

Fantasy Craft



THE CLEANSING OF
BLACK SPUR



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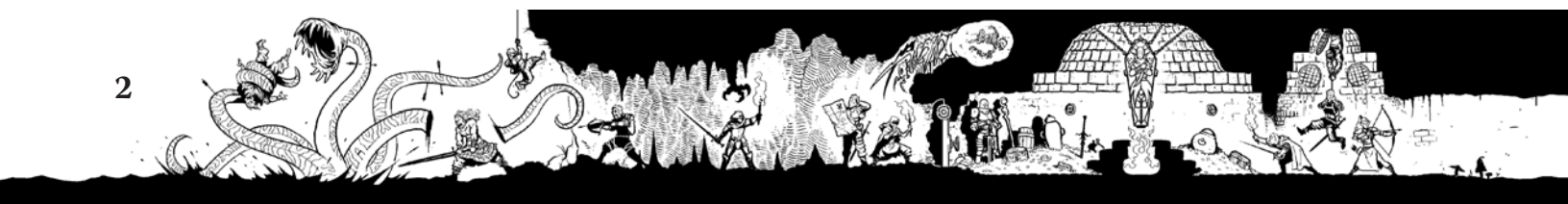
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FANTASY CRAFT CREATED BY ALEX FLAGG,
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INTRODUCTION

Sixty years ago, the citizens of Valespire built a keep atop a small mountain named Black Spur. It was meant to serve as a headquarters while watching over the nearby trade road and suppressing the goblin raiders who ran thick in the area. One night, ten years after it's the keep was completed, goblins assaulted the site and slaughtered all within. The Valespire High Church decried the butchery as unholy, and declared the Spur and its surroundings anathema. Under church pressure, the King of the Realm built a new trade road and expanded his mounted roadwarden patrol corps rather than reclaim the Spur. The keep has since fallen to ruin, neglected and fading from general memory.

The truth, of course, is more complicated.

For over a thousand years the local goblins have called Black Spur "Dur-Basta." The site is quasi-holy to them, for it stands atop a rocky outcropping where a long-dead goblin hero tricked a great demon into entombing itself. This demon, the Hauntbeast, resides within Dur-Basta/Black Spur to this day. Unfortunately, every 50 years an astrological event aligns the aether of the region in such a way as to weaken the Hauntbeast's prison. With the spiritual walls thinned, the Hauntbeast's mind reaches out and corrupts the gullible and weak-willed, summoning them to Dur-Basta and commanding them to free their new master. The goblin shamans call a tribal moot during "the conjunction," turning their combined might toward standing vigil over Dur-Basta and holding the Hauntbeast's followers at bay.

As one might imagine, the goblin shamans were gravely concerned when the humans built their keep. Goblins view humans, and human soldiers especially, as notoriously foolish, and the shamans didn't dare brook the incursion for long. They tried raiding the site, hoping to convince the humans the keep wasn't worth the trouble, but the trespassers proved as stubborn as ever. During the last conjunction, the shamans detected suspicious fluctuations in the aether and grew concerned that some or all of the garrison soldiers had fallen under the Hauntbeast's sway. Facing no better options, the goblins assaulted the keep head-on, wiping out all but a handful of the humans. The survivors fled to Valespire and none of their kind returned.

Meanwhile, the Church's declaration covered for an internal scandal. A high-ranking Church Archivist, Pader Herel Asonza, had been uncovered as a demonologist, but not before he'd left Valespire on an official mission to Black Spur, ostensibly to catalog newly discovered relics held by the keep's chaplain. Piecing together Asonza's maddened research notes and his collection of forbidden texts, Church officials knew they had a rogue on their hands, and that his true mission at the keep was to free some great evil, but they also knew the Church could never reveal the truth. Religious pressure was brought to bear and the whole affair was hushed up, the site forever abandoned by official decree.

Now, 50 years gone, most of the original churchmen responsible for the cover-up are dead or retired, and the whole thing has been largely forgotten — except, that is, by Pader Agustin Asonza, descendant of Herel and a rising star in the Church Archivum. Agustin stumbled on unsuppressed portions of his progenitor's work and was appalled at what he read. He made it his personal (and private) mission to discover what Herel had been up to at Black Spur during that fateful attack 50 years ago, and to undo any damage Herel may have caused. Unfortunately, Agustin is a man of more scruple than sense, and in riding alone for Black Spur he was attacked by wyverns. He was saved by goblins, who were already gathering in an encampment at the base of Black Spur for their semi-centennial vigil, but both his legs were broken and he couldn't complete his mission.

The goblin chief, Kalkachanla, conversed with Agustin and decided his heart was in the right place, but without healers skilled in human injury he couldn't render assistance to the Archivist. Kalkachanla dispatched one of his top hunters, Trinkesti, with a squad of hunters to the closest human road, hoping to find someone who can help, or at worst travelers who can return him to Valespire.

Guess who's camping on the road when Trinkesti and her hunters arrive?

The Cleansing of Black Spur consists of three scenes...

SCENE ONE: OUT OF THE NIGHT

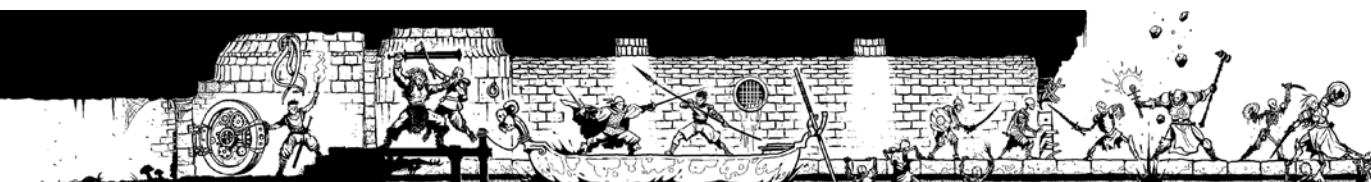
The PCs are camped for the night when a wyvern attacks. Trinkesti's hunters arrive to help and extend Kalkachanla's invitation for the PCs to come see (and perhaps help) Pader Asonza.

SCENE TWO: SINNER, SAINT

The PCs meet Pader Agustin Asonza and chief Kalkachanla, who explain what's really going on at Black Spur and request the party's aid. Kalkachanla warns that there isn't much time, as the conjunction is nigh and the goblins can't risk anyone being near Dur-Basta when the Hauntbeast's influence reaches its peak.

SCENE THREE: THE RUINS OF BLACK SPUR KEEP

The Party explores Black Spur, finding a murder of wyverns nesting there, and that a cult devoted to the Hauntbeast has somehow penetrated the goblin patrols and is preparing to summon their master. Confronting the cult's high priestess, Achela, most likely triggers Scene 4 immediately (*see page 16*).



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SCENE FOUR: RISE OF THE REAPER

Achela completes the ritual as the party approaches, breaking the first seal on the Hauntbeast's prison. A portion of the demon's malevolent spirit manifests as a huge undead wyvern called The Reaper, and its rise brings on the adventure's great final battle.

MENACE

The Cleansing of Black Spur assumes a Menace of II (Routine) or III (Challenging), though you can easily adjust that if you like. Keep in mind that a higher or lower Menace will adjust the number of Dramatic scenes.

SLIDING DCS

To allow for play at any Threat Level, this adventure features sliding DCS (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 370).

ADVENTURE TIMING

Splitting this adventure into four scenes offers maximum flexibility to spellcasters (and other characters with per-scene abilities). Scene 1 is a quick battle followed by quick roleplay, and Scene 2 is all roleplay, as Agustin explains part of his story and (hopefully) convinces the party to aid his quest. Scene 3 is potentially the longest, as the party explores the ruined keep (and likely engages in a series of short skirmishes). Scene 4 is a climactic, pitched fight, and while it contains just the one event, the Reaper isn't likely to go down easily.

If time is limited, Scenes 1 and 2 can be run together in about an hour. In a typical convention slot, this should leave two hours for the exploration of the keep, and an hour for the final battle and wrap-up.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Pader Agustin Asonza: The human Archivist (priestly scholar) whose private quest is abruptly cut short by a wyvern attack, and whose injuries prompt the goblin chieftain to send for help on the human road. Agustin has learned of the Hauntbeast from Kalkachanla, and assumes it's the focus of his ancestor's dark work, but his injuries prevent him from helping the goblins keep it at bay. Thus he asks the party to help in his stead.

Trinkesti: A leader among the goblin hunters camped at Black Spur. She doesn't much care for humans but loyally follows Kalkachanla's commands.

Kalkachanla: The local goblin chief. He is sympathetic to Agustin's quest but wary that it may deter the goblins from their ancient obligation.

Pader Rafael Oledo: The ghost of Black Spur Keep's former chaplain. His journal may provide a clue for PCs seeking to help Agustin.

Achela: The leader of a cult dedicated to the Hauntbeast. In her dementia, she believes she'll be rewarded for freeing her master from its prison, and so the task consumes her will.

The Cult of the Hauntbeast: These nine cultists — Benn, Caleb, Daghma, Ernesto, Felix, Geony, Hart, Ingmar, and Jeckot — support Achela in all things.

The Reaper: The Hauntbeast never makes an actual appearance in this adventure (the whole of the region would be in very dire trouble if it did), but a sliver of the creature's psyche gets loose and takes the form of this nightmarish abomination, which resembles a tremendous, rotting, undead wyvern.

SCENE 1: OUT OF THE NIGHT

The Road to Valespire, just after sunset

OBJECTIVES

- Fight off a lone wyvern
- Agree to accompany Trinkesti to the goblin camp

CHALLENGES

- A lone wyvern streaks out of the night to ambush the party.
- Trinkesti's hunters aren't especially fond of other species.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: The party is camping for the night when they're attacked by a wyvern looking for dinner. Trinkesti and her hunters arrive to help the party and after the battle, assuming the party doesn't attack the goblins, they speak of an injured human at their camp who needs assistance.

