Lair of the Shorlee Wyrm
OSR Adventure A20
For Lower-Level Adventuring Parties

A century ago, on the feast day of some god or saint, a dragon was slain in the Shorlee hills. The beast had started with livestock before moving on to human prey; farmers mostly, but also a local cleric and a sergeant of the guard. Crops were razed and revenues disrupted, and this is what finally got the magistrates involved. The best scholars of the realm opined (although some said hoped) that the dragon was merely passing through before moving on. Caution and patience were counseled, for the danger was short lived. This was not the case, and the dragon ravaged on as autumn passed to winter (when the attacks thankfully slowed) and spring returned. There was growing pressure for something to be done. A militia was dispatched, what men could be spared with the wars raging on, and was defeated. They were the best the authorities had to offer.

It was summarily decided that humility, not prestige, would win the day. The Heavens would provide if only the people would fast and pray. The Church gathered seven men, second sons from the poorer houses, and blessed them on a High Holy Day before all. Armed with the shield of faith and the finest weaponry (some say dwarven blades procured at great cost), they set off to locate the Shorlee Wyrm and slay the monster in its lair – if they could find it. The Heavens must have listened, for after seven days spent searching, they found the beast and threw it down in a terrible fight. Only one returned. As an act of piety, their names were withheld from the Chronicles of Shor; but the lone survivor was the Seventh Man (now a minor saint). He reported that the dragon, scourge of the hills, was bested before succumbing to his wounds and dying at sunrise.

The dragon was gone, and the people could return to living. But the experts were wrong. The wyrm was there to stay – and it had a lair. Sadly, the Seventh Man died before he could reveal its location, for a lair meant treasure. Unguarded wealth for the taking. There is a saying in Shorlee: wealth lies not for long. Soon enough, the nobles were searching for the dragon's lair, ostensibly to recover the bodies of the fallen. In truth, the wars were costly, and hoarded gold just might balance their ledgers. But the land was scoured to no avail. The dragon's lair proved elusive, supporting the church's claim that this victory was won by humility alone. There was a silver lining though; the old stories brought pilgrims – and their wealth – to the treasury. The lair of the Shorlee Wyrm would remain undiscovered for another hundred years.

But there is another saying in Shorlee: time tells all. After a heavy rain that flooded

the fields for a week and fouled the air with the bodies of livestock, the entrance to an earthen cave was found by the roots of an ancient oak. Surely this was not the entrance to the dragon's lair, for it was too small. But it hinted at a subterranean complex that just might be. It was found by a shepherd who followed a trail of coins to its mouth. He used these to pay off a debt, and this was duly recognized by the magistrate, who spread the word that wyrm's gold had returned to Shorlee. The nobles sent a party to investigate this, but they never returned. It was a stern rebuke from Heaven; but the rumors persist, and the region continues to attract heroes eager to seek their fortunes and see if the legends are true.

The Shorlee Hills

Shorlee is a place of rolling hills and rich farm (and grazing) lands, a veritable breadbasket for whatever setting the referee chooses. It is primarily rural, with multiple small villages of 100-150 people about a day's journey apart. Each of these fields a militia equal to 45% of the population treated as 1st level fighters armed with axes, bows (about half), or pole arms led by a 3rd level fighter in chainmail. The latter come armed with long swords and can fight mounted (a sign of their status). Pious people, every village has its own chapel with a cleric of 3-5th level (assume lawful/good alignment) to heal wounds and provide similar assistance in exchange for tithes or service of equal value. These are pacifistic, although the strongest among them might keep a suit of mail handy should danger threaten their parishioners.

Despite its famous dragon, Shorlee is a remarkably peaceful place located in the heartland of its country. Demi-humans are largely unheard of and sure to draw notice, even in taverns frequented by outsiders. True monsters are likewise rare, for the lands were subdued long ago, making the prospect of mysterious caves both exciting and frightening. Magic is viewed with suspicion, especially by the local clergy, although spell casters of good alignment will be tolerated if they respect the local ways. Given its religious history, pilgrims are not an uncommon sight. These are exclusively wealthy and accompanied by 2-4 retainers (2-3rd level fighters in plate mail and shield armed with short swords) who see their service as a religious devotion and are fanatically loyal, fighting to the death.

