

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS®

DCC #104: A LEVEL 0 ADVENTURE
BY TERRY OLSON & TEAM

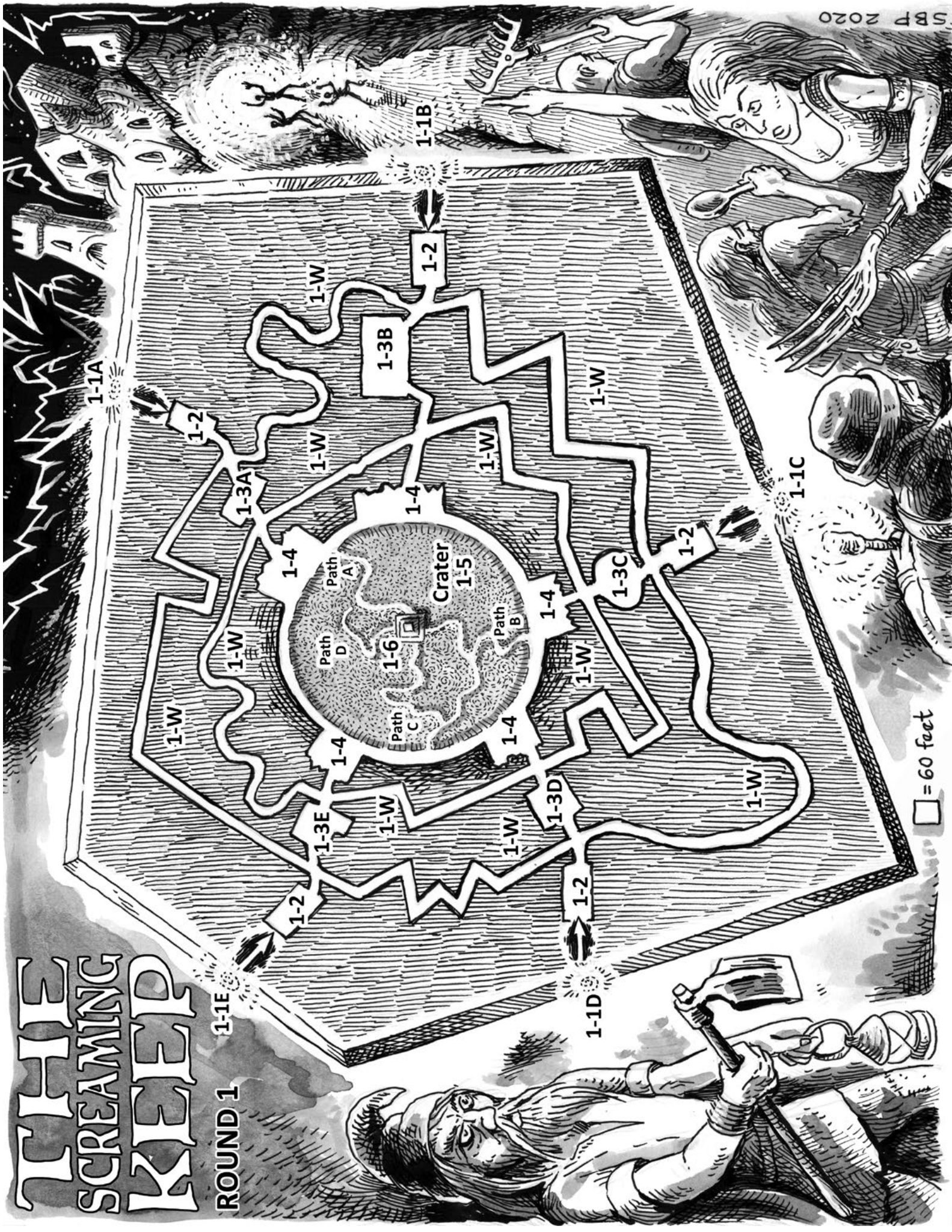
RETURN TO THE STARLESS SEA



JKZ
2023

THE SCREAMING KEEP

ROUND 1



□ = 60 feet

RETURN TO THE STARLESS SEA

THE 2022 DCC GEN CON TOURNAMENT

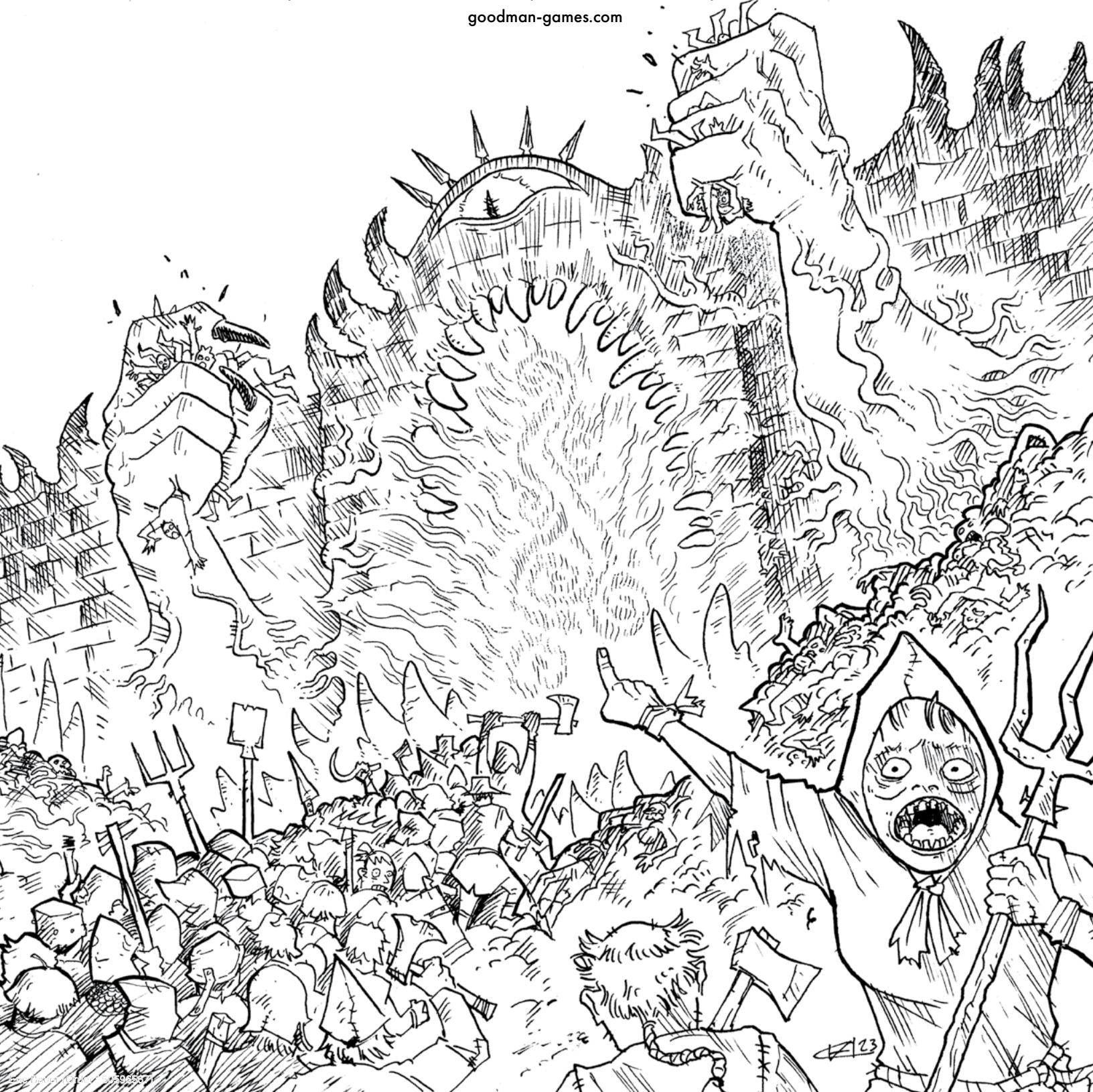
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INTRODUCTION



ne of the greatest traditions of “D&D publishing” is the convention tournament module. Many of TSR’s legendary adventures were originally designed as D&D tournaments for Origins or Gen Con; *Tomb of Horrors* being among the best-known of these. The first half-decade of TSR’s existence saw adventures published regularly based on their previous use as a convention tournament.

Almost 20 years ago, Goodman Games revived this tradition with *Dungeon Crawl Classics* #13: *Crypt of the Devil Lich*. This lethal dungeon was run as a team tournament at Gen Con 2004 under the 3.5 rules set. It proved to be extremely popular, and running annual team tournaments became a Goodman Games tradition. From 2004 to 2009, we ran DCC tournaments under the 3.5 rules set, with peak attendance that exceeded 200 players. During this time we also supported tournaments for other systems, including Xcrawl.

After the release of DCC RPG, we began to offer different kinds of team tournaments. Harley Stroh developed the tournament funnel concept, and subsequently created a spell duel tournament as well. All along, we wanted to return to the team tournament format. The “swingly” nature of DCC RPG play made this challenging, but eventually a solution was devised.

And thus, at Gen Con 2017 the DCC team tournament returned! Since that time, Goodman Games has run a tournament each year, even moving it to an online format during the pandemic. *Return to the Starless Sea* was the first DCC RPG tournament run at Gen Con once life returned to a somewhat normal fashion.

You hold in your hands the printed version of that adventure. This is the first time that the tournament entrants will have seen the full adventure contents. In fact, it’s the first time that anyone, beyond a select few judges and designers, will see the module as a whole.

Players and judges who have played DCC #67: *Sailors on the Starless Sea* will find themselves in territory both familiar and new. The round begins with thousands of angry peasants surrounding the Screaming Keep trying to find a way in when the walls open magical portals.

BACKGROUND



ong after the sun has set, when the night’s unnameable sounds begin, the village elders stare into the distance and mutter curses at the “Sailors on the Starless Sea.” This mob of peasants somehow challenged the corrupted hordes of the Chaos Lords... and won. They descended below the crumbling ruins, evaded the subterranean sea’s leviathan, and collapsed the Chaos Lords’ colossal cavern and the ziggurat temple within. Yes, these lowly villagers became reavers, cutpurses, heathen-slayers, and warlocks, but they left their original task unfinished.

The night of the collapse lasted for days uncountable as scintillating balls of flame erupted from the newly formed crater. When the sun finally relieved the terror, an undulating dark crimson mist spanned the basin like a lake of blood. Most folk stayed away from it, save for the occasional mooncalf “adventurers” that entered and never returned. But then, one cursed day, a new keep rose from the mist and began to scream.

The Screaming Keep built and rebuilt itself, never staying the same for long. Earthquakes began and with each one the keep grew larger, and the land withered, as if the citadel drained the life around it.

And now, the keep is growing again. Unspeakable terrors come out to take innocents back below. The land is barren. Milk is poison. Wells contain putrid sludge. So many villages are threatened that they’ve summoned hundreds of brave souls to assault the keep, descend into the mist, and stop whatever lies within the crater. It is time to Return to the Starless Sea.

ROUND 1

JUDGES INTRODUCTION



eturn to the Starless Sea was a competitive, scored, two-round tournament adventure where round 1 is a level 0 funnel and teams of five players throw their zeroes against the horrors of the keep, and the highest-scoring teams advance to round 2.

Tournament dungeon crawls are different from normal DCC RPG modules in that they follow a tournament play structure—Rounds are timed, teams are awarded points based on their accomplishments in the adventure, and top-scoring teams advance to the next round.

Although this module is presented as a “normal” adventure, judges may incorporate the following instructions to emulate the tournament structure.

TOURNAMENT INSTRUCTIONS



he Screaming Keep Round 1 map will show four area encounters strung linearly from 1-1 at the bottom to 1-4 at the top. There are five flights that are almost identical, the overview is to expedite play and keep each tournament flight unique as each flight has its own area 1-3. There are separate maps for each area and encounter. For non-tournament play, randomly pick a starting flight from 1-1A to 1-1E.

PCs and Pre-Generated Characters: Each player will be assigned four random level 0 characters at the start of the round.

Initiative Per Player: Initiative is determined via one roll per player’s cohort of PCs rather than one per PC. The player uses the best Agility modifier of their PCs. So, if the player’s PCs have Agility scores of 8, 10, 10, and 13, and that

TOURNAMENT MATERIALS

Return to the Starless Sea was originally run twice as a tournament: once online during “Bride of the Cyclops Con” in 2020 and once “in person” at Gen Con 2022. A rules pack was issued to the judges and players at each event that contained the tournament rules, scoring sheets, pre-generated level 1 characters, a deck of 50 0-level PCs, and more. Those materials have been collected and are available as a free download at goodman-games/return-to-the-starless-sea. Use your browser or the QRC below to access them if you’re interested in running *Return to the Starless Sea* as a tournament at home or just want to see how all the teams did!

Judges can also use the Purple Sorcerer 0-Level Party Generator to create their own deck of 0-level PCs for use with this adventure by visiting purplesorcerer.com.



ENCOUNTER MAPS

Throughout this adventure you’ll notice we have several room maps of the various encounters faced by the players as they strive to end the machinations of the Chaos Lords Molan and Felan. These maps were originally designed for use as VTT elements during Bride of the Cyclops Con, which took place while the world was shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. We knew people needed something to take their minds off of current events and Goodman Games dove head-first into the new (for us) digital world of online tabletop gaming. We’ve included these maps for posterity’s sake and as a benchmark for how far both Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG and the world has come since the gloomy years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

player rolls a 15, then the four PCs have initiative of 16 (15+1 from the 13 Agility). Note that for round 1, and only round 1, we ignore rolling d16 initiative for a PC with a 2h-weapon.

When In Doubt, Target The First Rank: At the beginning of combat, ask the players to determine the rank order of their PCs, front to back. Unless there is an obvious reason for an exception, direct damage is applied to the rank 1 PC until they fall, and then the rank 2, etc. Area of effect damage affects all the ranks.

Standardized Damage And Effects: Damage from non-PC attacks are standardized, ensuring that all PCs suffered equally in a given encounter. This number is usually average of the damage roll, rounding up, and is noted in brackets after the regular damage notation:

Guardian Angel: Init +3; Atk flaming sword +3 melee (1d10+3 plus fire [9]); Crit IV/d14 [+3 damage]; AC 15; HD 8d8; hp 64; MV fly 40'; Act 2d20; SP divine flame, retributive strike; SV Fort +3, Ref +5, Will Immune; AL L.

Monster Crits: For the funnel, monster crits inflict 3 points of damage in addition to the normal attack damage (noted as [+3 damage]). The judge is may narrate the crit however they desire.

Similarly, duration of effects are standardized and noted within brackets.

DEATH AND REPLACING LOST PCS



For a funnel, there is no bleeding out or recovering the body. A PC whose hp are reduced to zero or less is irrevocably dead. The player may later replace a lost PC from the “Gong Horde” PC deck as follows:

PCs are “dealt” to each player via a collection of 50 level 0 PC sheets. When a PC dies, have the player put the PC in the discard pile. If it’s clear that the PC will not be looted, discard the sheet. Otherwise, keep it visible until the encounter ends and looting the dead is over.

It’s intended that all players participate for the entire duration of round 1. Consequently, there are opportunities for a party to replace PCs in the event of multiple deaths or even a TPK. There are two ways for a party to get replacement PCs:

Area-Specific Replacement PCs: Some encounters have peasants that can be rescued as replacement PCs. They are not always obvious—some are hidden, some require going off the beaten path, etc. However, all have some risk associated with gaining them; the risk varies by encounter but can be quite high. The number of PCs lost in the rescue could equal, or exceed, the number rescued. If a party recovers an area-specific PC by overcoming the risks, good for them. They may recruit that PC even if it exceeds their original party size, which means a player may have more than four PCs if the extras are recovered in this way.

Replacement PCs from the Gong Horde: There are two other situations where players may obtain additional random PCs: a TPK and in between numbered areas. In both cases the PCs are assigned randomly from the peasant horde streaming in behind them.

- **TPK:** If the party TPKs in an encounter, hand out four new PCs to each player and start the party just beyond the encounter’s exit. The encounter is considered finished and looting of dead PCs is prohibited. The only exception to the above is a TPK in area 1-6, which immediately ends the session and terminates the round for that party.

- **In between areas:** If the party is between encounters, they can opt to refill their ranks from the invading peasants streaming through the halls and grounds. Specifically, this may occur in the entry hallway of 1-2, in the hallways between 1-2 and 1-3, in the hallways between 1-3 and 1-4, at the crater's edge between 1-4 and 1-5, and at the base of the crater between 1-5 and 1-6. The text has reminders in each of these areas. A player may only choose this option if they have less than four PCs; once they have four, this option is not available, even if some of those four were encounter-specific replacements. If, for some reason, the judge is tracking time for this process, it takes 1 round to gain a PC this way.

Running Out of PCs: Every table has 50 0-level character sheets. An especially unlucky group of players could use up all of them. In this case, the party may not replace PCs. If an encounter has replacement PCs available, then those PCs are dead upon recovery. **Judge, be sure to track every PC replaced in between encounters.**

NARRATE THE ENDING, REGARDLESS OF PROGRESS

In some cases, a party might advance to round 2 without having finished all of round 1. To prevent a possibly confusing discontinuity in the story for those who start round 2, narrate the ending as if the party survived all the way to area 1-6. Feel free to improvise, but be sure to read the last paragraph of read-aloud text at the end of area 1-6, “As you curse fate and prepare to die...”

INTRODUCTORY HANDOUT

As they gather at the table, provide teams a copy of the introductory handout.

JUDGING TIPS

Don't rush player actions or decisions. Give them as much time to decide their action as they want. This is especially true of the opening area 1-1 where players have a limited number of rounds to act but can take as long as they want to decide how to act in those 3 rounds.

Area 1-6 will be easier to run with a battle mat and some kind of representation (chits, written locations, etc.) of each PC. You do not have to represent the melt men; they're just a thick mob that the PCs must wade through.

We recommend using the “Gong Horde” deck of 50 level 0 PCs which you'll deal to players. When a PC dies, ask the player for the PC's sheet and keep it on your side of the table. As long as you have the sheet, that PC is lootable; once you put the card in the discard pile, it is not lootable. It's important to track the number of PCs, in case they run out.

During combat, you may find it helps to track initiative using an index card with a number written on it. Write the numbers 1 through 6 on an index card and use them to hand to the players (and yourself) to track initiative order. That way you can quickly visually see whose turn it is to act.



STARTING THE ADVENTURE (NON-TOURNAMENT VERSION)

Judges wishing to run this adventure as a non-tournament adventure at the start of a new campaign may wish to minimize or remove some of the references to the original DCC #67 *Sailors on the Starless Sea* to make this more of a stand-alone module. Below is a slightly modified version of the introduction that removes some of the more direct background references to the original *Sailors*:

There is a pitchfork that hangs above the mud hearth in your home. It is a humble thing: an oaken handle worn smooth by years of use; rusted iron tines, beaten sharp by a village blacksmith ages ago. Old stains that seem to boil beneath the rust.

You never use this pitchfork.

It was used, once – though whether by your great grandfather or his great grandfather you're not certain. But you know the stories that have been passed down: of the great evil that took root in the ancient keep that overlooks your hamlet; of your ancestors taking up clubs, and daggers, and – pitchforks – to confront the horrors that lurked beneath the ruins. Your village was nearly slaughtered that day, and those that returned were changed – with a darkness inside that made them reticent to speak of those events lest the evil return.

But your ancestors didn't finish what they had started. And now the keep rises again, building itself with each passing day.

Outside, a bell sounds in the village, calling your people to the market square, and the battle that must follow.

You're no hero. But you know what must be done.

You take the pitchfork down from the wall.

THROUGH THE BREACH!



You are one of the hundreds-strong peasant army surrounding the recently erected Screaming Keep. Those so-called heroes, "The Sailors on the Starless Sea," who triumphed here long ago left a disaster in their wake. And it only made things worse. Now you and countless others from surrounding villages have gathered to storm this new keep and bring an end to the missing villagers, infertile soil, barren livestock, as well as the evils you dare not mention.

This five-sided castle looks to be designed by an insane architect. The walls are combinations of stone and crystal with glowing veins of an alien red metal. Sections churn as short-lived towers thrust up to the sky and then melt back down, as if the building cannot make up its mind. All the while, spectral faces push through the wall and scream before being pulled back in. A vortex of purple lightning-racked clouds swirls above, with bass-like thunder complementing the soprano shrieks.

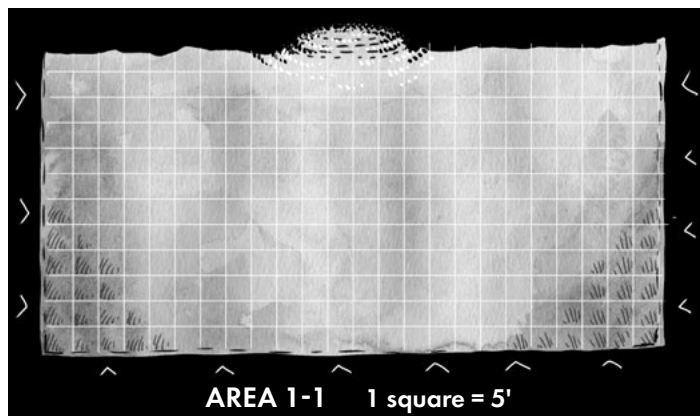
The party begins on one of the sides of the distorted pentagonal keep. The judge may pick or randomly choose one of the five starting locations (areas 1-1A to 1-1E). If PCs decide to look around the keep's exterior rather than stay by their section of wall, feel free to additionally use one of the alternative descriptions below, but keep two things in mind: the density of the peasant horde keeps them close to the wall; the peasant horde pushes them into the breach on round 3, regardless of exploration (see below).

Area 1-1A (Flight 1): Some of your comrades set grappling hooks and begin climbing up the wall. They ascend only a few tens of feet before the glowing-veined walls actively dislodge the climbers, who fall to their deaths. A breach in the wall invitingly opens, revealing a shimmering magical portal, but the teeth-like masonry mashes shut when pushing gongfarmers begin to surge from behind. As you resist, the breach opens again. What do you do?

Area 1-1B (Flight 2): Winged creatures, equal parts man and beast, swoop down and grab attackers in the distance. The flying beastmen lift their victims high into the air and drop them to their deaths. Laughing in guttural cries, they soar back to safety within the keep. A breach in the wall invitingly opens revealing a shimmering magical portal, but the teeth-like masonry mashes shut when pushing gongfarmers begin to surge from behind. As you resist, the breach opens again. What do you do?

Area 1-1C (Flight 3): Thick thorned vines erupt from the wall and grab comrades on either side of your party. Constricting like giant pythons, the vegetation squeezes the poor screaming gongfarmers until they burst like melons. The hellish vines shrink back into the stonework which closes behind them. A breach in the wall invitingly opens revealing a shimmering magical portal, but the teeth-like masonry mashes shut when pushing gongfarmers begin to surge from behind. As you resist, the breach opens again. What do you do?

Area 1-1D (Flight 4): About a hundred feet away, two huge red-veined stone fists push out from the wall and begin smashing



peasants into paste. After killing a few dozen, the fists flatten back into stonework. A breach in the wall invitingly opens revealing a shimmering magical portal, but the teeth-like masonry mashes shut when pushing gongfarmers begin to surge from behind. As you resist, the breach opens again. What do you do?

Area 1-1E (Flight 5): Scintillating red beams shoot from the wall and strike a number of your comrades dead. However, they rise again with glowing red eyes as zombies! They immediately attack your party's allies. They are quickly defeated, but not before killing more. A breach in the wall invitingly opens revealing a shimmering magical portal, but the teeth-like masonry mashes shut when pushing gongfarmers begin to surge from behind. As you resist, the breach opens again. What do you do?

Luck Check To Get Through...: A Luck check (roll d20 and obtain less than or equal to Luck score) is required for the PC to get through an opening without being mashed to pulp. If they pass, they make it through unscathed. If they fail, they take 1d8 [4] damage (most likely killing them). Track which of a player's PCs has passed through.

...But PCs can improve their chances: The following conditions grants a cumulative -1d "bonus" to the Luck check ("bonus" because moving down the dice chain makes rolling under one's Luck easier). To avoid complications in tracking 20 PCs, apply the bonuses the round they are given. In other words, a PC uses their bonus to get through the breach on the same round it is awarded.

Bonus	Check
0	d20
-1d	d16
-2d	d14
-3d	d12
-4d	d10
-5d	d8
-6d	d7
-7d	d6
-8d	d5
-9d	d4
-10d	d3

• **Strength and/or Agility scores are 14 or more:** Only a single -1d is rewarded, regardless of whether one or both

of the scores is high. Instead of asking for the scores of each PC as they try (which can become tedious quickly), tell the players once, "If your PC has a Strength and/or Agility of 14 or more, please reduce your Luck roll by 1d."

- **Bracing the breach:** A jumping PC may brace an object the same round that they jump (action plus move), or another PC who isn't jumping can brace. Bracing the breach imparts a -1d "bonus" to the jumper's Luck check. If the jumping PC fails their Luck check, then the jumper takes damage, and whatever was doing the bracing takes damage (PCs) or is destroyed (objects). Braced objects can be retrieved, but the retriever must make a Luck check similar to jumping through. Smart PCs will use other objects to dislodge bracing objects. A single brace can be used for multiple PCs, assuming they all pass their Luck checks.
- **Advantageous occupations:** PCs can use their occupations to gain a -1d advantage. If a PC "looks for a pattern" or something similar, ask the player to consider their character's occupation and reward them for good roleplaying. Do not award this bonus automatically; the PC must somehow first try to use their occupation. You can use the following as examples or award them automatically to catalyze other players to roleplay: animal trainer (knows when to avoid a mashing jaw), Dwarven stonemason (can read the stones), Elven sage (has read about buildings like this), fortune teller (already knew this was coming), gambler (knows when to take a risk), jester (advantageous acrobatics), minstrel (recognizes melodies in the screaming), slave (has a sense of when to run), wizard's apprentice (can vaguely guess a magical pattern).

Resisting the Rabble, 3 Round Maximum: The encounter lasts a maximum of 3 rounds. On round 2 warn the players that the rabble is pressing very hard behind them. If round 3 arrives, the PCs are forced through and must make unmodified Luck checks.

Example: Parzival the gambler faces the breach. On round 1, he decides to wait and see what happens to other PCs. On round 2, he feels the rabble pressing hard behind him and decides he better make the leap. Since his occupation is gambler, you decide he automatically has a -1d bonus (the standard d20 becomes a d16 for the Luck check). His Strength and Agility are both 14, so he gets another -1d (die becomes a d14). He places his lucky dice (starting equipment) into one of the breach's cracks (-1d, he's down to a d12) and leaps. His Luck is 9 but he rolls a 10. He's chomped and takes 1d8 [4] damage. Poor Parzival!

No Climbing: Some PCs may try alternate means to get past the wall. A common ploy is to climb over. The DC is 10 to climb, but after ascending 10' the climber is dislodged by suddenly protruding stones and falls for 1d6 [3] damage. Neither ropes nor grapples can find lasting purchase with the constantly changing stones. Remember that on the 3rd round the PC is forced through, regardless of what they may be doing.

Successful Crossings Do Not Split The Party: When a PC successfully enters the portal, they are surrounded by magi-

cal darkness and silence, and feel the sensation as if they're falling. This continues until the encounter is resolved for the party. Afterwards, the survivors simultaneously teleport into a hallway with a dead end behind them and a door leading to area 1-2 in front.

AREA 1-2

FORESHADOWING THE CHAOS LORD

Rushing through the arcane breach in the keep's outer wall, you find yourselves in a small corridor that opens into a large, oppressively hot chamber. Inside is a hellish sight: below a soaring, vaulted ceiling, are scores of bodies magically suspended twenty to thirty feet in the air, their skin entirely covered with glowing arcane symbols. As you watch, ghostly forms emerge from several of the limp forms and fly through the walls. The walls are covered in strange glyphs that seem to continuously swim and melt before reforming, as if dripping in a furnace.

Before reading more or letting the PCs take actions, **offer the players replacement PCs from the Gong Horde**. Once replacement PCs are dealt out, continue.

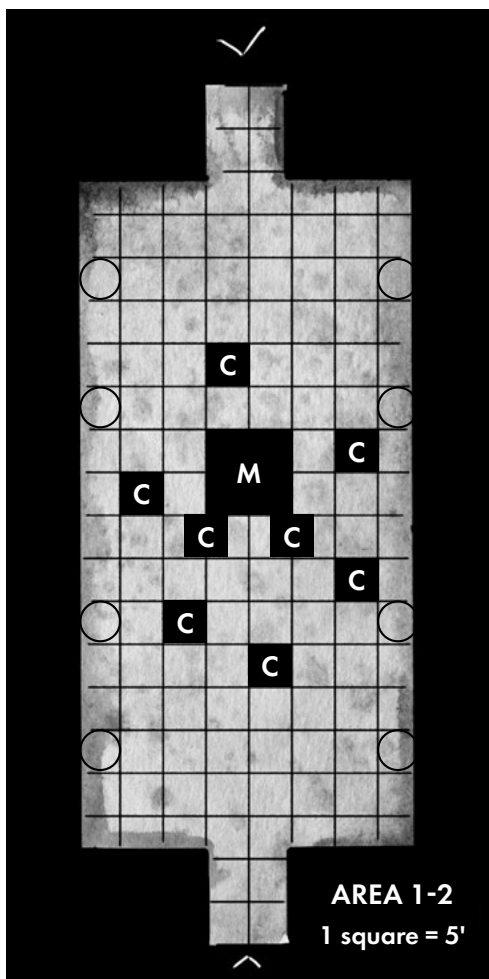
In the center of the room stands a 10' cyclopean humanoid, reading incantations from a writhing skin-covered grimoire held by a pair of cowed monstrosities, hiding all but hints of their most hideous features beneath their black robes. Another six of the hooded creatures stand between you and the chamber's only apparent exit on the far wall at least 80' distant.

The PCs find themselves in a large vaulted chamber being used as a ritual room by the minions of chaos occupying the keep. The stone walls of the oppressively hot room swim with arcane glyphs that continuously melt and reform in vertiginous patterns.

Glyphs: Staring at the glyphs for any length of time in an attempt to decipher them causes the PC to lose 1d3 [2] Personality as a piece of the their mind simply sloughs away (DC 12 Willpower save to resist). If inspected, the glyphs are actually freezing to the touch, and burn any PC foolish enough to brush against them for 1 point of cold damage per round of contact.

The vaulted ceiling soars to a point 30' above the floor and is supported by a number of large ribbed columns jutting from the walls and floor like bones of a ribcage. Suspended within the cupola hang scores of bodies that the PCs recognize as their fellow villagers, their naked skin inscribed with faintly glowing arcane symbols. As the PCs watch, ghostly forms emerge from several of the limp bodies and fly through the walls, speeding towards the red pulsing crystal at the heart of the keep.

In the center of the room stands the Nth Incarnation of the Chaos Lord Molan. A mighty servant of Chaos, Molan appears as a hellish horned humanoid standing 10' tall with a single blazing cyclopean eye set in the middle of a demonic skull. In battle, he wields a triple-headed spiked flail, merci-



lessly hammering any who would oppose his will of utter destruction and hatred of all life.

As he reads from an ancient tome covered in the still-living flesh of those victims bound to its pages, Molan feeds an endless procession of soul fragments into the maelstrom at the heart of the complex from peasants captured during the assault on the keep.

Gaining Surprise: Cautious parties that describe how they are moving carefully when

entering the room gain a single action (move, attack, etc.) of surprise where they can take an action before the Chaos Lord and his minions notice them. They can use this action to potentially get closer to where the summoning ritual is taking place by using the cover of the columns supporting the ceiling. Those parties that rush in, or are deliberately going as fast as they can, are immediately noticed by Molan, who halts his incantation and focuses his single blazing eye towards the source of the interruption.

Molan is flanked by his acolytes, oozing children of chaos who rush to attack the PCs to cover their lord's escape. Even if they win initiative, regardless of the actions of the PCs, Molan escapes this encounter after shooting at the PCs with his cyclopean eyebeam before vanishing with a deafening crack of thunder (DC 10 Fortitude save or lose next action):

- Round 0: Surprise action for parties that are being deliberately cautious.
- Round 1: Molan uses his eyebeam gaze against the PCs, targeting any that rush towards him while six children of chaos hop, crawl, and leap to attack the PCs; two remain holding the grimoire.
- Round 2: Molan and the two minions holding the grimoire escape in a deafening crack of thunder (DC 10 Fortitude save for all PCs or lose next action).

- Round 3+: After Molan's departure, the remaining six children of chaos continue to fight to the death.

The Nth Incarnation of the Chaos Lord Molan (1): Init +4; Atk flail +6 melee (1d6+1 [4]) or eyebeam gaze +6 missile fire (2d6 [8], range 60'); Crit DN/d8 [+3 damage]; AC 13; HD 8d10; hp 40; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP eyebeam gaze, immune to non-magical weapons; SV Fort +8, Ref +4, Will +4; AL C.

During combat, the Nth Incarnation of the Chaos Lord Molan attacks with his eyebeam gaze as he prepares his escape, targeting any PCs that rush towards him while commanding the children of chaos to surge forward to protect him. Though immune to the crude weapons of the party, Molan does not want to risk delaying the activation ritual by wading into direct combat with the PCs.

Judge's note: this incarnation of Molan is but one of an infinite reflections spawned by the reactivation of the keep. After escaping, Molan returns to the formless void of Chaos from which he was spawned, taking on different forms with each new summoning as detailed later in the adventure when the PCs encounter the Chaos Lord again.

Attacking the Grimoire: PCs might target the grimoire being held by two children of chaos. The book is AC 8 and has 5 hp. Being made of still-living flesh, it screams in agony when hit. Fire and holy water do 1d8 damage to it. If the grimoire is destroyed, the remaining children of chaos lose their next action as they clutch their heads and ululate in psychic anguish. Forcibly taking the book away requires an opposed Strength or Agility check with the two chaos children (for them, roll twice and take the largest unmodified roll).

Children of Chaos (6 +2 defending grimoire): Init +0; Atk claw/bite/sting +1 melee (1d4+1 [3]); Crit DN/d4 [+3 damage]; AC 11; HD 1d8; hp 4 each; MV 20' or fly 20' or crawl 20'; Act 1d20; SP death throes (goo, see below), immune to mind-altering spells; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -2; AL C.

Children of chaos are devolved, malformed once-natural creatures transformed by the oozing chaos of the keep into twisted shapes. The devolved children crawl, run, and hop towards the PCs on stubby legs or using short leathery wings, biting or pinching with crude claws and misshapen mouths, and shedding a goo-like substance when they die. Their minds are twisted by the transformation process, and they are immune to mind-affecting spells, such as *sleep* or *charm*.

Goo: The green goo left by the children of chaos is a highly caustic chaotic substance. If touched, it instantly causes the affected area to dissolve and melt, inflicting 1 point of damage in the process. If ingested in any quantity, the PC must immediately make a DC 20 Fortitude save or die. Even those unfortunates that somehow survive are wracked by a series of painful transformations and receive a random corruption for each dose consumed. Roll 1d10 on the Table 1-1: Chaos Corruption Table below, adding the PC's Luck modifier. Note that goo can be safely collected in an empty vial as long as it isn't touched.

Table 1-1: Chaos Corruption Table

D10 + Luck mod	Result (after first passing DC 20 Fortitude save or die)
1 or less	The PC is consumed from within by the elemental chaos. Each time this corruption is rolled, the PC experiences unearthly pain, suffering 1d4 [2] of damage and a permanent loss of -2 to all ability scores.
2	The goo dissolves the PC's bones, inflicting a loss of -1 Strength and -1 Stamina.
3	The PC's fingers and toes become fused together, causing a loss of -1 Agility.
4	The PC screams in agony as the chaos twists and deforms an appendage. Roll 1d4 to determine which limb: (1) left arm; (2) right arm; (3) left leg; (4) right leg. The PC suffers a -1 check penalty to checks to climb, jump, balance, swim, move silently, and other such physical activities.
5	The PC suffers from uncontrolled bouts of muscle spasms as their tissue is infused with the toxic substance, inflicting a permanent -5' MV penalty.
6	The PC's flesh melts into oleaginous lumps that covers their lower extremities, thereafter requiring specially fitted clothing and armor.
7	The PC's skin is permanently infused with an abyssal emerald color.
8	Chaotic taint. Roll 1d4: (1) the PC's fingers elongate into claws, which can be used to make a melee attack for 1d6 damage; (2) the PC's feet and legs become goat-like, transforming into shaggy, cloven hooved members and granting +5' climb; (3) vestigial leathern wings grow from the PC's back; (4) The PC's tongue is elongated into a prehensile member that can be used to grasp and carry small objects.
9	The PC's flesh is covered in a skein of overlapping plates that increase base AC to 11, but incur a -1 check penalty to all checks to climb, jump, balance, swim, sneak silently, and other such physical activities. Roll 1d4 for type: (1) feathers; (2) scales; (3) chitinous; (4) dermal bones.
10+	The PC is infused with the force of chaos. Each time this corruption is rolled, the PC gains +1 to either Strength, Agility, or Stamina (roll 1d3 to determine which stat) and loses -1 Personality as the transfusion slowly overwhelms their natural form.

Suspended Peasants As Replacement PCs: After Molan leaves and the remaining children are defeated, the suspended peasants descend to the ground, slowly enough to avoid falling damage. PCs pausing to take the time to check each body discover that those from which ghostly forms emerged are found to be dead, icy cold to the touch. However, the PCs may also discover villagers that are still alive, which may be recovered as extra party members.

Note that this option is only available to those players who have remaining PCs. Those who have lost all PCs must wait until leaving the room to recover PCs from the peasant horde.

Each player with remaining PCs may search the bodies to discover up to one living villager per player. Starting with the first player to search, that player makes a d20 Luck check using the highest Luck of their remaining PCs. If successful, the player finds a still-living villager that comes under their control. There is a risk to a prolonged search, however: **for each subsequent search, the Luck check increases by +1d**, going from d24 for the second player to d30 for the third to d100 for all subsequent players. **If a search roll is ever failed, the party is discovered by 2d4 [5] additional children of chaos** sent to reinforce the chamber against the PC's assault.

