

RAGING SWAN PRESS

20 THINGS #41:
RUINED WIZARD'S TOWER



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20 THINGS #41: RUINED WIZARD'S TOWER

Are you a busy GM? Does session prep take too long? Do you never have time to work on the cool little details that can bring your session to life? Well fear not! That's where the 20 Things line comes in. This supplement gives you, the time-crunched GM, the tools to effortlessly add verisimilitude and detail to your adventure. Use the material herein either before or during play and bask in your players' adulation.

This instalment provides five tables compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game and is designed to help you to flesh out and bring to life a ruined wizard's tower.

CREDITS

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DUNGEON BACKDROP: THE CRUMBLED TOWER

Hidden deep in the forest stands the Crumbled Tower. Pressed close by hoary, gnarled trees and wreathed in moss and lichens the tower is a forlorn remnant of an earlier time. Once a wizard lived here, but now the tower is nothing more than a brooding ruin standing amid the forest's gloom. Sometimes bandits lair within or adventurers wandering the surrounds use the ruin as a base. However, unknown to all, a hidden crypt yet lurks under the tower undisturbed these long ages past.

Each Dungeon Backdrop presents a fully fleshed out and lovingly detailed self-contained dungeon ready for you to use as you see fit. Stock the dungeon with your own monsters (and—perhaps—their treasure), decide their back story and you are good to go.

FOREWORD

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition supplement. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are magic-users, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we've made no attempt to note their "class" leaving them simply as "female human" and so on.

USING THIS BOOK

You can use these tables either during session prep or "on the fly" during the actual session. Roll on the desired table and describe the result. Remember:

- Some players may assume because you describe something it is important. This may slow down the party's progress through the adventure. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- Modify any result so it fit with your game.
- Ignore or re-roll inappropriate results.
- Have fun!

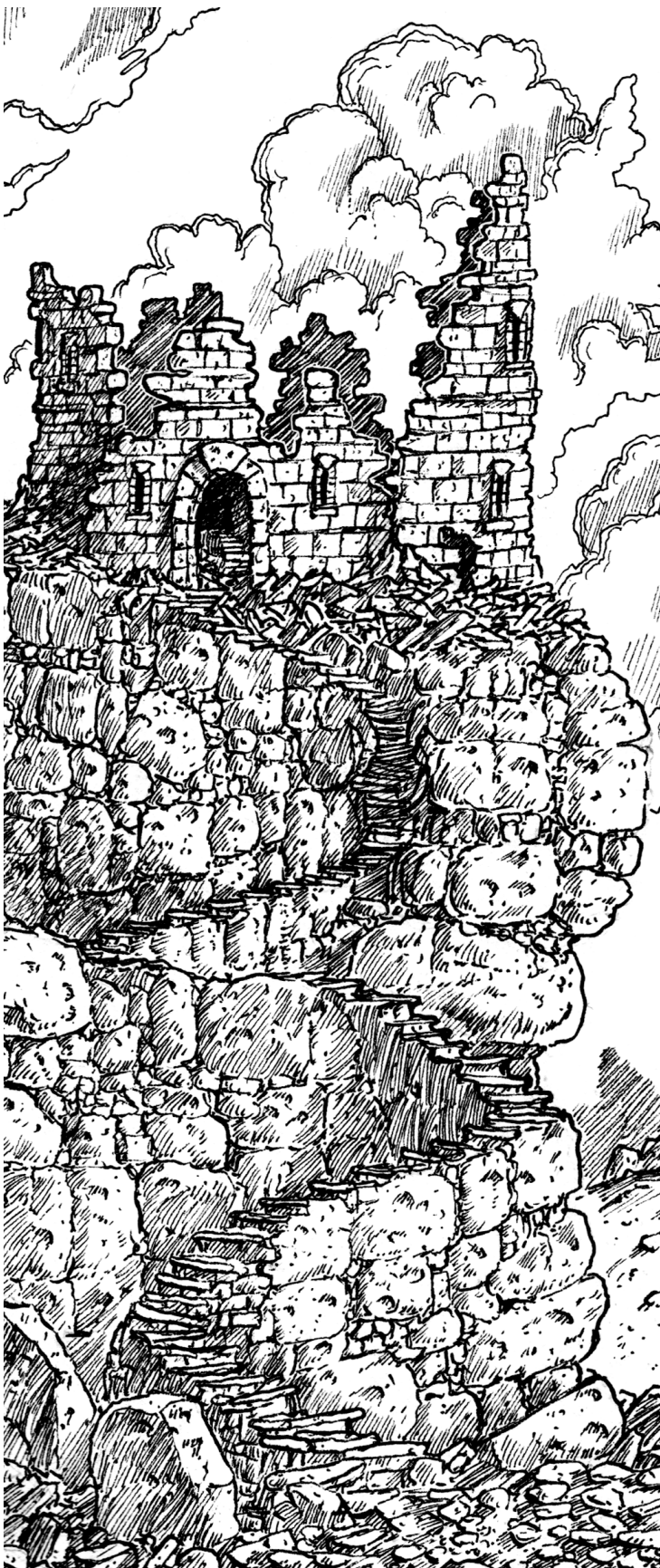
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1: DUNGEON DRESSING: OUTSIDE THE TOWER



