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DUNGEON BACKDROP:  
SCARLOCK HILL



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# DUNGEON BACKDROP:

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## SCARLOCK HILL



*With slick black fingers, the muddy soil grasps at your heels as you laboriously climb Scarlock Hill's rock-strewn slope. A hundred feet below, scores of tall pine trees silently watch your ascent. Against the scarlet backdrop of the setting sun, they resemble dark jagged towers rising from an ocean of boiling fog, and for a brief moment it almost seems as if you've crossed into another world.*

*A gentle but cold breeze picks up, eliciting timid whispers from the shivering shrubs of rose haw, urging you to turn back while you still can. You've all but reached the top now. One by one, the great standing stones crowning the ancient barrow mound hove into view: a perfect circle of eight megaliths surrounding a cracked altar stone. A lone crow perches on the nearest menhir. Pecking and scratching at the stone, it caws a final warning in the black language of its kind before flying off, leaving you alone atop Scarlock Hill.*

*You are a GM, but you are busy. You want to write your own modules, but you just don't have the time. And you don't want to use commercial modules. You want to make your campaign your own. That's where the *Dungeon Backdrop* line comes in! Each *Dungeon Backdrop* presents a fully fleshed out and lovingly detailed self-contained dungeon ready for you to use as you see fit. Stock the dungeon with your own monsters (and—perhaps—their treasure), decide their back story and you are good to go.*

*Every *Dungeon Backdrop* is carefully designed to be easily inserted into almost any fantasy campaign and is compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game. *Dungeon Backdrops*: we describe the dungeon, you add the monsters (and the treasure).*

## CREDITS

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## USING A DUNGEON BACKDROP

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Tweak and modify this Dungeon Backdrop to make it your own. The parts of this supplement describing the actual dungeon itself feature extensive space for you to make notes—adding treasure, opponents and so on.

**Campaign Setting:** This Dungeon Backdrop is designed for use with the Lonely Coast. However, the dungeon is relatively self-contained and with minimal effort can be easily modified to fit almost any campaign world.

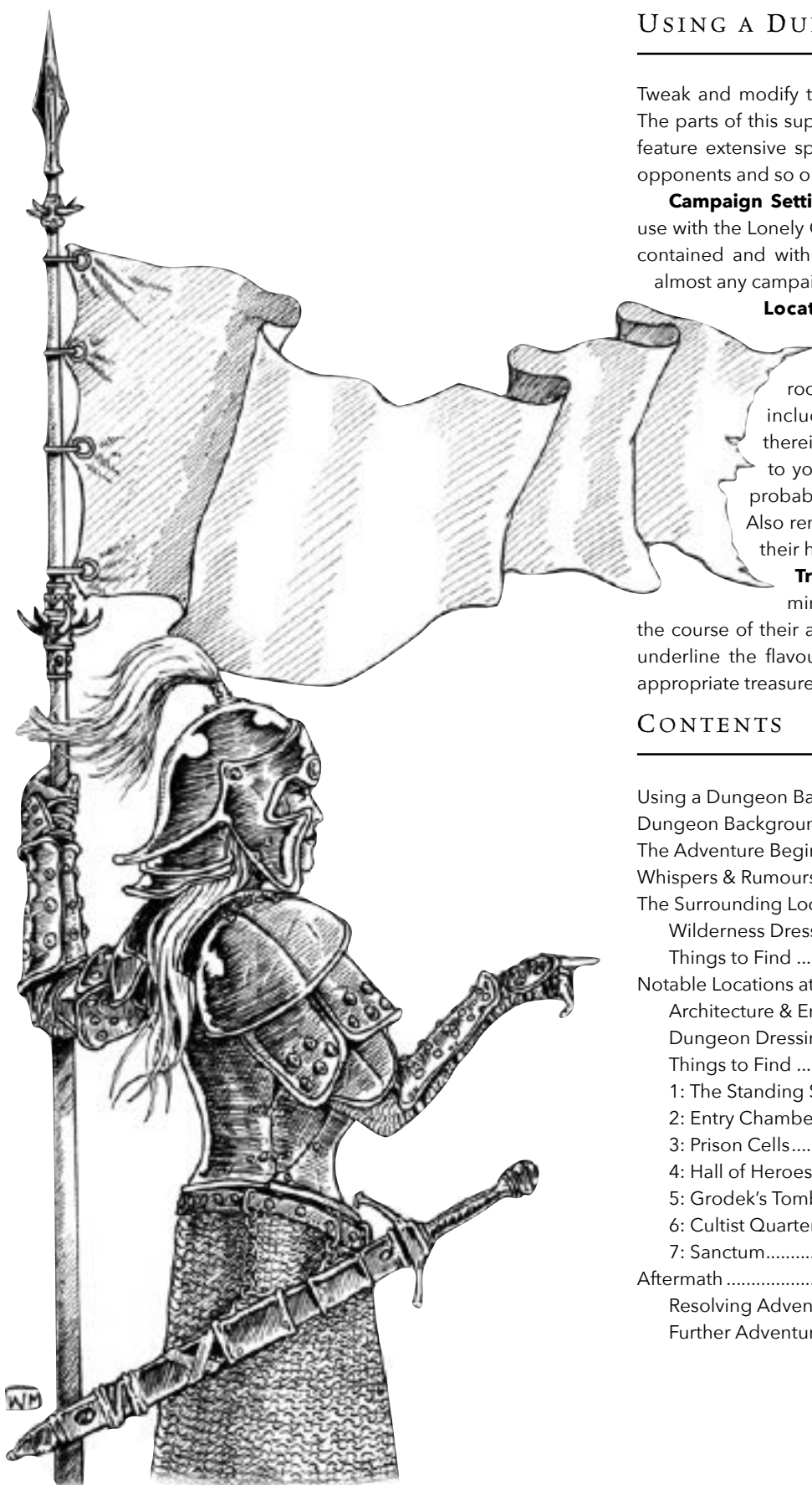
**Location Descriptions:** The various location descriptions provided herein only describe the basic appearance of the dungeon's rooms, chambers and corridors. They do not include descriptions of any monsters lurking therein. Remember when describing the dungeon to your players the snarling orcs (or whatever) are probably more noticeable than the room's features. Also remember, creatures in the dungeon will modify their home to better suit their needs.