Gear: Possessions only

LOCATION

The party is traveling along a road to Valespire, and has camped for the night at a little half-walled enclosure built and maintained by the Realm's road-warden corps. The enclosure is 20-ft. square and has waist-high stone walls with no roof and a central fire pit. A 20-ft. split-rail fence sticks out from one side, meant as a hitching post for animals. The place is kept up but devoid of comforts — the road-wardens intending the walls to give travelers shelter from the wind, no more.

Ambiance: The night is clear (faint ambient light) and breezy, with the scent of the fire in the air.

Terrain: Plains

Cultural Interest: The Realm



ACTION

Begin the adventure by reading the following aloud.

Your party is camped just off the road in a little travelers' enclosure maintained by the king's road-warden corps. It's 20-ft. square with waist-high stone walls, no roof, and a central fire pit. A 20-ft. split-rail fence sticks out from one side, meant as a hitching post for animals. The place is well kept but not comfortable — the road-wardens intend clearly don't intend anyone to linger.

Your animals are hitched up, the fire's banked low, and you settle in for the night.

This is a good time to draw a map and settle sleeping arrangements and watch schedules. Halfway through the first watch, a wyvern dives silently out of the night sky, looking for a quick kill (roll its Sneak vs. the PCs' Notice to see if it gains a surprise round). The creature uses its Charging Basics feat to approach a target, attack, and move away with its second half action, keeping itself out of Reach as much as possible. It tries to sting its first target and sow confusion, and if it can get its prey to scatter, it chooses a good-looking meal and tries to make off with them as a tidy meal. The PCs are unlikely to scatter, of course, but that's the wyvern's hope.

Only one wyvern attacks. These creatures typically appear in mobs, but the purpose of this combat is to introduce the PCs to the goblins and the local fauna, not to bog the action down with a big fight in the opening minutes.

The wyvern's true combat advantages are the conditions — sleeping prey and faint ambient light — and the faster the PCs overcome these challenges the better off they'll be. All characters not on watch must grab weapons and possibly don armor, and unless more light is forthcoming all combatants, including the wyvern, gain a +4 bonus to Defense (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 218). The goblins' darkvision negates this bonus, of course, but they're also sensitive to light and suffer 20 flash damage if the PCs produce brighter illumination (like a torch). This could lead to chaos — have fun with it.

Don't hesitate to award action dice to PCs who jump into battle without even thinking about taking the time to don their armor. A hero who pauses only long enough to grab his sword deserves to be rewarded for his courage.

In the second full round of combat, Trinkesti and her hunters break from the bushes and move to shoot the wyvern out of the sky. They remain mounted and fight with their bows until the wyvern is brought down.

After the fight, there may be a tense moment while the PCs and the goblins eye each other suspiciously. Unless the PCs attack, Trinkesti lowers her bow and holds up a hand in parlay.

"Hold. We have a human at our camp who needs help. Do you have a healer?"

Assuming this sparks a conversation, Trinkesti directs her hunters to start dressing out the wyvern. If the party admits to having a healer (or anyone with healing ability), Trinkesti asks that the party follow her group to the goblin camp.

Should the PCs answer in the negative, the goblin hunter asks that they at least come get the injured human and "take it away." Trinkesti refers to Agustin as an "it" throughout the discussion, regardless of what's said or asked ("He or she? I haven't looked. Humans are all alike on the outside. On the inside, too, if you bother to poke them with something sharp.").

Callous PCs may balk at charity healing, in which case Trinkesti offers the party dressed out wyvern viscera for their trouble ("the meat's tasty unless you hit the poison sacks, and some wizards pay for the stinger, eyes, and claws"). She won't offer coin to help humans, but she might mention that the injured human is a priest, and suggest the Church may pay for his safe return.

PCs who inquire about local history may know goblins seized the Black Spur Keep from humans around 50 years ago (see the next section), and may cite this as a reason not to trust Trinkesti and her group, or worse, to attack them. This may be a good time to remind the party that these particular goblins are asking about a healer to help an injured human. Failing that, the party may want to travel to Black Spur Keep to investigate whether the goblins are indeed in possession of a human, and why.

DIRECTION

Here are some questions you might be asked, and answers for you to offer.

Q: Why are we here?

A: You're adventurers, en route to Valespire where you hear the road-wardens are hiring. You know, fortune and glory, the usual.

Q: What's a road-warden?

A: The road-wardens were established about a hundred years ago, and have been custodians of the King's roads for as long as most anyone's been alive. The road-warden corps that serves this region got a big boost about 50 years ago when Black Spur Keep, a local guard outpost, was overrun.

Q: What happened to Black Spur Keep?

A: The story goes that goblins assaulted the keep and slaughtered every living thing therein. Only a handful escaped, and when they got back to Valespire and told their tale, the High Church decried the butchery as unholy and declared the whole place unclean. They pressured the throne into abandoning the outpost, and the King at the time built a new road (along which you're currently traveling). He also expanded the road-warden patrols rather than try to re-take the keep.

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Q: What's happening at the Keep now?

A: Nobody knows. It's a sin to visit, so nobody does, and with the new road there isn't a good reason to get close. The goblins could be using it as a capital now for all anybody knows.

Q: Is that a goblin chick? I've never seen one of those.

A: Keep staring and you may not live to see another. She looks hardcore like that.

CAST

No XP is listed for the goblins as the party shouldn't earn any for attacking well-meaning allies.

TRINKESTI (SPECIAL NPC)

"Don't be stupid."

Description: Trinkesti is a goblin female, which sets her apart from the most of the vigil-keepers. As a huntress, she dresses light and is built for speed and stealth. She wears her hair in a long braid and sports a shapeless red cap.

Motivations: Having fought for respect among her mostly male peers, Trinkesti's earned a reputation for hard work and determination. She's also grown largely humorless, as she doesn't like to show weakness before her hunters. Unlike many of her people, she has no love of pretty things — she's hardcore like that. She is, however, sympathetic to other hardcore females, particularly adventuring women.

Trinkesti (Small Folk Walker): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ S (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk VI; Def IV; Res II; Health V; Comp II; Skills: Notice V, Search VI, Sneak V, Survival VI; Qualities: *Class ability (Scout: huntsman — killing blow, trophy hunter), darkvision I, favored foes (animal), feat (Ambush Basics), light-sensitive*

Attacks/Weapons: Hatchet (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20; qualities: *AP 2, hurl, trip*), reflex bow + 40 barbed arrows (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20; range 30 ft. × 6; qualities: *bleed, poisonous*)

Mounts and Vehicles: Hunting Wolf (see right)

Gear: 2 jaw traps

Treasure: 2T

GOBLIN HUNTERS (STANDARD NPCS)

"Shh! You'll wake something... bad."

Description: Trinkesti's hunters also kit for speed and stealth. They wear no armor and carry weapons they can use from wolf-back. All look surly, and all look ready to inflict violence to anyone who gives them trouble.

Motivations: These hunters are ferociously loyal to Trinkesti. She's proven herself to them time and again, and so they'll follow her to the ends of the earth. For the purposes of this scene, this means that none of them make a move without their

leader's direct order. If they have to fight, they guide their wolves into flanking positions, coordinating to cause the most damage. Versus much stronger foes, they use their superior mounted mobility to harass the enemy.

Goblin Hunters (Small Folk Walkers): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ S (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk V; Def III; Res II; Health IV; Comp II; Skills: Notice III, Search VI, Sneak III, Survival VI; Qualities: *Class ability (Scout: huntsman — killing blow, trophy hunter), darkvision I, favored foes (animal), feat (Ambush Basics), light-sensitive*

Attacks/Weapons: Hatchet (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20; qualities: *AP 2, hurl, trip*), reflex bow + 40 barbed arrows (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20; range 30 ft. × 6; qualities: *bleed, poisonous*)

Mounts and Vehicles: Hunting Wolf (see below)

Gear: 2 jaw traps

Treasure: 2T

HUNTING WOLVES (STANDARD NPCS)

"Grrrr."

Description: The goblins ride big wolves bred for size and cunning. Most bear the scars of fighting difficult prey (and surviving intra-pack challenges), and all are exceptionally menacing.

Motivations: The wolves have no significant motivations of their own. They obey their masters. Absent a master, they act out of self-preservation, fleeing if faced with a superior foe.

Hunting Wolves (Medium Animal Walkers): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 5, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground (Run 150 ft.); Init II; Atk IV; Def IV; Res III; Health IV; Comp —; Skills: Search IV; Sneak II; Survival IV, Tactics IV; Qualities: *Feat (Wolf Pack Basics, Wolf Pack Mastery), improved sense (scent), superior runner I, superior traveler I, tough I, trick (Called Shot)*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite II (dmg 1d8+1 lethal; threat 17–20; upgrades: *trip*)

Gear: Riding tack

Treasure: 2T

WYVERN (STANDARD NPC, ADVERSARY)

"Hssssss!"

Description: Roughly resembling a dragon blended with a vulture (with scales across some of their bodies and feathers elsewhere), these beasts have no forearms and lack breath weapons. Nevertheless, they're fearsome predators.

Motivations: Wyverns are straightforward predators with few true tactics. They only retreat when severely outnumbered or facing a much stronger foe.



Wyvern (Large Beast Flyer/Walker — 85 XP): Str 14, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 9; SZ L (2×3, Reach 1); Spd 60 ft. winged flight, 20 ft. ground; Init III; Atk VI; Def III; Res VI; Health VII; Comp I; Skills: Search VI, Sneak V; Qualities: *Condition immunity (paralyzed), damage reduction 4, feat (Charging Basics), improved sense (scent), light sleeper*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite III (dmg 2d10+2 lethal; threat 17–20), Tail Slap II (dmg 1d10+2 lethal + paralyzing poison; threat 19–20; upgrades: *reach +1, venomous*), Wing Slam × 2 (Slam I: dmg 1d8+2 lethal; threat 20)

Gear: None

Treasure: 1A, 1T

NEXT STEPS

Ideally, the PCs agree to accompany Trinkesti and her hunters to the goblin camp, in which case they arrive just before dawn. Proceed to Scene 2.

