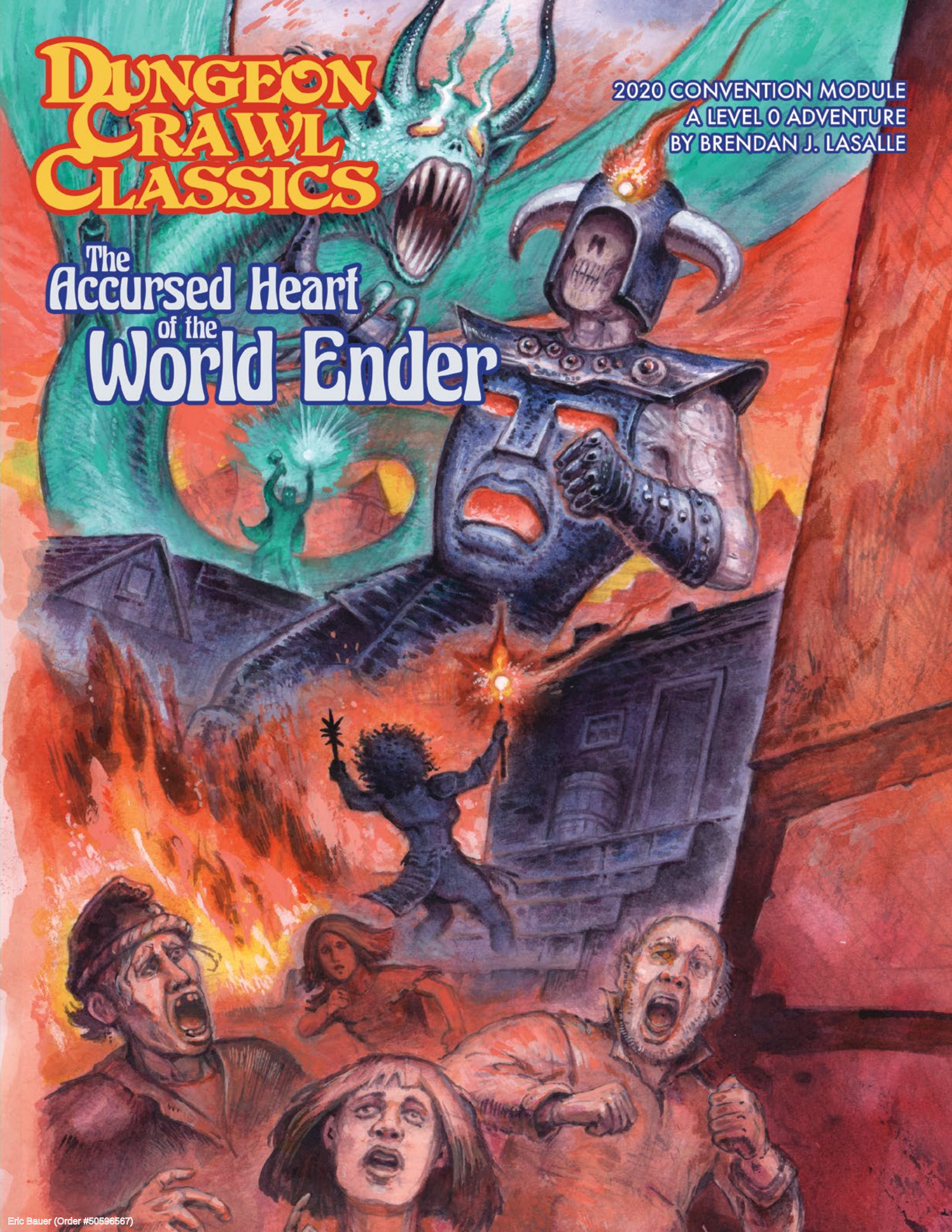
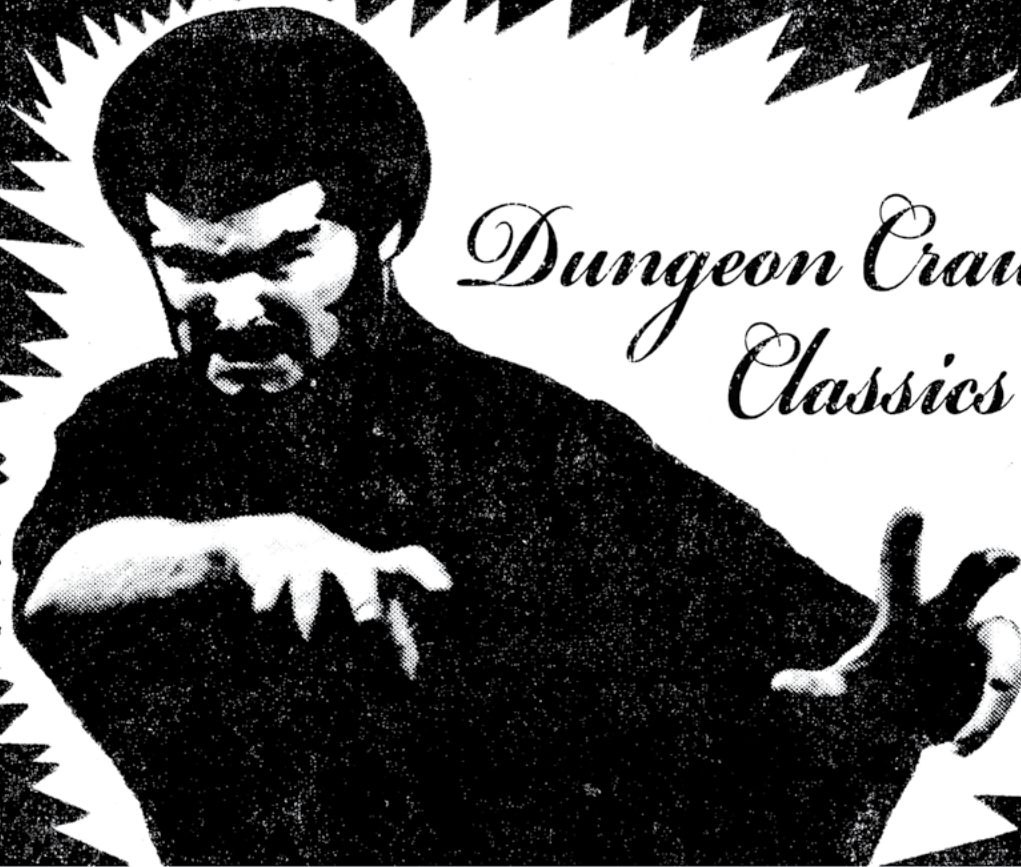


DUNGEON CRAWL CLASSICS

The Accursed Heart of the World Ender

2020 CONVENTION MODULE
A LEVEL 0 ADVENTURE
BY BRENDAN J. LASALLE





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The Accursed Heart of the World Ender

