Lair of the Mist Men

SM-1

A LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE

BY JON MARR

Compatible With DCC RPG

Purple Sorcerer Games

Lair of the Mist Men

A Level 1 DCC RPG Adventure

Introduction

The day has come when you can finally confront an enemy previously cloaked in mist, hidden and impervious to retaliation. For the past 3 months, strange creatures known as Mist Men have plagued your village and roads, striking without warning or apparent purpose, only to vanish into the mists from whence they came. After their latest raid, however, they left something behind: a talisman found by a farm boy that will guide you to their hidden lair. Finally, questions will be answered, and revenge will be yours to savor!

Overview

Lair of the Mist Men is a short adventure designed to be run in a session or two for 6-8 1st-level characters. Judges can flesh out the adventure by adding encounters in the swamp leading to the lair. In addition, the initial battle with the Mist Men found in **The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk** has been reproduced in **Appendix B** for those who wish to introduce the Mist Men to their campaign without also including Slither's End and its environs.

This adventure respects your initiative. If you think an encounter is too easy, increase the challenge! Too difficult? Just drop the number of foes. If a particular enemy doesn't fit in your campaign, replace them with a logical substitute with the same stats. Always bend the text to your vision!

The Sunken City

For centuries the Great City has shifted north in hops and spurts as the encroaching swamp swallowed the southern extents of the city. The ruins now stretch south for nearly 30 miles, with endless sunken avenues, courts and towers, and wide stretches of open swamp. The Lair of the Mist Men is located in the heart of the swamp, miles from civilization. For more information about the Sunken City, check out adventure **SC-1, Perils of the Sunken City and SC-2, The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk!** (Where we first encounter the Mist Men.)

Motivation

It's assumed that the party of adventures is seeking the Lair of the Mist Men to redress the raids that have plagued the surrounding villages for months. (Motivated either out of a sense of duty or acting as hired swords.)

Alternately players might be on the trail of strange magics rumored to be in the possession of these new enemies, and have paid the guide to lead them through the swamp.

Adventure Flow

After trekking through a fetid swamp, players will arrive at a large stone massif rising from the mire. They will need to defeat a band of Greyfolk and their outraged shaman, primitive swamp-dwellers who hold the rock (and its mystical cave) sacred. Players will then have to climb the treacherous path that encircles the massif, surviving an ambush by boulder-dropping Mist Men.

Once inside the cave, the true fun begins. Players will pass though mystical gates to move between chambers of the Mist Men lair, possibly rescuing captured villagers and gaining valuable information. They will battle alien creatures and experience reality-bending environments, all the while struggling to maintain a grip on their sanity as they move closer to the core of the Lair. Finally, at the heart of the Lair, they will uncover the true cause of the Mist Men's continuing presence, and encounter a deadly new foe that might plague the characters for years to come!

Getting to the Lair

To this point, it has proved impossible for anyone to track the Mist Men back to their base of operation. They travel too quickly, their tracks vanishing within minutes in the roiling black mist that seems to follow their every move, and they leave behind no clues.

The morning after the most recent attack on a remote farm, a farm lad made a startling discovery: one of the Mist Men weapons (a featureless silver tube) remained behind in the tall grass, emitting a keening whine just above the threshold of hearing. **Mingus**, a legendary local trapper, soon discovered that rather than burning the hand of all who attempted to grasp it, this particular tube was cool to the touch. When Mingus orientated the tube north-northwest, he noticed the whine cut out. Marching five miles north on the edge of the swamp to triangulate the angle where the sound cut off, the wily veteran guessed immediately where the two lines would cross: **Korik's Heart**: a massive rock resting twenty miles distant in the heart of the swamp. He will lead the party to this place, but at great risk, for the rock is sacred to the primitive folks of the swamp, and they have been known to feast on intruders!

Credits

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At the Sacred Rock

Player Introduction

After two days slogging though the mire, it seems there is no part of you that isn't covered in clinging muck. Your boots, pack, cloak: all reek with the odor of the swamp. As you look about, the eyes of your compatriots peer back from faces stained brown by drying mud and runnels of filthy sweat. The swamp mist that has been your constant companion still surrounds you, but you now sense a subtle change: a chillness wholly foreign to the fetid swamp brushes your skin, and your hairs (those still free of the muck) rise as if bathed in some strange energy.

"We're here," mutters old Mingus, your guide, checking the strange rod he carries one final time. Pointing up into the mists, he smiles grimly. "I believe that to be the fell place you seek..."

"What madness is this?" You wonder. As you stare ahead, you can barely detect a dark mass rising from the miasma of the swamp, but it is soon obscured by the mist, the ever present mist...

"Touch the rod, fool," your guide barks, "I've told you it is the key to this strange magic." As you place your hand on the cool metal of the rod, to your amazement the mist seems to peel back like curtains caught in the wind, and the lair of your prey is revealed for the first time: a towering stone massif rising from the swamp, a precarious path encircling it as it climbs. Near the top, a cave reaches into the heart of the stone. But that is not all: above the cave bizarre spheres of —brick?— seem to erupt from the stone like gigantic boils, coursing with some strange energy! Your guide is correct, this place can only be the Lair of the Mist Men!

Korik's Heart: The Sacred Rock

The stone massif called Korik's Rock rises out of the swamp as a solitary sentinel, dominating the land for miles around. In the best of times it is obscured by the haze of the mire, but since the arrival of the Mist Men it is perpetually cloaked in an uncanny clinging mist. It is a place of tremendous eldritch power: a soft spot between planes and a nexus of ever-replenished arcane energy. For generations without number, cultures have risen and fallen within its shadow. But in all ages the place has been considered sacred by shamans and thaumaturges of every ilk.

