



HOLLOW EARTH EXPEDITIONS

LITTLE TROUBLES COME IN BIG PACKAGES



This Unofficial Adventure may be used as a one-shot journey into the world of *Hollow Earth Expeditions* (created by **Exile Game Studios**) and the Ubiquity system or it may be used as an element in an existing campaign therein.

This adventure is tough, and may require up to five (5) player characters to safely complete. Read this carefully to determine the strength of your party before beginning. Having to carry the massive Activation Key when the characters are small might prove to be extremely taxing on even the (physically) strongest party.

Once the characters are shrunk, there is also a time limit with which they need to return to the shrine and return to normal. If unsuccessful, they may remain small forever.

It is set in a temperate forest filled with varieties of maple, birch, hickory and oak. It can be set anywhere within an existing campaign as the adventure area covers less than one-hundred square yards, with the central figure, an ancient shrine, being only fifty-feet in diameter.

The adventure is divided into two sections titled "Part 1 Tall" and "Part 2 Small." Although the "Small" section places the characters into a unique, albeit miniature, setting, there is no need for the Game Master to "Scale" the adventure using the Core Rulebooks Size tables as (almost) all hazards and encounters are set to the characters scale.

Creature encounter information may be found in the **Hollow Earth Expeditions: Mysteries Of The Hollow Earth Handbook** (pages 144-187, with most of the creatures being located in the *Megafauna* Section, starting on page 176).

Adventure Background

Ages ago an advanced civilization developed a technology that allowed them to reduce things, both inanimate objects and living creatures, down to less than 2% of its original size. Thought to be a perfect way to store materials for future use, it was soon learned that, after a short period of time, the process could not be reversed and whatever was "shrunk" remained that sized indefinitely.



Not deterred, the people realized that they could “shrink” themselves and explore their world from a whole new point of view. Being about one-inch in size allowed them to interact with their environment in a whole new way.

Thus, in a secluded forest glade, a shrine was built that incorporated this technology. People could go there, shrink, explore the forest, then return to the shrine and become normal again. As weapons and supplies carried were reduced with them as well, the explorers were well equipped to deal with the hazards of this miniature world.

However, one hazard could not be overcome. Time. The explorers had just 60 hours to return to the shrine and return to their normal size or they would remain small forever.

Still, many choose to explore the forest. Some were lost to time, other died by the beasts of the forest, and a few willfully choose to continue living the ultimate adventure and never returned to the shrine.

After a time, the ancient people stopped going to the shrine to explore.

No one knows what happen

to the Shrine builders. All that is known is that it was eventually abandoned. Lost in this quiet forest until...

PART I TALL

A limited amount of the adventure takes place before the characters reach the shrine. While they are still “Normal” size. Scale for skill use, movement and combat are normal through this section. A few trinkets and clues as to the shrines purpose are picked up in the area around it, but the only important item is the Shrine Activation Key found within the Dollhouse.

The Dollhouse

While traveling through a heavily forrested section of a valley, the characters happen upon a small building, the size of a child’s dollhouse, partially ruined by fire. Read or paraphrase the following:

Your travels and keen sight have revealed a unique artifact, a tiny one-floor building. No larger then a child’s dollhouse, with a tiny rocking chair sitting on a partially burned front porch. The chair being no more then a half-inch in height. The house is built in a high point in a birch tree, perhaps 6-feet off the ground, in a “Y” between three branches.

It appears to have no inhabitants as the front door and part of the porch have been destroyed by fire. Normal-Sized spiderwebs hanging from the ruins give the impression that it has been abandoned for quite some time.

In fact, the building is still inhabited. Should anyone reach a hand into it, they will find a (normal) tarantula has made a home in the houses rafters and it will bite them (causing no damage, but annoying the character non the less).

If the spider is dealt with, or the house is knocked from it’s perch, a (**Hard 4**) **Feat Of Strength** to accomplish, then it can be searched without any problem.

Within it, a successful **Investigation/Search**

could reveal the following things:

- A result of (**Average 2**) will reveal the building appeared to have been occupied by two or three creatures. Given the size of the furnishings (beds, table, chairs, etc), the creatures could not have been any larger than about 1-Inch tall.
- A result of (**Tough 3**) will allow the character to find a long stick hidden along one of the rafters. The stick is about the size and shape of a new 2H pencil and has a strange writings down it's length, with each of its six sides having a different language. This is the Activation Key to the Shrine.
- A result of (**Hard 4**) will allow the characters to notice worked iron pots and pans scattered amongst the old spider webbing. The largest of these pots being no more than the size of a small ladies thimble.
- A result of (**Very Hard 5**) will allow the character to find a tiny flintlock rifle, and a shoulder bag containing a small beetle mandible and grains of sand.

Attached to the bottom of the house can be found a thimble-sized basket with block & tackle set, along with a large spool of thread. A simple system of pulleys seems to allow the basket to be lowered to the ground easily.



The only thing of importance is the Shrine Key, but if the characters do not find it here at the house, it can be placed near the Shrine (perhaps on the stone deck). Just so long as the characters have it so as to activate the Shrine in the "Short" section.

