

A Hole Lot of Trouble

(Jonathan Hicks)

- *An encounter for Rank 1-2 adventurers **The village of Dulsbury in the north of Albion has a most peculiar problem - they have a hole. Dulsbury sits on a hill at the edge of Fenring Forest with a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. During a rather vicious thunderstorm, the villagers heard an almighty crash, the ground rumbled, and they woke up to find a huge hole, 20m across, in the field of Farmer Mugger (who grows the finest cabbages this side of the river). The hole itself appears bottomless and the locals are afraid to go near it. Rumours started almost immediately -- the hole is an opening to the Abyss, and those devout to the True Faith feel chills and a sense of overwhelming dread when they approach the hole. The local priest has been summoned. The rumour that the hole is a gateway to Hell has also attracted members of a cult thought long dead: the Cloaked Believers, a group of devil worshippers known for kidnapping, murder, and other vile practices. They have decided that this is their time and have made camp in the woods close to the hole. More of their black-cloaked kind have been quietly heading to their camp. The Cloaked Believers are followers of the Shadow Star, Lusiren the Fallen, who is said to have been cast out of the heavens for defying the True Faith and creating evil creatures to follow her as she tried to overthrow God. It is one of many cults that dot the lands, but this one seems to be gathering momentum. The cult camp for now consists of only four Believers and a Black Cleric, a leader of local cult members. The cult is but a pale shadow of its former power. They are devout but not stupid and will fight until they have no hope, then they will either flee (and swear revenge on the party!) or surrender. Their faith only stretches so far. They do not wear armour, just thin, badly made black cloaks and undergarments, and they all wield shortswords (d8, 3). If the party slay the Believers and Cleric and loot them for treasure, they will find a single crown, 24 florins, 24 pennies, and a tiny piece of quartz of low quality worth 17F. ^ CLOAKED BELIEVER (Black Cleric values after the oblique ||| RE 1/2 | ^ ATTACK | 13/14 | Axe (d8, 6) || ^ DEFENCE | 7/8 | Dirt & Refuse (AF 2) || ^ MAGICAL ATTACK | N/A ^ Magic Points | None | ^ MAGICAL DEFENCE | 3/4 ^ Health Points | 11/12 | ^ EVASION | 4 ^ Movement | 10m (20m) | ^ STEALTH | 13 ^ PERCEPTION | 5 (Normal) | The Cloaked Believers are here because they heard the rumours of the hole and that it may be a gateway to Hell, so they figured this was the time to try and complete their cult's mission to bring Lusiren back into the world to overthrow the True Faith. They have already started to make plans to get into the hole and have thrown six ropes down, tying them off on strong pegs that can take the weight of a grown person and their equipment, even armoured knights. The Hole is deep and disappears into darkness - throwing an object down there does not result in any sounds of impact - and the cold is almost stifling. As soon as anyone makes a descent they can feel the chill of the dark and their breath explodes into clouds of mist. The ropes are nearly 100 feet long and as the players get to the bottom they can see that rough rock and roots slowly give way to construction, like the bricked walls of a well but with huge blocks three feet across. As they descend further the blocks become more intricate in design, with writing and artwork reminiscent of the Selentine Empire carved into the stone, spiralling down into the hole (the carvings on Trajan's column monument in Rome are similar). It tells a story: the first carvings show a legion of Selentine soldiers marching across hills and across a river, fighting**

local warrior tribes and defeating them with sword and shield. The tribes seem unorganized while the Selentine warriors are uniform and ordered. They build fortresses and towns, cultivate the fields, and seem to 'civilise' the local tribes. Then they are attacked by a huge dragon. The carvings show the beast destroying what they have built and taking their riches for its hoard. To hide the treasure, the Selentines dig a huge hole and throw their wealth into it in an attempt to hide it from the dragon. They cover the hole with thick beams of wood and dirt so that it appears to be simple farmland. The dragon returns, circles, and leaves. The next part of the carving shows a Selentine official holding up a scroll, but it ends abruptly. The story is over. The rope ends, but there is still no bottom. Under the feet of the players is a level mist, a floor of fog that roils and bursts as if boiling. The cold shakes the bones and the silence is total, other than the breathing of the players and the creaking ropes. Do the players go back up, or do they drop through the mist and pray that there is something not too far below? If the players do elect to drop then they pass Through the Mist for a second and then emerge underneath, landing in ankle-deep mud and filth. Any player dropping through the mist should test Reflexes to avoid taking a single point of damage. There is little light down here. The daylight penetrates the mist so that there is some light but it is gloomy. Torches or lanterns will help. There is nothing down here but rotted scrolls, papyrus, clothes, old tools, and broken pots and utensils. There is no sign of treasure. Until...** the muck suddenly erupts and a grotesque, twisted creature with an axe explodes from the filth. It is skeletal, twice the size of a normal person, and seems to pull the broken items and filth to its body like a magnet, the dirt and grime folding over the cracked and splintered bones like skin and muscle. It wields a huge axe (d8, 6).

It hisses in a strange language, and if anyone can understand Selentine, the gist is clear – 'I am the Guardian of the Gold and you will not steal from us, reptile scum!'

This is a Guardian Spirit, created to protect hidden treasure by forming a body from whatever it can find. It is old and weak but will fight hard. It is a Rank 4 creature so the players will have to fight together or retreat as best they can and regroup! The spirit will not cross through the mist.

GUARDIAN SPIRIT			RE 4
ATTACK	17	Axe (d8, 6)	
DEFENCE	9	Dirt & Refuse (AF 2)	
MAGICAL ATTACK	N/A	Magic Points	None
MAGICAL DEFENCE	7	Health Points	12
EVASION	6	Movement	12m (25m)
STEALTH	15	PERCEPTION	9 (Darksight)

If they defeat the spirit then they can search the refuse at the bottom of the hole. There are riches here – the Treasure Type is Good for Cash, Gems/Jewellery, and Magic Items (Dragon Warriors p131) and they may make one automatic roll on the Magic Items table (Dragon Warriors p132).

What they do with the hole afterwards is up to them – it might make for an interesting dig site for scholars or even a local landmark that people will pay to visit!

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