

Midnight Jungle

This is the loosely-applied name given to part of the great Gray Forest jungle that covers much of the Dorian Peninsula south of the Dungroth region, not far north of Nibirum's equator (the map is set at about 8.5 degrees North latitude). It lies on an approximate west-east line between the settlements of Day, on the Peninsula's west coast, and Moon on its east, but is much closer to Day. Midnight Jungle is a trackless area where strange and unusual things may be found, and while travel is somewhat easier when following one or other of the streams, it is not always safer. Tropical vegetation covers most of the mapped zone, dense in places, with only a few clearer areas, broken by low hills and cliff-lines, chiefly nearer the western map edge, which form some of the more obvious terrain features.

Location details were adapted and inspired by a mixture of randomly-drawn cards from Inkwell Ideas' newest Hexploration Decks, "Along The Way" and "Strongholds", with more from a special combined sampler pack of cards based on what would become the "Into the Wilderness", "Settled Lands" and "Beyond the Pale" decks, plus two of the Creature Decks, "Fey, Constructs, & Wildlife" and "Animals & Vermin", in combination with keyword-ideas from the many random lists in the Knave 2nd edition RPG rules published by Swordfish Islands LLC. Some names were based on random tables in Mythmere Games' "Nomicon".

Locations

Places marked with darker labels are noted in alphabetical order below. Paler labels indicate elements less described (chiefly river names).

Apricot Grove: In the southeastern corner of the map, this is a substantial Grove of Apricot trees in the jungle, commonly a major draw for wildlife locally when the fruits are on the boughs.

Aptal Pond: Close to the central-eastern map edge, on one of the tributaries of the Green River, is this small lake. Its waters have healing properties if drunk or used freshly here, something the region's wildlife takes advantage of, and although its power dilutes rapidly downstream along the tributary, the trees by the Pond and the stream close-by all seems to be somewhat taller and healthier than elsewhere in the jungle.

Balegyle Stump: Roughly a mile or so upstream (1.5 kilometres) from the Ullan Mead Hall on The Rill in the southeast of the map, this is an enormous dead tree stump, still with some heavy, partly broken, branches attached, and equally massive roots that curl out of the ground in places. An ill-defined archway trail alongside the river has been cut through its middle, leading somewhat more clearly towards the Mead Hall. Nearby are numerous small burrows scattered in the jungle, home to the local Halflings, in a loosely village-sized conglomeration, although they do not consider it a settlement as such. Human-fist-sized Giant Glass Crickets roost noisily in the hollow top of the Stump, which are quite a pest hereabouts, and hard to spot, as their near-transparent forms help them blend into whatever they are resting on. A lazy, often hungry, Ogre, Flook, loiters nearby, usually lying around in one of the larger living jungle trees. Inside the tunnel through the Stump, a distracted demon bard, Askme, has taken-up temporary residence, trying to compose a series of ballads. He hates to be disturbed, especially by questions.

The Cleft: A narrow, roughly east-west valley, walled-in by high, sheer rock cliffs, in the map's southwest, with a tributary stream of the Cloud River in its base. Shrubby jungle vegetation and grasses are its main obvious features, although there are a number of burial mounds hidden among them, one of which conceals the Gugoroag Chapel. Hills ring The Cleft's outer sides, so finding it can be very difficult.

Cloud Crags: Towards the middle-western map edge, a pair of roughly parallel cliff-lines frame a line of rounded hills, cut through by waterfalls where the Cloud River passes through them and off-map to the west. Large parts of both cliff-lines have been carved at some distant time into forms like fluffy clouds all along their lengths (several miles/kilometres). With the rounded hills on top of the lower, northwestern, pale sandstone cliffs, the whole can seem like an in-jungle cloud- or fog-bank when approaching from the northwest. The labelled site shows where weather prediction and weather-related magics can be used particularly favourably.

Dire Boars: The jungle west of Giant Toad Swamp in the map's southwest corner is home to a herd of Dire Boars, which may be found ranging some distance from their marked spot, though usually not beyond the Cloud River, or far into the Swamp.

Giant Rats: East of a curling series of bends in the Green River in the north-centre of the map, is an area of jungle plagued by Giant Rats. They mostly stay on the east side of the river, at least.