The six languages on the Key are not important, but should include Ancient Latin and Atlantean. All the sides say the exact same thing; "This Key To Learning Lies In Your Point Of View."

After the characters are finished, one (chosen randomly) will notice light shining off something in the distance. Although hard to make out in the dense forest (even with a spyglass), it appears to be some sort of dark flat structure no more than a couple hundred yards away...

A Boar'ing Afternoon

As the characters head for the stone structure, they will cross over a small stream only 4 or 5 feet wide, and only a few inches deep. Its gravelly shores teeming with tiny river crabs, fish, small rodents and insects. The water is warm, but seems clean. An (**Average 2**) **Survival/Navigation** skill check will reveal that the stream seems to be flowing in the general direction of the stone structure.

Should the party choose to follow the stream, or travel cross-country, after a few minutes of walking, read or paraphrase the following:

As you travel through the dense forest, you suddenly break through some scrub onto a small clearing or game trail. Not but 20-feet down the trail a large Boar like creature is rustling at some roots. It is easily larger than any hunting dog, its eyes being chest high. As you enter onto the trail, it looks up at you, locks eyes, snorts and then charges...

The creature is an adult Archaeotherium that is foraging for food. Like their modern cousins, they are aggressive and consider any close creature to be challenging or attacking them. So it will

attack the first creature that came out of the woods, then attack randomly after that.

Use the stats for **Archaeotherium (Mysteries of the Hollow Earth 162)** for this fight.

The stone shrine is only about 100-feet from the battle sight and can easily be seen by anyone who looks past the Archaeotherium.

Should anyone in the party examine the game trail, a (**Hard 4**) **Investigate/Search** or **Survival/Tracking** will reveal that the "game trail" is actually an old stone path or walkway, long grown over from ages without any proper care. The original stone path appears to have been about 10-feet wide, and goes in a winding path through the forest. One end of the path stops at the edge of the Stone Shrine, while the other leads to a large clearing about a half-mile from the shrine. The winding nature of the path makes the total distance walked about 1-mile.

The clearing is almost 100-yards across and, although heavily overgrown, it is easy for anyone to make out large stone slabs scattered across it, as if at one time it had been some great patio or parking area.

The Prospect of Mystery

Just upriver from the shrine, the winding path brushes once more against the stream in an fast current area that is teeming with small fish and crabs. From here the characters can clearly see the black stone shrine, which is only about 50 feet away. An observant character (**Tough 3 Perception** check) will notice an odd pile of debris on the far side of the stream. If they investigate, read the following:

Brushing away vines and overgrown grasses, you uncover a pile of animal bones, perhaps from a horse or mule. The bones are unremarkable and appear to have been there for years, picked clean by the tiny scavengers of the forest. What is interesting, though, is the scattered

collection of man-made gear intermixed with the bones. Pick axe and shovel heads, flat tin pie pans, rotted scraps of leather and metal buckles, a hammer head and a pile of rusted iron nails, all give the impression that this was a supply animal for some hardened mountain man.

Indeed, this was a supply mule for the old prospector Jack (see "gold, Gold, GOLD!" for more details on Jack), tied to this tree while he examined, and accidentally activated, the Shrine. Because Jack was unable to return to normal size, the mule died of starvation. All of his river prospecting equipment fell into ruin where the beast died.

The Stone Shrine

Forming a small clearing along the course of the stream can be found the dark stone structure the party has been walking toward, the Alter. Read or paraphrase the following:

Forming a clearing in the middle of this dense forest is a large, flat shrine or alter. Made of a black marble-like rock, with thin veins of gold and silver running through it's length. The shrine measures almost 60-feet across and is cut into a hexagonal shape. Two small channels, each about 2-feet across and only a six-inches deep, are designed to direct the stream across the length of the shrine and allow it to continue on its way on the other side. Four evenly spaced bridges, each 2-feet wide, allow you to step across the stream without getting wet.

In the center of the shrine is a wide pedestal, almost 6-foot wide and 2-foot tall. It is cut to a hexagonal shape matching sides with the larger, flat area. The outside edges of the pedestal is engraved with images of giant trees and plants, with tall, thin, elegant looking humans walking amongst them in poses that seem to depict peace, relaxation or meditation.

The top of the pedestal is almost entirely featureless, save for six rings of words carved boldly in a circle across the top. Each ring appears to be written in a different script or language. A small hole in the exact center, perhaps 1/4 inch wide, is the only other marking.

Standing near the pedestal, you gain a sense of peace and your aching bones do not feel quite so sore as they did but a few minutes ago.

The “good feeling” from the pedestal is not fake, any character touching it for a few moments will find all their Non-Lethal damage gone. Waiting an hour by the pedestal will result in one Lethal disappearing, and another each subsequent hour after that point.

The six rings of words written across the top are similar to that on the Activation Key (and need to be made up of the same six languages). The translation reads; “Look, Learn & Return. 60 Cycles Begins Now.”

The “Look, Learn & Return” is just a message of travel. Go and see what is around the shrine. The “60 Cycles Begins Now” is a warning that after 60 Cycles, or hours, the process cannot be undone and the characters are stuck in their small state forever.

