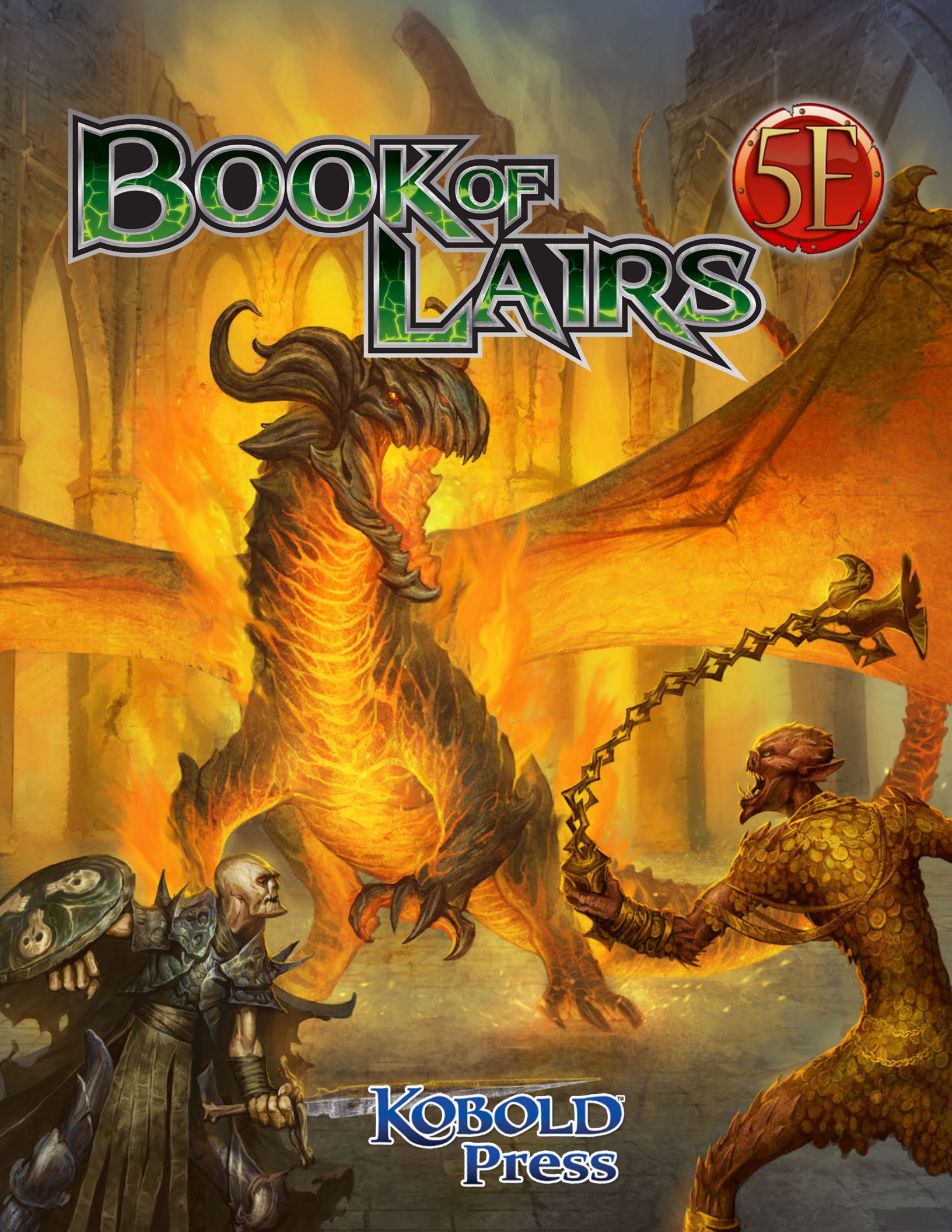


BOOK OF LAIRS



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BOOK OF LAIRS



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KOBOLD PRESS

PO Box 2811

Kirkland WA 98083

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Riverfront Rat Gang	4
Lost Halls of Everforge	8
Den of the Rotten Kings	12
The Clockwork Tower	16
Doom Croaker's Branches	20
Castle of Sand	24
The Pirates' Cove	28
All-Seeing Eye	32
The Alchemists' Guildhall	36
The Hive	40
Temple of the Deep Ones	44

Monument of the Thunderer	48
House of Reeds and Whispers	52
Tomb of the Scorpion Prince	56
The Dark Forest	60
Ruins of the Umbral Tower	64
The Warlock's Crypt	68
The Aboleth's Grotto	72
Bloodwood of the Cruor Circle	76
Imperial Ghoul Outpost	80
The Cistern	84
Fane of Serpents	88
Sky Stairs of Beldestan	92
Citadel of the Void Dragons	97
A Triangle in Shadows	101



THE RIVERFRONT RAT GANG

By Mike Welham

The Riverfront Rat Gang is a ratfolk lair, also featuring wharflings and a doppelrat, designed for five 1st-level characters.

BACKGROUND

The old dockyards once served as the primary center of commerce in town. Years ago, political pressure from an influential merchant who wanted the docks to be closer to her business forced shipping concerns to move their docks upriver. The new facility accommodates larger ships, and the old docks fell into disuse. Talk of converting the property into a set of riverside shops died when a rat infestation proved to be an unsolvable problem. Thus, the old dockyards have been decaying for years.

This situation suited a former thieves' guild member, a **ratfolk rogue** (TOB) named Matimer Creel. A botched robbery (for which Matimer blamed his accomplice) turned the guild against Matimer, who fled from certain death at the hands of the guild master. He hid out in the old dockyards, confident that not even guild members bothered to go there.

From there he began to exact revenge against the guild by ruining its plans or stealing directly from it. He also befriended the rat population, thanks to a golden rat's tooth he acquired, and the vermin help with his schemes. A trio of rat-like wharflings and a doppelrat, washed up on the riverbank near the docks, have joined Matimer's retinue.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party might visit this riverfront location to help someone retrieve an item stolen by Matimer or his wharfling pets—though so far, no townspeople or thieves know that Matimer is living at the wharf. Alternatively, the thieves' guild might send the characters after their former member. If the characters ask townspeople about the riverfront, with DC 10 Charisma checks they learn about the history of the place (but not about Matimer). They also hear rumors about the thieves' guild operating out of this area.

ON THE RIVERFRONT

The old dockyards feature an upper and a lower walkway. Two main docks jut from the upper walkway, and larger craft used these during the dockyards' heyday. The lower walkway, 20 feet below the upper one, has an area where smaller fishing vessels could unload their cargoes. In the time since shipping moved upriver, the walkway and docks have fallen into disrepair.

1. ENTRANCE TO UPPER WALKWAY

A slow-moving river flanks this wooden walkway along the eastern and southern edges. The walkway's western edge has one intact building among several ruins. Massive holes provide a view of a lower walkway and the water below it. The stench of ancient mold and hints of urine lingers in the area. An intact wooden barrel stands at the northern end.

The northern end of the walkway provides the best access to it, but daring characters can climb over the rubble that marks the remains of warehouses and offices that once stood along the walkway. Each 10-foot section of walkway marked with a T collapses when anything heavier than 50 pounds rests on one of its squares. Characters who succeed on DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) checks can note the weakened sections and circumvent them. The creatures that inhabit the riverfront are too small to trigger a collapse. Heavier creatures that enter a weakened section must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or fall down to the lower walkway, falling prone and taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage. Those who succeed are able to leap to safety.

2. RAT-FILLED ALLEY

Rats scurry about this trash-choked alleyway between two demolished buildings. Some rats flee into piles of trash when they hear noise, but most stand their ground when intruders arrive.

The buildings along the upper walkway were falling apart even before the docks were abandoned. Warehouse and





shop owners took the truly valuable items when they moved upriver, and overlooked items have become treasure for Matimer and the wharfings. The burgeoning rat population protects its territory. If the party is careful not to attack or otherwise act aggressively toward the rats, the creatures bristle at the incursion, but leave the characters alone. Aggression causes them to collect into a **swarm of rats** (MM) and attack. They do not pursue foes who move at least 10 feet from the alley's entryway.

With an hour of work, the characters can find a few coins in the rubble. An abandoned wharfing nest sits at the end of the alley, but the wharfings removed everything of value. Characters who succeed on a DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check realize that rats did not create this nest.

3. LEANING DOCK

This dock leans downward to the northeast, but seems mostly intact. A crate is sliding slowly and inexorably toward the water.

The wharfings and rats have gnawed on the beams holding up the docks, and one beam has snapped, causing the dock to twist toward the water. The other support beams still hold, but it will not take much to hasten their collapse.

Once the crate moves into the middle of the dock, the dock falls into the water. Additionally, anything weighing over 100 pounds that moves beyond the western or southern 5 feet of the dock causes it to collapse. The crate weighs 75 pounds and contains rusted iron equipment and weapons. Two small gold bars (worth 25 gp each) rest in a hidden compartment at the bottom of the crate.

Creatures on the dock when it collapses must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or fall into the water below. In addition, they must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be hit by the crate, taking 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage.

A ladder to the north leads down to the lower walkway.

4. WAREHOUSE

Judging from its appearance, this building served as a warehouse. The remnants of shelves line the walls, and a broken desk covered with crude illustrations sits in the middle of the building, seemingly dragged from its original position. A pile of other debris serves as a makeshift barricade near the entrance. A campfire smolders near the southern wall, the smell of cooked animal wafting from it.

A former adventurer named Donnar Alden, a **druid** (MM), has lived in this warehouse for six months. After witnessing the manifestation of Chittr'k'k, a rat demon, on his last adventure, he retired to these rat-infested docks. Matimer leaves the druid alone, since the man has empathy with the animals and seems harmless.

If the characters interact with Donnar, he is friendly and shows them charcoal sketches of Chittr'k'k. He answers the characters' questions without betraying Matimer, as below:

WHY DO YOU LIVE HERE?

I cannot stray from my friends. We sing the praises of Chittr'k'k.

WHO (OR WHAT) IS CHITTR'K'K?

The lord of the rats. He has needles for teeth, and he has eyes everywhere.

DOES ANYONE ELSE LIVE HERE?

It is just me and my rat friends. No one else understands them.

Donnar retains some of the adventuring gear he used, and characters who defeat the druid—along with a **swarm of rats** (MM) that come to his aid—find a magic quarterstaff made of dark walnut and carved with rats and moons that allows the wielder to speak with rats (as *speak with animals*) and summon one swarm of rats (as *conjure animals*) once per day. Donnar also carries a strange, small stone idol of Chittr'k'k, the rat-demon, that could be sold to the right collector for 50 gp.

If the party does not defeat or intimidate Donnar, he goes to warn Matimer as soon as they are gone. Matimer is on his guard and gains an extra swarm of rats as defenders. Donnar seeks other shelter and builds a small shrine to Chittr'k'k elsewhere.

5. BROKEN DOCK

The longer wooden dock to the south has numerous missing slats and looks like it would collapse in a stiff breeze. Two shabby wooden ladders flank the dock, leading to the lower walkway. A single crate sits at the edge of the dock, abandoned.

The dock creaks and moans when someone traverses it, but it holds together. The crate is very difficult to pry open (DC 20 Strength to open, AC 15, 10 hp), so Matimer left it in its current position to entice trespassers to investigate it and set off a death trap. The gaps between slats require a DC 5 Strength (Athletics) check to jump. Those that fail the check fall into the water below.

The crate contains four ceramic flasks of oil and a vial of alchemist's fire. If the crate is damaged, the vials break and detonate, dealing 11 (2d10) fire damage to all within 10 feet. A successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage. This dock otherwise holds nothing of interest.

Although the dock is safe, neither ladder is. A creature that weighs more than 50 pounds and tries to use a ladder causes it to break away from its moorings and fall 25 feet into the water. With a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, a character can hop off the ladder in time to avoid the fall.

6. WHARFLING NEST

A mound of trash blocks a short alleyway. A warehouse and rubble make up the alley's other borders.

The trash comprises the sum of the wharfings' gatherings, which they keep separate from Matimer's collection. Three **wharfings** (TOB) are here, either admiring their treasure by night or sleeping by day. They defend their nest fiercely.

The mound contains inexpensive items that Matimer allowed the wharfings to keep: 9 cp, a tin dog whistle, a copper hairpin topped with a silver-plated mermaid (worth 5 gp), a dented copper halfling teakettle (1 gp), polished brass buttons (5 sp), and a silver fork with missing middle tines (1 sp).

7. WALKWAY'S END

The end of the walkway is undamaged compared to the remainder. A ladder at the southern terminus leads down, and a large oaken barrel, gnawed at the top but otherwise whole, rests along the eastern edge.

Other than the 10-foot-square section by the ladder (noted with a T), this area is free from the pitfalls present elsewhere. The barrel once contained cheap wine, but it is now empty and smells of vinegar.

8. ROCKY BEACH

Debris covers the dirt and rocks along the river shore. Two corpses rest among the flotsam: a skeleton with gnawed bones, and an intact body resembling that of conjoined twins.

Matimer regularly scours this area for treasure, so there is nothing of significance on the beach. The skeleton belonged to a beggar who fell prey to the rats months ago, while the corpse was that of a thieves' guild member sent to investigate reports of thefts originating from the old dockyards. Mortally wounded by the doppelrat in area 9, she succumbed to its degenerate cloning disease and shed a duplicate as she died. Matimer left the body to rot, and the rats give it a wide berth, so a search turns up a +1 dagger and a set of thieves' tools.

9. GIANT NEST

Larger rats roam this area, crawling around an eight-foot-tall pile of trash. Beyond the enormous rats' nest, a hole cuts off access to the southern end of the walkway. Three ladders lead to the upper walkway.

If Matimer is aware of the party's arrival, he whips the **doppelrat** (TOB) here into a frenzy, allowing it 2 rounds of duplication before characters arrive. He hides behind the nest in area 10 while the doppelrat attacks. Eight **rats** (MM) stay out of combat unless something attacks them.

The nest contains only a few copper pieces, since Matimer and the wharflings have claimed everything else. However, searching through the nest exposes characters to a rat-borne disease.

10. MATIMER'S LAIR

This end of the lower walkway holds a nest that is tidier than the others. Stacks of coins, waterlogged books, and other items are sorted into piles. A ladder connects this level to the above walkway.

Matimer spends most of his time here when he is not stealing items from townspeople or taking revenge against the thieves' guild. The river and the walkway obstacles provide him a sense of security. If the party reaches his lair, he offers them expensive items to get them to leave. If the characters seem amenable, he attempts to enlist them in his vendetta against the thieves' guild.

Matimer's amassed wealth includes 74 gp, 190 sp, a pair of sapphire-studded earrings (worth 275 gp), a silver dagger (50 gp), a gold ring with an emerald inset (310 gp), and a variety of keys to lost locks, distant chests, and mundane doors—and one to the town's postern gate that is very valuable for Matimer's sneaking around, and that the thieves' guild would very much like back. Also among Matimer's collection are lists of guild member targets—with a couple of names crossed off.

CONCLUSION

If the party defeats Matimer, the thieves' guild claims the old dockyards as a secondary headquarters after exterminating the rats. Characters who search the ratfolk's collection discover a beautifully engraved parade helmet that the captain of the town watch claims to have lost, and for which the captain would surely pay a 5 gp reward (if its return were made quietly). Cleaning out all the treasure here will provoke the guild's ire, potentially causing problems for the characters in areas influenced by the guild and their allies.



LOST HALLS OF EVERFORGE

By Shawn Merwin

Lost Halls of Everforge is a flame dragon wyrmling lair suitable for four or five 3rd-level characters.

BACKGROUND

The Everforge clan of dwarves once held a place of honor and prestige, their weaponsmiths unrivaled in dwarven lands. The clan welcomed all visitors to its ancestral halls, but none were allowed into the Great Forge, which was magically linked to the Elemental Plane of Fire.

Decades ago, efreet found the bridge between worlds. The fire creatures sprang from the Great Forge and slaughtered the Everforge clan, burning their bones to ashes. The only survivor was Polla Everforge, the matriarch of the family. Skilled in elemental magic, she severed the link to the Plane of Fire and dismissed the rampaging efreet. The damage, however, had been done.

Recently a human sage named Spencius, who serves a flame dragon called Igbalneum, decided to rekindle the Great Forge. He believes a dragon that is bathed in elemental fire will become invincible. Thus, he sent bandits to abduct Polla and bring her to the Lost Halls so that he could force her to reopen the connection to the Plane of Fire. He brought Igbalneum and the dragon's servants to brush the dust off the Halls and make his theory a reality.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Polla Everforge has gone missing from her forge-home in the characters' city. Signs of a struggle in her smithy hint at abduction. Some suspect she might have been taken to her long-abandoned ancestral home: the Halls of Everforge. A dwarven official named Silvera Brighthelm asks the characters to investigate whether this is the case.

LIVING LAIR

Four groups of kobolds and other dragon servants are defending their new home. Only the Great Forge (area 12) details a set encounter in that area's description. The other areas include mentions of key features and what might happen if combat with some of the defenders occurs or moves into the area. The starting positions of defensive patrols are marked with P symbols on the map.

The four patrols to be found in the lair include these groups:

- 12 kobolds led by 2 winged kobolds (MM)
- 6 kobolds and 6 human bandits led by a human bandit captain (MM)
- 8 kobolds led by 2 human scouts (MM)
- 16 leaderless kobolds (MM)

When the characters enter the Halls of Everforge, no one notices. As the intruders battle the occupants, the dragon's servants defend the lair.

LAIR FEATURES

Unless otherwise noted, all areas are brightly lit with torches and lanterns to make life easier for Spencius. Doors are closed but not locked, and secret doors can be found with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. The dragon's servants already know where the secret doors are and use them freely. Ceilings are 15 feet high, except in the Great Forge, the ceiling of which is 30 feet high.

1. HALL OF ARMAMENTS

Large, intricate marble sculptures depicting weapons, shields, and armor line the walls of this great hall. Six stone doors stand among the statuary. At the end of the long hall is a large set of double doors, decorated with a carving that resembles dwarves working at a forge.

Thick dust covers the area, and obvious tracks are evidence of heavy traffic of human-sized boots. Smaller reptilian tracks are also visible.

At the end of the hall near the Great Forge, the kobolds have placed four traps. A creature that steps on a pressure plate springs a dart trap: +3 to hit; 2d4 piercing damage; DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to find traps. In addition, springing one of these traps throws open the doors to the Great Forge, announcing the presence of the characters.

2. PRESENTATION HALL

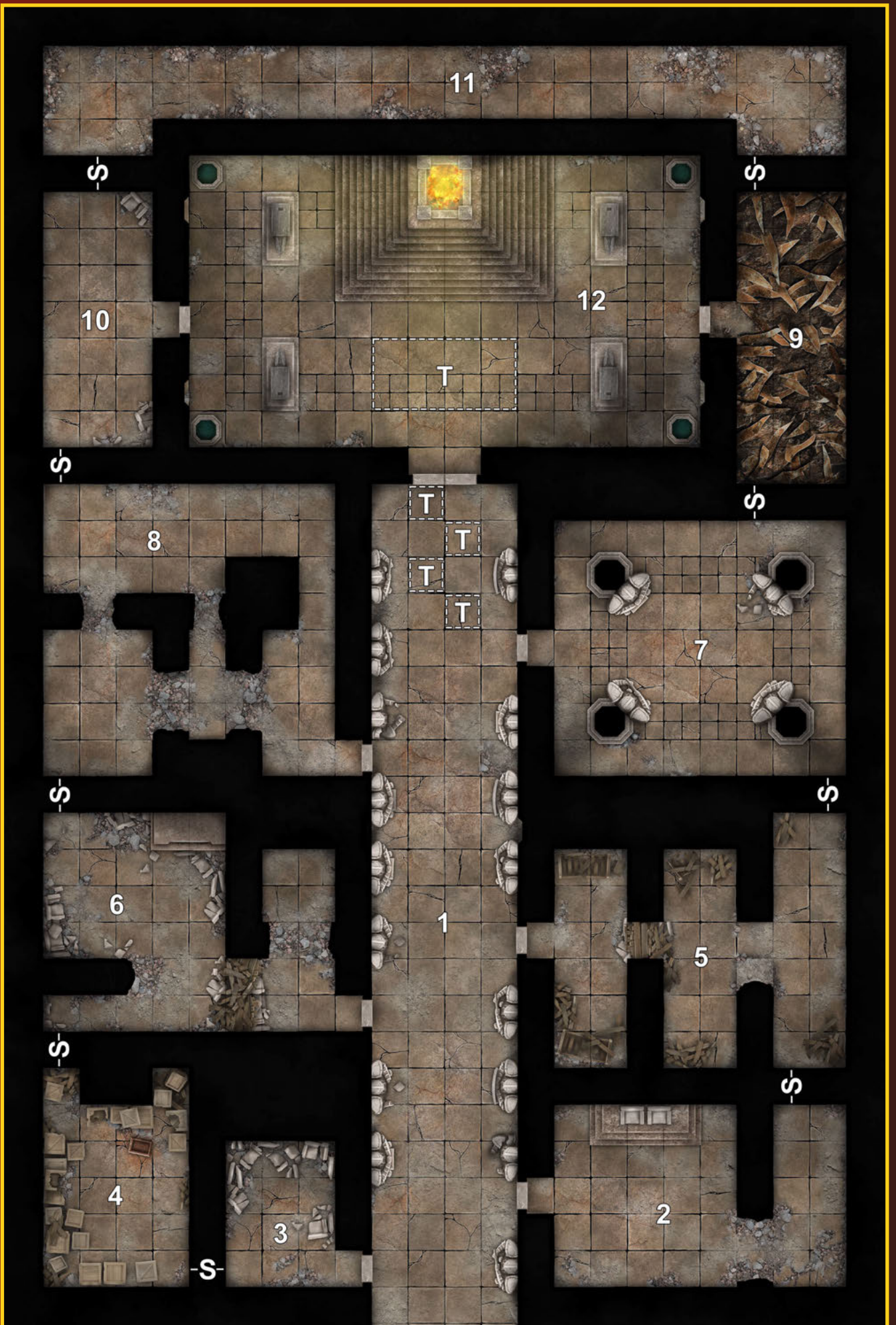
Two large, throne-like seats carved into the north walls are the room's only furniture. Frescoes depict dwarves presenting radiant weapons to honored guests.

The first dwarf, or a creature of another race who has the noble background, who sits in one of the stone seats receives a blessing from the Everforge ancestors. One weapon wielded by that character becomes enchanted with a +1 bonus, as a dwarven spirit possesses the weapon.

3. ROOM OF RESPITE

The crumbled ruins of fine stone furnishings adorn this room. Frescoes on the walls show dwarves entertaining visitors with song, food, and drink.

If a patrol is encountered here, the defenders retreat through the secret door into area 4 to use the rubble as cover.



4. STORAGE AREA

No frescoes line the walls here. Scattered around the room are several wood-and-iron chests of all sizes.

The chests have been opened and looted, except for one made completely of iron. That chest is trapped and locked: DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to open. If the chest is opened before the trap is disabled with a DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check, everyone in the room is exposed to a poison gas. The trap deals 2d6 poison damage, or half damage on a successful DC 10 Constitution saving throw. The chest contains 500 silver pieces, 5 gems worth 50 gp each, a *potion of climbing*, and a *potion of healing*.

A patrol encountered here snipes at characters from behind the cover of the chests and retreats through the secret door when pressed.

5. GUEST CHAMBERS

Around the edges of these chambers are the remnants of their furniture: broken bed frames, rotted straw mattresses, and crumbling wooden chairs and nightstands. A four-foot-high barricade of wood and stone separates the chambers.

The barricade contains perches on both sides where kobolds can stand and fire over. It can be leaped with a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check; otherwise it takes 20 feet of movement to move over it into the adjacent area. Smashing through the barricade requires a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check.

A patrol encountered here uses the barricade as cover to snipe at intruders and retreats through the secret doors if the battle goes poorly.

6. KITCHEN

Stone tables and chairs, smashed into rubble, are strewn about the room. A mosaic on the wall shows dwarves cooking and serving sumptuous meals to finely dressed and bejeweled visitors. A four-foot-high barricade of wood and stone separates the two chambers of this area.

An iron oven occupies the corner of the larger chamber. Arcane glyphs on the oven can be interpreted by a character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check. The runes reveal the oven's command word, and the knowledge that when the command word is spoken (requiring an action), the oven instantly heats to cooking temperature. When this occurs, all creatures adjacent to the oven take 1d6 fire damage. The barricade is identical to the one in area 5.

7. HALL OF ANCESTORS

Four pillars carved in the form of dwarven weaponsmiths support the ceiling of this large hall. Mismatched mirrors and pieces of polished metal cover the walls, creating a hodgepodge of dazzling reflections. Every movement in this chamber is reflected dozens of times in a dizzying array of images along the walls.

The many mirrors can be disorienting to visitors. The defenders of the place are accustomed to this room, making them immune to its effect. Each character must attempt a DC 10 Intelligence saving throw at the start of each turn. Until a character succeeds, that individual has disadvantage on attack rolls.

In a secret compartment in the southwest pillar, which can be found with a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check, is a *potion of heroism*.

8. EMPTY ROOMS

No torches or lanterns light this area. The frescoes on the walls are faded beyond recognition. No furnishings or even rubble remains.

A patrol encountered in this area uses the area's passages and chambers to snipe and fall back, forcing the characters to track them down to fight. The southern secret door serves as an escape route if necessary, but patrols do not use the northern secret door.

9. SMELTING HALL

Twisted, scorched metal fills this room to the ceiling. It was obviously once an area for smelting ore, but the equipment is torn and demolished. The stench of burning is overpowering.

Moving through this room requires 10 feet of movement for every 5 feet moved. Creatures 10 feet away have total cover, and creatures just 5 feet away have half cover.

The twisted metal is attached very loosely to the walls and ceiling. With a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check as an action, a creature can bring down the metal in an adjacent square, dealing 3d6 slashing damage to occupants of that square—with a 30% chance to bring down metal in its own square for the same damage.

10. WEAPON ROOM

Hunks of twisted, partially melted metal covering the floor and walls of this unlit room are the remains of suits of armor and weapons. One suit of plate, held up by a stanchion in the center of the room, appears to have survived.

The **animated armor** (MM) in this room, left from the time when the Everforge clan lived here, guards the area against intruders. When a creature gets within 5 feet of it, the armor attacks, joined by four **flying swords** (MM). The dragon's servants avoid this room.

11. ORE ROOM

This long room is littered with piles of metal ore. Shovels, picks, and other tools hang from hooks on the walls. Shafts in the ceiling once brought in ore from another place higher in the mountain.

If a battle happens here, the dragon's servants try to hide behind the piles of ore to gain half cover.

Eight **stirges** (MM) nest in the ore shafts but do not come out unless a battle breaks out here. If they emerge, they target characters and enemies equally.

12. GREAT FORGE

Steep steps lead up to a dais that dominates this area. Four large anvils rest next to large vats of water. The walls contain detailed murals that depict dwarven craftsmen creating radiant weapons and armor.

Sitting on the dais is a dragon the size of a large dog. Tinges of red peek through its charcoal-black scales. An elderly male human in robes stands near it, glaring at an even older female dwarf. As you enter, the top of the dais wavers in a heat-haze, and a jet of blue flame erupts upward from it. Eight kobolds, spread throughout the room, move toward you.

The dragon hisses. "After my transformation, I shall have a pleasurable meal indeed."

The ritual to connect the Great Forge and the Plane of Fire is complete, and each round the link strengthens. After 3 rounds of combat, the anvils glow hot enough to deal damage. Thereafter, a creature that starts its turn adjacent to an anvil takes 1 fire damage on round 4, 2 fire damage on round 5, and so forth.

The steps leading up to the dais are steep, counting as difficult terrain.

At the end of round 8, if Igbalneum the **flame dragon wyrmling** (TOB) is still alive, it plunges into the flame on the dais and grows into a young flame dragon in a burst of smoke and sparks—and more than doubling in size to the dimensions of a horse. At that point, the characters should flee. Even if they don't, the dragon spares them. He eats a few kobolds and flies away to lay waste to the area, taunting the characters as he goes. His plots can haunt the characters until they gain enough power to deal with him.

The elderly sage Spencius is a mere **acolyte** (MM) who hides once the battle begins but heals his master if possible. The eight kobolds are willing to die serving their dragon master, knowing that he would eat them in displeasure if they didn't fight. The other patrols slink away from the Halls and do not return.

CONCLUSION

If the characters defeat Igbalneum before the dragon transforms, Polla performs a 10-minute quenching ritual and severs the link to the Plane of Fire. She shows her gratitude by offering them 750 gp and one of the last pieces created by her clan: a suit of adamantine chain mail.



DEN OF THE ROTTEN KINGS

By Mike Shea

Den of the Rotten Kings is a wererat lair suitable for four 3rd-level characters.

BACKGROUND

For a decade the Rotten Kings have ruled over the lowest level of criminal activities in the city. No other crime lord or criminal group has ever seriously challenged the Kings for supremacy, and the muggers, thieves, and cutthroats that make up the gang are as overconfident as they are sinister.

A few months ago, the Rotten Kings enslaved an apothecary and forced him to create a powerful drug from strange mushrooms that grow in their den. The Kings began selling this narcotic to the common folk of the city, and now some of the city's young nobles have also been found with the drug. The Kings' trade in the substance, it appears, is expanding.

Though the city watch knows roughly where they live and wants to shut them down, the Rotten Kings have sent a message to the city leaders telling them that, if the guards mount a large-scale assault against them, the Kings will release barrels of this drug into the city's cisterns, tainting the city's water supply.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The city's leadership, fed up with the Rotten Kings' threats and determined to stop the proliferation of the narcotic mushrooms, hires the adventurers to quietly infiltrate the thieves' den and root them out before they can dump the drug into the city's water supply.

THE DEN OF THE ROTTEN KINGS

Much of the Kings' den makes use of the ruins of the old city, now buried beneath the present-day structures. The rest of the den is carved out of natural earth and rock. The Kings have placed torches every 30 feet to keep their tunnels illuminated.

1. FRESHWATER WELL

Water flows from catchments above into the darkness of the well below. The well's stonework is ancient, yet shows signs of recent repair.

A metal grate in a featureless stone building at ground level leads down into this deep, freshwater reservoir.

Loose stones on the walls provide footholds for those climbing to the cistern 50 feet below.

Every 10 feet, a foothold is set to collapse when stepped on, dropping the climber into the shallow water below and dealing 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage from the fall. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check will reveal the dangerous footholds. A fall alerts the lookout in the cistern.

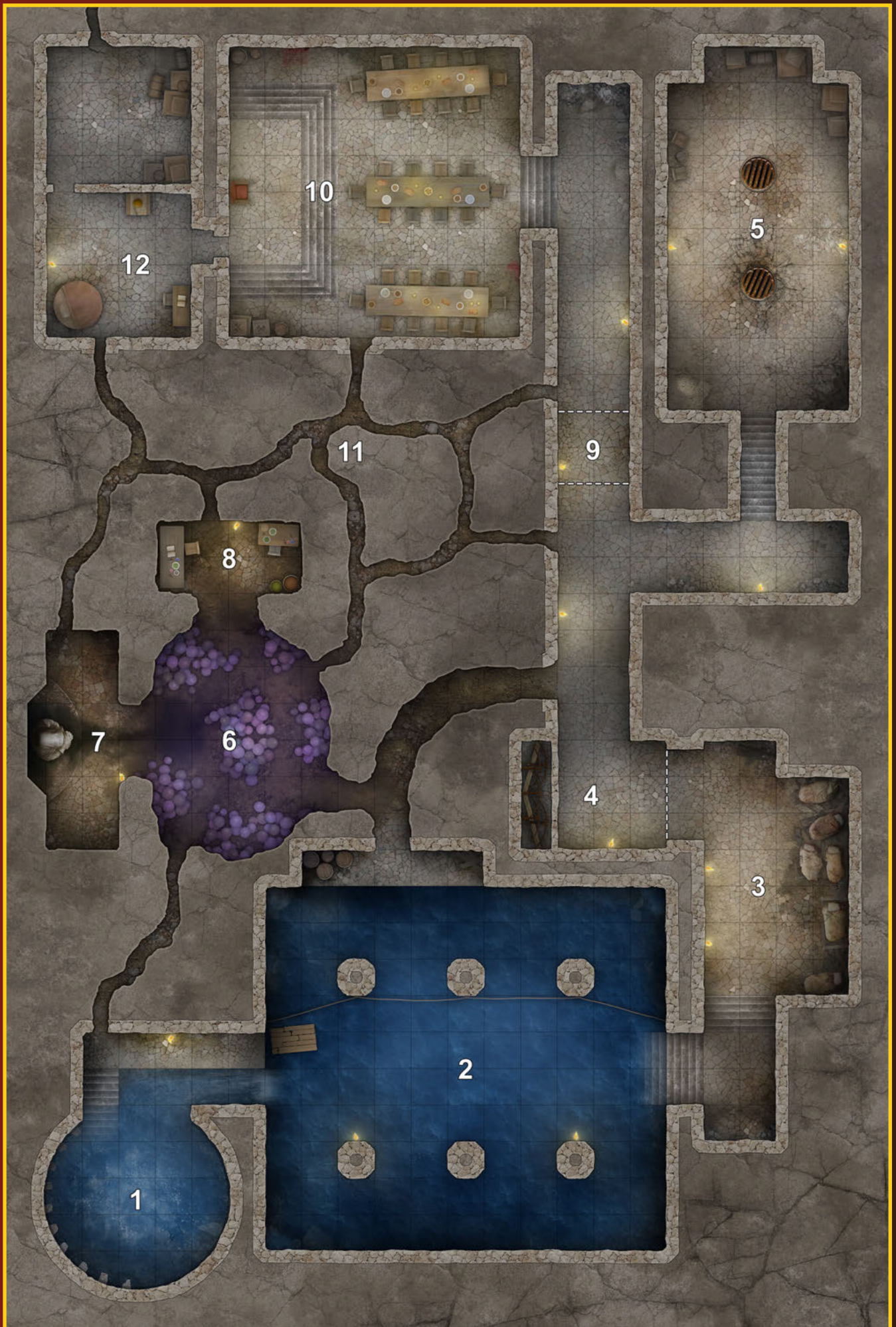
2. CISTERN

An ancient archway leads into a large underground pool of fresh water. Stone pillars carved into the visages of men and women with the heads of wolves hold up the arched, 30-foot-high ceiling. A long rope hangs from iron rings hammered into the pillars and connects to a raft on the far side of the chamber near a stairwell illuminated by torchlight.

The cistern is 40 feet deep. Hidden in the shadows high up on the east wall is a broken stone opening that takes an active DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check to see. A **bandit** (MM) keeps watch over the cistern. If this lookout sees anyone unfamiliar, he throws bones and decaying meat at the intruders. This commotion awakens and attracts two **bone crabs** (TOB) lurking in the water. These creatures, accustomed to devouring intruders, attack those on the raft.

On the alcove above sit three barrels. One of these contains the concentrated mushroom spores that King Sketch, leader of the Rotten Kings, has threatened to pour into the cistern. The other barrel contains black sawdust, which can be used as a ruse. Because of the finality of dumping the mushroom spores into the cistern, only King Sketch can make the decision to dump the spores. If the lookout is wounded or if it appears the characters will defeat





the crabs, the lookout kicks the barrel of sawdust into the cistern to distract the characters before running off to warn the others of the intrusion.

3. SACKS

Rotted bedrolls and infested blankets lie in piles in this alcove. Faded depictions of life in the city hundreds of years ago line the ten-foot-high walls. Someone has scrawled obscene pictures over various parts of a once-beautiful mosaic.

Lower-level members of the Rotten Kings sleep here. A thorough search of the sleeping piles reveals 16 cp and a dagger with its tip broken off. Though in poor condition, the dagger is hundreds of years old and worth 100 gp to the right collector.

4. CROSSBOW TRAP

At the end of this hall is a sheet of canvas painted to look like the other walls of this chamber. Six heavy crossbows sit behind this canvas, tied to a tripwire on the south end of the hall. If the trap is triggered, each creature in the hall must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d10) piercing damage. Spotting the fake canvas wall takes a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, and disarming the trap takes a DC 13 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check.

5. CAGES

A steep stairwell leads down to a stone floor. Two large pits in this room are covered with wrought iron grates. A terrible screeching fills the room. One man is kneeling next to one of the grates, poking into it with a long stick. Two others watch near by, smiling.

The grates lead to two pits. Iron bars surround the inside of each pit, just far enough apart to keep out dozens of large rats that screech and snap at the victims from outside the bars.

The Rotten Kings use these cages to torture their captives. Those in the cages are just out of reach of the rats, and they must move back and forth to avoid getting bitten. The three **thugs** (MM) in this area are easily surprised given the cruel fun they're having and the screeching of the rats.

The thugs are tormenting a former member of the Rotten Kings named Kave, who was caught stealing from the Kings and sentenced to starve in the cages for his betrayal. If he is saved, he can tell the characters about the mushroom grove (area 6) and the feasting hall (area 10).

6. MUSHROOM GROVE

Acrid, moist air fills this natural cavern. Large black and violet mushrooms grow from thick mounds of refuse. Narrow trails wind through the mountains of trash. In the back of the chamber sits a pool of thick black liquid flowing out of the shadows to the north.

These mushrooms are highly toxic, and disturbing them makes them burst. Anyone within 5 feet of a bursting mushroom takes 3 (1d6) poison damage. The mushrooms require the strange black liquid flowing past the altar of the maiden (area 7) to become toxic.

7. ALTAR OF THE MAIDEN

A statue of a cloaked woman stands in the center of this chamber. She appears cowed in black, her hands crossed in front of her. One hand holds a skull missing its lower jaw. The other hand holds a dagger. A flat stone altar lies in front of the statue. Streams of black liquid pour from cracks in the walls, surrounding the statue and flowing south.

This chamber was excavated centuries ago and then lost beneath the earth. The Rotten Kings discovered it a few months ago as they explored the strange mushroom grove. They describe the statue as the Maiden, and they treat the image as a deity.

Wrapped around the statue is an *empty cloak* (TOB). When it is disturbed, this cloak animates and attacks with the *dagger of venom* it wields. This increases the cloak's attack bonus to +7 and deals 7 (1d4+5) damage. The first target hit by the cloak must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the target takes 11 (2d10) poison damage and becomes poisoned for 1 minute.



8. APOTHECARY'S LAB

Tables loaded with scorched bottles and flasks sit around this crowded room. A thin man rushes between tables stirring vials that sit over open flames. A chain locked around his waist is bolted to the center of the room. He has full access to the tables but can reach nothing else.

Gessel the apothecary (mage, *MM*) has been enslaved by the Kings for almost a year. So long has his torment lasted that he now fears everyone he sees. It requires a DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check to get Gessel to open up to the characters. If they persuade him to talk to them, he tells the characters that he has been concentrating the mushroom spores into a drug that, when inhaled, gives strange and wonderful visions and feelings of euphoria. Inhaling too much of the stuff, though, poisons and kills those who ingest it.

Within the chamber are three *potions of greater healing* and two *potions of poison* brewed from the strange spores.

9. FLAMING OIL TRAP

Four flasks of oil hang high on the ceiling. Stepping on a loose tile on the floor releases the flasks, which smash open and release their oil, which catches fire from the torches on the walls. Creatures within 15 feet of the explosion take 7 (2d6) fire damage if they fail a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or half as much if they succeed.

Detecting the trap requires a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check, and disarming the trap requires a DC 13 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. Instead of disarming it, characters can simply avoid the trap if they detect it.

10. THE FEASTING HALL

Tables and chairs are scattered throughout this long chamber. The smell of decaying meat is thick in the air. Tattered tapestries hang on the walls, their once-beautiful scenes of forests and merchant ships stained and defaced. Crates and barrels marked with symbols of crossed hammers, scissors cutting cloth, and foaming mugs sit in the corners of the room. A throne of torn red velvet and black oak rests on a raised platform at the far end of the room. Atop it sits a wererat in gleaming black armor. Half a dozen rogues and footpads sit at various tables, feasting and throwing dice.

This room serves as the audience hall, meeting room, storeroom, and dining hall of the Rotten Kings. If they come under attack, the Kings tip over the tables and use them as

cover. Three **wererats** (*MM*), including King Sketch, and five **bandits** (*MM*) reside in the hall.

King Sketch is a wererat with 66 hit points. He wears a suit of gleaming black +1 *leather* armor, giving him an AC of 14. He fires a +1 *light crossbow* of elven make known as "Seeker." With the weapon, he has a +5 bonus to hit and deals 7 (1d8+3) damage.

If things look bad, Sketch sends one of the other wererats to crawl through the tunnels to the alcove above the cistern. The wererat will dump the mushroom barrel while King Sketch flees to his private chambers.

The crates and barrels contain an assortment of stolen goods including ironware, bolts of cloth, herbs, tobacco, mead, and ale. These goods are worth a total of 105 gp.

11. THE WARRENS

The wererats of the Rotten Kings use these 2-foot-diameter tunnels to give them greater access throughout the den. Small characters can follow at half speed, but the wererats know these tunnels and can pass through them at full speed.

12. KING SKETCH'S DEN

A strange mixture of obscene art objects, paintings, and silk screens decorate this chamber. A round bed sits in the northwestern corner, and a recently constructed wall partially blocks off the east side of the room.

This is King Sketch's private chambers. In the east side of the chamber is a dresser and a large oak chest. If he is attempting to escape, King Sketch takes his treasure out of the chest and tries to drag it through a 3-foot-tall secret tunnel to the east that leads out into the city's sewers.

King Sketch's treasure hoard includes 1,486 cp, 1,301 sp, 85 gp, an ivory pair of dice worth 75 gp, an onyx locket worth 25 gp, a silk embroidered handkerchief worth 20 gp, a feather mask with silver thread worth 30 gp, and a soapstone pitcher worth 25 gp.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER ADVENTURES

If the Kings release the mushrooms into the water supply, the city is at great risk, and the characters might be blamed. They might have to go on a quest to find an antidote and restore the city's water supply. If King Sketch gets away, the characters might find themselves on a hunt throughout the city for the elusive wererat lord.

