



Cairn

ADVENTURE ANTHOLOGY

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MARRA 24

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ADVENTURE ANTHOLOGY



What's in this book

This is the first official Adventure Anthology for Cairn. This book contains three brand new adventures written by guest adventure writers. From mansions to mangroves, with adventures designed for quick sessions or settings for entire campaigns, this is the perfect book for any table.

Credits

Dread Hospitality

Written by Amanda P.

Developmental Editing by Brad Kerr and Yochai Gal

Editing by Derek B.

Bloodmarm Barrow

Written by Brad Kerr

Editing by Yochai Gal & Derek B.

The Tide Returning

Written by Zedeck Siew

Editing by Yochai Gal & Derek B.

Production Credits

Cover art by Ben Marra

Illustrations & Cartography by Rob Matthews

Layout by Adam Hensley

About the Adventures

Dread Hospitality (pg. 5-23)

A mansion adventure that explores the grotesque, solipsistic nature of power and greed.

Bloodmarm Barrow (pg. 25-37)

Player characters will investigate strange and supernatural happenings in a remote burial mound where bandits lurk and a powerful extraplanar creature secretly dwells.

The Tide Returning (pg. 39-63)

This is a campaign setting and hexcrawl, set in a vast mangrove wood punctuated by giant, building-sized trees.



Dread Hospitality

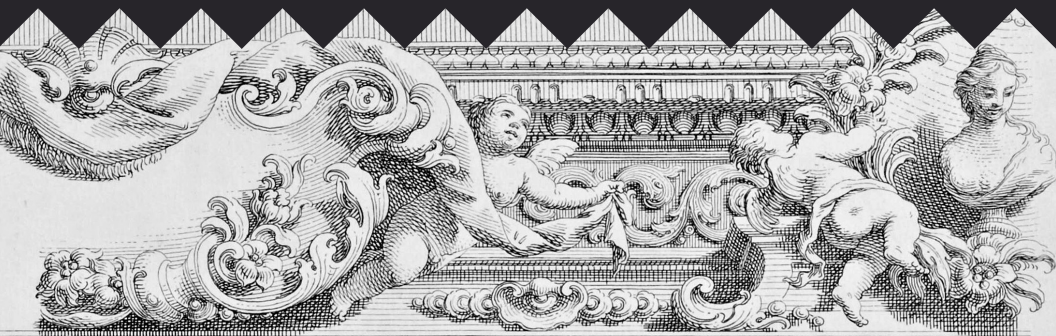


WRITTEN BY AMANDA P.

Dread Hospitality

A mansion adventure that explores the grotesque, solipsistic nature of power and greed.

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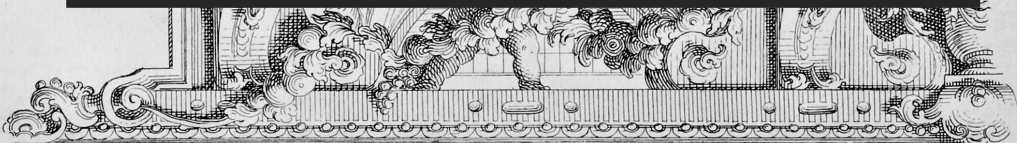
Content Warnings

Human sacrifice, malicious wealthy people, robots, taxidermy, snakes, demons, body horror, immolation.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks: Nick, Sally Tamarkin, and C.

Thank you to my playtesters: Deldon, Dan, Nick, and Matt.



THE SITUATION

Lord Horace Appleblossom ruled his domain through petty tyranny, seeking money and power to excess. He feared murder because he was notoriously faithless. He betrayed his fellow patricians and dealt with sorcerers of ill repute.

Lord Appleblossom hired builders to create **Agonius Hall**, a residence and workshop to explore his interests in automata and the occult. Paranoia was suffused in the home's design. **Defense mechanisms** were added in case a grudge came home to roost.

A month ago, he hosted a dinner with three rivals. That evening, a terrible storm struck the area, seemingly centered on Agonius Hall.

Since that night, no one has emerged. Strange reptilian beasts venture from the grounds, spreading death and mischief. Over their cups in taverns, peasants speak of vast treasures contained in Agonius Hall.

Two weeks ago, the heirs of the three rivals received blackmail letters inviting them to the hall, taunting them with the fate of their loved ones. Perceiving the obvious trap for what it is, one hires adventurers to head to the hall in their stead.



WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING

Lord Horace Appleblossom desired to live forever. He studied under three sorcerers who taught him occult arts for life preservation. He then bound them to himself as insurance against death.

Then, Lord Horace Appleblossom ritually sacrificed his rivals in an attempt to gain eternal life and power. Lord Horace's beloved mountain lion Agonius was slain as a direct result of his master's greed.

The ritual failed. Horace died and aspects of his personality attached to creatures and objects in the Hall. The three Sorcerers he entrapped perished and in doing so tethered Horace's soul to his undead body. A gate to the demonic realm remained cracked open.

The incident drew the demon Lord Svork's attention. He directed his influence through the opened Gate from his demonic realm to the mansion, dispatching reptilian Sverks through the Gate.

Lucius Callo, Lord Horace's engineer, immediately took power with his automatons and sent letters to each of the sacrificed enemies' heirs. Each heir requires proof of death to ascend and secure their position.

The Sverks clashed with the automatons and the undead Agonius. Lucius locked himself in his workshop, working tirelessly on a great automaton suit. Soon, Lucius will use his automaton suit to gather the ritual sacrifices.

If Lucius Callo performs the ritual a second time, he believes that Lord Horace could be restored. Lord Svork requires the ritual be performed again to cross over into this plane. He will take Lord Horace's place, consume everyone in the Hall, and attempt to carve out a realm.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Lord Polonius Lyra's heir, Lady Hild Lyra-Montague received a threatening letter supposedly from Lord Horace Appleblossom summoning her to Agonius Hall. She has hired the adventurers to go in her stead and acquire **proof of death** so that she can assume control of her uncle's estate. She seeks her uncle's signet ring (pg. 21) but will accept an eye witness (pg. 21, Jensen). The reward is 500gp for the signet ring and/or 250gp for the eye witness. *Alternatively, one of the player characters is the heir.*



WHAT COULD HAPPEN

If nothing changes, the following will occur:

- After 5d4 dungeon cycles **Lucius** will complete his automaton armor suit.
- While in the suit he will marshal his automatons and march through the halls gathering the ritual components in this order:
 - † The undead **Lord Horace** who is amenable to the ritual,
 - † **Agonius** the undead mountain lion who must be subdued,
 - † **Young Lord Statue** who requires charm and deference, and
 - † three **human sacrifices**: the adventurers and/or Jensen Wilthorn, Catherine, and Hal Cremwar.
- Once all are in **U4**, the living will be sacrificed by fire and the escaped personality traits will return to Lord Horace. This will not have the intended result.
- **Lord Svork** will consume all present and enter this plane, taking Young Lord Horace's shape to carve out a demonic realm.



D10 RUMORS

The adventurers spoke with locals in the area and gathered the following true gossip.

1 “No one has left Agonius Hall for a month, and strange shrieking has been heard in the hills.”

2 “That strange man Lucius and his boiling automatons ended up here because he did wrong in the City.”

3 “Lord Horace loved that mountain lion Agonius. It was the only thing that man ever liked.”

4 “One time, a man told a secret in a room at Agonius Hall, and somehow the Lord knew!”

5 “Everything in that house clicks and clacks, moves without a push.”

6 “The Lake’s been drained since Lord Horace started doing some strange construction underground.”

7 “Lord Horace consorted with three strange sorcerers. They say that they know Death’s face and spurn it.”

8 “The day after the fancy lords went to the Hall, a strange black smoke clouded the sky.”

9 “They say Lord Horace wanted to be an eternal lord. He would deal with anyone to do it.”

10 “That house’s oddly warm. They say it’s heated by hot water. That’s unnatural, I say!”

IMPORTANT FACTIONS & NPCs

Lord Horace Appleblossom

Lord Horace Appleblossom is a conniving, distrustful patrician. He sought eternal life through an occult ritual and in doing so died and caused the death of his one true friend, Agonius the mountain lion. He takes no responsibility for this. At this time he is mostly dead, a source of great horror for all the remaining people in the Hall.

Lucius Callo

Lucius Callo is an arrogant self-described genius, expelled from polite circles due to corruption. Hired by Lord Horace, he built the Hall's automatons and mechanisms. Through dreams Lord Svork has preyed upon his worst impulses, promising power if he completes the ritual. Lucius works tirelessly on his automaton body armor to make his dreams a reality.

Catherine

Catherine is a brash young woman far from home, hired to cook at the Hall. She is the only human household servant because the automatons proved to be inferior cooks. She remains in the Hall due to having nowhere to go coupled with fear of the Sverks and not wanting to leave her friend Jensen Wilthorn behind. Recent stress induces her to "attack first, ask questions later." She overacts confidence to conceal her terror.

The Automatons

The Automatons: Non-sentient steam-powered machines with boilers in their torsos created by Lucius Callo to perform tasks. There are three types: Automites, Constructoids, and Chevaltrons. All Automatons can be weakened by damaging their water tank boilers.

Lord Svork

Lord Svork is the Dreadlord Anromedus Hallion's 7th Cupbearer's Underservant.

Frustrated by his lack of upward mobility, he stumbled upon Lord Horace Appleblossom's pathetic ritual grasping at eternal life and saw a suitable vessel to carve out his own realm. After the first ritual failed, he tempted Lucius Callo and dispatched his Sverks through the portal as a tether for the second ritual.

IMPORTANT FACTIONS & NPCs

Sverks

Sverks are short bipedal reptilian demonspawn with volcanic rock scales and bony plates on their backs resembling stegosauri. They are cowards when alone but vicious in groups. They serve as a tether for Lord Svork to this realm so the gate remains open.

Argonius

The mountain lion Agonius was Lord Horace's stalwart companion. When Lord Horace ordered his automatons to capture his rivals to ritualistically murder them for power, Lord Lyra attempted to flee and slew Agonius. Dead due to his master's violent greed, Agonius' corpse became reanimated by Horace's Aggression when the ritual failed.

Three Sorcerers Souls

The souls of the three Sorcerers killed by Lord Appleblossom remain trapped in the Library. Slain by the first ritual, they remain stuck in a state of unlife, tethering Lord Appleblossom's soul to his mostly dead body. They scream a horrific death rattle that shakes the Hall if Horace is killed and they are still intact.

Jensen Wilthorn

Jensen Wilthorn is a machinist in his early 20s with a lanky build, and unkempt long red hair. He previously served as Lucius' apprentice and witnessed the ritual. Jensen's voice cracks and he is prone to fainting. He is friends with Catherine. He created the organist automaton and will not leave without it.

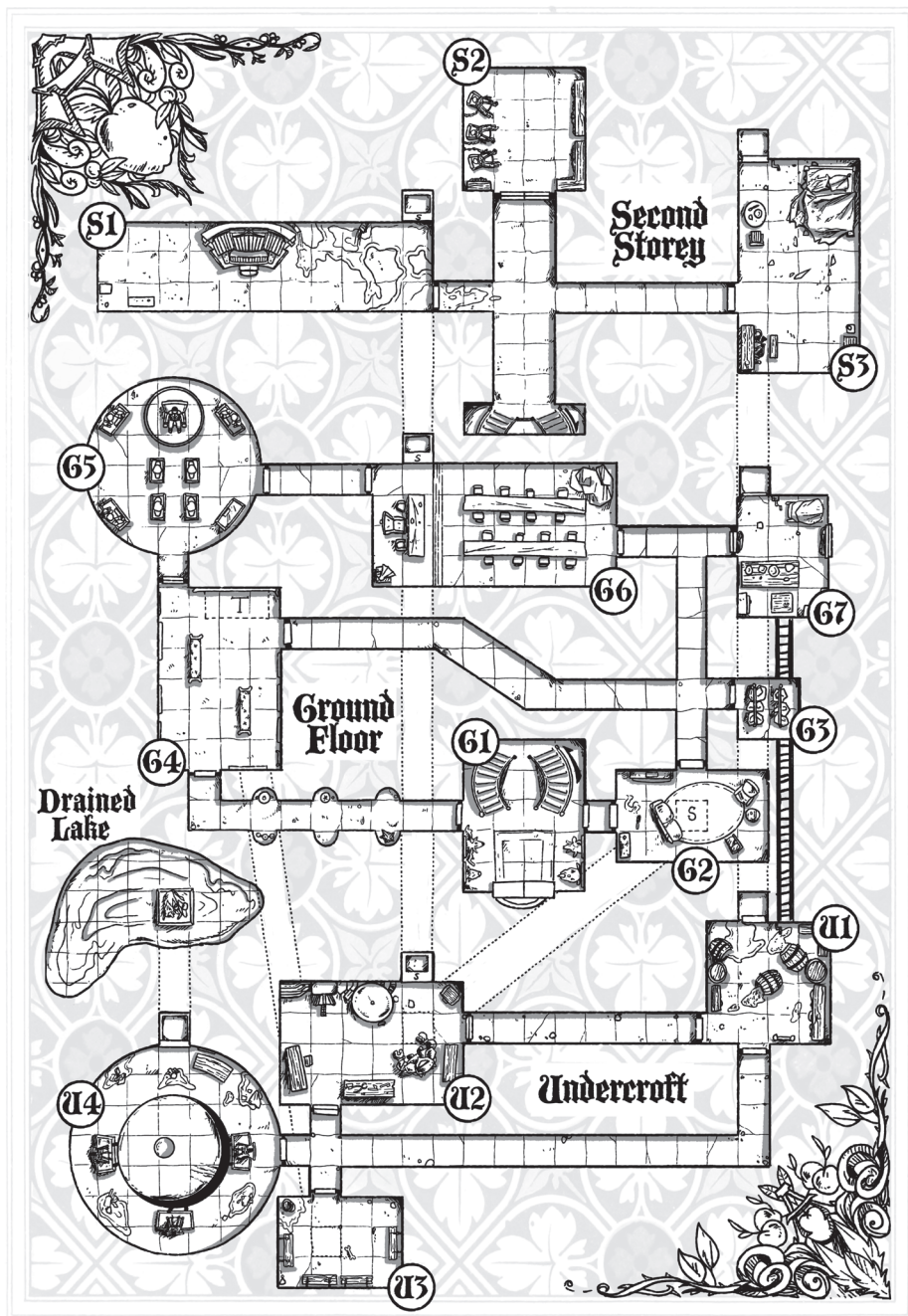
Hal Cremwar

Hal Cremwar is an aspiring gentleman thief that reeks of turnips. He was arrested by the Chevaltrons after breaking in a week ago but escaped. He aims to change his fortunes through robbing the place.

The Three Rivals

The Three Rivals were Polonius Lyra, Priscilla Bucina, and Giannis Ancoravis.

Agonius Hall



d8 Random Encounters

On a 1 or 2 on the Dungeon Events table roll 1d8:

- 1 **Catherine** hums murder ballads to herself as she sneaks food to U3 and attempts to convince Jensen to leave. She uses a kitchen knife's reflection to peek around corners and will defend herself with uncanny aim before fleeing to G7.
- 2 **d6+2 Sverks** stalk through the halls, restraining two large snakes on rope leads. They release the snakes to restrain any living creature they deem potential sustenance.
- 3 **d6+2 Automites** whir by on idle patrol, ringing their alarm bells if they perceive an intruder, following until **two Chevaltrons** arrive to detain them.
- 4 An honor guard of four **Chevaltron** begin marching with **Lord Horace** on a palanquin through the first floor before returning to the Statuary. The Lord cries out "Kneel!" and orders the Chevaltrons to attack those who refuse. If the party is not nearby they will hear this happening.
- 5 The **bronze statue of Young Lord Horace** promenades by, playing **Hymn to His Youth** on a lute. Listeners in the same room must Save WIL or follow him counterclockwise through the ground floor. Save WIL to end the effect. The Young Lord reacts poorly to those who resist or interfere with his song.
- 6 **Two Chevaltron** march with military precision, patrolling the halls. All intruders are detained to U3.
- 7 A broken **Constructoid** rolls awkwardly down the hallway, swinging its hammer at a Sverk who shoots its spines. The spines fly wildly in all directions, **save DEX**. The spines pierce the Constructoid's boiler, leaking water everywhere and it slowly rolls to a stop.
- 8 **Unstable water pipe**: with a harrowing crack, the nearest water pipe bursts and sprays boiling water, d6 **blast** damage, **save DEX**.