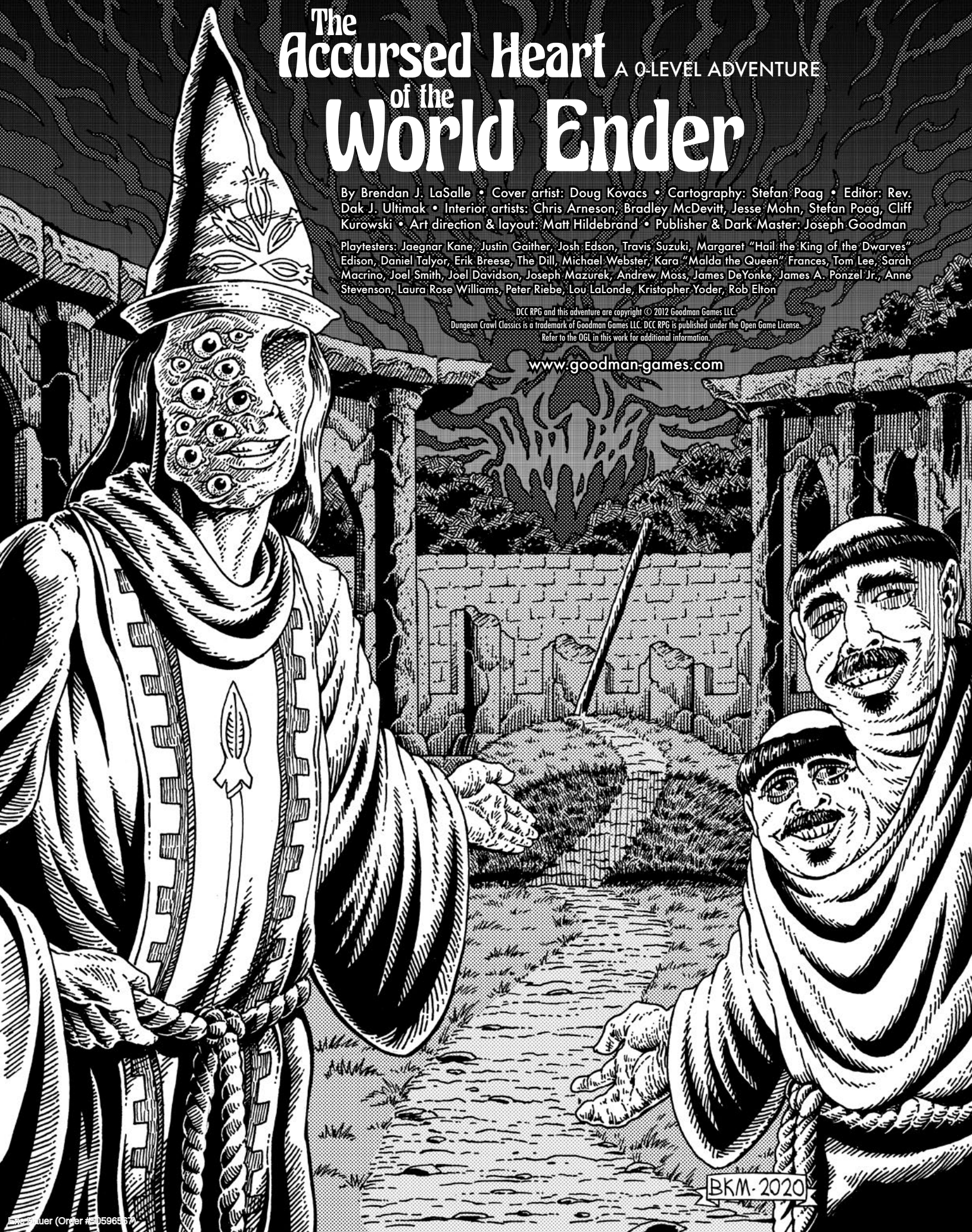
A 0-LEVEL ADVENTURE

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INTRODUCTION



Remember the good old days, when adventurers were running scared, NPCs were there to murder you, and the finale of every dungeon was the chaos lord on the 666th level? These are the good old days! *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG adventures don't waste your time with humdrum scenarios, boilerplate campaign settings, or NPCs who want you to kill ten shadow cats. Each adventure is 100% good, solid *Dungeon Crawl Classics* with monsters you have never seen before, traps that spare the flesh but destroy the soul, and the secret portals that lead to a thousand insane worlds.

The Accursed Heart of the World Ender is a funnel adventure designed for a group of level zero characters. At first it seems that the characters may hold the answer to an ancient prophesy. However, they find that all was illusion, and instead of becoming kings, and uniting the land, they are forced to deal with a horrifically powerful enemy bent on the death of the universe. They have to discover the creature's weakness and exploit it to destroy it and save the world from utter destruction.

BACKGROUND



In an age before the ascendancy of man the world was nearly destroyed when an infernal fiend, the demon exile known as Gorflagrator – permanently expelled from Pandemonium by the demon queen Kol – decided to destroy the world. A legion of giants rose up to defeat him, and the demon was finally undone by the power of the Seven-Tree Spear – a magical weapon gifted by the First Gods – that pierced the demon's foul heart, the horrifying creature's only vulnerability.

Undone but not destroyed, the divine magic of the Seven-Tree Spear fought against the monstrous power of Gorflagrator and reached stalemate. The demon was powerless and inert only as long as the spear remained in its heart. The god's themselves cursed the spear to punish would-be thieves with physical mutation. Then the giants placed a powerful ward on the spear so that it could never be removed.

Gorflagrator would not be so easily finished, and his never-waning power raveled the giants' ward ever so slightly so that the spear could be removed. But, only by an individual of the same bloodline of the giants' slaves that actually buried the creature, a very early form of human, barely upright.

The forces arrayed against the creature buried him deep in the earth to prevent his return, then built a mighty keep, and finally a city on the surface – far above the interred creature.

Gorflagrator's return was first carefully guarded against, then disregarded as an impossibility, then finally forgotten as time did its unerring work. The city and keep fell, and the torpid creature – buffeted by the changes in the earth over geologic time – eventually rose so close to the surface that he rested unearthed upon the ground. Then over time became a hill with only the shaft of spear protruding into the air.

The spear became the subject of local legend. Storytellers claimed that whoever could draw it from the ground would inherit great wealth and power. Thus, people traveled to the spear to test their worth, but all instead found magical disfigurement. None knew that dozens of times over the ages the world came within a handbreadth of total destruction.

In recent generations, the legend of the spear developed another false association. A nearby kingdom fell to war, and the royal bloodline went underground. Storytellers combined the two tales, now claiming that only one of the true bloodline of the king could ever draw the spear from the earth and retake the kingdom from the squabbling warlords who now ruled there. A misguided belief system sprung up around this oft-distorted tale, and true believers built a magnificent temple around the 'hill of the spear.' The Temple of the Sacred Bloodline became the terminus of a septennial pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is what has drawn forth our heroes, eager to claim the crown. The so-called lore keepers say that the gods themselves await the return of the royal families true line, and shall grant supernatural power and magical allies to support their return to power and primacy.

The warlords that now control the region are obviously dead set against the pilgrimage, an open act of rebellion that takes much needed workers out of the chain of production the illegitimate despots need to supply their armies, the only thing that stands between themselves and violent and just deposition. While the general feeling amongst the warlords is that the legend of the spear is very likely superstitious nonsense, on the off chance that the stories are true none of the warlords are looking forward to the return of a wrathful king and their avenging host. Every year the warlords set double patrols against the pilgrims, enacting severe discipline on those attempting to sneak away to join the other bloodline hopefuls.

ENTER THE DEMON



When the final pilgrim draws forth the spear, Gorflagrator rises from the earth to begin his destruction of the world. His full power won't return for 24 hours, but he is still deadly.

Gorflagrator is ego-maniacal, ultra-violent, vengeful, a compulsive breaker of oaths, addicted to ash and the cries of mourners, and mad from its eons of imprisonment in the earth. Pain, death, and destruction are his entire *raison d'être* – his only plan is to destroy the world, then the Universe, then the Multiverse, then himself, laughing all the while. However, the beast is in no hurry now that it believes its heart, and therefore his own existence, is safe. He wants to play. He will destroy all those who physically oppose him, but won't pursue fleeing characters until he realizes that his heart is in extreme danger. When the PCs flee, he turns his attention to the compound and the templars, only regaining interest in them once he realizes the actual threat.

In game: when the PCs flee Gorflagrator, whether or not the servant of Akspythyn is in play, the demon doesn't catch up to them until they reach the area 3-1, when he begins to understand that these pitiful nothings have a chance of ending his life.

ADVENTURE FLOW

This adventure is written fairly linearly, with the major action looking like this:

- arrival at the temple
- mutations while attempting to draw the spear
- demon rises, fights the PCs
- flee to capture the heart
- encounter trouble as they follow the blood trail
- battle the heart and hand

The linear nature is intentional and meant to allow the judge to run the adventure in a single session. However, the judge shouldn't feel as they must be tied to the flow of the story as presented. If your players' take the adventure in a different direction, don't feel as if you must force them to adhere to the story as presented. If they come up with variant solutions to the problem that seem feasible, allow them to take the story wherever it goes, using your improv skills to deal with whatever changes they bring.

END OF THE WORLD?



It's not out of the question that the characters could fail, and the world could fall to Gorflagrator's terror. If the PCs don't destroy the heart and the creature prevails, the beast grows in power before the great forces needed to destroy have time to array themselves, and the world dies, despoil by fire and unholy might.

We recommend you let it happen. "Go then, there are other worlds than these."

INVOLVING THE PLAYERS



The characters are all from a collection of disarrayed towns and villages that was once a powerful kingdom. A terrible war brought down the royal line, and any survivors fled and went underground.

All their life the PCs heard stories about The Pilgrimage. Every seven years, templars in disguise wander through the community, tapping young people as possibilities for the next in the bloodline. The templars' guidelines for choosing individuals who might be true bloodline of the lost royal family are a gallimaufry of institutional bias, questionable clues found in barely understood ancient texts, edicts from the high priests of the Temple of the Sacred Bloodline, images from dreams, and rank superstition. The process may as well be random, and it doesn't exclude dwarves, elves, or halflings (unless it better suites your campaign to do so), as none now remember anything about the old bloodline.

Each character has been tapped as a possible bloodline descendant of the royal family. They are asked to join the pilgrimage, which is kept secret and safe from the warlords that would put an end to it by a relay of safe houses run by true believers. Accepting the pilgrimage is the first test—any who would turn their back on their duty to restore the monarchy could never have sprung from the royal bloodline! The pilgrims are all to leave on the same night, sneaking past sentries who know to look for young people carrying all of their possessions to the east.

