

THE BEHOLDER CONTRACTS

An OSR adventure for 4-5 players of levels 1-3

by David Whiteland





A BRIEF ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure assumes that the players begin in the Gardens of Serenity (**section 1**); it is merely a suggested add-in to your campaign world and as good a place as any to start. If you wish to start the adventure elsewhere, you may skip section 1 entirely.

Maxamullion, aide to the wizard Tiresias, approaches the players with a proposal (**section 2**). They are to retrieve an item stolen from Tiresias: the Lute of Ages. To facilitate this, the players are offered the use of five magic items of great power, but in turn have to sign a magical contract guaranteeing the items' return. In truth, Tiresias (**section 3**) doesn't care about the Lute: he wants the players to journey to a specific place, take in specific sights there, and then return with that knowledge, which he can then harvest from the players by means of tearing out their eyes. The contract is the means by which he can guarantee their return.

The players journey (**section 4**) to Thunderhead Peak (**section 5**) and, assuming they manage to avoid being slain by the wizard who lives there (**section 6**), discover that the culprit they've been sent after is not there, but also more likely than not will partake of the sight that Tiresias wants them to experience. A search of a nearby tomb (**section 7**) and an encounter with its undead troubadour inhabitant (**section 8**) may or may not result in the players recovering the Lute, but either way, the time on the contract grows short, and they must travel through the Shifting Mire (**section 9**) to Tiresias' lair (**section 10**) to return the items and thus fulfill the terms of the contract (**section 11**). There the wizard will attempt to catch the players off-guard and steal their eyes for his own dark sorcery; it remains to be seen if he will succeed.

1. THE GARDENS OF SERENITY

Hidden in the trough of a wooded valley lie the walled Gardens of Serenity. The community of monks who tend them offer convalescence or refuge to anyone in need who comes to their gates.

The adventurers have been recovering from the wounds of their last adventure, and now that their injuries have been healed, they know that soon the monks will ask them to leave. The party's equipment is sparse, any valuables and magic items having been given to the monks as payment for their hospitality.

The monks belong to a quiet and graceful order, and number around forty including some healers and druids. All of them, men and women, wear pale robes; there is no apparent hierarchy.

PRESENT AT THE GARDEN

5 Druids (lvls 6, 4, 4, 3, 2)

AC 10 (AC 8 plus weapon if hostile). Assign (especially benevolent) magic items. Spells mostly not offensive.

3 Healers (lvls 4, 4, 2)

AC 10, staff.

32 Monks (lvls 4, 3 × 3, 8 × 2, 20)

AC 7-10

Healers & Monks are not proficient in weapons

Other Guests

15 + 1D6 in number. Remember that some are wounded, weak, poorly equipped, etc. Roll 1D10:

1-6	Character (lvl 1-8, mostly low/middle)
7-8	Merchant
9	Pilgrim
10	Other

Guests are generally expected to pay for their visit in whatever way they can. In return they are free to wander in both the Outer and Inner Gardens, as well as sharing the communal meals.

The Outer Gardens consist mainly of paths and tracks winding amongst flowering trees. Countless varieties of water-plants thrive on the banks of the small stream which twists along the valley. Unlike the Outer Gardens, the central Inner Gardens are formal and neat. There are still pools and rare and beautiful plants. Weapons and artefacts of force (wands and the like) are forbidden here, and the place emanates an atmosphere of peace and tranquility.

Surrounding the perimeter wall of the Inner Gardens are the various features of the community; the halls of the monks, chambers and dormitories for their guests, bee hives, vegetable plots, nurseries, herb gardens, storehouses and the like.

The location of the Gardens of Serenity is not common knowledge, and most of the guests consider it a privilege to stay, even though they pay for it. Most of the other convalescents are adventurers or travellers, and the tales told around the evening fires are full of strange and wondrous places and creatures.

It is the concentration of adventurers that has attracted the attention of the wizard Tiresias. He has sent one of his henchmen to the Gardens to locate a group that suits his purposes. Since his arrival, some two days earlier, Maxamullion has been observing the guests and, as they wander through one of the more remote parts of the Outer Gardens, he approaches the party.

2. MAXAMULLION

Maxamullion is the foremost of Tiresias' three henchmen. A former slaver, he is a tall, brawny and powerful man, cunning and particularly treacherous.

When encountered, Maxamullion is wearing studded leather armour and a white hooded cloak, and carrying a white shield. The shield has a silver fleur-de-lis for an emblem. If questioned about this, he will claim that it is his personal mark; in fact both this and the white cloak are intended to give an impression of goodness.

However, perhaps the most striking feature is the patch he always wears over his left eye. Both his eyes are intact and see well; he wears it so that Tiresias cannot use him to work his gruesome magic (see section 3), knowing that the wizard requires pairs of eyes. Tiresias tolerates this distrust, because Maxamullion is a useful servant and performs his tasks callously well.