Finally, each village is governed by a magistrate answering to the **Lord of the Shor**, who maintains several heavily guarded estates in the region (each has a house guard equal to the militia of a larger village clad in plate mail and shield with maces and spears). The Lord is perpetually afar, either fighting the King's wars or attending affairs of state, leaving things to his **Steward**, a 5th level fighter and veteran of repute. He has broad authority and maintains a network of spies such that news will reach his ears within a day. Adventurers, while not exactly outlawed, will still be watched until the Steward in satisfied they pose no threat. Any efforts to explore the cave will draw his immediate ire, for he fears stirring up evil things and worries about endangering the lucrative pilgrim trade.

The party may already know of the region's history, for the dragon is legendary and the subject of ballads; or perhaps they hear of it only after chatting with the locals. The cave, with its reputed treasure, has enticed others before, but none have succeeded in plumbing its storied

depths. That said, the referee should place the entrance within a day's travel from any given village to facilitate rest and resupply. A steady stream of wealthy pilgrims means most equipment is available at the standard price. Optionally, in addition to assistance from the local clergy, there will be 2-8 militia willing to sign on with a party. These come with axes or bows. again, about half, but must be armored at the party's expense. Wages can be negotiated under whatever terms the referee is willing to entertain.

Rumors

Each villager questioned has a 45% chance of spreading a rumor, whether true (T) or false (F) as shown, noting that a party's maximum charisma dictates the maximum result possible. The locals know little beyond guesses and hearsay.

3d6	Rumor
3	A farmer from a nearby village killed a kobold on his property. (T)
4	Wolves prowl the Shorlee hills. (T)
5	There are other entrances. (T)
6	The cave reopened because the gods are angry with Shorlee. (F)
7	Undead haunt the cave. (T)
8	The spirits of the seven warriors continue their vigil below. (F)
9	Ghosts haunt the hills at night. (F)
10	Druids worship in secret. (F)
11	All gold taken from the cave is cursed unless immediately spent. (F)
12	The dragon was never slain. (F)
13	Cave water is poisonous. (F)
14	Dwarven weapons were lost in the caves, some of them magic. (T)
15	Shorlee lies over the site of an ancient, fallen civilization. (T)
16	Giant spiders hide in the trees. (T)
17	A wizard was buried nearby. (T)
18	The dragon left a clutch of eggs. (T)

Of course, the local clergy are too sensible to spread rumors unless some offering (at least 5 gp) is humbly made.

