

Quests of Doom 4



Awakenings

By Steve Winter



FROG GOD
GAMES

Quests of Doom 4

Awakenings

Author
Steve Winter

Developer
Patrick N. Pilgrim

Producer
Bill Webb

Editor
Jeff Harkness

5e Conversion
Patrick N. Pilgrim

Layout and Graphic Design
Charles A. Wright

Front Cover Art
Artem Shukaev

Interior Art
Rowena Aitken, Lloyd Metcalf,
MKUltra

Cartography
Alyssa Faden

FROG GOD GAMES IS

CEO
Bill Webb

Frog V
Patrick N. Pilgrim

Customer Service Manager
Krista Webb

Creative Director:
Swords & Wizardry
Matthew J. Finch

Art Director
Charles A. Wright

Zach of All Trades
Zach Glazar

Creative Director:
Pathfinder Roleplaying Game
Greg A. Vaughan

Developers
John Ling and
Patrick N. Pilgrim

Final Boss
Skeeter Green



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 The Tome of Horrors Complete ^{PF, S&W}
 Tome of Horrors 4 ^{PF, S&W}
 Tome of Adventure Design
 Monstrosities ^{S&W}
 Bill Webb's Book of Dirty Tricks
 Razor Coast: Fire as She Bears ^{PF}
 Book of Lost Spells ^{5e, PF}
 Fifth Edition Foes ^{5e}
 The Tome of Blighted Horrors ^{5e, PF, S&W}
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 Rappan Athuk Expansions Vol. I ^{PF, S&W}
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 LL5: Borderland Provinces ^{5e, PF, S&W}
 LL6: The Northlands Saga Complete ^{PF, S&W}
 LL7: The Blight ^{5e, PF, S&W}
 LL8: Bard's Gate ^{5e, PF, S&W}
 LL9: Adventures in the Borderland Provinces ^{5e, PF, S&W}

QUESTS OF DOOM

Quests of Doom (Vol. 1) ^{5e}
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 Dunes of Desolation ^{PF}
 Fields of Blood ^{PF}
 Mountains of Madness ^{PF}
 Marshes of Malice ^{PF}

* (forthcoming from **Frog God Games**)

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Awakenings

“Animals, whom we have made our slaves, we do not like to consider our equal.”

— Charles Darwin

Awakenings is an adventure intended for characters from 1st to 3rd level. Characters at the upper limit of that range, or parties with more than five characters, might find some of the challenges on the easy side. You should always feel free to add more foes to any encounter to bring it in line with the group’s power level.

This adventure can be placed in any land you choose as fits the needs of your own campaign. However, in the **Lost Lands** campaign setting, *Awakenings* is set in the southern marches of the Kingdom of Sulley of **Borderlands Provinces** fame. When the characters first spot the falling star as described below they should be in the County of Vourdon, probably on or near the South Road running between Kingston and Olaric, with the meteor’s impact point lying somewhere in the northern expanse of the Lorremach Highhills to the east.

Adventure Synopsis

Awakenings combines elements of a fairy tale (talking, anthropomorphic animals) with elements of cosmic horror (a malignant alien intelligence from the stars).

The adventure begins on a night when the characters witness a meteor streaking overhead. Such an event is always important. Whether or not the characters believe it’s an omen, a fallen star is always an immensely valuable object. If they don’t choose to search for it on their own, some patron offers them a hefty sum to find it.

As they scour the countryside for the impact site, the characters hear more and more stories about animals behaving in strange ways: walking upright, talking in human speech, even exhibiting magical powers. Before long, they encounter these strange sights themselves, and their own animals show the same symptoms!

Soon, the characters encounter an entire community of these amazingly intelligent, magically powerful animals, and they’re not all friendly. One group in particular, under the sway of a creature called the Bear King, has plans so evil that they must be stopped. But that means finding the fallen star and confronting the entity at its core.

The real villain of *Awakenings* is a formless intelligence from the stars called the drift. It takes over the minds of creatures with Intelligence 2 or 3 — beasts of all kinds — and uses their bodies to feed its need for sensory input and to spread its influence and control across the world. The characters confront the beasts “awakened” by the drift, as the animals display what seems to be ever-increasing intelligence, human mannerisms, magical powers, and finally, murderous insanity.

Adventure Hooks

The first hook to *Awakenings* is seeing the falling star. One night, preferably when the characters are nearing the end of an earlier adventure, they witness an unusual astronomical event.

As you gaze up into the mass of stars, movement from the west draws your attention. A meteor streaks out of the heavens and crosses the starry sky from west to east, leaving a blood-red trail in its wake. Many seconds after spotting it, you hear it — soft at first, but quickly building to a roar, like a landslide crashing down around you. Then almost as quickly as it came, it disappears behind a range of hills on the eastern horizon. If it struck the ground at all, it happened many leagues away to the east — too far away to track down tonight.

Characters have seen countless shooting stars and may have seen a meteor before. The most unusual and significant thing about this one was its ominous color, but hours or days of study in a library concerned with astrology would be needed to determine its exact meaning.

Over the next few days, characters should encounter NPCs who talk about the omen. If characters are in the wilderness, fey creatures and even monstrous races (goblins, orcs, etc.) will be talking about it. Some proclaim that it means doom; others that it’s a good sign. In the meantime, life goes on.

If seeing the falling star isn’t enough to spark the characters’ curiosity, then the next time they enter a town or inn, or meet travelers on the road, the star is all anyone wants to talk about. If characters continue to ignore it, they either are approached by a patron or meet an NPC in the wilderness who’d like to hire their services. The two potential NPC patrons are Aguise Treldetric, an astrologer and alchemist who wants the starmetal for research, and Lyrene Tammar, a noble who believes the falling star portends a coming change of power. Although they’re described here as a human man and an elvish woman, both of these NPCs can be any race or gender that suits you.

Aguise Treldetric

Treldetric is an astrologer and alchemist who believes he can learn the secrets of the universe by studying the material inside the falling star. He doesn’t know whether the object was made of starmetal, cosmic ice, or some other matter. Whatever it is, anything that comes from the stars is bound to be highly valuable.



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Characters encounter Treldetric in or near the wilderness, where he's trying to find the object on his own. He's cold, hungry, and desperate to be rescued from his own incompetence as a woodsman.

The astrologer recognizes the characters as adventurers immediately — he's hired adventurers before — so he begs them to accept his offer of employment. He'll pay them a lump sum of 100 gp plus one-tenth of the fallen star (by weight). He realizes that the gold doesn't amount to a lot; Treldetric isn't a rich man. The share of the fallen star, however, could be worth far more than gold. He's not above dropping hints about the incredible value of any object that falls from space, especially if it's made of starmetal or (dare he say it? yes!) astral diamond. He's an honest man, however, so he readily admits if pressed that he doesn't know what the object will be made of.

If the characters are willing to work for him, they can drop him off at the first hamlet or farm they encounter. He'll either stay there until they return or catch a lift on a passing merchant's wagon back to his home in Fenvo.

Having tracked the star's progress across the sky, Treldetric was able to identify its trajectory with some certainty, but he has no idea where it actually came down. He advises the characters that if they follow the azimuth he gives them (as marked on the map), they're bound to come across the impact site sooner or later.

When characters first encounter Treldetric, he's hauling his food and camping gear on a mule. He gladly turns the supplies and the cantankerous animal over to the characters as a gift to help in their search. The supplies are useful, but the camping gear is poorly made and not well-suited to this climate. Despite Treldetric's claims, the mule is perfectly well behaved and cooperative around anyone with animal handling proficiency. It dislikes Treldetric simply because he has no idea how to deal with the animal or make it do what he wants done.

Lyrene Tammar

Tammar is the ranking scion of a once-powerful elvish family of the Forest Kingdoms pushed out of its seat long ago (and to elves, "long ago" can be a very long time indeed). She has been assured by her advisers that the falling star portends the fall of the current ruling house and the resurgence of her clan, but only if she lays claim to the star itself. The region she hopes to rule need not be local; she may have been traveling through the area with her retinue when the star passed over, and she recognizes an opportunity when she sees one.

Tammar offers the characters 100 gp apiece in assorted gems if they bring her the star. She isn't willing to negotiate letting them keep any of the object, but she'll throw in one 1st or 2nd level scroll or potion per character. Within those restrictions, characters can choose what they want. Characters can have either the gold or the magic up front, and the rest on delivery.

