

BLACK LUNG



# Black Lung

a charity zine

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# Cursed Barrow of the Whispering Skulls

by Levi Combs



A quiet hamlet in the middle of nowhere. A terrifying mystery unleashed on an unsuspecting populace. What are these mysterious floating skulls that petrify the living and stare enigmatically from beyond the grave? What do they want? Does their sudden appearance herald doom for the benign folk of Bentlebrow's Ridge, or is it something even more sinister?

A long-forgotten barrow-tomb has been accidentally uncovered by a farmer's plow and seven glowing skulls with gemstones for eyes have silently floated out. They are hovering above the newly uncovered entrance and a murmur of whispers surrounds them. No one is brave enough to approach them but locals fear that the worst is yet to come. Will the characters uncover the mystery behind their sudden appearance and what that might mean for the small frontier settlement of Bentlebrow's Ridge?

### **Thar's Somethin' Strange Happenin' Over at Ole Farmer Jessup's Place...**

Two days ago in the small farming village of Bentlebrow's Ridge, a local farmer (one Jessup Elkins) was plowing a freshly cleared plot of land to the west of his farm when his horses stumbled and his plow disappeared into the ground. As his horses scattered to safety, the ground gave way and created a large hole that revealed a shallow subterranean cavern. Inside, an ancient stone marker bearing a strange pattern of swirling runes was revealed.

Once the dust had cleared, Jessup warily climbed down into the hole and investigated. With dreams of riches and buried treasure in his eyes, he pried at the stone marker until it came loose, revealing a long-abandoned entrance to an underground chamber.

Much to his surprise, out floated seven menacing skulls wreathed in purple flames, each with precious stones adorning their eye sockets. These skulls quietly drifted to the surface and formed a circle around the newly-uncovered barrow, followed by a curious, discordant aura of hushed whispering that seemed to emanate from nowhere and everywhere all at once. Fleeing for his life, Jessup ran into town to tell his neighbors what he'd seen, and his disturbing tale has the superstitious locals spooked beyond belief.

Since this occurred, no one has been brave enough to approach the plot, much less confront the skulls or investigate the barrow. Farmer Jessup refuses to go anywhere near it and has even preemptively discussed moving his family away from Bentlebrow's Ridge for good.

The characters can stumble onto the circumstances at Bentlebrow's Ridge in a number of different ways. The characters may simply be passing through during overland travel to another destination and stopped in the village to provision themselves. They might have come to the town to meet a relative or friend, or to seek out the advice of an expert who makes their home there. Ultimately, the characters might have been in the right place at the right time, having been summoned by a call for heroes to investigate this newly uncovered mystery.

Regardless of their circumstance, the scenario begins with the characters riding into Bentlebrow's Ridge to find that the whole town is in an uproar over the disturbance in Jessup's field and it's all anyone can talk about.



## Rumors About Town

The whole settlement is abuzz with rumors and opinions on just what exactly is happening over at Jessup Elkin's farm. They range from the ludicrous to the possibly credible, but it's up to the characters to separate the wheat from the chaff. The Game Master can use any of the following:

*"I ain't seen nuthin' like this in damn near fifty years! We ain't had wizardin' and whatnot since that pointy hat fellar rode through and turned that Tilly boy into a donkey fer tryin' to take his horse!"*

*"Now look here – this ain't the first time we've had strange things happen up here in these parts. My granpappy's pappy passed it on down that long 'fore Bentlebrow's Ridge was here, this was the home of some sorta wizard that lived in these parts. He had an ole crooked tower and folks used to come from miles around to get their curses lifted and*

*problems solved and whatnot. He had a buncha 'prentices too – young fellars that come out here and try to learn his secrets, if'n they had the knack for it."*

*"My aunt Jennie said them skulls ain't nothin' but the devil's bid'ness ... and they mean to damn the whole town!"*

*"My missus and I aim to get out of town 'fore sundown. If what Jessup says is true, then there ain't gonna be nobody left alive by dawn!"*

## Confronting the Skulls

*There's only one thing wrong with these skulls ... they're alive!*

As said by the townsfolk, there are indeed seven human-sized skulls floating silently above a large hole in the ground. The skulls are in varying degrees of physical shape with a few bearing cracks or missing jawbones but are mostly complete. A variety of sparkling gemstones fill their eye sockets, one to each eye. A constant susurrus of low whispers surrounds them, seemingly coming from everywhere and nowhere all at once. Other than outwardly looking strange, a bit fearsome, and obviously magical, they do not give off any other indications that they might be hostile.

If approached within 20 ft., the skulls will all turn slowly, casting their hollow bejeweled gazes down upon those who come near. They will not answer any questions, but if they are addressed, the whispering will suddenly stop and they will speak as one in a hollow, deep cacophony of voices:

*Rest we did, in graves of old.  
Unremembered by tales bold.  
Students of magic, book, and spell.  
By our master's hand, slain as well.  
Imprisoned in spirit, if not in mind.  
We nourished his life, our souls resigned.  
We now gather, here as one.  
To claim our master, Valshathrun.  
His skull within, we cannot obtain.  
Bring him to us, and end our pain.  
Will you aid us now, against the odds?  
So we may sleep and dream, amongst the  
gods?*



This is the only thing the skulls will say and if pressed with other questions, they will only stare wordlessly, floating silently and waiting with eternal patience. They take no other action, but will repeat their rhyme if asked. On the occasion that someone foolishly attacks them, each skull acts as a 7<sup>th</sup> level wizard, using its full arsenal of spells against the one who assailed it. This might mean 7 *lightning bolts* being concentrated on a single character at once or the skulls acting in concert with a series of spells to disable, drive off or kill their attacker. Again, they're not here for a fight but will certainly deal promptly with anyone attacking them. The specifics and spell rosters are left up to each individual Game Master. They do not pursue anyone who flees.

**Eldritch Skull:** Neutral, AC 5, MV 15ft., ATKS 1, DMG by spell, HD 3 + 3, SA/SD spells, +1 or better weapon to hit, immunities as a wight.

Sample Spell List for an Eldritch Skull: 4,3,2,1 – *burning hands, charm person, magic missile, sleep; invisibility, mirror image, shatter, web; lightning bolt, tongues; dimension door.*

## 1 - Entrance to the Cursed Barrow

*"Happy is the tomb where no wizard hath lain, and happy is the town at night whose wizards are all ashes."*

- HP Lovecraft, "The Festival"

The skulls float above a large, ragged hole in the ground that is roughly 15 ft. wide and 10 ft. deep. As characters make their way down, the skulls tilt slowly to look downward and gaze at them silently. A broken horse-plow lies on the ground nearby.

Fresh dirt from the recent collapse lines the bottom of the hole and a very old-looking circular stone marker has been thrown to one side of an opening. This entrance leads straight down and into darkness. The marker appears to have been more of a door or capstone, leading to what most have presumed to be an underground barrow of some sort. The door is marked with a curious symbol that no one will initially recognize. However, if a *read magic* spell or similar magics are used, it can be identified as the personal symbol of the long-dead wizard **Valshathrun**. Otherwise, the door is typical of its kind, competently fashioned from chiseled stone.

The entrance shaft is well constructed, rather than natural, and leads straight down. After 20 ft. the corridor terminates in an unlit underground chamber.

## 2 - Inner Chamber

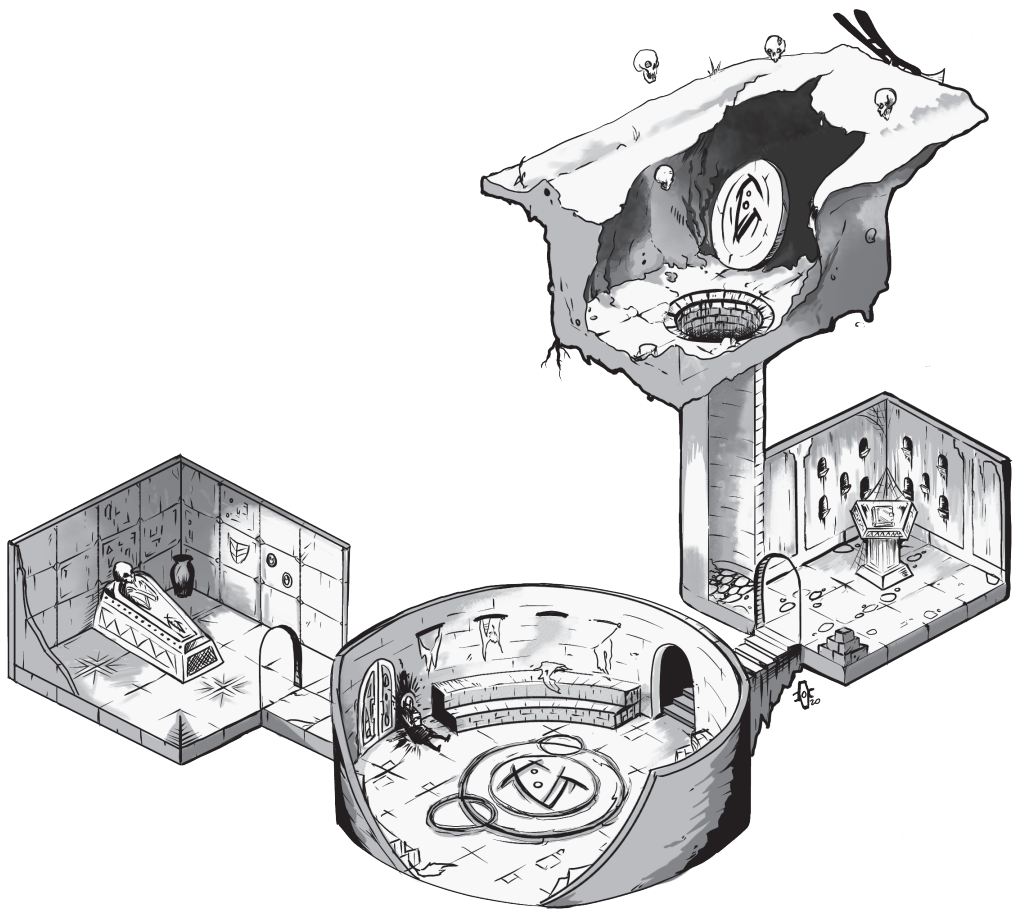
*A tale of dread despair ... written with the souls of the damned!*

This chamber is dominated by a finely worked stone pedestal with a flat, tilted top. There are ten skull-sized niches in the walls surrounding the pedestal, leading one to presume that the skulls which currently float outside the barrow once resided within them. A *detect magic* or similar spell reveals a latent trace of magic related to some sort of magical stasis-type effect.

Upon further examination, the pedestal is revealed to be a podium of sorts, upon which sits a large, brass-bound book of indeterminate age. The book is covered with a thick layer of dust and cobwebs. If the cobwebs are cleared away, the book appears to still be in fine shape despite having been underground and exposed to the elements for a very long time.

The book carries a minor enchantment which protects it from aging, but is otherwise non-magical. Its cover bears the same symbol that was inlaid upon the door - revealed to anyone perusing the book in the same manner as the symbol on the door to once again be the personal symbol of Valshathrun.

Within its pages, characters can read all about Valshathrun's many mighty and horrible deeds, including the grim fate of every



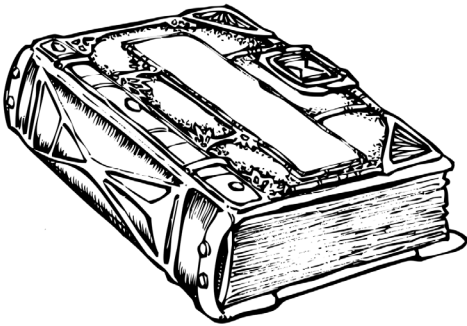
apprentice who had ever served him. Through perusing the tome, it is revealed that Valshathrun was fond of grooming younger wizards to a certain level of power and then trapping their souls, binding their spirits within their skulls so that he could draw upon them for power. He brought them to this place, one by one, with the ultimate goal of one day achieving some sort of immortality through the annihilation of their souls.

Despite the horrors that unfold as one reads the book, discerning characters are also able to detect that the hand that ultimately penned these tales idolized Valshathrun. The reason for this is exposed if characters read through until the very end, where it is revealed that the author is actually Valshathrun's last apprentice – a young mageling named **Theera** – who not only served her master until his untimely demise but was also hopelessly in love with him. She spirited away his remains to this specially prepared subterranean vault centuries ago, after he was slain in spell-combat with a rival wizard. In time, the tower above was abandoned and with no one left



to claim it, it was torn down stone by stone and carted off by locals until it was more or less forgotten.

Theera hoped to one day grow powerful enough to call her dead lover's spirit back from the grave, but ultimately died long before she had any opportunity to do so while attempting to unlock the secrets of her master's spellbook, which was trapped with *explosive runes*. Her remains are found in the **Forum (area 3)**.



### 3 - Forum

*Horror outlives the horrible...*

This circular room appears to be a forum of some sort, with two tiers of seating on each side of the chamber. The walls are hung with drooping, ragged tapestries that are so worm-eaten and tattered that it is difficult to ascertain what they once depicted. One of the tapestries has completely fallen from the wall while the others all seem to be hanging on by a thread.

A very old, desiccated body is sprawled out on the ground next to the tomb, covered in cobwebs. The mummified corpse wears black robes cut with a mustard-yellow trim that have deteriorated and disintegrated with age. A book is clutched in the corpse's hands, but it can be easily removed.

The book is one of many spellbooks that once belonged to Valshathrun. After he was slain in spell-battle and his tower looted, there was little left in the way of powerful magic for Theera to salvage. She was able to recover this spellbook and brought it here in order to learn its secrets in an effort to call her master's spirit from the afterworld. Unfortunately for her, Theera was slain by *explosive runes* inscribed inside the spellbook – one last insult to her in an ultimately wasted life. Because of her rabid devotion to Valshathrun and the nature of her demise, she persists here as a **burning geist**.

If her remains are disturbed or searched, Theera's spirit will not bother to manifest and attack, having persisted here in her undying devotion to Valshathrun for too long. She will only manifest and attack if Valshathrun's remains are disturbed. See the encounter description in **Valshathrun's Tomb (Area 4)** for more details.