The small hole in the center is the “Keyhole” with which the key from the Dollhouse fits. Should any character place the key into the hole, the shrine will instantly activate. Read or paraphrase the following:

A bright flash of light momentarily blinds you as a tingling feeling stretches up from your feet, slowly causing the numbness to reach your fingertips as your sight returns. Powerful winds push and pull at your body as you desperately try to hold onto anything to stay afoot. Pack animals, the shrine, even each other slowly get ripped from your grip as you are tossed into the air, swirling about in the madness of what must be the eye of a cyclone. The last thing you remember is the sickening feeling of finding the hard ground...

If the characters choose to examine the area around the Shrine first, a careful look will reveal something of a mystery. A successful (**Tough 3**) **Perception** roll will allow the characters to notice an Activation Key, identical to the one found in the Doll House, hanging from the branch of a tree just upstream from the shrine. The Key is dangling, like a wind chime, being

held in place by a heavy thread tied carefully around it. The branch it is suspended from is about 5-feet in the air. A careful search will reveal no traps or creatures lurking in ambush, the Key is just hanging there. Removing the Key from the tree is a simple matter.

A successful (**Very Hard 5**) **Perception** roll will allow the characters to notice a thin rope bridge running just a foot off the ground between two maple trees. The bridge is very small, about the same scale as the Doll House and seems to cross an overflow channel for the stream that runs around the Shrine.

The same Perception roll will also allow the character to spot a huge (3-foot sphere) Hornet’s nest high up in the tree, with a dozen or so Hornets buzzing around near it. Poking around the tree, or the rose thicket near it, might spook the Hornets, causing them to Swarm.

PART 2 SMALL

The bulk of the adventure takes place after the characters activate the shrine. They are no longer “Normal” size, but rather have been reduced to about 1-Inch in height. Scale for skill use, movement and combat are still expressed in “normal” terms through this section due to the selection of creature and encounter use (what was once a “normal ant” and not worth investigating before is now a “Giant Ant,” which is detailed in **Mysteries of the Hollow Earth** (page 176). This makes it easy to avoid any rules conversions/changes.

Any of the tiny trinkets picked up at the Dollhouse before the characters are shrunk WILL NOT be larger now as their size stays relevant to the characters size. Therefore, all of their weapons and equipment will also be shrunk down to a useable size.

The only exception to this is the Shrine Activation Key, which is specially designed and is not affected by the shrinking/enlarging properties of the Shrine. **HOWEVER**, that 7-Inch long,

0.01 ounce Stick is now a 35-foot long, 530 pound Telephone Pole!

Part 2 Small begins with the characters having been hurled several hundred yards away from the shrine. Unfortunately, 200 YARDS in normal size is almost 7 MILES when you are reduced to 1-inch tall. Add to that that the trip is an uphill climb as the characters have been blown down river.

If the characters had any "pack" animals, it is at your discretion as to if they were reduced and hurled by the winds to the far reaches, or if they were outside the area of effect and are still standing there, waiting patiently for the characters to return.

New Point of View

As the characters start to wake up, read or paraphrase the following:

The hard rocks you are laying on seem cool and refreshing given the beating your mind just took, spinning wildly in the cyclone winds around the shrine.

However, a strange "clicking" sound catches your attention. A quick glance about reveals that you have been transported to the rocky shores of some great river, a hundred feet wide, with massive boulders scattered everywhere and thick jungles lining both shores. You turn and find yourself looking directly into the face of some giant crab, its massive pinchers about to pick up one of your traveling companions...

The creature facing off with the party is a common river crab, similar to one the party may have dined on earlier in Part 1 Tall. Now, due to their reduced size, the tiny crab is a massive monster about to return the favor.

Use the stats for **Giant Crab (Mysteries of the Hollow Earth 177-178)** for this fight.

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Complication: A round or so after the battle begins, have

Miles in an Acre

A Shrunken Human from this adventure has to get to a group of friends in a grove one acre away. How far does he have to travel?

In a setting where all the characters are but an inch or less in height, One Linear Acre is a sizeable distance for anyone to travel. Here is how that Acre breaks down for that human:

209 feet/acre (actual)
2,508 inches/acre (actual)

Now, if you convert this actual measurement to normal RPG/Miniature game measurement (that is, one inch equals 5 feet), then in these human measurements, that 2,508 inches per acre converts to...

12,540 feet
Or
2.375 (2-3/8ths) miles

To us, it's like walking across the back yard, but to that shrunken human, it's a jog across town.

Another thing to consider is the rough terrain that the characters will suddenly find themselves on. Walking on a gravel driveway is no task for an adult or even a child, but sit down with a magnifying glass and look closely at the "solid ground" a 1-Inch tall character will have to walk on. All those little pebbles are now boulders that need to be avoided.

the party make a (**Tough 3**) **Perception** check. A successful check means that the characters have noticed a strange looking log floating down the river past the battle scene. The log is neatly cut, with no branches, but seems to have massive writing on it. Any character can make a simple leap of deduction to realize that it looks exactly like the Activation Key (and that it has not been reduced in size as the character have been and now is 35-feet long and 530 pounds).

