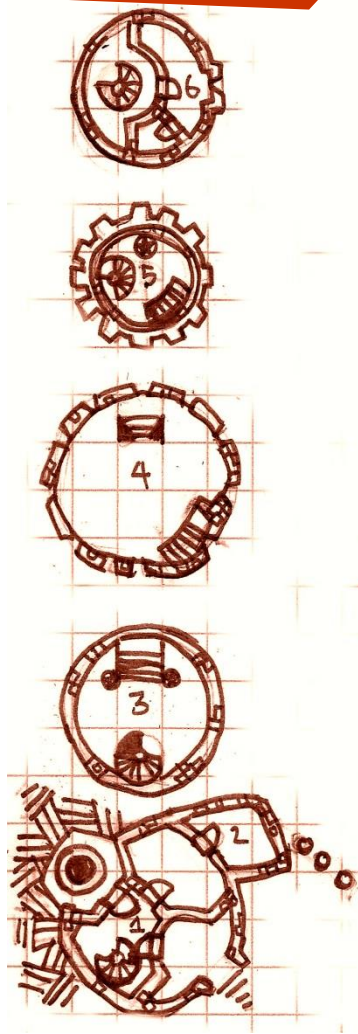


COMES THE MOUNTAIN

The doom of cities out of strange Vheissu comes. Encrusted with the dolmens and temples of dead cities, with thunderous cracking and crash its coming drives civilization before it. Once the most feared punishment of those who defied the Flame Magi, now forgotten and loosed upon the world by indifference. The Mountain's coming is slow but in a few weeks it will reach the capital to crush with its stone talons and burn with gouts of magma from within.

AREA A



THE MOUNTAIN is a stone colossus, armies cannot stop it. More calculated attacks have also failed; attempts to mine to its heart met with gouts of magma from within the Mountain, like blood from a wound. The Magi of Vheissu are not fools, and the wards of liquid fire that protect the mountain have broken the sorceries of priest-kings, academies of wizards, and circles of shaman alike. Even the most powerful of spells, sorceries that bend space and time, or the intervention of demi-gods can only slow the Mountain for a week or two. It's sides are covered with the debris of lost cities and a few buildings near its 500' summit promise to reveal the Mountain's secrets.

THE RED WATCH (AREA A) A bulbous tower of red tile, etched with sinuous waves of abstract flame. There are windows atop it and molten steps lead to a sagging arch at the tower's base. The interior is decorated in flame hued tiles of glass, stone and ceramic, again depicting flame patterns or the volcanic mountains and hanging towns of lost Vheissu. The doors within the Watch are the Mountain's porous black stone banded with bronze. The doors are malicious, and will always swing closed after 1 turn, requiring a Force check to open. Random encounters within the tower will be with flights of 1D6+6 **Sainted Haints** (as *Specters* – See A4).



THE MOUNTAIN

A1) Heart's Vault - Stairs of bronze railing and black stone treads lead upward. The door at the rear of this chamber is banded in gold (2,000 GP worth) and clearly marked with a **Ward of Death** (First to interact with the door or bands must Roll a CON check or die). Beyond the door is a rounded vault containing a well (See **B5**) leading to the **Mountain's Heart**. The floor of the well vault is decorated with a mosaic (containing 3,000 GP in semi-precious stones) depicting weeping kings, queens, sultans, and empresses offering up their children towards the well.

A2) Lava Blister - Once a guardroom, the floor sags and cracks, while fanciful gilded weapons hang on the walls (the steel within is rotten, and the whole collection worth only 400 GP) and jumbles of rotten furniture decorate the corners. The floor is weak and will crumble under more than 100lbs of weight, dropping into a Magma Cyst 50' below (5D6 damage and save vs. breath or die each round if not immune to fire).

A3) Singing Stone - The black stone stairs of this hall are flanked by bronze statues of crystal winged, lion headed woman. The statues sing incomprehensible hymns to the gods of rock and flame in sweet, high voices.