Of course, the party may choose to attack the goblins instead, especially if they're predisposed by local history (see *Direction*, page 5). If they insist on this course of action, there are a couple options.

If the party attacks the goblins during the wyvern fight, Trinkesti orders a withdrawal. The goblins use Total Defense to get and stay clear, leaving the party to fight the wyvern alone. Should the party press the fight against the goblins, you may want to add a second wyvern to keep them busy until tensions die down and peaceful talk can commence.

If the party attacks after the wyvern is downed, Trinkesti spends a round shouting "Wait! Wait!" and if that doesn't help she orders a retreat. The goblins are mounted on great wolves and likely faster than the party, which so the scene likely ends with them fleeing into the night. The party can track them back to their camp (leading to Scene 2), especially if their interest is peaked at mention of a human ("captive") in the goblins' possession.



SCENE 2: SINNER, SAINT

The goblin encampment, just before dawn

OBJECTIVES

- Agree to help Pader Asonza

CHALLENGES

- The party is outnumbered by goblins 15-to-1. Stupidity may result in somebody getting killed.
- Pader Asonza is gravely wounded, and the party may not be able to help him.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: The goblin encampment is a community clearly preparing for violence. The party is shown to the chief, Kalkachanla, who introduces them to Pader Agustin Asonza. The Archivist's legs are smashed and it's unlikely the party can truly help him in the short term, but he's conscious and coherent. He explains how he came to arrive at the goblin camp and asks the party to finish what he started — explore the keep and find anything related to the Hauntbeast's prison, so he can research how to strengthen it.

Gear: Possessions, and maybe a few wyvern pieces.

LOCATION

The goblin encampment has a core cluster of obviously permanent structures. Half a dozen low-slung longhouses (built for small creatures) and animal pens form the center of the camp, with tents surrounding them in a roughly oval pattern. It's conceivable that the goblins have been living here for decades, perhaps since the massacre of the garrison. Looming over the encampment is Black Spur, a small mountain (perhaps 500 ft. high), with a ruined keep at its peak.

Ambiance: Goblins aren't known for their hygiene and this camp is no exception, though steps have been taken to keep it defensible. Piles of dung and trash, for instance, are kept to a few locations rather than strewn about. There are even a few latrines dug, though they're open to the air rather than sheltered in any way. The smell of refuse, animals, and cooking fires is thick in the air, and many goblins are eating their main meal in the hours just before dawn. Soon they will retire, leaving the day to the gray morning haze (dim ambient light).

Terrain: Plains

Cultural Interest: Goblin Tribes, The Realm

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ACTION

Assuming the party travels with Trinkesti and her hunters, read the following aloud.

The goblin hunters lead you off the road and into the wilderness. You travel through the night, and as the grey of pre-dawn begins to thread along the horizon you realize your destination.

The mount known as Black Spur is a heap of rock about 500 ft. high, and you can just make out a ruined keep at its peak. Fifty years ago, say the local legends, goblins assaulted the human garrison here and slaughtered all within. Only a few survived, and when their tale was told the High Church declared the whole area anathema — desecrated ground.

It would appear the goblins don't listen to the High Church edicts. Their distinctly military encampment is built up at the base of Black Spur, and it's here that your travel ends. Half a dozen low-slung longhouses and animal pens form the center of the camp, with tents surrounding them in a roughly oval pattern. The camp is maybe a hundred goblins strong and it's clear they've been living here for decade — perhaps since the massacre of the garrison.

Your arrival draw looks of curiosity and suspicion from the goblins, but given your escort you go unchallenged. You're led to a somewhat better appointed longhouse in the center of the camp, and waiting for you is a wizened goblin chieftain. Your guide exchanges a respectful greeting and the older goblin sizes you up for a moment before speaking.

"Which of you," he asks, "is the healer?"

The goblin leader introduces himself as Kalkachanla and directs the healer, should one identify him or herself, inside the main longhouse. Kalkachanla doesn't protest if the entire party wants to enter, as he's more interested in getting Asonza out of here than he is in observing pleasantries and protocol.

The longhouse's interior is one big chamber, with sleeping mats along the walls and a central fire pit exhausting through a hole in the roof. The structure is built for small creatures and so Medium characters must stoop or crawl to enter (larger characters must stay outside). The ceiling is high enough that Medium characters can stand within, though they brush the roof. If the party healer happens to be Large or bigger, Kalkachanla orders Asonza brought out of the longhouse on a pallet, so the party can deal with him in the open.

Kalkachanla brings the healer to Asonza (the chieftain assumes the healer is also the party's leader unless someone else does most of the talking), at which point the Archivist perks up and speaks.

"Oh, Praises to Heaven! I'm so glad they found someone. Tell me, are you just travelers, or are you more, shall we say, adventure-minded?"

Any remotely adventure-minded answer prompts Agustin to launch into his tale. He first reviews or explains the accepted High Church version of events at Black Spur Keep 50 years ago (see the *Direction* section of *Scene 1*), after which he continues with the following.

"I work in the High Church Archivum and recently came across documents leading me to believe that the accepted version of events at Black Spur may be, shall we say, incomplete. I rode here to see if there was still anything to be found at the ruin, and unfortunately got more than I bargained for. I was attacked by a wyvern, which killed my horse, and I broke my legs when it threw me. It was only the intervention of these goblins that saved my life.

"Over these last days — it's so hard to reckon time through the pain — I had several conversations with good chief Kalkachanla here, and he filled in several gaps in the King's account. It appears that what we call Black Spur is in fact a goblin holy site called Dur-Basta, where one of their heroic ancestors tricked a great demon into entombing itself. This demon, the Hauntbeast, resides at the keep, held prisoner to this day. Unfortunately, there's an astrological event every 50 years that weakens the prison and the Hauntbeast uses these periods to reach out with its foul mind and corrupt the gullible and weak-willing. It calls them here and demands they free it, so the goblins have set up this encampment and bring their tribes together during this 'conjunction' to guard the keep from the Hauntbeast's minions.

"Our keep, shall we say... interrupted their vigil. They raided to drive us away and when that didn't work they reclaimed the site to protect us all. I know it's hard to believe but these goblins are our salvation. They're the reason we're all still standing here, and despite their awful deeds we owe them a debt of great thanks — and more, if you'll prepared to help.

"We're nearing another conjunction, and as you see the goblin tribes have gathered, but that's not how you can help. I believe the Hauntbeast's prison can be strengthened with the application of magic not possessed by the goblins. If I can learn more about the prison, bring that information back to my colleagues in the Archivum, perhaps we can help these goblins contain this monster for good and all.



"So I ask... will you help me? There can be no better time to learn of the prison than now, when it is most tangible — most vulnerable — and when the Hauntbeast is most active. Please... enter the keep and seek anything that might yield new findings. Will you do this? Can I count on you?"

Sages, historians, and scholars in the party may well be chomping at the bit to help, but others may be more mercenary. Should the PCs haggle, Agustin explains that if there's information to be found and the PCs find it (and it works), it's a double-win: the goblins can leave their vigil and the kingdom gets its keep back. Both would potentially owe a debt to whoever made it possible. If pressed, Agustin can also promise to draft from Archivum accounts to fund this as a "mission of acquisition," offering up to (TL × 100) silver pieces upon his safe return (and the delivery of useful new information) to Valespire.

The party's healer(s) can use the discussion time to assess Agustin's injuries. He's in bad shape, with two broken legs (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 207), and while the party can perform Treatment checks to help him (and prepare him for the journey to Valespire), he can't venture into the keep with them. He also refuses to leave the encampment until the party agrees to help — this may be the only chance to learn more about the Hauntbeast's prison in his lifetime and he doesn't intend to miss it.

If the party accepts Agustin's offer, Kalkachanla interjects.

"Beware. The conjunction comes, and none can be atop Dur-Basta when the Hauntbeast tests its walls. Come dusk, my hunters will enter the keep like lightning. We will kill all that stirs there, no matter its stance or species. The human Agustin's words may be wise but we cannot risk his offer of help becoming a path to the Beast's freedom. You understand this? We will not stand in your way, but if you remain atop Dur-Basta come sunset, you will die."

Kalkachanla isn't negotiating here. He's providing as clear a warning as he can.

DIRECTION

Here's some Q&A that might occur in this scene.

Q: Does anyone live in the keep?

A: Kalkachanla says "No. It was left as it fell. We guard the road to the keep but we do not live there. It is cursed ground."

Q: Does anyone know what's inside?

A: Agustin says "It's clear that a murder of wyverns is nesting up there. We've seen them, and one attacked me! The goblins have been dealing with them more of late. I suspect the Hauntbeast's power is driving them to greater violence."

Q: What's the deal with this conjunction thing?

A: Agustin says "Much of it is bound up in goblin mysticism and their shamans don't reckon magic the way we do, so it's difficult to say. It does appear that the natural ebb and flow of aether in the area is affected in some way by the moon, and that every 50 years it creates some kind of alignment that either increases infernal power or decreases the divine. Either way, it's the Hauntbeast's best chance of escaping its prison, and it happens at sunset tonight."

Q: Why don't we just wait 'til tomorrow?

A: Agustin says "The best time to study a thing is when it's active. Witnessing the Hauntbeast's struggles may provide crucial clues about its prison, and reveal other sorcery that may strengthen it and end this danger. After the conjunction, this opportunity will be lost."

Q: Why aren't the goblins vulnerable to the Hauntbeast's powers?