The first stop is a farmhouse far to the east, where the PCs all meet for the first time. The keepers of the farmhouse know only the location of the very next stop on the pilgrimage, and the keepers of that place in turn only know the location of the next stop, and so on. The characters travel a total of two weeks to get to their destination, traveling at night between secret destinations.

AREA 1: THE TEMPLE OF THE SACRED BLOODLINE

When the characters arrive at the valley of the temple:

After two arduous weeks of night travel you arrive at the temple at dawn, exhausted and hungry. From here they can look down and see a mighty forest, a ridge of foothills dotted with caves to the west, and the walled Temple of the Sacred Bloodline.

The temple is a buttressed gothic structure, forty feet high, covered in pictorial stained glass. The window art depicts scenes showing generic representations of the king and queen that the faithful believe shall someday come—the king victorious on the battlefield, the queen comforting the poor, the king rebuilding the great city, etc. A 12' tall stone wall covered in bold relief sculptures of similar themes surrounds the structure, with reinforced wooden gates in front.

The stacked stone walls are fairly easy to climb (DC 12 from the outside, 13 from the inside). As the PCs approach the gates, bells begin to ring in the structure as the faithful celebrate the arrival of the pilgrims.

There are 37 templars plus the Grand Wazir that live in the temple, and a dozen working families—farmers, woodcutters, glassblowers, etc.—that live in cabins nearby that support the temple. Everything is paid for by a secret network of aristocrats, who plan to help restore the monarchy, reinforcing the aristocratic status quo.

Area 1-1—Temple Gates: *Two humanoids in bilious white robes flank the gate. They smile and call "Hail, Pilgrims!," bowing deeply as you approach. They seem to be humans, but not completely so. The first templar has immensely long legs and must squat to look the pilgrims in the eye. The other has the head of a brachycephalic cat, but is otherwise recognizably human.*

If asked about their physical oddities, the templars assure the them that all shall be revealed in time.

The templars open the gates and bring the pilgrims to meet with Grand Wazir Palmot.

Templars (2): Init +0; Atk staff +0 melee (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d4; hp 3 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP mutation (effects may vary); SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +1; AL L.

The templars are all former pilgrims who attempted to draw the spear from the mounds, and had their physical forms altered by the curse upon the weapon. There are a total of 37 templars plus Grand Wazir Palmot living in and around the temple. Every pilgrim that attempts to draw the spear is invited to stay at the temple, but many leave to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Each templar has a mutation that may confer special abilities. Emnit the cat-faced templar has no special abilities. Wylla the long-legged templar can briefly stand all the way upright and be nearly 12' tall, and can run at 40' for short bursts—her legs are extremely long but not proportionally strong enough for their size.

Area 1-2—The Courtyard: *As the gates open, you see two lines of templars creating a path for you as you approach. Nearly all of them seem to have some supernatural physical oddity – one has two heads, another has bright blue hair, a third has multiple coin-sized holes through their body that you can clearly see light passing through them, and so on. As you enter, they throw purple flower petals in your path and begin to sing a song of hope and thanks. Beyond them you can see into the courtyard of the temple – the temple itself looms over all but there are several smaller out-buildings. To your right are animal pens along the wall.*

The templars finish their song, and one – an otherwise normal woman with ivy leaves in place of hair and eyebrows – says “Welcome, pilgrims, and thank you for your courage. Warm welcome to all and hail to thee who would be the new monarch that will deliver us from anarchy and despair. I know you are weary and must have many questions. Follow me to the Sacred Grove – the Grand Wazir awaits.

The characters are taken to Grand Wazir Palmot, who awaits them in the Sacred Grove (area 1-3).

The animal pens are home to three horses, a few goats, and many, many chickens. If the PCs arrive with any animals, they are housed here for the duration of their stay (that could be the new queen's hen!).

Most of the interior buildings are simply sheds where tools and supplies are stored, but a few key ones are marked on the map. If the PCs go exploring through these, they find mutant templars doing work who are happy to talk with the pilgrims. There are no armor and weapons other than staves to be found but PCs can always scrounge food, animal feed, horse tack, white robes, soap, and salt.

Area 1-3—The Sacred Grove: *This is a cultivated patch of greenery within the temple walls. There are several dozen slender trees, a circle of benches, a small pond where colorful fish swim about, and a small pulpit. A man awaits you, draped in the sweeping white robes of a templar and wearing a tall blue hat. The figure has no right eye, but the entire left side of his head is covered in a cluster of small eyes, all of which track you as you approach. “Welcome, friends. Sit and be rested,” he says.*

The Grand Wazir is a former pilgrim in his 50's. He asks the templar with the ivy-leaf hair to bring refreshments for the pilgrims, then asks the group to sit.

Palmot explains the situation to the pilgrims: the ceremony shall begin at dawn three days hence. The pilgrims shall be arranged in accordance with ancient and exacting traditions, and each shall attempt to draw forth the spear, and whoever successfully does so shall be declared the rightful monarch, be they man or woman, elf, halfling, dwarf, or human. The Wazir explains that those failing to draw the spear shall suffer the curse, and have their bodies or minds transformed in some way. These unfortunate pilgrims shall be allowed to join the temple or leave as they choose, but must first swear to all the gods never to reveal the location of the temple.

Palmot will answer any questions to the best of his ability with deference and respect.

The characters spend three days in the compound, sleeping in the longhouse and receiving instruction in the grove. They are well fed, bathed, groomed, and in all ways treated like potential royalty. Palmot leads them in prayer and meditation every day, and gives intensive instruction on the foundations of wise and fair leadership, history of the region, religion, and local heraldry. The judge might give otherwise untrained PCs a bonus to skill checks involving these subjects, perhaps a d12 or d14 when otherwise untrained.

Three days later the PCs are brought to the Temple of the Sacred Bloodline at dawn.

Area 1-4—The Temple of the Sacred Bloodline: The characters are not invited into the temple until the morning of the ceremony.

The interior of the temple is as ornate as the outside. The interior is all one vast space, built around a natural hill. The floors are grass, save for a worn path that leads to a wooden shaft protruding from the hill. The stained glass windows are artfully set so that the sunlight at dawn becomes multiple shafts of colored light, all centered on the shaft. On the far south end of the hall is an altar, styled to look like a miniature castle, complete with towers, crenelations, and arrow slits.

If a character goes behind the altar, one can see that it has several shelves holding sacred items: a silver dagger, two vials of holy water, an illuminated scripture on a velum scroll on two rods, and a second ancient scroll of animal hide. The scripture is the myth of the compiled legends surrounding the lost royal bloodline, the spear, and promise of the return of the monarchy.

The ancient animal hide scroll appears to have a brief invocation in the common tongue inscribed upon it. Palmot and his acolytes discovered it in the alter some weeks back and haven't opened it, taking it as a sign that the lost bloodline will return with this pilgrimage. They intend to hand it to scion of the lost bloodline when they appear, supposing that it is some qualifier of divine right or other. In actuality it was snuck in by forces opposed to Gorflagrator. If the animal hide scroll is read aloud after Gorflagrator returns, it summons the extra-planar Servant of Akspythyn, which attempts to hold the demon long enough for the PCs to get a head start on destroying the heart (see below).

Area 1: The Temple of the Sacred Bloodline

Animal pen 1-1

Dormitory 1-2

Mound and spear 1-4

Altar 1-3

Kitchen

1 square = 10 feet

SBP

AREA 1: THE TEMPLE OF THE SACRED BLOODLINE

Animal pen

1-1

1-2

1-3

1-4

Mound and spear

Altar

Kitchen

Dormitory

1 square = 10 feet

SBP

AREA 1: THE TEMPLE OF THE SACRED BLOODLINE

Dormitory

Kitchen

Altar

Mound and spear.

Animal pen

1-4

1-2

1-1

1-3

1 square
= 10 feet

SBP

THE CEREMONY

The ceremony begins at dawn. The templars chant quietly and ring tiny hand-chimes while Grand Wazir Palmot calls them one at a time to draw forth the spear. The characters are arranged to attempt drawing the spear by ancient and exacting regulations, which includes their Birth Auger, height, eye color, hand span, and the numerology of their name.

In game: have the players roll a Luck check for each character. The character that fails this check by the most is the last in line. Have the players take turns rolling for the results of their checks.

All attempts to draw the spear fail before the last character's attempt. Failure to remove the stave from the creature's heart means the attempter receives the First Gods' curse. Roll d% on the following table, adjusted by the character's Luck modifier x 10, e.g., a +1 Luck modifier count as +10% on the check. The change is permanent and irrevocable without the most extraordinary of means (e.g., a dangerous quest to another dimension).



