THE CHIPPEL OFTHE ANCHENTS



LEVEL 4 ADVENTURE



A LOW TIER ONE-SHOT ADVENTURE FOR THE WORLD'S GREATEST RPG GAME

THE CHAPEL OF THE ANCIENTS

We've lost too many good men. This is why To come to you. It is dangerous but the pay is good.

Captain Garanthe

BACKGROUND LORE



ocal reports of disappearances are on the rise. Public unrest has reached a terrible point where people in the large city are unwilling to leave their houses out of fear. Most

people know at least someone who has gone missing in the last few months. Garanthe, the captain of the City Watch tried to downplay the severity of the situation for a few weeks. The official statement was that a dark cult and a crime guild were in the middle of a turf war; the most savage faction war the city has seen in decades. Very few people believed him. The fact that nobody was ever found was proof enough that a simple gang war was nothing but a sorry excuse for the City Watch's mediocrity. People know that a cult is involved but not much more. A couple of well-informed individuals with good connections within the nobility circle know that an obscure organization named the Chapel of the Ancients is behind it all. The captain of the City Watch is aware of this as well but the watch has been unable to handle the cultists that grow in numbers and strength as time goes

They know where the cultists' lair is. A member of the watch managed to follow a cultist on the lose but was wise enough not to venture inside alone. The entrance to the lair is in the ancient ruins next to the city. The ruins are believed to be the remains of an earlier settlement hundreds of years before the current city. The guard followed the cultist through narrow alleys and under collapsed buildings and arches until the cultist reached a set of stairs that descended into the ground. Two other cultists stood guard by the stairs. The guard returned immediately and reported this information to Captain Garanthe. Since then, the captain has sent two strike teams to dismantle the cult. None of those men were seen again. Captain Garanthe is at a loss about what to do. He could keep sending troops but the City Watch can only withstand so many losses before they are left unable to handle the everyday stuff within the city. If the City Watch loses its standing with the community and its ability to handle a crowd of mad citizens, the city could turn on itself. The captain knows that his head is on the line but if the city fights back against the authority, it is the noble class who will pay for all this. Most of the missing people belong to the lower classes in the city. Those people are angry and the nobles are the first to blame for their plights.

Captain Garanthe has anonymously offered a hefty bounty and a Medal of Honor to those who help purge the Chapel of the Ancients. The anonymous notice posters in town lead adventurers to a meeting with the captain and the three influential nobles who sponsor the bounty fee of 2000 gold pieces. The captain explains the nature of the problem and the location of the lair but has little else to offer. He reminds the adventurers that the only thing worth recovering for the city is the missing people or their remains, if any are present. Any other material treasure or object in the chapel is theirs to keep. An added bonus to the task at hand.

THE RISE OF THE CULT

Haru was the name of a homeless man in the city. He roamed the streets and begged for spare coins or pieces of discarded food. Haru was never a bright individual, nor did he possess a strong sense of direction or objectives. After he lost the only family member who accepted him he ended up in the streets with no future. Store owners despised him. Locals avoided him. Kids bullied him. Such was Haru's existence. One day, he wandered into the ruined section of the city and stumbled across something that changed his life. The collapsed buildings there are all made of stone. Or at least, the stone is what remains of them. They are supposed to be so old that no one even knows who lived there. Haru walked those ample streets aimlessly for hours until he came across a flight of stairs that descended into the earth. Haru was simplemended enough to lack a sense of fear or self-preservation and ventured inside. The inside of the underground complex was dark but some strange braziers shone with aquamarine light and led the way.