A: Kalkachanla says "Goblins are *less vulnerable*, but not immune. We just stick together and watch for signs of trouble. We prefer to kill our friends than fall to the Beast."

Q: How do we know you're not under the Hauntbeast's power right now?

A: Kalkachanla says "If we were, I wouldn't warn you. I would smile and say 'Yes, adventurers, go to Dur-Basta. All is well.' And then I would chuckle as the Hauntbeast relieved you of your naïve lives."

CAST

No XP is listed for the NPCs in this scene as none of them mean the party harm and any combat that occurs can only be the result of unnecessary party aggression.

PADER AGUSTIN ASONZA (SPECIAL NPC)

"I believe I understand."

Description: Agustin is reasonably fit man, though he's clearly no fighter. Usually clean-shaven, he currently has a scruff of beard, as he's been living with the goblins for a few days now. His legs are mangled and he cannot walk. The goblins have done their best to splint his broken limbs but their knowledge of human injuries is sketchy at best, and it's questionable whether they helped or harmed him more in the process.

Motivations: Agustin is convinced he can help put things right at Black Spur Keep, if only he can recover what his ancestor took in. He also believes he can't afford to admit what he knows about old Pader Herel's ties to the slaughter of 50 years ago, lest he be tarred with the same brush.

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Pader Agustin Asonza (Medium Folk Walker): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init I; Atk I; Def II; Res II; Health II; Comp V; Skills: Investigate VII; Qualities: *Bright I, class ability (Explorer: bookworm II; Keeper: bright idea I), interests (goblin lore, dark magic), meek*

Attacks/Weapons: Scholar's sword (dmg 1d8 lethal; threat 20; qualities: *finesse, lure*)

Gear: Scribe's kit, astrolabe, magnifying glass

Treasure: None

KALKACHANLA (SPECIAL NPC)

"You would be useful to us, if only you weren't so reckless."

Description: Kalkachanla is a wizened old warrior but his eyes still shine in his leathery face. He wears full war-gear with the air of one who knows can kill, though not one who revels in it.

Motivations: The chieftain was at the keep during the battle 50 years ago, and the horrors of that night have gifted him with remarkable wisdom and patience. He understands that Agustin is no threat, and believes the Archivist may be the best hope to hold the Hauntbeast at bay forever. Shenanigans, however, will be met with Kalkachanla's hatchet.

Kalkachanla (Small Folk Walker): Str 15, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 25 ft. ground; Init V; Atk IV; Def IV; Res IV; Health V; Comp III; Skills: Intimidate VIII, Resolve IV, Tactics VIII; Qualities: *Class ability (Captain: battle planning I (crush them!, press on!), take heart), darkvision I, fearless I, feat (Ambush Basics, Battlefield Trickery, Coordinated Attack, Coordinated Move), frenzy II, light-sensitive, menacing threat*

Attacks/Weapons: Broadsword (dmg 1d10+2 lethal; threat 20; qualities: *massive*)

Mounts and Vehicles: Hunting wolf (see right)

Gear: Moderate scalemail with light fittings (DR 5; Resist Edged 3; DP -2; ACP -2; Spd -5 ft.; Disguise obvious)

Treasure: 1A, 2C, 1M

GOBLIN RIDERS (STANDARD NPCs)

"We are vigilant. Death to the Hauntbeast's minions!"

Description: The main goblin force is fearsome. All look surly, and all look ready to shred anyone presenting trouble.

Motivations: These goblins have been sent from all the local tribes as "chosen" guardians for the Hauntbeast vigil. They have no problem with killing the PCs but understand Kalkachanla's desire to get the blundering human scholar clear of the area. If they have to fight, the riders guide their wolves into flanking positions, coordinating to cause the most damage. Versus much stronger foes, they use their superior mounted mobility to harass the enemy.

Goblin Riders (Small Folk Walkers): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ S (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk V; Def III; Res II; Health IV; Comp II; Skills: Notice III, Search VI, Sneak III, Survival VI; Qualities: *Class ability (Scout: huntsman — killing blow, trophy hunter), darkvision I, favored foes (animal), feat (Ambush Basics), light-sensitive*

Attacks/Weapons: Hatchet (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20; qualities: *AP 2, hurl, trip*), reflex bow + 40 barbed arrows (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 20; range 30 ft. × 6; qualities: *bleed, poisonous*)

Mounts and Vehicles: Hunting Wolf (see below)

Gear: Partial studded leather armor (DR 2, Resist —; DP -1; ACP -0; Spd —; Disguise -0)

Treasure: 2T

HUNTING WOLVES (STANDARD NPCs)

"Grrrr."

Description: The goblins ride big wolves bred for size and cunning. Most bear the scars of fighting difficult prey (and surviving intra-pack challenges), and all are exceptionally menacing.

Motivations: The wolves have no significant motivations of their own. They obey their masters. Absent a master, they act out of self-preservation, fleeing if faced with a superior foe.

Hunting Wolves (Medium Animal Walkers): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 5, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground (Run 150 ft.); Init II; Atk IV; Def IV; Res III; Health IV; Comp —; Skills: Search IV; Sneak II; Survival IV, Tactics IV; Qualities: *Feat (Wolf Pack Basics, Wolf Pack Mastery), improved sense (scent), superior runner I, superior traveler I, tough I, trick (Called Shot)*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite II (dmg 1d8+1 lethal; threat 17–20; upgrades: *trip*)

Gear: Riding tack

Treasure: 2T

NEXT STEPS

This scene likely ends with the party agreeing to help Agustin and heading up to the keep, in which case they arrive just after dawn, in full daylight.

If the party cannot offer Agustin any healing at all, his wounds will keep for another day or two before they become truly life-threatening, and even if they won't he'd still implore them to venture into the keep. "The safety of the Realm is at stake. My life is trifling by comparison."

It's equally possible that the PCs have enough skill, magic, or both to completely heal Agustin. In this case, he happily joins the party in their new quest, though he stays out of combat and out of the party's way as much as possible. He isn't trained as an adventurer, after all, and he's overjoyed to leave what should have been a hero's job all along to the experts.



SCENE 3: THE RUINS OF BLACK SPUR KEEP

Black Spur Keep, morning

OBJECTIVES

- Find Pader Rafael's journal
- Explore Black Spur Keep

CHALLENGES

- A murder of wyverns nests in the keep.
- Cultists dedicated to the Hauntbeast have snuck in and are preparing to free their master.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard

GM Briefing: To satisfy their promise to Agustin, the party will likely fight wyverns at least once, and probably several times. Pader Rafael's journal is in the Chapel, and provides an important clue that can point the party to the Infernum, an evil tome currently held by the cult priestess Achela. This is what Agustin needs to strengthen the aether-prison. Sadly, facing Achela probably triggers Scene 4 (*see page 16*).

Gear: Whatever the party has from the first two scenes — likely, Possessions alone.

LOCATION

Black Spur Keep is a wreck. Every door has been forced and unless otherwise stated cannot either open or close. In some cases the doors are gone entirely (with the same effect). The keep's walls are 15 ft. high and topped with battlements (there was no need to build the walls higher, as the sheer approach would keep siege parties from exploiting them). Walkways are situated 10 ft. up as shown on the map on page 21. The western turrets match the walls in height, and the eastern tower stands 30 ft. high, containing a second story and a battlemented roof.

Skeletons and the decomposing remains of humans, horses, goblins, and wolves are sprinkled throughout the debris of the goblin assault and many minor clashes since (including shields, armor scraps, rusted weapons, rotted tack, door remnants, and the like). This has two mechanical effects. First, characters suffer a -2 penalty with Sneak checks in the keep, as there's just too much underfoot that crunches, scrapes, and shifts. Second, dropping prone into the debris and holding still grants a +2 bonus with Hide checks (which rises to +4 if the character spends a half-action burrowing into the scraps). This second bonus also applies to Stash checks made for objects as well.

Ambiance: The day is pleasant, clear, and breezy, the sun casting bright ambient light across areas open to the sky. Unfortunately, the keep smells of age and death. Everything here is musty and/or dusty, the debris of battle mixed with wyvern droppings and the remains of the murder's recent prey.

Terrain: Mountains

Cultural Interest: The Realm

ACTION

Open this scene by reading the following aloud.

The day is pleasant and the air is clear and breezy as you make your way along the track to the keep. Halfway up the mount, you find evidence of battle — skeletons and long-decayed corpses of goblins and wolves still lie where swords and bolts stole the life from them decades ago. And then you approach the keep grounds, the smell of death becomes overwhelming. The structure's huge doors are long gone, the entrance yawning like an indifferent god, waiting to swallow you whole...

The wyvern murder roosting in the keep consists of 2 mobs (each mob equal in number to the PCs in the party). Wyvern nests are located atop each gatehouse tower, atop each of the western turrets, and inside the ruined stables. The first thing to do when preparing the scene is figure out how many wyverns are present and distribute them roughly evenly between these areas (with any odd remainder starting in the stables, which have the most room).

All wyverns are in their nests when the party arrives, though you should have them move about periodically to keep the party on its toes. The wyverns have visual range increments of 100 ft. (about a quarter of the length of the keep), hearing range increments of 50 ft., and scent range increments of 10 ft. (*see Fantasy Craft, page 217*). Whenever PCs move or linger within these ranges, and especially if they enter a wyvern's line of sight or make unusual noises (scuffling around is ignored but shouting or breaking things isn't), they should make a team Sneak check opposed by the wyvern's Notice (for added discomfort, you can make both checks secretly). The wyvern notices the party if it wins the check, and if it scores a critical success and/or the PC(s) score a critical failure, the nearest *two* wyverns notice.

Any wyverns that spot intruders take flight and spend a round scanning visible parts of the keep for others. The characters may seize this opportunity to duck for cover, in which case they get one last chance to avoid combat. Another team Sneak check is made — no secret rolls this time — and if the party wins the check (remember the debris rules in the Location section), the wyvern(s) lose track of them and return to their nest(s). Otherwise, roll for initiative.