She urges the characters to move as fast as possible; Tammar believes others must be looking for the star, too, and it's essential that she gets it first. If the characters don't have horses of their own, Tammar insists on lending them some from her own stable, purely to speed up the search. They are beautiful, well-trained riding horses. She makes it clear that they're a loan, not a gift.

Locale

A map is provided for the region where the adventure occurs, but it should be easy to transplant *Awakenings* to another suitable location in any campaign world. It's a fairly typical area with one or two significant towns, many scattered farms and small farming communities, and plenty of rugged wilderness. In the early parts of the adventure, most of the important events occur at isolated farms. Later, characters press deeper into the wilderness and eventually wind up at or near an abandoned fort.

The Drift

"The drift" is the collective term for an alien intelligence that takes over animals in this adventure. It's called the drift because it travels between worlds by drifting through the timeless, spaceless void that separates them. No one knows where the drift originally came from. Not even the drift itself knows; it's been drifting for so long that it has forgotten its own origin. Or perhaps, it's adapted to its current existence so well that it simply doesn't care anymore.

On its own, the drift is pure intellect with no physical form at all. In that "natural," formless state, it is incapable of perceiving anything except gravity and mental energy. To have true senses and to interact with its surroundings, it must occupy a physical form. It does this by inhabiting other living creatures in a process very similar to what some people call possession.

In its unique, formless state, the drift has no individuality, but exists as a pure energy mind, thinking a single, identical thought. When it encounters a physical mind, it "breaks off" an element of itself to occupy that creature. The host creature "awakens" as the fragment of the drift melds with the creature's mind and body, and as the fragment itself becomes aware of its own personality. Its intelligence increases dramatically and it develops powers to control and alter reality.

Ultimately, however, the presence of the drift is inimical to biological minds, and the drift's hosts inevitably are driven insane.

The drift is infinitely divisible; each "fragment" can split off more fragments, etc., until (theoretically at least) the drift inhabits and controls every beast on an infected world.

At some point, insanity drives awakened animals to climb atop one another and form an enormous pyramid of living flesh called a driftmass. This mass levitates itself out of a world's atmosphere and into the void between worlds. Most of the creatures quickly suffocate and their corpses become freeze-dried mummies enclosing a few entities kept alive by the drift's magic during its eons-long voyage to a new homeworld.

Habitation and Awakening

The drift has an innate ability to dominate beasts. Creatures with Intelligence scores higher than 3 are difficult for the drift to seize and maintain control over, and creatures with Intelligence below 2 are too simple neurologically to meet the drift's sensory needs. Unfortunately, the multiverse is rife with a vast assortment of animals with Intelligence of 2 and 3, which offer rich pickings to the drift.

To inhabit a beast, the drift physically occupies the same space as the creature's brain. The target creature attempts a DC 16 Intelligence saving throw (which is nearly impossible to make successfully with a -4 Intelligence modifier). If the save succeeds, the drift can't adhere to the target mind and simply moves on. If the save fails, the drift settles into the creature's brain and begins enjoying its sensory input and learning to manipulate the creature's actions and thoughts. Either way, the host creature notices nothing unless its saving throw result is 20 or higher, in which case it experiences a few moments of panic, as if something is terribly amiss, but the sensation passes quickly.

Once the drift nestles into a creature's mind, the host is inhabited until the parasite is killed by psychic damage or it withdraws voluntarily. The creature isn't dominated, because the sentience that forms in the awakened mind is a union of the drift's alien ambition and the host's original personality. An animal remembers its former owners, and whether it was overworked and abused or respected and well-treated. It isn't simply the animal with suddenly high Intelligence, though, and neither is it the animal and the drift as separate entities wrestling for control. The two minds unite into one: animal playfulness, curiosity, urges, and fear of man, coupled with utterly alien intellect and purpose. The result is neither the animal nor the alien, but something new.

The host creature passes through five stages as the drift adjusts to its new physical form and learns to channel ever more of its prodigious psychic energy through the host animal's nervous system. These stages are the usual pattern; this sequence can be sped up or slowed down to match the pace of the characters' investigations.

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Stage (Number of days after habitation)	Effects
Stage 1 (Days 1–3)	The animal shows unnatural curiosity about its surroundings. A normally shy or fearful animal seems to have no fear. It stares at people and appears to listen intently to conversations (it's trying to learn the language). Its functional Intelligence is 5 (−3 Intelligence modifier).
Stage 2 (Days 4–5)	The animal speaks one- and two-word phrases, but they're mostly unintelligible while it figures out how to form speech. Its functional Intelligence is 9 (−1 Intelligence modifier).
Stage 3 (Days 6–7)	The animal can speak coherently in full sentences, but its words are still difficult to understand, as if it has a thick accent. During this stage, it develops a level 0 drift power. Its functional Intelligence is 13 (+1 Intelligence modifier, spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks).
Stage 4 (Days 8–10)	The animal's speech is as clear as if it were a native speaker of the language. It becomes capable of walking on its hind legs, if it wasn't before, and it begins learning to hold and manipulate objects with its forelimbs. It develops a level 1 drift power and a second level 0 drift power. Its functional Intelligence is 17 (+3 Intelligence modifier, spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks).
Stage 5 (Days 11+)	The animal is fully capable of walking upright on two legs (as an option; it can freely shift back and forth between two legs and four) and using its forelimbs almost as skillfully as human hands. It develops a level 2 drift power, a second level 1 power, and a third level 0 drift power. Its functional Intelligence is 21 (+5 Intelligence modifier, spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks).

	Level 0 (at will)	Level 1 (3 slots)	Level 2 (2 slots)
3	dancing lights	comprehend languages	enlarge/reduce
4	eldritch blast	cure wounds	hold person
5	fire bolt	fog cloud	invisibility
6	mage hand	mage armor	heat metal
7	minor illusion	magic missile	levitate
8	poison spray	ray of sickness	phantasmal force
9	prestidigitation	shield	silence
10	ray of frost	sleep	spider climb
11	shocking grasp	speak with animals	spike growth
12	thorn whip	witch bolt	web

Animal Companions

During the course of this adventure, the characters' horses, pets, or beast companions will be infected by the drift. This isn't essential, but it adds a lot to the adventure — it's why both NPC patrons offer to give or loan animals to the characters.

In most games, no one bothers to give horses and mules much personality or to become very emotionally attached to them, so they're good targets for ruthless drift habitation. A ranger's beast companion is slightly more problematic. Given that this adventure is for character levels 1 to 3, and beast masters don't get a companion until level 3, the rare character who has a beast companion probably won't have a long history with it. If something tragic happens to the animal, it's easy to replace under the rules.

Familiars and magically summoned steeds can't be inhabited by the drift because they're not beasts but celestial, fey, or fiendish spirits in animal form.

Map Movement

To track down the meteor, characters must head eastward. Unless the adventure is relocated to a different location in a specific campaign setting, they'll probably set out from the town of Feveno or that vicinity.

Each hex on the overland map represents half-a-day's travel on foot or horseback. From the hex they're in, characters can get a good idea of what's in the six surrounding hexes. They can identify the general terrain (forest, hills, etc.) and they can see chimney smoke if there's a farm or hamlet in the hex.

Unless characters do something odd, they'll move one hex in the morning (4 hours of travel), one hex in the afternoon (4 hours), and then make camp in the second hex.

It's possible to move a third hex at the risk of exhaustion. If the group moves a third hex, everyone must make four DC 13 Constitution saving throws. The character gains one level of exhaustion for each failure. Characters recover fully from one level during their long rest, but if they gain more than one level, they'll carry some exhaustion into the next day. Once characters decide to move a third hex, they're committed to making all four saving throws. There's no backing out if the first few go badly. The rolls don't need to be made in sequence; players can roll 4d20 at once and count the failures.

If a mule or other animal accompanies the characters, it must make the saving throws, too. If characters are riding horses instead of walking, then the horses make Constitution saving throws instead of the characters.

Drift Powers

Drift powers work the same as innate spellcasting. The creature's attack bonus equals its Int modifier (at the current stage) +2, and its saving throw DC equals its Intelligence modifier +10. Level 0 powers can be used at will; the creature has 3 daily slots for level 1 powers and 2 daily slots for its level 2 power.

You can either choose an animal's drift powers to match its role in the adventure, or roll for them randomly. All powers work as described in the Fifth Edition player's manual.

