

1e Maximum HP

The old school `zine for a new school world



Issue #004

Undead

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Raven Evermoor - Cover art and
interior art

Ian McGarty – First edit and 5E
conversions

G. Scott Swift – Editor in Chief

Lloyd Metcalf – Interior art,
layout, content, general goblin
labor

Josh Beckelheimer - Interior art

Chet Minton - Interior Art



Introduction

Welcome to Maximum HP #004, the Undead. In this issue, we venture into the thing that fuels the fears of every living creature – death. What could be worse than that? UNDEAD!

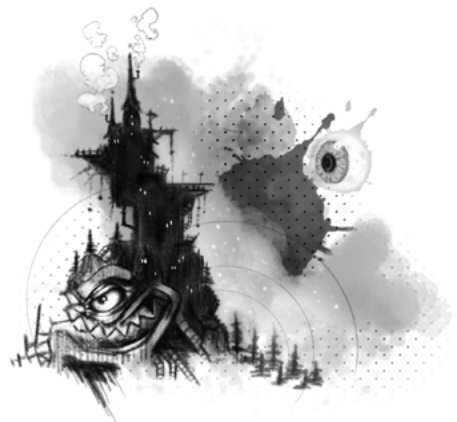
Undead are a staple in gaming and storytelling, but some of those stories can start to feel tame and tired if you've heard the plot a hundred times before.

At Fail Squad Games, we offer rousing content for your tabletop roleplaying games, never hard and fast rules. What follows in this and upcoming issues of Maximum HP are articles, notes, tips, tricks, traps, treasures, and other pieces that have come to mind for your gaming table organized by theme with each issue. To keep the 'zines fresh and exciting, we have liberated ourselves from a production deadline to allow us to channel maximum creativity into each issue. Content will be nurtured, selected from submissions, not rushed, and chosen as inspiration strikes or from where we see a need at our own tables.

The majority of this 'zine is intended for GMs, but players may also find much of the content interesting and, hopefully,

inspiring. It is suggested that players not read the adventure sections if their GM intends to run an adventure from the 'zine.

Our intent is to share the Fail Squad Games' style and that of our readers with other gamers of all editions to enrich their gaming experience. The 'zine format will present small, easy to digest articles firmly rooted in the spirit of the older edition games and magazines. Although the content may be informal, we want the physical product and presentation to be the best we can deliver for just a few bucks.



THE TRAP TRAP

Lloyd Metcalf – Worker Goblin

While working on Nights of Barrow Wight for this issue of Maximum HP, I began to realize how easy it is to fall into a trap that I think a lot of GMs hit when adjudicating traps, that being “Roll to notice the trap, roll to disarm, roll for damage (or not)”. Wash, rinse, and repeat.

An interesting conversation came up with a friend, and the solution might be to roll less and simplify the entire process of traps and riddles. Why design an elaborate trap if no one ever sees it or interacts with it, or an overly complex trap where the players only ever see a few dice rolls and some arbitrary damage they never remember?

For example, “You can see the floor five feet immediately in front of the door is different than the rest of the surrounding area.”

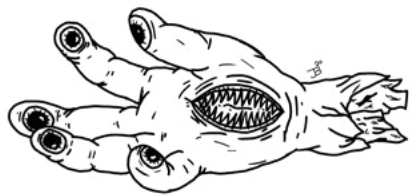
In fact, it’s a thin slab covering a ten-foot-deep pit with spikes at the bottom: a really simple cliché trap. The slab will only support about 40 pounds. No rolls to discover or disable are required; they are pointless since we want to make sure to include this situation in the adventure and make it

something to remember. It is what it is: a pit with spikes between the group and a door they want to get to on the opposing side.

Role it

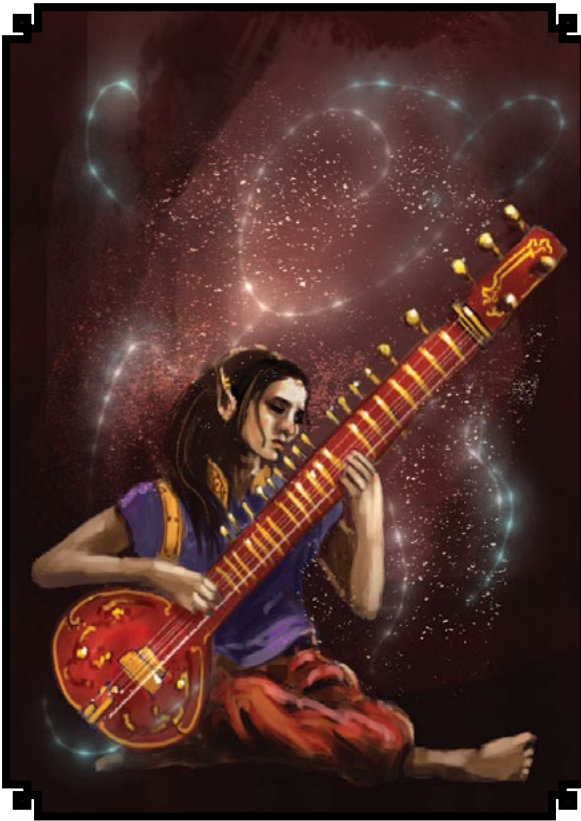
Let your players interact with the obstacle that they have likely forgotten in the first moment is a trap. It’s now become a roleplaying encounter with pieces to interact with instead of rolling to ignore. Let the group interact with the world you’ve built, finagle ropes, cast spells, and think of a way around the pit. This becomes far more memorable an encounter than “Roll to discover, roll to avoid, roll for damage.”

Doing this has changed my approach to writing traps and GMing them in my games. I hope this also helps others to think of interesting twists to pull players into games and leave some dice out in favor of roleplaying.



Nights of Barrow Wight

By Lloyd Metcalf of FSG



GM Background

An adventure for 3 - 5 level 5 characters

The setup for this adventure is purposefully vague and not intended to be a hand-holding adventure. The background information and setup of Wheatwind's situation is presented; However, the town specifics, NPCs, businesses, and details are to be flushed out by the GM and players. Most likely

the barrow can be placed on the outskirts of most any town in your world, making such information moot.

Introduction

A lonely barrow on the outskirts of Wheatwind hamlet fuels the nightmares of children and fills fireside tales with tragedy and horror. The ancient barrow has not seen a living soul for

generations, and legend tells that the last living person to visit continues to haunt the site.

Every second full moon, all doors and windows around Wheatwind are locked and shuttered. No residents venture past their doorstep for 2 days except to care for livestock, and then only well after sunup and long before sundown. Locals know this time as the “Nights of Barrow Wight”.

The residents of Wheatwind have accepted this time of fear as the price to pay for farming the unusually fertile soil of the valley. Wheatwind crops grow strong and fast. The produce is unusually large, and harvests are almost unnaturally fruitful.

During the Nights of Barrow Wight, solemn and low sitar music haunts the night air. Some have reported that during these times they hear sobbing, wailing, and other lamentable sounds echo around the hamlet. Such fretfulness encompasses the hamlet that a day of rest after the Nights of Barrow Wight is common.

The fireside tales regarding the Nights of Barrow Wight are many, none are joyful, and all bring a dark chill. Most tales relate the tragedy of a beautiful elven maid named Bronadwen who was

master of the exotic sitar. She had attracted the forbidden love of Johanson, a young military man in service to a stern and callous king. The man fell madly in love with the elf maid when, working as a royal guard, he heard her perform in the alcazar. Her music was so enticing and her beauty so ethereal that his heart was immediately stricken with a consuming passion for the sitar mistress. She also fell in love with the soldier, devoting her undying love to him for eternity. Because of her heritage and his service to the king, they were forbidden to ever be married.

They arranged many late-night romantic rendezvous at the nearby barrow where the maid would play for her love in secret. The music was sweet, and her wondrous sitar would weave haunting notes of love late into the night to entwine their hearts forever.

The jilted elven prince Hatholon became insanely jealous of Bronadwen’s love for the human. He reported their forbidden rendezvous to the king’s constable as revenge for his spurned advances.

The couple was discovered by the constable, and Johanson was sentenced to death for dissent. He was stripped of rank and station

before his hanging. Bronadwen's lover was then buried within the barrow in an unmarked grave of a commoner. Bronadwen blamed herself for her lover's demise. She continued to play among the hallways of the barrows, making sure the people of the village and the constable could hear. She played to remember her love, but also to remind Hatholon and the king's men of their hateful actions.

Hatholon continued to seethe with jealousy, the death of Johanson only intensifying Bronadwen's love for the man. He tried one last time to profess his love for the sitar maiden with a proposal of marriage, but he was only met with her tears for the loss of Johanson. Hatholon took Bronadwen's life and his own within the barrows. If he could not be with her, neither would he allow any other. There, his soul has held hers captive for many years. He keeps the living and loving creatures away from his torment and away from Bronadwen's heart.