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Fortunately for the party, the wyverns are used to one or two of them periodically slipping off for a bite, and since what they bring back isn't always dead the rest ignore the sounds of small skirmishes within the keep. Consequently, the party has three full rounds to finish each fight before attracting more wyverns. If they can bring their opponent(s) down and go quiet in that time, no more join the fray; otherwise, a fresh wyvern leaves its nest to investigate. It spends a round scanning the area and then joins the battle on a fresh Initiative Count, after which the three-round clock starts again. Unless the party can end the fight in that time, another wyvern joins, and so on.

Also remember that there's an active cult presence in the keep. This should become apparent to the PCs early on (the arcane sigil in the courtyard is a big, fat clue), but the party won't actually meet any of the other intruders until they enter the east tower (*see page 14*). In fact, the cult may not even notice the party entering the keep, as they have only a single lookout atop the eastern tower, and he's watching for wyvern activity, not foot traffic. The cultists teleported in using a disposable magic item and initially set about searching the keep, but the wyverns attacked shortly after the sigil was scribed in the courtyard. The cult has holed up in the eastern tower since, assuming their master will take care of the wyverns once it's freed.

Should the PCs become entrenched in an escalating battle they can't win, you can use the cultists to save the adventure and raise the stakes at the same time. Simply proceed to Scene 4, with Achela completing her ritual and the Hauntbeast bursting up through the courtyard (*see right*). The wyverns correctly identify the demon as the superior threat and attack, allowing the PCs a brief respite before the victor (the Hauntbeast, of course) turns its attention back to them. For simplicity, assume this pitched battle takes a full round per wyvern, the demon sending one of the lesser creatures crashing down into a part of the keep at the end of each of its Initiative Counts. If the party rushes into a structure, you can use the falling wyvern corpses to accentuate the chaos outside, which may be very effective if the party rushes the eastern tower to engage the cultists.

GATEHOUSE

Two 30-ft. (two-story) towers flank the keep's gaping opening. A set of thick doors once stood here as well but they've been burned and smashed, leaving only a wedged-open portcullis. The pulley-works is in the western gatehouse on the ground level, though the ropes have rotted away. If the portcullis is dropped there's no way to re-raise it without spending a day re-threading the pulley. Industrious characters may see this as an advantage, luring a wyvern — or the Reaper — through the gateway to bring the portcullis down on top of it. With a successful Taunt (or another tactic you approve), this inflicts 3d6 lethal damage (AP 4), with a critical success acting like a critical hit. This also yields an Instant Reward of 2 Reputation (*see Fantasy Craft, page 344*).

The eastern gatehouse's second floor has a door leading to the inner bailey. It was never forced and remains in its jamb, swollen tight. Forcing it to gain entry to the walkway beyond requires an Athletics check (average DC), and doing so also triggers a Sneak check with a -4 penalty opposed by the wyvern nesting on the gatehouse roof (don't forget there's a wyvern on the western gatehouse roof as well).

Also in the eastern gatehouse tower are the remnants of a fresh-killed human, perhaps only a day or two dead. The corpse wears a ring bearing the goblin theological symbol for evil, which can be identified with a Knowledge check (tricky DC).

The wyverns' treasure is found in their nests atop the towers.

COURTYARD

Most debris has been cleared from this area, making it difficult to cross without triggering a Sneak check. The party may still brave the area, however, as it contains a bold and fascinating feature: an arcane circle roughly 30 ft. in diameter, scribed in chalk, blood, wax, and colored sand. A successful Knowledge check (average DC with a Spellcasting synergy) reveals that the circle is an immense summoning sigil, though if the check also beats the hard DC it's evident the sigil has been drawn improperly and won't contain anything of significant power.

An old barricade has been erected in the southwestern corner of the courtyard, ostensibly by the defenders of 50 years ago. Another successful Knowledge check (easy DC with a Tactics synergy) reveals that the fighting was fierce around the barricade — that it was probably location of the defenders' last desperate stand against the goblins.

The cistern behind the barricade doesn't look safe to drink, what with the soot and floating debris, but it's actually harmless, if a bit brackish and sulfuric.

BARRACKS/SOUTHWEST TURRET

The turret at the keep's southwest corner contains a barracks comprised of a several small rooms with bunks and footlockers. A fair amount of the furniture that once stood in these rooms was pulled out and refashioned as the courtyard barricade, but most of the footlockers remain. Searching the former garrison's belongings nets two Treasure Rolls (1C and 1L), but also triggers a Sneak check against the wyvern nesting atop the turret.

Note that the turret's wide stairs allow the wyvern to chase the party back into the barracks, or to stalk down into the structure if they attract it with a clumsy search. On the up side, fighting the wyvern within the turret ensures that no more wyverns are attracted by the sound of combat, no longer how long the fight takes.

Once again, the wyvern's treasure can be found in its nest on the roof.



STABLES

This building once had a wooden roof but it's collapsed, leaving the interior open to the sky. A large wyvern nest is found here, built on a luxurious pile of straw, collapsed rubble, roof beams, horse corpses, wyvern droppings, and other detritus. This is an extremely dangerous place for the party to be near, as the whole nest of wyverns responds if even one wins a Notice check.

Of course, the wyverns' loot, buried in the huge nesting pile, may make the fight worth the trouble.

CASTELLAN'S STORES/NORTHWEST TURRET

The two largest rooms in this complex were used for storage, one for foodstuffs and the other for weapons and armor. The food has almost entirely rotted, though searching for a few hours uncovers a few things sealed in tight barrels that have survived (Treasure Roll 3G, all three rolls made exclusively in the Food & Drink section). The weapons and armor are all gone save for 27 normal arrows wrapped in an oilskin case, which slid beneath a table and were missed by the defenders 50 years ago.

The castellan's quarters and office have been ransacked, though the office still contains the garrison payroll (1C) in a locked chest in a corner. The lock isn't trapped and has a tricky DC.

There is a wyvern nest atop this turret, identical to the one in the southwest turret. This wyvern can also stalk down into the turret if the PCs attract its attention, and the resulting fight is likewise isolated.

CHAPEL

The chapel is a thick-walled stone building with a bell tower. Its peaked wooden roof remains intact. Just inside and to the east of the double doors (only one remains) hangs a dried-out rope with an ornamental tassel — the bell-pull. To the west of the doors is a rickety and aged ladder leading to the bell tower. The pews are intact and bodies are laid lengthwise along the benches; this place was used early in the battle as a hospital and retreat for the wounded but eventually the goblins broke in and put everyone to the sword.

The altar is simple, with a wooden holy symbol atop a dusty and rotted linen tablecloth. To the west of the altar, at the back of the chapel, stand a rickety writing desk and a short bookshelf. As the PCs approach halfway up the chapel, the ghost of Pader Rafael appears here, at the desk. Rafael is a ghost in the classic sense — more a temporal echo than any sort of intelligent, willful undead. As such, his spirit isn't aware of the party, nor can they interact with it in any way. Read the following aloud.

You spot a child dressed in a priest's habit sitting at the desk, though a second look reveals that the figure is actually a Pech, writing in a book. He finishes, and after blowing the ink dry for a moment he closes the book and rises to shelve it. The book is already on the shelf, however, and the Pech's copy seemingly merges with the old one and vanishes.

The Pech kneels at the altar for the space of a moment's prayer, then hurries out of the chapel. His form fades away about halfway to the door, and for a moment you can almost hear the sounds of battle in the distance.

The manifestation repeats about every ten minutes — the time required to peruse the journal, which the PCs can grab from the shelf. No check is required to identify the important sections, which are reproduced as a handout on page 20 — just patience and perhaps a Sneak check or two if the rest of the party does anything to attract the wyverns.

DINING HALL/KITCHEN

The dining hall's long tables and benches are strewn with bodies, the result of fierce fighting. The door to the inner bailey is breached and the carnage continues through it. A successful Knowledge or Investigate check (average DC) suggests that the goblins gained access to the inner bailey through this door, bypassing the heavy doors in the courtyard.

The kitchen was clearly spared most of the fighting as most of the scullery staff was killed in the dining hall melee. A single dead goblin is found in the room, locked in eternal struggle with the corpse of the garrison's cook.

INNER BAILEY

The massive doors between the inner bailey and the main courtyard are closed and barred, and have been for 50 years; the goblins bypassed this defense by moving through the dining hall (see above). Bodies and wreckage abound here as it endured some of the most pitched fighting 50 years ago.

A small portion of the bailey is walled off as a siege vault (see below), its double-doors pried open and shattered. This was clearly one of the goblins' destinations during the assault.

SIEGE VAULT

This is the siege vault mentioned in Pader Rafael's journal (see page 20), initially intended as a store for food and other supplies critical to the keep's prolonged defense. The ground level portion of the vault is empty save for debris left behind by the attacking goblins, but following the stairs down to the basement reveals that the vault doesn't contain supplies at all. Rather, the northwestern portion of the vault has been dug open, revealing the edge of a massive stone disk (the rest clearly extending out under the courtyard). Crude eldritch carvings are etched across what little



of the disk's surface is visible, and a successful Knowledge check (average DC with a Spellcasting synergy) reveals the same details about the disk as the sigil in the courtyard (*see page 12*).

EAST TOWER

The ground level doors into the east tower were breached long ago but have been propped back together, the work obviously recent. Two cultists are stationed inside as guards. Their readiness depends on how the rest of the scene has unfolded.