The book clutched in Theera's withered hands is one of Valshathrun's many spellbooks. It is no longer

magically trapped (the *explosive runes* having slain Theera before fading away). Aside from some minor notes on outlawed magical theory, the book contains the following spells, one on each page: *dimension door*, *ESP*, *explosive runes*, *forget*, *hold person*, *identify*, *protection from normal missiles*, *read magic*, *shatter*, *slow* and *wizard eye*.

#### 4 - Valshathrun's Tomb

*Some things are better left forgotten.*

The final chamber in this underground barrow contains a large, fairly ornate tomb that is obviously the resting place of someone significant. In fact, it is the crypt of the dread wizard Valshathrun!

Fortunately for the characters, little was left of Valshathrun after he was slain in spell-battle and only his bones and a few charred scraps of clothing were brought here by his insane apprentice Theera.

The tomb is well carved and the lid bears Valshathrun's symbol. The top can be easily slid aside, revealing some extremely old charred human remains, including a skull. If a *detect magic* spell or its equivalent is utilized, there is a latent aura of magic about the bones - a fading residual effect from the once-mighty magics that Valshathrun used to bind the spirits of his apprentices to him.

Valshathrun's spirit has long-departed the mortal realm, moving on to its ultimate fate. What does persist is the spirit of Theera, whose undying devotion to and outright obsession with her former lover causes her to persist as a **burning geist**. If Valshathrun's remains are disturbed - say, if the characters attempt to remove his scorched skull in order to take it outside or to investigate the bottom of the crypt for secret doors - Theera's spirit will manifest at the entrance of the chamber, wild-eyed and screaming ... and attack!



The unquiet spirit of Valshathrun's former apprentice appears as a tormented woman wreathed in crackling flames that completely envelop her. Her visage appears haggard and tortured, constantly in pain from the magical trap set by her former lover. Should Theera's spirit touch a character, the flames burn for 1d8 points of damage on the first round and then level loss on the following round. Successive attacks result in additional burning and level loss. Casting any sort of *cure* spell on the victim halts the successive damage and level drain.

### **Theera, the Burning Geist**

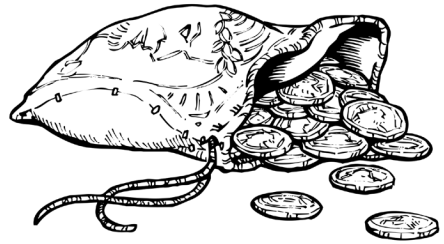
Neutral Evil, AC 2, MV 12', ATKS 1, DMG 1-8, HD 7 + 3, SA/SD energy drain (1 level), +1 or better weapon to hit, immunities as a spectre plus immune to fire.

## **Concluding the Adventure**

If the characters bring Valshathrun's skull outside and present it to the circle of bejeweled skulls floating above the barrow, the aura of whispering voices slowly fades away and the skull will drift out of the characters hands and into the middle of the circle above them. All the skulls will turn their attention to Valshathrun's skull and begin to chant in an unknown language. A flickering, greenish glow will slowly coalesce about the skull as the chanting from the circle increases, until Valshathrun's skull screams in unearthly

agony, his spirit is recalled to face judgment at the hands of his seven apprentices. The skulls then drop to the ground, lifeless and immobile. A *detect magic* or similar spell reveals that no trace of magic remains.

Left behind with the skulls are 14 well-preserved and polished gemstones of exceptional quality. These stones range in color and type but are worth 200 gp each. These stones will also detect as non-magical.



## **In Conclusion**

With the skulls gone and the barrow investigated, the folk of Bentle-brow's Ridge are extremely grateful to the characters – especially Jessup Elkins. The characters have proven themselves to be heroes and the local folk treat them as such. The characters forever after have friends and people they can count on in the area, should they need help, a place to hide or shelter for the night. Their names will begin to spread across the countryside as “mighty heroes who vanquished the old wizard's skulls.”

Huzzah! A round of your finest ale for these heroes!



# DARKNESS WITHIN

by Jack Cull

**Darkness Within** is a quick adventure intended for use within a dystopian post-punk cyberfantasy roleplaying game. It can also be easily used for a modern/futuristic Lovecraftian system, but you are welcome to port this scenario into any ruleset you wish. Additionally, this adventure can be easily modified to take place in a different era or setting (for example: 1920s, 1980s, fantasy medieval, etc.): simply exchange any equipment to be era-appropriate, and modify the location to match (private clinic for medical trials and research, elven apothecary and greenhouse, etc).

## OVERVIEW

**Cosmo**, a dwarven businessman, has made a name for himself cutting deals on the black market, and as someone who will set up a mercenary job on behalf of third parties who prefer to remain nameless. He's got a solid reputation for being a guy with excellent negotiation skills,

reasonable commission fees, and on-time deliveries... Which brings us to the current SNAFU he finds himself in: the previous team of couriers he hired to pick up a shipment of illegal vat-grown bioware has failed to return to him with the goods. Simply put, he wants to know what happened to his first team, and to get his shipment of bioware ASAP.

Cosmo gives the characters information on the Efstine Clinic, the facility where the product is produced. The Efstine Clinic has the front of a legit medical clinic, but under the surface they specialize in cyberware and bioware for the shadowrunning community. Their services include acquisition, removal, or installations of all kinds, complete with full medical recovery time. They grow their own bioware as well on-site, selling their wares at a premium price.

Unbeknownst to Cosmo, the Efstine Clinic was recently taken over by a strike force with ties to Aztech, led by a mysterious man named Seth Kerberos. With all the staff killed, the security team have since disguised themselves as employees of the clinic to hide their activity from prying eyes and give a show that everything is running as normal. The characters could piece together what occurred and retaliate, or might simply sneak their way in.

However, once the characters make it inside, they soon come to realize that something more sinister and otherworldly is going on at the Efstine Clinic. In addition to the employees being slightly *off*, there is a breathing black ichor that has taken over sections of the building, horrific creatures that stalk them from the shadows, and Seth Kerberos is a cult leader who has cast a spell which has torn an opening into a dark dimension.

Sadly, Cosmo won't be able to conclude his business arrangement delivering bioware to his respective buyer, but at least he knows he can trust the characters with any future jobs he comes across!

## IT'S LIKE THIS, SEE?

When the characters agree to the meeting, read this aloud:

Your fixer has enthusiastically set you up with a meeting with a dwarf calling himself Cosmo. Apparently this is an upstanding contact who is a bit of a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to the shadows. Not only that, but he pays well. What more can you ask for?

You meet in the morning in a swanky executive suite at a downtown hotel, escorted into the room by Cosmo's bodyguards: **Two-Ton Tony**, a 9-foot troll built like a brick shithouse, and a bearded orc named **Charlie** wearing a suit and bowler hat. Charlie offers to take your coats

and any gear you want put aside, then makes himself scarce. Cosmo beams at you from the other side of his desk.

## Cosmo

Need some help describing and roleplaying as Cosmo? Simply imagine a dwarven version of Joe Pesci from the Lethal Weapon film franchise, but with a Van Dyke beard and wearing a sharp suit.

When negotiating price, always offer to the characters slightly more than what they would earn on a typical run. Cosmo is always willing to negotiate, and can go up to double that number, but the characters need to make a successful Negotiation (8) check. Feel free to give a roll bonus for good roleplaying interaction with Cosmo.

“I’m gonna be up-front with you all: I’ve heard good things abou’cha, and I’m in a bit of a pickle. Had a team set to pick up a package for me ... hey, did you wanna drink? TONY! GET THE KETTLE ON! ... so where was I? Right! The package. So it’s a parcel of medical supplies. Alright, more like a crate. Of medical ... OKAY, look, it’s a big freezer container full of bioware, black market stuff grown on the down-low on-site, at a place called the Efstine Clinic. Publicly, they’re known to be a relatively legit little cyberware clinic. You know, cosmetic stuff.

Eyes, ears, noses. Occasional limb replacement for the disarmed. Heh. But like I said: on the down-low they deal in some stuff that is more OUR speed.” He motions back and forth between himself and you all.

“Truth be told, I’d already hired another team to retrieve the container. No offense to you, of course. But they haven’t come back and I need it the day after tomorrow for delivery to my buyer. Short notice, I know. But I can pay you for it handsomely, half now, half on completion. I’ve got a cover for you: couriers from C-Gets Delivery Services, complete with IDs, vehicle, the works. So whaddya say?”

When the characters accept the job, read this aloud:

“That’s great, really great!” Cosmo smiles widely at you and shakes your hands. “Tony’ll get your money right now. TONY! MONEY! And Charlie has the rest of it. If you can get me my package, great! If you can find out what happened to the other crew, even better! I look forward to hearing from you.”

Charlie hands you a set of keys, delivery service identification cards, a bundle of clothes, and your upfront payment. “I eyeballed you coming in, so they all should be the right fit. Those IDs will only be valid for a few days, so be sure to ditch them when you’re through. Good luck!” He tips his bowler hat to you as you head for the exit.

## BEHIND THE SCENES

As the characters come upon the clinic, the gamemaster should try to ensure that the players don't get any "unnatural" red flags for this gig, giving away the fact that there is something otherworldly going on (as opposed to simply a mercenary unit having taken over the building). A successful Perception (5) check while in the interior of the ground floor of the clinic will uncover carefully hidden evidence of a fire (recently repaired furniture, covered up bullet holes, dried drops of blood, a stray bullet casing). If the clinic staff or security guards are observed for an extended period of time, a successful Perception (4) [Social] check reveals that they are a little too physically fit to be clinic employees, and their work motions are a bit repetitive and rehearsed.

## THE EFSTINE CLINIC

This two-story medical clinic is an old converted automobile chop-shop, situated at the end of a street in a poor neighborhood. There are half a dozen parking spaces at the front of the building and a side road that grants access to the back bay door. All of the entries into the building (doors, windows, and bay door) are considered reinforced material barriers (security doors and armored glass). Three (3) security team members disguised as clinic guards protect the exterior of the

building: one at the lobby entrance, one at the back, and the other patrolling the area around the clinic. There is also a **Blood Spirit** (Force 5) patrolling the area in the astral plane (for Call of Cthulhu players, swap the Blood Spirit out for a second patrolling guard).

### Ground Floor

While the doors to the Lobby are open during daytime hours to customers, at night they are locked from the inside via the receptionist's computer terminal. The two doors at the back of the building are locked at all times by a maglock keypad (rating 6). The bay door at the back is locked by a maglock keypad (rating 6) and cardreader (rating 6), each of which would need to be bypassed individually to open. Only **Captain Falta** has the swipe card for the bay door.

**1: Lobby.** Like most clinic lobbies, this waiting room area is full of chairs and has a sterile, "overly-clean" lack of smell to the place. There is a station with a pot of soykaf and self-boiling a kettle for tea along the back wall. A green and black neon sign spelling out "The Efstine Clinic" adorns the wall behind the curved reception desk.

Inside the lobby are three (3) **Aztech Security Team** members: two pretending to be customers in the waiting room and the other as the receptionist. If spoken to, the fake receptionist will deny any knowledge

2nd Floor



Ground Floor



Basement





of Cosmo, or another group arriving to collect a package, and will deny that any such package exists on the premises. They will also state that the clinic is booked up for months and cannot provide any services.

**2: Surgical Suite.** A medical procedure room, complete with operating table, wheeled carts with tools and supplies, and semi-automated medical devices on articulated arms attached to the ceiling. Strapped to the table is the dead body of a male troll whose chest cavity is wide open. His heart has been removed and the area has been replaced with a metal housing unit. Four (4) **cultists** are working on the body, placing into the housing unit a device that resembles a clear gas grenade canister, filled with a thick black fluid.

During combat, any area of effect attack or missed shot will strike the canister, rupturing it and causing the black ichor to flood into the open chest of the troll. If that occurs, on the next round of combat the troll's head contorts, sprouts multiple chitin legs dripping with black ichor and tears itself from the body. This single (1) **necrotic flesh-beast** attacks the closest character, ignoring cultists and security team members.

**3: Restrooms.** Standard set of public restrooms. One (1) **security team** member disguised as a guard is here washing their hands (unless a noticeable fight has begun on the

ground floor, in which case they will cautiously exit with weapons at the ready).

**4: Supply Room.** This storage area is where all of the supplies for medical services are stored, ranging from boxes of surgical gloves and instruments all the way to automated medical device parts and an extra gurney. All manner of drugs that used to be stored here are gone. The only chem-like substances left are bottles of disinfectant.

**5: Vat Room.** This massive room contains the vats that the Efstine Clinic used to grow their black market bioware. Unfortunately, all of the equipment in this room has been broken or powered down. All of the bioware here has been ruined, the tissue having died, or worse. The fluids used for growing have gone rancid. The entire room smells of rotten flesh, and the ground and most surfaces are covered in black ichor, gone crusty at the edges.

The room's lights do not work and the entire area is in darkness. Faint illumination can be seen from the area above the room, but it is not enough to see in this space. If the bay door is opened during the day, half of the room is lit, with the black ichor retracting and giving off a hissing sound (like fat sizzling in a hot pan).

There are four (4) **necrotic flesh-beasts** in this room.

## Second Floor

The upper level of the Efstine Clinic can be easily reached in one to two ways: the transport elevator that travels all three floors, or the stairwell from the back hallway on the ground floor near the Supply Room.

**6: Storage Room.** This storage room contains items for the recovery rooms: extra bedding, pillows, towels, cleaning supplies. There is a washer and dryer unit along the back wall, along with a sink. Hidden on a shelf is a top-of-the-line shotgun loaded with armor piercing ammunition.

**7: Recovery Rooms.** These bedroom-like rooms are for patients recovering from their medical procedures at the clinic. Currently they are all empty.

**8: Vat Room Overlook.** There is a metal catwalk that circles this entire area and overlooks the vat room below on the ground floor. While there are electric lights here that illuminate the area, the lighting up here seems dim to anyone not using thermographic imaging. The walls and ceiling in this area are covered in a black mold, like mildew has gone rampant. Any characters who make a successful Perception (3) check notice that the walls make a low, long and ragged breathing sound.

## Basement

The basement area is only accessible via the transport elevator.

**9: Electrical Room.** This room contains the machinery that operates the elevator, as well as the computer server and network for the clinic. The roof of this room is coated in black ichor. A thick vein of organic material travels down the wall and has started to envelop the computer equipment.