THE CLOCKWORK TOWER

By Mike Welham

The Clockwork Tower is an azza gremlin lair suitable for five 3rd-level characters.

BACKGROUND

Jenneline Gyre, who was a wealthy adventurer before settling down as a clockmaker, commissioned a great clock tower. As construction neared its end, the clockmaker grew deathly ill, but she survived long enough to hear the clock strike noon for the first time, and she died happy.

The tower would have stood as her monument, but the Clockworkers' Guild suspected the place might be an implement for unsanctioned summonings and tried to shut it down. The inspectors died, crushed between the gears of the clock. The townsfolk reasoned that the clockmaker's ghost had taken vengeance, and they abandoned the tower for fear of suffering her wrath. The guild left two clockwork guardians in the tower, further deterring visitors. The clock tower has stood silent for months.

Three azza gremlins live on the top floor, and they often plot how they might use the massive clockworks to power an arcane device—someday, these plans might amount to something dangerous. At the moment, the strange blue lights they generate make it seem that the tower is haunted.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The party seeks to investigate the clock tower after the characters hear rumors that the tower is haunted. They may wish to explore it independently, or someone in town may ask them to put its ghost to rest.

1. THE CLOCK TOWER

This wooden clock tower stands sixty feet tall and looms over the town. The clock hands are nowhere near the correct time. A wide door on the western wall stands as the main entrance to the tower, and a grime-encrusted window covers part of the eastern wall, roughly forty feet above the ground.

PCs can enter the clock tower through the western side entrance or by way of a panel between the 6 and the 7 on the clock face. The panel, 10 feet off the ground, is difficult to see from where the PCs stand, requiring a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. If they enter this way, they arrive in area 8, the clock's gears and driver.

A notice tacked onto the door at the entrance bears the seal of the Clockworkers' Guild and a message warning people not to trespass. A simple lock prevents immediate entrance, but a character can open it by using thieves' tools and succeeding on a DC 15 Dexterity check. If necessary, the

door can be broken down (it has AC 15 and 18 hp) or smashed (with a successful DC 15 Strength check).

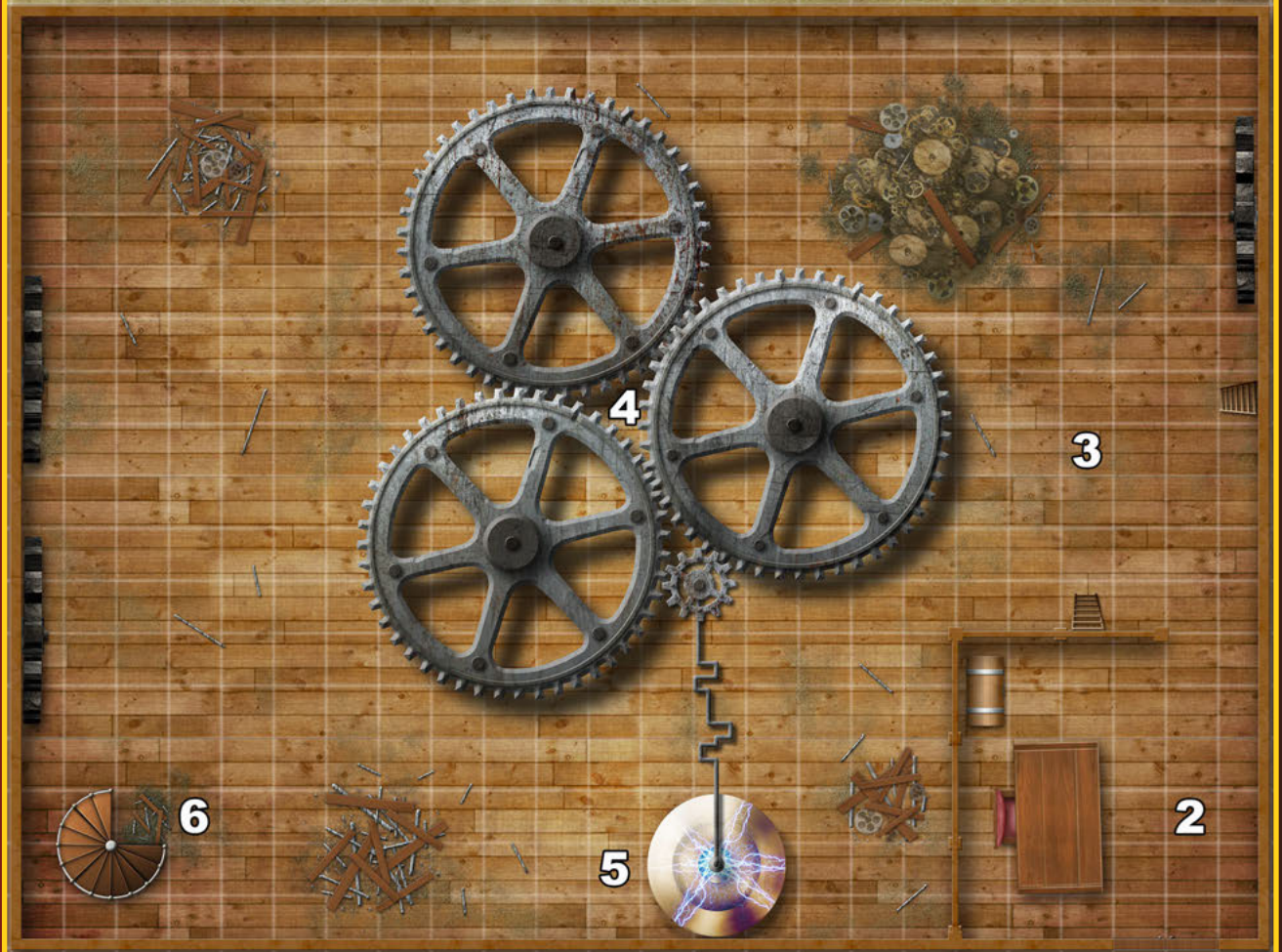
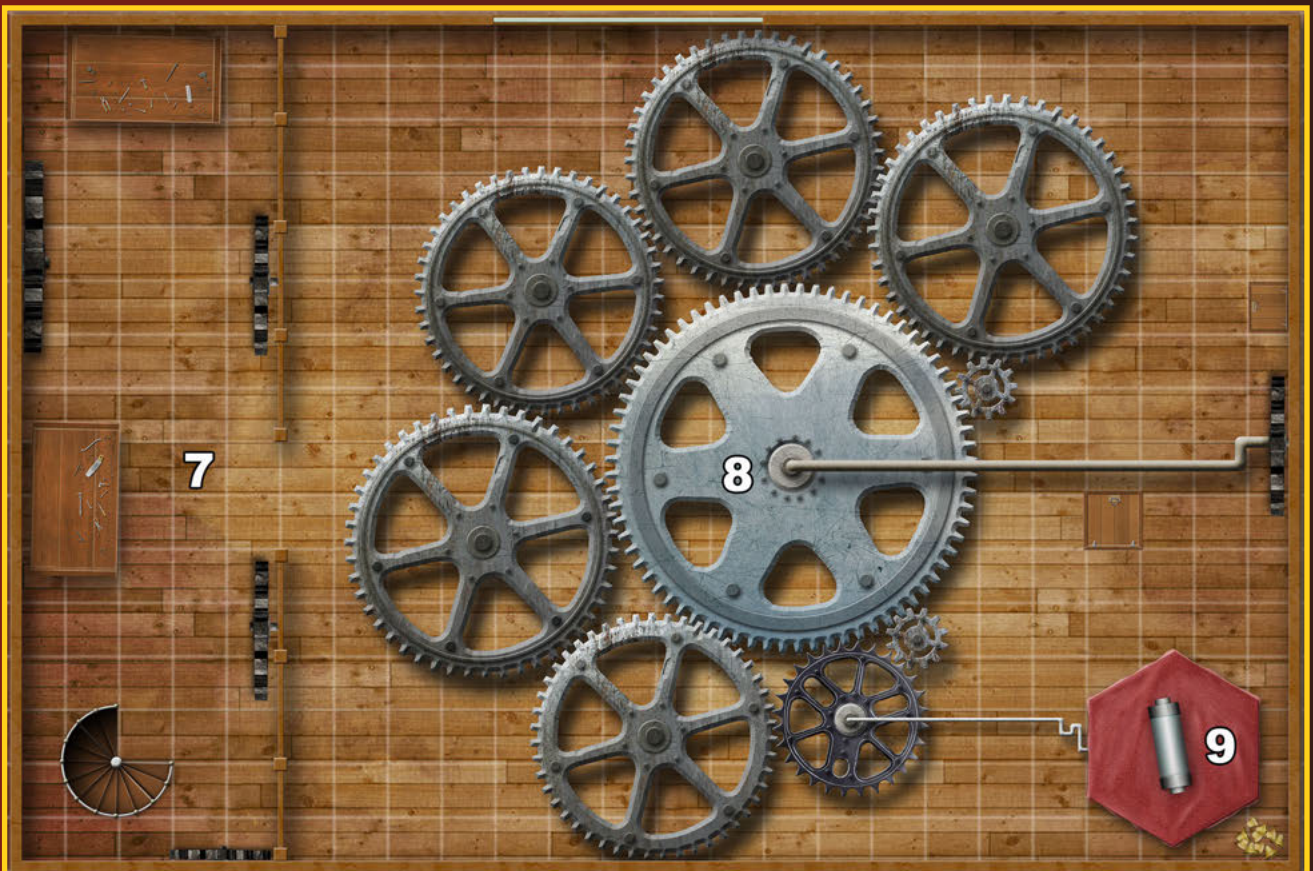
If the PCs ask townspeople about the clock tower, with DC 10 Charisma checks (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion as appropriate), they learn much of the background information—though not any details about the gremlins.

2. ENTRANCE CHAMBER

Beyond the door stands a dusty room containing a desk and a closed chest. The desk has a small central drawer and two side drawers, with space next to them for the plush chair that sits behind it. The desktop is clear. The sound of turning gears comes from the east.

This room has a 10-foot-high ceiling. Intended as an office for the clockmaker, it was never used. The inspectors stored measuring equipment in the unlocked chest, some of which (worth 15 gp) they left behind when they fled the tower. The





guild inspectors also recently stored explosive devices in the chest.

When lit, each of the two devices deals 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage 3 rounds later to all creatures within 20 feet. Creatures that succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw take half damage. A successful DC 15 Intelligence check can affix the explosive charge to an object such that it takes double damage. A brief inspection of the room, requiring a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check, reveals recent tracks in the dust.

The desk seems empty, but it conceals a hidden drawer, requiring an average check to find. The hidden drawer holds rolled-up blueprints for the tower. With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check, a character learns that the tower had some function other than telling time, but the exact purpose is unclear.

3. INSIDE THE CLOCK FACE

The entrance gives way to a high-ceilinged room. On the south wall, a ladder climbs to the round thick glass that marks the bottom of the clock face, terminating between the 6 and 7 on the face. The smell of oil and thunder permeates this area. To the north, beyond a pile of scrap metal, three gears turn effortlessly.

This room has a 30-foot ceiling. It contains a replacement gear that has begun to corrode.

The southern ladder leads to a hinged panel in the clock face. Although it is difficult to spot from the outside, the ladder and the hinges make it obvious from this side; the panel provides access to the clock face and hands.

4. MAIN GEARS

Three thirty-foot-diameter, five-foot-thick brass gears stand five feet above the ground and turn against each other. One-foot-diameter iron shafts lead from the center of each gear into the ceiling, apparently leading to other gears in the upper part of the tower. A small gear, fed by a crankshaft that terminates in a sparking, golden sphere to the west, provides the motive force to turn the larger gears. Beyond the gears to the north, a mechanical man and its hound stand motionless.

The Clockworkers' Guild inspectors noted an oddity when they performed their initial investigations: the gears in this section seemed unnecessary. The inspectors believed that the set of gears on the upper floor were sufficient to manage the clock. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence check draws the same conclusion.

The guild left a **clockwork huntsman** (TOB) and a **clockwork hound** (TOB) in this area to guard the tower. The creatures remain in a dormant state to preserve themselves, making them only dimly aware of activity in the tower. They ignore any action in this floor's southern area, but if a character interacts with the gears or the energy source (or if one of them is injured), they fully activate. The huntsman intones a

warning, "Intruders. Leave now, or I will resort to force." It gives the characters 2 rounds to comply before it attacks. It also attacks if any character takes hostile action against it. The hound follows the huntsman's lead.

The shafts lead through the ceiling and provide small gaps through which smaller creatures can squeeze. The gremlins' tiny size allows them to pass through the gaps without any problem, and they use the shafts to hide from the clockwork creatures. If a larger creature is caught in the gears by purposefully moving through the area or being shoved into the gears, it must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or take 22 (4d10) bludgeoning damage and be restrained. On a failure, the creature must repeat the saving throw at the start of its turn. On a success, the creature pulls free, is no longer restrained, and takes no further damage; otherwise, the effect of the gears continues.

The gears are recently oiled and in working order. Characters who search for the guild member's amulet can find it with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

5. ENERGY SOURCE

This golden sphere sparks with electricity, and the air near it carries a strong smell of ozone. A shaft attached to the sphere rotates, turning the small gear that drives the larger gears to the east.

An **air elemental** (MM) resides in this sphere. It defends its home, using the sphere's power to deliver a warning jolt of electricity to anyone who touches the sphere. The golden sphere grants any elemental, anyone holding a *wand of lightning bolts*, or any character within 50 feet who makes a



successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check the ability to generate lightning equal to a *witch's hex* spell.

A character who can speak Auran learns of the elemental's desire for freedom. If the characters free the creature, requiring several days' worth of work and three consecutive successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) checks, it grants them a boon: a *wand of lightning bolts*. If the characters smash the sphere (AC 14, 20 hp), the elemental bound to it dies.

6. RUBBISH-CHOKED STAIRS

Mounds of trash block the stairway leading to the second floor. The gremlins arranged the garbage so as to provide them a warning about intruders. A successful DC 20 Dexterity (Stealth) check is needed to move or avoid the trash without alerting the gremlins.

7. WORKSHOP

This workshop is immaculate. Tools cover a pair of workbenches, and pristine gears line the walls.

This workshop is used to repair broken gears. The gremlins have maintained the workshop and have replaced one gear since they got here.

One workbench has tools of excellent quality (worth 10 gp).

8. CLOCK DRIVER

Wildly turning gears block the way to the southern half of this area. The gears drive a central shaft that turns the hands of the clock. A smaller shaft leads to a covered table in the southwest corner, where a cylindrical device emits blue sparks. A pile of scrap metal sits nearby. A grimy window along the east wall lets in no light.

If the party has alerted the three **azza gremlins** (TOB) that are in this area, they stay hidden in area 9, hoping that the turning gears deter further investigation. They maintain the lightning device, just in case they need to use it against intruders. The gremlins inspected the clockwork creatures in the room below and have tried to make more from spare parts. Their clockwork is a ramshackle creation that functions as a suit of **animated armor** (MM) without the Antimagic Susceptibility trait.

The gears turn at varying speeds. Characters who want to cross the gears to the other side of the room must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. Failure means a character falls between the gears, which crush and grapple her (see area 4).

The characters can stop or jam the gears, but doing so runs the risk of the gears flying apart and attacking the characters. Roll 1d20 for every round in which the gears are jammed. If the result is equal to or lower than the number of characters, one of the smaller gears breaks free and targets a character with a ranged attack at +5 to hit and dealing 11 (2d10) piercing damage.

9. COVERED TABLE

A cloth draped over this table covers the space under the table. A blue-gray metal cylinder shoots orange sparks, while three tiny, blue creatures tinker with it. A pile of golden bells rests next to the table.

The azza gremlins merely want to be left alone to play with the lightning device. They are willing to parley with characters at first and express their desire to remain in the tower. The party can also convince the gremlins to relocate with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, but such checks are made with disadvantage unless the characters bribe the gremlins with the tools or explosive charges from area 2 (or another appropriate item). If the party offers the *wand of lightning bolts*, the gremlins quickly agree.

If the party attacks, the gremlins fight. As a bonus action, the gremlin can use the lightning device to deal 9 (2d8) lightning damage to a character and force the character to succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be pushed 15 feet. The gremlins use the device to push a foe back into the gears. The device can deliver two such jolts.

The clock's disconnected, solid bronze bells can be sold for 300 gp total, if the characters do not reconnect them to the clock.

CONCLUSION

If the PCs defeat or relocate the gremlins, they can restore the clock tower to working order. They must also convince the Clockworkers' Guild to leave the tower alone, or they can leverage the guild's resources to understand the tower's true purpose, one only hinted at in the clockmaker's blueprints. It is meant to perform a magical ritual over years, granting elemental power over lightning to the inhabitants of the tower—but this plan requires long study to uncover and put into action.

DOOM CROAKER'S BRANCHES

By Shawn Merwin

Doom Croaker's Branches is a lindwurm lair suitable for four or five 4th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

On one of the infinite branches of Yggdrasil, the World Tree, a vicious lindwurm attacked a colony of ratatosk, killing many and driving the rest from their home. The icy dragon recruited the inhabitants of nearby branches, plotting to expand its demesne. It also captured the leader of a small group of ravenfolk and held her hostage, forcing the remaining ravenfolk to serve it.

Fortunately for the surviving ratatosk, a portal between their planar home and the village of Nargenstal allowed them to escape. The displaced ratatosk, doubting the adventurers are altruistic enough to help them without payment, attempt to trick them into ridding their former home of the beast and its servants so that the squirrel-folk might return.

ADVENTURE HOOK

At the end of the adventure *The Raven's Call* (Kobold Press, 2015), the characters (hopefully) freed the village of Nargenstal from the clutches of the ogre Coalkell and his trollkin cohorts. *Doom Croaker's Branches* makes a good follow-on for that adventure. If that's when the party encounters it, as, as the PCs rest after their victory, a strange robe-clad group approaches the village. If not, the characters may encounter the ratatosk in any forest.

The group's leader calls out in a chittering voice, demanding to speak to the heroes (and affirming their victory over the trollkin).

When the PCs respond, the leader throws off her hood, revealing the speaker to be a ratatosk. This leader, Grutilda, warns of impending doom for all who live nearby.

"This place has seen strife and has persevered. But a new, frigid doom looms! An icy death awaits unless you heed my warning. I am the Great Seer, and I hear songs of the future sung by the winds. We are here to offer assistance against the Dread Ice Wyrms."

The **ratatosk** (TOB) leads ten of her followers that survived the lindwurm attack. She claims to be a seer, her visions telling her that a great ice dragon has its eyes on the village. She insists that the beast's century-long dormancy is about to end, putting everyone in great peril.

Grutilda is not lying outright, but she is not giving the full truth. The portal linking the ratatosk's branch of the World Tree and this area does pose a threat, even though no one (except the ratatosk) has passed through it in years.

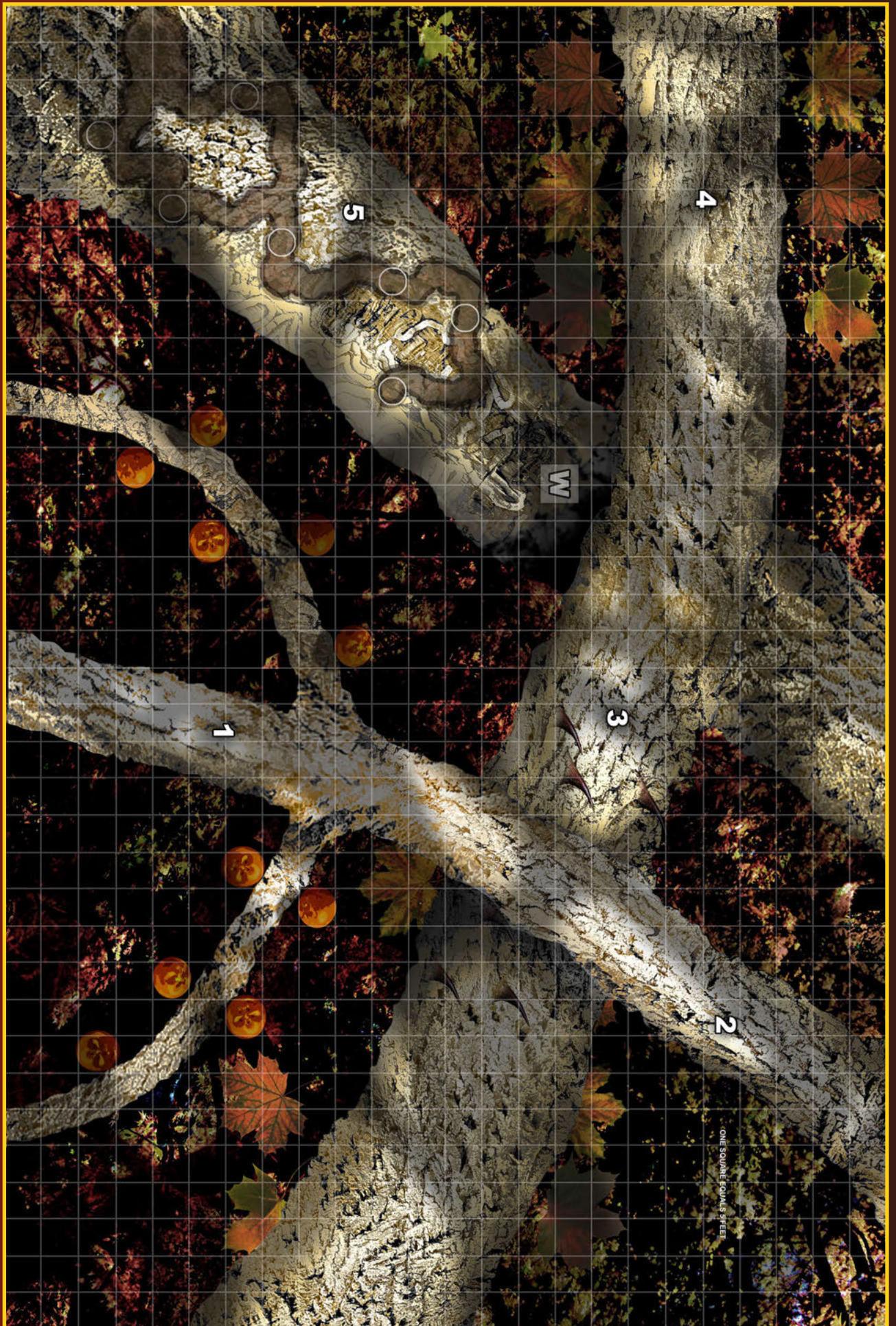
Now that the lindwurm has taken control of the branch, however, it could easily come through the portal and threaten the village. Grutilda does not reveal that her real goal in approaching the PCs is to encourage them to use the portal to travel to Yggdrasil's branches, where they might defeat the lindwurm and its servants. Grutilda hopes to secure their assistance by offering to make a potion for them.

"To defeat the Dread Ice Wyrms, you must resist its icy breath. I can help with this by brewing a potion that will make cold a mere inconvenience. But to do this, I must have four ingredients: juice from a lifecurrent, the tip of a silverthorn, a stem from a bloodleaf, and the frozen droppings of a lindwurm. These items can all be found on the branches of the World Tree, Yggdrasil. I can show you a nearby portal that will take you there."

This is all technically true, though the ratatosk is shading the truth—gathering those ingredients does permit the ratatosk to brew such a potion, but it also puts the heroes directly in the lindwurm's path. Grutilda hopes they don't question her rather convincing story—she has a +8 bonus on Charisma (Deception) checks. If they do quiz her closely, she admits that she feared they would not help without proper motivation, and she needs the PCs to defeat the lindwurm so that she and her followers can return.

She can make a *potion of cold resistance* with the ingredients, but the ratatosk have no other treasure





ONE SQUARE EQUALS ONE FEET

to offer, since the lindwurm's forces pillaged everything.

The portal to the ratatosk's former home on the branches of Yggdrasil is a couple of hours away, hidden in a forest near the village. Grutilda takes the PCs there, urging them to hurry back after completing their mission.

DOOM CROAKER'S BRANCHES

When the PCs enter the portal, they emerge into a brightly lit area high in the branches of Yggdrasil. Each of the three branches comprising this lair is separated from the one next to it by 10 feet: the topmost branch holds areas 1 and 2, the middle branch areas 3 and 4, and the lowest branch area 5. Characters who fall from one branch fall only 10 or 20 feet before hitting either branches or leaves. Vines allow them to climb back up if desired.

1. LIFECURRENTS

As you emerge from the portal, the ever-present smell of pine is replaced by a sweeter, fruity scent. You stand on a colossal branch, its rough bark making your footing unsure. Many more branches, all extending in different directions, obscure your view. Plump red berries, each at least three feet in diameter, are attached to smaller branches off the one you travel.

The red berries are lifecurrents, which hold the juice that Grutilda asked the PCs to secure. Getting the juice from a lifecurrent is a tricky proposition: if a berry is pierced or slashed without great care, it explodes, sending purplish-red juices geysering forth in all directions. Any creature within

10 feet of such an explosion must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded for 1d3 rounds by the spraying juice. In order to get the juice safely, a DC 10 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check is needed, along with a small piercing weapon and a suitable container.

If the ravenfolk scouts in area 2 witness a lifecurrent explosion, they leave their hiding spots and attack while the PCs are blinded. The ravenfolk guards in area 2 remain in place to protect the hidden young (see below).

2. RAVENS IN HIDING

The bark on the branch gets more uneven as you move north. Ten feet below you, another branch runs perpendicular to the one you travel on. On that lower branch, several large thorns glint silver in the sunlight, their tips pointing upward at you.

Traveling along the upper branch, starting where it intersects with the branch below, requires moving across uneven bark. This area is considered difficult terrain unless the moving creature makes a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

Hidden under some loose bark in a hollowed-out portion of the branch, two **ravenfolk guards** (TOB) tend to five fluffy-feathered ravenfolk babies. Three **ravenfolk scouts** (TOB) hide nearby on the branch, keeping watch for intruders. If the PCs approach the hiding place (at the northern section), the guards emerge and attack.

If the ravenfolk scouts left this area to engage the PCs in area 1, the guards call out to ten **ravens** (MM), who respond at the beginning of round 2 to harass the PCs. The ravenfolk,



fearing the safety of both the young and their captured leader, attack without hesitation. If they are questioned after being defeated, the ravenfolk describe their plight to the PCs, admitting they cannot do anything against the lindwurm or its other servants for fear of reprisal. They beg the PCs to let them escape with their young.

Characters who try to jump down or who fall to the branch below risk skewering themselves on the silverthorns (see area 3).

Hidden among the ravenfolk infants are all that is left of the ravenfolk treasure: four golden acorns (worth 25 gp each) and a *potion of healing*.

3. SILVERTHORNS

The bark of this branch is smoother than the one above it, marred by nothing except enormous silver thorns jutting from it.

Creatures that fall or jump from area 2 onto the branch here take 1d6 bludgeoning damage. Additionally, each must make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. Those that fail also take 1d6 piercing damage as they are skewered by the silverthorns.

Very fine webbing, practically invisible unless observed carefully with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, runs among the silverthorns. Creatures that land on the branch disturb the webbing, which alerts the seven **giant spiders** (MM) here that a potential meal has arrived. The spiders hide on the underside of the branch. Two spiders attack in the first round, three more arrive at the start of round 3, and the final two join the battle at the start of round 5.

The silverthorns contain a potent sap that can counteract the effects of poison. A character can identify this quality with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check. It requires an action to pierce the side of the thorn and extract the sap. The poison-cleansing properties of the sap disappear 1 hour after it is extracted.

4. BLOODLEAVES

This part of the branch contains thicker, denser webbing than in the silverthorn area. Two small, vaguely humanoid-shaped mounds of webs stand out amid the other webbing. Six very large, blood-red leaves, attached to the branch by thick stems, twitch slightly in the light breeze.

The webbed forms are gnome siblings named Eddinna and Frillo Sweetsop, who accidentally came here through a different portal days ago and stumbled into the clutches of four **ettercaps** (MM), which serve as lieutenants for the lindwurm. The ettercaps conceal themselves in the webbing when they notice combat taking place in area 3, and a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check is needed to see them in their hiding places.

The leaves attached to the branch are bloodleaves: semi-sentient, blood-drinking plants. They sense the proximity of warm-blooded creatures, and they swat with their broad, flat surfaces at any target that comes within reach. The 10-foot square directly in front of the stem of each leaf is the danger

zone. When a warm-blooded creature starts its turn in one of those places, the bloodleaf attacks with a spiny swat (+4 to hit, 1 piercing damage, DC 11 Constitution save to avoid 1d6 damage as blood is drained). After a bloodleaf drains blood, it stops attacking for 1 hour. Ettercaps do not attract the attention of the bloodleaves.

Eddinna and Frillo are noncombatants, and they are from a world foreign to the characters. How these two NPCs might come into play later in the campaign is left to the DM.

5. LINDWURM

The lowest branch is covered with slick patches of ice, and bark is torn away in several places, where large holes appear in the wood. The smell of rot and dung emanates from the branch in disgusting waves.

A 10-foot-square area on this branch is weakened by rot. Any creature that jumps onto or moves across this area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall all the way through, landing on a branch 10 feet below this one and taking 1d6 damage. A strong vine (Strength DC 10 to climb) can be used to get back up. The weak area is noticeable to a creature that makes a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, and the entire weakened area falls away when any part of it is touched.

The ice-covered branch is difficult terrain, and any creature that uses the Dash action must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or fall prone at the end of its move.

The **lindwurm** (TOB) begins the encounter squeezed into one of the holes at the southern end of the branch, where it has been keeping a close eye on its prisoner, the ravenfolk doom croaker. When a character arrives on its branch, the lindwurm emerges from its hiding place and attacks.

The characters can use the passageways inside the branch, accessible through the holes, to take cover from the lindwurm and attack from hiding. As a Large creature, the lindwurm will not enter the passages.

The lindwurm hoards 150 gp, 4 pieces of quartz (worth 50 gp each), and an *amulet of health* in the worm tunnels, where the doom croaker is also held captive. The characters can also find lindwurm droppings for Grutilda.

CONCLUSION

If the ravenfolk doom croaker survives, she expresses her appreciation to the characters by offering to use her gift of prophecy to give them a glimpse of their futures.

If the PCs return to the village, Grutilda the ratatosk is equally appreciative of their efforts. Although she has no treasure or arcane gifts, she can craft a potion as promised. Also, the ratatosk are expert guides around the branches and roots of Yggdrasil. If the characters ever have need of interplanar travel, the ratatosk eagerly volunteer to take them to their destination by way of one of the World Tree's portals.

CASTLE OF SAND

By Steve Winter

A welcoming desert oasis offers respite from the searing wasteland, but this paradise has perils. *Castle of Sand* is suitable for three to five 4th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

Imsim the dau lives a mostly solitary life in the remote desert. His home is inviting—splendid, beautiful, shaded, and cool—but it’s all an illusion. The dau are tricksters, and Imsim’s oasis is an illusion designed to lure in travelers—not because the dau means anyone harm, but because visitors break the monotony, and illusions are much easier to create and maintain than real structures. As it happens, the oasis is also a prison for the dau’s enemy, a captive mirager.

Though the buildings and the date palms are illusory, the danger here is real enough for anyone who transgresses Imsim’s rules of etiquette or tampers with his prisoner.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The best way for characters to encounter Imsim is a classic trope: desert travelers, suffering from heat and thirst, crest a sand dune or a stony hill and suddenly find themselves looking down on a lush, cool oasis. Characters might be drawn in this direction by the sight of birds circling in the distance; where there are birds, there’s likely to be water. It’s also possible that characters heard about this oasis from other travelers who never saw through the illusions and thus never encountered Imsim or Naydleh. In that case, the oasis might look significantly different from how it was described to the characters or represented on a desert map, because Imsim can change his illusions daily to suit his whims.

THE NATURE OF ILLUSION

Most of the oasis is created by Imsim’s *mirage arcane* spell. *Mirage arcane* is one of the most powerful of all illusions. Short of truesight, almost nothing can see through it or detect its false nature. The illusion looks, sounds, smells, and even feels completely real. In contrast, Naydleh’s *hallucinatory terrain* effect looks, sounds, and smells real, but it can’t alter the feel of the actual terrain, so characters who express doubt and make a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check recognize that they’re seeing an illusion. Likewise, Imsim’s *programmed illusion* can be recognized as an illusion by someone who interacts with it (hitting it with an attack, for example) and makes a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Each area of the oasis begins with read-aloud text that describes how Imsim’s or Naydleh’s illusion appears, followed by details of what lies beneath the illusions.

IMSIM’S OASIS

Your prayers are answered! Spreading before you is an oasis of palm trees, small plants, and clear water. Birds wheel overhead and wade along the reedy banks of the pond. A crumbling tomb stands at the edge of the greenery. A second small building is nestled among the palms. It could be a shelter erected by regular travelers along this route. As far as you can see, you have the oasis to yourselves.

1. POOL

This large pool of clear, cool water is shaded by date palms and ringed by reeds that sway gently in the breeze. You even see a few small fish darting among the reeds and stones, implying that this restful pool never dries out—a marvelous thing in this arid land.

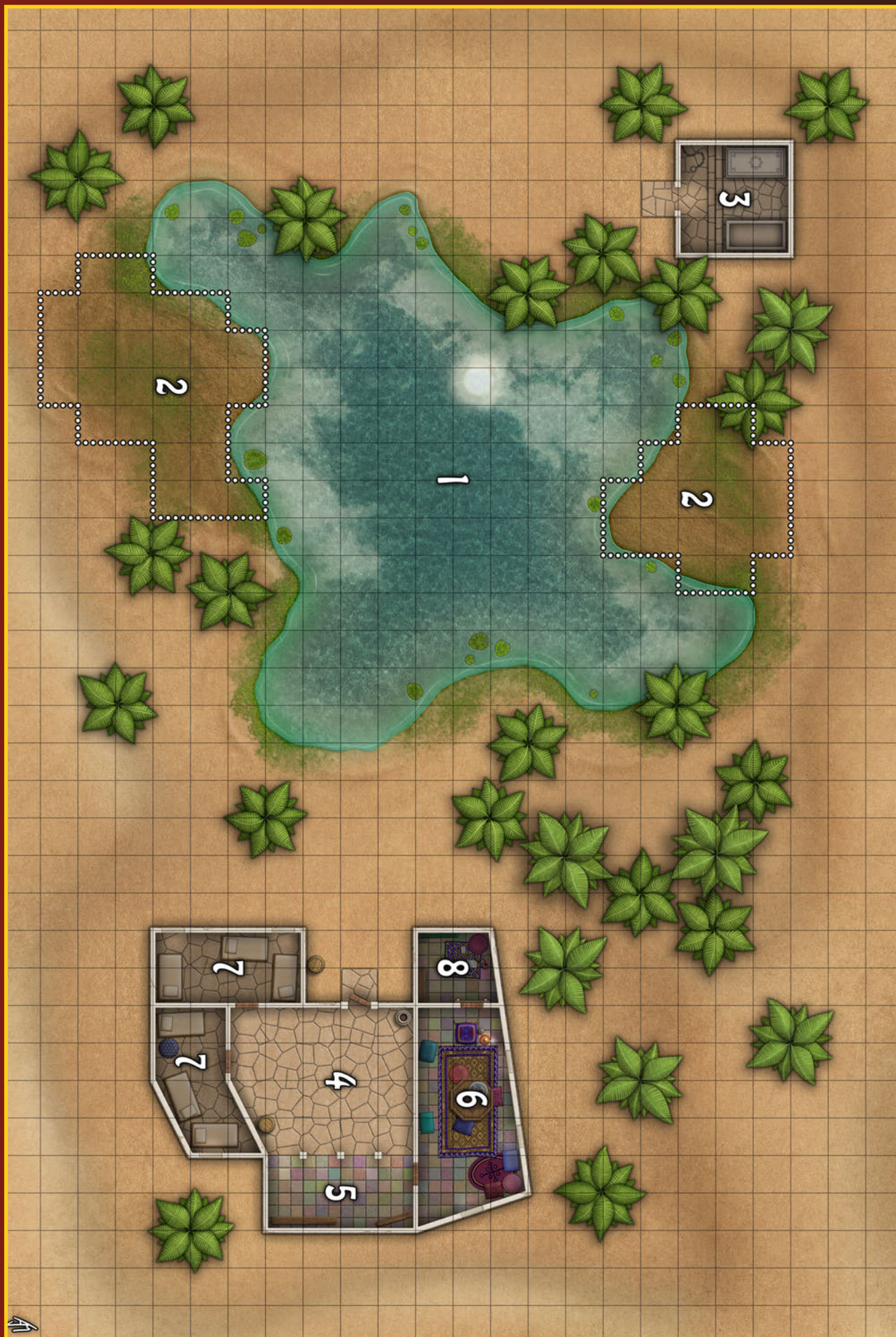
The pool is really a small, shallow mud hole inhabited by a bulette, surrounded only by stones and the withered trunks of a few long-dead trees.

The actual water here is muddy and smells bad, but it is real, so animals and people can slake their thirst and canteens and waterskins can be filled. A character with a Constitution score of 9 or lower who drinks more than a swallow of this water gains one level of exhaustion within 15 minutes; the exhaustion lasts until after the character completes a long rest.

The bulette that lurks in the mud below the pool attacks if any creature (characters, horses, or camels) wades into the pool and stirs up the mud. The bulette is aware of the quicksand (and unaffected by it, thanks to its burrowing ability), so it tries to lure enemies into that area. When the bulette is reduced to 20 or fewer hit points, it burrows away to safety, if it can.

2. QUICKSAND

Imsim’s illusion makes two areas next to the pool look like solid ground, but the terrain is actually quicksand. A creature that enters the quicksand becomes restrained and sinks 1d4 + 1 feet immediately, plus another 1d4 feet at the start of each of its turns. It can escape by making a successful Strength check; the DC equals 10 + the number of feet it has sunk into the quicksand. Another creature can also pull a trapped creature free, using a DC 5 points lower. Once a creature is completely submerged, it can’t breathe and is in danger of suffocating.



3. TOMB

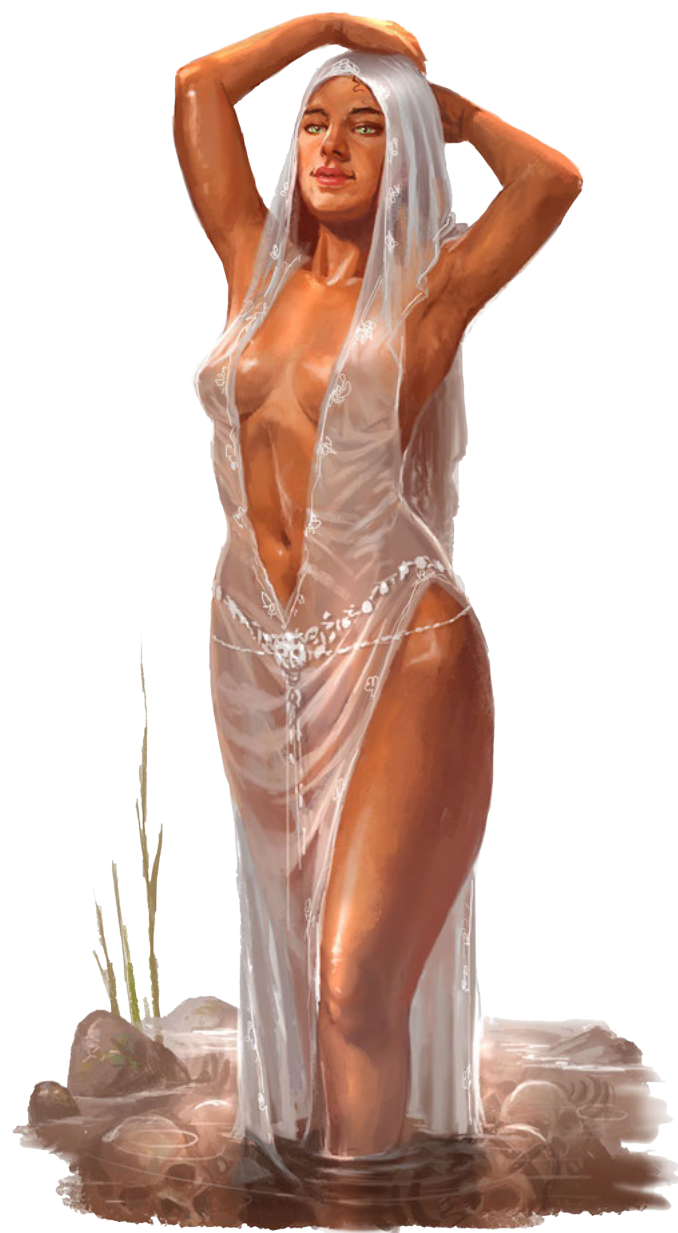
A tomb stands among the palm trees. Such structures are commonly used by the nomads of this region. This one appears quite new; the dome is covered in clean, white plaster, and the doorway is edged with bright, unchipped paint. As is typical, the small structure has no door, only an open doorway.

If characters look through the doorway, read:

Two stone sarcophagi dominate the room: one sealed, one standing open and unused. More alarming is the young woman crouching fearfully in the corner, where she is shackled to the wall. Even her ragged clothing, malnutrition, and sand flea bites can't hide the woman's beauty and courtly bearing.

What's actually here is an intact tomb, but one that is ancient and crumbling.

The "woman" is actually a mirager named Naydleh, who was imprisoned by Imsim for a murder committed generations ago. Naydleh uses *hallucinatory terrain* to



keep the crumbling tomb looking fresh, clean, and well maintained, in the hope of luring passersby into looking inside. The manacles are sealed with an *arcane lock*, so they are DC 25 against lockpicking attempts and DC 30 for squeezing out of, breaking, or wrenching from the stone.

Naydleh uses *suggestion* against whomever it deems to be the party's leader. The mirager uses *charm person* only if it believes it can slip away before the spell expires. Naydleh is very convincing and persuasive even without these spells. It wants to escape captivity and get revenge against Imsim for a century of imprisonment, so it uses all its wiles to persuade the party that it's a kidnapped human.