	Level 0 (at will)	Level 1 (3 slots)	Level 2 (2 slots)
1	acid splash	charm person	blindness/deafness
2	chill touch	chromatic orb	darkness

Mapped Encounters

Many hexes on the map indicate an encounter. Because of the distances involved, characters can easily skirt around farms if they choose to avoid those encounters.

Random Encounters

To spice things up and keep players on their toes, you can inject random encounters into the mix. Roll 1d20 per hex and check the table below. Add 5 to the roll if characters aren't following a road through the hex. Adjust the numbers of creatures in an encounter to suit the characters' level; these numbers are best for a group of four 2nd-level characters. Intelligent humanoids might or might not be friendly, depending on how belligerent the characters act and how you feel. Gnolls are always hostile.

1d20	Encounter
1–15	No encounter
16	Farmers (use the commoner stat block) hauling produce to Feveno; 50% chance one or more of their animals are awakened (Stage 1)
17	1 worg (Stage 2) plus 4 wolves
18	1 goblin boss (a goblin with 12 hit points) plus 6 goblins ; they've had to kill worgs recently because of strange behavior
19	3 hobgoblins plus 1 bugbear plus 12 stolen goats (Stage 2)
20	3 goblins plus 3 worgs ; they've had to kill worgs recently because of strange behavior
21	1 hobgoblin plus 2 bugbears
22	2 hippogriffs
23	1 ankheg
24	1 owlbear
25	5 gnolls

I. Rawk Enesti

The characters encounter a forester (Rawk Enesti) who's seen and heard strange things in the woods. He'll be hiking cross country if encountered in the morning, or making camp if encountered in the afternoon. His horse, Arbella, doesn't do anything obviously odd during this encounter, but if someone makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check during the conversation with Enesti, they notice that Arbella seems almost to be eavesdropping; she glances furtively from speaker to speaker, and swivels her ears to keep up with what's being said.

"I can't say what it is exactly ... but something's not right. You should have heard the coyotes howling two nights ago. I swear, it was like they were talking to each other. They always howl back and forth, but this was like ... question and answer. It was just something different in their tone, you know, like a conversation. It was spooky."

"It even affected my horse, Arbella. She's a sweet mare, never gave me a spot of trouble until yesterday. Suddenly, it was like she'd forgotten everything I ever taught her. Almost like she didn't even know me, at first. She remembered everything again real quick when I walked her through her paces, and she's even picked up a couple new tricks just today. But yesterday morning, she looked at me like I was a complete stranger. She's fine now, though, aren't you girl?"

2. Azerec Farm

This prosperous farm belongs to Quisto Azerec and his family. They're friendly and hospitable. Neither Quisto nor his wife Nona have seen anything unusual, but their youngest child (Tutoni, age 5) claims she had a conversation with the dog yesterday. It said her name and asked for food. It acts completely normal around the characters.

3. Leptoson Farm

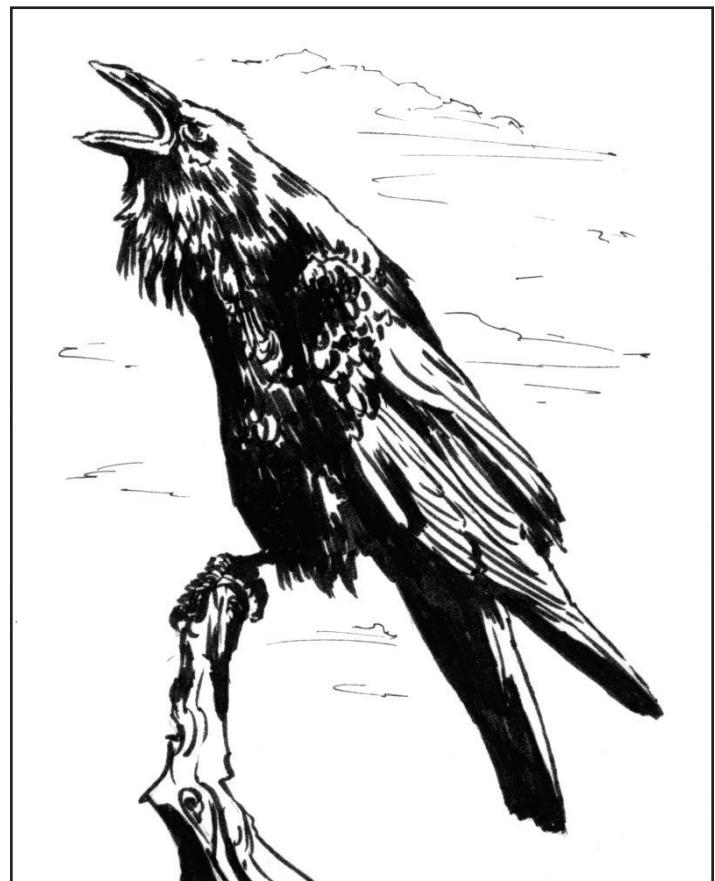
This small, rundown farm belongs to Lepto and Slusel Leptoson. Slusel, a thin, tidy woman, hollers to the characters from in front of the cabin as they approach, insisting that they leave any animals at least 100 yards away from the house. If characters agree to that, she is friendly and hospitable. Her husband Lepto is away in the forest, hunting. The only other people at the farm are her four children, aged 12, 10, 7, and 5.

Slusel explains that her husband left on a hunting trip two days ago. It's not unusual for him to be gone this long, but since he left, the animals started behaving very strangely. She's frightened about what's happening and concerned about Lepto's safety in the woods with the animals acting so oddly.

The odd behavior started just hours after Lepto left. First, one of the children said she heard a group of ravens cawing in a manner that sounded as if they were saying, "Come! Come play! Catch! Climb up!" Later, Slusel saw the horse, two cows, and the dog huddled together near the water trough almost as if they were talking to one another or planning something. Before the characters arrived, she saw a coyote trotting along the treeline while a grouse rode sedately on its back.

The animals in this area are at the end of stage 1. If characters arrive here in the afternoon, Slusel invites them to spend the night at the farm. Normally, she'd insist that strangers sleep in the barn — which is perfectly comfortable — but tonight she'd rather they stay in the house's common room, away from the animals. She won't insist either way because, although she's frightened, she still wants to believe this is all her imagination.

In the morning, the animals are into stage 2. Characters hear them speaking garbled words, but words nonetheless. The animals aren't



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threatening at all; they're filled with curiosity, like children, and they ask questions about everything in broken sentences of one to three words. They say nothing about the drift and claim to have no idea why they suddenly can talk; they just can. They should be portrayed as childlike, friendly, but not especially helpful around the farm. They'd rather explore and learn than do any work.

4. Farmer's Cooperative

Omit the second paragraph of this readaloud text if the characters have no animals with them.

You hear the rattling and clanking of several wagons approaching before you catch sight of them. When they come into view, you see immediately that they're three farmers' wagons hauling produce to market, probably in Feveno.

The wagons halt when the lead driver catches sight of you. He stands up and hollers, "Are your animals all right? We'll come no closer if they're not."

The farmers are Axem Alou, Rudis Krother, and Tom Loma. Alou does most of the talking for them. Krother spends most of the time scowling at the characters, and Loma just agrees with what everyone else says.

They've seen no changes in their animals, but they've heard crazy stories about tame animals going wild and wild animals becoming tame overnight, and about animals behaving in all sorts of strange ways, even talking. There's a talking pig at a tavern about a day behind them, if the characters can believe it. Alou is certain the falling star must have carried evil spirits that escaped when it hit the ground; that's the only possible explanation (and it's not far from the truth). They're nervous about leaving their families, but they must get their produce to market before it spoils.

5. The Laughing Sow Inn

You've arrived at a cozy-looking crossroads inn typical of the sort that are arranged a few days apart along most of the roads in this region. Folk are singing inside, and the smell of roast mutton makes your mouth water.

The sign above the inn door shows a laughing pig hoisting a mug of ale. The paint looks fresh, and you can see — barely — that it was painted over something different underneath. Beneath the laughing pig are the words "Mydra Mavato, Prop."

The inn is called the Laughing Sow. Up until four days ago, it was the Red Horse Inn, but that image on the sign has been replaced with this freshly painted one.

Inside, the inn looks like any other, with one big difference. Tables and benches fill the large common room. At the rear is a bar and a door into the kitchen. Half-a-dozen patrons are drinking and laughing.

The difference is that, among the drinking patrons, sitting on a bench at the table is a fully grown sow. Characters with a farming background can estimate it to weigh between 350 and 400 pounds. The sow is drinking ale from a mug, laughing, and talking, the same as everyone else at the table!