**10: Equipment Rooms.** When the clinic was up and running, these rooms stored all of the cyberware they had in stock, as well as containing extra weaponry for the clinic guards. Now, all of the equipment contained within has been destroyed.

**11: Guard Area.** These three rooms consist of a rec room, kitchenette, and bathroom previously used by the Efstine Clinic security guards. The armored window that would normally look out over the warehouse (now Ritual Chamber) is completely black, covered by a thick substance from the other side. Currently, it is where the Aztech security team has holed up, with a couple cots and sleeping bags set up. Unless a fight has kicked off elsewhere in the building, four (4) **security team** members are resting here.

**12: Office.** Formerly the office for the senior physician of the Efstine Clinic, this office is now where Captain Falta has set up shop. There are leather chairs around the main desk

where a computer and hardline communication device sits (though inoperable). Unless an alarm has been raised, he can be found here kicking back at the desk, smoking a cigar.

Stored in the corner on the far side of the room are delivery service uniforms and fake IDs from the first crew Cosmo sent in to retrieve his package. Underneath the pile of clothes are the weapons used by the group. The GM should feel free to reward the characters with a few choice pieces in this batch, should they take the time to investigate this area.

**13: Ritual Chamber.** Black ichor and mold have crusted over this door and it needs to be forced open in order to enter it (this can be a successful Body + Strength (3) check, but the use of fire or an explosive device can burn away the crust and allow entry as well).

The low murmur of chanting can be heard in the room from the hallway outside.

This chamber used to be not only a facility where the Clinic would grow rare and expensive pieces of the bioware for special clients, but also where they would run experiments. The nature of these tests has since been lost, but the GM may feel free to tie them to the nefarious dealings of a megacorp. Only four vats remain intact, the ones closest to the raised walkway at the entrance of

the room, and they are filled with a gray and black substance. The other eight vats have been severely damaged beyond repair.

The back half of the room is gone, having been destroyed, and opens into a void of dark nothingness. The edges of the room are frayed and torn, curling away in a manner not unlike paper. The reality and physics of the massive tear don't make sense, as a hole this big would have broken through to the surface above, or perhaps even into a nearby sewer system, but this rip in the fabric of the universe exists outside such things. See '**Staring into the Void**' for rules regarding this black emptiness.

At the center of the room, near the edge of the voice, stands **Seth Kerberos**, the leader of the operation. He is a handsome, olive-skinned man with short black hair and a neatly trimmed beard. He wears an extremely expensive, well-tailored suit and holds a platinum-handled cane. Around him, on their knees and chanting words of unknown origin, are eight (8) **cultists**. Also in the room are two (2) **security team members** and four (4) **necrotic fleshbeasts**.

## THE NETWORK

The Efstine Clinic has its own closed network computer system, and while it used to be connected to the outside world, the link has since been severed. Any character who wishes to jump into the closed network of the clinic should be given descriptors by the GM that something is very, very wrong here. Code and information isn't moving as it should, or is corrupted, or is being attacked by unknown programs. Movement on the network should feel sluggish, and security protocols are under assault by something more threatening than the character.

For every round the character is in the network, have them defend against the equivalent of an attack from Black IC (Host rating 10) as unknown programs and the corrupted system assaults them. Any damage done to the players hacking device cannot be easily repaired, and it begins to leak out a thick, black ichor. Corrupted hardware must be removed and replaced, costing a percentage equal to the amount of damage taken (i.e. 2 of 10 damage taken, repairs cost 20% market value to replace).

## PRU. IT'S KICKING OFF

All of the security team members are connected via communication devices, so should one ever go offline (is killed or captured) or require assistance, the entire building goes on alert. The cultists are not on the security network and will go about their work unless they individually hear a commotion.

When the characters first encounter a necrotic fleshbeast, read this aloud:

*A creature with decaying skin skitters out of the darkness. The size of a small canine, this creature moves about on spindly chitin legs, its body a mass of necrotic tissue and organs held together by a thick black ichor. Flesh, lungs, an ear,*



*multiple eyes, oh-god-is-that-a-hand, teeth ... It is truly a thing of nightmares, and it attacks without hesitation!*

When the characters enter the basement Ritual Chamber, read this aloud:

You stand on a raised walkway overlooking what used to be a large warehouse. While there clearly used to be numerous large vats stored in this chamber, all but four have been destroyed, as the entire back wall is gone; it's as if reality itself has simply been *torn* away, like the bottom of a wet paper bag, or a sack that tried to hold a rabid wolverine. Instead, there is a void of nothingness, a blackness of space, that issues forth translucent smoky dark wisps.

Standing on your side of the room are almost a dozen figures, chanting and gesticulating before a single figure, who stands near this otherworldly tear.

"I, Seth Kerberos, Creatus Tenebris, welcome you!" the leader shouts behind, turning his head slightly, his back still facing you. "I am so glad you have come so willingly to be our next offering to the Void."

If Kerberos is defeated in combat, read this aloud:

*As your last attack strikes Kerberos, he staggers backward with a look of confusion. "This cannot be," he snarls. He looks down at his wounds and then looks back up at you incredulously. "This. Cannot. BE!" The ground starts to shake and the very air between you*

*starts to pulse in violent waves of sonic energy. Cracks of red light form across his body, flashing in time with the waves. "I am ... ETERNAL," he hisses. "I will see you ... again ... when the Paths ... are complete ... and ... the Gates ... FALL!" And with that final word, his body is torn apart in an explosion of red and black energy, leaving nothing behind. You are all knocked off your feet. Any remaining cultists collapse as well, unconscious.*

If Kerberos is not defeated in combat, and leaves on his own, read this aloud:

*Kerberos laughs and calmly walks to the edge of the Void, where the ground of the chamber has peeled away into nothing. "I grow tired of this," he declares with a smirk. "But I look forward to seeing you again, when the Paths are complete, and the Gates fall." He takes one more step and disappears into the darkness. The remaining enemies seem bolstered by the confidence he had before he left and redouble their efforts to take you down.*

# STARING INTO THE VOID

Staring into the emptiness that is the Void is not recommended, as it starts to eat away at the sanity of those who look into it.

Any character that wishes to examine or otherwise look into, the Void must first make a Perception (3) check. Any characters who fail this check are considered “safe,” suffer one (1) point of Stun damage, and may continue to act freely.

Any characters who succeed in their Perception check lose themselves in the Void. The blackness encompasses their minds, the emptiness fills their soul, and a sense of dread takes over their entire being. The GM is encouraged each round to give the character a nightmare vision: something from their past that haunts them, a secret fear they carry deep down, or just something horrible and troubling that will unnerve them. Each round the character is lost in the Void, they take one (1) point of damage, starting with Stun but continuing to Physical, until they die.

Any characters who initially examine the Void in the Astral Plane count as though they succeeded in their Perception check (no roll required), but also take an immediate three (3) points of Stun damage.



Characters can try to break their connection with the Void once it has been established. Each round, the character may try a Willpower (3) check. Once two successful checks have been made (they don't need to be consecutive), the character shakes their head and is free from their entrapment.

If an affected character is knocked unconscious or is forcibly moved out of line of sight of the Void by another character, the affected character takes an additional three (3) points of damage, screams out in pain, and falls unconscious.

## AFTERMATH

Unfortunately, there is no crate at the Efstine Clinic for the characters to bring back to Cosmo. There is no bioware, cyberware, or other such "product" to salvage from the place, all of it either having been destroyed or corrupted. Most of the vats and other major medical equipment have been destroyed, and those that remain would need a large crew to disassemble and extract. If the characters wish to search for smaller medical supplies, they can obtain enough for 1d6 medical/first-aid kits.

It is up to the characters what they want to try to do with the Ritual Chamber and the Efstine Clinic as a whole. Do they leave it, saying "good riddance?" Do they set up demolition charges and blow the whole thing up? Regardless of what they decide, should anyone return to the site, the Void tear is gone and all the black mold and ichor has dissipated.

Returning to Cosmo empty-handed certainly puts a damper on his mood. According to the deal, he will not immediately want to give the characters the second half of their payment, as they do not have a package for him. With a successful Negotiation (5) check, they can convince him to at least give them partial payment.

If the characters decide to tell Cosmo about everything they encountered, he won't respond as surprised or horrified as one would normally expect. When pushed about it, all Cosmo says is, *"I need to get this news to people. I can't say more, but can I call on you again if I have another job?"*

# CAST OF SHADOWS

## Seth Kerberos

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	E	M	ESS
6	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	5	6	6

**Initiative:** 12(14)+1d6(2d6)

**Condition Monitor:** 11/12

**Armor:** 12

**Skills:** Astral Combat 9, Blades 6, Conjuring skill group 9, Counter-spelling 9, Etiquette 3, Perception 3, Pistols 4, Spellcasting 9

**Gear:** Armor Jacket, Ancient Sword [Blade, Acc 7, Reach 1, DV 10P, AP-3, combat foci (rating 2)], Ares Predator [Pistol, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP-1, SA, RC 0, 15(c)], Commlink (DR5)

**Spells:** Agony, Armor, Clairvoyance, Darkness Bolt (as Lightning Bolt, but bypasses Non-conductivity armor upgrades or similar), Detect Life, Detect Magic, Increase Reaction, Mana Barrier, Physical Barrier, Silence, Stunball, Stunbolt

## Cultists

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS
3	4	3	2	6	4	5	3	6

**Initiative:** 8+1d6

**Condition Monitor:** 10/11

**Armor:** 6

**Skills:** Blades 4, Clubs 4, Etiquette (Corporate) 5, Intimidation 5, Perception 4, Pistol 4

**Gear:** Armor clothing, Colt America [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP-0, SA, RC 0, 11(c)], Knife [Blade, Acc 5, Reach 0, DV 3P, AP-1], Stun Baton [Club, Reach 1, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP-5], Flashbang Grenade (1), Commlink (DR2)

## Captain Falta

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	E	ESS
6	5(7)	4(6)	3(5)	6	4	4	3	3	1.9

**Initiative:** 8(10)+1d6(3d6)

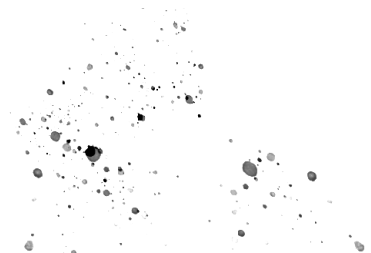
**Condition Monitor:** 11/11

**Armor:** 18

**Skills:** Athletics skill group 6, Close Combat skill group 7, Etiquette (Corporate) 6(8), Firearms skill group 7, Perception 6, Sneaking 6

**Augmentations:** Cybereyes 2 [flare compensation, image link, low-light vision, smartlink, thermographic vision], muscle augmentation 2, muscle toner 2, wired reflexes 2

**Gear:** Full body armor and full helmet (w/ chemical seal), Ares Predator [Pistol, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP-1, SA, RC 0, 15(c)], Ares Alpha [Assault Rifle, Acc 5(7), DV 11P, AP-2, SA/BF/FA, RC 11, 42(c)], Commlink (DR5)





## Aztech Security Team

B A R S W L I C ESS

5 5(7) 3(5) 4(6) 3 4 5 4 6

**Initiative:** 8(9)+1d6(2d6)

**Condition Monitor:** 11/10

**Armor:** 12

**Skills:** Blades 5, Clubs 5, Unarmed Combat 5, Throwing Weapons 4, Gymnastics 4, Running 4, Swimming 4, Sneaking 3, Disguise 3, Palming 3, Demolitions 4, Automatics 6, Longarms 6, Pistols 6, Perception 4

**Augmentations:** Muscle Augmentations 2, Muscle Toner 2, Synaptic Booster 1

**Gear:** Armor Jacket, HK-227 [SMG, Acc 5(7), DV 7P, SA/BF/FA, RC 0(1), 28(c)], Expandable Stun Baton [Club, Reach 0/1, Acc 4, DV 9S(e), AP-5], Tactical Glasses rating 2 [Image link, Smartlink, Low-light Vision], Flash-bang (2), Smoke Grenade (2), Commlink (DR4)