For many long years, the maiden has played during every second full moon. She plays songs of bitter love and lament to remind the living of their cruelty. Her music burns revenge on Hatholon's spirit, driving him mad in undeath.

Some residents of Wheatwind have witnessed shambling misshapen silhouettes during the Nights of Barrow Wight outside the burial site. None of them venture close enough to know for certain what horrors remain restless there, but the figures are plain in the moonlight.

Any livestock thoughtlessly left in the fields are frequently found disemboweled and drained of blood, or simply missing during the haunted nights. Barns are built tight, and all doors have heavy steel clasps or oak bars to seal them. Homes in the hamlet are built with unusually solid, meticulously crafted locks and deadbolts. Even chicken coops are overly sturdy with timber bars across the doors. To outsiders who have not heard the tales of the Nights of Barrow Wight, these precautions likely seem suspicious and unusual. To residents, they are a necessity.

Welcome to Wheatwind



The good folk of Wheatwind are friendly enough. Everything other than the overly sturdy barns, coops, and doors seems like the usual small village adventurers might come across anywhere in the land. The usual basic fare and goods are available for purchase, the inn has rooms, and the tavern has tales, indeed some rather haunting tales.

Tavern and market tales are likely where visitors hear about the Nights of Barrow Wight as residents prepare. During the nights, the haunting sitar music can be heard from the barrow. The music is low and quiet, carries unnaturally far in the air, and doesn't grow louder when the barrow is approached.

THE BARROW

Approaching the Barrow (See map)

Approaching the barrow during the Nights of Barrow Wight results in at least one encounter with 2d4 zombies, half of which are undead farm and field animals or pets. They still fight with the same mindless drive and veracity of their human counterparts. Some of the zombies may be recognized as locals who are missing or went to investigate the barrows and failed. All zombies around the barrows were created when

drained of life by **Hatholon**.

1. Entry to the Barrow

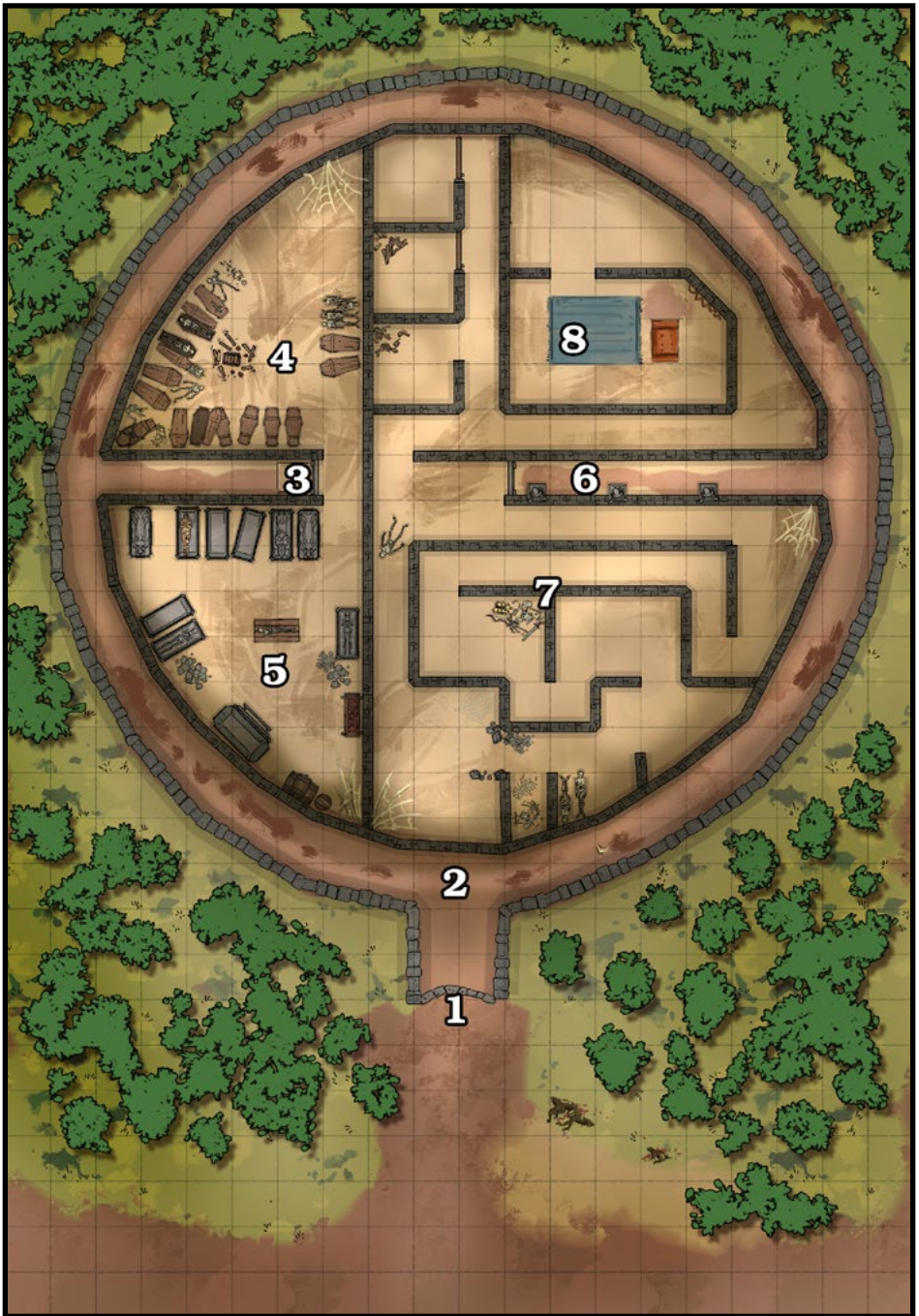
If the PCs enter during the Nights of Barrow Wight, the barrow echoes softly with low sitar music holding no discernable source. If they are entering on a night other than a second full moon, their presence initiates a Night of Barrow Wight, and they awaken Bronadwen, Hatholon, and the minions.

The barrow is a large mound of stone and grass-covered earth with a carefully crafted stonework tunnel on the southern side. Just a little over fifteen feet in, a wall can be seen with passages going left and right with a ceiling no more than seven feet high.

The construction of the barrow is very old. All the stones are worn smooth but remain solidly in place.

2. The Eternal Guard

The outer perimeter tunnel of the barrow has a four-inch rut worn into the stones of the floor. A fetid, sticky liquid smears the stones commonly along the path. A successful Wisdom or Intelligence check reveals that it is liquified rotten flesh. Scanning the hallway within 20 feet of the entrance



reveals a rotting human-sized foot. The sole is worn to stoneground bone, and what flesh remains on the appendage is putrified and oozing.

Two groups of four **zombies** eternally walk the ring of this outer hallway. They are always exactly opposite their counterparts on the circle. Most have worn the shoes, flesh, and part of the bone from their feet from walking the hall so long. When a zombie becomes inoperable, it is discarded in Area 4 and another raised by Hatholon to take its place with orders to attack any living thing that enters the barrow. One in each group carries an embroidered handkerchief with an H. These were Hatholon's footmen in life.

3. East Entry

Ahead, a stonework door hangs on solid hinges that have recently been oiled by the look of the streaks on the stone face. A thin, 5'x5' stone slab covers a ten-foot-deep pit, the bottom of which is covered with the skeletal remains of several snakes. More than 50 lbs. of weight on the slab causes it to swing down. The door is locked though a character proficient with thieves' tools may pick it with a successful Open Locks check.

You may allow players to roll to discover that the slab is a trap if you wish, but it isn't necessary. The true challenge is how the PCs find a way across and then unlock the door atop an open hole. This becomes especially difficult if pressed by the **eternal guard** (Area 2). If disturbed in any way, the skeletal snakes begin to move and bite viciously. There are 10 such snakes in the pit that bite for 1 hp each per round (10 hp/round total). The character avoids damage from the snakes with a successful saving throw v.s. Rod/Staff/Wand. On a failed saving throw, they suffer 1 point of damage per snake in the pit.

4. The Peasantry

Many of the wooden coffins here have rotted over the years or been completely looted. Bones and human remains are scattered about the floor amid the pine coffin remnants. What clothes that remain are those of simple peasants and farmers. Most of the remains are missing or have extremely worn feet.

One coffin in this area contains the remains of Johanson, Bronadwen's love. With a successful Find Traps check, a character discovers that his neck vertebrae are disjointed

in the coffin and an extremely well-hidden carving “Johanson Vendergard” on the bottom identifies the remains. If you wish, as GM it may make a better story to drop clues to the corpse being different if no one searches specifically in the coffin. Within the coffin, a copper key on a faded red and yellow hair ribbon lies atop a red and gold silken scarf. The key unlocks the door of the Guardian’s Hall (Area 6).