A thin path climbs the rock, circling about it twice before arriving at a cave that has long been the center place of mystical activity. It is a habitation of visions and dark rituals, and is now the entrance to the Mist Men's lair.

Before the arrival of the Mist Men, the guardians of the rock consisted of a rabble of loosely connected clans known collectively as the **Greyfolk**. Once great builders and sorcerers, the Greyfolk shattered their culture centuries past in a terrible arcane war. The survivors eke out a meager existence in the swamp, literally preying on the more civilized folk who live near the edge of the swamp. The arrival of a new enemy has further damaged their precarious existence, and they've suffered many casualties at the hands of foes they cannot begin to understand or combat.

Their leader, the Greyfolk shaman **Elock-tad** is desperate to maintain the confidence of his beleaguered followers. The arrival of the party is a perfect opportunity to strike at a foe his minions can comprehend, and perhaps overwhelm. A round of ritual sacrifices might regain the favor of his dark gods, granting him the power to drive out those who have desecrated the Sacred Rock!

Fury of the Greyfolk

As the party approaches the rock, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the towering rock, your guide steps aside to let you pass. "I must return to the village with confirmation of this location, this secret cannot die with us. With luck, we will cross paths on your return. Oh, and remember, keep your eyes open for Greyfolk. They do not take kindly to strangers, and rumors have it that they hold this part of the swamp sacred."

Bidding farewell, you move forward, the ground rising as you approach a tangle of low twisted willow trees. A thin path lined with tree stumps leads to a stone megalith that appears to grant access to the tangle.

When the party enters the clearing, read or paraphrase the following:

You quickly emerge into a large clearing. On the far side of the open space the path continues up the side of the massif. It appears a crude path has been carved into the rock, climbing into the mist. In the center of the clearing, a large stone table stained dark crimson squats half buried in the turf.

The calls of the swamp have increased in intensity as you have moved toward the rock, until even the former shop-dwellers of the party can tell that something is terribly wrong. Suddenly the fierce calls cease, and a single guttural voice splits the silence:

"Blassimers! Descrators! You spoil the Between Place! We will clean Ki-Re-Raknet! You will be cut out!"

With this cry, a swarm of shapes suddenly erupt from the surrounding bramble: tall mud-covered men with stringy grey hair waving short stabbing spears!

Greyfolk Warriors (10): Init 0; Atk spear +1 (1d6); AC 11; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref +1, Will 0; AL C.

Elock-tad the Greyfolk Shaman: Init +2; Atk spear +1 melee (1d6+1) or Curse of the Rock +2 ranged (1d6 and DC 12 Will save or confusion 1d4 rounds, 30' range) AC 12; HP 11; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref +1, Will +3; AL C.

(Confused characters roll a d4 for their action: 1) Attack nearest creature while shrieking in strange tongue. 2) Move away from combat at half speed. 3) Gaze up at the rock. 4) Act normally.)

Elock-tad will hang back shouting curses while his warriors take the fight to the party. If he or six of the warriors are slain, the remainder will flee into the swamp, leaving behind 1d6 crude but serviceable spears. If the Shaman escapes, he will attempt to rally more warriors to the cause and can be used to bedevil the party on their return journey.

The stone table is covered in dried blood. Bones, human and otherwise, clog the underbrush surrounding the clearing. If the party searches for any length of time the character with the highest luck discovers a silver torq worth 30 gp lost amidst the detritus.

Fury of the Greyfolk

The Lair of the Mist Men

Overview

Since their arrival three months past, the Mist Men have proven a deadly threat to all who live within range of their predations. But none of their actions (at least originally) were motivated by malice: they are simply a colony of castaways trapped in a reality they are struggling to comprehend. If not bound to the Sacred Rock against their will, they would have departed long ago. But a second dark power has every reason to keep them chained, and all will benefit if the party can uncover this truth and sever the link that binds the increasingly desperate Mist Men to this reality!

Background

The Mist Men are travelers of a sort, beings of energy moving between planes of existence that bear little resemblance to our own. Normally it would be impossible for them to drift into a reality such as the players inhabit, but Korik's Heart acts as a gateway that makes the transference possible. The fit is uncomfortable for the Mist Men however, and they would have quickly moved on if possible. But sinister envoys of a power capable of manipulating gateways like Korik's Heart —**The Vortex Temple**— detected the arrival of the ethereal travelers and quickly moved in to trap them as a spider in her web, feeding off the Mist Men's raw energy.

The Mist Men are now engaged in a desperate struggle to free themselves from this dark power, but the manner in which they manipulate energy and matter leaves them nearly defenseless against the new threat. Mist Men adapt to the distinct realities of the planes they move through by shaping matter to create analogs of forms common to the realm they currently inhabit. But the forms they create break down in the presence of the arcane devices used by The Vortex Temple to trap and bleed them of energy.

As their energy reserves reach critical levels, they have turned to the surrounding environment in a desperate attempt to fashion local 'resources' into forms that can engage their enemy. That this involves kidnapping local farmers and livestock and butchering them to create horrific hybrids fused together with cosmic goo means nothing to them, but for the remaining villagers trapped in the heart of the Lair, the terror is all too real.