Wizard's towers are strange places full of esoteric items and features of unknowable purpose and artifice.

1. Rubble and fallen masonry cover the ground surrounding the ruined tower. Some of the stones and chunks of masonry bear strange runes of obvious magical origin and intent. Knowledgeable characters can identify many of the runes as pertaining to defensive spells and enchantments.
2. The shattered remains of several gargoyles and other decorative features lie intermingled with the rubble and other debris surrounding the tower.
3. Sections of the tower's remaining walls are blackened and scorched as if exposed to intense heat. In places, the heat was so strong, the stone is vitrified.
4. The grass, bushes and other vegetation around the tower has grown stunted and twisted. The berries on the bushes are a deep purple in colour and are much smaller than berries found on normal bushes.
5. A campfire amid the rubble shows where at least one previous set of explorers spent the night. The fire's embers are cold.
6. The shadow cast by the ruined tower seems deeper and more elongated and jagged than it should be even in the strongest midday sun. From certain angles, the shadow looks like a grasping claw crawling away from the ruin.
7. A preternatural silence hangs over the ruin. Nearby, no birds sing and no animals scurry through the undergrowth. Even the wind seems strangely diminished as if it dares not blow over the tower's remains.
8. The ruin is unstable and small rocks and stones still occasionally fall from the crumbling edifice. Like occasional rain, the clatter of stones falling from above is sporadic, but strangely the tower never seems to diminish in size as a result of these falls.
9. Lying stark upon the ground, the bleached skeletons of previous explorers lie scattered about the tower's environs. Some clearly died violent deaths—broken and splintered bones being evident—while others seem to have no obvious cause of death.
10. A network of now weed-choked ditches and overgrown earthen banks surround the tower. From the air, a character skilled in the magical arts might realise the layout of the ditches and banks strongly resembles a symbol of protection used to ward off otherworldly threats. It is likely—given the damage to the surrounds—the symbol no longer functions (if it ever did).
11. A profusion of overly large flowers of purple, yellow and red hue grow in great clumps about the base of the ruined tower. Their ponderous petals nod gently in the breeze and the exotic scent of their pollen fills the air.
12. The skeletal remains of some huge winged beast lies trapped across the tower's ruin. Its bone lie scattered across a wide swath of ground about the tower.