Exactly what the mirager presses for depends on the characters' reactions. If they fall under the mirager's spells or they believe its lies and seem willing to fight whatever's in the house, Naydleh spurs them on. If they express doubts, Naydleh will settle for escaping now; it can come back for revenge later.

The sealed sarcophagus contains the skulls and neatly stacked bones of a half dozen nomads, all of whom have been dead for over a century.

4. HOUSE

This walled compound is small—literally. It appears it was built for a family of halflings or creatures of a similar size. Although the walls are solid, the plaster has fallen away in many places. The wooden main gate is unbarred and slightly ajar.

The actual terrain in this area consists of a few crumbling walls and a heap of conveniently placed boulders.

The house appears in good repair for a possibly abandoned desert structure, but it's not as pristine as the tomb. Human-sized characters can easily see over the tops of the walls into the courtyard. The buildings are small enough that Medium characters must duck to get through doorways and must be careful not to bump their heads against the ceiling while inside, but they don't need to crouch uncomfortably, thanks to the "high" ceilings (for a Small inhabitant).

4A. COURTYARD

This traditional courtyard is tidy. The paving stones are swept clear of sand, and no weeds grow between them.

The actual terrain here is flat, gravelly ground.

Nothing of interest can be found in the courtyard, but if characters shout a greeting, they hear a voice from the receiving room (area 4c) saying, "Welcome, travelers. Please join me in my parlor."

4B. VERANDA

This veranda is shaded from the sun, and the colorful tiles are cool to the touch. Two benches are pushed against the wall. One is sized for children or halflings, and it looks natural here. The other is large enough to be comfortable for adult humans, and it looks oversized in these surroundings.

This area contains boulders and a few fallen palm trunks.

4C. RECEIVING ROOM

Comfortable pillows are strewn about this room, and thick rugs cover the floor. The walls are painted in a beautiful pattern of interlocking blue and green diamonds, triangles, and more intricate shapes. A kettle steams on a small charcoal burner, with a ceramic pot of tea leaves sitting next to it. Crystal and silver cups are arrayed on a silver tray. A small man sits by the kettle. He is richly dressed but no more than three feet tall. His skin has the texture of sand, and the air around him shimmers faintly like a heat mirage—or is that only heat from the charcoal burner? He smiles as you enter and motions you toward the cushions with a sweep of his arm.

The ground in this area consists of stones, broken brickwork, and gravel.

The room's occupant is an illusion created by Imsim using *project image*. It shows Imsim as he really is, without visual enhancements. The dau is safely ensconced in his den (area 4e). The image moves as Imsim moves, and his words are heard as if spoken by the image.

Thanks to the dau's Tangible Illusion ability, the image is fully physical and can even interact with things in the room for the first ten minutes of the encounter; Imsim serves tea and moves cushions around as necessary. For all intents and purposes, the image is as real as anything else in the room for those ten minutes.

After ten minutes, the image loses its tangibility so that physical objects pass right through it, and vice versa. Someone who examines the image carefully can then recognize the deception with a successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Striking the nonphysical image with an attack that does any damage dispels it completely.

All Imsim wants from this encounter is pleasant company and intelligent conversation. He welcomes news of the wider world and tales of the characters' exploits. The projected image answers most questions honestly, provided they're asked politely, including questions about itself, its nature, and the prisoner in the tomb. The dau has a short attention span and a strict sense of etiquette, but otherwise is a witty and gracious host.

The situation changes and Imsim turns hostile if characters:

1. attack and dispel the image;
2. search the room or tamper with the door to area 4e;
3. behave rudely, voice insults, or do anything else that could reasonably be considered a serious breach of hospitality; or
4. bring Naydleh into the room.

After a minor infraction, Imsim chastises the characters for their bad manners and asks them to "respect the ancient traditions of hospitality" in his home. If the characters commit a serious breach, he demands that they leave, and if

they refuse, he attacks. When his projected image is tangible, it can fight as if it were Imsim. If a fight breaks out, it triggers Imsim's *programmed illusion* of a djinni materializing behind the dau. The djinni can't fight, but it looks incredibly menacing in the crowded room and adds weight to Imsim's commands for order. If the image of Imsim is dispelled in a fight, the dau casts *invisibility*, dispels all his illusions (revealing the lush oasis to be a sun-baked mud hole), and flies away. If the bulette is still alive, it bursts through the ground in the midst of the party and fights to the death.

If Naydleh is brought into the receiving room, Imsim scowls and says, "You should not have set that loose." The mirager won't fight the dau directly but instead tries to get the characters to attack. A character who is under the effect of the mirager's *suggestion* spell is compelled to attack; any who are charmed consider the dau to be a dire menace to their new friend, but they're free to decide for themselves whether attacking is the best course of action. At an opportune point during this fight, Naydleh gets close to a weakened character, slakes its enormous appetite with Thirst Kiss, then flees, laughing, into the desert. Imsim makes one attempt at that point to stop the fight and get the characters' aid in recapturing the mirager. If the characters remain hostile, Imsim turns invisible and flies away.

4D. SLEEPING ROOM

Two sleeping pallets and a few rugs decorate this plain but comfortable-looking room.

The area actually contains gravel, stones, and a threadbare camel skin.

If the encounter with Imsim goes well, the dau invites the characters to spend the night in his home. They can sleep safely and comfortably in these rooms.

4E. IMSIM'S DEN

Cushions, rugs, a hookah, and a shelf of books make this tiny, windowless room into a stuffy but cozy den. If the heavy bar were placed across the stout door, the room would be nigh impossible to break into.

Beneath the illusion lie crumbling walls, gravel floor, a plush rug, a hookah, and stacks of books.

Characters are unlikely to see the illusory version of the room described above, because Imsim keeps the door closed and barred while strangers are in the "house." When he dispels the *mirage arcane*, his rug, hookah, and books remain. The rug is exquisite but tiny (worth 20 gp), and the hookah is commonplace (worth 1 gp). The books are valuable: they include ten volumes on history, geography, philosophy, and other mundane topics, each worth 1d10 + 20 gp.

THE PIRATES' COVE

By Brian Engard

The Pirates' Cove is the lair of a blasphemous cult, suitable for four or five 5th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

The pirate ship *Inheritor* has been plaguing ships up and down the coast for years, but the behavior of the pirates has changed over the last few months: instead of taking booty from the vessels they attack, Captain Jarzon and his pirates are capturing crew members and taking them away.

Those who know of this new development suspect that the *Inheritor* has become involved in a slaving business, but the truth is even more sinister. The captain of the *Inheritor* is a recent convert to a very old religion: that of Shar-Ngolyeth, That Which Lurks Beneath the Tide. Captain Jarzon believes he has been promised great power, in exchange for which he captures people to sacrifice to Shar-Ngolyeth. His ultimate goal is unclear, even to those of his crew who have also converted, but he sometimes speaks of an island beneath the waves.

ADVENTURE HOOK

A ship's captain named Jenny Harken approaches the PCs and asks for help. Last week her ship, the *Second Best*, was attacked by the *Inheritor*. The pirates captured many of her crew before the captain and her remaining force fought them off. Among those taken was her first mate and lover, Red Bertram.

Her crew is diminished and wounded, so she approaches the PCs with an offer: she'll ferry them to the island where the *Inheritor* makes port. The PCs must invade the hideout, slaughter Captain Jarzon and the pirates he commands, and bring her crew—and Bertram—back. In exchange, she'll pay them handsomely, in addition to whatever plunder they find in the *Inheritor*'s hold.

1. CAVE ENTRANCE

As you come within sight of the cave the pirates call home, the jungle around you gives way to rock and sand. Ahead yawns open a stony cave maw, and dim light flickers inside. From where you stand, you can see six or seven figures moving about and you can hear talking, laughter, and the occasional song. The pirates seem unaware of your presence.

Seven of Captain Jarzon's most loyal crew members are in the cave's entrance. Four of them are **acolytes** (MM), full inductees into the cult of Shar-Ngolyeth who have magical powers. Two elf **spies** (MM) stick to the shadows and fight with hit-and-run tactics. The seventh guard is a **berserker**

(MM) with boils and pustules all over his face, and squirming tendrils writhing on one of his biceps.

Any PC who has a passive Perception score of 16 or higher also notices a large bronze bell just inside the cave entrance.

All seven pirates attack as soon as they see the PCs, but they're celebrating and not particularly attentive (Stealth DC 10 to get surprise). If the PCs don't deal with them before the first round of combat ends, one of the spies uses his turn to ring a bell by the tunnel that leads out of this chamber and into the next. If this happens, six **bandits** (MM) arrive 3 rounds later from the sleeping cave (area 3), and the enemies elsewhere in the complex lay an ambush.

When the berserker is killed, his pustules grow and burst, spewing forth tentacles. His body distorts and twists, bones breaking and skin melting. On the round following his death, his corpse becomes a **gibbering moulder** (MM), which will attack anything, including pirates, in the room.





2. THE MAIDEN'S LAKE

The waters here are still and peaceful. A young woman sits at the shore's edge, idly tracing her fingers through the water. Her fingers don't disturb the stillness of the water, and a distinct chill surrounds her. When she turns to look at you, her eyes are hollow, her face gaunt and sunken, and her body slightly translucent. She stands to face you. "Why have you come?" she asks.

The young woman, Charissa, is a **drowned maiden** (TOB) who was killed several weeks ago in one of Captain Jarzon's foul rites. To answer her question, the characters must choose their words carefully. Mentioning Jarzon or the sacrifices sends Charissa into a rage, summoning eight **shrouds** (TOB), other sacrificial victims, to fight alongside her.

The PCs can convince Charissa to stifle her rage and tell them a bit about the cave and the pirates with a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. In that case, Charissa shares the following information:

- She was taken from her home some time ago. She doesn't know how long.
- She was drowned in the sea as part of some ritual, her body left to drift with the tide.
- The captain is a religious figure to the pirates.
- When she died, a cold and unwholesome force wrapped itself around her soul.
- The ritual occurred further inside the caves, beyond the prison where she was held. The other end opens out to the sea, where the ship is anchored.

If the PCs return to this room after having killed Jarzon, Charissa is gone, her unfinished business taken care of.

3. SLEEPING CAVE

If the bell in the cave entrance has been rung, read:

Sleeping bags are strewn haphazardly around the room, and a low fire burns in the corner. Eight pirates stand at the ready, cutlasses drawn.

If not, read:

Sleeping bags are strewn haphazardly around the room, and a low fire burns in the corner. Eight pirates sleep peacefully here.

If the PCs surprise sleeping pirates, they can deal with them how they will. If the pirates are awake, they attack. There are six **bandits** (MM) and two **veterans** (MM) in this room. When the others attack, one of the veterans, a woman named Price, noticeably hesitates. A character can appeal to her, telling her they're here to kill Jarzon and stop his sacrifices. If a PC makes a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check, Price throws in with the PCs. She acts on her original initiative count, but attacks the other pirates instead of the PCs.

If Price survives, she tells the PCs that she doesn't like the new turn that Captain Jarzon's rule has taken, and she's not the only one. Most of the crew are loyal, but a

few would follow her lead if she called for a mutiny. If the characters trust her, she accompanies them to the cove and fights with them.

Price also has the following information to share, if asked:

- Captain Jarzon is a recent convert to the worship of something called That Which Lurks Beneath the Waves.
- There's a ritual happening right now. Jarzon has corralled several prisoners in the cove, and will ritually drown them all to appease his new god.
- The pirates keep rum in a connecting room, but something's wrong with it.
- The nearby cave with a lake is haunted. Pirates go there and don't come back.
- There are some guards in the prison, as well as some prisoners.
- Beyond the prison is the cove, where the *Inheritor* is anchored. Captain Jarzon is there, along with many of his most loyal followers.

4. RUM STORAGE

This small, dank room is full of the cloying smell of rum. Barrels are stacked everywhere, and there's a small chest in the corner.

The rum in this room is just rum. Although Price thinks something's wrong with it, the increased potency that the pirates feel when they come in here and drink is the work of a quartet of **rum gremlins** (TOB) playing merry havoc with the pirates during their revelries. The goblins are all hiding inside empty barrels when the PCs enter, and they watch from hiding to see what the PCs will do.

The chest in the corner is locked. It can be opened with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check; breaking the chest (AC 10) requires dealing a noisy 10 damage to it. The chest contains coins and jewels worth 300 gp. Price does not object if the PCs take the loot or the rum.

Any characters in the cave are subject to the gremlins' *aura of drunkenness*, which makes it quite difficult to pick the lock while in the rum storage room. If a PC investigates the room closely, or tries to open the chest, the gremlins play pranks using *prestidigitation*. This looks like spectral activity, but any PCs in the room who make successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) checks notice one of the gremlins playing a prank.

If the gremlins are discovered, they attack once and flee.

5. PRISON

If the bell has been rung, read:

You see a row of crude metal and wood cages, about half of them holding people. Nobody else is in sight.

If not, read:

You see a row of crude metal and wood cages, about half of them holding people. Five hulking bugbears stand guard. They seem surprised to see you.

If the bell has been rung, the **bugbears** (MM) are present, but they're lying in wait for the PCs. They attack from hiding, getting a surprise round if the PCs don't spot them in time. The characters can notice them with a successful DC 16 Wisdom (Perception) check, made with advantage because the prisoners try to warn them. If the bell has not been rung, the bugbears are out in the open and not expecting the PCs.

The locks on the cages are DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) to open, or the PCs can use the keys they can find on any of the bugbears. The six prisoners in these cages are sailors and nobles. They're noncombatants, weak and hungry, but they can give the PCs information:

- Red Bertram is not among them. He has been taken into the cove beyond.
- A dozen pirates are in the cove, plus the captain.
- They're enacting a dark ritual in there; the prisoners can hear the chanting, and the bugbears talked about it some.

6. THE COVE

A half-dozen pirates stand ready with weapons, guarding the exit from the prison. Behind them, closer to the water's edge, is a semicircle of pirates adorned in deep green robes, arrayed around a man with wide, fanatical eyes and a bristling black beard, also wearing robes.

This man, Captain Jarzon, looms over a red-haired man lying face down, partly underwater, as Jarzon gibbers words in an unknown language. Five corpses float in the water just offshore, being carried out to sea, beyond the ship grounded on the beach.

All eyes turn to you.

This area holds Red Bertram (unconscious and nearly drowned), a noncombatant; Captain Jarzon, a **cult fanatic** (MM); six **acolytes** (MM) around Captain Jarzon, and six **bandits** (MM) guarding the others. When battle ensues, the bandits move into melee, while the acolytes attack from range with spells. Jarzon takes out a knife and starts carving symbols into his arm, enacting a blood ritual.

If Price is present, she can convince the six bandits to join the PCs at the beginning of the second round of combat. The acolytes, however, remain loyal to Jarzon.

At the end of the second round of combat, Jarzon finishes his ritual and gives a shout of triumph. When this happens, a **krake spawn** (TOB) bursts out of the shallow water behind him and consumes him whole. Then this aspect of Shar-Ngolyeth begins consuming everyone else in the room, starting with whoever is closest. The acolytes defend it, and offer themselves up to it willingly.

If the PCs kill Jarzon before he completes the ritual, the aspect of Shar-Ngolyeth still appears and consumes him, but it's a weaker version with half normal hit points.

7. THE INHERITOR

The ship looks sturdy and seaworthy, its hold no doubt full of plunder.

If the PCs climb aboard the *Inheritor*, they can loot it to the tune of 800 gp, a chest that holds twelve gems worth 50 gp each, and an uncommon magical item. They can also take the ship, if they like, though they'll need a crew of at least twelve to sail it. If Price is with them, she'll lead the crew, but she expects to command the ship as her own and will fight to keep it.

CONCLUSION

If the PCs rescue Red Bertram, Captain Jenny is true to her word. She gives the PCs 150 gp apiece, and tells them that she owes them a favor. If the characters come back to Jenny without Bertram but the pirates have been slain, Jenny pays them 75 gp each, and she does not offer them a favor.

Either way, within a few months, the PCs hear rumors of an island emerging from the waves not far from the island where the *Inheritor* was docked. Perhaps there's a connection—and the *Temple of the Deep Ones* lair provides a ready follow-up for a future mission.



ALL-SEEING EYE

By Mike Welham

All-Seeing Eye is an oculo swarm and night scorpion lair for five 5th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

In the distant past, followers of Sanvi, a long-forgotten goddess of destiny, knowledge, and vision, built temples devoted to the goddess, who endowed the buildings with the ability to materialize in seemingly random places. At each location, her acolytes held a lottery and gave three winners access to the temple's inner sanctum, where they could divine their futures or receive an answer to a question concerning their fate. As word spread, these lotteries became popular among commoners, but hated by society's elite, who never won a lottery or gained admittance to the temples.

Eventually, these enemies conspired to destroy the temples whenever they appeared. Only one of the temples has survived to this day, sequestered in a remote location in a state of stasis. Its only resident, Nimon Velk, remains inside as caretaker. As the last of Sanvi's adherents, he seeks out worthies to receive her gifts, and the characters might fit the bill.

ADVENTURE HOOK

A dilapidated building suddenly appeared a mile outside of town days before the characters' arrival. Two of three townspeople who investigated the temple returned blind and insensate. The town's leaders ask the characters to investigate the location.

ALL-SEEING EYE

After speaking with the townsfolk about the building, the characters learn that a bright blue flash presaged the building's arrival. One of the two victims is missing his eyes, while the other is blinded from night scorpion poison, something a character can discern with a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check or a *detect poison and disease* spell. If the characters question the victims, they rant about huge insects and hundreds of eyes descending upon them.

The building is located 200 feet off the main road leading into town. The stone exterior is pitted and stained, but characters can see faded, stylized eyes covering the building's walls. A plain stone door is the only entrance. The closed and locked door displays two pairs of glass discs, one set at eye level for a Medium humanoid and the other at eye level for a Small humanoid. Looking into either set of discs opens the door.

Except where otherwise noted, the temple is illuminated by torchlight.

1. ENTRY HALL

Belying the building's outer shabbiness, this room is immaculate. A table covered in trays of sumptuous food and bottles of wine stands directly across from the entrance. Along the north and south walls stand two statues, carved in an ancient style, of a woman with a dark globe in her hands who seems to hold the entire room in her gaze. Two small doors lead to the south, and a large door leads east.

This area was a mess hall and devotion chamber for Sanvi's followers. The sustenance on the table is an illusion that conceals mere trail rations and flavored water, but the fare is nutritious and grants a +2 bonus on Wisdom (Perception) checks made while in the temple.

2. MEDITATION CHAMBER

Several worn throw pillows cover this room's floor. The faint smell of incense permeates the air.

Sanvi's acolytes would meditate on current deeds and future possibilities in this chamber. When the temple was open to the public, Sanvi's followers entertained visitors here with fortune-telling, using their deity-given abilities.

A caster who has at least one divination spell prepared can recover two expended spell slots of 2nd level or lower after completing a short rest in this room.

A blackened crystal ball rests under one of the pillows, requiring a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to discover. The crystal ball allows its possessor to ask it about a future event, but a curse on the device causes it to show the worst possible outcome.

3. SLEEPING QUARTERS

These cramped quarters hold four large bunk beds. Four open chests contain simple clothing: linen robes, woolen capes, and rope sandals, all of undyed and unornamented material.

Though Nimon does not use this room, he keeps it clean and ready for new initiates. In one of the chests, the characters can find a letter addressed to a former occupant of the room. It reads, "Your fee, as requested. I trust this will gain me access to the inner sanctum. —K."

4. KITCHEN AND ANOINTING HALL

A thick purple curtain, decorated with a pattern made up of a solid line and six dashed lines, covers the eastern end of this simple kitchen, featuring a stove and a table.

When the temple was operational, the kitchen in the western part of this room served the needs of Sanvi's



followers. The curtain conceals a fountain topped with a purple globe through which water flows. Beyond the fountain is a second curtain that encloses an apparently empty chamber. Although the water from the fountain is refreshing, its most important purpose is to reveal the secret door on the southern wall. Those who wash their eyes with the water can see the secret door. If no one does this, a character must succeed on a DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check to find the door.

5. MANY-EYED CHAMBER

Columns of stacked stone eyes protrude from the wall at five-foot intervals. Two beams of colored light cross the room east to west from every other pair of columns at heights of one foot and five feet above the floor. The room has no apparent exits.

This hall provides a test for initiates and a deterrent to intruders. Anyone who passes through a beam at either height takes 11 (2d10) radiant damage and a –2 penalty on checks that use a particular ability (from north to south, Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Charisma, Wisdom, and Intelligence). Avoiding each beam requires a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw—characters who discover the beam's effect can avoid the danger by slowly and carefully stepping over and crouching under the beams.

To open the secret door to the south, discovered with a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, all beams must be broken at the 5-foot height. Interrupting a beam with the trunks from area 3, stones, cloaks, shields, or similar objects counts for this purpose—but when the beam is restored, the secret door closes. Using brute force to open the door requires a DC 25 Strength check.

6. HALL OF UNTOLD FUTURES

The statues along the east and west walls of this long chamber are smaller versions of those in the banquet hall, except that they face into the walls rather than away from them. A green rug laid along the center of this corridor has several crystal lenses set within it.

Touching the statues reveals that they spin freely, and turning the statues to face each other activates the magic of the lenses. They display a riot of images featuring alternate timelines important to the characters or to the region. Use this opportunity to describe specific campaign events that would have gone poorly if not for character choices or the vagaries of luck. Anyone who views the displays must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or become unnerved and suffer disadvantage on all attack rolls and ability checks for 1 hour.

A dozen blindfolds hang from a peg next to the door in the northwest corner. A divination spell cast in this room reveals that “Blindness shows the easy path” (a clue for area 7).

7. UNSEEN PIT

A spiked pit fills the room all the way to the door at the north end. A small alcove to the east has a door in the far wall.

This area served as another test and deterrent. The pit is 20 feet deep. A creature that falls in takes 1d6 piercing damage from the spikes, in addition to any falling damage.

Anyone who cannot see the pit (by closing one's eyes or using a blindfold, or if the area is covered in magical darkness) does not fall in and treats the floor as solid in this area.

Opening the door to the east unleashes a gout of flame that deals 4d6 fire damage (DC 13 Dexterity save for half damage) to every creature in the alcove west of the door and releases a **fire dancer swarm** (TOB) that attacks anyone not wearing a blindfold.

In the center of the pit are the skeleton and treasure of an unfortunate victim. In a tattered sack the characters find 200 gp and a *potion of healing*.

8. STOREROOM

Four closed crates line this area's north wall. Chirruping sounds come from the easternmost one.

Three crates contain mundane supplies, and the fourth holds dozens of enormous crickets, food for the night scorpions in area 9.

A cloth bag behind the westernmost crate, containing four doses of night scorpion venom, is discoverable with a thorough search or a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.

9. NIGHT SCORPION TERRARIUMS

This room is dark. If the characters illuminate it, they see that this U-shaped room holds glass cases filled with dirt and branches. The southern case is cracked and empty. A door next to the broken case leads south out of this room.

Two **night scorpions** (TOB) that escaped from the broken terrarium attack intruders in this room.

10. THE LAST ACOLYTE

This hallway leads east and then bends to the north. A cot sits in the corner at the bend. Standing near the cot, an ancient man with a bandage over his left eye leans on a staff and beckons. A cloud of eyes hovers near him.

Nimon Velk has foreseen the characters' arrival and their potential role in restoring Sanvi to power. He greets them cheerily and answers any questions they have. Possible questions and Nimon's responses follow:

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

This is a temple to Sanvi—the last of its kind, I'm afraid.

WHO IS SANVI?

The goddess of destiny, knowledge, and vision. She is sadly forgotten by many.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHER PEOPLE WHO CAME HERE?

They were not permitted entry, and the temple just underwent a long period of magical stasis, so it defended itself against intruders.

WHY ARE WE PERMITTED ENTRY?

Sanvi granted me a vision that you would restore her to her former glory.

WHAT LIES BEYOND THIS ROOM?

The priestess's office, then the preparation rooms, and finally the chamber of the All-Seeing Eye.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER THREATS IN THIS TEMPLE?

No. My protector will not harm you if you have peaceful intentions. (Note: Nimon is unaware of the activated oculo swarms in area 13).

After Nimon answers the party's questions, he excuses himself to rest on the cot, and then dies peacefully in his sleep.

Nimon's guardian **oculo swarm** (TOB) remains on guard, but it attacks only if the PCs threaten it or Nimon.

11. PRIESTESS'S OFFICE

A tidy desk fills the southern end of this room, its bookcases filled with books and sheaves of paper.

The books and papers describe visions received by Sanvi's followers, and some scrolls tracking their success or failure.

Priestess Elora Rennett noted the order's corruption, and her knowledge about Sanvi's departure and the order's imminent destruction, in a ledger hidden in a secret drawer, which can be discovered with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. The drawer contains an enchanted hand mirror (requiring attunement) that allows its user to ignore cover when making ranged attacks—by magically seeing around corners.

12. PREPARATION CHAMBER

A simple altar with a pair of unlit candles stands at this chamber's western end. A blue cloth with an unblinking eye covers the altar.

If a character invokes Sanvi's name while at the altar, the candles flare and provide an effect equivalent to *daylight*.

13. EYE GUARDIAN

Light from the adjoining room does not travel far enough to pierce the darkness in this area.

If the characters bring a lit candle, torch, or other source of light into this area, they can see normally. Two **oculo swarms** (TOB) guard this chamber and attack the characters when they enter. In addition, a hidden spiked pit trap in front of the door to area 14 requires a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to locate. Anyone that walks over this area must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall 20 feet, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall and 11 (2d10) piercing damage from the spikes.

14. CHAMBER OF THE EYE

This eye-shaped room has a golden pedestal in the center, representing the iris. Eyes fashioned from gems and precious metals line the walls and blink in different patterns.

When the characters enter this room, a powerful yet warm voice proclaims, "Welcome, seekers! You have my eyes at your disposal. Ask your questions when you are ready."

Each character receives an answer to one question about the character's personal future, similar to a *divination* spell but effective up to a month away, or a character can ask a question regarding a past mystery. The answer is always truthful. Guide your players to ask questions that enhance the campaign or reveal a hidden truth.

CONCLUSION

Once all the characters have asked their questions and received their answers, the temple fades away and leaves them standing in an empty grove. At least one answer hints at the temple's new location, and the characters can pursue that lead at their leisure. Sanvi intends to use the characters as an instrument to return to prominence, but she is a patient goddess.

If the characters ask for intercession on behalf of the injured townspeople, the blinded victims regain their sight. Doing so grants the party favorable status in the town and earns them a reward of 500 gp.



THE ALCHEMISTS' GUILDHALL

By Shawn Merwin

The Alchemists' Guildhall is a rusalka lair suitable for four or five 6th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

In the city's wealthiest district, the Alchemists' Guild occupies a great hall that reflects its station in the city. Part of the guildhall rests on stilts, extending over the deep, clear lake water. Until recently, the guild had a good reputation among its customers. But now, a conniving rusalka named Zaeriez and her lake troll bodyguard have corrupted the organization.

After enthralling several alchemists and killing others, Zaeriez devised a greater plan. She ordered the beguiled alchemists to add a special ingredient to their potions, making anyone who drinks one susceptible to Zaeriez's powers permanently.

ADVENTURE HOOK

A seamstress who recently purchased a curative alchemical draught fell very ill, becoming listless and unresponsive. The family has tried to contact the alchemist directly, but to no avail. The seamstress's family asks the adventurers to go to the Alchemists' Guildhall, where this alchemist, named Vernor Avilleton, is said to spend most of his time, and confront him on their behalf.

1. GUARDHOUSE

The guildhall is finely crafted, the building on shore constructed expertly of stone. Another structure, connected to the first by a sturdy wooden bridge, rests on stilts sixty feet out in the lake. Three large windows on the closest building are shuttered. Between the main road and the front door sits a wooden shed. In the shed's doorway stands a woman dressed in splint mail, a sword sheathed on each hip.

Two human **veterans** (MM), Kewliza and Arleth, occupy the guardhouse. They were hired by the Alchemists' Guild to protect the area. The two veterans are on edge because of the alchemists' recent strange behavior. They approach visitors

peacefully, but if they are attacked, each blows a whistle loud enough to be heard at the nearest city watch house. A blown whistle brings four **guards** (MM) within 5 minutes.

The veterans say that no one is allowed into the guildhall without an invitation: the characters can leave a message here and wait to be contacted when a meeting is convenient. With a bit of persuasion (a successful DC 10 Charisma check), the characters can get Kewliza and Arleth to let the adventurers investigate—because they get the feeling something's wrong. The two appreciate their cushy jobs too much, however, to join the adventurers.

Each of the veterans carries a key to the front door. They possess no valuables and wear normal equipment. A wooden shelf in the guardhouse holds empty plates and glasses (used by the guards) and two *potions of healing*. The potions contain essence of rusalka, so imbibers have disadvantage on saving throws against the rusalka's magic.

2. SITTING ROOM

The locked front door bears a brass symbol of the Alchemists' Guild, a flask over an open flame. The lock can be picked by a character who uses thieves' tools and makes a successful DC 15 Dexterity check. Smashing the door, or breaking one of the windows, alerts the veterans at the guardhouse, as well as the guildhall occupants.

The room beyond contains serviceable furniture but is currently unoccupied. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the furniture has recently been soaked with fresh water.

3. DINING ROOM

A large oak dining table stands surrounded by matching chairs. Dirty plates, mugs, and flatware are heaped on the table, and the place is in need of cleaning. Sitting at the table, fiddling with a large glass vial containing a fiery red liquid, is a man dressed in Alchemists' Guild robes. He drips with water. "Welcome," he says in a slow, measured, flat tone. "I'm afraid you have arrived at a bad time. You might want to make an appointment with the guards outside and return later."

The maid who normally cooks and cleans has hidden in the pantry (area 6), leaving the dining room a mess.

The man at the table is Vernor Avilleton, the alchemist who sold the tainted potion to the seamstress. Zaeriez has ordered him to wait here and shoo away trespassers. The vial contains a modified *potion of fire breath*. If visitors seem intent on investigating, Vernor was ordered to drop the vial in the center of the room, unleashing a ball of fire with a 30-foot

LEARNING ABOUT VERNOR'S DOMINATION

With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check, an adventurer can determine that Vernor and the other victims in the guildhall are under a magical compulsion that has an unusual alchemical component. Removing the compulsion requires a casting of *dispel magic* (DC 15) or similar magic. Those who recover do not remember what happened to them.



radius, dealing 8d6 fire damage to anyone caught in the blast. A DC 13 Dexterity saving throw halves the damage. Vernor is immolated immediately.

4. SMALL LIBRARY

This small library is crammed with alchemical tomes, scrolls, and other writings, some of them quite rare. Several reading desks and chairs furnish the room. Various written works litter the tables.

A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the books open on the tables deal with either dangerous potion additives or mind-control magic. One of the scrolls is a *scroll of fireball*.

These books all bear a secret glyph that marks them as the property of the Alchemists' Guild. If the characters try to sell stolen books locally, buyers know to look for the mark and will report the theft to the authorities.

5. SLEEPING CHAMBERS

The door to this room is locked (Dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 10). The chamber is divided into two sleeping areas by thick silk curtains. Two alchemists rest in each curtained area, waiting to be summoned by Zaeriez. One is a fairly powerful **mage** (MM), while the three others fight as **cultists** (MM). They attack if disturbed and move to investigate any disturbances elsewhere. The mage's *wand of magic missiles* has rolled under his cot, and he carries a *potion of speed*, but it is tainted by the rusalka essence.

Adventurers can take a short rest here after defeating the occupants, but patrolling alchemists (or the lake troll) investigate before the PCs can complete a long rest.

6. KITCHEN

An old cast-iron oven in the corner holds blackened pots whose contents have boiled over. Cooking utensils and crocks of food line the walls, and sausages hang from hooks. The place reeks of burned food. A flimsy wooden door on the east wall leads into a pantry.

There is little of interest here, but a (rock) gnome maid called Stavhy (a noncombatant) hides in the pantry. She came here when the creatures took control of the guildhall and is too frightened to try escaping. With access to plentiful food and water, she is prepared to wait in the pantry until she is rescued.

If the characters unlock the door (Dexterity DC 10) or break it down (Strength DC 5), Stavhy is prepared. She hurls a handful of flour directly into the eyes of the door opener, and then she flails about with a rolling pin. The victim of the attack must make a successful DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded for 1 minute. A character who makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check can flush the victim's eyes and remove the blindness.

As a noncombatant, Stavhy can deal no damage and falls under the first blow she receives from a character. If the adventurers spare her, she can provide some valuable information:

- Five days ago, she heard a commotion in the workshop area: splashing and shouting, then silence. Master Avilleton approached her from across the bridge with a blank-eyed stare. He told her nothing was amiss and said she could leave for the day.
- The next day Stavhy returned without thinking of the previous day's incident. The alchemists, all looking odd, told her to remain in the kitchen and cook a large meal for later.
- That evening, Stavhy saw a terrible troll-like creature on the bridge. It spoke to the alchemists in Trade Tongue, ordering them around. One disobeyed, and the troll tore the poor bloke limb from limb. Stavhy ran and hid in the pantry and has not attempted to leave.

If given the chance, she insists that the PCs take her to safety.

7. BRIDGE AND BOAT

A wide wooden bridge connects the two buildings of the guildhall. A wooden roof covers the walkway, and thin wooden rails guard the sides. Water laps peacefully just below the bottom of the bridge.

Two **water elementals** (MM) lurk on either side of the bridge, just under the surface. They serve Zaeriez, tasked to guard the bridge against intruders. They also attack any creatures that swim from the shore toward the guildhall.

THE ROWBOAT: A small rowboat is drawn up along the shore; it has two well-worn oars and seats three people. The water elementals ignore the rowboat when it is moving away from the building. If the rowboat pulls up to the porch or the entry point beneath the workshop, the water elementals attack. They swamp the rowboat in a single round, and characters in a sinking rowboat have disadvantage on their attack rolls.

8. PORCH

A large porch of polished oak planks looks out onto the lake. The edges of the floor are open to the water. Comfortable lounging chairs and benches are pushed against the wall of the adjoining building.

The porch looks covered in water, belying the calmness of the lake as it gently laps just below floor level. Suddenly, a violent thrashing sound erupts in the water just to the north of the porch.

Four **eel hounds** (TOB) have adopted this porch as their sunning area. When the PCs open the door to the deck, one eel hound howls an alarm while the others swim to the opposite side of the porch to prepare an ambush. The entire water-facing edge of the porch is covered in slick spittle. Any character who falls prone in this area has a 20 percent chance of sliding off the porch into the lake, which is 10 feet deep.

If the characters try to approach the building by water, the eel hounds are the second line of defense after the water elementals. If Zaeriez is confronted by the characters

before they defeat the eel hounds, the creatures swim to her defense, arriving 3 rounds after combat starts.

9. ALCHEMY WORKSHOP

Several tables, shelves, and benches line the walls of this room, offering ample workspace for experiments. Large vats are placed throughout the room, each containing a liquid that looks like lake water. In the center of the room, two large, shallow boxes are filled with sand. A part of the floor in the corner is missing, leaving a hole directly over the lake. Six humans in alchemists' robes work mechanically at the tables, all wearing glazed looks.

A hag-like creature stands near the water. Her stringy hair looks like seaweed, and her wrinkled skin drips with foul-smelling water. Despite her terrible countenance, she seems somehow enchanting. A large troll standing between you and the water creature is less so.

"Continue working, my new friends," croaks the hag as she cocks an eye in your direction. "My pet and I will soon make more helpers for our cause, or dispose of those who refuse to join us." The troll gives a burbling chuckle, slashing its adamantite-colored claws in your direction.

Zaeriez, the **rusalka** (TOB), orders Feldush the **lake troll** (TOB) to attack, then attempts to dominate either a strong fighter or a wielder of arcane magic. Anyone who has imbibed a tainted potion within the last 24 hours has disadvantage on saving

throws against the rusalka's magic. Zaeriez jumps into the lake if threatened but can swim up through one of the vats, which pull water from the lake. The alchemists continue to work, even if attacked.

The sandboxes are useful for occasions when fire, or some other alchemical reaction, must be neutralized. Those areas are difficult terrain.

The rusalka wears a string of pearls worth 500 gp.

CONCLUSION

If the adventurers defeat Zaeriez and her pet troll, the surviving alchemists are released from her enchantment. They reward the characters with 100 gp and a valuable promise: the alchemists will make a very rare potion of any sort free of charge. Of course, if the adventurers are willing to help procure ingredients for a separate commission, the alchemists would be happy to compensate them for their trouble.



THE HIVE

By Mike Welham

The Hive is a spawn of Arbeyach lair, also featuring giant termites and termite swarms, for five 6th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

Several mounds in the Forsaken Hills are the dens of voracious termites that have added flesh to their diet to supplement dwindling wood supplies. At night, swarms of termites hunt and devour prey. They swarm over victims in wooden carts and wagons, and bring the dismantled wood back to their mounds.

Three spawn of Arbeyach, searching for a location to summon Ia'Affrat, Arbeyach's herald, discovered a mound filled with particularly nasty termites and used their vermin empathy to gain acceptance. They dug out a cavern beneath the mound, and now use the termites to protect themselves and gather food while they complete a difficult ritual involving dozens of sacrifices. The final sacrifice is prepared and the spawn are finishing their ritual when the party arrives.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Townfolk recognize the adventurers as brave outsiders and ask them to rescue their blacksmith, Devin Graysmith, who was abducted 24 hours ago by creatures that made buzzing sounds. If the characters know a nonplayer character in a town that borders a desert, hilly, or wasteland area, use that NPC instead to add urgency.

THE HIVE

A few folk know about the carnivorous termites, and can direct the PCs to the termite mounds. By making a DC 5 Wisdom (Survival) check to find tracks, they discover the correct mound to investigate. Skeletal animal remains, with scraps of flesh hanging from the bones, surround the mound. The termites do not consume bones, so they leave them outside their hive.

The mound has a chimney (area 5), which does not lead directly to the interior. The spawn of Arbeyach fortified the chimney's walls to prevent creatures from cutting through them. Accessing the caverns through the chimney requires major excavation and alerts the residents below. The narrow tunnel to area 1 sees little activity during the day, but observant characters can find it with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check.

All tunnels in the termite hive are difficult terrain for Medium creatures. The mound blocks all outside light, so characters must provide their own.

1. ENTRANCE TO THE HIVE

A cramped tunnel drops ten feet before opening into a slightly larger space. The packed dirt holds together well, despite smelling of rotting wood and chemicals. A small, intact skeleton rests five feet from the entrance.

A halfling named Vandin Yargill died here five days ago. The spawn stripped him of most of his gear. Only a pair of leather straps from his destroyed wooden shield, a canteen half-filled with water, and 7 gp remain. The spawn hope his body scares off rescuers.

2. FORMER FUNGAL GARDEN

The tunnel opens into a relatively spacious area. A few termites wave antennae and clack mandibles at the intrusion but do not move to attack. Brown sludge covers the floor, inches deep and reeking of rotting wood.

The spawn relocated the termites' fungal garden to area 4 and let the existing fungi decay. The spawn and termites suffer no effects from the rot, but humanoids must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw to avoid becoming poisoned from the smell for 1 hour.

A character who searches through the goop and makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check finds a dagger with a monogrammed hilt set with a tiny emerald (worth 20 gp), dropped by Vandin as he attempted to escape.

The termites in this area are treated as a **swarm of insects** (MM).

3. FIRST RESISTANCE

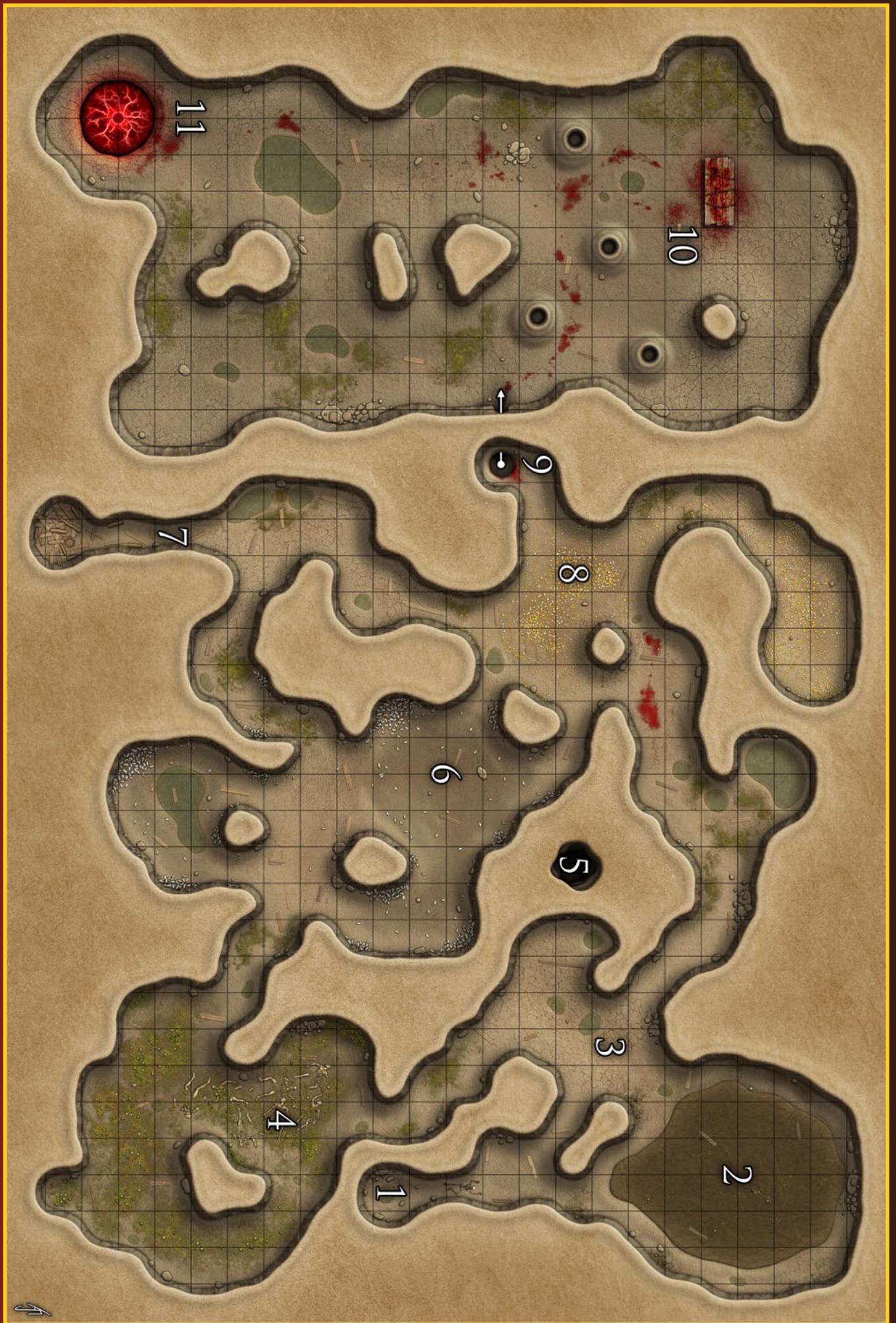
Hundreds of small termites, and two gigantic ones, crawl along the floor and block passage to the areas beyond.