A4) Demise of Saints - Once a scriptorium, filled with lecterns and scrolls, now dust and brittle tinder. The room is haunted by 35 **Sainted Haints**, the spirits of

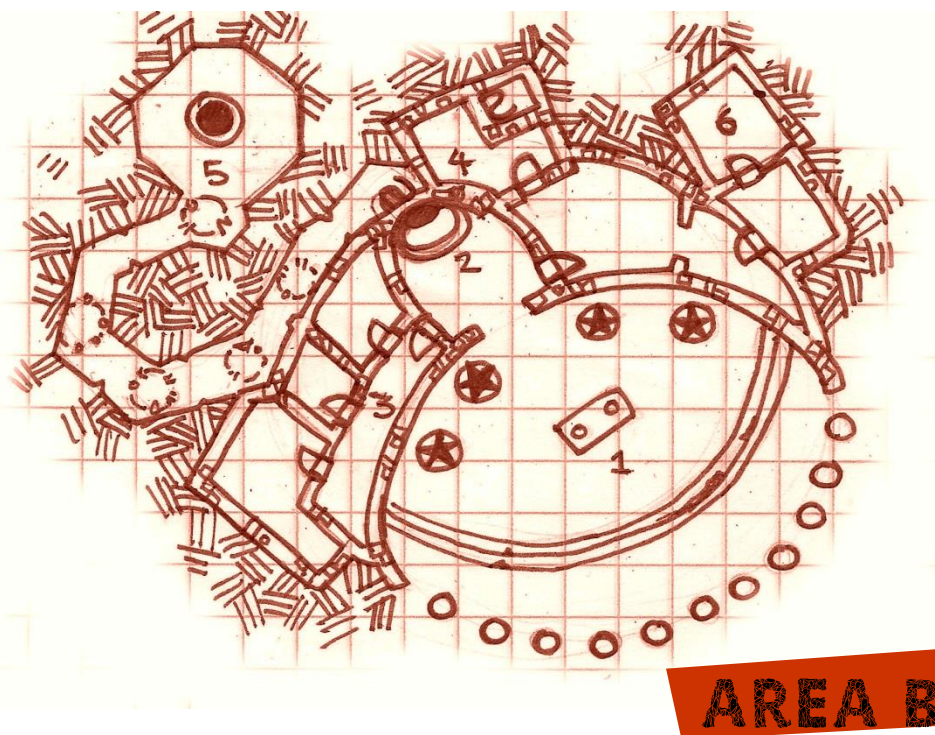
TEMPLE OF IRON AND FLAME (AREA B) Carved into the rock behind a colonnade of black marble veined with orange agate (12,000 GP worth requiring days of mining) is a domed temple. The dome is red ceramic tiles and the walls within are covered in black and red panels, broken up by mosaics and reliefs depicting rites, myths and industrial processes related to fire. Random encounters in the temple include only small snakes, vaporous apparitions and hissing black salamanders.

B1) Altar of Flame - An altar of black pumice, its top dished to contain a pile of burnt bones (from a large bird) stands at the center of this hall. Around the altar's base is a carved inscription (readable with magic), an ancient prayer to the destructive Flame Gods. Monumental bronze carvings loom behind the altar, each showing a different city enveloped in flames and ruin. Passing through the arch in the rear of the hall without first reciting a prayer to the gods of fire (including the one on the altar) will summon a *Wall of Fire* springs up between the columns and a **Hateful Phoenix**, which manifests above the altar (one per person crossing the arch without prayer - as *Fire Elemental* of the largest size).

the copyists whose ash covered bones calcify where they sacrificed themselves to their fiery gods amongst the detritus of their work. Each **Haint** is a figure of ash clad in robes of flame, unable to speak, but gesticulating to show its outrage at the intrusion of mortals. (As *specters*, but immune to all manifestations of fire).

A5) Mechanisms of Fire - The walls here are decorated in brass and bronze plate, and inscribed with runes that spell out the following spells: *Affect Normal Fires*, *Burning Hands*, *Fireball* and *Wall of Fire*. The spells can be deciphered with *Read Magic* and copied as a scroll (taking considerable time). This room once rotated with area **A6**, and behind its wall is a hollow space filled with arcane machinery.

A6) Wheelhouse - A cracked obsidian orb (500 GP) stands before a thin window. Turning the orb once provided control of the Mountain's wanderings, and the rotation of the tower's top floor, but it has lost its power. The small room near the window is a spartan cell, the mummified remains of a Vheissuian Magi sitting on the floor in a red embroidered loincloth. The magi committed suicide by digesting huge quantities of arcane regents and rare metals that transformed and preserved his flesh. The body is strangely crystalized, reddened and enchanted, providing protection from fire (for 2D20 turns) to any who eat a fist sized chunk of it.



