



The Svirfneblin Effect

An Encounter for Characters Level 5 to 7

The PCs descend a set of stone steps found in any underground area. There is no light in these chambers, as the inhabitants are quite capable of navigating the dark. Modify the area's description depending on the PCs' available light sources and vision types.

These rooms are populated by a misguided group of 21 **svirfnebli** who believe that an ancient **roper** is in fact the physical incarnation of the gnomish god Callarduran. When the PCs arrive, roll 1d6 to determine the current activities of the deep gnomes and consult the table.

Deep Gnome Status

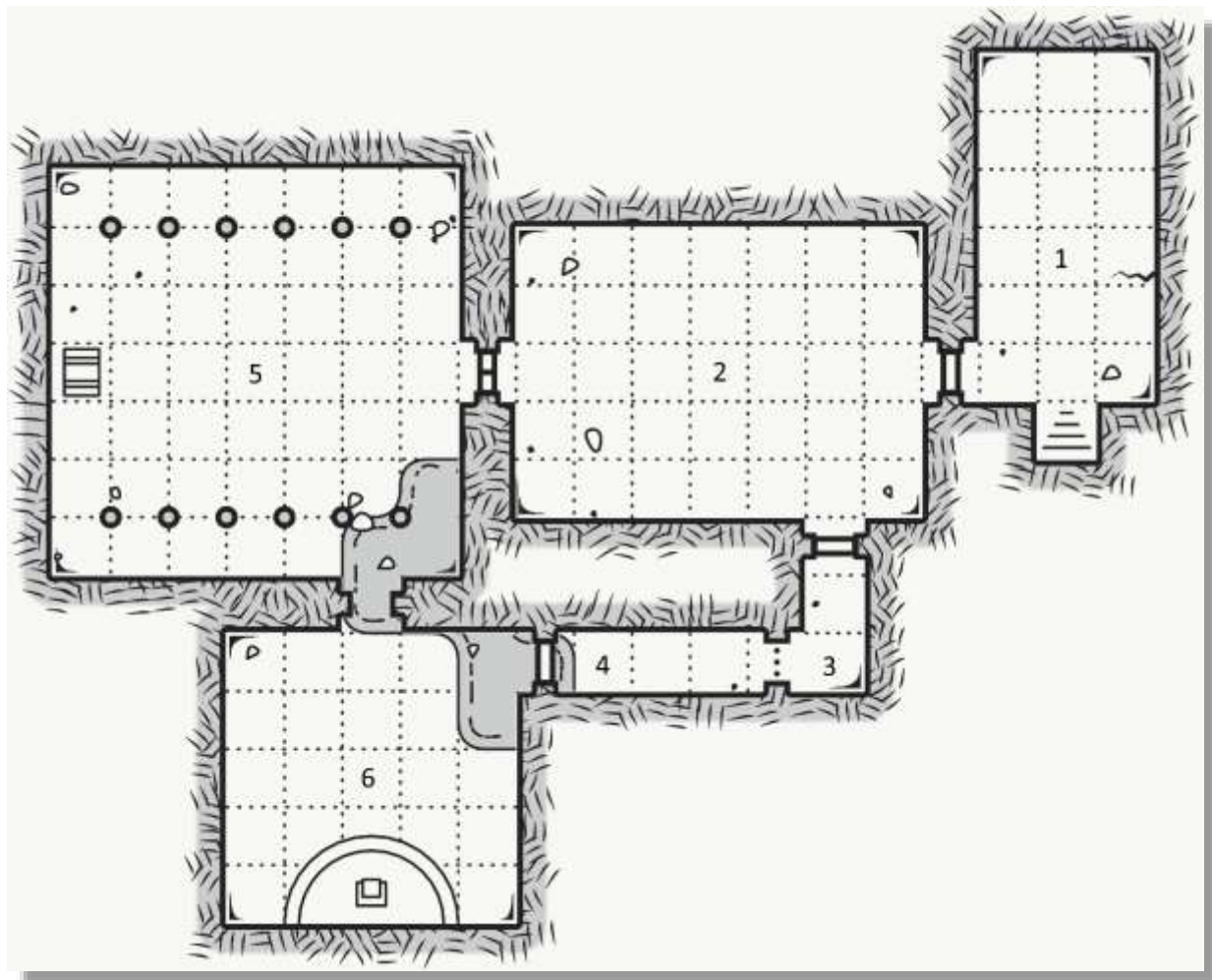
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| 1-2 | Planning: All svirfnebli are armed and alert, responding immediately to intruders. |
| 3-4 | Debating: The svirfnebli are arguing over how to deal with the gray ooze in areas 4, 5, and 6. Thus distracted, they suffer a -1 penalty on all initiative rolls. |
| 5 | Praying: Regardless of which area they inhabit, the svirfnebli are at prayer, humming a hymn of worship to Callarduran. |
| 6 | Resting: All svirfnebli except those in area 6 are sleeping and require 1d4 rounds to arm themselves. |



The svirfnebli despise surface-dwelling creatures and attack all intruders on sight. If the warren is alerted, all inhabitants leave off their pursuits and join the fray—except those trapped on the far side of the gray ooze in area 6.