HOUSE EXTERIOR

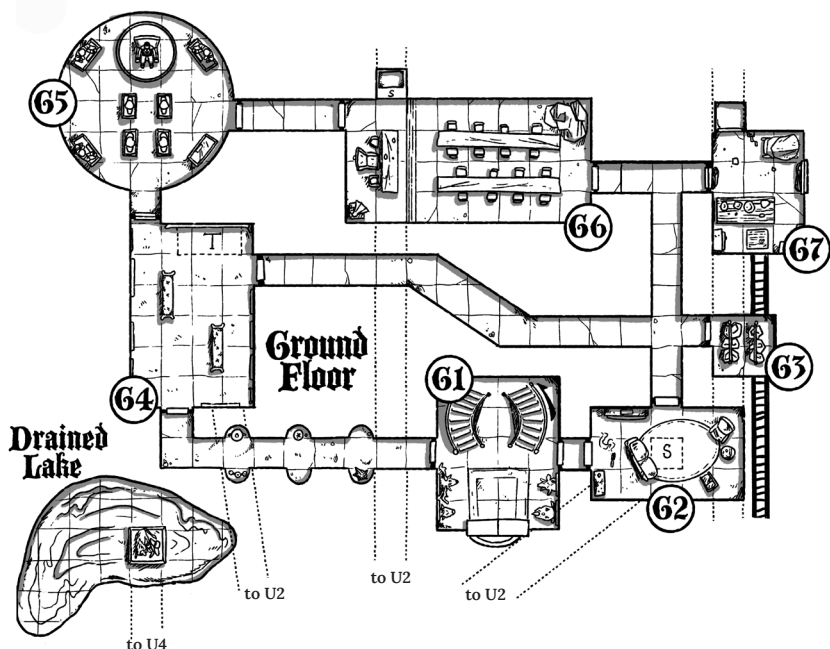
Agonius Hall is a grandiose neoclassical manor house that stands prominently on a picturesque hillside overlooking the surrounding tenant farmers fields. The **drained lake** is visible on the West side of the house. The hall can be entered by two visible doors: the **main entrance** by the decaying front garden (lock broken, heavy double doors swing listlessly in the wind), or the **servant's entrance** into the kitchen, located on the East side of the hall (tied shut from the inside).

The Drained Lake

To the west side of Agonius Hall is a muddy, drained **lakebed**. At the center on a raised platform stands **two bronze statues** on a 5' tall marble plinth.

- **Lakebed**: Deep footprints lead to the statues.
 - † Beneath the mud are metal shutters covering the ballroom glass dome ceiling.

- † Vent pipes can be spotted with a careful eye.
- † The lake was drained to fuel the automatons and the house's boiler system.
- **Bronze statues**: A tall lord and a mountain lion, striding together.
- † The plinth plaque declares "Noble Agonius, I praise your majesty. With affection, H.A."
- † **Honor Agonius**: read the plaque or praise the cat verbally to reveal a locked elevator door concealed in the plinth. It can be operated by entering the elevator via **U4** or by playing the song **Lord Horace's March** on the organ in **S1**. Can also be pried open but the elevator will not function.



PROCEDURES INSIDE AGONIUS HALL

This adventure requires tracking dungeon cycles for two main events.

Once the party enters the hall, **roll 5d4**. That is how many dungeon cycles it will take Lucius Callo to finish making the automaton armor and filling its boiler. After this is complete, he will march through the halls with six Chevaltron to gather the sacrifices.

There is an **Organ** on the second floor played by an automaton. Different songs have different effects on the house. The organ song plays repeatedly, becoming more languid until stopping abruptly after **3d4** dungeon cycles have passed. When the music stops everything remains in its current status.

- **Evening Song** retracts the stairs and places the automatons on slow evening patrol routes through the halls. This is what is being played when adventurers arrive at the Hall. The Lake Elevator is locked.

- **Alert** places all automatons on guard, searching for invaders. It retracts the main stair if it is down, closes all open doors, and locks all elevators.
- **Lord Horace's March** opens all locked doors including the lake elevator and restores the main staircase.
- **Ascension** reveals a secret elevator in the Music Room that stops at **G6** and **U2**.
- **Hymn to His Youth** encourages the **Young Lord** statue to return to **G5**.

For the Warden: Concealed in every public room is a hidden speaking tube system connected to Lord Horace's bedroom. If the party lingers in any one place, the Sverks in **S3** may overhear and head to their location.

GROUND FLOOR

First Impressions: Elegant finery covered in dust and spoiled by recent violence. The house is ostentatious, designed to intimidate through refinement. All rooms have pocket doors. Doors are unlocked and open unless noted. Organ music and the hum of pumping water can be heard at all times. All curtains are drawn shut.

G1 The Entrance Hall

A grand two-story room features a wooden **imperial staircase** with two parallel flights, candle lit by a crystal chandelier hanging close to the floor. **Trophy animal heads** hang on the east and west walls high above **marble bas relief** panels. Snoring can be heard from above. Above the staircase half-landing hangs a green **heraldic shield**. **Metal bits** are scattered on the floor in a pool of water.

- **Imperial staircase:** Two flights of stairs ascend from half-landing to the second floor.
 - † Staircase is retracted 15' below the second floor on both flights. Examining the staircase reveals a hinged access panel.
 - † **Access panel:** Manual crank control that resets the staircase. This takes one dungeon cycle.
- **Chandelier:** 4' above ground suspended by a pulley system. Candles are lit.
 - † 50' Hoist rope tied off on a rope cleat on the east wall at ground level. There is no counterweight.
 - † Releasing the rope from the cleat will cause the chandelier to descend if the rope is not held. The chandelier can support the weight of one adventurer.
- **Trophy animal heads:** Scratch marks on the walls below. **Two Sverks** sleep soundly on the trophy heads.
- **Marble Bas Relief panels:** Flattering depiction of a noble man and a mountain lion hunting. Two panels worth 500gp each and bulky.

- **Heraldic shield:** Depicts a golden lion biting a red apple on a green field. Worth 100 gp. Hung 7' above landing.
- **Metal bits:** Broken clockwork machinery lies in a puddle of water on the floor, pierced by an obsidian spine.

G2 Receiving Room

The room is dark and smoky smelling, with burnt furniture arranged haphazardly. An extinguished **torch** lies on the ground. All outside light is blocked by forest green floor length curtains along the southern wall. At center lies a round **ornamental rug**. A cold fireplace sits on the northern wall. On the marble mantle sits a **pendulum clock**. Above the mantle hangs a large **painting**. Two Constructoids hammer a railing back into place.

- **Torch:** Still held by a severed Sverk hand.
- **Pendulum clock:** Nonfunctional, it conceals behind it a speaking tube connected to S3. Worth 25gp.
- **Ornamental rug:** Blue and gold depicting hunting imagery. Hammer strikes can be heard below.
 - † The rug conceals a narrow wooden chute, navigable at a squeeze. Adventurers can slide to U2.
 - † In case of alarm, an Automite will ascend the long chute from U2.
- **Large painting:** An original watercolor landscape depicting majestic gray trees by a blue river hangs in a gold filigree frame on a wire.
 - † **Bell alarm**, replace the painting with an item of similar weight or trigger an Automite from U2.
- **Constructoids:** If they see strangers, they will steam whistle for backup and swing hammers menacingly.

G3 Cloak Room

This dark, dusty square chamber contains dark-stained mahogany coat racks in two even rows running North to South. Escaped prisoner **Hal Cremwar** sneaks around searching cloaks for valuables. The racks contain the following cloaks: rust brown, blue velvet with fur trim, dark azure, forest green, and black.

- **Hal Cremwar:** He will attempt to sell the adventurers on helping him steal rare books from **S2**. Will flee at the first sign of trouble. In his pockets: 49gp, a makeshift lockpick, a pilfered kitchen knife, and a finely carved wooden pipe. He knows Catherine is in the kitchen, having escaped the undercroft via the pantry ladder.
- **Blue velvet cloak** With ermine trimmings stitched with gold thread. Pockets jingle. It feels warm.
 - † **Trap:** Attempts to consume the wearer. Save STR or take d6 STR damage. Damaged as normal fabric.
- **Red and Brown:** Servants' cloaks with Lord Horace Appleblossom's green apple embroidered upon them. If searched, pockets contain bits of tobacco, a few coins, and a vial of sneezing powder.
- **Dark Azure:** Pinned with a silver trumpet.
- **Forest Green:** Pinned with a bronze harp. Pocket contains an insulting invitation letter from Lord Horace to Lord Lyra.
- **Black:** Red velvet underlinings pinned with an iron anchor.

G4 The Gallery

Framed oil and watercolor **paintings** depicting hunting imagery cover all walls, **wire-hung**. Hanging braziers light the room. Wall-to-wall crimson handwoven **carpet** depicting hunting feats covers the floor. The largest painting takes up half the north wall.

- **Paintings:**
 - † **The Prisoners:** Northern Renaissance-style painting of grim people caged by black iron bars. This is the largest

painting on the North wall.

- † **Upon inspection:** One prisoner can be seen shivering in a bleak grey cell.
- † **Carpet:** Slightly raised in front of the painting *The Prisoners*. See **Carpet**.
- † **Feline Portrait:** Oil painting of the mountain lion Agonius in silhouette, regal.
- † **Architectural rendering:** Agonius Hall, next to which can be seen a glass dome in the ground.
- **Wire-hung:** All art is wired to an alarm system. Triggers **two Chevaltron** to rush from **U2** to detain thieves.
 - † The alarm triggers by removing the painting from the hanging wire without replacing the weight.
- **Carpet:** Slightly raised in front of the painting *The Prisoners*.
 - † There is a hidden **pressure plate** in front of the painting *The Prisoners*.
 - † **Pressure Plate:** The room's doors close. The Prisoner painting slides up the wall vertically revealing a yawning hole. A powerful suction pulls the person who stepped on the plate, save DEX. On failure, the character is pulled into the hole and down a slick metal slide to **U3**.

G5 The Statuary

A circular room with **four plinths** holding three statues at four intercardinal directions and pedestals holding smaller statues and **busts**. The slightly decayed, reanimated body of **Lord Horace** rests on a marble throne at center of a round plinth with a **Chevaltron** behind his right shoulder. The door to **G4** is locked.

- **Four plinths:** The plaques on each read (clockwise from North): Lord Horace as a child, Lord Horace the young adventurer, Lord Horace in maturity, Lord Horace the elder. Each statue holds a book.
 - † **Missing statue:** Young Lord Horace. The marble has metal scrapes but no signs of something heavy being dragged.

- **Busts:** On a pedestal is the marble statue The Bust of the Martyr Martol. It depicts a partially-eviscerated monk smiling, eyes gazing upward. Worth 100gp.
- **Lord Horace:** Mostly dead. He tells meandering horrible stories of his ill gotten wealth.
 - † I listen to everybody from my room. No secrets can be held from me!
 - † That Lucius has brought me delightful automation everywhere.
 - † I adore the convenience of my elevators.
 - † I wish to hear my song, **Lord Horace's March**. Why does the organist not play it?
 - † Find Catherine to prepare me a nice port and some creme brulee.
 - † I delighted in sacrificing that terrible Lord Lyra and the rest of his peers. How dare he kill Agonius! The monster! He deserved to die for that, and for his threats.
- **Chevaltron:** Leaking water from chest chamber. It will attack any creature that approaches Lord Horace without kneeling and being invited to come closer. Can attack three times before shutting down due to leak.
- **Warden Note:** If the skeletons in the Chained Library have been slain, Lord Horace is dead and the Chevaltrons kneel unresponsive.

G6 The Banquet Hall

The banquet hall is a dark rectangular chamber with two long tables with benches and a **lord's table**. Tables and seating are draped in ghostly white fabric, casting long shadows. An Automite patrols the hall, its bells dinging lightly. A **phonograph** sits by the lord's table in a corner. The reanimated mountain lion **Agonius** rests on a pile of blankets and torn draperies in a corner of the room. A necrotic odor fills the hall emanating from it.

- **Lord's table:** lifting the fabric reveals that several chairs have signs of rope damage on the armrests and back.

† Puddle of blood: Concealed in the puddle is a golden harp brooch.

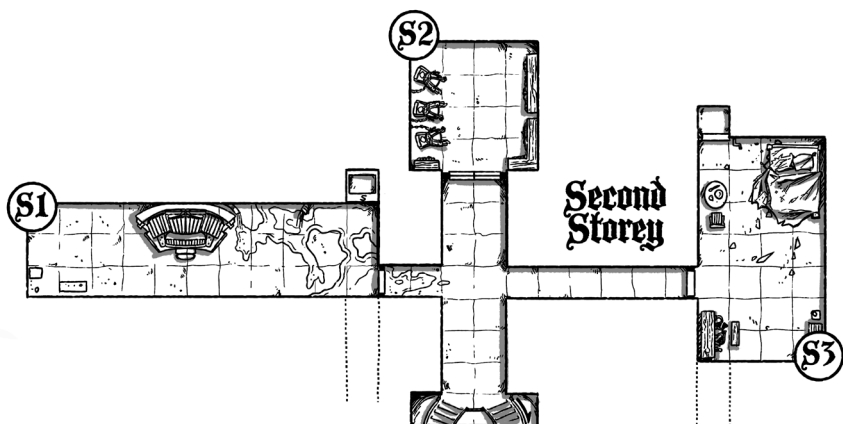
- **Phonograph** holds a wax cylinder hand-labeled "Song of Sedation".
 - † **If played:** A tender fiddle song quakes out of the horn. save WIL. on a failure the listener cannot move until the phonograph is turned off.
- **Agonius** rests in the Banquet Hall on a pile of draperies and Sverk bones. His ornamental torso armor crushes into his decaying flesh. If awoken, he hunts.

G7 The Kitchen

Immediately outside of the Kitchen is one long-dead Sverk with multiple stab wounds. The kitchen has doors that swing out, both of which are secured from inside with rope.

The kitchen is cluttered, with all surfaces covered in servingware. There is a **cot** in the northeast corner covered in soft linens. The **spice rack** above the prep table denotes a timid palette. The cookfire is only embers. There is a trapdoor and ladder to **U1** and a dumbwaiter to **U1** and **S3**.

- **Cot:** Catherine lives here at the moment. She defends the room, bristling with fiery energy and requires reassurance to enter.
 - † Catherine knows: everything became chaotic after Lord Horace's fancy dinner, that Jensen is in the prison, that Lucius is in his workshop, that there are chained skeletons in the Library, and that the organ music seems to be getting slower. She stole a household master key. She will not leave without Jensen.
- **Spice rack:** an unmarked brown **ceramic jar** sits on the shelf, wax seal cracked.
 - † Inside the jar is two tablespoons of unevenly ground chartreuse powder.
 - † **Consume the powder:** the ingester cannot speak for d6 dungeon cycles.



SECOND STORY

First Impressions: Loud organ music makes hearing difficult on this floor. The wallpaper and fabric hangings are heavily damaged.

S1 The Music Room

The hallway rug immediately outside of the room is wet.

The music room is long and narrow with a vaulted ceiling. It contains a **pipe organ** on the North wall, a book of **sheet music** open on top. Seated at the organ is a **metal figure**. A very hot broken metal pipe hangs loosely from the wall nearby leaking boiling water onto the soaked carpet. Several dead Sverk lie on the ground.

- **Pipe Organ:** A wooden book of sheet music is perched on the organ. It contains six songs:

- † **Evening Song** retracts the stairs and places the automatons on slow evening patrol routes through the halls. This is what is being played when adventurers arrive at the Hall.
- † **Alert** places all automatons on guard, searching for invaders. It retracts the main stair if it is down, closes all open doors, and locks all elevators.
- † **Lord Horace's March** opens all locked doors including S2 and the lake elevator, and restores the main staircase.

- † **Ascension** reveals a secret elevator in the Music Room that stops at G6 and U2.

- † **Hymn to His Youth** encourages the Young Lord statue to return to G5.

- **Metal Figure:** The organ player is a metal cylinder with finely crafted limbs and fingers to play the keys, but no head to lend it a humanlike appearance. It continually plays the **Evening Song** or **Alert** if the adventurers have been discovered by the automatons.

- **Boiler:** Water leaking from stab holes. The organ player will stop playing when its boiler is empty, 3d4 dungeon cycles after the party enters Agonius Hall.

- † The organ player cannot play a new song until the boiler has been refilled.
- † Filling the boiler takes one dungeon turn.

