

ONS6

An adventure for 4 to 6 PCs  
Level 10



# *One Night Stands*

— Curse of Shadowhold —

By Alexandra Pitchford



**Swords  
& Wizardry**

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# Curse of Shadowhold

*Curse of Shadowhold* is an adventure for the *Swords & Wizardry Complete* rules, designed for a party of four to six characters of 10th level. It takes the characters from the familiar streets of the frontier town of Nerimar into the depths of the nearby forest to a hidden village of elves and finally into the shadow-choked depths of an ancient ruin held in the grip of a terrible curse that has plagued the surrounding forest for millennia. Yet what seems at the start to be a simple rescue mission is not as it appears, and the characters will uncover terrible secrets in the depths of the ruins of Shadowhold that may spell the end of the peaceful haven of Golden Oak or even cost them their very souls.

## Nerimar and the Eastern Frontier

The adventure begins in the town of Nerimar, a bustling trade hub and the last stop on the road before passing into the Western Frontier, a land of haunted wilderness that few have succeeded in taming, though many have tried. Nerimar and its surroundings can be easily dropped into an existing campaign, or simply run as a stand-alone adventure using the information provided in the following paragraphs.

Miles from civilization, Nerimar grew from a small trapper's camp into a busy frontier town over the course of several generations, its economy fueled by trade in furs and lumber taken from the fringes of the Haunted Wood several miles to the east. Travelers and adventurers are a common sight on Nerimar's dingy streets. Its distance from more civilized lands, however, has made it a hotbed of crime and violence, as those on the fringes of society fled toward the Frontier to seek their fortunes or merely to escape the law. Though Nerimar is not without a constabulary, it is a token force at best, and only the roughest and most capable sorts make the town their home for very long.

Half a day's journey to the east lie the darkened boughs of the Haunted Wood, a forest claimed by the more superstitious among Nerimar's populace to be a cursed place. History would seem to support their belief, as many tales have emerged over the years of hunters and adventurers venturing too deep into the forest to never emerge again; some say they were taken by the spirits of the wood, while the more cynical merely write off such disappearances as nothing more than foolhardy folk getting lost in the twisting maze of trees and dying of starvation or exposure. In either case, this has led to many of Nerimar's inhabitants never venturing beyond the forest's edge, where the trees are thinner and the light less subdued by the thick boughs overhead.

## Adventure Background

Five thousand years ago, the Haunted Wood was not so dark a place. Part of a forest that stretched for leagues in every direction, it was home to a vibrant and expansive elven kingdom known as Alathanar. The Alathi elves, as they were known, were close to the natural world and worshipped the land in the form of a goddess, Shalraei. Possessed of advanced knowledge of the Arcane, the Alathi formed their dwellings from the living rock and trees, melding their cities with their surroundings to create beautiful structures of unrivaled grace.

But, as many ancient civilizations do, the Alathi fell into decline. Their Queen, a beautiful and wise priestess of Shalraei, passed on to the next world, and her son assumed the throne of the kingdom. At first, the transition was smooth, and life continued on as it always had. Yet, as the years passed, their new King grew darker of mood, and though few records know the true cause behind his changing demeanor they all agree

on one thing: the maddened King sparked a civil war that tore Alathanar apart and scattered its people, casting a dark pall over the entirety of what would one day become the Haunted Wood.

Though many of the Alathi fled the lands that had once been their kingdom, some lingered within the darkened boughs, clinging to a land they desperately wanted to call their home. It was the descendants of these remaining Alathi that founded Golden Oak, a small village deep within the Wood, a haven from the fell dangers that stalked the shadows.

But this safety came with a price. In the forest near Golden Oak lay the remnant of an ancient keep, a guard post that lay along the edge of what had once been Alathanar. It was here that the first of Golden Oak's Elders discovered a creature, magically bound within the bowels of the keep. Though the creature—a thing native to the Plane of Shadow—surely would have killed him, the ages it had spent trapped beneath the abandoned structure had weakened it considerably. And so, to the frightened elf, it offered a deal: not only would it allow him to live and escape from the keep, it would offer him and his people safe haven in the dangerous, haunted forest. The only condition being that every year upon the winter solstice, he would bring an offering to the keep so that the creature could feed upon it and grow stronger. Too frightened to refuse, the elf readily agreed and fled, returning to his people.

Golden Oak was founded shortly thereafter, and for generations, the Elders of Golden Oak have held to that promise, taking a sacrifice to the keep they came to call Shadowhold and offering it up to the creature in return for their own safety. Until recently, none save the Elder and their sacrifice knew of Shadowhold's location or ventured into its shadowy halls. But all of that changed when three weeks ago a hunting party of elves from Golden Oak stumbled across an entrance into Shadowhold's lower levels and vanished. Afraid for his people's safety and not yet knowing what they had discovered, the current Elder of Golden Oak, Verithrien Shadowleaf, sent a cadre of his best rangers into the forest to search for the lost hunting party. For days no word returned from either the hunters or the search party, and it wasn't until a member of the search party stumbled back into the village a week later that the Elder truly became alarmed.

The ranger was near death and half-crazed, yet from his ramblings the Elder was able to glean two things: that the hunters had inadvertently stumbled across Shadowhold, and that the seals that held the shadow creature in place were somehow weakened when they had ventured into its domain. Knowing that unleashing such a creature could mean the destruction of Golden Oak and reluctant to risk any more of his people, Verithrien sent his most able-bodied scout, Sarim Oakheart, to seek aid from the only place near enough to lend it...the rough and dangerous human town of Nerimar.

## Adventure Summary

The adventure begins with the characters in the town of Nerimar, on the edge of what the human lands call the Western Frontier. While out on the street one night, they hear the sounds of a scuffle, and happen upon a group of local trappers and toughs harassing an elven man. Though unarmed and battered, the man seems to be putting up a decent fight, until one of the trappers gets the better of him and knocks him to the ground, drawing a knife with the intent to kill.

The toughs prove a small challenge to the characters once they intervene, and the elven man thanks them profusely, introducing himself and beseeching their aid in a delicate matter that his people need help with. Once they agree, either readily or after being offered compensation, he leads them to the Haunted Wood, where they face some of the forest's more notorious predators before finally reaching the safe haven of Golden Oak.

In Golden Oak, Sarim introduces the characters to the village Elder,

who tells them of the disappearances of a group of hunters and the men sent to rescue them. He then provides a map to the last known location of the vanished elves, a forbidden ruin known as Shadowhold and sends Sarim to guide them. Facing down more dangers of the forest along the way, the characters reach Shadowhold and enter its subterranean levels. It is there they discover the fates of the missing elves, as well as others that have been claimed by the evil that dwells in the ancient keep's depths.

Yet not all is as it appears, and their simple search-and-rescue mission takes a drastic turn when they reach the lowest levels of the keep, a place where the veil between worlds is thin and the Plane of Shadow seeps through into the mortal world, trapping the characters in a strange demiplane between the two worlds. It is here that the darkest truths of Golden Oak are revealed, and the characters, while battling denizens of the Plane of Shadow, must contend with the realization that they were sent on a suicide mission. They must win through before finally facing the dark creature bound within Shadowhold's depths.

Once defeated, the strange convergence trapping them in the bowels of the keep does not end until the source is destroyed, a strange artifact known as a Datharian Mirror, which holds the lowest levels between planes. Yet all is not done, and the characters are left with a choice to confront the village Elder with their knowledge of the sacrifices made to the shadow creature or to simply accept his reward for defeating it and depart Golden Oak. In either case, without the creature's influence, some of the pall over that region of the forest lifts, as does the magic holding the dangerous predators in the forest around Golden Oak at bay.

## Adventure Hooks

The following adventure hooks can be used to get the characters to the town of Nerimar or, if the characters chose not to heed Sarim or allowed him to be killed by the local toughs, get them to the forest and into Shadowhold

1. Rumors abound about the Western Frontier, and many attribute the deaths and disappearances of local trappers and other settlers and traders to the strange creatures that inhabit the Haunted Wood. Yet still more claim that one can find their fortune in the wilds, and the promise of riches is often enough to overcome even the wariest man's hesitation.

2. Disappearances are not uncommon along the edge of the Haunted Wood, so few in Nerimar seemed to care when a local farmer's young daughter went missing from their farmstead near the forest's edge during the winter months. Distraught and desperate, the farmer blames the elves that tales say live deep within the forest for his girl's abduction, though most write his pleas off as the ramblings of a superstitious fool.

