

The Pursuit of Black Seth

A Battle of Survival for a 1 or more characters of Level 1-3

Introduction

For the past two weeks you have pursued the notorious group of outlaws known as the Red Hand gang, led by their infamous leader, the black hearted Seth Denigan, long known for his acts of cruelty and callousness to all who have had the misfortune of crossing his path.

But now the reward promised to you by Lord Halford for his head lies tantalisingly close at hand, the outlaws are just hours ahead of you and unaware that you are hot on their heels.

The road you find yourselves on is a lonely back roads one, empty of travellers. A violent earth tremor shook these sparsely populated parts recently, and no doubt the outlaws have decided to take advantage of the chaos following the quake to loot the shattered towns and villages.

Dark sombre clouds scud overhead and a chilling wind picks out chinks in your armour. Behind you lies a lonely, empty village, mysteriously deserted. You didn't stop for long there, something about the silence of that desolate place sent shivers down your spines.

Now as you urge your horses through a bank of trees you see the bulk of a mountain lying ahead and nearer at hand a solitary figure wearing grey robes, staff in hand hurries your way. He stops as if considering fleeing, but you see his shoulders slump as he realises flight is impossible, and then you are drawing abreast of him.

"A bleak day for travel" he greets you "and few there be that seek entry to these accursed lands"

His name is Tarn Goodfellow, which he will disclose if asked. He is cautious in his replies, preferring to tell the truth whenever possible.

If asked about his occupation, he will reply

"I am a merchant by trade, I have worked these roads for many a year, selling pots and pans, for all manner of things, but principally for the fungi's and mushrooms prized by alchemists and workers of magic"

If questioned about whether he has met the bandits, he will respond:

"No, I have met no one, you are the first travellers I have encountered since leaving the village of Byford, many leagues and two days distant"

He will then elaborate of this statement by adding:

"As I came down the road I saw a curious thing. The quake had shaken the mountain, the side of which had slipped, crashing down into the forest below, and in the newly created cliff I saw all manner of rooms and tunnels"

“In all the years I have travelled this road, I have never known that such a place existed. I thought to investigate but then I thought on the tales of the evil that dwells in such places, so I hurried onwards”

There is little else of value that he can tell the party, and it should become obvious that time is passing and the bandits drawing further away ...

The Mountain

Once the party leaves the merchant (unless they take him captive) they will pass through open forests of oak and hazel, interspersed with open green swards of waving grass. Within a short time they will find themselves climbing the lower slopes of the mountain. The trail ascends in a series of rocky zigzags until it passes through a cutting crossing the spine of a razor-backed ridge. The path then descends into a steep V-shaped valley. As the party should be beginning to think that the merchant lied to them, they will round a bulge in the mountainside,

“Ahead, the path has disappeared beneath a morass of tumbled clay and stone, above which is a freshly torn scar in the mountainside. Near the top of the slide, dark against the tumbled expanse of white clay, are exposed galleries and passageways -- evidently the caves of which the tinker spoke.”

Near the slide, concealed in a small copse of willows are the bandits horses, 9 in total. All are normal riding horses for the purposes of resale and HP. One particularly large and vicious brute with a glossy black coat, will attempt to bite anyone who approaches too closely. It can be identified as Black Seth's mount.

Pannier's dangle from the flanks of each horse, which if searched will be found to contain, food, water and wine for several days, as will assorted pieces of cheap jewellery and assorted coinage to the value of about 100 gold pieces.

Careful observation will reveal the bandits tracks leading from the copse in the direction of the slide a mere few hundred yards away across the mountainside.

On reaching the slide, the party will find ample evidence of the bandits passing; the impressions of the bandit's boots have sunk deep in the freshly exposed clay. Despite the slipperiness of the clay and the presence huge tumbled boulder the slide can be climbed until about 20' from the top. Here a vertical cliff forms a step to the caves beyond. A confused melee of footprints surrounds a rope dangling from the ledge above.

Climbing the rope brings the party to the ledge. A quick glance will be evidence enough to reveal that it is not natural, but part of a room once constructed within the interior of the mountain. The floor of the ledge is flagged, and on the far side, in the sloping wall is an archway about 6' tall. Lying to one side is a mound of rags that flutters in the cold breeze. The rags will disintegrate if handled, and what it once was will remain a mystery.

Clods of clay shed from the bandits boots, indicate that the bandits entered the tunnel. A ranger will be able to ascertain that the tracks only go in.