- If the party fought wyverns anywhere in the open, or did anything else to make their presence obvious (firing guns, ringing the church bell, etc.), the cultists are aware there are “intruders” in the keep and the guards are waiting for them. In this case the PCs must make a successful team Notice check opposed by the cultist's Sneak or the cultists gain a surprise round as the party enters.
- On the other hand, if the PCs have been exceptionally sneaky, or simply managed to do their fighting out of sight somehow (e.g. by luring wyverns down into the west towers and dealing with them there), the party may gain a surprise round if they make a successful team Sneak check opposed by the cultists' Notice; otherwise, the combat begins without a surprise round.

Especially wily PCs may be able to fast-talk the cultists into believing the party's here to help free the Hauntbeast, though it isn't easy. The party must make a team Bluff check opposed by the cultists' Sense Motive. The PCs suffer a total –10 penalty (–4 as the cultists aren't expecting reinforcements and –6 for the cultists' Cold Disposition — they aren't nice people and don't like outsiders). Some PCs may have class, feat, or other abilities to impact this check (or circumvent it), and these may or may not be available here, depending on the circumstances.

If the party wins the check, the guards welcome the PCs as fellow cultists and jovially inform them they're just in time, as “Achela should be completing the ritual any time now.” The PCs also gain an Instant Reward of 2 Reputation, as this kind of deception is too cool not to be told and retold for adventures to come. Achela is located in her “chapel” upstairs (*see Officer's Barracks/Cult Headquarters, right*), and PCs thought to be cultists can simply walk right up to see her.

Fighting anywhere in the east tower can be heard throughout the structure, drawing the other cultists into the combat. Any fighting here in the entry hall is immediately spotted by the cultist on the upper level landing (*see page 14*), who fires into the combat with his light crossbow. He uses free actions to cry for help from the others in the upper level, with the results described in that section.

Captain's Office (Ground Level, North of Entry Hall)

The desk here contains some loot (1L), but getting to it could be an issue, as the cult has stacked a couple dozen skeletal corpses throughout the room, along with wreckage they've cleared from other parts in the tower. Clearing a path takes 10 minutes of shoving and dragging, and reveals the body of the keep's former captain, Hector, still in his armor and carrying his equipment (moderate chainmail, a long sword, 2 daggers, and 2G in other assorted gear).

Captain's Quarters (Ground Level, South of Entry Hall)

This spacious, once well-appointed room contains the remnants of a large canopy bed, a footlocker, a wardrobe, a table, and two chairs. A compartment in the bottom of the wardrobe (average Search DC to find) holds a bit of loot (1L).

Meeting Room/Private Stores (Ground Level, East of Entry Hall)

This room contains a long, heavy table with a dozen sturdy chairs, all of which are still mostly intact. A torn tapestry map of the kingdom (circa 50 years ago) hangs on the east wall, and another displaying a broad battle scene hangs to its left. This second tapestry is more or less intact, concealing a door in the north wall (not a secret door, just a hidden one), which leads to an isolated basement room where the keep's private stores were kept. The goblins never discovered this room, and so it remains undisturbed even after all these years. The low-ceiling cellar contains luxury foodstuffs (mostly rotted), as well as several bottles and casks of fine wine (worth 150s).

Basement (Tower Lower Level)

The majority of the east tower's lower level contains more storage — mostly rotted food and ruined sundries, though an hour's search recovers a bit of salable treasure (1L).

The southeastern room here is a cell, though its only feature of note is a set of grimy manacles hanging on the back wall.

Officer's Barracks/Cult Headquarters (Tower Upper Level)

This level once housed the keep's officers but it's now almost entirely bare, most of its contents torn apart during the goblin attack and cleared out by the cultists. Achela works her ritual in the southeast chamber, where the walls are covered with ghastly eldritch symbols, scrawled with a maddened hand. The former occupant's bed has been turned into a sacrificial altar where an unlucky cultist has been ritually vivisected, her blood flung about the room and soaking the old mattress. Achela stands above the corpse, nearing the end of the arcane process required to free the Hauntbeast.



She reads from the *Infernum*, the book referenced in Pader Rafael's journal (see page 20), which rests on a reading stand beside the bed. The *Infernum* is what Pader Agustin needs to get his Archivum allies to help shore up the Hauntbeast's prison, though the PCs may not be able to claim it immediately — there are cultists and a horrible monster to attend to first.

Five cultists stand around Achela, chanting in low tones. Two of these cultists always remain to protect Achela and help with the ritual, even if combat erupts elsewhere in the tower. If and when fighting moves into this room, these cultists move to defend Achela, happy to lay down their lives for their dark mistress.

Additionally, a single guard is stationed on the upper level's landing, armed with a light crossbow. Engaging him immediately attracts both the cultists in the entry hall (who arrive to engage the following round) and those in Achela's ritual room (three of whom arrive at the start of Round 3). The reverse is also true — should a fight start in the ritual room, the landing cultist arrives at the start of Round 2 and those below arrive at the start of Round 3).

You have some options as the party enters the east tower, and especially as they reach Achela. If the party has had a relatively easy time of it and you have the time to run Scene 4, Achela completes the ritual at the end of her Initiative Count after the PCs enter the ritual room. This immediately triggers the final scene and the arrival of the Reaper, and probably leaves the party with at least a few cultists to deal with as well.

Alternately, if the party is low on ability uses and other resources, and/or if one or more of them are badly injured or you're running low on time, you can give them a chance to interrupt the ritual. Take quick stock of the PCs' options, vitality, and gear, and decide before running this combat (or the rest of a running combat) how long it takes Achela to complete the ritual: 1 to 5 full actions (3 being a good default if you're unsure how to gauge the party's remaining strength). If the party can keep her from performing these actions — with any combination of combat or other actions, the ritual is halted.

If the PCs Bluffed their way here, they're in the best position of all. Achela is a tad on the crazy side and unlikely to question more cultists unless they do something very out of character (like interfering with the ritual). She's thoroughly engrossed as they arrive, which counts as a Terminal Situation (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 217), so the PCs can simply behead or shank her to interrupt her dark work.

Halting the ritual doesn't necessarily have to prevent the Reaper's arrival; you can use the process to ramp up the tension in this scene and still trigger Scene 4 when the ritual is interrupted, on the grounds that the party's actions prevented the Hauntbeast from arriving in all its world-shattering might).

Should the ritual end before the Reaper's arrival, the earth quakes and all living beings atop Black Spur hear a great monstrous roar of frustration rage through their minds. The

remaining cultists, in a fit of despair that their chance at greatness has been stolen away, attack the PCs and fight to the death. This impacts the XP awarded (see page 19), but also gives the party the very best chance of ultimate survival.

DIRECTION

Here are some questions you might be asked, and answers for you to offer.

Q: How do I feel? Can I tell if the Hauntbeast is trying to take over my mind?

A: Hard to say. Sometimes you think you feel something, like someone's watching you, or you catch movement at the corner of your vision. You can't be certain if it's a presence, or just this creepy old ruin.

Q: C'mon, I'm a hardened adventurer — how creepy can it be?

A: Pretty creepy. Who knows how many men, goblins, horses, and more died here, and no one's ever picked up the pieces. Even scavengers seem to avoid the place. There are no rodents, insects, or other animals, and everything looks frozen in place, like a tomb no one bothers to visit.

Q: So the wyverns are all that lives here?

A: So it would seem — though Kalkachanla did mention that the Hauntbeast summons weak-willed people and creatures as the conjunction grows near. They probably aren't long-time residents, though.

Q: Could the wyverns have drawn this symbol in the courtyard?

A: Not a chance. Beyond the general lack of fine motor skills needed to scribe anything properly magical, wyverns are animalistic predators. They don't practice magic.

Q: Well somebody had to draw it. How could someone have gotten in past the goblins?

A: If whoever drew the sigil practices magic, there are any number of ways they could have slipped past the vigil. Teleportation comes to mind...

CAST

WYVERNS (STANDARD NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

"Hssssss!"

Description: Roughly resembling a dragon blended with a vulture (with scales across some of their bodies and feathers elsewhere), these beasts have no forearms and lack breath weapons. Nevertheless, they're fearsome predators.

THE CLEANSING OF BLACK SPUR



Motivations: Wyverns are straightforward predators with few true tactics. They only retreat when severely outnumbered or facing a much stronger foe.

Wyverns (Large Beast Flyer/Walkers — 85 XP): Str 14, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 9; SZ L (2×3, Reach 1); Spd 60 ft. winged flight, 20 ft. ground; Init III; Atk VI; Def III; Res VI; Health VII; Comp I; Skills: Search VI, Sneak V; Qualities: *Condition immunity (paralyzed), damage reduction 4, feat (Charging Basics), improved sense (scent), light sleeper*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite III (dmg 2d10+2 lethal; threat 17–20), Tail Slap II (dmg 1d10+2 lethal + paralyzing poison; threat 19–20; upgrades: *reach +1, venomous*), Wing Slam × 2 (Slam I: dmg 1d8+2 lethal; threat 20)

Gear: None

Treasure: 1A, 1T

ACHELA (STANDARD NPC, ADVERSARY)

“The master comes!”

Description: Achela would probably clean up nice, if she bothered. As it stands she’s a mess, with paint and gore smeared over her nearly-nude body and slender bones threaded into her hair. She wears a great deal of jewelry but it’s all cosmetic (worn to impress a suitor the day she became a brainwashed cultist), and has no real value.

Motivations: Achela is well and truly insane. She can’t be bargained with, even if the opportunity arises. She’s entirely devoted to summoning her new master, the Hauntbeast, and only death stays her hand. Achela is surprisingly dangerous in combat, moving with frenzied and furious speed.

Achela (Medium Folk Walker — 45 XP): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init VII; Atk III; Def V; Res II; Health II; Comp III; Skills: Bluff V, Impress V, Sense Motive VII, Spellcasting II; Spells: Locate Object, Scrye I; Qualities: *Feat (Lady Luck’s Smile), rend, spell defense I*

Attacks/Weapons: Ceremonial cult dagger (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 19–20; qualities: *bleed, hurl*)

Gear: Mage’s pouch, the Infernum

Treasure: 1C, 1L

CULTISTS (STANDARD NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

“Hail the master!”