## Necrotic Fleshbeast

B A R S W L I C E M ESS

6 6 6 5 6 2 4 2 2 5 6

**Initiative:** 12+3D6

**Movement:** x2/x6/+4

**Condition Monitor:** 12/11

**Armor:** 2

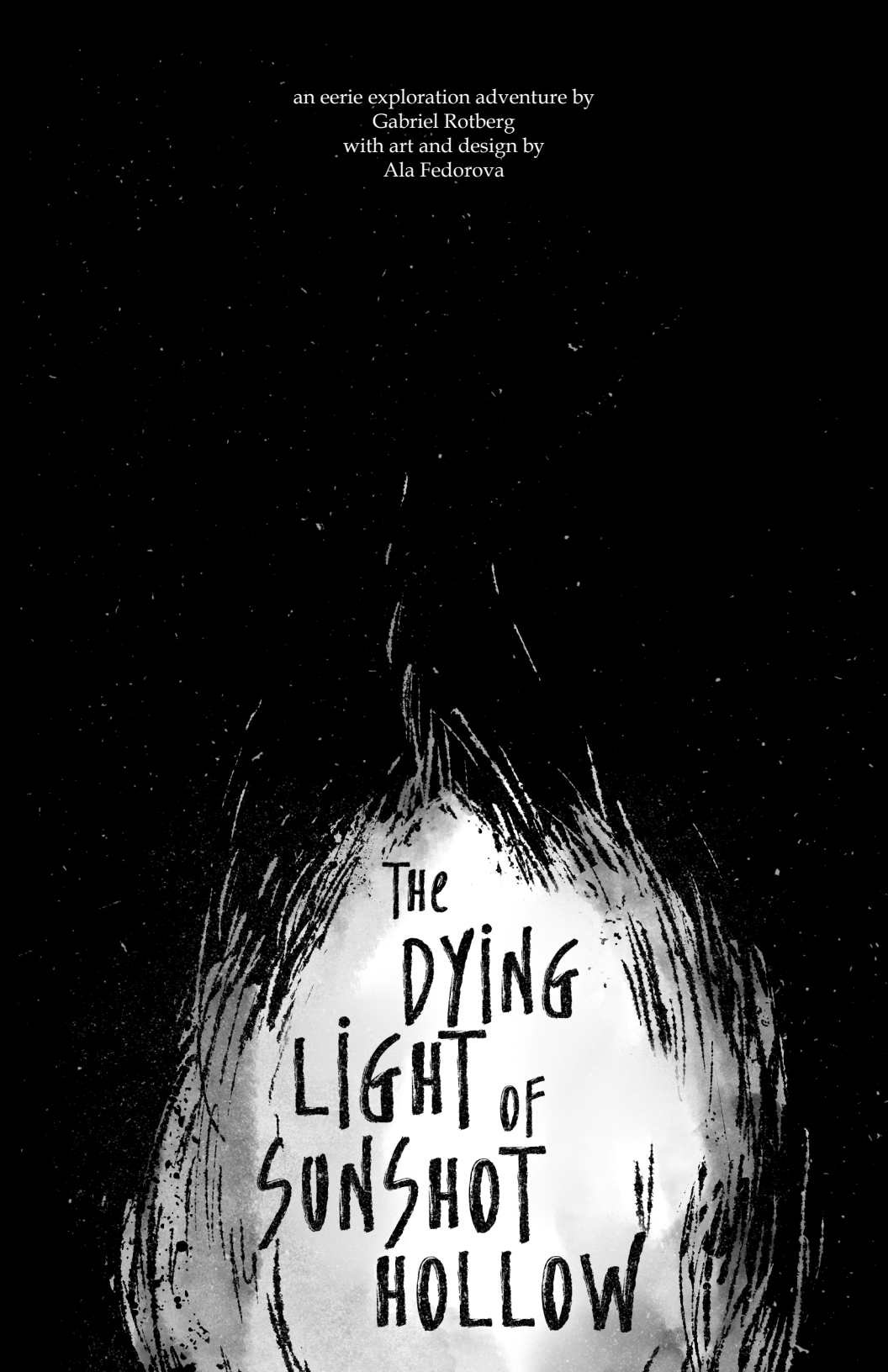
**Skills:** Climbing 3, Dodge 5, Exotic Ranged Weapon 5, Intimidation 5, Perception 3, Sneaking 5, Unarmed Combat 5

**Powers:** Armor 2, Corrosive Spit, Dual Natured, Fear, Immunity to Acid, Mystic Armor 2, Natural Weapon (Claw: DV (STR+2)P, AP -2), Regeneration

**Weaknesses:** Vulnerability to Fire



an eerie exploration adventure by  
Gabriel Rotberg  
with art and design by  
Ala Fedorova



THE  
DYING  
LIGHT OF  
SUNSHOT  
HOLLOW

The Dying Light of Sunshot Hollow is a system-agnostic exploration adventure featuring the sometimes unnatural horrors that lurk beneath the surface of the earth. Character classes and levels do not necessarily matter, and with some adjustment and improvisation by the GM, the camp and mine at Sunshot Hollow can fit nicely into most settings.

## BACKGROUND

Sunshot diamonds – the curious radiance and extreme rarity of these gemstones make them a treasure highly sought after by collectors and kings alike, but the only known provenance of these valuable stones is an arid, rocky stretch of inhospitable land at the foot of a chain of extinct volcanoes. The mining operation at **Sunshot Hollow**, as the locale is known, is an expensive and troublesome one. Everything from workers and tools to fresh food and water must be brought overland to the desolate region, and the closest route via caravan is still several days away from the nearest population center. Suffice to say, even with the exorbitant prices the finished sunshot diamonds can fetch, the profit for the enterprise is narrow even on a good day.

It would be a bit of an understatement to say that **Quintessa Meriweather**, the owner of the mining operation and primary investor behind the undertaking, is not having a good day. Despite some early successes and a rising demand for the radiant gemstones, continuing problems at the mine have sent costs skyrocketing and margins dwindling.

For weeks now, the miners have been growing fearful. Claims of changing, twisting passageways and once stable tunnels collapsing unexpectedly have given rise to rumors that something unseen and malignant stalks the darkness below the surface. Five days ago, the workers fled from the mine with stories of a new and unfamiliar passageway opening up before them, revealing a hazy chamber rich with the lustrous gemstones but full of nightmarish shadows and swirling acrid smoke. While fumes and fear drove the miners wheezing and tear-streaked from below, they did not return empty-handed. They brought a prize, and proof of their tale – a single sunshot diamond, uncut and as big as a man's fist, radiant inclusions shining true beneath its rough surface.

Fear and bitterness outweigh the promise of riches, and keep the workers from returning to the mine. Those present when the chamber was discovered have fallen sick, struggling with a relentless burning cough and blurred vision that only seems to get worse with time. A number of the miners have quit the venture, and many of those who

remain only do so that they might tend to their comrades who have become too ill to not make the journey back to civilization.

## CHARACTER HOOKS

The characters might become embroiled with the events at Sunshot Hollow in any number of ways. Quintessa is desperate, and she regards this as both the last straw and a final opportunity to salvage what she can from the venture before selling off the operation to the next hapless fool to come along. She seeks capable adventurers to make one last excursion into the mine, find this supposed chamber of riches, and extract what wealth they can. Quintessa has come to see the mine as a literal money pit, and while she's a shrewd negotiator, she's ultimately willing to offer a sizable cut of the profits for any of the gemstones recovered.

Alternatively, the characters might arrive at the site at the behest of a miner by the name of **Jarlan Vaud**. Jarlan is a mountain of a man, and a legend among the miners. It was he who made the desperate last foray into the hellish chamber and returned to the surface with the diamond, but he paid a steep price for his bravery. He is now partially blind and gasping for air with every breath; the mine itself has laid this giant of a man low when little else could. Resentful at his circumstances, he too seeks the wealth that now

shines in his mind's eye, a blurry echo of the last thing he saw with clear vision. He intends to deny Quintessa her prize, instead splitting what he can with the adventurers and his fellow miners before abandoning the job for good.

Finally, while Sunshot Hollow is remote, adventurers are often known for finding themselves in far-flung places - it's entirely possible they could simply stumble across the unfolding scene at the mine over the course of their travels.

## A HOLLOW FULL OF HOSTILITY

The journey to Sunshot Hollow is one of terrible, majestic beauty. The low, hummocky ridge where the entrance of the mine can be found is nestled in the shadows amidst a chain of ancient, extinct volcanoes - the kind that never seem to get any closer, just taller. The land that makes up the easiest approach is parched and bone dry, appearing flat from a distance but so full of hidden chasms and uneven fields of sharp, broken rocks that progress overland seems to take forever. Characters with any skill at wilderness survival should find themselves with plenty of opportunity to pit themselves against this unwelcoming host.

Upon arrival, it is clear that tensions in Sunshot Hollow are running high. While Quintessa's two guards

(**Rem** and **Clovis**) have managed to keep the situation at the workers' camp from becoming violent, their initial attempts to keep the miners from abandoning the site entirely almost ended with revolt. With that, most of those still healthy enough have chosen to begin the long journey back to civilization. Quintessa is determined to salvage what she can of the operation, but is unwilling to spend a single copper piece on miners who are unwilling or unable to work.

Amidst this anger, it can be difficult to get a clear picture of the situation underground.

*Quintessa Meriweather* is the owner of the mine, a somewhat academically inclined daughter of a minor noble house. While her initial interest and investment in the mine stemmed from a curiosity about the nature of the sunshot diamonds themselves, the promise of wealth and the subsequent specter of financial ruin have all but driven every other thought from her mind. Most of Quintessa Meriweather's knowledge is second- or thirdhand, as she has only been in the habit of spending time at the mine when absolutely necessary; something that has been far too frequent for her liking.

Quintessa is willing to share the following information about the mine with the characters:

- She's particularly skeptical about some of the more farfetched claims by the miners.
- She certainly believes the miners encountered trouble below, but faults recklessness or intentional sabotage.
- Evidence of lung damage and smoke inhalation could be from remnant volcanic gases. While the major volcanism is long extinct, it is perfectly reasonable that some geothermal activity might continue today.
- Minor temblors have persisted in the mine since operations began, but oddly are never felt at the surface.



- Shifting tunnels and unstable passages seem to her like a fantasy born of laziness and excuses.

If interest is shown in the sunshot diamonds themselves, Quintessa brightens a bit – her natural curiosity winning out over her concern for the situation at the mine, albeit briefly.

- They're valuable, magnificent, and utterly unique. Nothing like them has been found anywhere else, to her knowledge.
- The diamonds are natural, and filled with tiny, needle-like inclusions that seem to branch out from their core.
- The inclusions themselves are the source of the radiance and appear to be naturally magical, although she has no notion of how that could come to be.

The mine's foreman, **Hilda Durnheel**, is an even-tempered, muscular female dwarf nearly as wide as she is tall. Her interpretation of events is far more measured, in part by an unexplained sense of unease she feels whenever she enters the mine herself – something she's unconsciously been avoiding doing whenever possible.

Hilda is willing to share the following information with the characters:

- While she hasn't seen any shifting passages firsthand, she believes the workers who say they have.
- She's seen the results of a once stable tunnel that had collapsed for no obvious reason that she can fathom.
- There are places underground where rock seems to have swallowed mining equipment whole, and she has no explanation how that could be.

If pressed, she'll look a little bit sheepish before admitting the following:

- The mine itself makes her uncomfortable. She's seen a lot of damned unusual rocks in her time, but none that ever made her feel like they were breathing down her neck.
- Some of the miners who got sick said they saw more than just smoke and rocks down there – the ones who could still breathe well enough to speak, anyway.

The characters might talk to Jarlan, assuming he can still stick two words together without coughing his lungs out.

Of the miners most likely to have seen something useful, most are sick and delirious with what they've

taken to calling the Hollow Breath, much to Quintessa's annoyance. Jarlan Vaud is the exception to this rule, remaining lucid (if angry) despite his condition. Jarlan is an enormous human, and renowned amongst the miners for his incredible strength and skill. He (or any of the other miners cured of the affliction, see the section on the **Hollow Breath** for more information) will speak of what he's seen - grudgingly, unless the characters are there on his behalf or they've taken the opportunity to try to assist the afflicted workers.

Jarlan has plenty to share with the adventurers, although his naturally brusque manner and current condition likely keep him from becoming particularly long-winded.

- Tunnels have definitely shifted, although until recently none of the miners had seen it firsthand.
- One of the dwarven miners, **Dain Dunavok**, was obsessed with mapping the passages below, but swore there was something down there turning him around and playing tricks on him. He eventually became paranoid and quit the Hollow abruptly.
- The last venture down was the first time they had seen the rocks move directly, and before that they had all hoped they'd been imagining it.

- The miners saw a curtain of rock ten feet thick pull aside like it was nothing, and behind it was that chamber of smoke and diamonds.
- The smoke poured out, burning their lungs and their eyes.
- Jarlan grabbed a large diamond and ran (Quintessa has it now), and regrets risking his life for it.
- The miners used chalk to mark their path, and the characters might look for that if they are trying to reach the chamber again.
- If the characters help Jarlan and the other afflicted miners, he will offer his *enchanted mining cap* (see **Jarlan's enchanted mining cap**) as thanks.



# THE BEHEMOTH BELOW

For all the drama surrounding it, the entrance to the mine at Sunshot Hollow appears relatively unexceptional. A large, angular outcrop of dark stone casts a deep shadow over the threshold of the mine, which descends at a steep angle into the ridge that overlooks the hollow.

While the surface might appear mundane, the depths of the mine are another matter entirely. While the miners have noticed and been alarmed by the strange nature of the rocks here, they've only just scratched the surface. In the five days since anyone last entered the mine, the ways below have only become more mutable, and more dangerous.

The composition of the mine is curious as well. To an untrained eye, the crystalline granules that make up the dark rock appear similar to the volcanic rock plentiful in the region. In reality, it is something far more exotic – an amalgamation of ancient material from the far edges of space. A canny dwarf or other character with an affinity for rocks might easily identify that the mine is unusual, but it will take a true scholar of the esoteric to recognize the texture of the rock as chondritic, something only found in meteorites. It is particularly unlikely that any character will realize that they've entered the not-quite-deceased remains of an enormous **chondritic space troll** until it is far too late. The strange changes observed in the mine are the perpetual convulsions of this creature as it endlessly tries to regenerate itself, doomed to never die but never truly able to recover from the mortal blow that struck it down.

Travel inside the mine is tricky and difficult. In the passages that the miners have cleared, there tends to be enough room for two human-sized creatures to walk abreast, although a tall human will find the ceiling dangerously low. These tunnels have been twisted and displaced into the much narrower natural fractures of the rock, creating a strange and claustrophobic labyrinth. Beyond the entrance to the mine, it quickly becomes too dark to see without some kind of enhanced vision or additional light source. Small pinpricks of radiance are occasionally visible in the walls: microcrystalline sunshot diamonds that offer just enough light to be visible, but nowhere near enough to drive back the darkness. Climbing or spelunking gear is definitely recommended, and can be provided by the workers.



In general, travel through the depths will be determined by the characters setting an objective, the referee determining an abstract distance in poles (as in, the ubiquitous 10-foot adventuring variety) to that objective, and the characters attempting to find a way through the network of passages that will get there. The most obvious target the characters could seek out is the chamber of smoke and diamonds encountered by Jarlan and the other miners, which starts off at a distance of twelve (12) poles. The connections between, features encountered, and progress in poles of these passages are determined randomly by the referee using the tables below, and it is likely that no two journeys into the depths will be the same. Despite Jarlan's suggestion, the passages marked by the miners have shifted out of recognition in the intervening time - while their chalk symbols might be encountered in the depths, they seem conflicting and following does not help (or hinder!) their progress. Despite this, the situation is still stable enough that the characters should be able to feel confident marking their path and backtracking reliably if they need to, although adventurers who retreat from the mine for a day or more will find their previous path twisted beyond recognition. The distinction between areas and passages when exploring a cave can be delicate, but in the case of this adventure, areas will have features and be connected to other areas by one or more passages.

## AREAS AND FEATURES

As the characters delve deeper, roll on **Table 1** to determine the type of area they discover as well as the roll to determine the number of passages associated with it. Each area will also have a feature rolled from **Table 2**.