Entering the Mountain

The tunnel leading into the heart of the mountain is a flattened oval in profile; its dimensions close for human sized characters. Any over the height of 6'4" will literally scrape the ceiling. The entire length of the tunnel is constructed of flagged stonework, simple in design, but skilfully done as any dwarf will attest.

The tunnel curves in a gentle arc, heading initially northeast. About 30 yards in, there is a fork, from which emanates a slight haze of sunlight. The new tunnel leads back in the way they've just come, to a sheer cliff face, about 50 yards across from the ledge. The characters will be treated to a magnificent view across the valley, and the serried ranks of purplish hills beyond. But there is nothing of interest to be found, and the cold blustery wind that buffets the opening should quickly dissuade them from any leisurely study.

The Living Chambers

Room 1

A further 30 or 40 yards brings the party to a low narrow tunnel (of about 3' or 4' in height) inset into the right wall, flakes of drying, crumbling clay indicate that the bandits entered this tunnel but evidently returned and continued down the passage in which the party stands.

The tunnel extends in about 7 or 8' before opening out into a chamber.

Inside the room is utterly pitch black, once illuminated the party will find themselves in tall beehive shaped chamber. Two oblong dark masses occupy the centre of the room, the remains of a tiny fire between them.

On closer examination the dark objects suddenly resolve into two mummies lying on pallets. The creatures are of no race known to the party. The passing of years has reduced them to dried husks of no more than hair and bone.

From the one that seems to have survived in a greater state of preservation the characters will see something that might have looked like a polite raccoons face upon a furred humanoid body.

Utensils and furnishing are sparse consisting of no more than bedrolls, some low simple furniture and equally simple eating implements. These people whoever they were lived frugally, that much is evident.

The bandits tracks indicate that they clustered near the tunnel entrance, and made no attempt to search the chamber, beyond a couple who evidently went over to examine the corpses.

Room 2

Another beehive chamber, this room is virtually identical to the first, even to the two mummified corpses lying alongside the long dead hearth.

As with the first chamber, the bandits entered, touched nothing and returned to the main passage.

Room 3 – The Great Chamber

The tunnel continues to curve, by now heading almost due south.

The tunnel walls fall away as you emerge into a chamber. The cavern seems airy and you have the sense of a massive void. Ahead, the flickering light of your torch illuminates a low stone parapet that curves away into the darkness on either side. A confused medley of footprints indicates that the bandits milled around uncertainly here, before going to the parapet

The Temple

You find yourselves looking down into a vast circular room, the floor of which is perhaps 80 or more feet below you. A lantern casts a pool of flickering light across the mysterious room. At its boundaries where light merges into dancing grey shadows, you can see a small building of whitish stone, with a colonnaded portico, which somehow doesn't seem to fit with the simple and austere stonework you have observed so far. Across the far side you see a staircase descending into the gloom and around the outside, ovals of the deepest darkness indicate the presence of many tunnels.

The bandits trail circles around to the right, heading in the direction of the stairs. While in the great chamber the players will notice that the air is deeply still, without the faintest movement, and cold. Besides the measured tread of their boots, and rustle of their equipment, everything is silent, the silence so palpable that it seems to press in from the looming dark.

The Side Tunnels

The bandits entered two of the tunnels leading out from the grand chamber, but appear to have returned on both occasions.

Should the party persist in exploring these side tunnels then it is left to you as DM extrapolate what they find. However it is suggested that these tunnels should be dead and devoid of interest (granaries filled with ancient corn, utility rooms of no apparent function, more living chambers with mummified remains) to fit in with the plot.

But if the players insist on a thorough search then you might wish to create some provocative clues, such as some sort of ritual room with a circle mummified corpses all holding hands, or a great archway sealed by a slab of frozen, congealed stone melted out of the ceiling.

Should the party spend too much time in the tunnels, the lamp on the floor below will extinguish.

Descending the Staircase

Reaching the staircase, the party will find ample evidence from the clay still adhering to the bandit's boots that they have preceded the party down.

The treads of the stairs are narrow and close together, as if designed for a smaller foot than a human's, and as the party descends the staircase they will hear from far away, but quite clearly, the cry of a seagull.

The sound is quite distinct, and there can be no mistake. It appears to have sounded from the darkness below.

If the players ask, tell them the location is some 80 miles (or kilometres, leagues) or more from the nearest coast.

