

MIDDEN CLIFFS

WORK-IN-PROGRESS

Joe Banner



MIDDEN CLIFFS

Whatever the ratfolk are fleeing from, it's very big, and very scary. That wasn't the local's problem - until they found them huddled in their barns and filling their taverns.

SUMMARY

A terror from the deep has displaced the **ratfolk**, driving them to the surface. The nearest point of civilisation was Sorrowchurch Mill, whose owner saw them as easy labour. His mistake. Before long, a trickle of migrants became hundreds. Finding their brothers and sisters in chains, the new arrivals killed the mill owner and sacked the village. Now, the ratfolk have taken Sorrowchurch.

Lord Dunstan Dooley is a fool and a bigot, but considers the mill owner a friend and colleague. He is not yet aware of the miller's death - word travels slowly out here - but he has heard "strange dealings and stranger folk" coming from Sorrowchurch mill. Even now, he organises a (fully armed!) band of concerned neighbours to march on Sorrowchurch and discover the truth.

Desperation drove the ratfolk here, and that same desperation drove them to kill in self-defence. The mill owner's friends in will take no prisoners when they learn the truth. How will the players resolve the situation? Can bloodshed be avoided? And below all this, what terrible doom drove the ratfolk out in the first place?

Let's play to find out.

SORROWCHURCH

There's not much more to Sorrowchurch than an old, flooded mill and maybe half a dozen flooded ruins. (The rest of it was either washed away with the church a long time ago, or burned down by the ratfolk when they decided they could do better without the mill owner and the others.)

Was the mill owner right to put them to work? Were the ratfolk right to kill him? The mill owner saw it as honest work for bed and board. The ratfolk - once there was enough of them - saw it as slavery. The only ones still alive to tell the party any of this are the ratfolk in Sorrowchurch that revolted, or the few human stragglers who made it out when they did. In any case, now the ratfolk run Sorrowchurch... for better or worse.

The ratfolk tunnels run all over the place, along with worse things from the deep that threaten to follow them out. The rubble's clogged the river, and Sorrowchurch is ankle-deep in filth and water. (The rats don't seem to mind.)

GETTING STARTED

If you're pressed for time, the party start at the old **Sorrowchurch Mill** ready to plumb the depths for discarded ratfolk treasures.

SORROWCHURCH ENCOUNTERS & LOCATIONS

The old mill: the wooden building is higher than the floodwater, but rotten through. The wheel has snapped in half; most of it lies in the river mud, blocking the water. The old owner has been strung up above the old wheel as a grim example to others.

In my playtest, I wanted to show the ratfolk were friendly, but not to be trifled with; hence the old owner being strung up.

If you want to put them in a more sympathetic light, leave this detail out or even suggest they buried him.

The lower levels are flooded waist-deep but lead to a (relatively) drier area where the water drains downhill - the **flooded excavation**.

Three Ratfolk Guards (STR 12, 2D6HP, 1D8 damage) stand nearby. They're under orders to let anyone foolish enough to want to go down, but be very, very careful who they let back up.

The high street, such as it was, is flooded ankle-deep. Ratfolk tents cover the highest places, some selling knick-knacks.

The Dolorous Bishop was once the Sorrowchurch public house. The ratties have done a reasonable job making it their own, shoring up the old wood and stone with sodden carpets and tarps. It's (barely) dry, and very rickety, but it serves.

Mushroom stew: 10p
Fungus Mead: 50p

Familiar food: 50p
Familiar beer: 50p

Gin, wine or spirits: 1s
(Bottle: 5s)

Someone will offer mundane supplies, if the party need them, at the going rate. They serve a thick mushroom stew - a ratfolk favourite, from the caves - and a mildewy mead brewed from cave fungus. A couple of regular ales in bottles and even a bottle of half-decent wine sit behind the counter, but they cost twice as much as usual. A filthy pig sits in one corner, chewing on something. On closer inspection, it's a small bronze religious

idol that counts as a magic item (see *magical effects*). Taking the idol will make the pig and several of the bar patrons very angry...

A human corpse floats out of a flooded alleyway. The right side of its body is covered in mould. It lurches towards you as you come within smelling distance. (1D6 damage, 6HP.) Any ratfolk nearby will help defeat it, say nothing about where it came from, and glance nervously at the mill.

A festering hole lies in the centre of an otherwise unassuming field just outside town. The crops are long withered and rotten. 1D3 Tenebrous Tentacles burst from within; 1D4-1 desperate ratfolk are attempting to drive them back. (They can offer little if rescued, but can certainly put in a good word for the party in town.)