CURSE OF THE FIRST GODS

Roll d%	Result
-11 or lower	The PC dissolves into an amorphous blob and dies.
-1 to -10	The PC's highest stat is reduced to 3. Their physical appearance changes to reflect this change.
0	One of the PC's stats (randomly determined) is reduced to 3. Their physical appearance changes to reflect this change.
1	One of the PC's stats other than Luck (randomly determined) is reduced to 3. Their physical appearance changes to reflect this change.
2	The PC's face breaks out in pattern of concentric black and red circles, effectively putting a huge target on their face.
3	The PC develops a very cool looking flame-mark on their face. Don't share the following with the player: when Gorflagrator rises from the earth his first priority is to kill everyone with this mark. If the character survives the adventure they gain an additional +4 XP.
4	The PC grows emaciated and they cannot gain weight no matter how much they eat. They lose -1d3 Stamina.
5	One of the PC's legs grows 3x the other length, and they must drag it behind, reducing their speed by -10.
6	The PC becomes an idiot. Their intelligence is reduced to 3.
7	The PC's eyes meld into one big eye, giving them reduced depth perception and -1d ranged attacks.
8	The PC loses the power of speech, and can only point and grunt, screech, or gibber. They can still cast spells with whatever vocalizations they can muster.
9	The PC develops a hideous allergy to a common substance. Just touching it gives them hives and a -1d on attack and spell checks. Roll 1d6: (1) steel; (2) gold; (3) leather; (4) gemstones; (5) horses; (6) mithril.
10	The PC loses 1d4 on their highest stat, and gains the same amount on their lowest stat. Their appearance and personality changes to match.
11-13	The PC's body and face become asymmetrical, making the PC strange to look at.
14-16	The PC's highest stat and lowest stat are exchanged. Their appearance and personality change to match, and they are unrecognizable to anyone who knew them before their transformation.
17-19	The PC sprouts an extra (roll 1d5): (1) pair of eyes; (2) arm; (3) mouth; (4) row of teeth, behind the first one; (5) 1d6+1 fingers spread throughout their hands.
20-22	The PC grows +/- 1d6 years older or younger. The age ranges change for dwarves (1d30) and elves (1-100).
23	The PC's first + second and third + forth fingers meld together, giving them two large fingers and a thumb on each hand.

Roll d%	Result
24	The PC's alignment changes (determine new alignment randomly). Their physical appearance changes as well, and the change in some way reflects their new loyalty.
25-31	The PC transforms into an intelligent monster race*, roll 1d8: (1) lizardman; (2) centaur; (3) goblin; (4) raptor; (5) gnoll; (6) orc; (7) hobgoblin; (8) gnome.
32	The PC grows interesting pattern of facial hair that regrows every night if shaved. (Judge's option: a successful Luck check means this is a Magic Moustache if you have access to The 'Stashe Stash: Magic Moustaches for the DCC RPG, see DCC RPG Annual, Vol. 1.)
33	The PC grows obvious gills on the side of their neck, and may breathe underwater.
34	The PC grows suction cups all over their arms and legs. When unencumbered, they make all climb checks at +2d and gain a +1d on all grapple checks.
35	The PC grows a cluster of eyes all over their head, and can see in 360 degrees at once.
36-40	The PC becomes obsessed with being the most powerful member of whatever character class they choose when they reach first level, and take a point of Personality damage every day they do nothing to advance themselves. This obsession is overcome if the character ever reaches 5th level.
41-43	The PC's skin transforms, roll 1d6: (1) furred like a bear; (2) becomes crocodile-like; (3) becomes completely hairless; (4) turns completely blue; (5) permanently cold to the touch; (6) turns deep green.
44-45	The PC sprouts a tail, roll 1d6: (1) lion-like; (2) crocodile-like; (3) cat-like; (4) rat-like; (5) dog-like; (6) demon-like.
46	The PC's voice changes dramatically, roll 1d7: (1) child's voice; (2) a wookiee's screeching warble; (3) Death Metal rumble; (5) just wrong enough for their look to be extremely strange; (6) stage actor's projection; (7) astoundingly beautiful singing voice.
47-50	PC's race changes to one of the major PC races (determine randomly).
51	PC swaps gender every day.
52-55	PC's hair turns an unusual color, roll 1d8: (1) verdant green; (2) neon orange; (3) bone white; (4) so black it's like looking into the void; (5) deep magenta; (6) platinum; (7) rainbow; (8) animal print.
56	The PC grows an extra finger on each hand. Normal gauntlets or gloves don't fit them.
57-75	The PC gets +1d4 on their highest stat, but lose the same number of points from their lowest stat (min 3 max 18)
76-77	The PC's hand transforms into weapon capable of a 1d4 natural attack, roll 1d7: (1) demon claw; (2) lobster pincer; (3) massively over-sized fist; (4) sharp steel blade; (5) fist of unbreakable stone; (6) glass-braided cat-o-nine tails; (7) nunchucks.
78	Nothing initially changes, but an image of every creature the character kills in battle appears as a tattoo on the PC's skin the night after they are slain.
79	One arm grows massive and powerful (Strength 18). The arm is so big that the PC cannot wear normal armor (-2 AC for any armor type they choose as they have to leave one arm bare), unless they can have custom armor made.
80	PC grows antenna, develops heightened senses: +1d on checks to detect sounds, ambushes, or secret doors.
81-83	The PC's skin transforms to (roll 1d4): (1) dragon scales (+1 AC and 50% resistance to fire damage); (2) rhino hide (+2 AC, -5' movement); (3) fish scales (30' swim speed when unencumbered); (4) plant bark (regenerate extra 1d3 hit points for each night of rest).
84	The PC grows a second head. The head has its own personality, is the same alignment as the character
85	The PC grows a third useful arm.
86	One of the PC's feet becomes a hoof. They are -5' movement, +1d4 permanent Luck (changing modifier).
87	The PC becomes physically extremely attractive, gaining +1 Personality and the admiration of those that appreciate real beauty.
88-90	The PC gains +1d6 on their lowest stat, maximum 18.
91	The PC grows a tiny face behind their ear. The face knows a thousand rumors and will sometimes whisper them to the character, perhaps leading them to profitable adventures but occasionally sharing false information.

Roll d%	Result
92	The PC's feet transform into huge hands, giving them a climb speed of 30' while barefoot. They cannot wear normal boots, but they can hang upside-down like bats while their endurance lasts.
93	The PC automatically learns every language they are exposed to for more than a week.
94	The PC grows a demonic face in one of their hands, which is occasionally possessed by powerful supernatural beings who will offer cryptic advice, dangerous bargains, insulting quips, or other mysterious communications.
95	The PC permanently increases in size by 50%, conferring a +2 bonus to attacks, damage, and AC due to greater size and strength.
96	The PC becomes supernaturally fast and nimble, but terribly nervous. Their Agility increases to 18, but they are constantly jumpy and irritable, decreasing their Personality by an equal amount as it took to increase their Agility to 18 (minimum 3).
97	The PC's brain grows, elongating their head by 3" and making them a genius (Intelligence 18). They can't wear standard helmets, so unless it's custom any armor they wear is reduced by -2 AC.
98	The PC becomes obscenely muscular and veined – their strength increases to 18, but they must eat 3x the amount as a normal individual of their species to keep themselves healthy.
99	PC grows stout and hale, but their body rejects all toxins. Their Stamina increases to 18, but partaking in intoxicants such as alcohol or tobacco, or eating rich foods make them instantly physically ill.
100	PC becomes the idealized version of themselves, the person they always wished to be, in body and mind. Their Personality increases to 18.
101-109	Roll 2d5: The PC gains that many points that they can add to their base ability scores as they wish (max 18). Their appearance changes and the player can choose one cool cosmetic (i.e., can't affect stats or combat) mutation their character receives.
110-119	Roll 2d6: The PC gains that many points that they can add to their base ability scores as they wish (max 18). Their appearance changes and the player can choose one mutation their character receives. This could be a natural attack doing up to 1d6 damage, an appendage granting an enhanced or additional sense, or other similarly powered ability worked out between player and judge.
120+	Roll 2d7: The PC gains that many points that they can add to their base ability scores as they wish (max 18). Their appearance changes and the player can choose one mutation their character receives. This could be a natural attack doing up to 1d8 damage, an appendage granting specialized movement such as wings or webbed feet, the ability to cast a single randomly determined spell, or other similarly powered ability worked out between player and judge.

* The transformed character can gain levels as any class they wish. Their new forms have advantages and disadvantages:

Lizardman: 1d6 claw attack, 60' swim speed, can hold breath for 1 hour, strange form and tail makes wearing standard armor impossible.

Centaur: 1d6 hoof attack, 60' movement rate, x4 carrying capacity, cannot wear standard armor.

Goblin: Small size, 20' movement rate, infravision, stealth check bonus equal to halfling of same level, -1 attack penalty in bright light.

Raptor: Natural AC 14, 60' move, 10' jump, 1d4 natural attack, cannot use standard armor/ most equipment, any weapon that requires grasping is treated as a 2-handed weapon.