Physical Environment of the Lair

The Lair of the Mist Men is made up of numerous 'bubbles' of reality connected by cosmic gates, all existing inside, below, or on the edges of Korik's Heart. Most of the environment's domed chambers will appear almost mundane to the adventurers. Instead of walls of gleaming machinery, the party will encounter stone, worked wood, and iron. But the translation is not perfect, and everything will appear slightly off. Colors will be too bright, textures not quite right. The air itself will seem too thick and cloying. The cumulative effect of all this dissonance and the basic strangeness of this alternate space will eventually take a toll on the party, and some will struggle to maintain a grip on their sanity!

Peruse **Appendix A** for a fun method of dealing with the sanity-bending effects of visiting the Lair.

Mist Men Appearance

The default form for the Mist Men encountered is based on a race they met long ago in a reality somewhat analogous to the adventurer's world. The race's breathing requirements are somewhat different, which explains the special canisters and masks they wear. If the Mist Men were not starved for energy they would fashion a new form suited perfectly for their new environment, but creating new living 'templates' is extremely expensive in terms of energy required, so they must make do with what they have. Existing forms can be broken down to raw energy, at which point the memories gained while in the new form are slowly (2-3 days) reabsorbed into the colony's 'hive mind.'

Lair Encounter Table

Area	Type	Encounter
A	T/C	Mist Men Guards
B	T	The Portals
C	T/C	Room of Changing
D	C	Transmutatron Horrors
E	C	Mist Men and Rag Men
H	T	The Place Between
K	C	The Vortex Advance Party

Area A – Approaching the Cave: *You follow the thin path exiting the clearing, and begin to climb as you circle the massive rock. As the swamp recedes below, you find yourself in a strange netherworld floating above the mists. The rock path before you is often slick, seldom more than 3-4 feet wide, and finding your footing is a challenge. The drop-off to your right is not shear, but the idea of tumbling down the side of the massive rock into the swamp below holds no charm. Suddenly from above, you detect the sound of clattering stones, and a small boulder the size of your head whips past you into the haze below!"*

The thin path is known as the Shaman's Road, and in many places it has been literally carved from the rock. The Mist Men guard it closely. While they came into this world oblivious to the ways of men, the Mist Men are slowly learning to adapt to the savagery of the swamp. Five guards are stationed at the top of the path at the mouth of the cave, and will rain down stones on all who attempt to approach. Players will need to 'run the gauntlet' for about 50 feet of path before they can round the corner and move beyond the danger zone.

From that point on players will make one more circuit of the rock before reaching the mouth of the cave. When players approach the cave, the Mist Men will draw their silver tubes and attack to kill.

Mist Men (5): Init 0; Atk rods +2 ranged (1d4); Boulders +1 ranged (1d4 and DC 10 Ref save or slip and drop weapon. If save misses by 5 or more, players tumble off edge for an additional 2d4 damage and will need to reclimb from swamp below) AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; AL N.

Lair of the Mist Men
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Area A: Inside the Cave: *As you step inside the cave, you are nearly overwhelmed by the sheer sense of age present in this place. Nearly every inch of the smooth rock walls have been carved or painted in some primitive manner. Many of the crude animal or abstract shapes have been worn smooth by the years but others are obviously of more recent make. The air seems to crackle with eldritch power.*

As you press deeper into the cave, you are confronted with a startling scene: as the chamber broadens toward the back, a sphere of glowing blue stone unlike the cave walls juts into the chamber! A door of some sort seems to grant entry to the cottage-sized sphere, but it is filled with a mass of green vapor swirling like a whirlpool to the netherworld!

It is impossible to see into the portal. Players can stick their hands or other objects into the swirling mist experiencing nothing more than a strange tingling. Once more than half of their body passes into the portal, they will be drawn in and sucked down what appears to be a gelatinous tube of pulsing green energy, eventually popping out the other side of the portal in Area B. As characters pass through the tube, they will experience their first taste of the madness of the Lair. (See **Appendix A** for one approach to handle the slow onset of Lair Madness.)

Area B: The Portal Chamber: *You pass through the strange portal, dumped unceremoniously into a chamber shaped like a half-sphere the size of the small house. The walls are of simple cut stone, blank grey and smooth to the touch. But the color of the stone seems to somehow… dance. The chamber is bare save for three circles of midnight black seemingly painted on the floor in the center of the chamber, and another green portal on the far wall.*

As players recover from the strange journey through the first portal (and perhaps begin dealing with the first stages of Lair Madness) find ways to hint at the strangeness of the place. In most areas of the Lair, all surfaces are in some sense reactive to the thoughts of those nearby, so occasionally startle your players with momentary reflections of loved ones/enemies flashing on some surface, or a distant grumbling hum that sounds vaguely like a hated schoolmaster from years gone by…

This chamber is currently being reconfigured by the Mist Men to conserve energy, and is in a half-finished state. If a character steps on circle 1, they will fall through the floor and immediately tumble from a hole that appears in the roof of the chamber to crash onto the member of the party with the lowest luck score. (DC 12 Ref save by each of 1d4 dmg.) Circle 2 will teleport the first character who steps on it into a globe of restorative goo seemingly floating in the infinity of space, from which they will suddenly return five minutes later fully healed. If they enter the globe at full strength, they will instead receive a +2 luck bonus that will apply on their next luck roll. To those remaining in the chamber, the player will seem to vanish, the circle inactive from that point forward. Circle 3 will attempt to rebuild the character who steps on it from scratch, but will succeed only in granting anyone who steps on it a mop of bright red hair in the Mist Men style!