S2 The Chained Library

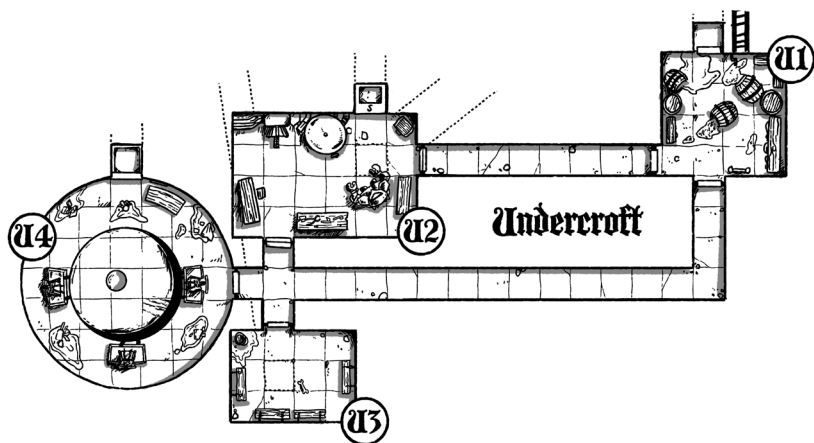
The heavy oak **door** is locked. A square dusty room with rows of **chained bookshelves** along the eastern and southern walls and three **skeletons** chained to heavy wooden chairs along the western wall.

- **Locked Door:** The key is held by both Lord Horace and Catherine.
- **Chained Bookshelves:** Five highly illegal occult texts worth 50 gp each. Each text is chained to its shelf. One red bound book rests on top of a shelf.
 - † **Red book:** Lord Horace's blackmail log and secrets. Reading it, one can learn:
 - † **The Rival Lords:** Polonius Lyra, Priscilla Bucina, and Giannis Ancoranavis.
 - † **Three Skeletons:** They were occult sorcerers who studied the art of unnaturally prolonging life. They taught Lord Horace how to use other people as a lifeline to prevent permanent death. Then, he trapped them into doing so for him.
- **Sorcerer Skeletons:** Each is chained to a heavy wooden chair and dressed in desecrated black robes. There is a **scroll** wired into each skeleton's mouth.
 - † **Chains:** If a skeleton is released from its chains, it attacks the nearest creature. If all three skeletons are slain, Lord Horace's soul is released and he dies permanently.
 - † **Scroll:** Covered in curses. Occasionally new words appear onto the scrolls. Anyone attempting to remove the scroll must save DEX or is bitten for d6 STR damage). The scrolls are as follows:
 - † **Bind:** The target cannot move for one hour.
 - † **Cruel Derision:** The target's confidence shatters for one hour.
 - † **Menace:** Name a person or specific creature. They cannot approach and will flee if approached by the caster for one hour.

S3 Lord Horace's Bedchamber and Office

Torn green wallpaper designed with golden filigree hangs limply on the walls. A brutalized **canopy bed** sits at center. A **Sverk** growls in front of a wooden console on the East wall. Soft murmuring sounds and snoring can be heard. There is a **dumbwaiter** on the East wall.

- **Canopy Bed:** The Sverks have been using this room as a nest. One **Sverk** sleeps concealed on the canopy.
- **Sverk:** Attempts to listen to other rooms using the wooden console while bleeding steaming black blood from a kitchen knife stabbed into its left arm.
- **Console:** Covered in tubes with a small ear trumpet at the end of each, labeled with a room name. There is a small, doodled reference map nailed on for all floors. Soft murmuring sounds issue forth from the trumpets.
 - † A PC can put a trumpet to their ear to overhear what is happening in the corresponding room.
- **Dumbwaiter:** connected to G7.



THE UNDERCROFT

First Impressions: The air is humid and reeks of metal lubricant. Chattering and hammering can be heard.

U1 The Pantry

Dry room with bare shelves on all walls. The air reeks of spoiled wine. Broken barrels and spilled grain cover the floor. A trap door and ladder lead up to **G7** along with a dumbwaiter.

U2 The Workshop Machinarium

The door is locked. This chaotic workshop contains an **automaton suit** being worked on by **Lucius Callo**. Within the room is the **pipe organ machinery** and the house's **boiler**, as well as a large workbench, a wooden **chest**, a forlorn cot, a storage **nook**, and various tools.

- **Automaton Suit:** Bipedal mechanical battle armor with grippers on the ends of each upper appendage.

† A fueled suit with a rider can walk and grip enormously heavy objects.

† **Unstable.** When piloted, roll Die of Fate every six dungeon cycles to determine if the boiler is empty (2-3). On a 1 the boiler explodes for d8 **blast**.

† **Fuel:** It takes three dungeon cycles to fill the boiler.

- **Lucius Callo** works on the suit. He summons automatons when in danger with a train conductor whistle.
- **Pipe organ machinery:** A weaponless **Chevaltron** cranks a hand blower, feeding air into the organ pipes.
- **Boiler:** Pumps hot water to various rooms, supporting mechanical devices.
- **Trapped chest:** Full of holes, wire attached to mechanism under box lid.
 - † **Dart trap:** Save DEX or take d6 STR damage.
 - † Contains Lucius's research on automatons, worth 300gp to a specialty buyer.
- **Nook:** Automite, Chevaltron with empty tanks. Lucius dispatches these to alerts.
- **Tools:** Chain cutters, sledgehammer (d8, bulky), rope (25ft), hand steamer (d8, blast, three uses).

U3 The Jail

A dank cell that contains benches and a crude chamber pot. There is a man-sized **hole** in the ceiling. One **prisoner** dressed in a dirty rust-colored tunic sits in the cell. He will attempt to bar entry.

- **Cell:** Unlocked.
- **Hole:** The bottom of the **G4** painting trap slide.
- **Prisoner:** Jensen Wilthorn remains in the cell to avoid the Sverks and the undead Agonius's hunger. Terror-stricken, he witnessed Lord Polonius Lyra's death via immolation in **U4**. He refuses to leave without significant persuasion. Catherine sneaks him food. He knows Hal Cremwar escaped the cell and has not seen him since. Jensen created the organist automaton and will not leave without it.

U4 Lord Horace's Ballroom

Two-story tall circular room with stone walls and a domed glass **ceiling**. Lit candelabras frame the room on all walls. The floor is covered in **metal pieces** in puddles of water. At center is an enormous metal circular **inlay** in the floor surrounded by three dusty **plinths** bearing **metal thrones**. A large **work table** stands on the north end of the room next to **metal** mounted onto the wall and a strange metal **door** on the North Wall.

- **Ceiling:** Metal can be seen through the glass dome.
- **Metal Pieces:** Broken Automites pierced by volcanic Sverk spikes.
- **Inlay:** A metal circular door in the floor, slightly ajar with obvious claw marks on the edge. Designed with fantastical otherworldly imagery of a great demonic war. Has distinct carvings leading to a circle at center, bloodstained. Pipes lead from it to the three metal thrones.
- **Metal Thrones:** Each chair has metal restraints, a hole in the backrest and a brazier underneath, as well as pipes that lead from it to the inlay. Three burnt skeletons sit on the chairs.

† The middle skeleton wears a **signet ring** emblazoned with a harp with the initials PL.

- **Work table:** Covered in metal parts, star maps, and a large tome.

† **Lord Horace's Grimoire** sits on the table. Formal handwriting describes a ritual granting eternal power through ritual sacrifice to entrap a demon, and how to tether one's soul to others to prevent complete death. Worth 250gp to sorcerers of ill repute.

- **Metal:** Switch system that calls elevator and opens the ceiling shutters, revealing the sky and some lake mud. These are very noisy processes.
- **Door:** Elevator to the **Drained Lake**.

POTENTIAL RESOLUTIONS

The adventure Dread Hospitality's problems include obtaining proof of death for Lord Polonius Lyra and preventing the ritual.

The proof of death quest can be resolved by either rescuing Jensen Wilthorn from **U2** or securing the signet ring from **U4**.

Preventing the ritual is achievable. These are a few potential methods.

1. Destroy the Sorcerer Skeletons in S2: this permanently kills Lord Horace, releases Agonius and the Young Lord Horace statue, and closes the gate in **U4**.
2. Capture or slay Lucius Callo: this prevents the ritual in the near term. However, Lord Svork will attempt to subdue any remaining human in the hall, beginning with Jensen Wilthorn. Removing the other humans would be wise.
3. Kill all the Sverks: this will remove the demon's tether to this plane for the moment
4. Use the automaton suit's enormous strength to close the gate in **U4**.
5. Destroy the Hall: a truly chaotic option but theoretically possible using the automaton suit.

BESTIARY

Agonius the Mountain Lion (His Aggression)

6 HP, 2 *Armor*, 10 STR, 14 DEX, 6 WIL, *claw* (d6+d6) and *bite* (d8)

- The undead Agonius reeks of necrosis, wearing highly ornamental gold and iron torso armor that crushes into its gray decaying flesh. It is mindlessly aggressive.
- **Critical Damage:** Necrotic poison spreads from the bite. Target takes d6 DEX damage.
- Dies if Lord Horace dies permanently.

Automite

3 HP, 1 *Armor*, 4 STR, 12 DEX, 8 WIL, *horizontal spinning blade* (d6+d6)

- Small mechanical boiler-powered machine with a spinning blade on top. Deeply risk averse.
- **Alarm bell:** Rings to draw attention when noticing anything out of place.
- Rolls through the manor house at breakneck speed.

Chevaltron

6 HP, 3 *Armor*, 8 STR, 6 DEX, 6 WIL, *vertical blade* (d10)

- 5' tall knight-style automatons powered by hissing boilers in their chests and enormous runes that dictate their behaviors.
- They move loudly and slowly in pairs, swinging their large right arms which resemble swords.

Hal Cremwar

6 HP, 10 STR, 12 DEX, 10 WIL, *dagger* (d6)

- An aspiring gentleman thief that reeks of turnips.

Lucius Callo

6 HP, 10 STR, 12 DEX, 12 WIL, *hammer* (d6)

- A corrupt engineer warped by a lesser demon's influence.

Lucius Callo in Automaton Armor

6 HP, 3 *Armor*, 16 STR, 6 DEX, 12 WIL, *gripper* (d10)

- A metal body cage with grippers on the ends of each mechanical arm. A boiler is mounted onto the back, and birdlike "feet" stick from the end of thick metal legs. The operator's torso is protected, but their head is exposed.
- Moves slowly and without agility for one hour on a full boiler.

Constrictor Snake

3 HP, 10 STR, 12 DEX, 3 WIL, *bite* (d6)

- Trained poorly to assist Sverks in hunting. Will constrict and capture large prey.

Constructoid

3 HP, 2 *Armor*, 6 STR, 8 DEX, 6 WIL, *ball peen hammer* (d6)

- 3' tall hammer-wielding bipedal automatons powered by hissing boilers in their chest. They do not have heads.
- **Primary function:** Repairing traps and other household structural items.

Sverk

3 HP, 1 *Armor*, 6 STR, 8 DEX, 3 WIL, *spear* (d6), *volcanic spine* (d4)

- Small reptilian bipedal creatures with volcanic rock skin spawned from the infernal Lord Svork. Their spines resemble stegosauri that they jettison as a weapon.

BESTIARY

Lord Horace Appleblossom

6 HP, 6 STR, 6 DEX, 14 WIL, *cane sword* (d6)

- A dead patriarch that remains tethered to his body, sustained by the Sorcerer Skeletons in the Chained Library's occult power. Dies permanently if the skeletons are released and slain.
- If slain and the Sorcerer Skeletons in S2 remain chained, he will awaken again in 3 days time. They scream when he is killed.
- **Ring Bell:** Once per combat, Lord Horace rings a large bell to summon four automatons of the following make. Roll d6: 1-2 Automites, 3-4 Constructoids, 5-6 Chevaltrons to arrive in two rounds of combat.
- **Carries:** Chain master key: Unlocks all doors and the chained skeletons who partially tether his soul to his rotting frame.

Lord Svork

10 HP, 3 Armor, 14 STR, 10 DEX, 16 WIL, *spine* (d8 blast), *infernal spear* (d12+d12)

- A large reptilian bipedal lesser demon in the shape of Lord Horace Appleblossom with volcanic rock skin.
- Dreadlord Anromedus Hallion's 7th Cup Bearer's Underservant. He dreams of being worshiped by screaming masses.
- **Spawn:** Ejects d6 spines. In one turn they will become Sverks, called to serve their master.

Sorcerer Skeleton

5 HP, 1 Armor, 8 STR, 13 DEX, 0 WIL, *bite* (d8)

- The skeletons serve as a tether for Lord Horace's soul to his body. Destroying them kills Lord Horace permanently and releases the loose personality aspects.
- They scream a horrific death rattle if Horace is killed and they are still intact.
- **Cast Spell:** If provoked the skeleton can cast its scroll spell.
 - † **Bind:** The target cannot move for one hour.
 - † **Cruel Derision:** The target's confidence shatters for one hour.
 - † **Menace:** Name a person or specific creature. They cannot approach and will flee if approached by the caster for one hour.

Young Lord Horace Statue (His Pride)

6 HP, 2 Armor, 6 STR, 6 DEX, 6 WIL 10, *book* (d6)

- Stone statue of young Lord Horace holding an adventure book. Adores charm and etiquette.
- **To Arms:** His lordly voice summons two automatons to his side. Roll d6 to determine what kind: 1-2 Automites, 3-4 Constructoids 5-6 Chevaltrons. Once per combat.
- Returns to being a normal statue if Lord Horace dies permanently.



The background is dark gray. A thick, light gray vertical bar runs down the left side. The title 'BLOODMARM' is in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Below it, 'BARROW' is in large, light gray, bold, sans-serif capital letters. There are several stylized, detailed eyes scattered around the text. A vertical light gray bar with a bulb at the bottom contains a series of small black teardrop shapes.

BLOODMARM BARROW

By Brad Kerr

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Intro

Bloodmarm Barrow is a location-based adventure for Cairn. Player characters will investigate strange and supernatural happenings in a remote burial mound where bandits lurk and a powerful extraplanar creature secretly dwells.

The Bloodmarm

The Bloodmarm is a living crystal from a transdimensional sea of blood. She takes root underground and flowers in darkness, sprouting obelisks that slowly stretch upwards. Her obelisks can “steal” the body parts of any sentient being foolish enough to make physical contact with her crystal; these aspects of humanity pollinate the Bloodmarm and she can replicate these human fragments endlessly in a kaleidoscope of flesh. The Bloodmarm dreams of a daughter. When one day she amasses enough human ingredients, her crystal-hearted conqueror spawn will step foot into the mortal world.



Playtesters: Derrick Martin-Campbell, Matt Stikker, Dan Cohen, Yochai Gal, Cassie Hodge, Mary Ferrigno, Amanda P.

Development and special thanks: Benjamin Marra

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- **A long time ago:** The Bloodmarm entered our world and took root deep below ground.
- **Some time later:** Ancient peoples from a long dead civilization interred their dead within large burial mounds unknowingly above the Bloodmarm.
- **Recently:** Bandits led by the witch, Mother Silvia, claimed the barrow as a secret hideout. Mother Silvia discovered the Bloodmarm obelisk and lost a hand to it.
- **Last week:** The bandits kidnapped farmer Arthur and his family to ransom them to the duke, Arthur's wealthy distant relative. Mother Silvia experimented with the obelisk; she used it to steal Arthur's face and distilled the magic runoff into a potion that replaces its imbiber's visage with that of Arthur's. In her experiments, she tested this potion on herself, the captives, the bandits, and their dogs.
- **This morning:** Arthur, bandaged and faceless, escaped the barrow. The bandits, still wearing his face, pursue.

THE HOOK

As the party of adventurers travel through the windy moors, they're hailed from a distance by Arthur, a bloody, bandaged, limping farmer. Arthur explains that a group of bandits kidnapped his family and "stole his face." He offers that his wealthy brother-in-law would reward the PCs for his family's safe return, though he himself refuses to return to the barrow. Arthur is a decent farmer but an ineffective coward in times of peril. He promises a plot of land, a cottage, and an heirloom sword to reluctant would-be rescuers.

REINFORCEMENTS

A group of mounted bandits search the moor for Arthur but will eventually give up and return to their hideout. The bandits return to the barrow the first time "Encounter" is rolled on the dungeon events table. There are 6+X bandits wherein X equals the number of player characters and hirelings. The returning bandits present an overwhelming force not easily confronted head-on. Their sudden arrival is portended by a clamor of hollering and hooves; moments later, they enter area 2.

PCs captured by the bandits or Mother Silvia will be stripped of weapons and valuables and tossed roughly into the prison pit (d6 STR damage, area 9).

THE IMMEDIATE ENVIRONS

Ten mossy, earthen burial domes lay haphazardly among an elevated patch of scruffy brush and rocky debris. Each 60' diameter dome stands approximately 12' high. Many of the domes have partly collapsed; only the two domes in the center of the cluster stand intact.