3. Though records from that time are sparse, a respected historian has traveled to Nerimar in the hopes of hiring a band of adventurers to aid him in seeking out the ruins of an ancient elven civilization that supposedly once existed within the Haunted Wood. Though aware of the danger, he is willing to pay good coin to any interested in taking up the challenge. This could serve as an alternative to Sarim's involvement, if the characters chose to ignore him.

## Beginning the Adventure

The characters should begin in the bustling frontier town of Nerimar, at the very edge of the Western Frontier. While there, they encounter the elven ranger Sarim, a scout from the hidden village of Golden Oak deep within the Haunted Wood. The bruised and battered ranger pleads with the characters for help, desiring their aid with a situation that endangers his people.

## Nerimar Nights

The nights in the town of Nerimar along the edge of the Western Frontier are never quiet or peaceful, and this night has proven itself to be no exception. Trappers returning from the wilds and other rough-and-tumble townsfolk drink, laugh, and fight well into the early hours, and the local guard seems more inclined to join in the nightly revelry than to interfere. It is in this early hour that you find yourselves on Nerimar's streets. From somewhere nearby, a cry goes up, drawing your attention to a group of local toughs surrounding the slender figure of an elf. Though bruised and battered, the elf seems to have been holding his own against the toughs—that is, until one of the men knocks him from his feet, a thin blade appearing in his hand as he towers over the fallen elf.

If the characters choose to intervene, read the following text as they approach the thugs unless they are taking particular care to remain stealthy.

The knife-wielding thug looks up as you approach, his cruel sneer only seeming to grow as he regards you. "Well, look what we have here, lads. You folks should have taken a different street," he growls, glancing back at the elf for a moment and brandishing his knife at him. "Best stay down, long-ears. I'll be back to finish you off in a bit."

**Creatures:** All told, **6 local thugs** surround the prone elf, having backed him against the wall of one of Nerimar's many ramshackle buildings. Though dazed and beaten, the elf is stable, and the characters have three rounds to engage the thugs as they taunt and kick the elf before their leader with the knife lands a killing blow. Should the characters ignore the assaulted elf, other possibilities may present themselves in Nerimar to continue the adventure.

**Nerimar Thugs (Thf7) (6):** HP 14, 24, 15, 18, 16, 20; **AC** 5[14]; **Atk** short sword (1d6+1) or dagger (1d4); **Move** 12; **Save** 9; **AL** C; **CL/XP** 7/600; **Special:** AC -1[+1] dexterity bonus, backstab (x3), +1 missile weapon attack bonus, thieving skills.

**Thieving Skills:** Climb 91%, Traps/Tasks 45%, Hear 5 in 6, Hide 40%, Silent 50%, Locks 40%

**Equipment:** +1 leather armor, +1 short sword, dagger

**Sarim Oakleaf, Elf Guide (Rgr7):** HP 42; **AC** 1[18]; **Atk** +1 spear (1d6+1) or silver dagger (1d4) or longbow x2 (1d6); **Move** 12; **Save** 8; **AL** L; **CL/XP** 7/600; **Special:** AC -1[+1] dexterity bonus, alertness, +7 damage bonus vs. giants and goblin-types, +1 missile weapon attack bonus, tracking.

**Equipment:** +2 chain armor, +1 spear, silver dagger, longbow, 20 +1, +2 vs. undead arrows, 20 arrows, 5 potions of healing. All equipment is currently stored in his camp outside of town.

**Tactics:** Should the characters intervene, the thugs quickly forget the elf and move to intercept the newcomers, itching to prove themselves better in a fight. Rowdy and crass, the thugs mock any seemingly weak or non-human characters as they attack, particularly females. Still, they are a cowardly bunch, and if reduced to below half hit points they attempt to flee. If more than half of them are killed or incapacitated, the rest make a break for it, unwilling to further risk themselves against the characters' superior skills.

**Development:** With the thugs defeated or driven off, the characters are able to aid the elf the men had accosted. Though battered and bruised, the elven man is still able enough to pick himself up and, after a few moments, he thanks the characters for their aid.

## CURSE OF THE SHADOWHOLD

“Thank you friends...” the elf says, his voice thickened by a badly split lip. He grimaces, stoic save for a slight limp. “Those men would have killed me, had you not intervened.”

He hesitates a moment, glancing between you, as if appraising each one of you before finally giving a short nod.

“Allow me to introduce myself. I am Sarim Oakleaf, of the village of Golden Oak. Though I hesitate to take advantage of your good will, you have proven yourselves capable enough, and my people are in dire need of aid.”

Though hesitant to tell the PCs the exact details of his request, and stressing that they should meet with the Elder of his village, Sarim does tell them that the issue has become more than the small elven village can contend with. Should the PCs prove hesitant, he offers them 500 gp apiece to meet with the Elder, assuring them that a greater reward could be theirs if they agree to help his people.

### What if the PCs don't rescue Sarim?

If the characters choose not to go to Sarim's aid, or fail to save him in time, there are other options for getting the party into the quest. Some of the Adventure Hooks could serve as excellent methods to get the party engaged in the adventure. Expanding on #3, the historian Aldren Voss has traveled to Nerimar seeking to discover the ruins of the long-lost elven civilization of Alathanar in the depths of the Haunted Wood. Aldren is an excellent character to serve as a guide in Sarim's place, and in either case the characters will find themselves the guests of the elves of Golden Oak before moving on to the ruins of Shadowhold.

Once the PCs accept Sarim's offer, read the text below.

“Thank you, friends,” Sarim says, looking relieved. “We may leave tomorrow, though it will take half a day's journey on foot.” He straightens, inclining his head in gratitude to each one of you. “Meet me at the town's edge tomorrow morning, once you have time to prepare yourselves for the journey. The forest can be dangerous, and it is unlikely we will reach the village before nightfall”

The next morning, the characters have ample time to get supplies, equipment, and anything else they may feel they need before meeting with Sarim. Though there is little danger between Nerimar and the forest's edge, once they pass beneath the boughs of the Haunted Wood the characters may very well find themselves fighting for their lives before ever reaching Golden Oak.

For characters seeking information about the Haunted Wood and its denizens, the majority of Nerimar's populace know little about either subject beyond rumor and superstition, though a careful probing to gather information will allow the characters to glean that the forest was once the home of an expansive elven civilization that vanished ages ago, leaving the forest a cursed and haunted place. This information is known if the historian Aldren Voss as detailed in the side box above is guiding the characters.

# Chapter One: Into the Haunted Wood

After half a day's trek across the rolling hills between Nerimar and the Haunted Wood, the characters finally reach the forest's edge. As in the stories whispered by many of the townsfolk, the Haunted Wood is a foreboding place, and several yards past the tree-line the interior is unnaturally dark, as if something were blocking out the sunlight from above. Although not completely devoid of light, the interior of the Haunted Wood should be considered to be no brighter than dim light unless otherwise noted.

Ahead of you, just beyond the crest of the next hill, you see the dark expanse of the Haunted Wood begin to rise up in your field of vision. To say the forest was foreboding would be an understatement; the trees themselves look dark, and somehow wrong, as if partially drained of color. Beyond the forest's edge, daylight seems to falter, giving way to dim shadows that choke the interior, making it difficult to see more than a few feet in any direction.

As the party reaches the very edge of the forest, Sarim calls for a halt. Read the text box below.

"I urge caution once we enter the Wood," Sarim says, his tone grim as he stops just before the tree-line. "The tales told by your townspeople are not entirely inaccurate. Long ago, this wood was cursed, and many dangers lurk beneath its boughs. I would not want any of us to join those already claimed by it."

Once the characters are ready, Sarim leads them into the forest, forgoing a source of light to prevent attracting predators. At first, their progress is uneventful, if slow, their pace cautious as their guide picks his way along the overgrown paths. If the characters choose to ignore his advice and produce light sources, the unnatural shadow that envelops the forest prevents any nonmagical light from providing illumination greater than dim light (magical light sources work normally). The dim light and dense foliage prevent seeing anything farther than a few feet away, making the need for caution that much more dire. For any surprise checks, the characters (and Sarim) take a -1 to their roll due to their surroundings.