Gnoll: Bite attack 1d3, +1d on perception checks involving scent.

Orc: +1 natural AC, 1d4 natural attack.

Hobgoblin: 60' infravision.

Gnome: Small size, 20' move, +1d on Personality checks to persuade, trick, or mislead.

Before the last character makes the attempt Grand Wazir Palmot addresses the pilgrims and his visibly disappointed templars:

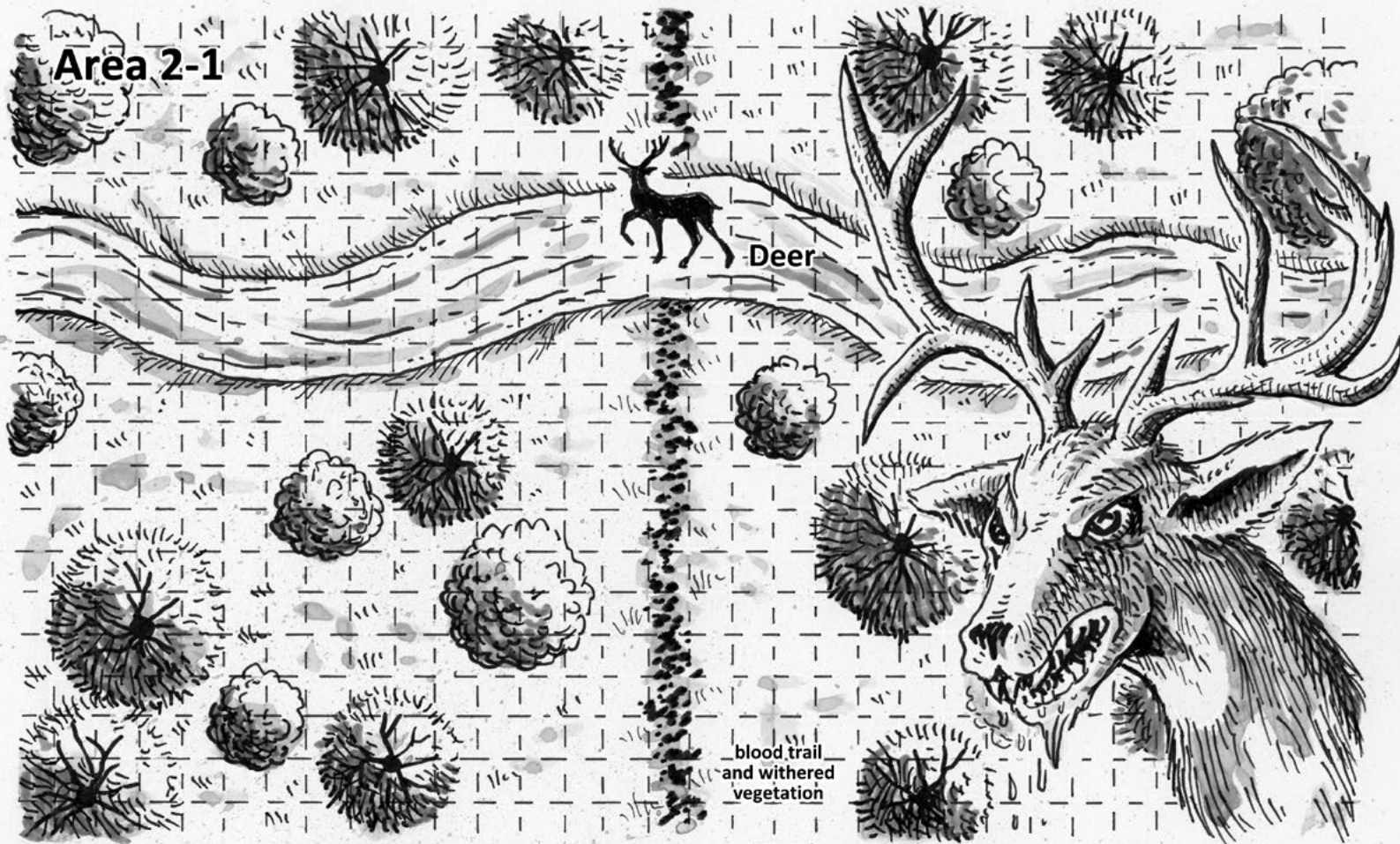
Friends and loyal templars, I beg you will keep your courage and reject despair. We have one pilgrim yet to test themselves, and they may still be our new monarch. I know the changes to your forms are life-changing; we have all faced it. Know that you shall always have a home here in the temple – you can join us, and if the monarch doesn't appear today, then perhaps in seven years they shall, or in the seven beyond that. Now, let us finish our sacred work. Please, remove the spear, pilgrim.

Shockingly, when the last pilgrim attempts to remove the spear it moves – just slightly at first, but then quickly. They are able to draw it from the ground, bursting forth with a clot of gore and spurt of black ichor.

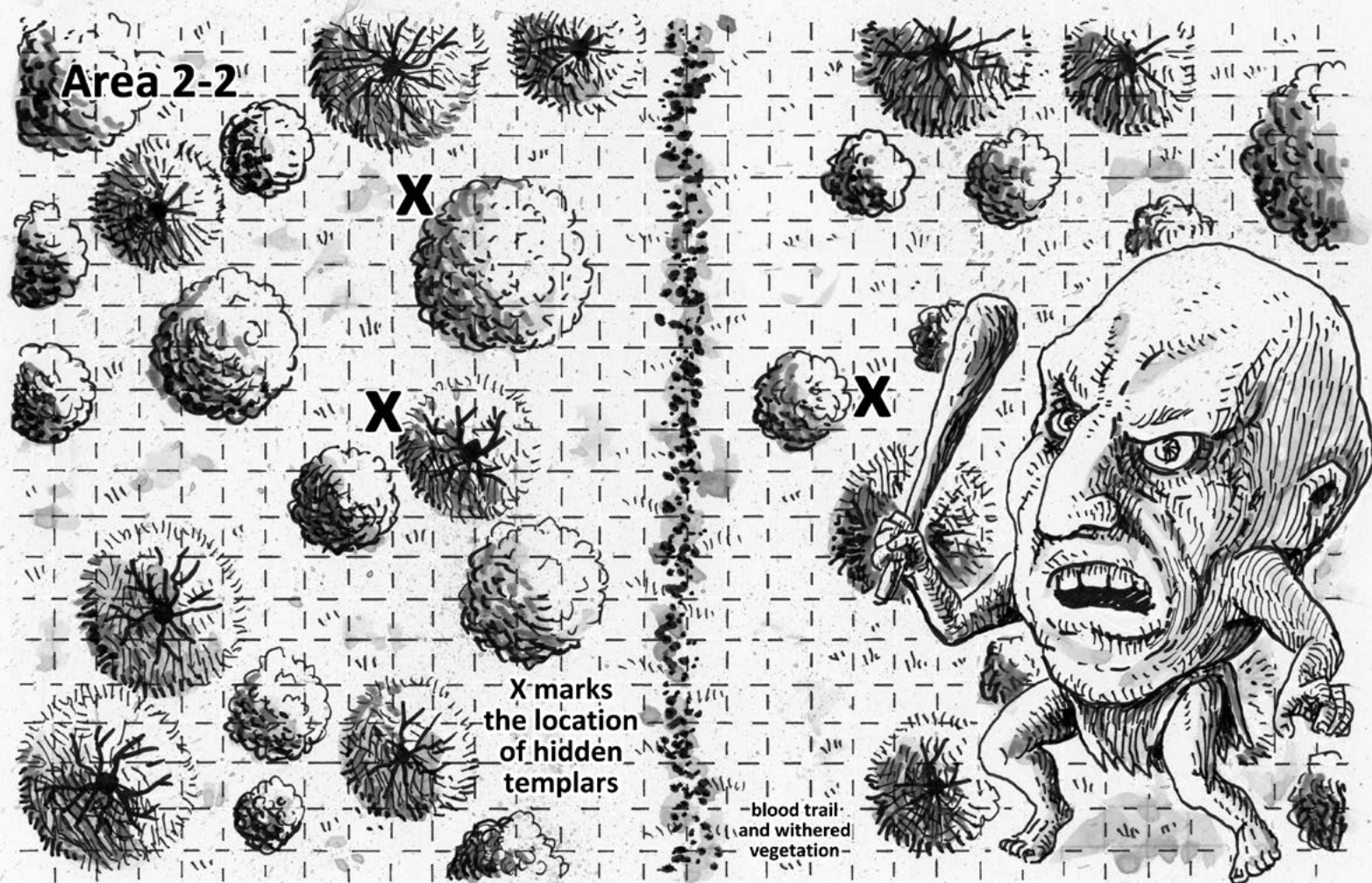
Palmot and the templars rejoice, cheering and offering prayers. They fall to their knees, chanting the name of their new regnant over and over.