A quiet clattering noise emanates from the dark corner to the north. A solemn skeleton sits on the floor repeatedly attempting to reconnect a flat-worn foot to its ankle.

The skeleton doesn’t attack but will answer when spoken to. The only words it can whisper are “Yes”, “No”, and “Hatholon”. It will only answer 4 or 5 questions before returning to the business of hoping the foot will reattach to its leg. It would much appreciate the eternal rest of its soul.

5. Honored Dead

The sarcophagi in this area are made of stone, and all the dead have been carefully prepared and wrapped for the afterlife. Most are wrapped in cloth strips coated in wax. The corpses retain much of

their skin. What can be seen of it is sunken, dried, and leathery. Touching any of the sarcophagi causes six of the corpses to rise quickly to attack. They whisper in unison, “Bronadwen is not for you!” over and over while animated.

The honored dead attack until destroyed or the living leave Area 4&5. Describe the honored dead as one would expect a mummy to be described; they are, however, only **skeletons**, but with maximum hp.

The unopened stone sarcophagi, barrels, and a couple of chests in the room collectively contain 4,000 cp, 875 sp, 102 gp, 9 pp, 4 gems worth 30 gp each, and an ornate golden chalice worth 50 gp. In one of the chests, a skull and the words “Beware the Guardian Hall” are scrawled in graphite upon a parchment. Three boxes, the middle one marked with an X, are drawn below the words, and bloody fingerprints adorn the back.

6. The Guardian’s Hall

The southern wall of this hallway is lined with leering stone, skeletal headed gargoyles. In place of wings, the creatures have a pair of elongated skeletal arms. The creatures perch atop half-columns

with their clawed forearms gripping their pillar, their hind legs poised to strike from the wall, and their mid arms embedded into the ceiling.

Each is carefully carved with great detail in polished marble and worth 700 gp if carefully removed. The center guardian is an actual elemental guardian gargoyle of the undead world. The creature remains utterly still, waiting for the best possible moment to surprise intruders who are living or not a minion of Hatholon. The **necrotic gargoyle** is intelligent enough to recognize the threat posed by magic-users and prefers to disable them whenever possible. The gargoyle is NOT, however, smart enough to see through rudimentary disguises. The gargoyle must save v.s. spell to see through the ruse of any creatures disguised as undead.

The most likely strategy is for the gargoyle to release its breath weapon in the narrow hall before moving to attack in the ensuing chaos. As a GM, the best approach is to allow the players some suspicion regarding the creatures if they haven't found the parchment from Area 5.

7. Hatholon's Haunt

This southern section of the barrow is the haunt of the horrendously jealous Hatholon. His earthly remains where he took his own life are marked on the map and act as a constant reminder of his demise.

Approaching his remains causes him such pain that he hasn't disturbed the scene for all his years in the barrow. Likewise, approaching Bronadwen's chamber causes similar distress. The creature is bound to the barrow and tortured by it constantly.

Hatholon acts, in all respects, as a **wight**. The one possession he retains is his +1 longsword, which he uses to attack the living and keep them from Bronadwen's rest at all costs. His second attack is almost always with a decrepit hand with which he drains the life from the living. He usually paces the southernmost section of the barrow but ventures out of the barrow on the Nights of Barrow Wight, as Bronadwen's music is utter torture for him to endure. He carries what he thinks is the only key to the Guardian's Hall (Area 6) around his neck.

If he is within the barrows, Hatholon is deep in the throes of utter madness from the sound of Bronadwen's sitar. He immediately is aware of any creature coming through the door

from Area 6. He assumes that all who enter have come to steal Bronadwen away and deserve death or an existence as a servant zombie.

Hatholon's remains are accompanied by a decaying backpack containing a wedding ring worth 400 gp, 100 ep, 121 gp, and 87 sp. The clothes on the remains were once fine silk but have long since deteriorated.

8. Bronadwen's Chamber

Bronadwen's spirit remains trapped and tormented here eternally. What was first her prison at the hands of Hatholon later became her tomb. Here, she remains, playing her sitar, hating the love and beauty of the living, and wishing for sweet release into the afterlife that she can't willingly invite.

Bronadwen is a **barrow haunt**, which is the lesser form of a banshee. (See Barrow Wight Creature entry). What makes Bronadwen particularly dangerous is her magical sitar, which she is very likely playing when PCs approach not only the barrows but this area.

Just entering the area from the door at the Guardian's Hall (Area

6) subjects visitors to the *Empathy* effect of Bronadwen's Sitar. The song she plays relays a feeling of hopelessness and utter sadness. One may not see the point in going on or seeing the light of day ever again.

Once any of the living are within sight, Bronadwen employs the *Enthrall* ability of her sitar to charm one member of the party. She follows with her **Song of Devotion** at the next opportunity if the party seems aggressive in any way and is close enough to be affected.

There are 4 **zombies** and 5 **skeletons** in service and audience to Bronadwen. They rise to attack at her command if needed.

Should the PCs somehow manage to approach Bronadwen to talk, which is extremely difficult but not impossible, she will relate the entire sad tale to those who wish to help. She may assist in defeating Hatholon with the help of her minions if persuaded but cannot attack or touch him directly.

She may be freed with a complicated blessing ritual by a good priest and laid to rest with her beloved Johanson.

Defeating her in battle is also an acceptable resolution for Bronadwen, but in her death

throes, she will request to be taken to Johanson for eternal slumber.

“Take me to Johanson or I shall rise again...” is her final warning.

Once resolved, the air in the barrow seems lighter and less troubled. None of the animated creations remain active, and the people of Wheatwind never again suffer through the Nights of Barrow Wight. The tales at the fire now conclude with the deeds of the brave heroes who came to the aid of the hamlet.

BARROW WIGHT MAGICAL ITEMS

Bronadwen's Sitar

Bronadwen's Sitar

This ornate magical musical instrument is crafted with expert, almost otherworldly skill. The instrument produces exceptional sound quality and is imbued with numerous magical abilities. All abilities are granted by the sitar and will only be allowed if the instrument is played with some skill and concentration. A musician must spend a full day practicing with the instrument have the proficiency required to play the sitar before benefiting from its powers.

Enamor. All hearing the sitar must make a save v.s. spell or become so enamored with the music and the musician that they react as if the musician's CHR is 3 points higher than it actually is. Listeners may make a saving throw at the end of their turn after the music stops.

Amplify. Once per day. At the musician's will, the sitar produces a controlled audible glamour to raise its volume by 150% and project a source of sound up to 20 yards away. (Expanded audio sources must be in line of sight of the sitar).

Empathy. The sitar master can transfer the emotion of the music to those who hear it unless they opt to make a saving throw v.s. rod, staff, wand to repel the effect.

Enthrall (1/day). The musician may select a humanoid creature within 30 ft. to target with a Charm spell. The creature must make a successful saving throw v.s. spell or be charmed. Only one humanoid may be so charmed at a time.

Quell. Once per day at the direction of the master, the sitar master can remove aggressive intent, stop a battle, or avert violent actions of creatures in

a 20' area. A successful saving throw v.s. spell is required to resist the effects. On a failed saving throw, the mood of the creature is affected, even those resistant to charm effects.

If the sitar is stored near any other instrument (within 5') for an hour, the other instrument will not remain in tune. After a full day of such proximity, the instrument will never tune correctly again. The sitar only fully functions for those who proficiently play sitar. Effects are bolstered for those who play sitar exclusively.

BARROW WIGHT CREATURES

Barrow Haunt (Bronadwen)

(Int. 15-16 Exceptionally intelligent; AL NE; AC 0; MV 15, Fly 12; HD 9; THAC0 11; #AT 1; Dmg 1-8; SA See below; SD +1 or better weapon to hit; SZ M; ML Elite (13); XP 5,000)

Immune to charm, sleep, fear etc as undead. Also Immune to poison and cold-based attacks. Infravision 60'

Detect Life. The barrow haunt can magically sense the presence of creatures within their lair that

are not undead or constructs. They know that living creatures have entered the area but are unable to discern exact locations.

Partially Incorporeal. The barrow haunt exists in the prime material plane and the world of the undead. They may move through walls, creatures, or objects but doing so requires one full round per five-foot square. Bronadwen is a prisoner of Hatholon, however, and cannot leave the northern half of the western side of the barrow. Moving through a living creature causes a necrotic chill and they are covered in a viscous ectoplasmic slime. Any actions taken by the victim on the following round are at a -2 penalty, this includes saving throws.

Special Attacks

Withering Touch. On a successful attack roll, the barrow wight drains life from the victim (2d6 + 2) necrotic damage and heals itself.