Haru found himself in a type of church. The imagery on the walls and pillars and the horizontal construction surrounding the chapel's nave reminded him of the Church of the Sun he used to attend to when he was young. The eerie lights led him to a large room illuminated by a pair of those magical braziers. At the end of the room stood a large statue on an altar. The creature was unlike anything Haru had ever seen or heard of. Not even the craziest tales, fables, or legends could come up with a creature as unknown as the one that stood before him. The ineffable image of the creature etched on his eyes. He turned away and closed his eyes but the enormous and tentacled stone idol remained in plain sight inside his head. The moment struck his conscience and his will disappeared as if it never had existed. Haru raised his gaze at the stone idol and saw it. The stone statue was immobile yet it seemed alive. Haru thought the dizziness he felt made it appear as if it moved, if only

a little. But then, he heard a voice in his head. A rasping, whispering, sibilant voice that scratched his inner ear each time it spoke.

The statue depicts Raa'xidras, who offered Haru a way to climb back to the top of the human hierarchy. It knew that Haru was at the bottom of the chain and that nobody felt sympathy for him. Haru felt warmth in his heart. The warmth enveloped him as he accepted. He could not deny the voice. It sounded so wise and intelligent. Surely it knew how to make things better.

Haru was unconscious for a day. When he woke up, it was not Haru any more. The otherworldly presence inside the grand statue in the chapel had planted a seed of intelligence and agency inside his mind. The former beggar was now a calculating, cold man with one purpose only: to start a cult, worship the stone idol in the chapel, and make all the sacrifices necessary to awaken the old idol and free whatever is inside it. He now calls himself Minister Haru. It is a different person altogether. The minister portrays a charismatic façade that attracts the gullible to join his cult. Raa'xidras' idol gifted Minister Haru the arcane powers to act as the leader of the organization.

Raa'xidras' idol has explained to Minister Haru that performing a sacrifice ritual at the steps of the idol is necessary to free the primordial being inside. The amount of souls needed to break the stone prison is so high that Haru may not be able to achieve it during his lifetime. But each sacrifice frees a tiny bit of the primordial's power and strengthens Haru. Besides,

Haru found a life-lengthening ritual in one of the ancient tomes in the chapel. The ritual requires body parts of at least 300 people to work and it should double Haru's lifetime if it works.

CHAPEL OF THE ANCIENTS

The mystery behind the chapel and the strange stone idol by the altar is one that most likely will never be revealed to any living person. The origin is so strange and removed from the current age that living people, even elves, would have no frame of reference to understand the subtleties of its history. The stone idol was originally a primordial being, a creature of chaos that lived in the first era of the world. Its name was Raa'xidras. The world back then was home to many others like it. The hierarchy they shared would be incomprehensible to anyone. It has a shifting quality that moved depending on the time and space the creatures were in. Raa'xidras found itself with an enemy in an unfortunate moment when the chain of command severely disadvantaged it. Its primordial foe launched an attack that bent the rules of reality and turned Raa'xidras into a piece of stone. The primordial was immobile but sentient of its existence. Its eyes ever bright and seeing. And so, eons passed, and with time, Raa'xidras' sanity decreased. It became a mad entity forever trapped within the hard shell that surrounded it.