The termites respond to commands from the spawn of Arbeyach, enough to avoid entry areas and wait for intruders. The aggressive termites act as a **swarm of insects** (MM), and their swarm damage harms wooden objects in the area. The two **giant termites** (TOB) pursue characters into the tunnels, and they move at normal speed through them. The giant termites chase PCs into area 2, but they let characters retreat through the tunnel to area 1.

4. FUNGAL GARDENS AND LARDER

Humanoid corpses lie rotting across the floor, and stalks of brown, gray, and black fungi sprout from the bodies. Dozens of termites tend the strange garden, some of them eating the fungi.

After moving the fungal gardens to this location, the



spawn of Arbeyach enhanced them to strengthen the giant termite warriors. A creature that eats any of the fungus must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the character becomes poisoned. On a success, the character gains a +2 bonus on attack and damage rolls for 1 minute. Fungus removed from this chamber remains useful—and poisonous—for 24 hours.

The termites attack as a **swarm of insects** (MM) when intruders enter. They pursue PCs who move toward area 6, but allow intruders to retreat toward area 3.

Although the fungi thrive in animal corpses, the spawn prefer using their sacrificial victims' bodies. A few of value are left on the bodies: a copper bracelet with a lapis lazuli charm (worth 15 gp), a gold locket (worth 20 gp) holding a strand of blond hair and a scrap of paper inscribed with



a stylized S, and an incense stick that acts as a mild insect repellent for 1 hour (termites take a –2 penalty on attack and damage rolls against anyone holding burning incense).

5. CHIMNEY

The mound's prominent chimney provides modest airflow. Made of sand shored up with saliva and dung, it is purely functional. The spawn of Arbeyach fortified it to bar access to the tunnels short of a major demolition.

6. ROYAL CHAMBER

A twelve-foot-long, eight-foot-wide termite sits in the middle of this area. Currently in the process of extruding a batch of eggs, the creature hisses at your intrusion. Two smaller, but still large, termites carrying eggs stop their task to deal with unwelcome guests.

The mound's central chamber houses the **giant termite queen** (TOB), which the spawn of Arbeyach saw no reason to move. The queen defends her nest, and two **giant termites** (TOB) scuttle around the characters to protect the queen. Termites from adjoining areas move to this chamber after a 2-round delay if the queen is in distress.

The three dozen termite eggs found in the chamber weigh 1 pound each, are worth 10 gp apiece to the right buyer.

7. WOOD STORAGE

A long, tight tunnel filled with termites ends at a small alcove containing wooden objects.

Dozens of termites fill this area, but they do not form a threatening swarm. The westernmost chamber holds partially eaten wooden objects, including Vandin's +1 shield, but the shield must be repaired before it can be used. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check realizes that the wood stores are inadequate for a termite colony of this size.

8. FINAL REDOUBT/ TREASURE CHAMBER

A giant termite guards the southwestern exit, while another blocks the southern exit. A four-armed, bipedal insect creature guards the southeastern exit. Pale termites cover the walls.

The spawn set guards at several of the entrances to this chamber to prevent rescuers from reaching the sacrificial chamber (area 10). One **spawn of Abreyach** (TOB) is stationed in this area and mentally alerts the other two spawn in area 10 when the party arrives.

The two **giant termites** (TOB) might not be present if the party attacked the queen in area 6. If the characters battled the queen and the giant termites joined in, then only the spawn and two **swarms of insects** (MM) remain on guard here.

The spawn littered the southernmost dead-end tunnel with treasure to distract intruders and perhaps draw them away from the queen. If the party enters the dead-end tunnel to investigate the shiny wealth, they trigger a cave-in that may trap them in the tunnel until they can dig themselves

out. When the tunnel collapses, characters must make a DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) saving throw. Failure means a character is trapped in the dead end and takes 1d12 bludgeoning damage from falling stones. Those who succeed take no damage and remain in the main chamber.

The small trove contains 320 cp, 185 sp, 210 gp, a pale glowing citrine (worth 350 gp) that magically radiates light equal to a candle, a *potion of cure wounds*, and a *wand of plant destruction*.

WAND OF PLANT DESTRUCTION

Wand, rare (requires attunement)

This wand of petrified wood has 7 charges. While holding it, you can use an action to expend 1, 2, or 3 of its charges to deal 2d8 necrotic damage per charge to a plant or a plant creature within 30 feet. A successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw halves the damage.

The wand regains 1d6+1 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the wand's last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the wand shatters and is destroyed.

9. TO THE CELLAR

The short tunnel ends abruptly, leading to a hole with a sizable drop. Buzzing sounds come from beyond the hole.

The 5-foot-diameter hole drops 20 feet down, and the hole itself is a trap. (The spawn can avoid it, and the termites are too light to activate it.) If a Medium creature climbs down the hole, the sand collapses and buries the creature, threatening to suffocate it. Clearing out the loose sand requires 5 rounds of digging.

Characters can avoid this hazard with a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or by jumping down the hole and taking 7 (2d6) falling damage instead. A creature buried by the sand must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or begin suffocating after a number of rounds equal to its Constitution modifier (minimum 1).

10. SACRIFICIAL ALTAR

Smaller mounds dot the cavern, blocking the way to a table with a human body on it. An insect creature holds a curved bone blade, dripping with blood, over the body. Another insect readies to attack.

"You're too late to s-s-s-ave your friend," the creature with the knife buzzes gleefully.

If the characters reach this chamber without taking more than one short rest, the two **spawn of Arbeyach** (TOB) here are distracted, concentrating on their nearly completed ritual, and can be surprised. That gives the characters a round to act before the following events begin to occur.

Characters have five rounds to save the wounded victim, after which time the NPC dies and the portal (area 11) is irrevocably opened. If the characters heal the victim, this

halts the sequence of events (any existing effects persist). The spawn seek to kill the sacrifice in preference to attacking the PCs. If the characters end the ritual by saving the victim and killing the spawn, the portal closes and all existing effects end after 1 hour.

ROUND 1: Both spawn move to attack, while blood drains from the victim into the ground. The victim is dying and making death saving throws. The sacrifice's magic becomes visible as motes of red drifting up from the blood.

ROUND 2: The buzzing from area 11 intensifies and drowns out the sound of spoken spellcasting, making such activity difficult (treat as a counterspell attempt and expend the spell slot on a failure).

ROUND 3: Clouds of gnats reduce visibility (as a *fog cloud* spell).

ROUND 4–5: A **swarm of insects** (MM) erupts from the portal (round 4) and moves to attack the party (round 5).

ROUND 5: The sacrificial victim dies.

ROUND 6: Ia'Affrat emerges from the portal and attacks the PCs.

11. IA'AFRAT'S PORTAL

This corner of the chamber features an empty mound with a chimney that extends into darkness. A faint buzzing sound emanates from the bottomless mound.

If the spawn of Arbeyach are successful in completing their ritual, as per the description in area 10, the demonic herald **Ia'Affrat** (TOB) emerges from the portal at the chimney's mouth. If he defeats the characters, he devours them, absorbs the termites into his being, and inflicts exquisite tortures on the nearby townsfolk as his insect minions destroy the town. The party might be better off fleeing rather than confronting Ia'Affrat; victory is far from certain.

If the party thwarts the spawn's efforts, the portal goes dormant, once more awaiting the completion of the summoning ritual. Permanently destroying the portal requires considerable arcane might and might be the subject of further adventures.

CONCLUSION

Assuming the PCs stop the ritual, they prevent Ia'Affrat's emergence and the subsequent wave of destruction. If they rescue the victim, they receive a reward in gold and magic items (of the DM's choice) equivalent to 1,000 gp. The townsfolk proclaim the characters honorary citizens, and they receive free food and lodging whenever they're in town.

TEMPLE OF THE DEEP ONES

By Brian Engard

Temple of the Deep Ones is the lair of a group of deep ones and their god, suitable for four or five 7th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

Ship captains report that a mysterious island has surfaced in the middle of a heavily trafficked trade route. Worse, ships that venture too close to the island are assaulted by a terrible creature and its servants. The island is disrupting trade throughout this part of the world, and several ships have already been lost.

Unbeknownst to those that know of the place, the island rises at the will of Shar-Ngolyeth, a long-lost deity also known as That Which Lurks Beneath the Waves. The island is populated by a cult of deep ones and the beasts they have subjugated in the name of their dark god. The creature responsible for sinking ships is an aspect of Shar-Ngolyeth, a kraken. It is *not* meant for combat encounters; it's largely a plot device in this adventure.

ADVENTURE HOOK

If the PCs visited the *Pirate's Cove* lair (presented earlier in this book), they know why the island has risen: Captain Jarzon's ritual called it up, and summoned an aspect of Shar-Ngolyeth. The deep ones now seek to feed their god, and thus set it free.

If this is not sufficient motivation for the PCs to get involved, or if they didn't visit the *Pirate's Cove* lair, then a man named Ricard Baron comes to them, representing merchants who want the island investigated and dealt with so that they can continue plying their trades upon the seas. They provide passage to the island, in the form of a small boat, and significant pay. The party is promised 1,000 gp, half up front and half upon completion of the task.

1. ROCKY SHOALS

The closer you come to the island, the thicker the fog that hangs in the air, and the more violently the sea churns.

The PCs start off in a rowboat, let off by a ship that brought them near the island but dared not approach closer. Just as that ship sails out of sight, the characters come under attack.

The group that sets upon the PCs' boat consists of four **deep ones** (TOB) and a **coral drake** (TOB) that they have tamed. The drake circles the rowboat, while the deep ones try to drag characters out of the boat and into the water. When someone falls in the water, the drake attacks that character.

After these threats are dealt with, read:

You row with all your might toward the island, dodging jutting rocks while peering through the thick mist. Eventually, you feel your boat run aground.

You can decide whether the PCs come ashore in the jungle (area 2) or the swamp (area 3).





2. JUNGLE

The mist is hot on your face. As you peer into it, you see great towering trees before you, just a few yards from where you stand. You'll have to go through heavy vegetation to get anywhere; from what you can tell, the jungle stretches for miles in either direction. For all you know, it makes up the entire island.

Navigating the jungle is difficult. After every hour the PCs spend walking through the jungle, one of them must make a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check. On a success, the PCs remain on track; three successes gets them through the jungle and within sight of the outer temple (area 4). On a failure, the characters get a little lost. They do not make progress in getting through the jungle, and they have one of the following random encounters (choose or roll 1d6):

1. Six **deep ones** and a **deep one priest** (TOB).
2. A **coral drake** (TOB) and a **deep one priest** (TOB).
3. Four **bone crabs** (TOB).
4. Two **chuuls** (MM).
5. A **shambling mound** (MM).
6. A pool containing a **water weird** (MM).

3. SWAMP

Mist hangs heavy in the air, which is laden with the stench of decay. Before you stretches a vast swamp—dark, wet, and full of danger. It stretches for miles in either direction, and might make up the entire island for all you know.

Navigating the swamp is as difficult as navigating the jungle, but presents different dangers. After every hour the PCs spend navigating the swamp, one of them must make a DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check to stay on course. Three successful checks get the PCs through the swamp, and PCs trained in Nature can assist the lead navigator. When the navigator fails a check, the party does not make progress toward the temple, and has one of the following random encounters (choose or roll 1d6):

1. Six **deep ones** and a **deep one priest** (TOB).
2. A **coral drake** (TOB) and a **deep one priest** (TOB).
3. Two **basilisks** (MM).
4. A coven of three **green hags** (MM). They offer the PCs a

THE HAGS' BARGAIN

The bargain that the hags offer the PCs doesn't have an immediate negative consequence. If all the PCs accept, the hags show them the way to the temple, eliminating the need for any further Nature checks to navigate.

If the PCs accept the bargain, giving the hags their blood and hair should come back to haunt them. Don't do anything with this story nugget immediately; instead, use the hags' leverage as fodder for a future adventure.

bargain: safe passage through the swamp in exchange for a drop of blood and a lock of hair from each of them. See The Hags' Bargain sidebar for more information.

5. A **Zanskaren viper** (TOB) and two **swamp adders** (TOB).
6. An **otyugh** (MM) in a pile of corpses.

4. OUTER TEMPLE

A structure rises up in front of you, a twisted thing made of coral, bone, and some unwholesome substance that you can't identify but that appears to be alive. Deep ones patrol the outside of the structure, guarding against interlopers and looking for potential sacrifices.

The outer temple is guarded by six **deep ones** (TOB), a **deep one priest** (TOB), and the priest's trained **otyugh** (MM). They attack any intruders they find, trying to capture rather than kill. If the priest is killed, the otyugh goes berserk, attacking anyone in the area, including deep ones, and devouring anything it kills.

5. UPPER EDIFICE

This large chamber, lit by dimly glowing fungus on the walls, is full of deep ones in robes, one of them gesticulating wildly as others throw an unfortunate dwarf down a gaping hole in the center of the room. The dwarf screams as he descends; then the sound stops abruptly.

The upper edifice is shrouded in dim light from the fungus. Inside are four **deep ones** (TOB), a **deep one priest** (TOB), and a **deep one archimandrite** (TOB) next to the maw. They all attack the PCs when they enter, trying to subdue them and throw them down the maw.

6. THE MAW

A great, toothy mouth, like that of a lamprey, is carved out of the coral of the temple. It glistens, and a palpable evil presence emanates from it. Whatever power motivates this island, it is surely located at the bottom of the maw.

BEING TAKEN CAPTIVE

If the PCs are taken captive at the outer temple, they'll be fed to the maw. Give the players descriptions of the upper edifice (area 5) and the entrance to the maw (area 6), then have the deep ones toss the characters in the maw; they take falling damage as described in area 6. Then skip to the Lair of Shar-Ngolyeth (area 7) and allow the PCs to slip their bonds.

If a PC comes up with a clever escape plan before they're tossed in the maw, run with it! For reference, slipping free from the ropes requires a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. Characters will have to find improvised weapons; rocks are plentiful. Their own weapons are still at the top of the pit.

Climbing down into the maw requires a character to make three DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) checks. If the party has brought climbing gear, they can use it and gain advantage on the checks. Falling down the full length of the maw, an 80-foot-deep hole, causes a character to take 8d6 points of falling damage.

As the PCs descend, they can feel the evil presence growing more and more aware of their presence. If they're climbing down the walls, the maw itself starts to lash out at them. If a character fails a check while climbing, a tentacle springs from the wall, trying to dislodge the intruder. A character attacked by a tentacle must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity or Strength saving throw to avoid falling the rest of the way down.

7. THE LAIR OF SHAR-NGOLYETH

This rough cavern is illuminated by the same glowing fungus that lit the chamber above. An unclean red light comes from a small altar next to one wall; upon that altar is a tiny statue made of the same substance as the rest of the temple, a writhing mass of tentacles and eyes.

As you watch, a pirate captain's shape materializes out of thin air and says, "Have you come to offer sacrifice to That Which Lurks Beneath the Waves?"

If the party played through Pirate's Cove, they recognize the spectral form of Captain Jarzon, the pirate cultist whose actions caused this island to rise from the sea. Captain Jarzon is a **specter** (MM) who speaks for Shar-Ngolyeth. He will say little and answer few questions; the one piece of information that he'll give the PCs is that Shar-Ngolyeth desires to bring the oceans forth to consume the land. If the PCs disagree with this course of action (and why wouldn't they?), then both Jarzon and Shar-Ngolyeth attack.

Shar-Ngolyeth does not exist entirely within this reality, and instead it animates the **idolic deity** (TOB) on the altar. Jarzon fights until he is destroyed, and Shar-Ngolyeth fights until the idol is destroyed. If the idol is destroyed first, Jarzon unravels into wisps of smoke.

CONCLUSION

If the PCs destroy Shar-Ngolyeth's idol, the being's link to this world is severed. The kraken spawn that acts as Shar-Ngolyeth's aspect immediately withers and dies and the mist dissipates, but the island remains. It's up to the PCs to find a way out of the maw and off the island but, once they do, the trade consortium (if the PCs were hired by them) makes good on its deal and pays them the other 500 gp promised.

And the world is safe from the designs of Shar-Ngolyeth. For now.



MONUMENT OF THE THUNDERER

By James J. Haeck

Monument of the Thunderer is a desert half-dragon lair intended to challenge a party of four 7th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

Near the city-state of Makuria, on a small island in the middle of the Green Nuria River, an immense stone sculpture of a dragon watches over the mighty Red Cliffs and the waterfall that pours off them. The monument was built by ancient worshipers of the Mharoti conqueror known as Zulatil the Thunderer, but now serves as a base of operations for a band of sinister thugs who call themselves the Red Cliff Raiders.

RED CLIFF RAIDERS. One year ago, a band of Nurian mercenaries were captured by a power-hungry Mharoti half-blue dragon mage named Zahiil and swore fealty to the creature in exchange for their lives. The half-dragon agreed to spare them on one condition: that they bring him a titan's divine spark, by any means necessary. Under Zahiil's command, the ex-mercenaries grew rich and infamous by raiding the caravans of wealthy merchants and adventurers en route to Nuria, ostensibly searching for Zahiil's divine spark. They ambush their targets on wyvernback, swooping down upon them from the top of the towering Red Cliffs.

The Raiders have just scored an incredible victory. While scouring the desert near Siwal, their wyvern riders attacked a group of adventurers who were transporting a chest, glowing with internal light, across the wastes. The thieves plundered the treasure and fled. On their return, Zahiil identified the glowing orb within as the divine spark he had been searching for, and attempted to consume its power. The mage's first attempt at performing the ritual failed disastrously, and Zahiil now secretly suffers from a terrible curse brought about by his failure. He still hopes to successfully absorb the spark and eliminate the Raiders before they learn of his weakness, but his new meditations are interrupted by the PCs' arrival.

1. THE GREEN NURIA

One of the mighty River Nuria's tributaries, the Green Nuria is rapid and unforgiving to those caught in its waters. Any creature that enters a space completely filled with water for the first time on its turn or starts its turn in one must make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check or be swept 15 feet toward the edge of the waterfall (see area 2). Succeeding on this check allows the creature to swim against the current, treating the river as difficult terrain.

2. WATERFALL

The Green Nuria tumbles over the Red Cliffs into a verdant river valley 50 feet below. Any creature that falls over the waterfall can make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw to grab vines at the edge of the cliff and avoid falling. On a success, the creature can hang onto the cliff and takes no falling damage, unless it fell from a greater height (see area 7). On a failure, the creature falls, but is caught 20 feet from the ground by the thick vines growing in the water and takes falling damage equal to the distance it fell. If the save fails by 5 or more, the creature falls through the vines to the bottom of the valley.

Any creature that begins its turn in the vines takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage from falling water and must succeed on a DC 8 Strength saving throw or lose its grip and fall through.

3. MONUMENT APPROACH

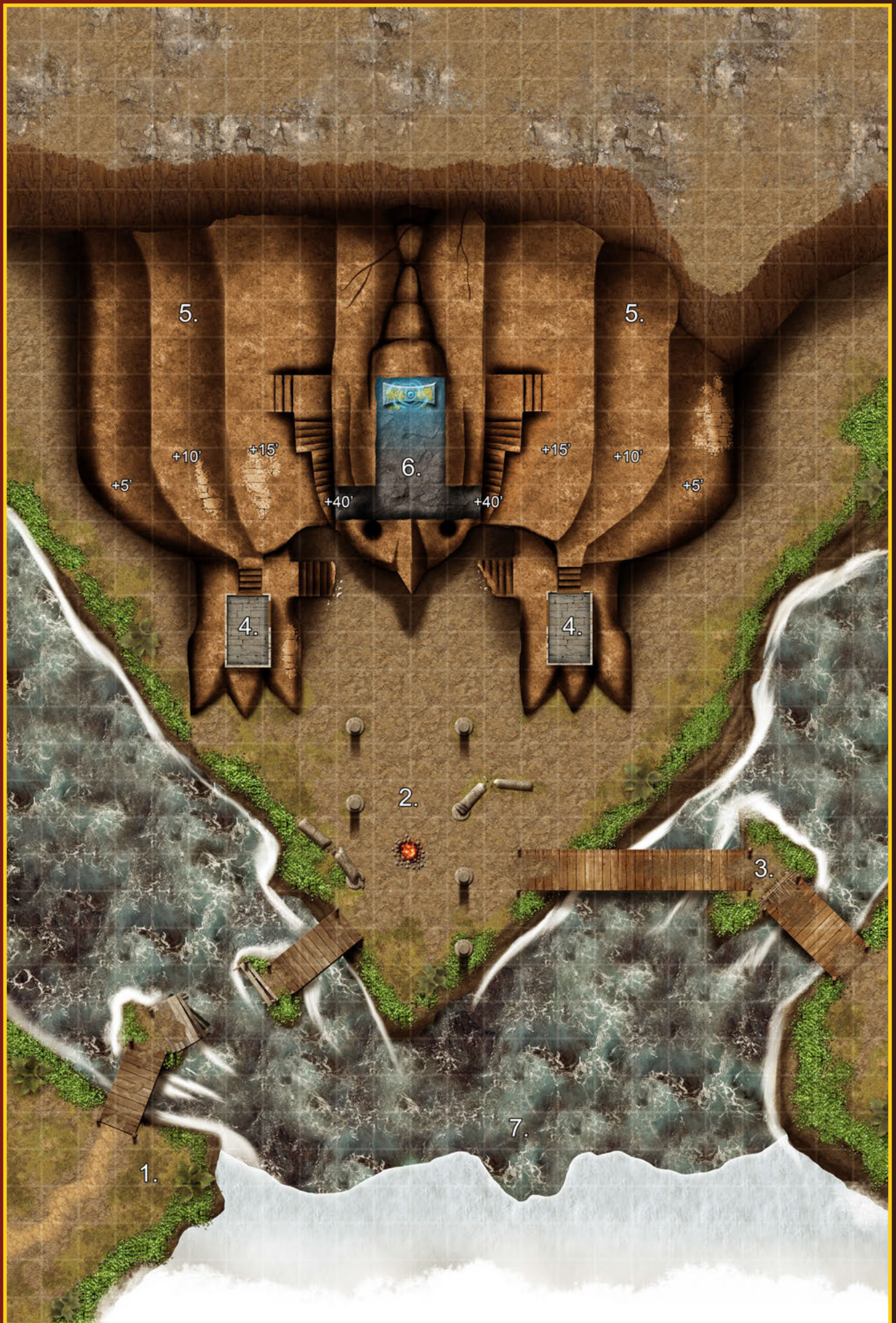
Four **thugs** (MM), two **bandits** (MM), and a **berserker** (MM) are on guard duty here, and have circled around a campfire and taken a break to eat. Their pet **death dog** (MM), a mangy beast named Twofy, snaps up the scraps they throw him. The thugs and the bandits attempt to frighten intruders away, then attack with crossbows and alert the knights in area 7. The berserker, spoiling for a fight, charges the characters as soon as they approach the Raiders' side of the river. The thugs and the bandits support him with missile fire (see "Pillars"). The Raiders in this area each carry 1d6 gp.

PILLARS. The thugs and the bandits shoot from behind the standing pillars, gaining half cover against attacks from the other side. A prone character gains three-quarters cover when behind a fallen pillar.

4. BARRICADE

When the Red Cliff Raiders were simple mercenaries, a trollkin **veteran** (MM) named Garlin was their leader. Now Zahiil's reluctant servant, she is dozing at her post, but awakens as soon as a wyvern snatches a character (see area 7). She wields a heavy crossbow and keeps watch over the eastern road from behind a barricade made of sharpened sticks and spears. A character who falls on the barricade or is forced into its space must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d6 piercing damage.

BETRAYAL. Garlin holds little love for Zahiil and considers him an arrogant, condescending lout. She plans to murder him and make off with the gold he has been hoarding, and sees the chaos caused by the PCs' arrival as the perfect opportunity to strike. She does not attack unless provoked,



but instead asks for the characters' help in defeating Zahiil, offering the party half of the gold hidden in his lair.

5. WEST CLAW GUARD POST

Ramshackle wooden walls have been erected around the right claw of the dragon statue to create a makeshift shelter for sentries. This station is abandoned, and the thugs assigned to it are typically found lounging around the campfire (area 3). The room is filled with barrels of beer and crates of rations—dried nuts, preserved crocodile, and stale honey cakes. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a hidden stash of 35 gp and 23 sp in one of these barrels.

STAIRS. The “dewclaws” of the statue’s front legs are actually stairs that lead here from area 3, and the “thumb” talons of the monument’s wings are stairs that lead to area 7.

6. EAST CLAW PRISON

A makeshift wooden prison, similar to the guard post on the western claw, has been built here. Three **guards** (*MM*) watch over the two bound prisoners inside. The guards become aware of fighting in area 3 as soon as it begins, but want to avoid conflict. If the PCs don't attack their post and ascend the monument, the guards gather up their prisoners and flee past the barricade in area 4, hoping to ransom them in Siwal. The guards have divided up their prisoners' possessions, and each carries an art object worth 50 gp.

The two prisoners are locked inside a cell that requires a DC 15 Dexterity check to unlock. They are wealthy merchants (**commoners**) who, if rescued, might hire the PCs to return them to their home cities.

STAIRS. The “dewclaws” of the statue’s front legs are actually stairs that lead here from area 3.

7. STONE WINGS

Three **knights** (*MM*), equipped with lances instead of greatswords, sit by a cooking fire atop one of the dragon monument's colossal wings, eating and tending to their **wyvern** (*MM*) mounts. These knights were not part of the original Red Cliff Raiders and are unflinchingly loyal to Zahiil. The other Raiders fear this sinister trio, but respect their power. The knights take meals apart from their inferiors, eating fresh food and drinking fine wine.

Zahiil's knights have trained their mounts to snatch people and objects from the ground, both to drop enemies from the sky and to steal cargo from caravans and adventurers. While mounted, a knight can command its wyvern to snatch a creature using the Snatch action (see below).

When alerted by the Raiders in area 3, the wyvern riders spend their first turn picking up weapons, setting down food, and putting on helmets. On their next turn, the knights mount their wyverns and immediately fly toward the PCs. When in range, one knight uses its action to command its mount to snatch a character in its claws and hurl that individual over the waterfall. The other wyvern riders harry the characters on the ground. The knights attempt to throw only one character over the waterfall at a time.



HB3

The first wyvern to successfully grapple a creature lets out a triumphant shriek, waking the trollkin Garlin in area 4.

If a wyvern's rider is killed or unseated, a PC who mounts the wyvern can make a DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check as an action to command the wyvern to fly in a specific direction; if the check fails, the wyvern acts independently until the rider's next turn. After two successes, the wyvern obeys the rider's commands unerringly for the next hour, or until it takes damage or the rider dismounts.

Snatch. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage. The target must make a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check contested by the wyvern's Strength (Athletics) check or be grappled in the wyvern's claws. The target's check automatically succeeds if it is Large or larger.

PLATFORMS. The stone wings of the dragon monument are platforms that provide access to the monument's head. Each "bone" in the stone wing increases in elevation, with the lowest tier 5 feet above the ground, the middle tier 10 feet above, and the top tier 15 feet above. A creature can make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check as an action to climb to the next tier.

8. ZAHIIIL'S LAIR

Staircases representing the monument's ear frills lead to its hollow eyes. Each eyehole is 5 feet tall and opens into the dragon's head.

Using *transmute rock*, Zahiil the **half-blue dragon mage** (MM) created a rectangular room inside the dragon's head. In the back of the room is a stone pedestal that holds a shining orb of light—the divine spark. Piled around this pedestal is a heap of gold and jewels: 300 cp, 216 sp, 527 gp, and ten tiny sapphires each worth 30 gp. Zahiil tried and failed to integrate the divine spark into his body, and is suffering from a permanent curse because of his failure: at the start of each of his turns, he must make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or waste his action that turn doing nothing. Zahiil is still able to move, use a bonus action, and take a reaction as normal on a turn when he loses his action.

Use the mage statistics for Zahiil but add resistance to lightning damage and the breath weapon of a blue dragon wyrmling. These changes increase the mage's challenge rating to 7 and increase its XP value to 2,900.

TACTICS. Zahiil realizes on the third round that his lair is under attack. He ceases his meditations and emerges from the dragon's head to cast a spell, then retreats inside until his next turn. If he is about to be confronted in his lair, Zahiil seizes the divine spark and stows it in a satchel at his side. He uses his strongest spells to keep attackers at bay until he can escape the monument using the Dash or Disengage action. If escape becomes impossible or he is reduced to half of his maximum hit points, Zahiil falls to his knees and pleads for mercy, hoping to escape captivity later.

LAST RESORT. The half-dragon has one final avenue of escape: to let the divine spark consume *him*. When Zahiil is reduced to 0 hit points while holding the divine spark, he can use a reaction to release the titan's primordial power and transform himself into a **half-blue dragon archmage**, ending the curse. In this state, Zahiil cannot cast spells of 7th level or higher, but can still cast lower-level spells using higher-level spell slots.

Zahiil's conscious mind is quickly consumed by the power of the spark. At the end of each of his turns, Zahiil must make a Constitution saving throw. The DC begins at 5, and increases by 5 for each turn he spends in this state. On a failure, Zahiil is completely overwhelmed by the spark's power, and both he and the spark disintegrate completely. The archmage's Magic Resistance feature does not grant him advantage on this saving throw.

CONCLUSION

The merchants of Siwal and Makuria are grateful to anyone who removes the threat of the Red Cliff Raiders, though not grateful enough to pay an additional reward. A song about the events is briefly popular in Nurian taverns. More lastingly, priest-theurges of Thoth-Hermes investigate the monument and establish a shrine to their god, in his guise as a friend to travelers.

HOUSE OF REEDS AND WHISPERS

By Jon Sawatsky

House of Reeds and Whispers is the lair of a pair of red hags, suitable for four characters of 8th level.

BACKGROUND

Two red hag sisters recently exsanguinated an eccentric collector named Nahl Fry and took up residence in his swamp-side home. Liori and Ijith were seeking an artifact from the ancient city of Talitheos, the sunken stronghold of the red hags. They found the artifact, a pair of knitting needles made from blood-infused coral, in Nahl Fry's collection.

The sisters yearn to understand how the artifact works, and so they are testing its dark powers against a nearby hamlet. They have knitted rapidly growing crimson reeds that funnel the blood of fauna and farm animals back to the house. The hamlet's leader, Galnas, hires the PCs to investigate. The party must press through the reeds, defeat the sisters' guardians, face the hags, and end the reedy infestation.

GALNAS'S PLEA

The speaker for the hamlet of Farris is a sturdy, middle-aged woman named Galnas. She wears her dark hair in a topknot, and her commoner's clothing is worn but clean. She speaks directly, though her voice shakes slightly. She explains the situation:

- The fast-growing reeds resemble reeds from the nearby swamp.
- The reeds have reached the edge of the hamlet.
- Farm animals have gone missing.
- A tracker followed the growth back to the home of an eccentric collector named Nahl Fry.
- Whispers float through the reeds, but the words are indecipherable.
- The hamlet has scraped together 50 gp as a reward.

INSPECTING THE REEDS

If the PCs investigate the reeds, they can discover the following important details:

- The reeds are magical and regenerate within an hour if pruned.
- The reeds are grasping and make movement through them difficult (treat as a *grasping vine* spell).
- A character who makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check can hear some whispers among the reeds. They belong to two distinct female voices; a speaker of the northern tongue recognizes some words (stitch, weave, blood) but the context is unclear.

1. YARD AND PORCH

The reedy trail ends in the yard of a small home. A shed leans precariously just west of the house. The reeds grow tall here, coalescing into a ropy mass at the doorway to the house. The walls, roof, and porch are lightly covered with the twisting stalks. Swamp gas hangs heavy in the air. A particularly thick reed sways ominously atop the crumbling chimney.

The reeds are 4 feet tall throughout this area, and the yard is difficult terrain. Dexterity (Stealth) checks made by characters in the tall reeds receive advantage.

It is possible to cut a path through the grass. One 5-foot square of reeds can be removed per minute. A keen eye (Perception DC 14) on the house reveals darting movement and then stillness. Eight **eel hounds** (TOB) "swim" through the hags' conjured vegetation. They plot to ambush the party as they approach the house.

THE SHED

The dark, windowless shed contains a few broken pieces of furniture and several splintered crates. The ripe smell of rotting fish is strong here. A wet, flapping sound comes from the back of the shed.

The eel hounds use the shed to hide their young. Ten eel hound pups (AC 10, hp 4) lie helpless awaiting their next meal. Slaying a pup or removing one from the shed results in a yipping burble that immediately triggers the eel hound ambush. If a pup calls out, all eel hounds receive advantage on their first attack against the party.

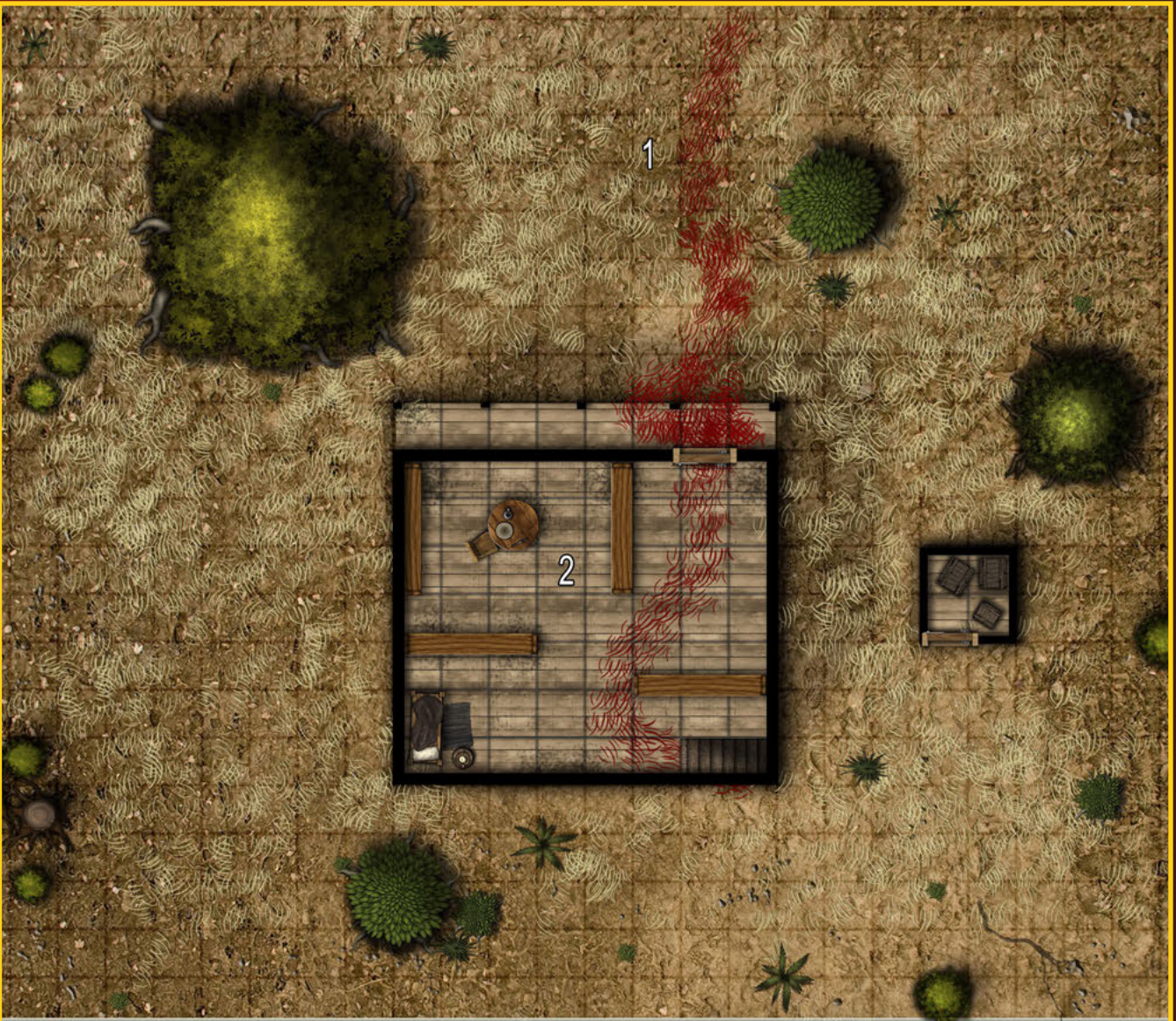
AMBUSH

Moving through the reeds as though in water, blue-scaled hounds squirm to flank and snap with slavering jaws. Their cries are high-pitched and otherworldly.

The eel hounds attempt to surprise the party and receive advantage on their Stealth checks. The hounds use their swim speed in the reeds. Four hounds attack immediately, while the remaining four hang back and use their *slick spittle* ability to surround the PCs with a partial ring of foul excretions.

THE CHIMNEY STALK

When a PC is within 20 feet of the porch, the chimney stalk (AC 14, HP 10) shoots up 60 feet into the air, then arches down menacingly and reveals a blood-red eye hidden in its center. The eye makes a sweeping pass within reach of the PCs, observes them as it goes, and then retreats into the chimney.



There is a wet, popping sound as the reed in the chimney explodes upward into the air. It bends to face you and reveals an unblinking crimson eye; after a moment, it swings downward in a sweeping arc.

A DC 12 Sleight of Hand or Acrobatics check allows a character to grab the spying reed and prevent its retreat. If the stalk is grabbed in this manner, it can be killed with no attack roll. Grabbing the reed and severing its end provides the characters involved with Inspiration. Afterward, the eye quickly shrivels into dust.

2. MAIN FLOOR

The main floor of the house consists of one large room divided into smaller spaces by tall shelves. The reeds are an undulating mass that trails off into the cellar by way of makeshift stairs toward the back of the house. The whispers are louder here; they occasionally come across as a rhythmic chant.

The party is free to explore the main floor (the hags are in no rush to confront them). The desiccated remains of Nahl Fry sit at the top of the cellar stairs. His body is wrapped into the reed rope that descends into the darkness. His open mouth is filled with pulsing stalks.

WHISPERS

The whispers are the product of the hags' strange conversation. They communicate to conjure up a clear vision of sunken Talitheos. Wrapped inside the whispers are images of the city in its glory. The scene is all imaginary, since neither hag has actually seen the legendary place. Standing this close to the sibilant communication is dangerous for the characters. Each PC must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become entranced, the character's mind lost in the imagined streets of Talitheos. Read the following to characters who fail the save:

Sea air fills your lungs. A city full of beautiful, crimson-skinned humanoids is set before you. The coral-tiled buildings gleam in the sun; a seabird calls from a rooftop perch. The citizens of this place look at you curiously as they pass. You sense you are in a dream that is not your own. A feeling of dread rises as you realize you are lost in this place. The only escape is to find the main gates.

Each character who becomes entranced must make an ability check of the character's choice (DC 12) and briefly explain how the ability check helps the character escape (for instance, "I use my charm to convince a street vendor to direct me to the front gate"). After 1 minute, all characters return to their senses; those who fail this ability check take 7 psychic damage and are frightened for 15 minutes.

THE COLLECTOR'S SHELVES. Nahl's collection of curiosities is largely untouched by the sisters. Strangely shaped stones, pipes carved from bone, and enigmatic

devices line the shelves in an orderly fashion. A few items of note include an ivory comb (worth 50 gp), an amber-encased scarab (worth 25 gp), and a *pearl of power*. A hidden compartment (Perception DC 12) at the back of one shelf slides open to reveal an ornate wood box containing three exquisitely cut sapphires (worth 300 gp each). The gems fit together in the anatomical shape of a heart.

3. CELLAR

The stairs lead down to a large chamber. Wooden planks at random intervals shore up its unfinished walls. A recent expansion to the cellar is evident. The reeds splay out in all directions from the bottom of the stairs; woven into them are the dried-up remains of numerous animals. They merge into two fibrous masses along opposite walls before continuing on to form a long curtain hanging at the back of the cellar.



The reeds here do not hamper movement, but they do hide the reedlings in the room (see below). Two mounds of dirt from the hags' recent excavation provide half cover to adjacent combatants. The curtain of reeds provides three-quarters cover to the hags.

COMBAT WITH LIORI AND IJITH

Read the following once the PCs move 10 feet into the room. As this scene unfolds, the two **red hags** (TOB) behind the curtain enter the fray.

Suddenly, a candle is lit behind the living veil, revealing the silhouetted figures of two women. The whispering stops. "Eh, me sister, enough blood to see the spires of Alghos," says a smooth female voice. "Yea, there is—blood for us both," says another. A face, round and childlike, emerges from the reeds nearby. Its blank expression turns vicious as it hisses through sharp teeth.

Three reedlings, each one treated as a **child of the briar** (TOB), rise randomly within 10 feet of the PCs and attack in the first round. Two reedlings use *entangle* while the third attempts a *thorny grapple* on a nearby target. Liori steps out from behind the curtain and enters combat in round two. She employs her *siphoning aura*, then casts *barkskin* and *freedom of movement* before moving into melee. Ijith stays behind the curtain and uses the needles to continue stitching new reedlings. Ijith creates a new reedling at the start of round three and again at round five. New reedlings appear at the curtain and can take actions in the round they are created. On round six, or if pressed into combat early, Ijith abandons her needlework and enters the fight in the same manner as her sister.