The portal on the far side of the room (and all other green portals) behaves exactly like the one the party just passed through.

Area C: The Room of Changing *As you emerge once again from the sickening passageway, you find yourself in a chamber shaped much like the one you just left, but on a much larger scale. However, there's one startling difference: above you, instead of a stone dome, lurks a dark night sky filled with millions of shining, glimmering stars!*

The ceiling is illusionary, and its appearance will be changing shortly! (Though characters with stargazing in their background will immediately recognize that the constellations bear no resemblance to those they know!) The Room of Changing acts as a battle trainer for the Mist Men, and the environment can be changed at will by those with the proper skill and knowledge to imagine different threats. The players possess neither of these things, so the room will react somewhat chaotically to their disorganized thoughts.

After 10 seconds, players will hear a 'click' that echoes about the chamber, and the scene will switch to a completely new environment (domed ceiling and floor) swarming with monsters. Every two rounds, the scene will change again. All of the 'foes' will charge directly at the adventures, have the same stats, and will vanish if they suffer any damage, only to replaced by new foes with the next shift. Feel free to re-create past enemies from the minds of the characters, or use foes from the list below:

- Foot long scorpions racing through a blazing desert.
- Angry villagers storming though a burning village at night.
- Dog-sized vampiric rabbits leaping about a bone littered field.
- Smiling cherubs with flaming eyes and red bat-wings flitting amongst puffy clouds wielding sharp little spears.

If players attempt to use either of the doors on the far side of the chamber to escape, they will find they are inactive. (The door they came through still works.) In the center of the chamber is a small platform bearing three lecterns, each with a large key-like shape jutting from the top. Turning the center key ends the simulations. Turning the left and right keys activate the appropriate door leading to areas D and E respectively.

Force Beasts (12): Init 0; Atk varies +0 melee (1d4); AC 8; HP 1; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will 0; AL N.

Area D: The Transmutatron Horrors *While your passage through the portals remains an uncanny experience, the scene before you leaves you breathless! Another circular chamber opens before you, a large contraption towering above you to your left. It seems to have been fashioned from huge boards of bleached driftwood and crackles with some demonic energy. Two 'arms' reach out from the machine, each with a creature tied to the top: on the first a chicken struggles in a shower of feathers, on the other rests what appears to be the still form of an old man. On a low platform in line with the arms, a young man lies bound by a thin cage of metal, shrieking in pain.*

Two of the Mist creatures hover over the man, while a third stands in a corner next to a large cage holding two creatures of nightmare. With a muffled shout, the third Mist Man throws open the cage door, and the two monsters, seemingly some unholy blend of beetles and pigs, scuttle across the room toward you!

Exo-Hogs (2): Init 0; Atk tusks +2 melee (1d6); AC 14; HP 9; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref 0, Will -2; AL N.

Mist Men (3): Init 0; Atk ranged +2 melee (1d4 or Stun: DC 10 Fort Save or unconscious for 5-20 minutes); AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; AL N.

The machine is central to the Mist Men efforts to create a hybrid foe capable of battling their enemies. So far their efforts have proved less than satisfactory. The exo-hogs are powerful, but difficult to control, and they tend to disassemble in clouds of ichorous goo when brought close to the devices of the Vortex Temple foes. The old man has been dead for days, but the Mist Men haven't quite figured this out, and their sense of smell is quite primitive in their current form. The young man is named Saynen, and is generally unharmed —save for a clucking chicken head sprouting from his neck— but is quite mad. If the players treat him with kindness and attempt to gently extract information, they will be rewarded with the following info: (Bullying will only elicit enraged clucks.)

- *They have the others in the pens. Not many left... beware the rag men! Beware the rag men!*
- *They cut Sue up! Right in front of me like it was nothing! Put one piece there... another there! What are these things? Why are they doing this?*
- *They took Brinlock through a room full of stars to spy on the triangle men through the crack in the world! The triangle men are doing something they want to stop! But something jumped out of a star and bit him! When he came back he could only tell that story over and over again until they chopped him up....*
- *Take me with you! I'll kill anything you want me to! Do you want me to kill him over there? Do you?!?*

If armed, Saynen will fight alongside the party like, well, *a mad man*. His chicken head will shriek horrible curses with each deranged stroke. He can also describe in general the path back to the pens in Area E.

The machine is controlled by Mist Men mind powers, and thus immune to the twisted imaginations of the players. The chicken on the machine is alive and completely edible.

The red portal (and all other red portals on the map) travel to other chambers in the Lair inaccessible to the players. The surface will resist passage as if the players were pressing against a wall of gelatin. If players are having too easy a go, Mist Men can appear through these portals at any time, or you can make them passable to add extra chambers of your own design to the Lair.

Area E: The Pens *As you step from the portal, you are nearly overwhelmed by the reek that permeates the chamber before you: a thick miasma of offal, blood and death! Three Mist Men stand rigidly near two crude pens that have been constructed on the far side of this circular chamber. The first pen is packed with pigs, chickens, goats, cows, and a few filthy villagers. The second contains horrors almost too terrible to describe: twitching gangly creatures that seem to consist of body parts from many creatures, haphazardly stitched together with glowing eldritch twine!*

Upon noticing intruders, two of the Mist Men will draw their silver tubes and attack while the third releases the Rag Men.

Rag Men (8): Init -3; Atk punch +0 (1d4+1 from burning ooze); AC 8; HP 4; MV 20'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref 0, Will -2; AL N.