Description: These sad, supernaturally dominated stooges have ritually scarred themselves as a token of their unwilling reverence. They wear the clothes and accessories of their former lives and PCs who’ve spent time in the area may identify some

of them as citizens of Valespire and neighboring areas. PCs who live here may even recognize one or two of the cultists as friends and acquaintances, leading to the delivery of uncomfortable news to relatives and others after the adventure.

Motivations: The cultists follow Achela’s lead without question (or for that matter, interpretation). All are devoted worshippers of the Hauntbeast and patently incapable of defying his will, or that of his appointed agent in this world. They’re also immune to Morale and other effects that lead them to betray their unholy allies.

Cultists (Medium Folk Walkers — 25 XP): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init II; Atk II; Def III; Res IV; Health II; Comp II; Skills: Resolve V; Qualities: *Cagey I, class ability (Sage: assistance I), rend*

Attacks/Weapons: Club (dmg 1d8 subdual; threat 20), light crossbow +10 bolts (1d6 lethal; threat 19–20; range 50 ft. × 6; qualities: *AP (2), load 5*)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

NEXT STEPS

Assuming the Reaper arrives, whether the party interrupts the ritual or not (*see page 15*), the action shifts immediately to Scene 4. If the Reaper’s arrival is thwarted, the adventure ends and the party collects no XP from Scene 4.

SCENE 4: RISE OF THE REAPER

Black Spur Keep, mid- to late afternoon

OBJECTIVES

- Slay the Reaper
- Destroy the cult
- Recover the Infernum

CHALLENGES

- The Reaper is an infernal horror — you know, the kind the old school avengers chat about when they want to scare the new kids at the tavern. It won’t go down easily.
- This is a Dramatic scene and the stakes are therefore higher for everyone.
- The cult may try to help the Reaper against the players — unless you’re feeling particularly kind.
- If the PCs have taken too long, a hundred goblins will swarm in and kill them without mercy.



SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Dramatic

GM Briefing: Whether because Achela's ritual is completed or interrupted, the Reaper arrives, bursting through the arcane sigil in the courtyard. It takes the monster a few rounds to realize it can break free of the sigil but when it does it immediately makes to kill every living thing in the area. This is a straight-up fight to the death with a creature out of nightmare.

Gear: Possessions, plus whatever the party has carried out of previous scenes.

LOCATION

The Reaper's arrival rents the courtyard to pieces, tossing stone fragments in all directions, and as it breaks free of the sigil the downdraft of its huge wingspan kicks up a lot of wind, and still greater clouds of debris. PCs atop the gate houses and eastern tower suffer no significant effects from this, but anyone standing in the open on lower terrain suffers a -2 penalty with attack checks. The Reaper is immune to this penalty.

Ambiance: The wind also carries with it the smell of death and rot, and the Reaper's unnerving roars continue unabated throughout the scene, with effects described in its stat block (see page 18). This isn't a moment for the faint-hearted and there's no time to concoct complex plans.

Terrain: Mountains

Cultural Interest: The Realm

ACTION

If Achela lives as the Reaper arrives, read the following aloud to start this scene.

The cult priestess' voice rises to an atonal wail, a sound met by a hideous roar from outside the tower. The priestess' eyes snap open and she cackles with mad glee: "The master comes!"

Otherwise, read the following aloud.

The ground trembles and the tower shifts as a frightening roar is heard outside. For a moment after, it's like the whole world freezes in place, awaiting... You shudder to consider.

Read the following aloud to any characters outside.

The whole of Black Spur wavers as a terrifying roar is heard, seemingly rising through the earth itself. It's many seconds later before your vision clears and your hearing returns. Something in you is different now, like a piece of your soul is missing, or has fled this awful place.

These unfortunate souls have the misfortune to be at ground zero, without cover, for the Reaper's first roar, and must make a Fortitude save to resist its effects (see page 18).

Start the initiative clock and keep it running, the better to provide the proper sense of pressure and approaching horror (plus, timing is an issue, as explained in a bit). You may wish, however, to relax the movement rules unless the party is chasing down cultists or other enemies. If possible, give everyone a chance to establish where they are and what they're doing as the Reaper emerges.

Round 1: Surviving cultists rush to the roof of the east tower to get a look at the courtyard as the Reaper's first roar is heard everywhere in the keep (this is what those outside save against).

Round 2: The Reaper fully coalesces in the sigil and any remaining wyverns emerge from their nests, viewing the courtyard with curious suspicion. Surviving cultists collapse to their knees before their master, gibbering nonsense as the experience drives them irreparably mad.

Round 3: The Reaper begins testing its bonds and the wyverns take flight, circling high above the sigil. They howl and shriek in support of the Reaper, the Hauntbeast's influence taking hold.

Round 4: The Reaper frees itself from the improperly drawn containment sigil and each character and creature within 30 ft. must make a Fortitude save (average DC) or become *sprawled*.

Round 5: The Reaper moves to kill every living creature in the keep, its wings kicking up debris as described in the Location section (see left). Unless the party has attacked, the Reaper starts with any cultists on the roof of the east tower, who flail and genuflect all the way up to the first of them being eaten alive. After that their survival instinct kicks in and they flee for their lives — all but Achela, who wades into the nearest combatants fighting the Reaper. Like we said, she's a tad on the crazy side.

As of Round 5, the fight is well and truly on. Those first four rounds are all they have to dispatch remaining cultists (and/or wyverns if the party is feeling frisky), get in position, and prepare spells, abilities, and anything else they think might help them survive the coming onslaught. Any damage directed at the Reaper before Round 5 immediately breaks the containment sigil and frees the beast, though only casters may know this and only with a successful Knowledge check (hard DC with a Spellcasting synergy).

The Reaper is an exceptionally tough opponent, quite capable of taking the entire party on by itself. It attacks head-on, using its roar attack as often as possible to blanket the ground beneath it, and lays into the closest attackers with its melee attacks and its frenzy ability. In any rounds when its most recent attacker is dead or unavailable, it attacks and/or consumes the nearest living thing, be it cultist, wyvern, or player character (or, if they've arrived, goblin).

THE CLEANSING OF BLACK SPUR



You have more options here. If the party is struggling, you can bring the cultists and/or the wyverns in to help.

- The cultists are fanatically dedicated to their master — until its avatar starts eating them, at which point their biological imperative kicks in and they flee. They could just as easily turn on the Reaper, throwing themselves at the beast in a futile display of rebellion. They don't stand a chance of hurting the monster but they might slow it down as it enjoys each of them as a momentary snack.
- The wyverns fall under the Hauntbeast's control from the start but could break free for a period (or for good) and attack the Reaper. Alternately, they could rush to support their "god" and attack the party, or simply circle until and unless the Reaper is defeated, then flee into the night sky.

There's also the little matter of the goblin moot to consider. If the PCs take too long to search the keep, or the fighting continues past the sun's crest over the horizon, the goblins swarm up the mount, single-mindedly killing everything in their path. It's debatable whether they're a match for the Reaper on their own but in any case you shouldn't be running that combat step-by-step (should it even come to that). The logistics are simply untenable, and no fun for anyone. It's best to use the goblins as another way to spice up the final battle and/or distract the Reaper or hinder the PCs as they try to put the beast down. The presence of literally dozens of combatants can promote all sorts of amazing sequences against which the players can earn their legends.

Read the following aloud when and if the Reaper is defeated.

The beast rears up, the blood from its wounds suddenly sizzling with anger. Your armor and the stones at your feet boil as the blood burns away, leaving scars and stains you doubt will ever fade. Slowly, impossibly, the monster folds in on itself, crumbling and imploding as its shrieks grow ever higher in pitch. Eventually they can no longer be heard and the creature's form has collapsed down into a raging ball of infernal fire. There's a full second of utter silence and then the ball explodes in a burst of eldritch energy that bowls over everything not anchored in place. The wash is soon past you but its soul-smashing impact remains. You feel hollow, and suddenly very small.

With the Reaper slain, the party is left to pick up the pieces and contemplate its lonely place in a universe that allows something that terrible to exist.

CAST

THE REAPER (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY)

"RrrrrAAAHH!"

Description: The Reaper is a fiend of the first order, resembling a wyvern in an advanced state of decay. Its wing-leather is tattered and the flesh of its body is half-gone. One eye socket is empty and the other is filled with a rheumy eyeball glowing with malevolent rage. It reeks of sulfur and rot, and has a breathy, stomach-churning roar that can bring the stoutest warrior to his knees.

Motivations: As a herald of the Hauntbeast, the Reaper is a weakened manifestation of that cosmic enemy's savage soul. It's bent on sowing death and carnage, creating the proper carpet of gore for the arrival of its lord. Achela doesn't entirely grasp that the Reaper isn't actually the Hauntbeast but Agustin can explain the difference to survivors after the dust settles.

The Reaper, Undead Alpha Wyvern (Large Beast Flyer/Walker — 155 XP): Str 16, Dex 10, Con 14, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 9; SZ L (2x2, Reach 3); Spd 60 ft. winged flight, 20 ft. ground; Init III; Atk VII; Def IV; Res VI; Health VIII; Comp II; Skills: Search VI, Sneak V; Qualities: *Class ability (Captain: battle planning I (crush them!, no prisoners!)), condition immunity (paralyzed), damage reduction 4, feat (Charging Basics), frenzy II, improved sense (scent), treacherous, undead, veteran II*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite III (dmg 2d10+3 lethal; threat 17–20; upgrades: *grab*), Tail Slap II (dmg 1d10+3 lethal + paralyzing poison; threat 19–20; upgrades: *reach +1, venomous*), Wing Slam × 2 (Slam I: dmg 1d8+3 lethal; threat 20), Roar (soul-draining attack IV: 60-ft. cone; Fort DC 25 or die (standard character), lose 1 action die 10 max. vitality (special character))

Gear: None

Treasure: None

NEXT STEPS

With the Reaper defeated (or prevented from arriving), the party is left to decide what to do with any surviving enemies. Cultists and wyverns flee when the dust settles (out of fear or simply to escape the chaos), and while the latter simply fly off to new roosts the former are troublesome. Any who get out of the keep are likely caught by the goblins and slain, and any the PCs take prisoner are doomed to wretched lives in Valespire's asylum (or worse).