Should the characters be venturing into the forest without Sarim, and unless they have another guide familiar with the Haunted Wood such as Aldren Voss, they'll be forced to find their way on their own. Have the characters make a secret door check for each hour of travel, with each success bringing them closer to the elven village deep within the forest. Reaching the village of Golden Oak requires five successful checks or five hours of travel with their guide. After making three checks (whether successful or not) or three hours with a guide, the characters encounter the first of the Wood's cursed wildlife.

## Shadows in the Brush

After what seems like an eternity wandering through the unnaturally dim woodland, you reach the edge of a small clearing. Yet even without the thick boughs overhead, the sky is blotted out by a thick pall, a darkness that seems to absorb the sun's light. The forest is eerily still, silent...yet, a moment later, something rustles in the underbrush nearby, and a bone-chilling howl cuts through the air, followed by another and another, a chorus, rising up into the darkened boughs.

The characters have unwittingly stumbled across the hunting grounds of a pack of **12 shadow wolves**, tainted and twisted by the curse gripping the forest. The wolves spread out and attack the characters, hoping for a quick and easy meal and fighting to the death.

**Shadow Wolves (12):** HD 4; HP 13, 23, 16, 19, 10, 23, 15, 25, 17, 14, 23, 21; AC 6[13]; Atk ghostly bite (1d4 Strength); Move 18; Save 13; AL C; CL/XP 6/400; **Special:** incorporeal, strength damage, shadow blend. See *Tome of Horrors Complete* for more details.

## To Sanctuary

With the wolves defeated, the characters are free to continue on their way toward the elven village. Should they be accompanied by Sarim, he is able to lead them onward with few incidents. Without him, the characters must continue to make secret door checks to find their way. If the characters fail these checks too often, or if you want to speed up the process, read the following text. It does not occur if Sarim is present.

After wandering through the shadow-choked trees for some time, another sound of movement reaches your ears, a humanoid figure emerging from behind the trunk of a thick oak several yards ahead of you. Though difficult to make out, the figure approaches slowly, resolving into a slim elf with a bow held at the ready, arrow nocked against the string.

"Hail, travelers," he says, his tone grim as he warily glances at each of you. "You find yourselves in the territory of my people. Turn around at once, and return from whence you came."

The **elf sentinel**, a sentry of Golden Oak, watches the party warily, though he makes no move to threaten them. In truth, he is more surprised than worried, as few outsiders make it so deep into the Haunted Wood alive. Impressed by their progress into the wood, and admittedly curious as to the intentions of the characters, the sentinel will grudgingly agree, if asked, to lead them to the village, whistling sharply to summon a handful of other sentinels to escort the characters the rest of the way to the village of Golden Oak to speak with their Elder.

**Elf Sentinel (Rgr3):** HP 20; AC 5[14]; Atk longsword (1d8) or longbow x2 (1d6); Move 12; Save 12; AL L; CL/XP 3/60; **Special:** AC -1[+1] dexterity bonus, alertness, +3 damage



bonus vs. giants and goblin-types +1 missile weapon attack bonus, tracking.

**Equipment:** leather armor, shield, longsword, longbow, 20 arrows.

## Golden Oak

The atmosphere is guarded as the characters arrive within the village of Golden Oak, whether they were guided there by Sarim or not. The elves are on edge, a fact that should be abundantly clear to all of the characters. Once within the village, the characters are met by a full contingent of sentinels, their bows held with arrows nocked, though their strings are not yet drawn as they watch the group warily. Here, Sarim approaches the rangers, speaking to them briefly before returning to the party. If the characters were guided to the village by the sentinels encountered in the Haunted Wood, skip the text box below and instead have them led directly to the village Elder which you will need to modify accordingly.

Sarim manages a weary smile as he returns from speaking with the rangers, exhaling and hazarding a glance back at them.

"They have agreed to see us the rest of the way to the Elder, though I am afraid we all must tread carefully," he says, turning his attention back to you. "Though I was sent to ask for help, not all in the village agreed that we needed the assistance of outsiders to solve our...problem." Sarim shrugs, turning once more and motioning for you to follow. "Please...the Elder is patient and wise, but I would still prefer not to keep him waiting long."

The characters are escorted toward a large structure at the village's center, a series of hut-like structures, obviously countless centuries old, intertwined in the boughs of a massive oak tree that towers over the village, its bark the color of burnished gold and its branches spreading out like an aegis over the elven settlement. An opening in the tree's roots leads to a staircase carved into the heartwood, spiraling up until they emerge within the structure half-hidden by a veil of emerald leaves. Once there, the majority of the rangers remain behind, leaving two to guide the characters into the structure's central chamber where the Elder awaits.

A kind of meeting chamber, the room is dominated by a large central table, a silver-haired elven man clad in robes of pale green standing at its head, his expression grim as he regards the party. The two rangers flank the door, and Sarim motions for the characters to remain where they are before moving to speak quietly with the Elder, his tone hushed and difficult to hear across the broad chamber. Finally, he turns and waves the characters over, something in his short exchange with the Elder clearly having unsettled the ranger.

As you approach, Sarim steps aside, hanging back and allowing the Elder a small amount of privacy as he speaks.

"Greetings, guests of Golden Oak," he begins, inclining his head respectfully. "I am Verithrien Shadowleaf, the Elder of this humble sanctuary against the darkness." He smiles, the thin lines at the corners of his eyes the only signs of his great age. "Sarim has informed me of the circumstances of your recruitment, and allow me to extend my gratitude to you for saving his life. Though a great warrior, he, like many of my people, are not familiar with the ways of outsiders...I fear I have lost too many of my people over the years to misunderstandings such as the one that nearly claimed him."

Verithrien turns, moving toward the other side of the table where a decanter of a clear, red wine was set, pouring himself a glass and motioning toward you. "Please...pour yourselves something to drink and have a seat. We have much to discuss, and precious little time to discuss it."

He waits for everyone to take their seats, taking his own customary position at the head of the table and steepling his fingers, his sharp emerald eyes peering at each of you in turn before he continues.

"The situation my village finds itself in is most dire..." he says

grimly, his earlier friendly demeanor vanishing. "For generations, Golden Oak has been a beacon of light amid the darkness that haunts this forest, and my people have upheld a fragile balance. But something changed recently, and a number of my hunters have vanished...taken by the evil that dwells in the forest's depths."

Verithrien sighs, leaning back in his chair, the situation clearly weighing upon the Elder's shoulders. "Normally, we would resolve things ourselves and not trouble outsiders. Yet when I sent a party of our rangers to track them down, they also failed to return, but not before my own apprentice, who I had sent to accompany them, contacted me with the location that they had tracked the missing hunters to."

From within the voluminous sleeves of his robe, Verithrien draws a rolled piece of parchment, spreading it out on the table's surface.

"They tracked the hunters here, to a ruin deep within the forest, a place taboo to my people due to the dangers that lurk within. I urge you, please...you have come this far, and I believe that you can succeed where my own people failed. Something stirs within the ruin, upsetting the forest's balance, and though my own people are likely long dead...please, venture into the ruin and restore the balance, or Golden Oak itself may finally be swallowed up by the darkness."

Here Verithrien allows the characters to ask any questions of him that they wish, though he becomes evasive on matters pertaining to the specifics of the ruin, stating that such information was simply lost over the centuries. The position of Golden Oak's people has always been tenuous within the forest—a balance so delicate that treading foot in the wrong part of the ancient forest could upset it—thus many places beneath the dark boughs were declared forbidden for reasons long forgotten. Still, he answers what he can, relating what can be found in the first three paragraphs of the "Adventure Background."

Verithrien advises that his village is fairly cash poor, due the elves' heavy reliance of barter of goods and skills, but that he does have a number of magic items collected by the village Elders over the centuries. In exchange for undertaking this mission, he promises each character one magic item from this collection (see the side box in "Concluding the Adventure").

Once the characters are satisfied and agree to the journey to the ruin, he informs them that they will be given a place to rest within the village for the night and access to any mundane gear or supplies they might need for the journey, as a show of good faith.

With that, Verithrien withdraws, and the characters are left in the care of Sarim who guides them into another part of the sprawling structure set amongst the boughs of the tree, where rooms have been set aside for them. The characters are then allowed to rest and, in the morning, prepare for the journey to come.