Giant Spiders: A little over a mile northwest of Aptal Pond by the eastern map border, an area of the jungle canopy is festooned with huge skeins of spiderweb, thanks to the Giant Spiders that lurk among the foliage here. They have a blue-green coloration which makes them particularly hard to spot against the vegetation, for all the webbing is a distinct warning.

Giant Toad Swamp: Near the southwestern map corner, south of The Cleft, a pair of cliff-lines flank a great swampy hollow in which is a substantial lake, through which one of the tributaries of Cloud River runs. It is home to significant numbers of Giant Toads, as well as large numbers of unpleasantly over-sized insects.

Glass Jungle: A couple of miles (3 km) east of the eastern tip of The Cleft in the central-south of the map, this area of jungle vegetation has been turned to glass or crystal. Nothing living grows here, and no creatures venture through it. Leaf edges can be razor-sharp, for all the place has an ethereal beauty about it.

Gugoroag Chapel: A well-concealed, partly subterranean, Chapel in the depths of The Cleft in the map's southwest, this is a deliberately hidden place, built by a mysterious order of fanatical masons, and used by a band of inimical cultists, the Gugoroag. It lies in one of a number of seemingly identical low barrow-mounds in the valley bottom, covered with grasses and jungle shrubs, so even noticing there are such mounds here is difficult, let alone finding this one, as no clear paths lead to it. Inside, the Chapel has a wall of skulls that hisses when lies are told near it.

Lilithni: A little west of the map's centre, in the low hills between The Rill and the Silk Stream, a rocky outcrop has a closed stone doorway set into it, once the entrance to a great Elven estate and hall here, of which just this old doorway remains. The rocks nearby seem once to have been parts of structures here, although their form is no longer identifiable. The place has been long forgotten, except for the name, and obscure tales indicating it was once a place that welcomed and gifted travellers from other worlds (possibly those using the Stone Portal that lies north-northwest over The Rill from here, about five miles, 8 km, away). Now, it is a dangerous place. Anyone approaching the place starts feeling increasingly uneasy. Resting or sleeping nearby brings horrific nightmares, liable to erode the sanity of those suffering them. Only moving further from the spot will relieve these.

Mud Volcano: Near the northeastern map corner is a group of the most substantial hills in this area. Even so, they occupy only a fairly small region, at the heart of which, the tallest is a volcano that periodically spews forth fresh, hot, mud, splattering the land, vegetation and any creatures in the vicinity. Over time, it has created all the hills here, those closest to the volcano in general devoid of much vegetation, although further from it, the jungle appears unusually lush and fecund. Eruptions tend to occur at random intervals.

Mystic Glade: A broad southerly bend in the Green River's course northeast of the map's centre marks the southern boundary of this open area in the jungle. A demi-god once died here in an act that opened the way for an Outsider to enter the world, and a byproduct of the powerful magics involved still lingers, randomly flaring into activity. When it does so, those passing through the Glade may have strange visions, premonitions, or gain temporary magical abilities. Staying in the Glade for any length of time may bring less pleasant effects. There are rumours locally of people vanishing from the Glade having done so, for instance.

Ossan Armoury: In the northwest corner of the map, one of the low hills there conceals this magical Armoury of demon-hunting gear, protected and maintained by the remnant heirs to a secret order of demon-hunters. There is enough here to equip a small army of expert hunters. Attempts by unsuccessful looters to raid it over the years have resulted in some superficial damage in a few places, leaving the treasures within quite intact.

Palace of the Bat: Atop a particularly sheer, high cliff-line in the map's northwest, stands a great rambling, Gothic-style, half-timbered, palatial hall, topped by spiked towers and battlements. The base of the cliff is marked by tall, fang-like, sharply-pointed, rock pinnacles, and a tall, narrow, sharp-arched, fanged-maw-like opening mars the cliffs, marking the entrance to the deadly caverns beneath the Palace. The terrain is rocky and barren all around the foot of the cliffs nearby, and the jungle vegetation on top, extending into the hills around, is sparse and often distorted in form. Vast clouds of bats swoop around here at dusk and in the moonlight from the caverns, controlled, when required, by the gigantic, vampiric, Bat-Thing that inhabits the Palace. The house was built originally for a ruler's consort, but it became cursed when a coven of arcanists punctured reality here with a foolish ritual, one that means its victims are forever burdened by visions of past atrocities from other places and times.

