d10; hp 51; MV 40'; Act 1d24; SP infravision, crit on 20-24, +10 to Strength checks when grappling; SV Fort +12, Ref +6, Will +8; AL C.

Ohlsonovik's spectacles can be knocked from his face or broken with a successful Mighty Deed of Arms against AC 14. If successful, he immediately assumes his normal form. Any damage Ohlsonovik has suffered while in enlarged form is applied to his reduced hit point total, possibly slaying him if he's taken sufficient damage.

**Ohlsonovik (without spectacles):** Init +1; Atk club +10 melee (2d8+4) or hurled stone +3 missile fire (1d8+5, range 50'); AC 15; HD 6d10; hp 30; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP infravision; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +7; AL C.

One of female giants wears a pair of earrings fashioned from raw gold nuggets (100 gp total value). Ohlsonovik's spectacles only function for him and lose their magical enchantment if he is slain. The non-magical spectacles retain some value as a curiosity and are worth 50 gp to the right buyer. They weigh 10 lbs.

There is little of value in this room: rough, dirty giant clothing, a 10 gallon jug of corn liquor, general foodstuffs, and the like. The stone bench near the fire, however, is of interest. On the underside of the bench are three glyphs carved into the stone. These sigils are the proper solution to the Wheel's door lock (see area 3-2 below). The giants found the stone, a relic from the days of the Wheel's construction, in the Deep Hollows and turned it into a seat, oblivious to its real significance. A DC 8 Intelligence check or simply looking under the bench discovers the glyphs.

**Area 2-6B – Ma and Pa Bigginty's Room:** *A titanichand-made bed covered by an equally huge quilt occupies most of this room. The remaining floor space contains a battered wardrobe and chest, a chair situated beneath the room's sole window, and a wicker basket containing large balls of yarn and bone needles. A befouled chamber pot resides partially beneath the great bed.*

This bedroom is occupied by Ma and Pa Bigginty, the hill giant clan's erstwhile matriarch and patriarch. If the PCs enter during the daylight and haven't alerted the giants to their presence, both occupants are awake. Pa Bigginty is suffering from the gout and lies prostrate in the bed, occasionally howling orders to his wife and daughters. Ma Bigginty ignores her husband, concentrating on her current sewing work. After dark, the two are in bed, snoring away

PA BIGGINTY KNOCKS THE GHOST OUT OF CROALEISTER THE IMPROBABLE,  
WHILE OHLSONOVIR MEETS HIS DOOM AT THE HANDS OF THE BAND!





with wall-shaking exhalations. If awake, and combat occurs in area 2-6A, both parents storm into that area 1d3+1 rounds after the battle begins. Combat in that area occurring while Ma and Pa Bigginty are asleep wakes them, but delays their appearance for 2d4+1 rounds.

**Ma and Pa Bigginty, Hill Giants (2):** Init -2; Atk club +15 melee (2d8+8) or hurled stone +6 missile fire (1d8+10, range 100'); AC 16; HD 8d10; hp 44, 36; MV 30' for Ma, 20' for Pa; Act 1d24; SP infravision, crit on 20-24, Pa suffers -2 penalty to all rolls; SV Fort +10, Ref +5, Will +6; AL C

Due to his illness, Pa Bigginty suffers a -2 penalty to all rolls and his speed is reduced to 20'.

The wardrobe holds only smelly giant clothes, but the chest contains a dozen raw gold nuggets (50 gp value each) and a human-sized pearl necklace (35 gp value) that Ma Bigginty wears as a bracelet on special occasions.

**Area 2-7 – Squire Grady's Cabin:** *The ruins of a hard-scrabble mountain cabin stand in the shadow of the mountains, its walls and half-collapsed roof overgrown with kudzu. A plot of farmland close to the home has run wild and a few stalks of untended corn protrude from the underbrush. The front entrance stands open, and a rotting door lies on the porch nearby.*

This cabin was the home of Squire Grady, a stubborn Shud-folk farmer who, despite the warnings of others, laid claim to a cursed plot of land in the Deep Hollows. Squire Grady, cantankerous and unyielding as the mountains themselves, refused to be driven off by the ghosts who haunt the land and even in death refuses to relinquish his claim.

The interior of the cabin is in as poor shape as its exterior. It holds little beside rotting furnishings, an ash-filled hearth, and decayed hooked rugs. A single, sturdy rocking chair has survived time and the elements, and this seat rests close by the cold fire.

PCs investigating the cabin cause Squire Grady, now a lingering spirit, to appear, crotchety as ever and upset that folks are trespassing. A wizened, transparent figure with a long beard and dressed in mountain home-spun manifests in the rocking chair, glaring at the intruders, before asking, "What are you 'uns doing in a man's home? Got no manners, do you? Not even a knock at the door to say you come a'callin'!"

Although cantankerous, Squire Grady's spirit is not dangerous. He continues to berate and threaten the PCs, but takes no direct action. Attacks and spells pass through him without effect, but he can be turned as a 5 HD un-dead. Doing so causes his spirit to disperse, but it reforms the following night.

If the PCs placate Squire Grady with apologies and good manners, he calms down and begrudgingly offers them a roof over their heads. Then he inquires what brings them to the Deep Hollows. If they reveal the object of their search, Grady's spirit turns thoughtful and offers a proposition: "Mayhaps I can help you 'uns out. Old Grady knows a thing or two about these hills and I 'spect I know what you all are lookin' fer. But, one good turn deserves another, heh? If you 'uns help me out, I'll skritch your backs in return."

Grady explains there's spirits ("hants," he calls them), who've been trying to drive him off his land since he first arrived. They hound him even in death, whispering under his eaves and tapping at his walls. If the PCs take care of the spirit's ghost problem, he'll direct them to a secret way in the mountains he suspects leads to the Wheel (area 2-8). Assuming the party agrees, they need only wait until nightfall before the "hants" manifest outside the cabin and begin their nightly campaign of fear. Slaying or turning the "hants" permanently stops them from bothering Squire Grady, earning both his respect and directions to the Wheel's back door.

**"Hants" (8):** Init +2; Atk touch +6 melee (1d6+special) or poltergeist thrown object +4 ranged (1d6); AC 10; HD 2d12; hp 11 each; MV fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP frigid touch inflicts 1d6 damage and target must make a DC 10 Fort save or temporarily lose 1d3 points of Strength, Agility or Stamina (target's choice), immune to non-magical weapons, un-dead traits; SV Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +6; AL C.

Transparent spirits that emit a frigid aura of air, the "Hants" in the Deep Hollows are the un-dead spirits of the original inhabitants of the valleys. Slain in the lunar catastrophe that destroyed Luhsaal and decimated their civilization, some still cling to their homeland in the afterlife, attempting to drive away those who would settle in their wake.

**Area 2-8 – Backdoor Trail:** If the party has helped Squire Grady, they find this site without difficulty. If they are unaware of its existence, a DC 10 Intelligence check is required to spot the trail.

*Near the east edge of the river is a dark mass of stone resembling a sleeping bear. Passing around the stone and leading to the water's edge are a number of large, splayed-toed footprints. The tracks lead to and from the river, vanishing into the undergrowth further up the bank.*

These tracks were made by the Gray-Back Trolls living in the lower chambers beneath the Wheel. They come to the river frequently to hunt and drink. Anyone following the tracks uncovers a broad trail has been broken through the underbrush and leads up into the foothills. After two miles, this path leads to 3-1.

**Area 2-9 – The Sin-Eater:** Show the players Handout B, then read or paraphrase the following:

*A dilapidated log cabin squats atop a bare hummock that rises from the surrounding swamp waters. A chorus of frogs croaks from the weedy waters around the low hill and a thin stream of smoke rises from the cabin's stone chimney.*



Long ago, the thing now known as the Sin-Eater was a mortal man who loved a sorceress. When her beauty was destroyed by magical corruption, the Sin-Eater embarked on a quest to find the means to restore her lost loveliness, bartering with entities best avoided. He achieved his wish, but doomed himself in the process, becoming a monstrous thing that now feeds on corruption and death. His beloved was his first meal. Since that time, the Sin-Eater has dwelled in the Deep Hollows, dining on afflicted wizards that seek his assistance, unaware of his true form.

The Sin-Eater appears to be a frail-looking man dressed in simple homespun garb. He moves about slowly, leaning on a hawthorn cane. He welcomes travelers with aloof courtesy, inquiring their purpose here. If asked about the bridge, he claims he knows where it lies, but it's a long, convoluted trip there and invites the party to rest the night at his cabin while he draws a detailed map to guide them. This is a lie and he has other plans for the wizards in the group.

If a corrupted wizard is present, he smiles at them knowingly. A DC 15 Intelligence check detects eagerness in the Sin-Eater's dealings with a corrupted individual. He reveals he is the Sin-Eater spoken of by the Shudfolk and offers to help cure the wizard of corruption if he's interested. This service, he explains, is one he must give freely. The gods forbid him to take payment in return.

If a wizard agrees to undergo the cure, the Sin-Eater attempts to separate him from his friends, luring him inside the cabin and instructing the sorcerer to remove his weapons, clothing, armor, and other worn possessions ("It interferes with the ritual, you understand."). Once inside, he closes and bolts the stout cabin door, refusing to allow others inside while undertaking his sin-eating. If the rest of the party insists, he shrugs and tells the wizard he cannot do the rite unless his directions are followed.

Should the wizard be foolish enough to agree to the imposed conditions, the Sin-Eater performs a mummary of pseudo-religious gestures and prayers over the naked wizard for a few minutes. Then, tired of the charade, he reveals his true form and attacks. Those outside the cabin must batter down the barred door (DC 13 Strength check) or otherwise bypass it to join the battle.

**Sin-Eater:** Init +4; Atk slam +5 melee (1d8) or bite +4 melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 8d8; hp 37; MV 20'; Act 2d20; SP instill fear (DC 12 Will save or suffer -3 penalty to attacks, saves, skill checks, and spell checks), immune to fire, impart corruption; SV Fort +6, Ref +4, Will +8; AL C.

A singular monstrosity, the Sin Eater is a horrific, shambling mass of putrid meat, flailing tendrils, and dog-shaped skulls with gnashing teeth. Its partially extraplanar origins make it immune to fire and its gruesome appearance strikes fear into those glimpsing it, requiring a successful DC 12 Will save to avoid negative modifiers to their actions. Three times per day, the Sin Eater can impart corruption on a target it successfully hits. The victim must make a DC 13 Fort save or gain a random corruption trait from the Greater Corruption Table (DCC RPG, p. 119). This inflicted corrup-

tion can affect all classes, regardless of spell-casting ability.

Once the Sin-Eater is dispatched, a search of the cabin reveals only rustic furnishings and no obvious food. Beneath a threadbare rug on the floor is a trapdoor leading into a shallow, damp root cellar. The cellar contains a midden of humanoid bones, rotting wizard's robes, and two nearly destroyed grimoires. The spells *shatter*, *planar step*, *wizard sense*, and *Hepsoj's fecund fungi* can still be deciphered on their water-damaged pages.

**Area 2-10 - The Bad Lick Bridge:** Show the players Handout C, then read or paraphrase the following: A great stone span crosses the high, narrow gorge before you, granting passage from one side of the surging river to the other. The bridge appears of ancient construction, but relatively intact assuming its great age. Several small gaps, created when paving slabs broke loose from their moorings to plummet into the water 100' below, are present in the span's deck. Despite these gaps, it appears that careful travelers may be able cross the bridge safely.

The 200' long, 20' wide bridge is situated above the PCs, assuming they arrived by traveling along the floor of the hollow. Luckily, a narrow footpath winds up the north side of the gorge, terminating at the north end of the bridge. Once they reach the span, a DC 10 Intelligence check by a dwarf or other PC with stone-working experience identifies the bridge as being several centuries old, but of obvious competent construction. A similar check also determines the bridge is sound and in no danger of collapse.

Unfortunately, the bridge is the lair of the Bad Lick Beast, a supernatural creature that's claimed the Deep Hollows as its hunting grounds. The PCs have likely caught signs of the beast during their travels, but now they must overcome it to reach the main entrance of the Wheel. The Bad Lick Beast lurks beneath the bridge hidden amongst the supports, and cannot be seen from the gorge below or atop the bridge. It flies up to attack any creature intruding on the span.

