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Sample file

Grimmsgate

An introductory adventure for the Swords & Wizardry™ fantasy role-playing game, for 4-8 characters level 1-3.

Introduction

If you're already an old hand at using adventure modules, and you don't need any explanation about what's going on here, then feel free to skip forward to the rest of the adventure. On the other hand, if this is your first time reading a published adventure, welcome! You might need a few words of introduction to get you started with your first time as a Referee, but fear not – *Swords & Wizardry* isn't complicated, and neither is running an adventure. Presumably you've taken at least a quick look at the *Swords & Wizardry* rulebook, and you've got the idea of how the game is played. The non-Referee players create characters in a fantasy world, and as the players tell the Referee what their characters are doing, the Referee describes the results. Using dice, a few rules, and this back-and-forth exchange of information, questions, and descriptions, the story of the characters emerges as they explore the world, fight monsters, gain treasure, and become more powerful. Because the Referee is not in control of the characters, and since the players aren't in control of the Referee's world, the epic story that emerges will contain surprises for everyone.

As the Referee, one of your most difficult tasks is preparing the adventures that will confront your players. When everyone sits down at the gaming table, the players are going to be asking you for information about the fantasy world: "What do we see?" "Do we know any rumors?" "Where should we go?" For many Referees, preparing the adventure ahead of time is part of the fun of the game. Other Referees enjoy playing the game, but prefer to use pre-prepared modules like this one. This adventure is a good introduction to running a *Swords & Wizardry* adventure even if you never plan on using a published adventure module again. One tip to start out with, though. If you plan on writing your own adventures, they don't need to be as detailed as what you read here: all you really need are quick notes to jog your memory.

Enjoy!

If you are going to be a player in this adventure, and you are not the Referee, READ NO FURTHER!

Background

The Present Day

Deep in the wooded wilderness, the village of Grimmsgate is an outpost town on a seldom-traveled trail, right at the edge of nowhere. The village's half-ruined temple of Law, dilapidated inn, drunken blacksmith, exiled trader and a few fur-trappers are enough to keep the bloody-minded denizens of the dark forest at bay, but nobody really expects the village to still be there in another ten years. The woods have become too dangerous for the trappers who once caught animals for fur, and merchants no longer travel the poorly-maintained road because of bandits. None of the nearby barons are willing to accept responsibility for the village, because the one and only attempt that was ever made to subdue this part of the wilderness, a patrolling troop of knights and soldiers, completely disappeared in the forest without leaving a trace. When the search parties also failed to return, civilization gave up on Grimmsgate and departed, making no further efforts to stave off the slow advance of Chaos.

Imprisonment of the Demon

The slow deterioration in this area is rooted in events long ago, at a place that is now referred to as the Elder Temple, a partially-collapsed hillside not far from the village of Grimmsgate. In the almost-mythic past, a group of three paladins killed a manifestation of a demon named Vuod the Putrefactor. They burned the body and placed the ashes into a magically-sealed jar made of green glass. The jar was given over to the priests of Law at the Elder Temple, and left under their protection. For as long as the demon's ashes remained within the protective jar, the demon would not be able to manifest itself again in the material plane of existence.

Arumvel's Crime

For centuries the ashes of Vuod were kept safe by the priests of the Temple, until the unforeseen day when one of the priests, the acolyte Arumvel, became so curious about the forbidden jar on the pedestal in the Temple that he decided it could do no harm to at least touch it. The moment Arumvel reached out his hand and made contact with the demon's prison, the ashes of Vuod the Putrefactor exploded outward and coated Arumvel's body, destroying most of his soul and taking complete possession of the too-curious priest. With Arumvel possessed by the demon, the other priests were taken by surprise and either killed or enslaved to Arumvel's will. A few of the Temple servants managed to leave warnings before they died, but the bloody events of the Temple's desecration left no survivors. After the carnage, Vuod the Putrefactor escaped from the material plane, leaving Arumvel behind – still alive, but with his body and soul horribly warped. Slowly, the wilderness has encroached into the area where the Elder Temple once held it at bay.