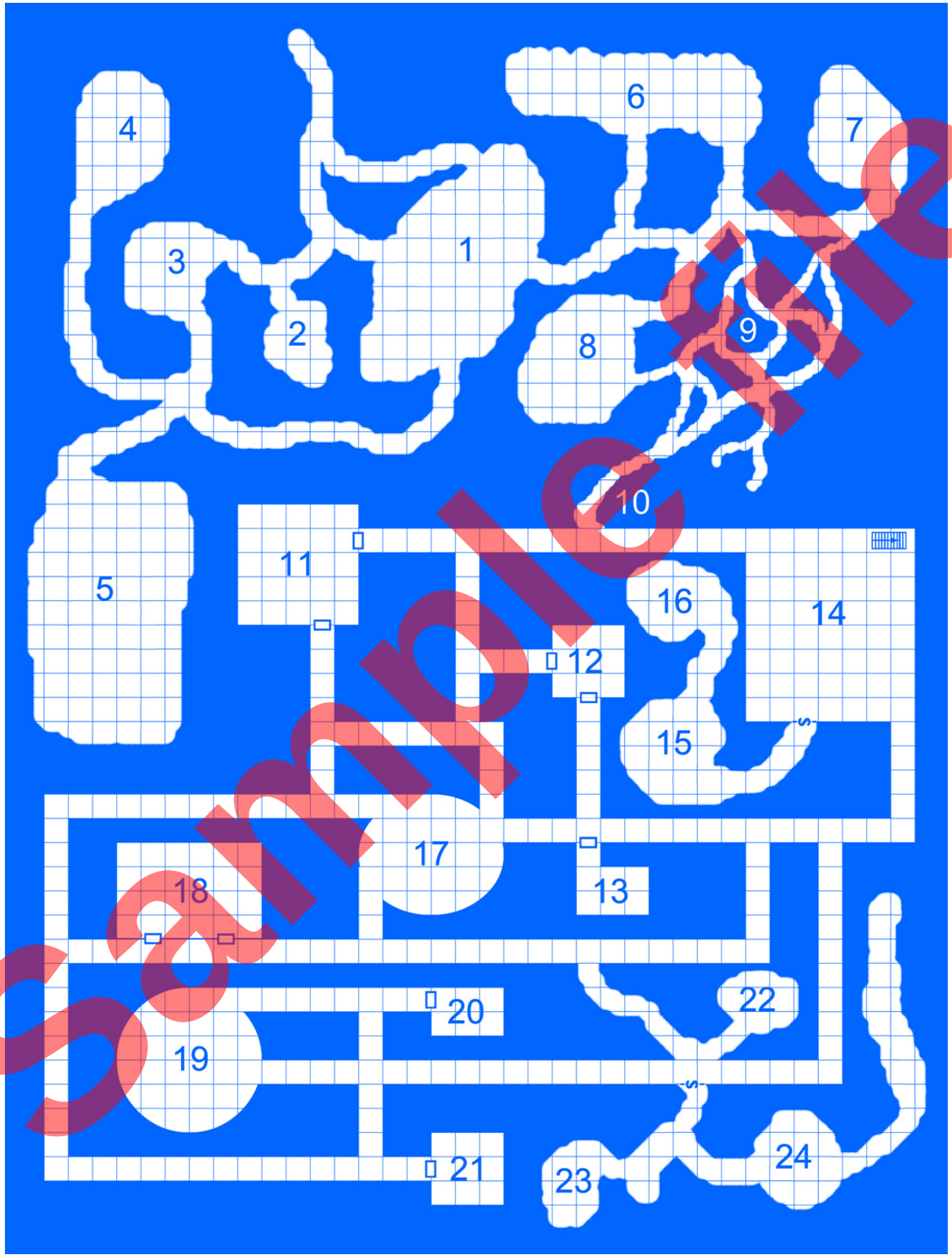
Wandering Monsters

While travel between the cave and civilization takes less than a day, there is still time for encounters to happen; generally, a 1 in 10 chance per wilderness hex explored, noting that these are included in the attached **Referee Worksheet** for quick reference should they occur.

1d10	Result	Number	Locale
1	Ogre	1-2	Hills
2	Basilisk	1	Hills
3	Bear	1-2	Any
4	Dryad	2-4	Woods
5	Wolf	1-6	Hills
6	Bandit	2-12	Any
7	Militia	2-8	Any
8	Kobold	2-12	Any
9	Pixie	1-4	Hills
10	Giant spider	1-2	Woods

While so-called true monsters are extremely rare, ogres are known to venture down from the mountains from time to time; and it is widely held that dryads and other faerie folk live in the wilds (a throwback to an earlier pagan tradition), although there are no verified accounts of them beyond the old tales. Bears and wolves are a constant threat, and bandits prey upon wealthy pilgrims on their way to some shrine or another. Kobolds are a new introduction to the region, and will not have been encountered until the party arrives (of course, the Steward will not be pleased when he finds out).

Note: Encounters only occur in the indicated locale. If these conditions are not met, the referee moves up or down the table until a suitable result is found.



Level One: The Caves and Ruins

The referee can consult the following Dungeon Key for all levels, with additional details in the area descriptions.

Dungeon Level Key

The cave lies in a place of scattered ruins too old (and eroded) to tell much of a tale, although the locals speculate nonetheless. Indeed, many of the choicest stones, at least those small enough to carry, have been harvested; curious heirlooms repurposed in cottages or village wells (one sits proudly atop the altar of a popular church). But the region is also known for its impressive oaks, and it is under one such tree that the floods opened a cave into the earth. This is more of a hole, really, one halflings will declare suitably comfortable. An examination in daylight reveals that this extends about 5' down before gradually leveling off and continuing southward out of sight. It was here that the shepherd found his riches glimmering in the noonday sun, although he lacked the courage to go further.

Only one character of any size (or race), can enter at a time, although even halflings will have little trouble doing so, for it is a safe drop and easy enough to navigate owing to the twisted roots of the ancient oak. From here the ground levels off somewhat, inclining at a shallow grade (dwarves will detect this immediately) and widening enough for two to walk abreast and draw weapons. The referee should position 3d6 cp in plain sight to entice the party and verify the shepherd's account, with another 3d6 locatable if a search (assume 1 turn) is made. From here the earthen tunnel branches three ways as the air thickens. Increasingly large fungi, man-sized mushrooms and glistening moss, grow profusely as the underworld here is revealed as a lush environment, especially in the open areas (1-8 in particular). The expedition begins.

Wandering Monsters

As areas 1-8 constitute a unique environment, there is a 1 in 10 chance per turn spent exploring of some wandering monster turning up, rolling as follows.