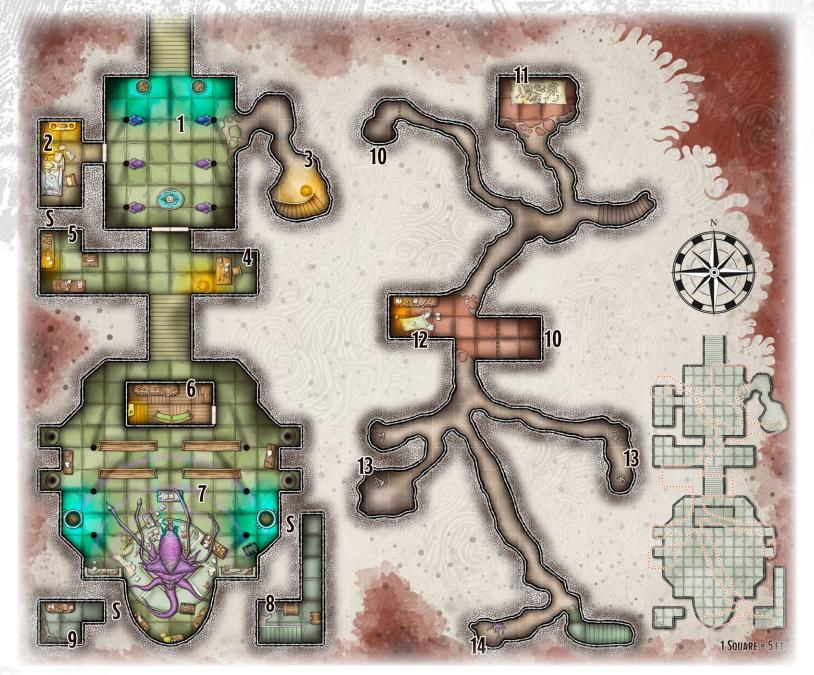
After a long time. A race unknown to today's' scholars found the stone idol and felt a unique attraction to it. Raa'xidras tried to influence their minds but they had an innate resistance to it. Whoever they were, they could only feel an unexplainable attraction. They built the underground chapel and the city around it. Millennia passed and they too perished or moved on, leaving behind a husk of a city. Then humans and other humanoid races settled the area. The new races shared some features with the builders of the ruined city but their innate resistance to Raa'xidras' mind onslaught had been watered down after generations. To this day, only elves and gnomes retain a bit of that innate resistance. The rest of the races, humans in particular, are prone to Raa'xidras' influence over their minds.

AREA DESCRIPTIONS

1. Antechamber

A long flight of stairs that ventures down into the earth leads to an underground chamber of clear religious intent. Two braziers flank the entrance and bathe the area with an eerie aquamarine light. Arcane visages of otherworldly creatures stand inert; carved onto the rows of pillars in the room.

A fountain next to the double doors at the end of this room holds crystal clear water. A shell lays by the border of the fountain. Cultists have started a tradition of drinking a sip of the fountain water with the shell each time



they return to the chapel. A *detect magic* spell reveals the fountain has a conjuration aura. The fountain replenishes itself at dawn. Any attempt to relocate the fountain causes it to lose its magic.

1 **cult fanatic** and 3 **cultists** stand guard in this chamber and attempt to imprison any intruders. If successful, they bring any surviving prisoners to **Area 10**.

A successful **DC 17 Dexterity (Thieves Tools) check** allows a character to bypass the lock on the door to **Area 2**. Minister Haru owns the only key to this room.

2. ARCANE STUDY

Bundles of papers, diagrams, scrolls, and books lay scattered on a desk and across the floor, their content appears to be arcane formulae and schematics. Two glowing crystal spheres on a shelf by the north wall light the room. They do not appear to have a clear light source.

Minister Haru studies magic and prepares his spells in this room. The room is off-limits to the rest of the cult. Two golden medallions in a drawer are worth 100 gp each. Minister Haru's spellbook is on the table. It contains all the spells from the **mage** statblock. Manipulating any of the crystal spheres may trigger a trap as detailed below.

PITFALL TRAP

Simple Trap (level 1-5, setback trap)

Description. A hidden pit trap intended to lead trespassers to a cell in the dungeon level.

Trigger. Manipulating any of the spheres on the shelf triggers the trap. The floor gives in and reveals a pit that reaches the north **Area 10**. A passive **Perception score of 16 or higher** reveals the sensible trigger buttons under the lamps.

Effect. Any creature standing next to the shelf must make a **DC 16 Dexterity saving throw** to avoid falling

down the pit as the floor tiles collapse and taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning.

Countermeasures. If detected, a successful **DC 15 Dexterity (Thieves Tools) check** allows a character to disassemble the button's mechanism, rendering it inert.

Reset. After discharging, the trap must be reset manually by Minister Haru.

A passive **Perception score of 16 or higher** reveals the outline of a section of the south wall that slides sideways. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a switch behind a removable brick that causes the wall to move aside when pushed. The secret passage leads to **Area 5**.