The key is heading for a series of rapids down river that will take it with great speed away from the party unless it is stopped somehow. A single character simply swimming out to it will not slow, stop or change it's direction. But tying a rope to it, or multiple characters pushing against it might be able to lodge it up on the shore.

If the characters are unable to recover the Key during the battle, it will go through the rough waters and then lodge itself on some rocks about 100 feet out in the middle, around 3 miles down river from the battle with the crab.

Besides the dangers of swimming in a fast current river, there is an additional danger. Minnows! The river is teeming with **Shark sized Minnows**. Not that big a deal unless you consider these tiny carnivores are now 5 feet long, swimming in packs like hungry sharks!

After the battle, and subsequent recovery of the Key, the characters can analyze their situation. Any successful Perception check by a character "looking about" will allow them to notice the shrine, now almost 7-miles away. It is up on high, split by two great rivers that form into one after falling from it's incredible heights. Looking toward the Shrine, the characters are on the Right Side of the river.

Note: if the characters did not recover the Key before it went down river, then they are about 10-miles away from the shrine.

Note 2: if the Key is still hanging in the tree by the shrine, then it should be noted that it is on the Left Side of the River, in an area not too far away from the Bramble Village.

Shark Minnows (Follower 2)

Primary Attributes:

Body 4, Dexterity 2, Strength 4
Charisma 0, Intelligence 0, Willpower 2.

Secondary Attributes:

Size 0, Move 0 (Swim 12), Perception 4
Initiative 2, Defense 6, Stun 4, Health 6.

Skills: Brawl 4, Stealth 6, Survival 6.

Talents: Alertness (+2 Perception Rating),
Skill Aptitude (+2 Survival Rating).

Weapons: Bite 6L.

Shark Minnows hunt in packs of 5 to 10, pecking at food sources like a swarm of Piranhas. Because they are pack hunters, they will even attack dead Shark Minnows.

Note 3: if the characters have recovered 2 or more keys, then any keys that are in storage (backpacks, pockets, whatever) will "grow" as the character shrinks, ripping whatever it is contained in. In such case, both keys will be seen floating down the river.

If the characters examine the local foliage, they will discover that it resembles normal grass, plants and trees, only they seem to tower over the character, much like a New York Skyscraper.

Any character who makes a successful (**Nigh Impossible 6**) **Investigate/Search, Survival/Foraging** or **Perception** check will find a large, heavy brick of pure gold. Mere "gold dust" to a normal sized person, to he party member it weights between 1 and 5 pounds! Anyone else who searches hard needs to make the same (**Nigh Impossible 6**) roll to possibly find another. There are a total of 1 to 3 gold dust bricks in the area.

Given all this information, the characters should be able to make the determination that the shrine has reduced them in size. Hopefully they will also remember the part of the writing where it said "*60 Cycles Begins Now.*"

Bramble Raiders

However the characters devise to move the Key, they need to realize that it will take several strong people to move it. A combined Strength of 12 is required to carry the Key, and that must be done over 4 characters due to it's length. Movement in such case will be 1/2 to 3/4 normal depending on terrain.

The Key can also be dragged, again requiring a 12 strength, however there is no minimum number of characters required, and movement is reduced to 1/4 to 1/2 depending on terrain.

HEX Core Rulebook, Page 46, has the table which covers Walking Movement Per Hour. To determine the speed at which the party is moving with the Key, take the average Move and consult the table.

No matter how they do it, constant struggle with the Key will slowly wear away at the characters and they will start to suffer from Fatigue.

Fatigue: HEX Core: Pg 135. *Your character can perform a strenuous activity... ..for a number of hours equal to his Body Rating. After this limit, your character suffers a Nonlethal wound for each additional increment of time based on his Body Rating. The fatigue remains until the character rests or sleeps for eight hours plus the number of wounds he has suffered.*

However the characters decide to move the Key, please keep in mind that they are traveling on rough terrain and should any character fall while holding it could cause danger or injury to others as they try and maintain control.

Several hours after the characters begin their voyage upstream, they are set upon by a Bramble raiding party. 8 Raiders will jump out from behind several large rocks and attack. 3 will open fire with their rifles while the rest will

charge and attack with knives, clubs or swords.

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Bramble Raider Follower 1				
Archetype: Criminal		Motivation: Survival		
Style: 0		Health: 4		
PRIMARY ATTRIBUTES				
Body: 2			Charisma: 2	
Dexterity: 2			Intelligence: 2	
Strength: 2			Willpower: 2	
SECONDARY ATTRIBUTES				
Size: 0			Initiative: 4	
Move: 4			Defense: 4	
Perception: 6			Stun: 2	
SKILLS	BASE	LEVELS	RATING	AVERAGE
Athletics	2	2	4	(2)
Brawl	2	2	4	(2)
Firearms	2	2	4	(2)
—Archaic			5	(2+)
Intimidation	2	2	4	(2)
Melee	2	2	4	(2)
TALENTS				
Alertness 1 (+2 Perception Rating)				
RESOURCES				
None				
FLAWS				
Superstitious (Goes Out Of Their Way To Follow Unusual Beliefs)				
WEAPONS	RATING	SIZE	ATTACK	AVG
Knife	1L	0	5L	(2+L)
Club	2N	0	6N	(3N)
Spear	3L	0	7L	(3+L)
Flintlock Rifle	3L	0	8L	(4L)

Use the **Bramble Raider** stats listed in this module for this fight.