2: DUNGEON DRESSING: INSIDE THE TOWER

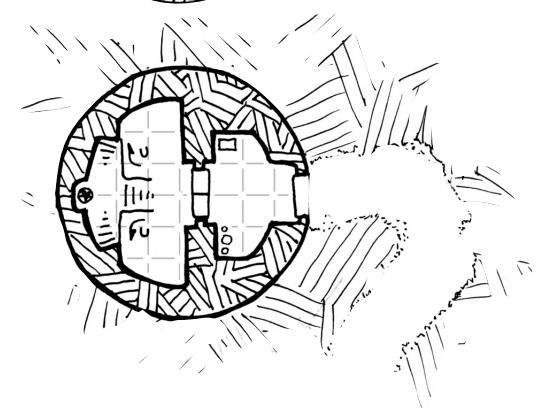
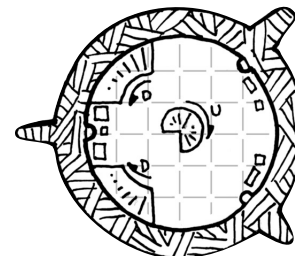
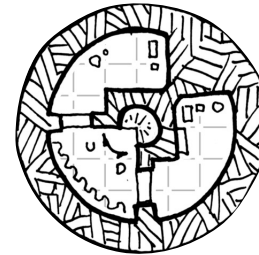
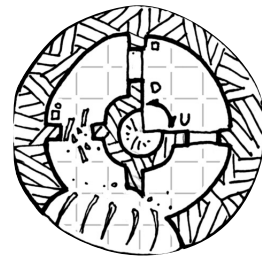
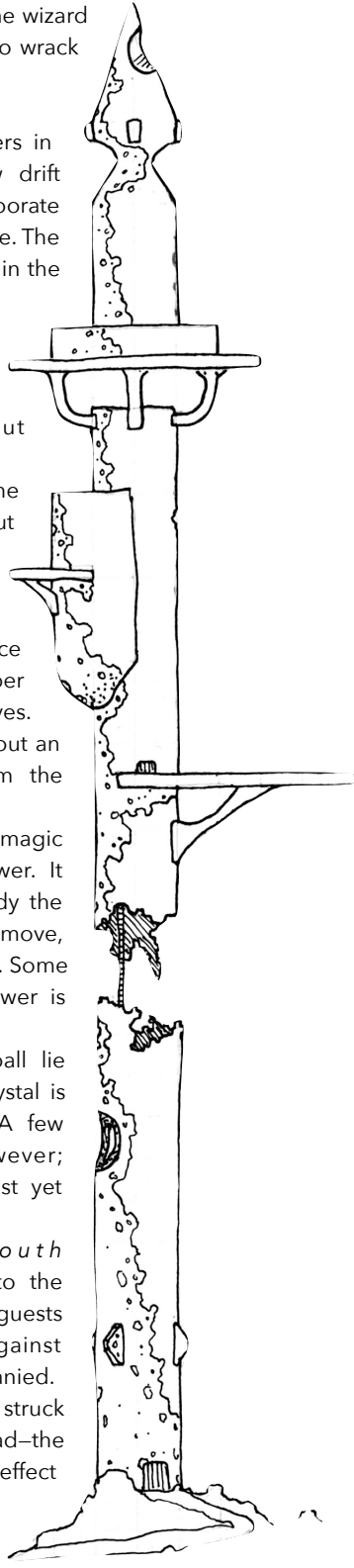
Within wizard's towers, terrible, eldritch deeds are wrought and strange, otherworldly research is carried out to its logical, but sometimes unwise, conclusion. Such arcane works leave their mark on the fabric of the place.