1D3 Tenebrous Tentacles: 1D10 damage, 12HP (want to **pull them in**)

1D4-1 Desperate Ratfolk: 1D6 damage, 6HP (want to **drive them away**)

One of Lord Dooley's Scouts, spotted on the outskirts (1D6 damage, 7HP). He carries a pistol, two days' rations, freshly-written details of the ratfolk's movements from the last few days and instructions to return before "the proposed march upon Sorrowchurch". The date for the march is tomorrow morning. The instructions are sealed and signed (in a shaky hand) by Lord Dooley of Bishopstide.

WHO ARE THE RATFOLK?

'Ratfolk' is the derogatory term for a subculture of wild folk native to the region. (Despite the name, they look more like furry halflings than skaven.) The locals around here are secular and paranoid; they think the ratfolk are only out to scrounge and steal what they've earned by honest toil. Regardless of intent, what should be made clear is the ratfolk have the same capacity for industry, language and knowledge as we do.

Ratfolk Names

Bambi
Biko
Boogie
Britty
Burton
Charcoal
Curious
Dizzy
Duchess
Greenwood
Magnus
Omar
Ophelia
Peanut
Pitch
Sly
Squeaky

Until you came to the region, you'd never heard of these strange folk. Now, they're all you hear talk about. No-one knows for sure where they came from, other than "underground", or what made them flee. Some kind of war is assumed, though the sides are unclear. The survivors seem to be the ones caught in the middle who didn't want to fight.

Ratfolk Weapons

Chunk of waterwheel
Fence-post spear
Bicycle chain
Stitched net
One or more bricks
Stone dagger
A small but vicious pig
A stolen crucifix
A huge book (unread)

They're smart, quick-witted, able and desperate. bad for anyone whose land they wind up on, unless they can force them into working for their keep. Naturally, outcry over immigrants taking all the good jobs has been louder than the potential of slave labour.



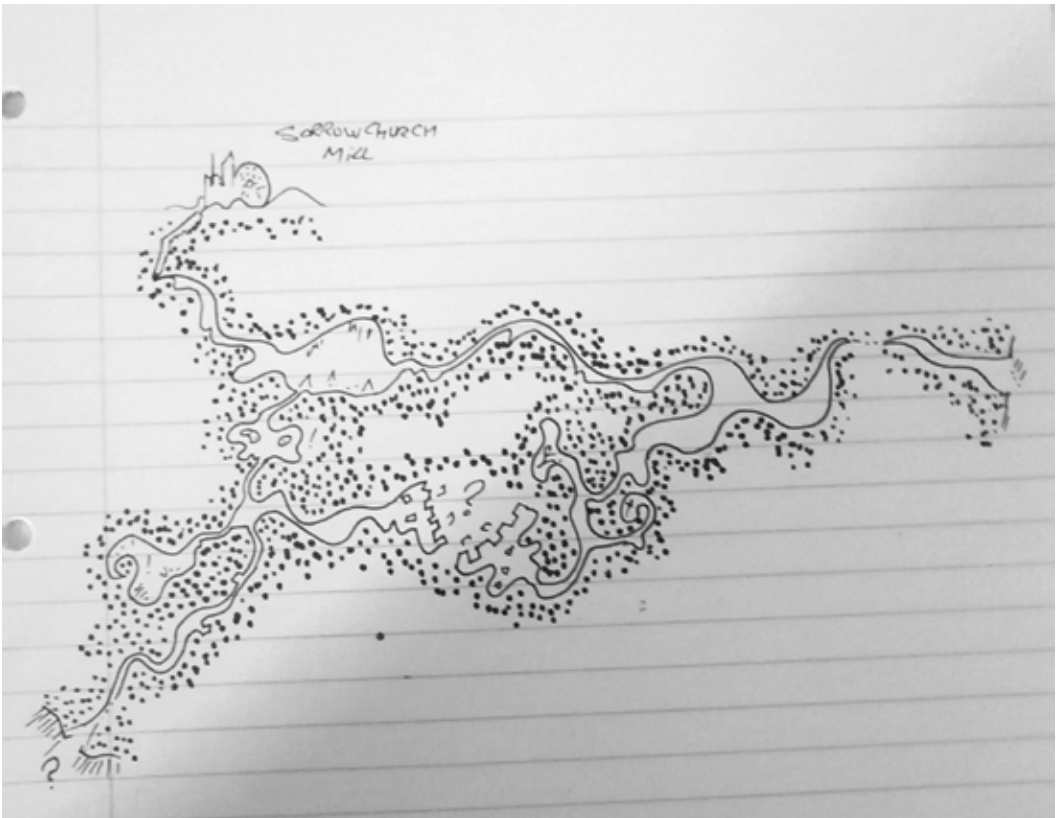


THE RATFOLKS EXODUS

The warrens below Sorrowchurch, you have learned, may hold a wealth of unclaimed treasure. The ratfolk fled their underground homes in a hurry and may have dropped much on the way, or left plenty behind.

Rival treasure hunters and locals keen to retake the village already converge on your location, but you have just got in ahead of them. You may have hours, a day at most, before the place is swarming with competition.