**Treasure:** The text only presents the details of minor treasures the characters could discover in the course of their adventure. Most is of little value, but serves to underline the flavour of the dungeon. Remember to add level-appropriate treasure when designing your dungeon.

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## DUNGEON BACKGROUND

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Two millennia ago, an ancient people—the Tuath—emerged from the primeval Tangled Wood. Despite fighting an endless war against the goblins of the forest, these primitive humans dominated the Lonely Coast for almost 200 years. The goblin wars culminated in the massacre at Talan’s Bluff, where the Tuath were defeated, leaving behind a legacy of stone and stories. Ancient hill forts, sunken tombs and crude temples remain the sole testament of a proud warrior people and their near-mythical hero-kings, whose history soon faded into storied legend.

One such hero-king was Grodek, who ruled over the fortress of Caer Killaen, near present-day Swallowfeld. Having suffered a mortal wound from a goblin arrow, Grodek lay dying on the field of battle. A wandering fey found the moribund king, and used faerie magic to save his life. Grateful beyond words, Grodek vowed to repay his rescuer with whatever the fey desired. When the fey responded he would marry Grodek’s first-born daughter on her eighteenth birthday, the king hastily agreed. The girl had not even been born yet, and Grodek wagered the debt would soon be forgotten.

Many years later, Grodek wed Queen Ella, and the pair had a daughter named Elis, who grew into a fine young woman. On her seventeenth birthday, a visitor came to Caer Killaen. It was the fey to whom Grodek owed his life debt, come to remind the king of his vow. Unwilling to part with his only child, but loath to offend the fey, Grodek feigned acquiescence and sent him away.

Another year passed, and on the eve of Elis’ eighteenth birthday the king called upon his finest warriors to escort the girl to Talan’s Bluff, far from the fey’s domain. The fey, however, had foreseen Grodek’s deception. On a lonely forest road, they confronted the royal retinue with twenty warriors of their own. It was then Grodek broke his oath, commanding his retinue to strike the fey down. But the betrayed forest folk had ancient magic at their call and raised a veil of mist to engulf the king and his men who, in their rage and confusion, set upon each other.

When the fog had lifted, the king found his daughter impaled upon his own spear. Of the fey, there was no trace.

Grodek went mad with grief and took his own life. A barrow was constructed atop a flat-topped hill and crowned with eight great menhirs to commemorate the king’s tragic saga, as well as to ward his tomb against intruders.

The barrow remained untouched until a century ago, when the Red Rubric, a sect dedicated to Braal, god of hatred and malice, solved the riddle of the stones and used the barrow as a base of operations. Before long, however, the cult’s horrid depredations drew attention to their lair, and the local people responded by building a massive bonfire atop the hill which burned for several days, suffocating all the cultists trapped in the tunnels below.

Today, the hill’s history is all but forgotten, leaving only half-remembered legends to serve as a warning against the dangers of lingering amid the lightning-prone megaliths.

## THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

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The characters can stumble on Scarlock Hill by happenstance and decide to explore the locale on a whim. Alternatively, use one of the hooks below to lure the characters to the hill:

**Gone With the Wind:** “Red” Hemmo Sakarias has been missing for two days now. The shepherd was last seen rounding up his flock atop Scarlock Hill in the midst of a terrible gale. His saddened wife, Alvi, begs the party to investigate and gives them an urn containing 1d100x10 sp..