Mist Men (3): Init 0; Atk ranged +2 melee (1d4 or Stun: DC 10 Fort Save or unconscious for 5-20 minutes); AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; AL N.

The Rag Men represent early efforts on the part of the Mist Men. They drip ichorous ooze wherever they go, and when dropped to 0 hit points explode in a fountain of spraying slime. Anyone facing a Rag Man when it goes down must make a DC 7 Ref save or be blinded the next round. (If a player attempts to protect their eyes while attacking, forgo the save, but give them a -2 penalty to hit.)

There are 3 surviving villagers in the pens, and if anything they are even more crazed than Saynen in Area D. They will fight with great vigor, but offer little information other than repeating 'Talk to Saynen! They took him, but he knows!' If Saynen is with the party, they will fall in behind him and follow his every crazed command.

Areas F & G: Storage Chambers *After the insanity of recent destinations, this chamber appears almost mundane: a collection of boxes and cast-asides, and two additional portals, one red, one green. Tis a wonder... even the Mist Men have junk rooms!*

Players can rest safely in either chamber for a time. (Unless you wish to have more foes appear through the portals.) Spread amongst the clutter of the two rooms are many uncanny Mist Men artifacts, and a few useful items:

- A giant mahogany foot the size of a small cow, with four toes.
- A leather-bound log book written in a language no one understands, but filled with amazing charts of unknown lands and sketches of bizarre creatures.
- 18 still-edible ration bars wrapped in a strange crinkly paper labeled *Munchy Lunchies Lembas Plus, twill fill a stout man for TWO days!*
- A box with two matching earrings that allow separate wearers to hear each other's conversations regardless of distance. (But which cause the bearer's ear to imperceptibly grow over time, eventually swelling to half again the normal size.)
- A jet black wand that when used by a wizard will stain the wizard's hand a deep burgundy for ever more, but grants a +1 casting bonus to any spell involving fire.
- A stack of scrolls filled with incomprehensibly clumsy erotic poetry from a race who refer to themselves as the "All Out Lords of the Muddy Pomp."
- A lovely short sword that remains ever sharp and grants a +1 bonus to damage. On a critical it does an additional 1d4 damage, filling the room with the sound of ethereal whispers.
- Eight vials of green brackish liquid that restore 1d12 HP per horrifying dose.

The Lair is lit throughout by the ambient glow of blue/green lichen that cover many sections of the walls. (The lichen is actually the Mist Men intelligences in their most natural physical form.)

Area H: The Place Between *Of all the sights you have witnessed in this strange place, nothing has prepared you for what lies before you now. You stare into a massive sphere seemingly filled with the very stars of the sky! Amorphous shapes drift between the lights, with an occasional racing spark dancing from one side of the sphere to the next. The place is impossibly large, dropping below and climbing above to heights and depths the Sacred Rock could not possibly contain! And yet here it is, and it would seem ones needs to cross this space, as a sister doorway awaits you on the opposite side of the sphere.*

The boundaries between dimensions are thin here, and things tend to drift in and out from the great beyond. The size of the space is deceptive as well, and though it appears impossibly large, a determined traveller can cross it in 3-4 rounds by 'swimming' through the nearly zero gravity space. The greatest dangers are the otherworldly entities that drift about in the cosmic soup. To be touched by one of these creatures is to invite madness, or worse!

Any character with a swimming background can cross the divide in three rounds. Those without take four. Each round a character is in open space, roll a d8:

1) A 'shooting star' of chaotic energy rushes toward the character. (DC 13 Ref save or roll on the Cosmic Corruption chart.)

2) An ethereal mass drifts lazily in the direction of the character. (DC 7 Ref save to clumsily swim out of the way or take one step on the path to madness. See **Appendix A**.)

3) A wave of entropy engulfs the character. (DC 10 Will save or take one step on the path to madness. See **Appendix A**.)

4) Lighting strike from beyond! 1d6 electrical damage. (DC 10 Fort save for half damage)

5+) The character moves safely.

Probably the safest method to cross is for a single adventurer to make the journey trailing some type of line, tying it off on the far side in some manner. Characters that pull along a fixed line can cross in two rounds. Regardless, reward your players for creative solutions —remember all the farm animals in the pens!— and stress the absolute weirdness of the environment.

Cosmic Corruption (roll 1d6)

1) The character's eyes turn jet black, filled with twinkling stars.

2) If the target is a wizard, he forgets one random spell, but comprehends a new random one on the spot. Non-wizards take one step on the path to madness.

3) The character's skin glows a subtle blue in the dark.

4) From this point forward, the character will no longer recognize his own name, and will refer to himself as "StarRider".

5) The vastness of the cosmos is simply too much to comprehend. Lose 1 point of intelligence permanently, but gain one point of personality.

6) The character takes on aspects of a comet of ill luck. The first person to touch the character each day loses 1 point of luck.