When PCs exit the room, they see a momentary stream of mangled peasant ghosts flowing toward the area 1-3 encounter. Read the following:

As you exit, a ghostly procession of your dead, mangled comrades flows through the air away from you, down the corridor, through an intersection, and into a chamber some distance beyond. The last ghost in line turns around and beckons you to follow as the spectral stream disappears.

BURNED ON BURNING LUCK (BY STEFAN FLICKINGER):

My group surprised Molan and, with some hot rolls, basically decimated his chaos children in the first round. Then they quickly lost two PCs to Molan's eye-beam. By the time the Chaos Lord's second turn came around, one lone chaos child remained. Molan disappeared in a crack of thunder, requiring a Fortitude save (DC 10) for unknown consequences. Almost every surviving character blew their save. I went through each PC one by one, "Do you want to burn any Luck?" It's important to note that most only missed DC 10 by a few measly points. Almost every PC burned Luck to ensure that they had a 15. After everyone had given their final answer regarding Luck, I asked who had got a 10 or above. Then, I described that those who failed lost their next action (no damage or anything fatal). Everyone groaned but had a good laugh at how much Luck they burned to survive something that was ultimately pretty harmless.





AREAS 1-W

WANDERING IN THE CORRIDORS

After area 1-2 the PCs are free to wander. However, in between encounters, the ghostly procession (see above) is trying to urge the party on the most direct path to the ziggurat; note that during the encounters there are no ghosts, unless specifically mentioned. The Screaming Keep enjoys torturing those who stray too far within, so it attacks the PCs by various means. PCs experience these attacks in the order they are listed on Table 1-2. So, the first time they reach an area 1-W they receive result 1, the second time, result 2, etc. If PCs backtrack through an area 1-W they've already crossed, then treat it as another attack. If a party should brazenly use up all 10 results, then roll randomly after that.

These encounters come into play if the party turns left or right at the four-way intersections on The Screaming Keep Round 1 map. Draw a random corridor as they proceed (judge's choice of size and shape — the keep is always changing!) and attack them after they progress 100' or so. Whether they turn around or proceed to the hallway's end, they return to The Screaming Keep Round 1 map. They arrive at the same location if they retreat or, if they proceed, they arrive on the opposite side of a similar-looking location.

For example, if they originally turned left, and they retreat from the hallway, then they arrive via the left-hand side on The Screaming Keep Round 1 map, to the same physical location of the keep. If they originally turned left and they proceed to hallway's end, then they arrive via the right-hand side on The Screaming Keep Round 1 map. This isn't the same part of the keep they left, i.e., any chalk marks they left at the origin are not present, but the same map applies. Because the keep's structure is constantly changing and may even involve magical portals both seen and unseen, the hallway's path need not make Euclidean sense.

**Table 1-2: Screaming Keep
Attacks at Areas 1-W**

1	A black portal opens in the ceiling and a huge tentacle made of glowing red metal plates pushes through. It swings at the rear rank characters with the two lowest Luck scores! Roll once and apply to both PCs. +5 to hit, 1d6 [4] damage. The portal and tentacle disappear after the attack.
2	Three battered peasant corpses lie face down in the corridor. Suddenly they rise; their eyes glow bright red and their veins glow red beneath their skin. They attack!
3	Faces appear in the ceiling and begin screaming as if tortured. All PCs must make a DC 13 Fortitude save or lose 1d3[2] points of Strength.
4	Giant crimson-veined stone palms erupt from the corridors walls and attempt to squash the front of the party. The front rank PC of each player (or the first five PCs in marching order if there are fewer than five players) must make a DC 13 Reflex save or take 1d4 [3] points of damage.
5	A magical portal forms, through which alien five-legged creatures stampede as if chased! All PCs must make a DC 13 Reflex or be trampled for 1d3 [2] points of damage. After running through the PCs, the pentapods exit through another spontaneously appearing portal, which disappears just as quickly.
6	A crimson mist hisses from the corridor as its very stones whirl and fly at the party! The PCs with the three lowest Luck scores (determine randomly if more than three are equivalent) must make a DC 13 Reflex save or take 1d3 [2] points of damage. The mist fades and the stones return their respective places in the corridors floor, ceiling, and walls.
7	Dead bodies, both bestial-human hybrids and peasants, fill the corridor. Seven of the peasant corpses rise; their eyes glow bright red and their veins glow red beneath their skin. They attack!
8	The ceiling rains stones on the PCs! The PCs with the five lowest Luck scores (determine randomly if more than five are equivalent) must make a DC 13 Reflex save or take 1d6 [4] points of damage.
9	Crimson-veined three-fingered stone fists blast out of the walls and attack each PC! +8 to hit, 1d6 [4] damage. The fists retreat back into the walls after attacking.
10	Gravity suddenly shifts! The entire party is propelled backwards until they hit a wall. All PCs must make a DC 18 Reflex save or take 1d10 [6] points of damage.

Area 1-3 (Flight Specific): There are five locations, 1-3A to 1-3E, listed below. Each area corresponding to the five different starts and their 1st round flights. Use the appropriate encounter for each particular flight.

Before moving on or letting the PCs take actions, **allow replacement PCs from the Gong Horde**. Once replacement PCs are dealt out, continue.

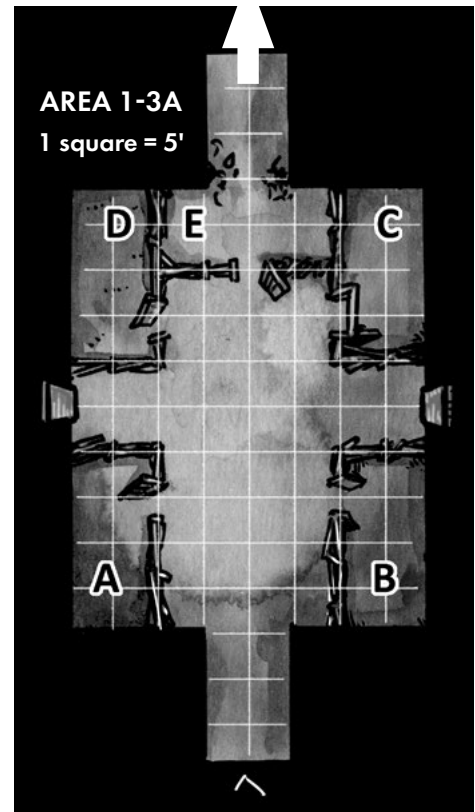
Area 1-3A (Flight 1)—Penned In: *You emerge into a large open space covered in matted, damp straw that is filled with the familiar scent of barnyard animals. Above, the sky swirls in a kaleidoscope of stars as purple lightning-racked clouds race impossibly fast across its face and the ever-present bass-like thunder reverberates in the distance.*

The roughly 40' by 60' area is enclosed by high stone walls that seem to pulse unsettlingly with a barely perceptible movement. Empty pens and stables, gates broken and shifted apparently as a result of the keep's ongoing transformation, line the perimeter. Sealed portals flank the stables to the left and right from which agonizing screams can be heard echoing. Inside the pen along the far wall, a mist-filled breach leads deeper into the structure.

The floor of the enclosure is covered by matted, damp straw. PCs pausing to clear away the straw to examine the floor underneath discover a large pentagram etched in the packed earth, clearly recognizable to those with an arcane background as some type of summoning circle or possibly a gateway to a demon-world.

False Exits: The left and right doors are "false exits" that lead to shallow dead-end alcoves. If a PC ignores the screaming and opens the unlocked door, they see countless mouths in the wall that spit chaos stuff before disappearing. The PC must make a DC 15 Reflex save or take 1d8 [4] points of damage.

Examining the Pens: PCs examining the pens can make a DC 12 Intelligence check (one roll per player, reduced to DC 8 if they have a PC with a farm-related occupation) to discern the kind of animal, goat or bovine, for which the four pens are intended. Even without a successful check, the PCs see that the pens contain



various tools, left leaning against the fence or hanging from pegs along the walls, that can be used as improvised weapons as well as equipment as follows:

Pen A (goat)

- Pitchfork (as spear)
- Flint and steel
- Grappling hook

Pen B (bovine)

- Hammer (as club)
- Lantern
- Chain, 10'

Pen C (goat)

- Shovel (as staff)
- Two coils of rope, 50'

Pen D (bovine)

- Leather apron (as +1 AC modifier)
- Two sacks of feed
- Wineskin filled with a sweet red wine
- Three concealed clay pots (see below)

Pen E (corpses, misty exit...and Killer Chaos Chicken, see below)

If the party deliberately states that they are examining the floor of the pen, they can also make out the vague shapes of several mounds beneath the straw covering the floor. Otherwise, the matted covering conceals this from casual observation.

The stables were once used by the minions of the Chaos Lords for breeding stock for both food and sacrifices. With the advent of the ceremony to raise the leviathan, the leaking chaos energy corrupted the mundane animals that once were kept here, transforming them into chaos beasts that now lie concealed in the straw. There are five pens in total, two goat pens, two bovine pens, and one empty pen located on the far end of the yard, which also contains the only true exit from the room.

Retrieving Items: PCs entering a pen to retrieve tools or equipment trigger an attack by the transformed occupants. If a clever PC stays outside a pen and uses one of their own items as a tool to retrieve something within, then require a Luck check. If successful, they get the item; if not, the item falls into the straw and provokes the contained animals to attack. Each goat pen holds three of the chaos animals concealed beneath its straw covering, whereas each bovine pen holds two.

The chaos beasts appear as warped versions of barnyard animals, corrupted into nightmares creatures. Hairless, their skin is just exposed muscle and sinew where numerous vestigial fanged mouths have formed that mindlessly open and snap close, and feet that end in arched talons instead of hooves, giving them an unnatural, bird-like gait. Each chaos goat has a 5' long arm-like pseudopod emerging from their

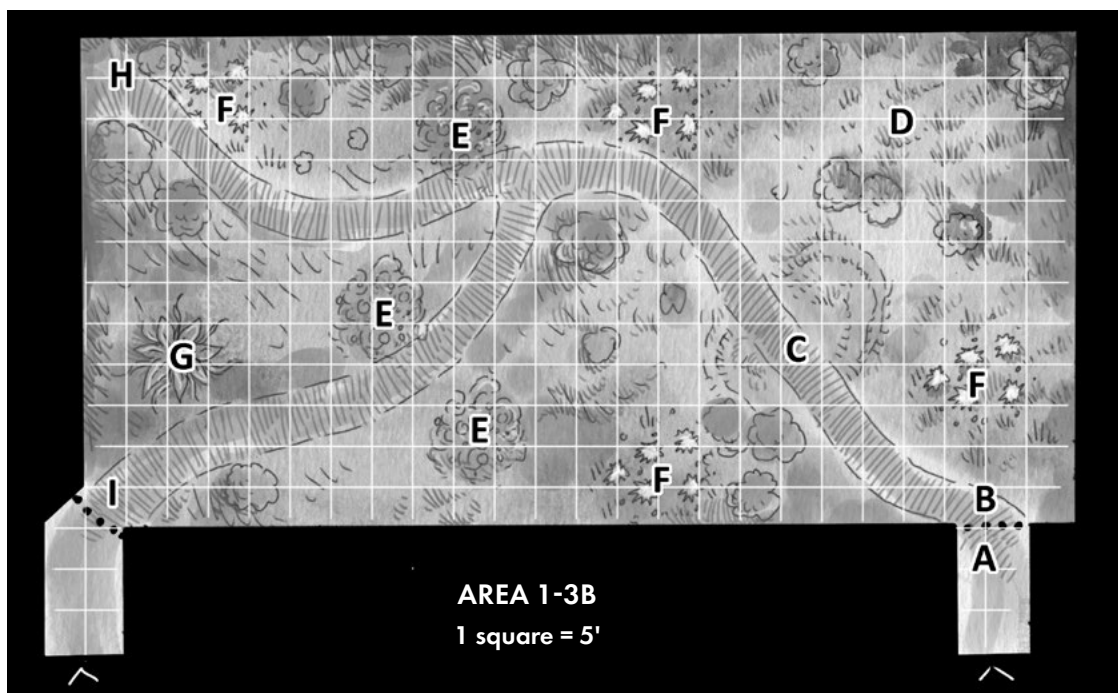
THREE HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE (CHAOS CHICKENS ARE STUPID) (BY TIM DESCHENE)

The Killer Chaos Chicken is a TPK made feathered flesh. Most DCC players (and Monty Python fans) know that it is more dangerous than its meek appearance suggests. Savvy players look for ways to get through encounters like this while minimizing or eliminating the need to touch the dice, those cruel objects of chance. That is exactly what Gavin, Michael, Jason, and Dwayne of Take Off Every Ziggurat did during the first round of Return to the Starless Sea at Gen Con 2022.

Walking into the animal pen, they were immediately alerted to danger, sensing doom beneath the straw covered floors inside the animal pens. They got to work, using their peasant knowledge and sacrificing equipment to bolster the doors and trap whatever may be lying in wait. That bypassed a combat with several corrupted animals who were hidden in the straw-filled pens. Little did they know, they had one, final, feathery challenge ahead.

Hearing the description of the final pen filled with decapitated bodies, both animal and human, Michael quickly asked, "Are the heads still here?" I assured him they were, and he snatched two up from the hay. Just then, the foul beast approached from the mists ahead. Michael's quick thinking confused their bird-brained nemesis. Which head should it attack? I gave an equal chance for each head. Rolling a d3, it attacked a diversionary head instead! The quick-witted hero leapt through the magic portal, having fooled the beast. Players being players, the rest of the team attempted to copy Mike's tactic. It's not so easy to do when the chicken is upon you. Even the sturdiest of heroes would quake when confronted by such a creature. Every subsequent player had to make a Luck check in order to find a suitable head that would confuse the chicken. Those who failed to find an appropriate distraction were effortlessly dispatched. Some who found heads still failed to trick the monster. Even though several of the zeroes fell that encounter, a great deal of them made their way to safety by relying on their wits rather than the dice. If they had stood toe-to-talon with the Chaos Chicken, they would have all assuredly died that day.

trunk that can be used to attack nearby creatures, along with a bile-filled throat sack carrying a caustic acid that can be sprayed at targets up to 20' away, whereas the chaos bovines have a single large horn that emerges from the center of its exposed skull it uses to gore creatures before devouring them.



AREA 1-3B
1 square = 5'

Bypassing the pens: PCs attempting to bypass the pens to reach the far exit (E) must make DC 8 Agility checks not to trigger a release of the remaining animals (one check per player, using lowest Agility modifier).

Chaos Goat (6 total, 3 per goat pen): Init +0; Atk pseudopod +0 melee (1d3 [2]) or spit acid; Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 11; HD 1d6; hp 4 each; MV 20' or climb 20'; Act 1d20; SP spit acid 1/day (1d6 [3], range 20', DC 12 Ref save to avoid), immune to acid; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

Chaos Bovine (4 total, 2 per bovine pen): Init +0; Atk gore +1 melee (1d6 [3]) or charge; Crit M/d8 [+3 damage]; AC 11; HD 2d10; hp 14 each; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP charge (target is speared upon a successful attack when full movement is used, doubling damage; speared targets must make a DC 12 Strength check to remove themselves from horn); SV Fort +3, Ref +0, Will +1; AL C.

The Far Pen (E): Approaching the far pen (E), the PCs can see many corpses scattered within, including several cows, goats, and what they recognize as fellow peasants. Each has been neatly decapitated. PCs ignoring the grisly scene and rushing into the breach are surprised by its deadly architect (surprised PCs cannot act on the first round of combat). The chaos chicken emerges from the mist as they approach: a seemingly harmless chicken once penned alongside the other animals.

Killer Chaos Chicken (1): Init +5; Atk bite +5 melee (1d8 [4], reach 10'); Crit special; AC 15; HD 2d8; hp 14; MV 30' or fly 30'; Act 1d20; SP crit on 16-20 (automatic decapitation), *peck of opportunity*, regeneration, vulnerable to fire; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +1; AL C.

In combat, the chaos chicken can attack targets up to 10' away, using its deadly bite to automatically decapitate opponents on a successful crit. Its *peck of opportunity* can make up to five "free" attacks at PCs (one attack per PC) who flee from or past, especially toward the exit. Given that it can

attack up to five fleeing PCs per round, running past it is a risky strategy. At the end of each round, the chaos chicken regenerates 3 hp, including the round it is killed. It can only be truly put down by fire, from which it does not regenerate.

Unless the PCs have some means of attacking from a distance, the chaos chicken is a deadly opponent. Even then, its regenerative ability means that once defeated, they have—at most—a single round to run past it into the opening. Fortunately, concealed in the straw in one of the pens (D) along

the wall are three oil-filled clay pots. PCs that manage to retrieve the clay pots can use them as improvised firebombs. If ignited before they are thrown, they deal 1d6 [3] and ignite the target with a successful hit, requiring a DC 12 Reflex save to put out.

Corral the Chicken: While hard to ignite, the damp straw covering the floor of the pen can be used by clever players to create enough fire and smoke to potentially corral the chaos chicken, who avoids sources of fire, allowing them to escape without suffering its deadly attack.

When PCs exit the room, they again see peasant ghosts, this time leading them to the area 1-4 that is closest. Read the following:

Leaving the room, you again see specters of fallen villagers. This time they're being dragged by disembodied bestial ghostly claws which glow crimson. As before, they flow through the air away from you, down the corridor, through an intersection, and through a door beyond.

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE WITH... EWE? (BY MICHAEL BOLAM)

In round 1's encounter, "Penned In", the party had triggered multiple chaos bovines and chaos goats. One of the players was up in initiative, so I began describing his situation. It was dire for his gongfarmers - "Chaos Goats to the left, Chaos Bovines to the right..." On cue, one of the other players, 3rd Party Publishing Extraordinaire "Bygrinstow" (aka Jon Wilson), completed the worst classic-song parody I've heard in a while: "Here I am, stuck in the middle with Chaos Ewe." <groan>

Area 1-3B (Flight 2)—The Infernal Garden: From out of the wreckage of the Chaos Lords' citadel, amidst the death and destruction of things unholy, rose hybrid things born of the forbidden union of pure chaos energy and soul-warping matter.

Teaming with poisonous plants and savage creatures, the infernal garden is an untamed wilderness of madness and death.

Fed by things both grim and otherworldly, this unholy place teams with strange and alien vegetation, and is home to a savage predator cloaked in foliage—the Devil Flower.

Area A—Iron Gate: *A verdigris-covered gate, its heavy black iron over-greened by time, swings inward with a hideous grating. Beyond lies a strange and wondrous garden enclosed within an open courtyard. Jungle-like in its vitality, labyrinthine creepers and thick stunted trees squat dark and baleful in the silent gloom; while above the sky is a riot of sonorous purple-lighting that burns through swirling primordial mists with the ghostly light of remote worlds.*

A single overgrown path cuts through the garden, disappearing into the primordial green riot beyond.

Area B—Garden Path: *A twisted path, long disused and well-nigh overgrown, cuts through the jungle-like garden. Off to the right of the path stretches a strange purple lawn. While to the left rests an ominous copse of balefully twisted trees.*

Area C—Disturbed Ground: *A large patch of ground has been disturbed here; the rank soil pushed aside to reveal the courtyard's strange floor beneath. Comprised of stone and some unnamed crystal, the floor is veined with a metallic blood-red ooze that seemingly pulsates with eldritch energy.*

PCs with occupations such as ditch digger, apothecarist, farmer, forester, hunter, herbalist, or woodcutter automatically realize that the disturbed ground is the result of someone, or something, having uprooted a large tree here. All other PCs can glean the same information with a DC 12 Intelligence check.

In truth, this area is where the Devil Flower had taken root and grown. Fed by the chaotic fluid pulsating throughout the citadel walls and floor, the Devil Flower has reached full maturity and uprooted itself to prowl the Infernal Garden in search of prey.

Area D—Serpent Grass: *A queer purple grass that squirms like countless worms stretches out beneath the gloom of twisted trees. Off in the distance, through the garden shadows, you catch sight of oddly humanoid-shaped foliage that sway in the ghostly breeze.*

Anyone treading the strange purple grass can feel the blades squirming underfoot like bloated grave worms. The Serpent Grass will attempt to encase and cocoon anyone who approaches its feeding ground, whereby its elastic-like blades stretch out like living tentacles from the dank earth to completely entwine its prey. Note that anyone who has smeared themselves with the juice of the Eternal Fruit (see Area F) are repulsive to the Serpent Grass and thereby free from its attacks (treat as holy water, see below).

Serpent Grass (1): Init -2; Atk tentacle grab +2 melee ([1] hp + entangle); Crit M/d10 [+3 damage]; AC 10; HD 4d8; hp 20; MV 0'; Act special; SP half damage from non-area attacks, entangle (DC 12 Strength check or be rooted in place for 1 hp of damage per round), repulsed by fire or holy water; SV Fort +4; Ref -4 Will +2; AL C.

The Serpent Grass occupies the area about the six strange humanoid-shaped bushes and attempts to tentacle grab anyone investigating them. Anyone hit by a tentacle grab must make a DC 12 Strength check or become entangled. Entangled creatures take 1 hp of damage each round. On subsequent rounds, an entangled PC makes a DC 12 Strength check to escape or remain entangled and takes 1 hit point of damage. Serpent Grass takes half damage from any attack that is not an area effect (i.e., swinging a sword is not nearly as effective as launching a fireball into the deadly lawn). Note that if fire or holy water is used against Serpent Grass it will retreat into the earth until the threat has passed.

Should the PCs approach the six oddly humanoid-shaped bushes they quickly realize that these are no mere bushes, but helpless individuals, horribly trapped within a suffocating shell of living Serpent Grass.

Replacing Lost Characters: Allow PCs to replace lost characters here by cutting free any of the six vine-covered wretches trapped within. There is a 1 in 3 chance that a person set free is a beastman — villagers that have been transformed into a hunched, feral cross between a human and beast. Each of the beastman is covered in thick fur or scales and has the head of a different animal or insect; most have also been corrupted with additional disturbing mutations such as bulbous, oversized eyes or a body that weeps maggots and flies from its open maw and nose. Should the PCs inadvertently free a beastman, it automatically attacks the party in a frenzied rage; its mind ravaged by the time spent imprisoned within the Serpent Grass.

Beastman (varies): Init +4; Atk bite +0 melee (1d4 [2]); Crit III/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

Area E—Anarchy Fruit: *You enter a copse of twisted, intertwining boles with enormous leafage like glistening dragon scales. Hanging from the brazen foliage are glowing globular fruits that pulsate with the eerie luminescence of a cadaverous moon.*

Although the trees themselves are harmless, the night-shining Anarchy Fruit contains within it the nectar of pure chaos. **Anyone who consumes a fruit must roll a d20 modified by Luck and consult Table 1-3**, as the effects differ due to the wild and chaotic nature of the fruit.

Note that once an Anarchy Fruit is consumed, its effect is only applied once. Eating multiple fruits do not stack nor alter the initial effect rolled. Although anarchy fruit can be harvested, eating it at a later time has no effect. Once picked from the tree, Anarchy Fruit loses its potency in 1 turn. A total of 2d10 Anarchy Fruits can be successfully harvested from the grove.

Table 1-3: Anarchy Fruit Consumption Table

D20 + Luck Modifier	Result
2 or less	Tastes like blood. Causes severe stomach cramps. In 2 turns the PC's belly explodes in shower of gore and bloated maggots – instant death!
3-4	Tastes like rotten fish. PC vomits uncontrollably for 4 rounds taking 1d6 [4] points of damage (DC 15 Fort save to half).
5-6	Tastes like rotten meat. PC permanently loses 1d6 [4] points of Strength (DC 15 Fort save to half).
7-8	Tastes like burnt ash. PC acts last in every initiative order for the remainder of Round 1 of this adventure.
9-12	Tastes like chicken. PC suffers from uncontrollable and wicked gas for the remainder of the tournament round but is otherwise unaffected.
13-14	Tastes like strong coffee. PC acts first in every initiative order for the remainder of the Round 1 of this adventure.
15-16	Tastes like dark chocolate. PC permanently gains 1d4 [2] points of Agility.
17-18	Tastes like fine wine. PC permanently gains 1d4 [2] points of Strength.
19+	Tastes like milk and honey. PC permanently gains 1d6 [3] hit points.

Area F—Divine Weed: Throughout the emerald tangle rise open patches of ivory flowers that have broken free from the oppressive growth of the garden; their fluted bronze stems are heavy with golden fruits the size of large berries.

Stretching through the riot of vegetation are Divine Weeds; lawful plants that have taken root and are slowly beating back the chaotic verdigris within the courtyard. None can truly say why or how these weeds have come to pass, be it the natural order of the cosmos attempting to maintain balance or the divine intervention of Lawful gods. Regardless, these strange and holy plants have infiltrated the chaotic garden and can prove to be a valuable asset to those savvy enough to harvest them. PCs with occupations such as apothecarist, farmer, forester, hunter, herbalist, or woodcutter, automatically realize that the strange ivory and gold plants are actually a powerful weed that is slowly choking out the garden. All other PCs can glean the same information with a DC 12 Intelligence check.

Eternal Fruit: The Divine Weed's golden fruit is a powerful combatant of Chaos. Anyone who smears themselves with its golden nectar become repugnant to all fauna within the Infernal Garden. Moreover, **the golden fruits can be used as a missile weapon against the Devil Flower**, whereby a successful missile attack inflicts 1d6 damage, as the nectar

burns chaotic creatures like acid. Note that only 1d4 + Luck modifier of fruits may be harvested per character.

Area G—Devil Flower: Before you stands a strange, giant tulip-shaped plant with an almost unbearable odor of decay. Its thick green foliage swells with a pallid and purple-petaled flower the color of putrefying flesh. Suddenly, to your horror, its petals part revealing a wide tooth-filled mouth dripping with saliva, and its leaves elongate into tentacle-like vines that lash out toward you. From the darkness of its maw you hear the command, "Feed me!"

Devil Flower (1): Init -2; Atk lashing vines +2 melee (1d4 [2], 10' reach); Crit special; AC 13; HD 5d10; hp 25; MV 30'; Act 3d20; SP swallow whole on critical hit (instant death), half damage from bludgeoning weapons, vulnerable to Eternal Fruit and fire (double damage); SV Fort +4; Ref -4 Will +2; AL C.

Born of Chaos, the Devil Flower is an unholy thing that stalks its garden in search of prey. Standing almost twice as tall as a grown man and possessing a ravenous appetite for living flesh, the Devil Flower resembles nothing more than an over-sized alien looking tulip plant. Yet, when it chooses to attack its true nature is revealed. When in combat, the purple petaled flower parts revealing a broad tooth-filled mouth able to swallow a person whole (on a natural 20 to hit roll). The Devil Flower is also capable of swift movement, whereby it may uproot itself and move in a crab-like manner, propelled by its thick gnarled roots.

Area H—Dead End: You follow the overgrown path as it winds its way through the garden, and despite the primeval silence you can't help but feel that some invisible presence is watching. Suddenly the path ends abruptly at the strange veined walls of the citadel.

If the PCs have not yet encountered the Devil Flower, it will have followed them through the garden and attempts to launch a surprise attack here. As the PCs turn to make their way back from the dead end have each player roll a DC 15 Intelligence check using their PC with the highest Intelligence modifier. Those that pass the check notice a strange over-sized tulip flower, they do not remember passing, standing just off the garden path. Those that fail the check are considered surprised and cannot act in the first round of combat (see Devil Flower in area G).

Area I—Exit: A verdigris-covered gate looms before you, beyond which lies the gloom-filled halls of the keep.

The gate is unlocked and opens with a hideous grating. Note that if the Devil Flower has not been encountered, it will be waiting here.

When PCs exit through the gate they again see peasant ghosts, this time leading them to the area 1-4 that is closest. Read the following:

Leaving the room, you again see specters of fallen villagers. This time they're being dragged by disembodied bestial ghostly claws which glow crimson. As before, they flow through the air away from you, down the corridor, through an intersection, and through a door beyond.

WHAT IF THE PCS ATTEMPT TO...

Climb the Courtyard Walls: *Thick twisted black creepers cover the cold stone walls, allowing only a glimmer of the strange red veins that pulsate beneath. Slithering throughout the tangle you catch sight of stealthy vipers with pale, heavy coils and eyes like tiny drops of blood.*

Due to the tangle of vines, the courtyard walls are easy to climb (DC 5 Strength or Agility check). Yet, anyone who attempts to climb them must make a DC 15 Reflex save every 10' or be bitten by one of the countless vipers that nest here. A viper's bite is extremely poisonous, dealing 1d6 [4] damage (DC 15 Fortitude save for half). Should the threat of the vipers not be enough to discourage the PCs from climbing, they quickly realize their efforts to scale the walls are hopeless as the walls themselves elongate, growing ever taller the closer one gets to reaching its summit. It becomes very clear the walls do not want to be climbed.

Burn the Garden: *The rich vegetation begins to smoke like mortuary tapers, giving off thick coils of choking blue-black smoke that reeks with the foulness of a bloody abattoir.*

The garden is far too thick and vibrant to burn. Any attempt to light a fire results in choking plumes of thick dark smoke (DC 12 Fortitude save or retch for 1d3 rounds and lose 1 hp). The smoke dissipates in 2d4 rounds.

Stray from the Garden Path: *You stumble over roots and twisted limbs into a riot of savage brambles that tear at your raiment and lacerate your skin.*

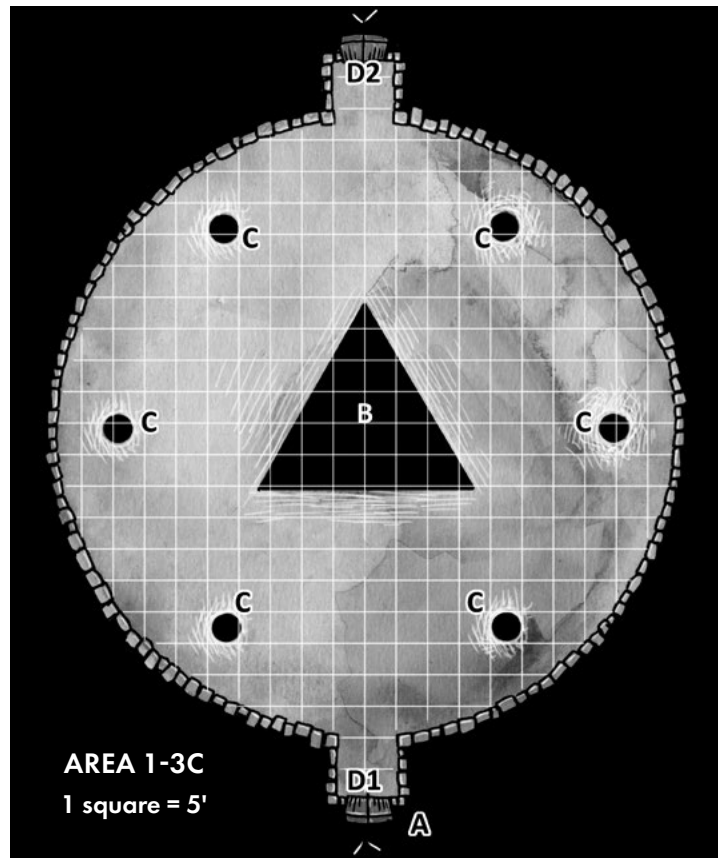
Cutting through the garden is a slow and arduous process as the verdigris is jungle-like in its vitality, reducing PCs' movement speed by half. Furthermore, anyone traversing the garden is set upon by the Devil Flower within 1d4 rounds.

AREA 1-3C (FLIGHT 3) GALLERY OF DEATH

Your perilous flight through the bizarre halls of the Screaming Keep brings you face-to-face with an open double doorway wrought of solid iron.

Area A—Beyond the Iron Doors: *Beyond the open portal looms a large circular chamber, its cold stone walls and fluted columns veined with a strange sanguine ichor that glows red and lustful as the coals of hell's deepest pits. In the room's center you catch sight of a large triangular monument, its smooth black sides adorned with dozens of wicked-looking knives, their naked edges agleam of razor-sharp steel.*

What might first appear to be an armory or weapons repository is in fact a deviously designed gallery of death. The triangular monument at the chamber's center is a large semi-dormant arcane magnet the size of a small cabin. All about its sides are



wicked-looking knives, their serrated blades are over a foot long. These “displayed” daggers are arranged in a haphazard fashion, with seemingly no order to their placement.

Anyone may move about the chamber freely so long as the arcane magnet remains in its semi-dormant state. Once the arcane magnet has been activated, the entire chamber transforms into a cunning death trap; drawing all metal towards it with violent force as well as opening a dimensional portal in the ceiling whereby beastmen ambush the party.

Activating the Arcane Magnet: The triangular shaped magnet will activate with any of the following actions:

- Removing even a single dagger “displayed” along one of its sides (area B).
- Causing any damage to one of the crystal columns (areas C).
- Attempting to open the door opposite the triangular monument (area D2).

Once the arcane magnet has been activated, the trap is sprung. Refer to section **Death Magnetic** below for details.

Area B—The Monument: *Comprised of a strange black alloy veined in sickly red, this triangular monument is the size of a small cabin. Displayed all about its three smooth sides are wicked-looking knives, their serrated blades over a foot long of razor-sharp death. Circling the strange triangular monument are six crystal columns evenly spaced about the room that rise to the ceiling above.*

The monument is in fact a large and powerful arcane magnet that when activated draws any metal towards it with violent force. In its semi-dormant state, the monument still has enough magnetic pull to keep the “displayed” weap-

ons adhered to its sides (DC 12 Intelligence check to notice the daggers seem to be arrayed in a haphazard fashion and somehow stuck to the monument rather than hung). Anyone in possession of metal objects who approaches within 2' of the monument can feel a slight vibration as the semi-dormant magnet feebly attempts to draw any metal towards it.

Removing a Dagger: Removing any of the “displayed” daggers is simple enough, as the weapon easily comes away from the monument with minimal force. These serrated-edged daggers are comprised of razor-sharp steel and the first one removed inflicts 1d5 damage (Serrated Dagger; damage 1d5, range 10/20/30); the condition of others is determined when the magnet is disabled, see below. Judges are encouraged to describe the fearsome-looking knives “displayed” upon the monument in the most favorable light.

Once a single dagger is removed from the triangular monument, the trap is sprung. See section **Death Magnetic** below.

Area C—Crystal Columns: *Circling the triangular monument are six narrow-fluted crystal columns that rise thirty-feet to the ceiling above. Veined with a strange red alloy, the columns gleam with a sanguine radiance, casting everything in ghostly shadows and alien gloom.*

Comprised of an unknown crystal and veined with the same glowing metal as the stone of the keep's walls, these columns feed off the energy of the monument and act as a conduit that allows the dimensional portal in the ceiling above to open. Once the monument activates, the crystal columns glow with the energy of lost eons, turning bright crimson as the rising sun.

Destroying even a single column severs the connection between portal and monument, thereby permanently eliminating the threat of both. Should the PCs' exuberance lead them to destroy three or more crystal columns, a large portion of the ceiling collapses inflicting 2d6 [6] damage (DC 13 Reflex save for half). The crystal columns have AC 2 and hp 30 each, on a fumble the PC's weapon shatters.

Note that striking or otherwise causing damage to any crystal column while the arcane magnet is still in its semi-dormant state turns the chamber into a gallery of death. See section **Death Magnetic** below.

Area D—Iron Doors: *You stand before a massive double door wrought from solid iron. The doors have no handles or fixtures and their surfaces offer no bolt or catch.*

So long as the arcane magnet is in its semi-dormant state, both doors swing silently outward with even the gentlest push, but any attempt to open this door while the magnet is still in this state turns the chamber into a gallery of death. See section **Death Magnetic** below.

Also, **once the monument is activated, its powerful magnetic force pulls both doors closed.** Once closed, the iron doors can only be opened by disabling the magnet or with a successful DC 20 Strength check. Up to two PCs can force the doors simultaneously, in this case take the highest Strength roll of the two, but allow both PCs to burn Luck to increase the result.

Should PCs become split between both sides of a door while the arcane magnet is active, one PC on each side of the door can attempt to pull and push respectively, as above, take the highest roll of the two. As above, a DC 20 Strength check is required to open the iron door.

If the PCs use anything metal to spike or wedge the door open, these objects become useless once the arcane magnet activates, and go streaking across the room toward the monument. If the object used is made of wood or some other material, the violent force of the arcane magnet's pulls snaps these items easily. Should a PC be foolish enough to be standing in the open doorway when the arcane magnet activates, the swinging metal door crushes them for 1d8 [4] hit point of damage (DC 15 Reflex save for half).

Death Magnetic: Once the magnet activates, read or paraphrase the following:

Suddenly the door in which you had entered slams shut, its thunderous boom echoing wildly throughout the uncanny citadel. While within the chamber, the veins of glowing red metal that spiderweb the strange triangular monument and crystal columns begin to pulsate, filling the air with an eldritch drone and unearthly vibrations.

Once the arcane magnet has been activated, all metal in the chamber is violently drawn towards the monument (DC 17 Strength check to resist). For a PC, this is metal worn (armor) or held in hand. Metal that is within a container (like spikes in a backpack) remains so. For PCs' weapons, even if they are only partially metallic (such as a handaxe), the Strength check is necessary. This also results in both iron doors sealing shut (see area D for info). PCs wearing metal or metal accented armor (e.g. studded leather) must also pass the DC 17 Strength check or be violently slammed into the monument for 1d4 [2] points of damage. Once a PC passes the Strength check they can resist the magnet's pull for the rest of the encounter.

But things only get worse, for the chaotic energy of the monument flows through the six crystal columns into the ceiling where it opens a dimensional portal between two worlds—this and the Realm of Chaos.

What was once the ceiling is now a swirling vortex of coiling purple vapors and crawling shadows that seem to boil with the cadaverous light of remote worlds. Within the chaotic maelstrom you catch sight of foul entities, their distorted bestial faces roaring with unearthly cries. They plunge into the room as the portal closes behind them.