**Getting to the Point:** It’s no secret Sir Talek Annear (LN male human fighter 4), Swallowfeld’s protector, deeply admires the hero-kings of ancient lore. He offers a standing reward of 100 gp for whoever can gain entrance to the barrow beneath Scarlock Hill and retrieve the head of *Balak*, King Grodek’s legendary thrice-barbed spear.

**What a Nice Man:** Dour-faced Kitto Joliffe (NE male human fighter 2) approaches the characters with a few salient rumours surrounding Scarlock Hill and tries his best to bait them into investigating the standing stones. If they express interest, Kitto helpfully offers to guide them to the hilltop the next day.

In truth, Kitto is a cultist of Braal. He knows about the Red Rubric and seeks access to the barrow so he can recover their secrets. Rather than risk his own life, however, he prefers some greedy adventurers clear the barrow while he waits outside.

## WHISPERS & RUMOURS

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A character may know one or more rumours from the list below. The character can learn this information in several ways: by overhearing locals gossiping, chatting with regulars over a few drinks at the local tavern and so on.

1. The standing stones mark the battlefield where King Grodek once lay dying. A fey prince healed his wounds, and the king promised him the hand of his unborn daughter in return.
2. The stones are petrified warriors. The king’s daughter, Elis, was promised to a faerie prince, but the king absconded with her before the wedding. Suspecting betrayal, the fey confronted the king and his men on the hilltop and used their magic to turn Grodek’s warriors to stone.
3. The megaliths are a prehistoric lunar temple where King Grodek wed Queen Ella. The king is famously known for having slain his own daughter, claiming he was blinded by faerie magic.
4. Less than a century ago, a cult of Braal took refuge in the barrow beneath Scarlock Hill. Local villagers built a massive bonfire atop the hill, to trap and suffocate the cultists.
5. Scarlock Hill derives its name from Scarlock; a cheeky rogue from local folklore. The hill is where he’s said to have caught lightning in a bottle.
6. It’s dangerous to roam the hilltop. The stones are said to draw down lightning strikes, even on clear, cloudless days.

## THE SURROUNDING LOCALITY

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Scarlock Hill lies less than a mile north of Swallowfeld, just beyond Feybrook Bridge. During daytime, flocks of sheep lazily graze along its lush southern flank while villagers hike up the winding Scarlock Way to wander the Bellswood, where it's customary for couples to hang tiny bells amid the tree branches to celebrate betrothals, weddings and anniversaries. The steep final climb, as well as the megaliths' well-deserved reputation for drawing down lightning strikes, causes most sensible folk to avoid the hilltop—especially during the all-too-frequent thunderstorms the hill seems to attract.

1. **Feybrook Bridge:** A bronze plaque bearing the name of Sir Talek Annear, protector of Swallowfeld, graces this well-kept stone bridge across the Feybrook. During daytime, local children play nearby, hunt for frogs or pick sprigs of water mint growing beneath the bridge.
2. **Old Gallows:** Far too old to support a hanging body, the gallows now serve as a signpost. East points to Wolverton, and south to Swallowfeld. West lies Scarlock Way: a steep, winding path leading to the windswept hilltop.
3. **Bellswood:** Hundreds of tiny copper bells hang from the branches of these pine trees. A gentle ringing chorus resounds whenever the wind blows through them.
4. **Splintered Elm:** This hundred-year elm tree was shattered by lightning many decades ago. Owls and bluebirds nest inside its great hollow trunk.
5. **Hilltop:** Fire-scorched bushes and patches of sintered sand bear witness to the frequent lightning strikes plaguing Scarlock Hill. A character carefully searching this area finds 1d4 pieces of fulgurite—crystals created from lightning-vitrified sand each worth 1d10 gp.

## WILDERNESS DRESSING

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Use this list, to add life and detail to Scarlock Hill:

1. Dark purple mushrooms stand amid the tall grass, forming a large, almost perfectly circular, fairy ring.
2. A sudden squall tears through the trees and noisily rips off a heavy branch which just misses a character as it falls to the ground.
3. An angry buzzing alerts the characters to a fallen beehive several yards ahead, where swarms of surly bees hover over the sticky ruin of their honey-covered nest.
4. Plaintive bleating leads the party to a wounded sheep with a severely injured leg. A character tending the wound or at least four points of magical healing saves the poor creature, which may have been mauled by a wolf.
5. A salvo of staccato shrieks echoes across the sky as a flock of blackbirds circles overhead. A ranger or druid knows their behaviour heralds a coming storm.

6. Among the trees sits a poorly hidden lean-to shelter made of fallen branches. A foul-tempered badger lairs inside this disused children's fort.

## THINGS TO FIND

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Use this list to determine what minor objects or features of interest the party discover if they search the surrounds. Modify the value of items below to suit your campaign.