# Chapter 2:

# The Heart of Darkness

The dawn comes, though the forest's ever-pervasive gloom makes the early hour seem like the dead of night. Soon enough, Sarim arrives to wake the characters, informing them that he has been tasked with accompanying them to the ruin. Should the characters need, they now have the time to gather any supplies they feel they might need, or trade for whatever more powerful items the villagers might be willing to spare, though such items are unfortunately scarce. When the characters are ready, Sarim meets them at the village's northern edge, pausing only long enough to repeat his warnings about the dangers of the forest's dark depths before leading them beyond the protection of the village. If Sarim is not with the party, then one of the elf sentinels will perform this role.

It isn't long after leaving the village that the gloom settles in, impairing the vision of any characters without darkvision. Once again, the forest prevents nonmagical light sources from providing more than dim light, and Sarim (or another guide) suggests that no light sources be used to avoid attracting attention. The forest itself is oddly quiet, and even Sarim seems unsettled as he guides the party through the forest using the Elder's map as a guide.

The journey itself takes seven hours, with the map and guide to show the way. Without these, the characters would soon become hopelessly lost and only manage to find their way back to Golden Oak after 2d6+5 hours. For each hour spent traveling in the Haunted Woods, there is a 20% chance of an encounter (double that if the party is using a light source). If an encounter occurs, roll on the table

below. If combat occurs, Sarim (or other guide) will hang back and snipe at enemies with his bow. Foes will largely ignore him; he is not the focus of the adventure and should neither provide too much help for the characters nor draw too many attacks. You should strive to keep him alive as the guide and a source of information for the characters.

After what seems at first like aimless wandering along narrow paths through the thick trees eventually sees the characters and their guide emerging in a small clearing before the crumbled remains of what must have once been a large fortification. As the characters arrive, read the text below.

As you emerge into a small clearing, the darkness around you seems to deepen. Though you can still see, the air carries a pervasive sense of wrongness that seems to grow stronger the closer you get to the crumbling remains of what must have once been an impressive keep, the plant-choked rubble stretching well out of sight into the shadowy trees at the clearing's far side.

The portion visible was once a tower, part of the keep's outer wall, long-since reduced to naught but its foundations. It is within that ring of blackened stone that Sarim stops, crouching down next to a hole set into the tower's floor that must have once been sealed off by a trap door, though whether it rotted away or was removed entirely isn't readily obvious.

"Here's the entrance that the search party discovered," Sarim says, seeming reluctant as he starts into the blackness below. "The gods only know what's down there...I don't have much hope of finding any of our people alive after so long, but perhaps we can find something of theirs to take back to their families, and put an end to whatever was the cause of their disappearances."

Sarim accompanies the characters into the forbidden grounds of Shadowhold but will hang back in combat as before and use his bow for fire support.

## The Haunted Woods Random Encounter Table

d%	Encounter
01–25	2d4 shadow wolves
26–50	Tenebrous worm
51–75	3d6 shadows
76–00	2 shadow mastiffs

**Shadow Wolves (2d4):** HD 4; AC 6[13]; **Atk** ghostly bite (1d4 Strength); **Move** 18; **Save** 13; **AL** C; **CL/XP** 6/400; **Special:** incorporeal, strength damage, shadow blend. See *Tome of Horrors Complete* for more details.

**Tenebrous Worm:** HD 10; AC 1[18]; **Atk** bite (2d6 plus 1d6 acid); **Move** 9; **Save** 5; **AL** N; **CL/XP** 11/1700; **Special:** acid, bristles.

**Shadow (3d6):** HD 2+2; AC 7[12]; **Atk** touch (1d4 + strength drain); **Move** 12; **Save** 16; **AL** C; **CL/XP** 4/120; **Special:** drain 1 point Strength with hit, hit only by magic weapons, immune to cold, *charm*, *hold*, and *sleep*.

**Shadow Mastiffs (2):** HD 3; AC 6[13]; **Atk** bite (1d6+1); **Move** 18; **Save** 14; **AL** C; **CL/XP** 4/120; **Special:** baying, concealment in shadow.

## Shadowhold

The hole opens up onto a narrow stairwell, pitted and worn with age, that descends into the deep darkness of the ruin's lower levels. Runes of warding daubed onto the crumbling walls nearby indeed indicate the forbidden nature of the place and, should any characters take note of them and ask Sarim of their meaning, he informs them that they warn of a great evil contained somewhere below.

Within the halls of Shadowhold, even magical light sources will not provide more illumination than dim light.

### I. Entry Chamber

The stairwell leads the characters down into long chamber with delicately worked columns running its length. As the first character steps foot onto the chamber's floor, torches set in brackets on the columns flare to life with an eerie purple flame, casting the room in strange, dancing shadows and that give off only dim light.

# CURSE OF THE SHADOWHOLD

This chamber, cast in strange purple light and dancing shadows, smells of stale air and dust. Even here, there is a sense of unease, as if there truly is something vile sealed away here, its darkness seeping into the very stones of the place. At the chamber's far end, a passage is shrouded in more darkness, the light from the purple-flamed torches failing to penetrate far beyond the chamber.

Though at first glance there seems to be little sign of the passage of the missing elves, a thorough search of the area reveals the presence of several narrow footprints in the dust that cakes the stone floor, leading into the hall beyond the chamber and deeper into the ruin. Aside from that, no other signs of their passage can be found within this chamber. More glyphs of warning are scrawled upon the walls to either side of the hall leading from the chamber, these larger and more obvious than those upon the ruined walls above ground. The purple flames of the torches are otherwise mundane, though they never burn out and never give off more than a dim light.

As the characters approach the hallway, the air seems to grow colder, every breath misting in front of them. With the sudden chill the darkness thickens, the torches seeming to dim further, before flaring to light again moments later. Continuing along the hallway, torches flicker and sputter to life poorly lighting the way.

## 2. Storage Room

What was once a storage chamber now lies empty, its numerous shelves caked in the dust of ages. A ruined staircase sits in the northeast corner, only rising halfway to a rubble-choked opening above, sealed off by several slabs of fallen stone. Whatever had been kept within this room has long since been removed, and it seems no one has entered this chamber for many, many centuries.

This chamber was picked clean ages ago, and what was left has rotten away into dust. Though the characters may search thoroughly, their attempts only come up with a few torn shreds of paper that crumble at a touch and signs that someone may have taken refuge in the chamber in ages past, a ring of broken masonry marking out an ancient fire pit. No sign of the missing elves can be found in here; it seems that they passed this chamber by after entering the ruin.

## 3. Summoning Chamber

This large chamber is a hemisphere of smooth stone, polished to an almost mirror-like finish. The floor and much of the walls are carved with strange glyphs that seem to hum with power, and at the room's center a magic circle is picked out in silver and gems. Even more telling of the room's purpose, however, are dark stains that mar the floor in several places, the skeletal remains of several humanoid figures strewn here and there through the chamber. Strange whispers, half-heard and seeming to come from everywhere at once, fill the room, sibilant and seductive, beckoning you closer to the chamber's heart.

**Creatures:** This chamber, a summoning circle utilized by Shadowhold's mages before the elven empire's fall, was once the prison of a powerful **shadow demon**, its indistinct form captured within the chamber's circle. Unfortunately, a group of interloping adventurers disturbed the circle over a century ago, freeing the demon, which promptly slew the intruders and attempted to escape. Yet the ancient elves had put contingencies in place, and the demon found itself sealed within the chamber itself, unable to pass beyond the entryway. In the time since, it has lurked in the shadows of the summoning chamber, attacking any that dare enter its demesne. Likewise, the dark magic of Shadowhold has caused the spirits of the demon's victims to rise as **6 greater shadows**, feeding off of those that the demon lures into the chamber with its dark whispers.

**Shadow Demon:** HD 7; HP 38; AC 4[15]; Atk 2 claws (1d6), bite (1d8); **Move** 0 (fly 15); **Save** 9; **AL** C; **CL/XP** 12/2000; **Special:** immunity to cold, electricity and poison, incorporeal, shadow blend, spells, sunlight powerlessness, telepathy 100 ft. See **Tome of Horrors Complete** for more details.

**Greater Shadows (6):** HD 3+3; HP 18, 22, 16, 25, 15, 23; **AC** 7[12]; **Atk** touch (1d4 + strength drain); **Move** 12; **Save** 15; **AL** C; **CL/XP** 4/120; **Special:** drain 1d2 points of strength with hit, hit only by magic weapons, immune to cold, *charm*, *hold*, and *sleep*.