3. Dungeon Access

A short tunnel parts from the antechamber and into a rough cavern illuminated by a single brazier. A set of curving stairs descends further down into unknown darkness.

A single **cult fanatic** guards the room. If possible, the cultist attempts to escape down the stairs and run to the secret door in **Area 8**. He means to alert Minister Haru of the intruders.



4. DECOY OFFICE

Many trinkets and books stand on a wooden desk.
The books appear to be logs of some kind. A registry of past purchases or a list of things and people.

The documents on the desk are decoys. They do not relate to any of the cult's activities. Their only goal is to cause suspicion and curiosity in anyone alien to the cult. Opening the only drawer of the desk may trigger a trap as detailed below. Minister Haru had his cultist prepare the decoy office in the event that unwanted visitors managed to get this far.

PITFALL SLIDE TRAP

The trap is identical to the one in **Area 2** with the following differences:

- The two easternmost floor tiles in the room are the area of effect.
- Opening the drawer of the desk triggers the trap.
- The pitfall leads to a rough slide that moves any affected creature to the south Area 10.
- The countermeasure implies that the person disarms a trigger switch that activates when the drawer is pulled.

5. WORKSHOP

Weapons, wood carving tools, carpentry instructions, and several pieces of wood lay scattered across three wooden tables. A bronze oil lamp provides dim light.

Some of the cultists work here and carve crescent-shaped wooden amulets for other cult members. A cultist has also started to carve leather too.

A passive **Perception score of 16 or higher** reveals the outline of a section of the north wall that slides sideways. A successful **DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a switch behind a removable brick that causes the wall to move aside when pushed. The secret passage leads to **Area 2**.

6. STUDY ROOM

A glowing crystal sphere illuminates this small rectangular room with wooden flooring and little furniture. A single tall bookcase dominates the view.

A successful **DC 17 Dexterity (Thieves Tools) check** allows a character to bypass the lock on the door to **Area 2**. Minister Haru owns the only key to this room.

The bookcase features a grand collection of literary classics of recent human culture and a few tomes of elven origin. A successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals that many of the books were recently added but the collection is not cohesive in its content. It

appears as if the collection was put together only to fill the available space without a clear purpose.

7. CHAPEL NAVE

Many voices chant in an incomprehensible tongue, the intensity grows louder with proximity. A large, underground chapel nave with strange imagery on the walls and pillars confirms the religious undertones of the complex. A large stone idol dominates the altar on the far end of the room. The idol portrays an alien creature of no known origin with a large bulbous head, long appendices, tentacled bottom, and aquamarine light rays shooting from its elongated eyes.

Four pits flank the nave. Before each of the sacrifices, a cultist first cuts a part from the victim's body with a cleaver or a catcher knife. The part is usually a hand, a finger, a foot, or a piece of flesh. The parts are then thrown down any of the pits for the ossuary.

The congregation chants as they finish a sacrifice ritual. The bodies of two male adults lie dead on the floor in front of the statue. After a moment, both corpses become ash and float toward the stone idol, merging with its surface. Minister Haru (mage) stands beside them with a blood-dripping ritual knife in his hand. There are twenty cult members in the room: 2 cult fanatics, 6 cultists, and 12 apprentice cultists (commoner). Minister Haru and the cultists are distracted by the ritual and can be surprised. If the cultists win this engagement, any surviving adventurers are taken down to **Area 10**. They are to be sacrificed for the idol the day after.

THE BALEFUL INFLUENCE

The stone idol aids the cultists in this battle with its mental influence. Any non-cultist that starts its turn within 25 feet of the statue must make a successful **DC 16 Wisdom saving throw** or become **frightened**. On a pass, the creature is immune to this effect for 24 hours. Affected creatures may repeat the save at the end of each turn. Elves and gnomes have advantage on the save.



A passive **Perception score of 14 or higher** reveals the outline of a secret door behind the east brazier and another one behind Raa'xidras' idol on the west side of the back altar. A successful **DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check** reveals a pushable brick next to each secret door that causes the wall section to move aside. The secret passages lead to **Area 8** and **Area 9**.