The sow likes to be called Mindy. She's at stage 5 of drift awakening and is, frankly, a drunk. But she's a friendly, funny drunk who's done wonders for business at the inn, which is why Mavato renamed it in her honor. She'll happily talk to the characters in her slurred, oinking speech, provided they keep buying the drinks (another mug of ale approximately every 15 minutes). Mindy tells jokes, sings songs, laughs uproariously at her own and everyone else's stories whether or not they're funny, belches, farts, pounds on the table, and pours equal amounts of ale down her throat and her chin.

Fully melded with the drift, Mindy's Intelligence score is 21, almost certainly making her the smartest being in the room. She's also been

drinking for a week straight, so her thinking is muddled, to say the least. She has zero inhibitions about saying anything, including information that the drift normally would keep to itself. But in her drunken state, she constantly contradicts herself and says things that just sound like inebriated nonsense. For example:

- "Urrr, ya oughta see the stars from out there in space. They're like ... you got nice eyes, honey!"
- "I can remember this one place where everything hopped a ... aroun' on one leg. Can ya pitcher it? Whatta bunch a dopes!"
- "Didja hear the one about the intellect devourer and the zombie? They were ... aww hell ... *braaaainnnns*. Ya get it? *Braaaaainnnns*."
- "Hey, watch this everybody! I'm a dragon!" (pinches lips shut and blows flames out her snout, using *minor illusion*)
- "Where'd I come from? I just 'drifted' in. Tha's right! Try to keep up, sweetheart. You're cute, but kinda dumb."

The proprietor, Mavato, explains (if questioned) that Mindy's been here for a year. She was completely normal until two weeks ago, and she's been talking and drinking like this for almost a week. He doesn't know what's behind the change, but it's the best thing that's ever happened to his business. All the other animals seem fine.

All of the patrons — most of whom are nearly as drunk as the sow — adore Mindy, and they're not afraid of anyone in their current state. Mavato won't put up with anyone threatening Mindy, and he just laughs if someone offers to buy her.

Mindy uses **giant boar** statistics with the following changes:

- Mindy has a Charisma of 14.
 - She has a CR of 3.
- Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** Mindy's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person*, *minor illusion*, *prestidigitation*

3/day each: *comprehend languages*, *ray of sickness*

2/day each: *hold person*

- She can use **Relentless** twice before having to complete a short or long rest for the ability to recharge.

6. Somasa Thoeb

A man is half jogging, half stumbling toward you on the road. He's wild-eyed and out of breath from running. His clothes are torn and he's covered in scratches, but you can't tell at a glance whether he was attacked or if he ran through a patch of thorn trees. He clutches desperately at your cloak and utters a few breathless words, all while throwing many glances over his shoulders: "They're watching us ... it's in their eyes ... it's got 'em ... my family!"

The man's name is Somasa Thoeb, but it might be a minute or more before he regains his breath and calms down enough to tell characters that. If characters push him away, he runs off in search of someone more sympathetic. If characters ask questions, offer him something to drink, or do anything else to calm him down, Thoeb collapses onto the ground and eventually calms down to the point where he can tell his story coherently. Relate his tale in your own words. The important points are listed below:

- Thoeb lives on a farm at the spot marked **6a** on the map.
- Besides himself, his family consists of his wife, two sons, three daughters, and his elderly father-in-law.
- A week ago, the animals on the farm all started acting strangely. At first, they just stared intently at things they'd never paid attention to before. Then, they started making unusual sounds, almost like words. Three days ago, Thoeb saw a few of the sheep standing on their hind legs, but they dropped back to all fours when they noticed him staring at them. Yesterday morning, tools and buckets in the barn were moved from where he knew

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he'd left them, and he had strange, unearthly visions all day. (The drift was experimenting with level 1 powers like *mage hand* and *minor illusion*.)

- Today was much worse: Animals floated into the air (*levitation*), climbed on the walls and roof of the barn (*spider climb*), grew larger or smaller (*enlarge/reduce*). When he overheard them speaking to one another in human speech, discussing killing him and his family, he told his wife to hide everyone in the forest while he went for help. He didn't trust the horses anymore, so he had to go on foot.

- Thoeb begs the characters to come with him back to his farm. He can't pay them anything, but he desperately needs their help to rescue his family.

At the Farm

The farm consists of four structures: a house with a common room, one private room, and a sleeping loft; a barn with four stalls and a hayloft; a grain crib that's half-full; and a sturdy smokehouse.

Since Thoeb left, the animals have taken over. One horse, two cows, three pigs, a dog, seven sheep, and a dozen ravens are awakened at stage 3. Their acknowledged master is a large house cat that the family named Calaban. It is at stage 5, with the drift powers of *chill touch*, *minor illusion*, *poison spray*, *charm person*, *witch bolt*, and *invisibility*. All of the other awakened animals on the farm have one level 0 power each of your choosing.

Calaban expects Thoeb to come back with help, and it doesn't intend to surrender the farm easily. With that in mind, it sent some of the other animals into the forest to find Thoeb's wife Pagli and the rest of the family. Once they were located, Calaban used *charm person* on Pagli to lure them all back to the farm where they are now imprisoned in the windowless smokehouse.

When characters approach the farm, Calaban uses *invisibility* on itself. It negotiates with the characters (in a very feline voice) from the safety of the barn roof. Calaban explains that Thoeb's family is safe but is being held hostage. The animals will release Thoeb's father-in-law and oldest son now as a sign of good faith. They will release the rest at this same time tomorrow, provided they don't see Thoeb or any of the characters snooping around the farm or in the area between now and then. If these conditions aren't met, the family will be killed. The animals can easily carry out this threat with their level 0 powers, but characters might not believe it if they haven't yet seen such powers in use. If they insist on a

demonstration, one of the sheep uses *acid splash* or *shocking grasp* on a normal chicken standing nearby.

During this encounter, most of the other animals are spread out around the characters or across the fields, not bunched together. The dog, the horse, and several ravens stand guard over the smokehouse. Calaban won't do anything that would end its *invisibility* unless it has no other option. The other animals do whatever Calaban tells them to.

This is a tricky situation for the characters. There's real danger here, but they might not yet have seen what drift-awakened animals can do. The safest course of action is for characters to agree to Calaban's terms and withdraw from the farm. The cat honors its word to release the hostages after 24 hours. It will be many hours later before the hostages make their way to wherever Thoeb and the characters are waiting for them; remember that the characters have been told to stay away from the farm, and it will be difficult to hide from the ravens scouting in the air and the dog sniffing around the property.

By the time the hostages are safe and characters could return to the farm, many of the animals will have advanced to stage 4 and developed additional powers. Calaban believes it will be secure surrounded by stage 4 followers. If characters choose to attack while the animals still have captives, the ravens don't hesitate to attack and kill the hostages. The dog, however, immediately switches sides and fights against the other animals; its affection for the family overpowers the drift side of its personality.

As mentioned above, if the encounter occurs as a result of the negotiations with Calaban, the characters could end up engaging in combat with 1 dog (a **mastiff** with the Level 1 *cure wounds* (heals 1d8 hit points of damage) drift power), 1 **riding horse** (with the Level 1 *shield* drift power), 2 **cows** (with the addition of the Level 1 *fog cloud* drift power), 3 pigs (uses **boar** statistics with the addition of the Level 1 *charm person* drift power), 7 **goats** (with the addition of the Level 1 *magic missile* drift power) and a dozen (12) **ravens** (with the addition of the Level 1 *magic missile* drift power).

Calaban uses the statistics for a **cat** with the following changes:

- Calaban has a CR of 2.
- He has 8 (4d4) hit points.
- He has an Intelligence of 16.
- **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** Calaban's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person*, *magic missile*, *shield*

3/day each: *darkness*, *mirror image*

2/day each: *invisibility*

7. Trange-sur-lorre

Trange-sur-lorre is a farming hamlet. Eight homes are clustered together, with gardens and a few outbuildings. Fields belonging to the individual farmers surround the hamlet, along with a communal pasture for horses, cows, and sheep. The hamlet's population is 59: 10 adult men, 9 adult women, 12 teenagers, 17 preteen children, and 11 grandparents. All use the **commoner** stat block.