The Brambles have very little of value on them beyond their weapons and a few extra shots for their Flintlocks.

Gold. GOLD. GOLD!!!

As the characters move along the river, either up the water itself, or along the bank where it is clear to walk, they easily notice a small building built among the rocks and shrubs. Easily because it appears to be built entirely out of Gold! Read or paraphrase the following:

Through your heavy struggles, your eyes are drawn to a golden passage. Path stones,

apparently made entirely of gold, weave up from the river to a small, one room cabin, also apparently crafted of bricks of gold. On a makeshift porch, an elderly man, sporting a thick beard and long eyebrows, sits puffing on a long pipe, also crafted of gold.

He chuckles softly as he looks at the group and says "Blowbacks Hu? So how long do you have left?"

The old man is named Jack (or Old Mad Jack to some of the other inhabitants) and his question is one of how many cycles they have until they are stuck. The term "Blowback" is a slang used to refer to anyone who has recently been shrunk down and blown off the shrine.

Although helpful, Jack will not let anyone near his home, threatening "Touch my gold and I'll skin ya." Anyone trying to touch his bricks will bring about a quick attack by one of his many Golden Daggers.

Pressed in conversation, Jack is very willing to "jaw" with the party and can provide a couple of pieces of information:

- Blowbacks only have 60 Cycles (hours) to return to the shrine and activate the key once more. The system will automatically reverse the effect. If you do not get back in time, you remain small forever.
- Bramble Raiders, descendants of people who remained small for one reason or another, hunt the shorelines, especially after there has been an activation of the shrine. They beat or kill any they find, taking their equipment and leaving them to suffer.
- The Brambles are highly Superstitious and believe that they have been made small because they have angered evil spirits.
- The Brambles have a settlement on the other side of the river (stream), underneath a large, thorny rose bush.
- There are several Activation Keys hidden about the area, although he doesn't know how many or where they are. One of his friends, named Thoom, hid one in the rafters

Old Mad Jack				
Ally 3				
Archetype: Adventurer		Motivation: Greed		
Style: 2		Health: 9		
PRIMARY ATTRIBUTES				
Body: 5			Charisma: 3	
Dexterity: 3			Intelligence: 3	
Strength: 3			Willpower: 4	
SECONDARY ATTRIBUTES				
Size: 0			Initiative: 6	
Move: 6			Defense: 8	
Perception: 7			Stun: 5	
SKILLS				
	BASE	LEVELS	RATING	AVERAGE
Art-Sculpture	3	1	4	(2)
Athletics	3	3	6	(3)
Brawl	3	2	5	(2+)
Firearms	3	3	6	(3)
Investigation	3	5	8	(4)
Melee	3	3	6	(3)
Stealth	3	2	5	(2+)
Survival	3	3	6	(3)
—Foraging			7	(3+)
—Tracking			7	(3+)
TALENTS				
Diehard 2 (Improved Death Threshold)				
Danger Sense (Reduced Surprise Penalty)				
Quick Healer (Double Normal Healing Rate)				
RESOURCES				
None				
FLAWS				
None				
WEAPONS				
	RATING	SIZE	ATTACK	AVG
3 Gold Knives	1L	0	6L	(3L)

of his house so that nobody would ever find it and risk becoming trapped.

- There is a giant tarantula, called *Old Burn*, that wanders these woods. Called that because half of his body is burned and scared. He is a friend and enemy, hunting small people, but also keeping the Brambles at bay.

Jack will not do anything to hinder the party, nor will he do anything to help them beyond giving them information.

He does know of an easy slope that leads right up to the shrine, although it will add about 4 miles to the journey.

The slope is an old water run off that has long since

been clogged off at the top, running only in times of heavy rainfall or flooding. The run off is about a mile up river from Jack's cabin, and runs to the right of the shrine, curving in a gradual curve back to a spot about a mile above the shrine on the river. From there, Jack believes, it should be an easier walk down to the shrine.

There is only one problem with the slope, it is a frequent hunting grounds for *Old Burn*, the tarantula, and the party may encounter him.

The Fallen

About a half mile up stream from Jack's cabin a small oak tree has fallen across the stream, causing a minor stoppage. Water is draining out from underneath the tree way beyond the normal shores of the stream. If the characters wish to stay clear of the water, they will need to travel up into the forest foliage. Although not an issue for a normal person, to a small character this tree trunk is almost 65-feet high. There are three primary ways to pass the tree.

Around: the characters can travel up into the wood line, walking around the uprooted tree. This will be a long trip as the characters will have to walk another mile out of their way.