There may yet be plenty of treasure to recover in the keep, if the party can stomach collecting it, and the Infernum can be delivered to Pader Agustin — unless the PCs decide to keep it (see page 19). This earns the Pader's thanks, and possibly that of the Church as well (again, if the party's successfully finished *The Darkest Hour*), plus any reward haggled in Scene 2.



Expanding the adventure is simple: Agustin may ask the PCs to take him to Valespire, delivering the book safely to the Archivum; spellcasters may be tapped to help strengthen the Hauntbeast's prison; and the Church may try to suppress Agustin's work as heretical, leading to a much grander campaign rooting out corruption of the cloth. The Hauntbeast can become a running adversary, its cults targeting the party and its pervasive influence infiltrating their dreams. The magic imprisoning the Hauntbeast has also been left deliberately vague so you can add specifics fitting your campaign, if you so desire.

REWARDS & PENALTIES

Don't forget XP for adversaries (listed in their stat blocks).

SCENE 1: OUT OF THE NIGHT

A. Agreeing to travel to the goblin camp 50 XP

SCENE 2: SINNER, SAINT

A. Successfully Treating Agustin 50 XP

A. Agreeing to investigate the keep 100 XP

SCENE 3: THE RUINS OF BLACK SPUR KEEP

A. Completing the scene
without fighting a single wyvern 25 XP

B. Completing the scene without attracting
the attention of a single wyvern 50 X

A. Identifying the nature of the sigil and/or disk 25 XP

A. Finding and reading the journal 50 XP

A. Interrupting the ritual without
preventing the Reaper's arrival 25 XP

B. Interrupting the ritual and
preventing the Reaper's arrival * 100 XP

A. Recovering the Infernum 100 XP

A. Ending the threat before the goblin assault 100 XP

* In this case, the PCs gain no experience for Scene 4.

SCENE 4: RISE OF THE REAPER

A. Recovering the Infernum ** 100 XP

A. Ending the threat before the goblin assault ** 100 XP

** These rewards may not be earned again if they were already earned in Scene 3.

PRIZES

Here are a couple examples of Prizes the party may earn in this adventure. These are, of course, just a limited sampling, as PCs with enough Charisma and the right abilities might even earn the trust of Trinkesti or Kalkachanla, or call upon them later for favors, just as they might the Church (assuming it's not hunting them for uncovering secrets it would prefer conceal). Particularly ambitious PCs might lobby the King of the Realm to claim Black Spur Keep as a Holding — on the grounds that the party restore it to its former glory and maintain it as a fort defending the area.

CONTACT: PADER AGUSTIN ASONZA

If one or more characters treat Asonza kindly, you can offer him as a Contact (at the normal Reputation cost, based on your perception of his Level of Trust).

MAGIC ITEM: THE INFERNUM

If the party keeps the Infernum rather than turning it over to Asonza, it becomes a Magic Item Prize with the following stats. The Reputation cost in this case is quite obvious, given the nature of the object and the Church's interest in keeping it safely tucked away.

Item: Book

Essence: Interest (Demonology)

Charm: Greater Spell Effect (Call from Beyond V once per adventure — may only be used to summon evil outsiders — 1 use per scene at Level 5–8, 2 uses per scene at Level 9–12, 3 uses per scene at Level 13–17, 4 uses per scene at Level 18–20)

Reputation Value: Varies by item Level (see *Fantasy Craft*, pages 195 and 199).

Note: Due to this item's Charm, its Level must be 9 or higher. Should the adventure be run at a lower Threat Level, the item's Level is 9.



EXCERPTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF PADER RAFAEL OLEDO

Last entry, dated 50 years ago

The goblins did not bother with siege — they simply attacked! A great horde is pressing against the walls even now, and they may gain entry at any moment. Saints preserve us! Pader Herel has locked himself atop the eastern tower and I fear for his soul! If only I could have sounded a warning! Curse me for not trying.

The day prior

Pader Herel grows more distant and paranoid with each passing hour. I looked through his reference books while he slept, and was appalled. He has an Infernum! Part of me wants to believe that his soul is strong, and he can use the secrets therein to puzzle out the goblin problem. But such a book as this is proscribed for a reason. Even skimming a page made me queasy. I know not what course to take now. Pader Herel is technically my superior, and he and Captain Hector seem to get along so well I cannot exercise my authority as the keep's chaplain. I can only hope Pader Herel leaves soon but even this is in vain, for the goblins are massing around the Spur. I have nothing but dread for the future.

Two days earlier

Pader Herel Asonza of the Archivum has arrived to examine our artifacts. He seems a learned man, and has hit it off with Captain Hector.

One week earlier

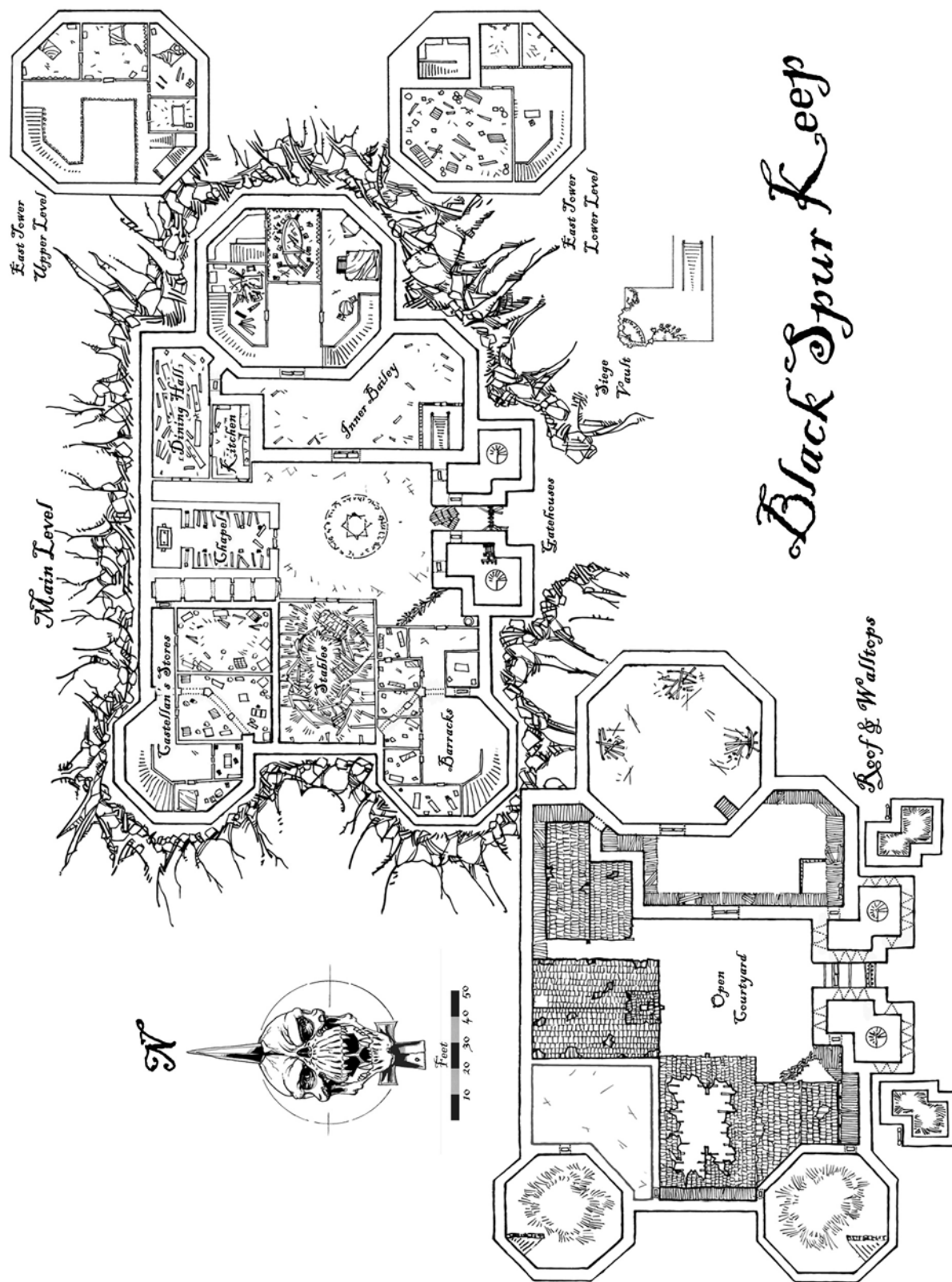
The siege vault diggers have uncovered the leading edge of a great stone disk covered in odd markings. Hopefully someone from Valespire will arrive soon and put the rumors to rest. Captain Hector ordered two more men flogged today for spreading "seditious lies" — stories about ghosts and curses, and intruding on something the goblins thought was best left buried. I disagree with the methods but I also understand the dangers of loose talk, and with the goblins raiding so frequently now I have to wonder where there's any truth to their concerns.

Two weeks earlier

Work on the siege vault hit a snag today. The soldiers have discovered a cache of bones and treasure, and one of the old veterans claims that they look goblin in nature. The more they dig, the more they find. We are stockpiling the artifacts in the dining hall, where they can be laid out. Captain Hector has sent a rider to Valespire for a scholar to evaluate the find.







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