Phosphorus Pools: On the eastern side of a tributary to the upper Rill, towards the southeastern map corner, an area of jungle has bare patches on its floor, which sometimes glow, and if touched with bare flesh, these will blister the skin, as they are shallow pools of phosphorus. Quite how they have originated here is unknown. The local wildlife avoids them.

Quasmir Glif: North of The Cleft in the map's southwest, in a somewhat clearer area surrounded by denser-than-normal jungle, an enormous, vertically-elongated, purple-rock shard, pierced by a similarly huge metallic object shaped like a vast diamond-form spear-head, sharply-angled to a point at either end, hangs suspended in the air, the whole secured to the ground by an array of huge metal chains. The surface the chains attach to is a flat expanse of purple rock like the vertical shard. There are angular designs in the surface of the metallic diamond, which is actually a hollow, tower-like craft, in which dwell a group of Planewalkers. They brought their vessel and its rock, together with the surface the Glif (as they call it) is attached to, from their home planet, the last surviving fragments of a destroyed world. While peaceable and willing to talk or trade, if threatened, they will simply dimensionally relocate this entire part of their world elsewhere.

Shornhallow: At the confluence of the Green River and The Rill by the northwestern map corner, is a village-sized series of dilapidated, long-abandoned, rectangular-plan buildings, each once with an intact gambrel roof. Most of the structures have fancy decoration in the woodwork of their gable-ends and inside. A pair of circular-plan stone towers stand taller than these structures, one broader than the other. The shorter, broader one stands on its own, while the taller, narrower one is attached to the northeastern long side of the largest house. Half-fallen fences, overgrown former stone and cinder paths connect some of the properties still, although no roads or bridges lead to or from the place, so far as the encroaching jungle allows. Shornhallow is dangerously infested with poltergeist energies, summoned accidentally by a crazed wild-magic adept. These energies manifest to spread sanity-threatening levels of fear and corruption for hours at a time, by day or night, whenever any living beings are here.

Silent Glade: Near the headwaters of The Rill in the southeastern map corner, this large jungle Glade is magically silent. There is no defined border to it, nor any barrier to enter or leave it. Utter silence prevails under all circumstances within it, however.

Smog Hills: A large group of unusual, mostly bare, hills in the map's east, south of the Green River, appears to be always hazy or misty, with smoky vents and cracks on their tops, flanks, and in the valleys between. Unpleasant fumes perpetually linger across them, killing-off most vegetation and scaring-off the wildlife. Occasional finds of precious metals and other useful substances draw folks here from time to time, however, such materials brought up from deep underground. Whether these are natural volcanic vents, or chimneys from some vast subterranean forge, is not known, though local tales cover both possibilities.

Sotologos (Fungal Mat): North of the major mapped bend in the Green River in the map's northeast, this is an area of jungle occupied by a mobile, semi-intelligent, Fungal Mat. It is able to spit acid at dangers, and feeds on any killed creatures, lurking like a hunter, unrecognisable as anything other than another part of the jungle's vegetation ordinarily.

Spiderswarm Cavern: East of the old Ussel Mine in the hills above Giant Toad Swamp, south of The Cleft in the map's southwest, is this large Cavern complex, home to a swarm of chunky Giant Red Spiders. They are the ancestors of escapees from a deep underground civilisation that once bred them for their silk and meat. Whether the cave tunnels here still connect to that deeper realm is unknown. As a result of their breeding, they are attracted especially to magic and spellcasters, which they will routinely attack, given the chance. They did though bring their own predators along with them from the depths, and which may also be encountered in the nearby jungle now, big, brassy, metallic-armoured Giant Centipedes.

Stone Portal: Northwest of the map's centre, the jungle surrounding the Stone Portal northeast of The Rill as far as the next, unnamed, stream in that direction, is particularly thin and scrubby, east to the glades where the Wild Maize grows. In the midst of this, about halfway between the two rivers, stands this seemingly ruinous stone gateway arch. It is surmounted by a large wooden mask, carved in the form of a huge deer-like skull, with a pair of large, curling and branching deer-like horns extending from either side of its top. A pair of tall, naturally rough, pillar-like standing stones flanks this Portal, each with an irregularly-placed, loosely oval, vertically-elongated and roughly-cut hole piercing it. The gateway is a magical travel portal. When activated, users can travel to anywhere they wish, as long as they have prior knowledge of their destination. However, they must pass through completely naked, and gain mild skin burns in the process. Trying to do so wearing any armour or clothing causes their garments to burst into flames or melt, causing far worse skin burns, and possibly even killing the wearer. Carried items of this sort not in contact with living flesh can be taken through unharmed. Each successful use causes the traveller to gain a geis of the GM's choosing. If required, the Portal can summon a group of Death Knights to defend itself. These are undead, strong, armoured warriors.