# TABLE 1: DISCOVERABLE AREAS

2d4      Type      Passages      Description

2	Crawl	1d2	A twisting, narrow space in the rock, just wide and tall enough to squeeze into, and nearly impossible to move through without being prone.
3	Flattener	1d3	A ten-foot wide gap in the rock, but with such a low ceiling that standing upright is impossible.
4	Fissure	1d3	A narrow, vertical cave with fifteen feet of headroom but barely enough space to squeeze through.
5	Mine	1d4	Cleared by the workers, this section of the mine is ten feet wide, thirty feet long, and relatively debris-free - although the ceiling may be uncomfortably low for an average human.
6	Room	1d3+1	An approximately ten foot by ten foot open area at the intersection of multiple natural passages, a cave room affords the uncommon luxury of being relatively spacious.
7	Hall	1d4	A large, natural opening in the network - nearly twenty feet long and ten feet wide, with plenty of headroom and a number of branching passageways.
8	Chamber	1d6+1	A very large cavity in the rock at the nexus of many passages. At least twenty feet by twenty feet, but only just enough headroom for a tall human to stand upright.

## TABLE 2: FEATURES

1d8

Feature

1	Caustic smoke. Characters must save appropriately or suffer difficulty breathing and temporary blindness (see the Hollow Breath).
2	Collapsing floor. Unwary delvers may find themselves falling ten to twenty feet into a new area and onto sharp rock. Roll for the new area, with no progress gained, and connect it with a <i>Chimney</i> passage.
3	Rubble slope, dangerous and unstable. Blundering adventurers may trigger a further collapse, and those slow to react may be caught under falling rocks.
4	A brackish cave spring, the water potable but disgusting.
5	Abandoned equipment, left behind and forgotten by the miners.
6	Chalk markings scrawled on the wall, noting a path or passage that no longer seems to exist.
7	* 1d4+1 small sunshot diamonds, scattered loosely across the ground.
8	* The desiccated corpse of <b>Dain Dunavok</b> , a dwarven miner trapped down here weeks ago. He still clenches a medium-sized sunshot diamond in his fist.

Features denoted with a \* should only appear once and can be ignored or rerolled if they come up in subsequent areas. If the same combination of area and feature is rolled again, the passage loops back to the previously visited location, furthering the unmappable, cyclopien feeling of these oppressive depths.

## PASSAGES

Each new area will have a number of passages in addition to the one through which the characters entered, rolled on Table 1 above. While the players may be tempted to try and map the cave, it should be emphasized that very little in this mine happens on a flat plane, there is hardly a right angle to be found, and the network of areas and passages is a tangled mess. As such, feel free to roll for each of the types of passages leading from a new area, or just pick the ones that make sense. If you like, you can also roll for the direction each passage exits the area using a d8 (1 is north, 2 is northeast, and so on) or a d2 in the case of the Chimney (up or down) but remember that these twisty passages don't always maintain a consistent heading, and might enter the next area from a completely different direction. In short, properly cautious characters are unlikely to get truly lost and unable to retrace their steps, but it can be very difficult to pick a direction and wind up where you expect.

## PROGRESS

Ultimately, the characters likely came here with a goal: find the chamber of diamonds encountered by Jarlan and his fellow miners. Progress toward that goal is measured in poles and is determined as each new area is discovered. Unlike the other tables, there are a number of ways particularly canny players might seek to improve their progress. Characters naturally attuned to elemental earth or stone might be able to leverage that power, while pathfinding or location-sensing magic of various flavors might be employed to direct the search. Record the total poles at each area in case the characters decide to backtrack.

## TABLE 3: PASSAGES

1d6

Type

Description

1	Dead end	This passageway ends in solid rock or becomes so narrow as to be impassable. (In the unlikely event this would close off the final passage, reroll or treat as Breakthrough instead.)
2	Breakthrough	Narrow cracks here suggest another area ahead, but force or other means must be employed to open the way.
3	Crawlway	A tiny passageway that requires squeezing headfirst and possibly leaving bulky equipment and armor behind. With luck, it doesn't become even narrower ahead (heads it doesn't, tails it does).
4	Chimney	A narrow vertical passage up or down, requiring ropes or climbing skill to traverse.
5	Keyhole	A small opening into the next area, slightly difficult to access and awkward to climb through.
6	Tunnel	A worked passageway created by the miners. This section is relatively safe and easily traversed.

## TABLE 4: PROGRESS

1d4

Progress in Poles

1	+ 0
2	+ 1
3	+ 2
4	+ 3



## THE CHAMBER OF SMOKE AND DYING LIGHT

Once the characters have accumulated twelve or more poles of progress, the next area they encounter will be the elusive Chamber of Smoke and Dying Light. The chamber takes the rough, irregular form of a wide, flattened sphere – approximately forty feet diameter at its widest point with a domed ceiling that reaches nearly twenty feet high. Misshapen outcrops of stone are scattered throughout, and the center of the chamber is dominated by a towering column of solid rock, its grotesquely bulbous form reaching from floor to ceiling. Raw sunshot diamonds stud the surface of the column, and their radiance combines with the haze to fill the area with a soft, ambient glow. Fortunately, the smoky haze that remains here, while acrid and foul-smelling, has dissipated enough that there is no immediate danger beyond some slight discomfort.

Examination of the chamber reveals signs that it is natural, or at least untouched by the hands of men. The rocks that form the walls and column of the chamber, unlike the rest of the mine, take forms that appear disturbingly organic. In fact, this chamber is the very core of the chondritic space troll, and that dark column of stone is all that remains of the creature's petrified heart. Anyone who takes the time to carefully inspect the column (perhaps while loosening diamonds) will notice a deep fissure about ten feet up on one side, apparently illuminated from within. Wedged inside this fissure is the remnant of an enormous magical sword. A properly motivated character with decent leverage and good grip strength should be able to pull it out, revealing three feet of strangely shaped hilt followed by another foot of shattered, blindingly radiant blade (see *Shattered Radiance*). Visually, it should be obvious that the broken blade and the tiny fragments trapped in the diamonds are somehow connected - the quality and color of light, if not the intensity, are identical.

Investigation of the stone outcrops will reveal that three of them are jumbled piles of ancient, fossilized bones. The bones are obviously enormous, and not even remotely humanoid. Anyone doing a more than cursory examination will also notice that each of the three sets of bones seems to be from a different species entirely, with skulls that appear vaguely reptilian. Hidden in one of the piles and still encircling one wicked looking claw is a large band of silver metal, elegantly patterned with geometric shapes (see *ancient band of eloquence*).

In total, there are four large sunshot diamonds, eleven medium-sized sunshot diamonds, and twenty-three small

sunshot diamonds that can be pried from the walls here. Excavating diamonds is not too difficult. It is almost as if the dark rock is trying to expel them. Every round spent at it will free 1d3 diamonds, or 1d6+1 diamonds if using an appropriate tool. A veritable fortune, but the removal from the column of either *Shattered Radiance* or any of the large diamonds will cause the chondritic space troll to begin convulsing, throwing the entire complex into turmoil and flooding it with more caustic smoke.

From this point on, the characters must try to resist the effects of the haze, which behaves as exposure to the Hollow Breath. To further complicate matters, the upheaval has caused the entire network of passages to shift and change. The route they took to get here no longer exists, and to escape they must seek the surface in much the same way they found this chamber, but now with the Hollow Breath hot on their heels. Once again, the characters must complete a total of twelve poles of progress to reach the mine's threshold, and for every turn they spend excavating diamonds and every new area they discover (or rediscover), the Hollow Breath expands one pole further into the complex. Whenever the characters enter an area within reach of the Hollow Breath, they must continue to resist its potentially compounding effects. The Hollow Breath will continue to fill the complex until it reaches the threshold of the mine, at which point it will settle and remain, poisoning the air for the foreseeable future.


## THE END OF SUNSHOT HOLLOW

When the characters resurface after the space troll has begun convulsing, the situation above has changed significantly. This time, there is no question that something has gone terribly wrong and the increasingly violent tremors can not only be felt at the surface but are now threatening the entire mining camp. Putting aside their differences in the face of this catastrophe, Quintessa and her guards work side by side to evacuate the camp with Hilda and any of the healthy workers (including Jarlan, if he has recovered). Regardless of what the characters decide to do with any of the recovered diamonds, this likely spells the end of the operation at Sunshot Hollow for good.



# THE FURTHER ADVENTURES WITH THE SPACE TROLL

Truly killing the chondritic space troll is probably beyond the scope of this adventure, as is entirely rousing it from its catatonic state, thankfully. That ancient civilization probably had the right idea, but even in its present state truly killing the creature might require drastic measures, such as excavating it, blasting it to pieces, and then painstakingly arranging for those pieces to be thrown into the nearest active volcano. The process by which it creates the sunshot diamonds is also one of geologic timescales, and even if *Shattered Radiance* is left lodged in its heart, it will be eons before more diamonds are produced that way.



## NEW MONSTERS

### The Hollow Breath

The Hollow Breath is the name given by the miners for both the horrible caustic smoke occasionally encountered within the mine, and the affliction it causes. Despite its exotic origin and debilitating effects, the Hollow Breath itself is entirely non-magical and not contagious. The smoke itself is filled with very fine, very sharp particulates - little slivers of volcanic glass, perfect for lacerating lungs and slicing corneas. Left untreated, the particulates will remain and even worsen over time. Avoiding consequences of exposure should require resisting a physical effect, along the lines of a Constitution Save or otherwise testing a character's hardiness. Clever use of protective gear may provide a bonus to such checks.

Failure results in damage to the lungs and eyes of the victim, potentially resulting in lost vision, difficulty breathing, and lasting physical injury. Subsequent failed checks will only exacerbate the damage, and enough exposure can leave even the hardest individual breathless and blind. For all that, magical remedies are a particularly effective treatment. Spells that heal injuries can temporarily negate the effects of an exposure to the Hollow Breath, while magic of the sort that cures diseases or poisons will instantly remove the condition.

## Chondritic Space Troll

Chondritic space trolls are distantly related to the more mundane and terrestrial rock trolls. Like their much smaller cousins, they are evil, malignant, and difficult to kill. Notably, mere sunlight is not enough to stop a chondritic space troll, and a far greater intensity of light is required to turn them back into the rocks they came from. Thankfully, chondritic space trolls are exceptionally rare. This particular specimen was relatively large, approximately 200 feet tall. It was regarded as a vengeful god when it first impacted the surface of the planet in a cataclysmic event many millions of years ago. It was only through the daring and selfless exploits of the heroes of that era that the space troll was vanquished at all, but the nature of its arrival still ushered in an age of destruction which spelled an end to that forgotten civilization.

Those ancient heroes forged an enormous blade of pure iridium and enchanted it with the most potent magics they could muster, causing it to shine with the intensity of a thousand suns. And then, through no small sacrifice, they drove that brilliant blade into the heart of the monster. Yet even this was not enough to truly end the creature for good. It remains where it fell, buried by time and forgotten for eons, not quite alive and yet not truly dead. It is the tiny fragments of that great blade that give the sunshot diamonds their

radiance - the beautiful baubles are in fact small cysts of crystal formed to shield their host from the debilitating effect of the light. Distressingly, with every diamond removed from its body, the chondritic space-troll becomes infinitesimally closer to reawakening.

## NEW ITEMS

### Jarlan's Enchanted Mining Cap

While this dirty leather-brimmed canvas cap doesn't offer much in the way of protection, it does afford a convenient hands-free light source. A *continual flame* burns at the center of a metal reflector which has been affixed to the cap's brim, allowing the user to direct a cone of light ahead of them, but not providing much in the way of peripheral illumination. A shutter allows the bearer to dim the light somewhat.

### Shattered Radiance

While the original name of this enormous weapon has been lost along with the ancient civilization responsible for its creation, it isn't hard to guess at the name they might have given it. New, the curved blade was likely ten feet long, nearly a foot wide, and incredibly painful to look at.

Even shattered, the jagged fragment of metal that remains is incredibly bright and shockingly heavy. The three foot long hilt is strangely shaped and was clearly never meant for humanoid hands. While it will never again perform as the legendary weapon it must once have been, an enterprising adventurer might be able to employ it as a savage battleaxe, and the lingering magic that remains allows it to serve well in this capacity, giving it a bonus to attack and damage rolls. In addition to the intense light it gives off, the magical illumination also serves to suppress or slow regeneration in those wounded by the weapon.



### **Ancient Band of Eloquence**

This circle of elegantly patterned metal is large enough for it to be worn as a bracelet. Incredibly, the enchantment it bears has endured through time out of mind, and anyone who wears it is temporarily imbued with the ability to speak the language of the ancient civilization that created it. Unfortunately, every other speaker of that language was wiped out several millions of years ago. Today, it serves mostly as a neat party trick and gives the wearer a surprising affinity for dealing with certain species of birds.



# Ki Sorcerer

by Brendan LaSalle



You can actually feel magic running through your body, sending tiny storms of electricity. It courses through you as real as your own blood. Every being has **ki**, the internal power flow that courses with the energy of the universe. Yours is simply stronger, and your willpower is strong enough to make it do magic.

**Ki sorcerers** are humanoids born with a natural attunement to magical energy. Without training they learn to manipulate magic, using their willpower and the innate magic of their blood to cast spells.

Unlike wizards and sorcerers, any race can become a ki sorcerer. If a 0-level non-human becomes a ki sorcerer, they retain any zero-level abilities/penalties that come with being a member of that race, but gain none of the higher level abilities of those races/classes.

**Hit points:** A ki sorcerer gains 1d6 hit points at each level.

**Weapon training:** Ki sorcerers are trained in the use of the dagger, short sword, staff, sling, darts, and crossbow. They normally shun armor as it hurts their spellcasting.

**Alignment:** Ki sorcerers can be of any alignment.

**Magic:** Ki sorcerer's physical being is suffused with magical energy. They learn to cast spells through willpower, rather than relying on ancient formulae. This limits the number of spells they can learn in comparison with wizards but gives advantages as well.

A ki sorcerer's spell check is normally  $1d20 + CL + PER$  mod.