Puffs of tobacco smoke and soft grumbling exhales from two guards standing in front of an unsealed mound (area 1). Careful inspection of the dome's perimeter reveals an unappealing vermin burrow opposite the entrance (area 4).

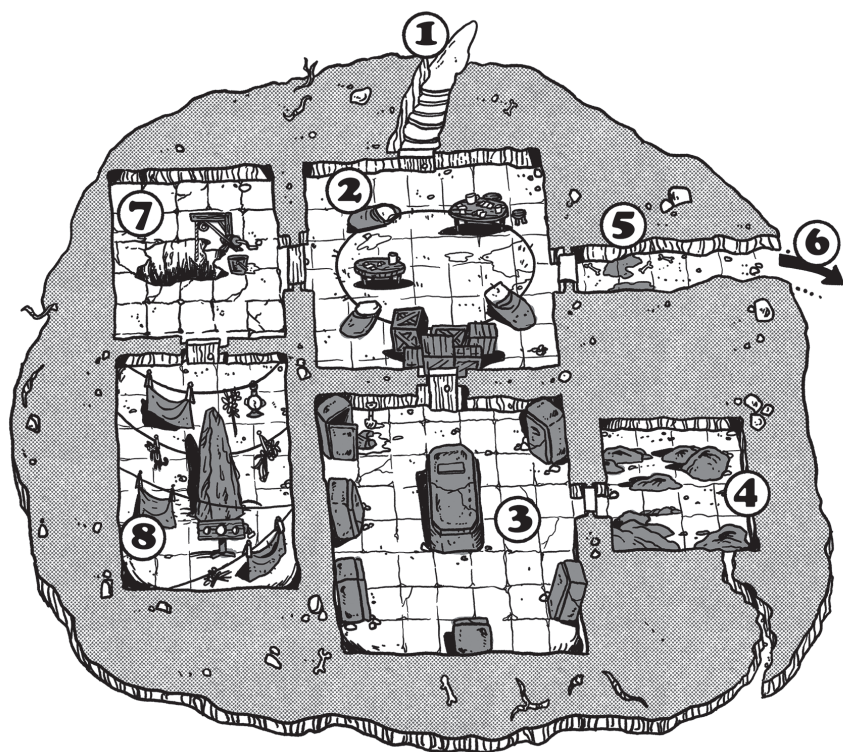
The neighboring, intact burial mound's entrance is sealed with a heavy stone (area 6). The entrance faces away from the guards' line of sight but the sounds of excavation may attract their curiosity.

BANDIT

4 HP, 1 Armor, 12 STR, 12 DEX, 9 WIL, blade (d6) or short bow (d6)

Many body types comprise the bandits. However, each bandit wears the same face.

Level One



1. ENTRANCE

Two foul-mouthed louts with the same face lean against polearms at the door of an unsealed burial mound. They explain that they're twins and roughly demand that any uninvited guests piss off. Halfway through the conversation a confused-looking third twin appears from the mound. They are poor conversationalists and prefer violence when words fail.

- **The "Twins":** Bandits who have imbibed a potion to give them the face of Arthur, human farmer. Mother Syliva, whom they greatly fear, charged them to stand guard while their comrades search for the escaped prisoner.
- **Treasure:** The bandits each carry one extra "Arthur Face" potion and a total of 65 GP between them.

"Arthur Potion"

An oily, barley-scented potion crafted by the witch Mother Syliva by stealing Farmer Arthur's face via the Bloodmarm's magic. The witch brewed a large batch of the stuff; bottled potions are plentifully stocked throughout the barrow.

Effect: The imbiber's face transforms into that of Arthur, a middle-aged peasant farmer. Duration: one week.

2. LIVING QUARTERS

Earthen walls, low ceilings, a grubby carpet on a dirt floor. The damp has gotten into the furniture here; black mold stains the wooden tables, playing cards, and dirty bedrolls. The cloying, oily smell of roast meat in an unventilated space hangs in the air and seeps into clothing. Crates stack high against a door on the southern wall.

- **Doors:** The sound of barking sounds from the east. Crates block the southern exit. The western door is silent.
- **Treasure:** In the crates: an abundance of mundane camping gear, iron rations, and shovels. A cask of fine olive oil (50 GP, bulky).

3. COFFINS

Colder in here; breath is suddenly visible. Six upright stone coffins line the walls; one coffin's lid is pried open and a hacked up corpse-rubbery, gray, and nude--lies in a heap before it. An ichor-stained shovel leans nearby. An oversized sarcophagus sits at the center of the room.

- **The upright coffins:** each contains a zombie wearing jewelry worth 3d20 GP. Interacting with a coffin awakens the zombie within and has a 2-in-6 chance of awakening the entire group.
- **Oversized Sarcophagus:** contains a secret staircase to the golden dome (room 11).

ZOMBIE

2 HP, 12 STR, 6 DEX, 3 WIL, jagged nails (d6)

- **Critical Damage:** Target is infected and becomes deprived. Without the services of a specialist or healer, they will become a zombie in 1d4 days.
- **Slow:** Zombies always attack last in a round.

4. RAT NEST

Piles of loose earth and the fetid miscellany of unchecked vermin nests punctuate an otherwise empty room. A dozen rats dug their way into the barrow and made a warren here. They also got into Mother Silvia's potions and now have identical human faces.

- **The rat tunnel:** a barely traversable exit. Attempts to crawl through the tunnel first require a turn clearing obstructions and widening pinch points. Unless extreme precautions are taken, the first person through the tunnel is bitten by a human-faced rat.
- **The rat nests:** Scraps of flannel and bits of paper fly under a churn of scurrying as rats seek cover. The glint of a golden amulet (100 GP) is barely visible. Anyone reaching a hand in to retrieve it will almost certainly get bitten by a human-faced rat.
- **Bitten by a human-faced rat:** A likely outcome from lingering too long in this room. Effect: 1 STR damage and save STR or be deprived from rat filth fever until medicinal ointment is applied.

5. KENNEL

Gnawed-on bones and acrid puddles of urine dot the stone floor of a damp corridor. Three slavering hound-things are chained by their necks at the corridor's middle; they have the long legs and matted fur of a wolfhound with the identical face of a man (farmer Arthur).

- **The dogs:** block passage to the adjoining barrow (area 6). Mother Silvia tested her Arthur potion on these guard hounds. The confused beasts don't know who to trust since everyone seems to look the same lately. PCs who look like Arthur may attempt to gain the dogs' trust.

HUNTING DOG

3 HP, 4 STR, 12 DEX, 8 WIL, bite (d6)

6. ANOTHER BARROW

A heavy, stone door opens to a dusty, cobweb-choked tomb. From some unseen corner comes a guttural chattering and the sound of crumpling metal.

- **The barrow:** An adjacent dungeon; its layout consists of a 3x3 grid of small rooms without doors.
- **The chattering sound:** A rust monster tunneled in and is gleefully devouring the armor off the many interred warriors. The curious beast comes sniffing towards any metal-laden interlopers.
- **Treasure:** Mostly eaten. Each room has a 1-in-6 chance that its stone coffins are yet unplundered and contains ancient armor, bronze swords (d6) and jewelry worth 1d6 x 10 GP.
- **Exit:** The tomb is sealed with a large stone and requires a STR save and a crowbar or something similar to push it aside.

RUST MONSTER

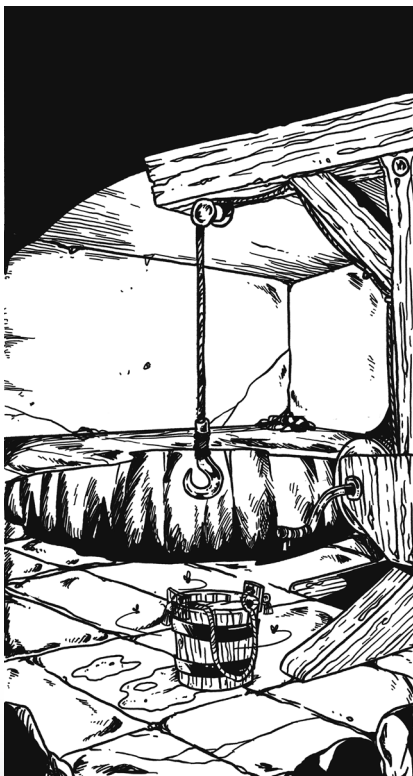
5 HP, 16 STR, 13 DEX, 5 WIL, bite (d6)

- Armadillo-like creatures with club-like tails and long antennae. Feed on iron and rusted metal.
- Any mundane metals its antennae touch instantly become rust. Can smell metal from a long distance away.
- **Critical Damage:** Metal armor rusts into useless weight.

7. THE PIT

A jagged hole gouged in the stone floor leads to a great darkness. Someone is crying down below. A crude winch and a gruel-splattered bucket stand nearby. A door to the south stands ajar. The hole leads 40' down to the prisoner holding cell (area 9).

- **The winch:** Un-oiled. It squeaks loudly.
- **The open door:** Leads to the witch' chamber (area 8). There's a 5-in-6 chance that Mother Sylvia hears anything above a whisper while the door remains open. Bells hang on the opposite end of the door and jingle loudly unless the door is closed carefully.



8. THE WITCH AND THE OBELISK

Door-mounted bells jingle whenever the door opens or closes, alerting Mother Silvia.

Yellow light glows from a hanging oil lantern. Clotheslines bearing painted silk, cat pets, and drying wildflowers criss-cross the room. From the center of the room juts a bulky, visibly damp crystal obelisk that nearly reaches the ceiling. A short, splintery pillory stands just before it. Someone inside the room hums softly to herself.

- **The obelisk:** actually the upper tip of the Bloodmarm (see area 10). Anyone who touches the obelisk must save WIL or magically lose the body part which made contact. Mother Silvia discovered a process of capturing the obelisk's magical condensation and bottling it. The resulting potion allows the imbiber to replace a body part with that of the obelisk's victim. Mother Silvia does not know the true nature of the obelisk and has not explored the lower floors.
- **Treasure:** An enormous stockpile of bottled "Arthur's Face" potions in a crate and the Witch's Sickle.
- **Witch Sickle:** Cut yourself (d4 STR) and splash your blood on a victim; they will treat you as a trusted friend for 1d6 hours. 3 charges.
 - **Recharge:** speak the name of a person or animal who knows your name, kill them with the sickle, and wash the blade with their blood.

Mother Silvia

8 HP, 12 STR, 10 DEX, 14 WIL, sickle (d6, see below)

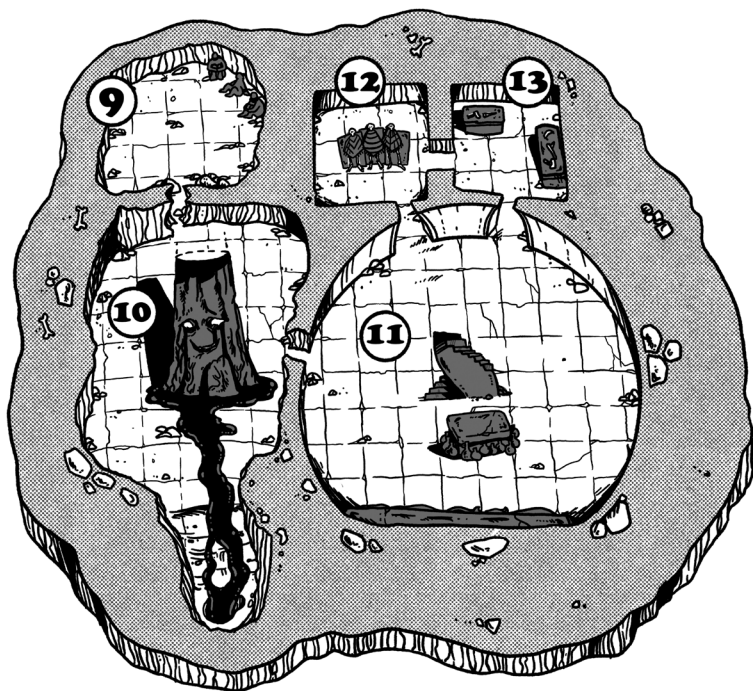
A bully of a witch with a low center of gravity, a missing hand, a blonde bob, and a patchwork catskin shawl dwells here. She, too, wears the face of Arthur the farmer. Mother Silvia huffily stomps up to trespassers, chides them for "having some nerve barging in here," inspects their hands, then thrusts the player character with the highest DEX towards the obelisk (save vs STR).

SPELLS:

- **Sleep** (A creature within line of sight falls into a light sleep)
- **Pox** (A touched creature develops a fever and open sores. They are deprived until medically treated)



Level Two



9. PRISONER PIT

A lightless pit, cold and silent, and stinking of stale sweat. The gray walls are slick from the heavy breath of three frightened prisoners, each of whom bears the face of Farmer Arthur. A warm breeze whistles slightly from a crack in the southern wall beside a pile of rocky debris.

The prisoners:

- **Babette** (STR 4), Arthur's mother. Too weak (or stubborn?) to climb a rope. Seemingly incapable of whispering.
- **Jenette** (STR 12), Arthur's wife. Farm tough but kind of losing it. The only thing that makes her madder than Arthur abandoning his family is that she now wears his stupid face. Wounded from a mysterious creature bite in area 10.
- **Toddlet** (STR 8), Jenette's brother. An extremely depressed poet who married a rich noble. His ransom is the real reason the family was abducted.
- **Above:** A hole to area 7 hangs 30' up. Climbing the slick stone without specialized gear is nearly impossible.
- **The crack in the wall:** A tiny, natural cave opening, recently excavated by the prisoners and only wide enough for someone to wriggle through slowly on their bellies with one arm extended over their head. The prisoners know something is on the other side but feel too frightened to investigate.
- **Cave debris:** A pile of rocks from the southern crack can serve as makeshift weapons (d6 damage).

10. THE BLOODMARM

A natural cavern. Gray stone, the warm smell of iron. A puddle of black oozes from a cyclopean column of twitching marble. It has a gash-like mouth of fractured stone and two lidless, weeping eyes. A mesh of veins throbs just below a thin outer layer of stone. The black puddle trickles south into a sloping stone cave mouth. The stone hums like an ultra-low-frequency bowed gong. Something close to words form. "Mmmmyyyyyy daughterrrrrrrrrr..."

- **The column:** The Bloodmarm. Spiraling bouquets of blooming left-hands and Arthur faces ascend like fractals from the blood towards anything that approaches.
- **The southern cave mouth:** A steep slope, slick from a constant trickle of blood, leads down to area 14. It appears extremely difficult to climb back out without rope.
- **North and Eastern exits:** Claustrophobic cracks in the stone. Anyone moving quickly or recklessly suffers 1d6 STR damage. The eastern crack sits dangerously close to the Bloodmarm's puddle.

The BLOODMARM

12 HP, 3 Armor, 16 STR, 4 DEX, 15 WIL 15, Blossoming hands (d6+d6)

- **Hostile Blood:** The Bloodmarm can only attack from the 5' radius puddle of blood that dribbles out of its obelisk. The puddle's radius expands every time the Bloodmarm is attacked; after three attacks, the blood puddle fills the entire room and spills into area 9.
- When the Bloodmarm has claimed six body parts it will assemble them into a daughter and free her to baptize the world in blood. (The newly created crystalline princess has the same stats as the Bloodmarm but has a human form capable of movement and may swim through solid earth like water.)
- **Critical Damage:** The Bloodmarm's yanks her target against her central column. Save WIL or lose a random body part.



11. GOLDEN DOME

A dome shaped room painted in gold leaf glitters brilliantly in torch light. 21 clay urns surround a large stone chest. A large bas relief set in the southern wall depicts a fanged warrior god, flying with winged boots and vomiting fire over a crowd of weeping skeletons.

- **The bas relief:** Extremely lifelike. The boots sparkle with gold.
- **Opening the chest:** Reveals 1440 ancient gold coins, a magic golden ax (d10+d10, bulky), and a saddle (bulky) that magically doubles the speed of any horse.
- **Touching the treasure** or attempting to remove the golden boots from the bas relief: awakens the ancient undead warrior god interred within the bas relief itself. It flies through the room screaming and vomiting fire. This also awakens any remaining zombies from area 3 who stumble down the stairs 3 rounds later.
- **Treasure:** Flying Boots. Allows bird-like flight for one dungeon turn. 3 charges. Recharge: Kill someone by kicking them with the boots.
- **Western exit:** A claustrophobic crack through the stone. Anyone moving quickly or recklessly suffers 1d6 STR damage. The awakened UNDEAD WARRIOR GOD is too big to fit through.