The unofficial mayor of the hamlet, Fitzwal Rorke, does most of the talking for the inhabitants. Of course, everyone saw the falling star fly overhead. They can point characters in the direction it traveled (east), but no one from the hamlet was foolish enough to go looking for it. Another group of adventurers, similar to the characters, came through Trange-sur-lorre yesterday, however, and they asked questions about the star, too. There were five people in the group, all on foot. They tried to buy some horses from people in Trange-sur-lorre, but no one was willing to sell. The disappointed adventurers headed east out of the village.

Everyone in Trange-sur-lorre is frankly incredulous if characters ask about animals talking, acting like humans, or exhibiting magical powers. They insist that nothing like that has happened in Trange-sur-lorre and that if it did, they'd kill those "demon-possessed" animals without hesitation.

For the time being, Trange-sur-lorre is a safe haven. The drift hasn't gained a foothold here yet. Within two days, however, a few animals become inhabited, and most of the rest begin showing signs of inhabitation within 4 days.



8. Competitors

The characters aren't the only ones looking for the fallen star. A second group of adventurers — probably hired by whichever patron didn't hire the characters — is also scouring the countryside for it. This group can be encountered in the marked hex or in any of the six surrounding hexes.

Depending on how things are going for the characters, this encounter can be deliberately staged as a meeting or as an ambush, with either side as the ambusers. Or it can be left up to chance. Make Wisdom (Perception) checks for the two most perceptive NPCs (with advantage). Do the same for the two characters who are paying the most attention to the group's surroundings. If the lowest of one group's rolls is higher than the highest of the other group's rolls, then the high-rolling party spots the other group without being seen in return, and it can do what it wants: set an ambush, follow from a distance, approach, or avoid the strangers. If neither side beat both of the other's rolls, then the two groups become aware of each other at the same time and at relatively close range (75 to 100 yards).

The NPC party consists of a **druid** named Serros Alpana, a **scout** named Hagark Throatslitter, and three **bandits**. The druid is their leader. The last thing they want is another group of adventurers in the neighborhood competing for their prize. They'll negotiate and even appear to share information, but mainly they just confirm and agree with what the characters already know. Hagark does let it slip that they had to kill their horses two days ago after the animals started acting very strangely. If the characters have horses, these NPCs offer to buy them at twice the going rate.

The price doesn't really matter to them, since they plan to kill the characters and take the horses and their money back anyway. Alpana says anything to win the characters' confidence, including offering to team up and split the pay for finding the star. But if this group walks away from this encounter, with or without horses, they'll find a way to circle back and attack the characters.

9. Emissaries to the Bear King

This encounter can occur in the marked hex or in any of the six surrounding hexes.

Several hundred yards ahead, you see something moving between the trees. At first it looks like an impossibly long creature, but you quickly realize that it's many individual animals — dozens, possibly a hundred or more — deer, foxes, rabbits, turkeys, and other woodland creatures, all moving calmly toward the east.

All of these animals are at stage 3 or 4 of awakening. Most of them are wild forest creatures, but a few such as the dogs and sheep were once domesticated. Their leader is a magnificent elk at stage 4 that calls itself Jostrocles.

This procession of animals is perfectly peaceful unless they're attacked, in which case they unleash a host of level 0 and 1 powers against the characters.

Jostrocles is intelligent, dignified, and well-spoken. He explains that the animals are on their way to pay homage to the "Bear King" at his palace. The characters are welcome to accompany the animals as long as they keep the peace. They can even hunt other animals along the way, but they mustn't kill one that's "awakened" (in Jostrocles's words).

Assuming characters carry on a conversation with Jostrocles, the elk speaks about "awakening" with near-religious awe. It won't mention the drift or space. Instead, it describes suddenly becoming more aware of its surroundings, as if an enclosing haze had lifted.

Ravens summoned the animals to the Bear King's court to pay him respect and to swear loyalty. This is all the ravens said, but the animals somehow know that it's the correct thing to do. They don't know whether the Bear King had anything to do with their awakening; secretly, Jostrocles hopes he did, and greatly looks forward to meeting him.

During this encounter, try to impress upon characters the great nobility

of Jostrocles. He is completely uneducated in the ways of humans or the wider world, but he is highly intelligent, dignified, and wise — more so than many human monarchs. The animals follow him not because he's the strongest or because he has some innate right to rule them, but because they consider Jostrocles to be the best among them.

Jostrocles uses the statistics of a **giant elk** with the following changes:

- Jostrocles has an Intelligence of 14.

• **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** Jostrocles' spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person, cure wounds*

3/day each: *slow*

Three other notable creatures among many the characters could meet during this trek include:

- Arvior, a chatty **badger** with a dark but rich sense of humor. The badger is effectively Jostrocles' jester. He says what others are too polite, shy, or fearful to say, and masks harsh truth in humor. Ideally, characters develop a fondness for Arvior because he plays important roles in "Discord Among Equals" and "Unexpected Allies."
- Kaffl, an **owl** with an injured wing. It sometimes rides on Jostrocles's back. Any healing spell fixes its wing and makes Kaffl a friend of the character for life.
- Stomper, a rabbit with a taste for practical jokes.

Jostrocles leads the animals (and the characters, if they come along) to encounter area 10: Welcome to the Jungle.

10. Welcome to the Jungle

If characters arrive here accompanying Jostrocles and the other animals, read the first set of boxed text.

For the past hour or more, Jostrocles has led the procession along well-hidden game trails through dense forest. But suddenly, although you're still in forest, it feels almost as if you've entered a glade. The trees are widely spaced, and the ground is almost free of underbrush. Sunlight reaches through the canopy in many places to dapple the ground.

Animals of all sorts are grazing, resting, or playing here. As if that isn't strange enough, many have gathered in small groups where they're conversing in low tones or laughing loudly.

Only two things disrupt the oddly idyllic scene. One is the packs of wolves apparently standing guard around the area and keeping wary eyes trained on you and your companions. The other is the crumbling ruin of an ancient building visible through the trees at the far side of the thinned area.

If characters arrive here on their own, read this second set of boxed text instead.

For the past hour or more, you've been following narrow game trails through dense forest. But suddenly, although you're still in a forest, it feels almost as if you've entered a glade. The trees are widely spaced, and the ground is almost free of underbrush. Sunlight reaches through the canopy in many places to dapple the ground.

Animals of all sorts are grazing, resting, or playing here. As if that isn't strange enough, many have gathered in small groups where they're conversing in low tones or laughing loudly.

Only two things disrupt the oddly idyllic scene. One is the crumbling ruin of an ancient building visible through the trees at the far side of the thinned area. The other is the two packs of wolves that are closing in on you from opposite sides in an effort to catch you between them.

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The wolf guards approach the group in either case, but they are much more menacing if the characters are alone.

If Jostrocles is leading the group, the elk explains to the wolves that the humans (all character races are humans to the animals) have shown themselves to be trustworthy. The wolves don't like it, but they allow the characters to wander freely through the glade while they take Jostrocles to see the Bear King in the ruined structure. The wolves won't let the characters come along, but Jostrocles promises to try to get them an audience if they want one. After about an hour, assuming they haven't stirred up any trouble, the characters are summoned to the structure to meet the Bear King.

If the characters came on their own, the wolves immediately close in and demand to know why they're here and what they want. The goal of the wolves is to keep the characters in a group at the edge of the glade until they get further orders from the Bear King, which takes about 15 minutes. They use nonviolent means to keep the intruders under control, as long as that works. The wolves don't intend to start a fight, but if one breaks out, they'll do their best to finish it. They want to capture the characters, so they'll knock them out, not kill them. They'll also do things like grappling (by biting at) a character's sword arm to prevent him or her from attacking. Captured characters are locked up in Fort Orvelle; see "Betrayal" and "Unexpected Allies," below.

There are 12 **wolf** guards with the following additional abilities:

- **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** The wolves' spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). They can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person, magic missile*

3/day each: *hold person*

If characters manage to not get immediately tossed in the dungeon, they're free to wander through the area, observing and talking to the animals. The wolves keep an eye on the characters but don't bother them unless they start trouble or approach within 20 yards of Fort Orvelle.

Hundreds of animals are in the glade, from Large to Tiny, and include herbivores and carnivores. They seem to get along fine.

Their conversation tends to fall into two subjects. The first can be summed up as, "So that's what it's like to be a fox" (or a squirrel, or a grouse, or whatever type of animal is being spoken to). The other is, "What do you suppose the Bear King has planned?" Many of the animals have seen the Bear King. Small, weak animals tend to describe him as immense and terrifying but fair, while large animals and fellow carnivores describe him as powerful and magnificent. He's been their "king" for over a week according to the animals who can remember back that far. Bear in mind that to them, that week is their entire childhood and adolescence; before that, they had little concept of time.