FIBROUS MASSES. Used to store the animal blood funneled here by the reeds, these masses provide magical boons to the red hags. As long as one of the masses is intact, a hag can spend an action to heal 10 hit points. Provide this information to the players when a hag uses this ability. The masses can be destroyed (AC 11, hp 15). If both masses are destroyed, the hags take 15 damage each and both are stunned for 1 round.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN. The hags' living quarters behind the reed curtain fill the back of the cellar. The source of all the reeds is hung on the wall here: a complicated knot combining river reeds with hair from the hags in an intricate pattern. The knot can be destroyed with little effort. Doing so causes all the reeds leading from the cellar to Farris to wilt

and die within minutes. If a close examination of the knot is made (DC 15 Investigation) prior to its destruction, the examining character is attuned to the knitting needles.

TALITHEOSIAN KNITTING NEEDLES

Wondrous item, artifact (requires attunement)

Carved from pearlescent stone, these knitting needles resemble two long, spindly fingers. Their tips are sharp.

These crimson red knitting needles are made from blood-infused coral. They can be used to cast *grasping vine* in a particular location. If the effect is strengthened by the addition of blood to the casting as a material component, the vine lasts for 1 week per level of the user, and the vines regenerate within 1 hour if cut. All such vines in an area are linked to a single knotted reed; if that knot is cut, all the reeds created by the needles wither in a few minutes. A caster using the needles can choose to stitch together a reedling (treat as a NE child of the briar, TOB), which serves the caster willingly. In addition to the listed effects, targets affected by the needles' ability take 5 piercing damage. Once the needles have been used, they cannot be used again until midnight.

CONCLUSION

The PCs are rewarded by the residents of Farris as previously detailed. Storylines that could stem from this adventure include:

- Possessing an artifact coveted by the red hags can be a dangerous thing to do.
- The original owner of the needles, Baba Yaga, might learn that they have been found, and come to politely ask for their return. Failure to return them leaves her considerably less polite.
- A map, annotated by the late Nahl Fry and purporting to show the location of Lost Talitheos, is found under the curios on the collector's shelf. It describes where he stashed other, more valuable items that would require a new expedition and a barge to move safely.
- The whispering needles begin to demand attention, and the demands are increasingly dark and malign. They compel the user to knit the hair of children into curious ropes that bind goodly spirits and summon storms, and then they knit the wool of an ychen bannog (TOB) into a hair shirt that turns the wearer into an ogre. In time, the needles turn their owner into a blood hag.

TOMB OF THE SCORPION PRINCE

By Shawn Merwin

Tomb of the Scorpion Prince is a venomous mummy lair suitable for four or five 8th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

The infamous Scorpion Prince ruled his domain centuries ago, but the lands are still desolate, a testament to his poisonous influence. His terrified subjects rejoiced in his death but also feared he would return if not interred properly. To ensure the prince's happiness in the afterlife and his tomb's security, his people erected a great monument and created trap-filled chambers to house and protect his body and his wealth.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The monument that rests atop the Tomb of the Scorpion Prince, buried for centuries, was recently unearthed by an earthquake. Two expeditions have entered the tomb seeking treasure, artifacts, and historical knowledge—but neither has emerged. False rumors claim that a cult seeks the rebirth of the Scorpion Prince. This so-called Scorpion Cult has survived the centuries to pursue its lone directive, which is the opposite of what the rumors say: oppose any infiltration of the tomb to ensure that the Scorpion Prince never returns. Cult members are willing to die to keep the terrible Scorpion Prince undisturbed.

TOMB OF THE SCORPION PRINCE

The deep sands give way to an awesome sight: an enormous scorpion, at least sixty feet tall and two hundred feet long, carved from yellow sandstone. The tilt of the structure makes it seem as if the scorpion is crawling up from beneath the sand.

Even after years underground, the painted colors of the monument remain vivid, and the meticulous carvings are unspoiled. But several of the gems that once adorned the scorpion are missing, leaving only indentations where they had been set. A large green aventurine gemstone, carved to resemble a scorpion's stinger, juts from the sand at the back of the monument.

Near the scorpion's mouth, a set of wide sandstone stairs leads down into darkness.

The tomb's doors are closed and unlocked. Ceilings inside the tomb are 10 feet high, unless otherwise noted. The interior is unlit.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals that dozens of human-sized tracks circle the statue, but less than a dozen lead down the stairway. None come up the stairs.

The aventurine gemstone is worth 500 gp but is also cursed. Any creature that touches the gem, even with covered skin,

must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. A creature that fail the saving throw gains vulnerability to poison damage and has disadvantage on saving throws against poison. At the end of a long rest, a cursed character can attempt the saving throw again. If the gem is removed from the statue, anyone that spends 8 hours resting within 300 feet of the gem must make the saving throw at the end of the long rest. The magic of the gem fades 12 days after it is removed.

1. SCORPION STAIRWAY

The steep stairs are cracked with age. Sharp, curved pieces of stone, resembling scorpion tails, jut from the cracks, making traversing the stairs difficult. Mosaics detail grisly scenes of pain and torture. Humans bow before a tall man dressed in bright robes wearing a scorpion crown. Scorpions bite and sting the screaming supplicants.

The stairs are difficult terrain. Inside, awaiting intruders, are twenty **scorpion cultists** (TOB), hiding in crevices in the sandy floors: five in the east corridor, five in the west, and ten north of the pit. They attack after noticing the first character enter the hallway intersection.

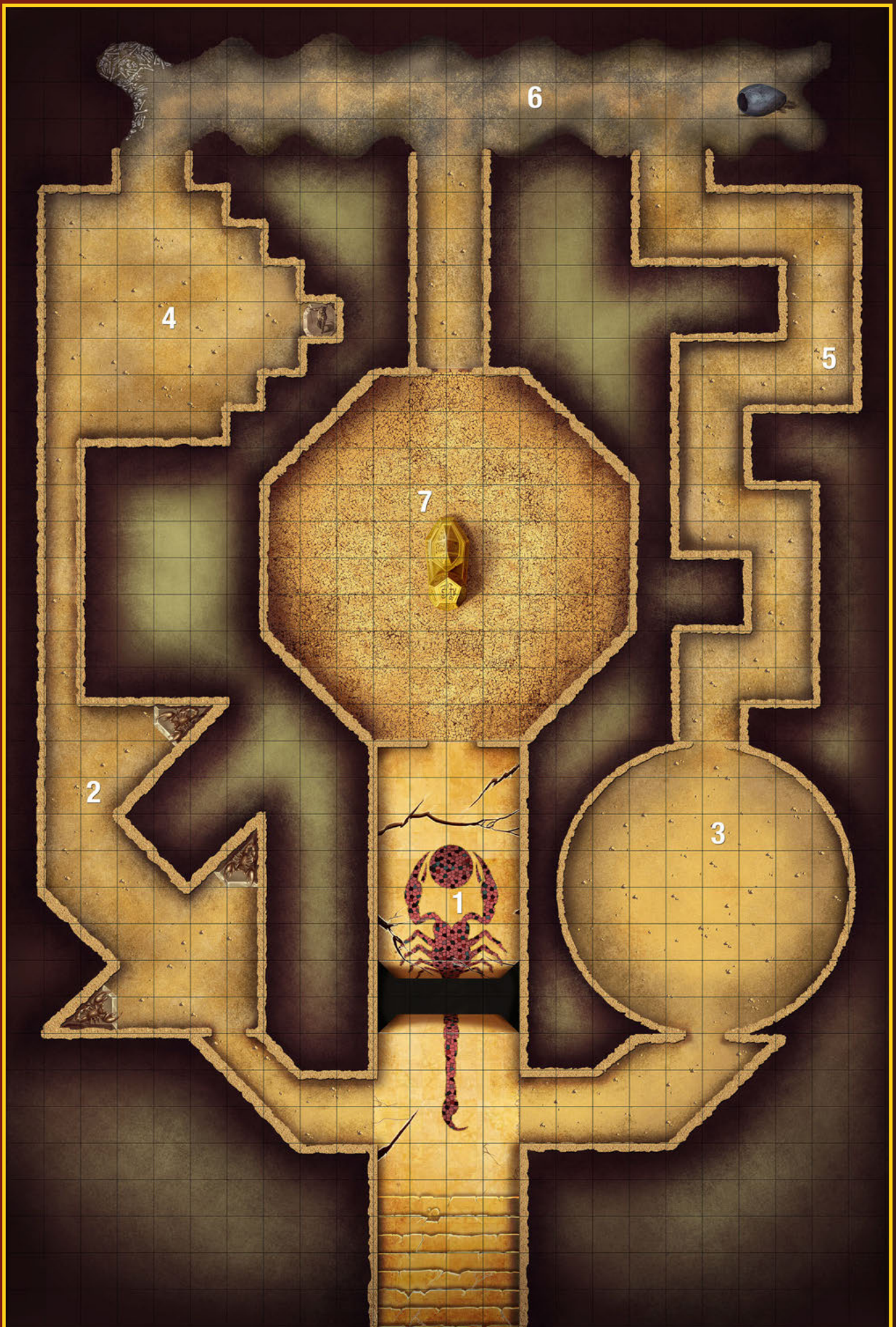
The pit is 30 feet deep, noticeable by a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. When a creature steps into a pit square, the entire floor opens, requiring a character to succeed on a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw to avoid falling. At the bottom of the pit are two **carrion beetles** (TOB). If the PCs avoid the trap, a cultist opens it by leaping in, sacrificing herself to free the beetles, which climb the pit walls and attack. Climbing the walls requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

The doors at the corridor's north end are false and trapped by a minor death glyph. They cannot be opened, and anyone attempting to do so must make a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 2d10 necrotic damage.

2. FIRE SCORPIONS

Ten-foot-tall scorpion statues lurk in this room's sharply angled corners. Two large red rubies decorate the eye sockets of each statue. The small triangular floor tiles resemble scorpions, and a smell of char permeates the air.

Each of the six rubies is worth 500 gp and has a tiny numeral, 1 through 6, etched into it. All the gems are trapped except for the ruby containing the numeral 3. Each ruby removed other than number 3 unleashes a spray of fire throughout all squares in each of the triangular rooms, dealing 3d6 fire damage (DC 10 Dexterity saving throw for half damage). Although the fire does not affect the 10-foot-square area between the two triangular chambers, the first



time the trap is sprung while a creature stands in that area, the tiles there turn into two **swarms of scorpions** (TOB). Also, when a ruby trap erupts, the doors between areas 1 and 2 lock for 3 rounds (Dexterity DC 15 to unlock).

3. SANDSTORM

A large hunk of smoky quartz rests on a small pedestal in this circular room. Its strangely smooth walls are riddled with tiny holes. The sand on the floor makes a spiral pattern, ending at the pedestal. Motes of sand and dust waft through the air.

After three creatures enter this room, a circular breeze begins and increases until the force is strong enough to push the PCs. Any creatures in the room must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw. Those that fail are pushed directly away from the pedestal as scorpion stingers extend from the wall holes. Creatures pushed into the stingers take 2d10 piercing damage. The wind continues, requiring a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to move each round. The doors also lock (Dexterity DC 15 to open).

Two **rotting winds** (TOB), immune to the whirlwind, emerge from the pedestal and attack.

The smoky quartz (worth 350 gp) can be removed from

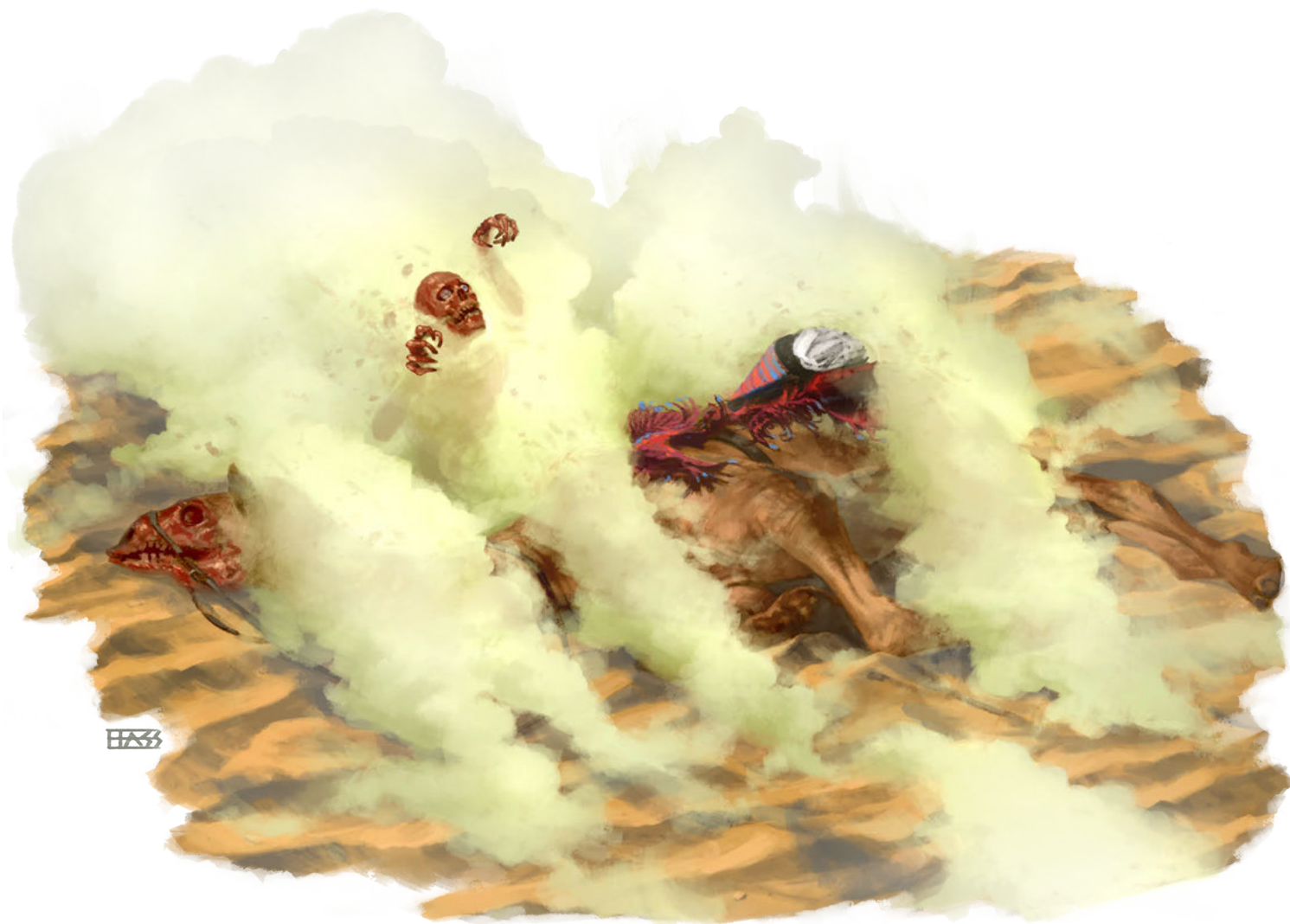
the pedestal only after the rotting winds are defeated. A tiny numeral 4 is etched into the gem. Removing the gem from the pedestal stops the wind and opens the locked doors.

4. SCORPION THRONE

A life-sized statue of the Scorpion Prince occupies a recess in this oddly shaped chamber. The statue wears a golden crown. A mosaic depicts the prince atop a dais, standing before a sea of corpses with a satisfied look. Funeral niches cover the east wall, each holding a body in a place of honor near the prince. Fresh corpses litter the floor, and the room smells of death and rotting.

Written in Common are haunting words: “Only the honored dead are shielded from the Scorpion Prince’s wrath.”

The fresh corpses are all that remain of the previous expeditions, their bodies placed here by the cultists. When the room is disturbed, the statue—which is actually a **shabti** (TOB)—attacks. If all the characters crawl into the niches, the shabti deactivates for 1 hour, allowing the PCs to escape and remove the crown. The headpiece is a *crown of wound closure*, as per the periapt of the same name.



5. EARTHQUAKE

The mosaic walls of this winding corridor depict the building of this tomb. Hundreds of laborers pull huge stone blocks, while others carve. Large scorpions oversee the work, threatening their charges with claws and stingers.

When a creature first moves 30 feet into this corridor from either direction, the area begins to shake. Creatures in the hallway must make a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check at the start of each of their turns, falling prone on a failure. At the same time, five **Stygian fat-tailed scorpions** (TOB) emerge from cracks in the floor and attack.

When a character first arrives at the center of this passageway, the floor cracks open, revealing a large brown carnelian (worth 200 gp). A tiny number 5 is etched into the gem.

6. DEADLY WAVES

The walls of this long chamber are carved in an undulating pattern, and they are streaked with grooves from wear. The western end of the chamber is clogged with an assortment of bones, carapaces, stones, and sand. In the eastern end, a large stone urn rests on its side, pointing west. The urn is carved to resemble a grimacing face, its mouth open wide.

The debris in the western end is difficult terrain. When PCs investigate the urn or reach the center of the room for the first time, the urn activates and spews a geyser of filthy water. Anyone in the chamber must make a DC 15 Strength saving throw or get pushed into the debris pile. A **sarcophagus slime** (TOB) hides in the debris, while another oozes from the urn.

A diamond (worth 750 gp) rattles around inside the skull of one of the sarcophagus slimes. The gem is etched with a tiny numeral 1.

7. FINAL REST

The painted doors before you have no hinges or latches. They depict four kneeling worshipers raising their arms to the Scorpion Prince. At the end of their arms, where offerings might be, are four depressions: one circle, one triangle, one square, and one pentagon.

The gems found in other chambers are the keys to opening this door. The diamond (1) goes into the circle-shaped hole, the ruby (3) into the triangle, the quartz (4) into the square, and the carnelian (5) into the pentagon. When the gems are put into the correct holes, the doors open. The doors are otherwise impassable through the use of force or magic. A DC 15 Intelligence check reveals the pattern. On a failed check, the adventurers figure incorrectly, triggering the trap described below.

If the gems are put into the wrong holes, gas fills the area. Anyone in the corridor leading from area 6 takes 2d6 poison damage (DC 10 Constitution saving throw for half damage).

When the characters gain access to the chamber, they have reached their final destination.

A standing sarcophagus dominates the center of this octagonal chamber, mounted atop an enormous hollow crystal with twenty facets, each bearing a number. The crystal spins without disturbing the sarcophagus, and a rattling noise indicates that objects are inside it. Four small stone chambers rest in this room, with no visible means of entering them.

The sarcophagus bears the countenance of the Scorpion Prince. The facets of the crystal display the numerals 1 through 20.

After the PCs investigate for 5 rounds, doorways appear in the four stone structures, revealing four **night scorpions** (TOB), one in each. One creature has a stinger made of diamond, one of ruby, one of smoky quartz, and one of carnelian. A small stone pedestal rests inside each chamber, bearing an indentation that could hold a gem.

At the same time, the sarcophagus opens to reveal the Scorpion Prince, a **venomous mummy** (TOB). It says in a booming voice, "You have freed me from my sleep, and this land will again know my merciful rule!" The four gems fall from the door and begin glowing brightly.

All creatures attack the PCs. The Scorpion Prince is immune to all damage until his night scorpion guards are killed. In addition, the night scorpions cannot be dropped below 1 hit point until the corresponding gem is placed on the pedestal in the matching night scorpion's chamber, based on the composition of each one's tail.

When defeated, the Scorpion Prince gives a final proclamation: "You will never have my treasure, the sum total of my greatness!" The crystal dodecahedron cannot be sundered by normal means; however, pressing the facet bearing the numeral 13 (the sum of the numbers on the four key gems) shatters it, revealing the treasure within: a +2 longbow, a dagger of venom, bracers of defense, and 200 pieces of turquoise worth 10 gp each. A DC 10 Intelligence check reveals that the numbers on the gems are the key to accessing the crystal.

CONCLUSION

With the release of the Scorpion Prince, his spirit might be free to wander the land again, even if his physical form is defeated. The vile spirit could inhabit the body of a current leader, forcing that person to do terrible things. What ritual needs to be performed to remove the spirit?

The Scorpion Cult might disband after its failure in keeping the Scorpion Prince locked away, or the cult might harry the PCs until all the treasure they removed from the tomb is returned. The Scorpion Cult could even forgive the PCs, and later seek their help in undoing the damage that the characters did with their intrusion.

THE DARK FOREST

By Marc Radle

The Dark Forest is an elder shadow drake lair suitable for four 8th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

A hidden grove within a dark forest has been home to a tribe of alseids for generations. The tribe's most recent leader and spiritual heart was an alseid shaman called Riatha the Raven. Within the grove lies an ancient ring of standing stones atop a burial mound. Here, Riatha conducted sacred nature rites to honor and bless the forest and the tribe.

During one of these ceremonies, the ground rumbled and a column of dense black energy shot straight up from the burial mound and into the night sky. Thick darkness enveloped the area, and the suddenly blinded alseids heard terrible roars. An instant later, the darkness dissipated to reveal a mysterious pool ringed with skulls among the standing stones. Two large, dragon-like creatures with black scales and burning red eyes glared at the confused alseids. On the ground lay the body of Riatha, deathly still. Terror and chaos followed as the creatures brought swift and sudden death, killing most of the alseid tribe members with razor-sharp teeth and deadly, black breath.

The alseids that survived the initial, bloody attack fled into the forest. They counterattacked a few hours later, desperate to reclaim their grove and recover the body of their beloved leader, but the attempt was a fiasco and they were quickly driven off. Now, the few remaining alseids hide in the forest, frightened and unsure what to do next.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The adventurers are exploring the forest and meet the beleaguered alseids, who beg for help.

1. FOREST PATH

A well-worn path meanders through the dark and foreboding forest. The screeches of birds and the low, plaintive howls of other forest creatures echo among the dense trees. The path is covered with dirt, twigs, wild grasses, and small rocks and stones. Gently running water can be heard up ahead.

The detritus on the ground makes it difficult to move silently, imposing disadvantage on the characters' Stealth checks.

2. MAKESHIFT LOG BRIDGE

The path opens into a small clearing with several jagged rock formations. The trunk of a fallen tree spans the width of the stream. On the far side of the stream, the path continues into the forest.

A badly injured fawn lies panting at the water's edge, large claw marks evident on its side.

The fawn was recently attacked by one of the elder shadow drakes, but escaped before it was killed. It made it as far as this spot before collapsing.

The tree trunk is roughly 3 feet in diameter and wet, making it slippery. Phosphorescent moss, which gives off an eerie green glow in the low light, covers portions of the tree trunk. A DC 10 Acrobatics check is required to walk across the tree trunk without slipping and falling into the rock-filled water below. Those who fall take 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

The alseids in area 4 likely hear the adventurers' activity in this area and send Tuallia, a young alseid warrior, to silently observe their activities. A DC 15 Perception check is necessary to discover him hiding among the trees. If the characters care for the injured animal or show it compassion, Tuallia reveals himself and asks the party to follow him to the alseid encampment (area 4).

3. STREAM

A swift-running stream winds its way through the forest. Large, jagged rocks and smooth boulders poke up out of the water at odd angles.

The steep, 3-foot-tall banks of the stream are rocky, dropping down sharply to the water. The stream is 8 feet deep in most places.

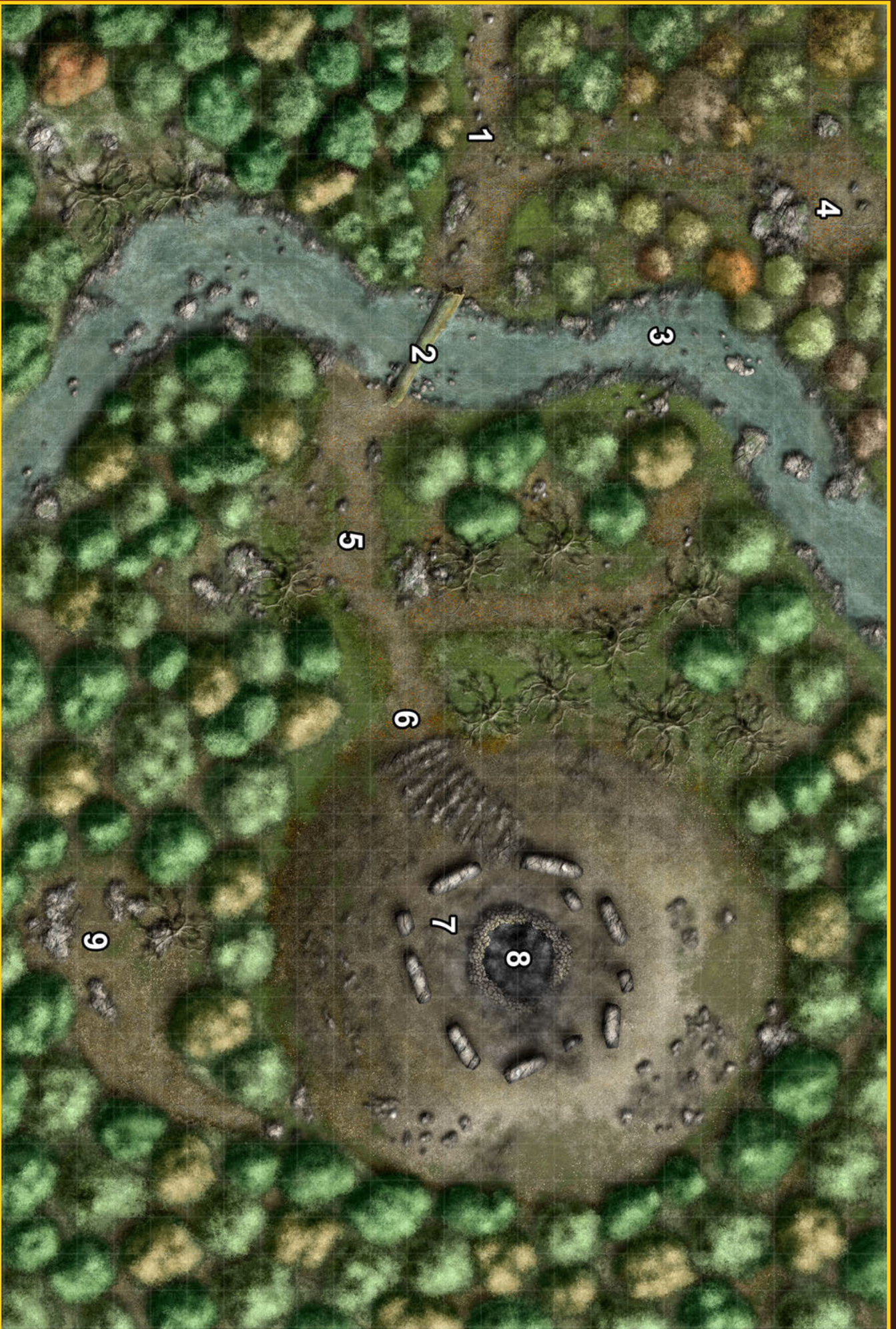
The water's current is swift: PCs who try to cross to the far bank must succeed on a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check. Those who fail the check are yanked from their feet, hitting one or more of the rocks in the water and taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage.

4. ALSEID ENCAMPMENT

A narrow trail leads to a small, secluded clearing. A small ring of stones contains the remains of a cook fire, and a wooden spear lies on the ground nearby. Small, dried branches that have been hollowed out and tied together with thin cord hang down from a tree limb and clack softly in the breeze.

The few surviving alseids are using this clearing as a temporary camp. The ground is fairly open, with a few large boulders and rock outcroppings. Tuallia leads the six remaining alseids, including one youngling and a critically wounded female.

The alseids can be convinced that the adventurers mean no harm to them or the forest if a character succeeds on a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check, modified up or down based



on Tuallia's earlier impression of the party. In such a case, Tuallia recounts the tribe's terrible ordeal and begs the party to destroy the two dragon-like creatures and recover Riatha's body for proper burial. What the alseids do not reveal, however, is that they are desperate to recover the Diadem of Moon and Stars, Riatha's magical crown.

The adventurers can take a short rest here. The alseids offer what amenities they can, although this amounts to little more than food and fresh water. Tuallia is proud and brave, but insists on remaining to protect his people—under no circumstances will he accompany the party to the burial mound clearing.

5. CLEARING

The path through the forest opens into a natural clearing with large and strange rock formations.

The ground here is muddy; a tangle of fallen branches and deep piles of rotting leaves make it difficult to navigate (treat as difficult terrain).

The far end of the clearing narrows to form a large, arched opening. Beyond this natural doorway, the adventurers can see a large, earthen mound rising up from the ground.

As soon as anyone approaches this arch of trees, a large, tree-like creature emerges from the forest and steps into the opening, blocking the way. Read the following:

A large, living tree with dark, cracked bark steps out of the shadows. Black eyes stare at you intently. Thick, dark, sap runs unchecked like tears down its gnarled face. The strange creature shows no other sign of emotion. It speaks to you in a deep, powerful, monotone voice:

"The Realms of Shadow have claimed this forest. Leave now or be forever destroyed."

If the characters immediately turn and leave, the **weeping treant** (TOB) allows them to do so. If they do anything other than leave (or if they leave and later the weeping treant catches them attempting to return), it attacks them without quarter.

6. BURIAL MOUND

A large, circular clearing lies before you. In its center, an earthen mound, some sixty feet across, rises fifteen feet above the forest floor. The mound is covered with wild flowers and grasses, recently trampled. Well-worn stone steps are cut into the front of the mound. The steps are cracked with age; in a few places they have crumbled away. A ring of standing stones encircles the top of the mound.

The steps are precarious in spots, but still serviceable. The mound's slope is easily climbed. The trees are particularly tall and dense around this area, and deep shadows envelop much of the clearing.

The clearing is quiet—even the sounds of birds have abruptly ceased. Thick mist swirls and drifts throughout the clearing, filling the air with an ominous and foreboding chill. Characters within the clearing must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or be frightened for as long as they remain in this area.

7. STANDING STONES

Tall standing stones jut out of the ground in the form of an irregularly shaped ring, resembling a misshapen stone claw bursting from the earth. A smaller ring of round rocks can be seen within.

PCs who investigate the standing stones discover that many are spattered with blood, and a few have deep claw marks gouged into them. Well-worn, druidic-looking runes are carved into each of the stones.

Maalyreth and Shydrageh, two **elder shadow drakes** (TOB), lurk in the deep shadows, watching the characters. If the characters move past the stones and toward the pool (area 8), the drakes use Shadow Jump to come down among the PCs and attack!

Two large dragon-like creatures with black scales and shadowy wings appear suddenly from the darkness, their red eyes glowing eerily as they attack.

The elder shadow drakes use their Speed Surge, Shadow Blend, and Shadow Jump traits to maneuver around the clearing, flanking their enemies and keeping the party off balance whenever possible. Maalyreth often flies above the battle to unleash his stygian breath against PCs in a group, while Shydrageh prefers getting close enough to bite.

They concentrate their attacks on any characters using fire or light spells against them.

8. BLACK POOL

Inside the ring of standing stones, a hundred skulls encircle a mysterious pool. The strange pool is filled with an inky blackness that looks like a vortex of roiling black storm clouds.

The pool is 20 feet across and ringed with both humanoid and animal skulls. A dense blackness seems to rise from its depths.

The air around the pool smells fetid and sulfurous.

The mysterious, swirling cloud of darkness in the pool is a portal to the Plane of Shadow, where the two elder shadow drakes emerged from before they savaged the alseid tribe. Although what lies beyond the portal is beyond the scope of this adventure, it can be used in any way you see fit. The clouds are dense enough to be essentially solid, and a specific, magical command word or phrase is needed to part the blackness.

9. SHADOW DRAKE LAIR

A short, narrow path opens into a small clearing. The trunk of a large tree near the entrance to the clearing is carved with beautifully detailed images of alseids and woodland animals. Jagged rocks take up much of the far side of the clearing.

The shadow drakes use this area to store treasure and food.

The characters see, scattered about the clearing, the decaying remains of three deer, a partially eaten boar, and a large bear. Flies buzz about everywhere. The smell here is absolutely putrid and nauseating.

Amid the jagged rocks lies the mutilated and partially eaten body of Riatha, the alseid shaman. A gnarled wooden staff with a crystal embedded in the top lies near her body. A delicate crown of woven silver and gold (the Diadem of Moon and Stars) still rests upon her brow.

As the party investigates the area around Riatha's broken body, three **shadows** (MM) erupt from the darkness of the nearby trees and attack.

10. SPIDERS AND WEBS

This portion of the forest seems especially dark and dense. Thick spider webs cover the trees here.

Spider webs fill the entire southwestern part of the forest. A faint, unpleasant smell rises here from the desiccated, half-eaten remains of various animals. Small victims—flies and other insects—are visible within the webs. A few still struggle, but most are long dead.

A difficult-to-reach clearing lies within these web-filled woods. Thorny bramble bushes and dense weeds surround the clearing, which is dominated by a formation of jagged rocks. Numerous spiders can be seen skittering about the ground and the trees. If the characters spend more than a few minutes in the clearing, they are attacked by five **giant spiders** (MM).

CONCLUSION

If the characters defeat the two elder shadow drakes, they can recover the body of Riatha. If they return Riatha's body to the alseids (including the diadem), they earn the alseids' undying gratitude. Failing to return Riatha's body, or keeping the Diadem, earns the alseids' undying hatred and likely an ambush the next time the party visits the forest.

For further adventures, the characters might unlock the portal to the Plane of Shadow. They might also wonder what lies inside, or perhaps beneath, the burial mound.

UMBRAL TOWER LAIR TIE-IN

This lair can be used in conjunction with the *Ruins of the Umbral Tower* lair that follows. If you want to use both maps and lairs together, the party can meet the shadow elf hunters when leaving the Dark Forest area.



RUINS OF THE UMBRAL TOWER

By Shawn Merwin with Wolfgang Baur

Ruins of the Umbral Tower is a shadow fey hunter lair suitable for four or five 8th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

The ruined Umbral Tower rests deep in the forest, in a marshy region avoided by all but songbirds. Long abandoned by its original occupant, the tower features a malfunctioning gate that connects this place and the Plane of Shadow. The site serves as a base for a group of shadow fey hunters and their entourage of hounds and guardians. The hunters used the gate to travel from their home plane, and they now attempt to bag as many trophies and as much loot as possible before returning home when the gate reactivates.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The trade road that skirts the forest has been plagued by bandits and raiders. Unlike regular bandits, however, these bandits don't steal trade goods, instead taking ears and scalps, and none of their victims are left alive. These mysterious bandits are likely lairing in the dangerous marshy forest. The characters are hired by the merchants' guild to patrol the road and stop the bandits.

THE CHASE

Your investigations of the trade road have been fruitless so far. No attacks have been reported in the past week, and some believe the bandits have finally left the area.

Those rumors prove to be false, however. As you round a bend in the road, the bodies of merchants and guards litter the path, and even the draft horses lie dead. Skulking amid the carnage are several shadowy figures. In the center is an elven form dressed in black leathers. Next to her is a large hound, the size of a pony, its muzzle frothing and crusted with blood. Two other hulking creatures, looking like oversized goblins, notice your presence, their flat, broad nostrils flaring—both are wounded. With a grunt of warning, the beasts stand and face you, while the elven creature and the hound slip away into the swampy overgrowth.

The characters begin 80 feet from the two **shadow fey guardians** (TOB). Behind them, the **shadow fey hunter** Lizelee (TOB) and the **hound of night** (TOB) flee toward the Umbral Tower. On their turn, the somewhat slower shadow fey guardians also attempt to escape into the forest. The chase is on!

RUNNING THE CHASE

Rather than counting squares to see if the characters can catch their quarry, this chase depends on skill or ability

checks. Each round, each character must attempt a check to simulate the chase through dangerous, marshy landscape. After each round, count the successes to see if the characters can first catch the shadow fey guardians, followed by the shadow fey hunter and her hound.

CHASE CHECKS: Each round, ask the characters how they are going to catch the fleeing creatures. Success at a simple task like running fast or smashing through thick undergrowth (DC 12 Athletics or Acrobatics) earns 1 success. Accomplishing a more inventive task such as using Nature, Survival, or Perception (DC 14) to discern the easiest path through the swap earns 2 successes.

Extremely ingenious ideas that succeed, such as using skills in new ways, or using spells and equipment strategically, should earn 3 successes. Spells such as *longstrider*, *speak with plants*, *dimension door*, *polymorph*, *create/destroy water*, *control water*, *water walk*, and *freedom of movement* could all help in the chase.

Run the chase for 3 rounds, adding obstacles as desired. Quicksand, hidden streams, sickening swamp gas, snake or crocodile nests, and thick vegetation are possible tests for the pursuing PCs. The base DC for most checks should be 14, with adjustments based on circumstances.

IN THE LEAD: The character who got the highest check result in the first round is in the lead for the entire chase, and retains that lead unless he or she voluntarily falls back or fails a check in the following rounds.

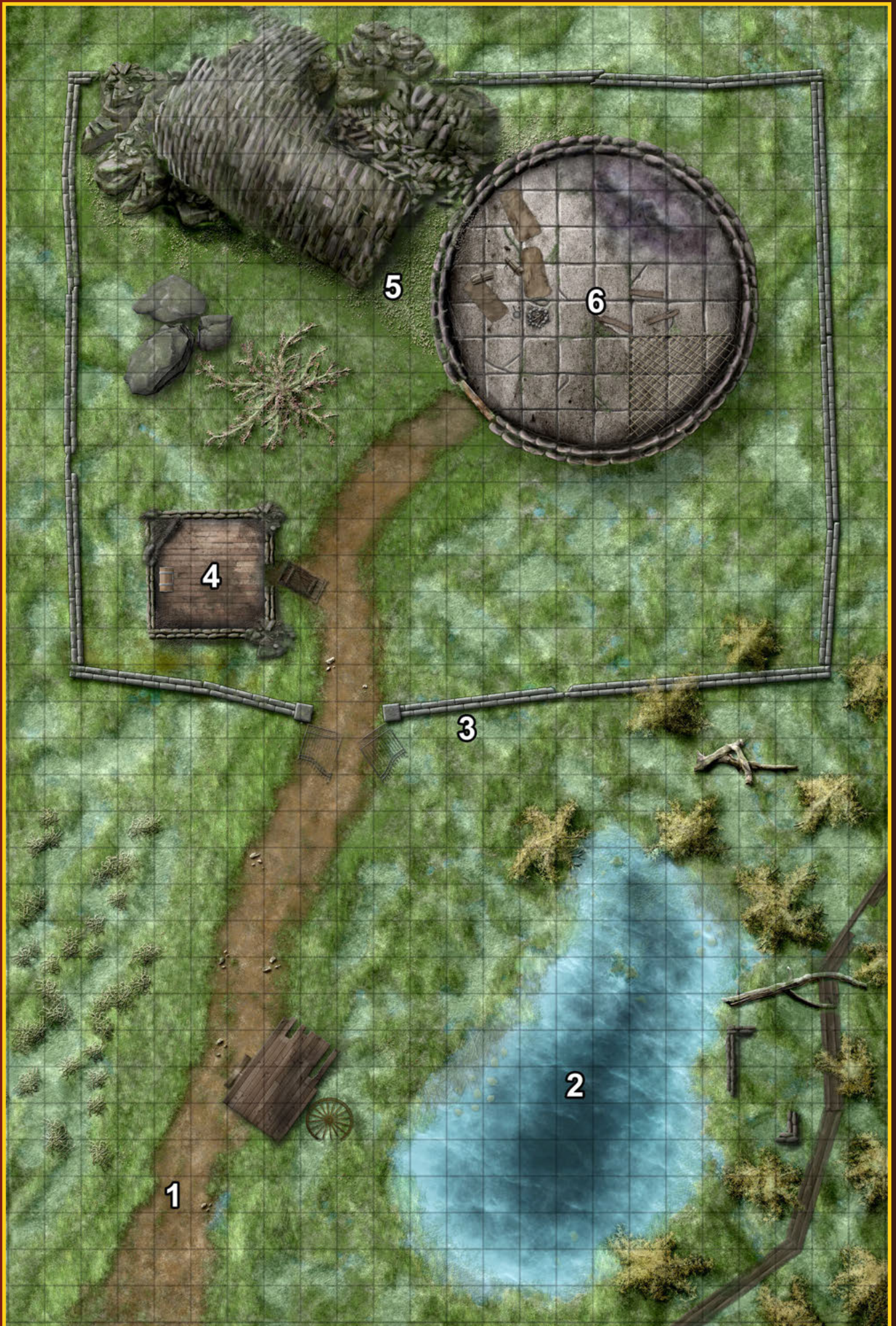
CHASE SUCCESS: At the end of 3 rounds, count up the successes. Subtract 1 for each failed check. If the total number of successes is lower than 2 per character, all the creatures escape. If the total is higher than 2 per character, the PCs overtake the shadow fey guardians but not the others. If the total is equal to 3 per character or higher, the PCs catch the entire hunting party before they reach the Umbral Tower.

If the characters can catch and defeat the hunting party, those enemies cannot warn the others of the PCs' approach. The PCs also won't face these extra enemies at the ruins.

If the characters catch their foes, the fleeing creatures are not ready for the fight, which takes place in a boggy clearing. The PCs gain a surprise round as the shadow fey creatures pull themselves together to mount a defense.

1. FOREST PATH

Deep in the forest, the marshy path leads slightly uphill toward a stone wall and the ruins of a collapsed tower. Although the sky is clear, something in the damp air seems to obscure light, making it hard to see details.



PUTRID HAUNTS

If you use this encounter in a temperate forest rather than a subtropical or tropical forest, substitute two **putrid haunts** (TOB) for the three crocodiles in area 2.

Everything within 100 feet of the ruins is bathed in shadowy dim light. All land off the path is difficult terrain. The vegetation on each side of the path also obscures vision and writhes in an unwholesome way, stirred by unfelt winds.

2. DARK POND

The swampy land gives way to a dark, murky pond to the right of the path. Thick clouds of mosquitos buzz over the muddy water, and clumps of reeds skirt the pond. Within the depths of the vegetation, a golden glint catches your eye.