1. A wax-wrapped honey-cake bearing tiny bite marks, perhaps made by a very small human child.
2. An old bird's nest, blown from its treetop perch. A tarnished bronze pendant shaped like a cloven skull lies within.
3. A pair of copper bells joined by a red silk ribbon. They bear the initials E and B, respectively.
4. A checkered red and white cloth bundle lies by a fine track. It contains a shepherd's lunch of rye bread, butter, hard cheese and a jug of watered-down ale.
5. A rusted saw, firmly stuck in the trunk of a stout pine tree.
6. A sprung wolf trap tethered to a wooden stake. Tufts of grey fur are stuck between its steel jaws.



## NOTABLE LOCATIONS AT A GLANCE

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The dungeon has several notable locations.

1. **The Standing Stones:** To enter the barrow, the characters must solve the mystery of the standing stones.
2. **Entry Chamber:** Cultist corpses lie piled upon one another in this soot-choked chamber.
3. **Cultist Cells:** The Red Rubric converted these tomb chambers into prison cells to hold their sacrificial victims.
4. **Hall of Heroes:** Five alcoves contain the desecrated remains of King Grodek's warriors.
5. **Grodek's Tomb:** Though the king's bones remain, this vault has been plundered long ago.
6. **Cultist Quarters:** This large burial vault served as the cult's living quarters.
7. **Sanctum:** Deep within the barrow, lies the Red Rubric's most prized treasure.

## ARCHITECTURE & ENVIRONMENT

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Many of the dungeon's locations share certain features. Unless stated otherwise in the location's description, assume the following:

**Air Quality:** Mould, soot and the dust of many of corpses make it hard to breathe the barrow's cold, damp air. Characters must make a saving throw against poison every 30 minutes spent inside the barrow. Failure indicates, the character becomes fatigued. Characters who are already fatigued become exhausted instead. Fatigued characters' movement is reduced by one-third and they suffer a -2 to their attack rolls. Exhausted characters suffer twice these listed penalties. These conditions wear off after one hour of fresh air.

**Illumination:** A black, chthonian darkness fills the barrow.

**Ceilings:** Thick oaken beams support a low, sagging ceiling barely 6 ft. in height. Medium or larger creatures wielding bludgeoning or slashing weapons suffer a -2 penalty to hit, due to the lack of space available to wield such weapons effectively.

**Walls:** Comprising crude masonry and groaning timbers, these ancient walls are full of cracks and crevices where tiny insects and other pests might lurk. The walls' poor condition makes them difficult to scale (-10% chance to success).

**Floors:** Several minor seismic events in the past shifted the flagstone floors of the barrow considerably. They are quite uneven and covered in light rubble throughout. Characters running or charging must roll equal or under the Dexterity on 3d6 to move.

**Doors:** Six-inch thick slabs of blue granite set into shallow trenches greased with animal fat function as doors.

**Stairs:** The uneven, rubble-strewn stairs inside the barrow are difficult terrain. The irregular steps make running, charging and the like difficult. Characters running or charging must roll equal or under the Dexterity on 3d6 to move.

## DUNGEON DRESSING

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Use this list to breathe life and detail into the dungeon:

1. Gnarled tree roots hang from the ceiling like hairy tentacles, impeding progress. They bleed a milky white resin, if cut.
2. A patch of wrinkly brown mushrooms resembles shrunken heads. They release a puff of noxious spores, when touched.
3. Jagged glass shards—the remains of perhaps two dozen jars and bottles—lie scattered across the floor. Treat the glass as caltrops that also impose a -4 penalty on Stealth checks made to move silently.
4. A pair of rusty iron shackles hangs from the wall.
5. Streaks of age-old blood defile the walls with the vile gospels of Braal, god of hatred and malice.
6. A chipped, crescent guillotine blade hangs from the ceiling from an iron pole; it is the remains of a triggered trap.
7. Slimy patches of luminescent green fungus bask the area in a cold and dim emerald radiance.
8. Bulbous drops of jet-black tar seep from the cracked ceiling like thick, stygian blood.
9. A ghostly whisper echoes through the barrow, repeating the words "*Dwi'n difaru - dwi'n difaru yn fawr*" over and over again. Characters who speak Sylph understand this as meaning: "*I regret it, I regret it so much*"
10. The faintly glowing apparition of an old man wearing an iron crown silently strides through the darkness before disappearing into the wall.