For over two hundred years after the slaughter at the Elder Temple, Arumvel the Wicked remained quiet, resting and regaining his strength. Now, with his assembled minions and the strength of centuries, he has finally turned his eye upon the lands beyond his lair.

The Rise of Arumvel

Arumvel the Wicked, horribly altered during his possession by the demon Vuod, is dedicated to the cause of Chaos. Unlike many servants of the dark powers, he is only slightly interested in conquest or power; instead, ruin, decline, and decay are his cherished goals. His influence upon the area around the Elder Temple has been subtle but very destructive over time, as trade in the area has been choked off, the Temple in Grimmsgate has become less and less able to protect the village, and monsters have begun to return to the area. These monsters included a band of mogura-jin looking for a base of operations and new sources of human prey; the mogura-jin are a race of cannibalistic mole-men, descended and degenerated from human beings. Seeing an opportunity, Arumvel recruited the mogura-jin to be his followers, supporting their raids and depredations with his own demonic and magical powers. Even worse, Arumvel began to create more of these degenerated beings by capturing and transforming humans into new stock that would increase the numbers of mole-men in his ranks. These cursed humans are only partially transformed into mole-men, but their offspring will be condemned to the same cursed existence as the true mogura-jin.

Referee Notes

Before running this adventure, read all the way through it to get familiarized with the different parts. The first section of the module is about the Village of Grimmsgate, which is where the characters arrive at the start of play. After the map and key for Grimmsgate, the next section is the wilderness map, describing the area in the vicinity of the village, the wandering monsters that may be found while exploring, and various

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interesting locations. The third section is the main adventure area for the module, the forbidding Elder Temple where Arumvel the Wicked makes his lair.

The Elder Temple contains several monsters that take only half damage when hit by non-magical weapons. Spells, magic weapons, and holy water are all ways to inflict damage on demons and undead. Holy water inflicts 1d4 hit points of damage if a bottle is thrown on such creatures. It is worthwhile to remind the players of the properties of holy water, especially if they are new players that might not know holy water can be used as a weapon in this way.

There are several reasons that might bring the characters to the Village of Grimmsgate, and if you choose to give the players some direction you can assign one of these missions to the characters ahead of time. Otherwise, simply tell the players that their characters are in search of treasure and adventure ... then wait and see what they do.

1. The characters have been charged by the priests of Law in another area to discover what has become of the Elder Temple. Unless the party is made up primarily of hero-types, there will likely need to be a financial reward involved if the characters are successful.

2. The characters are hired by a nearby baron to see if a small group of adventurers can do a better job of discovering and rooting out the evil in the area than the (already failed) military approach using knights and men-at-arms.

3. One of the characters has been deeded one of the abandoned houses in Grimmsgate, and the party is traveling to the village to see if it would be a good place as a base of operations for an adventuring career. The character might have won the house in a card game, inherited it, or bought it cheaply from someone who left the village due to the growing sense of hopelessness and defeat there.

Start

After several days of traveling, you and your companions are at last approaching the small village of Grimmsgate. The narrow road that leads for miles through this forest is overgrown with weeds, beginning to blend and disappear entirely back into the wilderness. Indeed, everything you have seen since the last real signs of civilization has had the same feeling of slow retreat and disintegration. More than once, you have passed by strange signs and indications – bones arranged in a circle around a human skull; a small, red-stained wicker basket by the side of the road; an unmarked grave in the dappled shade of the trees.

Finally, though, you see ahead of you the distinctive hill upon which the village of Grimmsgate is built. At the top, there is a small cluster of buildings – you can just barely see the half-collapsed roof of the old Temple of Law that was once said to be the pride of the village. Even at this distance, the place looks run down. Although the village is not fortified, the hill is very steep and only one path leads up to the top.

Do you head toward the village?

The Village of Grimmsgate

The village sits atop a steep hill, with a single pathway leading around the hill's natural curve and up to a gatehouse that protects the buildings at the summit. There are three farmhouse-type buildings along the path, but the rest of the village appears to be located behind the gatehouse, so that any attackers would have to take the gates before they could reach the regular buildings.