UNDEAD WARRIOR GOD

10 HP, 1 Armor, 14 STR, 13 DEX, 15 WIL, Fire vomit (d8, blast)

- Flight generated by its magical winged boots (see below).
- Too big to fit through the western crack to area 10.

12. LABORERS' GRAVE

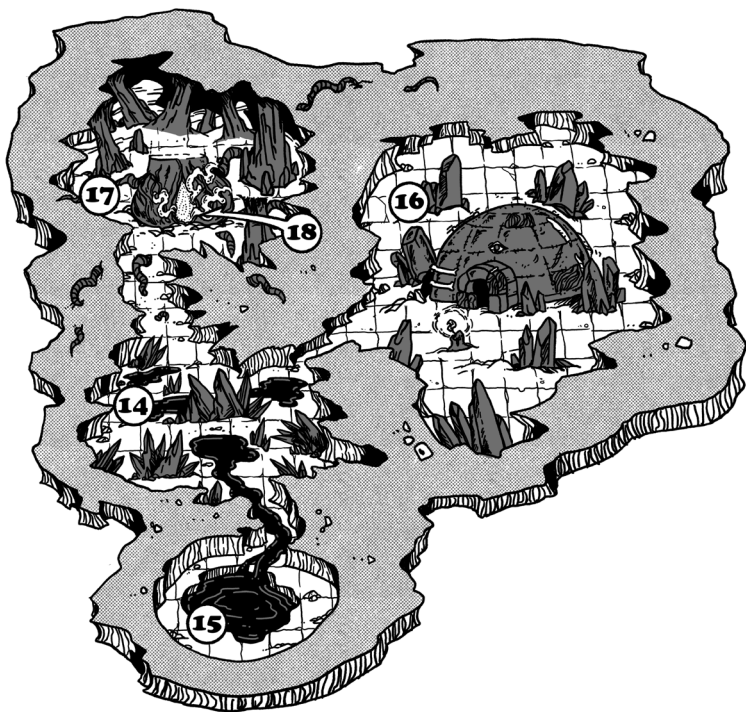
Three ash gray skeletons in ancient hide ponchos lie atop leather pallets.

- **The skeletons:** Ancient sculptor morticians who buried the forgotten warrior god within the bas relief in area 11 before ritualistically killing themselves. Their empty poison bottles lie beneath their bones. These artists found peace in death and will not re-animate.
- **The ancient ponchos:** disintegrate with any strenuous activity. The undead warrior god recognizes the poncho as a sign of a master artisan and will not attack one who wears it.

13. SUPPLY ROOM

A small stone chamber piled with ancient tools. Chisels, mallets, awls, brushes, dyes, scalpels, salt, linens, and jars.

- **The tools:** supplies used by the artisanal morticians in area 11 for sculpture and mummification. Awls and mallets may serve as makeshift weapons (d6).



14. BLOODY QUARTZ CAVERN

The blood-slickened slope from area 10 deposits PCs into a jagged, irregular cavern. Crystalline incursions fracture the floor into an arrow-sharp patchwork of quartz and gurgling blood puddles. The scraggy ceiling hangs only 3 feet overhead in some places. Unfurled hands and gasping Arthur faces bubble up from the puddles to grasp, wave, moan, or grimace, then disappear again into the froth.

- **Jagged floor:** PCs climbing down quickly from area 10 must save DEX or crash into pointy quartz clusters (1d6 STR damage).
- **Blood puddles:** PCs who linger too long in a puddle get scratched by a hand (1 STR damage). The Bloodmarm can't see here and thus can't launch focused attacks.
- **Exits:** A chorus of moans echoes from the north. Orange light glows in the northeast. Blood trickles south.

15. BLOOD WELL

A cylinder shaped room, crudely carved from the natural stone. Blood runs off from area 14 into here, forming a black pool, 10' wide. Hands and faces briefly bloom on the surface before sinking into the black. Jagr (area 16) carved this room to prevent the Bloodmarm's excretions from flooding his flesh palace.

- **The pool:** 12' deep, thrashing with hands and faces. There is nothing at the bottom.
- **Swimming in the pool:** Save STR or get ripped apart. Survivors are forever stained red and gain +1d4 STR from the ordeal.

16. FLESH PALACE

A natural cavern, 90' in diameter. Shards of smoky quartz pierces through the floor and ceiling. A leg-sized candle of indeterminate fat burns orange from the cavern's center, illuminating quivering pink igloo. The structure smells overwhelmingly of old sweat.

- **The candle:** Made of rendered human flesh. (Bulky)
- **The igloo:** Technically alive. A living structure grafted together from skin, muscle, and massive rib bones. A single bloodshot eyeball watches vigilantly. The entire structure gibbers atonally when unfamiliar visitors approach, alerting Jagr, its sole resident.
- **Jagr:** Human, probably, but unnaturally long, hairless, and pink. He does not remember how long he's lived here. His facial features have drifted across his face to uncomfortable but functional new homes. Every word he speaks is stretched out, slowed down, and detuned. Generally friendly, Jagr is an explorer of the Blood Sea (room 18) and a flesh artisan. He collects swathes of animal matter and stitches it into living art, architecture, and clothing. A kind of body horror zen gardener. He rarely gets visitors but appreciates conversation and is happy to share his home.
- **Wants:** Hair! The Blood Sea lacks hair. He's willing to trade a canoe and his service as a guide for 3 heads of hair (negotiable). He knows all about the Bloodmarm and happily answers any questions.
- **Doesn't want:** Anyone to destroy the Bloodmarm. The Blood Sea of her interior is his livelihood, companion, and muse.

JAGR

3 HP, 1 Armor, 11 STR, 8 DEX, 16 WIL, Hooked polearm (d8)

17. LOWER BLOODMARM

A low ceilinged cavern, a dense mesh of crystal javelins connecting floor to ceiling like the crystalized strands of a pulled-apart grilled cheese sandwich. A thick onion shaped veiny marble hunk plops in the middle of the crystal mesh: the lowest section of the Bloodmarm. Its roots spread widely throughout the cavern in black puddles. At the marble onion's center is a wide, misty gash.

- **Cramped quarters:** The abundance of crystal beams restricts motion and large weapons. Hands grow from bloodpuddles to scratch anyone who stands in one place too long (d4 STR damage).
- **The gash:** An open portal to the demiplane of the Blood Sea.



18. THE BLOOD SEA

A steaming red sea under a cold pink sky. The portal from area 17 emerges from a crack in a towering onion-shaped crystal bulb half submerged in blood. A network of crystals connects the bulb to a cyclopean molecule-formation of diamond that towers 200 feet overhead and yawns in all directions. Piecemeal patches of mammalia—an ear, a hoof, a finger, an armpit—float ethereally through the warm waves of blood. Red flashes of light crackle like bottle rockets intermittently on the ocean surface, sending small blood splashes everywhere.

- **This world:** the demi-plane of blood. An endless ocean.
- **The crystals:** the Bloodmarm's true form. The Bloodmarm is only one node of a living trans-planar crystal infection. Other major nodes connect similarly to other forgotten corners of the material plane. *Wardens may expand this as desired and place portals to other dungeons/incursion zones. Killing a Bloodmarm in*

the material plane severs its connection to the Blood Sea within 24 hours.

- **The sea:** raw animalia. Jagr skims off sheets of floating animal substance with his pole-hook for recipes, construction material, and art projects.
- **Submerging in blood:** A body painlessly begins to dissolve, reverting into primordial goo. Save WIL every turn to retain humanity. Success still results in elongated limbs and rearranged body features. (Boats are safe).
- **Monsters:** 2-in-6 chance each turn of a Blood-Fish attack.
- **The flashes of light:** temporary connections between the demiplane of blood and a bleeding animal in the material world. It's technically possible to traverse these portals though doing so likely kills the bloodied animal; Jagr knows this. Save DEX to "grab" a flash and pull through without falling into the blood sea.

BLOOD-FISH

6 HP, 10 STR, 12 DEX, 8 WIL, Bite: d6

A large fish made out of solid blood. Eats anything.

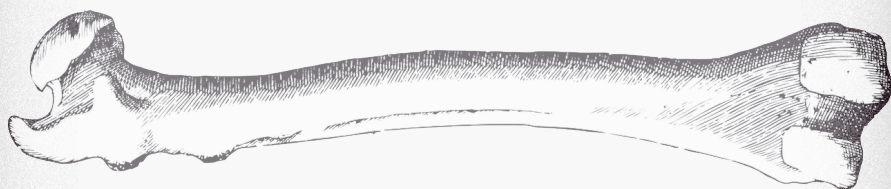
- **Critical Damage:** The Bloodfish grabs its target and dives 10'.

| d6 | What bleeding animal did I just crawl out of? |
|----|----------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | A deer, struck by a hunter's arrow. |
| 2 | A soldier, dying on an active battlefield. |
| 3 | A fish, beheaded by a chef in a luxury restaurant. |
| 4 | A tailor, pricked by a sewing needle. |
| 5 | A city pigeon, nabbed mid-flight by a falcon. |
| 6 | The duke! He cut himself shaving. |





The Tide Returning



A MANGROVE HEXCRAWL

Written by Zedeck Siew



GRANDAUNT NGENG WILL NOT MARRY

A fable the witch-folk tell

Ngeng ap Ten was no grandaunt then—her breasts stood high, her arms were masts, her hair flowed like the night breeze freely.

And like all young chieftesses she was quick to folly. She would not flee from a fight. She looked at the Zum King, saw his soft belly, his pale lips. She judged that she could not lose. She would have been right.

She kissed her spear and said: "I accept your challenge, o king. Should I win you will never seek me again, and live in peace always."

He pointed his sword and said: "I accept your terms, o queen. Should I win you will give me your hand, and rule with me in splendour now and ever."

Ngeng ap Ten laughed aloud and answered: "Never!"

She was no grandaunt then—her eyes glared fire, her fists were mallets, and her hair swirled like a storm approaching.

Spear haft sang, spear point shrieked. But though the Zum King was slow, unskilled, she found she could not fight him. Her thrusts were forced away. Her slashes she threw aside. She found she would not spill his blood.

She dropped her spear and said:
"Calunny! Treachery. My own right hand betrays me!"

He sheathed his sword and said: "I am a son of the gods of heaven. No mortal arm may hurt a star."

The Zum King offered her his open palm and said: "Come!"

Ngeng ap Ten was no grandaunt then—her heart beat steady, her brow an unbowed arch, her hair hung still like a veil never to be parted.

With her left hand she seized his sword. With his sword she severed her right arm at the elbow. This she offered to him, in accordance to his terms. He asked for her hand, if he won. It was her hand that she gave him.

Thus the Zum King, who thought to trick Ngeng ap Ten, was tricked in turn, and went home to his city with a wife he could not marry.

So it has been to this day: that the kings of Zum rule palace and markets with an arm now bone as their scepter.

Thus Ngeng ap Ten, who thought to best her enemies with might, learned guile instead, and paid a limb for wisdom.

So it has been to this day: that she is our Grandaunt Ngeng, living ever free and alone in the heart of the wood.

ZUM NEEDS ADVENTURERS!

You and others like you have answered summons. Lord Sheh is not impressed. “We make do, I guess!” he says, vexed.

The job is simply put: *Find Zum’s missing king.* Two nights ago he vanished from his bedroom. His scepter, the key symbol of royal power, is gone with him.

“Others are already searching the city. You lot search the wood. What? You don’t have a boat? Fucking clowns.” Lord Sheh will rent you a **skiff**: 50gp per day.

NAKNAM SHEH, WORRIED VIZIER

- Jeweled piercings wherever he can put one. Bouncing jowls, the swearsy energy of a celebrity chef yelling at his workers.
- Lord Sheh is a patriot; as the wealthiest man in Zum, his fortune is tethered to city’s fate. So he cares very much that the scepter, a magical artifact the equivalent of a nuclear deterrent, has slipped out of his control.
- **“Find the scepter, bring it back.** Do that and I’ll give you gold enough to sink a trade junk. Bring the king back too, if you can.”

GOOD CAPTAIN FINTAN, YOUR RIVAL

4 HP, 1 Armor 12 STR, 12 DEX, 8 WIL, boarding cleavers (d6) or handshot (d8, single shot)

- An uncomfortable amount of leather straps. The oiled mustache and smirk of your creepiest high-school teacher.
- Insists on “Good Captain Fintan”, in full. He has decided to be your foil. Will side with whichever faction you spurn. Will tail you, letting you face the wood’s dangers—then swoop in to deal with survivors and take credit.
- Has a ship, **a dozen pet crows that do his bidding**, and a human crew twice your party’s number. In violence his crew acts as a *detachment* using his attributes.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

This is a campaign setting and hexcrawl, set in a vast mangrove wood punctuated by giant, building-sized trees.

These trees are the elder ancestors of an indigenous people known as the witch-folk (pg. 49). These trees are also cut and carbonised into witch coal, chief export of the merchant city of Zum (pg. 44).

The Zum-folk are here to settle and exploit the wood. So the witch-folk resist. Zum’s missing king is an excuse to drop your characters into this volatile landscape. Events unfold and faction goals (pg. 52-53) are met, according to who you encounter in the wood, who you decide to help—or hinder.

Will you return Zum its king? Will you return Ngeng (pg. 63) her hand? Do you value profit, or a people’s love for their homeland?

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

YAMIN & SHIRI

- The runaways (pg. 54). Encountered in the wood.
- **They want:** to be together; to reach Grandaunt Ngeng; for this to be over.

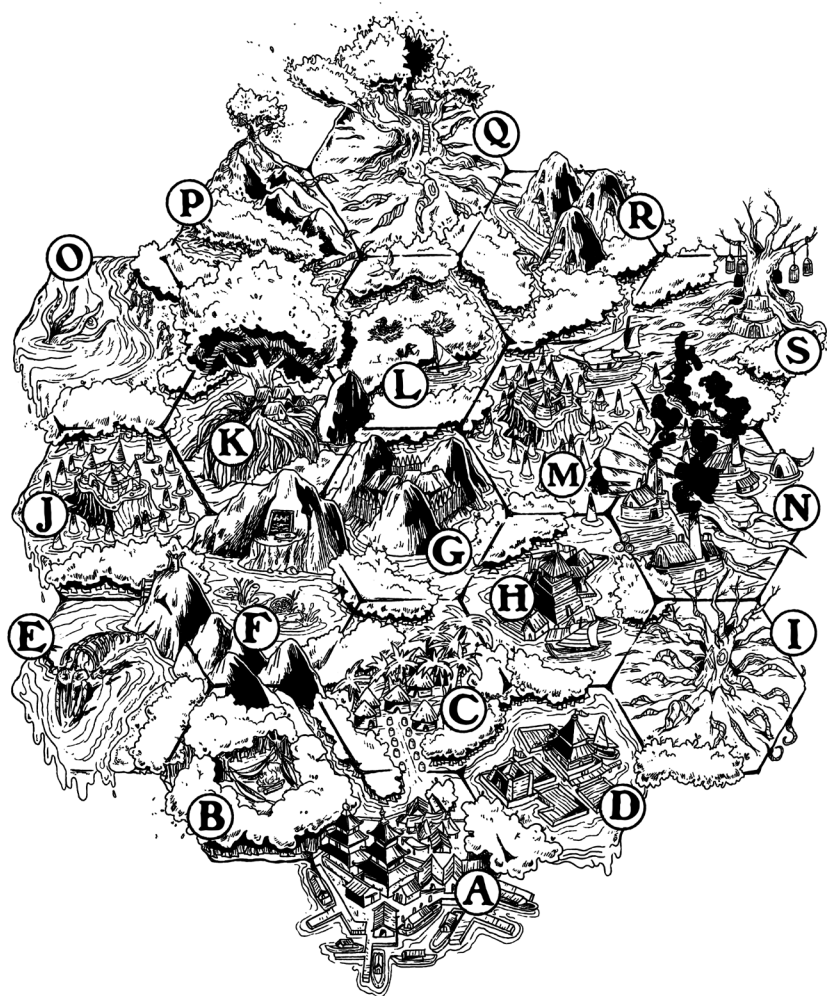
UMMUL GUL

- Leads the Zum-folk soldiers (pg.46). Encountered in Once Soot (pg. 62).
- **She wants:** to find the king; to escalate war with the witch-folk; to impress the court at Zum.

GRANDUNCLE SEE

- Leads the witch-folk resistance (pg. 53). Encountered at his tree (pg. 61).
- **He wants:** to find Ngeng’s arm; to kill the Zum-folk; to end the slow murder of his kin.