1d8	Result	Number
1	Basilisk	1
2-3	Stirge	2-4
4-6	Fire beetle	1-2
7	Kobold	3-12
8	Giant rat	2-4

Note: There is only one basilisk occupying the level, so if this is encountered as a wandering monster, it will not be in its lair in area 6 unless retreating. Kobolds are unarmored for fast and quiet movement and armed with spears. Cowardly things, they flee superior numbers (and report their presence), but fight when outnumbering intruders unless successful negotiations are made, perhaps a tribute.

The referee can familiarize themselves with the level and incorporate wandering monsters coherently. For convenience, these are included in the attached **Refe-**

ree Worksheet, noting that stirges and beetles are a routine threat.

1– Shrieker's Cave. This area extends 12' high and is filled with enough big mushrooms to feel like a forest. Indeed, the vegetation makes it difficult to detect enemies unless the party posts a watch or takes similar precautions; and even then, they must describe their positions (and actions) precisely. Failure to detect monsters results in the party being surprised and losing the initiative. It takes 2-3 turns to explore this area, long enough that wandering monsters may appear. Near the center of this fungal cavern lay several skeletal remains, all human and too ruined for the exact number to be known (or anything else about them), although the best guess is maybe four. There are 11 ep and 9 gp spilling from a rotted sack and a fine bracelet worth 60 gp on one skeletal wrist. A closer examination of this alerts the nearby shrieker.

AC: 7[12] MOVE: 1 HD: 3 HP: 11 #AT: 0 DAM: Nil (noise attracts monsters)

As new characters will have no prior experience with such a thing, it blends in nicely against the mushrooms. Anyone stooping to retrieve the bracelet will invariably trigger its deafening wail, which lasts 1-3 rounds; and given the relatively close quarters here, always attracts something from the wandering monster table within 2-3 rounds (long enough to create a false sense of security). Fire beetles tunnel up from below, while stirges swarm from the south. The dreaded basilisk, if present, comes from the west (1-3 in 1d6) or the east (4-5 in 1d6). Giant rats and Kobolds come from anywhere, but avoid superior numbers. Digging through the skeletal remains turns up a potion of **delusion** (taken to be invisibility) and a scroll with a **shield** spell in an ivory case worth 15 gp. This is watertight.

Note: Where applicable, the skeletal remains are too decayed to respond to the necromancer's ring from 3, below.

2 – Bone Den. Large stones protrude from the packed earth here, and one has fallen over, crushing the remains of some unfortunate victim (also unaffected by the necromancer's ring). A rotted cloth sack spills 18 cp for the taking, the source of the shepherd's lucky discovery. This is the remains of a thief who robbed pilgrims and fled to his just reward.

3 – Stone Camp. Outside of 20', an approaching party sees what appears to be living "figures" among the fungi. Upon closer inspection (within 10') these are revealed as a pair of eerily realistic stone statues, cultists from the temple complex who ran afoul of the basilisk and met their end. One is crouched defensively and the other stands with its hand raised in a warding gesture. The latter is noteworthy for the simple golden ring worn on one finger. This is a **necromancer's ring** (explained at the end of this book) and may be removed in 1 round. An Identify spell cast by anyone below 10th level reveals a **ring of protection +1**, and it functions as such, with the additional power of **undead control**, but only for cultists initiated into that rite. All others wearing it cause any humanoid corpses within 90' to rise as skeletons or zombies (as per the **Referee Worksheet**) to attack in 1-3 rounds.

4 – Bony Remnants. Six forgotten skeletons, all of them stripped clean by fire beetles, line the passageway leading up to this small circular alcove. If someone is wearing the necromancer's ring, these animate in 1-3 rounds after coming within

range and attack the party immediately unless bested or clerically turned.

AC: 7[12] MOVE: 12 HD: 1 HP: 4 #AT: 1 DAM: 1d6 (with bony claws)

Like all skeletons, these take only half damage from edged (or pointed) weaponry, with resistance to sleep, charm, hold, and/or cold-based attacks.

5 – A Fell Feast. Here the ceiling rises 18' high, a sign of gradual descent only dwarves (and possibly halflings) will notice. Recent flooding has eroded a sinkhole above through which some merchant's horse has fallen. This is strangely desiccated and is being feasted upon by a pair of fire beetles picking its bones clean with grim efficiency.

AC: 4[15] MOVE: 12 HD: 1+2 HP: 7 #AT: 1 DAM: 2d4 (deadly mandibles)

A swarm of 8 stirges occupies the limestone ceiling. These have drained the horse dry and are uninterested in more food at the moment (the beetles, being naturally armored, are not typically preyed upon). Characters are another matter however, and there is a 25% chance of 1-2, not content with their recent meal, coming down to attack exposed (unarmored) flesh.