**The Bad Lick Beast:** Init +6; Atk claw +5 melee (1d8+2) or head-butt +4 melee (1d6 + DC 10 Fort save or stunned for 1d3 rounds) or spell; AC 17; HD 8d12; hp 50; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* and *scorching ray* (+8 spell check), infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold; SV Fort +8, Ref +10, Will +7; AL C.

The Bad Lick Beast is an awful combination of man, goat, and moth. Goat-like legs extend from a muscular human torso crowned with the head of great ram, and a pair of black, moth-like wings grows from its back. Its eyes burn bright orange in the darkness. The Bad Lick Beast is partially demonic in origin, granting it protection against many attacks. It can cast both *darkness* and *scorching ray*, using those to soften up or inconvenience opponents before closing to melee combat. Overconfident and unchallenged, the Beast fights to the death.

Beneath the bridge and accessible with a DC 15 climb sheer surfaces check is the Beast's lair. Comprised of bones, branches, and rotting skins, the lair contains 267 gp in tattered pouches and an armlet worth 100 gp.

# THE LUHSAAL WHEEL



Whether by following the directions granted by various entities in the Shudder Mountains or simple chance, the party eventually stumbles upon the location of the Luhsaal Wheel. This ancient astronomical site will likely prove to be the location of the PCs' confrontation with Boak. Depending on how long their search took before the Wheel was located, the PCs may be able to ambush the former cleric and his allies as they arrive, or reach the ancient site just after Boak's transformation is complete.

There are two possible entrances to the Luhsaal Wheel, both of which take the party through dusty ceremonial chambers situated beneath the Wheel itself. These rooms were hewn from the surrounding stone and the walls, floors and ceilings of each bear the marks of the bronze tools that cut away the stone. Despite the obvious evidence of crude workmanship, time and the passage of many people through the chambers have worn the rooms level and relatively smooth. A DC 20 climb sheer surfaces check is required to ascend walls of the lower chambers.

**Area 3-1 - Forgotten Back Door:** *A straight, thin crack runs along the mountain face here, nearly imperceptible amongst the clinging lichens and small flowering plants that sprout from crevices in the stone. The narrow fissure extends vertically from the scree-covered ground upwards approximately 8' before terminating abruptly. A draught of horrible pungent air hints at a dark, open space beyond the gap.*

The fissure is a secret back entrance to the Luhsaal Wheel's lower chambers. A few weeks ago, a small band of gray-back trolls discovered the door while on their eternal hunt and claimed the Wheel's lower chambers as their own. Possessing little intelligence, they've left the door partially ajar to allow them to come and go, resulting in the noticeable gap in the cliff face.

Due to the obviousness of a doorway present at this location, discovering the door and the concealed catch that opens it is only a DC 5 Intelligence check. Any character listening at the crack can make a Luck check. If successful, they hear low, rumbling snores beyond the gap. These are from a young troll slumbering in chamber beyond. Opening the massive stone door requires a DC 12 Strength check. If the party fails their initial attempt to open the door, the troll within awakens and quietly waits to ambush intruders.

Past the secret door is a 20' square chamber with rough-hewn walls. A similarly crude staircase winds upward from this room, disappearing into darkness. Filthy, stinking animal pelts are piled in one corner and a collection of gnawed bones are strewn across the floor. A young gray-back troll has split away from the group up above and claimed this area as his own.



**Young Gray-Back Troll (1):** Init +5; Atk bite +8 melee (2d6+4) or claw +6 melee (2d4); AC 17; HD 6d8+2; hp 31; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP stench, regeneration, immune to critical hits, immune to mind-affecting spells, vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +6 (special); AL C.

Gray-Back trolls are a subspecies of troll indigenous to rocky terrain. Unlike their cousins, gray-back trolls resemble humanoid-shaped piles of stone covered with gray-green lichens and mosses. These growths are the troll's natural, scraggly hair rather than fungus and plants, and are most predominant on the troll's back, giving this species its name and providing natural camouflage in mountainous areas. They are otherwise identical to their rubbery-skinned counterparts (see DCC RPG page 429).

The stairs lead to a winding tunnel of nearly a mile in length through the bowels of the mountains before terminating at area 3-5 below.

**Area 3-2 - The Grand Entrance:** *Beyond the ancient bridge is a 40' wide, 30' deep ledge that lies perpendicular to a sheer rock face. Set into the rocky cliff at the far side of the ledge stands a great stone archway sealed by an imposing door. Blue bolts of lightning ripple silently across the door's face, hinting at magical wards or seals. In the center of the door are three circular dials set one inside the next. Each dial bears several different symbols, no two of which repeat.*

This door was the main entryway for visitors traveling to the Wheel. Only those granted admission by the observatory's curators or those wise enough to guess correct alignment of symbols to open the door's arcane combination lock could enter. Since the Wheel's abandonment, the doorway has remained sealed. While the flickering electricity is fearsome looking, touching the doorway only results in a tickling sensation that causes no damage (but see below).

The inside front cover of this adventure module shows the three spinning dials. You should photocopy the page three times, then remove the spinning dials and attach them with a pin to create a handout puzzle that your players can solve. The solution is shown on page 156.

Each of the three dials has hand-holds set into them, allowing the disc-shaped plates to spin 360°. To open the door, the three dials must be spun so that the symbols for "Earth," "Shul," and "Luhsaal" are arranged vertically at the top of the lock (see page 156 for solution). A cleric of Shul will recognize the bisected circle is an ancient symbol of his god, but that's the sole marking the PCs have a chance of deciphering. This puzzle requires player knowledge (or blind luck) and not dice rolls to solve. If the proper combination is aligned, there is a three second pause and then the blue bolts of lightning dissipate and the door groans open on hidden hinges. A 1/4-mile long, dark 20'-wide tunnel leading to area 3-3 lies beyond the great valve.

If an incorrect combination of symbols is aligned, after a three second delay, the blue lighting explodes outward with great force. The lightning acts like a *runic alphabet*, *fey*

spell of the *repulse* variety. If a DC 32 Will save is failed (extremely likely!), all creatures standing on the ledge suffer 1d8 points of damage and are pushed back 3d20 feet, possibly forcing them off the 30' wide ledge and into the chasm. The judge should make sure he knows the exact position of each PC during attempts to bypass the door and roll the distance repulsed separately for each PC. Characters standing on the bridge are unaffected by the trap. Once triggered, the ward is reset and activates again if the dials are incorrectly arranged.

The wards can be removed with a *dispel magic* (DC 32 spell check) or bashed in with a successful DC 25 Strength check. Breaking down the door triggers one final lightning blast which must be saved against.

**Area 3-3 – Star Chamber:** *This large chamber stands beneath a 30' high ceiling held aloft by columns carved from the surrounding mountain rock. The middle of the open room holds a 20' diameter table crafted from black stone. A number of dull crystalline specks are set into the table's surface in seemingly random patterns. In each of the room's four walls stands an open archway leading into darkness beyond. A thick blanket of dust covers the table and floor of the room and a horrendous odor fills the air here. You almost gag at the stench of rotting waste and decay.*

The table is made from a large sheet of glossy obsidian that rests atop a number of 3' high flat stones. The glittering specks set into its surface are small moonstones, affixed with a crude adhesive. The thick dust dims both the table and moonstones' natural sheen. The arrangement of the moonstones depicts constellations visible in the night sky above the Shudder Mountains and can be identified with a successful DC 10 Intelligence check or by a character with the appropriate background (astrologer, for example). A successful check also determines the stellar arrangements on the table are slightly different from the constellation's current position, hinting that whoever crafted this table did so millennia ago. There are a total of 300 moonstones worth 5 gp each. It takes a half hour to pry them all free.

A PC specifically investigating the dusty floor notices a number of large barefooted tracks leading back and forth from the northeast and southeast archways. Unless the party is very quiet and moves directly through this room, they attract the trolls in area 3-4 who attempt to surprise any PC approaching the western archway.

**Area 3-4 – Troll Lair:** *A number of bronze hooks hang along the top of the arched entry to this room, indicating a curtain or other barrier, now long gone, once separated this area from the main chamber. The 15' wide, 30' deep oval room contains fragments of dry-rotted wood that suggest decayed and ruined furnishing. Rotting animal hides and bones litter the floor beside mounds of black excrement. Complex geometric patterns drawn in flaking ochre adorn the walls of the room. The stench that afflicted the main chamber is even more pungent here, thick and fetid enough to bring tears to your eyes.*

Once a sleeping and prayer chamber for the Wheel's astronomers, this room is now home to a pair of gray-back trolls. If the PCs avoided detection in area 3-3, the trolls are here, stuffing themselves on the filthy stomach and bowels



of a dead catamount. The trolls, incessantly hungry, attack immediately.

**Gray-Back Troll (2):** Init +5; Atk bite +8 melee (2d6+4) or claw +6 melee (2d4); AC 17; HD 6d8+2; hp 31; MV 40'; Act 3d20; SP stench, regeneration, immune to critical hits, immune to mind-affecting spells, vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +6 (special); AL C.

Mixed amongst the debris here is a verdigris-covered bronze astrolabe of surprisingly advanced construction. Although non-magical, this device can be used to plot the best times to call upon supernatural forces for their assistance, granting the user a +2 bonus to his spell check when using *patron bond* and similar spells.

**Area 3-5 – Ancient Storeroom:** *This dusty, dark chamber contains a number of dry-rotted baskets and collapsed storage chests, each apparently emptied either purposefully or by time and decay. Several bronze spikes have been driven into the rough-hewn stone walls to serve as garment hooks, but these too are bare. Crumbling fragments of punky wood lie beneath an archway in the northeastern wall, suggesting it once held a door. An open archway exits the room to the southwest.*

This room was once a storage space for supplies, tools, and ceremonial vestments, but is now empty of all three. The baskets and rotted chests hold nothing but scraps of sackcloth and a few stone-hard beans. A PC inspecting the dusty floor notices large footprints leading from the southwestern archway to the northeast one. These tracks were left by the trolls coming and going through this area.

**Area 3-6 – The Luhsaal Wheel:** *Show the players Handout D, then read or paraphrase the following: The steep, winding staircase leads hundreds of feet up from the dusty chamber below. As you climb its corkscrewing stairs, the smell of fresh air becomes discernible. Almost unexpectedly, the stairs end at a small landing with an open archway leading outside to the mountains. Beyond the arch is a vast circular bowl surrounded by jagged mountains. The circular floor of the bowl has been planed smooth, but whether by the hands of man or the seemingly endless mountain winds is unknown. Myriad symbols fashioned from glittering stones decorate the bottom of the depression and a tall spire of black granite bearing gleaming white veins of mineral stands in the center of this open air amphitheatre dedicated to the heavens.*



The Luhsaal Wheel itself rests at the bottom of a natural bowl surrounded by the highest of the Shudder Mountain peaks. Masses of natural, weather-worn rock and scraggly alpine plants surround the perimeter of the bowl, providing possible concealment should the party wish to lie in wait for Boak's arrival.

The glittering stones are all gemstones of various types and number 777 in total. Their combined value is 2,250 gp, an ample reward for the party's efforts should they survive the final confrontation with Boak and his minions.

The granite obelisk stands 20' in height and serves as the center point of the Wheel. Numerous eldritch sigils fashioned from gems surround the spire's base and, once night falls, the white mineral veins that striate its face glow with moonlight. The obelisk focuses the power of the demon-haunted moon, Luhsaal, and Boak need only touch the spire once the sun has set to enact his transformation into a champion of Chaos.

If the party has beaten Boak to the Wheel, they have time to plan, possibly laying traps, developing ambushes, and making other preparations for the final battle. Attempts to destroy the spire, either through magic or physical force, are unsuccessful—Luhsaal's ambient power courses through the rock, protecting it from any harm the party is capable of delivering.



## JUSTICIA'S EMPOWERMENT

**Z**ugun, unknown to the PCs, has chosen one of them to be his agent of justice when he finally confronts his foe. The chosen PC is most likely a lawful cleric, but if a PC of another class has demonstrated actions in line with Justicia's beliefs, Zugun may pick that character as his physical host at the judge's discretion.

Once free of the chained coffin, Zugun's spirit merges with the chosen PC, causing a physical transformation that takes one round to complete. The PC's body swells as he grows to the height of 20' and a nimbus of glowing gold light surrounds him. Crackling fire envelops his weapon and he experiences a rush of power and divine purpose. This godly empowerment grants the PC a +6 bonus to attack, damage, and AC. His hit point total increases by +20 and he gains a +4 bonus to all Fortitude saves. In addition, he enjoys a +5 bonus to Willpower saves against spells and magical effects created by evil supernatural creatures (including Chaotic wizards). His weapon receives a +2d6 bonus to damage against the same types of creatures.