## THINGS TO FIND

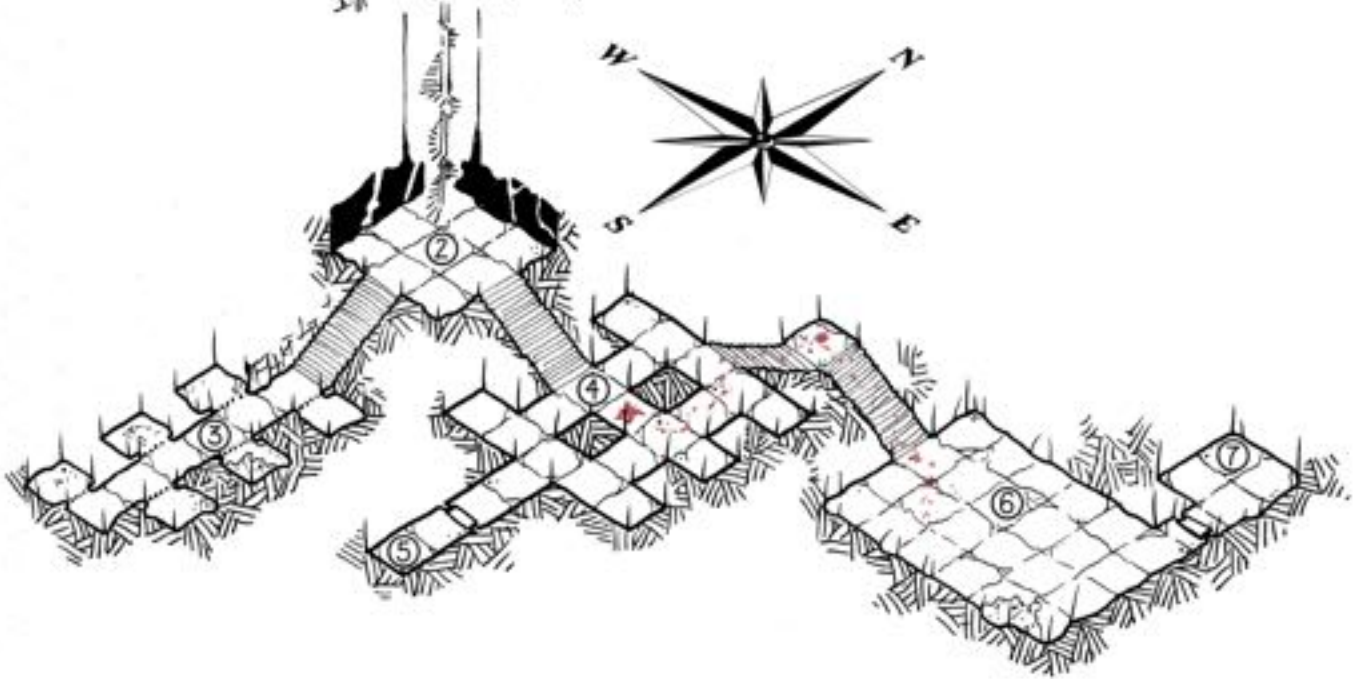
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Use this list to determine what minor objects or features of interest the party discover if they take the time to search. Modify the value of items below to suit your campaign.

1. A mouldy linen bundle of dark burgundy cultist robes. The pockets contain 2d10 sp, as well as clumps of human hair, nails and teeth.
2. A tarnished silver whistle, serves as home to a large, but harmless, wolf spider.
3. An enormous drinking horn, nearly five feet long and banded with beaten copper. It can hold eight gallons of ale.
4. A cloudy glass jar packed with 4d10 fermented toads. It violently explodes when opened. The resulting stench takes 2d4 days to wear off.
5. An oiled deerskin sheath containing a small but wickedly sharp flint dagger.
6. A polished horse skull, intricately engraved with decorative spiral patterns.
7. A cedar wood box containing 3d6 nuggets of sickly-sweet smelling incense.
8. A verdigris-encrusted copper signet ring emblazoned with the image of a cloven skull.
9. A bent iron sword. The dull rusty blade is pocked with indentations suggesting bite marks made by human teeth.
10. A small, felt-lined box containing six beautifully-preserved dead sparrows with tiny jets for eyes.



# The Old King's Barrow



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## GM NOTES

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*Running a fun puzzle at the table is an art. If the players are truly stumped, a gentle nudge in the right direction is preferable to frustration setting in. A leading question or two goes a long way: "Is there anything you recall about Scarlock Hill which can be linked to those glyphs?" Be permissive in allowing characters to obtain the necessary clues (glyphs and rumours), but let the players solve the mystery on their own.*

*If none of the characters know Sylph, consider using a different "ancient" language for the glyphs. Alternatively, a helpful sage may be able to translate for them.*

## I: THE STANDING STONES

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To enter the barrow, the characters must solve the mystery of the standing stones.

*Surrounding a cracked stone altar, eight megaliths stand in silent attention atop the windswept hill. Empty wineskins and the ashes of a campfire suggest the place is a favoured haunt of local youths.*

**Altar:** This massive slab of rock is 6 ft. by 3 ft. and is 3 ft. high. Long, thin cracks runs down the centre of its soot-blackened surface. The altar weighs 7,000 lbs. and is essentially unbreakable.

**Megaliths:** A thick coat of moss and grime cover the lower half of these 12-15 ft. tall standing stones. A character examining the megaliths spots an ancient Sylph glyph on a random stone. If the moss is scraped away, each of the megaliths is revealed to bear a glyph.