Ki sorcerers normally learn spells from the wizard spell list but may learn any spells from any class that they are exposed to. Every time a

sorcerer witnesses a cast spell or has a spell cast upon them they can make a Luck check using a die dependent on the level of spell to be learned (see chart). If they are successful then that spell is one they can learn. The judge may put restrictions such as study time, cost of materials for experimentation, or even a minor quest before the sorcerer learns to cast the spell.

Spell Level	Die
1 <sup>st</sup>	d16
2 <sup>nd</sup>	d20
3 <sup>rd</sup>	d24
4 <sup>th</sup>	d30

Ki sorcerers may spellburn to increase the power of their spells. However, because of the nature of their blood magic they can choose to spellburn either before or after the spell check, but not both. If they choose to spellburn points before the check, then those points are spent normally. If they choose to cast a spell after the spell check, then they can spend a maximum number of spellburn points equal to their CL + PER mod + their Luck modifier (if positive; negative Luck mod is ignored for this check).

Whenever a ki sorcerer gains a new spell they instantly and automatically gain a corruption from the spell's list, rolled the first time they cast a spell. However, they are immune to further corruption from

spell effects; any roll that would normally indicate a corruption becomes a misfire. If they learn a spell that normally doesn't cause corruption, they roll one from the Minor Corruption table.

Beginning at second level, a ki sorcerer can choose certain of their spells to be underpowered. When a sorcerer gains a spell they can choose to permanently cast it at -1d lower than normal. Choosing to do so allows the sorcerer to grant a +1d bonus on a spell they learn after they gain another level of experience. Both modifiers are permanent.

Example: Rocky the Undefeated, 1<sup>st</sup> lvl DCC Sorcerer, gains a level and learns *Ventriloquism*. Rocky decides he can afford to take this spell a little less seriously, so he chooses to take the spell at -1d. Going forward, his normal spell check for this spell is 1d16 + CL + PER mod. When he reaches 3<sup>rd</sup> level, he learns *Scare*, and decides to power this spell up. Now his normal check for *Scare* is 1d24 + CL + PER mod.

**Ki defense:** The ki sorcerer learns to use their inner power to help them avoid attacks. They attune themselves with the universe, and thus have forewarning of incoming melee, ranged, or spell attacks. They gain a bonus to Armor Class and to saving throws versus spells (but not spell-like) which increases as they level up, as seen in the **ki sorcerer table**.

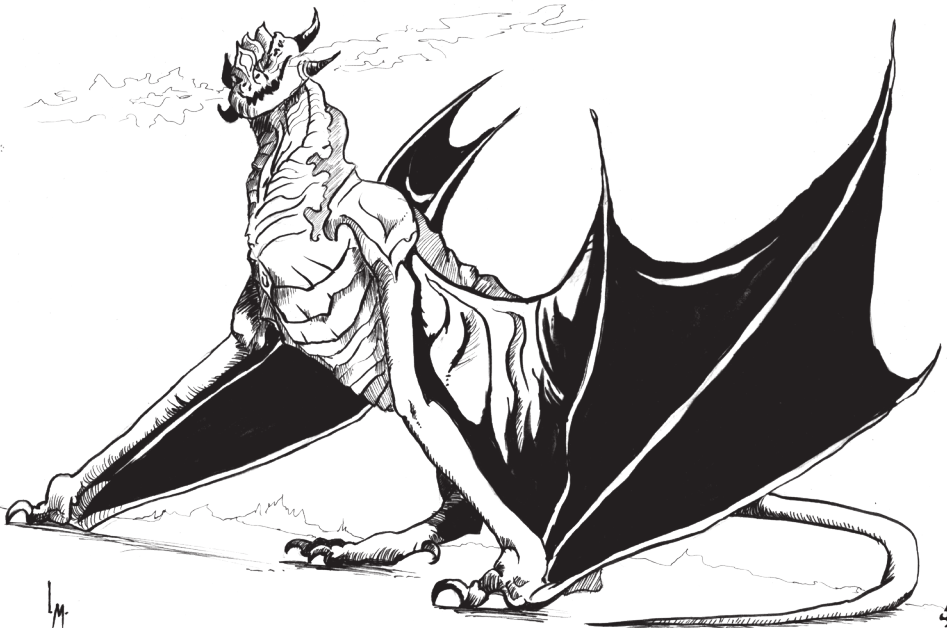
Table: Ki Sorcerer

Level	Crit Die/ Table	Action Dice	Spells	Max Spell Lvl	Ki Defense	Ref	Fort	Will
1	1d6/I	1d20	2	1	+1	+1	+0	+1
2	1d7/I	1d20	3	1	+2	+1	+0	+1
3	1d8/I	1d20	4	2	+2	+1	+1	+2
4	1d8/I	1d20	6	2	+3	+2	+1	+2
5	1d10/I	1d20 + 1d14	7	2	+3	+2	+1	+3
6	1d10/I	1d20 + 1d16	8	3	+4	+2	+2	+4
7	1d12/I	1d20 + 1d20	9	3	+4	+3	+2	+4
8	1d12/I	1d20 + 1d20	12	3	+5	+3	+2	+5
9	1d14/I	1d20 + 1d20	14	3	+5	+3	+3	+5
10	1d14/I	1d20 + 1d20 + 1d4	16	4	+6	+4	+3	+6

**Caster level:** A sorcerer's caster level is normally equal to their character level.

**Action dice:** The sorcerer's first action die may be used for attacks or spell checks, but all subsequent action die can be used for spell checks only.

**Luck:** Sorcerers may *choose* to add their Luck modifier to saving throws made against magic spells or spell-like effects.



# MUTANT MALADIES

by Skeeter Green

*"I don't know, she just got a scratch. I didn't even see what cut her, and then... well, THIS happened!"*

*"Well, it's not good. She has Rubyclot. It's not bad yet, so you may have saved her..."*

**"HAILOR! WE NEED YOU IN HERE NOW! SHE'S SEIZING!"**

*Mutant Maladies* is a new project from **Skeeter Green Productions** indexing diseases, contagions, and ailments for your favorite post-apocalyptic roleplaying game setting. The conditions presented in this zine range in severity from minor annoyances and irritations to planet-wide pestilence. Personal Afflictions (or PAs, as they are known among the healers) such as the homicidal Ares-13 flu and hallucination-inducing Precog Fever are detailed alongside epidemics, ranging from Darksight Blindness and UC (Ultra-Coagulation), to the feared world-wide pandemics Dusty Lung and Starburn. All these conditions and more are codified and catalogued for ease of use in your game, alongside more "standard" ailments such as AARS-4 (advanced acute radiation syndrome), NPP-20 (nano-parasitic protein 20), and V-DNA-2 (violent-DNA 2).

Here are three examples of these vicious maladies:

## DVT-66 (RUBYCLOT)

**Name:** DVT-66 (Deep Vein Thrombosis, Cycle 6-6)

**Aliases:** Rubyclot

**Initial Save:** Fort 13

**Secondary Save:** Fort 13 (see Effects)

**Immunity:** Entities without liquid blood are immune to this disease.

**Overview:** DVT-66 is an injury-specific version of UC (Ultra-Coagulation). While the subject does not need to suffer from UC to be susceptible to DVT-66, the afflictions do share some similarities. The treatments normally associated with U.C. have limited to no effect on severe cases of DVT-66.

Introduced with an injury exposing the infected patient's blood, DVT-66 begins to slow circulation, causing small clots to form near joints and other locations where blood flow may be restricted. The clots quickly form into solid stones, known for their bright red coloration; hence the term "Rubyclot."

**Effects:** One of the most physically painful contagions, DVT-66 produces solid clots throughout the circulatory system, predominantly in the joints of the infected. This causes temporary and partial paralysis, and in rare cases widespread full-body rigor. The stones formed by the clots are excruciatingly painful, and frequently the patient is unable to alert healers to their dire situation.



Initial damage from DVT-66 depends on the results of the saving throw:

A successful Fort save inflicts 1d6 points of damage immediately to the afflicted, and they suffer a -2 penalty to all physical activity rolls (combat, damage, Fort and Ref saves) for 4 hours, as the clotted "stone" works its way through the patient's body.

A failed Fort save inflicts 2d6 points of damage immediately, and the same -2 penalty to all physical activity rolls for 24 hours (unless cured). In addition, the infected host must make Fort saves every hour for 12 hours to determine the progress of the clot in their circulatory system.

If 2 Fort saves are made consecutively, the clot has run its course and fails to progress (the -2 penalty remains for 24 hours). If the Fort saves are not made, the disease inflicts an additional 1 point of damage each hour; in addition, the limb where the clot is located is paralyzed (see Table: Clot Location).

If the Fort save is failed 3 or more times consecutively without being cured (over 3 hours), the clot has progressed into the torso, inflicting an additional 1d6 points of immediate damage and causing the afflicted character to immediately seize into full paralysis.



**Table: Clot Location**

Roll (1d6)	Area	Result
1	Left Arm	Paralysis of limb for 1d6 days
2	Left Leg	Paralysis of limb for 1d6 days
3	Right Arm	Paralysis of limb for 1d6 days
4	Right Leg	Paralysis of limb for 1d6 days
5	Brain	Stroke (Fort save DC 14; success indicates recovery in 1d8 days, failure indicates death)
6	Heart	Heart Attack (Fort save DC 16; success indicates recovery in 2d6 days with a permanent -2 penalty to physical activity rolls, failure indicates death)

**Cure:** DVT-66 can be cured initially with a successful DC 13 Fort save or *neutralize disease*. After hour 5, 2 successive *neutralize disease* effects must be applied for recovery.

## **DARKSIGHT BLINDNESS**

**Name:** Darksight Blindness

**Aliases:** none

**Initial Save:** Fort 10

**Secondary Save:** None

**Immunity:** Entities without ocular sight are immune to this disease.

**Overview:** The Great Disaster created a severe change in the environment, as well as changing weather patterns, the diurnal/nocturnal flow, and the visible color spectrum. The changes were not all severe, but even subtle changes on such an incredibly large scope have far-reaching consequences. One of the lasting effects is a phenomenon known as “Darksight Blindness,” an ocular degeneration causing varying degrees of blindness in an infected individual.

**Effects:** Darksight Blindness is a catch-all term for a malady with varying effects. In some cases, beings who normally possess the ability to see in the infrared spectrum (infravision) lose this ability completely after failing a DC 10 Fort save. In others, the loss of sight can be temporary (lasting 2d6

days). Other sufferers of this disease have reported losing the ability to see after dusk, when the normal ambient light dips below human sight ranges. Sometimes called “dayvision” by the lay sufferer, this version of Darksight Blindness is less problematic for most pure-strain humans. However, the disease is highly problematic for nocturnal mutants and for plantients after “sundown,” for they suffer the inability to see anything until the next dawn.

**Cure:** Darksight Blindness can be cured with *neutralize disease*, a successful DC 10 Fort save, or inoculation.

## NANITE INDUCED CELLULAR LUNG-BONDING CANCER (BLACK LUNG)

**Name:** NICLBC (Nanite Induced Cellular Lung-Bonding Cancer)

**Aliases:** Black Lung, “Nickel-Back”

**Initial Save:** Fort 14

**Secondary Save:** Fort 16 (see Effects)

**Immunity:** Entities without respiratory organs are immune to this disease.

**Overview:** “Black Lung” is an insidious lab-created bioweapons disease that escaped from the development lab it was created in during the Great Disaster. Now prevalent in pockets surrounding once great cities of the past, NICLBC is a nanovirus comprised of millions of tiny organisms connected through hivemind technology. Originally designed to root out and destroy other viruses, Black Lung became corrupted during the Disaster, and its programming altered to infest the respiratory systems of any air-breathing beings. Non air-breathing entities appear to be immune, although strains of NICLBC-K are infrequently found in both amphibious and plantient victims.

**Effects:** The base version of NICLBC attacks the patient’s respiratory system, causing massive striations in the lung tissue. These striations in turn give the virus a place to replicate, causing the patient significant discomfort. During the infection phase, the afflicted must make a successful DC 14 Fort save or suffer infestation. If infested, the patient’s respiratory tissue blackens, and the diseased tissue discolors the surrounding tissue (in human hosts, this causes the torso to darken, frequently the first sign of infection). The tissue damage causes the patient to suffer a -2 penalty to all rolls while infected. In addition, the patient may either move at 50% speed OR take one other action, not both. If the patient attempts an attack action, their attack is at 1 dice lower in the attack chain.

At the end of 24 hours, the afflicted may attempt a new DC 16 Fort save. If this save is successful, the nanites exit the host, inflicting 1d6 points of damage, and the patient can recover normally. If the save fails, the nanites have lost connection to their hive programming, and are stuck in the respiratory tissue. This inflicts an immediate 2d6 points of damage, and increases the roll penalty to -4 to all rolls. This condition lasts for 7 days. At the end of seven days, a final DC 16 Fort save can be made. If successful, the condition remains for an additional 7 days, with the subject suffering 2d6 points of damage per day. If the save is failed, the subject loses the ability to breathe on their own. They immediately begin to suffer 2d6 points of damage per round until death occurs.

**Cure:** NICLBC (and its strains) can be cured with *neutralize disease*, a successful initial DC 14 Fort save, 2 successful DC 16 Fort saves on consecutive days, or removal of the infected respiratory tissue (judge's discretion). The patient's life can be prolonged with cures or medical attention, but this action does not remove the disease. Or you can quit smoking.



# THE FESTERING HUNGER

by Ian McGarty



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It has been here for eons, existing before the memories of mankind and quietly consuming. Many dark cults have worshiped this deadly being and paid with their lives, for the **Festering Hunger** is never sated. The Hunger, when seen in its corporeal form, is a corpulent mass of flesh struck through with ribbons of pus, tumors, and cysts. It survives by infecting hosts and growing inside them, eventually consuming them from within. The Festering Hunger spreads its pestilence with care and precision so that it is not noticed. It will slowly grow and infect a community only

to devour them all when it has spread amongst them. It does this in isolated villages and hamlets, where it can remain undetected by more powerful forces that may wish to destroy it. The Festering Hunger may directly control any creature it has infected but the greater the infection, the easier it is to puppet a creature. The most grotesque and deformed eventually join the Festering Hunger's corporeal mass, increasing its size and power. Pieces of the body can function if cut away from the main corpus and it can produce moist tendrils of pus-veined flesh to manipulate the world around it.