The Chamber Floor

Regardless of how the party reacts to the seagull cry, the chamber will sink back into its brooding silence and there will be no follow up sounds or signs of activity, no matter how long they wait.

If the party continues down, they will reach the floor of the chamber unmolested. Directly ahead of them as they approach its centre, is the lamp (which maybe extinguished if the party has delayed in searching the tunnels above), to the left, the silent mass of the white columned temple, and all around the dark maws of tunnel mouths.

The bandits tracks mill around, but it will be clear that the majority gathered in the chambers centre and then approached the building, while a small number (a ranger will say three) detached themselves and went into one of the western tunnels. In both cases the tracks go only in one direction.

As the player's characters approach the building you should build the mood of unease. Should someone cast detect evil, or should a paladin use his ability, then he or she will become aware of an aura of intense evil radiating from the temple. If a direction is asked for, it will seem to emanate from the roof, or near the ceiling of the temple.

The front of the temple is unadorned, save for some mystical runes that wreathe along the leading edge of the roof. Wide steps lead up to the columned porch, and beyond loom two high doors. When the party reaches the porch, they will see a pool of blood, arabesques

Should the party scout around the temple, they will find only the one entrance - the large double doors on the portico. Surrounding the temple is a bed of cinders, for which there is no rational explanation (there are no burn marks or soot adhering to the walls of the temple despite the fact that the ashes go right to the foot of the wall).

Touching the marble of the temple will produce a sensation of disgust and nausea. The stone will feel slimy and the characters will have the strongest urge to wipe their hands clean. A check will reveal no trace of moisture and a close examination of the stone will give the unsettling impression that the green swirls running through the white marble seem to writhe with a life of their own.

As the characters approach the double doors

“From the darkness behind you hear the scream of a woman in the pains of giving birth.”

You swing the doors open ...

... and find yourselves staring at the decapitated head of Black Seth

Mouth opened in an eternal rictus scream.

Hearts hammering from the shock, it will take the party a moment to recollect themselves and tear their gazes from the terrible spectacle of the decapitated head on the marble pedestal and the slow trickles of blood. The drips of blood will inevitably draw their gazes up to the ceiling ...

Then a moment later you wish you hadn't as you take in the forest of human limbs dangling from the roof, and the slow drips of blood puddling in crimson pools on the floor

Exiting the Temple

As the party steps from the building they will hear an enormous hollow boom, the sound echoing and re-echoing throughout the chamber. Its difficult to estimate the direction of the boom, all they will be able determine for certain is that the thud emanated from somewhere to their left, deep in the bowels of the complex.

Then before the last echoes have died away you hear a viscous sucking sound.

And then the clatter of booted feet, running. “Help” someone cries distantly “help ussss!” as the thuds of the boots come closer. In one of the passages to your left you see a bobbing light, steadily approaching.

The three are bandit's, the sole survivors from Denigan's little band.
AC 6 Hp 4, 6, 5 Weapons as per the MM

The three are hysterical. If questioned they will tell the party that Seth sent them to scout the tunnels beyond the temple cavern, while he prepared to enter the temple with the remaining men. They claim that they wandered through seemingly endless corridors and chambers until a giant bat swooped out of the darkness, nearly extinguishing their torches. They say, they then fled running hither and thither in their panic, until luckily they caught sight of the parties torches.

If the party attempts to delve deeper into the western reaches of the level, the bandits will become increasingly hysterical. If informed about Black Seth's demise, they will immediately begin shouting that a return to the surface should be made at once. Any efforts to quieten their clangour will prove fruitless (short of a sleep spell). They will only attack the party if they judge their self preservation is on the line, otherwise they will attempt to form a temporary truce.

If the party is still in the main chamber, they will become aware at some point of a growing noise echoing eerily from one of the northern corridors. The noise will at

first sound like the liquid babble of a fast flowing mountain stream over its rocky bed. Should the party stay and listen, the volume of the sound will steadily increase, slowly morphing into rising chorus of indistinct sound with occasional stray discordant shrieks clearly recognisable.

Assuming the party doesn't bolt, the sounds will abruptly increase, jumping up many decibels as if something had just rounded a corner, the torrent of sound will becoming a raging bedlam of incarnate white noise. At about this point, the party members may observe a faint luminescence of unhealthy pallor emanating from within the tunnel mouth.

The End Game?