There is a single drawback to this change. Due to Zugun's desire to defeat Boak, the PC must make a DC 18 Will save in order to attack an enemy other than Boak. If the save fails, he cannot direct his ire against the preferred foe, but can attack Boak normally.

# EVENT 3: THE CONFRONTATION

**B**oak and his forces arrive at the Wheel on the night of the Black Conflux, eschewing a long overland trip by *planar stepping* directly to the site. Moments after the sun drops below the horizon (approx. 7 PM), a black gash writhing with green flames along its edges appears in the air 20' away from the Wheel's obelisk. Boak steps through the hole, accompanied by an obese human male and four ghastly demons, intent on completing his transformation.

Once Boak and his minions appear, the battle commences. If the PCs are lying in ambush, they automatically surprise the former cleric and his allies and may attack unopposed for one round. Initiative is determined as normal the following round. Boak rushes to the obelisk, easily closing the distance and starting the transformation. His troops fan out to engage the party with spells and physical violence.

If the PCs have reached the Wheel before Boak, but are not present at the mountain bowl when he arrives (perhaps expecting him to arrive on foot and lying in wait in the lower chambers or lurking beneath the bridge), they're alerted to his arrival by a clap of thunder and arching tendrils of power writhing about the mountain top. They should realize their enemy has arrived and rush to confront him. Should they fail to take the hint, the judge can drop other clues they've been outmaneuvered (joyous cries of triumph, followed by maniacal laughter, silhouettes of the demons flapping above the bowl, etc.).

It is possible that the PCs do not reach the Wheel in time to prevent Boak's arrival. The judge can handle this development in two ways. He can "fudge" the time required to complete Boak's assumption of championship, extending it by several hours or even days to allow the PCs to challenge him at the Wheel. Or he can have the party encounter Boak in champion form along with his allies as they sweep down from the mountains to begin the campaign of cruelty, starting in the Deep Hollows and then moving out of the Shudder Mountain region. In this case, determine where the PCs are located on the outdoor map and conduct the final conflict there. Boak can still be defeated, but the PCs will have to continue their quest for the Wheel if they wish to profit from their efforts.

Regardless of the site of the battle, once Zugun and Boak are present in the same place, Zugun expends all his power to perform one final act to stop his former friend. Zugun, who has been carefully preparing for this moment, husbanding his dwindled life-force until he confronts Boak, calls upon Justicia for aid. This act is effectively divine intervention and the goddess acquiesces. The chains encircling the coffin shatter and the casket bursts, releasing a ghostly form that streaks towards one of the party members to enact Justicia's Empowerment (see sidebar). The battlefield erupts into chaos as now two titans duel to the death amongst the PCs and Boak's minions.

Assuming the confrontation happens at the Wheel, Boak's first action is to touch the obelisk and begin the championship transformation. As soon as his hand rests against the black stone, the sky overhead changes abruptly. Those present watch in horror and wonder as the sky fills with a massive, never-before-seen celestial body: the long-vanished moon of Luhsaal. Covering nearly a quarter of the sky, the party can see traces of ruined cities across its tarnished silvery face and great chasms tearing the body apart. This vista is a magical hallucination caused by the Wheel's obelisk channeling the destroyed moon's lingering energy and is only visible to those present atop the Wheel during the Black Conflux.

Arcs of lunar energy course down from the phantom moon into the obelisk, passing into Boak's body. His physical form begins the transformation into a champion of Chaos. Read the following to the PCs as this occurs

*Energy crackles around the changing Boak, encasing his body in a cocoon of power. His form grows in size, becoming nearly four times the size of a man. The former cleric's body swells as the power of the sundered moon courses through him. Bones burst from his flesh, reforming into plates of protective mail inscribed with the sigils of Chaos. A third eye of luminous crimson emerges from his forehead, causing runnels of blood to transform his face into a gore-streaked visage of terror.*

The transformation process takes two rounds to complete. While encased in the energy cocoon, Boak is immune to all spells and spell-like effects, and enjoys a +10 bonus to his AC against physical attacks. After the transformation is complete, the protective casing fades away and Boak, now in his champion form, turns to confront the party, directing his first attacks on the PC empowered by Zugun's prayer.

**Boak (5<sup>th</sup> level warrior, normal form):** Init +6 (d16); Atk two-handed sword melee +d7+2 (1d10+d7+2); AC 15 (25); HD 5d12+20; hp 66; MV 25'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP d7 deed die, mighty deed of arms, crit range 18-20, immune to spells & +10 AC bonus when in contact with the Wheel's obelisk; SV Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +3; AL C.

In his mortal form, Boak is a human male who, despite his centuries of life, appears only middle aged. His body is corded with muscles and his face is a tapestry of intricate tattoo-work dedicated to Chaos. He still wears his hair in a clerical tonsure, but his hair is long and matted with dried blood. He wields a great two-handed sword, etched with chaotic symbols, in battle.

**Boak (in Chaos Champion form):** Init +6 (d16); Atk two-handed sword +d7+8 melee (dmg 2d10+d7+2) or spell; AC 21; HD 5d12+40; hp 86; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP d7 deed die, mighty deed of arms, crit range 18-20, half-damage from fire and cold, spells (+5 to spell check): *magic missile*, *detect good*, *detect invisible*, and *shatter*; SV Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +5 (+10 vs. spells/spell-like effects from lawful entities); AL C.

In his champion form, Boak becomes a hybrid of mortal flesh and Chaotic empowerment. His 20' tall form is cov-



ered with bony plates and a glaring third eye pierces his blood-streaked forehead. As a Chaos champion, Boak's physical prowess is increased, granting him +20 hit points, +6 bonus to attacks, doubling his damage with his sword, and imparting a +5 bonus to Fortitude saves and a +2 bonus to Willpower saves. He also gains an additional +5 bonus to Willpower saves against spells and spell-like effects created by Lawful creatures. As an extra-planar hybrid, fire and cold inflict half-damage against the Chaos champion.

As a champion, Boak can employ the spells *magic missile*, *detect good*, *detect invisible*, and *shatter* with a +5 modifier to his spell check. These enchantments emanate from his third eye, and should he lose vision to that organ via spells or mighty deeds of arms, he loses his spellcasting power until sight returns to the afflicted orb.

**Malucius the Leper (5<sup>th</sup> lvl Wizard):** Init +1; Atk sword +2 melee (1d8) or spell; AC 11; HD 5d4+5; hp 22; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP spells; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +4; AL C.

Spells known (+7 spell check): *detect magic*, *feather fall*, *flaming hands*, *invoke patron* (Sezrekan 1/day), *magic missile*, *magic shield*, *patron bond*, *mirror image*, *ray of enfeeblement*, and *planar step*.

As a devoted servant of Chaos and the sorcerous arts, Malucius is a spell-slinger-for-hire, selling his talents to whatever twisted cause can meet his price. Malucius is an obese human male who keeps his corpulent body wrapped in leper's bandages to obscure the mystical diseases and corruption that wrack his body. Loyal to no one but himself, Malucius flees if Boak falls: he attempts to *planar step* or calls upon his patron.

**Type II Chaos Demons (4):** Init +4; Atk claw +7 melee (1d8) or forked tail +5 melee (1d4+bleed); AC 16; HD 6d8; hp 30 each; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 1d20; SP Type II demon traits, crit range 19-20, bleed attack causes victim to make a DC 14 Fort save or lose 1d3 hp per round (magical healing cures bleed), *choking cloud* (+6 spell check); SV Fort +6, Ref +5, Will +6; AL C.

These demons resemble rotting, man-sized hyenas with gore-streaked butterfly wings. Ferocious and of bestial intelligence, these demons are provided to Boak by the Host of Chaos as muscle and cannon-fodder to ensure the championship transformation succeeds this time. Boak has no true control over them, but their bloodlust ensures they attack his enemies without hesitation or direction. Like Malucius, they flee the battle if Boak is slain, returning to their native plane.

# ENDING THE ADVENTURE



he adventure concludes with the final battle against Boak and his forces. If the PCs are triumphant, the transformed former cleric and his schemes of evil are defeated. It is likely that the PC bearing Justicia's favor lays Boak low, but depending on how swiftly his minions are dispatched, the whole party may contribute to his defeat.

If the final battle occurs on the Wheel, when Boak is defeated, read the following:

*Your final strike against the Chaos champion lands true, sending the monstrosity staggering. A flood of gore spills from his wounds as the creature falls backward, its massive feet skidding on the blood-slick gemstones of the Wheel. With a moan, the giant of Chaos falls, impaling itself on the moon-glowing obelisk, speared on the very source of its transformation. With a final shudder, the body lies still. The obelisk's glow fades and the torn moon vanishes from the sky, returning the heavens to their peaceful, nocturnal state. Looking earthward, you see the now-mortal form of Boak, all vestiges of its transformation gone, lying like a shredded rag doll at the base of the black spire.*

Should the battle conclude elsewhere, the judge should ad-lib a similar climatic end to Boak.

If Boak is slain, his surviving cohorts flee, leaving the field to the victors. The empowered PC shrinks back to his normal size as Justicia's favor leaves him and the ghostly form of Zugun floats before the party. He bows deeply, saying, "My friends, your bravery and valiant efforts are awe-inspiring, and I cannot thank you enough for the blood you've spilled this night. Know that you've earned the good-will and respect of not only Justicia, but a tired, old man who is proud to call you 'comrades.' My task here is done and I go to my long-delayed reward. I shall not forget you and all that you have done, and I hope when your own worldly toils are complete, we meet again one day in a far, far better place." Zugun's form shimmers and dissipates into golden embers that drift off into the night.

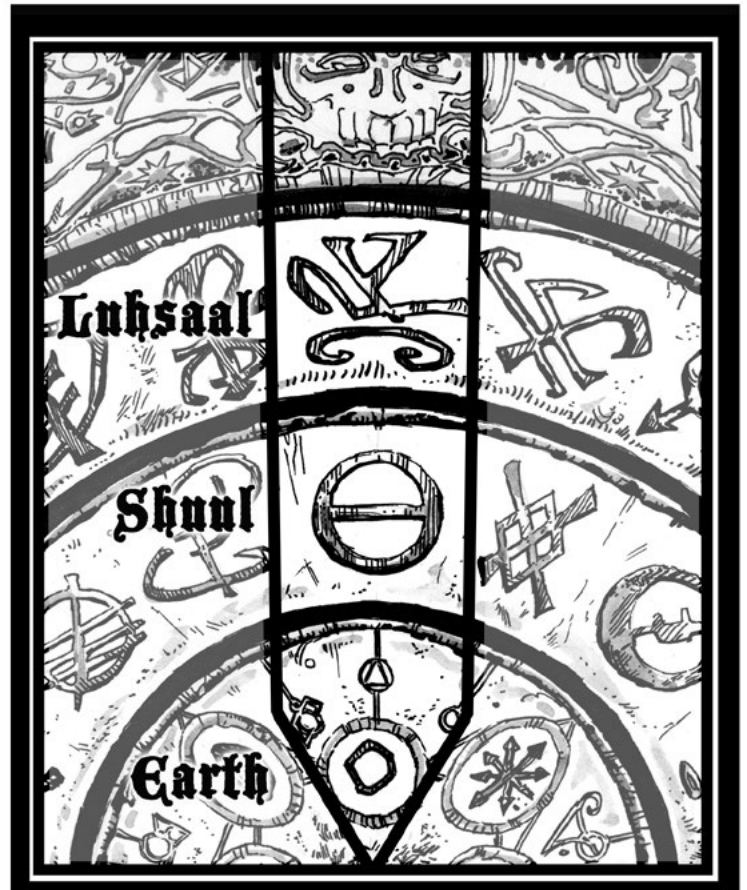
Their victory achieved, the party can now claim their just rewards in the form of the Wheel's many gemstones, but other,

less immediate recompense awaits them. Firstly, for aiding Justicia and saving the innocent from wholesale slaughter, each PC gains +2 Luck. Secondly, the broken remains of the Chained Coffin lay atop the Wheel. Although ruined, the orichalcum and adamantite of its construction is salvageable, and both of these metals can be used in the fabrication of magical arms, armor, and other enchanted items. If the PCs don't think of this on their own, a successful DC 5 Intelligence check by any spellcaster gives them the idea.

