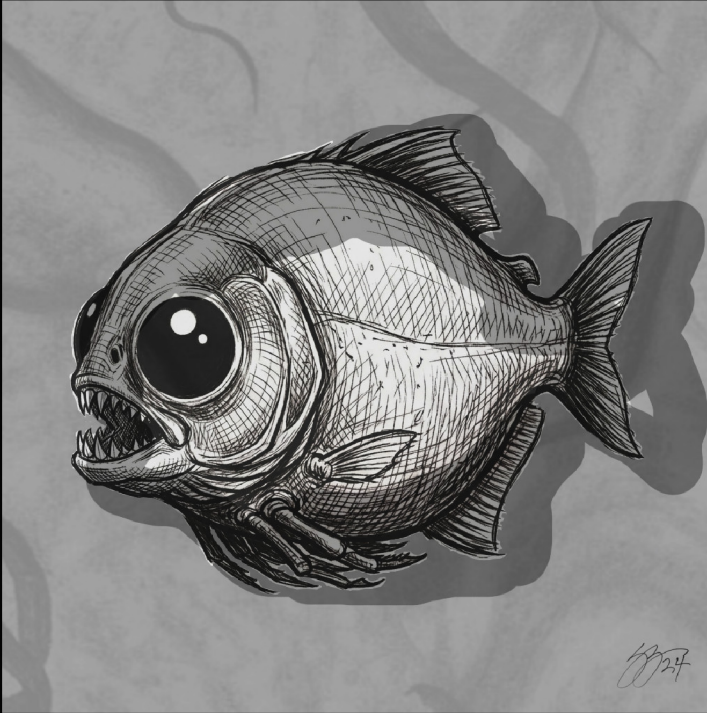




POSTCARD FROM THE DARK PEAK · #10

THE CUCKOO'S CAVE

A SOLO RPG SCENARIO · THE DARK PEAK · HELLSBOROUGH, S6

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A NOTE FROM PIP

I'll tell you what I know about the Cuckoo's Cave. Not everything – just what you need to survive the murkneet in it.

There's a Morivarid column that moves through the gulch below Kinder Scout. Not every murkneet. But often enough that someone put a name to the cave: the place you go when the swarm is between you and anywhere else. The floor is worn smooth. It has been smooth for longer than you have been alive.

The approach is simple. The gorse will hurt you going up and the Morivarids will try to hurt you before you get there. Once you're in, you're in. You don't come back out until the swarm passes.

That's the job. You're not retrieving anything. You're not killing anything. You're waiting – just waiting, that's the entire job – until the murkneet is over and the swarm has moved through.

People find that harder than it sounds.

– Pip Rippon, field notes, somewhere with a pint, after the fact

YOUR CHARACTER

You are a crosslander, travelling west through the Dark Peak. The swarm found you first.

Distribute the numbers **3, 2, 1** between your three stats. Choose according to who you are.

STAT	WHAT IT COVERS
GRIT	Strength, endurance, physical force. Not dying.
WIT	Perception, quickness, stillness. Not being noticed.
MURK	Sensitivity to dark matter. Resistance to things that feed on minds.

HP: 6. At 0 HP you stopped holding. The swarm finished what it started in the gorse.

TESTS

When you attempt something uncertain and the outcome matters, roll **2d6 + the relevant stat**.

ROLL	RESULT
10+	Success. You do the thing.
7-9	Success with cost. You do the thing, but something goes wrong, you take 1 damage, or the situation gets worse.
6 or less	Failure. Your own bad luck decides what happens instead.

When a creature attacks you, roll **2d6 + Grit** to resist physical damage, or **2d6 + Murk** to resist mental damage. On a failure, take the creature's listed damage.

THE GULCH AND THE CAVE

Two areas. You will not spend long in the first.

THE GULCH

The shale canyon below Kinder Scout. Fifty-foot walls. A black stream. Morivarids in the murk. You start here.



THE CUCKOO'S CAVE

A crack in the cliff face, sixty feet up the south wall. One way in. Worn floor. Four Dyapnids inside when you arrive. You are here until the swarm passes.

To reach the cave: Move through the gulch and scramble up the gorse slope. Roll on the Encounter Table once during the approach - this is your first encounter roll.

To complete the scenario: Survive **5 encounter rolls inside the cave** without leaving. After the 5th roll, roll **Grit 7+** to confirm you are still functional. Then walk out.

If you leave before 5 rolls: The scenario ends as a failure. The gulch was still full of them.

ENCOUNTER TABLE

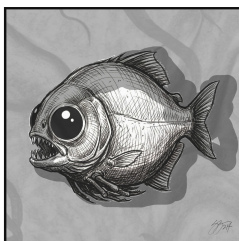
Roll 2d6 on approach and each time something in the cave shifts, a creature acts, or you fail a test.