Song of Devotion (1/Day). The haunt sings a single note of lost love and longing (as charm). All creatures within 30 feet that can hear must make a saving throw v.s. death. On a failure, the victim drops to 1 hit point, cannot bring themselves to harm the haunt, and feel a sense

of love and empathy for the creature. On a success, the victim takes 2d6+1 damage (Psychic - based) that carries a feeling of being utterly heartbroken. As a matter of mechanic simplicity, this is typically expressed in physical hit point removal.

Necrotic Gargoyle

(Int. 5-7 Low intelligence; AL CE; AC 5; MV 9, Crawl ceiling or walls 15; HD 4+4; THAC0 15; #AT 4; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-6/1-4; SA Surprise, Ghoulish Breath – see below; SD +1 weapon or better to hit; SZ M; ML Steady (11); XP 500

False Appearance. While the necrotic gargoyle remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from an inanimate statue.

Ghoulish Breath (1/day). The gargoyle may breathe a cloud of undead vapor that acts like fog, causing all within the 90' cube to make a saving throw v.s. paralyzation. A creature that is paralyzed is awake and aware and may make a saving throw at the end of subsequent rounds to end the paralysis.

NEW CREATURES

Horde Haunt

The horde haunt rises from slain dark armies left on the battlefield, the culmination of the hate that fueled the wicked creatures in life. The haunt searches for souls of the living to draw through itself and into the dark realms of the wicked gods that drove the armies from which it was created.

Horde Haunt

(Int. 15-16 Exceptionally intelligent; AL CE; AC 1; MV 12, Fl 18(C); HD 10+2; THAC0 9; #AT 1 + innate (See below); Dmg 5-10; SA Energy drain (see below); SD +1 or better magical weapon to hit; SZ M; ML Champion (16); XP 8,800)

Half Damage from acid, fire, lightning, thunder

Damage Immunities cold, poison, non magical weapons

Immunities charm, sleep, fear, hold, as undead.

Blink (3/day). In lieu of its movement, a haunt may teleport to any point it can see within 120 ft.



Aura of Fear. Any living creature that begins its turn or moves within 30 feet of the haunt must make a successful saving throw petrify/polymorph or be stricken with paralytic fear. A creature may end the paralysis with a successful saving throw at the end of following rounds. The haunt prefers not to attack

creatures paralyzed with fear until no victims remain.

Actions

Energy Drain. Creatures struck by the haunt must save v.s. death or be aged 1 year and suffer the effects of exhaustion (-2 to hit and damage, -2 on all strength and dex based feats).

Ethereal Swallow (Recharge 5-6 *). A successful hit causes damage equal to half of remaining hp plus the target is ejected into the ethereal plane or a plane appropriate to its ceation army's pantheon.

*Recharge means that at the begining of each round the haunt rolls roll 1d6. On a result of 5 or 6 it may use the ability again.

Amorous Wight

(Int. 8-10 Average (human) intelligence; AL LE; AC 5; MV 12; HD 4+3; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1-4; SA Energy drain (1 life lvl per hit); SD Hit only by silver or +1 or better magical weapon, unaffected by sleep, charm, hold, poison, or paralyzation; SZ M; ML Elite (14); XP 2,000)

These wights are created nearly identically to regular wights except for being granted the gift of preservation and beauty (CHR 17). They use their unnatural gifts to lure victims within reach and surprise them with their draining touch.

In addition to being a wight, they may cast *charm person*, *friends*, and *minor illusion* once per day innately to lure victims to their grisly death.

The wight chooses the most

realistic scenario to present itself, pretending to be a captive in a tomb, a handsome stranger in distress in the night, or other believable situations which may charm their target.

The wights frequently control lesser undead, zombies, skeletons, and the like as part of their ruse, or keep them hidden nearby should their façade fail.



Shattered Dead

Shattered dead are undead of various types infused with an incendiary surprise. Creating these skeletal creatures takes meticulous preparation and planning by their master, be it a necromancer, wizard, or the like, but the results are very deadly and useful. The raised dead must be a vertebrate with bones capable of being hollowed out and filled with an explosive compound.

The animating master must collect potassium nitrate, sulfur, powdered charcoal, and, of course, skeletal remains to animate. The compound mixture and application of the ingredients is a heavily guarded and dangerous secret that combines exact measurement and a bit of luck. The cost for these supplies is ultimately up to the GM, but the suggested cost in gp is listed below.

The master carefully hollows the thoroughly dried bones of their creation, fills them with the volatile mixture, and then seals the bones with wax or bonemeal glue before animating the corpse. The method of ignition varies but frequently involves a candle wick, fuse, or a plan of immersing the creation in flame

at a critical time. Some shattered dead can even be commanded to douse themselves in flame if the command is simple enough.

The skeletons explode violently when ignited. As if the concussive explosion weren't bad enough, the dried bones create splintered projectiles that impale bystanders. The size of the explosion and damage from projectiles depend on the master's skill at mixing the powder, hollowing out the bones, and the quantity of ingredients available. To add a higher level of devastation to the shattered dead, some malicious necromancers seal and fill their animation's cranial cavity with lamp oil or other flammables that amplify the explosion. Doing so adds time to the project (1–4 hours). Once the shattered dead explodes, it is utterly destroyed.

All shattered dead are immune to sleep, charm, and hold spells. They are resistant to piercing and slashing weapons and cold.

There are three basic levels of shattered undead though resourceful necromancers have certainly created more. The creation of level 2 and 3 shattered undead is more involved and expensive and requires undead masters to typically seek out sturdier

remains to animate, such as large animals or ogres.

Shattered Dead Level 1:

- 8 hours of preparation, ½ lb. explosive mixture before animation. Cost 150 gp.

- They gain the following trait:

Explosive Personality 1. When the undead with this trait reaches 0 hit points and is within 10' of fire, they immediately cause a 20-foot-radius explosion. All targets in this area must make a saving throw v.s. breath weapon. If they fail, they suffer 2d6 fire damage. They take half damage with a successful saving throw.

Shattered Dead Level 2

- 16 hours of preparation, 1 ½ lb. explosive mixture. Cost 450 gp.

- They gain the following trait:

Explosive Personality 2. When the undead with this trait reaches 0 hit points and is within 10' of fire, they immediately cause a 30-foot-radius explosion. All targets in this area must make a saving throw v.s. breath weapon. If they fail, they suffer 3d6 fire damage and are deafened for 3d4 turns and stunned for 2 turns. They take half damage with a successful saving throw.

Shattered Dead Level 3

- 32 hours of preparation, 3 lb. explosive mixture. Cost 900 gp.

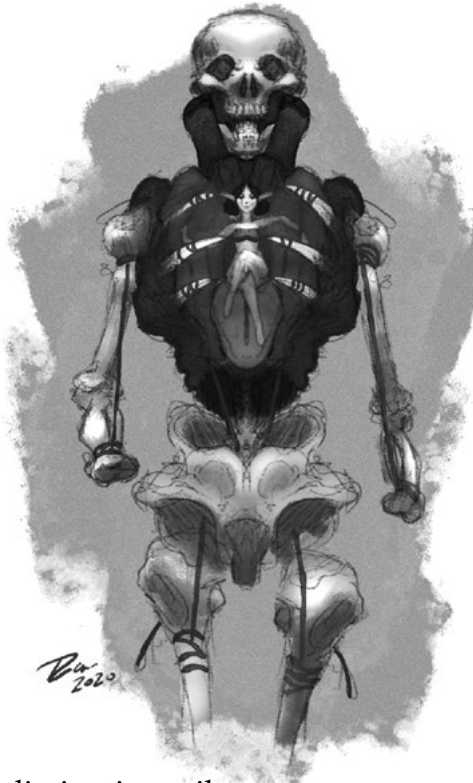
- They gain the following trait:

Explosive Personality 3. When the undead with this trait reaches 0 hit points and is within 10' of fire, they immediately cause a 40-foot radius explosion. All targets in this area must make a saving throw v.s. breath weapon. If they fail, they suffer 4d10 fire damage and are deafened for 2d4 hours and stunned for 6 turns. They take half damage with a successful saving throw.

Necromancer's Carriage

A Necromancer's Carriage requires a skeleton to be animated, usually by a diminutive shaman, hence the name. The ideal carriage is formed from the skeleton of a large human up to a small ogre. The bones are meticulously cleaned of all fetid and rotting material. Occasionally, the ribcage and anatomical structure of the skeleton are altered to accommodate the user or pilot.

The most common creators of these undead conveyances are kobold shamans or other



diminutive evil creatures. Necromancers of similar stature — halflings, fae, goblins, and the like — have created many variations on the creatures for show and battle.