The shiny object at the edge of the 10-foot-deep pond is a gold ring on the pinky finger of a severed hand. Lurking at the edge of the pond are three **giant crocodiles** (MM). One is within 5 feet of the hand, waiting to attack anything that approaches. Noticing the hidden crocodile requires a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check by the character approaching the ring—failure to notice it gives the crocodile a surprise round.

Two **shadow fey hunters** (TOB) hide beneath low-hanging willow tree branches across the pond. If the PCs and the giant crocodiles fight, the hunters shoot at the characters during combat, hiding as a bonus action after each shot. They shoot for 2 rounds, then retreat and warn the hunting party inside the tower. If the characters ignore the crocodiles, the hunters fire arrows for 1 round and then run for the tower.

The gold ring is a *ring of cold resistance*. Once it is attuned to a PC, the wearer gains the benefit but also sweats profusely and feels warm even in the coolest environs. The sweating causes the wearer to suffer a –2 penalty on Charisma (Deception) checks.

3. STONE WALL AND WARDS

The courtyard of the tower, its ground dry and raised above the marshland, is surrounded by a five-foot-high stone wall of smooth, weathered stone. The wall's black surfaces seem to absorb rather than reflect light. A ten-foot-wide opening leads into the courtyard.

A DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that this stone is not native to the area, while a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the stone came from the Plane of Shadow.

SHADOW CHAMBERS

The tower itself is relatively small, but the hunting party has access to three shadow chambers—small pocket rooms that are comfortable, fey rooms made of shadow stuff. Treat these as *tiny hut* spells, holding up to nine creatures in a 20-foot-radius space and appointed in a suitable manner for the hunters and hounds.

The wall is cool to the touch and can be climbed easily, but any noise attracts the **hound of night** (TOB) that patrols the courtyard. It rushes the first wall climber it sees, attacking and barking a warning to alert the tower residents.

Any characters who move through the opening trigger a silent alarm, which sends a mental warning to all the shadow fey hunters. This shadowy magical alarm can be noticed with a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check and can be removed automatically with *dispel magic* or similar effects.

4. STORAGE SHED

A small shed, made of the same dark stone as the wall and the tower, rests in the southwest corner of the courtyard. An opening on the east wall leads into its shadowy interior.

The shadow fey hunters learned that this building was trapped when one of their hounds wandered in out of curiosity. After examination, they chose to leave this security measure from the time of the tower's original owner intact. If the PCs investigate, read:

The gloom of this area pervades the shed as well. In the murky shadows of the building rests a large chest, its shiny silver bindings glinting. The body of a large hound, like the one you saw on the trade road, lies desiccated in the center of the room.

The entire shed is ensorcelled to drain the life from creatures while simultaneously trapping them. Three rounds after a living creature enters, a shadowy force field seals the entryway. At the same time, occupants of the shed feel a mix of dread and exhaustion. Starting in round 4, and each round thereafter, a creature in the shed rolls one of its Hit Dice and takes that much damage. That Hit Die is unavailable for healing until the creature completes a long rest. A creature dies from shock if it reaches 0 Hit Dice and is forced to roll another Hit Die.

Bringing down the shadow field can be accomplished in several ways:

- A DC 17 check using *dispel magic*
- Two DC 20 Dexterity (thieves' tools) checks to destroy the runes powering the spell
- 150 points of slashing damage with attacks that hit AC 10
- 50 points of radiant, thunder, or force damage against AC 10

The shed walls are immune to magical effects, and no teleportation magic works in this area.

If the situation seems dire, the galeb duhr (area 5) might intercede on behalf of the PCs. It can breach the shed floor in 1 round, breaking the spell and dismissing the effect. It expects some gratitude or gems as a reward, and it is not subtle about asking for compensation in Sylvan or Terran.

The locked chest can be opened with a DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. Inside the chest are 200 pp and ten black opals worth 50 gp each.

5. RUBBLE

Jagged chunks of black stone rest here—the remnants of the collapsed tower.

Hidden amid the rubble is a solitary **galeb duhr** (MM) named Longwinter, which resembles just another stone, of a pale white among many. The power of the tower's strange shadow stone perplexes the creature; Longwinter has been studying the stone and observing the shadow fey hunters for weeks, barely moving. The galeb duhr does not attack unless provoked.

If the PCs notice it with a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check, approach it peacefully, and find a way to communicate with it, the galeb duhr tells them it has seen hunters coming and going with black hounds in the area recently, skinning prey and also stringing human ears on necklaces.

The shadow fey observe what happens in the rubble by peering through cracks and holes in the tower. If they see the characters speaking with the galeb duhr, they attack everyone, bringing the elemental creature into the fight as an ally of the PCs.

6. UMBRAL TOWER

The western wall of the ruined tower has collapsed, exposing the inside. Only the ground floor of the tower remains intact—the upper floors have crumbled. The interior is hidden in shadow.

If a character approaches close enough to look into the interior, he or she spots the prisoners kept there.

Inside, bedrolls dot the floor. A makeshift wooden cage holds three gnomes, dirty and bedraggled. A wavering sheet of shadowy energy hovers at the back of the tower.

Much closer to the front of the tower are more of the shadow guardians you saw earlier, as well as a black armored huntress and a dark hound.

The number of enemies depends on how many creatures escaped during the chase scene and in the encounter at the pond. If none of those creatures are present, four **shadow fey guardians** (TOB) accompany the leader of the hunting party, a **shadow fey hunter** (TOB) named Tympyz. If all the creatures escaped during the chase scene, the four guardians are joined by two more **shadow fey guardians**, a second **shadow fey hunter**, two more **shadow fey hunters** from area 2, and the **hound of night**.

The shadow fey creatures prefer to attack with surprise when the PCs enter the tower. Tympyz commands the fight and uses her bow and arrows to target spellcasters. The hound concentrates on armored fighters.

Each round after the PCs enter the tower, there is a 5 percent chance that the shadow gate opens. If that happens, the shadow creatures withdraw and retreat back to their home plane if they have been attacked or even just threatened by the party.

Sacks throughout the tower hold the spoils gathered by the hunting party: four golden deer figurines worth 100 gp each,

a diamond bracelet worth 1,000 gp, and a +1 *breastplate*, as well as a gruesome collection of human ears and scalps. If the shadow fey were able to gather up some of their loot and retreat, one of the three treasures is missing.

CONCLUSION

If the characters vanquish all of the shadow fey before the gate comes open, they can easily free the three gnome prisoners, who are scholars of shadow magic. Their leader, a rock gnome called Professor Probble, believes that the tower offers access to the Plane of Shadow. With the knowledge provided by the gnomes, who have little wealth but plenty of information, the PCs can enter the Plane of Shadow.

If the gate came open and some of the shadow fey escaped, the characters might want to pursue their quarry into the Plane of Shadow after they learn from the gnomes how to get there. Perhaps, once they get there, the characters discover that the hunting party was an advance scouting group for a larger attack force.



THE WARLOCK'S CRYPT

By Marc Radle

The Warlock's Crypt is a fext and noctiny lair suitable for four 9th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

An ancient warlock king known as the King in Silver, whose patron was Death itself, knew he was growing old and would soon die. The aging king pledged the souls of his two sons, the Black Prince and the Red Prince, to Death in exchange for his own eternal life. As the final words of the pledge passed his lips, the old king collapsed to the ground, dead. Elsewhere in the castle, the two young princes died suddenly in their sleep. All three were interred in the royal crypt within a nearby burial mound. Ultimately, the king got what he asked for—he and his sons were returned to life as fext in the service of Death itself.

When the fext awoke and climbed out of their coffins, they were confused because it seemed they were trapped within the small royal crypt. Then, the King in Silver discovered a secret door leading to a hidden stone stair that descended into a complex of ancient tunnels and chambers. At the far end of the complex, the fext discovered a second set of ancient stone stairs leading up through a shaft to a hidden exit on the surface.

The three fext now lurk within the lower chambers, doing their patron's dark bidding. When commanded, they creep forth from the crypt to spread death during the dark of night.

1. BURIAL CHAMBER

A tunnel leads down from the side of the burial mound into a roughly circular chamber. An elaborate stone coffin sits in each of three round alcoves. All three coffins are open, their lids either pushed aside or lying on the floor. A large black iron brazier pitted with age stands in the center of the chamber.

Mismatched tapestries cover the worked stone walls of the three alcoves. They depict family sigils, scenes of battle, and so on. Some have been defaced or slashed.

Characters who investigate the insides of the coffins find scores of deep, seemingly haphazard scratches.

One of the tapestries in the northern alcove conceals a secret door.

2. CHAMBER OF STATUES

Carved holy symbols decorate the walls of this chamber. Several have been defaced. Two small alcoves are cut into the southern wall; each one contains a white marble statue.

The two statues depict deities of life and death. The face of the deity of life statue has been completely chipped away.

3. MAUSOLEUM

Religious symbols are carved into the walls of this chamber, shrouded by dust and cobwebs. Two plain stone sarcophagi dominate the northern part of the area.

The west sarcophagus contains two occupants, laid to rest holding hands.

The east sarcophagus holds a child's remains. Worn and faded toys lie amid the dust.

4. TOMB

This burial chamber contains two large clay burial urns.

One urn holds a jumble of misshapen humanoid bones.

The other contains fifteen human skulls. Hidden beneath the skulls is a battered chest holding 260 gp, and a pair of gleaming silver daggers with roses engraved on their pommels (worth 20 gp each).

5. TOMB

This small burial chamber is empty.

6. TOMB

A single large clay burial urn sits in the middle of this small chamber.

The urn is filled with bones from many different individuals, all jumbled together. If the bones are disturbed, a great cloud of grave dust billows up around the PCs, requiring a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to avoid being incapacitated from coughing for 2d6 minutes.

Searching through the bones reveals a scroll case containing seven tightly rolled parchments. Most crumble to dust as soon as they are touched. One does not, however—it is a scroll of *spirit guardians*.

7. TOMB

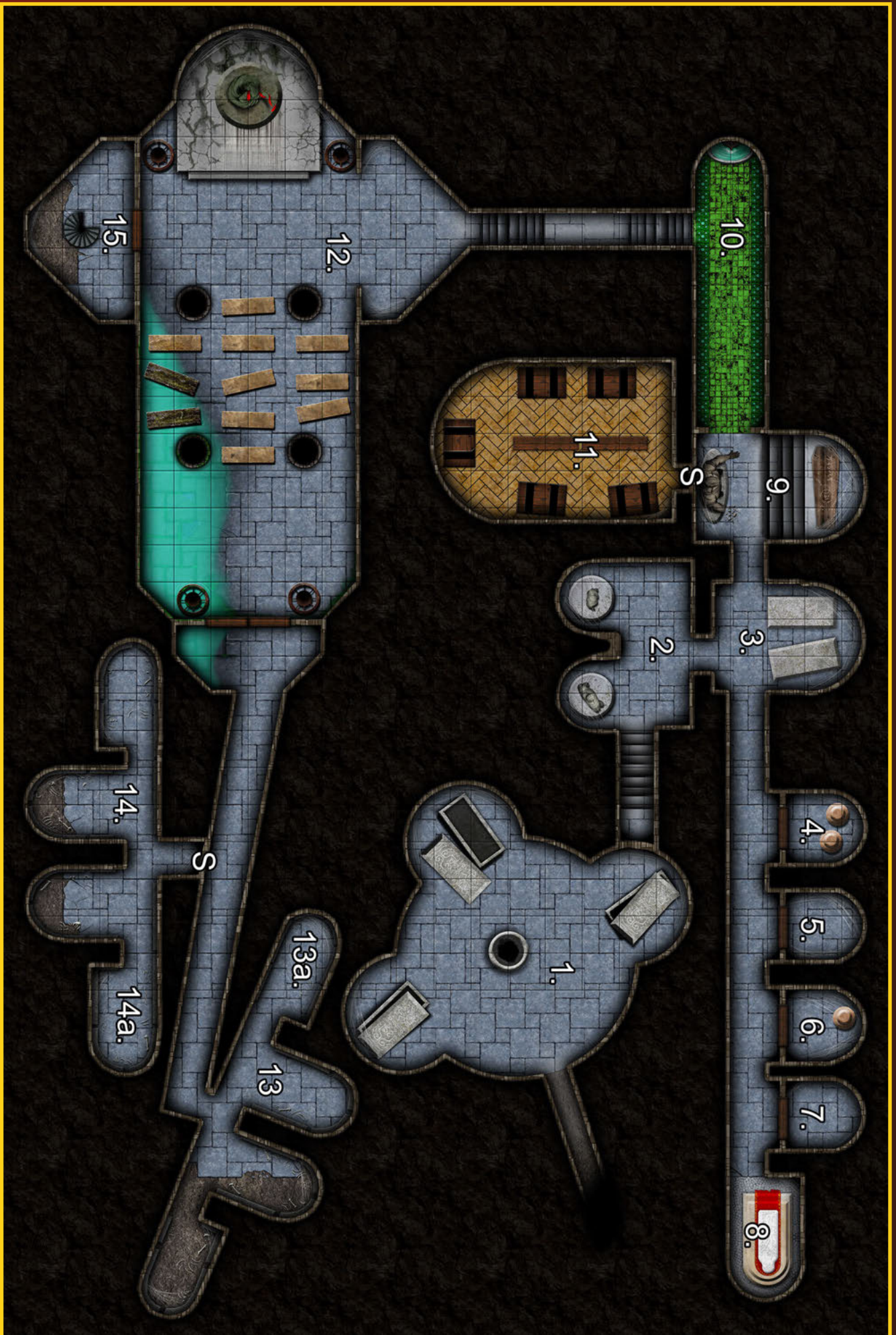
This small burial chamber is empty, except for the bodies of a few long-dead rats.

8. BLEEDING BRIDE'S FINAL REST

An open burial chamber containing an imposing marble coffin lies at the end of the hall. A red velvet cloth blankets the coffin. A dark stain mars the floor of this chamber.

The stain is old, dried blood.

Lifting the lid reveals a sheet of fine white linen that covers the body of a remarkably preserved, beautiful young woman



in a faded bridal gown, her abdomen stained with blood.

A beautiful woman, dressed as if for a wedding, rises up from the coffin and extends an accusing finger. Her partially translucent form hovers for a moment before she glides toward you, her lifeless eyes swelling up with tears.

The creature is a **banshee** (MM). The lovelorn creature focuses her hatred on one particular character.

9. BURIAL OF HONOR

Steps lead up to a stone platform in the northern part of this chamber. A wooden coffin rests on the dais. The coffin is covered in carvings and symbols. The southern part of the chamber is dominated by a large stone statue, clearly that of a god or other divine being.

The Black Prince, a **fext** (TOB), is crouched in the shadows behind the coffin. If no one approaches the coffin, the Black Prince remains hidden, learning what he can about the party. If the characters head back to explore areas 3 through 8, the Black Prince sneaks away to report to the King in Silver in the temple (area 12). If the characters go through the archway into area 10, he quietly follows them until an opportunity arises to strike from behind.

If a character steps onto the stone platform, the Black Prince leaps out and attacks.

Investigating the contents of the coffin reveals a skeleton within wearing faded robes. A silver ring set with a small ruby is on one finger. The ring is valuable for its materials and exceptional workmanship (worth 800 gp), but the tiny symbols etched into the silver suggest there might be more to the ring.

A DC 16 Perception check when investigating the statue reveals a small panel, set into the base. Pressing the panel produces a faint click as the statue slides to the left, revealing a secret passage that leads to area 11.

10. CLEANSING FOUNTAIN

As you step through the archway, you see a wide hallway leading west. The floor features what must have once been an elaborate and brightly colored mosaic, depicting a stylized representation of the afterlife, but exact details are hard to pick out because many of the tiles are cracked and some are missing altogether. At the far end of the hall, the face of a monstrous creature is carved into the stone wall of an alcove. Water trickles from its mouth into a large stone basin directly under it in the floor.

Some of the fext's noctiny servants have rigged a trap in the monstrous stone face of the fountain. Anyone who walks down the center of the hall, instead of staying near one of the walls, activates a hidden pressure plate, firing eight barbed javelins from the monstrous creature's mouth, four in the first round and four more in the second.

The pressure plate can be spotted with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check or a DC 15 Intelligence

(Investigation) check. The javelin-hurling slot in the stone face can be spotted with a DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Wedging a shield or other object in front of the mouth does not prevent the trap from activating, but it catches the javelins before they go far, and jams the trap.

Barbed Javelin Trap. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +7 to hit, range 50 ft., up to four targets or a single target four times. *Hit:* 27 (6d10) piercing damage, or half damage with a successful DC 16 Dexterity saving throw.

11. VAULT

Numerous shelves and niches, most of them empty, line the walls of this large chamber. An old writing desk, several chests, and a rotting chair sit in the southern portion of the room. The floor is an intricate herringbone pattern of brickwork.

The vault, once the place where objects of significance to the deceased were interred, has been claimed by the King in Silver (currently in area 12) as his personal quarters. None but the king may safely enter here.



Guarding this chamber are three **lich hounds** (TOB). They leap from the deep shadows and attack anyone other than the king who enters.

Crude stick carvings of people being killed and dismembered are etched into the surface of the writing desk. A curved penknife encrusted with dried blood is stuck into the desktop.

A fine silver candlestick (worth 50 gp) holding four partially burned black candles stands toward the back of the table. If they are burned, the candles give off the sickly smell of scorched flesh.

A well-made, reinforced pouch sits on a high shelf. The pouch holds two *potions of gaseous form* and a slim dagger with splotches of dried blood on the hilt.

12. TEMPLE

Long stairs lead down to an enormous chamber of some sort.

You are in an empty, cavernous chamber. Through a wide archway, the trappings of a temple can be seen. Stone pillars support a vaulted ceiling. Broken benches line the center portion of the room. Carved holy symbols decorate the walls, though many have been defaced. Iron braziers emit a dim glow but, oddly, give off very little heat. Shallow water spreads across the southeast portion of the room.

This chamber was once a temple where the living came to pray for the deceased.

From the area to the west, the party hears the slowly increasing rhythm of beating drums, strange chanting, and muffled cries.

Water trickles from the cracked stone ceiling and down the walls in the southeast portion of the temple. Stagnant water, three inches deep, makes this area difficult terrain.

In the west end of the temple, a stone step leads to a large dais upon which is a large altar stained with blood. Polished skulls with their tops removed sit at each corner. Within each skull a single, foul-smelling candle burns—its flame dancing wildly, as if caught in a strong wind, though no wind is present.

The King in Silver, a **fext** (TOB) with maximum hit points, chants with both arms outstretched, silver daggers in each hand. The Red Prince, also a **fext**, stands next to him, pinning a woman upon the altar. Standing in front of the dais are twelve **noctinys** (TOB), in rapturous anticipation of the coming sacrifice.

Roaming about in the temple are four **lich hounds** (TOB), watching for trouble.

The PCs must act quickly to save the woman from a slow and gruesome death.

Beyond the doors leading east is a long, narrow corridor. The fext and the noctinys avoid entering this area. If the characters investigate, they discover that the passageway turns north and opens into a sepulcher that contains four burial alcoves. (If they find the secret door, they can discover another sepulcher to the south, also with four alcoves.)

Hundreds of small niches are carved into the walls of each burial alcove. The densely packed niches run from floor to

ceiling. While some are filled with skulls, partially burnt candles, and tiny idols or other religious items, most of the niches contain little more than piles of rotting, rusting, or desiccated remains.

13. NORTHERN SEPULCHER

The stench of decay is heavy in the air here. Cobwebs hang from the corners of the ceiling. The walls here were once decorated with brightly painted images painted on the smooth stone. The colors have long since faded, and now only a suggestion remains of what once was depicted. The floor is rough and pitted, as if it had been scoured by acid or some other strong chemical.

A **gelatinous cube** (MM) aimlessly roams the northern sepulcher. It is aware of the PCs as soon as they enter the corridor and silently glides down the hallway to attack.

Some of the burial niches in the western alcove (13a) are larger than the others and contain shrouded, skeletal remains. One such skeleton has fallen from its niche and lies crumpled on the floor. If the PCs disturb these remains, the ghostly forms of two **wraiths** (MM) emerge from the darkness of the niche and attack.

14. SOUTHERN SEPULCHER

The stench of decay is heavy in the air here. Thick layers of dust and small droppings—from rats or mice, most likely—cover the floors, while cobwebs hang from almost every part of the ceiling.

The floor of the eastern alcove (14a) is covered with bones. A successful DC 18 Perception check reveals the glint of a gem (an emerald worth 1,200 gp) in a niche near the ceiling.

Touching or disturbing the bones in any way causes them to rise and attack as a **bone swarm** (TOB).

15. ANTECHAMBER

This is an empty chamber, similar to the one on the north side of the temple. A narrow shaft pierces the stone ceiling. A slight breeze issues from the shaft down into the otherwise dank air of the room.

The fext sometimes come and go by way of this shaft, using *gaseous form*. Occasionally, when they capture someone destined to be sacrificed, they drop the captive down the shaft into the antechamber below, taking perverse delight in the pain and injury that such a fall causes.

CONCLUSION

If the characters can destroy the fext and their noctiny followers, they will have rid the area of a very dangerous threat. If they were able to rescue the woman, they can deliver her to her grateful family—which, depending on who those people are, can be used as a plot device, a new ally, or perhaps even the catalyst for the characters' next adventure.

THE ABOLETH'S GROTTO

By Enrique Bertran

The Aboleth's Grotto is a nihileth lair suitable for four 10th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

The small town of Springwell harbors a secret that almost nobody knows about, and those who do conveniently ignore: it sits right over an unoccupied settlement of the deep caverns of the underworld.

By pure luck, this secret had never been an issue — until now. About two weeks ago, people started getting sick. Reddick, the priest at the only church in town, traced the cause to foul well water. The clergy began working overtime purifying the town's water—while dealing with the real issue secretly, to avoid a panic.

An undead aboleth, a creature known as a nihileth, rose from the waters below and settled in a small grotto a mile outside of town, bringing a small band of adoring sahuagin with it. It created an illusory image of itself to Reddick, who immediately linked the aboleth to the fouled water. He sent out a small party of temple guards and acolytes to investigate and destroy the undead aberration, but they never returned. Reddick fears he has made a terrible mistake.

ADVENTURE HOOK

All of the town's acolytes are gone and the townsfolk are starting to panic, as Reddick feared would happen. Reddick's work purifying the town's water has been interrupted by the need to tend to the villagers. The aboleth is using its Psychic Drain on Reddick as well, and if this continues the only person available who can purify the water may soon be completely useless. He needs the adventurers to go to the grotto, find out what happened to his acolytes, and deal with this aberration.

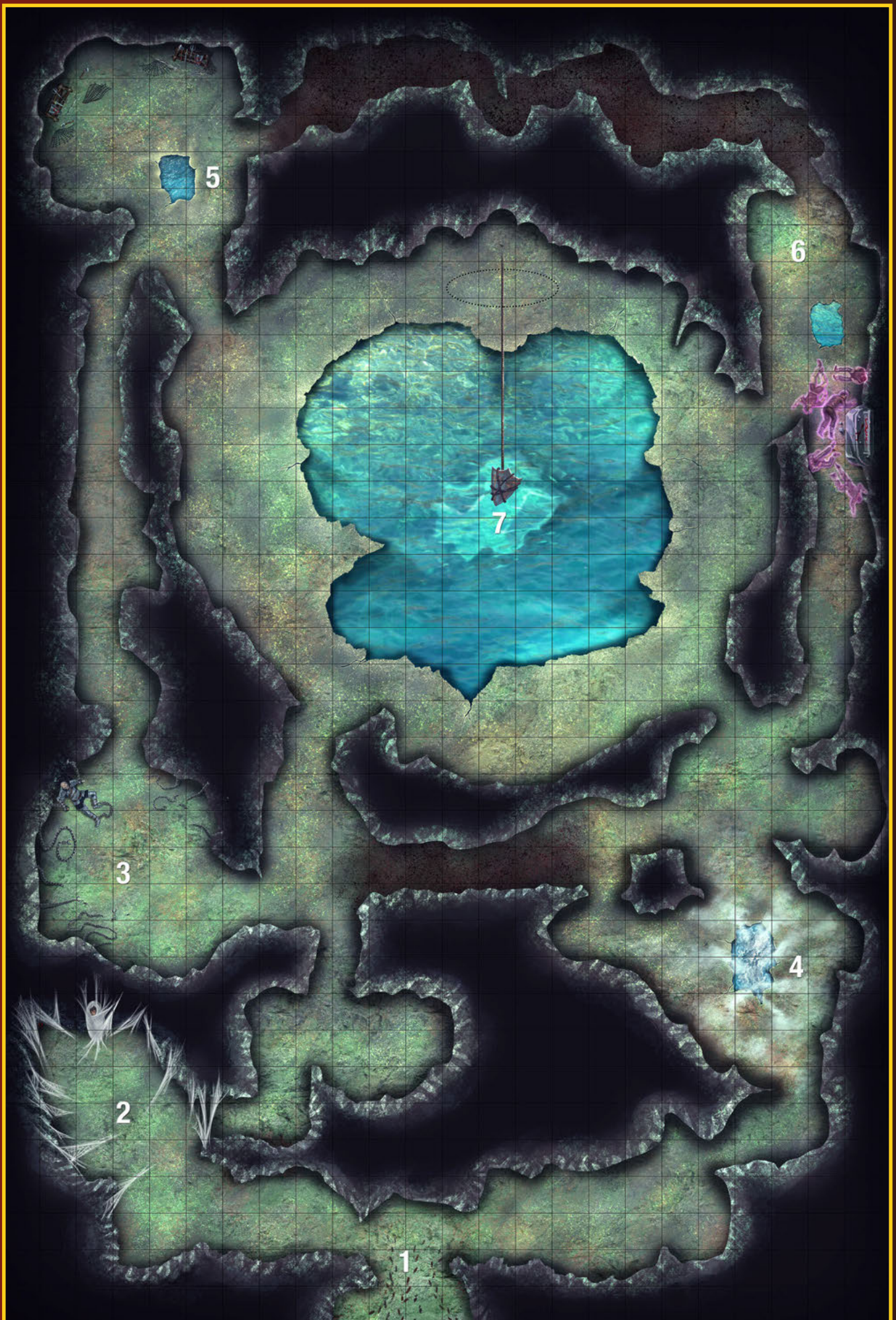
THE ABOLETH'S GROTTO

Unless otherwise noted, every cavern in the grotto is dimly lit by phosphorescent moss and fungi. The ceilings in the caves are 20 feet high.

FUNGUS

The exotic fungus found on the floor is known as "cacklewood." Any humanoid that eats it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or laugh maniacally for the next 1d6 minutes. The caverns carry sound, and any creature within 50 feet of someone under the effects of cacklewood hears the laughter and knows which direction it is coming from.





ENCOUNTERS

Use the following table to generate encounters for the party as it travels through the dimly lit passageways of the aboleth's grotto. Roll on a d6 whenever you feel it's appropriate to do so.

d6	ENCOUNTER
1-3	3 nihilethic zombies (TOB)
4	4 giant spiders (MM)
5	12 sahuagin (MM)
6	3 swarms of doppelrats and a ratfolk rogue (TOB)

1. ENTRANCE

The cave's entrance lies under a rocky overhang and leads into a small hill. Various footprints lead in and out, and it smells of rot and dampness, creating an unpleasant musty odor with overtones of fish. The path splits into two dimly lit caverns ahead.

The entrance shows signs of a scuffle between the clerics and other volunteers sent by Reddick to investigate, and the group of fanatical sahuagin who worship the undead aberration, confusing it for one of their gods.

If the PCs search the dusty ground around the entrance, a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check uncovers some fish bones, seashells, and a holy symbol from the Church of Light attached to a broken necklace. A check result of 15 or higher also reveals that some of the footprints are webbed.

2. SPIDER'S DEN

Webbing covers the entire ceiling. Muffled screams from a webbed cocoon in the northwestern corner fill the air. A giant spider appears from the shadows, ready to attack.

Once the **giant spider** (MM) is defeated, the characters can rescue the person in the cocoon. Climbing 20 feet up the slick cavern walls to reach it requires a successful DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check for every 10 feet climbed. Ripping through the cocoon and carrying down the person inside it requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check. A failed check results in 2d6 points of bludgeoning damage to the person inside the cocoon, who is already in bad shape. Taking this damage renders him unconscious for 2d10 minutes.

The person trapped in the spider's cocoon is a villager named Thayne. He tells the PCs that he attempted to escape and return to Springwell, but the spider got to him first. He isn't sure how long he's been in the cocoon.

He also tells the characters that all the townsfolk who came to defeat the beast in the lake are dead. He says that they "turned on each other" once they started making their way through the grotto. He warns the party about the creature having "evil mind charms," and also about some fish people in league with the beast.

Thayne doesn't have any more information to offer, and asks the party for food and water before returning to Springwell.

3. PRISON

This cavern serves as a makeshift prison. Several rusty chains and manacles are attached to the walls, and a dead acolyte of the Church of Light remains shackled to the northwestern wall. She's clutching her holy symbol with her left hand, while her right hand shows cuts consistent with a struggle.

With a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check, the PCs notice that all the shackles are lightly coated with a yellowish slime.

If the PCs spend too much time here without trying to be stealthy, the noise attracts the attention of a band of five sahuagin led by a baron currently in the narrow tunnel leading north to area 4.

The narrow tunnel floor is covered in muck (mostly bat guano). The guano has smothered the phosphorescent fungi, leaving this passage in complete darkness. A **swarm of skin bats** (TOB) makes its home in this tunnel.

4. STEAM ROOM

A fine plume of steam rises from the bubbling pool in this cavern. Small openings riddle the floor, and the cavern is much warmer than the area you came from. Five lurching zombies dressed in cleric's robes approach from the northern passage and march toward you.

The bubbling coming from the pools is quite loud, and anyone who attempts a Wisdom (Perception) check that relies on hearing has disadvantage. Active and potentially harmful steam vents riddle the floor. On initiative count 20, roll a d6. On a 1, a random PC must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 5 (1d10) fire damage. The five **nihilethic zombies** (TOB) in this chamber are immune to the steam. One of the zombies still carries a *potion of healing* in a pocket of its robe.

Creatures in the superheated water from the pool are scalded for 5 (1d10) fire damage. Any creature shoved into the pool must succeed on a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check to climb out of it, but still takes scalding fire damage in that round.

5. WORSHIPPER'S CHAMBER

This room currently serves as the sahuagin's rudimentary quarters. Nets, tridents and shields litter the floor. A **sahuagin baron** and five **sahuagin** (MM) are in this chamber gathering equipment, ritual components and other items. They are preparing to leave for area 5, where a ceremony is taking place. They attack as soon as they spot the PCs. Searching the bodies yields a pearl necklace worth 2,500 gp, and a gold brooch in the shape of a fish worth 750 gp.

After defeating the baron and its underlings, the party hears a loud splash and grunting sounds coming from the southeast. It's the aboleth, raising more zombies in anticipation of the adventurers' arrival.

The water in the small pool is cool to the touch, but poisoned by the aboleth and unsafe to drink.

The tunnel east of this chamber is also covered in guano and completely dark. A **giant wolf spider** (MM) hides in a cavity near the eastern end of the tunnel.

6. SAHUAGIN SHRINE

A crude stone altar, along with an image of an aboleth, drawn in blood, graces the eastern wall of this improvised shrine. Five dead townsfolk lie at the altar steps, their remains translucent and glowing with a faint purple aura. A sahuagin priestess stands at the altar, arms raised in evocation.

The **sahuagin priestess** (MM) thinks she's raising these zombies to serve their nihilistic master, but that's not entirely true. The aboleth itself is raising the zombies, but it has the sahuagin convinced that they are powerful enough to do so. The aboleth hopes that the promise of more power will keep these useful servants around when the time comes to spread the Void's influence throughout this region of the world.

The sahuagin are very protective of their makeshift shrine, and installed a **falling net trap** (DMG) at the northern entrance of this chamber. The priestess attacks the PCs as soon as they enter the shrine. When the fighting commences, the five townsfolk rise as **nihilethic zombies** (TOB) and attack the characters. Every two rounds of combat, two **sahuagin** (MM) swim up from the pool near the northern entrance to join the fight.

This pool is connected to a sahuagin settlement below ground, and serves as an escape route if the going gets tough.

7. ABOLETH'S POOL

A chill falls over you as the pool that dominates the middle of this cavern becomes turbulent. You catch a glimpse of the undead aboleth as it sinks into the pool; it's a large, ethereal, tentacled creature surrounded by a cold mist. At the same time six of its zombies rise in unison, lumbering toward you. And as if that weren't enough, a sahuagin baron and a pair of its minions enter the fray.

The **nihileth** (TOB) will use its Enslave action and its Psychic Drain legendary action first; while the six **zombies** (MM) distract the PCs. The **sahuagin baron** and the two **sahuagin** (MM) fight to defend the aboleth, but won't protect the zombies.

If the PCs did not defeat the enemies in areas 3, 4, and 5, they join the battle after 3 rounds of combat, approaching from their respective areas.

SHIELD ON A ROPE

This cavern sits under a wooded hill, and there's an opening in the ceiling through which a rope hangs.

Its other end is tied to a tree on the hill above. A rusty shield is tied to the rope at its lower end, and for years children have used it to swing from the stone bridge into the pool. The shield can be grabbed from either side of the bridge.

A character can use an action to tilt the shield, reflecting the light from the opening in the ceiling toward any humanoid it can see within 10 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of its next turn.

A character can use an action to swing the shield at any humanoid it can see within 10 feet. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

The shield is a long-forgotten +2 *shield*.

CONCLUSION

If the adventurers defeat the aboleth and its zombies, any remaining sahuagin scramble to get away as soon as possible. Within days, Springwell's water supply returns to normal. The PCs earn the town's gratitude, along with the promise of free healing, food and shelter if their travels ever bring them to the area again.



BLOODWOOD OF THE CRUOR CIRCLE

By Robert Adducci

Bloodwood of the Cruor Circle is an alseid and blood hag lair suitable for four or five 10th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

The Cruor Circle, a coven of dark druids led by a blood hag, has taken over control of the local alseid herd with the power of the blood. Within the forest, those who do not make proper sacrifices are stalked by the alseids and taken to the Bloodwood. Within the Bloodwood, captives become blood sacrifices, empowering the creation of sap demons, blood ponds, and other twisted products of the dark druids.

ADVENTURE HOOK

This lair can be easily worked into an existing campaign. Perhaps the group has been hired to find a missing person, or the characters are just traveling through the area.

SACRIFICE

Read the following once the characters enter the forest:

The dank smell of decay and the creaking of tree boughs in this forest have put you on edge. While hunting, you came upon a wooden sign with writing scrawled on it in blood. Shortly after seeing the sign, you took down a deer.

If the characters look, the sign reads:

The Circle demands a taste of all blood spilled and the blood of the hunter. Pay homage by reciting these words after a kill: 'To the Cruor I give this life blood from dying veins to strengthen the guardians of the Bloodwood.' To finish your tribute, sacrifice a drop of your own blood by mixing it with that of the slain.

When the characters kill the deer, ask the players if they make the blood sacrifice or not. If all the characters make the sacrifice, all traces of blood on the ground disappear as it soaks into the ground. If they do not, the trees shudder and a low cackling can be heard on the wind.

FEY DEALINGS

The sound of hooves beating the ground emanates from the forest. Instead of horses, several beings approach your camp. Each has the lower body of a deer and the upper body of an elf with wild hair and a red circle on differing places of the body—some have it on their chests, some on their flanks, and others on the face or forehead. On either side of a

female wielding a red wooden cudgel are two males with small horns protruding from their foreheads.

A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that these beings are alseids, which are normally reclusive and live in harmony with their forest homes. The group includes twelve **alseids** (TOB) and an **alseid druid** (MM) named Erana. She addresses the party in one of two ways, depending on why she and her troop were drawn here.

If the characters all made the blood sacrifice, Erana informs them that “The Mother has received your sacrifice and desires an audience with you.” Continue with “Development,” below.

If the characters did not all make the blood sacrifice, Erana tells them that “By failing to pay the proper sacrifice, you have raised the ire of the Cruor Circle, which guards this forest.” As recompense, she says, the characters must travel to the Bloodwood, where “the Mother will explain what you must do.”





DEVELOPMENT

If the characters agree to go to the Bloodwood with the alseids and speak with the Mother, they all make the journey without incident. Continue with “The Black Thicket,” below.

If the characters refuse to go along, Erana calls out, “Mother Congeala! We offer you the blood of these interlopers!” With that, she casts *entangle*. Half of the alseids attack with their spears while the others attack at range. The two alseids who guard Erana have advantage on attacks when adjacent to the druid.

Characters who fall to the alseids’ attack are not killed, but are taken to the Bloodwood to be infected by sap demons in the Cruor Circle’s blood rites (if they do not escape first).

If the characters defeat the alseids and make a proper sacrifice to the Cruor Circle using their blood, all of the nearby blood disappears completely. Mother Congeala will be pleased with this; however, she still has need of the characters’ services. The characters find it impossible to leave the woods. Every path fades away, or leads to a blocked pass or an impassable thicket. When they travel the wood from now on, they see druidic marks on trees. Following the marks leads them to the Bloodwood. They approach the place along the path that leads to the palisade (area 1).

TREASURE

The alseids carry two *potions of healing* and 140 gp worth of herbs and gems.

THE BLACK THICKET

If the characters travel to the Bloodwood with Erana, she stops on the path that leads to the entrance and points out the thicket that lies north and west of the path. She explains that a group of spider creatures has invaded this area recently. “The Mother would look kindly upon you,” she says, “were you to dispatch these monsters and bring her proof of your success.”

In this area are five **giant spiders** (MM), two **swarms of spiders** (MM), and three **ettercaps** (MM). The group has made its home in a thicket that is now covered in thick webs that hamper movement on the ground (difficult terrain) and is so dense that little light gets inside (lightly obscured by dim light, providing half cover for creatures are more than 10 feet away). All of the monsters are in trees 15 feet above the ground when first encountered. The remains of deer, alseids, and other unidentifiable creatures are tangled in the webs.

If the characters arrive in this area unescorted, they might choose to explore the thicket before entering the Bloodwood. If not, or if they decline the opportunity given them by Erana, continue with “The Bloodwood.”

TREASURE

An unlocked chest contains 7,600 cp, 2,100 gp, and 100 pp as well as *oil of sharpness*.

THE BLOODWOOD

The Cruor Circle’s headquarters is surrounded by a palisade. When a fight starts anywhere in the camp, four **alseids** (TOB) and two **alseid druids** (MM) arrive on the scene every 3 rounds, and two **sap demons** (TOB) arrive in the following round (on the 4th, 8th, 12th, and 16th rounds). A total of sixteen alseids, eight alseid druids, and eight sap demons defend the encampment.

1. PALISADE

The forest turns dark with pungent smoke that smells of blood. Nearby trees weep with red sap, splattering you and your gear. Along the side of the path spikes with impaled bodies line the way toward the Bloodwood. Along the north side of the trail lies a dark thicket covered in webs. Ahead of you stands a crude round spiked palisade with various humanoid creatures impaled atop it. Thorny vines cover the structure, its gates open for you. Four alseid guards watch you enter, their bows at the ready.



Characters attempting to climb the palisade must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 2d6 piercing damage from the thorny vines.

As the PCs pass through the gate, two of the alseids follow, ushering them along with spears.

2. ALSEID CAMP

Inside the palisade the smell of blood is nearly overwhelming. A stand of large trees dominates the center of the encampment. Pavilion-like structures can be seen with alseid adults and fawns moving about. Several young alseids scrape red sap from the trees into buckets.

If any of these creatures are approached, they say, “You must see the Mother,” pointing toward the center of the encampment.

3. BLOOD POOLS

Walking toward the center of the camp, you see several large pools of a viscous red liquid. Three alseids with red sigils painted on their bodies throw crimson sap, a bucket of blood, and handfuls of herbs into a pool. Two pots of boiling blood are hung over small fires. Vague shapes undulate under the surface of the pools. Behind the pools are two wooden cages holding a variety of injured humanoids looking at you with pleading eyes.

The druids are preparing the pools to create sap demons. Some pools already have fully formed demons within them, while others have hints of the malevolent beings.

Approaching the pools or talking to the druids is not allowed, and the characters’ escorts continue to usher them toward the center of the camp. An attempt to gain access to the cages upsets the druids and their followers. The two alseids (TOB) serving as escorts attack, along with three alseid druids (MM) and two sap demons (TOB), which erupt from the pools. The sap demons attack with surprise, and thus gain advantage on their first attacks. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check is needed to discern that fire affects the sap demons as a *haste* spell and cold affects them as a *slow* spell.

4. BLOODWOOD CIRCLE

The smell of boiling blood and thick smoke assaults you as you near the perimeter of a ring of large trees. Druidic glyphs in blood cover the trees as well as an inner ring of smaller trees. Between the two rings a number of alseids mill about, some tending to large, boiling cauldrons of blood, others drawing sigils on trees or themselves with blood. Three small huts stand equidistant around the ring.

As you enter the circle, activity stops and the alseids watch you inquisitively. A pudgy, friendly-looking, elfish woman comes out of one of the huts and approaches you. She is flanked by two male alseids, sporting impressive antlers with dangling talismans atop their heads. Behind them shamble two ettercaps, each bleeding from the eyes, nose, ears, and mouth.

“Welcome to the Bloodwood of the Cruor Circle. I am Mother Congeala,” the woman says. “Have you come to offer a sacrifice of the sanguine fluid within your veins?”

Mother Congeala is a **blood hag** (TOB). The two ettercaps (MM) are infected by sap demons. The two alseid druids (MM) are members of the Cruor Circle named Marasen and Illian. The rest of the alseids in this area leave when Mother Congeala appears.

A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check enables a character to realize that the ettercaps are infected by sap demons, as well as understanding the effects of fire and cold on such creatures.

DEVELOPMENT

If the characters respond positively to Mother Congeala’s question, she offers the characters a chance to pay their debt by killing the spider creatures in the thicket.

If the characters have already killed the ettercaps and have brought the bodies to offer as sacrifice, Mother Congeala honors them by asking them to participate in the sacrificial ritual. She ultimately wants her sap demons to infect the characters, since they would make powerful hosts for the demons. A character who participates in the ritual must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be grappled, at which point one of the sap demons uses its Soul Sap ability to try to dominate the character. If more than two characters take part, roll randomly to determine whom the sap demons attack.