A flood of pallid creatures, like molten waxen images of men held to the hot flame of a candle, flow viscously from the tunnel mouth. Twisted and demented, like a nightmarish vision from some fevered dream, they ooze towards you foot by foot, blubbering, gibbering, hooting, hollering and screeching in endless torment, their numbers growing with every passing second.

The flood of creatures will seem never-ending, regardless of how well the party fight, and how many they slay.

The creatures are lemures (hp average 13-14). How many there are (50, 500 or 50,000 is up to you as DM), but effectively they should be considered numberless for the purposes of the encounter. This is not a fight where brawn or sophistication in weapons and armour, or even in spell crafting will give the victory.

Reward the players for novel approaches (like a mage leading the lemures away into the tunnels and then using spider climb to escape). If the party beats a hasty retreat to the stairs, then they should be able to easily outpace the lemures.

The Real Endgame

Explanation

In the time before, the Tanuki were a shy, reclusive race. Inquisitive by nature, they led a solitary existence, delving into the mysteries of time, nature and of the cosmos. When humanity burst with boisterous exuberance from the cradle of its birth, the Tanuki withdrew to the far and distant parts of the world, where they could continue their studies in peace. One such colony established a subterranean enclave beneath a lonely mountain, far out in the unexplored wilderlands.

Millennia would pass before a conclave of rulers from the depths of the lower Abyssal planes, in the course their interminable plotting and scheming to gain dominion, made an alliance with the lords of Gehenna. A gate was opened between the two infernal realms, and as the currency of the pact was to be in souls, vrock herders drove tormented, wailing lemures into the gate.

It was then it happened, in a billion's to one chance, the wormhole connecting the gates intersected another wormhole and instead of the lemures arriving amidst the infernos and ash plains of Tartarous, they poured onto the prime material plane.

The Tanuki had generated the stray wormhole, and it was into their mountain fastness that the lemures and their Vrock herders arrived. In that terrible instant, many of the Tanuki were slain and their psionic metaconcert shattered, collapsing the wormhole. The survivors fled from the great Kiva.

When what remained of the Tanuki leadership could regather for a hurried meeting, they realised that the situation was hopeless. And in act of supreme self-sacrifice they sealed off all the entrances to outside from the mountain stronghold, sealing themselves, their people and the lemures and vlocks inside. Those that remained died fighting the invaders, or went to their rooms with their mates, and families, to take poison, and to die peacefully.

Denied of prey, the vlocks savagely turned upon each, each trying to gain control of the mindless lemures wandering the corridors of the dead and silent city, till at last only one remained, trapped in the stygian darkness of the entombed city. And so the ages rolled on, until one day, an earthquake shook the mountain, and the mountainside slid into the valley, revealing what had been once hidden ...

Tanuki, the

FREQUENCY: *Rare*

NO. APPEARING: *1-200*

ARMOUR CLASS: *8*

MOVE: *12''*

HIT DICE: *1-6 hp*

% IN LAIR: *95%*

TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*

NO. OF ATTACKS: *1*

DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-4 or by weapon type*

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Psionic attack*

SPECIAL DEFENCES: *Psionic defense*

MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*

ALIGNMENT: *Neutral Evil*

INTELLIGENCE: *Very - Exceptional*

SIZE: *S*

PSIONIC ABILITY: *Special*

Attack/Defence Modes: *Special*

The Tanuki are a shy and reclusive race, preferring to hide away from the boisterous younger races, such as mankind and his allies, although occasionally they have dealings with Elves, trading lore and knowledge in exchange for magic items which they adore.

Tanuki have limited psionic abilities, each adult will have between 1-6 points of psionic strength (equal to their hp). Their power lies in being able to form psionic metaconcerts, when they do this, 80% of their combined psionic potential forms their psionic strength (the remaining 20% is used in controlling and directing the forces they generate). This psionic strength is divided equally between attack and defence modes. They are capable of performing any major or minor disciple. If the disciple

requires an individual, they will select the strongest individual from with the convert to receive the powers.

Tanuki employ a limited number of simple weapons including daggers, bo sticks and javelins. However they will prefer to avoid using any weapons, even when confronted, choosing wherever possible to slip away and hide.

Description: Tanuki resemble humanoid raccoons, have a raccoon like head, fur and a prehensile tail. However they walk upright, have humanoid hands with opposable thumbs. Typically they have a mid brown fur, with darker stripes.