Area I: The Crack in the World *You emerge in the smallest chamber encountered yet. The room positively shines with the amount of radiant lichen covering the walls. To your right is another portal, glowing bright blue like none you've seen before. To your left is a jagged crack in the wall large enough to step through from which pours a languid purple light. Through this crack you feel, more than hear, a bone rattling hum that cycles on and off every two seconds like an unholy heartbeat.*

When the players reach this point, the Mist Men intelligence will at long last coordinate all that they have learned of the inhabitants of this plane, and comprehend that perhaps these primitive beings might actually be the answer to their problems in confronting the Vortex Temple. The glowing lichen on the wall will begin shifting into strange formations, and images will begin to flash in the players minds. Choose memories that will resonate with the players, but they should involve three themes:

Help (party rescuing the villagers, saving a friend from a fall)
Binding/Leeching (mosquito sucking blood, ship at anchor)
Reward (chest of treasure, cheering crowd)

If the players peek through the crack in the wall they'll see a twisting passageway of natural stone bathed in purple light. Just inside the path are the remains of numerous hybrid creatures that have failed to penetrate the Vortex Temple's cave. Most have disintegrated, but there is a clear demarcation point where the Mist Men matter cuts off, and the passageway beyond that point is clear and bare.

Area J: The Core *This blue portal resists all your attempts to pass through it.*

The portal from area I leads to the Core of the Lair and is inaccessible to the players as long as the Vortex Temple device is in operation. If the players engage the enemy in area K and return, the portal will operate differently...

Area K: The Vortex Gate *As you make your way down the thin rock passageway, you sense that you are no longer in the Lair —the air has changed— and the stone feels like stone once more. The pulsing hum continues to grow in intensity until you arrive at the mouth of the passageway to peek warily into a large natural cavern. Before you is a strange triangular device —apparently the source of the sound— that glows purple with each pulse. Attached to the device is a thick rope of some kind twisting toward the back of the cavern.*

Through this rope —in a manner that is difficult to describe— you can sense the power of the Lair, in all its strange and twisted character, being drawn away toward yet another portal. But this new portal is different than those you have encountered in the Lair: larger, triangular in shape, and glowing purple. Through the portal you can even see trees, fields, and a distant village! You are unable to enjoy the view for long, and quickly duck back into cover: the room is inhabited, and the occupants are no Mist Men!

The Vortex Temple, amongst other talents, are masters of gate travel, using them to move instantly between all the places of power in this world. They also seek out sacred sites such as Korik's Heart to probe them for artifacts of power. It was pure luck that the Mist Men stumbled into their net. But stumble they did, and the Temple has no intentions of letting their reluctant prey depart!

The power of the Lair is being drawn into the triangular device, which passes down the 'rope' and through the purple gate to a matching device on the far side. The device also acts as an anchor that keeps the Lair trapped in this plane of existence.

This advance party from the Temple consists of 4 Guardians of the Vortex and one leader, known as a Seeker. Each appears as a tall, thin human, masked and hooded, dressed in dark purple (almost black) leather armor. Stitched across each chest is an upside down triangle of midnight black. The Guardians each bear two wicked knives, and the Seeker is adept in arcane powers, creating a blast of fire by forming his fingers into the shape of a triangle before him. All have the ability to teleport short distances to aid them in battle.

They will silently —and apparently without coordination— leap to attack at the first sign of the party. The Guardians will engage the front line, focusing on any who appear to possess ranged or eldritch powers, teleporting if necessary to achieve an advantageous position. The Seeker will hang back in the vicinity of the device, sending out arcs of deadly fire.

(Note: there are many large boulders strewn about the chamber to provide cover for the successfully sneaky.)

Guardians of the Vortex (4): Init +4; Atk knife +4 (1d4+1); AC 13; HP 9; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d16; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +1; AL C. (Special: short range teleport, 20', once per day)

Seeker: Init +4; Atk Triangle of Fire +3 ranged (1d10), 30' range) AC 12; HP 11; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; AL C. (Special: short range teleport, 50', twice per day)

The forces of the Vortex Temple will fight to the death, and if defeated, the Seeker will make a final gesture toward the vortex device before he falls. Its 'pulse' will increase in intensity, and the cavern will begin to shake violently. Finally, after about 60 seconds, the device will detonate, vaporizing the entire cavern. (The same chain of events will be triggered if the 'rope' from the device is severed. Consider it AC 12 with 10 hp. Anyone who targets it will gain the immediate attention of all the servants of the Vortex.)

Once the Vortex device is no longer operating, the Lair will immediately begin the process of leaving our space, eventually riding the shock wave of the Vortex device's explosion to travel to some reality beyond the comprehension of men.

Wrapping Up

At the close of the fight —in either victory or defeat— if the party dashes back towards the Lair, they will find that the blue portal is now shaded green, and if they pass through it they will suddenly appear on their backs in Area A. If they have defeated the Vortex forces, and the destruction sequence has begun, all of Korik's Heart will shake as the Lair of the Mist Men breaks free from the Vortex device and begins transitionally away from this plane. The 'bubble' entrance to the Lair will slowly vanish, leaving nothing behind but the original cave wall covered in primitive art.

Alternately, in victory the party might wish to jump through the Vortex gate before it collapses, finding themselves in the presence of another Vortex device resting on a bluff overlooking a river village. This could be any location in your world. (Alternately, the gate will take them to the struggling community of **Blessed Home**, starting point for **Adventure M-1: Against the Vortex Temple**, where your players can learn much more about the Vortex Temple and their sinister plans for humanity!)

If the players were defeated by the Vortex forces, they can attempt to make their way through the Lair again at some point. The Mist Men will not engage them in any way, but the players will still need to deal with the maddening effects of the Lair. (Alternately, you could have the first portal transport them directly to the Crack in the World.) Whether or not the Vortex forces have been reinforced in the party's absence is up to the GM, depending largely on one's predilection for tormenting players.