1. Rubble, wind-blown leaves and the detritus of previous exploration and the like cover the floor. Bones lie amid the mess; some are merely the remains of animals who wandered into the tower while others are much larger and have clearly lain here for some time.
2. Broken, rotting furniture lies scattered about; other smaller remains—perhaps plates, mouldering books or other mundane items—hint at the functions of various rooms and are intermingled with the larger pieces of trash. Many of the pieces bear the wizard's personal sigil.
3. Iron torch sconces jut from the walls. Of various esoteric designs some are wrought to resemble skeletal arms while others appear to resemble the arms and claws of terrible, otherworldly beings. A few are in the shape of various forbidden magical runes.
4. In places, rotting oaken wainscoting hangs from the walls while in others its remains litter the floor. Several missing panels once concealed secret storage niches and the like which are now revealed (and empty). Perhaps some of the remaining panels yet conceal similar niches.
5. Esoteric symbols decorate the risers of the stairs linking the tower's various levels. As the stairs rise through the tower, the character of the symbols becomes darker and more unknowable. Magical traps could yet lurk among these symbols. Others could hide dusty, undisturbed storage niches perhaps containing a hidden treasure (see "5: Lost Treasures" to determine what might lie within).
6. Dusty, water damaged tapestries hang from the walls. None of the tapestries depict normal, mundane scenes. Instead, they show various horrible otherworldly monsters and grim planar scenes of destruction and slaughter.
7. The remains of a large wooden bookshelf, pulled away from the wall and smashed, cover the floor with shards of soft, mouldering wood. Intermingled with the mess, perceptive characters find the rotting remains of several books all rendered worthless and unreadable by time and weather. The faded titles on some of the covers—*The Demonicon*, *On the Art* and so on—are just legible.
8. Small sections of stonework appear to have been melted by splatters of some kind of powerful acid or other agent. It looks like the splatters descend one wall before crossing the floor for a short distance.
9. A faint, unplaceable odour hangs in the air, and seemingly resists dissipation by any wind or airflow short of hurricane-strength winds. The smell is reminiscent of a wet dog or cat.
10. The shattered remains of two glass vials lie scattered about the floor. In one place, it looks like the glass shards have been crushed into nothing more than fragments by something heavy. A skilled tracker may be able to make out a single footprint among the crushed glass.
11. The shattered remains of alchemical equipment—smashed test tubes, retorts, and the like—lie scattered about the floor. The trash is quite deep; this might be a good place to find a lost treasure (see "5: Lost Treasures").
12. The remains of a stuffed owlbear lean against one wall. The creature is huge and has been posed with its arms outstretched as if it were about to pounce. The creature is now mouldy, missing many of its feathers, and looks in a sorry state. Paranoid characters may think the creature an animated guardian (and they could be right...)
13. A large tripod, that still supports a gong almost cleaved in two, leans drunkenly against a wall. The gong's hammer—similarly broken in two—lies on the other side of the chamber. Careful examination of the hammer's head and the gong reveal small sections of scorched metal.
14. Many pieces of burnt and scorched parchment swirl about the chamber, caught in the grip of an unseen and unnatural breeze. The breeze emanates from the floor in roughly the centre of the swirling mass of parchment.
15. A hole in an external wall once held a small forge connected to the outside by a short length of bronze chimney. The forge has been comprehensively shattered, but the short length of bronzed chimney—now green with verdigris—still precariously clings to the wall.
16. A pile of broken furniture, fallen masonry and the like partially blocks access to the next area the characters try to enter. It looks like the pile has been placed here—perhaps as a rudimentary breastworks.
17. Carved into the floor in the centre of the room are the words, "The blade overcame the art", in Common. Unperceptive characters or those moving quickly might miss the small carved words.
18. An arrow slit or window pierces one external wall. A rusting grappling hook is wedged upon the sill. Outside, a short length of rotting rope hangs from the grapnel. Characters investigating the rope can easily see it has been cut—the ends are not frayed—which hints at foul play.
19. Dried blood covers the floor and wall. In the midst of the blood lies the cold, but not yet decomposed body of an orc (or other humanoid appropriate to the setting). Strangely, the orc wears only a loincloth. In death, its face is twisted into a savage snarl. A strange, acrid odour rises from the corpse.
20. A jagged sword blade protrudes from a gap in the wall or floor between two closely set stones. Distracted characters could walk into the blade and injure themselves. Of the sword's hilt there is no sign in the immediate vicinity, but the characters find it in the next area they explore. Its pommel was clearly once set with precious gems—several small empty holes show where they once glimmered.