While this adventure is now finished, if the players enjoyed their time in the Shudder Mountains, the judge can design his own adventures in the Deep Hollows, creating new sites to discover or threats to be combated. Also, the Luh-saal Wheel may serve to launch new, otherworldly adventures. Perhaps at certain times, the Wheel acts as a gateway to whatever strange dimensions moons go to when they die and the PCs can explore and plunder the ruined cities they glimpse on its surface during the Black Conflux.

One thing is for certain in the world of *Dungeon Crawl Classics*: There's always a new adventure waiting around the corner for those brave enough to risk their lives in the search for it!

## WHEEL SOLUTION





# APPENDIX A: TIME TRACKER



*The Chained Coffin* is a timed adventure where the party has (theoretically) seven days to locate the Luhsaal Wheel and confront Boak. To make accounting the passage of time easier, the following time tracker is provided. Simply check-off each day as it passes and use the space provided to record any important or memorable events that occur during the 24-hour period.

| Check Box                | Adventure Day | Important Events Log                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day Zero      | The PCs arrive in Bent Pine if they chose not to confirm Zugun's identity                                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day One       | PCs confirming Zugun's story may arrive in Bent Pines on this day (as determined by a d3 roll; see p. 5)                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day Two       | PCs confirming Zugun's story may arrive in Bent Pines on this day (as determined by a d3 roll; see p. 5)                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day Three     | PCs confirming Zugun's story may arrive in Bent Pines on this day (as determined by a d3 roll; see p. 5)                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day Four      |                                                                                                                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day Five      |                                                                                                                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day Six       |                                                                                                                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Day Seven     | The Black Conflux begins at sundown. Boak and his minions arrive at the Luhsaal Wheel at 7 PM to begin the transformation. |



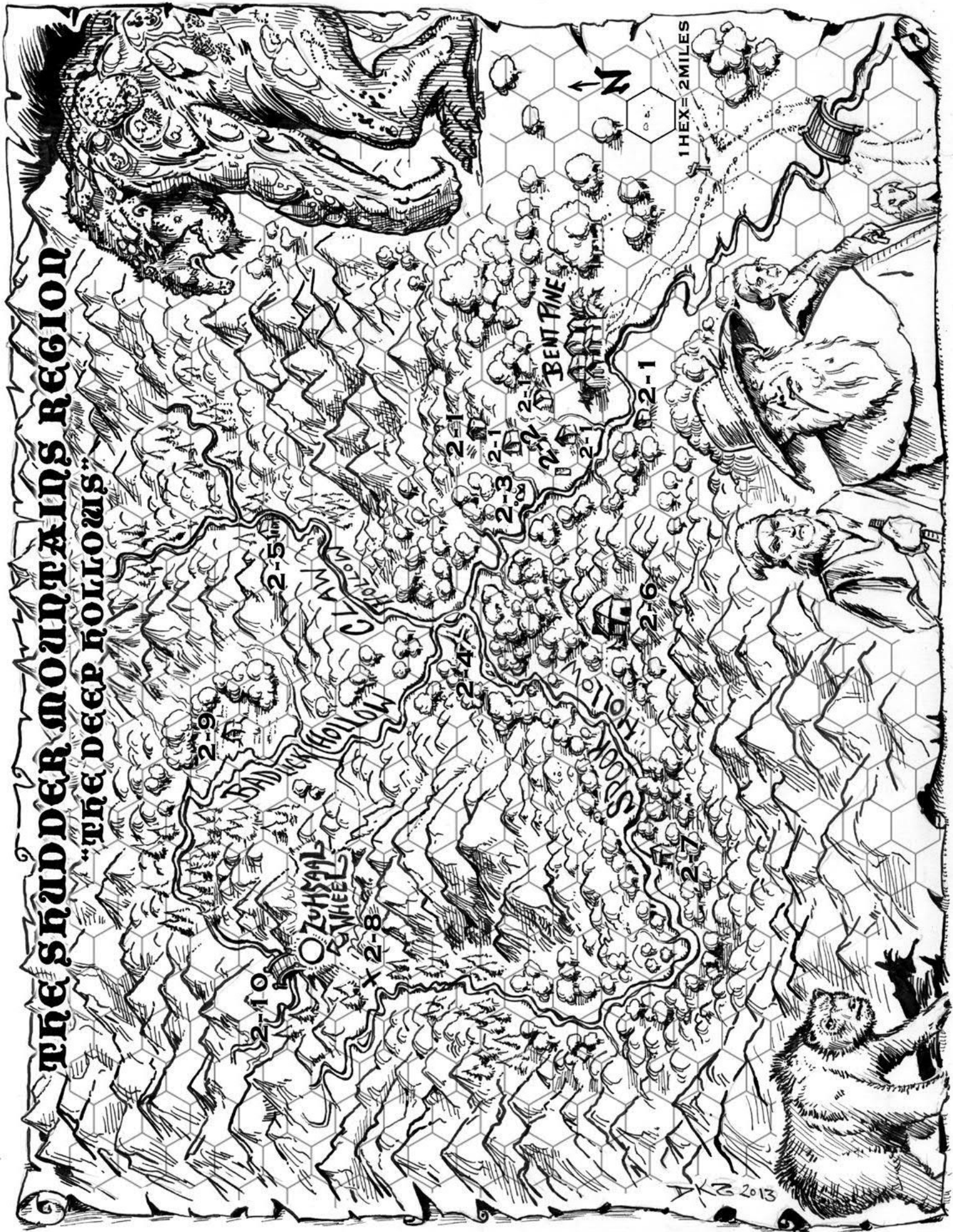
## EXPLORATION REMINDERS

**Random Encounters:** Check three times per day; twice during daylight and once at night. Encounter has a 2 in 6 chance of happening. See table on p.8 for potential encounters.

**Movement:** Mounted PC can travel up to 8 hexes (16 miles) per day. Parties traveling on foot move up to 6 hexes (12 miles) per day.

# THE SHUDDER MOUNTAINS REGION

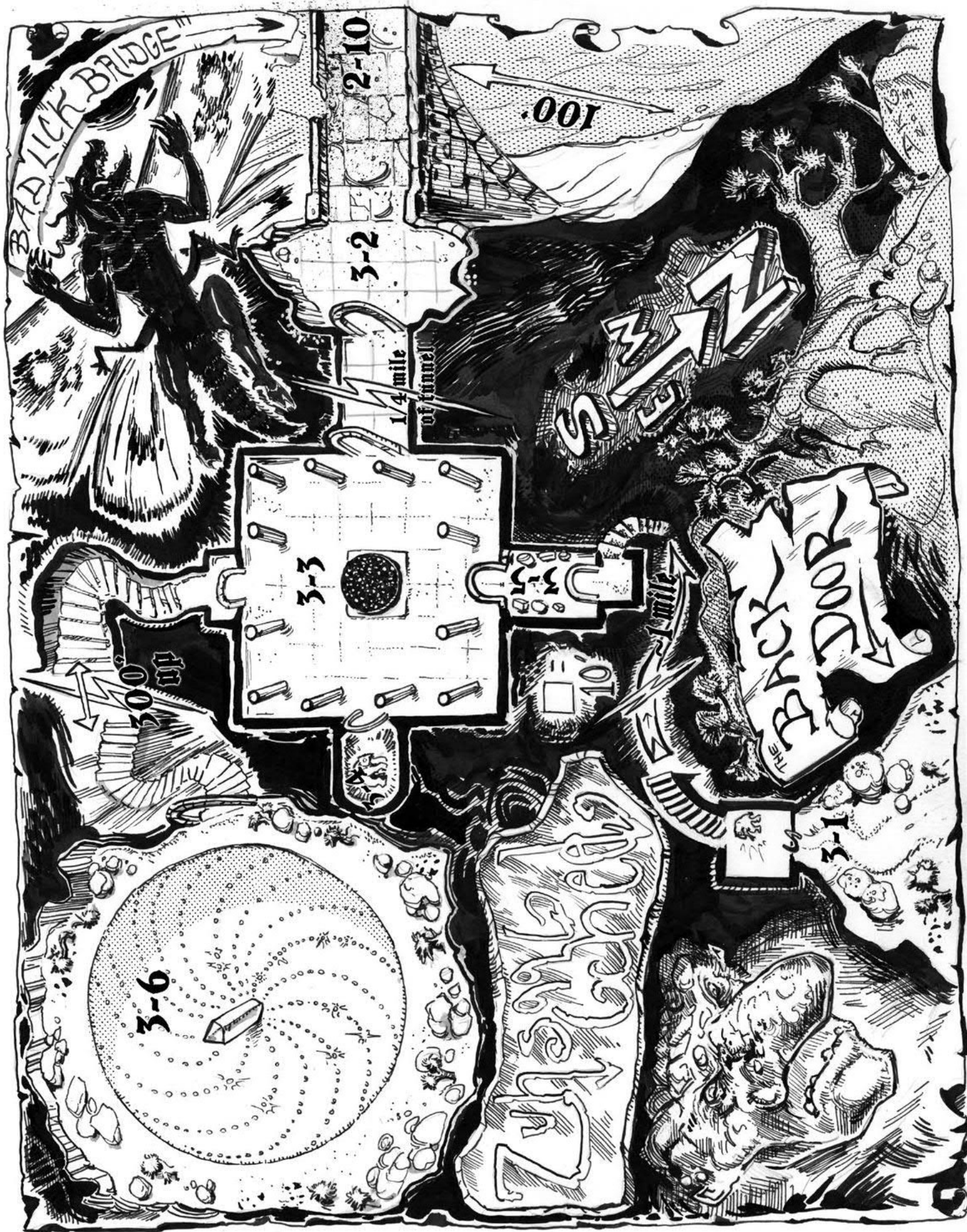
## "THE DEER HOLLOW"