If the players defeat the Vortex forces, their actions will not be overlooked by the departing Mist Men. As the party opens their packs for their next meal, each will find a nearly inexhaustible Mist Man weapon tube, attuned to their individual use that will burn the hand of any other who attempts to grasp it!

Appendix A: The Path to Madness

The Lair of the Mist Men is an environment that will test the sanity of normal men. Everything about it is 'wrong', and as your players move through the lair the mental effects will slowly accumulate.

There are many systems for dealing with sanity in a game, and if you have a preferred method, use it! But what follows is a simple (and humourous) method that will add some personality to your characters while keeping the game moving.

Have your players make a DC 5 Will save for each character as they pass through any portal in the Lair. (If they're teleporting into a fight, roll after the combat is complete.) Alternately, choose three or four unlucky souls each passage if the party is too large. Each time a character fails a roll, their reality is bent in some way, and they take one step down the ***Path to Madness***. After three steps, they go crazy!

When a character 'takes their first step', choose a topic significant to that character, or roll d24 and reference the following chart. This topic will spontaneously arise in the character's mind with great force: an absurd obsessive madness the character will begin contemplating with great interest in a subconscious attempt to block out the chaos around him. The mania will start small, but grow in intensity with each fail. The character might fear the topic, or love it, and the effects can last as long as the judge wants: remember, it's for fun and to add personality to the game! (But trust Nardgrog, when a reference to a character's obsession pops up out of the blue five adventures down the road, it'll be hilarious.)

Obsession

1) Chickens (Either the species or one particular chicken)
2) Hair loss (And the fragility of dwarven self-image)
3) Cows (Meat, leather, or milk?)
4) Poetry (Of the lonely gong farmer)
5) Oil (And the merits of lighting things on fire)
6) Thatch (Just thatch, sweet thatch)
7) Mud (How deep? Is there something in there?)
8) Pole arms (And the question of fairness)
9) Your Great Aunt Gretchie (And her death-mouth kisses)
10) Your baker (And his questionable sourdough genealogy)
11) Things that won't break (And why not?)
12) Sneaky elves noticing things (And whether they're ALL blackmailers or just that bastard GoldenBow)
13) Halflings (And that whole two weapons thing)
14) Cheese (And its potential for dealing death)
15) Goblins (And their questionable choices in footwear)
16) Broken toenails (And the value of hoarding nails and other effluvia as a hedge against black magic)
17) Barmaids (Beefy)
18) Villagers (Who like cats)
19) Teak (And other strange woods)
20) Ducks and wolves (Particularly how they don't interact)
21) Back hair (And the werewolf threat)
22) Taxes and fees (And the violence inherent in the system)
23) Corruption (And whether creams will help)
24) Bastard swords (And other vaguely naughty weapons)

Stages Along the Path

Stage 1: The topic pops into your head with slightly more than comfortable regularity.

Stage 2: You begin to annoy your fellows by discussing the topic more than is really necessary, bringing it up at inappropriate times or even out of the blue. You dream about your topic and begin creating amateur art or poetry about it.

Stage 3: You barely keep yourself in check. At the slightest excuse or provocation, you break into maniacal discourse about your topic. You're capable of violence if crossed about your topic. You start a club or organize a convention.

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Appendix B: Attack of the Mist Men

The following encounter was originally included in **Adventure SC-1: The Ooze Pits of Jonas Gralk** to introduce the Mist Men to players. If you are not running that adventure, you can trigger this encounter next to any village in your world to get the ball rolling.

A local farm has been attacked, and the town council has tasked you with dealing with the threat. Grik, the farm's owner, leads the party to his home where they discover a scene of chaos:

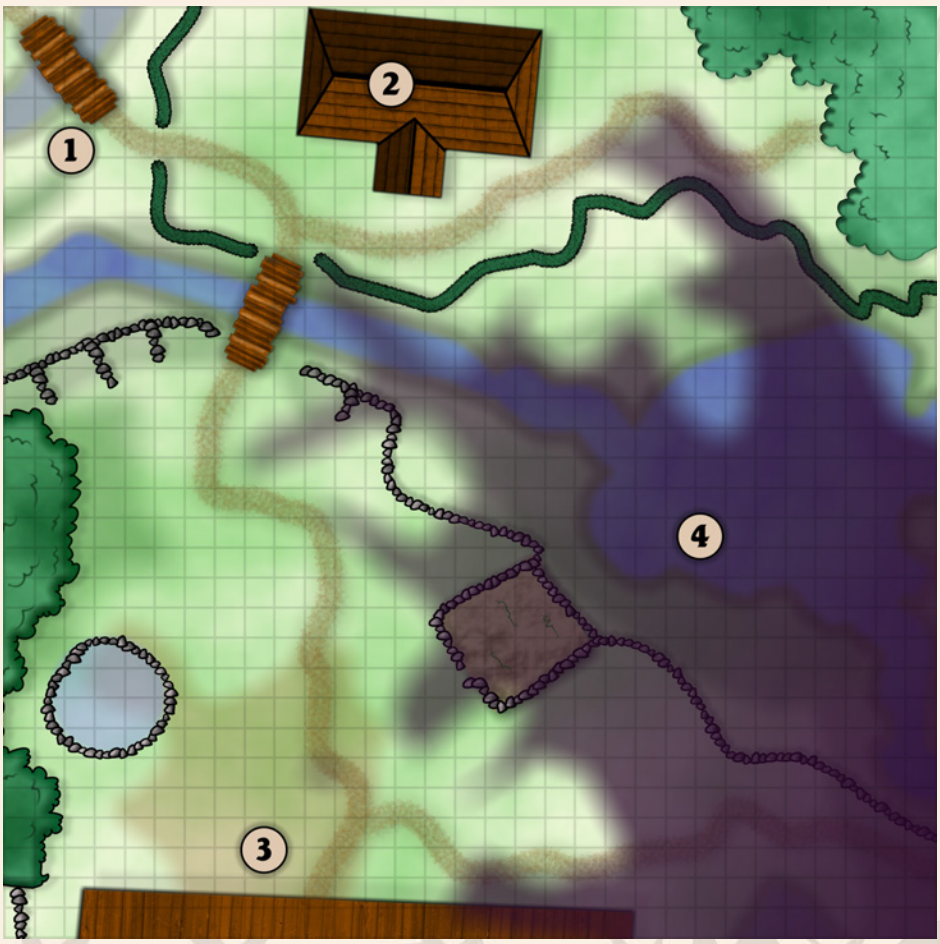
A roiling black/red mist obscures much of Grik's farm, tendrils reaching out like grasping arms. Man-like shapes move about the edge of the mass. The mists seem to follow the figures: their features difficult to discern. The shrieks of pigs echo from the barn to the south, where the majority of the figures seem to be dragging lifeless hogs through the open double doors. Other figures stand near Grik's house, holding some strange metal device up as if measuring it in some way. Others crawl about on all fours, or stomp woodenly in the mire, seemingly fascinated by the splashing water. One is gazing intently at a chicken it holds up by its foot.