**Treasure:** With the demon and shadows defeated, the characters are free to search the chamber. Though most of the gear of the would-be adventurers has rotted away, a search lets the characters find 2 *potions of extra-healing*, a *scroll of restoration*, and *bracers of defense*, AC 4[15] among the bodies.

## 4. Shadow's Heart

This chamber sits below the heart of what was once the keep above, its ceiling arching up and disappearing into darkness. Its center is dominated by a massive crystalline formation, purple and shining like the strange flames that burn on the torches that line the walls. A strange music fills the room, like a thousand discordant chimes, the crystal itself vibrating at a frequency that makes it almost hard to think.

Near to the strange crystalline construction, several bodies lie sprawled on the stone. Fresher by far than the skeletal remains found in the summoning chamber, these remains are elven, three in all, and Sarim quickly recognizes them as members of the first party of missing hunters. Though not the entire group, these few were clearly struck down by something. Upon closer inspection their flesh is pallid and withered, something having drained the life from them until they were naught but husks.

**Trap:** This room bears a trap that is activated if anyone approaches within 5 feet of the crystalline heart. If that occurs, arcs of purple energy shoot forth from the crystal, one for each living creature in the room. The arcs attack as a 10 HD monster and drain 1d4 levels; a save negates the drain. The trap resets itself after one hour.

## 5. Crypt

This narrow chamber is lined by small alcoves, each containing a slender sarcophagus, the lid carved with runes resembling the modern elvish script, though different enough to be indecipherable at first glance. Some show deep gouges along the edges of the lid, as if someone in ages past had attempted to pry them open, though no other signs of intrusion can be seen.

These two ancient burial chambers, once used by the elves that lived in Shadowhold to inter their honored dead, now lie quiet and unused. Though there are signs of someone attempting to break into the sarcophagi, the remains within are relatively undisturbed. Each body within is immaculately preserved, as if the occupant was merely sleeping. However, should any object within the sarcophagus be removed, it quickly decays and crumbles to dust, the preservative magic sustaining it dissipating.



## 6. The Descent

This chamber is the largest by far, like the heart of a great cathedral, its arched ceiling high above shrouded in darkness. As you enter, great braziers lining the walls flare to life with that eerie purple flame, and a chill wind whistles and flutters the tattered banners hanging from the dark stone walls. At the chamber's far end, a great statue carved of something resembling obsidian towers above a long stairwell that descends further into the ruin, the shadows writhing around the statue's base.

Almost some sort of fane or chapel in appearance, this chamber's walls and columns are carved with strange reliefs depicting elves and other humanoid creatures amid dark, writhing tendrils. The 20-foot statue is of an elven woman, her slender frame draped in flowing cloth that frays at the edges, carved to appear to whip around her body as if alive.

Even more unsettling, however, are the remains that lay in several places throughout the chamber. Though clad as the dead hunters found in Area 4, their bodies are desiccated, as if all the life had been drained from them before their bodies were discarded. As in the summoning chamber, as the characters move nearer to the statue and the stairs, strange, dark whispers fill the room, the torches spluttering and dimming abruptly as the chill wind kicks up again. Yet nothing attacks from the thrashing shadows, the whispers beckoning the characters deeper, to travel down the steps and into the embrace of the darkness that envelops the level below.

Should the characters begin to descend, the light cast from the torches above stops abruptly halfway down, as if a palpable sheet of darkness was hung across the stairwell. Though not solid, nothing can be seen beyond, the surface of it rippling like a pool of ink.

## 7. The Cryptorium

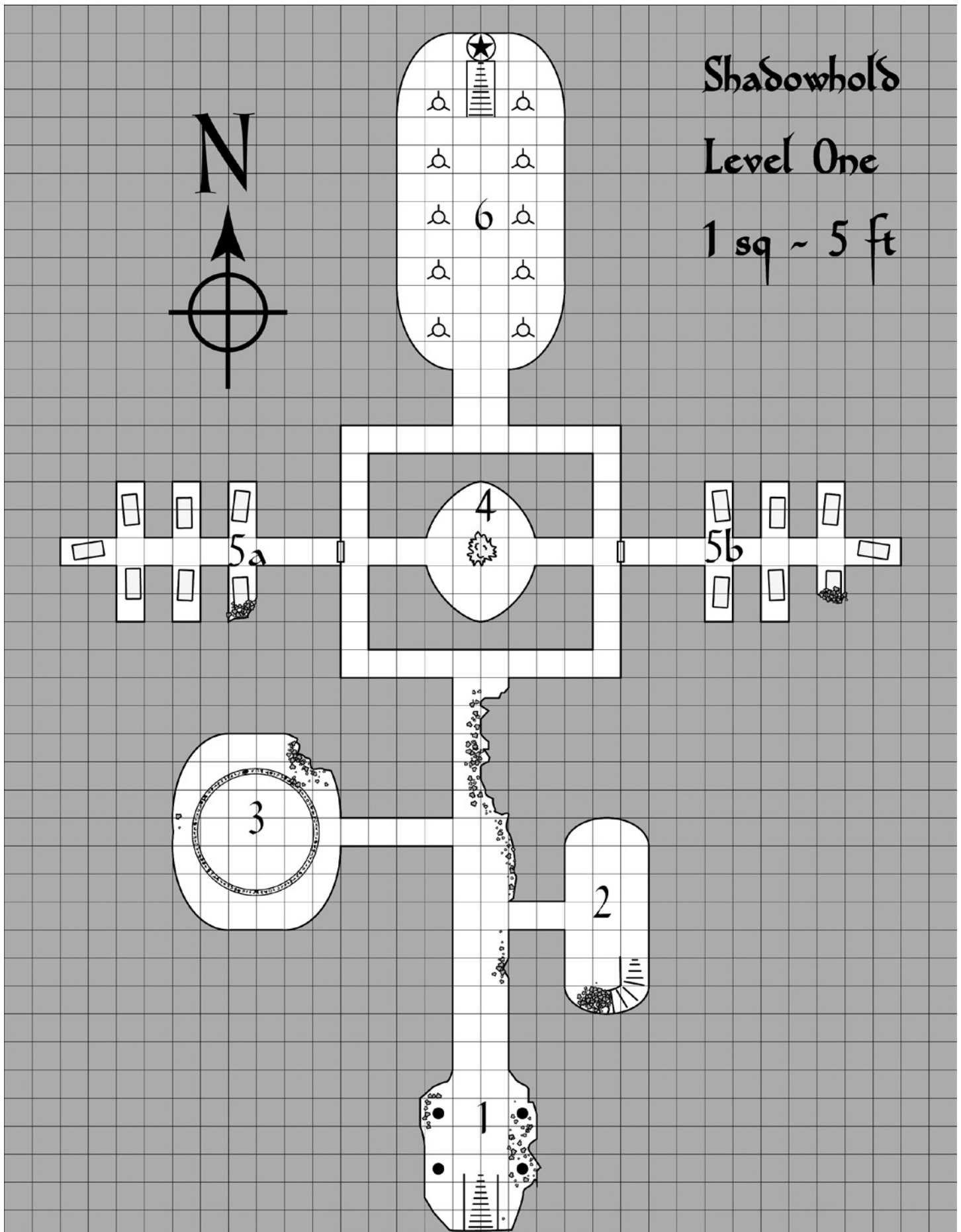
As you pass through the rippling veil of darkness, it solidifies behind you, the surface becoming a flat plane like pitch-black glass that resists any attempt to pass through or force it open. Below, the stairwell opens up into a large chamber, its walls lined with numerous alcoves, within which lay the rotting remains of a multitude of elven bodies. The air itself here seems to ripple and quiver, all color washed out and dull, and shadows clinging to every surface in ropy strands that seem to defy the light of the guttering purple torches.