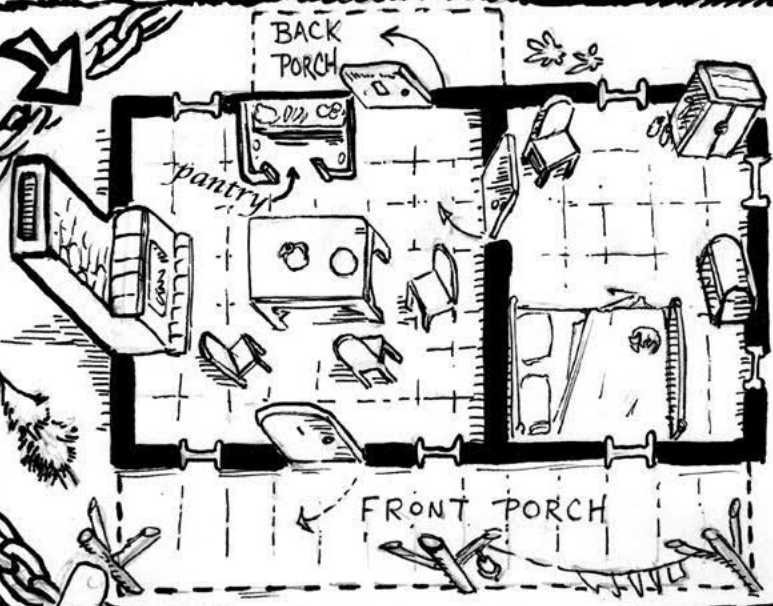




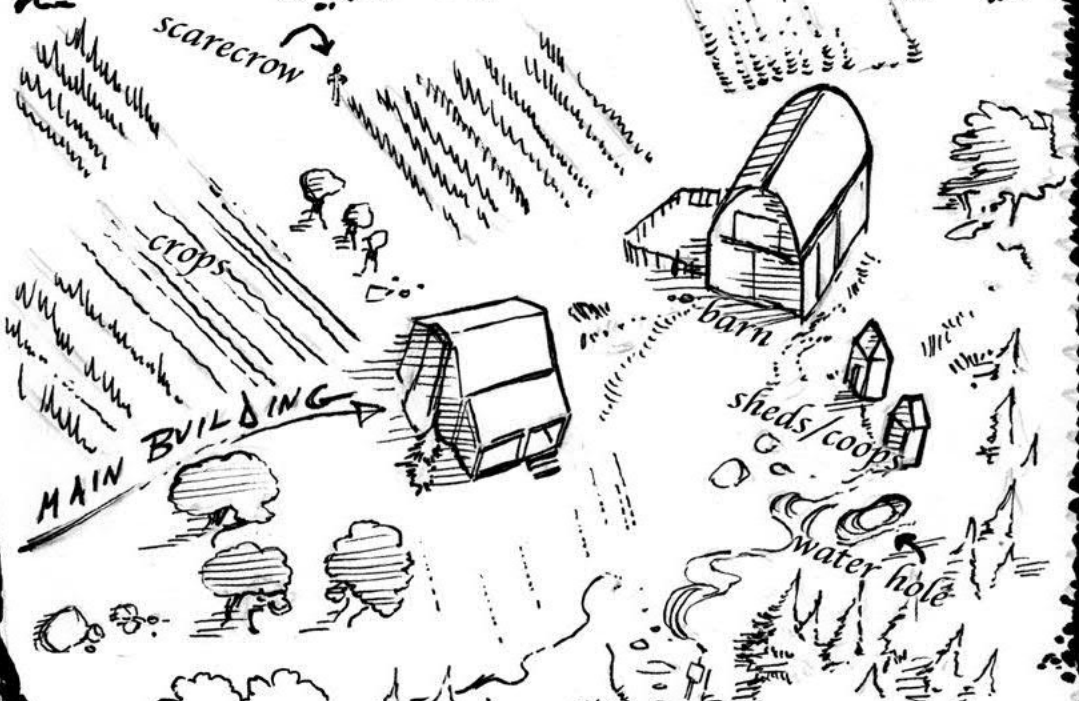




# THE CHAINED COFFIN



TYPICAL SHUDFOLK FARM



AREAS  
2-1 & 2-7



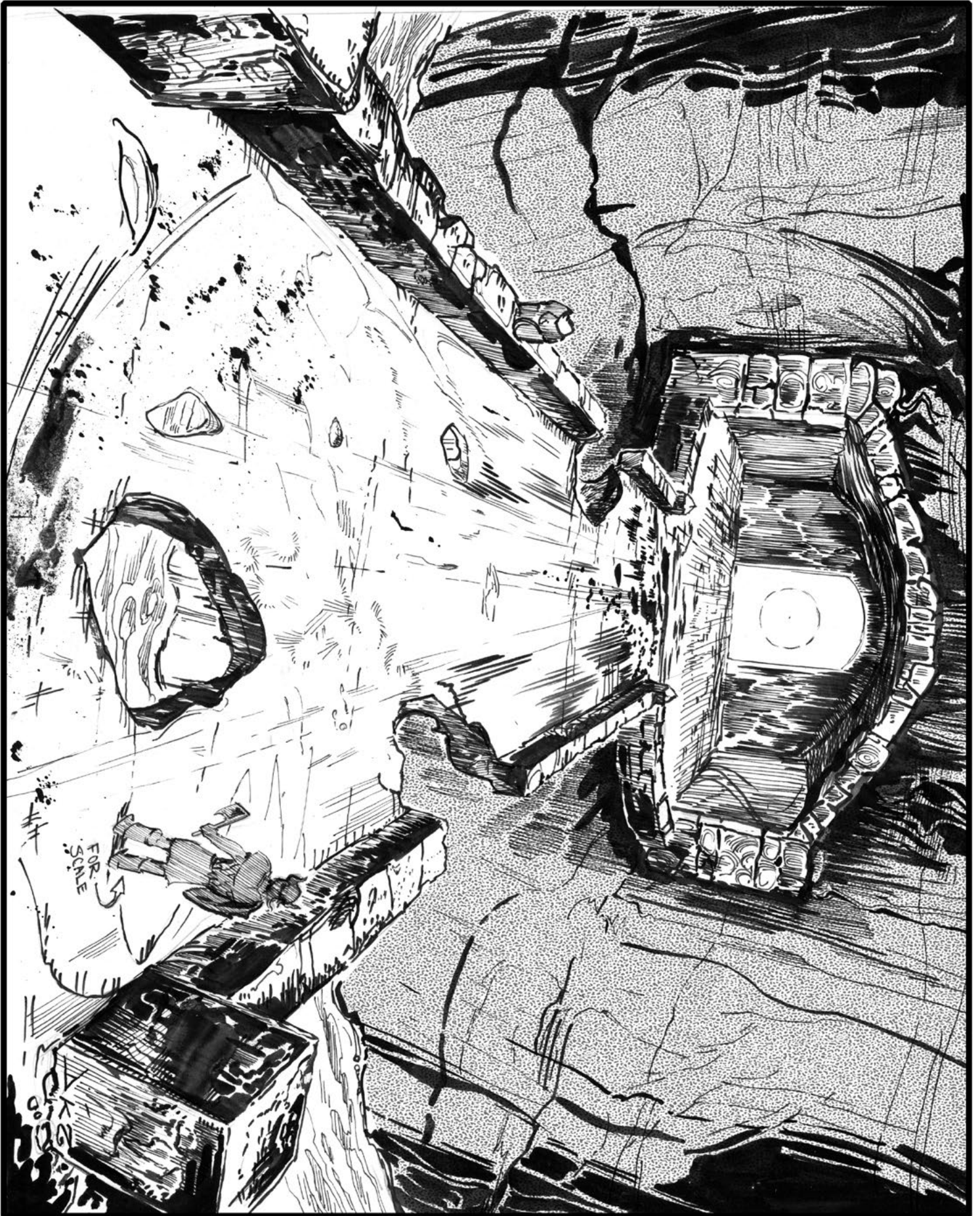
# HANDOUT A



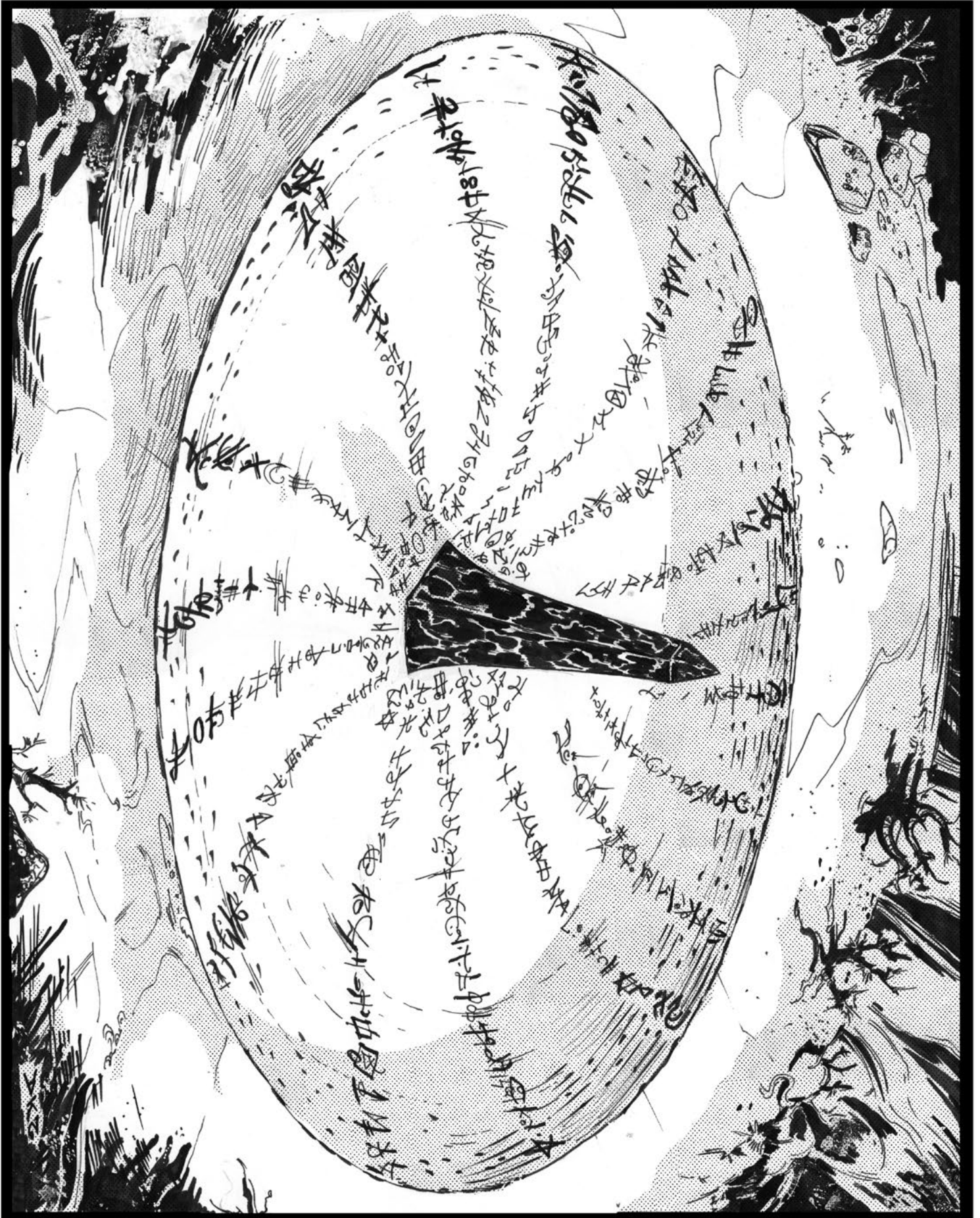




# HANDOUT C









## FIVE ADDITIONAL USES FOR THE SPINNING WHEEL PUZZLE



*he Chained Coffin* introduces a combination puzzle to stymie the PCs (and their players), forcing them to rely on either knowledge encountered during their exploration of the Deep Hollows or blind luck to solve. A mock-up of this puzzle is included with the adventure, but once solved, might seem to lack purpose outside of replaying the adventure at a later date. This isn't the case, however. The judge can reuse the spinning wheel puzzle in his campaign, utilizing the suggestions provided below.

The most obvious way to recycle the wheel is as another combination lock, either within the environs of the Shudder Mountains or elsewhere in the campaign world. The judge need only decide on a new combination of proper symbols, designate what happens if the PCs fail to align the right runes, and the wheel is ready for reuse. But combination locks are just one possibility. Five more alternate uses for the puzzle appear below.

**Multiplanar Amulet:** Consisting of three movable discs, this amulet allows the wearer to transport himself (and possibly those in close contact with the owner) to a multitude of other worlds. To employ the amulet, the wearer must align the proper symbols keyed to each world or dimension, much like punching in the correct digits on a telephone connects one with a specific person. Once the designated dimensional sigils are aligned, the owner merely speaks a command word and is whisked away to the keyed plane of existence or alien world. Unfortunately, the amulet does not come with a key listing the correct symbol alignments, forcing the wearer to conduct research to learn them or trust in blind luck not to end up on a world inimical to mortal life.

**Talisman of Monstrous Summonings:** This talisman conjures up various monstrous creatures and otherworldly entities when the symbols on its three dials are set in the proper alignment. The owner places the device where he wishes the monster to appear, turns the dials so that the symbols keyed to a specific creature are in the proper order, and then invokes the talisman's power. The creature appears the following round, willing to obey the talisman's owner—usually. Not every alignment of symbols summons a creature. Some have no effect, while other combinations call up a monstrous being, but does not compel service from the creature. The talisman is seldom discovered with proper annotation, leaving it to the new owner to discover what combinations work via trial and error.

**Orrery of Fortuitous Evocation:** This device acts as a reference tool for wizards, allowing them to determine

the time and place a certain spell would be most effective. The symbols on the innermost ring are tied to planetary movement, while those on the center dial indicate certain locations throughout the multiverse. The outmost ring's symbols each represent a different spell, known and unknown. When the owner wishes to determine the best place and time to cast a specific spell, he touches the symbol representing the spell to be cast and then aligns the other disks. When the proper time and place are aligned with the spell, the runes glow a coppery-green color, alerting the wizard to the correct combination. If the wizard casts the spell at the location indicated during the time period stipulated, he gains a +5 bonus to his spellcheck. Note, however, that some of these orreries are faulty, and may lead the caster to the worst possible place and time to perform his incantations.

**Construct Activation Code:** The PCs discover a motionless artificial creature (golem, robot, or similar being) with three overlapping discs set into its chest or other body part. Turning the discs so that the correct symbols are aligned causes the creature to come to life, rousing from its stupor. Using the proper "start-up code" compels the constructed life-form to obey the PC activating it, granting the party a useful (and likely powerful) ally. Using the wrong combination has no effect at best or, at worst, brings the creature to life with an intense desire to kill the person who entered the incorrect code!