ROLL	ENCOUNTER
2	A second way in. Morivarids have found a gap at the back of the cave. Three inside, orienting. Skip directly to the Morivarid encounter - no test to avoid it.
3-4	One gets through. A Morivarid has squeezed through the entrance crack - disoriented, but fast. Roll Wit 7+ to freeze and let it pass. On a failure, it orients and attacks: roll Grit 7+ to resist. On a 6 or less, take 2 damage. (Single creature.)
5-6	The Dyapnids react. One advances. Roll Grit 7+ or Murk 7+ (your choice) to hold your ground and show no threat. On a 7-9, it retreats after checking

ROLL	ENCOUNTER
	you. On a 6 or less, hive response - see Dyapnid rules.
7-8	Cold air through the crack. The chittering outside drops for sixty seconds and then rises again. Nothing has changed. Add +1 to your next encounter roll.
9-10	The section moves on. A stretch of the swarm passes without finding the gap. The black stream sixty feet below is briefly audible through the crack - which should not be possible. It is audible anyway. The clock is still running.
11	What Clough Ley left. In the back of the cave, under a folded scarf: a pistol, still charged. The scarf smells of someone who has been dead a very long time. The pistol grants Grit +2 on one attack roll. One shot only.
12	The Murk Wraith. It stands in the cave entrance. It does not come in. It asks one question - see The Murk Wraith. Roll Murk 7+ or take 1 Murk damage. After it withdraws, three shapes appear briefly on the ridge outside the crack. Then they are gone.

THE CREATURES

MORIVARID



Flying fish, the size of a large hand, with void-black eyes and teeth like a pike's - except pikes are not interested in eyes, and these are.

They travel in threes. You will only ever see two of them. The third is already behind you, orienting on the soft tissue of your right eye with the focused attention of something that has never done anything else.

STAT BLOCK

HP 2 each **Damage** 2 (targeted, physical - always to the face) **Type** Hungry

They come in threes: When the full swarm is inside (encounter 2), roll Grit 7+ once for all three. On a 7-9, one connects. On a 6 or less, two connect. Take 2 damage per connection.

Smoke: Morivarids are drawn to movement and warmth. If you have snough and can make smoke at the cave entrance, they will not approach that gap for one encounter roll.

DYAPNID

Beetle. Body length of an arm from elbow to fingertip, which is not a comfortable length for a beetle. Chitinous shell, mandibles that can reduce bone to fragments in under a minute.

Four of them in the cave when you arrive. Not wild - the spacing is too deliberate, the stillness too trained. Domesticated by the Xin and then, at some point, not. The hive response triggers on fast movement and fear-smell, in that order - and, the Xin discovered, on the dark matter signature of genuine fear, which the murk carries and which no amount of physical stillness can fully mask.



STAT BLOCK

HP 4 **Damage** 3 (crushing, physical) **Type** Hungry

Hive response: If triggered (encounter roll 5-6, or any fast movement in the cave), two Dyapnids can reach you at once. Roll Grit 7+ twice. Each failure deals 3 damage. Maximum 6

damage.

Stillness: Dyapnids will not initiate on a character who remains still or moves at walking pace. Running triggers the response immediately.

MURK WRAITH



A revenant. Tall, and slim in a way that isn't quite right - not thin, arranged wrong. The cold of something that used to have a body temperature.

It appears on a roll of 12, or automatically after 4 encounter rolls in the cave - whichever comes first. It stands in the cave entrance. It does not come in unless provoked.

STAT BLOCK

HP 1 **Damage** 1 to Murk (not HP) **Type** Lurker

The question: "Do you know how long this cave has been occupied?"

- **Do not answer:** Roll Murk 7+ to hold composure. On a 10+, it waits three minutes and withdraws. On a 7-9, it withdraws but takes 1 Murk damage from you as it goes. On a 6 or less, it enters.
- **If you answer, or look directly at it:** Take 2 Murk damage. It enters regardless.
- **If it enters:** It cannot be damaged with Grit. Roll Murk 10+ to repel it. On a 7-9, it retreats to the entrance. On a 6 or less, it remains and drains 1 Murk per encounter roll until you reach 0.

OBJECTIVE

Survive 5 encounter rolls inside the cave without leaving. After the 5th, roll **Grit 7+**.

ROLL	RESULT
10+	The swarm has fully cleared. The Dyapnids leave first - single file, through the crack. Then silence, and then the sound of the stream returning to where it belongs. Walk out.
7-9	The swarm has cleared. You held, but at cost. Walk out. Add +2 to any encounter roll made leaving the area - something came with you.
6 or less	You held but the holding took more than it should. You are at HP 1. The Dyapnids are gone. The Morivarids are gone. The wraith is still at the entrance. It has not asked its question yet.

HOW TO PLAY

A complete example. Follow this once and you'll have it.

STEP 1 -- MAKE YOUR CHARACTER

Assign **3, 2, 1** to your stats. For this example: **Grit 1 · Wit 2 · Murk 3 · HP 6**. Write it down. Strong dark matter resistance, weak on physical damage - the tension that makes the Dyapnid encounters dangerous.