Your adventure starts in the FLOODED EXCAVATION within Sorrowchurch Mill.



1. FLOODED EXCAVATION

Floodwater thunders down this black tunnel, but travel is possible if you go slow and steady. (Anyone who moves quickly - say, if they're running, treasure-laden, from some monster below - must make a DEX save or slide to the bottom.)

At the bottom, the water seeps away through a hive of stalagmites leaving a clear, dark, damp cavern. Half a dozen abandoned rat tents lie here. This is where many of the ratfolk stayed, huddled in the dark, before they decided to dig to the surface. Exploring the tents for 15 minutes or more will uncover several mundane items (adventuring gear and the like, maybe even a weapon or two) but will undoubtedly trigger a wandering encounter.

2. TWIN POOLS

There is a second, narrow route from the flooded excavation, only spotted if they spend time searching. The party must squeeze through, single file. (If they need to travel quickly, ask what they leave behind.)

The entirely natural cavern contains two pools of murky water. The water is too dense and oily to tell how deep they are at easy glance. (They're effectively bottomless, though there are numerous outcroppings making it possible to swim back up if unimpeded.)

Once the party enter, the leftmost pool starts rippling, Jurassic Park-style. After a tense delay a tentacled creature will silently rise from the right-most pool.

Tentacled Creature some kind of infected or possessed ratfolk, dead for many months, head obscured by

tentacles. 8HP, 1D8 damage. If it deals 5 or more damage the target is grappled and must pass a DEX save to free themselves. **Wants to** drag them down, into the deeps.

Beyond the pools is another narrow passage, barely visible by torchlight. This leads directly to the GREAT BLOCKAGE if the party bear left.

3. THE LONG MARCH

Everywhere there are the long, cold passages the ratfolk dug to flee their home. Sometimes they are short and narrow, others wide and tall. They wind their way here and there, doubling back on themselves at times. Several caves and paths have been excavated further, as described below.

The passage ends abruptly at the GREAT BLOCKAGE after about a mile.

4. A WRONG TURN

A winding corridor, part natural, part excavated by desperate claws. After a few hundred metres, the route steepens and there is a powerful smell of seawater. The corridor ends abruptly at (or, more precisely, out) the side of the cliffs, leading to a sheer drop of over 100 metres onto the waves below.

5. A HOLY FONT

A rusty iron idol with ruby eyes (1g each) sits in a pool of saltwater. At one point this was obviously a place of worship or meditation for the ratfolk, before they moved on. A blue glowing mold has started to spread over the idol, and it sits in the pool slightly askew.

If the mold is cleaned away and the idol placed back straight, any ratfolk encountered (wandering creatures, the infant at the blockage, etc.) will be significantly calmer and won't attack the party unless attacked first. They won't know the party fixed the idol, but if told they will be grateful.

If the idol is taken, any ratfolk will be significantly more aggressive or troublesome. They won't know instinctively the party have the idol, but if they happen to find out it's liable to make them even angrier. Further, if the mold isn't cleaned off properly it will spread to and weaken any iron tools the bearer carries.

6. THE TROVE

An old chest rests ajar on a squat stalagmite in the centre of the room. The chest is stuffed with 5D6x10 silvers worth of curios - faded artworks, lost jewellery, forgotten tomes, antique weapons and so forth.

The chest could be carried between two persons as is (one hand each) or the party can spend time splitting the spoils between them. (Anyone carrying a quarter or more of the treasure by themselves is so laden down they must re-roll successful DEX checks.)

An iron millipede, invisible until it moves, is wrapped around the stalagmite under the treasure.

7. A FOOLHARDY BARRICADE

A cavern has been naturally shored up with leather, old wood and other rubble, which takes about half an hour to clear. Behind is the last stand of maybe a dozen ratfolk, who apparently didn't have enough food to go

round. There's a 4-in-6 chance a single rat remains, still gnawing the bones of their comrades. Roll for treasure, although anything that could have been eaten (paper, leather, etc.) has been at least gnawed.

8. AN ALTERNATE ROUTE

Another passage leads north for several miles, eventually making its way to daylight. A half-decent tracker would be able to deduce many small groups of ratfolk have gone this way in twos and threes, all heading north through the forests. It would seem not all the ratfolk are in the Midden Cliffs after all...

9. AN UNFORTUNATE TRESPASSER

This was once a passage, but was caved in some time ago. The cave is filled with spiky stalagmites - a skeleton is impaled on one - and smells of rot and waste. There's a pallet of damp straw in one corner, and a pile of stolen silver knick-knacks worth 1g (mostly from the Bishopstide estate) in another.

The single occupant (6HP) has albino skin, glowing red eyes and a gun that fires blasts of gobby, dirty water (1D4 damage and blasts you towards the nearest spike.) If killed, they are carrying a magic stone trinket and inspection reveals this strange feral creature was human.