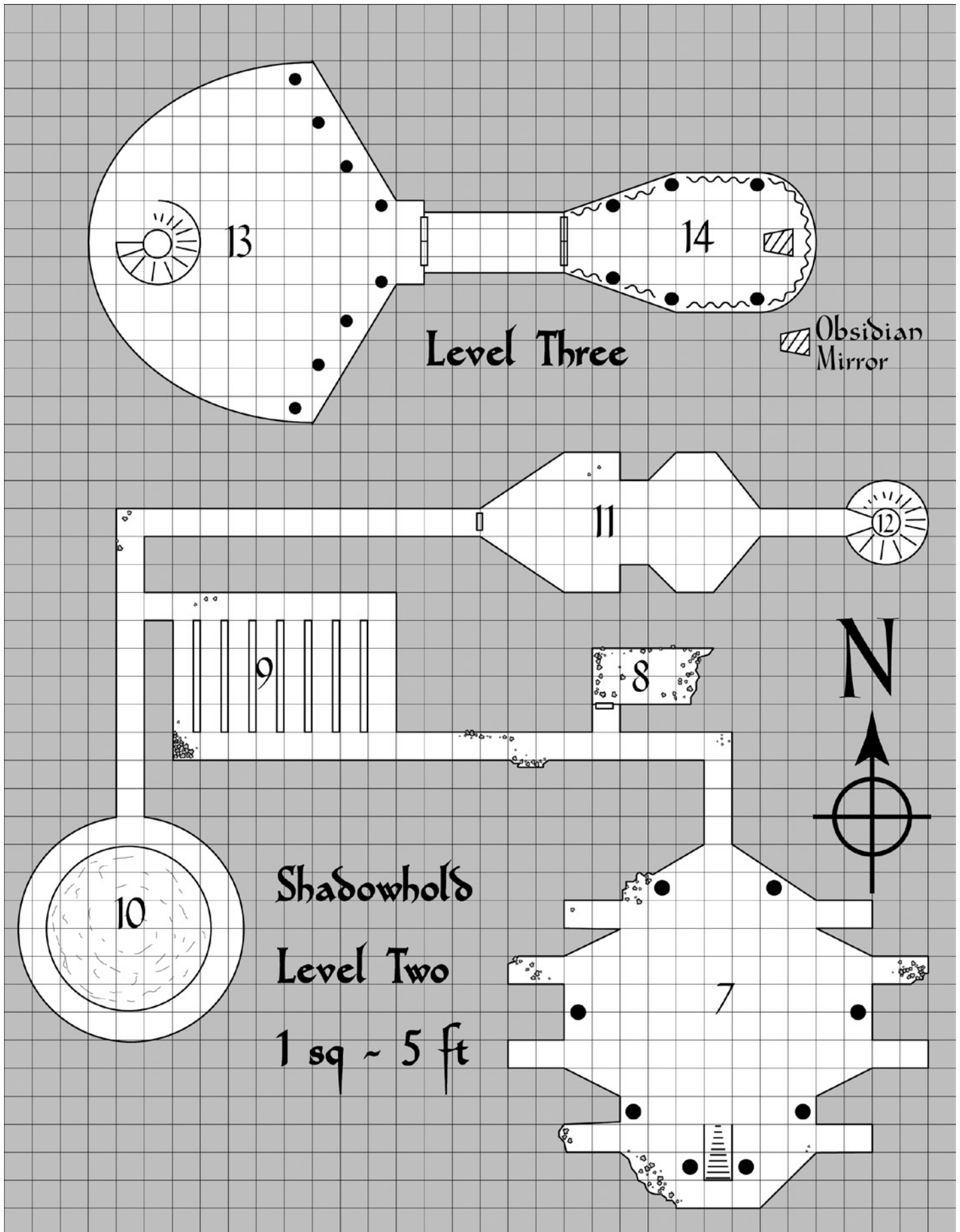
With their passage into the lower level of the ruin, the characters pass within a strange convergence between the Material Plane and the Plane of Shadow. Though weakening due to the intrusion of the hunters and the search party sent to find them, the magic is still strong enough to prevent the characters from escaping the lower level once they pass through the veil. Though the convergence once only covered a single chamber—the prison of the creature trapped within the ruin—in the time since the disappearances its demesne has grown, encompassing the entirety of the ruin's lowest level. Within any part of the ruin's lower levels, as long as the convergence is in effect, any *light* or *continual light* spell has a 50% chance of failure, its power extinguished by the shadows that permeate everything.

**Treasure:** The alcoves lining the walls contain mostly dust or little more than scraps of cloth and desiccated bone, though a few of the more well-preserved bodies still bear some of their burial adornments. Any character searching the bodies can find 1,500 gp worth of ornate jewelry, but exposure to the negative energies of the Plane of Shadow has caused much of the rest to dull and tarnish.



# CURSE OF THE SHADOWHOLD





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### 8. Collapsed Chamber

When the characters first approach this chamber, the door is sealed tightly shut, barricaded from the other side. An Open Door check with a +1 penalty is required to force the door open, pushing aside the rubble and debris used to block it shut. Once the characters force their way inside, read the text below.

This nondescript chamber might once have been any number of things, but its interior is now choked with rubble and earth. Yet the rubble shows signs of being recently moved, and the bodies of over half-a-dozen elves litter the floor here, not drained like the bodies found before, but brutally slain, their throats torn open, eyes wide and staring. The air is still thick with the sharp tang of blood.

**Creature:** The culprit of the brutal killings quickly makes himself known, a haggard-looking **mad elf** and former chief ranger of Golden Oak, crouched in the far corner near the collapsed end of the room cackling and muttering to himself, his hands drenched in blood and clutching a wicked-looking knife. When he sees the characters, he lets out a wild scream, lurching to his feet and lunging at them, swiping madly with his dagger. If he manages to get past them he begins sniping them with his longbow until he runs out of arrows and then returns to melee with his dagger.

**Valdis, Mad Elf (Rgr12):** HP 66; AC 1[18]; Atk dagger (1d4) or +1 longbow x2 (1d6+1); Move 12; Save 4; AL N; CL/XP 12/2000; **Special:** AC -1[+1] dexterity bonus, alertness, +12 damage bonus vs. giants and goblin-types +1 missile weapon attack bonus, tracking, spells (Clr 3/2/1; MU 2/1; none prepared).

**Equipment:** +1 chain armor, gauntlets of dexterity, cloak of elvenkind, dagger, +1 longbow, 13 arrows.

**Development:** Should the characters manage to subdue Valdis without killing him, he seems to snap out of whatever madness had him in its grip, calming enough to become aware of the horrific scene in the chamber and his part in it. He becomes violently ill, though that subsides quickly



enough and, should the characters question him, he reveals that he was part of the rescue party that was sent into the ruin to find the missing hunters. In their search, they came under attack by strange, shadow-tainted undead and had barricaded themselves within this chamber. There Valdis' memory is jumbled. He remembers hearing whispering, and then...blood, violence, and screaming, and little else before the characters managed to subdue him.

Should the characters suggest he come with them, he flatly refuses, too shaken and weak to wish to face the monstrosities he knows to be further in the ruin. Instead he chooses to remain behind and see that his dead comrades receive a proper burial. He does not resist being made prisoner for his crimes but will violently resist if forced to continue deeper into the dungeon.

### 9. The Great Library

Massive stone shelves fill this chamber, rising nearly to the ceiling and filled with row upon row of thick, leather-bound tomes. The entire chamber smells of dust and old paper, though even here the shadows hang thick, clinging to every surface and nearly dousing the weak light emanating from the torches set into the sconces along the walls.

Once a repository of the knowledge of the ancient elves who lived within the keep, this library is home to texts either forbidden or deemed extremely valuable. The books themselves are written in an ancient dialect of elven that not even Sarim can decipher, and require magic to begin the long, arduous process of translating them. Still, despite the failures of the preservative magic throughout the ruin, many of the tomes are in good enough condition that, if transported carefully, could fetch a high price to the right collectors. With careful search, the characters can find six volumes, worth 1,500 gp each, that can survive being removed from the chamber's protective magic.

A more thorough search uncovers several volumes written far more recently and in a dialect of elven Sarim can decipher. They detail the fall of Alathanar, conveying much of the ancient empire's history. They also include information on the history of Shadowhold itself, mentioning a dark creature from the Plane of Shadow summoned and imprisoned beneath the keep by the ancient Alathi as part of a plan that the ancient empire was never able to enact. Even more alarming, the later entries mention the village of Golden Oak itself, and allude to a pact made between the Elders of the village and whatever was sealed beneath the keep, though it does not specify the nature of the deal.

### 10. The Charnel Pit

The reek of decay hits you like a wave even before entering this circular chamber. The stone floor drops away five feet beyond the entry, leaving a narrow ledge surrounding a great pit that dominates the center of the room. Closer to the pit, the smell of death is almost overpowering, and upon closer inspection the source is obvious: the pit below is filled with piles of desiccated, rotting corpses in various stages of decay, some reduced to nothing but bone and tatters, and others seeming all too recent.