The jubilation is extremely short lived: Drawing the weapon out awakens Gorflagrator the World Ender from his long

Area 2-1



Area 2-2





torpor. He bursts forth from the ground, which instantly slays the pilgrim that drew the weapon.

The first thing Gorflagrator does is attempt to grab the spear—he finds he cannot voluntarily come within 5 feet of it (although he can absolutely be stabbed with it).

He then rips out his own massive, still-beating heart, says a few profane words of power over it (that all assembled hear as if it were coming from someone standing behind them, whispering in to their ear)—and the heart grows massive bat wings. The heart flies from the temple, smashing a stained glass window to escape, and heads east, towards the cave-studded hills. As soon as the heart gets out in the light it begins to billow black smoke. At the same time, smoke begins to issue from Gorflagrator's body. The heart drips black ichor as it flies, leaving a path that runs up the east wall of the temple compound and into the woods.

Having had, in his mind, protected his immortality by hiding his heart far from the spear, he turns his attention to the destruction of the world.

Gorflagrator attacks the PCs. He can't strike any who are in immediate proximity to the Seven-Tree Spear directly, but

can attempt workarounds, such as breaking off huge chunks of the building and using them as throwing weapons. He might also grab one PC to hurl at another, taking a -4 to hit penalty (assuming the character hefted and thrown does not wish to be hefted and thrown).

If any of the pilgrims offer their fealty to Gorflagrator the demon welcomes them as an ally, promising them immortality and unlimited dark power if they will take the spear away and hide it. He speaks only to that individual (see his supernatural voice, below), and bids them to "throw it into the deepest sea, hide it on the farthest glacier, bury it beneath the highest mountain." While hiding the Seven-Tree Spear will indeed allow the demon to destroy the world, the creature is lying about any kind of reward.

If any of the pilgrims read aloud the invocation on the animal hide scroll from behind the altar in the presence of Gorflagrator, it summons the Servant of Akspythyn, an extraplanar beast, which attempts to delay the demon to give the PCs time to capture the heart. The Servant of Akspythyn appears as a massive winged snake creature, with small insect-like arms and eyes that crackle with electricity. It instantly grapples with Gorflagrator, who seems to relish the oppor-

tunity to dominate the servant of one of its ancient enemies. While they wrestle, the Servant sends a psychic message to every surviving PC:

Go and find the heart. Destroy it with the Seven-Tree Spear or rip it apart with your hands if need be. I shall delay the creature for as long as I can. Go now! The existence of the world resides with you.

The PCs cannot harm, bolster, or otherwise interact with the Servant of Akspythyn – it is more of a magical spell effect cast at the demon rather than a real creature. Assuming the PCs leave, the Servant of Akspythyn holds it off long enough that it can't catch up with the PCs before they reach area 3-1.

If the PCs leave to follow the heart, the demon doesn't automatically follow them. Its ego and madness is such that it doesn't recognize the threat the PCs pose, and instead stays behind to destroy the temple and the templars, and threaten and rant against the First Gods and the giants who imprisoned him.

Gorflagrator the World Ender (recently risen): Init +1; Atk fist or foot stomp +10 melee (3d6+10 or improvised weapon +10); AC 15 (25 once his armor is summoned); HD 19d12; hp 99 (173 at full power); MV 20'; Act 2d20; SP demon traits, multiple targets, magic, regeneration, supernatural voice, vulnerable heart; SV Fort +7, Ref +5, Will +11; AL C.

The grand demon queen Kol expelled Gorflagrator the World Ender for attempting to destroy Pandemonium itself. The demon immediately began his plan to destroy all mortal worlds, only to be defeated by the ancient giants and their divine patrons.

Gorflagrator is a 100' tall humanoid demon with a skeletal face and gray skin. It radiates an aura of clammy cold that can be felt up to 60' away. The demon smells of sulfur and rot. When he summons his armor it includes a horned helmet with a glowing orb centerpiece, huge gauntlets, and an armored skirt.

The demon possesses a supernatural voice. When he speaks, his mouth moves normally but everyone who perceives his voice hears it coming from over their shoulder, as if the demon was standing behind them and whispering. Gorflagrator can choose who hears his voice and who doesn't, so he could pick one pilgrim out of a crowd and speak only to them, although all would see his mouth move.

If there are several targets clustered together, Gorflagrator can strike up to three with his massive fist or foot, rolling one attack to strike all. In addition, the demon's strength is such that he can use huge objects, such as adult trees, wagons, humanoids, or giant boulders as throwing weapons, with a +10 to hit and doing 1, 2, or 3d6 damage or more, possibly with a chance of striking multiple targets.

Gorflagrator regenerates 1d3 points of damage per round, but cannot regenerate damage from wounds caused by magical or blessed weapons. Holy water or a blessed holy symbol touched to his skin causes him 1d6 damage that he cannot regenerate. If the demon is somehow reduced to zero hit points but his heart still exists, he falls inert for 1 hour

before awakening with 21 hit points and beginning his cycle of regeneration again.

When Gorflagrator first arises from his torpor, his magical powers are extremely limited, but in 24 hours they grow immense and neigh irresistible. The demon can create one magical effect per combat round in addition to any attack actions it might take.

Once combat is begun, the creature makes the following effects happen:

Round	Effect
1	The sky grows dark. Clouds roll in from all directions. A cold wind, unnatural for the time of year, begins to blow.
2	The Temple of the Holy Bloodline changes, becoming an unholy temple sacred to the demon. All the stained glass windows and art transform and become depictions of Gorflagrator himself destroying the world, defiling holy sites, gleefully devouring handfuls of humans, etc.
3	The demon summons his armor, including a horned helm, a breastplate with a face with fiery eyes, and gauntlets. The armor gives him a +10 AC.
4	The demon attempts to enact further magic, but has squandered all of his power. PCs in his presence hear profane magic words and there is a tiny spark, but there is no further effect. The demon looks a little embarrassed for just a moment, then resumes trying to destroy the world.

The Seven-Tree Spear: The true name of the spear the giants used to stop Gorflagrator is lost to time. The old gods wove the wood of seven trees together, each with a different prohibition against the demon, and gave it to the giants to destroy the demon. The Seven-Tree Spear is 12' long with a blade of pure silver, made magically hard enough to retain a permanent razor-sharp edge. If examined carefully, it is apparent that the shaft is composed of seven distinct types of wood, all combined in an impossible spiral to make one nearly unbreakable whole. Combatants wielding the spear must use both hands.

The spear creates a mystical barrier against the demon it was created to destroy: while the spear can be thrust out of the barrier to stab the demon, Gorflagrator cannot come closer than five feet to the spear, meaning that the wielder of the Seven-Tree Spear and folks immediately standing next to them are safe from the creature. The spear is +3 to hit and damage against Gorflagrator, creatures infected by the demon, or the demon's heart. One strike against the demon's heart while it is separated from the rest of its body destroys the demon forever.

Once Gorflagrator is dead, the spear becomes a standard +1 spear. However, true giants will not attack a character who holds the spear before them, although they may attack back.

AREA 2: A PATH OF CORRUPTION

Gorflagrator's heart flies over the wall, over the woods, and into a cave in the hills on the east side of the forest, dripping its foul blood as it goes. It is an easy task to follow the blood trail left by the heart, as the foliage near it all begins to blacken and wilt. By the time the characters have followed the trail for an hour the blood trail has destroyed all the foliage within 10' of where it befouled the earth. The skies are dark and the wind fierce, making travel unpleasant.

Area 2-1—River Crossing: The PCs eventually come to a stream:

The blood trail ends at a shallow stream, but clearly continues on beyond it. Four deer stand in the stream, drinking. You have just a moment to notice how black and murky the water around their legs is before they raise their heads to look at you. These are no normal deer – their eyes are too close together, their teeth too sharp, their antlers too sharp and asymmetrical. They bare their teeth and prepare to charge.

These deer had the misfortune from drinking from water polluted by the blood of the accursed heart, and are transformed. They attack the PCs, fighting to the death.

Pandemonium Deer (4): Init +2; Atk antler charge +2 melee (1d6) or bite +0 melee (1d3); AC 11; HD 1d10+2; hp 11 each; MV 50'; Act 1d20; SP demonic vulnerability; SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +1; AL C.

These deer drank from the stream infected by the black ichor dripped by Gorflagrator's heart, and are now infused with the demon's evil essence. Their eyes have moved forward in their head and their teeth have become jagged, giving them a predator's mien. The deer take 1d6 damage from holy water, and can be turned by a Lawful cleric. A pandemonium deer struck by the Spear of the Seven Trees for even 1 point of damage dies.