Rumor Table

Assuming the players tell you that their characters ask some questions in Grimmsgate, the answers will automatically yield the following two pieces of information about the area:

“Seems like things have been going downhill for years, here in Grimmsgate. Ever since the barons lost a big patrol in the forest, they haven't sent anyone since. Seems like we lost a fur trapper or a farmer every month for a while, and now there aren't enough people to keep things going.”

“There is an old temple out there somewhere nearby. It's called the Elder Temple because it was before we had a temple here in the village. Something bad happened there a long time ago.”

Once this basic information is conveyed to the players, there are a few more rumors that might be floating around in Grimmsgate. You might choose to give the party 1d3+1 of these additional rumors (rolling randomly on a d6 to see which ones they hear), or, if the players themselves are new to the game, you might decide to tell them all these rumors as a way of helping them along a bit. Note that rumors 4 and 5 contradict each other; #4 is technically the truth, but it is not the whole story and is actually a bit misleading.

Roll 1d6 to determine which rumor the characters hear:

- 1 Two nearby farmers, Albraith and Etarra, disappeared from their farmhouse only a couple of days ago.
- 2 To find the Elder Temple, go south downriver from the ford.
- 3 The Elder Temple was a building on a hill, but now all that is left is the catacombs underneath the ruins.
- 4 Someone freed a demon in the Elder Temple, and it killed all the priests before it disappeared.
- 5 Someone freed a demon in the Elder Temple, and the demon is still there to this very day.
- 6 Something must be keeping travelers away from Harkin's Ford up to the northeast, because no one has come to the village from that direction in several days.

Map Key

G-1. Abandoned Farmhouses

Three stone farmhouses were once built beside the pathway that leads up to the top of Grimmsgate Hill, but they appear to be abandoned now. One of them has a wooden shutter that bangs open and closed in the wind. A cat sits in one of the dark windows, watching you as you pass by.

The cat is a regular cat, but it is feral and will run away if anyone tries to approach it.