From the open portal spew savage beastmen, intent on the destruction of anyone within the chamber. The beastmen's initial descent into the chamber allows for a free surprise attack as they rain down upon the PCs in a fury of raking claws and slavering jaws. Have each player roll a DC 15 Intelligence check using their PC with the highest Intelligence modifier. Those groups of PCs that fail the check are considered surprised and cannot act in the first round of combat.

Note: Many PCs might be weaponless and must resort to punching for 1d3 damage. Treat this as “real” damage rath-



er than subdual damage. The extraplanar nature of these particular beastmen is such that they suffer real damage rather than subdual from unarmed attacks from beings on this plane. PCs can also punch the pillars for real damage if necessary.

Beastmen (5): Init +1; Atk claw or bite +0 melee (1d4 [2]); Crit III/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 4 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

Disabling the Arcane Magnet: PCs may disable the arcane magnet by destroying a crystal column (see area C above) or demolishing by attacking the magnet itself. The arcane magnet has AC 2 and hp 50, on a fumble the PC's weapon shatters. Its vulnerability to fire (deals 2x damage) and electricity (deals 5x damage).

Note that covering the monument (e.g. with a cloak or horsehair blanket, etc.) does not disable the magnet but does reduce the intensity of its magnetic pull, thereby reducing the check needed to resist the magnet's pull from a DC 17 to a DC 13 Strength check.

Once the Arcane Magnet is Disabled: Its intense magnetic pull momentarily reverses before going completely dormant; sending all metal objects attached to it hurling through the air with lighting speed - creating a veritable weapon storm. Everyone within the room (beastmen included) must make a Reflex save and refer to the table below. Note that clever PCs who have taken cover by either lying flat upon the ground or hiding behind columns or other PCs gain a +1d modifier on the Reflex save.

PCs who are stuck to the magnet when it is disabled also go hurling through the air with the suddenly reversal of its arcane draw, sending them crashing into the surrounding walls in a mangled heap for 1d8 [4] damage (DC 15 Reflex save for half).

Table 1-4: Weapon Storm

Reflex Save Result	Result
1 or less	A serrated dagger helicopters through the air striking character across the neck in a shower of blood and gore – decapitation. Instant death.
2-4	A serrated dagger hurls through the air striking character in the chest for 1d8 [4] damage.
5-7	A serrated dagger streaks through the air striking character in the midsection for 1d6 [3] damage.
8-10	A serrated dagger sails through the air slamming into character's back for 1d3 [1] damage.
11-19	Weapons go whizzing by with blinding speed, entirely missing character. No effect.
20+ (first time)	An exquisitely crafted mithril dagger lands harmlessly at the PC's feet. This wicked-looking weapon deals 1d7 damage and is extremely light and easy to throw. (Serrated Mithril Dagger; damage 1d7, range 15/30/45).
20+ (subsequent times)	A viciously pristine serrated dagger (damage 1d5, range 10/20/30) lands harmlessly at the PC's feet.

Note that unless stated above, **there is a 2 in 3 chance that a recovered dagger is damaged and considered useless.** Serrated daggers that are successfully recovered are still slightly dulled and treated as normal daggers (damage 1d4, range 10/20/30).

Greedy PCs: Some PCs might wish to gather daggers. As noted in the table, there is a 2/3 chance that a recovered dagger is useless. This check includes daggers that have struck PCs. Allow each PC one "free" attempt at recovery. If a PC attempts more than once, then the party has drawn the attention of five more beastmen who happen to be passing by. Use the same stats as above.

Once the weapon storm has passed, the iron door at the opposite end of the chamber (area D) is no longer held closed by the powerful draw of the magnet and silently swings open, revealing a corridor.

When PCs exit they again see peasant ghosts, this time leading them to the area 1-4 that is closest. Read the following:

Leaving the room, you again see specters of fallen villagers. This time they're being dragged by disembodied bestial ghostly claws which glow crimson. As before, they flow through the air away from you, down the corridor, through an intersection, and through a door beyond.

AREA 1-3D (FLIGHT 4)

THE ARMORY



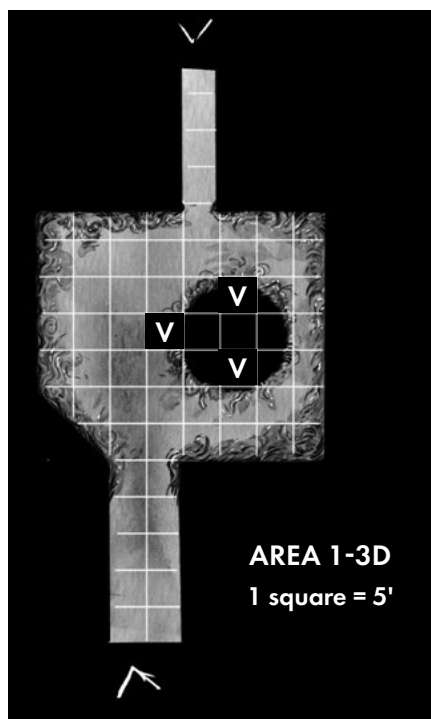
The following read-aloud text has a passphrase that may help the PCs in the encounter. It is critical that you read this description as you would any other, without telegraphing that the passphrase is coming, hinting that players should pay extra attention, grab pencil and paper, etc. Most importantly, read the passphrase only once, do not repeat it!

Outside the Armory: *As you cautiously make your way down the corridor, the heavy footfalls and guttural babel of beastmen warn you to dive for cover. You get a quick glimpse of a pair of misshapen creatures, each carrying the lifeless body of one of your villagers, before they shamble out of your view through a doorway draped in vines. A second later, a beastman's voice carries out of the chamber in a deliberate and forceful incantation of frenzied, indecipherable syllables that sound like, "ANÁL NATHRACH KHANDAR ESTRADA KHANDOS KLAATU BARADA NIKTO KOVACS!" Afterwards, there is only silence.*

The beastmen speak words of chaos which allow them to pass into the chamber unmolested by the two vine horrors who act as guards. The words in the description above are just the phonetic representation of what the PCs hear; the actual meaning of the guttural babbles is inaccessible to them. If a player wishes to repeat what the beastmen say, they must do it from the collective memories of those at the table. However, the party may also make a single DC 11 Intelligence check by the PC with the largest Intelligence score. They remember an additional word for each integer above 11 scored on the roll, and the forgotten words are remembered in the order they were spoken. For the sake of clarity, this check is only made once. If the PCs successfully speak the incantation, they are unmolested by the encounter's vine horrors, except if they fail in recovering a villager (see below). This failure demonstrates to the guardians that these are false allies, and they join the unarmored young vine horror in attacking the party.

Inside the Armory: *Long ropy vines hang from the archway that leads into the chamber, their flesh covered in a thick sap. The sweet smell of rot wafts into the corridor, like a larder gone bad in midsummer. The walls and ceiling of the humid room beyond are shrouded by more of the wildly growing vines. A dull crimson glow emanates from the spaces between the vines, bathing the chamber, which seems to serve as some sort of profane mortuary, in an eerie red light. Instead of lying within burial niches, a dozen or more corpses are entangled in the vines, which creep from a wide pit located in the right corner of the room.*

The pit serves as a makeshift armory and spawning chamber for the vine horrors, rotting corpses animated by the foul vines growing from seeds planted in their chests. When alerted, the vines unwind from the wall allowing the horrors to shamble forward to attack any nearby creatures. Beastmen dump the corpses of their victims into the pit, along with any extra equipment that they do not immediately need, and exit from the opposite door. Of the many bodies in the



room, only two of the corpses have completely transformed into vine horrors and act as guards and servants for the armory. One hangs from the ceiling over the entrance, and one lies by the lip of the pit. Note that two additional young vine horrors are within the pit (see below).

Unless the PCs are taking precautions (looking at the ceiling, looking at the lip of the pit, weapons ready and drawn, etc.), they are surprised for one round. The vine horror

guards animate and attack for the following conditions:

- if dealt damage,
- if the PCs try to remove equipment from them,
- if the PCs try to gain a replacement PC (see below),
- once a PC moves to within 10' of the pit without speaking the required incantation,
- or once misspeaking the incantation three times.

Vine Horror Guards (2): Init +2; Atk vine +2 melee (1d4 [2]) and longsword +2 melee (1d8 [4], one has 3-bladed sword); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 13; HD 2d10; hp 10 each; MV 20'; Act 2d20; SP entangle (automatic 1d4 [2] damage on next round if vine attack lands; PC must spend action for DC 15 Str check to escape), ; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

Three-Bladed Longsword (1d8, range 10/20/30, special attacks): The vine horror by the entrance wields a bizarre three-bladed longsword; be sure to describe this to the players! The two exterior blades can be fired as missile weapons (each as a separate action), with a range of 10/20/30 and doing 1d8 [4] damage (no damage mod for high Strength). In melee combat, the wielder may roll 1d8 per blade remaining and keep the highest damage roll. Blades may be recovered and reattached. If there is a question of a blade's recoverability, have the wielder make a Luck check.

Replacement PCs: There's a chance that some of the villagers are still alive and can be used as replacement PCs. If the party tries to rescue a villager from the vines, have the rescuer make a Luck check: success means a new PC has joined the party, while failure results in them disturbing an unarmored young vine horror. Each successful attempt by the party (not player!) adds a cumulative +1d penalty to successive Luck checks (die gets one step bigger). Up to four new PCs can be rescued this way. The two vine horror guards attack regardless of the outcome of the Luck roll if they have not already been destroyed.

Unarmored Young Vine Horror (variable based on Luck check): Init +2; Atk vine+2 melee (1d4 [2]); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 11; HD 2d6; hp 7 each; MV 20'; Act 2d16; SP entangle (automatic 1d6 [3] damage on next round if both vine attacks land; PC must spend action for DC 10 Str check to escape); SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

Once PCs look into the pit, read the following:

Looking into the pit, you see several more corpses suspended in the creepers. Some of the bodies still wear serviceable equipment!

Salvageable equipment and the depth in which they hang are as follows:

10 feet:

- Backpack containing 25' rope, prybar, hammer, six iron spikes
- Corpse wearing studded leather armor (**armored young vine horror**).
- Spear (1d8)

20 feet (Bottom of Pit):

- Quiver containing a shortbow and seven arrows (1d6, range 50/100/150)
- Battleaxe (1d10, two handed, d16 initiative die)
- Corpse wearing a bandolier holding two ceramic jars of alchemist's fire. (2d6 [6] damage; victim must make a DC 15 Reflex save each round or suffer an additional 1d6 [3] damage; fire burns out naturally after 6 rounds; fumble means jar shatters in thrower's hand, inflicting damage as usual
- Corpse wearing chainmail (+5 AC, -5 check penalty, -5 speed, d12 fumble die), shield hanging from strap (+1 AC, -1 check penalty, d8 fumble die), warhammer (1d8) tucked in belt (**armored young vine horror**).

PCs entering the pit without a rope or other climbing kit must succeed on a DC 6 Agility check every 10' due to the slickness of the vines. Moving to different equipment locations at the same depth also requires a check. Failing this check causes the climber to plummet to the bottom of the pit, taking 1d6 [3] points of damage for every 10' fallen.

Armored young vine horrors will move to attack anyone who falls into the pit or anyone who tries to remove equipment from the pit. They gain surprise if it is one of them that a PC is trying to loot. If the party uses tools (such as grappling hook and rope) to extract the equipment "safely", then the beasts attack but do not surprise the party. Note that these young horrors do not know how to use the warhammer and shield that are listed among their equipment.

Armored Young Vine Horror (2): Init +2; Atk vine+2 melee (1d4 [2]); Crit M/d8 [+3 damage]; AC 13 (studded leather) or 15 (chainmail); HD 2d6; hp 7 each; MV 20'; Act 2d16; SP entangle (automatic 1d6 [3] damage on next round if both vine attacks land; PC must spend action for DC 10 Str check to escape); SV Fort +1, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

Fire: If anyone should try to burn the vines, or if a mishap

with the alchemist's fire should occur, they will find that the resin coating the vines is quite flammable. The canopy goes up like tinder, and a yellow acrid smoke floods the room. Anyone who starts their initiative count in the room while the fire burns must make a DC 10 Fortitude save or suffer 1d4 [2] damage from fire and smoke inhalation. The fire burns for 6 rounds. The vines will be scorched, but are much too green to burn completely. The pit will be much easier to climb once the sap is burned away, but all the gear will be destroyed in the fire.

When PCs exit they again see peasant ghosts, this time leading them to area 1-4. Read the following:

Leaving the room, you again see specters of fallen villagers. This time they're being dragged by disembodied bestial ghostly claws which glow crimson. As before, they flow through the air away from you, down the corridor, through an intersection, and through a door beyond.

AREA 1-3E (FLIGHT 5)

THE MESS HALL MESS



Large wooden double doors block the next room. Characters listening at the doors hear the crackling of a fire. They smell wood smoke, roasted meat, and boiled vegetables. There is light coming through the crack between the doors and along the floor. The doors are unlocked.

Inside the room, the main area of the floor has eight well-worn tables and benches with seating for 50–60 individuals. The walls, floors, ceiling, even the tables, have veins of glowing red metal streaming through them, bathing everything in the room in a crimson glow. A huge tapestry covers two of the walls, depicting a violent battle with beastly men overtaking humans, dwarves, and elves. Four large wagon wheel chandeliers, each set with a half dozen candles, hang over the four corners lighting the room.

The tables are set with basic earthenware plates and bowls and pewter goblets and utensils (characters collecting dishes or utensils can use them as simple weapon, dealing 1d3 damage). Baskets of rustic bread, jugs of weak wine, and bowls of boiled carrots, cabbages, potatoes, and other root vegetables are set at each table. Steam still rises from the bowls of hot vegetables, as if the tables has just been prepared for the next banquet.

A large cooking area takes up most of one side of the room and contains three large boars roasting on iron spits over coals. A food preparation area, complete with cooking utensils, pots, pans, and serving dishes are arranged around the area. To the left of the cooking area is a small pantry filled with dried goods, salt, spices, and other cooking supplies.

Droppable Chandeliers: The chandeliers are held by heavy ropes that run through a pulley system to the four corners of the room. The ropes are tied down to metal brackets at chest



level in the respective corners of the room. The ropes may be cut to drop the chandeliers on enemies, but the attack infers no bonuses from Strength or Agility. Instead the character's current Luck modifier affects the attack (d20+Luck modifier against all targets beneath the chandelier) and damage (1d8+Luck modifier to all struck targets) rolls.).

Once all PCs, or at least 10 of them, have entered, the room springs to life as ghostly figures fill the room. Read the following:

Wafts of light flow from the glowing metal coalescing into humanoid figures with the same crimson glow. The tables are full of raucous beastly men and women and the central table is filled with similar figures in more formal military dress. Finally, a ghostly cook appears in the cooking area, preparing to pull the boars off the fire. The crowd pays no attention to you, and you are unable to interact with them.

After a few moments of revelry, the crowd quiets as the cook pulls the last of the boars off the coals and draws a large knife to begin butchering them. As the cook raises the knife above the first of the boars, the room goes silent as the ghostly figures dissolve into the table settings and food. A low roaring erupts from the room as the food, bowls, plates, and utensils spiral into a vortex, buffeting the PCs in a Food-nado.

Floor Attack (top of each round): At the top of each round, the streams of red metal in the floor targets one PC chosen randomly, forming into a metallic hand that attempts to trip them. The affected PC must make a DC 12 Reflex save or be

knocked prone. Attacking the floor has no effect but standing on the tables (or overturned tables) blocks the floor's ability to attack. Prone PCs grant a +1d bonus to incoming attacks.

Food-nado (1): Init +0; Atk food slam +0 melee (1d3 [2]) or hurled utensil +0 missile fire (1d3 [2], range 100'); Crit M/d8 [+3 damage]; AC 10; HD 3d12; hp 25; Act 5d20; SP Low-Luck swarm (occupies 40'x40' area, targets each player's PC with the lowest Luck); SV Fort +5, Ref +0; Will +1; AL C.

The Food-nado is a swirling maelstrom of food, utensils, and tableware. It is in constant movement, swirling around the room and following PCs out of the room into hallways and adjacent rooms. Each round, all of the PCs bombarded with food, utensils, and tableware (no roll required), but the PC with the lowest luck for each player is subjected to a slam or ranged attack from a particularly hard piece of food or sharp utensil. Note that PCs outside of the Food-nado's 40' by 40' area can still be targeted with hurled utensils.

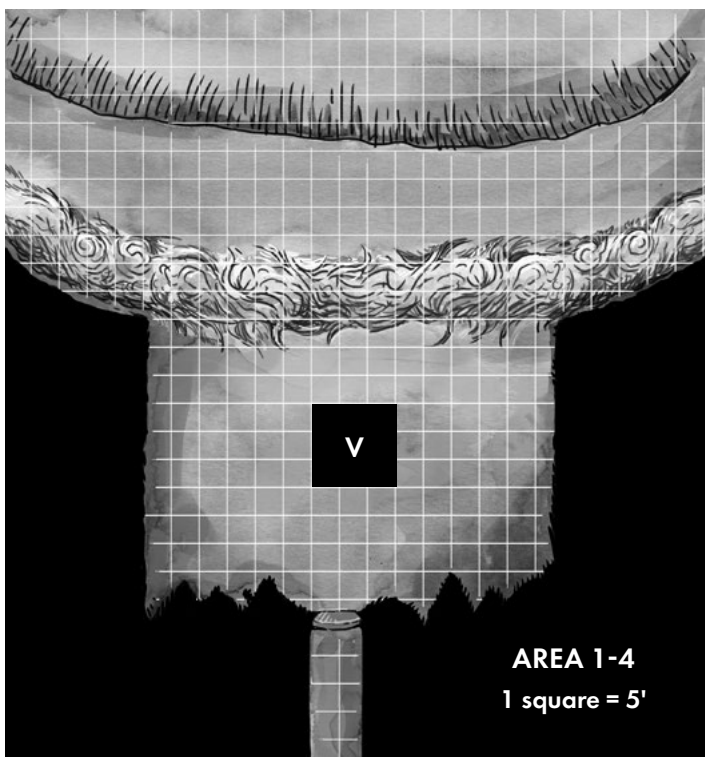
After 5 rounds or after the Food-nado has been defeated, ear-piercing squeals ring from the cooking area. The roasted boars, still on their spits, are charging toward the party.

Spitted Boar (3): Init +0; Atk spit gore +1 melee (1d3 +skewered); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 13; HD 1d6+2; hp 8, 6, 5; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP skewered (DC 12 Reflex save or take 1 damage each successive round; see below); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

Skewered PCs are run through with the spit and take 1 point of damage each round. Other PCs may take an action to remove the character, or the PC can remove themselves with an action, but the removed PC must make a DC 14 Fortitude save (DC 16 for elves due to the spit being made of iron) to survive being pulled off the spit. Otherwise, they die.

When PCs exit they again see specters from the gongfarmer army, this time leading them to the area 1-4 that is closest. Read the following:

Leaving the room, you again see specters of fallen villagers. This time they're being dragged by disembodied bestial ghostly claws which glow crimson. As before, they flow through the air away from you, down the corridor, through an intersection, and through a door beyond.



AREA 1-4 THE VINE WALL



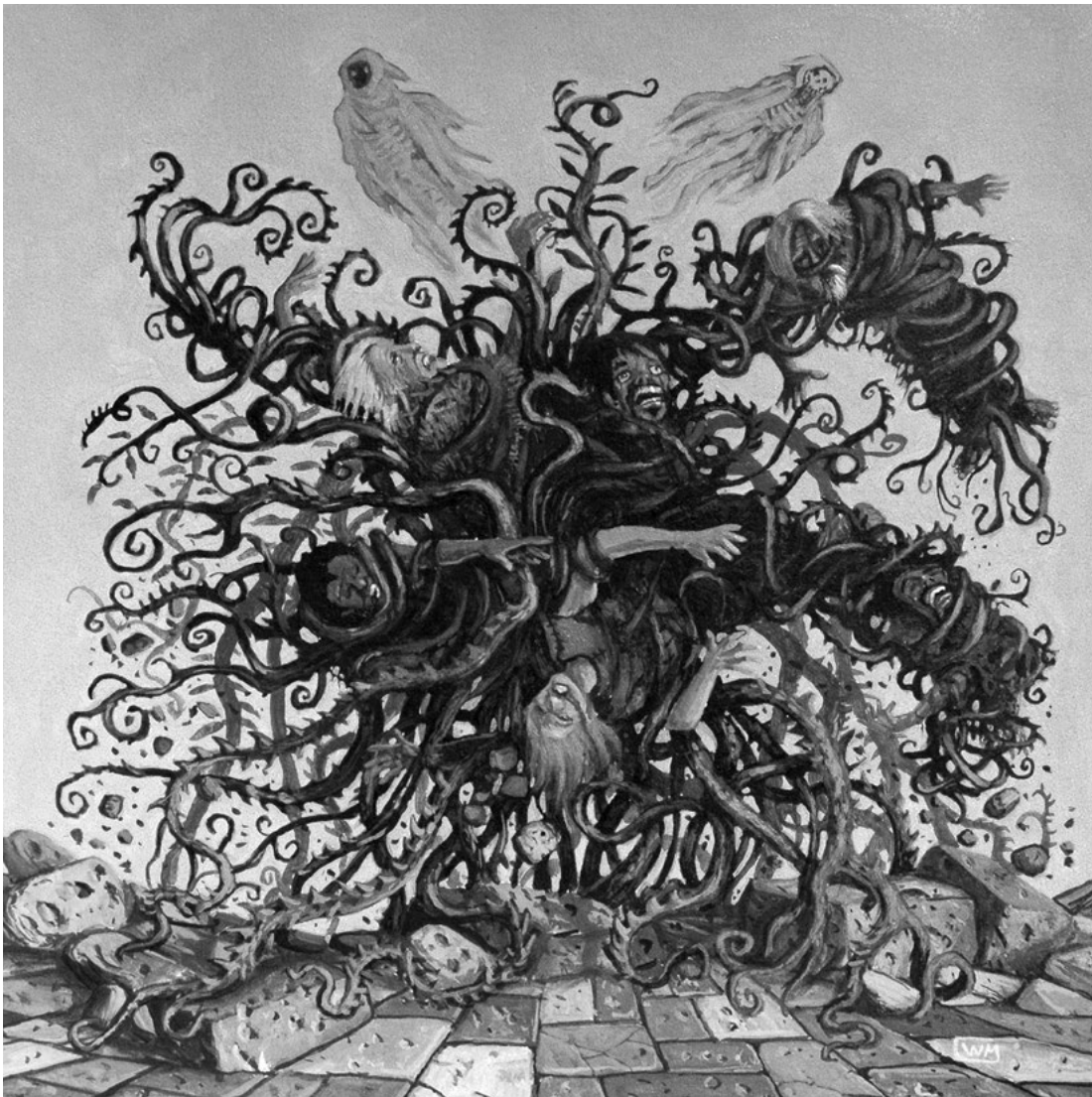
efore moving on or letting the PCs take actions, **allow replacement PCs from the peasant horde.** Once replacement PCs are dealt out, continue.

You emerge into a courtyard sloping gently down to a wall of thorned vines that encircles a giant crater. Twisted within the vegetation are writhing bodies, some scream for help, though for others it's unclear whether their motion is their own or that of the vines. Specters stream through the air passing over the vine wall to whatever lies beyond. Winds howl and purple lightning flashes as glowing metallic red veins appear in the foliage. Vines thread through ten of the bodies and form a giant four-armed monstrosity composed of thorns, corpses, and malice! Connected by an umbilical cord of writhing vegetation, it shamles from the wall which lowers somewhat with the creature's advance. Those peasants stuck in the upper wall are shredded to death with the wall's partial descent. The beast attacks!

This is a dangerous foe, but smart play can go a long way toward victory. The horror can be killed either by direct melee or by attacking its umbilical cord. The cord is still part of the creature and shares its hit points, but its AC is lower since it is less effective at dodging. Although ganging up on the cord may seem prudent, it allows the horror to melee at close range doing lots of damage. There are alternatives.

The giant four-armed vine horror can stretch its arms up to 30', but this makes its attacks weaker and also lowers the wall (see below). The horror moves closest to the largest group of PCs, trying to maximize damage to PC clusters. If possible, it saves its arm-stretching attacks for isolated PCs. Note that the arms are big enough that scattered PCs can still melee them instead of the creature's torso, but only for the round in which they are stretched, even if they aren't in melee range with the creature's torso. If the horror retracts an arm for a closer target, the wall does not regain its lost height. The red veins threading the beast and the wall are pumping with arcane energies that grant the vegetation immunity to fire.

		Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
A: Use row G from previous round	Wall Height (round begins)	60'			
B	Distance from start				
C	Additional 10' length of Arm 1				
D	Additional 10' length of Arm 2				
E	Additional 10' length of Arm 3				
F	Additional 10' length of Arm 4				
G: Total A minus sum of B through F.	Wall Height (round ends)				



Giant Four-Armed Vine Horror (1): Init +2; Atk thorny-corpse bash +3 melee (1d6 [3] up to 10'/1d4 [2] for 10'-20'/1d3 [1] for 20'-30'); Crit M/d10 [+3 damage]; AC 16 (umbilical cord AC 13); HD 4d10; hp 28; MV 30'; Act 4d20; SP long reach (melee attacks can range up to 30', but damage becomes weaker the longer the reach), immune to fire; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +1; AL N.

At combat's beginning, after the horror's initial advance, the wall is 60' tall. If a PC observes the wall during combat (this takes an action, but doesn't count against movement), they note that the wall lowers further as the creature stretches its umbilical cord and arms to attack. To summarize:

- The wall lowers 10' for every 10' an arm stretches beyond its natural 10' length.
- The wall lowers 10' for every 10' the creature moves beyond its initial position (20' from the wall).
- Distances round down, so 15' counts as 10', 25' counts as 20', etc.

Use the above tracking table to aid in tracking the vine horror's arm length, position, and wall height.

Here are some examples that reduce the wall 60', completely lowering it:

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- All four arms are stretched to 20' and umbilical cord stretched to 40' (20' beyond initial position); each arm lowers wall by 10' (40' due to arms) and extra 20' of umbilical cord lowers wall by 20'.
- Two arms stretched to 30' and two arms stretched to 20'.
- Umbilical cord stretched 80' (10' wall reduction per 10' stretch beyond 20')

Grappling the beast: Clever players may try to pull the horror away from the wall. This is an opposed Strength check, with the creature getting a +8 to its roll (it's huge!). However, each PC pulling may make the Strength check with the party choosing the best of the rolls (a natural 20 automatically succeeds). A successful check pulls the creature 20' and lowers the wall by the same amount. Improvised weapons (such as a grappling hook) do 1d3 additional damage.

Scaling the vine wall: The wall requires a DC 10 Strength or Agility check (whatever is more advantageous), but it can only be climbed 20' per round. The vines are alive and work against the PC. If a PC fails their climb check, they take 1d6 [3] points falling damage. **If they succeed, after each round's ascent the PC must make a DC 14 Reflex save to avoid 1d3 [1] points of damage from the vines.** Grant a +1d bonus to the save to PCs who make clever use of equipment, farm animals, or corpses to protect themselves. The horror isn't concerned with anything on the other side (the crater's side) of the vine wall. Any PCs savvy enough to get past the wall without "wasting" time to kill the horror are safe from its attacks unless they attack from the crater's side of the wall.

The keep's walls to the sides and along the door are not climbable. The walls actively dislodge hands, feet, grappling hooks, etc.

Extracting replacement PCs from the wall: If the party is running low on PCs, they can try to bolster their ranks with writhing bodies within the wall. Extracting a body takes a full round. At the end of the extraction's round, the "savior" PC must make a Luck check. If they succeed, the body

is alive and counts as a new level 0 to be claimed by any player at the table. If they fail, the wall retaliates by throwing thorns at its former prisoner (killing them) and at the savior PC who takes 1d3 [1] damage.

The living wall does not yield its fruit easily. For each successful Luck check by the party (not a particular PC), the next Luck check die increases by +1d, up to d100 as indicated below.

Successful Extractions by PARTY (not PC)	Luck Check Die
0	d20
1	d24
2	d30
3 or more	d100

Once either the wall is completely lowered or the vine horror is defeated, all the bodies that were contained within the wall are soon dead from the wall's vines' furious writhing. If they think to, a player may have one of their PCs attempt to recover a single body before this happens.

DOUBLE CRITS AND A NEAR MISS (BY JAMES POZENEL):

In the tournament's funnel, The High Fives had acquitted themselves quite well leading up to a four-armed 10-corpse giant vine horror and the 60' vine wall behind it. Unfortunately, the monster got the jump on them and went first in initiative. Two died right away and the pack of gongfarmers were hemmed in at the entrance to the room. Near round's end, one of the characters scored a critical hit that would lead to their victory. They stunned the beast and dropped its initiative to the end of the next round—eliminating its advantage and allowing the party to essentially attack twice before the horror could recover. Several PCs chose to flank the abomination and attack its umbilicus. As the penultimate player's round drew to the end, one of his characters scored another critical hit! The last player of the round started his PCs' actions. Boom! Another critical hit! What luck! The player rolls a '1' and revealed that their PC had a -1 to the crit roll. The character landed such a heavy blow that they dropped their weapon, but not without dealing another +1d6 damage. The monstrosity shuddered, heaved, and perished! The final two blows dealt enough damage to take half the vine horror's hit points! The team's luck did not stop there as they went on to have a strong round; they only missed qualifying for the finals by 4 points!

AREA 1-5 THE CHAOS CRATER



Because the area 1-5 map represents a huge crater, you may either run its encounters as "theater of the mind" or map out a separate battle area and run encounters there. A simple sketch of the walkway is sufficient.

Before moving on or letting the PCs take actions, offer replacement PCs from the peasant horde. Once replacement PCs are dealt out, continue.

An intense heat, horrid screams, and hellish growls rise from the massive crater that dominates the keep's courtyard. Peering over the edge is like staring into the eye of a terrible abomination! Glowing crimson "veins" of ridged steel steeply descend into the infernal abyss, wind around the edge, and become a faint glow obscured by vapor that seeps from the crater's surface. The misty miasma is not so thick as to hide the cyclopean ziggurat that pulsates with an eldritch vermillion aura some 400' below. There are three paths descending into the mist. On the first you see a large worm through a gap in the mist, on the second you see a swarm of lightning laced-insects momentarily revealed, and on the third a strange lizard leaps above the miasma before falling back below. You watch as other villagers choose their paths to bravely, or perhaps foolishly, descend into the crater and disappear within the vapor. Winged beastmen soar above the crater and dive below. Though you cannot see your comrades' fates, you can hear their screams!

The crater is approximately 400' deep, 600' wide at the top, and tapers to 200' wide towards the bottom; its angle of descent is roughly 45 degrees. There are three noticeable paths from which the PCs must choose: the one with the large worm is path A, the one with the insects is path B, and the one with the lizard is path C.

Limited visibility: A hazy vapor fills the crater, obscuring vision beyond 50'. The party cannot see what lies ahead beyond this distance.

Leaving any of the paths: PCs can leave the metal paths to cautiously descend the crater's surface, but they must succeed a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer 1d3 [1] damage each round from the chaotic miasma seeping out from the stone and flowing through the air. By strange dweomercraft, or the unseen strings of fate, the PCs are safe from this harmful substance as long as they stick to the red metallic path!

WHEN WINGED BEASTMEN ATTACK!



pawns of chaos, the winged beastmen are a hideous amalgam of feral animals and man. Each winged beastman has a thick, leathery hide and the head of a different animal or insect, along with a thin membrane of skin along their sides that can be collapsed or extended to serve as bat-like wings. Though not superb flyers, their wings allow them to swoop around and perform

diving stoop attacks in order to carry off their prey. Once carried, the PC has 1 round to muscle their way back down safely, or be dropped from a great height, or worst, tossed directly into the ziggurat...A deadly fall they will not survive!

Winged Beastmen (6): Init +2; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4 [2] +stoop attack) or weapon +1 melee (1d6 [3]); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 6 each; MV 30' or 50' fly; Act 1d20; SP stoop attack (DC 12 Strength check or grabbed), catch and release (Strength check vs d20+2, or dropped to death!); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

With a successful claw attack the PC must make a DC 12 Strength check or be stooped and lifted 5' into the air. On the following round the PC must make an opposing Strength check vs the beastman (d20+2), failure means the fiend proceeds high over to the ziggurat...However, should the PC succeed the check they will have maneuvered the beastman's flight back towards the path and have jumped free, landing back on the path.

The winged beastmen attack the party until either two PCs or two of their own are slain, and then retreat, gliding towards their lair (area F-2). If applicable, PCs with missile weapons can attempt parting shots.

PATH A – PATH OF THE WORM

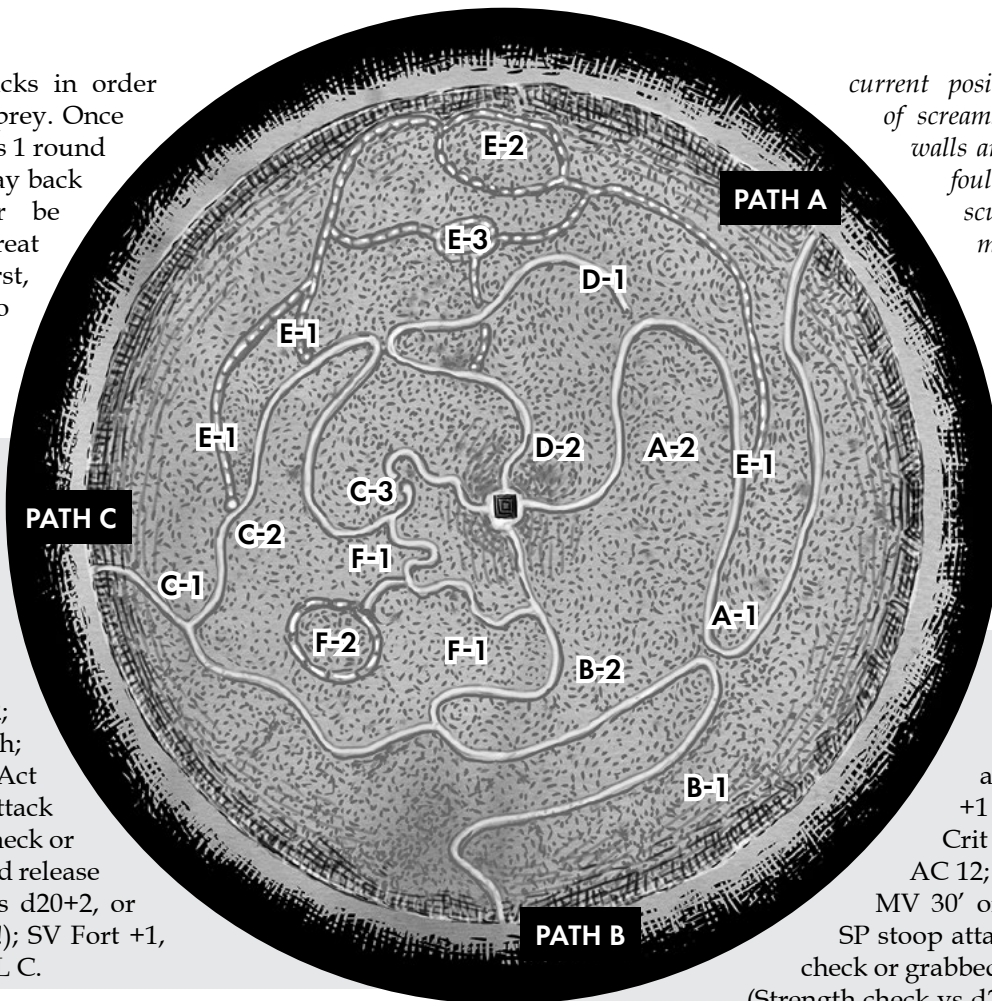
Area A-1—The Beastmen Cometh: *The glowing metal path descends at a gentle pace around the edge of the crater, before bending 180 degrees and sloping down in the other direction. At the bend, you can barely see another path a short run through the chaotic mist. Uphill along that alternate path fly strange insects laced with lightning.*

At the 180 degree bend the PCs can spy area B-1 (Path B). PCs can reach this path by climbing the rocky surface but each PC must succeed a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer the corrupting effects of the stone (1d3 [1] damage).

Should the PC continue down Path A, past the bend they are attacked by a band of winged beastmen near area E-1. Read or paraphrase the following:

You spy a 3' wide hole in the crater wall roughly 30' from your

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current position when a series of screams reverberate off the walls and you catch sight of foul winged shadows, obscured by the steaming miasma, swooping in to attack the villagers descending other paths! To your horror a band of this roving winged demons catches sight of your group and breaks away from the rest, diving in your direction!

Winged Beastmen (6): Init +2; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4 [2] +stoop attack) or weapon +1 melee (1d6 [3]); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 6 each; MV 30' or 50' fly; Act 1d20; SP stoop attack (DC 12 Strength check or grabbed), catch and release (Strength check vs d20+2, or dropped to death!); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

See When Winged Beastmen Attack! above.

A 3'-wide hole burrowed into the crater's wall leads into the worm tunnels (areas E-1). The winged beastmen will not follow the PC into the hole, but may continue to attack if the two PC kill quota has not been met.

Once either two PCs or two of their own are slain, and they retreat, read or paraphrase the following:

The winged beastmen circle around, but as you prepare for another clash they veer away, swooping down and towards an ominous opening below flanked by glowing iron shards. It seems like your current path avoids their lair, but you might rescue your friends by crossing to the other path uphill at the bend.

A junction to area D-1 is found at the next bend: This mist parts to reveal the beginning of another path, unseen from the crater's lip. It is a modest climb downward from your walkway.

Path D is roughly 40' below and winds around the other side of the crater. Reaching this ledge is a simple feat but each PC must succeed a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer the corrupting effects of the stone (1d3 [1] damage).

Area A-2—The "Offal" Undead: *The glowing crimson path widens and forms grooves akin to shallow steps as it slowly rounds the edge of the crater. Littered across the steps are the slain and mutilated bodies of your fellow villagers. Their spilled intestines illuminating weirdly from the glow of the steel path. Further*

down towards the end of the stair you catch sight of another band of villagers.