Discord Among Equals

This event occurs while characters are exploring the glade and awaiting their audience with the Bear King. Characters can notice it on their own or Kaffl (the injured owl) could come hopping and flapping (or flying) toward them, yelling for their help.

About a hundred yards away, six wolves have surrounded Arvior and are threatening the badger. You can't hear what any of them are saying from this distance, but it's obvious the badger's been hurt. His flank is shiny with fresh blood, and he seems to be looking for a way to break out of the wolves' circle.

The wolves, who are fanatically loyal to the Bear King, took offense at Arvior's humorous jibes at their liege. The badger is seriously hurt (1 hit point left). If characters intervene, the wolves back down, and Arvior is hugely grateful. If characters don't intervene, Jostrocles jumps into the center of the circle of wolves, stands over Arvior, and intimidates the wolves into backing off.

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Fort Orvelle

The structure in the glade is the remains of Fort Orvelle, obviously abandoned long ago. A character who makes a successful DC 10 Intelligence (History) check recognizes it as Foerdewaith construction. The foundation and ground floor were made of stone, but the upper floors would have been timber. Only the stone construction remains, covered by moss and ivy.

The foundation of the fort covers an area approximately 50 feet wide by 30 feet deep. Stone walls still stand above most of the perimeter, to a height that varies from 5 to 10 feet. The walls are 2 feet thick, with one main, gothic-arched doorway (the doors rotted away decades ago). Narrow windows pierce the walls approximately every 10 feet; a few of these still have gothic arches at the top, but most have crumbled below that height.

The interior of the structure is open to the sky. A few pillars still stand, but the beams and arches they supported are long gone. The floor is still paved with flagstones, but they're heaved up and uneven from plants growing beneath and between them. Crumbling stone walls divide the interior into three smaller spaces: one "grand hall" and two small rooms across one of the narrow ends.

The only "room" still intact is a cellar beneath one of the small rooms. See "Betrayal!" for further details on this chamber.

The Bear King holds court in this structure. His "throne" is the remains of a once-fine sedan chair large enough for two human passengers. No mention is made of where he got this unusual conveyance, but a character who inspects the seat and makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) or (Medicine) check notices what appears to be quite a lot of dried blood on the slashed seat cushion. Many large bones are scattered on the floor around the throne. All are fresh (the creatures they came from died anytime from a day to a week ago) and have been gnawed clean. Most of the bones are from deer and sheep, but characters who carefully scan the piles spot a few recognizably human parts such as skulls and bones from humanoid hands or feet.

The Bear King

The Bear King was the first animal awakened by the drift on this planet. He spends most of his time in his "throne room" inside the crumbling remains of Fort Orvelle. That's where characters are brought for their audience with him, if they don't get imprisoned before then.

The Bear King is a particularly large brown bear (uses **polar bear** stats). A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that he's a seasoned adult, probably 10 to 15 years old. Many scars can be seen through his fur, indicating he's lived a long and violent life.

Characters receiving an audience with the Bear King are escorted into his chamber by stage 5 wolves that remain throughout the meeting. Jostrocles might also be present at your discretion.

The inside of Fort Orvelle looks not much different from the outside: crumbling stone walls covered with moss and ivy. The floor is paved with flagstones, but they're heaved and cracked from the many plants growing underneath and between them. A few pillars still stand, but everything above this ground floor collapsed and rotted away long ago, leaving the structure open to the sky. The whole interior is one large room except for two smaller chambers seen through their open doorways to your right. Like the rest of the building, those rooms have no doors or ceilings.

The Bear King is a particularly large brown bear. Many scars from a lifetime of fighting other bears, woodland monsters, and possibly hunters mark his fur. Some of the scars look as if swords inflicted them — including one that hasn't yet healed. He's seated on the tattered remains of a sedan chair built to carry two human passengers; where he got that conveyance is anyone's guess. Gnawed bones of large animals are scattered around his feet.

QUESTS OF DOOM 4

Betrayal!



Being fully awakened (stage 5) and having Intelligence 21, the Bear King is not about to be tricked, intimidated, or pressured by any party of roustabout humans. He's killed more than his share, both before and after awakening, and he's not shy about admitting it.

The Bear King is gruff and plainspoken but not necessarily rude. He wants information from these humans, so he doesn't want to anger or offend them until he gets it. He has many questions about how the humans are organized, their rulers, their armies, and their wizards. In short, he's wondering whether the animals could defeat them if enough animals were awakened, but he won't come right out and ask that question.

Some characters might see this as an opportunity to join with the awakened animals as their military advisors. If so, there's no reason not to let the adventure move in that direction. The Bear King gladly uses them but never trusts them; they'll be watched at all times (effective spies are easy to come by when you command tiny awakened animals).

If characters are rash enough to attack the Bear King, he and his wolves fight back viciously, and dozens more awakened animals start pouring into the fight beginning on the third round. By this point in the adventure, characters should understand the foolishness of a direct assault: Fully awakened animals are tough, and they're especially tough in large groups. Attacking the Bear King only guarantees the characters are captured and locked in the cellar.

The Bear King is a **brown bear** with the following changes:

- The Bear King has an AC of 12 and 42 hit points (5d10 + 15).
- He has a Strength of 20 (+5).
- His Bite attack does 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage.
- His Claws attack does 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage.

• **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** The Bear King's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *magic missile, shield, sleep*
3/day each: *levitate, mirror image*
2/day each: *lightning bolt*

The 4 guards are **wolves** with the following additional features:

• **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** The wolves' spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). They can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person, magic missile, fog cloud*
3/day each: *hold person, mirror image*
2/day each: *haste*

If characters pledge fealty to the Bear King and join his ranks as advisors against their fellow humans, the adventure veers off in a new direction. If they take the more likely course of attacking or biding their time, see "Betrayal!" below.

At some point, the characters are likely to wind up in the Bear King's "dungeon" (the cellar beneath Fort Orville). This can happen for several reasons. Getting pushy or mouthy with the Bear King's wolf guards or foolishly attacking the Bear King directly are surefire tickets to the dungeon. But even if characters behave themselves and bide their time, the Bear King doesn't trust them. If they try to leave the glade or if they stick around for 24 hours, the Bear King's paranoia gets the better of him and he orders the characters' capture and imprisonment.

Rather than describe exactly how the animals strike, you must use your best judgment in setting up this treacherous attack. Different groups of players will fall into different traps; a ploy that nets one group easily will be just as easily avoided by another. The Number 1 factor to plan around is that when the animals strike, they strike with overwhelming force. They don't send six wolves to capture five adventurers; the Bear King sends everything he's got. If the characters trust the animals, the attack might come at night when most of the humans are sleeping, or during one of the Bear King's speeches, when it's natural for the humans to be surrounded by hundreds of animals.

However it's staged, plan to use a force that can capture the characters in no more than three rounds of combat; two is better. Include plenty of animals with powers that debilitate or subdue, such as *blindness/deafness, charm person, sleep, hold person, and web*. It's OK to drive characters to 0 hit points; they'll recover after a long rest. The animals fight to knock the characters unconscious so they're automatically stable when they reach 0 hit points.

Once they're out, the characters are dragged into Fort Orville and dropped into the cellar, and rocks are heaped atop the trapdoor. Eventually, they awaken in the cold, damp, dark cellar. They have been stripped of their weapons, pouches, packs, and other accoutrements, but they still have their clothes, boots, armor, and belts. Holy symbols, magical items, and implements that look like clothing or jewelry probably remain; the animals haven't yet figured out all the intricacies of human decorations. Weapons or other items that *players specifically stipulated beforehand they keep hidden* — a knife that's habitually carried concealed in a boot, for example, or a potion vial that's sewn into a cloak — are overlooked by the animals. Once characters are captured, however, it's too late for players to start listing their holdout weapons. Unless they described it before the attack or have it written on their character sheet, they don't have it.

An Unexpected Ally

Once they wake up and have time to take stock of their situation, characters discover that they're not the only ones in the cellar. The other prisoner resembles a belabrah (these low-level characters probably have never encountered one before, but the name might mean something to the players). Those who can see make out a form resembling a naked brain about the size of a basketball that hovers in the air. It has no eyes or other apparent organs, but it does have a heavy, serrated beak. Many barbed tentacles drift and writhe beneath it.