# **Festering Hunger**

*Medium to huge aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** (see Table: Size Chart)

**Speed** 40 ft., 40 ft. swim, 40 ft. climb

**STR** 20 (+5) **DEX** 13 (+1) **CON** 20 (+5)

**INT** 16 (+3) **WIS** 7 (-1) **CHA** 5 (-3)

**Saving Throws** (see size chart)

**Damage Resistances** Force; Bludgeoning, Piercing, and Slashing from non-magical weapons

**Condition Immunities** Charmed, Deafened, Disease, Exhaustion, Frightened, Petrified, Poisoned, Prone

**Damage Immunities** Acid, Fire, Lightning

**Senses** true sight 120 ft.

**Languages** telepathy

**Spellcasting.** The Festering Hunger is a 8<sup>th</sup> level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared: (4, 3, 3, 2)

1<sup>st</sup> Level: *Acid Stream*

2<sup>nd</sup> Level: *Acid Arrow, Blur, Crown of Madness, See Invisibility*

3<sup>rd</sup> Level: *Counterspell, Enemies Abound, Gaseous Form*

4<sup>th</sup> Level: *Blight, Secret Chest* (this is always cast and the Festering Hunger saves its memorable trinkets in the small chest hidden within its body. Anyone who touches it will activate it. There is a 25% chance that another Medium Festering Hunger is inside)

**Legendary Resistance.** (see Table: Size Chart)

**Table: Size Chart**

Size	Hit Points	Saving Throws	Powers
Medium	114 (12d8+60)	STR +8, CON +8, INT +6	1 Legendary Action, 1 Legendary Resistance
Large	126 (12d10+60)	STR+9, CON +9, INT +7	2 Legendary Actions, 2 Legendary Resistances
Huge	138 (12d12+60)	STR+10, CON +10, INT +8	3 Legendary Actions, 3 Legendary Resistances

## Actions

**Multiattack.** the Festering Hunger uses its Disgusting Presence and then makes 2 nascent tendril attacks and 1 consume attack.

**Nascent Tendril.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* (+7/+11/+15) to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* (2d8/2d10/2d12+5) bludgeoning damage plus 1d8 acid damage.

**Consume.** The Festering Hunger erupts a gout of pus, bile, and body fluid onto all creatures in a 15 ft. cone. Each creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 2d8+5 acid damage and become infected by the Festering Hunger.

## Legendary Actions

**Stage I (1 Legendary Action).** The Festering Hunger bursts a vitreous pustule, covering the target in a gout of acidic pus. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or suffer 2d8 acid damage, suffer additional 5 acid damage at the start each of their turns, take a -2 penalty to AC and Dexterity saving throws, move at half speed and lose the ability to use reactions. This condition can be removed if an action is spent removing the crust of acid pus and viscous liquid.

**Stage II (2 Legendary Actions).** The Festering Hunger has a burst of celerity allowing it to move 40ft. and make a melee attack.

**Stage III (2 Legendary Actions).** The Festering Hunger begins pulling in organic matter from around it with a wriggling mass of tendrils that pull their prizes back into their quivering host. The Festering Hunger immediately regains 3 Hit Dice worth of hit points.

**Stage IV (3 Legendary Actions).** The Festering Hunger splits into two Festering Hungers, one size below that of the original. Both creatures will begin with all of their hit points and spell slots available.

## The Infected

The victims of the Festering Hunger will live for a short time without noticing the detrimental side effects. When a being first fails their saving throw, they are immediately infected. After their first short rest, they must succeed a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or lose 1 point of Constitution and take 2d8 poison damage. After completing their next long rest they must succeed a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or lose another point of Constitution. This will continue until they have succeeded on saving throws for 3 consecutive nights. When a creature's Constitution Score falls to 5 or lower, they are immediately in the thrall of the Festering Hunger and will carry out its wishes to the best their diseased bodies will allow. Before their Constitution reaches 5, the infection may be cured by using *Remove Curse* and

*Cure Disease* within one minute of one another. If this is done, the infected person will begin convulsing and coughing, their body wracked with pain. This will continue for 3 turns, at which time they will cough up a sizzling and steaming mass of wet, black flesh.

Occasionally, the Festering Hunger encounters a being that desires to bond with it, to taste its power. In these instances, the Festering Hunger will implant itself into the brain of the creature in a procedure you may describe to your players if they themselves have the Constitution for it. These twisted creatures become the Festering Hunger's harbingers and quietly spread its vile reach across the countryside

The Infected appear as bloated corpse-like bodies of Festering Hunger's victim. They often remain inert until something rouses them. With a passing glance, these creatures all appear to be rotting, swollen corpses that are recently deceased. A closer examination will reveal that they are still breathing and inactive until they hear the call of their master. While mobile and active, they are unresponsive and the being that is infected may have listless or heavily lidded eyes, seeming completely unconscious while they carry out the macabre acts of their master.

## **The Infected**

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*Medium aberration, chaotic evil*

**Armor Class** 11

**Hit Points** 42 (5d8+15)

**Speed** 30 ft.

**STR** 10 (+0) **DEX** 13 (+1) **CON** 15 (+3) **INT** 10 (+0) **WIS** 10 (+0) **CHA** 8 (-1)

**Damage Resistances** Lightning; Bludgeoning, Piercing, Slashing from nonmagical weapons

**Damage Immunities** Poison

**Condition Immunities** Blinded, Charmed, Deafened, Diseased, Exhaustion, Frightened, Poisoned

**Senses** true sight 40 ft.

**Languages** none

## Actions

**Multiattack.** an Infected may make two Cyst Fist attacks.

**Cyst Fist.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) acid damage.

**Burst.** If the Infected has 8 or fewer HP, it may explode. Any creature within a 15 ft. radius must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) acid and become infected, or half as much damage on a successful one.

## A Sample Lair

The Festering Hunger has consumed many small settlements of people and will take you to one such place. The Village of Oesten is an idyllic cluster of small stone and thatch buildings clustered together on hills overlooking their crops and herds. A large stone windmill is the centerpiece of this countryside retreat and its creaks can be heard on quiet mornings when the dew lies thick.

All the trouble began about three months ago when one of the shepherds came down with a sickness. He wouldn't stop sprouting cysts, wounds, and tumors and his moans of discomfort and raspy breath troubled his family for nearly a month before he fell into a deep coma. By that time several others had come down with the same illness. Thank-

fully, a wandering priest arrived and began to assist the wounded. Despite every effort, everyone in the village succumbed to the illness. Now, all that remains is the worn out priest who is actually a cultist who has sacrificed this whole town to grant the Festering Hunger a generous and powerful corporeal body to play with.



When the characters arrive, the lanes of the village are empty and the simple wooden gates lie open. Chickens, cats, a few pigs and dogs can be seen wandering. A successful DC 22 Wisdom (Perception) check will immediately detect the faint smell of decomposing flesh. The odor emanates from the buildings. Many of the buildings can be found with doors ajar and windows unshuttered. The bodies of the villagers lie in various states of decay. The buildings are mostly empty of anything of value but each can be searched with Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation) checks:



Roll	DC 10	DC 15	DC 20
1	A small shell necklace (5 sp)	A golden belt buckle with a bas-relief of a wagon wheel (30 gp)	A platinum necklace set with a trilliant cut sunshot diamond (, 1250 gp)
2	A pair of worn boots	<i>Bulfrey's Guide</i> : a book of local area history (grants advantage on History checks if consulted)	A locked oak strong-box (DC 18) containing 237 gp, 743 sp, and a worn golden idol (375 gp)
3	A tarnished and worn shortsword	+1 <i>sling</i> , the <i>Shortwhip</i> . A supple and well oiled 3 ft. long strip of leather decorated with a scene of rabbits, hills, and gardens	A treasure map
4	15 arrows	A fancy hat with ermine trim (25 gp)	A golden necklace limned with shards of emerald (215 gp)
5	<i>Love Is An Illusion</i> : a gnomish romance novel	A silver necklace studded with tiny emerald shards and a single amethyst in the center (165 gp)	+1 <i>longbow</i>
6	1d10 copper pieces	A stag figurine made of glass (20 gp). It is extremely fragile and will break if precautions are not taken	<i>Greater Restoration</i> scroll
7	1d4 silver pieces	+1 <i>longsword</i> , <i>Eleron's Faith</i> . A soldier's sword, worn but well cared for. The pommel is carved with archaic common spelling "Honor and Fidelity"	A wooden elm branch carved with an intricate pattern of lines. This is a druid scroll of <i>Mass Cure Wounds</i>
8	A soiled loincloth	A foot wide geode that has been sliced and polished. The crystals are deep purples and lilacs (110 gp)	<i>Potion of Greater Healing</i>



The priest can be found in the upper ring and will greet the characters as soon as they enter. He is a portly man with a ruddy complexion. He always seems to be out of breath. He is quite friendly and introduces himself as **Lilidu Rowull**. He readily shares information about the sickness that has struck the village and will alert the characters that many of the “corpses” are actually still alive. He will offer food and drink and direct them to a home in the upper ring that he has been using, which is free of bodies. Ideally, he will wait until they are comfortable and attempt to lure a few of the characters to the Grist Mill. If he is unsuccessful, he will ready 2-8 Infected to ambush the characters after he leads them to the Grist Mill and the Festering Hunger. He will cast *Shield of Faith* as soon as the characters see the Festering Hunger’s corporeal form. If Lilidu thinks the fight is lost, he will use *Feign Death* as a readied action. In combat, he has a *portable hole* and 5 Mancatchers.

Every 2 rounds of fighting in the Grist Mill will draw 2 more Infected to the battle.

## Lilidu Rowull, Devotee of the Festering Hunger

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*Medium humanoid, lawful evil*

**Armor Class** 19 (with *Shield of Faith*)

**Hit Points** 42 (5d8+15)

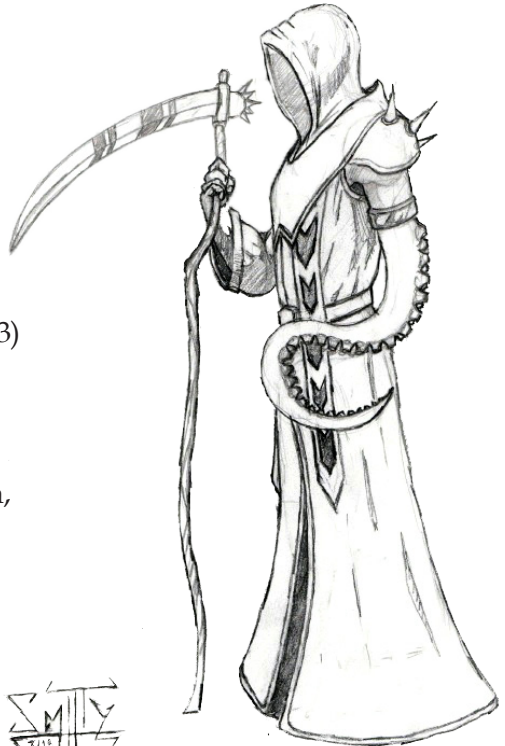
**Speed** 30 ft.

**STR** 12 (+1) **DEX** 12 (+1) **CON** 16 (+3)  
**INT** 6 (-2) **WIS** 18 (+4) **CHA** 8 (-1)

**Damage Resistances** Lightning

**Damage Immunities** Acid, Poison,  
Critical hits

**Condition Immunities** Diseased,  
Poisoned



**Spellcasting.** Lilidu is a 5<sup>th</sup> level spellcaster. His spellcasting modifier is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following wizard spells prepared: (3, 2, 2)

1<sup>st</sup>: *bane, guiding bolt, inflict wounds, shield of faith*

2<sup>nd</sup>: *blindness/deafness, hold person, spiritual weapon*

3<sup>rd</sup>: *feign death, spirit guardians*

## Actions

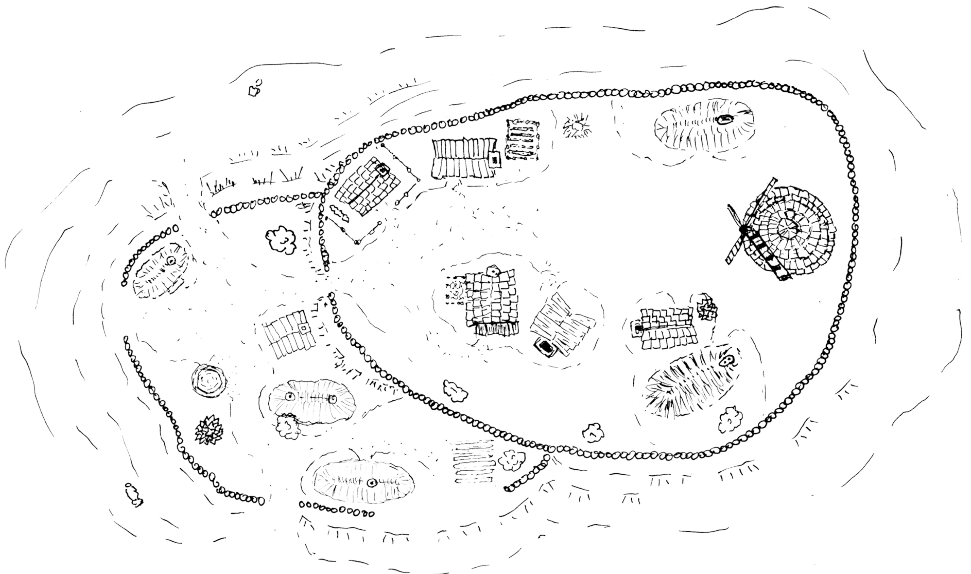
**Multiattack.** Lilidu may make two mutagenic arm strikes and make a Mancatcher attack or cast a spell.

**Mutagenic Arm.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d10+4) plus 6 (1d6+3) acid damage.

**Mancatcher.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 +1) plus character is *grappled* and may be moved up to 10 ft. as well as taking 3 (1d6) damage at the start of each of their turns. The *grappled* condition may be removed as an action with a DC 18 Strength check. As long as a character has the *grappled* condition imposed by the Mancatcher, their movement is halved.