Characters who refuse to participate in the ritual will be grappled by the druids, and Mother Congeala will attempt to use her Blood Drinking Hair trait so that the sap demons can attempt to infect the victims.

BLOOD CAULDRONS. There are three blood cauldrons spaced around the circle. The blood hag, the sap demons, or the alseid druids can spend an action when adjacent to a cauldron to heal 4d4 + 4 damage by drinking the blood. Each creature can do this once during the encounter. A cauldron can be pushed over with a successful DC 15 Strength check.

TREASURE

In Mother Congeala’s hut the characters find 6,000 gp, 500 pp, and five art objects (a gold ring set with bloodstones, a carved ivory statue of an alseid, a large gold bracelet, a silver necklace with a bloodstone pendant, and a bronze crown) worth 750 gp each, as well as a *scimitar of speed* and a *ring of telekinesis*.

CONCLUSION

Defeating Mother Congeala and her two druids causes the rest of the alseids to flee the area. The trees cease weeping blood, and the way out of the forest can be easily found. If the characters were looking for a certain person who was taken captive, that individual can be found in one of the other two huts in the circle.

IMPERIAL GHOUL OUTPOST

By Shawn Merwin

Imperial Ghoul Outpost is an iron ghoulish lair suitable for four or five 10th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

When a clan of duergar prospectors unearthed caverns not on their maps, they were particularly excited about a strange new iron ore they found there. Not long after mining began, undead horrors emerged to attack the dwarves. Only one duergar escaped, his mind shattered by the experience. The Ghoul Imperium continues to explore the area, and it has its own plans for the newly discovered ore.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The duergar leaders, fearful of an undead incursion close to their territory and covetous of the new ore their prospectors have reported, ask the PCs to investigate the newly excavated chambers and remove any threats. Experts in weaponsmithing, they offer a single magic weapon (DM's choice) for completing the mission, as well as a valuable gem (worth 2,500 gp).

If the PCs ask to speak to the surviving prospector, they

are shown a plain stone cell containing a haggard, twitching duergar. Ukri Mukgrim, one of the leaders of a clan famous for its prospecting and mining expertise, mutters incoherently to himself. If the PCs make a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) or Wisdom (Medicine) check, they can calm him enough to get the following information:

The duergar's eyes clear momentarily. He says, in Dwarvish, "Bones everywhere. And blood. Our blood and their bones. Bones in piles. Piles that move. Corpses in armor. They talked. They want the ore. You cannot let them have the ore. The ore would be our downfall."

Ukri cannot be coaxed into revealing more; after this moment of lucidity, his madness returns for good.

The duergar leaders tell the characters that at least fifty dwarves went to the site, led by six members of clan Mukgrim, including Ukri. The other clan members are described to the characters as follows:

- Kreena, clan matron
- Ynoh, Kreena's elderly father and an expert miner
- Arinam, a one-eyed miner who wields a pick in each hand
- Thrua, Kreena's young daughter, a staff-wielding practitioner of elemental magic
- Ogel, an extremely tall mining engineer who wears special magnifying goggles

Initial reports from the newly discovered caverns detailed rich veins of an exotic iron ore. The purplish-black ore seemed to have magical properties, and the clan experts believed that powerful magic weapons might be made from it.

IMPERIAL GHOUL OUTPOST

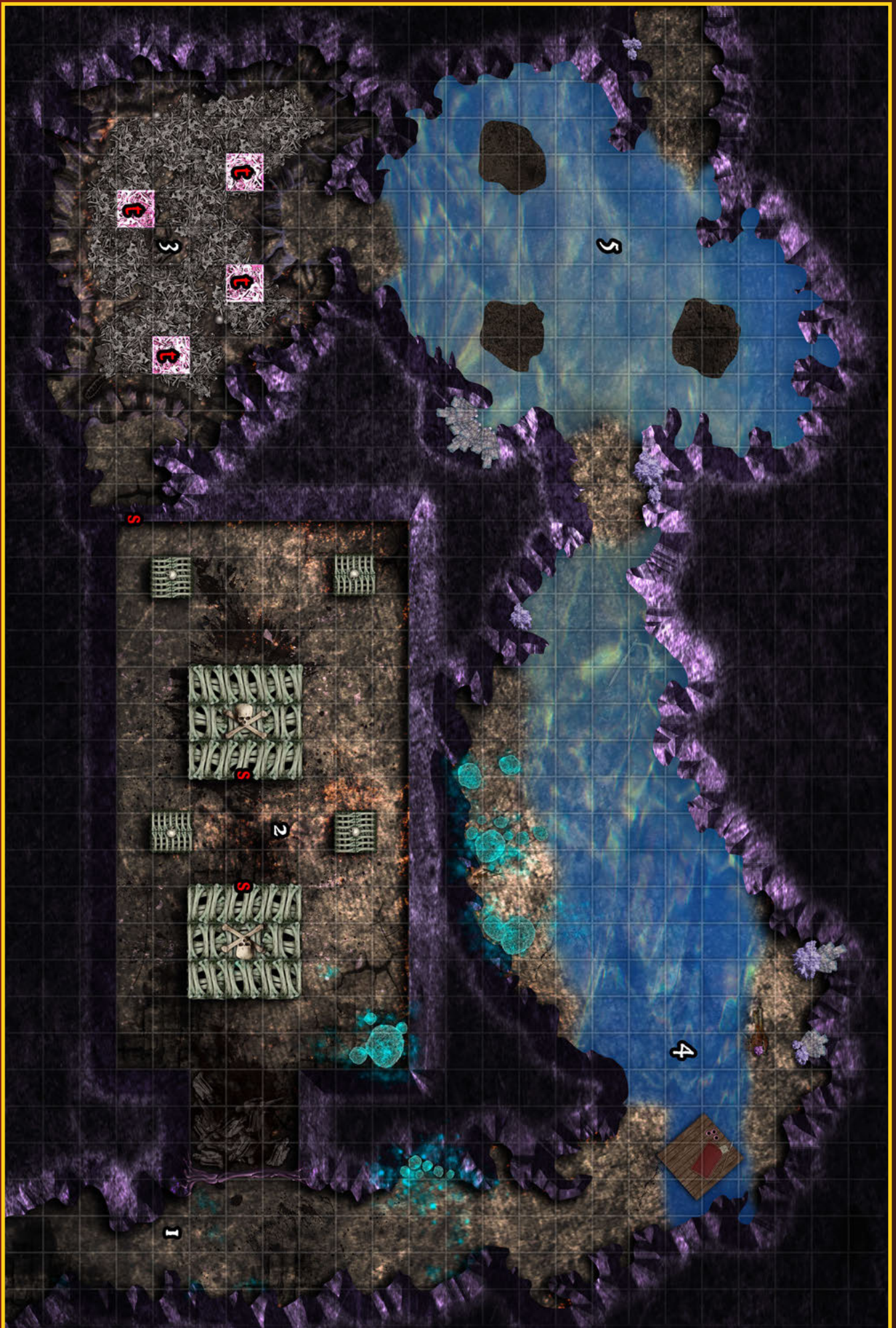
All chambers are unlit, and the rough walls can be climbed with a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. The ceilings, unless otherwise noted, are 20 feet above floor or water level.

In addition to the other monsters in the lair, a **bone collective** (TOB) in the service of a nearby lich was dispatched by its master to gather information and secure the area for further mining. The bone collective has a 75 percent chance of joining any combat against the characters, but it withdraws immediately after taking damage. If it takes damage in area 5, it retreats from the outpost to warn its master of the PCs' threat.

1. ENTRY

Blood-covered mining equipment—shovels, picks, hammers, hand drills, handcarts, and other tools—litters this passage, which slopes sharply down as it continues to the north. On the west wall, a sheet of strange material, sewn to form a curtain, blocks an opening.





A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the curtain is made from duergar skin and sewn together with ligaments and thick beard hair. As the PCs investigate, five **wraiths** (*MM*) emerge from the eastern wall. The tortured souls of the slain clan leaders, the wraiths appear as the duergar did in life. (Use the Adventure Hook details to describe the wraiths individually.)

During combat, if the PCs address any of the wraiths by name, the spirits become visibly confused: all attacks against them are made with advantage. In addition, the reminder of their mortal lives prompts each to provide one piece of helpful information after their fitful souls are put to rest:

- **KREENA**: “The bones have a life of their own!”
- **YNOH**: “The water in the deep chamber can be drained—strike carefully with your pick.”
- **ARINAM**: “My picks were useless against the bone creatures!”
- **THRUA**: “The ore in the stalagmite cavern is dangerous in some spots.”
- **OHEL**: “The hounds knocked me down and tore out my guts! I couldn’t move!”

Among the mining equipment are Ogel’s goggles. They act as a regular magnifying glass, but they also are enchanted to enable the wearer to cast *detect magic* once per day.

2. BONE CHAMBERS

In the easternmost section of this area, behind a leathery curtain, piles of duergar corpses lie rotting. The bones and skin have been removed from many of the dwarven bodies. The rest of the chamber shows signs of recent expert dwarven excavation. Six square constructs inhabit the room, each about ten feet tall and made from interconnected bones. Some of the bones are yellowed with age, while others are so fresh as to bear small bits of flesh. Some of the bones are painted red and black.

The painted areas contain a variety of magical sigils. A DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the sigils are not complete, but they are necessary components in necromantic rituals. A DC 20 Intelligence (History) check reveals that these sigils are often used by the Ghoul Imperium.

Each of the secret doors in the two largest bone constructs can be found with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Perception) check. The doors are not locked but are trapped with necromantic magic that deals 2d10 necrotic damage to anyone attempting to open them. A DC 15 Dexterity (thieves’ tools) check disables the trap on a single door.

SPLITSOUL

Splitsoul ore is regular iron that has been tainted by the touch of demonic energy. Magic weapons forged from soulsplit ore deal 1 point of necrotic damage on a hit. A sword made with soulsplit ore can be fashioned into a *nine lives stealer*.

The 15-foot-square bone constructs are hollow. Within each one is a single diamond resting atop a pile of bones. A slight flickering within the diamonds is evidence that a duergar soul is trapped in each. These souls power the magic of the room. With a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check as an action, a character can release a soul from its prison.

If both souls are released, the following happens:

- Attacks against undead in this room score a critical hit on a roll of 19 or 20.
- The secret door in the southwest corner opens.
- The trapped structures (see below) only function 50 percent of the time.

When the characters open any of the secret doors, bones break away from the six structures to form a **bone swarm** (*TOB*). At the start of every round after the first, any living creatures standing directly between any of the four smaller bone structures must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw as the structure move together violently and then return to their starting positions in the following round. A failed saving throw results in 3d10 bludgeoning damage.

The secret door in the southwest corner can be found with a DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check but can be opened only with the use of magic, such as a *knock* spell, unless the souls are released from the diamonds.

3. SOULSPLIT ORE

Two ledges on the north and east sides of this cavern overlook the floor thirty feet below. A conglomeration of bones, broken weapons, and other mundane adventuring equipment covers the cavern floor. Dozens of sharp stalagmites protrude from the floor. The walls and floor are streaked with veins of a purplish-black ore.

When the first living creature touches the cavern floor, the veins of ore pulse brightly for an instant as fourteen jumbled skeletons rise and attack from among the bones on the floor. Use **minotaur skeleton** (*MM*) statistics, except for size Medium.

Four spaces in this chamber are trapped. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check discerns the location and operation of each one. When a creature steps onto one of these squares, stalagmites of soulsplit ore erupt from the floor. A successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw allows the creature to avoid the sharp stalagmites; otherwise the victim takes 4d6 piercing damage. Each trap can be deactivated separately with a DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check as an action. If the PCs heard the warning from Thrua Mukgrim’s wraith, any checks they attempt here are made with advantage.

The cavern floor is difficult terrain. Usable equipment from explorers who have died here over the years is easily salvageable: four 50-foot lengths of silk rope, two waterskins, twelve torches, three backpacks, twelve sacks, a steel mirror, two bullseye lanterns, eleven flasks of oil, a healer’s kit, two crowbars, a climber’s kit, a bag of caltrops, four bedrolls, and a mundane wand. Searching the debris and making a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation)

check yields a set of golden earrings (worth 100 gp), a thin platinum bracelet bearing a drow house insignia (worth 400 gp), and a *potion of greater healing* in a decorative silver flask of deep gnome design (worth 500 gp).

4. RIPPLES

A makeshift raft is beached at the east end of this water-filled cavern. The murky water down the center obscures the water's contents and its depth, while dry stone shelves line the northern and southern edges. An occasional ripple plays across the surface.

The water here is 10 feet deep and murky enough to conceal the six **darakhul ghouls** (TOB) working beneath the surface, using their war picks to extract pieces of soulsplit ore for analysis. They walk across the cavern's floor at half speed, climbing onto land as part of their normal movement.

When the PCs use the raft or break the surface of the water, the ghouls move to attack when the raft is 10 feet from shore. A ghoul can use an action to bring its weaponry to bear against the raft; if one does so, it sunders the raft, spilling any passengers into the water.

The soulsplit ore's magical properties have leached into the water here, giving it a slightly necromantic tinge. Any creature touching the water at the start of its turn takes 1 necrotic damage.

5. IRON MARSHAL

Thick, fat, pulsing veins of purplish-black ore crisscross the chamber walls. Three islands made of loamy soil rest amid dirty, foul-smelling water. An injured duergar writhes on the westernmost island, covered in pustules and shouting in agony.

An **iron ghoul** (TOB) called the Iron Marshal captured Traas Mukgrim and is questioning the hostage. The suffering duergar is conscious but diseased with sewer plague, having only 1 hit point and suffering from five levels of exhaustion.

Buried beneath the soil of the three islands are six **putrid haunts** (TOB), two at each one. They rise when a character enters an island square or interacts with Traas. The Iron Marshal and two **lich hounds** (TOB) wait in the 20-foot-deep water, biding their time to attack at the right moment.

Several sections of this cavern show structural weakness: a solid strike with a piercing weapon empties the water quickly. This weakness is noticed with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, made with advantage if the PCs heard the warning from Ynoh Mukgrim's wraith. With an action and a DC 10 Strength check, a character using a piercing melee weapon can strike the wall and split it floor to ceiling, draining all the water in 1 round.

If the PCs did not defeat the darakhul ghouls in area 4, two arrive every other round after combat starts to assist their leader.

Beneath the water, in the center of the chamber floor, stands a 10-foot-tall obelisk made of splitsoul ore. Ancient, indecipherable script is etched into the obelisk, and the writings writhe and wriggle when observed, as if telling some sort of grisly story. This column's power, and how it can be used, is left to the clever machinations of the DM.

CONCLUSION

The defeat of the Iron Marshal and its soldiers strikes a blow against the Ghoul Imperium's expansion. The lich ruling this area does not give up easily, however. If the duergar attempt to mine the soulsplit ore, they face further attacks. The PCs might need to drive deeper into Ghoul Imperium territory to keep the ore away from the undead.

Traas Mukgrim, if rescued, heard the undead creatures speaking of their expansion plans. He might have important information that the PCs can use to plan their assault against the Ghoul Imperium.



THE CISTERN

By Jon Sawatsky

The Cistern is a deep drake lair suitable for four or five 10th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

Hada the Black, a necromancer who was apprehended during an investigation of five missing orphans perished last night in the custody of city officials. The inquisitor who questioned Hada is certain that the children are still alive. After the characters hear of a contract offered by the city guard, they discuss the situation with the inquisitor. The tired and disheveled man smooths his crimson robes as he speaks. A study of him and a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that he is frightened. During the conversation he reveals the following facts:

- There is a 1,000 gp reward for the return of the five children.
- Hada's lair is located in an unused cistern.
- Hada mentioned having a pet who watches over the children.

ADVENTURE HOOK

A woman in a charcoal-colored robe calls out to the PCs as they walk through the city. Her skin is pale and she carries a staff carved in the shape of an oar. She is a priest of the greater god of death, Charun (*Midgard Campaign Setting*, page 252), and she offers the party a magical beacon (detailed in area 4) to help against the undead. Her conversation with the PCs goes something like this:

"Hold, hold! I would speak with you. I am Tallenya, and I know of your conversation with the Inquisitor. Given the crimes and the criminal involved, it should not surprise you to discover Charun's interest. We cannot let the dead rot under the streets, or worse, walk in the shadows for eternity. I have here a sacred beacon, it is heavily incensed and blessed to end the suffering of the dead. Unwrap it when you see fit, so the dead can board the boatman's vessel. Take it, and know that it may only be unwrapped once."

1. ENTRANCE

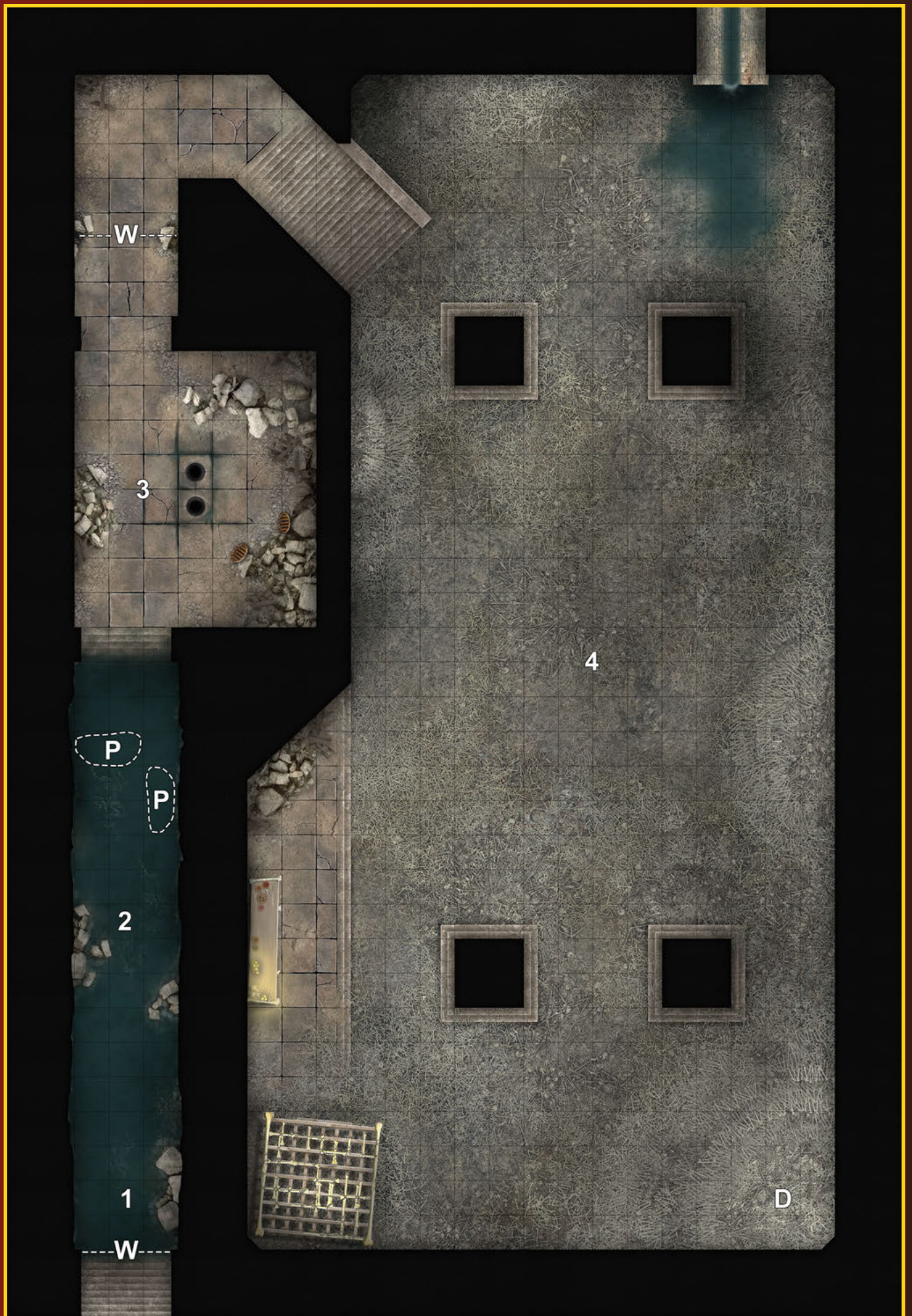
At the bottom of a long stone staircase stands a crumbling archway. A tunnel extends into the darkness beyond. The air here turns slightly sour, and a faraway drip of water echoes in the quiet. Several rats regard you from near the bottom steps; their eyes watching your every move.

The entrance is protected by a magical ward. A line of rat bones crosses the floor just inside the tunnel's entrance. It is difficult to see (Perception DC 15), and if this area is

crossed without proper examination and disenchantment or disassembling—requiring either a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check or a DC 14 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check—the bones explode into slivers. Characters within 10 feet of the entrance must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw, taking 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage on a failure, or half damage on a success. Spellcasters can choose to study the ward closely while disenchanting it. Such examination (Investigation DC 17) provides them with advantage when attempting to disenchant Hada's other ward at area 2.

The triggering of the ward alerts the ghouls in area 3; they prepare to ambush the PCs by hiding in the watery pits described in area 2. If a *speak with animals* spell is cast on the rats, the caster receives images of a massive scaled claw and of a tall woman in a black cowl coming and going through the entrance; occasionally she travels with smaller humans.





2. COLLAPSING TUNNEL

The walls of the dark tunnel are damaged in many places, and stones lie in heaps on the ground. Sinister glyphs and playful graffiti are scratched into some of the rock. Each step you take is punctuated by the soft splash of ankle-deep, fetid water.

The tunnel to the abandoned cistern is in bad shape. As the deep drake grew from a hatchling to a juvenile, its passage through the tunnel damaged the walls. A proper examination (Perception DC 13) reveals deep claw marks; PCs who are familiar with stonework receive advantage on this check. The tunnel is flooded with water from the adjacent sewer. Two hazards in this area might slow the PCs.

WATERY PITS. The flooded floor hides two pits. The sudden drops into deep water are difficult to spot (Perception DC 15) but can be safely avoided by skirting their edges. Stepping into such a pit immerses the PC in 10 feet of water. A successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw allows a character to grab the edge and avoid the effects of the foul water. PCs forced to swim in the water must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 hour; the save can be repeated every 15 minutes. Climbing out of the pit can be done automatically as part of movement.

FALLING STONES. Hada has warded the tunnel. The ruinous state of the walls made it easy for her to affix small bundles of humanoid bones and hair to a faulty section of stone. Noticing the grim effigies is difficult (Perception DC 15), although dwarves and characters with a background in stonework have advantage on the check. If identified, the bundles can be disenchanting or disassembled with a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check or a DC 14 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check. Otherwise, characters who come within 10 feet of the ward trigger it, causing stones to fall from above. Anyone within 20 feet of the wards must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 15 (3d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage on a failure, or half damage on a success.

IMPERIAL AMBUSH. If the ghouls in area 3 noticed the triggering of the ward in area 1, they hide in the watery pits and attack the party at an inopportune moment. The undead suffer no ill effects from the water. See area 3 for details on the ghouls and their mission.

3. OVERFLOW CHAMBER

The tunnel widens ahead, leading into a small ruined chamber. Two large drains in the center of the chamber fail to effectively remove the sewer water from the tunnel. Two iron grates lean against a pile of stones near the drains. A pile of waist-high debris lines the western wall. A faint moan can be heard coming from inside the drains.

This chamber serves as host to a small unit of imperial ghouls, led by an iron ghoul known as Officer Naragal, that are tasked with stealing Hada's pet drake. Currently, three **imperial ghouls** (TOB) await the return of Naragal, who is in area 4 attempting to communicate with the drake. They are hidden behind the rubble along the western wall. The ghouls

attack the PCs on sight. They carry nothing of value with them, but a missive from a legion commander details their orders in the Darakhul tongue. The missive refers to the deep drake as a "serpent of shadow."

THE DRAINS. The drains are full of Hada's zombies. In each round of combat (up to a maximum of ten) after the ghouls attack, a **zombie** (MM) crawls out of one of the drains and attacks the PCs. Covering a drain with one of the grates takes an action and a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check. If both grates are replaced, no further zombies arrive.

IMPERIAL GHOULS' TACTICS. The ghouls attempt to surprise the PCs. They coordinate their attacks to use the zombies as flankers when possible.

Note: if the PCs unwrap the beacon during this encounter, refer to "Planting Charun's Beacon" in area 4. Consider having the death butterfly swarm flutter off toward Naragal to reduce the difficulty of the encounter in area 4.

4. CISTERN

A crumbling staircase leads 20 feet down into an enormous cistern. Four columns stretch from the silt-covered floor into the darkness above. A stone gorgon's head leers at you from its location on the nearest column. A small stream of murky water seeps into the chamber by way of an aqueduct along the top of the western wall. From the darkness to the east you hear a soft voice, its tone at once soothing and sinister.

The voice is that of Officer Naragal, an **iron ghoul** (TOB), who is attempting to coax Hada's **deep drake** (TOB) away from its sleeping mound in the cistern's northeast corner. Interrupting Naragal has the following consequences:

- Combat begins; Naragal and the deep drake roll initiative separately.
- Officer Naragal curses the PCs in Darakhul before charging them.
- The drake sounds its alien and sinister mewling before emerging to defend its lair on round two.

DEEP DRAKE

A cry, cold and alien, rises from the darkness. Soon afterward, a breath of moving air indicates that something massive is drawing near. Claws appear at the edge of the light, covered in glassy black scales. A draconic visage descends into view, its violet eyes narrowing in a wicked stare. The ghoulish captain gurgles a terrified and adoring cry. Hada's pet has awakened.

Hada's pet drake prefers attacking the PCs instead of Naragal, but it does not care if he is in the path of its breath weapon. The cistern is a tight place for the large creature, but it does its best to avoid being flanked.

OFFICER NARAGAL'S TACTICS. Officer Naragal attacks the PCs. He uses the columns as cover. Even if he is struck by the drake's necrotic breath weapon, he does not retaliate; the drake is too valuable to him.

PLANTING CHARUN'S BEACON. The beacon can greatly assist the party in this potentially deadly encounter. Planting

the beacon and unfurling its linen wrappings requires an action. Doing so has the following consequences:

- Radiant energy pulses from the beacon every round on initiative count 10. Undead within 20 feet of the beacon take 5 radiant damage from the pulse.
- A single **death butterfly swarm** (TOB) emerges and instantly attacks Officer Naragal. The swarm occupies Naragal's attention, preventing him from attacking the PCs. You can resolve the combat between Naragal and the swarm normally, or consider Naragal to be occupied for 5 or 6 rounds, after which he reenters combat against the PCs with 48 hit points remaining.

Once his fight against the death butterfly swarm ends, Naragal can attempt to destroy the beacon with his glaive. Destroying the beacon requires Naragal to be adjacent to it and use an action to slice it in two (no roll required).

HADA'S CAGE. In the southeast corner of the cistern, five children are trapped inside Hada's bony prison, all 6 to 10 years old. Two boys, Sama and Yurj, and three girls, Ela, Omine, and Belo, watch the fight in terror. The youngest, Sama, is ill and injured. The children refuse to leave the relative safety of the cage until the combat is over. Even afterward, the children need to be convinced before they believe that they have been rescued. Coaxing them from the cage takes a confident and comforting tone (Diplomacy DC 12), or the offer of curing (healing spells) or tending to Sama's injuries (Medicine DC 12).

THE TABLE. Hada's table contains numerous components for necromancy spells. A close study (Investigation DC 14) of her work indicates that she had a fascination with exploding bones. A careful examination (Perception DC 14) of the table itself reveals a hidden drawer containing a bone handled +2 dagger, a spell scroll of *animate dead*, two potions of *supreme healing*, and a water-damaged journal. The journal describes Hada's desire to use her magic to give orphan children better lives than her own. Most of the writing consists of her plans for avenging various wrongs done to her; her madness is evident.

CONCLUSION

When the characters return to the surface, Tallenya is there to pay their fee, assuming all went well. If the characters return with rescued children, payment is made. Given the evidence of ghouls and necromancy, the town authorities order the cistern and tunnel collapsed and Hada's furnishings and remaining items burned.

How Hada came to possess the egg of such a terrifying beast remains unknown, but the city would appreciate a group willing to explore deeper into the underworld, perhaps leading to an encounter with the Imperial Ghoul Outpost from this volume or other creatures of the deep earth who knew Hada. If Officer Naragal or any of the imperial ghouls survived, they might also have set a watch on the passages leading here, in anticipation of visitors from the surface.



FANE OF SERPENTS

By Steve Winter

Fane of Serpents is a titanoboa lair suitable for three to five 10th-level characters.

BACKGROUND

A rocky butte covered with soaring ruins looms over the landscape. Legend describes it as a monument raised by an inhuman race that was wiped out centuries ago as retribution over foul practices. Locally, the spot is known as Titan's Height. It rises starkly above the surrounding area, with four terraced plateaus. Each level is covered with the ruins of many-columned halls in an architectural style unlike anything else in the area. Their age and strangeness alone are enough to generate fearful legends. The stories grow worse when travelers or livestock disappear near Titan's Height, which they sometimes do.

Of course, travelers get lost or waylaid by bandits all the time, and livestock that isn't watched has a tendency to wander off, fall into ravines, and be poached by lions or wyverns. As natural philosophers and less superstitious merchants tell their neighbors in the inns and markets of the region, none of these occurrences prove that anything malevolent lurks around Titan's Height.

But, in fact, something does. It's a titanoboa, a serpent of enormous size and age. Like a dragon, it spends most of its time asleep in a den beneath the ruins, emerging infrequently when hunger awakens it. Then it slithers down from the ruins and devours a few camels and goats, or a tent full of unwary travelers, before returning to its den to slumber for months.

The gigantic snake is not alone. It has attracted a small number of secretive lizardfolk admirers that live furtively among the ruins and call the snake Thont-Aisk, the monument crusher. A few months ago, a band of adventurers came to investigate the place, attracted by the same legends and rumors that now draw the PCs. Their leader, a mage named Karakin Aram, recognized a situation ripe for exploitation. The adventurers killed the lizardfolk leader and forced the others to obey them through intimidation and promises of power. Now Aram seeks a way to fully control the titanoboa.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Titan's Height has the usual allure of abandoned places: mystery, adventure, and the potential to claim ancient weapons,

gold, jewels, and magic. If that's not enough, any of the following enticements can be dangled in front of the characters.

- This has always been a perilous region for travelers, but recent attacks have created a mystery. Small caravans of people and pack animals have been wiped out, while their goods were left behind untouched.
- The glow of a campfire was seen on Titan's Height. Bandits have used the place as a hideout in the past, so the local ruler offers a small payment to anyone willing to investigate, with the promise of a more significant reward if bandits are found and destroyed.
- A lone adventurer tells of encountering a strange force near Titan's Height. Something clouded the minds of his companions and turned them against each other. He alone escaped. (This incident was the work of the lizardfolk, occurring before Aram arrived.)





FEATURES OF THE PLATEAU

Most titanoboas live in jungle areas, and Titan's Height is right at home in that environment. In a jungle setting, the ruins are heavily overgrown with creepers, vines, and trees. The plateau can just as easily rise above the desert, provided enough travelers pass through the area to keep the gigantic snake fed.

The lizardfolk watch the surrounding territory closely, on Aram's orders. Except for invisible creatures, nothing can approach Titan's Height without the lizardfolk noticing and alerting Aram.

The sides of the prominence are sheer, but they can be climbed normally. The lizardfolk won't allow climbers to ascend unmolested. They attack with javelins and bows, and by rolling large stones down onto the climbers' heads.

RAMPS. The ramps are less steep than stairs but steeper than most ramps. For every 10 feet of horizontal distance a ramp covers (one square on the map), it rises (or descends) 5 feet. Most ramps have landings at the halfway point. The four levels of the plateau are 20, 40, 60, and 80 feet above ground level. The sides of the ramps are crumbling, but the ramps are otherwise sound.

TERRACES. The plateaus were artificially leveled and paved with flat stones when the structures were built. Most of the paving is intact, except where trees have taken root and forced the stones aside. The four terraces together cover one and a half acres.

STRUCTURES. These massive, close-fitted stones are covered with carvings. The depictions are geometric, with no discernible writing or pictures to give them historical context. None of the structures have roofs, and it appears they never did.

The structures are still sound, although they might not look it. Many stones have toppled from the walls and columns, sometimes creating rubble piles that spill onto the level below.

The "walls" of the structures are riddled with openings and gaps. These barriers are more substantial than rows of columns, but they're pierced by many openings wide enough for a Medium creature to step through. Because of their age, it isn't obvious that these openings are design features and not the result of collapse. Dwarves recognize the difference immediately.

TITAN'S HEIGHT

If you've placed Titan's Height outside the jungle, modify the following description accordingly.

The rocky prominence rises like a fortress above the jungle. Four flat levels are stacked atop each other like layers of a cake. The lowest level is twenty feet above the forest floor, and the highest rises at least eighty feet overhead. Titanic ruins stand on each

level—roofless structures of columns and open walls. Ramps with occasional platforms connect the levels. Vines and creepers grow over everything, but not even the insistent forest could overpower this ancient bastion.

No matter how characters ascend the mound (unless they're invisible), they'll be observed by lizardfolk, who immediately inform Aram that they have intruders.

1. WELLHOUSE

A leather bucket is perched at the edge of what looks like a well inside this crumbling structure. A rope made from braided vines is tied to the bucket, with most of its length coiled on the floor.

The well is 30 feet deep. The water at the bottom is brown but drinkable.

2. LOWER TEMPLE

A tattered basket, a filthy mat of woven reeds, and an unpleasant odor indicate that something has been living in this columned enclosure.

The lizardfolk that remain on the plateau use this crumbling temple as their dwelling. The basket holds their next meal—five dead birds and a mostly dead rat. The twelve lizardfolk (MM) hide behind the temple (or wherever they can) and attack when most of the characters are inside the structure. They shoot their bows through gaps in the walls, gaining three-quarters cover from the stonework. When half are dead, the others flee.

3. GRAND RAMP

Aside from an immense heap of rubble where part of the cliff and stonework above has collapsed, this structure is largely intact. A few broken pots are scattered on the paving stones, but the feature that dominates the level is the great ramp that leads straight up to the higher landing. The surrounding walls enclose the ramp.

A nest of three poisonous snakes (MM) is located behind the ramp, at the southern end of the structure. Otherwise, this level is empty.

4. CONCEALED ENTRANCE

Two irregular passages that connect to Thont-Aisk's den are hidden behind heaps of rubble and foliage. The rubble is a mix of collapsed masonry and pieces of the cliff that have sheared off over the centuries. Rubble-filled squares on the map are extremely difficult terrain: every 1 foot of movement uses 4 feet of the moving creature's speed.

The titanoboa doesn't use these exits often, so the areas show few signs of disturbance. The openings can be found with a physical search of the immediate area—climbing over the rubble and pushing aside thorn bushes—but not by scanning it from 10 or 15 feet away.

5. SUN'S PATH

Three rows of columns run lengthwise through this hall. Those on the outside are as high as the walls, and those running down the center are only five feet high.

At the height of this temple's glory, the setting sun on the spring and autumn equinoxes shone exactly along the row of low pillars, squarely illuminating the great head in area 6, and the shadows of the pillars created the illusion that the head was floating. Curious characters can figure this out with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature or Religion) check.

6. THE GREAT HEAD

A massive, crumbling, stone head lies toppled on the paving stones of this structure. The features of the face suggest a humanoid creature, but they're elongated in a way that you've never seen on any humanoid. It might be nothing more than a surreal and unsettling artistic style, or this face could represent a race that died out long ago.

Aside from the great head, no features remain in this temple. The head is one of the ramag (see *Unlikely Heroes for 5th Edition*), an obscure race of portal-building humanoids that rarely leave their magical cities and planar redoubts.

7. NPCs' CAMP

Two simple shelters of stitched goatskin are slung in this narrow space, with wool and fur blankets, knapsacks, and a few other belongings strewn around.

Karakin Aram and the other NPCs pitched their camp in the sheltered space between the ramp and the "wall" surrounding the temple of the great head. A careful search turns up 800 gp worth of valuables, mostly in the form of jewelry and gems sewn into blanket linings or in concealed pockets inside knapsacks.

8. UPPER TEMPLE

The walls of this enclosure are thick and solid, unlike those on the levels below. An immense, two-tiered dais fills the area. Columns covered with geometric designs stand symmetrically on the platforms, and a ramp leads from the entrance straight up to the top level.

The lower level of the platform is 10 feet above the floor, and the upper level is 20 feet above the floor. At the center of the upper platform, an open pit plunges 50 feet down into a dark cavern. A strong animal smell wafts up from the pit. The sides of the cavity are curiously rippled in a deep, wavelike pattern; the indentations allow the titanoboa to slither up the walls of the shaft. Thont-Aisk will climb up from its den in 2d4 rounds if the lip of the pit is struck hard with a metallic object at least three times. This is how Aram summons the serpent.

9. THONT-AISK'S DEN

Omit the final sentence of the read-aloud text if Thont-Aisk is not in its den for some reason.

This broad cavern reeks of wild animal and death. The floor is strewn with the bones of animals and humanoids. In the far shadows, something stirs noiselessly.

The cavern is featureless except for stalagmites, stalactites, and the bones of the titanoboa's victims, accumulated over the centuries of the snake's life span. The floor of the cavern is difficult terrain for characters but not for Thont-Aisk. A 1-hour search among the bones reveals a stiff, moldering rucksack containing 700 gp, 10 pp, and some rotted paper. A second hour of searching uncovers a small wooden box containing 800 sp plus an opal-studded bracelet worth 50 gp, and a third hour uncovers a *potion of flying* and an electrum necklace worth 150 gp. No more treasure will be found after three hours.

OPPOSING ADVENTURERS

Karakin Aram is accompanied by two or three other NPC adventurers (include a fourth opponent if there are more than four player characters or if you want the final fight to be very tough on the PCs). You can decide the race and gender of each NPC. The individuals are:

KARAKIN ARAM, a **mage** (MM) with a *ring of evasion*, a *potion of invulnerability*, and a *potion of animal friendship*.

AZAT AVETIS, a **gladiator** (MM) with a *potion of fire giant strength* and a *potion of speed*.

STEPAN ZHIRAYR, a **veteran** (MM) with a *potion of flying* and a *potion of fire breath*.

ZABAYDA GABUKOJ, a **gladiator** (MM) with a *potion of heroism* and a *potion of invisibility*.

These adventurers intend to ambush and kill the intruding PCs. They drink their potions just before entering combat. They attack as PCs explore the third level. Their most likely deployment puts Avetis nearest the enemy, Zhirayr poised to take to the air and attack enemy spellcasters, and Aram at the top of the ramp to level 4, where he can throw a few spells down into the intruders before racing back to the pit to summon Thont-Aisk. These NPCs are experienced pros, however, so they adapt their deployment and tactics to the situation. One might even engage the player characters in conversation to suss out their strengths or lure them into a trap (but the speaker won't be Aram).

Whether the NPCs are winning or losing the battle, eventually Aram strikes the edge of the pit to summon Thont-Aisk. The **titanoboa** (TOB) arrives 2d4 rounds later, on its own initiative count. It won't attack Aram (because of his *potion of animal friendship*), but the other NPCs and player characters are equally appealing meals in its eyes. Typically, the giant snake attacks the closest target, but you can also select its victim randomly or choose the target that offers the most drama.

SKY STAIRS OF BELDESTAN

By Wolfgang Baur

Sky Stairs of Beldestan is a vampire warlock lair suitable for four characters of 14th level. It can be a lead-in to *Citadel of the Void Dragon*, or it can be played independently.

BACKGROUND

For as long as any dragon can remember, the stairs of Beldestan have been a site of pilgrimage, a direct route from dusty earth up to the heavens, where enormous creatures soar and carry sacrifices up to the gods. Its base is well known for the efficacy of the invocations offered there, but very few other than the most faithful dare venture up the stairs themselves: enormous eagles, howling winds, and various inimical undead make the stairs a place that few find congenial for long.

Those who climb the full height and return, however, are favored in the eyes of the gods, and certainly accomplishing such a feat is a daring and worthy endeavor. Many have set off for the heights, and but a few have returned, somewhat scarred and sometimes wiser for the effort.

The heroes might have several reasons to climb the stairs:

- To acquire a quiver full of roc feathers at a mage's request
- To prove their worthiness to an order of champions
- To reach the meadow of stones, where a powerful drake shares prophecies
- To visit a great void dragon's citadel, at the edge of the void, and sail the astral winds
- To carry a message to an archmage who lives at the top of the stairs

HEIGHTS OF DANGER

Ascending the stairs of Beldestan is a brutal climb against gravity: from a hilly base to the rarified and chilled air at five miles up, more than 31,000 feet high. Due to lack of air, all fire spells take a penalty to damage in encounter areas 7–11: discard all dice that would otherwise deal maximum damage. In those same areas, cold spells are more potent: reroll any damage die that comes up a 1.

Climbing on foot rather than by magical means leads to exhaustion sooner rather than later. After every 4 hours of climbing, a character must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw; if it fails, the character gains a level of exhaustion.

FLYING TIME: Flying to the top of the stairs is entirely possible, and is an easier way to reach the top in heavy armor or with a load of supplies. Flying up must be done in stages of about 10 minutes flight time, due to the limitations of the *fly* spell. This means flying to the top takes seven castings of the spell (if the caster can target all party members), and each casting moves the party up a little less than a mile. The party rests and regains strength at various niches, small ledges, or landings along the way and does not risk exhaustion from ascending the stairs. However, this method of travel requires a considerable amount of magical casting; to affect four party members at once requires a 6th-level spell slot.

Using *fly* rather than walking means the characters will still need to land in between castings (and to rest). In addition, flying movement grants the characters access to the lost ledge (area 10).

TRAVELERS AND PILGRIMS

The Sky Stairs are always attracting various heroes and seekers. Here are six optional NPCs for the characters to meet.

