

CIRCLES OF MADNESS

By Ambika Kirkland (<http://synefarah.deviantart.com/>)

Five days ago, something burned a livid purple streak across the sky and crashed amid the hills near the village of Ayerdale. It tore a swath through the forest and now rests in a smoldering crater some three hours trek from the small settlement. Many report that animals have started to act oddly, disappearing into the forest and returning with strange marks on their bodies.

THE CRASH SITE

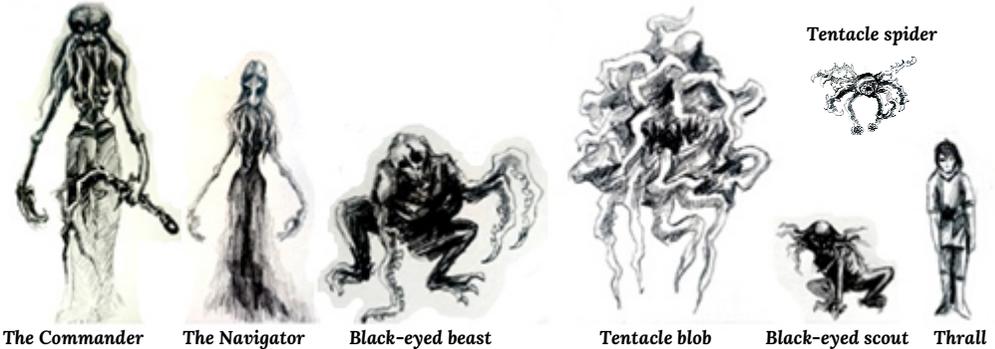
Trees are bent aside almost gently for 300 meters leading up to a burnt gash that spills into the smoking crater. A **huge metallic object** is embedded in the earth, ovoid, with a set of **metal stairs** at the front of the thing leading up into its gleaming belly. The **neat circular opening** beckons.

THE INTERIOR

1. The room is ice cold. **Strange etchings** in no known language cover the smooth walls.
2. An **urgent buzz** fills the hall, then a **flash of light**. Anyone in the hallway becomes stricken with **temporary madness** for unless their minds are strong enough to resist the effect.
3. A **young man** lies in the center of the room, eyes staring upwards at an array of small pinpricks of light that dot the domed ceiling. He smiles but will not speak, and resists attempts to move him.
4. The walls of this circular room are covered in banks of **smooth tablets** which dance with more **strange symbols**. Anyone who stares at them for too long may feel compelled to stand transfixed for several minutes, trapped in a dream of swirling black water and alien landscapes.
5. An empty chamber with some sort of vent embedded in the floor.
6. A huge, dead **tentacle blob** floats in a **cracked vat of cloudy fluid** in the main chamber. In the back rooms, **humanoid bodies** lie dead on metal slabs, marked with incisions and strange burns.
7. The floor seems to be made of black glass but it is actually a **viscous liquid pool**, 5' deep that can be waded through at ¼ speed. Anyone fully submerged in the liquid enters a state of uncanny calm and feels themselves floating in an endless expanse. They can breathe the liquid, but if they do so for more than a minute they will transform into **something not quite human** over the next month, sprouting tentacles as their eyes go dull black and their memories fade.
8. A curving hallway, its floor coated in a **sticky black substance**.
9. The curved NW wall is one smooth black panel. Anyone who has breathed **black liquid** or was transfixed by the **strange symbols (4)** will see pinpricks of light and multicolored globes dancing across the panel. **The Navigator** gazes at the panel guarded by 2 **black-eyed beasts** and 2 **thralls**.
10. An exploded **control panel** is surrounded by the burnt bodies of tentacled creatures.
11. A chamber full of shelves of **sticky green fluid**. A **tentacle spider** crouches in wait on the ceiling.
12. A room containing three **empty circular force fields** by the far wall. The force fields hum softly.
13. The outer wall of the crescent-shaped room is a **one-way window**, only transparent from within.
14. **Suspended-animation pods** line the walls. Some are empty, some hold dead **beasts** or **scouts**.
15. A second room of **Suspended-animation pods**. One contains an injured **Navigator**.
16. The **ship core**, a glowing coil that stretches to the ceiling, slowly pulsing.
17. The **Commander's** chamber is pitch black and no normal light penetrates it. He rests in a pool of **black liquid** at the western end of the room guarded by 2 **black-eyed beasts**, a **scout** and 2 **thralls**.
18. **The Control Room**. **Strange machinery** marked with alien runes lines the walls. From here, various settings of the vessel can be manipulated...but who knows what pressing things blindly could do.

AYERDALE NPCs Mayor Thorne just wants that thing gone...or at least for someone to assuage the villagers' fears. Myra, a worried middle-aged woman, says her teenage son Bryn has gone missing. Guard Captain Nissa sent 12 men armed with spears and bows to "deal with that thing in the woods" and they never returned. Town Charlatan Benno Briarbuckle is charging 5 copper for guided tours of the crash site. Brother Malcus says that the crash was a curse from the gods for the villagers' lack of faith, but a new cult led by Mad Linnea insists it is a blessing. The daring ruffian Pettan is certain there's something valuable in the crashed vessel.

CREATURES FROM BEYOND **The Commander** - Can employ mind control and uses a tentacle-covered wand to drain his enemies' life force. Its gaze inflicts madness. **The Navigator** - Uses mind control and psychic blasts. Very crafty. **Black-eyed beasts** - Misshapen...things with a vicious bite and insatiable hunger for flesh. **Tentacle blob** - Swims or levitates, enveloping creatures with its tentacles and emanating dread. **Tentacle spider** - Lightning fast. Hides on ceilings and jumps down to latch onto a victim's face. **Black-eyed scouts** - Incredibly stealthy and quick with a poison bite. **Thralls** - Mindless human servants whose eyes have turned eerie black.



The Commander The Navigator Black-eyed beast Tentacle blob Black-eyed scout Thrall

TO BE CONTINUED Will the adventurers cure a companion stricken by the black liquid or be forced to save others from the alien monstrosity he has become? Can these creatures be reasoned with? Are more on their way? Can the craft be navigated to far-off worlds? Will worshippers flock to the thing? Does it hold technology that could transform society? Is it carrying a deadly plague from distant stars? Will the craft's core explode and create a proliferation of strange powers in the surrounding lands?

Doors (Roll 1d6): 1. Metal, disappears when touched, 2. Invisible, requires entire movement to pass through, 3. Metal, gas trap, 4. Energy barrier, electrical damage when crossed, 5. Invisible, psychic damage when crossed, 6. Metal, covered in twisted symbols, causes temporary madness and psychic damage

Artifacts (Roll 1d6): 1. A pulsating silver egg, cold to the touch, 2. A small ring that causes guttural screams to echo in the wearer's head, 3. A headband that seems to protect the wearer from psychic assaults, 4. A rough stone orb which explodes when thrown, 5. A tablet of black glass that displays strange symbols, 6. A vial of viscous black liquid

Encounters (Roll 1d8): 1. A vivid hallucination of something significant to the character, 2. A tentacle blob and 1d4 black-eyed scouts, 3. 1d4 thralls, 4. A strange black-eyed child who repeats numbers over and over, 5. Four black-eyed beasts, 6. A scream of sirens sounds for 30 seconds then stops, 7. Three black-eyed scouts stalk the characters, 8. 1d4 tentacle spiders