If after clearing the rootball of the tree, the characters wish to try and walk through the forest to the stone channel, they can attempt to get directions by making a successful (**Hard 4**) **Survival/Navigation** skill check. Success will allow them to arrive at a spot on the channel about 1/2 mile up from the stream. Failure means that either they are unable to determine the correct direction, or they headed out in the wrong direction and are now lost in the woods.

At the Game Masters discretion, it is possible that the characters may run into a **Monstrous Small Toad** while it is out looking for a meal (see "Under" below for details on the Toad).

Over: although this "small tree" is 65-feet high, it does possess a great number of

Monstrous Small Toad (Follower 2)

Primary Attributes:

Body 5, Dexterity 4, Strength 5
Charisma 0, Intelligence 0, Willpower 4.

Secondary Attributes:

Size 1, Move 4 (Swim 9), Perception 6
Initiative 4, Defense 8, Stun 5, Health 10.

Skills: Brawl 8, Stealth 6, Survival 6.

Talents: Alertness (+2 Perception Rating),
Skill Aptitude (+2 Survival Rating).

Weapons: Bite 10L, Claw 8N.

If the toad succeeds in knocking a character unconscious (or killing one), it will grab up it's meal and hop off into the woods.

handholds in it's bark, making for easy climbing. This is a (**Tough 3**) skill check (See the table; HEX Core; pg 128 for distance climbed). However, moving the Key over may be a great deal harder.

Under: because the tree is sitting on the gravel of the stream, it is possible to tunnel under it by simply moving the large rocks. Accomplishing this is an *Extended Action* (HEX Core; pgs 106-107) requiring a total of 35 **Strength** or **Athletics** successes. Each turn spent clearing/digging consumes one hour of character time.

Although the "ceiling" is quite solid, and there is no danger of any form of "cave-in," there is another hazard. A **Monstrous Small Toad** (about the size of a sedan) has made it's home below the tree and the characters will unearth it's burrow. The toad will attack immediately.

One advantage to trying to dig under the tree is that there is a greater chance of unearthing a few Gold Dust Bricks. Any character who makes a successful (**Hard 4**) **Investigate/Search**, **Survival/Foraging** or **Perception** check will find a large, heavy brick of pure gold, weighing between 1 and 5 pounds. There are a total of 1 to 4 Gold Dust Bricks in the area.

Over The River: should the characters wish to climb on top of the fallen tree, then use it to cross over to the Left Side of the river, they can easily do that. They will find that the far side of the tree has landed on top of man made stone channel on the Left Side of the shrine. This channel is very clear of debris, as if it is flooded frequently. See "The Left Channel" for more information.

Climbing

Should the party elect to pass on the stone channel and instead follow the river to the Shrine, they will find travel growing slower and slower. Being forced to move at 1/4 their (Hourly) speed due to having to constantly climb, lift and pull the Key up. The climb is a full 5 miles at 1/4 speed and during the last mile there are two different points they will have to climb a natural cliff, almost 50-feet tall each. To make matters worse, a small crab is sitting in the water near the second cliff, looking for a meal. A successful (**Hard 4**) **Perception** check will allow a character to notice the crab's eye stalks sticking out of the water looking about.

Use the stats for **Giant Crab (Mysteries of the Hollow Earth 177-178)** for this fight.

After passing the second cliff, the characters will find themselves at the base of the twin waterfalls at the shrine. Beautiful and loud, the falls drop 200-feet from the channels that cross the top of the shrine. At first glance, the only way up appears to be a trek into the foliage and to the side of the shrine. However, there is a secret passage. a successful (**Very Hard 5**) **Investigate/Search** or **Perception** check will reveal a hidden passage behind both waterfalls.

The passages come together to form a single, 2-inch square tunnel that seems to run at a gradual slope. It travels for a mile in the dark, turning twice, before coming out at the base of one of carved trees on the waterfall side of the shrine.

If the characters take this passage, they will arrive on the top without encounter of Frog, Fish or Old Burn. However, the Brambles know about the passage and will be waiting at the top to threaten the party.

Should the characters elect to walk into the foliage, they will continue to move slowly (1/4 move) and, at the Game Masters discretion, may run into a Monstrous Small Toad, a Huge Tiny Centipede or perhaps even Old Burn.

Monstrous Small Toad can be found within this module. For stats for the **Huge Tiny Centipede**, see (**Mysteries of the Hollow Earth 177**) for this fight and use the stats for **Giant Spider (Mysteries of the Hollow Earth 179-180)** for **Old Burn**.

Fight or not, the characters will find themselves on top of the shrine after a walk of a few miles in the foliage.

Stone Channel

About a mile up from Jacks place is the stone channel. Crafted out of the same black stone (with gold and silver marble effects) as the Shrine, it measures some 180 feet wide and is about 60 feet tall. Although it is roughly clear of problems, there are scattered piles of rocks, leaves and broken tree limbs everywhere. This makes for a more "zig-zag" movement at times.

Should the party take the stone channel, they will find that they can continue at an even pace, as if walking on a road (1/2 movement due to the weight of the Key). It is 9 miles around to the other side of the Shrine, but with the even ground, it should be faster (and less taxing) then trying to climb up to the Shrine.