**Equipment.** 5 Mancatchers, adamantine chainmail, *portable hole*, 667 gp, 333 sp

## The Village of Oesten



# BUGGAN'S BLACKWOOD PIPE

A Cursed Magic Item for Old-School Style Roleplaying Games

by James M. Spahn

This exquisitely crafted dark wood smoking pipe is etched with the motif of gently wafting smoke and falling leaves. It is tipped with ivory and has a carved bowl that resembles a thick, heavy cloud. In addition to being a beautiful piece of craftsmanship, this long-stemmed pipe provides a relaxing smoke to anyone who uses it.

But the dark wood and beautiful craftsmanship conceal its true purpose. Buggans, terrible fey creatures who sow discord in tiny communities and fallow crops with tiny curses, craft these *Blackwood Pipes* and leave them as secret “gifts” to be discovered and used by halflings and other beings who enjoy a relaxing smoke from time to time. Enchanted with the malice of unchecked fire that burns and consumes, the *Buggan's Blackwood Pipe* is actually carved from the blackened remains of an arsonist's work. Buggans use their dark spells to draw the smoke from such terrible fires and trap it in this wood so that it can be released into anyone foolish enough to make use of these evil pipes.

When an unsuspecting victim smokes from a *Buggan's Blackwood Pipe*, they automatically receive a +2 bonus on all saving throws made to resist fear-based effects (magical or otherwise) their relaxed state. This bonus remains active as long as the victim smokes from the Blackwood Pipe at least once per day. However, the Referee should secretly make a saving throw on the character's behalf. If that saving throw is failed, the smoker loses one point of Constitution permanently. They are not aware of this loss.

The bonus remains for a full day, but the loss of Constitution continues to occur as each month the Referee makes a new saving throw as the victim continues to regularly make use of the *Blackwood Pipe*. Each failed saving throw results in another secret loss of Constitution. These negative effects are not noticed until the character has lost 4 points of Constitution, at which point they begin to develop a slight cough.

However, should the victim choose to stop using the *Blackwood Pipe*, they must make a saving throw (adding their Wisdom modifier) to resist its use at least once per day. If they fail, they will be compelled to make use of the *Blackwood Pipe* at least once per day. Failure to do so makes them agitated and distracted, imposing a -2 penalty on all saving throws and attack rolls until they can use the *Pipe*. In order to permanently break free of the *Blackwood Pipe's* hold, they must make ten

successful saving throws to resist its use in a row. Only then will this penalty go away, and they will be free of its curse.

If a victim's Constitution is ever reduced below 3, they are transformed into an **Air Elemental** of Evil alignment and will seek to inflict suffering and malice on any living beings they encounter.

Destroying the *Buggan's Blackwood Pipe* is no easy task. The *Pipe* must be returned to the arsonist whose deed helped create it and then the arsonist must repent for their initial crime. If this cannot be done, the *Blackwood Pipe* cannot be destroyed and, if disposed of, will eventually turn up and find a new victim.



# The Orc Pyromancer

by Jim Wampler

Ever had your players become obsessed with finding out what is behind a dungeon door that you have not yet mapped out? Is the party not taking your generous DM hints to just move along to the main plot? Then the **Orc Pyromancer** is here to satisfy the burning curiosity of even the most obstinate players. The Orc Pyromancer is a one room dungeon add-on you can drop into any existing dungeon map or adventure.

**Area 1 - The Iron Door:** *You are confronted with a heavy banded iron door. You can hear nothing on the other side, though a cursory check reveals that the door is locked and likely trapped.*

The door to Area 1 was intentionally designed to be easily picked and disarmed, as it acts as an early warning system for the orc pyromancer inside. Any thief can easily circumnavigate the lock and traps (DC 5 lock and trap, poison dart in keyhole, 1d4 poison damage), though these actions will take 2 rounds during which time both mechanisms will squeak and clack loudly. The iron door could also be knocked inwards off its hinges with at least 18 points of physical damage.

**Area X-2 - Lair of the Orc Elementalist:** *You enter a large 60 ft. cavern lit by the bright red glow of a magma pit at the far end. Next to the lava pit is a small metal chest. A group of 6 humanoids appear to be prepared for your arrival. They are a strange mix of orc and goblin, and although they appear heavily armed, you notice that their mouths and nostrils have been sewn shut. They immediately move toward you in a halting and curiously clumsy lockstep.*

Creations of the orc pyromancer **Reg'rett**, the beings in the cavern are actually **Phosphine Elementals** dressed in the air-tight hides of dead orcs and goblins. Though clumsy fighters, each Phosphine Elemental will detonate in a mighty explosion if hit for more than 1 hit point of damage (thereby piercing the humanoid skin and exposing the creature to air).

**Phosphine Elementals (6):** AL Neutral; MV 20 ft.; AC 12; HD 3+1; HP (effectively) 1; Atk shortsword 1d6; SP explodes on contact with air, 1d6 10 ft. radius

**NOTE:** The Phosphine Elementals start out positioned slightly over 10 ft. apart in the cavern, so that a missile strike on one will not trigger chain effect explosions of the entire group. Naturally, after one round of the elementals closing for melee with the PCs, this will no longer be the case.

Reg'rett casts *Invisibility* on himself after hearing the PCs tinker with the iron door from outside the cavern. He will wait and see how the battle goes before acting again (and thereby dispelling his *Invisibility* spell). Reg'rett is wearing a *Ring of Fire Immunity* and cannot be harmed by any heat-based attacks, including explosions from his own Phosphine Elementals.

**If the party retreats:** Reg'rett allows them to leave and re-locks the iron door.

**If the party survives the elemental explosions but is pretty beat up:** Reg'rett will use his invisibility to sneak to an advantageous spot and cast a 5d6 *Fireball* spell targeted on the party.

**If the party easily survives the elemental explosions:** Reg'rett will summon the **Fire Elemental** living in the magma caldera, then attempt to sneak behind the party before unleashing his 5d6 *Fireball* spell.

**Reg'rett (orc pyromancer):** AL Chaotic; MV 30 ft.; AC 10; HD 5; HP 12; Atk dagger 1d4; SP immune to heat-based attacks via *Ring of Fire Immunity*

**Spells:** *Fireball* (5d6, 25 ft radius), *Flaming Hands* (2d6, up to two adjacent targets), *Summon Elemental* (already used for the day)

**Fire Elemental:** AL Neutral; MV 15 ft. (cannot cross water); AC 17; HD 8; HP 28; Atk melee 3d8 (sets flammable objects aflame); SP takes 2x damage from cold-based attacks

**Treasure:** All equipment carried by the Phosphine Elementals (goblinoid weapons and armor) are ruined by any detonations. Reg'rett carries a finely crafted and jeweled dagger (150 GP), a *Ring of Immunity to Fire*, and scroll containing a 5d6 *Fireball* spell. The iron chest contains 1,000 gp, 500 sp, and a few coppers. If any elemental detonations or fireballs have taken place in the room, the iron chest instead contains one 160 lb. chunk of slowly cooling electrum.



# BARROW MIMIC

by Greg Gillespie

**No Enc:** 1

**Alignment:** Chaos

**Movement:** 10 ft.

**Armor Class:** 5

**Hit Dice:** 7-10

**Attacks:** 1

**Damage:** 3d4

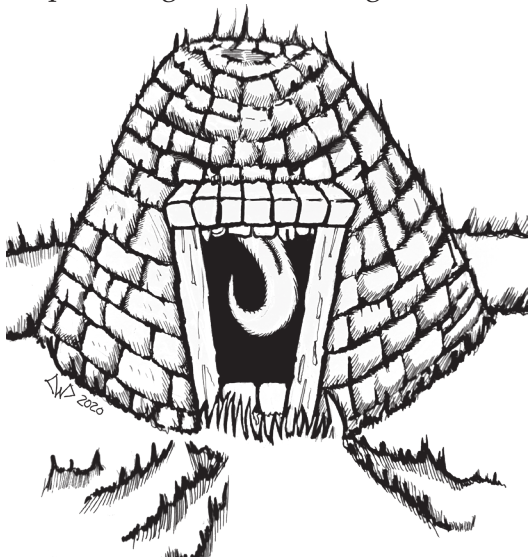
**Save:** F5-10

**Morale:** 10

**Hoard Class:** See below

**XP:** 1140/1560/2400/2400

A barrow mimic appears as a simple barrow mound. The creature shapes its mouth like an open stone arch and elves or thieves (1 on d6) can sometimes see teeth protruding from the top of the archway. Sages say the creature cannot take other forms. Barrow mimics move very slowly by means of three foot-like appendages. They rarely move during the day, preferring the cover of nightfall.



A mimic waits patiently for a living creature to enter its mouth and then attempts to bite for 3d4 hit points of damage. Upon a successful bite, the mimic will attempt to swallow its prey the following round for an automatic 3d4 hit points of damage each round thereafter.

Barrow mimics have weak respiratory systems. By nature of their magical creation, a black tar-like ichor builds up on their lungs and they need to expel the substance several times per day. The longer PCs stand in front of a barrow mimic, the higher the likelihood it will cough black ichor. For each round in the presence of the creature there is a cumulative 10% chance the mimic will give itself away by coughing. Anyone in the area of the mouth will be covered in ichor (Dexterity check to avoid) and will be both Diseased and Slowed (as per the spell).

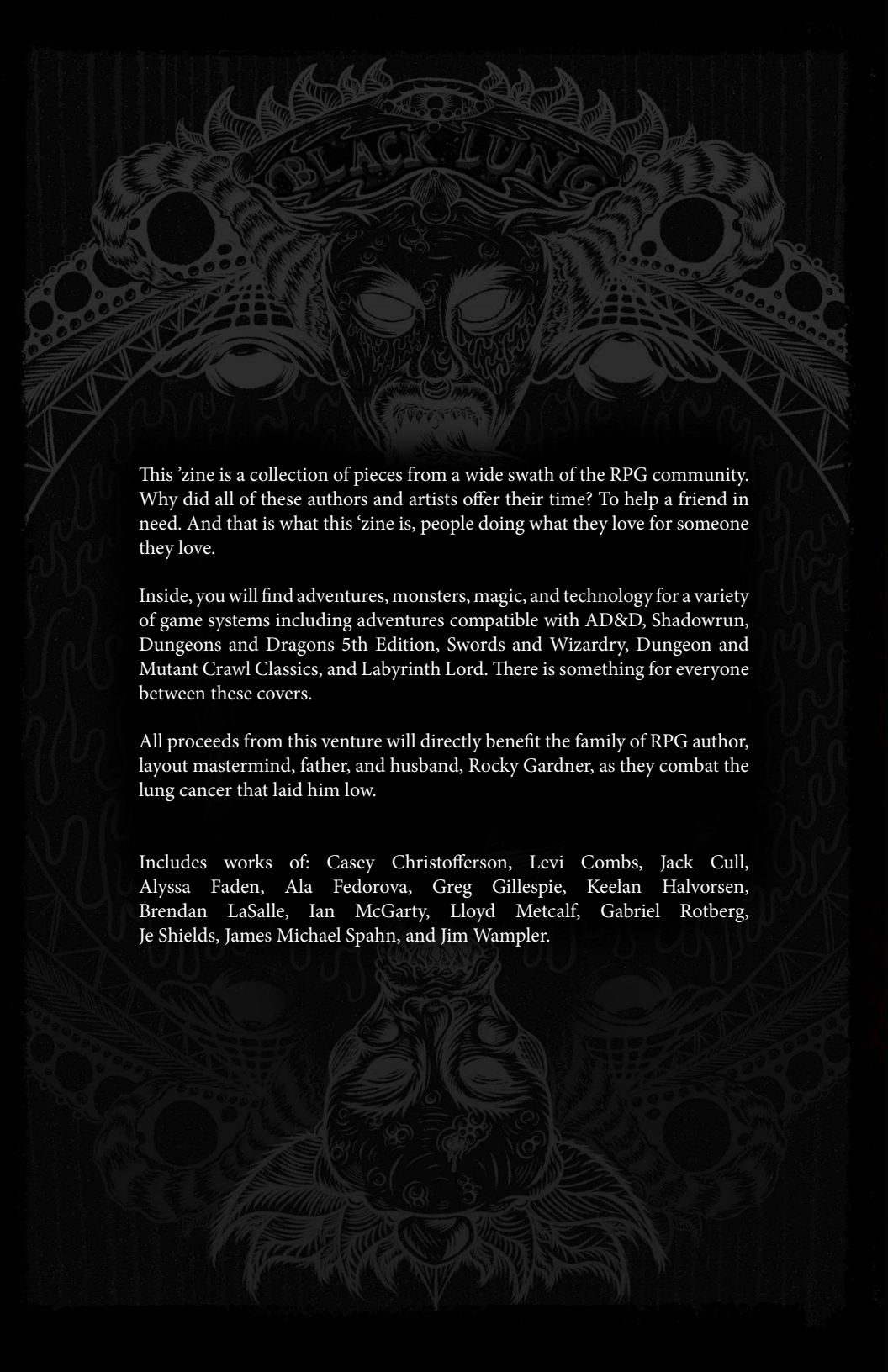
Barrow Mimics sometimes expel treasure items they cannot digest. As a result, the following Hoard Classes can be found in front of its mouth: I-VI as well as 1d6 gems (35%) and 1d3 jewelry (15%). Inside the creature are VIIx2 and a 15% chance of one of the following (1d4): Scroll, Potion, Wand, or Miscellaneous Magic Item.



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This 'zine is a collection of pieces from a wide swath of the RPG community. Why did all of these authors and artists offer their time? To help a friend in need. And that is what this 'zine is, people doing what they love for someone they love.

Inside, you will find adventures, monsters, magic, and technology for a variety of game systems including adventures compatible with AD&D, Shadowrun, Dungeons and Dragons 5th Edition, Swords and Wizardry, Dungeon and Mutant Crawl Classics, and Labyrinth Lord. There is something for everyone between these covers.

All proceeds from this venture will directly benefit the family of RPG author, layout mastermind, father, and husband, Rocky Gardner, as they combat the lung cancer that laid him low.

Includes works of: Casey Christofferson, Levi Combs, Jack Cull, Alyssa Faden, Ala Fedorova, Greg Gillespie, Keelan Halvorsen, Brendan LaSalle, Ian McGarty, Lloyd Metcalf, Gabriel Rotberg, Je Shields, James Michael Spahn, and Jim Wampler.