The red metal veins form a set of steps varying between 10 and 15 feet wide that wind down the edge of the crater roughly 100'. The bodies of slain villagers lay strewn across the steps and will resurrect into zombie gongfarmers if the party descends further (roughly 50').

Read or paraphrase as the dead rise: *Seemingly appearing from nowhere, a festering of flies begins to buzz about around the corpses as an overpowering stench hangs like a cloud over the steps, forcing you to gag. It's at this moment that you watch in horror as the slain villagers, above and below your position, rise up like macabre marionettes and begin to advance as a rank bloody, brown, and greenish ichor leaks from their wounds with every shambling step!*

First Round Nausea: At the start of the first round each PC must succeed a DC 8 Fortitude save or waste the round gagging helplessly (zombies get +1d to attacks) at the horrendous stench of these zombies.

Zombie Gongfarmers (7): Init -2; Atk bite +1 melee (1d4 [2]); Crit U/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 9; HD 2d4; hp 5 each; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SP undead traits, evisceration (see below), first round nausea; SV Fort +2, Ref -2, Will +1; AL C.

Though in life they may have had other occupations the Forces of Chaos have dictated the worth of these poor wretches, and thus reanimated them as zombie gongfarmers. Each time a zombie gongfarmer slays a PC, it and any other zombie is attacking the slain character must succeed a DC 10 Willpower save to resist their urge to eviscerate. Any zombies that fail this save desire only to dig into the slain PC's body and devour their viscera; they do not attack on the following round.

If any players ask about the party they saw earlier at the bottom of the stairs, make mention that they are also fighting this horde of zombies!

PATH B—PATH OF THE SWARM

Area B-1—Lightning Locust Hives: *The glowing steel path descends steeply, hugging the walls of the crater in a zig-zag formation. Clinging to the crater are several large oblong orbs; humming and shimmering with bright flashes of blue light. Static electricity rolls from the strange orbs across the rock and metal path.*

These oblong orbs of electricity are hives which house swarms of lightning locust. The hives cling to the crater wall, some large enough to hang over the path, forcing the PCs to crawl beneath them. One hive in particular cuts the width of the path in half and forces the PCs to succeed a DC 8 Agility check in order to safely sidestep it. Failing the check, the unfortunate PC has involuntarily kicked the hive and suffers an automatic 1d8 [4] hp damage from a focused strike (see monster stats). The static electricity rolling off the hives is harmless.

The lightning locust will only attack if any of the PCs inves-

tigates the hives, or further disturbs them besides the involuntary kick (above). Read or paraphrase if this occurs:

A buzzing grows into a loud crackling noise as the air becomes charged with static electricity. A rolling cloud of lightning bursts from the strange hives, rippling across the stone walls of the crater. This is no wild phenomenon of nature however, this is a swarm of hundreds, if not thousands, of electric blue locust!

Lightning Locust Swarm: Init +5; Atk electrical shock +2 (+4 against targets holding/wearing metal) ranged (1d3[1], 1d4 [2] if wearing metal); Crit M/d10 [+3 damage]; AC 10; HD 4d8; hp 18; MV 40' flying arc; Act 1d20 special (odd rounds) or 2d20 (even rounds); SP on odd-numbered rounds shocks all targets within 25' x 25' space, on even-numbered rounds focused strike (swarm attacks 1d3 [2] targets for 1d8 [4] damage, but swarm loses 1d4 [2] hp), half damage from non-area attacks; SV Fort +1, Ref +5, Will +1; AL C.

Rippling lightning rolls through this mass of flying insects, which moves in an arcing formation from 10' to 40'. The swarm always occupies a 25' x 25' radius. Anyone standing within this area is subject to a shocking attack. Targets holding or wearing metal have a greater chance of being hit (+4). Targets wearing metal also suffer more damage (+1, including studded leather). When using the standard swarm attack the judge should roll only once (to save time) and add bonuses as needed.

On even-numbered rounds the hivemind of the swarm opts to attack 1d3 [2] targets. These focused lightning strikes deal 1d8 [4] damage. Each time one of these focused strikes hits, the swarm discharges, losing 1d4 [2] hp. Should the swarm discharge completely, they retreat back into their hives to "recharge".

Junction to Path A: *As the path sharply bends, the chaotic miasma parts to reveal the bend of another path a short run across the crater's belching surface. Downhill on that alternate path, you hear the sounds of flesh slithering and rock being crushed.*

Past the hives, Path B bends close to area A-1 of Path A. PCs can reach this path by climbing the rocky surface, but each PC must succeed a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer the corrupting effects of the stone (1d3 [1] damage).

Area B-2—The Winged Beastmen Attack!: The path continues, steadily winding into the depths of the crater. Suddenly a gang of winged beastmen swoop down from above out of the miasma, their horrid animalistic faces, slobbering and howling for the taste of man-flesh!

Winged Beastmen (6): Init +2; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4 [2] +stoop attack) or weapon +1 melee (1d6 [3]); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 6 each; MV 30' or 50' fly; Act 1d20; SP stoop attack (DC 12 Strength check or grabbed), catch and release (Strength check vs d20+2, or dropped to death!); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

See When Winged Beastmen Attack! above.

Once either two PCs or two of their own are slain, and they retreat, read or paraphrase the following: *The winged beastmen circle around, but as you prepare for another clash they veer*

away, swooping down and towards an ominous opening below flanked by glowing iron shards. From this vantage point you spot a smaller trail forking from your current path that leads up towards their lair.

PATH C—THE PATH OF THE LIZARD

Area C-1—The Fork: The red metal path gradually descends into the crater. Roughly 60' down, the path forks. Should you continue straight the path slowly descends, curving around the crater until it connects to another steel path some 100' below. Taking the fork away from the straight, the path begins to rapidly slope back and forth weaving between large craggy boulders.

Area C-2—Those Aren't Boulders!: Bulbous rock formations hang over the red metal path ahead beyond which the path continues to curve around the crater.

The bulbous rock formations are camouflaged large corrupted lizards! Once your everyday garden variety type lizards, the resurgence of the chaotic energy surrounding the keep mutated the reptiles, causing rigid bulbous growths along their bodies, giving them the appearance of craggy boulders. During this transformation, the lizards' forelegs shrunk while their hind legs elongated, giving them the ability to leap great distances. In addition, the lizards can camouflage their bodies to the color of their surroundings.

The reptiles lie in wait hoping to ambush the party as they travel down this path. The PC with the highest Luck may (with a successful Luck check) catch a glimpse of one of the lizard's eyes slowly opening, before it quickly winks shut again. Should they fail the roll, the party is surprised and ambushed by leaping crush attacks.

Chaos Corrupted Lizards (3): Init +2; Atk long tongue +3 ranged (grabbed+bite) or leaping crush; Crit M/d8 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 2d6; hp 6 each; MV 10', 40' leap; Act 1d20; SP camouflage, climb sheer surfaces, bite (DC 10 Str check to escape, or bit, 1d6[3], on the following round), leaping crush (DC 12 Ref save or 1d8 [4] damage), improved crit (instantly grappled and bit on roll of 19-20); SV Fort +2, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

On the second round of combat, ask the PC with the highest Luck score to roll a Luck check. On a successful roll they will spy a 3' wide hole (area E-1) burrowed into the crater's wall. Otherwise, the hole is obscured by one of the lizards, and will not be found until at least one lizard is slain. Although the tunnel is too small for the great lizards to squeeze through, their 10' long tongues may still be able to reach a fleeing PC.

Junction to Path D: The mist parts to reveal another path, unseen from the crater's lip. It is a modest climb downward from your walkway.

This section of Path C bends close to Path D before sloping towards area C-3. Reaching path D is a simple feat but each PC must succeed a DC 15 Fortitude save or suffer the corrupting effects of the stone (1d3 [1] damage).

Area C-3—The Bridges and the Beastmen: Note that just before reaching the bridges (area C-3) a small trail winds up to the beastmen's lair (area F-1).

The metal path veers away from the crater, elevating slightly as it begins to stretch across the vast chasm. Unfortunately, after 50 feet the bridge has been severed, its steel structure melted away. However, another fragment of a bridge terminates to your left about 10 feet below you with the edge 15 feet away. If you can reach it, you can continue down the same side of the crater you've been on. Far below a flash of ectoplasmic waste blasts upwards from the top of ziggurat forcing you to shield your eyes as the ball of brightly colored raw phlogiston rolls towards the turbulent heavens above! Swooping around the extended path are several winged creatures, each a hideous amalgam of animal and man!

The Bridge: A running leap (DC 13 Agility check) is needed to jump the gap to the other broken bridge. Should PCs find a clever implement to improve their chances (such as using the wings off a slain beastman) grant a +1d bonus. Failing the check, the PC falls to their death, or if attacked by a winged beastmen on the same round, will be grappled and tossed directly over the ziggurat as it blasts phlogiston sludge that obliterates their frail fleshy vessels!

Winged Beastmen (6): Init +2; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4 [2] +stoop attack) or weapon +1 melee (1d6 [3]); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 6 each; MV 30' or 50' fly; Act 1d20; SP stoop attack (DC 12 Strength check or grabbed), catch and release (Strength check vs d20+2, or dropped to death!); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

See When Winged Beastmen Attack! above.

Once either two PCs or two of their own are slain, and they retreat, read or paraphrase the following: *The winged beastmen circle around, but as you prepare for another clash they veer away, swooping up towards an ominous opening lined with glowing iron shards. A nearby path winds up towards this lair.*

Reaching the other side: PCs reaching this point have triumphed over the horrors of the crater, read or paraphrase the following:

The trail winds back and forth leading down towards the bottom of the crater, and the mighty ziggurat that towers ahead.

PATH D—THE HIDDEN PATH

This path can only be accessed by PCs discovering the route before area A-2 or navigating the worm tunnels from area E-3.

Area D-1—The Hidden Path: Climbing down the rocky surface, you've safely reached a hidden path which winds in the opposite direction of the corpse covered stairs above.

Area D-2—The Trail to the Bottom: PCs reaching this point, either from the worm tunnels (area E-3) or the path from area A-1 have triumphed the horrors of the crater, read or paraphrase the following:

The trail winds back and forth leading down towards the bottom of the crater, and the mighty ziggurat that towers ahead.

PATH E—INTO THE WORMHOLE

Area E-1—Worm Tunnels: *This 3 foot-wide tunnel was burrowed by something big! The walls are scarred by spinning grooves and twists away into the darkness.*

These tunnels, made by the burrowing brimstone worms, run maze-like through the crater. PCs attempting to utilize the burrows must crawl through on hands and knees. Crawling through the tunnels is not considered “straying from the path” as far as the corrupting influence is considered (the worm tunnels are too deep for the chaotic miasma).

As soon as they enter the tunnels the PCs will begin to feel vibrations through the stone. At each fork the PC in the lead must succeed in a Luck check. Failing the check results in a brimstone worm’s spiked slam (+2 melee, 1d6 [3] damage) targeting the PC with the lowest Luck for only one round as it moves through their current location. If the worm misses, party members adjacent to the target can attack the worm as it leaves. If the party chooses to follow the path of the worm it will lead to its lair (area E-2).

Brimstone Worm (1): Init +0; Atk spiked slam +2 melee (1d6 [3]); Crit on 23–24 (swallowed whole); AC 15 (13 when burrowing); HD 3d10; hp 15 each; MV 15'; Act 1d24; SP burrow & surprise (-2 to AC when burrowing, +2 bonus to attack on following round), swallowed whole (on a crit, PC is swallowed and slowly burned alive for 1d3 [2] damage per round); SV Fort +4; Ref +2; Will +1; AL C.

The brimstone worms are 10 feet long and 3 feet wide monstrosities with spiked heads, hard outer shells and hellfire maws. The worm’s spiked heads allow them to easily burrow through the hard, stone walls of the crater. When a worm makes a critical hit (on 23–24) the target is flung into the air and then swallowed whole to be slowly burned alive by the raging supernatural hellfire within these worms. Swallowed PCs must succeed a DC 10 Strength check or inflict up to 6 damage in order to cut themselves free.

Area E-2—Worm Lair: *You slide down the tunnel, landing into a large cavern. Veins of red glowing metal run through the stone walls. Attached to the cavern walls are six steaming, mucus laden cocoons. Muffled noises emit from these disgusting wiggling swathes! A shambling shape rises at your presence, a mighty worm, its head covered in multiple bull horns, opens the leaves of its roaring maw as a wave of intense heat radiates from that ghastly orifice!*

The six cocoons each house a 0-level villager (possible replacement PCs). Each still carries their weapons and equipment. Any attacks on the cocoons (i.e. not gently cutting them open) will inflict damage on the villagers within.

Brimstone Worm (1): Init +0; Atk spiked slam +2 melee (1d6 [3]); Crit on 23–24 (swallowed whole); AC 15 (13 when burrowing); HD 3d10; hp 15; MV 15'; Act 1d24; SP burrow & surprise (-2 to AC when burrowing, +2 bonus to attack on following round), swallowed whole (on a crit, a PC is swallowed and slowly burned alive for 1d3 [2] damage per round); SV Fort +4; Ref +2; Will +1; AL C.

On a critical hit (on 23–24) the target is swallowed whole and slowly burned alive (1d3 [2] damage per round). PCs must make a DC 10 Strength check or inflict up to 6 damage in order to cut themselves free.

Area E-3—Vertical Tunnel Shaft: *The tunnel opens into a small grotto. A sliver of crimson metal runs through this section illuminating the area with a faint red hue. Another hole continues ahead, while a vertical shaft leads into the dark unknown below.*

PC can easily climb down the shaft without the need of Strength checks, and Luck checks are not required in this section of the tunnels. Depending on their direction the holes will exit into different areas of the map. The vertical shaft leads to area D-2 (Path D).

PATH F—THE BEASTMEN OF DOOM

Area F-1—Path of Doom: *Rising away from the flowing metal path is a steep natural trail that leads towards a fissure in the crater flanked with several sharp columns of red hot steel, like a patch of crystal shards in a mine. From time to time, bestial forms swoop out of the cave on horrid wings only to return with screaming and bloody villagers in their clawed appendages! Thankfully the trail is set deep between the rocks, obscuring your party from their sight.*

Climbing the steep path to the grotto takes time, but the party will reach it unaccosted by the winged beastmen who swoop in and out of the cave entrance, read or paraphrase the following:

The foul hot stench of beast, blood, and sweat hangs heavy in the air. The steel shards flanking the entrance radiate an intense heat. Peering into the grotto you find a narrow path, illuminated faintly by more steel shards penetrating the cavern walls. An assortment of blood curdling screams, growls, and hissing echoes down the passage which gradually slopes upwards.

The steel shards radiate an intense heat and touching them causes 1 point of damage (if this happens to be enough to kill a fragile PC they burst into flames).

Area F-2—Lair of the Beastmen: *The heat and stench grow stronger with each passing second. The ground beneath your feet becomes moist and sticky as the cavern opens into a wide 100 foot space. Villagers howl in pain; their bodies impaled and roasting on the hot steel shards piercing the cavern walls. Four winged beastmen howl and holler at the pain they’ve invoked, while another two present six villagers to the monstrous thing perched upon a mound of corpses in the center of the grotto. The thing’s coiled serpentine form wraps around the mound. It extends gossamer bat wings as it releases a terrible hiss from its mangy feline face. In one malformed appendage it wields a chain of fire, and in the other a mace comprised of skulls.*

There are six weaponless 0-level villagers (and possible replacement PCs) standing before the Lord of Beastmen, which seeing their chance instantly join the fray, grabbing weapons from the mounds of corpses. The grotto is roughly circular and a 100' wide with a ceiling that reaches 60', allowing the beastmen ease of flight. All impaled and suffering villagers within the grotto are too far gone to rescue.



The Lord of Beastmen is a hulking figure with a serpentine body some 8' in length. Large gossamer bat wings that shimmer and swirl with the ebb and flow of chaotic energy flap wildly on its backside. Its hissing head is that of a feral feline, spitting with vile rage.

The beastmen's lord can attack twice per round and prefers to use its Flaming Chain to grapple targets, drawing them in for a killing stroke with its Mace of Skulls. In its other claw it carries a terrible mace with a head comprised of skulls. The skulls constantly shift between one another, and are held together by terrible magics. When a struck with a critical hit (19-20) a skull explodes dealing an additional 1d6 [3] damage to any PC within 5'. If all five skulls are ruptured in this manner the monster loses this critical attack.

Foregoing a regular action the Lord of Beastman can opt to create a torrent of wind with its mighty wings. Any targets caught in this wind (15' forward cone) must succeed a DC 12 Fortitude save or be pushed back 10' and, should they be within reach, must succeed a

Luck check or be pushed into one of the many hot metal shards for 1d6 [3] damage.

Should the party triumph over the Beastman Lord, they may be able to acquire its weapons, each of which was forged by the Forces of Chaos and should not be used lightly. The Flaming Chain continues to burn indefinitely, and any PC attempting to recover it must succeed a DC 10 Fortitude save when first touched for be burned for 1 damage. If the Mace of Skulls is recovered, with skulls still intact, use the stats below; otherwise its magical properties are gone and it is merely a club (1d4 [2] damage).

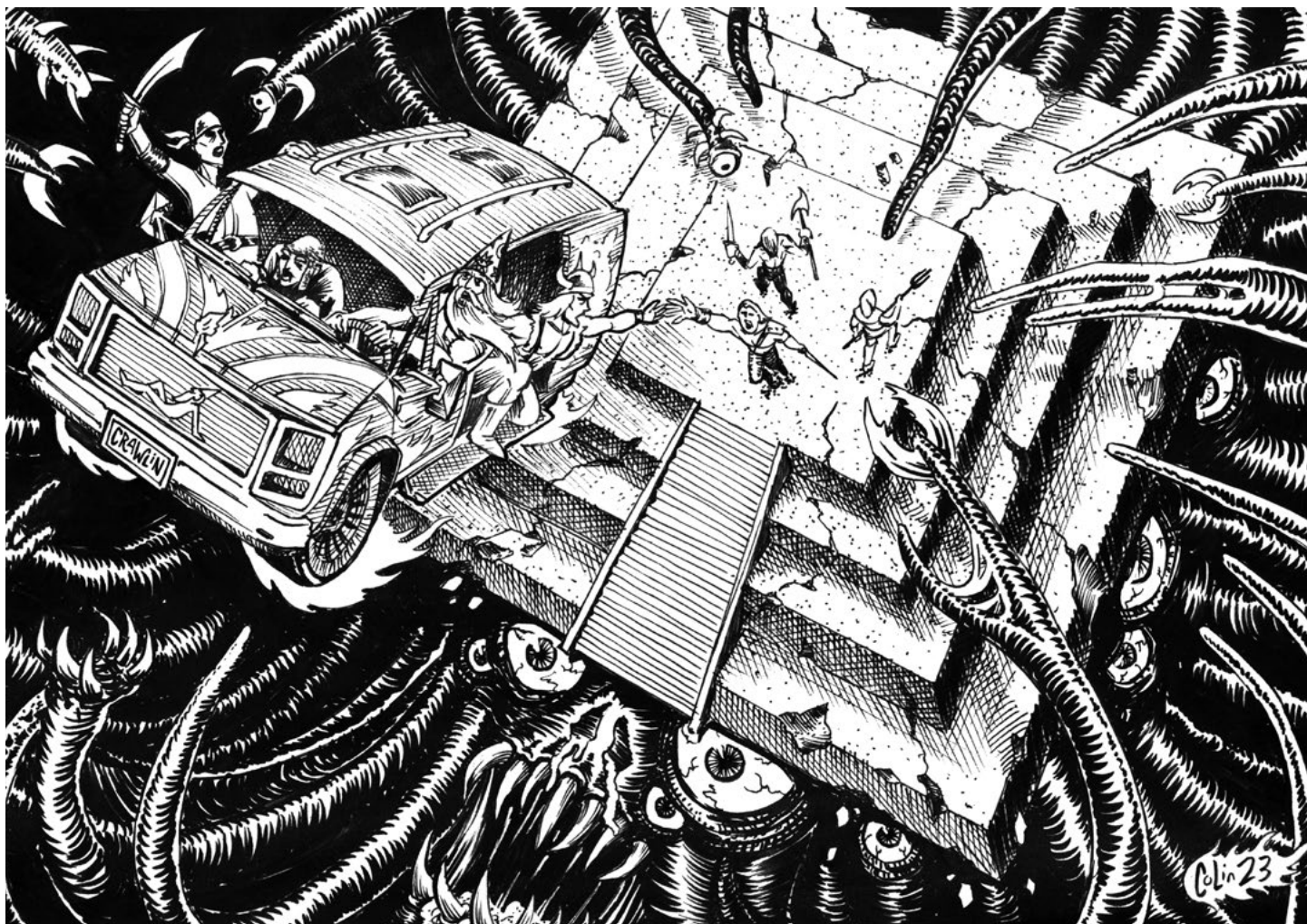
Flaming Chain (chaotic): +1 melee (1d4 [2]); SP grapple (on a critical hit the PC can grapple a target, victim suffers 1 hp burning damage each round, DC 10 Strength to break free), increased fumble (1-3, wielder grapples self).

Mace of Skulls (chaotic): +1 melee (1d8 [4]); SP mace explosion (on a critical hit a skull of the mace explodes for 1d6 [3] damage within a 5' radius, attack limited to number of skulls remaining), increased fumble (1-3, skull explodes, wielder takes damage).

Winged Beastmen (6): Init +2; Atk claw +2 melee (1d4 [2] +stoop attack) or weapon +1 melee (1d6 [3]); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 6 each; MV 30' or 50' fly; Act 1d20; SP stoop attack (DC 12 Strength check or grabbed), catch and release (Strength check vs d20+2, or dropped to death!); SV Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +1; AL C.

With a successful claw attack the winged beastmen might achieve a stoop attack as above. If successful the beastman will fly up to the ceiling and drop their victim (5d6 [18] falling damage). However, should the PC succeed the Strength check they have forced the beastman to impale themselves on one of the many shards piercing this cave for 1d6 [3] damage before they were able to fly any higher than 20'. If the PC succeeds a DC 10 Reflex they will land safely on the floor, otherwise they suffer 1d6 [3] damage from a rough fall.

Lord of Beastmen (1): Init +2; Atk Mace of Skulls +1 melee (1d8 [4]) and Flaming Chain +2 melee (1d4 [2] plus chain grapple) or torrent of wind; Crit III/d8 [+3 damage] or special; AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 14; MV 30' or 40' fly; Act 2d20; SP chain grapple (DC 10 Ref save or on subsequent rounds take 1 hp fire damage, DC 10 Strength check to escape), torrent of wind (DC 12 Fort save or pushed 10', 15' range), improved crit range with mace (19-20), mace explosion (on a critical hit a skull of the mace explodes for 1d6 [3] damage for all targets within a 5' radius, limited five skulls); SV Fort +3, Ref +2; Will +2; AL C.



AREA 1-6 – THE ZIGGURAT

Before moving on or letting the PCs take actions, **offer replacement PCs from the peasant horde.** Once replacement PCs are dealt out, continue.

The area 1-6 map just represents one of the ziggurat's four stairways, whichever corresponds to where the party exits area 1-5. It is fatal (see below) to traverse the 10' ledges of the ziggurat, so a scaled map of the entire ziggurat is unnecessary.

Depending on the judge, they might want to track specific positions of each of the twenty or so gongfarmer PCs, especially if each player's cohorts separate themselves.

You stand at the base of a glowing red ziggurat that pulses in sync with your pounding heart. The crater's metal veins feed it with arcane energies pumped down from above. Black stairways on all four sides funnel spectral processions of peasant ghosts up to the structure's zenith into a throbbing crimson crystal which devours them. With each consumption, ectoplasmic waste and raw phlogiston blast upward, answered by flashes of purple lightning and booming thunder from the turbulent clouds above. Tragically, the doomed souls of your fallen comrades are oblivious to your presence and do nothing to alter their fates.

The stairs and straying from them: The stairways to the top are each 120' long, so at least 2 rounds are necessary to reach the crystal, but it will take longer once the meltmen appear (see below). PCs may wish to avoid the ghosts and black stairways and instead climb the 10' tall red "steps" for each level. A prospective climber feels extreme heat radiating from the crimson surface just before touching it. Persisting with contact inflicts 1d4 [2] points of fire damage per DC 10 climb of each of the levels (i.e., per each 10' step). Also, any flammable object ignites if held against the red portions of the structure for the length of an action.

The ghosts ignore attempts to interact with them and slowly march to the crystal, until PCs have ascended 60' up the stairway. Once someone has passed this first half of the climb, read the following.

As you make half of the ascent, the ziggurat's rhythmic pulsing accelerates to stroboscopic flashing. A low-pitched hum emits from the zenith's red crystal, which shoots arcane rays into the climbing specters. The ghosts immediately transform into waxy humanoids that drip like melting candles. These turn with malevolence, barring your passage and slowly converging to destroy you!

Meltman Swarm (1): Init always last; Atk goo fist +3 melee (1d3 [1]); Crit M/d10 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 4d30; hp 65; MV 30'; Act 1d20 special; SP swarm attack (any PC on stair-

way is attacked once per round unless exempted by “can’t touch this”), inhibit movement (PC’s movement through swarm is negated unless that PC has inflicted damage in the same round), can’t touch this (a PC who inflicts damage is not targeted by the swarm for that round), takes 1d6 additional damage from flaming objects; SV Fort +2, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

The meltmen are so numerous that they’re treated as a swarm. They attack everyone on the stairway once per round and prohibit all PCs’ movement. The exception to this is **if a PC inflicts damage before moving, then on that same round the PC may move their full movement rate and is not attacked by the swarm.** Thus, a PC that successfully attacks two rounds can make it to the top unscathed (two 30’ moves from halfway to the top). A PC that is unable to land a blow remains in place until the swarm is defeated. Only the PC that inflicts the blow can move, no others are able to take advantage of this momentary opportunity.

Tracking Movement and Attacks: This encounter can be challenging because one must track positions and whether attacks were successful for up to 20 PCs. **If a PC successfully attacks the meltmen, add an additional marker to its location, mini, or sheet** as a reminder to not attack it that round. At the beginning of the round, remove this additional marker. Tracking PC positions can be cumbersome, but the map has helpful demarcations. Remember that unarmored humans/elves will move in 30’ increments, and unarmored dwarves/halflings move in 20’ increments. From the halfway point, an unarmored human or elf (MV 30’) reaches the top after two successful moves. An unarmored dwarf or halfling (MV 20’) reaches the top after three successful moves.

Vulnerability to Fire: The meltmen have a lot of hit points and are difficult to defeat entirely. However, they have a vulnerability to fire and melt much faster when direct heat is applied. PCs who learn that the ziggurat’s structure ignites combustibles can use this to their advantage. Also, flaming makeshift weapons (such as a torch, begging bowl, bundle of wood, etc.) do 1d3 damage plus 1d6 fire damage to the swarm, guaranteeing full movement and no incoming attacks on the round a PC successfully hits with such an attack.

Grappling a Meltman: As another strategy for ignition, PCs might choose to throw or push a meltman off the stairway onto the red part of the structure. Treat this as a grapple: an opposed Strength or Agility check vs the meltman receiving no bonuses (1d20). If multiple PCs gang up on one meltman, then let all participating players roll and take the highest result. Success indicates that meltman is destroyed (PC rolls 1d3+1d6 for damage), but only the PC with the highest roll gets full movement and immunity from attacks for the round.

When either the meltman swarm is defeated, or the PCs reach the crystal, the crystal begins attacking the PCs. It prioritizes targets closest to it. **Unless they are at the top of the stairway, PCs suffer a -1d penalty to missile attacks against the crystal.** This is due to the crystal being “hidden” by the lack of sight-lines from the stairs’ incline.



Chaos Crystal (1): Init +3; Atk chaos ray +3 missile fire (1d8 [4], range 300’); Crit M/d8 [+3 damage]; AC 13; HD 3d10; hp 14; MV 0’; Act 1d20; SP death throes (kills any remaining meltmen and rouses leviathan), painful surface (touching the crystal’s surface requires a DC 16 Fortitude save or take 1d10 [5] damage), immune to critical hits, immune to mental effects; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +5; AL C.

When the party destroys the crystal, they discover that they’re standing on the proverbial “tip of the iceberg” as the ziggurat proves to be a “cap” for the cyclopean soul-eating leviathan, which is now roused and vengeful; the party just destroyed its mechanism for absorbing soul stuff! There is no defense against this beast, but luckily the Purple Sorcerer whisks the party away to start round 2 of the tournament. Read the following.

As the malignant crystal shatters, the ziggurat shudders and pitches as it rises into the air! You barely maintain your balance as countless appendages burst outward from the ground beneath the structure. Some are tentacles, some have giant pinchers, some have eyes, and many thick ones have chomping mouths. A huge body begins to bulge underneath as the ziggurat continues to rise... you’ve awakened a cyclopean soul-eating leviathan! Struggling to maintain your sanity, you realize that this must be the fault of those “Sailors of the Starless Sea” who raided the previous keep so long ago.

Give the PCs one round to take actions in the same initiative order of the encounter. They are unable to even scratch the

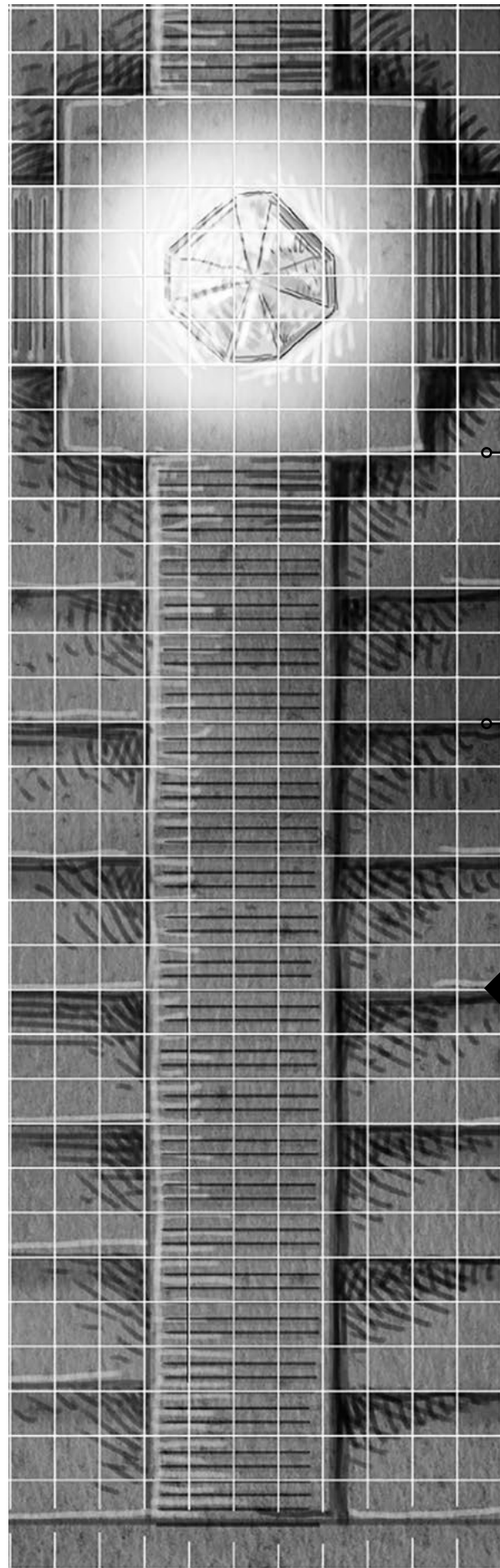
leviathan unless they crit; then they can roll damage. Regardless, the creature's hit points are beyond anything the party can overcome. Meanwhile, the leviathan spends its actions powering up some big attack. The purpose of this one round with the beast is to smash the hopes of the PCs, only to give them a lifeline afterwards. Read the following.

As you curse fate and prepare to die, a hole rips in the very fabric of space above you! A strange vehicle of metal, tinted glass windows, and four wheels flies through. It's adorned with images of wizards, sorcery, fearsome creatures, and flashing lights that spell, "Wizard Van." The vehicle hovers before you as its side door slides open revealing none other than the legendary Purple Sorcerer! He cries, "The only way to end this is to stop it from beginning! Come with me if you want to live."

Assuming the PCs leap into the wizard van, they are teleported away to begin round 2 of the tournament. Allow them a full round to get into the van. If they decide not to trust the Purple Sorcerer, his van teleports away while they witness the tentacled maws of the leviathan sucking their souls into death.

BUZZER BEATER FTW! (BY STEFAN FLICKINGER):

The party had one minute left, and knew that time was of the essence. They were at the ziggurat finale, had defeated the swarm of meltmen impeding their progress, but had been unsuccessful damaging the structure's chaos crystal. Matt Sauers' PCs had not reached the crystal — but did have three ranged weapons. They attacked, two hit, but they were both slings. As Matt was rolling his damage and hemming about not being able to defeat the terrible gem, almost everyone simultaneously yelled, "YOU CAN BURN LUCK FOR DAMAGE!" He burned 11 points of Luck on one of his attacks, which was enough to shatter the crystal as the gong rang marking the round's end. I don't think I've ever seen that much excitement from a group who looked like they were not going to finish. Tons of exuberance!



60'

30'

**MELTMEN
ATTACK 60'**



ROUND 2

JUDGES INTRODUCTION



At the start of round 2, the PCs have been rescued by the Purple Sorcerer only to be transported into the past, back to the very origins of the chaos keep itself. In this time, the Chaos Lords Molan and Felan are on the cusp of completing the ceremony that will power the Well of Souls, setting off the events the adventures experienced in their own present that leads to the activation of the leviathan into an unstoppable Titan of Chaos. The PCs must enter the half-finished keep to stop the brothers before they can complete the ritual, thus preventing the armies of chaos from returning and potentially altering the character's very own future.

As they transition to the past, the zero-level PCs who survived the keep are also transformed, becoming level one characters. For purposes of tournament play, pre-set characters are provided to the teams to allow them to decide which PCs level up as the Purple Sorcerer's van travels the phlogiston pathways back in time. During normal campaign play, allow the players to level up as normal during the transition, choosing from any of the standard DCC RPG character classes, or the preferred setting of the judge.

JUDGES NOTES

PC Bleeding Out and Death: Level 1 PCs have 1 round of bleeding out before dying. For the tournament, we'll be adopting the following from DCC Lankmar: As an action, a character may staunch the wounds of a bleeding out ally. A bleeding-out character saved by another staunching their wounds remains incapacitated and is considered to be at 0 hit points and unconscious. They cannot take any action and are at the mercy of their enemies. An unconscious PC with 0 hit points is utterly defenseless and can be killed by an enemy administering a coup de grâce. Remember that a PC who is saved from bleeding out loses 1 point of Stamina. A PC who has died is eligible for recovering the body, unless eaten or otherwise mentioned in the adventure text. The PC must succeed on a Luck check. If successful, they are restored to 1 hp, lose 1 point of Strength, Agility, or Stamina (determined randomly), and suffer a -4 penalty to all rolls for the rest of the tournament round.

Never reveal DC, AC, etc.: Do not reveal the numerical target for rolls. For ability checks and saving throws, do not reveal the DC. For combat, do not reveal the AC. Players are welcome to deduce targets, but they cannot know ahead of time what they are. They need to spend resources such as Luck without knowing how much to spend. And, Luck must be spent before knowing whether the numerical target was achieved.

Only one Luck burn for a roll: For situations where PCs burn Luck to boost a roll, ask the player "Are you happy with that?" Once they say "yes," they can no longer modify the roll.

Monster Fumbles: Unless otherwise noted, if a monster fumbles, do not roll on the fumble table. Instead, it gets a -2 penalty to its next attack.

Ability Loss: If a PC loses points on an ability score such that their modifier changes, then that translates to all applicable areas (saving throws, attack/damage bonuses, AC) except for hit points. For the tournament, Stamina loss does not affect total hp.

Lay on Hands: If a cleric's lay on hands effect has more HD than the PC, all HD are rolled with the best results being taken.

Monster Crits, Mighty Deeds of Arms, Corruption, Deity Disapproval: If available, use the tournament-specific rules rather than running them as stated in the DCC RPG rulebook.

Event 2-1—Van vs. Dragon Dogfight: Round 2 begins with the wizard van racing through a kaleidoscopic wormhole. Read or paraphrase the following:

Inside the so-called "wizard van", you've been teleported away from the cyclopean soul-eating leviathan. A kaleidoscopic turbulence flows outside of the vehicle's windows. The Purple Sorcerer looks back from his seat and says,

"Whoa! That was close! As I said when I rescued you (Don't everyone thank me at once), the only way to end this is to stop it from beginning. So, we're going back in time. I need to concentrate on some time-light navigation for the moment, so you all discuss your experiences amongst yourselves and let me know when you're ready to hear what you need to do. If you find yourselves in different bodies as we travel the time-space foldings of the multiverse, don't despair. At least your souls are intact. Oh yeah, I gave you some weapons and armor. It could be worse!"