8. SECRET VAULT

Read the following when entering from Area 7.

The secret passage leads to a short hallway and a set of stairs that descend into the dungeon. Two wooden chests in the dark are the only thing in the room.

The two chests are unlocked. They contain any valuables the kidnapped people had on them when they were taken. A leather sack of coins and jewelry in one of the chests is worth 215 gp. If the adventurers find themselves captured and moved to any of the cells. Their weapons and belongings are placed in these chests.

9. SECRET LIBRARY

The secret passage leads to a small chamber with a single bookcase. The books and scrolls appear to be as old as the construction around them. A quick look reveals that the books are written in a strange language no one present understands.

These are the books that originally were located in the study room (**Area 6**). The books were written by the ancient civilization that built the chapel. They are not only written in a different language, but most of them also employ ciphers and codes in their writing. A *comprehend languages* reveals some of the background information about Raa'xidras but weeks of study and code-cracking are needed to fully understand the knowledge within. There are 4 *potions of healing* on top of the bookcase.

10. TRAP CELL

The two cells can be accessed from the dungeon level or by triggering one of the two traps in the main level. Iron bar gates with medium-quality locks keep people locked inside. There are 2 male adults in the north cell, and 1 female adult and a male child in the south cell. Any of those groups is to be sacrificed the day after to the stone idol.

A successful **DC 16 Dexterity (Thieves Tools) check** allows a character to bypass the lock on the iron bar gate. Minister Haru and three other cultists own keys to these cells.

11. OSSUARY

A mound of bones, desiccated body parts, and skulls on a large piece of fabric are the only things in this partially collapsed room. Strange-looking runes on the fabric reveal its arcane purposes, whatever they may be.

Minister Haru and the cultists have gathered all the disposed body parts from the sacrifices in this room. The minister plans to conduct a ritual that will lengthen his lifespan, using all the body parts as material components. He still needs to double the number of bones and body parts.

12. ACOLYTE'S TRAINING ROOM

Scrolls and schematics extended on the floor as three apprentice cultists try to perform a magic trick depicted in the documents. The three cultists repeat the verbal components once and again without success.

3 **cultists** practice their first spell from the papers on the floor. They are distracted by their task and can be surprised. A successful **DC 11 Intelligence (Arcana) check** reveals that the spell they try to perform is *darkness*.

13. BODY PART MOUNDS

Mounds of recently disposed of body parts litter the floor. Many of them are fresh but others are rotting. Rats scatter when anyone approaches the areas. There is nothing of value in these areas.

14. THE STRANGE EFFIGY

A strange tentacled being protrudes from the rough rock wall. The thing appears to be made of rock but some of its parts are soft like living flesh. The creature writhes and makes faint moves but it appears unaware of its surroundings.

The recent sacrifices at the altar have started the liberation of Raa'xidras. The strange effigy is to the south and under the stone idol. It appears that a form of root protrudes from the idol, into the floor, and into this cave. The creature appears to be "alive" but it does not respond to its surroundings in any way. Damaging it or destroying the visible part does not cause it to react either. Destroying it does not impede the liberation of the ancient primordial in any way.

DEVELOPMENT

Defeating Minister Haru and his cult stops the problem of the disappearances. Any rescued survivors from the cells thank the adventurers and return to the city to tell the tale of their deeds. Garanthe, the captain of the City Watch is happy that the problem is over and pays the agreed-upon reward. The city throws a grand festival the next day and the adventurers receive a Medal of Honor.

The danger of Raa'xidras and the stone idol is not over, however. The destruction of the cult causes the stone idol to hibernate for months before resurfacing again. Any person who comes in contact with the statue may fall to its influence and restart the cult. Raa'xidras is not in a rush, it can wait millennia to return to the Material Plane. Also, destroying the stone idol is impossible. The statue can be destroyed with ease; it is nothing but stone. But the magic that empowers the arcane prison reforms the statue at dawn.



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