The Surprising Ambush

After traveling up the stone channel about a mile, the party has a rather surprising encounter with one of the areas denizens, a large field mouse. The encounter quickly turns tragic

though. Read or paraphrase the following:

As you round a group of broken branches and rocks in the channel, you are shocked when another pile suddenly moves, quickly racing out in the channel in front of you. You are eye to eye with the creature. Not a vicious monster, but rather an adult field mouse, about the size of a draft horse. Cocking its head slightly as it looks at you, it slowly turns and starts to walk off. That's when the real attack occurs.

In a blur of monstrous legs, a massive, horribly scared tarantula darts out from the shadows and attacks the mouse. Eight legs grasp and hold him tight as steely fangs inject paralyzing poison into the helpless creature. Within moments, the mouse stops moving...

The Tarantula is the one known as **Old Burn** and it has been stalking the mouse for some time. The groups appearance caused the mouse to come out into the open, when allowed **Old Burn** to be able to attack it.

If the party does nothing, then after a few moments **Old Burn** will take the mouse and disappear into the shrubs. If the party chooses to attack, then Old Burn will fight to defend itself and its kill.

Use the stats for **Giant Spider (Mysteries of the Hollow Earth 179-180)** for **Old Burn**.

If he is reduced to 2 Health, **Old Burn** will try to grab his mouse and retreat into the shrubs, moving half his normal speed due to having to carry the mouse.

Should the party somehow save the mouse from being taken by **Old Burn**, then it will slowly recover from the toxin after about an hour. Any character with **Medicine/Veterinary** can make a (**Tough 3**) skill check to try and reduce that time. If successful, the mouse will recover in about 20 minutes.

The mouse is a wild animal and cannot be tamed or "harnessed" (like a horse or ox). It will fight any

Giant Mouse (Follower 1)

Primary Attributes:

Body 3, Dexterity 4, Strength 3
Charisma 0, Intelligence 0, Willpower 2.

Secondary Attributes:

Size 1, Move 9 (Run 18), Perception 4
Initiative 4, Defense 6, Stun 3, Health 6.

Skills: Brawl 8, Stealth 4, Survival 4.

Talents: Alertness (+2 Perception Rating).

Weapons: Bite 8L.

restraints put on it and race off into the shrub in a random direction as fast as possible. If it is attached to something (for example, if the Key is roped to it), then it will drag the item with it into the woods.

If, somehow, the party devises a way to "tame" or at least "control" the mouse (drugs, mind control, unique artifact, etc), then it's statistics are as follows:

Due to it's large size (similar to that of a draft horse from the characters point of view), the mouse can drag the Key and still move at a Speed of 9.

The Left Channel

The fallen tree rests right on top of the Left Channel, and the characters can easily drop the Key into the channel from on top, then climb down (in much the same way they climbed "Over"). Walking the channel they will find it mostly clear of debris, unlike the Right channel, which is filled with debris, rocks, leaves and branches.

Still, walking speed is about the same (1/2 movement due to the weight of the Key). However, half way around the channel, the characters can easily see a rope-style bridge crossing the channel. Read or paraphrase the following:

Your walk along the channel has been long and quiet, with only a few pieces of debris to break up the monotony of the long, black

canyon. However, up ahead you spot possible signs of civilization, a rope bridge. Anchored on both sides by young trees, this three-strand bridge towers almost 200 feet above your heads. One end seems to be anchored in a tree near the shrine while the other in a tree just above a thick tangle of rose bushes. From where you stand, there appears to be no way up to the bridge, or even the canyon ledge below it..."

Indeed, the channel ledge, which is 120-feet above the characters, is smooth with no holds for a thrown grappling hook. Nor do the walls look easily climbable.

The bridge was built by the Brambles and runs from a tree near the edge of the Shrine to a tree that climbs out of the rose thicket that hides their village. They use it to cross over onto the shrine in order to try and block "blowbacks" from being returned to normal size.

The rest of the walk up the channel is without incident, however when they reach the top, they will find that the channel has been blocked by a dam.

As you reach the upper end of the channel, you find that it has been blocked by a man-made dam. Massive rocks, twigs, clay and mud have been crammed together to form a huge dam, extending higher than the 60-foot high walls of the channel. Due to the "earthen" nature of the dam, it's walls have a gradual slope on them, thus making it easy to climb (or drag the Key up).

On the other side of the dam, the river runs half way up the side, forming a depth of about 10 feet in the top of the channel. Large numbers of minnows, crabs and other small river creatures can be seen swimming around in the shallows near the channels mouth.

The Shrine

However the party manages to get the Key to the shrine, hopefully they have done so before their 60 Cycles has expired. As they stand at the edge of the shrine, read or paraphrase the following:

With only 500 or so yards to the center, the pedestal that controls the shrine is in sight. All that lies between you and it is a stretch of flat black rock. Carefully you look out, checking for dangers, that's when a single human figure, a Bramble, steps out from the shadow of a rock some 200 feet ahead of you and calls to you.