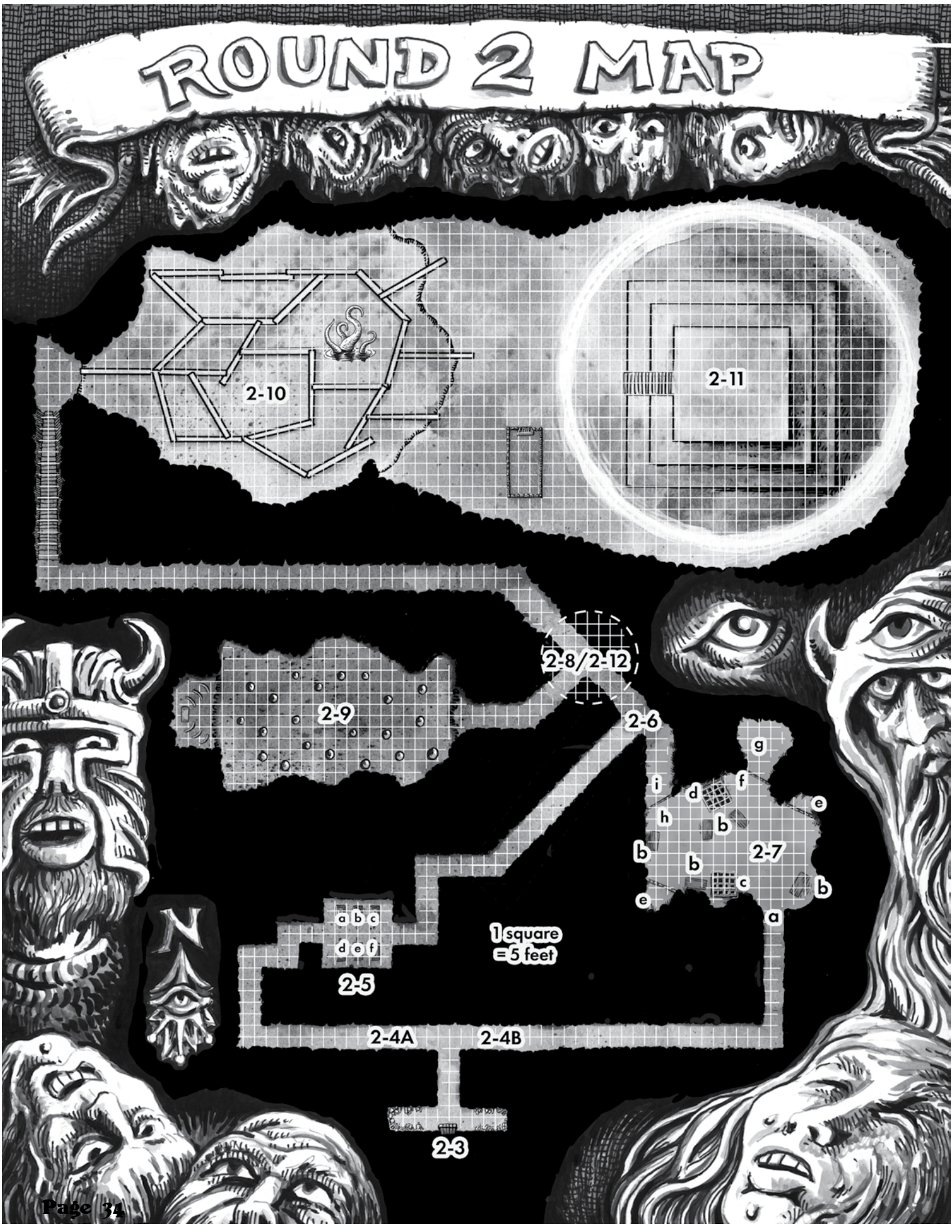
Tournament Specific Rules: Pre-generated characters are usually provided for tournaments. Unlike previous tournaments, each of the players must decide which character they want while the tournament clock is ticking! At this point, give the players the five PC sheets and respective grimoires. Players must choose quickly and get on with it, since remaining time is factored in the scoring. There will be inevitable mismatches between the level 1 choices and the surviving level 0 characters (different number of PCs, different races, occupations, etc.). Also, no equipment transfers from the first round. For the tournament, offer the Purple Sorcerer's explanation: it is a hazard of traveling the multiverse's foldings of time and space.

For campaign play, have the PCs level up as normal.

When the players have chosen PCs and said that they're ready, the Purple Sorcerer continues:

"Wow, you bunch already look more powerful! Now, I mean... then... I mean when I picked you up in the future that is now your past...you know what I mean... the Well of Souls had transformed the leviathan into something unstoppable. So, you must travel to the distant past and kill the Chaos Lord Molan before he can ac-

ROUND 2 MAP



tivate the Well of Souls. Don't interrupt! It's a simple matter of your future being the past and the past being your future." A loud boom sounds and the Purple Sorcerer says, "I have a bad feeling about this."

The van suddenly shakes and moans just as the scenery outside fades from scintillant swirling to something familiar. "Uh oh!" he exclaims. "There's a chaos dragon chasing us! I've put the van on autopilot to land near the site of the future keep, but you may still want to help it a bit. Only a wizard or elf can drive! The van is tough, she'll hold together." (He whispers, "Hear me baby? Hold together.") "That ladder on the wall leads to a phlogiston cannon. Also, your missile weapons and spells will pass through to the outside. Don't be surprised; it's a wizard van! Crank some tunes. And, if you get a chance, shake out the rug. Once you're in the tunnels, remember the following: while no path is safe, the left-hand path is usually faster, but the right-hand path has potential boons. I'm going to go aid some others whose chances suddenly look better than yours!" With that, the Purple Sorcerer disappears as a loud roar

sounds behind the van, which dives down into a narrow canyon as the dragon follows closely behind!

Roll initiative and note that this encounter lasts 4 combat rounds. Use the van interior player handouts as the "map" so that players can describe how their PCs interact with the van. As this is a level 1 adventure, the dragon does not target the PCs (who would be instantly slaughtered). Instead, it targets the van. If the van's hp are reduced to zero, then the PCs take damage when the van crashes. Otherwise, the van crashes without wounding the party (though the party may be wounded by the dragon's breath weapon). For this segment the PCs are at the mercy of the van's autopilot, so a map is neither required nor provided.

Read the round-by-round descriptions below to simulate the changing conditions of the aerial dog-fight. Use the tracking table to monitor the hp of the dragon and van.

Round	Event	Dragon hp (50)	Van damage	Van healing	Van hp (30)
1	Dive into canyon				
2	Go below rocky arches				
3	Energy web, breath weapon				
4	Crash landing				

Chaos Dragon ("Dog-fighting" stats only): Init +6; Atk eye-beams +8 missile fire (1d20 [10], range 500') or breath weapon; Crit special; AC 18; HD 8d8; hp 50; MV fly 50'; Act 1d20; SP gravity-shift breath weapon (DC 14 Ref save, 1d6 [4] damage, once per encounter, see round 3 below), passenger crit (on a critical hit, the van takes double damage and all van passengers take 1d4 [2] damage); SV Fort +8, Ref +8, Will +8; AL C.

Wizard Van ("Dog-fighting" stats only): Init N/A; Atk phlogiston cannon +3 (+gunner's attack mod) missile fire (1d12+deed die if applicable, range 500'); Crit use gunner's Crit table; AC 10 (+driver's spell check, +2 if 3rd gear engaged); HD 5d12; hp 30; MV fly 50'; Act 1d20; SP soft crash (if the van has more than 0 hp when it crashes in round 4, the PCs take no damage from the impact), death throes (if reduced to less than 0 hp, the van can no longer be healed, but continues to fly until round 4), one-way walls (missile weapons and spells pass from the inside to the outside); SV Fort +3 (+driver's Fort save), Ref +3 (+driver's Ref save), Will +3 (+driver's Will save); AL N/A.

Exploring the Van: The van has numerous devices to aid the PCs. If the glovebox is opened, then give the players the music cartridges handout. See the Van's Judges Key and References in the Appendix for detailed information on the van's various devices.

Driving the Van: A wizard or elf can aid the van's autopilot. The PC must sit in the driver's seat, grab the wheel, and make a spell check. The spell check's result is added to the van's AC until the PCs' turn next round (The van's AC is 10, so a spell check result of 14 makes the van's AC 24). Driving is a full round action. On a spell check of 1, the van swerves into some rocks and takes 1d20 [10] points of damage. Note that the van cannot be set off its pre-programmed course by the driver; the driver merely makes the autopilot's evasive maneuvers more effective.

Healing the Van: When the van takes damage, the PCs note that inside its metal shell is flesh and blood. Clerics can heal flesh and blood! The van adheres to no alignment, so treat it as "adjacent" if a cleric lays on hands. The van's hit die is d12.

Attacking the Dragon: There are (at least) two ways to damage the dragon. First, archers and spell-slingers can attack from within the van. Projectiles and magic travel from the inside to the outside unhindered, and the range to the dragon is always 50'. Second, a PC can climb the ladder to the van's windowed crawlspace and fire the phlogiston cannon. Although all PCs are untrained in this weapon, the van's targeting computer compensates such that a PC rolls a d20 and adds +3 to their missile attack modifier. The crawlspace window has a heads-up-display and there is a crossbow-like trigger to fire the phlogiston cannon.



PC Critical Hits on the Dragon: Some PC critical hit results might have to be re-interpreted for a dragon in flight. For example, the crit is supposed to “sweep the foe off his feet” and knock the enemy prone the next round; this doesn’t apply to a flying dragon, but the beast should still be penalized. When in doubt and reinterpretation is necessary, apply a -1d penalty to the dragon’s next attack roll.

Round 1: *A large dragon with sickly pink, green, and orange scales dives and follows the van into a narrow bendy canyon.*

This round PCs can drive and use the phlogiston cannon, as well as take their normal actions to try to damage the dragon. The dragon uses its eye-beams to attack the van.

Round 2: *The van banks under a series of many rocky arches that span the canyon. The dragon follows aggressively, its eyes glowing for another attack!*

This round presents PCs with an opportunity to “weaponize the dungeon”. Instead of targeting the dragon, the gunner can target a rocky arch and try to rain rubble on the beast as it passes below. Treat the bridge as AC 10. On a successful hit, the dragon takes 2d6 damage. If the attack was a successful Mighty Deed of Arms, award an additional 1d6 damage. If a spell-slinger wants to use this strategy, the spell must do at least 10 points of damage to the arch. The dragon uses its eye-beams to attack the van.

Round 3: *The construction site comes into view, but it’s protected by a hemispherical web of crackling energy. The web is attached*

to two large metal spheres atop poles on opposite sides of the site. The van is on course to land at the site, regardless of this obstacle. Meanwhile, the dragon is preparing to breathe!

If the PCs aren’t careful, this can be a high damage round for the wizard van. At the round’s end the van exits the canyon, passes through the shielding energy web, and takes 10 points of damage...unless the PCs destroy the shield first. To accomplish this, they need to destroy one of the metal spheres; each is AC 14 and has 4 hp. Instead of using its eye-beams this round, the dragon breathes with its gravity shift breath weapon. Instead of gravity pulling down, it instantly pulls to the side. All PCs must make a DC 14 Reflex save (remember armor check penalties!). Those who fail take 1d6 [4] points of damage. The van must also save (Reflex save +3 +driver’s Reflex modifier). If it fails, it slams into the side of the canyon and takes 1d20 [10] points of damage.

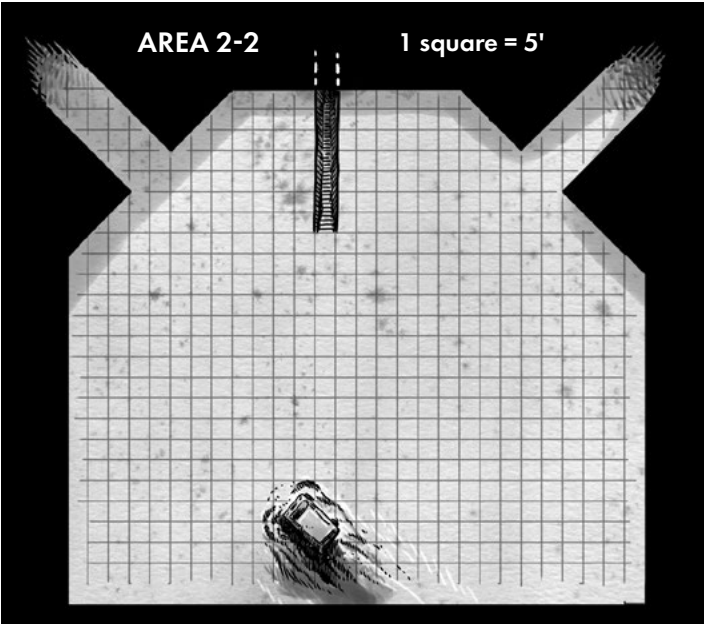
Round 4: Adjust the text if the PCs managed to kill the dragon.

The dragon begins to pull up and away as the van pitches and yaws in a rapid descent toward the ground. With a loud crash, the battered vehicle plows into the ground and skids to a stop just as the doors fall off the frames and its viscous blood seeps out. The van starts fading from existence! Your survival seems nothing short of miraculous, but you know your troubles are far from over...

The van crashes at the beginning of the round, and the dragon (if still alive) retreats and is gone at the end of the round. When the van crashes the PCs take no damage if the van

has more than 0 hp at impact. If it dropped below zero during the fight (at which point healing it is ineffective), then the PCs take 1d6 [3] points of damage from the impact. Regardless, the van is “dead” after crashing. The PCs have this one round to emerge from the van, take parting shots at the dragon, heal, etc. By the end of the round the dragon has disappeared.

At round’s end the PCs’ begin the next encounter, area 2-2. There is no time to rest!



Area 2-2—Race to the Tunnel: *The wreckage of the van smokes behind you as you take in your surroundings. You’re a short run from stairs to a tunnel underneath the construction site. A fortified wall guards the site above ground, from which two gates open as numerous soldiers begin pointing in your direction and gathering arms and horses. There’s a lot of unintelligible shouting, but “kill them” comes across clearly. The chaos cavalry looks to be two-dozen strong and far beyond your martial might, but you think you can beat them to the tunnel...if you hurry!*

Assembling beyond the walls of the partially constructed keep are solders of Felan and Molan’s chaos army, humans corrupted by greed and the promise of rich rewards by the two brothers. The soldiers wear hardened, black-leather animal skins over chain shirts, hiding their chaos-marred features behind cruel looking iron helms. When they spy the wreckage of the van, the solders quickly mount red-eyed coursers and ready their charge.

The party is 80’ from the tunnel’s entrance. Thus, PCs with MV 30’ can reach it in just under a round and a half (assuming two 30’ moves per round with a standard action substituted for movement), whereas slower PCs need longer (use the table below for easy reference). No matter where they are, the Chaos Cavalry catches up to the PCs at the beginning of the 4th round. It is highly unlikely that the party can survive a confrontation with them, so they better hurry to the tunnel! They have a maximum of six move actions they can take before getting caught!

Number of Move Actions to Reach Tunnel (80’ away).

Move Rate	Move Actions
30’	3
25’	4
20’	4
15’	6
10’ and less	Caught by cavalry

Chaos Cavalry (swarm): Init always last; Atk longsword +4 melee (1d8+2 [7]); Crit special; AC 14; HD 48d12; hp 300; MV 50’; Act 2d20 special; SP swarming double attack (every PC within a 50x50’ area receives two attacks per round), trampling crit (if the cavalry inflicts a critical hit, the target is trampled and must make a DC 19 Fort save; if the save is failed the target dies, otherwise they are reduced to 1 remaining hp); SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +4; AL C.

Even though the cavalry emerges from two different sides, they immediately join to become one “swarm.”

DUNGEON INTERIORS

Unless otherwise stated, the tunnels and rooms are carved out of some gruesome mixture of rock and hardened flesh, as if bodies were used as mortar for stones. Moreover, all of the walls glow a faint pink, removing the need for light sources.

Area 2-3—An Open Door: If the party makes it to the tunnel before the cavalry reaches them, they may slam the tunnel door shut for immediate (but possibly temporary) safety. Read the following:

Slamming the tunnel door shut you hear the neighing of horses reined to a halt on the other side. You hear one of the riders shout, “Bah! The masters will deal with them... if the demons or the creeping death don’t get them first!” The soldiers laugh maniacally as they slowly turn their mounts around. The wooden door is thick and strong. Piles of miscellaneous construction equipment are gathered nearby. A candle-lit tunnel extends behind you, but shortly ends in a T-intersection. There is something unnatural about the earth here, it seems like fatty flesh and tendons are interwoven among the rocks, almost like mortar. The walls glow with a dim pinkish light.

If players ask, and only if they ask, specify that the door is unlocked and has no locking mechanism. However, it swings into the room, so it can be spiked closed, secured with magic, or sufficiently barricaded with the miscellaneous construction equipment lying nearby.

Industrious thieves can even attempt to trap the door...only if the player suggests it, however; do not offer it as an option. Have the thief crudely describe the type of trap they want to make, and then make a Luck check to see if the materials are present among the items. If the thief succeeds, they may construct the trap. Have them make a DC 13 *disable trap* check and note success or failure for scoring purposes. On a natural 1 the trap backfires and causes the thief 1d10 [6] damage.

If the PCs do not think to secure the door behind them, some dismounted soldiers will eventually sneak in to attack them later at area 2-8.

Area 2-4A—To the Left: *The floor along this corridor seems more flesh than rock, though strangely it's hard rather than squishy. In the distance, the path turns to the right, beyond which you hear a wolf's howl abruptly silenced.*

If a PC looks for tracks, a DC 8 Intelligence check reveals that many tracks lead down the corridor (West) and continue to area 2-5, but they are from various types of animals too numerous to distinguish.

Area 2-4B—To the Right: *The floor along this corridor is both mineral and organic, like hardened flesh. The hallway eventually turns left, and echoes of incantations come from beyond the bend.*

If a PC looks for tracks, a DC 8 Intelligence check reveals that only humanoid tracks lead east to area 2-7.

Area 2-5—Elzemon's Menagerie: *This 30x30' room is dimly lit by several lanterns hanging from the rock and tendon-mortared walls, and the rank odor of an animal pen accosts your nostrils. Standing in the center of the room are two demonic-looking creatures; equal parts bat and man, they stand barely over two feet tall. Each wears a necklace with a scintillating gem attached to the chain. They loiter around a wooden pail filled with blood-soaked entrails, apparently having a lively argument. Both sides of the room have three pits covered by a shimmering translucent energy, and the rearmost four emit bestial growls. Waist-high plinths stand at the mouth of every pit, each with a one-inch circular hole and dial in its center. Scattered throughout the room are bales of hay, buckets, shovels, and wheelbarrows. The rough outline of an open archway is visible across the room, another plinth stands beside it.*

The lesser quasits are arguing over whose turn it is to feed the wolves. Keeping the wolves in their pens is a difficult task once the force fields are removed, which makes feeding duty very unpleasant. It is Elzemon's turn, but he is trying to convince, bribe, or cajole Paimon to do it instead. If the party wishes to sneak past, they gain +1d to sneak checks due to the noise from the animals and the quasits' focus on their argument. Sneaking through the room requires a DC 12 *sneak silently* or DC 16 Agility check; the attempts are made with d24s (+1d bonus), but armor penalties apply.

The pits are sealed by invisible shields which are powered by the plinths. All shields are active when the characters arrive. The quasits activate them by placing their gems into the hole and turning the dial clockwise. The gem can then be removed. Doing the opposite (turning counter-clockwise) will deactivate the shield. The plinths can also be picked. They are not trapped, but thieves run the risk of poking the wrong pieces which will cause them to be electrocuted. A DC 13 *find trap* check alerts the thief to this danger. As with all traps, fumbling this roll will also cause the thief to trigger the "trap." A DC 13 *disable trap* check will eliminate the risk for accidental shock and for alerting the quasits when failing the pick lock check. Picking the lock requires a DC 17 *pick lock* check. If the roll fumbles or fails by 10 or more, the character



is shocked for 1d6 [3] damage and the quasits are alerted to the intruders. These particular trap and lock checks take an action to execute, rather than a 10-minute turn.

All of the pits are 3' deep and are not significant combat obstacles, except for halflings. The first two (pits a & d) are empty of animals, but the north pit closest to the entry holds a badly damaged skeleton. If the PCs search the bones, they find that a bone scroll case is mixed in with the remains of the skeleton. Inside the scroll case is a ragged parchment with two names scrawled on it: Elzemon and Paimon. The deceased discovered the quasit's names but was unable to use that to his advantage (see lesser quasit stat block) before being eaten.

If the PCs do not attempt to be stealthy or are spotted, the quasits notice them and fade, becoming only partially visible. Something about the mystical nature of the gems causes the gems to remain visible, however. This enables the PCs to target the quasits normally. However, if the PCs remove the gem, they suffer a -1d action die penalty to attack the respective quasit. The exit is barred by an invisible shield, and its plinth can be unlocked as described above.

Once the PCs are discovered, the quasits respond in the following manner.

Round 1: The quasits become partially visible, but their gems reveal their positions. Elzemon flies up 20' and hesitates for the round, considering his options while the Paimon moves to the north-east wolf pit (pit c) and unlocks it.

Round 2: The first two wolves attack the PCs but they act at the bottom of initiative; wolves want nothing to do with

the quasits. Paimon moves to the south-east wolf pit (pit f) and unlocks it. Elzemon heads to the opposite door and disables the shield. He then moves through the arch to call for reinforcements. He does not take the time to secure the door behind him and leaves his gem in the plinth.

Round 3: The second two wolves join in the melee, also acting last. Paimon unlocks the north-center wolf pit (pit b).

Round 4: The third two wolves join in the melee, also acting last. Paimon unlocks the south-center wolf pit (pit e). Elzemon makes contact with two wandering chaos warriors (who are coming down the corridor from 2-8) and they rush back to the chamber with him. The two warriors wear the armor and badge of the Chaos Lord Felan and wield stygian axes they use to slash into their forearms to invoke a maddening blood-frenzy as they charge into combat. Note that if Elzemon does not reach these warriors, the party never encounters them.

Round 5: The fourth two wolves join in the melee, also acting last. Paimon fights to the death. The chaos warriors enter the fray and fight to the death. If wolves remain, choose randomly whether they target PCs or chaos warriors. Elzemon tries to avoid combat, fleeing once the battle looks lost (not to found again... in this adventure).

To prevent the opening of pits, characters can take a quasit's gem by making a successful Mighty Deed, by making a DC 15 *pick pocket* check, or by attempting to grapple the quasit. PCs use opposed attack rolls using higher of Strength or Agility with an additional +4 bonus due to the small stature of the quasits, who get a +3 to the opposed roll. Another character can steal the gem from the restrained quasit, no roll required, on their turn. Otherwise, the character involved in the grapple can take it on the following round if the quasit is still restrained. A character may use their action to attempt to knock a foe into an open pit (successful Mighty Deed, appropriate use of a spell, or a successful opposed Strength check). It takes another action to replace the gem and turn the dial to re-seal the pit.

Lesser Quasits (Elzemon and Paimon): Init +4; Atk claw +3 melee (1d6+1 [4]); Crit DN/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 15; HD 5d8; hp 23 each; MV 35' (fly); Act 1d20; SP partially visible (attacker -1d to hit if gem is removed); SV Fort +2, Ref +6, Will +5 (immune to Will effects unless true name is known); AL C.

Ferocious Wolf (8, 2 each in 4 pits): Init always last; Atk bite +2 melee (1d4 [2]); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 1d8; hp 6 each; MV 40'; Act 1d20; SP ferocious (fights to death, no morale check); SV Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +1; AL L.

Chaos Berserker Warrior (2): Init +2; Atk axe +3 melee (1d8+2 [6]); Crit III/d8 [+3 damage]; AC 14 (padded + shield); HD 2d12; hp 12 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP battle madness (unless "1-shotted" and reduced to 0 hp, at first wound gain +5 hit points, +2 Atk, damage, and saving throws for 1 round); SV Fort +3, Ref+2, Will +0; AL C.

PCs that examine the pits in the calm of post combat discover hairs, claws, etc., of many different animal species. Obviously, these have held other beasts besides wolves.

Area 2-6—Intersection: Improvise read-aloud text here based on whether PCs arrive here from area 2-5 or area 2-7. The description must give them enough information that they know which direction (northwest) takes them further into the complex whereas the other direction corresponds to the path they did not choose back at area 2-4.

If the PCs come from area 2-5, be sure to mention "echoes of incantations" coming from the southeast passage.

If the PCs come from area 2-7, be sure to mention "wolf-like howls and growls" coming from the southwest passage.

Area 2-7—Of Beast and Man: *The rock-and-flesh tunnel gives way to a large chamber with freshly dug sides still sweating with foul moisture and the sickening rot of decay. Crude torches hang from its walls casting eerie shadows in the surrounding gloom. Vile-looking priests adorned in the rotting skins of feral beasts move about the chamber, their attention focused upon long wooden tables as they prepare for grisly and unholy rites.*

Area A—Preparation Chamber: Part unholy laboratory, part heartless prison, this newly quarried chamber serves as a place of arcane research and profane studies. Black-hearted acolytes carry out blasphemous sacraments and foul rituals within, all in the names of the Chaos Lords, Molan and Felan. The two haven't discovered the formation of beastmen yet, but unless they're stopped, they will.

The chaos acolytes plan to administer nameless tortures and ghastly rites upon helpless peasants to attune them for the transmutation process that is to follow. Here in this sorrow-filled chamber, men and women will be taken from their pens to stained wooden tables and subjected to grisly rituals and dark magics, little more than laboratory rats at the hands of their cruel oppressors. Once the unnamable sacrament has been performed, the subjects will be deemed "ready" and placed into holding cells before they are marched to the ziggurat (area 2-11) to be preserved in the structure until Molan activates the Well of Souls and masters beastman formation. (Note: Appendix B includes an additional encounter that fuses these subjects with those animals from area 2-5.)

Due to the uncertain light, cluttered chamber, and the acolytes' focus as they prepare their rituals, a skilled thief may move about the chamber unnoticed with a DC 10 *sneak silently* check or a DC 8 *hide in shadows* check. All other PCs must succeed in a DC 15 Agility check to accomplish the same feat.

If the PCs are noticed, the chaos acolytes spring into action, defending their sacred preparation chamber to the death. At the onset of combat, two acolytes race to the two cells (areas E) and throw open the iron gates, thereby releasing the enthralled peasants within while the remaining three acolytes engage the PCs with spells. Once released, the enthralled peasants attack the PCs, arming themselves with random digging tools that are scattered about the chamber (e.g., picks, shovels, sledges, rakes, etc.).

Once the cell gates have been thrown open, read or paraphrase the following:

From out of the darkness emerge simple village folk – men and women – their emaciated bodies caked in blood and filth. Shuffling toward you, each of them carries a shovel or pickaxe in a white knuckled grip, their glazed eyes nothing more than florescent green pools of sorrow, pain, and madness.

The enthralled peasants are nothing more than a mindless horde, their bodies and minds polluted by the chaos reagent and controlled by the acolytes’ will. In order to disrupt the mind control, all five acolytes must be killed. When the final acolyte falls the peasants return to their normal state.

Chaos Acolyte (5): Init +1; Atk meat hook +1 melee (1d4 [2]) or chaos bolt (1d6+1 [4], DC 11 Will save for half); Crit III/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 5 each; MV 30’; Act 1d20; SP chaos bolt (2/day); SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

These servants of chaos wear the skins of beasts (ram, boar, bear, wolf, and giant lizard) and so long as the peasants are still under their mind control the acolytes’ eyes gleam with a sickly florescent green luminescence. In combat, an acolyte can cast a chaos bolt of purple fire twice per day against anyone within his line of sight. Once their spells have been depleted, they attack using one of their many implements of torture – a savage looking meat hook. Should PCs attempt to spell duel the acolytes, treat the acolyte’s spell checks as 1d20+2.

Enthralled Peasant (10): Init -2; Atk digging tool -1 melee (1d4-1 [2]); Crit III/d4 [+3 damage]; AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 2 each; MV 30’; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref -2, Will -1; AL N.

If the peasants are freed of their mind control, they are far too battered and broken of body and spirit to press on and will not accompany the PCs further into the tournament, choosing rather to make a hurried escape out of the foul tunnels on their own. If any of the peasants survives after the battle, they thank the party profusely and warn them, “Beware of the Cult Leader! Beware of the Buffalo! He commands the beasts!”, before racing out of the tunnels to freedom. Moreover, should the PCs treat the liberated peasants well (e.g., providing food, water, healing, etc.), one of them explains that he was captured foolishly exploring the tunnels and reveals the location of a healing potion he hid away before capture (see area I).

Engaging the Enthralled Peasants: Although weak and easy to dispatch, killing an enthralled peasant can come with great consequences. Having traveled back in time, the very peasants that engage the PCs are none other than their ancient ancestors. Killing them serves to disrupt the PCs’ family lineage, altering their timeline and gene pool. This can lead to some strange and serious results. Each time an enthralled peasant is slain, all PCs must make a roll on Table 2-1: Slain Ancestor Paradox.

Savvy PCs may choose to either grapple the peasants or knock then unconscious to avoid the ill effects of killing them. For game purposes a grappled peasant has a -2 modifier to its opposed grappling attack roll. Should the PCs opt to knock a peasant unconscious instead, this can be accomplished with the use of Mighty Deeds or by inflicting subdu-

al damage. Judges are well to be reminded the official rules for subdual damage as written in the DCC RPG rulebook.

Subdual Damage: You can use the flat of your sword to subdue an opponent you wish to capture alive. If a character is proficient in one of the following weapons, they can inflict subdual damage with it: swords, axes, clubs, spears, and staves. There is no attack penalty, but subdual damage is one die lower than normal for the weapon, according to the dice chain. An opponent brought to 0 hit points via subdual damage collapses unconscious.

Note that each time an enthralled peasant is slain or injured, the PCs are overcome with a suffocating sense of emptiness and begin to partially fade in and out of existence. This represents the growing uncertainty in the PCs’ timeline and the mounting possibility of their nihility.

Table 2-1: Slain Ancestor Paradox:
Note that no effect listed below can improve an ability score beyond 18 or reduce it below 3.

D20 + Luck mod	Result
1 or less	PC’s direct descendant has been slain. Character fades out of existence, never having been born at all. No one remembers them and there is no record of their life. They simply are not and have never been alive.
2	PC’s family lineage has been altered resulting in a debilitating and incurable sickness passed down over generations. Character takes on a sickly and pallid visage and constantly shakes uncontrollably. Sickness results in a permanent loss of 1d4 [2] hit points.
3	A descendant has been killed that alters PC’s timeline and introduces a genetic mutation into their family lineage. Character now has gills, large unblinking bulbous fish eyes, and webbed feet and hands. This distinctive “look” drops the character to a 3 Personality score. Character also has a yearning to return to their new hometown, a strange place called Innsmouth.
4	PC has altered their gene pool. Character is suddenly 30 pounds thinner resulting in a permanent 2 point loss to both Strength and Stamina.
5	PC has altered their gene pool. Character is suddenly 30 pounds heavier resulting in a permanent 2 point gain to Strength and a permanent 2 point loss to Agility.

D20 + Luck mod	Result
6	PC has altered their gene pool. Roll 1d2: (1) character's height increases by 10 inches resulting in a permanent 5' movement speed bonus; (2) character's height decreases by 10 inches resulting in a permanent 5' movement speed penalty.
7	PC has altered their gene pool. Character's skin changes. Roll 1d8: (1) albino; (2) pitch black; (3) clear; (4) shimmering quality; (5) malevolent yellow; (6) ashen and pallid; (7) thick bear-like fur (+1 to AC); (8) reptilian scale (+2 to AC).
8	PC has altered their family tree and upbringing resulting in significant behavioral and social changes. Roll 1d6: (1) alignment change, roll randomly; (2) profession change, reroll starting profession; (3) education change (un-schooled) permanently lose 1 point of Intelligence; (4) education change (professionally tutored) permanently gain 1 point of Intelligence; (5) born into squalor, reduce current wealth to 1/10 of total; (6) born into purple, increase current wealth x10.
9	PC has altered their gene pool. Character's hair or eyes change. Roll 1d10: (1) hair turns bone white; (2) hair turns pitch black; (3) no hair, bald as a newborn baby; (4) hair unruly and always sticks straight up; (5) hair turns platinum blonde; (6) hair turns fiery orange; (7) eyes turn blue; (8) eyes turn green; (9) eyes become cat-like, character gains infravision (range of 100'); (10) eyes turn mirror-like, character can see invisible objects (range of 60').
10+	Peasant slain is not an ancestor, no effect.

Area B—Altars of Sacrament: Long makeshift tables with lashes and shackles are haphazardly set about the chamber, their worm-eaten wood stained by countless rituals.

Each table also contains several wicked-looking utensils, their fire-blackened edges stained with gore. Glass jars filled with a strange, viscous fluorescent green fluid also litter the tables. This foul-smelling chaos reagent is used in the abhorrent ritual to prepare subjects for their bestial transformation. There are 1d3 [2] vials of chaos reagent per table.

Chaos Reagent: This foul smelling florescent green ichor is pure chaos distilled. Consuming the reagent without first performing the complex ceremony results in a painful toxic reaction (DC 16 Fortitude save or suffer 1d8 [4] damage). Intrepid PCs may choose to apply the reagent to their weapons. One vial may be applied to a blade granting a one-time 1d6 [3] points of damage for a successful hit. However, applying the reagent to the blade requires a DC 9 *handle poison* check. All non-thieves attempt the same check using a d10 (untrained roll). If the check fails, the individual injures themselves for 3 points of damage and the vial of reagent is wasted. Since Molan is vulnerable to poison, this is especially useful against him (see area 2-11).

Area C—Pit of Obscenity: A heavy iron grate rests over a freshly dug pit, its sides dank and slimy fall away into darkness. A foul charnel house smell swells from within its hidden depths. Beyond the grate's rusted iron bars you catch sight of writhing squamous shapes in the darkness below.

Not every experiment and unholy ritual goes as planned. Here in this dread pit are the chaos acolytes' castoffs, peasants for whom the arcane ritual did not go as planned, their battered and broken bodies dumped unceremoniously within.

Anyone who gazes into the 15' pit sees what appears to be men and women, pitifully huddled about its bottom. In truth, the creature that is kept within is a mindless and abhorrent mistake. A result of dozens of discarded peasants, their dead bodies corrupted by the chaos reagent have fused together to create a single grotesque mass of un-dead roiling flesh.

Anyone lifting the iron grate atop the pit (DC 8 Strength check) releases the abomination into the chamber whereby it gropes along the floor in search of living flesh. If the iron grate is lifted, read or paraphrase the following:

A hideous mass of decayed, churning flesh vomits forth from out of the pit. Comprised of a twisted mass of rotting human limbs and deformed faces, it gropes along the ground towards you in search of living flesh.

Creeping Death (1): Init always last; Atk roiling flesh +4 melee (1d4 [2]); Crit U/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 10; HD 3d20; hp 36; MV 5', climb 5'; Act 3d20; SP un-dead traits (immune to crits, disease, poison, sleep, charm, paralysis, mental effects, cold damage), vulnerable to fire and holy water (double damage), PCs slain by the creeping death are ineligible for a recovering the body roll; SV Fort +6, Ref -2, Will +0; AL N.

Every victim the Creeping Death kills is absorbed into its hideous mass of un-dead flesh and becomes part of the creature. It harbors a strong sense of vengeance toward the acolytes and prioritizes attacking them above all other targets; this is a valuable chance for PCs to weaponize the encounter. Once the acolytes are dead, the beast's targeting priority from highest to lowest is the PCs, the peasants from the cells, and finally Khargis (see below).

Note that the Creeping Death is considered un-dead, enabling a cleric to turn it as unholy. The turn unholy check must be 20 or over to cause the Creeping Death to retreat into its vile pit.

Area D—Open Pit: A heavy iron grate rests over an open pit, its thick bars twisted and splayed open like a burst rib cage. The foul stench of death emanates from deep within.

Like area C, the 15' pit is used to house the acolytes' "mistakes", whereby peasants for whom the arcane process failed are callously dumped within to die. Currently the pit is empty and can serve for some well-placed Mighty Deeds should warriors be savvy enough to use it. Anyone forced into the pit takes 1d6 [3] points of damage and must succeed in a DC 15 Strength or Agility check to escape.

Area E—Cells: Heavy iron bars are drawn across a narrow alcove. The fetid stench of rot and sickness permeates the cramped chamber beyond.

This narrow alcove is used to house the peasants. A total of five peasants are kept in each cell. If the peasants have not already been released by the chaos acolytes, they can be found huddled within. The cells do not lock, a simple bolt and latch is used to secure them.

Area F—Locked Gate: A heavy iron gate blocks your way. Beyond its thick iron bars you catch sight of lurid candle light dancing off of cavern walls.

If the PCs reach the gate without alerting the chaos acolytes in the main chamber, they find the way unlocked. Otherwise, the moment the acolytes are aware of the PCs and combat issues, Khargis located in area G will immediately lock the gate and hide (DC 10 *pick lock* or DC 16 Strength check to open the gate; if both fail, allow 20 points of damage to break down).

Area G—Khargis' Study: This squat cavern is covered in thick mismatched carpets and tattered furs. Gruesome tapestries painted upon the rotting hides of beasts cover the bare dirt walls. A simple worktable heaped with strange instruments and glass jars rests opposite a small writing table. A single black candle burns in a silver holder atop its surface, its flickering flame casting oily shadows along the walls.

This chamber serves as the cult leader Khargis' personal study. Dressed in the moldering hide of a flayed buffalo, Khargis appears as a hunched, deformed human with an elongated bovine face and glassy eyes that are set back toward the sides of his head. The cult leader can normally be found here working on his chaos reagent.

If Khargis is aware of the PCs presence (i.e., combat with the acolytes), he can be found hiding under his writing desk. If not discovered, he launches a surprise attack (DC 15 Intelligence check to avoid). Those that fail the check are considered surprised and cannot act in the first round of combat.

Khargis, Chaos Cult Leader (1): Init +2; Atk spiked mace +1 melee (1d6 [3]) or eldritch bolt (2d4 [4], DC 13 Reflex save to avoid, range 50'); Crit III/d8 [+3 damage]; AC 13; HD 3d8; hp 12; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP eldritch bolt (4/day); SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +4; AL C.

The cult leader attacks by casting an eldritch bolt of undulating purple energy at a single target within line of sight. If a PC spellduels Khargis, treat his spellchecks as 1d20+3. If captured and interrogated the cult leader will imitate the sounds and mannerisms of a buffalo and only reveal that "Molan never lets the soldiers through the Iridescent Membrane" before rousing himself to a bestial seizure and dying.

Work bench: The table is littered with all manner of arcane instruments (e.g., beakers, retorts, flasks, etc.) all of which contain a strange glowing florescent green liquid – the chaos reagent. This foul-smelling reagent is used in the abhorrent ritual to prepare subjects for their bestial transformation. Consuming the reagent without first performing the complex sacrament results in a painful toxic reaction (see

Chaos Reagent above). The work bench contains 1d6 [3] vials of reagent.

Hidden beneath the work bench is a small oak chest partially buried within the dirt floor (DC 8 *find trap* or DC 13 Intelligence check to find). Inside the unlocked chest is a silver ceremonial dagger (30 gp) and a small pouch of uncut gemstones worth 50 gp total.