Piloting kobolds frequently festoon their carriages with brightly colored paint, charms, and fabric. The pilot usually fashions a padded seat atop the pelvic arch or in the ribcage of the animated conveyance, connecting to a front support of the sternum or some such place, so they may ride in comfort. While the animated skeleton can be directed with verbal

commands, many prefer rigging handlebars or reins to direct the creation's movement.

Each carriage is different, but they all serve a similar purpose, which is to carry the pilot tirelessly and follow orders to the best of its limited ability. Creatures contained within the carriage are considered under partial cover from the ribcage, and some clever pilots seek armor for their carriages. The passenger is unable to wield a bow or sweeping weapon but may use piercing, small, or thrusting weapons such as darts, blowgun, dagger, rapier, or cast spells from their seat. A carriage may be raised for use by a pilot other than the creator, but the pilot must be present and participate in the ceremonial casting.

Most pilots delight in the chaos of casting spells and taking action from the relative safety of a ribcage while the skeleton shoots with a bow or attacks with a weapon too great for the pilot to wield alone.

Mechanics for the carriage depend on the skeleton being raised and the armor attached to it. An ogrish, ox, horse, or other large skeleton carries more hit points and power than a regular humanoid animation. The

carriage acts as an undead for all gaming purposes; the health and armor class are the most common variants depending on size and equipment. Raising a carriage is not necessarily an evil act, only the most common use.

Once, during an orc march into the darklands, in an act of desperation, pixies agreed that in dire times, grim actions were required to divert the invaders around their forest. The pixies raised a small army of deer, wolf, bear, and moose carriages to ride to the edge of their beloved forest in an effort to divert the orcs. The orcs were initially amused by the gayly decorated monstrosities that met them until the fae creatures began charming members of the army to ride their carriages and bark commands at troops while they cast spells from the safety of the bones. Not only was the forest saved, but the march was completely disbanded. The pixies later arranged the bones to rest in a most honored and protected grove deep in the forest.

NEW ITEMS

Rings for the Undead

by Dr. B. Dennis Sustare

Here is an assortment of magical rings appropriate for use by the undead. Caution to GM: may cause unbalance in the dungeon.

Ring of Protection Against Turning - Grants the undead advantage and +4 to saving throws versus Turn Undead. Very popular with skeletons but condemned by the church.

Ring of Attract Brains - As a bonus action, the undead causes the creature with the highest Intelligence within 30 feet to make a saving throw v.s. spell or immediately move 10 feet towards the undead. Zombies love these rings, wizards, not so much.

Fleshrot Cafe Ring - Occasionally, a ghoul discovers they like the taste of rotting flesh even better than that of living flesh. This ring provides that delightful flavor by making all meat taste like it has been maggot food for some time. It has no effect on plant food and, thus, makes a poor gift for a vegan.

Ring of Human Smell - For the ghast that wants to partake in



human social gatherings, this ring reduces its odor to merely being no worse than a sweaty athlete (and no better). The ring is often cursed and, thus, dangerous for a bard to try on since it also cancels the effects of perfumes.

Magic Shadow Ring – Somewhat specialized, this ring allows a shadow to simulate the form of any desired animal. Popular for entertaining undead children.

SPF 1000 Ring – Allows undead such as wights to operate in full daylight without ill effect. It removes *Sunlight Sensitivity* from any undead type creature.

Can also be used by the living to prevent sunburn. Prolonged use results in vitamin D deficiency.

Finger Extension Ring – Permits the wearer to extend the finger bearing the ring up to twenty feet, thus making it possible to touch something, or someone, a good distance away. Beloved by wraiths, the ring grants a range of 20 feet to melee attacks of the undead bearer.

SPECTRE Ring – Identifies the owner as a member of the Special Executive for Counterintelligence, Terrorism, Revenge, and Extortion. Probably no particular advantage for the undead, unless wanting to appear in a Bond film.

Babyfying Ring – When worn by a ghost, it acts as the reverse of their normal rapid aging effect of a touch, by instantly reducing the target's age by 50%. Thus, a 20-year-old adventurer would suddenly become just 10. Not too drastic an effect on long-lived dwarves, but then, neither is rapid aging. Repeated touches stack, removing 50% of what is left. Ghosts are amused by babies.

Ring of Fire Resistance – A common magical ring, but especially prized by mummies.

Ring of Voice Amplification –

Makes even the slightest whisper surprisingly loud. Try it out on your favorite banshee to amplify their shriek.

Ring of Protection from

Splinters – Gives total protection from sharp pieces of wood penetrating the body. Stakes to the chest just make vampires giggle. This ring grants an undead creature immunity to wooden weapons or wood-based attacks.

Finally, there are no special rings for liches. A lich can pretty much design and construct any type of ring imaginable since they are very smart and have plenty of time on their hands. So, make up any ring you can think of and give it to your favorite lich.

Corpse Plow

John Larson

This item appears to be an ordinary plow with a blackened iron blade and hardwood handles. The plow weighs 200 pounds and is designed to be pulled behind a draft animal. The blade is exceptionally sharp and can move through the most difficult soil, leaving wide furrows in its wake.

Created by a notable cleric to disinter bodies from a large necropolis as part of a reprioritization project, when the apparatus passed within 5 ft. of a buried body, the corpse would rise to the surface as if it had been dug up by more traditional means. From there, the Corpse Plow has since been infused with dark necromantic magic to raise the dead and animate them as zombies (as per the *Monster Manual*).

One notable use of the Corpse Plow was by a Cleric of Death who tilled the soil of an ancient battlefield and composed a small army of loyal zombie warriors.

When hitched behind a horse or similar draft animal, the Corpse Plow is capable of digging up and animating one corpse every other round. If the wielder of the Corpse Plow is of an evil alignment, the resultant zombies become obedient servants. If not, the zombies will attack any living creatures.

Death Masque

John Larson

This is a ceramic mask that fully covers the face and is held in place by silk ribbons. The mask is of an androgynous human face

with a neutral expression. When placed on the face, the wearer is instantly transformed as per the *alter self* spell, but every time it is worn, there is a 1 in 6 chance the curse of the Death Masque will manifest — the magic of the mask creates the illusion that the wearer is a member of the undead. Additionally, the wearer is susceptible to the *detect undead* and *control undead* spells. The Death Masque can only be removed by a *remove curse* spell.

Mourner's Tears

John Larson

This silvery draught was created to induce crying during burial ceremonies. In its optimum concentration, the Mourner's Tears causes the imbiber to cry uncontrollably for 1d6 rounds and act with advantage on skills requiring the appearance of sadness, lamentation, grief, and the like. The Mourner's Tears can be diluted with commonly imbibed beverages to affect a mass number of people, but with a lesser effect. Instead of crying uncontrollably, those who drink the diluted potion are merely compelled to tear up and do not gain the advantage as a full dose does.

Fiddle of the Funeral March

John Larson

This well-worn violin operates as the mundane version of the same except when it is played in conjunction with a funeral procession, any creature within 30 feet of the curious dirge must make a saving throw v.s. spell or be compelled to join the mourners so long as the music plays. If the Fiddle of the Funeral March is played by a bard, the range increases to 60 feet.



FIGHT LIKE A GHOUL (OR GHAST)

Getting the Most from Your Monster and Bridging the Edition Gap
by Alan McCoy



Ghouls and their more powerful brethren, ghastrs, are a classic pairing that has been part of the game since its beginning. As it is almost unheard of for ghouls to be encountered without ghastrs, both are going to be considered here.

These are undead created specifically by the action of the Demon Lord Orcus. Legend has it that an elven worshiper of Orcus turned against his people and feasted on elven flesh to honor his demonic prince. As a reward, Orcus awarded this loathsome elf with undead status. Since this foul event, Orcus has taken a passing interest in the destruction and mayhem caused by his creations. Orcus sometimes allows his demonic servants to utilize both ghouls and ghastrs as slaves. It is believed that if a group of ghouls finds itself without a ghastr to guide it, one of their number will be elevated to the status of ghastr by the will of Orcus.

One of the most terrible abilities of the ghastr is the fact that their touch can cause humans and demi-humans, except for elves, to become paralyzed. A target so incapacitated can quickly become overwhelmed and killed. Victims slain by a ghastr will soon rise as an undead ghastr themselves unless proper

blessings are done to ensure this is prevented.

The ghastr is far more than a more powerful ghastr, and in any group that includes ghouls, they will dominate their lesser kin. Ghastrs exude a carrion's stench. This powerful miasma causes retching and nausea unless the living somehow avoids the effect, usually a saving throw. Their paralytic touch is more powerful and may affect elves as well. The older edition ghastr has one weakness that their lesser kin did not have, cold iron. This effect was dropped in 5e, but these weapons would cause double normal damage to ghastrs, and adding this small detail can make an interesting encounter in a crypt with these creatures.