TWEEDLETOES (devilish gnomish prince, *TOB*) is a card cheat and a kidnapper. If he manages to catch a victim alone, he attempts to kidnap that person by using a sleeping poison or a *hold person* scroll, and then carries his quarry to a quiet hillside where he can cut out the victim's heart and sacrifice it to infernal powers.

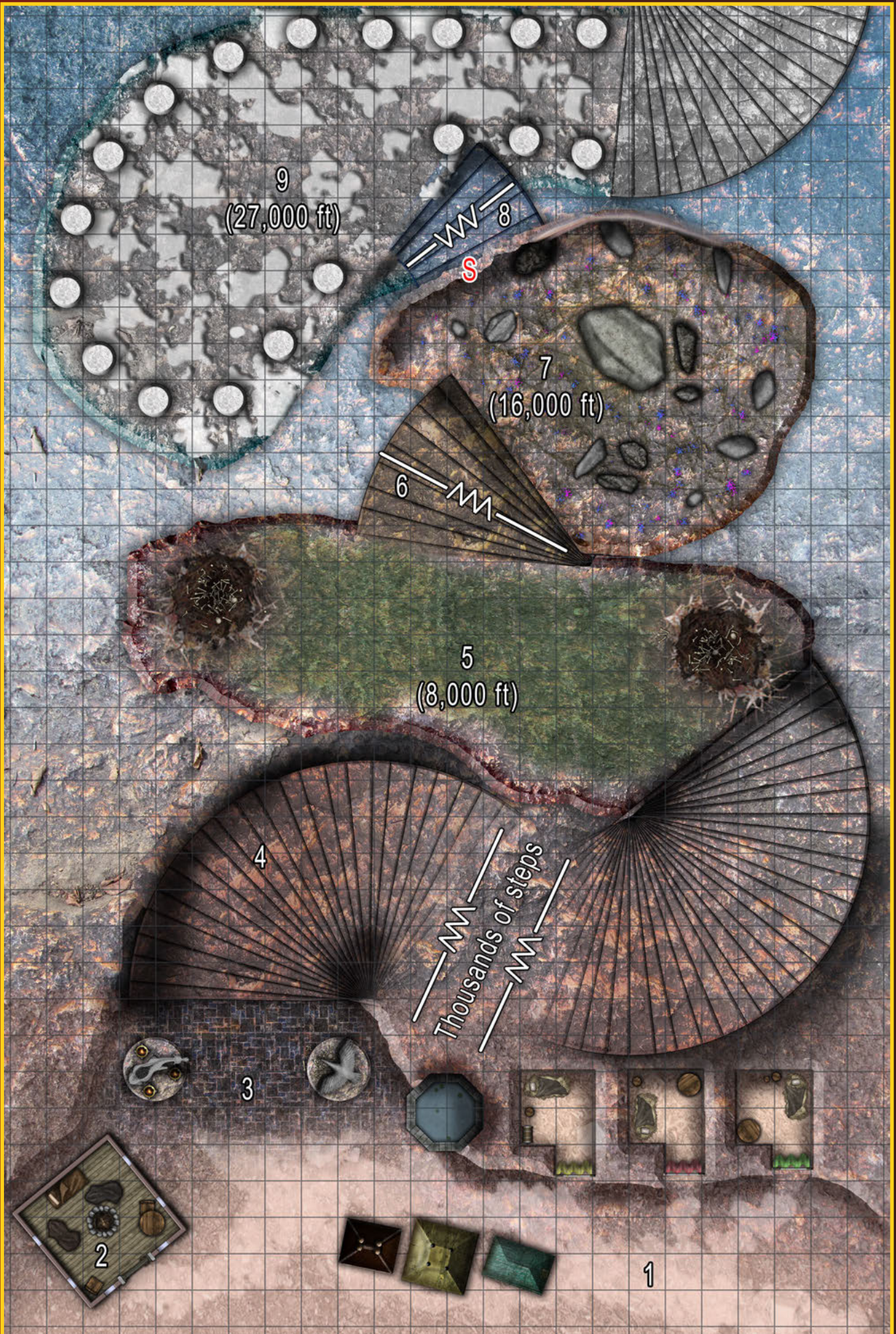
RAKESH KYBANA (bandit lord, *TOB*) is a bad man with a somewhat clever plan. He hopes to acquire a roc egg for himself and train the hatchling, as a way to extend his hill gang's reach beyond a few trade routes. He claims, however, to be a scholar interested in roc nesting habits.

Temple guard **UTTANDA NAGASSORA** (city watch, *TOB*) offers to watch mounts or gear the characters might want to leave behind. She is honest and trustworthy if adequately paid, but she has disdain for gearforged and dragonkin.

ORGO VARDESH HADERESH (dwarven ringmage, *TOB*) and his companion, **RETHSA HADERESH** (wolf reaver dwarf, *TOB*), are seeking information from the meadow of stones and know a lot about the star drake guardian up there. They share what they know only if someone promises to take them to the landing four miles up—until they get there, they say nothing.

ANG CHOPALI (cultist, *MM*), a porter, seeks to reach the abandoned sky temple and call forth the winds with an invocation of the Elder Gods. He is willing to help carry any burden if the characters will take him along on a “holy, purifying journey to help my mother's soul rest.”

OZMIR AL-MHARESHI, Adept of the Blue Portal, a novitiate priest of Azuran (cleric, *MM*), is a very earnest and sincere nuisance. He asks to join any party in climbing the stairs as part of a sense of duty, but he's a coward who spends most of his time saying “My thoughts and prayers go with you” rather than providing any meaningful help.



1. MOUNTAIN ROAD

The mountain track up to the base of the stairs is dusty and well traveled. Pilgrims heading down the slopes seem happy to be returning to the lowlands. At the end of the track, dozens of small hermits' cells have been carved from a cliff face of red stone. Animals and people are gathered around a mountain spring, and three simple stalls sell incense, amulets, and a nutty, spiced flatbread.

The stone cells are each large enough to hold two or three people, and all have simple coverings over the doors to keep wind out. The fountain is fed by a mountain spring, and the water is extremely cold. The amulet seller Alina Skyseeker, the incense-seller Qakkim Paresh-walla, and the baker Khareem all hawk their wares to a steady stream of pilgrims.

Questioning pilgrims, merchants, and other visitors reveals basic information (no check required), and purchasing amulets or incense may provide additional information with a successful Charisma (Persuasion) check. See the table below for details.

Those who know the lore of Beldestan can make a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) or Intelligence (History) check to learn that the stairs are, indeed, the work of prehuman architects, and those who survive the trip to the top often return drastically changed.

2. HERMIT'S HUT

A small house with many windows stands directly beside the cliff. Coming from inside are the sounds of chanting.

The hermit's hut is a communal gathering space for priests and pilgrims; it's the warmest of the shelters and always filled with smoke and incense. The priest of Azuran the Wind Lord is Gulham Kahn, a man of 40-some years with a long, curly black beard and a bald head kept wrapped in a sky-blue turban. He is eager to see someone, anyone, restore safe passage to the stairs, or at least to roust the rocs from their nesting site. To help in this effort, he offers a reward of 100 gp to anyone who pledges to climb to the rocs' nest and slay the creatures. He also advises them to make an offering (see area 3) before beginning the climb.

3. GATE OF SPHINX AND CAMEL

This small, open courtyard is paved with black and golden stone, some in spirals or burst patterns, resembling the shell of an enormous sea creature. Two statues flank a fifty-foot-wide sweep of stairs. One statue is of a stone camel wearing a bridle and saddlebags, with ashes from burned incense lying on the ground before it. The other is a vulture-headed sphinx with a pile of bones lying on the ground before it.

The sphinx is a petrified **gypsosphinx** (TOB) that animates when questioned—it responds with a curse (as the *hex* spell so that attacks against the PCs deal extra necrotic damage and all characters suffer disadvantage on Constitution checks) that lasts for 24 hours on those who climb the stairs without making an offering of either bones or incense.

4. FIRST STAIRS

These stairs twist and turn in a rough spiral, and are made of reddish-black stone with streaks of white. Climbing them takes 6 to 8 hours. They end at a height of about 8,000 feet.

5. ROC'S NEST LANDING

Grass grows around two nests made of gigantic branches, walls of mud, and hundreds of bones perched on both sides of the landing. Each nest is about fifteen feet wide; the rocs in them are preening their enormous feathers.

These nests are home to three **rocs** (MM), two parents and one of their fully grown offspring. The parents are in the nest nearer to the southeastern stairs down. The rocs have no treasure, and are delighted when food walks directly into their lair.

6. SECOND STAIRS

Much like the first stairs, another few thousand steps go up. These are of a grayish-green stone and end at an altitude of about 16,000 feet. The air is much thinner here, and climbing these stairs takes 7 to 9 hours.

CHECK INFORMATION

No check	The stairs are five miles high, and the air at the top is thin and frozen.
No check	Five or six landings exist on the way up, where travelers can rest. Flying is easier.
10	A family of rocs nests on the first great landing, and feasts on mountain goats and sometimes pilgrims.
15	A paladin once visited the stairs and was transformed into a star drake. Some say she still guards a meadow of oracular stones on a higher ledge.
19	Long ago, when the stairs were safer, a second temple stood near the top, dedicated to the Wind Lords and Aqua'an, the dragon god of wind. Some sort of evil subverted the temple's priesthood.
21	One section of the stairs is cut off; some say a group of holy pilgrims sits there in silent meditation.
23	At the very top of the stairs is the lair of a powerful dragon or wizard—no one's quite sure which—that surely has the ear of the gods.



7. MEADOW OF STONES

Dozens of stone slabs stand on a stony landing, with drifts of moss and sprays of blue and purple alpine flowers among them. A deep blue drake is perched on a sun-drenched tablet. No stairs climb up from this point.

The **star drake** (TOB) calls himself Najma Al-Beldestani, and he considers himself the keeper of the meadow, which is a powerful oracular set of tablets. Anyone who casts a divination spell in the meadow discovers that it automatically acts as a higher-level spell (if the caster wishes). A *guidance* spell acts as *augury*, *augury* acts as *divination*, and *divination* acts as *foresight* (for a single casting). The two dwarves, Orgo and Rethsa, know this (and have brought a *spell scroll of augury* and an important question of their own). Few others know the secret, though Najma offers to “help guide the learning” of any priest in the party in exchange for a hefty bribe (1,000 gp in value or more).

The secret stairs here can be opened by finding the Tablet of the Azure Door; it is clearly labeled as “the stone of opening the way” in Draconic. Reading the invocation on the stone slab (or using a *knock* spell) opens the secret door. Najma can open and close the door at will (and can use it as an escape route if hard pressed).

If the star drake is killed, the party can find 330 gp, 1,000 sp, and a ruby worth 250 gp hidden under a fallen monument stone.

8. HIDDEN STAIR

Unlocking the Azure Door opens a bluish, glowing portal that leads to thousands more stairs. If the characters do not open the door, other options include flying off the meadow of stones and up 400 yards to a reasonable landing spot on the stairs. Doing this might draw the attention of the invisible stalkers in area 9, and it prevents any possibility of surprise.

9. TEMPLE OF THE WIND WALKERS

The blue stairs open onto a snowy temple space where a dozen pillars hold up a stony roof. Broken statues litter the floor, and stairs lead farther up. The pillars are covered in runes, and the space is filled with shadows and echoes.

At the top of the hidden stairs is Valeed Al-Zalam, the warden of the temple and a **vampire warlock** (TOB). He is served by six **invisible stalkers** (MM) and three **dismortuum** (TOB). After long years of study, he believes he can summon and bind an elder monstrosity to serve him. Indeed, if he survives his encounter with the characters, he proceeds to summon a **star spawn of Cthulhu** (TOB) to the temple, and then launches a rampage against all towns and villages near the stairs, carving out a new kingdom for himself and his followers of the gods of the Void in Beldestan.

Valeed’s crypt is hidden within one of the temple pillars; finding it requires a successful DC 18 Wisdom (Perception) check or a *detect magic* spell. Opening it requires shattering

the pillar (which has 300 hit points) or using magic to dispel the arcane lock on the pillar. Valeed's treasure includes *spell scrolls* of *chain lightning*, *dispel magic*, and *cone of cold* (which he might use in combat against flying foes) and a *ring of protection +1* (which he wears). He wears a golden dragon torc set with turquoise worth 900 gp.

10. LOST LEDGE

A character ascending the stairs by flying can see a small ledge on one side of the stairway, with glints of gold. This is a statue of Sunbright Farsheed, a dragonkin prophet of Azuran, that was lost 100 years ago when magic warped the stairs. The statue weighs 200 pounds and is worth 4,000 gp to anyone who can get it off the stairs. It is considered a deeply sacred relic by all those at the base of the stairs, so removing it by way of that route may prove problematic.

At your option, the statue might be haunted by a wispy **shroud** (TOB) of pious Brother Qayoom the Eternal, once a priest of Azuram and now a simple haunt that can provide some advice to those climbing the sky stairs. He makes it clear that melting or breaking down the statue of Farsheed is an unholy and profane act.

11. FINAL STAIRS

The last section of the stairs is guarded by three **voidlings** (TOB), which attempt to destroy and disincorporate any creatures climbing the last section to the top.

CONCLUSION

If the characters make it past the warlock Valeed and to the top of the stairs, they might find a number of things at the top, depending on what direction you want to go next. Possibilities include:

- A planar portal tended by two **ramag** (TOB), leading to the other worlds and spheres.
- The *Citadel of the Void Dragons* lair from this volume, the home of a mated pair of void dragons.
- A divine messenger charges characters who survive to the top of the stairs with a holy quest or geas (perhaps involving the delivery of the statue of Farsheed to a worthy temple in the foothills).

Anyone who returns successfully to the base of the stairs is honored and welcomed, and given the title Al-Faraz, meaning "of the summit."



CITADEL OF THE VOID DRAGONS

By Wolfgang Baur

Citadel of the Void Dragons is a void dragon lair suitable for four characters of 14th level. It is a logical sequel to *Sky Stairs of Beldestan*, but it can be played independently.

BACKGROUND

The void dragon Astraxis and his mate, Yrsinestra, have long lived in an orbital citadel where the sky meets the void. This location allows the dragons to communicate with malign creatures of the void and still enables them to feast on the whales, cattle, and other large animals of the firmament below. This ready food supply is urgently needed right now, because the mated pair has recently laid a clutch of eggs. As a result, Astraxis is almost never at the lair—he is constantly on the hunt, bringing food to Yrsinestra and often sleeping on the earth below the citadel.

CITADEL OF THE VOID DRAGON

The citadel is at the edge of space, and the air around it is extremely cold. (If a more mundane location is desired, it can be placed atop an icy mountain 30,000 feet tall.) Due to lack of air, all fire spells take a penalty to damage throughout the citadel: discard all dice that would otherwise deal maximum damage. At the same time, cold spells are more potent: reroll any damage die that comes up a 1.

In addition, characters who finish a long rest in or near the citadel without shelter or additional atmosphere of some kind (magical or otherwise) gain no benefit from the rest if they fail a DC 12 Constitution check.

1. TOP OF THE STAIRS

A portcullis of hardened steel seals the top of the stairs; the ground around the portcullis is scorched as if by burning oil or a magical fire.

The portcullis requires a DC 21 Strength check to lift. Close inspection reveals some claw marks of unusual size on the flagstones near the portcullis (where the dragons lift and lower it). Most visitors fly when they approach the citadel, but the gate keeps out those few who climb to the citadel.

2. COURTYARD OF BONES

This open courtyard is paved with black and golden stones, some in spirals or burst patterns, somewhat resembling the shell of an enormous sea creature. Huge bones are everywhere—those of cattle, elephants, and sea creatures of prodigious size—as well as the scattered remains of barrels, chests, and crates. Most of the courtyard is walled in, except for a thirty-foot-wide stretch where the wind howls in. Beside that gap stands a blue tower. Other

structures of blue, indigo, and purple are arrayed along the walls, and green columns hold up a vaulted ceiling to the south.

The courtyard is the landing runway for the void dragons. A long string of chests filled with food for humans lines the wall next to the mage's chamber (area 5). The courtyard is otherwise deserted.

3. THE AXIS

This twenty-foot-diameter column is slightly translucent, like an enormous jewel.

The citadel's axis is, remarkably, a deeply flawed and low-quality sapphire, weighing roughly 2 tons. It's the magical focus that keeps the citadel aloft; if it is struck or chipped with a bolt of magical force or a weapon, three things happen.

First, the axis resonates with a deep, ringing tone, and the entire citadel shakes as if affected by an *earthquake* spell. Creatures that fail a DC 18 Constitution saving throw lose concentration on spells. Creatures that fail a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw fall prone, and must attempt a second Dexterity saving throw; if this fails as well, they are flung off the citadel and begin falling toward the earth miles below.

Second, a chip of sapphire worth 1,000 gp is removed from the surface of the axis. This chip can be replaced in its original location with a *mending* spell.

Third, all creatures aboard the citadel are immediately aware that its stability is threatened, and they either rush to investigate or prepare to escape. The creatures of the chamberlain's tower (area 4) appear in rounds 1, 3, and 5 after the axis is struck.

Striking the axis with a mithral or steel weapon shatters the weapon (adamantine weapons are not affected). A bard who is given enough time with it might discover resonant frequencies and figure out its function in holding the castle aloft (a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check is sufficient).

4. CHAMBERLAIN'S TOWER

This 100-foot-high chamber has stairs up to a second floor where the citadel's chamberlain once lived; dusty furnishings are neglected throughout the tower. The tower's chamberlain is long dead, but the tower's name has remained unchanged.

Its first floor is guarded by a **corpse mound** (TOB) built of bones from the courtyard. The top floor is home to two **monolith champions** (TOB), and their commander, a **spectral guardian** (TOB) that resembles a knight in red armor. They strive to keep visitors out of the citadel, either by escorting them to the stairs, or by chasing or killing those who will not leave peacefully.

5. MAGE'S CHAMBER

Racks of scrolls cover the walls; glyphs and inlaid bits of shell and bone cover the floor in arcane patterns. A human is studying a book at a table, and a dozen small automatons are scurrying around holding various volumes.

Yrsinestra has dominated a human **mage** (MM) named Olessy Plendremine to serve as a guardian (and later, as nanny and arcane tutor to her wyrmlings). The mage takes his new duties seriously, and will attack intruders in the courtyard or in his chamber. The twelve **library automatons** (TOB) attempt to defend the library's books and scrolls, and a **shield guardian** (MM) defends the mage.

The chamber is filled with centuries of arcane lore. The manuscripts here are almost all concerned with star magic and shadow magic, with void creatures such as the mi-go and star spawn of Cthulhu, and with the life and power of the various living stars and celestial beings. The collection includes the spells *dimension door* and *shapechange*, in a wizard's spellbook, plus *spell scrolls* of *daylight* and *cone of cold*.

This is an excellent place to introduce spells of the Star and Shadow schools as well (See *Deep Magic: Illumination* by Kobold Press). Many such spells can be found in the chamber's writings with an hour of searching.

6. SKYBRIDGE

A narrow bridge leads over empty space to a heavy steel door engraved with green sigils. There is no obvious handle on the door.

The doors on the bridge are magically trapped to discourage visitors from outside. Touching either door triggers a *gust of wind* spell, which pushes intruders who fail a DC 14 Strength saving throw off the bridge. The fall to earth results in 20d6 falling damage; the use of any flying or teleportation magic avoids the damage. Either door can be opened safely by saying "Open" in Draconic, Infernal, or the Void Speech; the word echoes loudly enough to alert inhabitants beyond the door that they have a visitor.

7. JADE VAULT

A pergola of crystal slabs hangs between four enormous jade pillars, all of them etched with strange patterns. To one side are double doors ten feet wide and marked with moving, crawling runes. To their left is an enormous red stone block that doesn't match the stone to either side.

Examining the jade pillars closely requires a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw against *hypnotic pattern*, or the viewer stands charmed until someone deals damage to it (usually, an angry void dragon or mage).

The stone block is a plug that seals the dragons' lair; it is a 10-by-10-foot cube with a "bar" of stone carved out in the middle, enabling a void dragon to push or pull the 20-ton stone. Moving it by other means requires magic or a successful DC 23 Strength check.

8. UPPER AND LOWER LOOKOUT TOWER

This blue tower is one hundred feet tall and has a parapet and a pointed roof at the upper end. The door shines silver and ruby red.

The tower connects the courtyard side of the citadel with the bottom of the citadel's stone base, where a tower descends 100 feet to another lookout platform. Both are always watched by Arundara and Charita Amal, a pair of **rakshasas** (MM) bound in servitude to the mage Olessy Plendremine (see area 6). If the rakshasas see someone sneaking into the citadel, they ring a gong to alert the castle watch in the chamberlain's tower (area 4).

If the mage is slain, both rakshasa lookouts head for the stairs and leave.

One of the rakshasas wears a gold and mithral necklace worth 500 gp.

9. MI-GO GARDENS

The door to this chamber is heavy and airtight, to contain a rich atmosphere suitable for the growth of vegetation.

The thick air is rich in scents, heavy with jasmine and citrus and the tang of some alien musk, reptilian or perhaps draconic. The plants within the room have red, purple, and orange leaves. They rustle in the steamy air, obscuring the view of walls and floors.

The room is home to six **mi-go** (TOB) that serve the void dragon as messengers and scholars, dissecting creatures of the void and creating devices of interest to the mage and the void dragons. They fight to the death to defend the chambers.

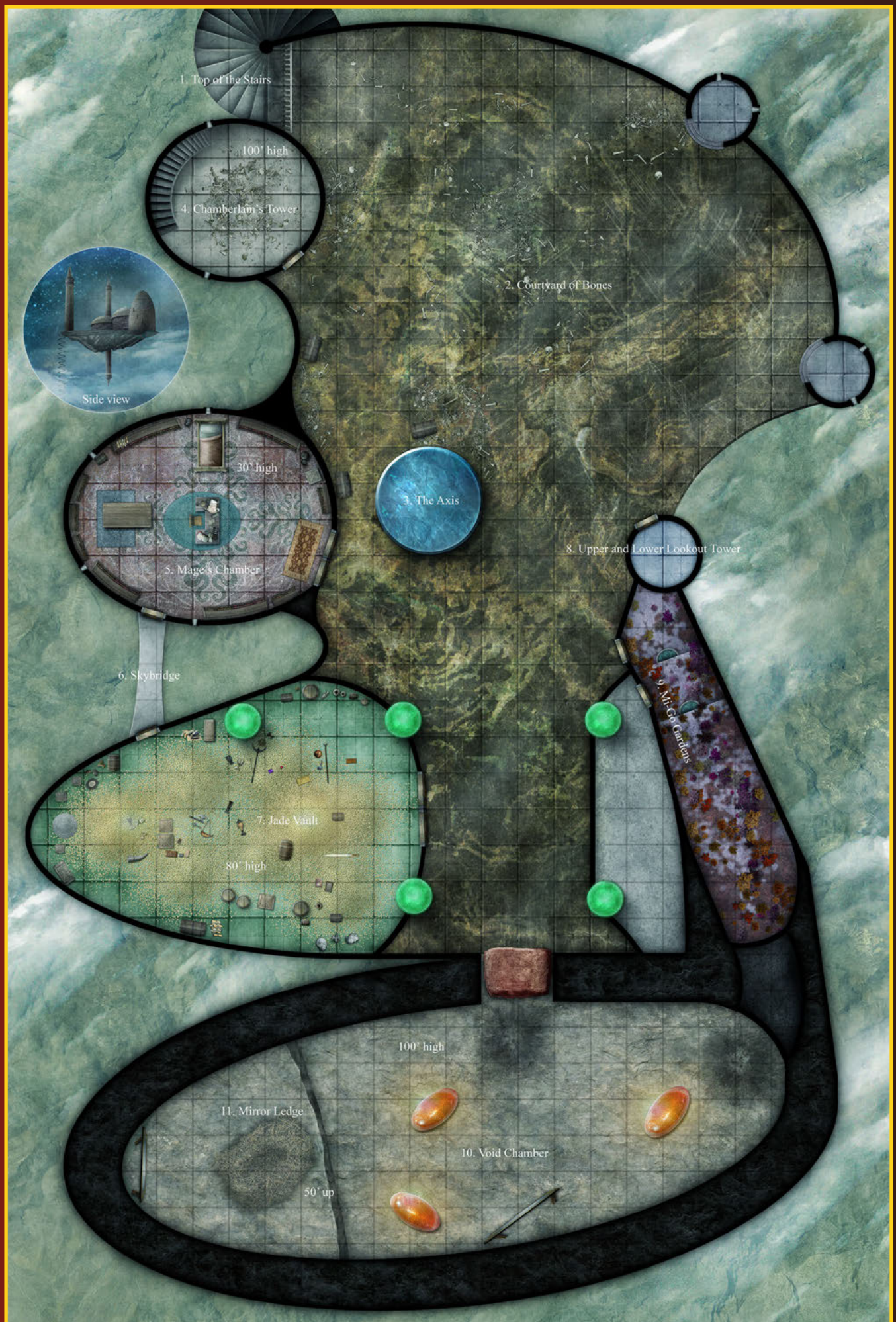
The secret door to the south is an arcane passageway; it requires a DC 18 Perception check or a *detect magic* spell to discover. Once it is found, a DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that a *knock* or *dimension door* spell opens it, as does the ability to fold space (as the void dragons and mi-go can do with their void traveler abilities).

The mi-go tend their peculiar plants and extract ichors and spores from them for use in some distant trade. The gardens are almost ready for a final harvest, whereupon the mi-go midwives will return to their distant travels through the void. A successful DC 17 Intelligence (Nature) check reveals that the remaining plants include lampfruits (which glow even in an airless void) and purple starvines (which induce a state of vegetative hibernation and are useful in healing). Altogether, a dozen lampfruits and a half-dozen starvines are worth 3,600 gp to the right buyer.

10. VOID CHAMBER

The void dragon uses mirrors to see visitors entering its lair. If the party enters by way of the stone block, convey the following information to any character who has a passive Perception of 16 or lower:

The enormous chamber beyond is warm with orange light, and slightly fogged with scarlet mist. A dragon's long neck rises at the end of a tunnel straight ahead.



If any character has a passive Perception of 17 or higher, add:

The dragon ahead in the scarlet light seems slightly askew, as if a magical warding or barrier is between you and it.

If the party enters by way of the secret passage, read:

The chamber beyond is warm with orange light, and slightly fogged with scarlet mist. Three enormous stones generate both the light and heat. The chamber is more than sixty feet across, and there may be a ledge or cliff at the far end.

Yrsinestra, an **adult void dragon** (TOB), sits on the ledge 50 feet up; her mate is currently hunting. All intruders are met with a blast of stellar flare breath while climbing up to the ledge or flying to it—but the dragon doesn't stay there for long. As soon as intruders commit to coming up to the ledge, Yrsinestra leaps down to one of the three large sunstones and fights from that high ground with full attacks. She shifts position freely among the sunstones without needing to withdraw against non-flying foes.

11. MIRROR LEDGE

The nest where Yrsinestra perches above the main chamber has an excellent view of the chamber below. At the back of the ledge are three eggs that will hatch within 2 weeks. These large, orange-shelled eggs at first glance resemble smaller versions of the sunstones in the chamber below, and their exterior is extremely stony and durable (AC 20, 30 hit points each).

The treasure on the ledge includes 8,000 gp, three bars of platinum worth 1,000 gp each, a scattering of hundreds of semiprecious stones such as amethysts, turquoise, and chalcedony (worth a total of 2,500 gp), and a silver crown set with opals and peridots that is enchanted to allow the wearer to cast an *alter self* spell once per day.

In addition, much of the dragons' treasure is kept in an interdimensional vault. If the characters can find it (requiring detect magic and then *knock*), the vault contains a **hoard golem** (TOB) serving as a guardian, and also holds 13,000 gp, 42,000 sp, 123,000 cp, three platinum bars (worth 4,000 gp each), a +3 *shield*, a *staff of cold*, and a *ring of protection*. The pride of their hoard is a matched set of star sapphires, each worth 5,000 gp and enchanted with a *feather fall* spell and a *shield* spell, which trigger when circumstances warrant. The sapphires emit humming, resonant tones related to the strength of ley lines and arcane forces around them; louder tones indicate greater magical energy.

CONCLUSION

If the PCs kill Yrsinestra, her mate Astraxis is motivated to seek them out, ideally with a company of twenty noctiny minions, its monoliths and mi-go, and whatever other survivors it can muster from the citadel. If the characters decide to turn the citadel into a fortress of their own, one of the living stars of the Court of a Million Stars will visit within three months, inquiring about their right to hold the property and suggesting that they declare their fealty to the Court. But that is another adventure entirely.



A TRIANGLE IN SHADOWS

By Jeff Grubb

A Triangle in Shadows is an umbral vampire lair suitable for a party of four 15th-level characters. Magic weapons are highly advised.

BACKGROUND

The City Fallen into Shadow is the domain of the fiendish umbral vampires, and they are rarely found outside it. But one named Caragorn has fled the city after coming between the lovers Philadon and Zenobia. Philadon and Caragorn, however, are secretly meeting at Caragorn's tower behind Zenobia's back. Zenobia suspects them of collusion, and is seeking out the two male umbral vampires to get revenge.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The forest north of town has fallen under the sway of shadow. Sunlight grows dim as one enters the area, and utter blackness exists at its center. Tenebrous beasts roam there, and other creatures who have ventured into the darkness have not returned, most recently a trio of dwarven woodcutters. One of the dwarves' relatives, a sad-faced carpenter named Galon, wants someone to find out what happened to his cousins, and he approaches the PCs for their aid.

Galon is actually an unwitting cat's-paw of Zenobia, who has not located Caragorn's tower due to its inherent magics. She wants someone to find the tower for her and engage her faithless lovers in combat while she closes in for the kill.

THE FOREST IN SHADOW

The forest is shrouded in dim light within a half-mile of the tower, and darkness within 100 feet. Even light sources or abilities such as darkvision do not raise the illumination beyond dim. Truesight and blindsight are unaffected.

Within the forest roam some of Caragorn's more recent victims, and characters have a 40 percent chance of encountering 1d6 **shadows** (MM).

APPROACHING THE TOWER

The tower is a strange, windowless structure. Each triangular floor points in the opposite direction of the floors beneath and above (that is, if the first floor "points" north, the second floor "points" south, so that if viewed from above, the building resembles a hexagon). The ceilings are 10 feet high on the first floor, 20 feet high on the second, and 30 feet high on the third.

Three dwarf-sized **shadows** (MM), the spiritual remains of the woodcutters, and three **hounds of the night** (TOB) protect the tower.

1. ENTRY PORCH

Black granite stars, cracked and uneven, lead up to a triangular stone porch and a black iron door. At the corner of the porch stands a ten-foot-tall statue carved of ebon stone depicting a strikingly beautiful woman in hunting garb. She is blindfolded and looking away from the tower.

Caragorn installed the statue of Zenobia as a joke. It is a nonmagical object, but those who later meet Zenobia will notice the resemblance, even though it portrays her before her transformation into an umbral vampire. The blindfold is his commentary on the woman.

The iron door is locked (requiring a DC 15 Dexterity check with thieves' tools). Making more than one attempt warns Marzel, the tower's concierge, of visitors, and he readies his hounds of the night that are currently in area 4. The door can be forced open (Strength DC 15) or destroyed (AC 19, 27 hit points).

2. FOYER

The iron door opens onto a large foyer, dimly lit by candles set in the wall. To your left a white spiral staircase ascends and a few overstuffed chairs stand around a low table. A sideboard, closed, is against the wall behind the chairs. Across from the entrance is a pair of doors, and between them are two portraits of handsome young men in military dress.

The sideboard contains drinks from the fiery to the diabolical (one of them is midnight tears, another one pale tincture (DMG), and two others are bottles of fermented kraken's blood). The pictures are of Caragorn and Philadon as they looked in life. Their uniforms are those of ancient nations (History DC 25 to recognize) that have been dust for centuries.

If Marzel knows the heroes are here, the right-hand door swings open and four **hounds of the night** (TOB) rush out to attack. Marzel will follow, using his pipes to cast *confusion* on his foes, then switch to his bow and its sleep poison. If Marzel has not been alerted, the room is empty.

The interior doors are a rich, deep mahogany, and are unlocked. The iron spiral staircase is narrow—characters must go up single file—and is treated as difficult terrain. The staircase leads to area 7.

3. MARZEL'S QUARTERS

The door opens into a tidy, well-organized personal quarters. A comfortable bed is set against the north wall, next to a writing desk, and armoires line the other walls. While well cared for, the room has a scent of rot and mildew.

This room belongs to Marzel the **dark satyr** (TOB), who serves as the tower's concierge and attendant. He secures and butchers the bodies that the hounds of the night bring back, tends to the demands of his masters, steers the tower to its next destination with the soul organ, and keeps the riffraff from interrupting the idylls of Caragorn and Philadon.

Marzel has obsidian skin, red eyes, and insect legs. He has been provided with a bellboy's jacket and a small pillbox-style hat. If surprised, he buys time by casting *fear* or using his pipes to cast *confusion*, then opens the northern door to release the four hounds of the night within, and supports them with his bow and sleep-poison arrows.

A small chest beneath the bed contains 1,500 gp and 100 pp, taken from the bodies. His masters care not for money, so Marzel uses this for the house fund.

4. KENNEL

Marzel keeps the hounds of the night here and dotes on them. The dozen cages in the room are all open, because Marzel cannot bear to lock them in.

Four **hounds of the night** (TOB) currently roam the room. They attack anyone other than Marzel or the masters.



5. KITCHEN/WORKSHOP

The walls are lined with low counters, above which hang a variety of flensing knives, cleavers, tongs, extractors, clamps, and other devices of torture. The center of the room is dominated by a low iron table and a large bin with a metal lid.

Umbral vampires do not eat in the same fashion that mortal creatures do, but they do enjoy decadent smells and flavors. Marzel uses this space to reduce victims to their base essence, which is then either sprinkled over braziers to scent the upper room or smoked in a hookah. He also uses the area to prepare his own meals, and to work the mortal remains of his captives into components for the soul organ (see area 7).

The long table shows the fresh bloodstains of his most recent acquisitions, the three dwarven hunters. The large bin is stuffed with dorrequi parts that Marzel uses to make his sleep poisons and pipes. No recipes or formulae can be found, since he has been making these items from memory for a long time.

6. MEAT LOCKER

A rush of rotten-smelling air greets you as the door comes open. The room is stacked with body parts in various levels of decomposition.

Marzel puts the remains of his prey here. The objects in this room vary from jerky-tough corpses to the freshly flensed and beheaded remains of the dwarven woodcutters.

An **ochre jelly** (MM) makes its lair here. The creature stays out of Marzel's way, hanging on the ceiling. If an individual paws through its treasures, however, it drops down and attacks.

7. BALLROOM

The spiral staircase leads to an enormous room in a roughly triangular shape. The dark red wood floor is laid in a parquet pattern, and unlit torches line the walls. Set into the northern wall is a grisly artifact. It looks like a large musical organ of a type that might be found in a great church, but it is made entirely of meat and viscera. Another spiral staircase ascends from the southeast part of the room.

This ballroom is where Philadon and Caragorn entertain mortal guests, who are later drained of their strength and life and taken to the meat locker below. The space has only a few items in it, including tables and chairs stored along the walls, and the soul organ mentioned above.

The soul organ is a magic device developed by Philadon that is made of the corpses of the vampires' strength-drained victims. It looks like a large church organ made of glistening, fresh meat. Lungs and intestines serve as pipes, teeth become keys, and bones become foot pedals. When the organ is played, the decaying heads mounted over the keyboard scream. The soul organ moves the tower swiftly through the planes and protects it from divinations and other locating spells. In this way Caragorn has stayed one step ahead of Zenobia. Caragorn, Philadon, and Marzel all know how to operate the device, but anyone else must make



a successful DC 30 Intelligence (Arcana) check to operate it correctly. The organ is fairly fragile (AC 10, 30 hit points) but can be repaired using fresh corpses—again, an easy task for Marzel, Caragorn or Philadon, but nearly impossible (DC 30 Arcana) for others.

If the heroes attempt to use the organ, the two umbral vampires in area 8 will be warned and prepared for invaders. If no attack comes within a half-hour, they come down into the ballroom, ready for a fight. If Marzel is still alive when the organ is used improperly, he comes immediately, bringing his hounds of the night.

8. BEDROOM

The staircase twists up to another large room, dominated by a great wrought iron bed frame facing a glassed-in balcony to the south. Cushions litter the floor, and diaphanous dark curtains hang from the ceiling. A love seat is positioned along one wall, and a set of large, high-backed chairs frame a chess table on the other. A harp made of the bones is positioned next to an ornate hookah. Tattered books and scrolls are piled on and around the love seat and the cushions. Ancient swords hang on the walls, and suggestive sculptures writhe in the corner. Weapons hang from the walls, interspersed with bookcases straining under the weight of chained books.

Beyond the balcony is the vista of a great city wrapped in dark fog. Huge, twisted towers loom out the murk, and a darker shape floats by the window. It has the size and dimensions of a whale, recognizable as a living thing only because of its multiple baleful red eyes.

Unless they are summoned elsewhere, Caragorn and Philadon are lounging here. They wear the tattered remains of the fine raiment seen in the portraits earlier. They are not receiving visitors at the moment.

Both umbral vampires cast *mirror image* at once, then *black tentacles*. Only after attempting to restrain their opponents do they use their umbral grasp. They will use shadow blend, then strike for maximum efficiency.

Three rounds after combat begins with the two male umbral vampires, Zenobia, the third side of this romantic triangle, arrives. If the heroes have not dealt with Marzel, she will be at half strength (42 hit points) from her battle with the attendant. She calls Caragorn all sorts of names (Incubus! Tempter! Seducer!) and Philadon as well (Philanderer! Faithless! Betrayer!), but will attack the heroes first, deciding to sort out her differences with Philadon and Caragorn later.

The balcony over the City Fallen into Shadow might be an illusory projection, or a true portal into that realm (at the DM's option). If the former, dealing 20 damage to the illusion disrupts it. If the latter, breaking the window (again, by dealing 20 damage) moves the entire tower bodily into the tenebral plane of shadow. The huge creature is a peaceful native of shadow, and would have the statistics of a whale, but other natives are not as kindly.

The two small rooms off the bedroom (8a and 8b) are a bath and a closet. The bath is dominated

by a large tub filled with shadows and blood. The closet is filled with ragged and archaic finery from all eras. It includes a *cloak of displacement* attuned to Philadon, and an *arrow-catching shield* attuned to Caragorn. They will equip these items if they suspect interlopers are in the tower. Also among the uniforms is a *bag of devouring*.

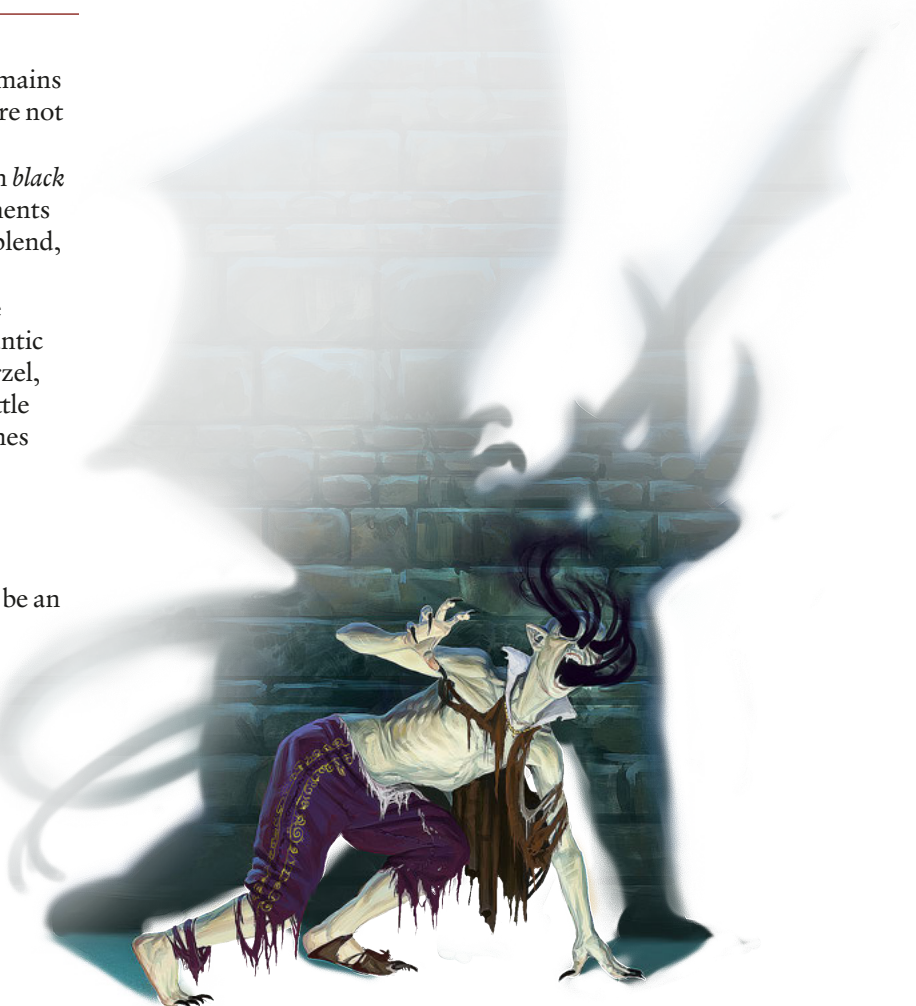
CONCLUSION

Destroying the soul organ traps the tower in its present location, and the tower loses both its magical nature and its baleful influence.

Breaking the balcony window on the top floor ends the illusion, or propels the tower into the Plane of Shadow itself, with consequences beyond the scope of this adventure.

The harp, the hookah, and six of the writhing stone statues can be sold for 250 gp each. The weapons on the wall are of archaic design, but nonmagical. The books are all in Void Speech and other esoteric languages and deal with magical theory, and the eight most usable can be sold for 250 gp each.

Zenobia is outraged at both Caragorn and Philadon, but will take out the heroes first to clear the battlefield. If the characters choose to flee, only then will the jealous umbral vampires fall on each other.



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