Map of THE GREAT WOOD



HEX A

PALACE

- At night guards patrol with lamps; they make a circuit of the verandas every hour.
- Two nights ago a guard called **Naus** was on duty. On the king's veranda she sneezed. She only sneezes around cats. On the dormitory veranda she smelled cigarillos.
- Escorted by a guard, you may enter the king's private residence to search for clues. An open space divided by folding screens, and full of **canny-ware**—human servants permanently bonded to heirloom objects or furnishings.

CANNY-WARE INTERVIEWS

These belong the apartment itself:

- **The front doors** are a pair of young men, bald and stuttery. That night they opened once, when the peacock fan left. They heard the veranda door open once, and splashes—they assumed this was the porcelain chamberpot, emptied.
- **The bolster pillow** is a woman with smudged kohl. When the king began to bed his scepter she was relegated to spending nights in the dormitory. That night she saw the peacock fan on the dormitory veranda, lamp lit, smoking.
- **The porcelain chamberpot** is a blind man, toothless and nearly deaf. That night the king complained of a urine stench. He left via the veranda door, emptied himself off the kitchen veranda, then fell asleep there.
- **The peacock fan** is a bony woman without a smile. That night the king complained of feeling chilly. So she retired to the dormitory. Unable to sleep, she spent an hour on the dormitory veranda, smoking. She saw nothing unusual.
 - » **If questioned under duress**, the peacock fan says nothing; she will face death with her silence if she has to.
- **The veranda door** is temporarily uncanny, its human body having passed the week before. The next morning it was found shut, but unlatched.

These are frequently called for:

- **The serving tray** is a large man with a deft touch. That evening the king kept his bowl of dates and wine jug from dinner—he wanted to snack, later. The next morning the bowl was empty, the jug was missing.
- **The writing bench** is a precise woman with ink-stained fingers. The king spent the last year writing down witch-folk songs, which the scepter sung. A week ago he composed a letter to **Ummul Gul** (pg. 63), asking after a witch-folk man named **Krun** (pg. 58).
- **The pleasure sampan** is a small man, sunburnt and scarred. The king spent the last month swimming the width of the canal. There was always a cat watching from the opposite bank—a different one every time.
- **The silk parasol** is monosyllabic—unless you express outrage at the idea of canny-ware. Then they whisper to you their name: Kanan al Kad. They tell you the scepter's name: **Shiri** (pg. 54). They tell you to seek **Granduncle See** (pg. 62).
 - » **If questioned under duress**, the silk parasol admits to anything you suggest; they are too terrified to do otherwise.

ON THE OPPOSITE SHORE

- **Two sets of human footprints** to the center of a small islet. Pieces of wood, piled as if to make a fire. A bow, string snapped.
- **Two mudskippers** (pg. 49) fight over a hunter's basket. In the basket: poisonous fruit paste; dried fish; a length of rope, one end tied into a noose.
- **Northeasterly**: the prints of at least seven people, running. Patches of ground covered in fur. As if whole cats—tortoises, gingers, tuxedos—were fully plucked.

HEX A

THE MARKETS OF ZUM

The traditional Zum-folk dwelling is a houseboat. Current fashion means new homes are built rudderless, within a fence of pilings. Zum bobs up and down with the tide, but can no longer flee a storm.

Much is sold in its markets—though its most famous goods, **cray sauce** (pg. 50) and **witch coal** (pg. 59) are often warehoused for export by merchant nobles.

FIREARMS

Barking Hound Market is a-chime with small hammers. Its artisans make flintlocks with dog-head muzzles. Only one shot per combat; reloading takes minutes of calm and dry.

Handshot (d8, single shot) - 15gp

Blusterbuss (d10, blast, bulky, single shot) - 30gp

Grenade (d12, blast, bulky, single use) - 45gp

Powder cask (d12+d12, blast, single use; when rigged to blow has a d100-second fuse; otherwise enough to last a crew a month) - 100gp

→ Powder is imported from the mainland. Most ships carry a cask aboard, for emergencies. Inert if wet through.

PROTECTIVE CHARMS

Shields are common, but the climate makes worn armor a liability. Dangerous-looking folk visit **Cunning Eye Market** to buy luck and safety in battle.

Glass baby (+1 Armor, after the first time it protects you) - 5gp

Starmetal eye (+1 Armor; must be worn visible around your neck) - 15gp

Animal tattoo (1 Armor: 2 Armor for a combat if you spend a watch in meditation) - 100gp

→ An animal tattoo takes two days to complete. Typical forms favored here include the heron; the snake; the turtle. You may never harm creatures that take the shape of your animal tattoo.

→ This animal guides you: you thrust like your heron; you twist like a snake; your skin is hard as turtle scutes. Others are compelled to describe your actions in the idiom of this animal.

CANNY-WARE

To the priests of **Bowed God Market** bring 500gp, a thrall you own, and the inanimate object you wish to make canny.

There will be one night of fearful rites. In the morning: your thrall is permanently joined to this object—if physically separated from it, they are wracked with agony; harm done to it transfers to their flesh, instead.

Henceforth your thrall is no longer a person. They are called by the canny object's name. Their own is expunged from all record.

War galleys and weapons are never made canny. The priests insist murder is the province of actual people, not mere things.

EXPLORING THE WOOD

It is a landscape of the interstice—too shallow to be sea; too low to be land. **Every watch the tide changes.**

Travel is slow, through inlets and across reefs. Moving between hexes takes **one watch by boat**; or **one day on foot**. Strong currents mean that **swimming anywhere incurs 1 Fatigue**.

ENCOUNTERS AT HIGH TIDE

There is always something—but things are simpler when the tide is high. Roll whenever you attempt to move between hexes:

d6 High Tide Encounters

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | You are holding your breath. The wind begins to moan. A storm! House-high waves and driving rain make travel impossible for one watch. |
| 2 | A crow shows up. Another crow. And another. Soon they are a gang, cawing. Spies for Good Captain Fintan (pg. 41); he hides someplace close. |
| 3 | Flashing from under the water's surface. This is not sunlight. It is a school of shingfish . Harmless—unless you are stupid and try swimming. |
| 4 | Rhythmic knocking. d10 cray bravos . They test their courage by taunting you. Able to lead you to their tribe, provided you can parley in cray. |
| 5 | A sail bearing the eye emblem of Lady Gul (pg. 52)! A galley full of soldiers , looking for the king. Not above piracy, if you appear easy to bully. |
| 6 | The sky blinks—the shadow of an enormous honey buzzard, circling, head tilted. Brother Kitte (pg. 46) is scanning the breadth of the wood. |

SHINGFISH

8 HP, 6 STR, 14 DEX, 6 WIL, fins (d6), *detachment*

When soldiers cornered Grandaunt Shing at the quay she shattered. Her pieces scattered over the water, sank, and swam away.

Paper-thin, sushi knife-sharp. They always school in the shape of a silvery woman. They slice nets and target swimmers. **Critical Damage:** with blood in the water, they frenzy; all their attacks are Enhanced.

Out of water, a shingfish may serve as a **balanced throwing knife** (d6), but rots within hours.

FREE CRAYFOLK

4 HP, 1 Armor, 8 STR, 12 DEX, 8 WIL, pincers (d6)

Put your head underwater. At-tat, at-tat-tat-tat, like castanets. The sound of a cray chieftess, leading her tribe in a travel chant.

They range the wood in endless migration. They know safe ways through the roots. They share this knowledge with those they trust. How can they trust you? You are ack-ack-clack—people who eat people.

Cray is a rhythmic language, spoken with the click-snap of pincers. Nobody in Zum bothers to know cray. Why learn what livestock have to say?

ZUM SOLDIER

4 HP, 1 Armor, 10 STR, 12 DEX, 8 WIL, spear (d6) or blusterbuss (d10, blast, single shot)

You can tell who they serve by their cloth hats—the pattern on the fabric is their lord's emblem, repeated.

Most soldiers in the wood wear the **silver eye of Ummul Gul**. They openly discuss her prospects at court. “They laugh at her, them palace dandies.” “They’ll not laugh when they see their coal yards burning.” “They’ll beg our lady for help, then.”

Ship crews are *detachments*, led by a **tattooed captain** (2 Armor) with a brace of handshots (d8). Test Morale using the captain's 14 WIL. Down the captain and their crew surrenders.

BROTHER KITTE, REBEL RAPTOR

12 HP, 12 STR, 14 DEX, 14 WIL, talons (d10+d10)

Throat wider than your waist. Claws bigger than sickles. He knows he comes off strong, so he tries to be polite.

Speaks with a thick northern accent. A migratory bird, he is not local to the wood, so this is not quite his fight—but he does like **Granduncle See** (pg. 62) as a roost. Throwing in with the witch-folk is Kitten's way of keeping his winter home tidy.

Instead of dealing damage he may try snatching you: **DEX save** or be borne aloft, utterly at his mercy.



ENCOUNTERS AT LOW TIDE

It is not that there's more going on when the sea retreats. You are just paying more mind. You are, after all, a land creature.

When you prepare to move between hexes, roll for the weather:

| d6 | Weather |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Sweat stings your eye. Unbearable, mouth-drying heat. Your must rest and consume a Ration—otherwise add 2 Fatigue . |
| 2 | Light rain. Ground heat bakes you; the drizzle chills you. Fever weather. STR save or be Deprived until a full night's rest. |
| 3 | Downpour. It was only overcast before—how quickly the sky turns! Blocks sight like a heavy curtain; drowns out most sounds . |
| 4 | The smell of flowers. You breathe in an invigorating breeze . It is a welcome relief from the terrible humidity. Recover d6 STR . |
| 5 | A swarm of leaves! This is the wind Grandaunt Rie's spirit became . DEX save to triple boat travel speed; else be run aground. |
| 6 | The smell of ash. This is the smog Grandaunt Rie's body became . You cough and cough; all creatures take d4 STR damage . |

Combine results from tables A and B

| d6 | Low Tide Encounters (A) |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Muttered reproachments, carried by the wind. A scold-scold... |
| 2 | Peck-peck-pecking at tidepool gastropods. A sandpiper flock... |
| 3 | Flashing metal and the lilt of a posh voice. A heron knight... |
| 4 | The wet cluck of a tongue, unexpectedly close. d8 hunters... |
| 5 | Glistening flanks, gaping gobs. A pack of 2d6 mudskippers... |
| 6 | The path is strewn with giant balls of mud. Granduncle Beg... |
| d6 | Low Tide Encounters (B) |
| 1 | Quietly trailing... A sight-sight , waving at you from the water's still surface. |
| 2 | About to surprise... A herd of sea snails , crossing your path, and so very slow. |
| 3 | Confounded by... A worm ship , popping and crackling, cresting rough terrain. |
| 4 | Trying to avoid... d4 canny-ware runaways , bellies gurgling as they forage. |
| 5 | Struggling with... Prospectors , baskets not yet full enough to head for home. |
| 6 | Oblivious to... The runaways (pg. 54). It is the king, his scepter, their cat. |

SCOLD-SCOLD

→ Expire mid-sentence anywhere in the wood and it remembers what you sound like.
Your soul is trapped here, a disembodied voice.

d6 About to die, this scold-scold has been:

- 1 **Cussing** out their new apprentice. “That’s not how you do that, shit-for-brains!”
- 2 **Praising** a lovable, clumsy puppy. “No, your other foot. That’s right, good boy!”
- 3 **Losing patience** at a young child. “Don’t bend your—tch. Okay. Maybe stop?”
- 4 **Viciously badmouthing** their rival. “So cringe! Personally, I’d be embarrassed.”
- 5 **Politely condescending** to a lord. “If your gracefulness might ease up a little?”
- 6 **Frustrated, ranting to themselves.** “I don’t understand why they are like that!”

→ In that same tone the scold-scold now comments on your actions. Acknowledge them at all and **they latch onto you**. They become a constant voice behind your left shoulder. Criticizing everything you do.

→ Annoying, and ruinous to your self-esteem—but their advice is pretty good, and their read on people rarely wrong.

HERON KNIGHT

6 HP, 2 Armor, 12 STR, 16 DEX, 10 WIL, beak (d8)

Steel body, damascened feathers. They pose like a bodybuilder. **Every round, in daylight:** sun flashes off their wingtips, blinding a random foe.

They are filled with magic springs. These make them quicker than most swordpersons.
Critical Damage: they sever one of your limbs.

Harrad Blessed Be, sixth king of Zum, wanted vassals incapable of treason. He built six heron knights. These were loyal to him—and only him. They would not bow to his heir.

d6 Six heron knights, now liegeless. Which have you encountered?

- 1 **Sharp**, who has two rubies for eyes. In search of an opponent who will best her in single combat. None have beaten her, yet.
- 2 **Stout**, taller than you are. Their mission: to taste the meat of every animal. They have not yet tasted witch-folk flesh or royal blood.
- 3 **Learned**, a Charm spell etched into his skin. Wants to teach the lesser folk good manners. Has ensorcelled a gang of ten otters.
- 4 **Quiet**, belly sloshing with ink—her talons are nibs. She considers herself an artist. She makes bad cartoons of anybody she meets.
- 5 **Pure**, crest of peacock feathers. A creep, he badgers you with amorous advances. Sleeping with him hurts; he is all razor edges.
- 6 **Shining**, who jangles with jewelry. Made of base steel they covet gold; whatever they cannot wear they stash in their nest (pg. 60).

WITCH-FOLK HUNTER

6 HP, 1 Armor, 12 STR, 12 DEX, 10 WIL, long knife (d6) or bow (d6)

They cover ground without a sound. They cluck their tongues—signals, intimidation. Scrimshawed human bones line their vests like brigandine.

War vests. **Granduncle See** (pg. 62) has called on them to serve. “Accursed Zum has lost its king, its source of power!” “Nelek’s daughter stole him away.” “We must rescue her, capture him, bring them to Granduncle See.”

In lieu of an attack, they may throw a net; **DEX save** or be caught until freed by a friend. **Critical Damage:** Poison on their weapon does an additional **d6 STR damage**.

MUDSKIPPER

6 HP, 12 STR, 14 DEX, 8 WIL, bite (d8)

They were the size of thumbs, once. But they gorged on the flesh of the **god-fish** (pg. 56), and grew. These are the size of wild dogs.

Pack hunters. Their flopping would be comical if they weren’t rushing to encircle you. Their mouths as wide as your face. As they pounce they make neither growl nor hoot—only a wet wheezing as they maul you.

Critical Damage: Their barb teeth break off in the wound. Distractingly painful; digging these out requires a trained healer or does **1 additional STR damage**.

GRANDUNCLE BEG, GIANT CRAB

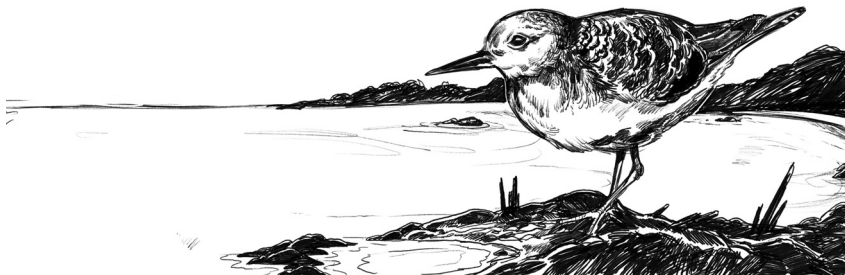
10 HP, 2 Armor, 16 STR, 8 DEX, 8 WIL, pincers (d6+d6)

They seized his home then mocked his poverty. Humiliated, Granduncle Beg let go of human language and human dignity. He lives now as a house-sized crab.

Ceaselessly picks at the earth with his pincers. Filtered through his mouthparts, he **swallows any metals he finds**; the rest he spits out as a packed clod, wide as a wrecking ball. He trails these balls behind him.

If you look shiny he will pick at you. **Critical damage:** Maxillae like human hands strip you of metal gear and currency, then cement you into a mud ball. **Others must dig you out.**

In Granduncle Beg’s belly is the assorted property of previous victims, including **d6 silver bracelets, each containing a random spell**.



SIGHT-SIGHT

Drown anywhere in the wood and it remembers your likeness. Your soul is trapped here, a reflection in the mirror that is the water's surface.

They wave at you from the water. Wave back and they climb onto the shoulders of your reflection. They tell you their story, and you are possessed by their anger.