B2) Black Fountain – A fountain of cool water made from obsidian carved with peaceful images of a mountain cataract (10,000 GP but attached to wall and very heavy) bubbles soothingly here. The rear of the fountain is a stele carved with thousands of glyphs (prayers), pressing one unremarkable glyph will unlatch a hidden catch and cause the stele to swing inward.

B3) Dust Halls – Empty halls and priests cells, that contain dust, ash and small bones. A few small bronze bells are ground into the dirt.

B4) Patriarch's Vault – The office of the temple hierarch, walls paneled in riveted bronze (including a secret door triggered by a sliding rivet) with patterns depicting the 500 positions of worship for the Vehissuian cult of fire. Behind the secret door is a treasury including a set of gold and obsidian tile vestments (50,000 GP, as leather armor, reflect spells 25%) and several coffers full of red gems and yellow gold bars (30,000 GP) total.

B5) Path of Fire and Stone – A winding corridor of stone, inlaid marked with glowing 10' circles of obsidian sigils. Crossing the circles, unless led by one in the obsidian tile vestments, causes them to burst into towers of black flame (as 10D6 *Fireball*), or jagged barriers of spinning obsidian (as *Blade Barrier*). Beyond is a chamber with a central well between smooth stone walls. The well also exits through the ceiling to **A1**. In the darkness the walls will glow with the

history of the Mountain and tell how to mollify it through the sacrifice of royal blood.

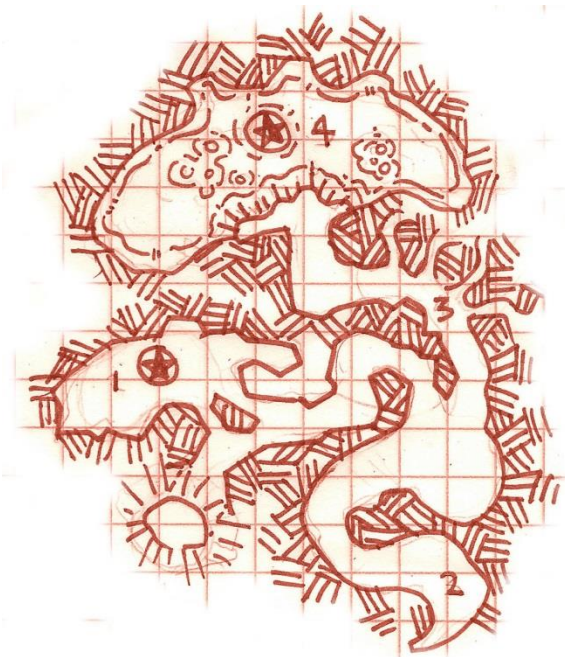
The well leads to the **Mountain's Heart**, a huge red crystal floating in a magma filled chamber 300' below. If a member of any royal lineage is hurled down the well the Mountain will settle and become quiescent for ten years. Destroying the **Heart** will also stop the Mountain, though the heart is submerged in a 10' x 10' magma chamber and immune to normal weapons. Descending the well without protection from fire will cause 3D6 damage per round as hot volcanic gasses boil from below. Entering the **Heart's** magma pool without complete immunity to heat and fire damage is instant death, and even those who are resistant will be attacked each round they remain in the pool by 1D4 of the **Flame Salamanders** (as *giant lizards*) that cavort around the **Heart**.

B6) Hall of Iron Crescent shaped halls of tile and stone hold ranks of **Black Iron Statues**, 120 in all, each depicting a bird headed lion with obsidian eyes. The statues are warm to the touch and will grow warmer until, red hot, they animate (as *Gorgons*) at a rate of 1D10 per hour to hunt anyone who removes the vestments in **B5** from the temple. The halls behind the statues contain dusty meditation chambers of carved stone benches and intricately tiled mandalas of semi-precious stone (5,000 GP).

ICONS OF RUIN (AREA C) – A field of monuments blocks the best path up the Mountain. To avoid travelling through it necessitates climbing gear and risks falling from jagged cliffs. While moving through the field the **Monumental Wrecks** within, the crumbled remnants of shattered cities, will animate to attack (As animated *stone statues*). The **Wrecks** are rooted in the earth and can't move, but 1D6 will be able to attack a party moving through the field per round. It will take 12 rounds to cross the field at unencumbered speed.