Writing desk: Strewn about Khargis' desk are dozens of drawings and designs outlining the construction of a mighty keep atop a hill. Each page is marked by a wax seal depicting a crimson skull. Rifling through the desk turns up more of the same drawings as well as a heavy iron key (opens Area H). There's one small piece of parchment that says, "It still listens to me, but may eventually require a sacrifice."

Tapestries: Painted upon moldering animal skins are gruesome tapestries depicting scenes of bloody battle and heartless slaughter. Consistent throughout are two distinct images. One is of a massively muscled man adorned in the hides of basilisks and the fur of polar worms that wields an enormous iron axe. While the other is a hellishly horned humanoid with a single cyclopean eye wielding a triple-headed spiked flail. The tapestries of course depict the Chaos Lords, brothers Felan and Molan. If it isn't already clear, the PCs can glean this information with a successful DC 6 Intelligence check. See DCC #67: *Sailors on the Starless Sea* for more details on Molan and Felan if you're unfamiliar with the pair.

Area H – Locked Gate: A heavy iron gate blocks your way. Beyond its thick iron bars, you catch sight of a recently constructed hallway.

The gate is locked and can be opened with the cult leader's key (area G) or by a DC 10 *pick lock* or DC 16 Strength check to open; if both fail, allow 20 points of damage to break it down. Beyond the newly laid hall is the next part of the tournament.

Area I – Secret Stash: Hidden beneath a freshly laid flagstone is a healing poultice squirreled away here by a captured villager. If the PCs were told of the hiding place, it can easily be found. If not, a DC 12 *find trap* or DC 16 Intelligence check turns up the item.

Healing potion: This small vial of golden arcane liquid tastes of honeyed cinnamon and restores its user to full hit points. The vial contains enough liquid for two doses.

Area 2-8—Intersection and a Possible Ambush: This intersection shows the faintest signs of moisture. To the left, the passageway slopes downward before bending out of sight. The occasional tiny "plops" of water droplets breaking the surface of some distant pool can be heard from this passage. In front of you, the corridor continues straight for some distance before turning to the left and out of view.

If, and only if, the PCs did not secure the door at the complex's entrance (area 2-3), there are three crossbowmen from the chaos cavalry who approach the PCs from behind. These soldiers fight to the death. They gain a surprise attack unless the party declared they were watching behind them.

Crossbowmen (3): Init +6 (with surprise), otherwise +2; Atk crossbow +2 missile fire (1d6 [4]) or longsword +1 melee (1d8 [4]); Crit III/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 5 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; AL C.

Area 2-9—Grotto of the Star Champion: A weirdly lit cavern of hardened flesh and rock opens up before you, its floor gradually rising to an elevated point along the far wall roughly 10' above the level of the entrance. The source of the illumination is a glowing azure pool that covers the length of the cavern between you and the rise. Scattered throughout the cavern, dozens of milky-white stalagmites emerge from the water, fed by drops that occasionally fall from the ceiling, keeping the formations in a constant state of slick moisture. Along the far wall, glittering points of light reflect in the pool like distant stars in the night sky.



This underground chamber is a weep-hole collection basin fed from the rivulets of water that permeate the cavern ceiling above. Unless the PCs have a means of traveling on or above the water, the pool can only be crossed by wading through it. The pool itself is shallow, with a bottom that can be clearly seen a foot below the surface. Spellcasters that approach the pool sense a strange magic (no spell check required), a remnant of the leeches chaos from the layers of rock and stone above the cavern. The pool by itself is not dangerous, and PCs can easily ascend to the rise if they do nothing else but overcome their fear and get a little wet.

Scattered throughout the chamber are dozens of milky-colored stalagmites, their bases covered by the shallow water. The formations range in height from man-sized to giant 12' columns that almost reach the cavern's ceiling. Close inspection of the formations reveals shadowy, indistinct forms inside.

If PCs approach the far shore, read the following:

Covering the cavern wall next to the rise is a vast mosaic of what looks to be a star-filled night sky, made up of various constellations depicting scenes of the armies of Chaos sweeping over the land. A large central image dominates the mural: the outline of a huge shield-clad and horn-helmed warrior raising a massive axe above its head. Before the image lie rows of rough-cut pews that surround a crude bloodstained stone altar, atop of which are seven small metal disks, identical apart from a varying number of short raised spikes or points along the circumferences. Looking again at the mosaic, you noticed that two of these disks, one with a single point and the other with eight, have already been placed on the image.

Give the players the area 2-9 Puzzle Handouts A and B, the constellation and the pointed disks. Players can place or describe how PCs place the pointed disks on the puzzle. Refer to the Judge's Aid "Area 2-9: Judge's Constellation Reference" for the puzzle's solution.

The underground grotto serves as a crude temple to Chaos, a fact easily confirmed by any clerics in the party. The sweeping image carved on the cavern wall is vast, consisting of a number of constellation-like images made up of 'stars' where the naturally smooth cave wall has been chiseled to reveal quartz-like facets that are connected by painted lines. Each asterism is roughly outlined in blood-red paint, depicting bestial warriors overwhelming the surrounding lands like a wave of stars flowing from the night sky.

In the center of the image is a huge warrior whose outline is comprised of nine various-sized 'major' stars connected by central lines, each of which is further connected to a number of 'minor' stars, creating 'clusters' of stars consisting of a major star and one, two, or three minor stars. Unlike the other constellations in the mosaic, each major star making up the outline of the star-champion holds a shallow circular depression outlined by nine points (for reference, see the player handout).

Directly before the star-champion is a crude stone altar surrounded by rows of pews, whose rough edges appear to have been hacked from the living rock itself, as if carved by a huge axe. Laid out on the surface of the altar are seven metal disks, each identical except for a varying number of two to nine triangular 'teeth' along the circle's circumference. The disks with one and eight such features have already been placed on the constellation and cannot be removed. PCs comparing the disks to the depressions in the stars on the star-champion constellation readily observe they appear to be exact matches, with each 'point' of the star lining up with the triangles on the edge of the disk. (As each star has nine points, and every disk is the same size, every disk can be placed in any star in any orientation.)

The star-champion constellation conceals a secret cache that can only be revealed by physically placing the disks in the proper stars (or with an incredibly skilled and lucky thief, see below). Improperly placing the disks activates one of the dozens of chaos-wraiths that are encased in the stalagmites scattered throughout the room (see below). The star-champion is only activated once all nine disks are placed in the constellation, with placed disks having no other effect until then.

The stars making up the star-champion constellation are divided into three groups of three different-sized stars (large, medium, and small), each group distinguished by the number of connected, or linked, minor stars. Group A stars are each connected to one minor star, group B stars are each connected to two minor stars, and group C stars are each connected to three minor stars. The list of star groups are as follows (judges may also refer to the judge’s version of the star-constellation handout for identifying the specific stars that make up the three groups). Note that “left” and “right” are with respect to the warrior’s point of view; the warrior is facing the viewer, so “left shoulder” is on the right side of the image:

Major Star	Size	Linked Minor Stars	Group
Left shoulder	Large	1	A
Right hand	Medium	1	
Right leg	Small	1	
Right shoulder	Large	2	B
Waist	Medium	2	
Left hand	Small	2	
Axe	Large	3	C
Helm	Medium	3	
Left Leg	Small	3	

The Wrath of the Chaos-Wraiths: Incorrectly placing a pattern of disks into the star-champion constellation causes a random stalagmite formation in the chamber to split open with a thunderous crack, releasing an enervating energy that briefly takes the shape of a horn-helmed wraith-like entity sweeping a massive axe across the chamber before fading out of existence. This entity lasts only for the round and then dissipates. However, a party cleric can protect the party by turning it (see below).

When a chaos-wraith is released, each PC in the chamber to make an ability check against the DC of the sum of each of the three groups of stars, A, B, and C, representing the wraith’s opposing Strength, Agility, and Stamina, respectively. PCs failing the check permanently lose a point from the corresponding ability. Here, and only here, should the judge disclose the target DCs for ability checks, thus providing an additional hint.

For example, the following placement of disks would result in each PC in the chamber making a separate Strength, Agility, and Stamina ability check of DC 12, DC 24, and DC 9 by rolling 1d20 and adding their corresponding ability modifier to the result, with failure causing a loss of one point of either Strength, Agility, or Stamina:

Star	Disk	Group	Stat	DC of Ability Check
Left shoulder	5	A	Strength	5+4+3 = 12
Right hand	4			
Right leg	3			
Right shoulder	9	B	Agility	9+7+8 = 24
Waist	7			
Left hand	8			
Axe	1	C	Stamina	1+2+6 = 9
Helm	2			
Left Leg	6			

The chaos-wraiths are not true monsters and cannot be engaged in combat by the party. They are also immune to normal magic, and any attempt to strike or otherwise harm the chaos-wraith passes through harmlessly without effect. However, clerics can preemptively attempt to turn a released chaos-wraith using their turn unholy ability, with success causing the chaos-wraith to dissipate (for Lawful and Neutral clerics) or bow in supplication (for Chaotic clerics) before striking with its enervating energies. Assess the cleric’s turn attempt before any other PC makes their ability check. If the cleric fails the turn attempt, however, they make that round’s ability checks with a d16.

When the chaos-wraith emerges, its appearance and hit dice for the purposes of a cleric's turn unholy ability varies based on the highest of the sums of the three groups, which translates as follows. Note that all chaos-wraiths have the same ability-draining effect, regardless of their size:

Sum of Disks in Highest Group	Height	DC for level 1 Cleric (include Luck mod)
15	Man-sized	12
16-18	8'	15
19-20	10'	18
20+	12'	20

To aid in the determination of which combinations are being attempted by the PCs, use the below table to track the configuration of placed disks attempted. Players can use the player handouts to indicate which disks are being placed where, using chits, dice, marked paper, or cut-outs of the disks themselves. See the judge's version of the star-map handout for identifying the correct placement of the disks.

Disk Placement Tracker:

Group	Star	Solution	#1	Sum	#2	Sum	#3	Sum	#4	Sum
A (Strength)	Left shoulder	3								
	Right hand	6								
	Right leg	9								
B (Agility)	Right shoulder	2								
	Waist	5								
	Left hand	8	8		8		8			

Group	Star	Solution	#1	Sum	#2	Sum	#3	Sum	#4	Sum
C (Stamina)	Axe	1	1		1		1			
	Helm	4								
	Left Leg	7								

Solving the Puzzle: On the surface, this may seem like an impossible challenge: there are thousands of permutations (5,040 to be exact!), but only a single correct solution. Two things work in the players' favor, however: first, each time a disk is correctly placed, its 'star' flares up, but only once all the stars are placed in the constellation and the mechanism activates. In other words, if disk 4 was correctly placed in the helm, that 'star' would flare up on activation before dimming again once the chaos-wraith that is released disappears.

Second, PCs can deduce the correct sequence by noting the size of the stars depicted on the star map. Ever since ancient times, measuring a star's luminosity has followed a reverse scale for brightness, meaning that the brighter the star, the lower its apparent magnitude. Thus, the larger stars on the mosaic correspond to the smaller numbers of the disk, with the '1', '2', and '3' disks corresponding the three largest (brightest) stars. This is hinted by the already placed 1-pointed disk. Furthermore, each star is linked to a number of smaller minor stars, creating clusters that further differentiate the relative brightness between stars of the same size. This is hinted by the already placed 8-pointed disk. The correct sequence is to match the lowest numbered disk with the largest star with the largest cluster of minor stars (Axe), then disk 2 with the next largest star cluster (Right Shoulder), etc., through disk nine, which matches the smallest star with only a single linked minor star (Right Leg). An easy way to remember the correct order for disks from 1 to 9 points is, "Large-3-2-1, Medium-3-2-1, Small-3-2-1."

Judge's Note: While evident from the handout, players should only be informed about the differences in the star sizes and the number of linked minor stars if they specifically ask or describe some action that would infer that knowledge.

Use of divining spells such as the cleric spell *second sight* can also offer limited aid. For each successful casting, the PC can determine whether a specific complete pattern of disks is correct or not, subject to the accuracy identified in the spell check result. In other words, the spell does not provide feedback on the placement of individual disks, but only on the configuration of all the disks. And unless the spell check is

high enough (24+), the cleric must recast the spell with each new disk pattern that they wish to attempt.

The prize: Once the correct sequence of disks has been placed, all the stars immediately flare up, and a hidden cache located in the handle of the axe opens to reveal a scroll bound in black hair secreted within. The scroll is an enchantment, *Felan's Doom*, written by Molan (who of course does not trust his brother) that turns his brother Felan's own axe against him. The scroll can be used by the PCs to their great benefit in the final encounter of the round. Note that any PC can read the scroll and discern its function, but casting it requires a spell check in the presence of Felan. Wizards, clerics, and elves (i.e., spellcasters) use a d20; thieves use their *cast spell from scroll* die and other untrained PCs use d10 + Intelligence modifier. The scroll's chamber is carefully hidden, but a thief who specifically searches the constellation and scores 32 or more on a *find trap* check discovers the cache and can access it without solving the puzzle.

Can PCs attack the chaos-wraiths before they are activated? Once PCs realize the nature of the stalagmites in the chamber, they may attempt to attack or otherwise prevent the creatures within from coming out. However, the arcane nature of the seeping water that fills the chamber prevents such efforts – effectively making them immune to any physical attacks by the party. There are also dozens of formations, and as each activation is random, it prevents the party from trying to anticipate which one will be triggered and set traps or otherwise get a free round of action against the spawned star-champion.

In addition, the weird energy of the chaos-infused waters has a deleterious effect on spells cast at it. Directing magical energy at the stalagmites causes the spell to rebound with a random misfire effect as determined by rolling d4 on the following table:

Table 2-2: Spell Misfire Effects for Chaos Stalagmites

d4	Effect
1	Spell reflects against the caster.
2	Spell reflects against a random party member.
3	Spell rebounds and shatters the stalactites hanging above the party, initiating a partial cave in. Each PC in the chamber takes 2d6 [7] of damage from the falling debris (DC 12 Reflex save to avoid).
4	Spell explodes with phlogiston energy, causing spell check damage to all within 30' (DC 15 Reflex save to avoid).

What is to prevent the PCs from stealing the disks and skipping the chamber? Nothing, except they will not recover Molan's scroll. The disks themselves are made of crude iron and have little value outside of the puzzle.

Can the stars be triggered in any other way? Only the disks can be used to activate the constellation; however, a thief may attempt a DC 25 *disable trap* check to try and correctly deduce the placement of a single disk by careful trial and error of the corresponding stars. Succeeding on the attempt allows the PC to identify the correct placement of a single disk. A separate check is required for each disk to be examined in this fashion.

Failing the check, however, causes all the stars in the constellation to suddenly flare with arcane energy as enervating rays of light shoot out of eye-slits of the helm at each PC in the chamber, inflicting 1 point of random Strength, Agility, or Stamina damage.

Area 2-10—Pathways of the Leviathan: *Climbing down the passageway's slick steps carved and molded from flesh and stone, you emerge onto a ledge of rock overlooking a grotesque vista – an enormous cavern, the flesh-like walls of which seem to pulse with a terrifying life, breathing like the interior of a giant womb. Below, the cavern descends to a dark pool at the bottom of a vast pit, fed by rivulets of water that hint at the great sea that may one day fill the enormous space.*

A wide stairway of wet, undulating steps leads down from the ledge where it ends at a series of rope-and-wood walkways built across the surface of the black lake, extending to a far shore where an unseen source of light flares. Every few seconds, a flash of arcane lightning arcs from the distant shore towards the cavern wall, briefly illuminating the entire cavern. Where the lightning strikes, the living stone seems to bubble and melt, expanding like a boil about to burst.

Throughout the cavern, the rock and stones are kept in a constant state of dampness, fed by rivulets of water running down the cavern walls and feeding the water, which one day may fill the entire cavern to create a vast 'starless sea', but is for now only a fraction of its future size.

From the ledge where the PCs enter the chamber, steps lead down the steep sides of the pit to the edge of the black lake. Where the steps meet the waterline, the PCs can see a series of floating wooden walkways extending across the surface of the water to the far shore which seems to be the source of the arcane lightning. Despite their disturbing flesh-like appearance, the stairs are otherwise a solid surface, and cautious parties descending slowly and carefully can easily negotiate the well-worn steps to the lake below.

PCs may try to circumvent the unnatural pathway by climbing the pulsing walls of the cavern. Ascending the walls and negotiating them to reach a point where they can climb down to the far shore is treacherous due to their ever-shifting nature and the ever-present threat of the arcane lightning. Every few seconds, occasional flashes of scintillant arcane energy arc from a distant shore on the far side of the lake. Where they strike the walls, the flesh-like rock melts and reforms, oozing like hardening lava that seems to be gradually expanding the size of the chamber itself. However, the fleshy-rocky surface itself is trivial to climb (even in armor), but the constant shifting and lighting strikes make this a matter of luck rather than skill.

Each round a PC attempts to climb the walls they must make a Luck check. With a success, they are able to scale further across the surface towards their goal. Failure means that the PC does not make any progress that round as they lose ground negotiating the shifting surface. Worse, failing the roll by more than 5 points means the PC is not only unable to make progress, but is in the path of one of the arcane bolts (DC 15 Reflex save to avoid, remember to include armor penalties; the only sure way to dodge is to drop from the wall into the water below, which is an automatic success, but PCs need to declare before attempting the save, see below for penalties for PCs in the water).

PCs struck by a bolt as they traverse the wall are suffused with primordial arcane chaos, and suffer damage and effects as per the table below:

**AN EPIC FAIL
(BY MICHAEL BOLAM)**

In the tournament's final round, the team was going into the last two areas in pretty good shape. The wizard hadn't spell-burned, and Luck was mostly intact. The cleric had some disapproval, and the wizard had lost *magic missile*, but nothing too horrible. Then the leviathan happened! The beast "dismantled" both warriors and the thief, while the cleric (with a *sanctuary* spell running) waltzed past. The wizard luckily survived (because the leviathan was too busy killing everyone else) but he was badly injured.

When the final battle began, the wizard was killed by charging guards, who had managed a pretty good initiative. Later in the round, the cleric saved him from bleeding out. When the wizard's turn came up, he threw the "Hail Mary," spell-burning himself down to almost nothing with a *magic missile*. The player rolled a natural one, fumbling the massive spell! Afterwards, the guards beat down the two casters ending the round in a TPK. It was epic...unfortunately, an epic fail, but that's why you play the game!

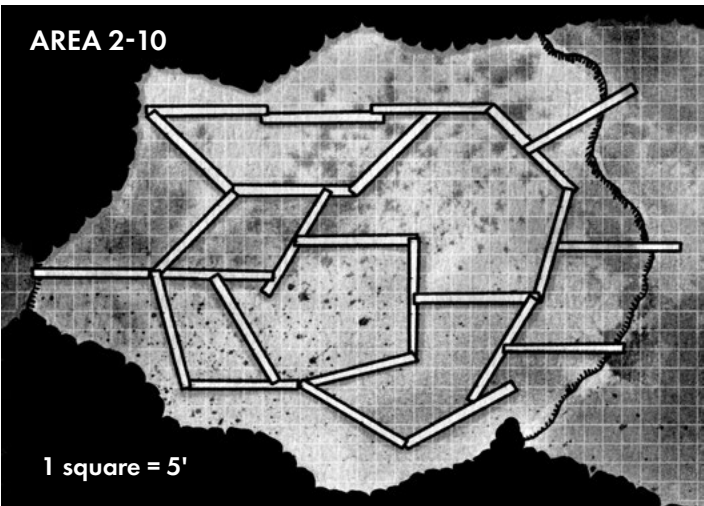


Table 2-3: Effect of Arcane Chaos Bolts

d4-Luck Modifier	Effect
1 or less	PC is grazed by the arcane bolt of chaos, taking 1d6 [3] damage.
2	PC is struck by the arcane bolt of chaos, taking 1d8 [4] damage. In addition, the PC is transformed by the primordial chaos, and rerolls a random ability using a 1d20, replacing the ability with the new result.
3	PC is pierced by the arcane bolt of chaos, taking 1d10 [5] damage. In addition, the PC is transformed by the primordial chaos, and rerolls two random abilities using a 1d16, replacing the abilities with the new results.
4	PC is impaled by the arcane bolt of chaos, and becomes partially melted into the wall taking 1d12 [6] damage. In addition, the PC is transformed by the primordial chaos, and rerolls three random abilities using a 1d14, replacing the abilities with the new results.

PCs must succeed on a total of three Luck checks to successfully navigate to the far shore. Despite the dangers of the climb, PCs choosing to cross the water using the walkways risk a far more dangerous path. When they first came to the underground lake, Molan, Felan, and Khargis (area 2-7) made a pact with the eternal beast that lives in the dark waters to guard the cavern from those who might disturb their attempts to raise chaos into the world. Now, as in the future, the eternal leviathan watches from below, challenging any who would cross.

Chaos Leviathan, Young (1): Init +0; Atk tentacle strike +4 melee (1d6+2 [4] or grapple, determined randomly); Crit special; AC 15; HD 8d10; hp 44; MV 50'; Act 3d20 plus 1 walkway smash; SP grapple (DC 16 Strength check to escape, see below), walkway smash (once per round tries to shatter a walkway; 50% chance of success), may target a maximum of two groups per round, may not attack a single PC more than once per round, loses an action per tentacle cleaved by a single blow inflicting 8+ damage, unique crits and fumbles (see Table 2-4 and 2-5 below); SV Fort +8, Ref -2, Will +6; AL C.

Only the leviathan's writhing tentacles can be seen above the surface of the lake. PCs drawn below the dark waters by the grasping arms glimpse the hideous body of the creature – an enormous beast covered by thousands of thickly hooded eyes and slack jaws – the horrified, tortured faces of all its previous victims.

After the PCs step onto the walkways, tentacles rise from the nearby black waters. Unlike its future iteration, the beast cannot be appeased (there is no incense, and any treasure carried by the party is of no interest to the creature). If the PCs continue crossing without somehow tricking the beast (see below), it attacks. The leviathan spans the entire cav-



ern, and regardless of which pathways they take, the PCs can be attacked anywhere while they are on the lake. PCs have a choice: split the party, and hope that some will make it through, or fight to attempt to defeat the creature—an almost impossible task. Splitting the party forces the leviathan to concentrate its attacks, as despite its prodigious size, it can attack no more than two ‘groups’ of PCs in a single round and doesn’t attack a single PC more than once per round. When faced with a choice, the leviathan will always target the groups with the most PCs.

In battle, the leviathan will use its attacks to attempt to grab PCs and pull them into the dark waters. On a successful attack, the leviathan can opt to forgo inflicting damage and instead loop around the PC’s limbs or waist. For the tournament, the judge should make this choice randomly. The following round, the PC must succeed on a DC 16 Strength check or be drawn into the dark waters where they are drowned and torn limb from limb. Fellow party members can attempt to save a held companion by cleaving through the tentacle holding a PC by inflicting 8 or more points of damage to it in a single blow, causing it to separate from the leviathan and release its victim. Tentacles severed in this manner also reduce the number of attacks available to the creature on subsequent rounds. If at least three tentacles are severed, the leviathan no longer shatters walkways (see below). However, it always has at least 1 action die for attacking a PC.

Each round, the leviathan attempts to shatter a walkway with a 50% chance of success. If the leviathan is successful, the walkway shatters, tumbling any PCs currently on it into the lake. If they have not already acted that round, a PC may

choose to forgo all other actions that round and attempt to dash for safety. Those doing so may make a DC 10 Reflex save to escape before the walkway is torn apart.

PCs that fall into the lake are -2d on all actions until they can clamber onto another walkway, requiring a DC 10 Strength check modified by armor check penalties. Any nearby PC on the same walkway can spend a full round assisting their companion, adding their Strength modifier to the roll and reducing the check to DC 5. A natural ‘1’ on the assisted roll means that the assisting PC also falls into the water next to the already swimming companion!

The leviathan may be driven off, but not killed, by reducing its hit points to 0. If the PCs somehow manage this feat, any PCs still caught within its tentacles are permitted one last DC 20 Strength check to wrest free of the leviathan’s mighty grip. Those that fail are drawn beneath the waves and never seen again—except perhaps as terrified, slack-jawed faces embedded into the leviathan’s gibbering hide.

Navigating the web of interconnected walkways is time-consuming, especially if the PCs pause to fight the leviathan or rescue trapped companions. In addition, the leviathan’s attacks against the walkways may cut off former routes to reach the far shore, requiring unlucky parties to have to potentially backtrack to reach an alternative pathway. Each walkway ‘segment’ is 30’ long, meaning a PC with a MV 30’ can navigate two segments by taking no other action except moving at a full run. Judge’s should keep track of the party’s progress using the map, remembering to account for slow-moving PCs burdened by heavy armor or even carried companions.

PC Strategy (word of command): Commanding the leviathan to “retreat”, “leave”, “flee”, etc., when it is trapped in a (relative to its size) small pool is “completely contrary to (the) creature’s natural instinct.” Thus, it receives an extra +4 to its Willpower save, making its total Will save bonus +10 for these types of magical compulsion.

PC Strategy (holy sanctuary): A cleric who casts *holy sanctuary* with spell check of 28 or larger establishes all of area 2-10 as a holy sanctuary, but this does not extend beyond the shore into area 2-11 regardless of the check. Since the leviathan is an 8 HD creature, it must make a Willpower save (d20+6) vs. spell check to attack anyone in the party and to shatter a walkway.

PC Strategy (Distraction): Since the leviathan can sense what’s on the walkways, PCs may try to throw a rock to a distant walkway, or some other type of clever distraction. Have the PC make a relevant ability check (e.g., Agility for throwing something) with DC 15. If successful, the leviathan ignores that player/plank for that round (which may cause it to focus on the rest of the PCs!).

PC Strategy (Stealth): PCs may try to somehow sneak across a plank. Like the distraction section above, require a DC 15 ability/skill check, with the same result as the distraction section. Remember armor check penalties!

PC Strategy (Food): The leviathan’s hunger is limitless (it’s still growing!) and it eats anything offered. Mundane food has no effect. Magical food (such as from *food of the gods*), however, is especially tasty. For every two people a magical meal feeds, the leviathan sacrifices one of its action die, cumulative across rounds. So, a magical meal that feeds six PCs relaxes the beast for three actions (1 round’s worth of attacks). A meal that feeds 11 PCs relaxes the beast for its next five actions (note we round down); thus it has no actions for one round and only one action for the round after that. A *food of the gods* spell check of 30 or more pacifies the beast for the rest of the encounter.

PC Strategy (PC Sacrifice): A PC may decide to “take one for the team” and willingly sacrifice themselves to the beast... or perhaps their comrades “willingly” sacrifice them... regardless, treat this as six-person magical meal such that the leviathan loses three actions. (Of course, the party takes a scoring penalty for a PC death.) This also causes the beast to make a morale check (DC 10 Willpower save). If it fails, it is pacified for the rest of the encounter.

PC Strategy (Incense): Those players familiar with the adventure *DCC #67: The Sailors on the Starless Sea* may attempt to use incense on the beast. The leviathan hasn’t developed that level of sophistication yet and ignores incense.

PC Strategy (Climbing): As described above, PCs may try to climb the chamber’s shifting walls rather than brave the walkways. However, this is perilous and a matter of Luck rather than skill. If they succeed without falling into the water, the leviathan ignores them.

PC Strategy (Flying): PCs may levitate or fly (possibly via *force manipulation*) across the chamber to avoid disturbing the water or walkways. For each round a PC spends flying over the water, have the caster make a Luck check. If they fail, the leviathan has sensed their arcane energies and attacks! The chamber’s ceiling is not high enough to go beyond the reach of the beast’s tentacles.

PC Strategy (Disguise): Alternatively, while the leviathan cannot be appeased, it can be tricked into believing the PCs are agents of Molan and Felan. PCs donning the garb of chaos berserker warriors (area 2-5) or chaos acolytes (area 2-7) can attempt a DC 10 *disguise self* check (thieves roll a d20, all others treat as an untrained skill check modified by Personality). The check must be made at the time it counts, not before to see if the disguise is “good enough.” If the PC’s check is successful, the leviathan allows them to pass across unmolested. A check must be made for each PC crossing the waters; even a single failure causes the leviathan to realize the deception and attack the whole party.

Finally, the PCs have an opportunity to turn the leviathan to their cause. Any PC brazen enough to disguise themselves as the Khargis, the Chaos Cult Leader (area 2-7) and succeeding on a DC 16 *disguise self* check can command the leviathan to attack the soldiers guarding the half-finished ziggurat on the far shore (area 2-11).

Table 2-4: Critical Hits for Chaos Leviathan

d4-Luck Modifier	Effect
1 or less	The tentacle squeezes the victim’s chest with crushing force and inflicts an additional 1d6 [3] hp damage in addition to grappling the PC.
2	The tentacle wraps around the victim’s neck, strangling the PC and causing them to make a DC 20 Fortitude save or fall unconscious for 1d3 [2] rounds.
3	The tentacle enfolds the victim’s head, fracturing the PC’s skull with blinding force. The PC is temporarily blinded for 1d3 [2] rounds (-4 to hit and half movement) and must succeed on a DC 20 Fortitude save or permanently lose 1d4 [3] points of Intelligence.
4	The leviathan constricts around the victim’s limb, wrenching it off with a sudden sharp twist before dropping it in to chum up the dark waters. Roll 1d4 for the affected appendage: (1) right arm, (2) left arm, (3) right leg, (4) left leg. As a result, the PC takes an additional 2d8 [9] damage, and if they survive, suffers a permanent -1d penalty to all actions, regardless of the specific limb.



KENNON

Table 2-5: Fumble Table for Chaos Leviathan

d4	Effect
1	The leviathan's tentacle becomes entangled with the walkway next to its victim, causing it to be -2 to its next attack.
2	The leviathan's wild strike lashes out against a limb currently grappling another PC, forcing it to loosen its grip and reducing the Strength check required to wrest free to DC 10 until the next round.
3	The tentacle impales itself on the PC's weapon before it jerks away in pain, inflicting 1d6 [3] damage to the limb.
4	The tentacle grapples its own brethren, creating a knot of flailing appendages! Any remaining attacks by the leviathan are lost for the round.

BEWARE THE BUFFALO (BY ERIC DAUM)

Sometimes players pull off the wildest feats of daring-do. Enter the Peon Knights who saved a group of villagers, held captive and in thrall to chaos acolytes, even though these villagers (actually, their ancestors!) were a threat. The PCs treated them well, tended to their needs and fed them. Gratefully they told the PCs, "Beware of the cult-leader! Beware of the Buffalo! He commands the beasts!" They slayed the cult-leader, Khargis, in a pitched battle and, remembering the peasant's words, donned his moldering buffalo hide.

The Ziggurat and the vile lords of chaos, Felan and Molan, awaited them on the opposite shore of what would become the Starless Sea. They only needed to cross a rickety, piecemeal series of planks while escaping almost certain death in the grasp of the leviathan, the primordial monstrosity within the sea's black waters. The Peon Knights' warrior, disguised in the moldering buffalo hide of Khargis, knew the steel of his two-handed blade would not carry the day, and he not only posed as the cult leader but nearly believed his own ruse. Striding boldly toward the fell beast he pronounced his feigned authority and spoke, "Stand down, obey my command!" Everything was in place but the die roll...success! The PCs' actions put them in the best position to succeed when luck finally went their way. Not only did they avoid near certain doom with style, they did so without a scratch and had a new leviathan ally to help crush their foes. (Editor's note: The Peon Knights finished first in the finals and won a gold medal!)

Area 2-11—Finale at the Ziggurat: *An iridescent dome of gooey film, like a thick soap bubble, encloses a half-built ziggurat made from writhing, screaming peasants whose flesh has fused together like mortar. Small rocks, like rubble, litter the ground everywhere. Outside the dome, six soldiers watch two robed men, wear-*

ing red circlets, as they drag a struggling gongfarmer through the film; there are more desperate prisoners in a nearby locked cage. Upon passing through to the interior, the captive yields as his clothes liquefy and his skin begins to melt, although his robed escorts are unaffected except that their circlets briefly glow. The two men place the wailing gongfarmer like a brick upon the ziggurat's side, his skin fusing with the others who've had similar fates.

Just within the dome, a hide-armored warrior nearly seven feet tall and muscled like a bear, laughs deeply as he slaps the side of his enormous black battle axe into his gloved palm. Up on the ziggurat's plateau, a sorcerer yields a skulled scepter and casts spells at what can only be the Well of Souls! The wizard wears a red hooded cloak with horns and a single eye adorned over his forehead; although his appearance is different, this is definitely Molan and thus the warrior below is Felan. Just as you realize that here and now you can alter your apocalyptic futures, the skull on Molan's scepter rotates to look at you and shrieks. Alerted to your presence, the Chaos Lord points down at your party and screams, "Bring me their bodies!"

The objective of this encounter is to kill both Molan and Felan, but the Iridescent Membrane (the dome) provides a challenging hazard while the six soldiers and two priests provide a dangerous distraction. Roll initiative! The soldiers immediately engage with the party while the two priests (the robed figures) exit the dome and use the caged peasants as fuel for their harmful spells. Unless engaged (see below), Felan commands his troops from within the dome (granting them bonuses) while Molan continues with his ritual. However, the two focus their wrath on any PC that manages to penetrate or disable the shield.

Iridescent Membrane: Anyone passing through the iridescent membrane must make a DC 18 Fortitude save or becomes helplessly immobile as their skin melts (1 hp left). Such a victim can be killed with single attack action coup de grace (no to-hit roll required). A PC who bears one of the priests' red circlets (does not have to be worn) passes through with no ill effects. Although mundane non-magical objects (e.g. missile fire, a victim's armor and weapons, etc.) are liquefied and destroyed as they pass through the shield, magical items are impervious to the shield's effects. The priests' circlets are magical and specifically designed to protect their bearers from the membrane's effects. Thus, an effective way to get the party through the shield is to have two PCs enter bearing the circlets, then throw the circlets through the barrier to the next two PCs to enter, and so on.

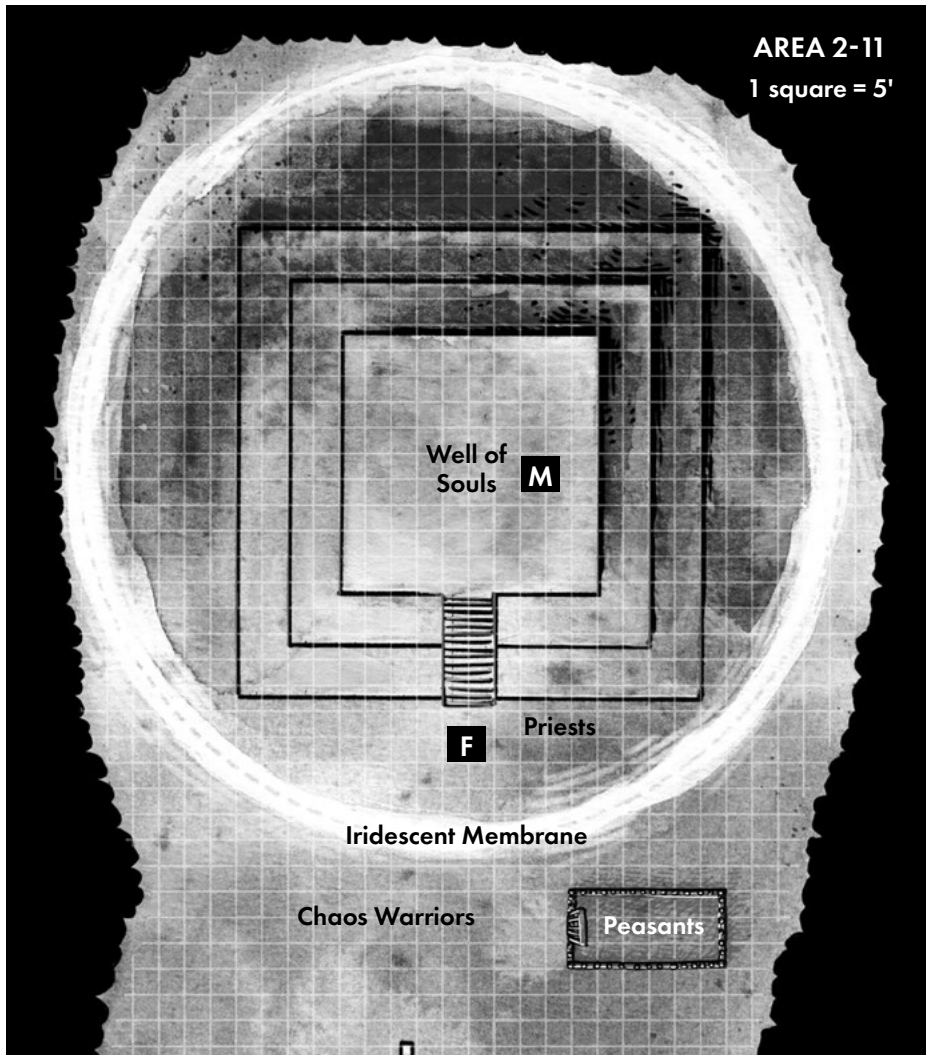
The iridescent membrane can be disabled via spell attacks, however, be they arcane or divine. The shield absorbs any spell cast at its interior or itself but can eventually dissipate. The shield has 30 "hp" and takes damage equivalent to the spell check of the spell it absorbs. Thus, casters who hit it with two 15 spell check spells destroy the shield. Note that a spell must be successfully cast to damage the membrane. A caster is immediately aware they have weakened the shield (though they don't know by how much) upon absorption. Note that the membrane only absorbs spell energy directed at it or those within its interior. A spell with an external target that has an area effect is negated at the membrane's

surface with no loss of its “hp,” unless it could somehow affect those within, e.g., *holy sanctuary*. Note that using *force manipulation* to penetrate the membrane damages the barrier according to the spell check, as described above.

Chaos Soldiers (6): Init +1; Atk long sword +1 melee (1d8 [5]); Crit III/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 13 (15 with Felan commanding), leather and shield; HD 1d8; hp 4 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP commanded defense (+2 to AC, 15 instead of 13, if Felan commands without distraction); SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; AL C.