Yet more evidence of the dark pact between the Elders of Golden Oak and the dark creature within the keep, this room is where the bodies of those sacrificed to the creature were disposed of, dumped unceremoniously into the room's central pit. The pit itself is 40 feet deep, the bottom entirely obscured by the reeking bodies left there to rot. The pit's walls are rough, and a Climb Walls check or the use of rope can see the characters down to the bottom of the pit. Doing so, however, exposes the characters who come into contact with the years of rot and filth to the diseases infesting the very air at the bottom of the pit. All characters who climb to the bottom of the pit must make a save or contract cackle fever (1d6 wisdom drain per hour, unconscious at zero wisdom, remain in coma until *cure disease*) from breathing the diseased air.



## 11. The Red Room

Closed off by a massive metal door etched with skulls, this room is a scene of utter horror. The blackened stone walls are awash in splashes of blood, the floor littered with bits and pieces of what might have been humanoids of some sort but are now bloody chunks beyond recognition. Whatever the purpose this room once had, it has been turned into little more than a slaughterhouse, the blood standing out vibrantly despite the washed-out color of everything else on this level of the ruin.

Once the chamber where the sacrifices were ritually prepared before being taken into the creature's prison below, with the intrusion of the elven hunters and the expansion of the creature's sphere of influence, this room became the site of a mass slaughter. When the search party reached this chamber, they discovered the fate of their missing comrades when they were beset upon by the slaving, hungry undead that their former kin had been transformed into by the creature.

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**Creatures:** As the characters enter the chamber, a successful surprise check with a -2 penalty reveals the presence of humanoid shapes lurking in the shadowy corners of the room. Whether they notice or not, the shadow-tainted undead lurch forward to attack, **6 shadow wight** elves wreathed in clinging shadows.

**Shadow Wights (6):** HD 4; HP 15, 22, 24, 18, 14, 17; AC 3[16]; **Atk** claw (1d4 plus 1d3 cold plus strength drain plus level drain); **Move** 12; **Save** 14; **AL** C; **CL/XP** 6/400; **Special:** drain 1d2 points of Strength with hit, level drain (1 level, save negates), hit only by magic weapons, immune to cold, *charm*, *hold*, and *sleep*.

With the undead defeated, the eerie chill in the room seems to lessen, though the darkness remains as strong as ever. Even here, the strange, sibilant whispers seem to beckon the characters forward, deeper into the ruin. Beyond the scene of carnage, another short hall leads away from the chamber, the whispers seeming to emanate from that direction.

## 12. The Spiral Stair

Beyond the room of carnage is a spiral stair of black stone cut from the living rock. Half-obsured by darkness, the shadows seem almost tangible as they writhe and lash out. The air here is thick, charged, and a great sense of unease permeates everything, as if the stair descended into the bowels of the Hells themselves.

These stairs descend into Area 13, the stink of blood and carnage lessening as the characters make their way down into the ruin's final chambers to confront the source of the dark power that lurks within the keep's heart.

## 13. The Black Hall

At the base of the spiral stair is a large room reminiscent of an audience chamber, its numerous columns carved into the shape of regal elves clad in robes or armor, all of them wrapped in thick tendrils of shadow that grasp and squeeze the stone. At the hall's far end stand a pair of doors, twenty feet tall and crafted of black metal, their surfaces depicting a great, indistinct shape looming over armies that cower before it. Tattered banners line the walls, their colors leached away. Whatever emblems may have once been worked into their fabric having faded long ago.

The room is eerily silent as the characters arrive in it, their footfalls echoing off of the chamber's tall ceiling 30 feet above. The doors themselves, though appearing heavy, swing open at the merest touch to reveal a long hall beyond, its walls covered in frescoes of the same looming, shadowy creature. At the end, a set of smaller doors are set into the wall, crafted of the same dark metal but plain in appearance save for a sigil of warning, much like the ones on the ruins above, carved into their surface. These, too, easily swing open to allow the characters into the ruin's final chamber.

## 14. The Dark Shrine

This room, the ruin's deepest chamber, resembles some sort of wicked shrine. Eerie, twisted statues stand in place of columns here, their features like those of elves but somehow warped into something abhorrent. Behind them black curtains, tattered with dry rot, hang against the walls from floor to ceiling. At the chamber's far end, a mirror stands in a frame of pure obsidian, its smooth face emanating a dull purple glow that flares brighter as you enter, the shadows around you writhing in answer.

Once all the characters enter the chamber, the doors behind them swing shut with a muted clang, the ever-present purple-flamed torches flaring up brighter than ever before, causing the rooms shadows to dance erratically, though the lighting remains dim. At the room's far end, the mirror itself begins to pulse and vibrate, the same dark whispers permeating the air. After a few moments, though, the whispers stop, and a voice booms out from all around the characters in an eerie whisper.

"Ah...more food...the Elders are generous this year..." A sibilant voice hisses from all around you. The shadows closest to the mirror seem to rise up, forming a shapeless mass in which two pinpricks of crimson light, like burning coals, flare into being. "And quite powerful food as well...oh, my...what ever did I do to deserve such bounty."

The voice now slithers forth from that mass, which quickly dissipates, the sound of cruel laughter echoing around the chamber.

"Do you have any last requests, delectable morsels, before I eat you as I did your friends? Or would you rather skip straight to the main course?"

True to its word, the shadowy creature is quite content to hold off on its attack, certain that the characters have no means of striking it yet. Imprisoned beneath the keep for generations, the creature displays a love of toying with its "food" and will answer any question pertaining to the "Adventure Background" truthfully, feeling no need to lie to the beings it intends to devour shortly. If the characters have no questions, Sarim steps forward and asks the shadow creature about the pact made between it and the Elders of Golden Oak. Whether the characters or Sarim asks, read the text on the following page.

## CURSE OF THE SHADOWHOLD



“The Pact?” The creature laughs again, the sound muffled by the chamber’s curtained walls. “Ah, yes...I recall...so long ago. One of your kind stumbled upon my prison. I would have devoured him, had he not, in his panic, offered me a sweeter deal.”

The crimson eyes flare to life in the shadows near the mirror again, the same dark mass looming forward.

“This...Elder...as he became known to me...in exchange for his life, and for a sanctuary for his people, offered to bring every ten years a sacrifice. And every decade, you have provided...such delicious things. Yet for centuries I have been fed scraps, and always have I hungered for more. When your kin ventured too deep into this ruin and breached my prison, they weakened the wards holding me here, and so I devoured them...as I will devour you and, soon, every living thing in this wretched woodland.”

The dark shape seems to grow more solid, until a vague figure, huge in size with great, bat-like wings, resolves itself from the gloom, stretching open a maw lined with black, dagger-like teeth.

“And now I tire of this...prepare yourselves for death.”

**Creature:** With that, **The Shadow Beast** lunges forward, hoping to use its impressive size and power to overwhelm the characters. Although nearly twenty feet tall, the creature’s massive wings are too large to open in the chamber, and the ceiling too low to allow him to fly, forcing him to fight on the ground. If any character thinks to somehow obscure the obsidian mirror such as with a curtain torn from the wall or a character’s cloak (it is immune to physical damage), they find that the shrouding cloth is drawn tight against the mirror’s face as if being drawn against it by some great suction. It is not drawn into the mirror but will require a full minute of tearing and pulling to free the mirror from its cloaking presence. While the mirror is so cloaked, the magical connection to the Shadow Plane is temporarily obscured. During this time, light sources will work normally (potentially exposing The Shadow Beast to the effects of its light aversion, weakening it considerably. The Beast howls in rage if it appears somebody is attempting to do this and attacks with a fury against such an individual.

**The Shadow Beast, Nightwing (Nightshade):** HD 12; HP 60; **Atk** bite (2d6 plus 2d4 cold plus strength drain plus level drain1); **Move** 9 (fly 18); **Save** 3; **AL** C; **CL/XP** 15/2900; **Special:** drain 1d4 points of strength with hit, hit only by magic weapons, immune to cold, *charm*, *hold*, and *sleep*, level drain (1 level, save negates), magic resistance (50%), light aversion (loses cold, strength drain and level drain under bright light).