The invaders are Mist Men and for the purposes of this encounter most of their actions will seem incomprehensible. Twenty are at the farm: half are coming and going from the barn/pen at **Location 3**. All will ignore the party unless attacked, at which point those who aren't dragging pigs will turn on the party drawing 18 inch silver tubes from bands at their waists. The tubes shoot tiny darts that either stun (DC 10 Fort save or unconscious for 5-20 minutes) or wound (1d4 Dmg). Once a Mist Man has been slain the rest will switch to wounding darts. Players who attempt to grasp a silver tube will be burned (DC 10 Ref save or 1 point of damage.)

Mist Men (10): Init 0; Atk ranged +2 melee; Dmg 1d4; (or Stun: DC 10 Fort Save or unconscious for 5-20 minutes) AC 12; HP 4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort 0, Ref 0, Will +2; AL N.

Once six Mist Men have fallen, the roiling mist will turn bright red and the remainder will turn in the direction of the heart of the mist at **Location 4**, dropping whatever farm goods they're carrying. After a round of rising electrical fury, all Mist Men (dead or alive) and their artifacts will seem to evaporate into the mists, and the mass will retreat into the swamp at unbelievable speed.

During the fight, those who move deep into the mist will be at -2 to all actions, as visibility is very poor. Anyone caught in the mist when it retreats will suffer 1d4 electrical damage. (Give them fair warning that something nasty is about to occur, they have one round to sprint out of the mist before it's too late.)



Name:

AC (9) HP (4)

Occupation: Barber

Alignment: Law Neutral Chaos

		mod
Strength	12	0
Agility	8	-1
Stamina	11	0
Personality	12	0
Intelligence	10	0
Luck	11	0

Saves

Reflex	-1
Fortitude	0
Will	0

Speed 30 Init -1

Weapons
- Razor +0 (1d4)

Equipment
- Starting Funds: 30cp
- Scissors
- Hammer - small (5 sp)

Notes
- Lucky Roll: Pack hunter (Attack/damage rolls for 0-level weapon)(0)
- Languages: Common

XP

Name:

AC (10) HP (3)

Occupation: Wheat Farmer

Alignment: Law Neutral Chaos

		mod
Strength	13	1
Agility	12	0
Stamina	8	-1
Personality	8	-1
Intelligence	11	0
Luck	5	-2

Saves

Reflex	0
Fortitude	-1
Will	-1

Speed 30 Init 0

Weapons
- Pitchfork +1 (1d8+1)

Equipment
- Starting Funds: 23cp
- Cow
- Holy water (1 vial) (25 gp)

Notes
- Lucky Roll: The Broken Star (Fumbles)(-2)
- Languages: Common

XP

Name:

AC (10) HP (5)

Occupation: Caravan guard

Alignment: Law Neutral Chaos

		mod
Strength	7	-1
Agility	12	0
Stamina	13	1
Personality	13	1
Intelligence	14	1
Luck	9	0

Saves

Reflex	0
Fortitude	1
Will	1

Speed 30 Init 0

Weapons
- Short sword -1 (1d6-1)

Equipment
- Starting Funds: 31cp
- Linen (1 yard)
- Rope - 50' (25 cp)

Notes
- Lucky Roll: Four-leafed clover (Find secret doors)(0)
- Languages: Common

XP

Name:

AC (10) HP (1)

Occupation: Miller/baker

Alignment: Law Neutral Chaos

		mod
Strength	13	1
Agility	10	0
Stamina	8	-1
Personality	15	1
Intelligence	13	1
Luck	15	1

Saves

Reflex	0
Fortitude	-1
Will	1

Speed 30 Init 0

Weapons
- Club +1 (1d4+1)

Equipment
- Starting Funds: 33cp
- Flour (1 lb.)
- Holy water (1 vial) (25 gp)

Notes
- Lucky Roll: Unholy house (Corruption rolls)(+1)
- Languages: Common

XP