As undead, both ghouls and ghastrs are susceptible to being turned or destroyed by clerics. Magic circles of protection may keep ghouls at bay but are ineffective against ghastrs unless the circle is fortified with cold iron. In 5e, the ghastr's presence is so commanding that all ghouls within 30' of the creature save against turning with advantage (+3 average). This is a very powerful characteristic that can be exploited by the GM to challenge the heroes.

Roleplay

While these creatures rarely, if ever, communicate with the living, ghosts can speak the languages that it knew in life. If they do speak, it is with a raspy, whispering voice which is the vocal equivalent of fingernails scraping down a chalkboard.

These undead need to consume living flesh to maintain their unlife. Their short-term goals are to feed themselves to survive. Corpse flesh is worthless to them, so they are unlikely to engage in wanton slaughter, preferring to maintain the food supply.

Ghouls are cunning; aware that elves are immune, they overwhelm by numbers and multiple attacks to slay them. If a ghost is present, they make great efforts to paralyze an elf as their flesh is especially satisfying to their hunger.

As stated, ghosts are intelligent. If they observe defensive measures that they can defeat, they will do their best to do so.

Example: Clerics are primary targets so as to neutralize the turning ability. Ghosts move forward to disrupt magic circles of protection to allow ghouls to attack.

Combat

If a ghost is present in an attacking group, they move close enough to allow their stench aura to weaken their foes and dispense their inspirational resistance to turning, adjusting their position when needed to provide the most possible coverage to hinder their victims and empower their minions.

Once a target is paralyzed, the group usually grabs up their prey to retreat, returning to their lair to feast. A victim must be paralyzed before feeding as these undead monsters need living flesh. Of course, this means if you are taken by a pack of these undead, they eat you while you are alive and still conscious to witness the act. Thankfully, a group typically only needs to feed once per day. Unfortunately, this means that once these creatures detect a group of living creatures, they stalk that group, waiting for an opportune moment to take another victim.

A ghost-led band always has an escape route planned which might include traps. They are especially fond of poison gas and other toxic attacks since the dead don't need to breathe.

UNUSUAL ZOMBIES TABLE

By Robert Nemeth aka NOLAbert



Notes from the Worker Goblin:

I am always a fan of departing from the standard books everyone has read. "You see a group of 5 zombies," doesn't sound very terrifying anymore. "Rotting fetid corpses rise from the floor, some ejecting tentacles through their flesh with the sounds of snapping bones," sounds like something that will get a player's attention.

Combining creature abilities and adding small adjustments can make for some great play. Robert Nemeth has provided us with a table to replace some standard ...yawwn... zombie encounters in our adventures.

2d6

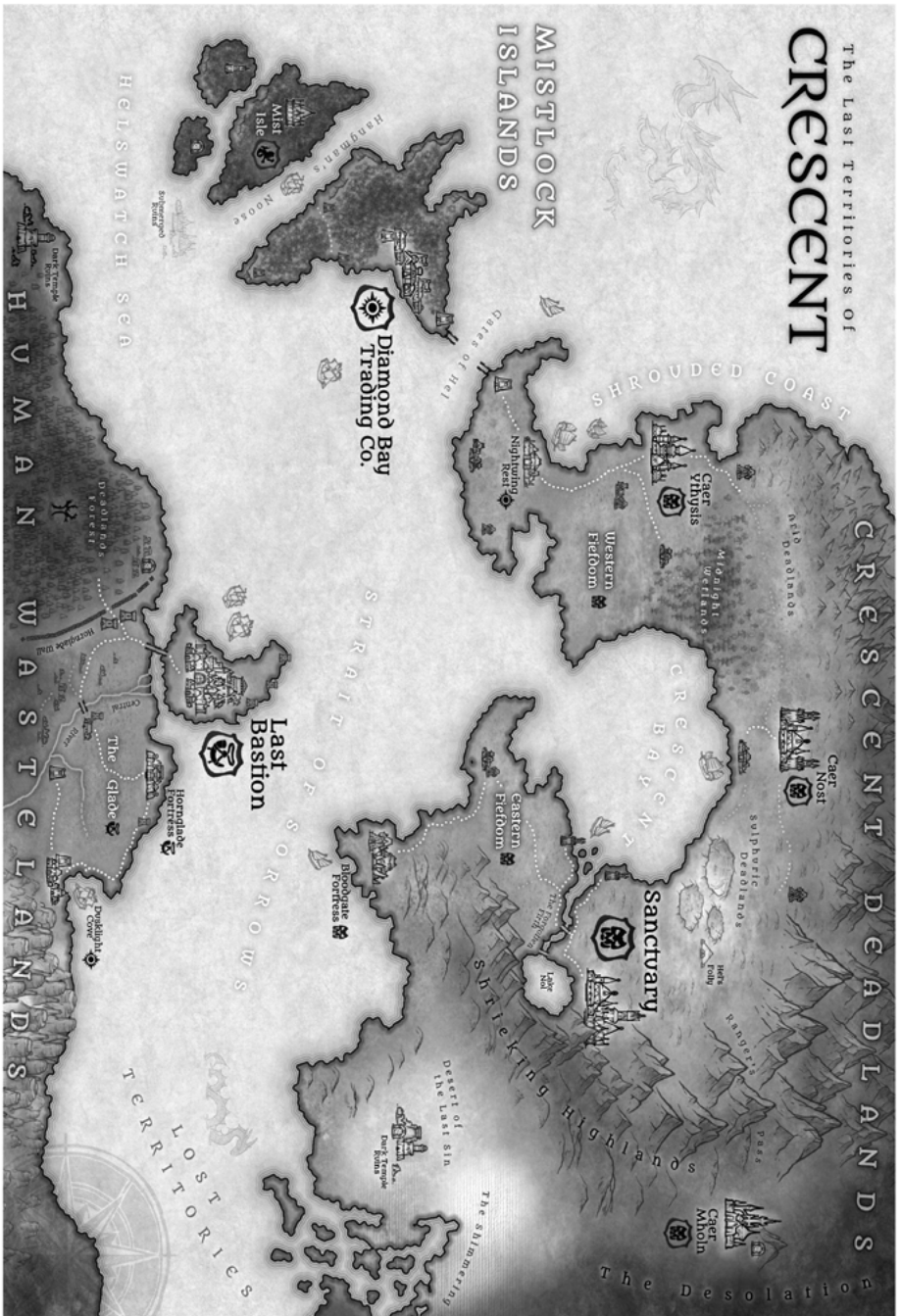
Unusual Zombies

- Corpse Plant: Zombies are animated like puppets from a giant, 10-foot-tall plant that sends out 2d6 feelers to animate the corpses of sacrifices provided by a death cult. The stench of death fills the area but is particularly potent near the plant, requiring a saving throw v.s. death or be incapacitated. Use the vine blight stats except it is a large plant (like a weaker version of the corpse flower from M's Tome of Foes).
- 2
- Carrion Crows: 2d6 + 2 zombified kenku. They have a taste for living flesh and decorate their nests with the skulls of victims.
- 3

- 4 Deadhead: Zombie bard that croaks out a discordant melody as a bonus action. All who can hear must make a successful saving throw v.s. petri / poly or take 2d4 psychic damage.
- 5 Death's Head: A swarm of moths (treat as swarm of wasps for stats) erupts from the zombie when reduced to 0 hp and attacks the nearest PC. Although it doesn't inflict damage, the swarm provides aid to remaining zombies, giving +3 bonus to hit.
- 6 Death Throes: When reduced to 0 hp, the zombie makes an extra attack as reaction against a random creature in melee range.
- 7 Cannibal Corpse: 2d8 + 1 zombies. Replace regular attack with bite attack for 1d4 + 1 piercing damage. Zombies regain hp equal to damage caused.
- 8 Putreruption: When reduced to 0 hp or on receiving a critical hit, the zombie explodes, spewing gore on all creatures within 10'. Creatures need to make a saving throw v.s. poison or be poisoned for 1 minute.
- 9 The Little Death: Instead of a regular attack, can grapple (escape STR check), and the target must make a successful saving throw vs death or be choked unconscious for 1 minute.
- 10 Death Grell: Zombified grell. Tentacles do necrotic damage plus saving throw v.s. paralyzation or be paralyzed for 1 minute.
- 11 Zombae: Formerly suitors or courtesans in life, now the undead! Besides their standard attack, can give one last caress for a saving throw v.s. spell or the target becomes charmed for 1 minute.
- 12 Zomboid: Zombies are actually androids. Zomboids can shoot hands for ranged attacks (range 20/60). Any successful piercing or slashing attacks against zomboids causes 1d4 lightning damage to the attacker.

THE LAST TERRITORIES OF CRESCENT

By Mari Black – Twitter @LochNessRaven



A note from the Goblin Laborer.