**Catastrophe Timer:** Three massive discs stand in the center of an ancient ruin, optimally at the site where the party encounters a sorcerous mastermind, evil warlord, or vile priest. As the PC and their adversary battle, the spinning wheels turn, moving a randomly-determined number of stops on their dials every round. The judge chooses three symbols on the wheels that will trigger a great catastrophe (spell explosion, volcanic eruption, rise of the cursed undead army, etc.) when they align. Each round during the battle, the judge rolls a d6, d16, and d24 (for the innermost, middle, and outermost wheels, respectively) to determine the number of increments each wheel moves. When two of the chosen symbols turn adjacent to each other, those runes glow and the sigils' wheels locks in place. The third disc continues its revolution until the last symbol aligns with the immobile, shining runes. At that point, the last sign illuminates and the catastrophe occurs. Due to the random nature of the wheels' progress each round and the party not knowing which signs are important, the catastrophe timer adds an additional level of fear and uncertainty to the battle. Even the judge doesn't know when the disaster will occur!

## BAD LICK BEAST ALTERNATES



*he Bad Lick Beast* (see area 2-10) is a product of two real-world legends—both of which have their roots in the Appalachian region—mixed together and "DCC RPGized." Readers familiar with the Pope Lick Monster and the famed Mothman might see the resemblance if they squint their eyes a bit. These two fabled monsters are

not the only things said to stalk the night back in the hills, however. Judges seeking to introduce another foe to challenge (and hopefully frighten) the PCs, whether in the Deep Hollows or in other parts of the Shudder Mountains, might consider one of the following critters, each of which is another branch off the Bad Lick's family tree of real-world legends. Like the Bad Lick Beast, these critters are all of par-

tial infernal origin, owing their existence to pools of spoiled magic found deep in the Shudder Mountains.

**The Flatwoods Terror:** Init +5; Atk claw +10 melee (1d10+3) or spell; AC 18; HD 10d12; hp 80; MV 30' or fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* and *choking cloud* (+10 spell check), infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 18-20; SV Fort +10, Ref +9, Will +10; AL C.

This grotesque abomination stands 10' tall and possesses a black, teardrop-shaped head. Two luminous eyes burn from its otherwise blank face and the creature emits a ghastly stench. Spindly, but surprisingly strong arms terminating in clawed hands dangle near its wasp-thin waist. The Flatwoods Terror appears to have no legs, its body a wedge of dark flesh below the waist. It moves by flying through the air, propelled by no visible means.

**The Bog Hollow Ripper:** Init +6; Atk claw +6 melee (1d8+3) or bite +5 melee (2d5+3) or horn impale +8 melee (1d6+3); AC 17; HD 7d12; hp 60; MV 30' or jump 50' (100' if moves 10' before leap); Act 2d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), ability drain (DC 14 Fort save or permanently lose 1d5 Strength); infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 19-20; SV Fort +8, Ref +11, Will +6; AL C.

The Bog Hollow Ripper has reptilian features, possessing a leathery, textured skin. Three ridges of short, sharp scales line its hunched back and it bears clawed, webbed hands and feet. A small horn protrudes from above its black, oval-shaped eyes. Its mouth is wide, lipless, and froglike, but bears four rows of jagged, tearing teeth. It can leap an astounding 50' from a standing position and twice that distance with a running start.

**The Hollows Hulk:** Init +3; Atk club +10 melee (1d10+6) or torso mouth bite +8 (1d8+6) or head bite +5 melee (1d6+6 + poison); AC 18; HD 8d12; hp 70; MV body 20', head flies at 40'; Act 3d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), poisonous saliva (1d3 Stamina loss, plus DC 16 Fort save or death) infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 19-20; SV Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +6; AL C.

A brutish humanoid standing 9' tall, the Hollows Hulk's skin is pale gray and sleek like a seal's coat. No head sits atop its broad shoulders. Instead, the creature carries its detached head tucked under one arm, gripping a gnarled club in the other. A second, and far larger mouth gapes from the beast's massive torso. The Hollows Hulk's head can move independently, floating through the air to bite victims with a maw filled with venomous slobber.

**The Thunder Notch Buzzard:** Init +3; Atk claw +7 melee (2d6+3) or beak +5 melee (1d10+3) or spell; AC 14; HD 8d12; hp 68; MV 20' or fly 50'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* and *scorching ray* (+8 spell check), infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 18-20; SV Fort +8, Ref +6, Will +6; AL C.

This creature resembles a massive buzzard with a wing-

span measuring 35' long. Scaly, leprous skin covers its bare head, and its dark feathers are mangy with mites and age. Burning orange eyes, positioned forward looking like a man's, peer down at its prey and causes flesh to blister and burn with their glare (as per *scorching ray*). The Thunder Notch Buzzard is an excellent mimic, capable of reproducing any noise or voice it hears and using this ability with a vindictive malevolence to confuse, dispirit, and lure victims to their doom.

**The White Fright:** Init +3; Atk claw +6 melee (1d8+2 plus infection) or bite +5 melee (1d10+2); AC 15; HD 8d12; hp 70; MV 20' or 40' (all fours); Act 2d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), infection (as mummy rot, DCC RPG p. 422); infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 19-20; SV Fort +9, Ref +6, Will +5; AL C.

The size of a grizzly bear, this variant is covered with coarse, shaggy hair, dirty white in color. A long, snaggle-tooth snout juts from its equine face, bristling with oversized fangs. Claws, filthy and bloodstained, tip its shovel-like hands. This creature moves about mostly on two legs, but can drop to all fours to run with astonishing speed.

**The Sawtooth Ridge Screecher:** Init +4; Atk bite +9 melee (2d8+4) or constricting tentacle +6 melee (1d6+4 each round); AC 14; HD 7d12; hp 65; MV fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), terrorizing screech (affects all within 30'; DC 14 Will save or flee in panic for 1d6+1 rounds); infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 18-20, repelled by seven-pointed star; SV Fort +6, Ref +9, Will +7; AL C.

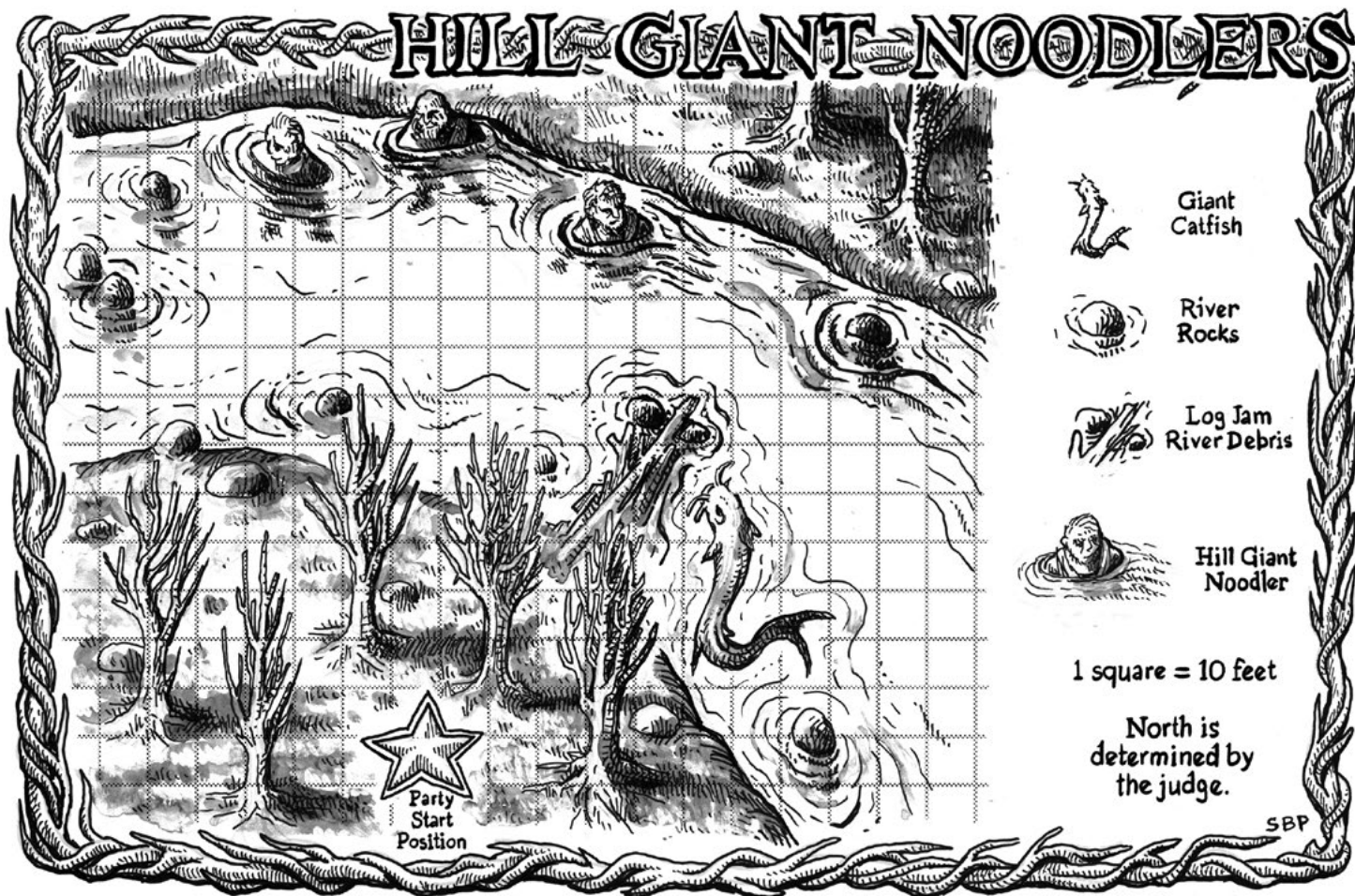
Resembling a huge bipedal creature bearing both reptilian features and avian plumage, this variant has a single eye set dead center in its head above a metal beak lined with razor sharp teeth. A pair of 10' tentacles extend from its body, trailing along behind the creature as it soars through the night sky. This beast screams with a sizzling cry similar to a steam whistle, and its screech instills horror in those unfortunate enough to hear it. The Screecher abhors the sign of a seven-pointed star, unable to attack any creature bearing such a symbol.

**The Backwoods Devil:** Init +6; Atk bite +7 melee (1d12+2) or sting +6 melee (1d6+2 plus poison); AC 13; HD 8d12; hp 68; MV 20' or fly 50'; Act 2d20; SP *darkness* (+8 spell check), droning wings (affects all within 40'; DC 10 Will save or paralyzed for 2d6 rounds), poison (1d6 plus DC 17 Fort save or take an additional 4d6 dmg) infravision, immune to non-magical weapons, half-damage from acid, fire & cold, crit threat range 18-20; SV Fort +5, Ref +10, Will +6; AL C.

The buzz of this 15' long waspish creature heralds its approach. Seeming a mixture of both yellow jacket wasp and praying mantis, the beat of the Backwoods Devil's wings tears leaves from trees, blows small opponents prone, and creates a hypnotizing drone. Prey incapacitated by the sound of its wings are cut in half by the Backwoods Devil's fearsomely large mandibles. It also bears a venomous sting capable of killing creatures much larger than itself.







## BONUS ENCOUNTER FOR THE CHAINED COFFIN



his encounter was originally created as a promotional offer. Buyers who pre-ordered DCC #83 would receive this bonus encounter on an accompanying postcard. Now, as part of this compilation, we present it outside of that format for the first time!

### HILL GIANT NOODLERS

This encounter can occur anywhere along one of the rivers in the Shudder Mountains.

The sound of splashing water and gruff voices is heard ahead. The river grows broad and slow here, its water tan and murky from sediment washed down from the mountains above. Three large humanoid forms, immersed in the lazy waters up to their huge shoulders, splash about near the opposite shore. They seem to be feeling along the riverbed in search of something.

These three figures are Bigginty hill giants "noodling" for the giant catfish along the riverbank. The river is 6' deep here, but appears deeper due to the giants' crouched posture. Preferring humanoid to fish, the giants attack the party. Two waded out of the river, while the third pulls rocks from the riverbed to hurl at the party.