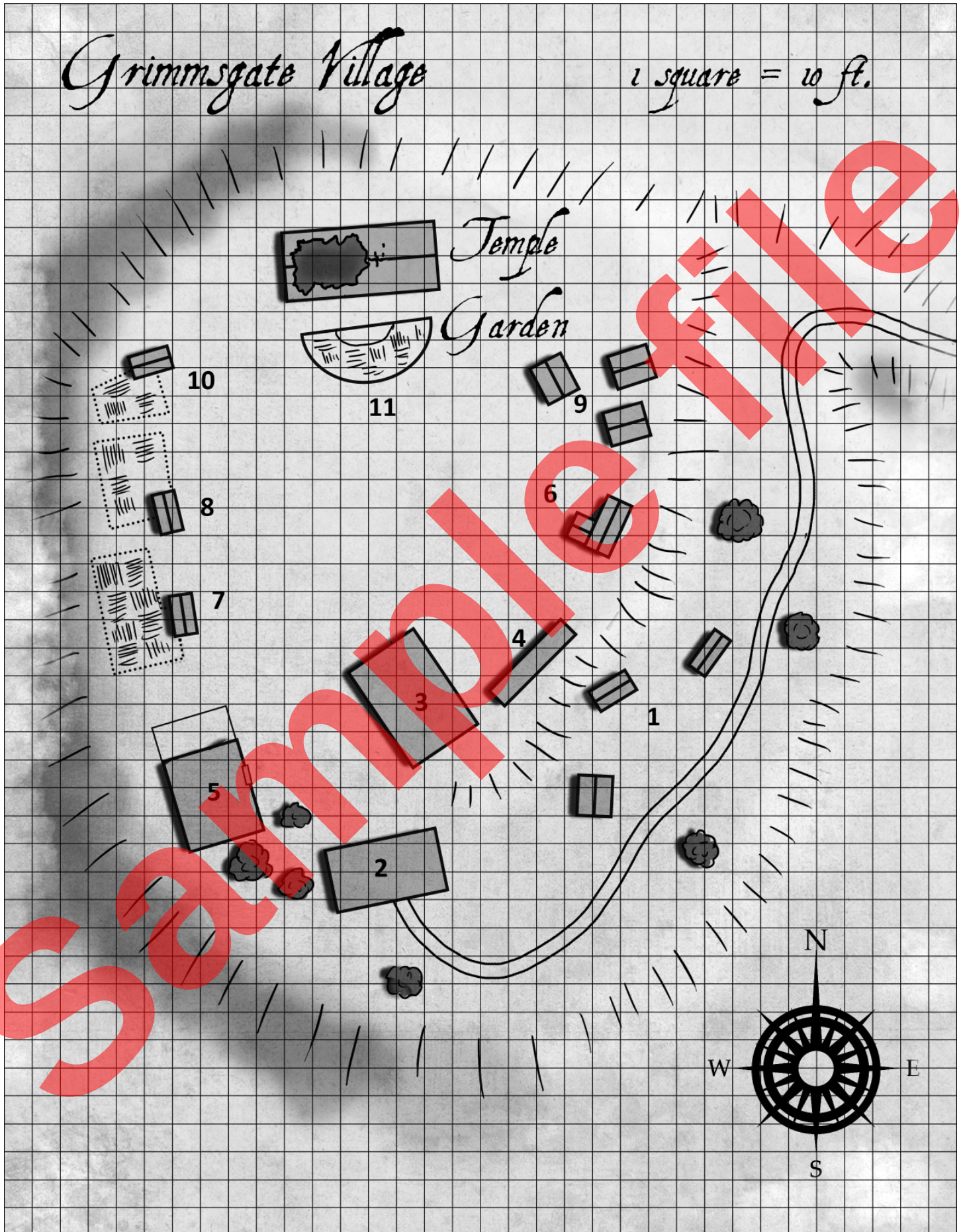
G-2. Grimm's Gatehouse

The trail up to the hilltop is blocked by a half-ruined gatehouse. The gates have fallen off and have been pushed to the side to keep them from blocking the entrance. However, the rusting iron portcullis has been lowered, and there is a guard standing atop the building with his crossbow leveled at you.

G-3. Silver Dagger Inn

A large building with a wooden sign out front painted to represent a silver dagger. It has recently been painted, and shows other signs of attempted repairs, but this is obviously an old building and the repairs are not expertly done. As you draw nearer to the inn, one of the wooden roof shingles comes loose in the breeze and slides down, falling to the ground in the overgrown grass.

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The Silver Dagger Inn has six rooms for rent upstairs (1gp/night), each of which can sleep as many as three people if two share a bed and the third sleeps on the floor. On the ground floor, there is a common room where meals are served; the common room serves as a tavern for the rest of the village as well, for on most nights there are no guests staying at the Inn at all. The rooms are clean, but all of them have ceilings that leak if it rains, and the floorboards squeak.

The innkeeper of the Silver Dagger is Ralmar Prath, a tall, thin fellow with a shiny, bald head. His wife Miralda and his two sons Ullin and Jark help him with the various tasks of running the inn and the stable.

Ralmar Prath (Ftr5): HD 5d8hp; HP 25; AC 4[15]; Atk 1 longsword (1d8) or longbow (1d6); Move 12; Save 10; AL L; CL/XP 5/240; Special: 5 attacks against opponents with 1HD or less.

Miralda, Ullin and Jark (Normal Humans): HD 1d6hp; HP 6, 4, 5; AC 9[10]; Atk 1 dagger (1d4); Move 12; Save 18; AL L, L, N; CL/XP B/10; Special: None.

Ralmar's room contains a strongbox with 320gp, 426sp, and a small emerald (200gp).

G-4. Stable

This long, stone building has broad double doors and smells of horses and manure. There is no sign on the front, but this is obviously the village's stable. The stones in one corner of the building appear to be coming loose, but as far as you can tell at a glance, the building is still structurally sound.

The stables are owned by the temple, but Ralmar Prath of the Silver Dagger manages them on the temple's behalf. There are three horses and five mules kept here.