**The Puzzle:** Characters able to read Sylph can translate the glyphs with a half-hour of study. Each represents a concept:

- **Stone A:** Bargain, contract, oath
- **Stone B:** Bloodshed, death, murder
- **Stone C:** Flight, escape, evasion
- **Stone D:** Mercy, medicine, aid
- **Stone E:** Betrayal, treachery, oath-breaking
- **Stone F:** Father, parent, birth
- **Stone G:** Tragedy, sorrow, mourning
- **Stone H:** Confrontation, accusation, challenge

**The Trap:** Characters accumulate an increasingly large electric charge with every glyph they touch. Touching 1-3 glyphs, only generates a slight tingling sensation. Touching 6-7 glyphs has a character's hair standing on end and fills the air with an audible crackle and the smell of ozone. This built-up energy cannot be discharged like common electricity, but remains with the character for 1d8 hours, or until they have touched all eight glyphs.

When a character has touched all the glyphs in the wrong order, a bolt of lightning strikes them, dealing 3d10 electricity damage (a successful save against breath weapon halves).

**The Solution:** Triggered in proper order (by a single character), the glyphs retell the tragic saga of King Grodek. This causes the altar stone to move, revealing a winding stair down into the barrow. The correct order is this:

**D - A - F - C - H - E - B - G**

Characters who analyse the partially conflicting rumours surrounding the origin of the stones (see "Whispers and Rumours" entries 1-3) may realise each contains an important part of the king's legend. After some deductive reasoning, they should be able to match each of these key events to their corresponding glyphs and put them in the correct order.

Sharp-witted players may even predict the full sequence from as few as three ordered glyphs if they recognise the emerging pattern of an eight-pointed star between the megaliths.

The passage into the barrow remains open for 2d8 minutes.

## 2: ENTRY CHAMBER

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Cultist corpses sprawl atop one another, in this soot-choked room.

*Thinly veiled in a pall of soot and ashes, a score of twisted corpses covers the floor. Frozen in time, withered hands grasp at thin air, while leathery skulls are forever locked in silent screams.*

**A Way Back:** Characters inside the barrow can cause the altar to shift aside, by touching a spiral glyph at the top of the stairs.

**Choking Dust:** Unless the characters are very careful (rolling equal or under their Dexterity on 4d6), wading through the bodies stirs up a thick cloud of ash, soot and corpse dust. The effect is similar to a *stinking cloud*, but forces characters to make a successful saving throw against poison. Failure results in a violent coughing fit, causing the character to be nauseated (as *stinking cloud*) while in this area.

Once kicked up, the dust takes 1d6+2 hours to settle.

**Corpses:** The twenty-three bodies in this area belong to the men and women of the Red Rubric cult. When the villagers discovered the cult's lair, they built a great bonfire over the stone altar above this chamber. Burning for several days, the flames sucked the oxygen from below, replacing it with acrid, suffocating smoke which killed the cultists. Searching the bodies takes 20 minutes and yields 10d10 sp, as well as 1d4 random trinkets (see "Things to Find"). Remember, such as search may stir up the choking dust.

## 3: PRISON CELLS

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The Red Rubric converted these tombs into prison cells, to hold their sacrificial victims.

*Three rusted iron gates on either side of this looming hallway mark dank, dismal cells. A large congress of pale grey salamanders nervously skitter across the floor and walls at your approach.*

**Iron Gates:** Decades of corrosion have gnawed through the iron bars, who can be pried apart with a successful open doors roll.

**Cells:** Each cell has a 50% chance of containing the withered remains of 1d2 kidnapped victims whose twisted limbs and leering faces evidence a horrible choking death, similar to the cultists in area 2.

**Salamanders:** Latent necromantic energies inside the barrow have turned these creatures into tiny undead. The pale, eyeless amphibians possess blindsight (range 40 ft.) and begin stalking the characters as soon as they leave this area. Every ten minutes, 2d10 of them creep from the shadows to join the others in observing the characters. Once they outnumber the party ten to one, the zombie salamanders swarm one of the characters, "attacking" with their toothless bites. While completely harmless, the experience could be highly unnerving...

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## GM NOTES

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*The choking dust in area 2 isn't just a hindrance; the coughing fits of would-be intruders function as a crude alarm for the dungeon's denizens!*

*If you've chosen intelligent, living creatures to dwell beneath Scarlock Hill, consider giving them some protection from the dust as well as the dungeon's bad air in general. Primitive gas masks consisting of tarred leather sacks with reed tubes, for example, also serve to keep your players guessing at their foe's true nature and identity.*

*At your option, the zombie salamanders in area 3 can be upgraded to a proper threat. Consider using the stats for a giant rat as a base.*

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## GM NOTES

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The blood in area 4 is from "Red" Hemmo Sakarias (see "The Adventure Begins: Gone with the Wind"). The cause of his injury depends on your preferences for stocking the dungeon. A concealed spear trap is a solid choice, especially with the characters distracted by the blood...