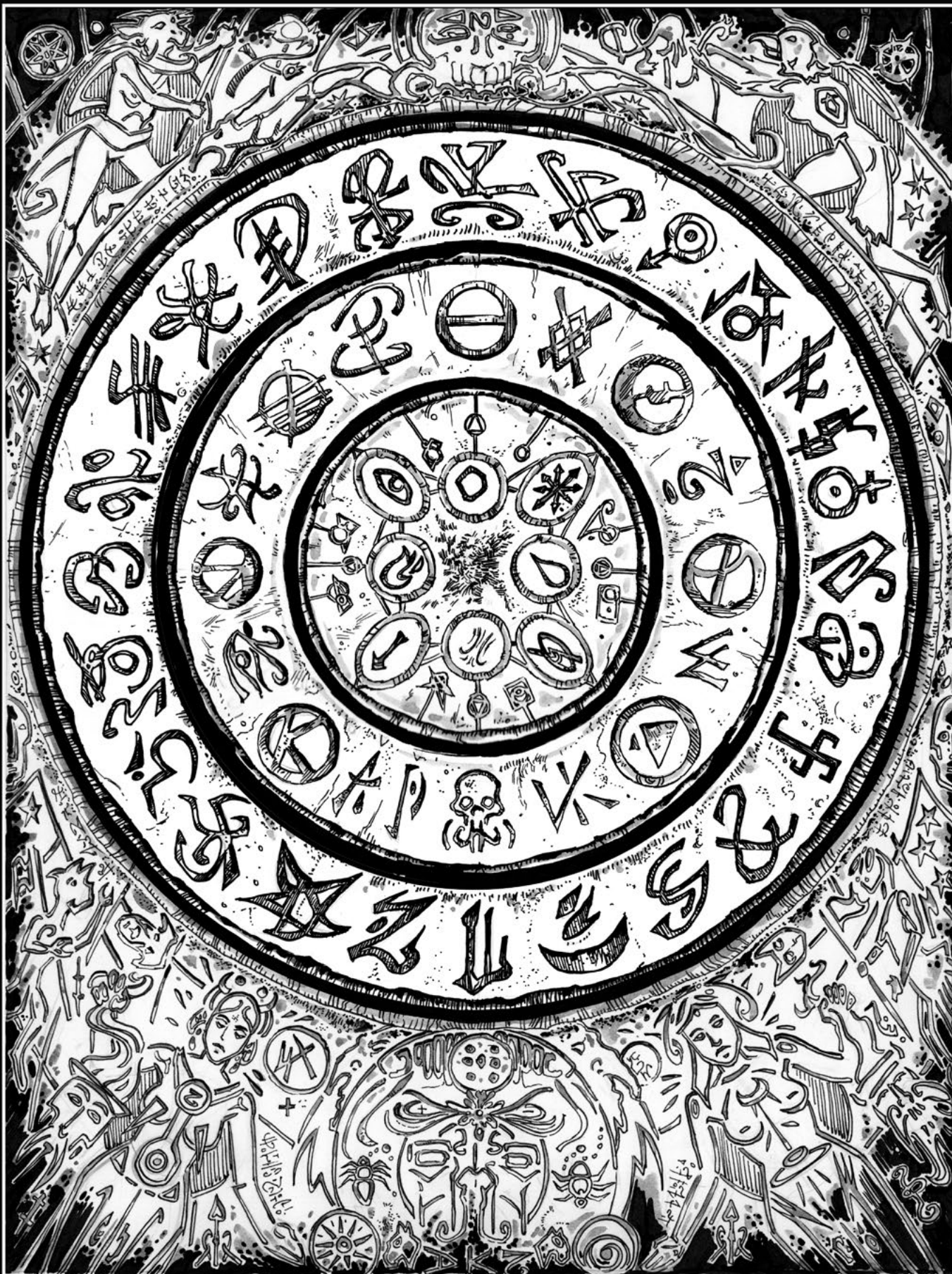
**Hill Giants (3):** see DCC RPG p. 414

Complicating matters, the hill giants' fishing efforts have stirred up a giant catfish, which is now angry and lurking in the murky water. PCs entering the river must make an Intelligence check (DC 1d20+10) to avoid being surprised by the enraged fish. The catfish ignores the giants during the battle.

**Giant Catfish (1):** Init +2; Atk bite +6 melee (dmg 2d8+2) or barbels +4 melee (dmg 1d6 + poison); AC 15; HD 8d8+5; HP 41; MV 20' or swim 40'; Act 1d20; SP poison barbels (DC 13 Fort; 1d6 damage on successful save, 2d6 damage if failed), SV Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +2; AL N

After the battle, if the riverbank is searched, a successful Luck check by the PCs discovers the catfish's den. The muddy tunnel is 15' deep and 4' in diameter. It contains mixed animal and humanoid bones, and a gold bracelet (50 gp value).

*Map:* See Attached. No direction compass is included since this encounter can be placed anywhere along the rivers in Coffin, making direction relative.







Spinning Wheel Puzzle, Random Starting Position



## CHAPTER NINE

# FURTHER STORIES TO HARKEN TO

*There are more tales to be told in the Shudder Mountains than anyone can spin in a lifetime.*

*These will keep the pump primed and wellspring waters flowing whenever you might feel yourself running dry for a spell.*



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# APPENDIX N INSPIRATIONS: THE CHAINED COFFIN

by Michael Curtis



n a world where Lovecraft and Tolkien have become part of the cultural mainstream, there are as yet unrecognized geniuses of the phantasmagorical and the weird awaiting discovery in the shadows, beyond the reach of the public eye. Some of these masters composed stories well situated in the realm of Sword & Sorcery, while others' works transcend easy categorization, being unique in setting, tone, language, or structure. Although a great many of the names on the famed Appendix N are easily identified as fantasy or science fiction authors, one name seems oddly out of place among those scribes of the fantastic: *Manly Wade Wellman*.

At first glance, it appears difficult to reconcile Wellman's place on the Appendix N list. He is, after all, the writer who beat William Faulkner out of the Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine Award and whose non-fiction was nominated for a Pulitzer. Respectability seems at direct odds with tales of the weird, the fantastical, or the futuristic, especially during the period Wellman was writing. Don't let the mainstream accolades fool you, though: Wellman's heart thrummed to the beat of the bizarre and the horrific, making him no less deserving of a place on the Appendix N list than Lovecraft, Leiber, Moorcock, or Burroughs.

To the reader unfamiliar with Wellman, I envy you. There is a fabulous storehouse of literary treasure awaiting you, one that will not only thrill and entertain, but inspire you to plunder that vault of its jewels and use them to adorn your DCC RPG campaigns. This article provides a brief overview of some of Wellman's most famous stories—his Silver John tales—as well as tips on how they can be beneficial to your DCC campaign and provide guidance on how to transform Wellman's written creations into gameable ideas suitable for the playing table.

Wellman's stories, especially his Silver John tales, naturally lend themselves to the game table. This is due in part to Wellman's ability as a storyteller. He weaves details and descriptions with a talent akin to that of the old man sitting in the corner by the fire, telling yarns as old as the hills to the next generation. Wellman's language and mental imagery, often derived from the vistas and people around him, paint beautiful thought pictures. I suspect he'd have made one hell of a DCC RPG judge!

But mental pictures and pretty language mean nothing if they lack a good tale to lend themselves to. Luckily, Wellman's stories are fit seamlessly into those we usually tell

around the game table. Most follow a similar structure: Silver John, the wandering musician and storyteller in this case, encounters evil and malignant forces in the wilds of the Appalachian hills and hollows. This is not unlike what the PCs face at every game session and judges looking for inspiration to introduce new material into their campaigns need only read a few of Wellman's stories.

The following few brief synopses are only a sample of the literary and gameable riches that awaits the DCC RPG judge in Wellman's body of Appalachian tales. In addition to the basic premise of each tale, I've also touched upon what the judge might take away from the story and utilize in his or her own campaign.

"O Ugly Bird!" the very first Silver John story, demonstrates what to expect in Wellman's Appalachian cycle tales. In this yarn, John crosses paths with a conjure-man who has the locals under his fiendish thumb, terrifying them with both his magic and a ferocious-looking buzzard that is decidedly unnatural. Judges seeking to give an evil wizard a more interesting familiar than a black cat or bat should definitely give this one a read, as should anyone else looking to start with Wellman's Silver John stories.

"Old Devlins Was A-Waiting" features a spell that transcends time and space, calling up a fearsome figure John must face off against. That figure is no less than Devil Anse Hatfield from the famed Hatfield and McCoy feud. For a judge with an elaborate campaign world history, such a spell might summon a wizard who once threatened the world with his magic or a warlord who caused the earth to tremble under his steel-shod tread. Can the PCs stop the spell or, failing that, turn back that which it called from the depths of history?

"The Little Black Train" is the tale of a proud woman suffering under a potent death curse. She believes she's shaken off the fatal enchantment and celebrates her renewed future with a mountainside shindig. Unfortunately, it soon appears that she might not have escaped her certain fate and it's up to John to turn aside the Little Black Train. Given there's a whole appendix in the DCC RPG rules devoted to curses, "The Little Black Train" provides some unique suggestions on their effects and how they can be countered. Sometimes you just need a good tune...

"The Desrick on Yandro" is the story of a greedy businessman seeking gold in the mountains. His rudeness and disdain for the customs and beliefs of the Appalachian people



gets him in over his head with some of the stranger things that call those old hills home. This story is a veritable Appalachian bestiary awaiting translation into game terms.

“Owls Hoot in the Daytime” presents the tale of a secret location high in the hills, a place of old evil, unnatural events, and a guardian who must keep that evil at bay. When John decides to see if there’s any truth to the old legends, he encounters both a fabulous treasure and a horrific force that might predate the world itself. This one is a role-playing adventure in and of itself, one featuring monsters, treasure, interesting NPCs, and even a giant possum who might be more than it seems.

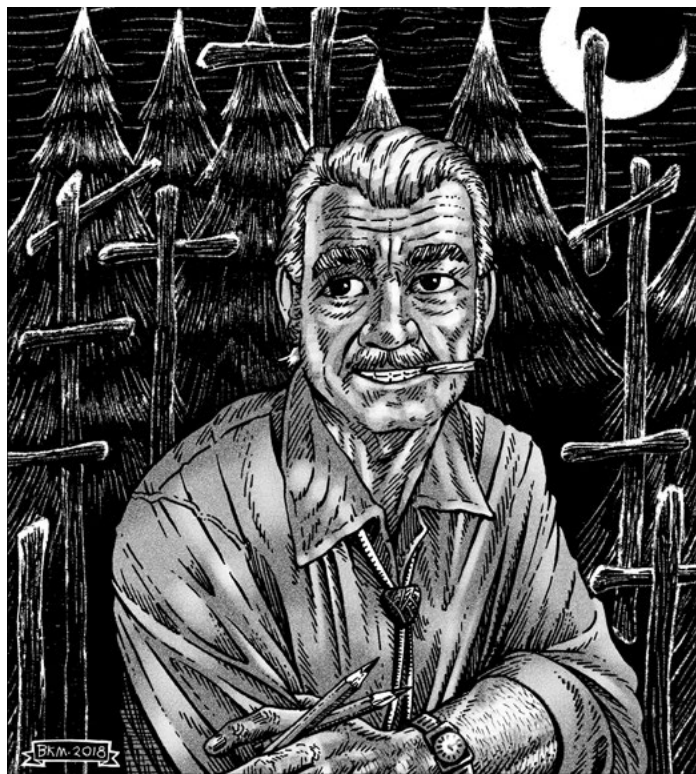
Once you’ve had the chance to acquaint yourself with Wellman’s stories, you’ll indubitably want to incorporate some of those wonderful characters, creatures, and magic into your DCC RPG game — assuming you can tear yourself away from the tales to do so! Luckily, *The Chained Coffin* has already done some of the work for you, taking inspiration from Wellman’s work and other traditional American folklore to create a DCC RPG campaign setting unlike any other. But there’s far more waiting to be developed into game terms and put to good use in your home campaign. Let’s talk a bit about how to do that.

Translating Wellman into gameable terms can broadly be relegated into two methods: straight conversion and inspirational elaboration. Straight conversion is the most common way game masters adapt material from other media formats into game form. The game master encounters a cool new monster, magical item, or spell and decides how best to represent that thing using his or her favorite game’s rules mechanics. Inspirational elaboration goes a bit further, challenging the judge to create entirely new mechanics or rules based on a concept or conceit encountered in non-gaming matter.

DCC #85 *The Chained Coffin* is primarily straight conversion. I was captivated by Wellman’s Silver John stories and wanted to create a DCC RPG adventure and setting that called to mind the unique landscape and culture of the Appalachians, doing for role-playing games what Wellman did for literature.