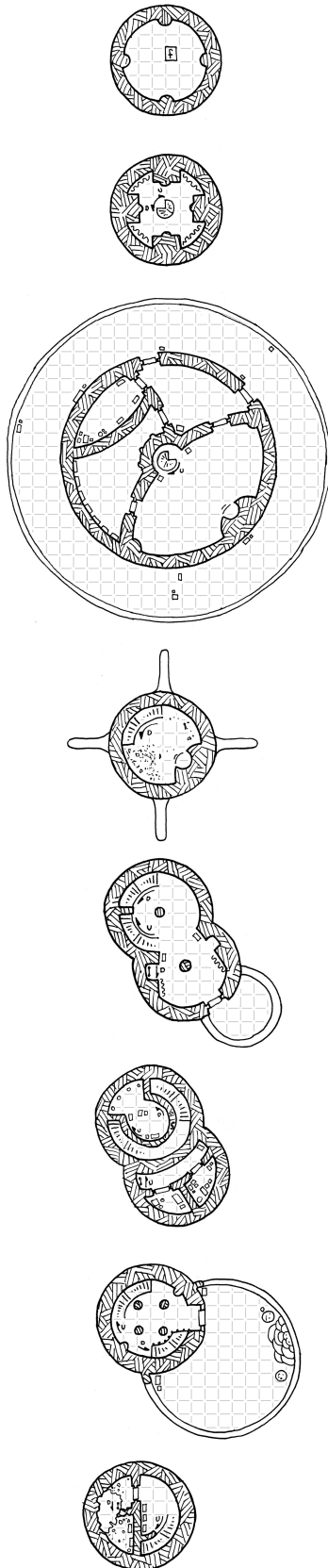
3: LINGERING SPELL EFFECTS

Wizard's towers are strange places. Sometimes, even after they are destroyed or abandoned strange effects—leavings of the wizard's esoteric researches and work, or lingering echoes of whatever befell the wizard—remain after the tower has fallen into wrack and ruin.

1. A small globe of darkness hovers in mid-air. Faint wisps of shadow drift from the globe to seemingly evaporate as they float away on a faint breeze. The temperature is noticeably cooler, in the vicinity of the globe.
2. A silvery rune graven into the floor still gives off a faint glow, which is practically undetectable in daylight but obvious in dim or darker light.
3. Shadows move and shift in the corner of the characters' eyes but disappear or stop moving when looked at. The shadows are of a variety of shapes and sizes; perceptive characters notice several of the shadows have deeper spots that look disturbingly like eyes.
4. Heatless yellow flames dance about an ornate chandelier hanging from the ceiling in the centre of the room.
5. A permanent *unseen servant*, its magic now fading, yet haunts the tower. It continues to mindlessly try to tidy the tower; in its vicinity small objects move, dust gets blown about and so on. Some characters might believe the tower is haunted, as a result.
6. Scattered shards of a crystal ball lie about the floor; much of the crystal is shattered into tiny fragments. A few large fragments remain, however; within them, faint eddies of mist yet swirl in suggestive patterns.
7. A permanent *magic mouth* programmed to greet visitors to the tower remains functional. It bids guests welcome and warns them against entering certain areas unaccompanied.
8. Characters entering this area are struck with a feeling of nameless dread—the remains of a permanent *fear* effect placed here to keep intruders away from a hidden treasure.



4: STRANGE SIGHTS & SOUNDS



Wizard's towers are strange places, full of strange sights, sounds and smells.