Area 2-2—Ambush in the Woods: A group of the templars, shocked that they have wasted their lives and deformed their bodies for a lie, pledged themselves to Gorflagrator in vane hopes that he will reward them with immortality and limitless dark power as he promised. The demon

used his magic, increasing with each passing hour, to swiftly transport the templars into the PCs path.

Have your players make a DC 11 Intelligence check for each surviving character; if none make it the party has failed to notice the templars in their billowing white robes hiding in the trees, and are *surprised*. If the templars have surprise, one hurls a rock at whatever character carries the spear, and then demands that the PCs drop the weapon and walk away. Assuming they do not, the templars charge out and attack. If the Seven-Tree Spear is loose, one will grab it and they will all flee back towards the temple.

These templars are already demoralized and are likely to run if they are not clearly winning; they make morale checks at -1d. Likewise, they are similarly more likely to be swayed by persuasive arguments or threats (+1d to whomever makes such an attempt).

If the PCs have lost less than half their number up to this point, double the number of templars to make this a challenging fight.

Templars (3 or more): Init +0; Atk staff +0 melee (1d4) or hurled rock +0 missile fire (1d2); AC 10, HD 1d4; hp 3; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP mutation; SV Fort +0, Ref +0, Will +1; AL L.

These mutated unfortunates attempted the pilgrimage seven years ago, and joined the templars after their failed attempt to draw the Seven-Tree Spear. They have makeshift clubs and rocks along with the following mutations:

1. Mouth full of needle teeth, natural bite attack (+0, 1d4).
2. Upside-down face.
3. Just a huge head with arms and legs growing out of it.

(if additional templars are used)

4. Claws like a tiger (natural attack 1d6 damage).
5. One arm 3x longer than the other, +2d damage with hurled rocks.
6. Multiple voice boxes, natural 5 part harmony when they speak or sing.

AREA 3: A CAVE IN A HILL

The blood trail eventually leads out of the forest and into the cave-dotted foothills west of the temple. It is very easy to see which one the demon's heart flew into – the blood trail goes straight up the side of a hill, crossing a switch-backed trail that leads to the cave.

If the characters check for tracks along the switch backs they might find signs that horses and men have been up and down the hill recently (DC 13 Intelligence check).

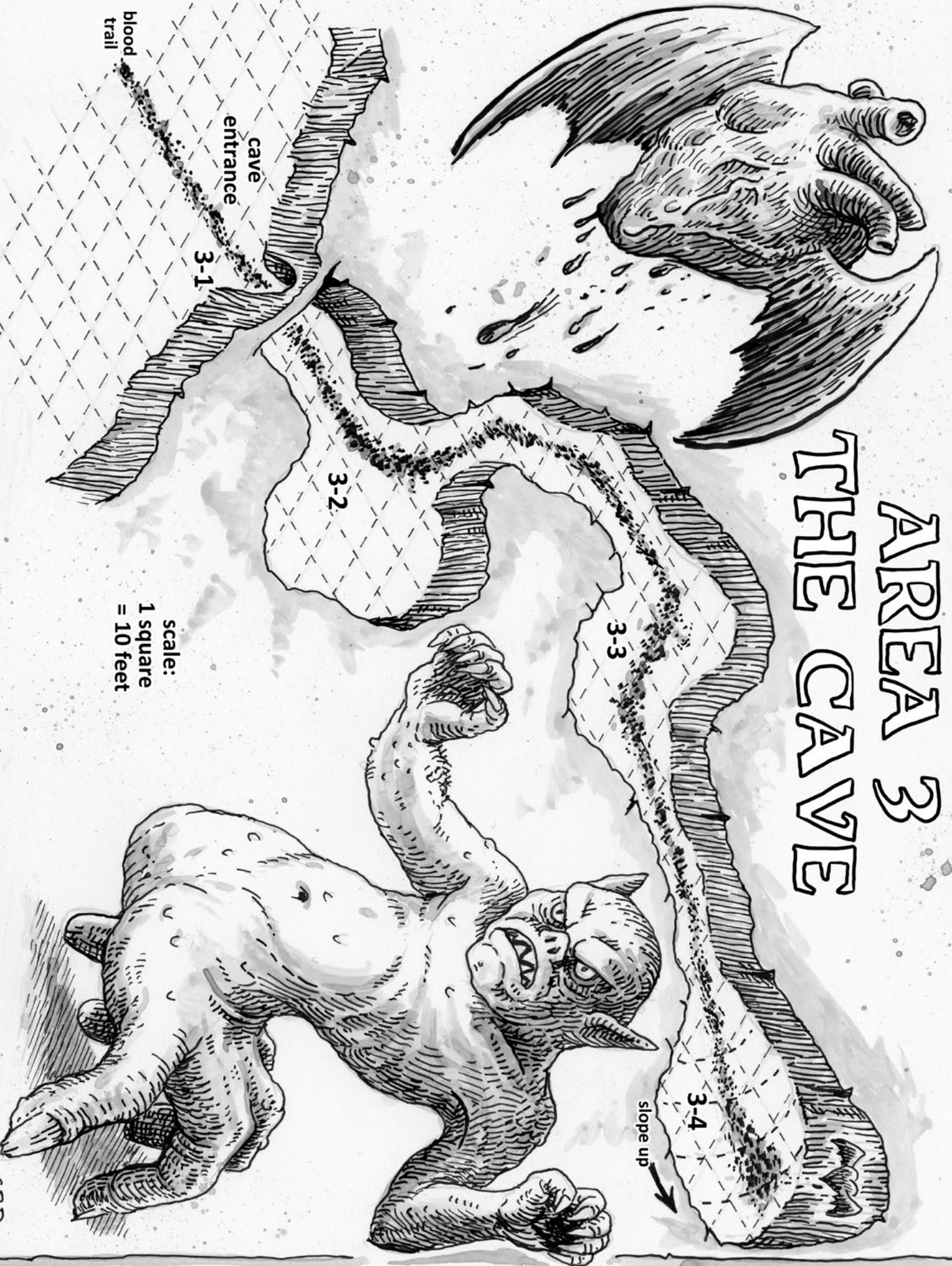
The cavern complex is natural and rough. Unless otherwise stated in the description, the cave ceiling is an average of nine-foot high.

Area 3-1—Cave Entrance: *The cave mouth is nine feet wide. The blood trail goes directly inside – this must be where the heart is hiding from the sunlight!*

The demon, who sensed that his heart was in danger, raced to catch them here but didn't make it in time to block their entrance and finish them off.

Unless otherwise serves your game better, when the characters arrive Gorflagrator is hiding in the trees waiting for them to make a move for the heart. Have the players roll a Luck check for each character; whichever character fails by the most gets targeted by a boulder that the creature tosses just before they make it inside (+7 to hit, 2d6 damage).

AREA 3 THE CAVE



Assuming the player's rush inside rather than stand and fight, they smell horses and hear the nickering of animals coming from the cavern before them. Gorflagrator climbs the hill behind the adventurers, and if they dawdle inside he reaches inside and attempts to snatch them – he can reach up to about 30' into the cave, and if he can he'll grab them one by one and pitch them into the forest.

Area 3-2—Wide Cavern: *There are two lanterns illuminating this cavern. The blood trail has discolored the stone and can clearly be seen as it goes through this chamber and down a rough passageway beyond. You see seven horses within, hobbled. Their eyes are wide, and the panicky beasts stamp and whine as you enter. A man in ring mail armor is attempting to calm the animals, but as you enter the passage he whirls to face you, clearly shocked at your appearance. "Halt! Take not one more step!" He calls over his shoulder into the cavern "My lord! Intruders!"*

Two rounds after the characters enter the guard is joined by his fellow man-at-arms, Lord Featherstone, and the entourage. If the PCs attack, the nobleman and his entourage will fight back but aren't above surrender or even begging for their lives should the tide turn against them.

Lord Featherstone tries to avoid combat, doing his best to remain stoic in the face of this hoard of mutants. If he sees the spear, he demands to know how the PCs came to have it in their possession.

Featherstone knows about the pilgrimage—he had the presence of mind to send an infiltrator along with the last pilgrimage seven years go, who gathered enough intelligence to allow the scheming nobleman to formulate a plan. Lord Featherstone, along with his young aristocrat supporters, have been watching the Temple of the Sacred Bloodline, waiting to see if anyone left with the spear. The nobleman planned to stop them as they left the temple, claim the Seven-Tree Spear as his own, and use it to convince all the other noblemen in the region of his legitimacy—demanding they fall in line behind his claim to the royal bloodline, opening the way for him to become the new King.

Lord Featherstone refuses to recognize the PCs as possible heirs to the throne. Instead, he makes them an offer: hours earlier the heart flew through their cavern and is now in the farthest reach of the underground network. The noble sent his third bodyguard, man-at-arms Kevin, in after it, but the heart promptly destroyed him. If the PCs will go after it with the spear and destroy the heart, he promises them the friendship and protection of House Featherstone.