Given Wellman’s talent, converting some of his ideas into gameable form was easier than doing so with the works of a lesser author. Wellman’s descriptive language provided a solid base to begin the adaptation process. Let’s take a look at the monster the Abandoned from *The Chained Coffin Companion* and see how it I developed it, transforming a creature from one of Wellman’s stories into a critter to haunt the Shudder Mountains.

The backstory of *The Chained Coffin* involves an ancient race who settled in the Shudder Mountains before the dawn of time, then vanished for reasons I’ll not reveal here. These ancient inhabitants delved deep into the mountains, excavating strange ores and honeycombing the hills with mines. When they vanished, they left behind a race of monstrous foremen that still dwell down there in the dark.



This background element tied in really well with aspects of Wellman’s story “Shiver in the Pines,” a tale which inspired some of the Shudder’s own history. I won’t ruin the story for those who’ve not read it, but suffice to say that John and some acquaintances encounter a creature I wanted to convert over to DCC RPG.

I started with the brief description Wellman gives of the creature in that story — “[It] looked like a big, big man wearing a fur coat; until you saw the fur was on his skin, with warty muscles bunching through. His head was more like a frog’s than anything else, wide in the mouth and big in the eyes and no nose. He spread his arms...and took hold with his hands that had both webs and claws.” — and used that as a basis for my version.

With these details in mind, I opened the DCC rulebook and started looking for a foundation to build upon, something pre-existing that would provide guidance as to how strong, tough, deadly, etc. my creature should be. “Big, big man” sounds about ogre-size to me, so I’ll assign it HD comparable to that of an ogre as given in the rules. It has fur, but nothing about a thick hide, so I’ll take the ogre’s AC of 16 and knock it down a few points to 13. It’s not a lumbering brute, so we’ll bump the speed to 30 feet, assign a slightly weaker melee attack, changing the slam to a claw to better fit Wellman’s description. As it dwells in the dark, infravision is a natural advantage and we’ll keep the saving throws comparable. To finish off the Abandoned, I want to give it a special power or advantage to differentiate it from the ogre it started as. An event in “Shiver in the Pines” suggests the creature can grab you and drag you down into the dark, so the Abandoned gets a grapple attack bonus to reflect that. And we’re done! A brand new DCC beastie walks from Wellman’s work into your campaign world.

Inspirational elaboration is a little harder to do, but the effort is worth the reward. The satisfaction of creating something entirely new, be it for your own gaming group, a convention game, or publication, makes the mental struggle and sweat worthwhile.

When you elaborate on material, you're not simply filing off the serial numbers of something that already exists, but taking a kernel of an idea and cultivating it into a new, odd, terrifying, or evocative creation of your own manufacture. In many case of inspirational elaboration, you might begin with taking a pre-existing mechanic or system (possibly one from an entirely different game system than the one you're playing) and tweaking or building upon it until you get something utterly new. Here's one example of how inspirational elaboration led to a unique new magical power in the Shudder Mountain game material:

Music plays an important role in the Silver John stories. Not only does Wellman use American folk songs as a means to evoke the Appalachians' unique character, but Silver John often depends on the song themselves to provide the lore he needs to overcome evil or to turn aside a malicious force. For example, in "Where Did She Wander?" it's a song that tells the dark tale of Becky Til Hoppard and it is music that undoes an awakening evil in "Can These Bones Live?" I wanted to incorporate the power of music in the Shudder Mountain setting, but there was no direct correlation between Wellman's tales and the DCC RPG rules. I guess I'd just have to elaborate:

I could have created an entirely new character class, a variant of the bard, for example (a class which was inspired by Silver John if the stories about the early days of D&D are true). However, I wanted to touch upon the idea that music is universal; that anyone, regardless of class or race, could possibly learn a song or two that might possess intrinsic power capable of being turned against the evils of the Shudders or to otherwise impose supernatural effects. It made more sense to put the power into the songs themselves than

into the person performing them. Thus, the concept of the Old Songs in the Shudder Mountains came to be.

I decided to use a simple game mechanic similar to a spell-check, but even more basic. Personality appeared the best modifier for resolving Old Song checks, best reflecting the need for a forceful personality, personal charisma, and showmanship to invoke the music's powers. From there, it was simply a matter of including a governor of sorts, a means to prevent the PCs from whipping out an Old Song every time they ran into a giant possum that failed to take a liking to the party. That led to the Stamina cost for using Old Songs, a means to serve as both a check against misuse as well as demonstrate the physical toll of calling on the ancient power in the music of the mountains. With the game mechanics nailed down, it was just a matter of cooking up a few Old Songs to add to the campaign setting. I could have included more, but, like patrons, I thought the judges (and perhaps even the players) should create their own songs to personalize their own campaigns and cater to their personal tastes. And there we have it: a unique game mechanic and campaign-specific power that lends its own distinctive touch to the Shudder Mountains, inspired by the stories that Wellman penned.

Although this article focuses on Wellman's work, hopefully the lessons it seeks to impart are universal. A judge armed with these pieces of advice can go forth and plunder his or her favorite authors for new DCC RPG material, creating a richer campaign world and new challenges to confront the players. At the very least, I hope I've inspired you to familiarize yourself with Manly Wade Wellman's stories, either for the first time or to reacquaint yourself with his wonderful backwoods yarns. Even if you choose not to adapt those stories to your DCC campaign, the enjoyment of reading these literary treasures far exceeds the time and cost to track them down. Maybe I'll see you someday in the backwoods. I'll keep a sitting stump free for you and a jug of good hill liquor waiting!

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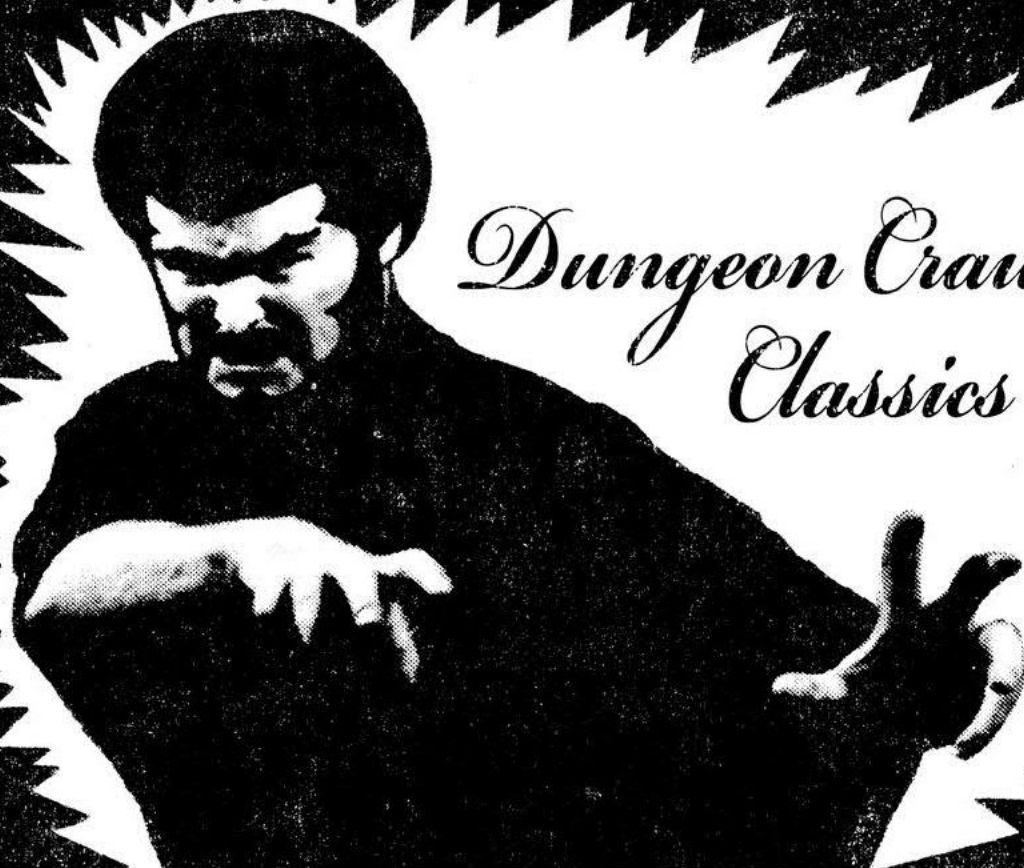
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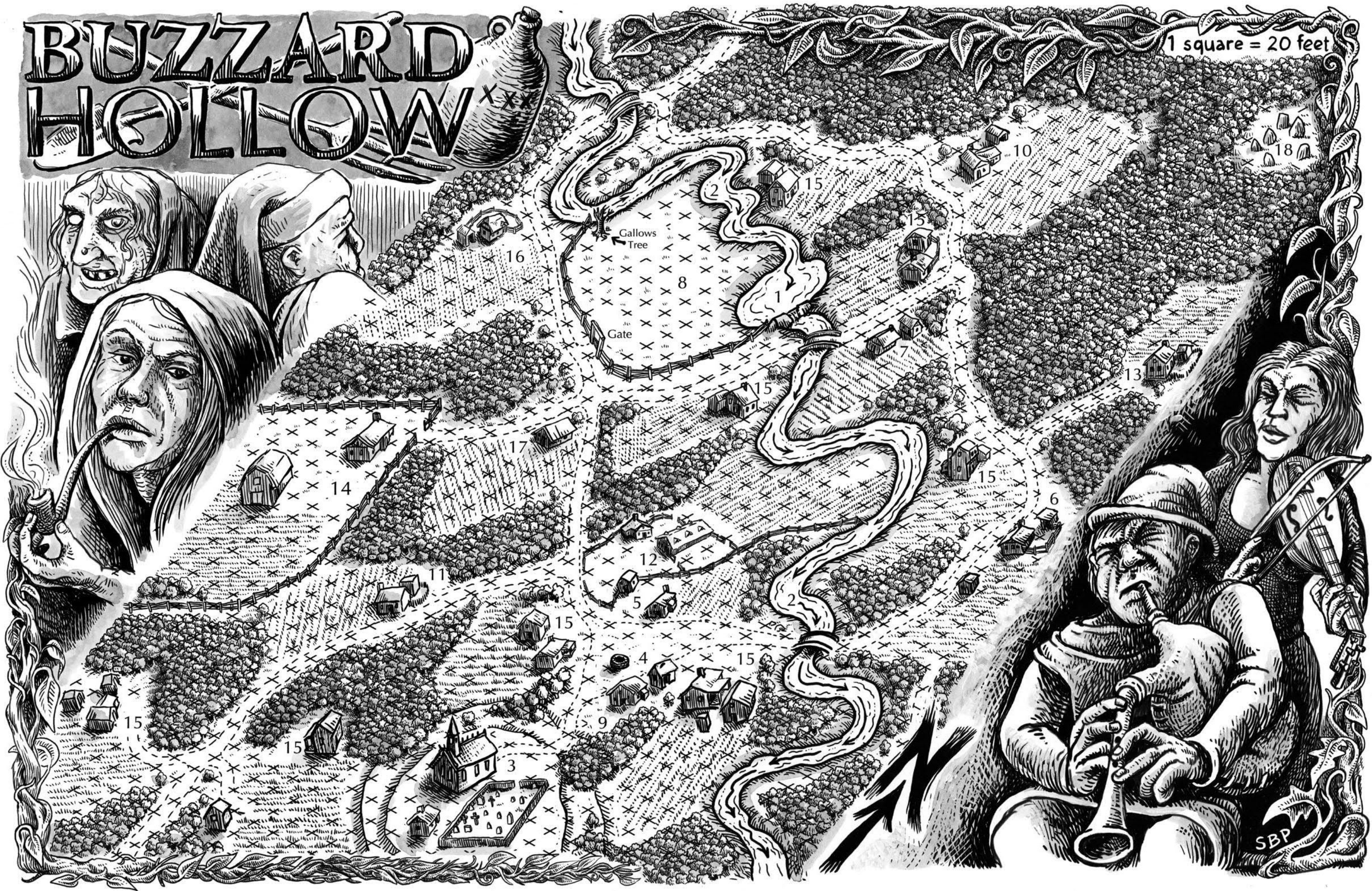






# BUZZARD HOLLOW

1 square = 20 feet



SBP



# The Shudder Mountains

1 HEX = 4 MILES