Balak, the spearhead found in area 5, is coveted by Sir Talek Annear (see "The Adventure Begins: Getting to the Point"). When fitted to a new shaft, Balak grants a +1 to hit and damage, although it is nonmagical. At your option, the weapon may also possess magical powers.

Intelligent dungeon dwellers would likely have disposed of Red's body in area 6 by the time the characters arrive. In this case, consider placing the poor shepherd's corpse outside instead—perhaps inside the splintered elm upon the hill (see "The Surrounding Locality").

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## 4: HALL OF HEROES

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These five alcoves contain the desecrated remains of King Grodek's warriors.

*Tiny shapes cavort in a dark puddle sitting between two massive pillars upholding the crumbling ceiling. From shadowed alcoves, hollow eyes glare in mute disapproval at your presence.*

**Puddle:** As the characters approach, 1d6+1 blood-slick zombie salamanders (see area 3) cease feeding and skitter away. Closer inspection confirms the liquid is semi-congealed blood. Crimson trails lead north from the puddle, down the stairs towards area 6.

**Alcoves:** The wizened corpses of ancient warriors occupy these alcoves. All have been severely disfigured, missing teeth, hair, hands or even entire limbs. A character wise in magical ways can reveal the missing parts were harvested for necromantic spell components. Nothing of value remains.

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## 5: GRODEK'S TOMB

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Though the king's bones remain, his vault was looted long ago.

*Half-devoured by pale moss and lichen, a crumbling granite throne rests against the far wall. Slouched upon it is the skeletal shape of an ancient king.*

**The King:** Deep gouges mark the skeleton's lower ribs and spine. A character examining the remains identifies the cause as a fatal, self-inflicted wound, possibly the result of falling on one's sword. The corpse was robbed of all valuables long ago.

**Overgrown Throne:** Characters sifting through the shaggy coat of moss and lichen find a spearhead. While the shaft has rotted away, the spearhead remains in good condition. Measuring over a foot long, it sports three sets of wicked barbs. A character learned in history identifies this as *Balak*, King Grodek's legendary thrice-barbed spear.

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## 6: CULTIST QUARTERS

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This large burial vault served as the cult's living quarters.

*Scarlet streaks of blood lead down the stairs into a spacious chamber where rows of shabby beds and cupboards give the appearance of living quarters.*

**Blood Trail:** The blood trail terminates behind a toppled cupboard, where the body of a stout, red-haired man in shepherd's clothing lies clutching a mortal wound.

**Containers:** Old clothes, perished foodstuffs and various personal effects make up the majority of the items here. A thorough search takes 30 minutes and yields 2d6x100 sp, plus 1d4+1 random trinkets (see "Things to Find"). In addition, the characters find a 110-year-old deed of ownership for a place called Craghollow Mine, signed by one Ravin Wearne. A character familiar with the Lonely Coast identifies Ravin as an ancestor of Talek Wearne, current lord of Oakhurst.

## 7: SANCTUM

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Deep within the barrow lies the Red Rubric's most prized treasure.

*A three-fold lectern resembling a trio of kneeling demons sits upon an elaborate mosaic at the centre of this chamber. A gilded scroll lies cradled between the brass-wrought fiends' curved horns.*

**Mosaic:** Though covered in grime and missing several tiles, the mosaic presents a detailed map of a small archipelago near the coast. A character familiar with the Lonely Coast identifies the location as the Shard Isles; a cluster of small islets a few miles west of Wolverton.

**Lectern:** Artfully wrought of solid brass and moulded into disturbingly life-like images of three identical fiends, the lectern weighs 750 lbs. A character examining the lectern establishes its value at 500 gp, or 100 gp if sold as scrap metal. Resting across the ram's horns of each demon lies a gilded scroll.

**Scrolls:** At first glance, all three scrolls seem identical: supple sheets of gold-beaten vellum, loosely wrapped around an ornate ivory cylinder. Only one of them is the real deal, however; the remaining two are dangerous decoys:

- **Scroll 1:** Exuding a faint alteration aura, this decoy scroll is inscribed with *explosive runes*. Anyone foolish enough to unfurl it and gaze upon its writing suffers their full effect.
- **Scroll 2:** A faint transmutation aura hangs over this decoy scroll. When removed from the lectern, it magically transforms into a venomous snake which attacks until killed.
- **Scroll 3:** Steeped in a faint evocation aura, this scroll bears only a single glowing rune. A character using comprehend languages or deciphering the scroll in some other way identifies the writing as that of the Abyss; the rune represents "Rho" - a sound without any intrinsic meaning.

When read aloud, the rune glows a hot, sullen red. After 1d3 rounds, the sigil flares brightly, immolating the scroll which is reduced to ashes. At the same time, the reader feels a sharp burning pain in their chest, and suffers 1d4 fire damage. Inspection reveals the *Rho* sigil is now branded into the character's flesh. The demonic brand cannot be removed by magical means, short of a *wish*. All attempts to disfigure or remove the mark are unsuccessful, as the brand magically reforms itself within 1d12 minutes.