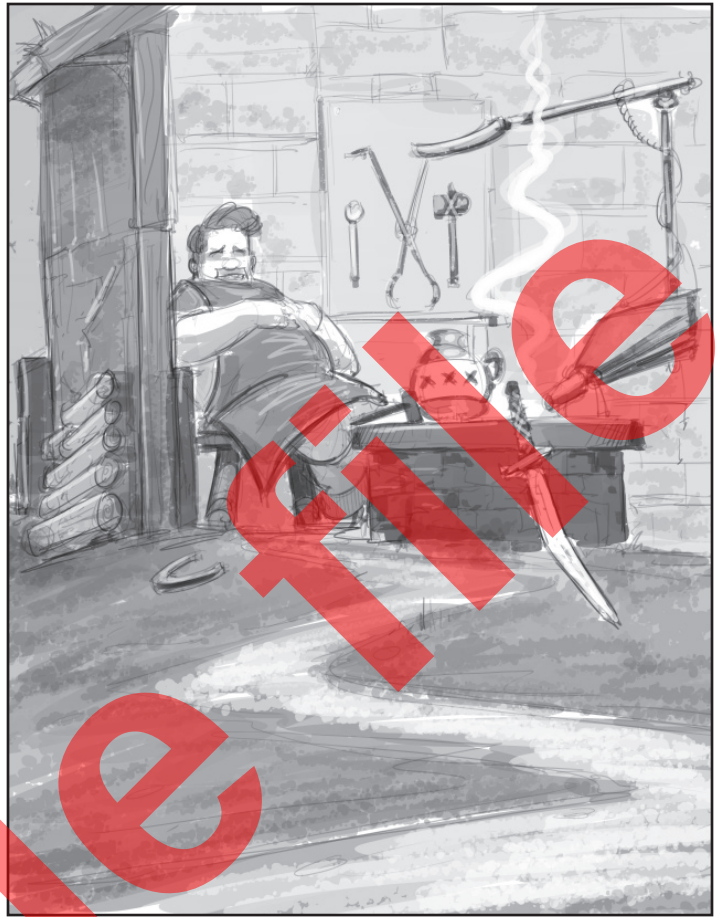
G-5. The Emporium (Merchant)

This is a well-tended stone building with a roof of wooden shingles. A sign over the door reads: "The Hilltop Emporium."

The Emporium is a combination of a store and trading post, the headquarters of Pantro Panga's tiny mercantile empire. Pantro is an extremely flamboyant and somewhat manic person with big dreams of becoming a great merchant owning caravans and fleets of ships. Unfortunately, he is in what might be the worst possible location to succeed in such a plan. He owns a mule (in the stables), the small amount of merchandise in his store, and not much else.

The characters can buy any equipment from the standard equipment list here, but quantities will be limited. Pantro has only one suit of plate mail, for example. He will buy anything valuable that the characters bring to him, with the hopes of either selling it here or shipping it by caravan to a town or even a city.

At some point, Pantro can easily become a source of adventures, especially if you decide that he is running out of cash and needs to take all these things he has been buying from the characters into a town for sale. At that point he might hire the characters to guard him and the caravan (he will rent the other mules in the village stable for the journey). He would be expecting to join up with a larger caravan within a day or so, but if the rendezvous fails due to a delay somewhere, he would likely choose to go on alone if he has guards. Guarding a caravan through the wilderness and past the threat of bandits and monsters can make for an excellent adventure.



G-6. "Drunken" Smith

The building has a blacksmith's forge in the front. A sign on the side of the building reads "Blacksmith," but it is so faded that you can barely read it.

The blacksmith of Grimmsgate is nicknamed "Drunken" Smith, and the nickname describes him well. When he is sober, he can shoe horses, repair armor and weapons, and even make swords and daggers. When he is not sober, his creations and repairs tend to be off center, bent, or slightly twisted.

G-7. Stevin's Farmhouse

This building is in excellent repair, and the stone wall around the garden is painted a cheery yellow color.

This farmhouse belongs to Stevin Farmer. Stevin's farm is a half hour walk from the bottom of the hill.

G-8. Farmer Ezrac's House

This half-timbered house leans slightly to one side, and there are some holes in the plaster.

Farmer Ezrac is not friendly to visitors, and generally keeps to himself even with the other villagers.

G-9. Abandoned Houses

Three farmhouses are clustered together here, all of them obviously abandoned.