Svirfnebli (21): AC 2; MV 9"; HD 3+6; hp 20 each; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1d6+1 (pick) or 1d3 dart (see below); SA spell-like attacks, +2 to-hit with darts; SD various; MR 20%; AL NE; Size S; xp 425 each. All darts are poisoned, forcing a saving throw vs. Poison to avoid being *stunned* for one round and *slowed* for the four rounds following that.

Each svirfneblin carries 3d6 small, unworked gemstones worth 10 gp each, in addition to their picks and metal armor.



Deep gnomes are highly intelligent and rarely choose to engage their foes head-on, preferring spells such as *blindness* and *change self* to distract and disorient an enemy, following this with a volley of poisoned darts. Given their numbers, their magic, and their toxin, they should prove a keen and worthy opponent.

The group is led by narcissistic and slightly deranged deep gnome named Kheeldu, a demagogue in the process of establishing a cult to feed his own ego.

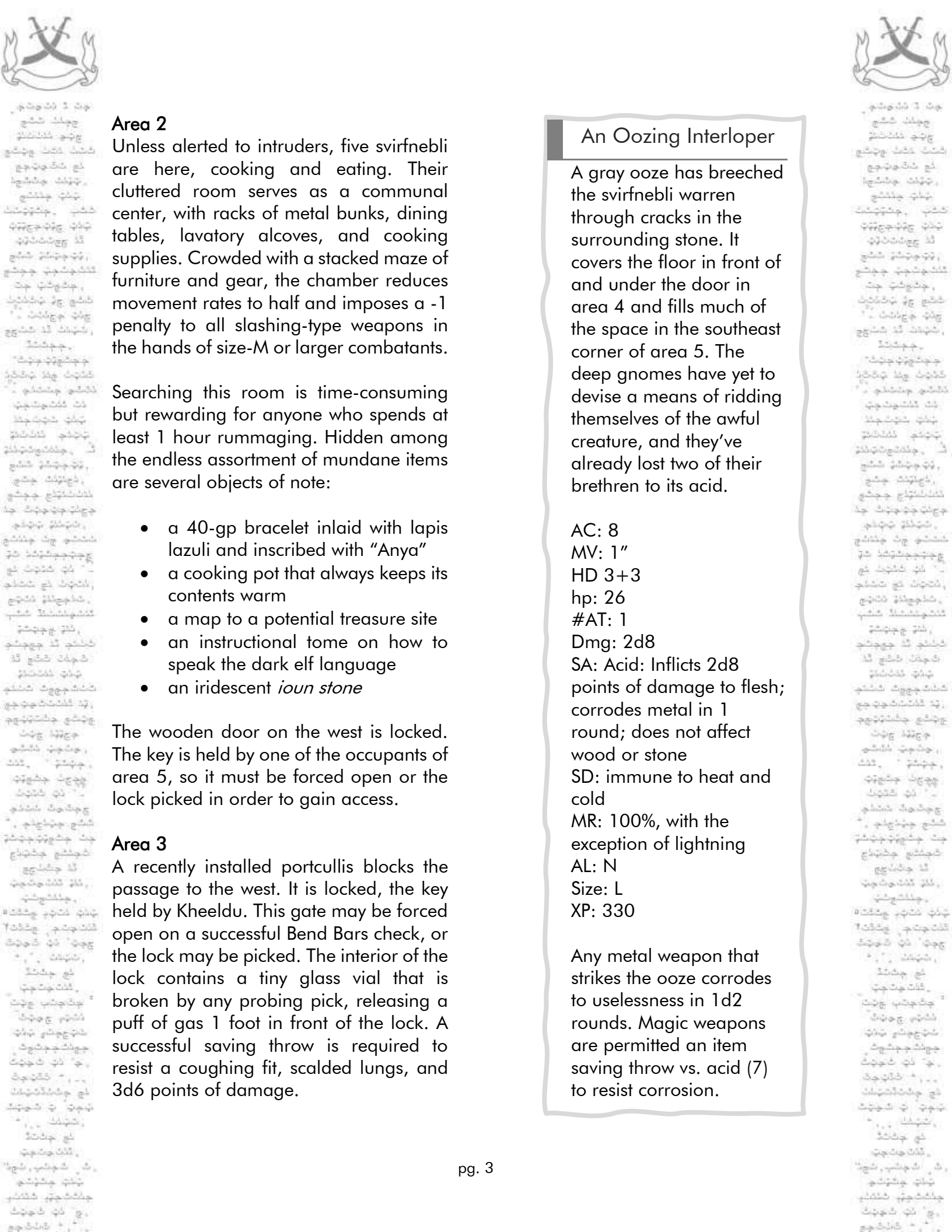
Area 1

Five *svirfnebli* are present here at all times. Their clan is using these chambers as a staging point to extend their influence