While the hit points lost to this branding cannot be healed as long as the rune is present, the bearer of *Rho* suffers no additional ill effects.



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## GM NOTES

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*Feel free to adjust the effects of both decoy scrolls to your own tastes, as well as the party's level.*

*The brand bestowed by third scroll serves as a future adventure hook (see "Further Adventures, A Bad Sign"), and the "permanent" hit point loss (1d4) merely provides extra motivation for the players to pursue this. If you or your group dislike this effect, discard it.*

## AFTERMATH

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Although the ancient barrow may be cleared, the discoveries made therein serve only to deepen the mysteries of the cult of the Red Rubric! Use the suggestions below to expand the story and continue the characters' adventures on the Lonely Coast.

## RESOLVING ADVENTURE HOOKS

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If you used one or more of the hooks presented in "The Adventure Begins" use these notes to resolve the adventure's aftermath:

**Gone with the Wind:** Fearing curious youths might suffer the same tragic fate as poor Hemmo Sakarias, the villagers of Swallowfeld demand the standing stones be pulled down and the barrow sealed for good. The request is flatly denied by Sir Talek Annear, who sees the work as a waste of time. Do the characters side with the villagers to demolish the stones and seal the barrow against Sir Talek's will? Or can Talek's promise of hard coin convince them to break up the angry mob preparing to storm Scarlock Hill armed with picks and mattocks?

**Getting to the Point:** If the characters recovered *Balak* from the tomb, Sir Talek Annear pays them the agreed reward. If the party manage to impress the haughty nobleman, Sir Talek has several more tasks for them, each involving the retrieval of some long-lost artifact or weapon from the Elder Days.

Should the characters choose to keep the spear for themselves, Sir Talek could become a powerful enemy, and one to bear a long-lasting grudge.

**What a Nice Man:** When the characters emerge from the barrow, they are greeted by Kitto Joliffe and his abrasive wife, Tecca (NE female cleric [Braal] 4). If the party seems badly hurt, the couple drop their charade and attack the characters then and there. Otherwise, the Joliffes invite them to their home, Swallowfeld's Grist Mill (see *The Lonely Coast* page 56). There the heroes are offered a hearty meal and several jugs of ale as the Joliffes coax them into recounting their adventure. As soon as they learn how to open the passage, Tecca sends a group of 2d6

cultists to Scarlock Hill to search the area and take anything the characters may have missed. In addition, one experienced cultist is assigned to follow the characters around and steal anything thought pertinent to Tecca's cult of Braal.

## FURTHER ADVENTURES

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The characters' discoveries beneath Scarlock Hill are certain to lead to exciting new exploits! Consider the following ideas when preparing for an upcoming adventure:

**A Bad Sign:** There's a good chance one of the characters (or perhaps an unfortunate ally) has been branded with *Rho*, the fell rune bestowed by the scroll in area 7. While the arcane brand seems but a minor cosmetic inconvenience at first, its true effects won't manifest themselves until several days later. But how can the bearer rid themselves of the brand? And what, if anything, does *Rho* mean? Maybe there is a sage or scholar out there, capable of fathoming the sigil's occult meaning? Or does the answer lie with the supposedly-extinct cult of the Red Rubric? Perhaps it's wise for the characters to remain discreet in their investigations, so as not to attract the attention of those seeking to attain *Rho*'s secret for their own sinister purposes.

**It's Mine Now:** The deed to Craghollow Mine found in area 6 suggests it once belonged to the Red Rubric. But why would an evil cult be interested in mining ore? Perhaps Craghollow simply served as one of their lairs? Or were the cultists actually digging for some vile artifact, sacred to Braal?

While the location of Craghollow Mine isn't clearly noted on the deed, Ravin Wearne's signature suggests it might not be far from the village of Oakhurst.

**Island Vacation:** Judging from the elaborate mosaic found in area 7, the Shard Isles must have held an important meaning to the Red Rubric. What foul, blasphemous secrets could lie hidden among these rocky islets?

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## THE SECRET NAME

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While this Dungeon Backdrop is a complete, standalone product, it has been designed for use with the Secret Name storyline by Raging Swan Press.

The Secret Name provides GMs with a selection of antagonists, agendas and agents to customise a mini-campaign linking together the following products:

- *Dungeon Backdrop: Scarlock Hill*
- *Dungeon Backdrop: Craghollow Mine*
- *Dungeon Backdrop: The Shard Isles*

The Further Adventures section in each of these Dungeon Backdrops presents in-game leads to both other linked dungeons, allowing you to run them in any order.

The Secret Name can be downloaded for free at  
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# GLOAMHOLD AND ITS SURROUNDINGS



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