This creature is an alien from another world. It came here with the drift after its own world was overwhelmed and destroyed (see area **11. The Driftmass**, below). Its name sounds like Khotl. It knows Common reasonably well (it learned by listening to the animals above) but because of its beak, it finds it impossible to correctly pronounce consonants that are formed with the lips (f, m, p, v, w).

Khotl explains to the characters that it used magic to survive the long voyage through space so it could warn the inhabitants of this world against the drift. The journey so weakened it, however, that the first awakened creature (the Bear King) overpowered it and trapped it here. Khotl can fill the characters in on any details about the drift they haven't figured out for themselves. Most importantly, it can tell them about the driftcore and guide them to the driftmass.

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"At the core ob the drikt-bass is the oldest consciousness ob the drikt. Through eons it has degenerated into biological sludge, but its intelligence rebains great. While it libs, its sbawn shall sblend and rekroduce until your world is consuned; but destroy it, and its stawn bill gradually beaken and die."

Arvior to the Rescue

Sometime after the characters learn the true nature of what they're up against from Khotl and what they must do to defeat the drift, they are rescued from an unexpected direction.

The silence of the cellar is broken by a scratching noise coming from behind one of the walls. The noise continues for a minute or so, then the wall crumbles inward and the dirt-smudged face of a badger appears — it's Arvior! "Hurry up now," he says, "there's no time to lose."

Arvior and five other badgers dug an escape tunnel into Fort Orville's cellar. All Medium and Small characters, including Khotl, can crawl and wriggle through it. The tunnel emerges 50 yards away in a large patch of heavy brush that offers full concealment, as long characters keep low.

The challenge is recovering the characters' weapons and gear. All of it is stacked outside Fort Orville. No one is guarding it since the cellar is considered escape-proof. If the characters are patient for a few hours, Arvior and his companions can sneak it away without incident while the

characters hide in the forest. If they insist on snatching their belongings NOW, it takes one successful DC 13 Dexterity (Stealth) check to reach the Fort unnoticed by any of the Bear King's wolves and another to get back to the safety of cover unnoticed. A clever plan, such as having the badgers cause a disturbance elsewhere in the camp at the same time, can gain tactical advantage on the Stealth checks. All the gear amounts to two loads while sneaking (two trips for one character, or two characters making a single trip). Someone could gather just weapons, spell books, and crucial magic items in a single trip, leaving behind packs, food, money, blankets, etc.

Khotl is a **belabrah** (see Appendix A) with the following additional features:

- **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** Khotl's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *cure wounds, magic missile, sleep*

3/day each: *spike growth, web*

2/day each: *phantasmal force*

Arvior is a **badger** with the following changes:

- Arvior has 9 hit points and an AC of 11.
- He has a CR of 1/4 (50 XP).

- **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** Arvior's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +3 to hit with spell attacks). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *cure wounds (heals 1d8 hit points), sleep*

3/day each: *silence*

ii. The Driftmass

The driftmass is the heart of the evil that animates the drift. It's constructed from the decomposing bodies of countless alien creatures that the drift awakened on the last world it visited. In the final stages of their awakening, as they descended into madness, they climbed atop one another to form a writhing, squealing, living pyramid of flesh that then levitated out of the planet's atmosphere and into the void between worlds. Most of the alien creatures suffocated immediately and their corpses became freeze-dried mummies during the eons-long voyage, but a few survived through the drift's magic.

What the characters find here is well outside their experience. Confronting the horror at the center of the driftmass, however, is the only way the drift can be stopped from spreading across the characters' world.

There can be no doubt that you've found the site of the falling star's impact. Trees are snapped off like jackstraws and scattered across the ground in scorched heaps. The earth itself is plowed up in a massive furrow 50 yards wide, and the destruction extends for a quarter mile through the forest.

At the end of the immense scar is a mound of mummified flesh 75 feet across and 50 feet high. The creatures that form this hideous mausoleum are like nothing you've seen before. You spot things whose bodies appear to have been an armored bulb with a central beak surrounded by spiked tentacles, and others that look as if they were nothing but muscle and tendon wrapped around lidless eyes and fang-filled mouths seemingly placed at random on their bodies.

On one side of the mound, the corpses are burst outward, as if something emerged from inside. A dank, black tunnel extends into the mound.

The characters are brave adventurers, but crawling into this pile of alien corpses takes extraordinary courage. Tell everyone as they enter the once-living alien vault that they feel sickened and menaced in a way they've never felt before. Khotl can describe the inside layout. It's also willing to come along to aid the characters, as are Arvior and the other badgers.

Iia, b, c: Awakened Survivors

Unfortunately for the heroes, not everything inside the driftmass is dead — but everything that survives is completely insane. Characters encounter the creatures listed below at the labeled spots. All of these are alien creatures from another world entirely, driven mad by centuries of drift inhabitation.

11a. A gibbering mouther with the following additions:

- **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** The gibbering mouther's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12, +2 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *charm person, sleep*
3/day each: *darkness*

11b. A grick with the following additions:

- **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** The grick's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 10, +0 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *fog cloud, heat metal*
3/day each: *slow*

11c. A belabtra (see Appendix A) with the following additions:

- **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** The belabtra's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 11, +1 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *magic missile, sleep*
3/day each: *mirror image*

Because the driftmass is built from tangled corpses, all spaces inside it are difficult terrain.

During their first battle inside the driftmass, every character must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw at the start of his or her turn. Those who fail can do nothing on their turn but take the dodge action and repeat the saving throw at the start of their next turn. Those who succeed are fine and don't need to make this saving throw anymore.

11d: The Driftcore

At the heart of the driftmass is the oldest entity ever awakened by the drift. Its original form is gone; through eons of habitation, its flesh has melted into gelatinous goo resembling a black pudding.

Unlike the other creatures surviving in the driftmass, this one is not insane, but its psychology is so completely alien and evil that it may seem insane to adventurers.

If a character has a passive Perception of 25 or higher, they notice a black semi-fluid substance in the small spaces between the tangled, mummified alien corpses, otherwise they can't spot the driftcore when they enter this chamber because its amorphous body has oozed into the spaces between the tangled, mummified alien corpses. It doesn't attack immediately but speaks to the characters telepathically. Begin the conversation with point Number 1 below, then fill in with other snippets as the conversation flows. Some phrases might make sense in context; others won't. They don't need to. That's part of the driftcore's alienness. Note that it never addresses the characters directly but always refers to them in the third person.

- “They impress us with their violent determination. Why have they come?”
- “The learning is now. The harvesting is to come.”
- “Their world is but a stopping point. In time we shall harvest sensation, extend our mass, and move on.”
- “Their world has much to offer. The harvesting shall be many cycles.”
- “Their impulses are not easily shared. These others absorb without reasoning. We flourish therein.”
- “They are free to leave but not to interfere.”
- “They seek causality to nourish comprehension. Thus larger knowing eludes them.”



Finally, the driftcore oozes out of the walls to attack.

The driftcore is a **black pudding** with the following additions:

- It has an Intelligence of 18.
- Its size is Huge and has 95 hit points ($10d12 + 30$)
- **Innate Spellcasting (Drift Powers).** The driftcore's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *acid splash, chill touch, poison spray*
3/day each: *ray of sickness, sleep*
2/day each: *enlarge/reduce*

Treasure: Once the driftcore is dead, characters spot the glint of gold among the mummified corpses. Getting to it involves some grisly work cutting through the mummies. The gold is strange, alien jewelry worn by some of these creatures when they were incorporated into the driftmass. Characters can find a total of eight pieces with values of 20, 30, 40, 40, 50, 60, 60, and 80 gp respectively (totaling 380 gp). One of the items (a necklace that humans could wear as a bracelet) includes three *beads of force* as part of its decoration.

Also, see “Conclusion” below.

Conclusion

If the driftcore is destroyed, most of the threat from the drift dies with it. The drift can no longer spread from one awakened animal to another.

The affected animals, however, are still awakened. They retain their heightened Intelligence and drift powers — for a while. They lose 1 point of Intelligence per day, and they lose their highest-level drift power every third day. If the characters' animals were affected, this could be a sad

AWAKENINGS

decline for the characters to watch, as their loyal companions slowly lose the ability to speak and to reason like humans.

If the Bear King is still around, he's no friendlier now than he was before. At least he'll be back to normal within a few weeks.

As an alternative, animals could retain some of their gained IQ; their Intelligence score stops declining when it reaches their original score +2. This would allow them to retain some speech and reasoning capacity, which would make them very valuable (and unique) mounts and companions. If so, the animals themselves become the adventure's reward, and the treasure from the driftcore could be reduced.