Chaos Priests (2): Init +1; Atk carved human femur +1 melee (1d4 [2]) or soul bolt +3 missile fire (1d4 [3], limited ammo, range 100'); Crit III/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 11, padded armor; HD 1d6; hp 4 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP limited ammo (drains life from 1 captive peasant for each casting of soul bolt), red circlet (enables safe passage through iridescent membrane); SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

Clever parties may realize that the priests' circlets are the key to penetrating the dome quickly and safely. A priest's circlet can be removed by a critical hit (the circlet falls off due to the impact, regardless of body part affected), a DC 18 *pick pocket* check, a successful Mighty Deed of Arms, or by grappling (priest gets +1 to opposed roll, someone other than the pinning PC must remove the circlet).



Captive Peasants: There are eight remaining peasants in the locked cage (DC 13 *pick lock* check to open, DC 15 Strength check to force). Through a previous ritual, these peasants have been attuned to the chaos priests. When a priest casts their soul bolt, one of these peasants dies. Thus, the priests can cast up to eight soul bolts in total. Freed peasants can join the fray to assist the party, but if either of the two chaos priests are still in the fight, then each peasant must make a morale check (DC 10 Willpower save) each round; failure results in the peasant cowering in fear for 1 round. Use the table below to track the remaining peasants.

Soul bolts casted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Remaining peasants	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

Peasants (8): Init -1; Atk rock from ground +0 melee or missile fire (1d3 [2]) or by weapon; Crit III/d4 [+3 damage]; AC 9; HD 1d4; hp 1 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP soul bolt bond (a peasant dies when a chaos priest casts soul bolt); SV Fort -1, Ref -1, Will +0; AL N.

Weaponizing the Dungeon: As mentioned in area 2-10, if a PC successfully disguised themselves as Khargis, they can command the leviathan to attack the soldiers. The judge need not roll the attacks. The leviathan kills three soldiers per round for 2 rounds, then retreats into the water fearing the Chaos Lords. The priests stay away from the beast and are not targeted.

Felan (1): Init +4 (d16 since 2-handed weapon); Atk *Boomercleaver* +4 melee or missile fire (1d10+1 [6], range 30', axe teleports back after being thrown); Crit DN/d4 (heals 6 hp) [+3 damage]; AC 15 (chain-mail); HD 3d12; hp 23; MV 30' (no penalty from armor); Act 1d20; SP long-range guard (once per round, Felan can throw *Boomercleaver* at anyone within 30' who moves past him, just like a withdrawal from melee), healing crit (if Felan scores a critical hit he heals 6 hp in addition to critical damage), immune to immobilization (granted by *Boomercleaver*), vulnerable to fire (double-damage, due to *Boomercleaver*); SV Fort +5, Ref +3, Will +3; AL C.

Boomercleaver: this magical battleaxe has no bonus to hit or damage, but can be thrown up to 30' with it teleporting back to its wielder whether it hits or misses. The axe grants immunity to all immobilizing effects. Unfortunately, the axe confers a vulnerability to fire to its wielder, who suffers double-damage from any fire-based attack.

Molan (1): Init +5; Atk *bolts of ire* spell +5 missile fire (1d6 [3], range sight) or scepter +2 melee (1d3+1 [2]); Crit DN/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 11, but 1 in 3 chance to hit if chaotic clones active (padded armor); HD 5d4; hp 18; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d16; SP spell (*chaotic clones*, attackers have a 1 in 3 chance to hit Molan regardless of attack roll, includes spells with specific targets, such as *magic missile*, takes both action dice to cast), spell (*entropic glue*, Molan must use d20 action to cast, up to 30' radius targeted anywhere on the ziggurat, those caught within must make DC 15 Strength check or have MV 0' for the round), d24 save vs spells (due to *Skullshriek*), d14 saves from poisons (due to *Skullshriek*); SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +7; AL C.

Skullshriek: This scepter is a +1 magical weapon that does 1d3+1 damage. It grants its wielder a +1d bonus (d20 becomes d24) to saves vs. spells and also shrieks loudly whenever an enemy comes within 100'. Unfortunately, the scepter bestows a -2d penalty (so d20 becomes d14) to saves from poisons.

Overcoming the Dome, Felan, and Molan: As soon as a PC penetrates the dome (or it is destroyed), the Chaos Lords attack. Note that if there are any chaos soldiers remaining, their armor class is no longer boosted by Felan's command once he attacks. Felan uses his large axe *Boomercleaver* (which he can throw and it teleports back to him!) while Molan casts *chaotic clones* for defense, *entropic glue* to immobilize combatants on the ziggurat (though Felan's axe grants immunity), and *bolts of ire* to damage foes. Note that Molan's scepter *Skullshriek* grants him +1d to saves vs. spells. Due to Felan's long-range guard special ability, it's dangerous to try to move past him even if he's engaged in melee. If the party gained the scroll *Felan's Doom* from area 2-9 and reads it with a spell check of 12 or more, *Boomercleaver* jumps from Felan's hands, cleaves his chest, and liquefies into molten metal immediately killing him. Note that any PC can read the scroll and discern its function, but casting it requires a spell check. Wizards, clerics, and elves (i.e., spellcasters) use a d20; thieves use their *cast spell from scroll* die and other untrained PCs use d10 + Intelligence modifier. Note that this particular spell, being written by Molan, penetrates the iridescent membrane.

When Felan is slain, the chaos soldiers (but not the priests) must make a morale check.

With Molan defeated, the PCs have prevented the well's ritual from being completed and altered their future for the better...maybe. If the party has eliminated Molan before the area's other adversaries, they must still face them.

Tournament Notes: Any PC deaths that occur after Molan's defeat are not counted, and the area is scored as being completed even if a TPK occurs (Felan is tough!). Regardless, they've conquered round 2 of the tournament! In the event of a TPK after Molan's death, improvise the passage below to reflect the robodragons killing the remainder of the adversaries and recovering the PCs' bodies (allow Luck checks for each PC to not be truly dead). Otherwise, if any of the PCs are still alive, read the following as is:

With the death of the Chaos Lords, their ritual is prematurely ended and the Well of Souls is destroyed! Now the cyclopean soul-eating leviathan of your previously doomed future is a thing of the past! You've altered the fates of the entire region and saved countless lives to come. As you feel the thrill of surviving this epic ordeal, there's a loud boom as the entire chamber flashes with stroboscopic light. When the flashing ceases, giant mechanized robodragons warp into the chamber, led by a larger purple wrym. Will the challenges never end? As they fly down, the party sees the lead beast is driven by the Purple Sorcerer and the robodragons are piloted by... future versions of yourselves! Your violet patron exclaims, "Great job gang! But...there are a few consequences we need to sort out. Come with me if you want to live!"

Thus ends the final round of Return to the Starless Sea!

ENDING THE ADVENTURE (NON-TOURNAMENT VERSION)



While the climatic ending of round 2 sees the return of the Purple Sorcerer to once again recruit the characters into their role in a (possibly) never-ending series of temporal events that they are now swept into, judges running *Return to the Starless Sea* as part of a campaign may not find it suitable to continue the time-hopping adventures so immediately after its conclusion, especially if they wish to explore the changed world the PCs now find themselves in. Defeating the brothers Felan and Molan is a cataclysmic event, sure to reverberate across the multiverse in numerous ways, and judges are encouraged to tailor their settings with appropriate outcomes for their own campaign as the PCs embark on their next path.

For example, given their role in striking a blow against the forces of Chaos, the Scions of Law are likely to take an interest in shaping the PC's destinies, perhaps guiding them to stamp out the fleeing remnants of the brothers' army before they can reform into a new threat. Or perhaps abandoned in the past, the PCs must search for a means to return to their own time, seeking a powerful artifact or even the younger version of the Purple Sorcerer who must be convinced to aid them in this timeline. Finally, the phlogiston upheaval of the destruction of the Well of Souls may propel the characters to entirely different place and time; for example, carrying their adventures forward into the Purple Planet, the Shudder Mountains or even perhaps even the Dying Earth – the possibilities are endless!



MOLAN'S END (BY TIM DESCHENE)

Gen Con, August 7, 2022. Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis. It was the finals for the Return to the Starless Sea tournament. I was running an eclectic group of gamers named I Haven't Had Enough Coffee for This! through the second round. One of five teams out of dozens to make it this far, they quickly demonstrated their savviness in the game's early minutes. Tom, playing the wizard called Wayne, was able to dispatch the Chaos Dragon with some hefty *magic missiles*. Cut, the thief played by Roger, wisely barricaded a door which would save them from a later ambush—a fate that TPK'd one of the other teams. They decided to forgo the quick path and used guerrilla tactics instead of head-on combat. The wizard drove off the leviathan with *magic missiles*, adding another fell-beast to his kill count. All these decisions led them to the final encounter area in relatively good shape, but then the Fates turned.

The chaos soldiers and priests made quick work of them, dropping the thief, wizard, and one of the warriors in the first round of combat. Calling upon Dread Cthulhu, Richard the cleric beseeched his god to intervene. His successful invocation allowed for the thief to reverse his fate. Instead of falling to a chaos soldier with the higher initiative, he was able to reroll his initiative and go before the fatal blow to imbibe his healing potion (found during one of their explorations of the long path), leaving him at 1 hp instead! Chris, as the warrior named Barry, freed the prisoners, adding more allies to the ranks against the soldiers and priests. During the confusion of battle, Cut was able to slip past while Barry preoccupied Felan, sacrificing himself in battle against the Chaos Lord. In a series

of unbelievable rolls—18 on the die to *sneak silently*, and a natural 20 to *climb sheer surfaces*—Cut found himself facing an unaware Molan, who was preoccupied with powering the Well of Souls atop the ziggurat, trusting that his brother was butchering the remaining survivors below. Sneaking up to the Chaos Lord, Roger looked at me and said, "I want to take my dagger and jam it into his one eye." Because of his previous high rolls, Judge Terry Olson advised me to grant a +1d bonus to Cut's backstab attempt. Roger took the hefty d24 in his hand and cast it. We watched with tense anticipation. The die made its way across the table, rolling and bouncing in slow motion as we held our breath. An eternity later it stopped...AND SHOWED A 24! Cut had rolled a critical hit on his backstab! In another strange occurrence of Fate, Roger's critical hit resulted in a 16 on Table II, which reads, "Lightning-fast shot to the face pops the foe's eye like a grape. Foe is permanently blinded in one eye and can take no actions for 1d3 rounds." He had managed to call his shot! Molan fell and Cut finished him with a coup de grace, ending the ritual and finishing the adventure. Soon after, Felan avenged his brother but it was too late. As Cut's lifeblood spilled onto the ziggurat, his gaze settled on the defeated Chaos Lord—he had saved the future and was welcomed to Valhalla. Thus, the first team to ever finish this adventure was found. It was bittersweet, having the honor of judging such a moment but knowing that they truly come once in a lifetime.

Hail, Cut, Richard, Olaf, Barry, and Wayne! On Valkyrie's wings you fly!

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APPENDIX ROUND 1

ROUND 1: INTRODUCTORY HANDOUT

There is a pitchfork that hangs above the mud hearth in your home. It is a humble thing: an oaken handle worn smooth by years of use; rusted iron tines, beaten sharp by a village blacksmith ages ago. Old stains that seem to boil beneath the rust.

You never use this pitchfork.

It was used, once – though whether by your great grandfather or his great grandfather you're not certain. But you know by heart the stories that have been passed down: of the snarling beastmen that terrorized your hamlet; of their master, a towering man-bull. Of the horrific vines that grew from the bodies of the dead; of strange, corrupting magics; of the god-things that lurked beneath the old ruins on the hill.

These are heroic tales, of your ancestors taking up clubs, and daggers, and – pitchforks – to confront the horrors that lurked beneath the ruins. Your village was nearly slaughtered that day, and those that returned were changed. They had a darkness to them but also a freedom, like whatever happened beneath the hill had struck off the fetters of tradition and society.

But your ancestors didn't finish what they had started. And now the keep rises again, building itself with each passing day.

Outside, a bell sounds in the village, calling your people to the market square, and the battle that must follow.

You're no hero. But you know what must be done.

You take the pitchfork down from the wall.

Notes on the Team Tournament Funnel Setting for Round 1:

- This round is a funnel, which means you will be playing more than one PC at a time.
- There will be many PC deaths, most due to unlucky dice rolls.
- This round is a combat-heavy experience where you are part of a peasant army surging into a keep. There will always be comrades nearby from whom you can replenish your ranks.
- You can replace PCs between encounters from this peasant horde, but this will have a scoring penalty. If you manage to get a new PC from an area-specific encounter, no penalty is applied.
- Some players may choose not to fully replace their PCs to avoid the scoring penalties but beware that a TPK results in an additional penalty beyond normal PC death.
- By design, this round equalizes the odds of survival. If you're a new player to DCC, you have similar chances of survival (and possibly advancement!) as a veteran player. However, keep an eye on the veterans; they always seem to have a trick up their sleeves.
- Even though the atmosphere may seem both urgent and relentless, don't be afraid to discuss options with your teammates. A DCC combat round represents about 10 seconds of action, but you can take 10 minutes (or however long you want) to decide what happens in those 10 seconds.
- However, the faster you finish the adventure, the more of a bonus you get to your score.
- Finally, the funnel is an experience where the strongest can perish, and the most unlikely can prevail. Embrace it and have fun!

APPENDIX ROUND 2: EXTRA ENCOUNTER



From the onset of development for Return to the Starless Sea's round 2, there was worry that the round was too long. We needed the wizard van, we needed the leviathan, and we needed the grand finale with the Chaos Lords. These encounters demanded time-consuming careful play. In playtesting, these worries proved to be well-founded, as no initial playtest group made it to the finale in the 4-hour limit. So, with only a couple of weeks to go before the tourney's con debut, we re-mapped round 2 while eliminating some of its encounters.

The result was tighter, more thematic, and a more cohesive round. Indeed, many round 2 finalists had the pleasure of reaching the finale and TPK'ing or running out of time rather than never seeing it. Those who read between the lines will deduce that only one group has yet conquered area 2-11 as of this writing (within the time limit). Consider the gauntlet thrown.

The original (inferior) round 2 map sits within the belly of the Mother Orm somewhere on the Purple Planet, most likely never to be seen again. However, among the encounters that were cut was one we wish we could have kept. Round 2 has area 2-5, where animals are "prepared" for transformation; there is also area 2-7 where people are ritually prepared for transformation. However, the chamber where the animals and people are merged to make the first beastmen is sadly missing. Here we present area 2-12, the Beastmen Fusion Chamber. To use this in play, substitute it in place of the intersection area 2-8.

Area 2-12—Beastmen Fusion Chamber: *A slow droning hum, WOHMM-WOHMM-WOHMM, followed by a slight vibration underfoot draws you to a pair of sturdy iron doors. Hammered into the metal is a circular sigil. One half portrays a man in the fetal position while the other half displays a plethora of animals; both halves are intertwined in a disturbing yet artistic manner.*

Beyond these doors lies the fusion chamber; where humanity and beast are merged into one horrid amalgam. The symbol hammered into the front of the door, similar in form to yin & yang, should be warning enough. The droning hum comes from beyond the doors and at no point does it ever break its consistent, slow repetition. Despite their appearance the iron doors swing open with relative ease. Read or paraphrase the following:

With a simple push the iron doors swing open. A rush of rancid air tinged with a metallic taste reveals a grand circular chamber. Dominating and protruding from the domed ceiling is an 8' tall crystal prism. The prism pulsates in rhythm with the blaring drone, dimly illuminating the chamber in a rainbow display of refracted light. A large bronze telescope attached to a swivel and wheel surrounds the prism.

Directly below the crystal, standing at a 35 degree angle is an iron egg shaped pod. Nearby are a sealed metal table and a platform with chains attached. Lining and protruding from the walls, rising in rows of three, are 48 egg shaped pods. A strange green lumines-

cence radiates from the bubbles of pale viscera covering the top half of each pod. Two other iron doors, identical to the one you opened, stand closed within the chamber. A console covered by a metal plate stands near the iron egg-shaped pod.

The Waken of the Proto-Beastmen: Once at least two PCs enter the chamber, read or paraphrase the following:

The droning increases its rhythm, growing ever louder until it crescendos into a single agonizing pitch! The bronze telescope swivels and blasts a beam of wavy green-grey light into the crystal, which appears to soak up the light momentarily before refracting it into three separate rays, each aimed for a pod along the wall! The jelly-like shells of the pods instantly evaporate into a thick steam. The ray shuts off. And, as the prism returns to its low humming state, monstrous shapes emerge from three pods!

Three proto-beastmen have emerged from their egg-shaped pods (gorilla-body, rhino-head, and elephant-man). Once people from surrounding villages, they have been disgustingly transformed, yet unlike their beastmen descendants, these forebears still somewhat resemble the humans they once were. The process of transformation has scarred their psyche and they attack with abandon. Only on a fumbled roll does their humanity revert back into their semi-conscious mind... in which case they proceed to rip and tear at their own flesh.

Proto-Beastman, Gorilla-body (1+): Init +2; Atk bite +2 melee (1d4+2 [4]) or slam +3 melee (1d6+2 [5]); Crit III/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 13; HD 2d8; hp 8; MV 30', climb 20'; Act 1d20; SP slipping humanity (on a fumble the beastman inflicts 1 hp damage to their self); SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -0; AL C.

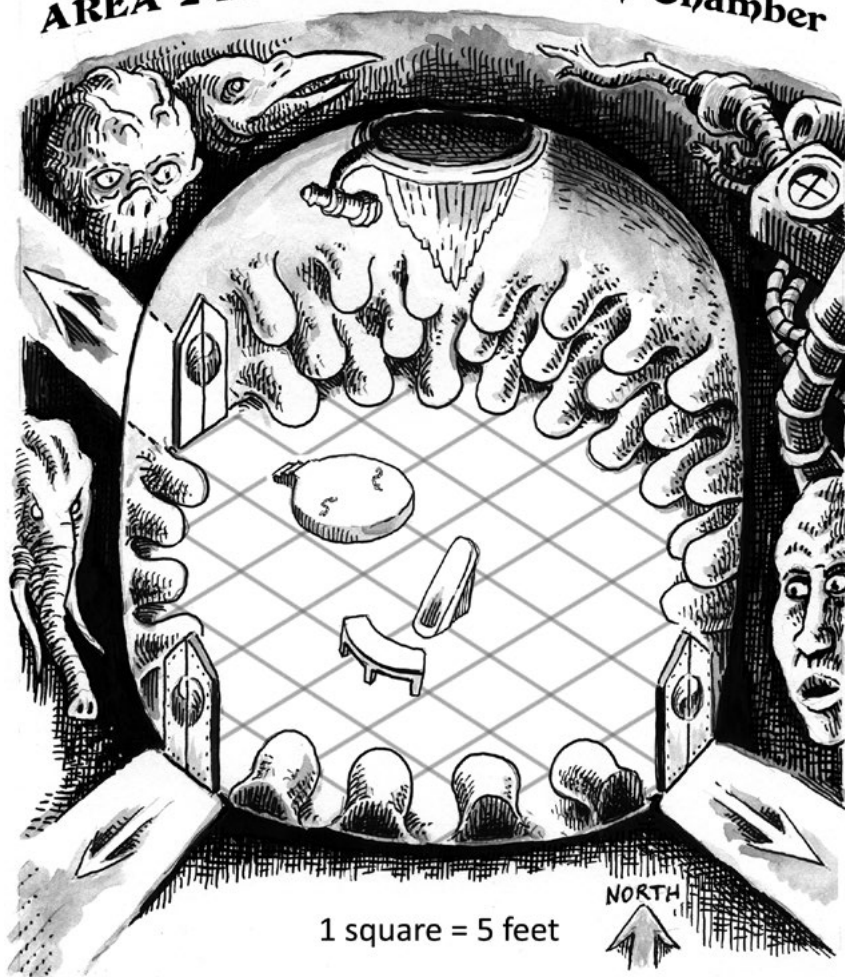
This person's torso, arms, and legs were the only portion transformed into a gorilla, while their head, hilariously small in comparison, peaks out from under the muscular sinews of its chest and shoulders.

Proto-Beastman, Elephant-man (1+): Init +1; Atk thrashing trunk +3 melee (1d4 [2], DC 10 Reflex save or grappled and gore); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 13; HD 2d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP grapple and gore (DC 13 Strength check to escape or 1d6 [3] damage on following round), slipping humanity (on a fumble the beastman inflicts 1 hp damage to their self); SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -0; AL C.

Driven completely insane from the transformation process, this elephant-man constantly wails out, "I'M NOT AN ANIMAL," while thrashing about wildly with his mismatched arms and legs and the horrible boney tusks formed from his jaws. A pink fleshy trunk grows from his nose and can grapple hapless targets!

Proto-Beastman, Rhino-head (1+): Init -1; Atk charging gore +3 melee (1d8 [4]); Crit M/d6 [+3 damage]; AC 14; HD 2d8, hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP slipping humanity (on a fumble the beastman inflicts 1 hp damage to their self); SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will -0; AL C.

AREA 2-12: Beast Man Fusion Chamber



Once a strong and muscular youth, in the pod his skin grew hard and took on a grey pigment from the rhino essence. The cartilage in his nose grew into an overly large horn, stretching and piercing through his flesh, which constantly leaks puss and snot, giving him a dreadful appearance.

Stopping the Hatching Process: Unless the PCs interfere (below), the mechanism hatches three more proto-beastmen every 4 rounds (see Table 2-6: Random Proto-Beastmen below). There are three primary ways in which the PCs can stop the process:

- **Cracking the Crystal Prism:** The crystal can be attacked, though melee attacks require PCs to climb the protruding pods (no check required) to reach the top row (30' high) in 2 rounds. The prism can be damaged: AC 2, 25 hp, on a fumble a melee attacker must make a DC 15 Reflex save or fall 30' to the floor below for 3d6 [10] damage. If the PCs are able to break the prism (reduce to 0 hp) all the built-up energy and essence is released in a tremendous phlogiston blast that showers the area in crystal shards (DC 13 Reflex save or 1d3 [2] damage). This blast begins a chain reaction causing each of the pods to explode one by one. The PC in the chamber with the lowest Luck score must succeed a DC 13 Reflex save on their flight out or suffer 1d6 [4] damage. NOTE: Any magical effects directed at the prism are reflected at the caster.

- **Aim the beam at the console:** A PC can attempt to aim the beam at the console (DC 13 Agility check), see below for more details on the console. Doing so destroys the device, causing it to explode for 2d8 [8] damage to those adjacent to it, including the console's operator (DC 15 Reflex save to avoid). Afterwards, without the beams to "hatch" the eggs, the proto-beastmen will forever lay in a state of torpor.

- **Breaking off the telescope:** To break the telescope, PCs must first climb the protruding pods (no check required) to reach the top row (30' high) in 2 rounds. From this vantage point, a PC with the intent of breaking the telescope from its swivel must succeed a DC 15 Strength check (warriors and dwarves can add their deed die to the check). Doing so causes a small combustion of phlogiston that the breaker must avoid (DC 13 Reflex save) or suffer 1d6 [3] damage.

The Console: The console controls the fusion chamber and just so happens to be set to reactivate when the party enters the room. A locked metal lid with a single small porthole hides all but the spinning hourglass. A DC 13 *pick lock* or DC 15 Strength check is needed to open this lid. Once opened the controls can be reached.

Show the Beastman Fusion Chamber Handout when the PCs first lay eyes on the opened console and read or paraphrase the following: *A metal table, angled upwards, houses a swiveling lever with a large red button on top on its right. On its left, another lever can be moved into three positions marked with three symbols. Between the two levers is a spinning hourglass filled with strange bubbly black ichor embedded behind a pane of glass counts down the seconds.*

The swiveling lever can be moved in any direction and controls the angle of the telescope, allowing its beam to be directed towards anything in the room. The red button atop this lever fires the beam. The lever to the left controls the position of the telescope, spinning it around the crystal. Positioning the lever in the middle holds the telescope in place, the "up" position spins it counterclockwise, while down spins it clockwise. Additionally, the telescopic laser can only be fired once per round.

It takes deft hands to control both the angle and position of the telescope. Any PC attempting to do so must first state their intentions clearly then roll a DC 13 Agility check. Example intentions and their consequences are as follows:

- **Angling the telescope to fire a beam at the crystal:** The single beam is refracted into four separate beams. If the roll is successful, 1d3 refracted beams hit a pod and hatch a beastman (determine using the table below), while any others angle up harmlessly towards the ceiling. Failing the roll, one beam is directed towards a randomly determined PC. The PC targeted must succeed a DC 15 Reflex save or be mutated, suffering 1 hp damage and permanent loss of 1d4 [2] Personality. If a PC is reduced to 0



Table 2-6: Random Proto-Beastmen Table
(Roll 3 times with repeats permitted)

Roll (1d3)	Type of Proto-Beastman
1	Rhino-head
2	Elephant-Man
3	Gorilla-body

The Pods: PCs peering into the pods can barely make out the distorted image of the horrid creatures moving within. The jelly-like viscera covering the top half of the pod cannot be easily cut open (DC 13 Strength check) and reseals within 2 rounds. The pods cannot be manipulated (e.g., broken away from the wall) without great physical force or magic.

BACKGROUND OF THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE FUSION CHAMBER

The process of transforming the cells of a living being is a complex web of phlogiston mathematics, which fortunately has been boiled down into a console of simple levers and dials. The full process involves a human strapped into the iron pod while an animal of some variety is chained to the platform nearby. The bronze telescope attached to the ceiling is etched with archaic symbols tapping it into the chaos plane and emits a pure ray of jaal (a pale green-grey beam, visibly wavy) into the crystal. The crystal, mined from the 9th dimension, not only serves to refract beams of light, but can house an infinite amount of energy, as well as the essence of living creatures. For campaign play, judges can entertain notions of allowing PCs to try to create beastmen. However, for tournament play, the PCs are unable to succeed without the proper rituals, and strapping oneself to the table or pod is ineffectual.

Using the console, the controller fragments the rays at the right angles, sapping the essence from the creatures on the platform into the human strapped into the pod. Once the subject is encased in the pod, the pod is automatically sent through a tube beneath the floor where it shortly reemerges within an opening along the wall. At that point another empty pod is tubed through the chamber, rising into the empty space at the center.

Personality they are transformed into a proto-beastman (chosen randomly from table below) and are considered a tournament fatality. Though the crystal refracts the light into four beams, only the automated mechanisms of the console can aim four beams precisely.

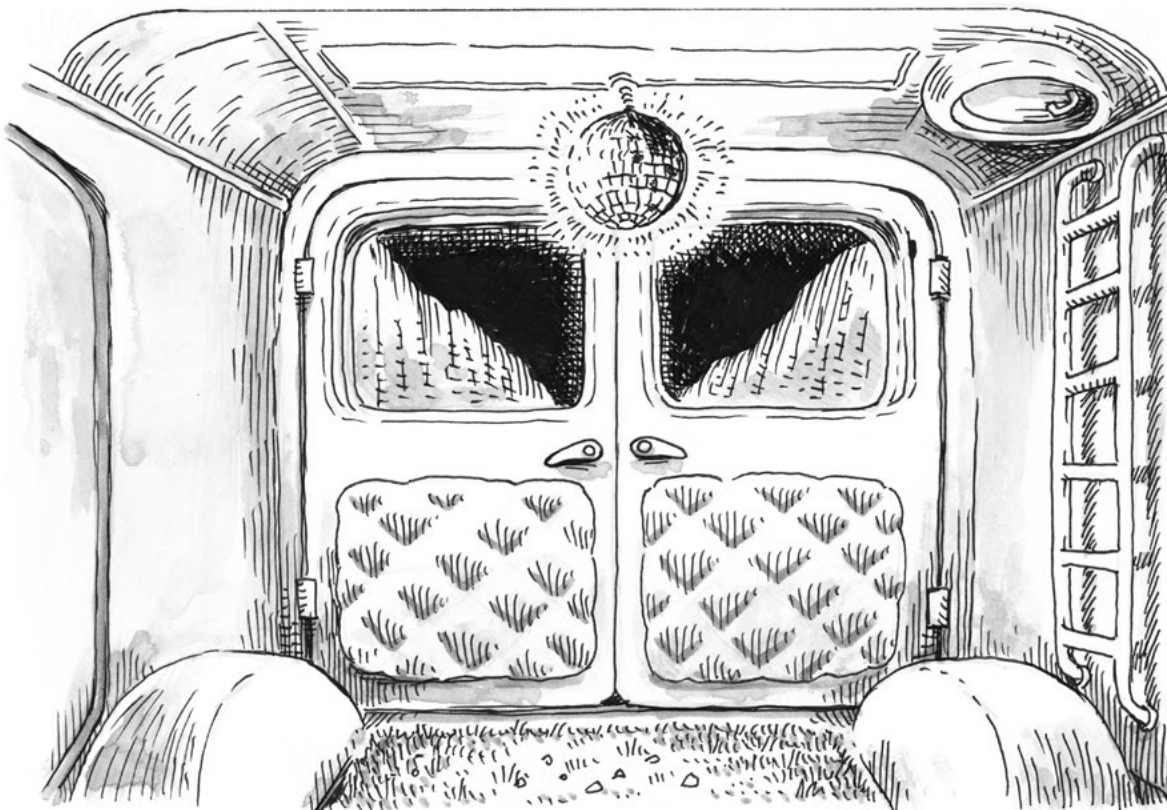
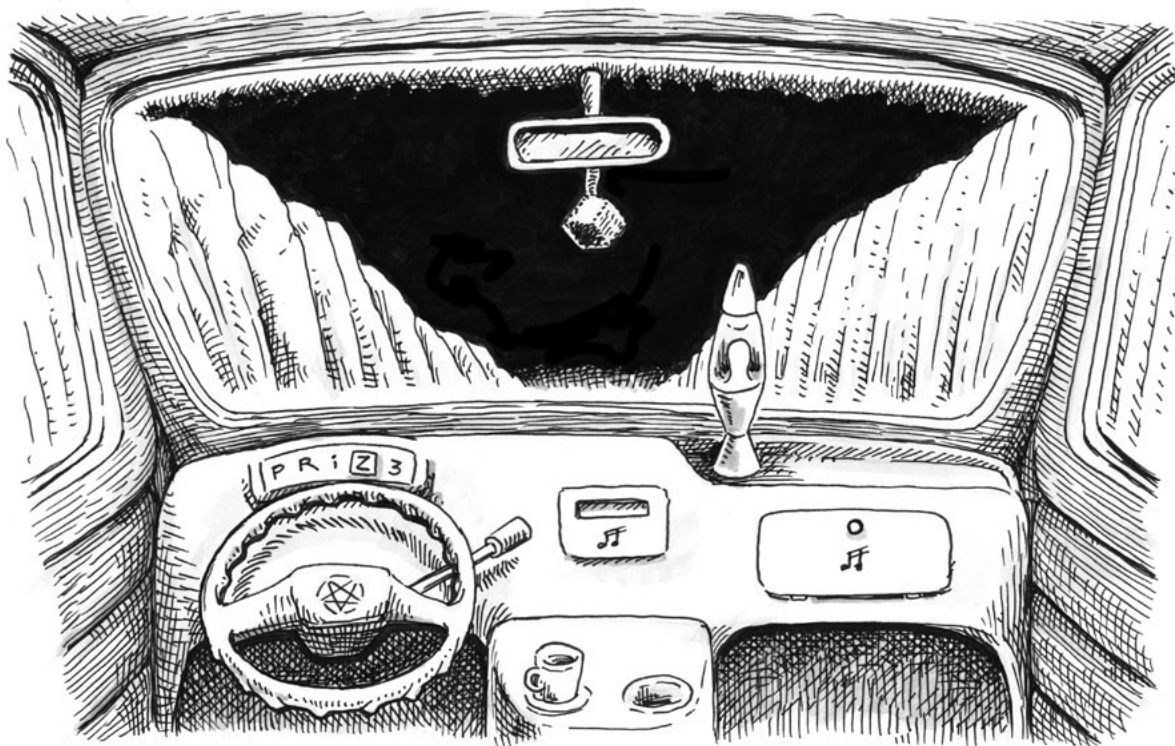
- Angling the telescope at a target (e.g., beastmen, pods, console): Ignoring the crystal and simply aiming the telescope at a target will cause damage instead of mutations. Succeeding on the DC 13 Agility check causes a single beam to hit its mark dealing 1d8 damage (player rolls). If a pod is hit it explodes, killing the monster within (the non-refracted beam has too much energy). See **Stopping the Hatching Process** above for what happens when the console is hit. On a failed Agility check, the beam misses its mark completely. The PC must make a Luck check; if failed, the PC nearest to the intended target takes 1d8 [4] damage.

In the center of the console, behind a pane of glass is a spinning hourglass filled with a strange black ichor. The hourglass measures the time between each automatic zapping of the crystal (4 rounds) and the subsequent release of another three proto-beastmen, see table below. If the telescope has been moved, due to PCs tampering with the levers, it automatically resets itself into the proper position. Destroying the hourglass does NOT stop the chamber's machinations, but actually forces the laser to randomly go off every 2d4 rounds (reroll after each blast).