"Ho Blowbacks! I have ah hundred warriors surround'in ya and I'll keel ya unless ya give us all you'se stuff. Leave ya stuff there in the dirt, and ya can take the key and go. Try and cross without leaving me my dues, and I'll end ya." Calmly he crosses his arms and waits...

The Bramble is too far away to tell if he is bluffing, but a successful (**Tough 3**) **Perception** check will allow a character to notice around 8 Brambles hiding in the shrubs and under rocks and such. A Successful (**Very Hard 5**) **Perception** check will reveal that there appear to be no other Brambles in the area.

If the characters drop their gear and start across, the Brambles will calmly walk over, pick up their gear and then attack the party, trying to take members prisoner first, but being content to kill anyone who causes a problem.

If the party refuses to drop their gear, then the Brambles will immediately attack! There are 12 Brambles hiding around the area, including the Bramble "spokesman" (treat as a normal Bramble) and all will use their flintlock rifles in their first attack, then charge in with spear and club.

They will fight until they are reduced to about 4 or 5, then the survivors will flee into the scrub, leaving their dead behind.

With the way clear, it is possible for the party to drag the Key to the base of the pedestal. Read the following:

The great pedestal, only two-feet tall when last you saw it, now stretches some 120 feet into the sky. The outside edges, engraved with images of giant trees, plants and people walking about, now also reveal easy handholds and hidden ladders. Climbing up should be easy save for the 500 pound telephone pole you have

to somehow drag up to the top...

The Shrine Builders had never intended for the key to be removed from the machine, thus no easy way to get it back to the top exists. The characters will have to be creative on this (using block and tackle, rope pulley systems or just brute force). The handholds and ladders around the outside edge provide excellent surfaces for climbing or for attaching or tying ropes.

Assuming they do it within the allotted time, when the party reaches the top, they will find everything as before, except that part of the writing, that which reads "60 Cycles Begins Now" is glowing. Dropping the key into the hole will cause the machine to activate, changing the process to "Tall" and returning everyone on the alter to "Normal" human height in the same flash of light and wind. The characters are back, No harm done.

An observant character will notice that the winds have once again caused the Key to be blown out of the hole and into the stream, where it slowly floats toward the edge and off downstream once more.

When the party activates the machine, returning them to normal size, any dead brambles still on the shrine and their gear will also be enlarged.

If somehow the Giant Mouse happened to be on the pedestal when the shrine was activated, the he too will be enlarged to "Human Normal" size, now a 7-foot tall, 2,000 pound mouse.

If anyone happened to find a "grain" of gold, it will also enlarge to human size, resulting in a pure gold nugget from 1 to 5 pounds (roll 5 dice, each success is a pound, minimum of 1 pound).

Continuing The Adventure...

...Hunting Old Burn

Killing Old Burn would be difficult, but not impossible, for the characters. As a "normal" sized man, locating him in the underbrush is a (Hard 4)

Science/Biology or **Survival/Hunting** skill check. As he is actually just a normal tarantula, Old Burn can easily be killed (by a knife, club, gunshot or boot). This, however, would be a tragedy to Old Jack as fear of Old Burn is what keeps the Brambles from prowling around where Jack's cabin is.

...The Bramble Village

The Bramble Village is built within a thick strand of roses at the base of a young silver maple tree. Cramped, multi-level buildings are interwoven into the rose thicket, creating a rough symbiosis. The thicket provides security and protection for the Brambles, while they help keep harmful insects from eating it. Ages ago a few brave Brambles also helped move a hornet's nests high into the maple tree's branches. One of those nests has grown into a massive colony and, although not harmful to the Brambles, their aggressive nature keeps the larger creatures out of the rose thick.

There are easily three possible ways that the characters might end up at the Bramble Village:

One; they could become captured by the Brambles at the shrine, thus missing their chance to become "normal size" ever again. Captured "Blowbacks" are usually sold at auction or used as slave labor until such time as they have earned their freedom. Freedom can only be earned by years of hard work and showing that a Blowback shows the killer instinct necessary to survive in Bramble society.

Two; they could search out the builders of the rope bridge that crosses the Left Channel by either climbing up and out under the bridge, or backtracking from the fallen tree or the dam. Finding the village would be a bad thing as there are hundreds of Brambles living in the village, all of whom will fight to capture the characters and steal their gear.

Three; the characters may elect to try and locate the Bramble Village after they have been returned to "normal" size, perhaps intent on exacting revenge on them or seeing to it that

they do not attack any others who accidentally find themselves at the mercy of the shrine. Such investigation would be fraught with peril, not from the Brambles who are too small to be a danger to a "normal" man, but rather from the massive Hornet's nest found within the tree. Should the village be disturbed, Bramble scouts in the tree would "disturb" the nest, causing them to swarm, attacking whatever creatures are nearby.

...Searching For Keys

Beyond the Key found within the Doll House, and the Key Trap set by the Brambles, there is the possibility that other keys lay scattered around the forest somewhere. Washed up in debris downstream from the Shrine, wrapped up in the backpack of a crumbling body out in the forest. It is unknown how many Activation Keys were actually made by the Ancient people who constructed the shrine...