Only through retribution will they find peace. Their know-how and ghostly nudges lend advantage to or enhances any actions that serve their revenge.

d6 This sight-sight perished:

- 1 Crying at **thrall-takers** (pg. 61), begging them to return her son.
- 2 Hugging a porcelain jar, full of rocks. He was **canny-ware** (pg. 44).
- 3 Cursing the name **Jinna Jil** (pg. 56), who bedded their spouse.
- 4 Becoming topiary in **Grandaunt Leek's** (pg. 60) macabre garden.
- 5 Shot by **Krun al Nelek's** (pg. 58) arrow, tipped with paralytic venom.
- 6 Stuck in a **Granduncle Beg** (pg. 49) ball, unable to flee high tide.

WORM SHIP

8 HP, 3 Armor, 14 STR, 6 DEX, 4 WIL, keel crush (d10) and rigging whip (d6)

Sometimes shipworms feasting on a wreck forget they are worms and start to believe they are a ship. They are vaguely aware ships should sail.

Unable to float, a worm ship glides over land on a tide of molluscoid muscle. It leaves a snail-mucous trail as wide as a city street. Pale flesh fills its cracks; radulae hang from its mast as pantomime rigging.

Critical Damage: It catches one of your limbs between its planks. You can feel its digestive juices—**additional 1 DEX damage per round**.

d6 Before it sunk, this ship had been carrying:

- 1 **Gold bullion** in locked iron chests. Enough to build a sea fortress.
- 2 **Cray sauce.** Sealed pots, stamped with **Sheh Farms** (pg. 57)' seal.
- 3 **Porcelain.** A single painted jar survives. Will buy you a good skiff.
- 4 **Witch coal** (pg. 59). Ruined by damp; makes a lethal fume if burned.
- 5 **Thralls.** Marrowless bone shards now jag the deck like caltrops.
- 6 Nothing—but the **worm ship's flesh is plump, buttery.** Won't keep.

CANNY-WARE RUNAWAY

Irregular sunburns. If they are caught out they call warnings with sore-throat voices. Maybe they have a weapon, shared between them.

They escaped the closest Zum-folk settlement. Desperate to get further away. They feel agony if separated from their canny object. **Harm done to this object transfers onto their body.**

| d6 | This runaway is: | They fastidiously try to protect: |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Elderly. Their back thickened by whip scars. | A pillow. Golden brocade over the softest down. |
| 2 | A child. Barely able to lift their canny thing. | A serving tray. Brass and studded with emeralds. |
| 3 | Wincing, slowed by a broken, festering limb. | A chest. Full of fine silk clothes. Locked, no key. |
| 4 | Nursing an infant. Another burden to carry. | A folding screen. Three panels, delicate paper. |
| 5 | In pain. Doubles over. It is food poisoning. | A door. Dancing women carved into dark wood. |
| 6 | Soft, gowned in silk, unused to the outside. | A sampan. Seats two, not counting themselves. |

PROSPECTOR

It takes daring and wisdom to make a living off the wood. Curious how this is never a particularly good living—it is always somebody else that gets rich.

| d6 | These prospectors are: |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Honey whisperers. Always men. Their voices have a buzzy quality, from the spell-songs that lull winged insects to sleep. |
| 2 | Wine pickers. Excellent climbers. Water from a single winenut will make you drunk; too-old fruit explode like grenades. |
| 3 | Clam diggers. Bucket-shaped shovels—and iron mittens. The springclam's stinger is a chitin needle that pierces leather. |
| 4 | Eel handlers. Always women. Hooked bracelets. Eels are as strong as pythons, but their slipperiness is the problem. |
| 5 | Gold sniffers. A child with a magic nose-ring does the sniffing. The ring was once lost to the sea; it will find others like it. |
| 6 | Gem finders. Always folk unable to have children. The fairy civet poops jade. Its invisibility magic hides it from the virile. |

WAR IN THE WOOD

There are those who serve under **the silver eye of Lady Gul**, governor of **Once Soot** (pg. 59). There are those who have donned **war vests for Granduncle See** (pg. 62), who was Grandaunt Soot's brother.

How often you encounter living members of a faction marks how far along their plans are.

THE SILVER EYE OF LADY GUL

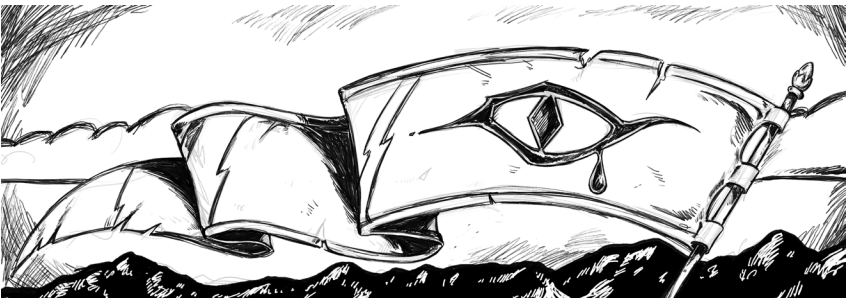
She runs no trade junks, owns no overseas contracts. The viziers laugh at her. “Why does Lady Gul fly a silver banner?” “She cannot afford gold.”

What money she has she spends on soldiery. Often forced to deal with witch-folk, she understands the threat they present; knows the damage they can do; has made ready to face them in war.

Now that war is here, and she delights in its coming. Let Zum burn. It will be her silver-eye banner that returns the king, saves the city—will the viziers be laughing, then?

Every time you meet forces aligned with Lady Gul, her ambitions advance a step on the following track:

| Step | Lady Gul's Progress |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Blockade! Whenever you roll for an encounter in hex neighboring Granduncle See's tree (pg. 61), you encounter an additional Zum war galley (pg. 62). |
| 2 | Pacification! A ship bearing the eye of Gul puts Cold Cave Village (pg. 60) to the torch. Surviving village folk are taken to Deadbranch Gaol (pg. 60). |
| 3 | Justice! The murderer Krun al Nelek (pg. 58) is captured. He is impaled from anus to mouth on a ship's boom, and displayed on Once Soot's walls (pg. 62). |
| 4 | Rescue! The missing King of Zum (pg. 54) has been found. He and his scepter are brought to to Ummul's ship (pg. 62); she will keep him safe from harm. |
| 5 | Victory! The giant honey buzzard called Kitte (pg. 46) is shot out of the sky. Ummul paints his talons into her insignia; fashions his skull to be her helmet. |
| 6 | Siege! The taloned eye of Gul, sign of the queen-in-waiting, assaults Granduncle See. His tree falls , whether by scepter-magic, or by ships full of powder. |



THE BITTER FRUIT OF GRANDUNCLE SEE

He remembers Zum's arrival: a beggar court, on rafts, asking for alms. His kin, kind by nature, pledged the Zum king fruit and wood and peace.

Zum took more. Zum still takes. Zum took his sister. No kindness remains in Granduncle See (pg 62). Only anger. He bears bitter fruit—poison fruit his children crush into paste, to coat their blades and arrowheads.

His kin, faithful by nature, pledged peace to the Zum king's scepter. That scepter is now lost. Granduncle See is bound to peace no longer.

Every time you meet creatures loyal to Granduncle See, his cause advances a step on the following track. **Even results are acts of great magic**; Granduncle See loses one of his branches when they occur.

| Step | Granduncle See's Progress |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | A sacrifice. Twenty-one soldiers (pg. 46), bellies open, guts knotted together, arranged on the deck of a Zaq war galley. It is Krun al Nelek's (pg. 58) doing. |
| 2 | A liberation. Enclosures at Sheh Farms (pg. 57) disintegrate; the captive cray swim free. Crayfolk (pg. 45) you encounter are now loyal to Granduncle See. |
| 3 | An offering. A fire starts in the king's private apartments (pg. 42); soon the palace is ablaze. Copycat canny-ware (p.g 44) self-immolations throughout Zum. |
| 4 | A summoning. When you roll a weather result involving Grandaunt Rie (pg. 58), a storm hits instead. Travel is impossible ; any vessel underway is wrecked. |
| 5 | A rescue. Shiri ap Nelek (pg. 54) and the Zum king are found. Separated from Meaw (pg. 54), kept in Brother Kitte's roost (pg. 46); the bird brings them food. |
| 6 | A resurrection. The animated skeleton of the god-fish (pg. 56) lurches towards Once Soot (pg. 62). It will take three days to arrive. It will flatten the fort utterly. |

CURRENTS, AT CROSS PURPOSES

At this point, everything is an escalation. **If a step on either track is impossible**—due to circumstance; characters being dead or otherwise unavailable; so on—the next step down occurs instead.

Either tracks culminate in a cataclysmic defeat of the opposing faction. But these tracks are **not mutually exclusive**. A downed opponent can still topple you. Mutual destruction.

If the **runaways** (pg. 54) are being held at **Once Soot** (pg. 62) or **Granduncle See** (pg. 62), the **destruction of that location results in their escape**.

THE RUNAWAYS

The night they left the palace they were ambushed by **Nana ap Sark** (pg. 55), who tried to bind and gag them. Meaw's quick violence let them escape.

Now they are wary of both Zum-folk and witch-folk. They are wary of you—though **Shiri insists on hearing you out**.

The route to **Grandaunt Ngeng** (pg. 63) Meaw leads them on is mystic and non-linear, **taking a further six days** from when you first encounter them.

YAMIN BLESSED BE, RUNAWAY KING

Cloak of gold brocade, now very crusty. The scruff and hunch of a sweaty backpacker. Slapping at mosquitoes.

He left Zum for her. Here in the wood they are not sovereign and slave, they are Yamin and Shiri—lovers. Equals! But it has been hard. He is tired. **He no longer trusts the cat**. Soon he will snap, ask that they turn back.

While Yamin is alive, acts that would spill blood are impossible in his presence. Doesn't apply to anybody the Zum-folk do not consider persons.

SHIRI AP NELEK, ROYAL SCEPTER

6 HP, 10 STR, 12 DEX, 8 WIL, scepter (d6)

Indestructible scepter slung like a musket. Hitched skirt, bruises on her knees and arms. The determined optimism of a divorcee on holiday.

She was taken young—not young enough. She remembers **Three Finger Village** (pg. 57), in dusklight. She remembers her mother's voice, teaching her the words to songs that would call Grandaunt Ngeng. So she sang. Grandaunt Ngeng answered.

Wracked by agony if separated from the scepter. Her main goal is to reach **Grandaunt Ngeng's tree** (pg 63), and be rid of the damned thing forever.

THE RIGHT HAND OF GRANDAUNT NGENG

When an elder tree of the witch-folk performs a great act of magic, one of their branches withers to ash.

The scepter of Zum is a branch plucked from Grandaunt Ngeng's body, a single gift of witchery from her soul. But the cunning Zum kings found a loophole.

They made their branch canny, thereby extending its power to perpetuity—whenever a Zum king puts it to use, **it does not wither; the thrall joined to it is ashed instead**.

Shiri's predecessor was ashed when the scepter was used to fell **Grandaunt Soot** (pg. 62). She will die if the scepter is used, now.

MEAW, FELINE GUIDE

6 HP, 10 STR, 14 DEX, 10 WIL, scratch (d4, ignores Armor and HP)

A hairball every hour. The weariness of a dame who has had too many litters; here are two more kittens she must care for.

The boy is as soft as a neutered housepet. The girl is too eager, too open to take risks. Poor naive kittens. Meaw will do what she can to lead them to Grandaunt Ngeng. **Halfheartedly protests any diversion**; says: "I told you it was a bad idea," after.

Meaw may disappear at will, leaving all her fur behind, instantly reappearing at a spot within sight with a full coat of a different pattern.

LOCATIONS IN THE WOOD

HEX B

Near Wood

A close mangal, with stilt roots so interlaced **any trek is a constant clamber**. A path marked with a series of nooses dangling from tree branches.

The path leads to a bivouac: hammocks between trunks, the camp floor a rope net. During violent action, **DEX save** or lose a round as you topple through the net.

Present: **Nana ap Sark** and **four hunters** (pg. 49). Normally competent, they would have ambushed you before you got close—but they are still recovering from their encounter with the **runaways** (pg. 54).

NANA AP SARK, EXPERT SCOUT

6 HP, 1 Armor, 12 STR, 12 DEX, 10 WIL, long knife (d6)

Permanent frown, shaved head, war vest Armored entirely in vertebrae. **Poultice tied to her scratched-out right eye**.

Her band was tasked with watching Zum. They saw the **peacock fan's** (pg. 43) midnight signal. They tried to apprehend the Zum king. They underestimated the **cat** (pg. 54). She lost her bow, her basket, her eye.

Tell her your intentions and her band will shadow you in secret. If you find the Zum king they make themselves known, by shooting Meaw full of arrows.

HEX C

Stone Well Village

Mangrove trees give way to a coconut forest. Between the palms, on either side of the dirt track: **stone burial urns**.

Karim al Kad, blind village chief, has forbidden his people from breaking their burial urns. He does not want old bones sewn onto vests. Stone Well Village cannot join **Granduncle See's** (pg. 62) war! Stone Well Village would die.

Karim has seen it! The pain from springclam venom gives him visions. May relay to you what Lady Gul and Granduncle See have already done, and **may do soon** (pg. 52-53).

HEX D

Jil Farms

In the middle of the bay: a grid of **tennis-court-sized enclosures**, perimetered by wooden gangplanks. Patrolled by cray farmers, feeding their stocks.

At the southwest end: a barracks full of **soldiers** (pg. 46) wearing the red fishhook of Lord Jil.

At the northeast end: a mansion. A **pleasure yacht** tethered to the pier. Dumbbells and pull-up bars on the veranda. **Ground floor**: a rich parlor filled with **abused canny-ware** (pg. 44).

Upper floor: a boudoir of shuttered windows, soft bedding, billowing silk. A hookah.

In a chest: love letters from middle-aged Zum-folk men and women of quality. Signed, perfumed, explicit—incriminating.

JINNA JIL, NOTORIOUS BLACKMAILER

Sculpted abs in an open robe. A scar from brow to cheek, aesthetically placed, which he claims he got fighting off witch-folk raiders.

Very good at sounding interested in you, in the things you do, in flattering your looks. **An excellent masseur.** Jinna targets the married and neglected, pampers them, has them pine for him in writing. Then forces them to pay for his discretion.

Low, growling voice—unless he is faced with violence, at which **he screams for his household soldiers.**

HEX E

God-Fish Bones

Putrefaction. A god's body, made of divine matter, does not easily return to the earth.

Even now meat clings in strips to his cathedral-sized ribcage.

High tide: Red waves conceal carnivorous fish the size of cats. **Swimming is fatal.**

Low tide: Old Mouth sleeps in the shade of the god-fish's upper jaw. Stirs at the sound of violence or voices. Territorial.

East of the god-fish's tail: **A limestone hill.** Bamboo scaffolding up the north side. On the hilltop: **Thirteen hunters** (pg. 49) chant a spell on repeat. Their voices rising in volume and fervour.

If slain—by the enemy, or by their own hands—their spell is complete: **Granduncle See** (pg. 62) will lose a branch; the god-fish's bones will slough their remaining flesh, and **animate** (pg. 56).

OLD MOUTH, MUDSKIPPER MOTHER

| 12 HP, 2 Armor, 18 STR, 16 DEX, 10 WIL, swipe (d20, blast)

The first mortal thing to feast on the god-fish's carcass. She has not stopped growing, since. She is no longer mortal.

Jealously guards her eternal meal. Her maw is wide enough to swallow a skiff. Instead of an attack she may swallow you. Make a **STR save** every round. **Three successes:** You cut yourself out. **Three failures:** You are crushed by gut actions.

Her scales as slick with mucous, making her hard to scale. The mucous is a powerful curative; a rice bowl's amount **heals d6 STR.**

HEX F

Learned's Nest

A teeming reef, overlooked by a cliff. In the cliff: a ledge stuffed with straw; a chalkboard; a mahogany dining table; **fine table brass and china worth 500gp**.

High Tide: A **raft of sea otters** float on their backs, and crack snails, and face the cliff. **Learned** (pg. 48) teaches a class on meal etiquette. He plucks an otter from his audience, sits them at the table, tests them.

They always make a mess. The otters ignore Learned's scoldings. They are loyal vassals, though. **Dex save** if you act to harm Learned; **fail and you have harmed an otter instead**.

HEX G

Three-Finger Village

An island with **three limestone hills**. Homes huddle in the trefoil valley, wooden palisades at all entrances. **Guards armed with blusterbusses**.

To be let in, **you must be sworn to Granduncle See** (pg. 62). Three Finger Village has joined the war. They have every cause to. They have lost much to Zum: people; forage ground; their ancestor-mother **Grandaunt Soot** (pg. 62).

The home-village of **Shiri** (pg. 54) and **Krun** (pg. 58). Villagers know the latter's hideout, and **send him supplies every other night**.