and eventually gain control of the region as their numbers increase. Their primary agenda is to complete work on the apparatus in area 5. They are also devoutly religious and sworn to protect Kheeldu and the idol in area 6.

The deep gnomes use this room as a first line of defense against intruders. They have constructed a barricade of stone and metal sheets, providing them with partial cover (+4 AC) against ranged attacks. Their initial volley involves *blindness* spells and poisoned darts. If three deep gnomes are slain, the remaining two attempt to retreat to area 2.

Sounds of combat carry to areas 2 and 5.



Area 2

Unless alerted to intruders, five svirfnebli are here, cooking and eating. Their cluttered room serves as a communal center, with racks of metal bunks, dining tables, lavatory alcoves, and cooking supplies. Crowded with a stacked maze of furniture and gear, the chamber reduces movement rates to half and imposes a -1 penalty to all slashing-type weapons in the hands of size-M or larger combatants.

Searching this room is time-consuming but rewarding for anyone who spends at least 1 hour rummaging. Hidden among the endless assortment of mundane items are several objects of note:

- a 40-gp bracelet inlaid with lapis lazuli and inscribed with "Anya"
- a cooking pot that always keeps its contents warm
- a map to a potential treasure site
- an instructional tome on how to speak the dark elf language
- an iridescent *ioun stone*

The wooden door on the west is locked. The key is held by one of the occupants of area 5, so it must be forced open or the lock picked in order to gain access.

Area 3

A recently installed portcullis blocks the passage to the west. It is locked, the key held by Kheeldu. This gate may be forced open on a successful Bend Bars check, or the lock may be picked. The interior of the lock contains a tiny glass vial that is broken by any probing pick, releasing a puff of gas 1 foot in front of the lock. A successful saving throw is required to resist a coughing fit, scalded lungs, and 3d6 points of damage.

An Oozing Interloper

A gray ooze has breached the svirfnebli warren through cracks in the surrounding stone. It covers the floor in front of and under the door in area 4 and fills much of the space in the southeast corner of area 5. The deep gnomes have yet to devise a means of ridding themselves of the awful creature, and they've already lost two of their brethren to its acid.

AC: 8

MV: 1"

HD 3+3

hp: 26

#AT: 1

Dmg: 2d8

SA: Acid: Inflicts 2d8 points of damage to flesh; corrodes metal in 1 round; does not affect wood or stone

SD: immune to heat and cold

MR: 100%, with the exception of lightning

AL: N

Size: L

XP: 330

Any metal weapon that strikes the ooze corrodes to uselessness in 1d2 rounds. Magic weapons are permitted an item saving throw vs. acid (7) to resist corrosion.



Area 4

Though the door here is unlocked, the floor in front of it is covered in gray ooze, obstructing easy passage. Refer to the sidebar on page 3.

Area 5

Unless alerted to the presence of intruders, six *svirfnebli* are present here at all times, either discussing the gray ooze or laboring away at an odd device against the western wall.

The 20-foot ceiling of this chamber is supported by 12 pillars, each of which has been deftly carved with faces representing different gnomish deities. These totems are highly detailed and brightly painted. Anyone succeeding in a search for secret doors discovers that one of the pillars is hollow. Swinging open a hinged face reveals a hollow space holding a cache of 13 semi-precious gemstones worth 3d10 gp each, a few pieces of long-rotten fruit, and a *potion of heroism*.

The *svirfnebli* are constructing an apparatus against the western wall. A combination of mechanics and magic, the **maschin-i-grozob** transforms raw reagents and rare components into a perpetually endless stream of *demi-shadow monsters*, as per the illusionist's spell, that rise through a flue connected to the strange device. Free of the chimney, the *demi-shadow monsters* harass the countryside. The deep gnomes intend to fine-tune the grozob and eventually deploy it in their never-ending skirmishes against surface-dweller and other foes.