If the players think of it, their characters could actually rent or buy one of these houses from the Temple (Rhall). The price to rent would be 30gp per month, and the cost to buy would be 600gp (no farmland would come with the purchase or rental of the house, just the building itself).

G-10. Trake Farmhouse

This building is a farmhouse with two cows in the stone-walled enclosure behind the building.

An elderly couple named Yorbin and Melly Trake live here. Their three adult children have all left the area to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

G-11. Temple of Law

This large building is obviously a Temple of Law, but it is in terrible disrepair. Parts of the roof have collapsed into the building, and the garden in front of the temple is choked with weeds.

An old cleric named Rhall is the last remaining priest here, although he has a letter claiming that an acolyte will be sent to him from a larger temple "soon." Rhall has been camping out in the semi-ruin ever since the roof started to fall in. He has been trying to figure out how to restore some kind of spirit to the villagers, but so far he has been unsuccessful at fighting off the sense of defeat that has been eating away at the community for years. He has begun to suspect that there are supernatural forces at work, and it has crossed his mind that the old stories about the Elder Temple might have something to do with the way that Grimmsgate seems to be dying away.

Although Rhall is unable to do any sort of adventuring – he lost an arm several years ago, and his lungs are weak – he can be of invaluable aid to the party as long as they are helping the village. He owns several scrolls of clerical spells, some of which are more powerful than he could cast without the help of the scroll. In one case, the scrolls could literally mean the difference between life and death. The scrolls are: *raise dead* x2, *remove curse*, and *cure blindness*. Rhall will not allow adventurers to take the scrolls with them, but he will use the spells to restore them if they return battered from an expedition to help the village.

Rhall (Clr4): HD 4d6hp; HP 20; AC 4[15]; Atk 1 mace (1d6); Move 12; Save 12; AL L; CL/XP 5/240; Special: Spells (2/1), +2 save vs. paralysis and poison, turn undead. Spells: *Cure light wounds* x2, *Speak with animals*.

The Wilderness

The wilderness map shows the area around the village of Grimmsgate, including the location of the Elder Temple. One square on the map represents a half mile, and it will take the party about a half hour to travel across a square. The terrain here is rough, and this movement rate assumes that the party is also moving slowly and carefully.

Map Key

W-1. Village of Grimmsgate

The village of Grimmsgate is described in its own section. If the module is being placed into an existing campaign, you, as the Referee, could certainly choose to change the name of the village or to create your own.

W-2. The Elder Temple

The Elder Temple is described in its own section.

W-3. Harkin's Ford

Harkin's Ford is a shallow point in the river, where it is possible to cross without a bridge or ferry. An ogre has recently taken up residence near the ford, finding that it is a good place to attack small groups of travelers. The ogre is careful not to attack groups of more than three people, but anyone coming to the ford and looking around will find traces of the ogre's presence: a skull here and there, a mortar and pestle where the ogre grinds bones, and even its pile of sleeping furs if they range far enough around the area. If the party stays long enough, the ogre will lose patience and come out from its hiding place to attack these interlopers. If the party is simply approaching the ford before heading south, following directions to the Elder Temple, they are not likely to be stopped by the ogre.

Ogre of Harkin's Ford: HD 4+1; HP 21; AC 5[14]; Atk 1 weapon (1d10+1); Move 9; Save 13; AL C; CL/XP 4/120; Special: None.

Treasure: The ogre carries a bag that contains two human skulls, a gallon of beer, a haunch of venison, 250gp, a jeweled dagger (100gp), and an ivory drinking horn (100gp).

W-4. Young Black Dragon

This is the lair of the young black dragon Iscarax, a recent arrival in the area. Iscarax's lair is a very small cave, and the dragon intends to find a deeper lair or perhaps a swamp in the future. For the time being, though, the young dragon has found itself drawn to this area for some reason it does not understand, and it intends to stay for a while. The reason why Iscarax has been drawn to this area, of course, is due to the influence of Arumvel.

Young Black Dragon (6HD): HD 6 (12hp); AC 2[17]; Atk 2 claws (1d4), 1 bite (3d6); Move 9 (Fly 24); Save 11; AL C; CL/XP 5/240; Special: Spits acid.