Appendix A: New Creatures and NPCs

Belabra

This creature resembles a man-sized flying jellyfish with twelve long tentacles. Four thin eyestalks protrude from its cap. Its cap is blackish gray and its eyestalks are dark gray.

Belabra (Tangler)

Medium aberration, neutral

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 39 (6d8+12)

Speed 5 ft., fly 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Acidic Blood. Each time the belabra is hit with an attack that does piercing or slashing damage, all creatures within 10 feet of the belabra must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be sprayed with the belabra's blood. On a failed save, the creature takes 4 (1d6 + 1) acid damage and has disadvantage on attacks, saving throws or ability checks due to sneezing and partial blindness until the end of the belabra's next turn.

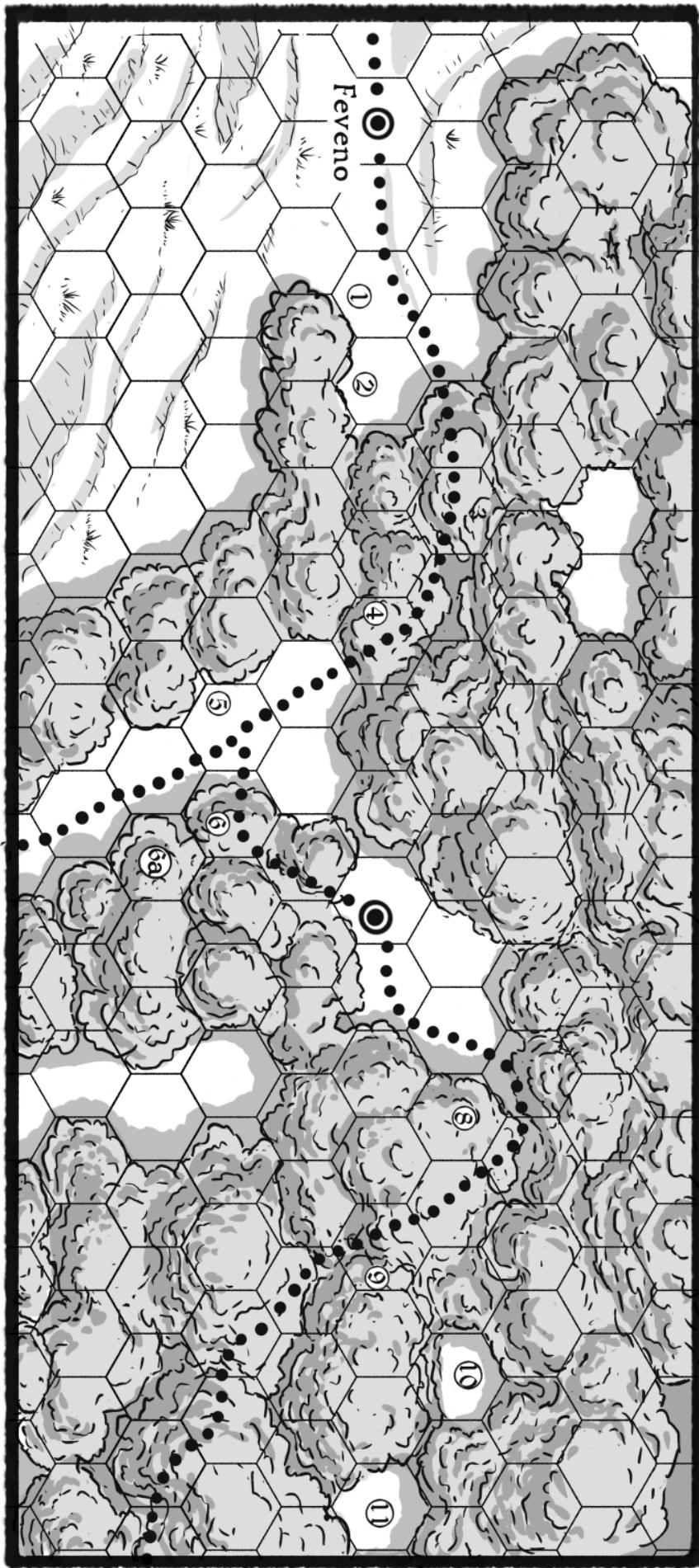
Actions

Multiattack. The belabra makes two attacks: one with its slam and one with its tentacles or bite (if the target is grappled).

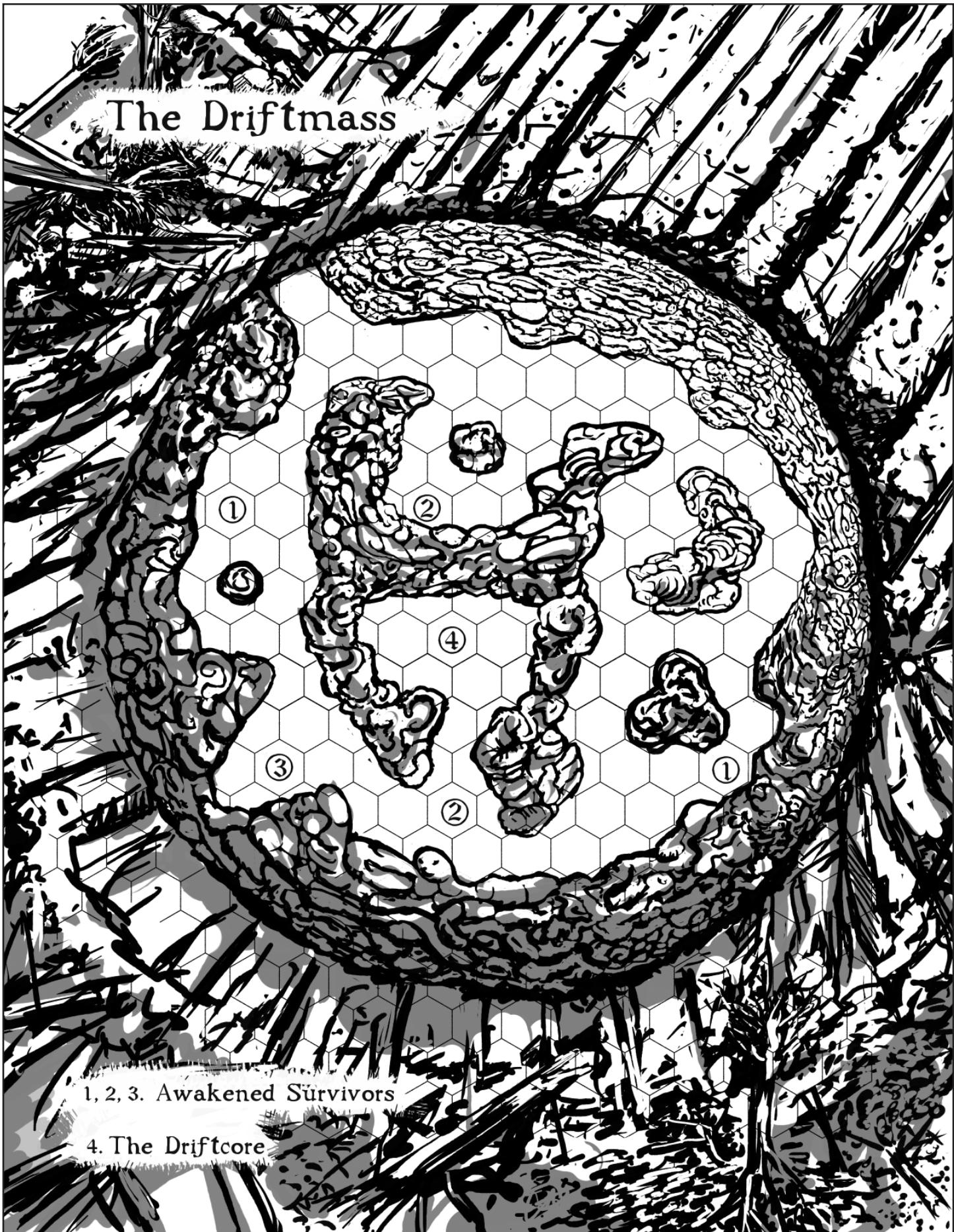
Bite. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage

Slam. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft.; one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Tentacles. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft.; one target. Hit: 9 (2d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and target is grappled (escape DC 12). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and takes 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage from the tentacle barbs at the start of its turn.



Awakenings



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