HEX H

Sheh Farms

Over a shallow reef, **between three islets**: a haphazard tangle of farmers' bunkhouses, gangplanks, enclosures.

Low tide: The enclosures dry out. **Cray** crawl on the exposed reef bed and each other for hours.

Patrolling the islets: **War galley** (pg. 62) flying the gold-ring sigil of Lord Sheh. In the middle of the farms: a **guardhouse**.

The ground-floor magazine: **Thirty blusterbusses; ten casks of powder** (pg. 44); **four idle soldiers** (pg. 46). The first-floor office: A safe with **3000 gold**; the clerk **Jannam Sheh**, the vizier's distant nephew. Will gleefully work against his stuck-up uncle.

The top-floor watchpost: **A long jezzail** (d12, single shot) with a mounted looking glass; **one sleeping soldier** (pg. 46).

HEX I

Grandaunt Shing's Body

Low tide: **A rocky beach, strewn with knee roots**—arches you could stroll through. Portals that lead nowhere.

A leafless tree, tall as abandoned flats. A house-sized X in red paint on its trunk, ugly and inevitable, next to a similarly-sized O in yellow. Grandaunt Shing has been claimed by Lord Sheh, for **witch coal** (pg. 59).

Wedged in the crook of a branch, up high: **A worm ship** (pg. 50). How the hells did it get there?

HEX J

Once Rie

Built on the stump that was once Grandaunt Rie: **a brick fort**. The walls are rough, unplastered, easily scaled.

Turrets at cardinal points. Atop each: a banner with the red wave sigil of Lord Zaq; a signal lamp; **a nervous soldier** (pg. 46). **On the west wall**: A gate with a jammed portcullis, and wooden stairs down to a pier. A **war galley** is anchored here.

Within: **a donjon** with rusty swords; **an empty charcoal yard**. The house of Zaq grew rich on **witch coal** (pg. 59), but has since parleyed that wealth into international shipping.

The oft-drunk captain **Manishi Zaq** now commands this backwater. Every other night another soldier from his **forty-person garrison** goes missing. **Krun's** (pg. 58) doing.

HEX K

(Granduncle See's Shade, pg. 61)

HEX L

Colony Wood

The roar of birdsong. **Heavy nests on every tree**: black egrets, forkbill rails, giant doves, screech parakeets. **Disturb a nest and provoke d6 damage in pecks**.

Even moving though this place causes mass, fluttering squawks. The birds allay suspicion: if they spook at the slightest human presence, how could **Krun al Nelek** be hiding here?

A one-man skiff tethered to a tree at the wood's edge. A dropping-spattered mud track leads to **a thatched, chimneyed hut**. Inside: **knives of every size**; a pot to boil down bones. The birds have already warned Krun he has visitors.

If the boat is gone: Krun is off, plying his trade.

KRUN AL NELEK, VENGEFUL KILLER

8 HP, 1 Armor, 12 STR, 16 DEX, 10 WIL, knives (2d8) or throwing knife (d6)

Like the mousiest nephew at your family reunion. Unless you pay him specific mind **he just fades into the background**.

When **Granduncle See** (pg. 62) offered to swap his heart out for a poison fruit, Krun did not refuse. He'd stopped being a person at four, when he saw his mother murdered, his sister stolen by Zum soldiers.

Not interested in much besides killing Zum-folk. **Preternaturally inconspicuous**: lose sight of him, and you don't see him again until he does damage to you.

HEX M

(Once Soot, pg. 62)

HEX N

Soot Yards

Three plumes of jet-black smoke around **a colossal tree, fallen over**, bone color.

When she was cut, the bulk of Grandaunt Soot fell southeast, onto sandbars planted with flags displaying Lord Sheh's gold ring, or Lady Eng's green foot, or Lady Oa's black sword. Those sandbars are **walled factories**, now.

Timber piles, warded kilns, docks for cargo junks. Each is defended by a **fully-crewed galley** (pg. 62), and staffed by **twenty coal priests**.

The priests work the kiln. **They set out in three-person teams**, cutting blocks from the trunk and branches. Thus is Grandaunt Soot's body slowly eaten.

COAL PRIEST

4 HP, 1 Armor, 10 STR, 12 DEX, 10 WIL, blessed handaxe (d6)

Tongues and teeth stained black. Voices raspy. Fanny-pack-like net pouches, a-bulge with **glowering witch coal briquettes**.

They snack on the stuff like crisps; a habit that allows them tireless sorcery. Every round, instead of an attack, **they may cast one of these spells**: *Hold Limb*, *Spellsaw*, *Command Wood*. They suffer no short-term ill effects.

In the long term? Coal priests are as **wrinkled as octogenarians**. Make a comment and they fume. "I'm only twenty-four!" one rasps.

WITCH COAL

The puissance of a witch-folk elder: carbonized, broken into convenient chips. Zum's principle export. Now fueling mago-industrial revolutions abroad.

Identical to normal charcoal—except **it burns cold**; you can touch its flame, palm its glowing pieces. Pop one into your mouth. Chew. Swallow! Cast a spell you know. **You do not gain Fatigue**. Even under duress, you do **not need a WIL save** to avoid ill effects.

Eat three mouthfuls of witch coal, and your spell's impact is instantly enhanced, as if you had spent time in safety on its casting.

Coal priests do not mind a side hustle; they sell you witch coal at **25gp per mouthful**. "Wholesale price, wholesale price!" they rasp.

HEX O

Grandaunt Leek's Garden

A warm lagoon. Deep in the middle. In the shallows near the shore: **shapes in the water, vague pillars**, fuzzy with luminescent color.

These are **human skeletons**: bones held upright and together by blooming coral. Welcome to Grandaunt Leek's garden!

Low tide: many skulls break the surface, their eye sockets stuffed with shriveled polyps. Among them: **d4 still-living victims**. Grandaunt Leek has just planted them—wedging their legs into heavy rocks. They sputter and scream.

High tide: they drown.

GRANDAUNT LEEK, GIANT SQUID

| 18 HP, 2 Armor, 18 STR, 16 DEX, 16 WIL, smash (d12), *detachment*

She foresaw her own felling—so she felled herself. Toppling into the sea, her branches turned into seven tentacles, her leaves into barbed suckers.

Grandaunt Leek carries on like a retiree; the wood's woes are not her problem. She cares about her coral garden, though. **She is sick of planting sailors.** “Bring me something interesting to plant! A ship captain, a noblewoman—a king?”

Fight her and she plants you. **Critical Damage:** She grabs you tight, and flees. You wake in her garden, your legs crushed by rocks. The tide is rising.

HEX P

Shining's Nest

Above the treeline, **on a jut of headland:** a tree. It seems to shimmer. Get closer. You see its branches are decked with bangles; its twigs wear rings; its leaves have jeweled earstuds.

In the tree's largest crook: a nest woven from necklaces. This is where the **heron knight Shining** (pg. 48) sleeps.

Their **nest is worth 2500gp**. Each accessorized tree branch is worth **250gp**. Shining senses any intent to steal from their hoard; **they return in a half-hour**, in fury.

HEX Q

(Grandaunt Ngeng's Shade, pg. 63)

HEX R

Cold Cave Village

A narrow forest canal, skiff-wide. You come to a dock. **Steps carved into the limestone—**up, up, up. A whole community, in caves. Guano fertilises veggie gardens.

“Witch-folk” is not a witch-folk word; Mostly they identify themselves as children of Grandaunt This or Granduncle That. Cold Cave Village venerates Grandaunt Shing as their ancestor; the **shingfish** (pg. 45) never harm them.

Most villagers **prospect** (pg. 51) and sell their goods to Zum-folk brokers. **Match or exceed their 1gp day wage** and they will happily serve you as a guide.

HEX S

Deadbranch Gaol

On the eastern end of a mudflat: **a tree the height of a five-storey building.** Formerly **Granduncle Beg** (pg. 49)—now denuded.

Cages hang from bleached branches. Winch lifts, to hoist these cages from any ships docked below. Merchandise kidnapped from witch-folk settlements are sorted here, then sold in Zum as servants or **canny-ware** (pg. 44).

A fort is built between the tree's stilt-roots. Garrison: two **war galleys**, fifty thrall-takers—**soldiers** (p.g 46) wearing the heron sign of the Zum king.

THRALLS

Thrall-taking is a nationalized industry, the sole prerogative of the royal house of Zum. **Yamin** (pg. 54) knows this, and **fears Shiri finding out**.

The thrall-takers have not raided, recently. They are bored; most cages are empty; what goods they have are half-starved, poor quality. They will sell such scum to you at cost: **100gp per head**. They will buy at the same price.

“Keep your thrall properly manacled,” they warn. “So close to the wood, they always think they can escape.”

HEX K

Granduncle See's Shade

A great tidal flat. Overhead: **stilt roots**, large and as tangled as spaghetti junctions. **Low tide**: mud up to your knees. **High tide**: water only deep enough for skiff hulls.

Rope nets spanning two parallel roots serve as hammocks, encampments, sentry stations. You are watched. **d6 hunters** (pg. 49) let you stumble some distance in—just enough for retreat to be difficult—then **call a challenge**.

Before noon: The tree's shadow falls over the western flat. **After noon**: The tree's shadow falls over the eastern flat. This is **effectively twilight**.

Built in the armpits where Granduncle See's stilt roots meet his trunk: **a town**.

THE TOWN

A work hall: baskets of bitter fruit, springclam needles. The shing of blades being sharpened. A hunter stands mannequin straight—circling him is **Missam ap Sukna**, bespectacled tailor; she sews bones to his vest.

A meeting hall: raucous with heated debate. **Alluru al Senen**, chief of **Cold Cave Village** (pg. 60), argues that detente with Zum is still possible.

An ancestors' hall: recessed into the tree trunk. Shelves lined with the skulls of those martyred by the Zum-folk enemy. Their keeper, the whipsnake **Sister Ritsis**, may coil herself through a skull's sockets, and so speak what said skull knew in life.

A rest hall: rows of hammocks. **Thirty hunters** (pg. 49), recovering from recent expeditions out in the wood. The herbwise **Massim al Sukna**, quite deaf, applies splints and yells advice.

THE TREE

A staircase spirals up the trunk. **Where it first forks**: an altar to a male face, formed in the bark. Granduncle See. **Offerings**: jars of blood; cray sauce; winenut water.

Past this point: Rope ladders and pulley lifts. The height should scare you. Six branches, total.

First branch: A-rustle with pickers, shimmying out onto flexing sprigs, grabbing at bitter fruit. **Second branch**: A howdah-like sentry tower. Powder cask; a long jezzail (d12, single shot); a hunter (pg. 49) with a looking glass. **Third branch**: A tribe of loudly-pacifist macaques; “Why can't civility prevail?” they moan. **Fourth branch**: A tribe of mute langurs; excellent bowyers, they cut and string the hunters' weapons. **Fifth branch**: Brother Kitte's (pg. 46) roost—a driftwood nest the size of a junk, lined with faded silk and cushions. **Sixth branch**: Too high to reach by the wingless.

GRANDUNCLE SEE, WAR LEADER

Eyes glossy as lychee seeds, teeth jagged like a shark's. Quiet voice, like somebody shouting in a downstairs room.

"Find my lost daughter, Shiri!" he says. "She carries Ngeng's branch. Ngeng should've never given it away. Ngeng should've never let these devils stay." He weeps fat sap tears. "My poor children, my poor sister." He scowls. "The devils must pay!"

Granduncle See understands you are not kin. **He will trust no oaths from you.**

"Trades, then." For every head belonging to a named Zum-folk character you bring him, **he teaches you a spell of your choice.** He knows them all.

HEX M

Once Soot

Pneumatophores, tall as menhirs. House-boats tethered to many; flagpoles spiked on some. The silver eye banner flies, here.

The tide is never low enough to walk to the stump that was once Grandaunt Soot: Built upon it: **a brick fort.** Walls plastered smooth. Open turrets at each cardinal point. In each, **an explosive harpoon gun** (d10, blast, single shot), mounted on a skyward swivel.

South wall: Winch lifts down to a shipyard. In drydock: **Two war galleys**, hulls punctured.

Approach the fort without escort and you are inspected by a **skiff with d6 soldiers** (pg. 46). They confiscate any contraband—meaning valuables—you carry.

THE FORT

An armory: As many firearms as you might want; enough powder casks to blow up a granduncle. Quartermaster **Assai Mulk** sells you munitions at three times normal price.

A storehouse: Timber to repair three ships; **a week's supply of food.** The Zum-folk have maritime supremacy; they expect raids, not a siege. Steward **Ginni Jun** is often asleep.

Oubliettes dug into the wood floor. **Every morning:** gaoler **Gavar Tim** marches a shivering young woman, **Nene ap Siluk**, around the yard. Under his instruments she has been forced to say that her home, **Cold Cave Village** (pg. 60), is in league with the enemy.

A barracks: **Fifty soldiers** (pg. 46) sleep here. **Every evening:** Commodore **Etan Yar** oversees roll call in the yard.

THE WARSHIP

Three masts, a crew of **forty soldiers** (pg. 46)—the **Undeterred** is Zum's largest warship.

Lining the gunwales: Shields, with painted eyes. On the forecastle: **an explosive harpoon gun** (d10, blast, single shot), aimed at the air.

Underdecks: A complement of **thirty canny-ware** (pg. 44) oars, chained. **Bosun Nakai Yar** has the key. **Stern:** Storage for powder and victuals. **Fore:** A brig, currently empty.

In the poop deck: Spartan but sturdy furniture; a stuffed marlin serving as a punching bag; a strongbox of **promissory notes worth 15000gp**—Lady Gul's warchest. A wide bed, a **canny-ware harp**, set to playing sentimental ballads. Ummul never sleeps on land.

UMMUL GUL, AMBITIOUS KNIGHT

6 HP, 1 Armor, 8 STR, 14 DEX, 14 WIL, fists (d8+d8)

An eye tattooed on every knuckle. These narrow if her hands are open; widen into glares when she balls her fists.

She has been squeezing the witch-folk for years; the war they bring will win her support at court. If she can recover **the king** (pg. 54), so much the better; one less variable to worry about, when she moves to become Ummul Blessed Be.

She sizes you up. **Can she trust you with her ambitions?**

She wields no weapons; her own fingers do harm enough. In lieu of damage, she may slap you: **you are struck blind for a day.**

HEX Q

Grandaunt Ngeng's Shade

Buttress roots like folds of a flowing dress, trunk leaning westwards, one branch-arm flung out, her crown a bouffant of silver leaves. **A colossal dancer photographed mid-swing.**

Low Tide: A woman with one arm and white hair wanders over the laterite-rock beach, collecting shells. This is **Grandaunt Ngeng.**

Rope ladders. On the flat table of a limb stump, four storeys up: **a thatched hut.** If allowed to journey unmolested, Meaw eventually leads **the runaways here** (pg. 54).

GRANDAUNT NGENG, WOODLAND MATRIARCH

She has your mother's voice, your mother's smell. Her left arm used to swing heavy war clubs; her right arm ends above the elbow.

She invites to her hut for a meal. "Porridge and fish flakes," she says. She is **waiting for the Zum king and her daughter, Shiri.** "My daughter is bringing my right hand back to me," she explains.

Grandaunt Ngeng will hold the **scepter** (pg. 54) to her arm-stump. It will reattach, and a cosmic reversal will happen—all time will rewind to the moment of her meeting with the Zum King, **long ago** (pg. 40).

A do-over. She has seen what her honorable compromise has wrought. She hopes to act better, this time, and reject the man more vehemently.

THE TIDE, RETURNING

The problem with Grandaunt Ngeng's plan is this: her past self has none of the knowledge her present self possesses. **Young Ngeng will always cut off her arm,** and doom the wood's history with Zum to repeat.

However: **if you escorted the runaways, or otherwise helped bring the scepter** (pg. 54) to Grandaunt Ngeng, you become Fate's agent in this matter.

You are pulled into the past:

You stand on a laterite-rock-strewn beach. **Young Ngeng** (attributes as hunter, pg. 49) has been challenged to a duel by the **Zum King.** No Zum-folk blood may be spilled in his presence. But he travels with **two guards** (attributes as soldiers, pg. 46), for safety.

Should Ngeng lose the duel, Ngeng must marry the Zum King. Ngeng is about to agree to these terms.



ADVENTURE ANTHOLOGY

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This is the first official Adventure Anthology for Cairn. This book contains three brand new adventures written by guest adventure writers. From mansions to mangroves, adventures designed for quick sessions or settings to play an entire campaign in, this is the perfect book for any table.

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