Construction on the grozob is frequently interrupted while the deep gnomes debate how best to deal with the gray

ooze that has leaked into the southeast corner of the room. The *maschin-i-grozob* is currently nonfunctional, but anyone succeeding in an Intelligence check can spend 1d4 hours making it fully operational.

Area 6

Five *svirfnebli* are present here at all times, in addition to their leader, Kheeldu. The room is adorned like an odd church, with stylized imagery painted on the walls. From the ceiling hang inscrutable symbols made of twisted pieces of expertly forged steel. Unhealthy incense smolders in burners shaped like lizard mouths.

Kheeldu: AC -1; MV 9"; HD 6+9; hp 46; #AT 1 or 2; Dmg 1d6+1 (pick) or 1d3 (dart); SA spells; SD various; MR 35%; AL CE; Size S; xp 2260. Kheeldu carries a key to the portcullis at area 4 and a *potion of healing*, which he quaffs at the first opportunity; Spells: 1st level—*color spray*, *detect invisibility*, *hypnotism*, *wall of fog*; 2nd level—*blindness*, *invisibility*, *mirror image*; 3rd level—*fear*.

Kheeldu is a coward at heart and uses his magic in an attempt to escape if reduced to less than 10 hit points. He has convinced his followers that the deity Callarduran is manifested in the massive stalagmite on the south side of the room, around which the deep gnomes have constructed a low wall that is adorned with trinkets and the bones of the sacrificed dead. Occasionally this great stone structure moves, shifts, or emits a deep groan. Kheeldu uses this as evidence that his theory is correct. In reality, the stalagmite is a dormant roper that is on the verge of waking after a decades-long slumber. The roper opens its eye and fully animates in 1d4 rounds



after any commotion begins in the room, using its tentacles to attack anyone within reach—the PCs and svirfnebli alike.

To get within melee range of the roper, an attacker must leap over the 3-foot prayer wall in front of it.



Roper: AC 0; MV 3"; HD 11; hp 70; #AT 1; Dmg 5d4; SA 4 poisonous strands; SD see below; MR 80%; AL CE; Size L; xp 3870.

The roper's four toxic appendages can reach a distance of 50 feet. On a successful strike, it lowers its victim's Strength by half and begins dragging the victim 10 feet per round until it can bite down with its toothed maw. The victim may attempt an Open Doors check (with reduced Strength) each round to break free of the tentacle before being devoured. The roper is immune to

lightning and takes only half damage from cold-based attacks. It suffers a -4 penalty to all saving throws against fire-based spells.

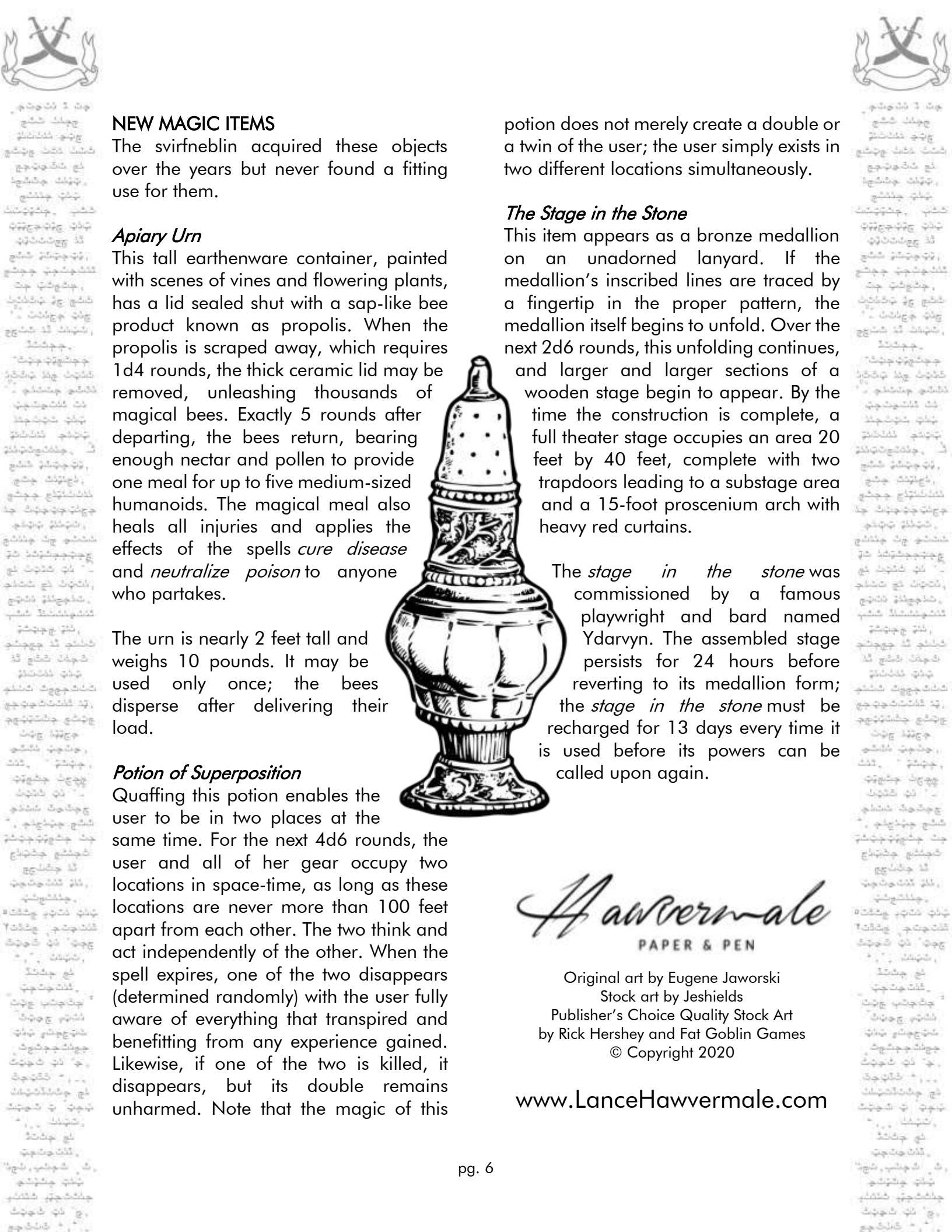
If the roper is reduced to zero hit points, its eye closes and its body immediately calcifies. Over the next several minutes, it hardens completely, so that it becomes a misshapen but otherwise harmless stalagmite.