Note that Lord Featherstone will do absolutely anything to be king—he wants that spear, and while he will bargain and deal fairly if he can, he is absolutely comfortable with treachery and violence. He might agree to support one of them as the new king, but will not keep his word unless there is absolutely no alternative.

Bart and Tom, men-at-arms (2): Init +0; Atk warclub +1 melee (1d6+1); AC 14; HD 1d8 +1; hp 9 each; MV 25'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref -1, Will +0; AL L.

Tom and Bart have been infantrymen, town guards, and

are now personal guards to Lord Featherstone. The men-at-arms wear ring mail armor (+4 AC, -5 check penalty, -5' move, fumble 1d14), and carry iron-shod war clubs.

Alfrad Featherstone, the ninth Lord Featherstone: Init +2; Atk rapier +3 melee (1d6); AC 13; HD 1d8; hp 6; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +2; AL N.

Lord Alfrad Featherstone comes from one of the few noble families the warlords dominating the PCs' home region have allowed to retain its titles and lands, thanks to their willingness to collaborate with these mercenaries in order to prevent sedition and rebellion among the peasants. He is extremely well practiced with the rapier, reflected in his higher "to-hit" chance with this weapon, and is an experienced writer, accountant, and diplomat. He speaks common, elvish, and two other languages, all fluently with literacy. He wears studded leather armor, carries an extremely fancy rapier, and has a high-quality spyglass with him. He wears 100 gp worth of extremely distinctive jewelry, including the gold signet ring of his house. In a pouch in his possessions are documents of dubious origin that support his claim that the Featherstone family is a distant branch of the deposed king's family.

Lord Featherstone's Entourage (3): Init +0; Atk dagger +1 melee (1d4); AC 12; HD 1d6; hp 4 each; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will +1; AL N.

These young nobles, Lords Tytheius and Reldon, and Lady Waburta, all support Lord Featherstone's claim to the throne, and they all look forward to the gratitude of their patron once his house ascends to the highest office in the land. They are willing to fight for Lord Featherstone but are not suicidal.

Area 3-3—Inner Chamber: As the characters enter this chamber, they hear the beating of the demon's heart. As they progress towards area 3-4 the beating grows obscenely loud.

Lord Featherstone and his entourage have camped out in this chamber for two days prior, waiting to see the result of the pilgrimage. In this chamber are four bedrolls, a cot, a fancy rug (the heart's blood trail runs straight over it and one of the cots, blackening and ruining them), and all of the saddles, tack, and saddlebags for the horses in area 3-2. If the PCs check through the bags they find two week's worth of fancy rations, including wine, pastry, and sugar plums, 85 gold pieces, 264 silver pieces, and a detailed map of the valley around the Temple of the Sacred Bloodline.

Area 3-4—The Cave of the Accursed Heart: *By the time you reach this chamber the beating of the heart is so loud that you can feel it reverberating in your chest. This room smells intensely of blood and sulfur.*

The floor of this chamber elevates, so that when it reaches the northeast most point it is nearly 10' higher than at the entryway. In the farthest edge of the room is the demon's purple-black heart, suspending itself in the uppermost corner with its vast wings. Will it ever run out of blood? You watch the severed connections continue to drip its foul ichor, adding to the rivulets of black blood that

run down this passageway to pool at your feet. The heart beats, twitches, and shifts positions as you watch – you feel that even without eyes it follows your movements. On the ground before you is a dead man-at-arms, his body mostly dissolved, his hand now separated from his arm still clutching his cudgel.

The heart can sense the area around it, and is fully aware of the presence of the characters, and especially the spear. The heart knows it is cornered, and once the PCs enter the chamber it attacks, concentrating on whoever carries the Seven-Tree Spear.

Gorflagrator has one more card to play. Knowing that plans for the destruction of all the multiverses are at stake, the demon sacrifices a part of its power permanently to attempt to save its heart. The creature bites off one of its hands, then spends a massive amount of its arcane energy to animate it, as he did with his heart. The hand grows a demonic torso, head, and arms from its stump, and then animates, entering in to destroy the PCs. One round after combat begins the hand makes it way to area 3-3. If no one stands in its way it continues on to charge the PCs, attacking them without mercy.

If the heart is slain, then the Gorflagrator (and the animated hand) dies as well. The PCs hear a tremendous screech of pain from outside of the cavern, a cry so loud as to be heard for miles. Then the demon falls, crashing like thunder. The demon, heart, and hand all blacken and reduce to ash within minutes.

The Accursed Heart of the World Ender: Init +0; Atk wing slash +3 melee (1d6+3) or blood blast; AC 12; HD 6d8+8; hp 26 (50 at full strength); MV Fly 60', waddle on its wings 10'; Act 1d20; SP blood blast (1d3 corrosive, DC 11 Ref save to avoid), demonic vulnerabilities; SV Fort +6, Ref -1, Will +8; AL C.

Gorflagrator's gave his heart wings and a semblance of sentience to allow it to escape possible destruction from the Seven-Tree Spear. His plan was to send it to the far side of the planet until he had dealt with his attackers and the spear, but the demon didn't count on the damage the heart would take from sunlight, forcing it to hide in darkness.

Once per round the heart can fire a wild blast of its foul blood at up to three targets standing adjacent. Targets must make a DC 11 Reflex save or take 1d3 points of corrosive damage.

The heart is vulnerable to sunlight – it takes 2 points of fire damage per minute it is outdoors in daylight, even if the day is overcast. Holy water or a blessed holy symbol touched to the heart's flesh causes it 1d6 damage. It takes normal damage from fire. The heart can be destroyed with normal weapons, and takes double damage from the Seven-Tree Spear. However, the magic of the spear doesn't work to keep the heart at bay – it can attack characters wielding it normally.

Gorflagrator's Hand: Init +1; Atk claw +3 melee (1d8+1); AC 13; HD 3d8+3; hp 21; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP demonic vulnerabilities; SV Fort +1, Ref -1, Will +4; AL C.

The animated hand of the demon is a stupid, brutish thing, that can only attack and kill. When created, it costs Gorflagrator 21 permanent hit points that it can never regenerate,



and it lowers the demon's ultimate capacity to do magic, a major setback to its long-term plans.

Holy water or a blessed holy symbol touched to the hand's flesh causes it 1d6 damage. It is immune to fire. The hand can be destroyed with normal weapons, and takes double damage from the Seven-Tree Spear. However, like the heart the magic of the spear doesn't prevent it from attacking whomever wields the spear.

OPTIONAL ENDING: THE CONTAMINATION OF EVIL

When Gorflagrator dies every character who faced him experiences a kind of waking nightmare:

The world changes in your perception – colors become brighter, sounds more clear and acute. Your senses seem to extend much farther than they normally could, allowing you to see remote places and hear sounds from across the universe. You see the demon's final breath escape its body as a physical thing, a cloud of black, greasy smoke that rises out of the beast's horrible maw. This smoke doesn't dissipate – its volume splits into two huge tendrils, then four, then dozens, and finally hundreds of lines of dense smoke that spread out in all directions across the sky. You see this smoke touch down near and far – somehow you can see all of this at once, evil smoke arcing through the air, coming down to be inhaled by mortal men and animals. You see the smoke's corruption reflected in the victim's eyes, a blackness like ink injected into their pupils. Every individual touched seems to wake up to a new reality, some horrible destructive purpose. Even as your enhanced perception begins to fade, you see the infected creatures change, some grabbing the nearest dangerous implement and attacking a random innocent, some more patient, perhaps more subtle, that seem to be changed in more thoughtful ways.

Throughout the characters careers they might meet creatures touched by Gorflagrator's evil. While most cannot detect any physical change in these unfortunate souls, the survivors of the accursed heart clearly see a blotchy blackness swimming around the characters eyes. The judge might use this as a hook to involve the PCs in future adventures, as every infected creature has been drawn to profoundly immoral and wicked actions with the intent of spreading harm and destruction, even though the victims themselves don't know why, and are likely to become involved with dark cults, plots against humanity, and similar anti-social actions. Mind you, only the PCs will instantly recognize this unnatural darkness in creatures, and they might find themselves facing low justice if they simply slay infected individuals, seemingly without cause to the world at large.

AFTERMATH

The surviving characters are now free to do as they wish. If Lord Featherstone survives he will still attempt to get the spear from them, but he will be more wary of them now that they proved themselves greater than the challenge of the demon's heart. Depending on circumstances, he may become the PCs' patron, or worst enemy.

The forces of Order realize that the PCs have saved their world and reward them with 3 points of Luck each, and unlike most such awards these points permanently increase the character's Luck modifier.

The world may never know it, but a band of simple peasants prevented the end of all things. What else may they accomplish?



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ISBN 978-1-950783-53-3



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