**Development:** With the destruction of the Shadow Beast, the darkness seems to lessen, the air quivering for a moment before the mirror at the chamber’s far side cracks and then shatters completely. With a sudden rush of wind, color returns to the world, the strange convergence that had trapped the characters in the lowest levels of the ruin finally ending and the lighting both in the keep and in the surrounding forest returning to normal. See “Return to Golden Oak” below.

**Treasure:** Should the characters search the chamber; they find numerous ancient writings and ornamented ritual tools worth 12,000 gp in total if sold to the right collector.

## Return to Golden Oak

As the characters make their way back through the ruin toward the surface, they note the complete disappearance of the strange, living shadows that had clung to everything, and even the eerie purple flames on the torches have returned to normal, their taint quickly fading with The Beast's demise. Once on the surface, the characters are greeted not by the Haunted Wood's eternal gloom, but by the dim rays of dawn filtering down through the canopy. Though most of the Wood's vast expanse remains cloaked in eternal night, it seems that this section of the forest, along its furthest edge, was held in the grip of that strange beast and has now been freed from its foul influence. Now, the edge of the forest feels the sun and provides haven for normal animal life, though the trees remain dull and gray from long years spent in shadow.

Despite The Shadow Beast's defeat Sarim (if he survived) is troubled, urging the characters to return with him to Golden Oak with haste. He does not wish even to allow the party to rest and regain spells. The revelation of the Elders' actions in feeding the evil force beneath the ruin has shaken the ranger's trust in his own people, and even without the characters (unless physically restrained) he will quickly make his way back through the ruin and—alongside Valdis, should he have survived—returns to Golden Oak to confront Verithrien. If neither Sarim nor Valdis survived, then it will be up to the characters as to how they wish to deal with the sins of the Elder.

Depending on what transpires and who survives the discovery of Golden Oak's dark secret, the following options are provided below based on the different approaches that the characters may take.

### Sarim Returns to Golden Oak Ahead of the Characters

If the characters have let Sarim return on his own, they reach Golden Oak to find the village in chaos. The villagers cluster around the base of Verithrien's golden-barked oak tree, the more militant calling for blood, while many simply look on in utter disbelief. If the characters do nothing to intervene, Sarim soon appears on a vine-covered balcony with the Elder in tow, nudging the older elf forward to the jeering of many of the villagers. If Sarim was killed but Valdis lives, then he fills this role. Read the following:

"Now you know this man, our Elder, has betrayed us. As they all have betrayed us!" Sarim shouts, his voice carrying over the voices of the villagers clustered around the base of the massive oak. "For generations they have sacrificed our people—they say for our safety, but the truth is that they only did so out of cowardice. The Beast that held this part of our land in its grip is dead, and with it goes its foul curse! We are free, and Verithrien will face the judgment of all those he fed to the darkness!"

With that, Sarim drives his spear through the Elder's back, the tip erupting from Verithrien's chest in a spray of blood before the older elf is tipped over the balcony's edge to fall with a crash to the ground below.

A riot ensues in which both Sarim (and Valdis, if still alive) each have a 50% chance of being slain. The characters are not harmed by the elves as long as they don't participate, though if they do, they must face 3d6 elf sentinels before winning free of the mob in order to flee. Continued resistance will only result in them facing off against the entire village.

**Elf Sentinels (Rgr3) (3d6):** HP 20; AC 5[14]; Atk longsword (1d8) or longbow x2 (1d6); Move 12; Save 12; AL L; CL/XP 3/60; **Special:** AC -1[+1] dexterity bonus, alertness, +1 missile weapon attack bonus, tracking, +3 damage bonus vs. giants and goblin-types.

**Equipment:** leather armor, shield, longsword, longbow, 20 arrows

## The Characters Return to Golden Oak With Sarim

Sarim (or Valdis if Sarim is dead) heads rapidly back towards Golden Oak. He is quite vocal in his intent to slay Elder Verithrien for his and his predecessors' crimes against entire generations of elves. Though Sarim's trek through the newly bright forest had whipped him into anger, he is easy enough to reason with and calm down. He relents and agrees that Verithrien will be held accountable for what he and the Elders before him have done, but in a proper way, rather than murdering him in a fit of anger. If the characters do not attempt to dissuade Sarim then events unfold as described under "Sarim Returns to Golden Oak Ahead of the Characters" unless the party actively stops the elven ranger.

In this case Sarim publicly makes his case against the Elder and reveals what was discovered in Shadowhold. If neither Sarim nor Valdis survived, and the characters make the same accusations, the outcome is still the same.

When they confront Verithrien, the Elder is defensive, angrily denying the creature's words at first, before demanding that the characters and Sarim understand the price of his people's continued existence within the cursed forest. Finally, though, he gives in, his own guilt causing him to back down and turn himself over to village sentinels for justice without a fight. The elven leader is deposed, stripped of all his possessions, and exiled forever from the Haunted Wood. With the pact broken, the elves of Golden Oak need no longer live in fear of the darkness lurking within the forest, or at least along the forest's edge.

### The Characters Do Not Return to Golden Oak

If the characters fail to return to Golden Oak after the defeat of The Shadow Beast, a number of things can happen. Largely, they miss out on the extra boons that the elves would have granted them, but also the events following the Beast's defeat play out a bit differently.

If Sarim was with them when they confronted The Shadow Beast, he still returns to his village, and without the intervention of the characters he slays the Elder and quickly becomes the village's new guiding voice. Though he is quick enough to give the characters credit in slaying the beast, Sarim's revelation of their Elder's treachery and his method of dealing with Verithrien cement him as the sole hero of Golden Oak in the minds of his kin. See "Concluding the Adventure."

## Concluding the Adventure

If the characters did not participate in a riot, then with the Beast dead, the Elder deposed, and the forest's edge freed from The Shadow Beast's curse, the elves of Golden Oak treat the characters as heroes, where once they treated them with mistrust and disdain. From this point on, the characters are always welcome in Golden Oak, and receive fair and friendly dealings with other elves in the Haunted Wood and its surrounding regions. Also, in their gratitude, the villagers of Golden Oak open up the Elder's stores of magical items to the characters, allowing them each to choose a single item (see side box) in thanks for freeing their people and discovering the fate of their missing kin.

The lifting of the curse on the forest's edge has other benefits, as well, and in the weeks that follow the characters' victory over The Shadow Beast, word spreads to Nerimar of the strange gloom lifting from part of the forest. What follows is a great boom for the town as loggers, hunters, and trappers are able to delve deeper into the forest than ever before, bringing back thousands of gold pieces in new trade goods to bolster the town's economy. Yet here the characters' involvement goes largely unappreciated, and it is likely that only the elves of the Haunted Wood will ever truly see their accomplishment as more than a boastful tall tale.

If the characters don't return to Golden Oak, then the rush of frontiersmen



## Verithrien's Magic

Verithrien has a large store of magic items from which he will allow each character to choose a single item as a reward for completing the mission. The following items are available, but feel free to add any additional ones you would like to introduce to your campaign. These items are not considered to be a part of those available for sale in Golden Oak. Items with charges are assumed to be fully charged.

- +1 plate armor*
- +1 chain armor*
- +1 ring armor*
- +1 leather armor*
- +1 freezing arrows (20)*
- +1 two-handed sword*
- +1 shield*
- +1 battle axe*
- bag of holding*
- boots of leaping*
- bracers of defense, AC 2[17]*
- cloak of protection +1*
- decanter of endless water*
- figurine of the onyx dog*
- helm of reading magic and languages*
- horn of Valhalla, silver*
- horseshoes of speed*
- jug of alchemy*
- medallion of ESP*
- necklace of firebaubles*
- robe of blending*
- rope of climbing*
- ring of shooting stars*
- ring of protection +1*
- wand of cure light wounds*
- wand of paralyzing*
- wand of polymorph*

eager to reap the benefits of the curse being lifted still occurs, of course, but it isn't long before the humans and elves clash beneath the boughs of the Haunted Wood, and relations become even tenser between the peoples of Golden Oak and Nerimar.

If Sarim wasn't present when the Elder's actions were revealed, and the characters never return to Golden Oak, Verithrien remains in power in the village. He travels to the ruin sometime after the curse is lifted, only to discover it barren, its magic gone and The Beast dead. With the creature gone the sacrifices stop. The elves of Golden Oak live on much as they did before, protecting their sanctuary from outside incursions but largely remaining insular. Though clashes with humans inevitably occur, they're few and far between, Verithrien's magic making Golden Oak difficult for the humans to discover...while those that do are never seen again.

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