10. THE GREAT BLOCKAGE

At the end of the march the passage has been demolished in order to stop whatever the party were chasing following them. Despite the thick stone, if the party listen carefully they can hear shambling and rustling from further down, punctuated by an occasional ratty scream, then a heavy silence.

A single ratfolk infant, abandoned and ill-tempered yet somehow still alive, scampers about the rock. They barely speak rat, much less common. The last thing their parents told them was not to disturb the rock. If the party cause them distress, the first thing they'll try and do is dismantle the blockage, bawling all the time.

TREASURE

When you find treasure, roll 2D6. On a 12, you find a minor magical trinket. On a 10-11, you find a pretty necklace or trinket worth 50s. On a 7-9, you find useful spare equipment (spare torches, rope, chalk etc.) but nothing saleable or magical. On a 6-, you disturb a number of giant rats equal to your roll.

One-hundred silver shillings (s) make a gold guilder (g).

50s could buy many hot meals, several decent weapons, a breastplate and helm, or a month's stay in a decent boarding house.



MAGICAL EFFECTS (1d6)

1. Your eyes glow red, but you can see in the dark.
2. You don't need to breathe, but take double damage in daylight.
3. You can eat anything but salt, which becomes toxic.
4. You're immune to parasites and infection, but sick up anything you eat on a 4+.
5. You fear nothing, but the effect is neutralised for a few hours by sex, alcohol, pipeleaf, chocolate etc.
6. You gain +1 armour and your skin glows gold; those that fear the light will target you first.

WANDERING MONSTERS

1d10	Name	HP	Damage	Special
1	1d4 Giant rats	6	1d4	-
2	1d4 Giant spiders	8	1d6	On 6 damage, <i>webbed</i> (save v DEX to break free)
3	1d6 Ratfolk stragglers	1d6	1d6	-
4	1d6 Ratfolk guardians	8	1d8	Armour 1
5	1d6 Human looters	7	1d6	On CRITICAL DAMAGE, steal something valuable and flee
6	1 Human cannon	15	1d12	Requires a human and a torch to fire
7	1 Iron millipede	2d6+1	1d8	On 5+ damage, damage spreads to an adjacent target.
8	1d3 Eldritch collectives	3d6	1d8	Look like 2-3 ratfolk smushed together. With tentacles.
9	1d3 Tenebrous tentacles	12	1d10	On 6+ damage, <i>tangled</i> (save v DEX to break free)
10	1 Ectoplasmic horror	15	1d8	On CRITICAL DAMAGE, spawn a second horror with 1HP.

LORD DOOLEY'S REQUEST

Sorrowchurch lies near to the coastline, on top of a region several leagues south of the capital known as the Middin Cliffs. Although the beaches and ports below the cliffs are a hub of trade, Sorrowchurch and the surrounding towns are isolated.

Recently, an unnatural erosion has revealed chunks of limestone and lurid coral hidden among the natural rock. First to be blamed are the strange small folk - locals call them ratties - who came to live amongst us when their underground homes were overrun.

SWINNERD, A TYPICAL TOWN

A typical village - church, general store (usually a butchers or post office with a small grocers), townhouse and inn, maybe twenty small houses.

Other villages: Muxton, Sorrowchurch, Bishopstide (Lower), Abrés-Jumeaux.

Othmar runs the Swinnerd corner shop. He's like the shopkeeper in Open All Hours, except he keeps meat effigies in the basement. Wants to sell cheap tat.

Father Maurus is the vicar for Muxton and elsewhere, and often addled. Wants to spend his days in quiet (drunk) meditation. One of the drinks in his larder is actually a shot of Wish Spirit.

The Maiden (of Ettecote): Pub in Swinnerd, charges 1s/week for a room | Birdie Cherrington (30y pub wench, one deflated boob, watery eyes, fancies a bit of Laurie)

Other hamlets: St Malachy's Bluff, Kingsmarsh Ford.

Other odd places: Soapstone Cove, Roughshead Pier

WEIRD THINGS

Meaty scarecrows seen around Swinnerd after dark

Empty mollusc shells on the London road, getting bigger

A knife-headed humanoid thing stealing sheep

Poachers, stealing pigs and freeing them on the moors

A gummy gel, found in jellyfish corpses on the beach.

Leaves bare skin permanently pruned. If eaten, lose 2D6
WIL and gain gills. Brings rain if enough folk eat it at once.

BISHOPSTIDE

Bishopstide: One to three farms or cottages and an empty church. (The vicar from Muxton comes monthly.)

Potentially isolated by bad roads, weather etc.

Dunstan Dooling lives in Upper Bishopstide. He used to own all the land, till the migrants squatted on it. Wants to tear down 'lower Bishopstide' and get his land back.