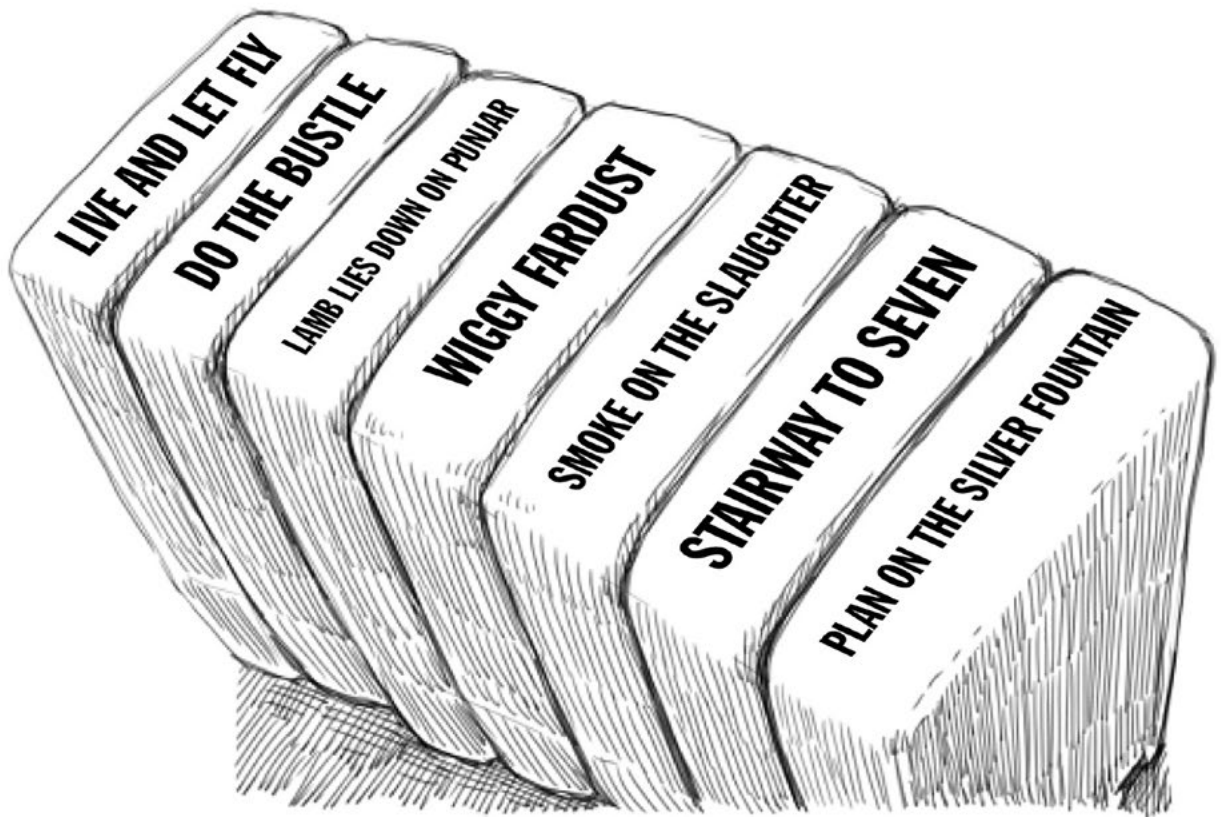


PLAYER HANDOUTS

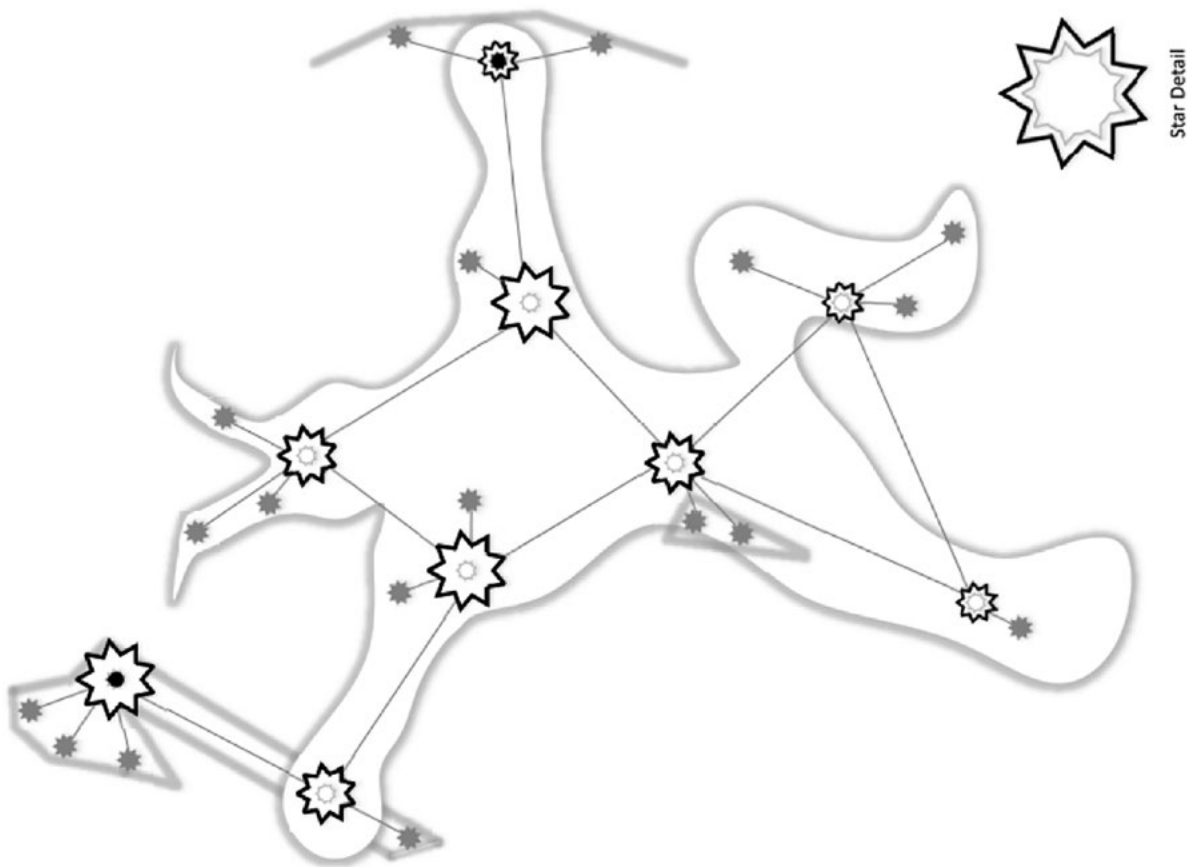
EVENT 2-1: VAN FRONT AND REAR INTERIOR HANDOUTS



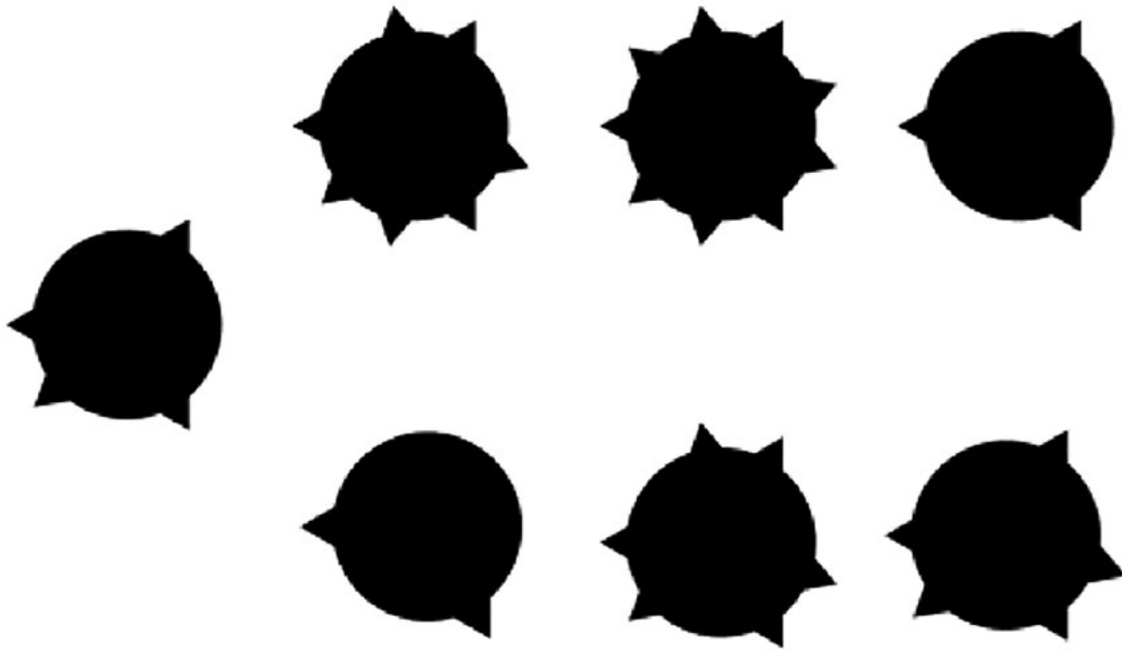
EVENT 2-1: VAN GLOVEBOX HANDOUT



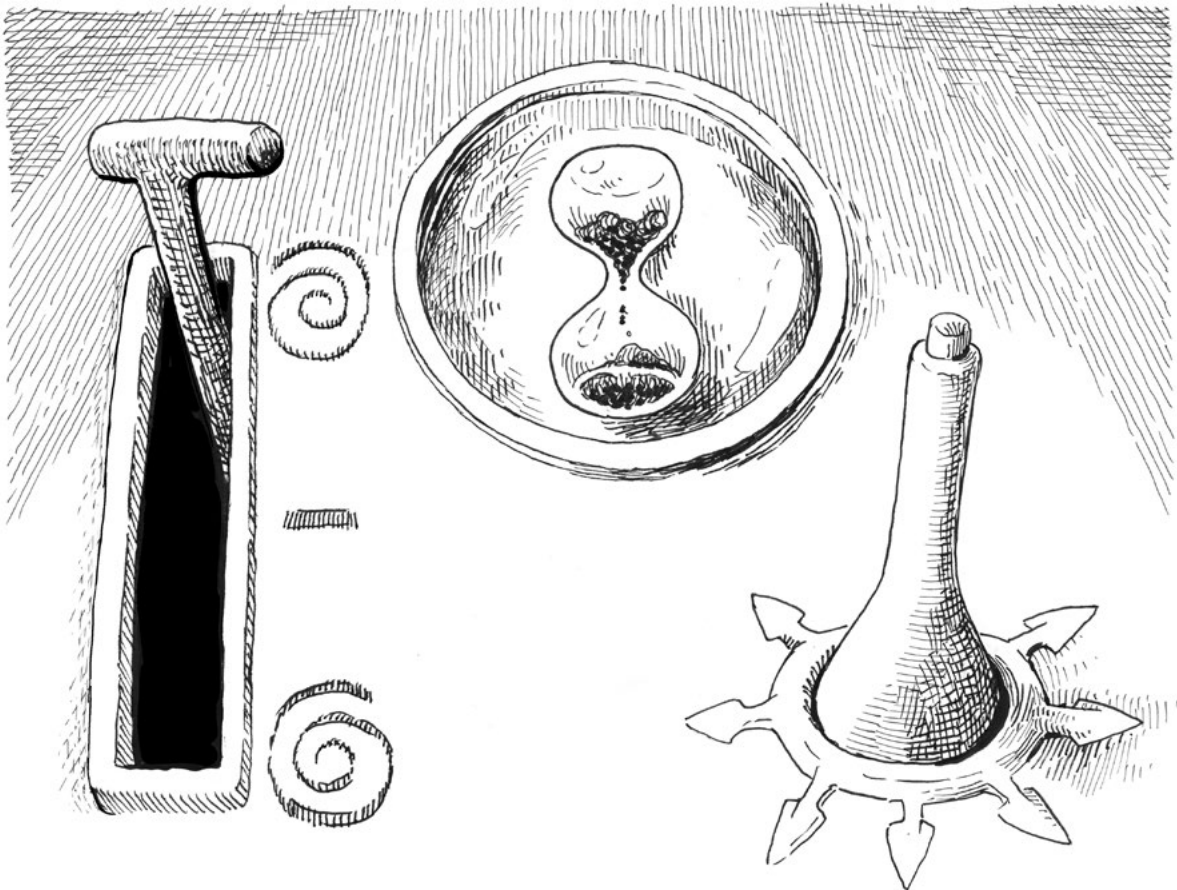
AREA 2-9: GROTTO OF THE STAR CHAMPION, HANDOUT A



AREA 2-9: GROTTO OF THE STAR CHAMPION, HANDOUT B



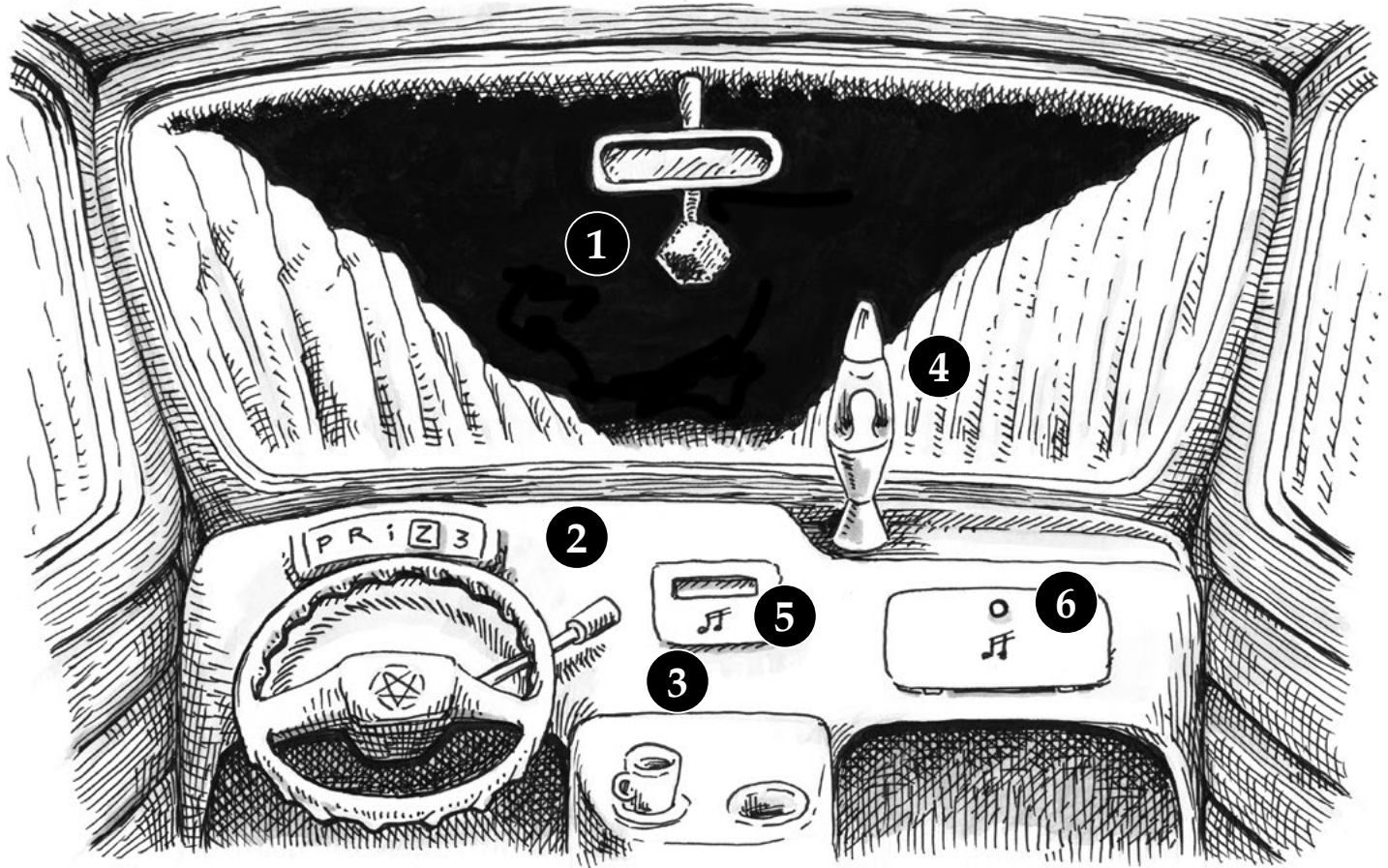
AREA 2-12: BEASTMEN FUSION CHAMBER HANDOUT



ROUND 2 MAPS AND JUDGE'S AIDS

EVENT 2-1: WIZARD VAN FRONT JUDGE'S REFERENCE

Judge's Key: Front View



1 Fluffy Cube: A PC of any class can spellburn to activate the cube and add to the phlogiston cannon's damage for its next attack (1 point spellburn = +1 damage).

2 Gear Shift (lever is stuck in 2nd gear): Requires a DC 16 *pick pockets* or Strength check to shift into 3rd gear. If 3rd gear is engaged, increase van's AC by +2.

3 Steaming Drink: If totally consumed, d24 on the next round's spellcheck or saving throw (whichever is first).

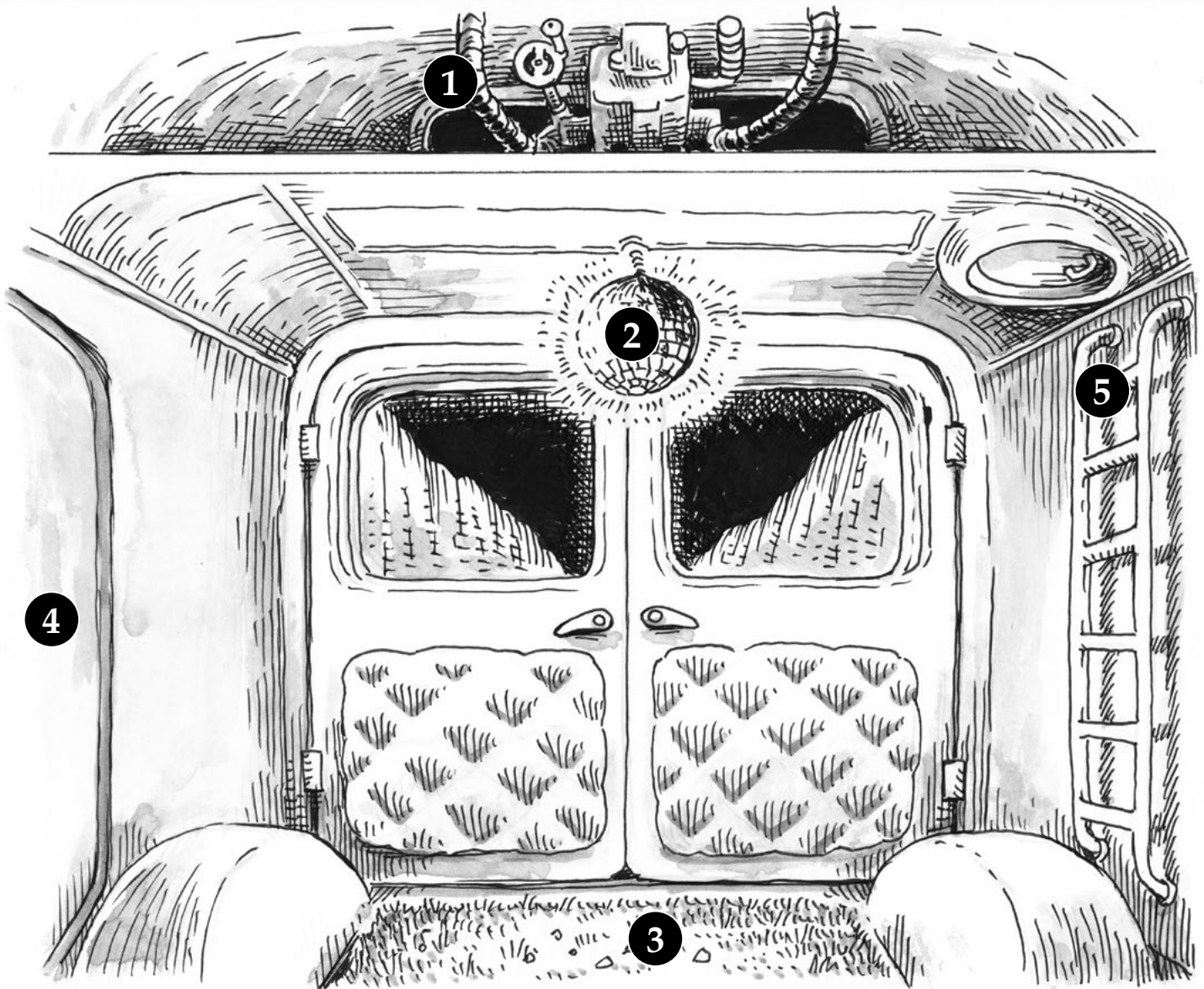
4 Lava Lamp: A simple flick of the switch lets the driver reroll one roll, but only once.

5 Music Player (describe as an 8-Track!): Requires a cartridge from the glove box.

6 Glove Box (locked): Requires a DC 10 *pick lock* check or DC 14 Strength check to force open. Contains music cartridges (describe as 8-track tapes). See Van Music Judge's Reference.

EVENT 2-1: WIZARD VAN REAR JUDGE'S REFERENCE

Judge's Key: Rear View



1 Phlogiston Cannon (in windowed crawlspace): +3 missile fire, 1d12 damage, range 500' (normal attack modifiers apply).

2 Mirrored Ball: Spending 1 action spinning ball will dazzle the dragon, suffering -2 penalty to its next attack.

3 Shag Rug (with dust and debris): Spending 1 action shaking out the rug will cause the debris to act as chaff, imposing a -4 penalty to the dragon's next attack.

4 Side Door

5 Ladder to Cannon Crawlspace

EVENT 2-1: VAN MUSIC JUDGE'S REFERENCE

Judge's Key

Live and Let Fly: +2 to missile attacks (Wings' "Live and Let Die")

Do the Bustle: +2 to Reflex saves (Van McCoy's "Do the Hustle")

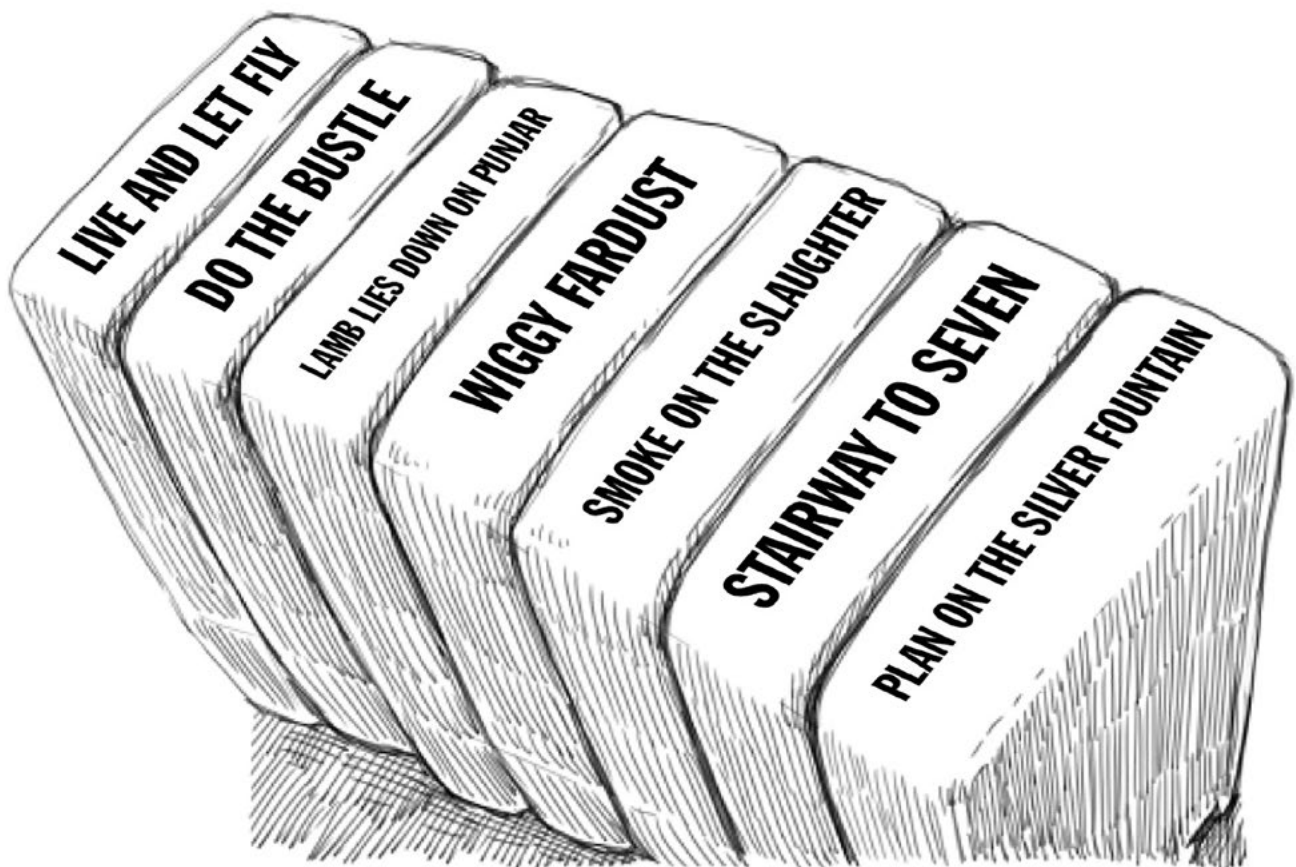
Lamb Lies Down on Punjar: Lamb's wool surrounds van, +5 hp to van for round played (Genesis' "Lamb Lies Down on Broadway")

Wiggy Fardust: +2 to spell checks (David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust")

Smoke on the Slaughter: +2 to damage dice (Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water")

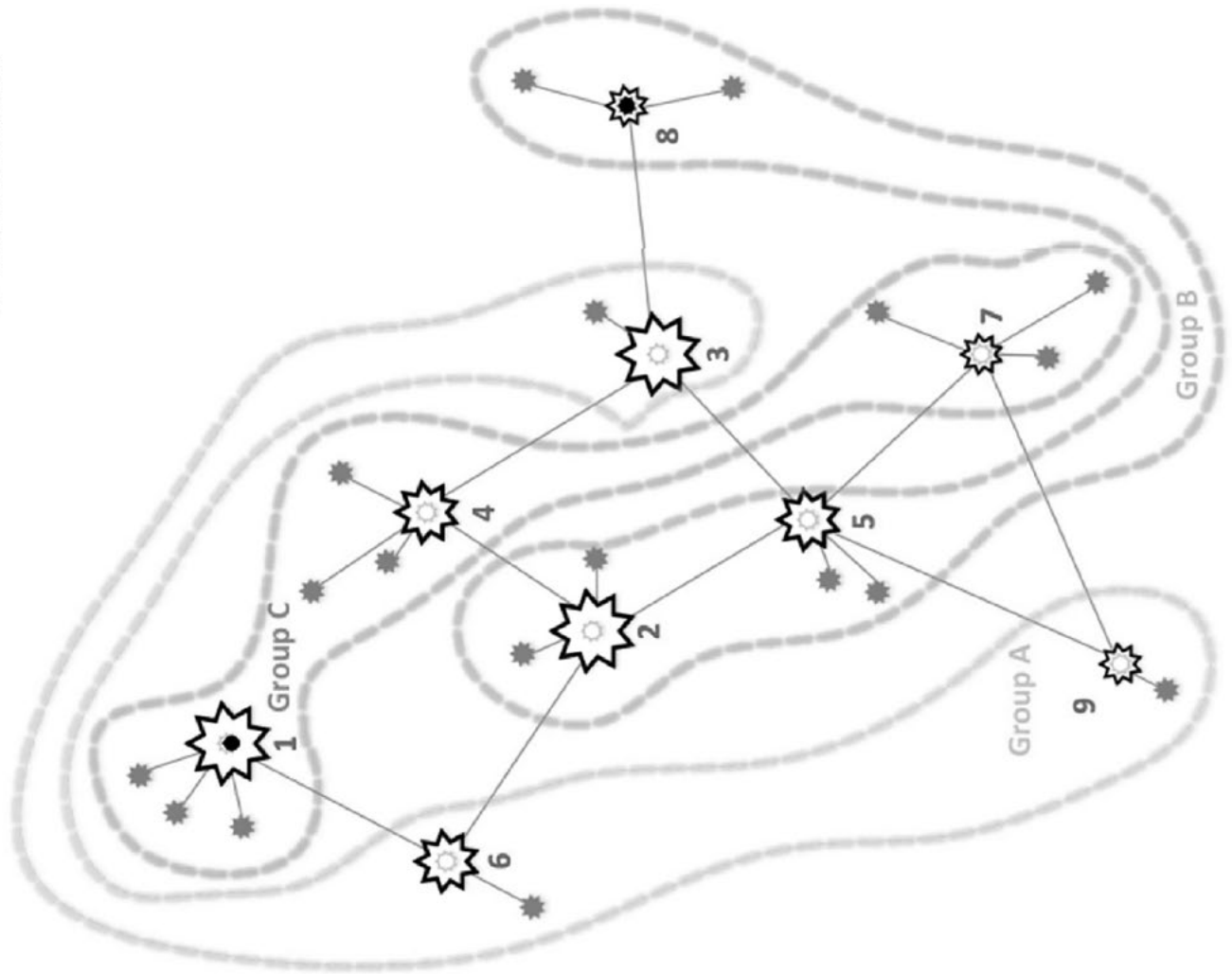
Stairway to Seven: Party has a bonus pool of 7 points they can distribute across as many dice rolls (or spend on a single roll) while the song is playing. Usable only 1 time. (Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven")

Plan on the Silver Fountain: All PCs heal 2 hp per round, up to their max hp. (Rainbow's "Man on the Silver Mountain")



AREA 2-9: CONSTELLATION JUDGE'S REFERENCE

X – Correct Disk Number



JUDGE HANDOUT A

RETURN TO THE STARLESS SEA



THE RETURN TO THE RETURN OF THE STARLESS SEA

Hail, Reavers! This year was Goodman Games' official return to Gen Con, and with that, the return of the Gen Con DCC RPG tournament! Speaking of "returns," this year's tournament, which was the largest in Goodman Games' history (198 players!), was *Return to the Starless Sea*. Those of you with good memories will recall that two years ago in the year that shall not be named, we ran an online version of this tournament for Bride of Cyclops Con. But this year we ran it at a real table, with real players and real dice... and even a real wizard van! And we gamed on the floor of Lucas Oil Stadium!

Return to the Starless Sea differentiates itself from previous tournaments by having a zero-level funnel in round 1 and a 1st level adventure in round 2. There were five separate flights of the round 1 funnel, each slightly different from the other. The top team from each of these five flights advanced to the final round, round 2. The funnel was designed especially for new players, giving them similar chances of advancement as experienced reavers. And we had a lot of new players. In fact, our final round's second place team, "The Live Stock," had players new to DCC. Awesome!

The first round begins long after the adventure *Sailors on the Starless Sea*. The keep has rebuilt itself and is repopulated with even deadlier adversaries. Now, a peasant army surrounds it, ready to end the threat once again. The players begin with 20 PCs but they can draw from a deck of an additional 30, which represents the gongfarmer horde surging behind them. This helps ensure that everyone can play round one for the full duration; indeed, only one team managed a "true" TPK, where each player ran out of PCs with no more replacements in the deck.

Even though the funnel format places a PC's odds of survival mostly in rolls of the dice, those players who could tap into "gongfarmer ingenuity" managed to thrive where others faltered. Where some PCs trusted an unmodified Luck roll to get them through an animated wall's chomping maw, others improved their chances by propping that maw open with miscellaneous equipment and farm animals. (When you're invading a chaos keep, do you really need that spyglass?) Where some PCs tried to go toe-to-beak with a vorpal chicken of Chaos, others picked up severed heads from the ground and held them next to their own, giving the perplexed poultry a good chance of pecking the wrong target. Where some tried to strike a soul-absorbing jewel by slogging their way up a ziggurat's stairway mosh-pit-packed with meltmen, others shot at the jewel with slings and bows, burning Luck to increase damage. (Pro move!) Where some took scoring penalties for recovering PCs from the gongfarmer horde, others bravely searched worm tunnels and rescued villagers to replenish their ranks. One group even followed winged beastman to their lair and defeated their leader, gaining his power-

ful mace of skulls! Finally, where some PCs chose to trudge down a crater fraught with obstacles, one PC forced a winged beastman to fly them to the bottom.

Round 1 ended with the PCs discovering that despite their hard-won victories, they were ultimately doomed. However, as they prepared to meet their end, they were rescued by a wizard van piloted by the Purple Sorcerer! He told them that the only way to finish their task is to stop it from beginning; the PCs joined him, and round 1 ended.

Round 2 began with the sorcerer using the wizard van to time-travel to the era **before** *Sailors on the Starless Sea*, when the keep is under construction and the leviathan is... smaller. This adventure is in the typical tournament style, with a lot more options and fewer constraints. Unlike the funnel, each player gets only one first level PC (all tables have the same five PCs). When that PC dies, the player sounds the Doom Gong and is eliminated.

The Purple Sorcerer quickly abandoned the PCs when a dragon attacked the wizard van, leaving the PCs to pilot the van and figure out how to use it to their advantage. One team, "Take Off Every Ziggurat" (our third-place finalists), actually played their round inside our own wizard van parked on the stadium floor. Amazing!

Who puts a first level party up against a dragon? We do! And two of the five teams, the first-place champions "I Haven't Had Enough Coffee for This!" and our van-based players "Take Off Every Ziggurat," managed to defeat the beast! The others crash-landed the van and survived.

This round had plenty of highs and lows, but even the lows were entertaining. One PC wiped himself out of all existence and memory (Marty McFly style) by accidentally killing a direct-line ancestor. If you find yourself in the distant past fighting someone who looks a bit like you and is from the same region as you, it might be prudent to apply subdual damage. Just sayin'. Two teams suffered TPKs by being ambushed by soldiers who followed them into the complex. Always secure that dungeon entrance, folks! On the other hand, we saw brilliant uses of *holy sanctuary* to both prevent a pesky quasit (you know the one) from getting help, and to enable safe passage past the leviathan. And, for the first time, we saw our devious puzzle finally get solved! Kudos to our second-place team, "The Live Stock."

Perhaps the most amazing part of the round was watching our champions, "I Haven't Had Enough Coffee for This!" conquer the finale. The cleric called on Cthulhu for divine intervention to wind back time and reroll initiative for their fallen thief, successfully getting him back in action. As the rest of his party was struck down, this thief, Cut, managed a natural 20 to sneakily climb up behind Molan the Chaos Lord.

Because of his amazing roll to get behind Molan, we granted him a +1d bonus to his backstab die, and he rolled a natural 24! He critted his backstab! Killing Molan mid-ritual was the primary goal of the adventure, and Cut did it just before Molan's brother, the dreaded Felan, threw his axe Boomerclawer to mortally wound the thief. As Cut lay dying, he knew that his team had stopped the ritual and prevented the events of both

round 1 and *Sailors of the Starless Sea* from ever happening. That's a better ending than *Rogue One*!

Congratulations and extreme gratitude to all our tournament players and judges. We can't wait to roll dice with you next year!



GEN CON 2022 TOURNAMENT WINNERS

Left to right: (back row) Tom Colley, Chris Bissette, Roger Penny, Mike Kenyon, Jan Pierskalla; (front row) Judge Tim Deschene



THE PHLOGISTONIC EYE SEES ALL!



Behold! Once again it is time for the unrelenting gaze of the Phlogiston Eye to peer across the multiverse. It perceives all, knows all! This time it glares at the wretched mortals which other pathetic souls have deemed worthy of accolades in this pitiless multiverse...

Goodman Games closed out 2023 with their annual Goodie Awards, a star-studded (well, RPG industry stars, anyway) award show that recognizes the contributions made by the fans to the Goodman Games' community. Although many were rightfully nominated and honored, only eight went home with medals acknowledging their contributions to our growing gaming scene.

NOMINEES

Shane "Judge Kablooeey" Madgett

Jason Daniel

Richard Gould

Gilbert Isla

Christian Ovsenik, Steve Barnett, and Greg Burchell

Cory Welch

Eric Daum

Nick Baran

Levi Combs

Brian Shutter

Bruce Cunnington

Ian Kelley

Troy Tucker

Spencer Ellsworth

Philippe Lepinard

Devin Watkins

Daniel J. Bishop

Trevor Stamper & Ed Stanek

Stefan Surratt

HONOREES

Ryan Moore

Tim Deschene

Alex Kurowski

Loz the Eye-Wizard

Alex Coggon

Tom Colley

Louis ("Lou") Hoefer

Ross Jackson

Jessica McDevitt

Aaron Kreader

Jim Kitchen

MEDALISTS

Casey Coyle

Mihailo Tesic

Lisa Doyle

Cory Gahsman (DM Cojo)

Jim Meyers

Christopher Willett

Jeremy Shuman

Aaron Koelman

This year's Goodie Awards was especially poignant for the Goodman Games community. Medalist Aaron Koelman lost his battle to cancer a week after we awarded him his medal. Aaron, a loving husband and father, and a stalwart of the DCC RPG community, will be greatly missed by all who knew him and live on in our memories.

The Phlogiston Eye often stares into the strange corners of the multiverse, witnessing things undreamt of by god and mortal. Yet, even it is known to shed a tear or two when confronted by acts of selflessness. The Phlogiston Eye shall spare its dread gaze on these fine souls...for now.

The Phlogiston Eye sees all, knows all! Keep your own eyes open and await its next return in future Dungeon Crawl Classics adventures!

Casey Coyle



Jim Meyers



Mihailo Tesic



Christopher Willett



Lisa Doyle



Jeremy Shuman



Cory Gahsman



Aaron Koelman



We're with the band.

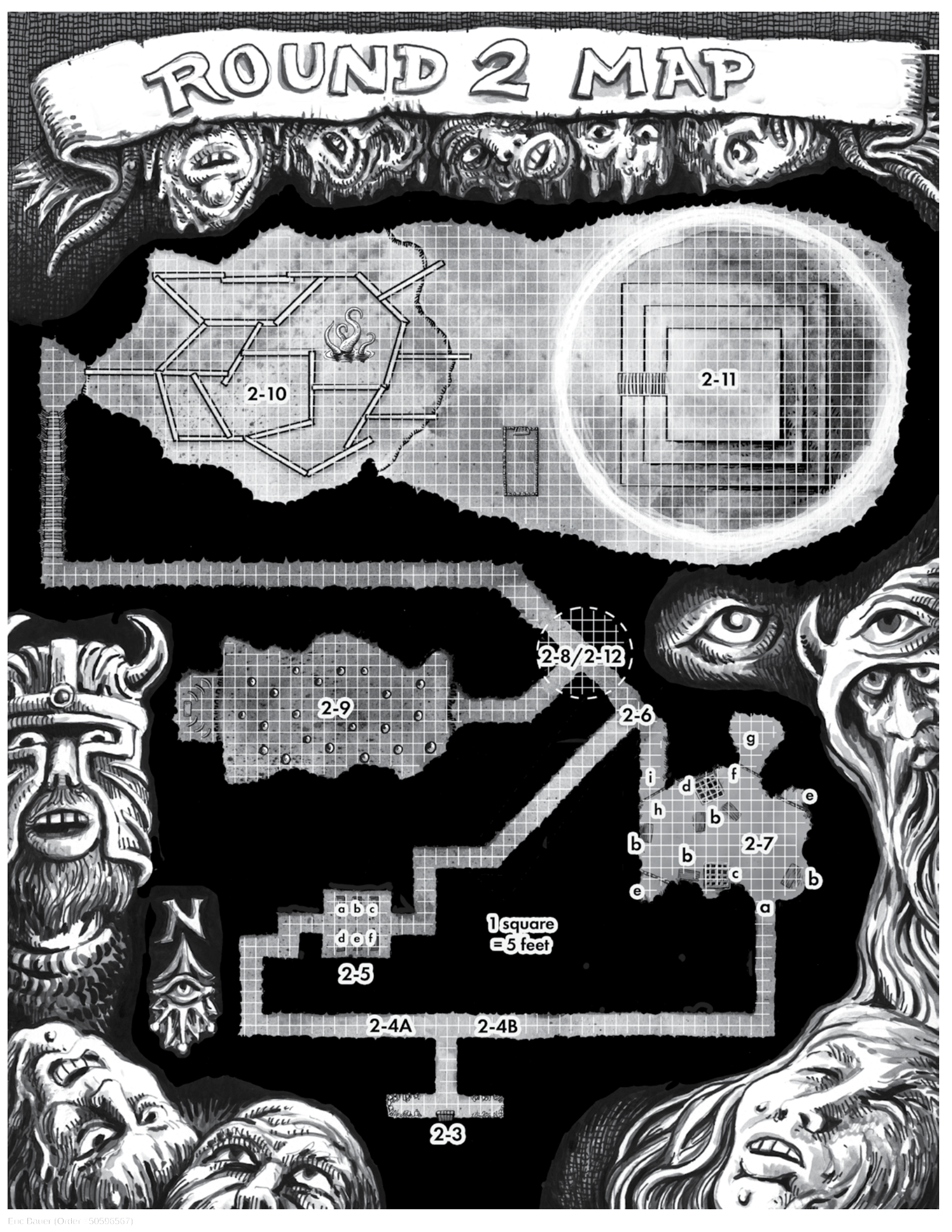


The band of adventurers, that is. Join us in the pages of Dungeon Crawl Classics adventure modules. Stand-alone, world-neutral, all new, and inspired by Appendix N. Learn more at www.goodman-games.com.



DCC RPG

ROUND 2 MAP



ROUND 2 MAP

2-10

2-11

2-8/2-12

2-9

2-6

2-7

2-5

1 square
= 5 feet

2-4A

2-4B

2-3

N

a b c
d e f

g
i d f
h b
b b c
e a

DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS®

RETURN TO THE STARLESS SEA

DCC #104: A LEVEL 0 ADVENTURE
BY TERRY OLSON & TEAM

Long ago, a horde of lowly gongfarmers entered the Chaos Lords' keep to end an ominous threat, but left their task unfinished. Now, a new cohort of would-be adventurers must complete what was left undone. To do so, they must breach the murderous walls of the Screaming Keep, stop a soul-stealing incantation, defeat terrible vine horrors, and make their way to the ziggurat at the heart of the Chaos Crater!

But their trials don't end there. These lowly gongfarmers, now newly minted heroes, have to travel back in time to stop the nefarious Chaos Lords' plans before they can even begin, facing off against dragons, proto-beastmen, and a "baby" leviathan hungry for their souls.

Return to the Starless Sea takes the PCs from 0 level to level 1 in a fast-paced journey back to where it all began. Originally run as the 2022 Gen Con tournament, *Return to the Starless Sea* is the perfect way to start a new DCC RPG campaign. Just don't inadvertently kill any of your ancestors in the process!

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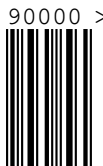


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