1. Cut into the wall, a glowing rune—etched in pale red light—provides faint illumination, akin to that of a candle. A careful examination of the rune reveals the light to be gently pulsating. Characters steeped in arcane lore can identify the rune as the wizard's personal sigil.
2. Glimmering motes of multi-coloured light drift gently through the air, on the breeze. Feather-light they can be blown or pushed about, but disappear if they touch anything.
3. The faint scent of burning or scorched flesh hangs in the air, and stubbornly refuses to dissipate. The smell is particularly strong in areas featuring scorched and blackened stone.
4. The faint suggestion of chanting—screeched in a high-pitched desperate tone—reach the party's ears. The chanting seems to come from a higher floor in the tower. This is an echo of the tower's master's final spell. The chanting ends in a choking sounds that trails away into nothingness.
5. Wisps of mist—glimmering with a soft effulgence—drift down the stairs from the wizard's laboratory or library. Investigations, reveal the wisps are emerging from a dented iron cauldron of odd construct. The cauldron is empty, but the wisps continue to emerge as long as the cauldron is within the tower.
6. The temperature suddenly drops to freezing. Ice forms quickly on any metal or stone surfaces. Moments later, the temperature rises far above boiling and the ice steams away in mere second before the temperature returns to normal.
7. Birds swoop and dive about the tower, but none land on its crumbling structure; something seems to repel them from its surrounds. Sometimes when the birds swarm in vast numbers, their calls and squarks can reach near cacophonous levels.
8. The characters repeated hear the same sound, as they explore the tower. It could be chucking, crying, screaming, whispering or something else entirely. Wherever they go in the ruin the sound follows them, but seems to come from nowhere in particular.
9. Insubstantial figures move about the tower, reenacting their last actions therein. They take no notice of the characters and act as if the tower was in perfect condition. This could mean they ascend missing stairs, walk through doors long since decayed and fallen or use objects and furniture no longer present in the tower.
10. A tiny rippling curtain of black energy covers a portion of one wall. The darkness is a portal to the wizard's extra-dimensional storage space. It is too small for most characters to enter, but someone putting their hand inside might be able to grope around inside and discover a lost treasure (see "5: Lost Treasures").

5: LOST TREASURES

Wizard's towers are strange places full of esoteric items of unknowable purpose and unidentifiable artifice.

1. An old platinum coin lies amid the dust and grime of the tower. So old it is almost worn smooth it is a remnant of an ancient, fallen evil empire imprinted with the insane, broken psyche of an elder lich.
2. A tightly wound scroll contains the wizard's first musing on the subject of lichdom and the steps that might be necessary to begin the transformation. The research is at a very early stage but nevertheless provides important insights into the process (and perhaps the author's state of mind).
3. A crescent moon sigil decorates the hilt of this finely wrought silver dagger. The weapon rests in a wolf-fur scabbard.
4. Four belt pouches festoon this surprisingly well preserved wide leather belt. The pouches contain an array of material components for common low-level spells along with a vial filled with silver dust worth 25 gp.
5. Hanging in the remains of a cupboard or wardrobe this once fine, now dusty and dirty, red robe clearly once belonged to a wizard who wanted to be identified as such. It has a deep cowl and wide sleeves. Small pockets—deep enough to hold a coin or small spell component—pierce the inner hem of each sleeve.
6. Three sturdy clay vials each etched with the same magical rune fill a small wooden box. Ornately carved with magical symbols, the box has three sections each perfectly size to take one of the vials. Whatever the vials contain, they are clearly a set.
7. Decorated with jagged lightning bolt sigils, woven into and among other protective sigils these supple, leather bracers are fine enough to be imbued with magic.
8. Carved from basalt rock, this beautiful statuette of a horned owl has a deep crack running down its body. This statuette is a *figurine of wondrous power (serpentine owl)*, but the damage it has suffered reduces the duration of its transformation by half.
9. Rolled up, and hidden under other detritus and rubbish, lies a five-foot square black rug. A gleaming silver pentagram pattern decorates the rug. Characters wise in arcane lore can identify the pentagram as one designed to confine a summoned creature.
10. Covered in dust and grime, this hand-sized prism radiates faint divination magic. Investigations reveal the prism is enchanted to reveal the presence of magic, but has a range of only about two-foot. It is useful for examining magical items, but less useful when used to search for magical traps.

11. An ornate crystal hourglass lies on its side under a table. It is in surprisingly good condition. The multi-coloured sand takes one hour to drain from one chamber to the other.
12. Stone stoppers fill both ends of this overly wide and long, hardened leather scroll tube. The tube feels empty, but characters opening it discover three feathers prepared for use as quills of fine enough quality for use in scribing scrolls and spellbooks. The feathers—beautifully multi-coloured things that shimmer in the light—come from a couatl.



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