STEP 2 -- THE GOAL

Scramble up through The Gulch to The Cuckoo's Cave. Survive **5 encounter rolls inside** without leaving. Roll Grit 7+ after the 5th. Walk out. The approach costs 1 roll - 6 total, but only the 5 inside count toward the hold.

STEP 3 -- THE APPROACH

Roll 2d6 for the approach. You roll **3+4 = 7**. Look up 7-8.

"Cold air through the crack. The chittering outside drops for sixty seconds and then rises again. Add +1 to your next encounter roll."

The gorse took some skin. Nothing connected. You're in the cave. The Dyapnids are at the back, watching. Note the +1.

APPROACH COMPLETE · CAVE ROLLS SURVIVED: 0 OF 5

STEP 4 -- CAVE ROLL 1 (WITH +1)

Roll 2d6, add the +1. You roll **2+4 = 6, +1 = 7**. Look up 7-8.

"Cold air again. Nothing enters. Add +1 to your next encounter roll."

The cave is breathing. Two cold airs in a row. Note the second +1.

CAVE ROLLS SURVIVED: 1 OF 5

STEP 5 -- CAVE ROLL 2 (WITH +1)

Roll 2d6, add the +1. You roll **1+3 = 4, +1 = 5**. Look up 5-6.

"The Dyapnids react. One advances. Roll Grit 7+ or Murk 7+."

Grit 1 is not the right choice here. Use **Murk 7+** (2d6 + Murk 3). You roll **3+4 = 7, +3 = 10**.

10

10+: It retreats after checking you. The dark matter signature of calm is enough. The formation resettles.

CAVE ROLLS SURVIVED: 2 OF 5

HOW TO PLAY CONTINUED

STEP 6 -- CAVE ROLL 3

Roll 2d6. You roll **1+3 = 4**. Look up 3-4.

"One gets through. A Morivarid has squeezed through the entrance crack. Roll Wit 7+."

Roll 2d6 + Wit 2. You roll **3+2 = 5**, **+2 = 7**.

7

7-9: You freeze in time - but it clips you on the way past. Take 1 damage. HP 6 → 5. It exits through the crack.

CAVE ROLLS SURVIVED: 3 OF 5 · HP: 5

STEP 7 -- CAVE ROLL 4 + THE MURK WRAITH

Roll 2d6. You roll **4+5 = 9**. Look up 9-10.

"The section moves on. The black stream sixty feet below is briefly audible. The clock is still running."

Four cave rolls complete. **The Murk Wraith appears automatically.** Tall, arranged wrong, cold in the wrong way.

"Do you know how long this cave has been occupied?"

Look at the wall to the right of its face. Roll **Murk 7+** (2d6 + Murk 3). You roll **5+6 = 11**, **+3 = 14**.

14

10+: You hold. Three minutes. It withdraws. Three shapes on the ridge outside. Then gone.

CAVE ROLLS SURVIVED: 4 OF 5 · MURK: 3 (INTACT)

STEP 8 -- CAVE ROLL 5 AND THE FINAL TEST

Roll 2d6. You roll **5+3 = 8**. Look up 7-8. Cold air. The clock has run.

Five cave rolls survived. Roll **Grit 7+** (2d6 + Grit 1). You roll **4+4 = 8**, **+1 = 9**.

9

7-9: The swarm has cleared. You held, but at cost. Walk out. Add +2 to encounter rolls leaving the area.

The Dyapnids leave first, single file. Then the sound of the stream. Wait thirty minutes. Then move.

Result: HP 5, Murk 3 intact. The gulch is empty. Three shapes on the ridge. You know who they are. You walk west.

FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1 The approach costs one encounter roll.** You need 5 inside the cave - leaving at 4 is still a failure.
 - 2 Grit 7+ OR Murk 7+ on the Dyapnid test.** Choose based on your stats. This choice matters.
 - 3 The Murk Wraith appears automatically after 4 cave rolls.** You cannot avoid it. Do not look at it. Do not answer.
 - 4 Leaving the cave early is instant failure** regardless of HP or Murk remaining.
 - 5 The final Grit test determines your exit.** A 7-9 means something came through the gorse with you.
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OUTCOME

If you walk out of the cave:

The gulch is empty. The black stream runs without sound. On the ridge to the south, if you look, three shapes stand against the murkriase. Still. Unarmed. You know who they are. You walk west.

If you reach 0 HP:

The cave was not the safe place you thought it was. The Dyapnids were faster than you gave them credit for, or the Morivarids found the gap at the back, or you moved when you should have been still. The floor of the cave is already worn smooth. It has absorbed worse than you.

If you leave the cave before 5 rolls:

You were back in the gulch before the swarm had passed. Your name will be noted on the hivemind under the same query that has been logging crosslanders in this gulch for a very long time: pending. Pending. Still pending.

If you reach 0 Murk:

The wraith asked its question. You answered. Or you looked at it too long, and it took what it needed without waiting. You stayed in the cave. You are still in the cave. The question it asked - "Do you know how long this cave has been occupied?" - now has one more answer in it.

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