THE OLD GODS (AREA D) – Dolmen of red stones, cracked and lichen shrouded surround a stone lined shaft. A monument to tribal earth spirits, subsumed by The Mountain, the spirits will aid any who stand within the circle by whispering to them the riddle of the mountain's power "The Mountain eats kings before it rests."

MAGMA BORE (AREA E) – Lava tubes on The Mountain's snout belch sulfurous fumes, and will spew magma when it enters its city crushing madness. Within the air is toxic (save vs. poison every turn or take -1 to all actions and -1HP per round while in the cave) and the caves are the home of a tribe of **Vulcani**, impure spirits of elemental fire that resemble crudely formed men of lava rock, legless and supported by serpentine bodies. The **Vulcani** roam the mountainsides and cavort in the burning ruins of cities left in the Mountain's wake as they, like all their kind, are wanderers who relish destruction and renewal. The **Vulcani** are elemental creatures, but rather than the indifference and distance displayed by most elementals, **Vulcani** are malicious and playful, delighting in the fires created by their searing flesh and molten breath, amused by the fragility and curiosity of the terrestrial plane's inhabitants. Encounters within or near the Bore will be with 1D6 **Vulcani**.



E1) SHRINE OF FIRE - A cave studded with raw gems (5,000 GP worth) and decorated with a crude statue of a serpentine form. 1D6 **Vulcani** (as *Salamanders*) will be in this room at any time paying homage to their god. One of them will always carry a staff of black rock while in this room designating it a priest.

E2) FATE OF THE RELUCTANT PRINCE - The air in this cave is clear and provides a break from the bore's fumes. A jumble of twisted molten steel and shattered weapons covers the floor, all that remains of a sacrificial prince and his entourage of Kinights of the Body. If the pile is investigated the mournful spirits of the Knights will rise from the tortured remnants of their armor and silently begin telling the story of how they refused to sacrifice their prince and instead tried to unearth the mountains secrets, but failed. The Prince's body was destroyed here with his guard by the **Vulcani**. The ghosts can be communicated with and understood by means of a *Speak with Dead Spell* and know that passing beyond the altar in Area **B1** summons horrible fire birds. Among the remains are slagged silver and gold ornaments worth 300 GP for the metal content.

E3) THE SIGHING VENTS - Sulfurous fumes regularly spew from these vents at incredible temperatures and any character walking this hall will be blasted and scalded by them. 1D6-1 jets of superheated steam will strike anyone in the hall per round and each will do 4D6 points of damage unless the target is immune to heat. Attempting to avoid the jets or block them with a shield may work allowing a Save vs. Breath against each jet to avoid damage.

E4) POOL OF PROPHECY - A statue of red crystal dominates this lava chamber, lit by the hellish glow of the magma pool below. 1D6 **Vulcani** will be cavorting in the pool at any time, but the elementals view the statue oracle's pool as a place of sanctuary and will not attack unless provoked. If the **Vulcani** are enraged they will attack by pulling enemies into the lava pool, harmless to them, but doing 5D6 damage and save vs. breath or die each round to anything not immune to fire. The red crystal statue represents one of the god's of fire, but shifts constantly from bull, to horse, to man and everything between as befits fire's protean nature. If addressed the statue will respond and offer to answer one yes or no question with truth per mortal in the room. It knows everything fire knows, which is to say most but not all things.

STOPPING THE MOUNTAIN is near impossible with normal means, as armies and spells tend to fail against it due to both its size and the wards built into it by its creators. Even a Wish or similar spell will only slow the Mountain for a week, and if it should reach a city it will destroy it in a few days of titanic fury. The easiest way to stop the Mountain is to mollify it with a sacrifice of royal blood, serving The Mountain's original purpose to cow and intimidate conquered states for the ash shrouded oligarchs of Vheissu.

Regardless of the Mountain or the menaced city's fate, the Mountain leaves behind several adventure hooks. The first is to simply follow its trail of destruction back through ruined and molten cities, looting whatever remains. Secondly, if the Mountain's lust for royal sacrifices is discovered, it's worthwhile to remember that while the sacrifice must be of a line that has controlled a mid-sized polity for at least three generations it needn't be the royalty of the threatened city and hunting down rival monarchs to feed the Mountain is not an unreasonable plan. A competent looting of the mountain is also likely to release an army of 120 gorgons to plague the party in the future and leave their own path of destruction in the party's wake.

COMES THE MOUNTAIN