Various items are scattered about the top of the prayer wall, most of them worthless baubles such as bits of colored glass, broken weapons, or metal sticks bent into roughly humanoid effigies. There are also several jars of exotic incense, two bottles of rare spices (50 gp each) and a decanter half full of spoiled wine. Three magic items can also be found here, either through a mundane search or by way of *detect magic*. Refer to New Magic Items on page 6.

Aftermath

Fully completing this challenge likely requires defeating all 21 deep gnomes, their leader, and the roper. Achieving this feat leaves the PCs in command of the warren and its contents. They may use the maschin-i-grozob for whatever strange purposes they devise.

On the other hand, if the PCs are forced to retreat, the deep gnomes quickly send word to their kinfolk in the deep subterranean cities, requesting aid, provisions, and reinforcements. The next time the PCs visit, they find these chambers even more fortified than before.



NEW MAGIC ITEMS

The svirfneblin acquired these objects over the years but never found a fitting use for them.

Apiary Urn

This tall earthenware container, painted with scenes of vines and flowering plants, has a lid sealed shut with a sap-like bee product known as propolis. When the propolis is scraped away, which requires 1d4 rounds, the thick ceramic lid may be removed, unleashing thousands of magical bees. Exactly 5 rounds after departing, the bees return, bearing enough nectar and pollen to provide one meal for up to five medium-sized humanoids. The magical meal also heals all injuries and applies the effects of the spells *cure disease* and *neutralize poison* to anyone who partakes.

The urn is nearly 2 feet tall and weighs 10 pounds. It may be used only once; the bees disperse after delivering their load.

Potion of Superposition

Quaffing this potion enables the user to be in two places at the same time. For the next 4d6 rounds, the user and all of her gear occupy two locations in space-time, as long as these locations are never more than 100 feet apart from each other. The two think and act independently of the other. When the spell expires, one of the two disappears (determined randomly) with the user fully aware of everything that transpired and benefitting from any experience gained. Likewise, if one of the two is killed, it disappears, but its double remains unharmed. Note that the magic of this

potion does not merely create a double or a twin of the user; the user simply exists in two different locations simultaneously.

The Stage in the Stone

This item appears as a bronze medallion on an unadorned lanyard. If the medallion's inscribed lines are traced by a fingertip in the proper pattern, the medallion itself begins to unfold. Over the next 2d6 rounds, this unfolding continues, and larger and larger sections of a wooden stage begin to appear. By the time the construction is complete, a full theater stage occupies an area 20 feet by 40 feet, complete with two trapdoors leading to a substage area and a 15-foot proscenium arch with heavy red curtains.

The *stage in the stone* was commissioned by a famous playwright and bard named Ydarvyn. The assembled stage persists for 24 hours before reverting to its medallion form; the *stage in the stone* must be recharged for 13 days every time it is used before its powers can be called upon again.



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PAPER & PEN

Original art by Eugene Jaworski
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