Tahekamen's Caves: Entrances to this cave complex are set into the hilly jungle between The Rill and Silk Stream in the middle of the map. The druidic hermit Tahekamen lives here, and the complex is detailed by a separate Atlas map.

Ullan Mead Hall: Alongside the east bank of The Rill in the southeast of the map, a mile or so (1.5 km) downstream from Balegyle Stump, stands this huge roundhouse. It has low, pale-coloured wattle-and-daub walls and a conical thatched roof, from the centre which a similarly-constructed tower rises a further three storeys, the two highest levels protruding through the lowest thatched roof in this tower, these being narrower again than that first tower level. A broad, stone chimney stack extends from the ground level to the height of the first tower storey on the side furthest from the river. As a traveller's rest, it seems very strangely-located, as there are no especially obvious or well-used trails nearby, except a poorly-defined one that runs from Balegyle Stump. Somehow though, folk passing through the jungle here seem often to be drawn to it, and it is rare to find as few as just one or two visitors present, as well as some locals. Said to have been built originally as a religious site by a priestly order dedicated to a now-forgotten harvest deity, it stands atop a subterranean fortification far older than the current building that completely conceals it. The innkeeper, Ellis Ullan, has a (magical?) knack of roping people in to doing favours and helping-out here.

Ussel Mine: In one of the western, steeper hills that lie between the hidden valley of The Cleft (to the north) and Giant Toad Swamp (to the south), is the entrance to this old, long-abandoned mine, so old that no discernible trails still lead here.

Watching Jungle: A couple of miles (3 km) north of the Ullan Mead Hall, on the other side of an upper tributary of The Rill from it in the map's southeast, a sizeable region of jungle seems always to be watching those passing through it. Plants and flowers turn to follow folks' movements, roots may shift subtly to trip walkers who become too curious, branches get in their way, the undergrowth thickens to make passing through more difficult, and so forth. There is no definable controller to all this, but the area is definitely unsafe to loiter in. Setting fires or camping here is liable to bring more overt actions. Rainwater in a bucket-like leaf overhead may tip out and douse a fire, for instance, thorny branches become more prevalent and damaging, perhaps exuding poisonous sap, and even dripping such sap into drinking vessels or onto prepared food, say.

Wild Maize: Clearings in the jungle along an unnamed stream around three miles (5 km) north of Tahekamen's Caves in the map's north-centre are filled with Wild Maize plants, growing almost as if they were farmed crops in fields, extending over an area a couple of miles (3 km) across. There is no sign of any settlements near this region, as if they were once agricultural lands reverting to the wild. In season, there will be edible maize crops available here.

Wood Golems: South of the Smog Hills in the map's east, Green-Man-like Wood Golems may be encountered from time to time. They are usually first noticed as leafy, humanoid faces in the tree trunks, and are mostly quite passive, unless the vegetation is damaged by travellers passing through, or if visitors try to start a fire. Then they will animate, leave their tree trunks and attack. Occasionally, one or more may simply randomly animate away from the trees anyway. No one knows who set them here or why. Perhaps some innate wild magic of the jungle has manifested them.

Yanamoro's Folly: In the map's south-centre, almost three miles (5 km) east of Quasmir Glif is a jungle clearing in which the reckless magical researcher Yanamoro has for some time been preparing a demon-summoning site. Instead of magical sigils and a well-prepared circle, possibly with standing stones, he has set-up a ring of rough wooden poles and other crudely home-made objects, with a view to binding the demon with, or possibly to, them, after summoning it. He is vague about much of this, if questioned. Should he be successful in summoning a demon at some future time (and he has scrappy, hand-scrawled texts that may allow him to do this), these preparations will prove hopelessly inadequate, and the demon is liable to devastate much of the region, unless stopped.