Mari was kind enough to allow us a premiere sneak peek of her world in this issue. Over the years, I have marveled at her handmade manuscript illuminations and accomplishments in academia. Her world is one of post-cataclysmic undead survival. I can only imagine how dark and utterly fun her full world will be. To make sense of this short glimpse, she has opted to use Fail Squad Games' Lands of Lunacy as a portal in and make the area of the map a realm in the lands. I am honored to be so connected to such a frightful world and have it added to this issue.

CRESCENT

"When the last bastion in the south falls and the dead spill across the broken shores, those who remain will weep in sorrow, not for the ones who went before but for those who must still endure."

~ the Last Curse of Ivoreth Hel

The Last Territories of Crescent represent all that is left of a once-powerful and ancient empire. Separated from a nameless ruined continent, its inhabitants are largely isolated from any contact outside their borders. Each Territory is segregated geographically by water, and politically by factions which balance between a reluctant ceasefire and total annihilation.

History

Over 1,000 years ago, the diverse and beautiful Empire of Crescent fell when a cataclysmic event tore the continent apart. The common histories say a sudden volcanic eruption triggered a devastating seismic reaction, resulting in a craterous landscape and the creation of the Strait of Sorrows.

The truth of this legend, along with the ancient libraries and most of the Kingdom's populace, has been long lost. Only a few records of this time remain, secreted away in the bowels of the Mist Isle temple; what is not commonly known is that the explosion was caused by the unstable reaction of dark magics.

Soon after, the first signs of The Desolation began spreading from the north. A necrotic

poison spread through the earth, and all that died from its toxins arose as undead abominations. The remaining descendants of the cataclysmic survivors clung desperately to survival. Plagued by ravaging undead hordes in the North and slow starvation in the South, few of the living inhabitants of Crescent realized that all contact outside their borders had ceased for many years.

Then the Vampyrism emerged. Out of the chaotic ashes, the elusive vampiric lords allied with the last orc raiders and seized control of the northern lands, reigning in the undead hordes and ruling their new territory with an iron fist. In exchange for their survival, the Vampyrism enforced the labor of all remaining living settlements north of the strait, bringing prosperity to the last remaining regions unspoiled by the chaotic necrotic blight.

Over the centuries, the Vampyrism has attempted many times to bring the Hornglade Free State under their alliance but have yet to succeed. Now, a bitter truce exists between the southern hinterlands and the northern deadlands, mediated by a new political power in the western isles as the Diamond Bay Trading Company uses its

neutral position to manipulate both sides. Meanwhile, The Desolation continues to spread, threatening the existence of those in its wake, casting a dark shadow over the future of all living creatures in Crescent.

Territories

Crescent Deadlands – Capital city: Sanctuary

The northern territory known as the Crescent Deadlands is controlled by the Vampyrism, an alliance of vampiric lords, wraiths, orc raiders, and their respective armies. It is unknown how many vampire lords exist, only that each belongs to the Veritas Vitae, a shadow court of powerful vampires who vie for prestige against each other. Despite this rivalry, the Vitae seem to have a strong common purpose and collectively rule the Crescent Deadlands with precision.

Human Wastelands – Capital city: Last Bastion

The southern territory known as the Human Wastelands is a misnomer as it is the home for many different living races. Once the human capital city-state, ancient Hornglade spanned for many miles before the appearance of the Deadlands

Forest ravaged the land. Very little of what remains now is habitable, and most of the living population reside in either the capital or the grasslands west of the Central River.

Mistlock Islands – Capital city: Diamond Bay

The four islands at the mouth of the Strait of Sorrows effectively control the passageway from Crescent into the uncharted oceans beyond. Protected by craggy cliffs and dense, verdant jungles, the Mistlock Islands seem to be frozen in time and are the last landmasses to retain the lush biodiversity that was prevalent before the fall of the Crescent Kingdom. Jointly controlled by the Diamond Bay Trading Company and the secretive Mistlock, the interiors of the islands are an enigma to all but those who reside there.

The Last Territories of Crescent: 2–5 Players

Adventure Launch

One night, a large, black tree dominates your dreams. Its twisted, leafless branches drip a toxic red sap, and the ground fizzes where the droplets fall. You find yourself surrounded by strangers, their features

shrouded and masked. One figure stands apart from the crowd studying the tree fervently. A gaping crack appears between the roots of the hideous growth, and a dark mirror forms within the space.

The lone figure throws their hood back to reveal the face of an elven woman, her expression twisted in sorrow. As she reaches out towards the mirror, you begin to run, but your feet slip in the acidic ooze that surrounds the tree. You try to scream but you choke on miasmic air and can't force a sound to escape your throat.

Watching helplessly, elven fingertips brush the mirror. She glances over her shoulder, noticing you for the first time. When your eyes meet, she whispers a single word:

“Crescent,” then vanishes, along with the cloaked strangers and the mirror. The black tree shivers silently.

Almost a year after the dream, you arrive at the temple ruins where you believe the haunting, toxic tree is located. It took months of searching and you've discovered that over time, entire parties have gone missing while in pursuit of a rare portal among the roots of a ghastly monument.

Slowly, you've been able to track down other missing adventurers and retrace their steps, but you know it must be here. During your search, you discover there were others, like you, who had similar nightmares. You've all agreed to meet here, at this abandoned place, to discover what happened to the people who disappeared.

Overarching plot: The players undertake to find the missing adventurers and previously located one part each of the formula that can unlock the Portals. Unbeknownst to them, the formulae are incomplete and the magic backfires, damaging the Portal and trapping them in the world of Crescent.

GM notes: Crescent was not only split off from the old continent during the massive explosion but from the plane of reality. The Territories now sit in a demiplane, existing in a pocket of their own reality separated by a semipermeable planar membrane. Only the Mistlock, a mysterious race who exist in another reality, or those who can fully activate and control the dark Portals, can move between the worlds.

Traveling through a damaged Portal has consequences. When players cross to Crescent, they should roll for a random

permanent Curse or Affliction (for Lands of Lunacy adventures from Fail Squad Games).

Major NPC: Ivoreth Hel

A frightful historic figure and leader of the now-extinct elven nation, Ivoreth Hel was a visionary general and mage. Tragically, her obsession with accumulating magical and political power no matter the cost directly resulted in the loss of the elven race and the magical split from the ancient Empire. Believed long dead, Ivoreth's fate is not so fortunate: she still wanders Crescent, sustained by unstable magics as a wraith-like lich, frightfully intelligent and a true embodiment of Neutral Evil necromancy. Long ago, Ivoreth discovered a weakness in the demiplane's membrane and lured unwary travelers from other worlds by manipulating their dreams. She captured the first of these visitors, twisting them into the vampire lords, pulling their strings from the deepest shadows even a millennium later. Ivoreth will occasionally appear to the players in random locations with intentions of assisting their quests in return for their help in stemming the growth of The Desolation; in truth, she seeks a means to fully reactivate the Portals and escape her

demiplane prison into a new reality she can conquer and exploit.

Adventure Springboards:

- At the annual Festival of Markets in Dusklight Cove, a surprise attack by the orcish Bloodgate Raiders decimates the port settlement. Survivors from the raid claimed to have seen the Bloodgate Captain, a brutal orog necromancer, hauling live captives onto his flagship before withdrawing.
- A strange fungus has been spreading out of the Midnight Wetlands and devastating nearby settlements. When burst, the deadly spores kill and infest their hosts, reanimating the corpses into shambling mushroom-covered zombies that continue to spread the fungus into populated areas.
- A gnomish archaeologist is hiring mercenaries for an expedition to the Desert of the Last Sin. Previous attempts to reach the dark temple have been strangely thwarted by a band of centaurs who warn that the ruins are home to something far more sinister than the undead harpies nesting there.
- An elven Death Knight with an undead army has laid siege to Last Bastion, claiming vengeance against the betrayal of the ancient leaders of Hornglade. While the Elder Council denies its accusations, the Death Knight alludes to a dark secret buried in the forgotten necropolis under the city's streets.
- A banshee is attacking boats and villages on the shores of Lake Nol. No one knows why she's suddenly awakened from centuries of dormancy as none survive hearing her lament.
- In a dark tavern in the neutral city of Nightwing Rest, a Revenant approaches you with a strange request to assist them in their fight against the wraith lord of Caer Nost. The Revenant promises a sizable reward which includes a rare map of safe passages through the northern Deadlands.
- As your reputation spreads, for better or for worse, your party finally catches the attention of the Veritas Vitae. You are cordially invited to a masquerade ball, but whether you'll be the guests of honor or the main course remains to be seen.