AC: 8[11] MOVE: 3/18 HD: 1+1 HP: 3 #AT: 1 DAM: 1d3 (and 1d4/round thereafter)

Otherwise, the stirges remain hidden in the darkness above, although anyone listening may hear rustling and mistake them for ordinary bats. Should the party slay the beetles and later return, the stirges will be hungry, noting that these quickly replace their losses. A prize of 2,000 cp has spilled from the horse's saddle bags, a tempting sight and sure to encourage greedy adventurers.

Note: Each fire beetle has two glowing glands that generate light in a 10' radius for 1-6 days unless badly damaged.

6 – Basilisk's Cavern. The big mushrooms grow especially large here, creating a jungle atmosphere. If using the south-central entrance, the party sees two "statues" similar to those in area 4, except kobolds frozen in surprise. This is the work of a basilisk, latest in a long line of the things that excavated these tunnels over many generations. Luckily, the beast is only in its lair 1-3 in 1d6 of the time, going often to the surface to seek prey.

AC: 4[15] MOVE: 6 HD: 6+1 HP: 16 #AT: 1 DAM: 1d10 (claws or petrifying gaze)

Mercifully, the endless vegetation here makes it harder to meet the basilisk's gaze, adding +2 to saving throws vs. petrification. That said, frontal attacks are rolled at -4 unless the monster is viewed

through a mirror, wherein attacks are rolled at -2, as doing so is awkward and renders activity difficult. A party's best chance involves making the thing see its own reflection or flanking it among the tall mushrooms. Its nest, a bed of crushed bones and filthy waste, holds 150 sp, a pair of **elven boots**, and a potion of **healing** in a dented copper vial.

7 – Wholesome Cave. No mushrooms grow in this place, although the ground is blanketed with bright green moss. Daylight streams through fissures in the ceiling, and fresh rainwater collects below, providing a safe way to refill canteens. There is nothing else of interest here unless wandering monsters arrive, and these are easily detected with little effort.

8 – Lonely Girl. The mushrooms return here, and an approaching party will notice red light, not unlike the glands of a fire beetle, shimmering through the fungal stalks. A closer inspection reveals an unexpected sight; a small human girl, no doubt from one of the villages, sitting on a makeshift bed and holding a fire beetle gland. She appears about seven years of age and has a dirty face, although not abnormally so given her surroundings. Her black hair falls in tangled locks, and her demeanor is innocent, but wary; just what might be expected from a frightened child glad to see adults again. She is, in fact, the last surviving child of the Shorlee Wyrm (one of a race of shape-shifting dragons explained later) and her consort, a wizard buried in this place.

AC: 2[17] MOVE: 9 HD: 9 HP: 27 #AT: 1 DAM: 1d8 (or breath weapon)

This puzzling child has a mix of dragon and human traits; most notably, superior toughness and a budding breath weapon useable once per day. This comes as a fiery cone 10' long dealing damage equal to her remaining hit points. As her race ages differently, she is really 100 years old, but with the body and mind of a young girl. She is also unaware of her heritage and cannot yet take dragon form, something that will not emerge for another century. If treated kindly, she joins the party, never speaking beyond simple gestures and never intervening on their behalf (as one would expect of a child) unless a motherly figure is present and proves themselves through many encounters. Monsters avoid her, although never the party, and she inevitably leaves even a friendly group, especially if they attempt to take her from the cool silence of her dungeon home. The referee can mediate this as they wish, but the girl must never be weaponized in a party's favor unless seriously balanced. Aside from her simple bed, she has no valuables.

9 – Giant Rat's Warren. No vegetation grows here, not even moss, although the ground is slick. For every 20' travelled, there is a 1 in 6 chance of 2-12 giant rats emerging from the dark to attack with their bite and filthy claws. Unlike the typical variety, these ones are aggressive against superior numbers as if compelled by magic or some disease.

AC: 7[12] MOVE: 12/6 HD: 1/2 HP: 2 #AT: 1 DAM: 1d3 (with possible disease)

Of course, taking a direct route minimizes the chance of this happening; but the warrens are twisting, and forward visibility limited. There is a silver necklace with emerald stones buried in the muck near the center of this worth 150 gp found after a turn of searching. The referee should roll for rats again when the party indicates a desire to look for such treasures. Like