THE TEMPLE OF THE FOREST BLIGHT

Lloyd Metcalf - Worker Goblin

What follows is a setting springboard. It's a piece of a project in the works from Fail Squad Games. We write and create storylines from a piece of inspiration that can easily be evolved into gaming material, adventures, and even entire campaigns or worlds. The intent is to provide enough of a story, background, and information to fire a GM's imagination and spark unique and memorable adventures for all at the table. The following is one take on one piece of art that can easily be made into a number of adventures in *The Forest Blight*.

Introduction

At the heart of an expansive forest, a mysterious desert is slowly spreading to swallow up the verdant paradise. The desert is currently thirty miles across with nothing but sand and open sky above. Once-grand trees crumble and die at the perimeter, leaving only lifeless sand and dunes. No trees or structures stand on the horizon, and no water finds purchase on the ground. The desert is a near perfectly round

scar on the face of the land. Sun-bleached animated skeletons of various types wander through the sweltering sands, hating and hunting the living. The wandering bones of the dead are bound to the desert, never leave it, and seem to be tormented by it at the same time. It is unknown how many wander the sands or lie in wait beneath it. The bones of horses, elk, humans and their kin, and even empty insectoid exoskeletons have been seen emerging from the sands. Storms and rain may travel across the land to feed surrounding forests, but clouds never form above this blight. Moist air evaporates at the border or circumvents the sands. There may be no hope for the forest or any living souls beyond if something isn't done to contain *The Forest Blight*.

At the exact center of the desert, the remnants of a hundreds-year-old structure stands, barely holding its form. A few scrubby briars and brush cling to life amid the nooks and crannies of the carved stones. A single great tree runs its trunk and roots around the skull of a titan that guards a crumbling entrance to some unknown underground

ruin. Nothing about this place feels natural or right. Adventure calls from within the ruins, and the fate of all living things you know may be hanging in the balance.

History

The remnants amid The Forest Blight were once a grand temple to Gaia, the Earth Goddess. The glorious temple was an elaborate interconnection of subterranean and overground beauty that housed the highest druidic circles of the land. The structure perfectly blended nature and design for those in residence. Small naturalist hamlets emerged nearby, and the elves claimed the forest as their own, vowing to protect the druidic circles and the temple. For generations, the forest was the pride of the elven nation and sought out by druids, unicorns, and other wondrous creatures for counsel of the masters and to behold the natural wonder.

The highest ruling druids, a pair of identical twins, passed away quietly, leaving the temple and its worshippers in grief and temporarily weakened. Kataigida was a wicked titan that lived among barren mountains, corrupted by dark

gods and powers who sought to destroy the temple and disrupt the elven nation that was constantly barring malicious ambitions. When Kataigida learned of the passing of the twins, he sent agents to poison the forest waters and called to his hill giant loyalists to raid the forest. They cut a swath of destruction to the temple where Kataigida prepared to summon a dark power to nullify the temple and fortify his army.

The portal opened, and the elder druids rained down all their power to thwart Kataigida's spells. The battle raged around them with hill giants, orcs, goblins, and worse cleaving into elves, men, and good creatures of the wild. It is said the forest itself rose to oppose Kataigida but was burned back with searing heat from the heart of the portal.

In an act of desperation, the daughter of the high druid circle of earth twin, Kelendra, leapt from the temple tower onto the belt of the titan. There she cut free a great **bag of holding** and, while falling, guided the giant satchel toward the gate from which Kataigida was summoning his dark power. Like a human-sized flying squirrel, she screamed her final prayer to Gaia, pulling back the opening

and inverting the sack as she entered the portal.

The resulting explosion killed Kataigida, halted the armies, and engulfed the strength of the temple, the dark summoning, and, unfortunately, the heart of the forest and elven nation. Balance was restored, but at a great price of destruction to everything. It was not a victory of good or evil, it was a victory of balance.

The result was a scorched forest. However, instead of healing as expected, the blight remained. Dark creatures inhabited the underground places of the old temple and the ruins of the hamlets. Elven settlements turned to dust or became strange pockets of twisted magic for the wicked creatures that took over.

The desert so remained. The creatures remained bound to the sands and the forest grew around it. The sands, however, crept forward. Those attempting to stop it found themselves victims of the mystical remnants.

The Titan Kataigida fell, scorched to death upon an entry into a portion of the underground tunnels of the temple. In a final act of dominance, a great tree grew in symbolic restraint of the

titan, forever binding his will in humility.

Adventure Info

The sands approaching the temple can be populated with any number of undead that are not sensitive to sunlight. Great elk, bear, moose, and other bestial skeletons pose a great challenge for adventurers, especially when they are lying dormant, hidden in the sand. Cattle and other bones simply lying in the desert, non-animated, make entertaining encounters as PCs are untrusting of anything non-living.

The footings of elven buildings, and perhaps even structural remains, provide interesting highly magical places to investigate. Hints of the past glory of the temple and druidic residents may be discovered in writings, petroglyphs, or magical remains. The dark power of the portal, however, may be the source for many disturbing undead: banshees, wights, ghouls, and worse, all in the form of a fallen elven civilization.

Other humanoid worshipper remains and altars to Gaia are found closer to the temple. Many of these would also be animated

or corrupted by the dark magic of the portal collision. Numerous small “dungeons” would be available as the underground labyrinth of the temple would have been under the feet of the closest worshippers.

The temple houses the undead anti-druidic circle “Nekros Kyklos”. A circle that draws its power from the destruction of living things. Within the temple, the circle employs shadows, ghouls, and wights. The ghost of a former druid hidden in the catacombs aids the party, offers them a chance to rest, and describes how the circle became dark and twisted.

Each druid of the circle may be based on a wraith with (anti) druidic spells up to level 3, including shapeshifting abilities. These added powers contribute to a higher CR and more XP. The head of the Nekros Kyklos could be based on a mummy lord or something a little less deadly depending on your party’s levels.

Numerous “dungeons” and overland adventures may exist in this setting. The defeat of each anti-druid weakens the power of evil on the land and regains a piece of the forest. Defeating the high anti-druid seals the portal, hidden deep underground,

forever. This allows the forest to reclaim the land and halt the spread of the desert.

Failure to address the issue could result in a world similar to a previously published canon work feature a dark sun and desert post-apocalyptic setting.

Any number of short one-shot adventures and dungeons may be tied together under this campaign umbrella. Keeping the desert high magic and with an undead presence will maintain the feel and theme of all sessions.



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address 25 CPW 3B, NY, NY 10023
telephone (917) 364-0446

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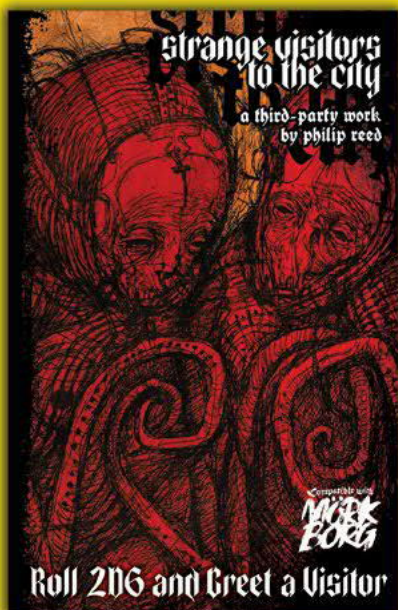
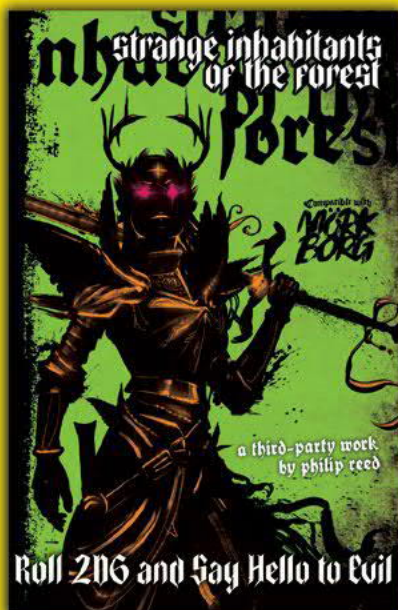
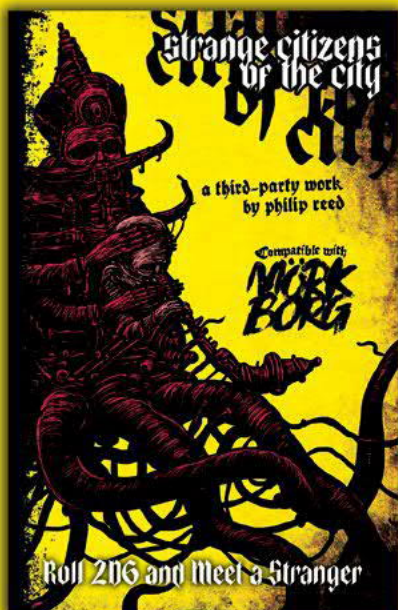


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