Maxamullion is a dangerous adversary when using any manner of weapon, but especially the notched cutlass he took from the captain of a slaving ship whom he had poisoned. Wounds caused by this blade are likely to fester and become diseased.

THE PITCH

Maxamullion will tell the players that he wants them to undertake a task for his mentor. He describes how a wandering minstrel, Pholas the Troubadour, took by trickery a magic lute from the possession of the Great Wizard several weeks ago. The lute is greatly valued by Tiresias and it is of the utmost importance to him that it is recovered. It is this mission that he wishes to entrust to a group of reliable adventurers. They will be warned that the job is likely to be dangerous. The terms are as follows: Tiresias claims the lute, and the adventurers may retain any and all bounty collected along the way in addition to a generous monetary payment (400 gp per person; can be driven up to 500 gp through negotiation).

Further information will not be given until the party have agreed to the undertaking. Maxamullion will allow himself to be talked into an advance payment of up to 50 gold pieces per person. He will then go into more detail.

MAXAMULLION

6th level Fighter

STR: 17 INT: 15 WIS: 12 DEX: 15 CON: 17 CHA: 13
AC 2 HP 50

Alignment: LE

Equipment:

+2 studded leather armour & +1 shield

Cutlass of Horrible Wounding (+2 sword: if hit, victim saves vs. system shock at -20% or contracts a random disease determined by 1D6):

- 1 Mummy Rot
- 2 Lycanthropy (as if bitten by wererat)
- 3 Festering Wound (can only heal via magic)
- 4 Foul Rotting as *periapt of foul rotting*
- 5-6 Roll on Disease (or Disorder) Table (p. 14, DMG)

Also carries the five magic items intended for the players (see separate callout box on next page) and one Beholder Contract.

The lute is the Lute of Ages, a renowned and archaic instrument with shimmering silver strings which can produce unmistakably pure notes. Pholas fled with it into the mountains: Tiresias' believes that the troubadour is imprisoned in the belvedere of Alcor the Lightning Wizard. Alcor, like Tiresias, is one of the Great Wizards, and has made his abode on Thunderhead Peak, highest of the pinnacles of the Northern Mountains. (The players are familiar with the geography of the surrounding lands).

Maxamullion will stress that it is essential that the mission succeeds. It is to ensure this that Tiresias has given him five magical items to distribute as he sees fit (see callout box on p. 3). The objects are valuable and powerful, but not part of the bounty of the job, and because of this the wizard has drawn up a contract to guarantee the items' return. Whoever signs the contract will be under pain of death to return the loaned items to Tiresias within one lunar month (28 days), at his home within the Shifting Mires of the Lowlands. Maxamullion will not release the items without this guarantee. If asked why the completion of the task itself is not being guaranteed, Maxamullion replies that Tiresias is not a cruel man; it is always possible that the Lute has been moved or destroyed, and he would not wish to see a horrible fate visited upon anyone due to circumstances outside their control.



In truth, the job is a ruse and Maxamullion is only here to try to dupe at least one member of the party into signing the contract, for this is no less than one of the Beholder Contracts (see section II). As he would prefer more than one signature, he will point out that it is a considerable risk for just one of the characters to take full responsibility for all of the items. Additionally, he will appeal to the party's sense of justice (if this seems a likely path to him): if that one character dies, then Tiresias has no way to guarantee the items' return.

3. TIRESIAS

Tiresias claims the title of Great Wizard and his peculiarity is a curious form of scrying. By gazing intently into a pair of eyes he is able to create an image within his crystal globe of any place, person, or object upon which those eyes have looked. Visions from eyes that have witnessed rare or secret places, people, documents or even events are particularly treasured by The All-Seeing Eye, as Tiresias sometimes grandly calls himself. He spends much of his time plotting the acquisition of valuable sights or poring over those already in his possession, and makes a considerable income by releasing information thus gained, for his clients are many and varied. Maxamullion acts as Tiresias' agent.

There are two limitations to the Great Wizard's power. Firstly, he must know the name / identity / etc. of that which is to be viewed, as well as being certain that the eyes have actually seen it. Failure in either case makes it impossible to create the image without dangerous psychic risk to himself.

Secondly, Tiresias' harrowing gaze cannot be voluntarily withstood for long by any but the most strong-willed, and if it is met it may irrecoverably twist a person's mind (if they survive the ordeal). Early in his studies, Tiresias found it difficult to hold the gaze of his tormented victims for the length of time desired, and so he began to discard all but their eyes. Now he has a grisly collection of pairs of eyes, each with its own set of sights beheld, which he is always seeking to increase.

In general, small eyes (cats, birds, etc.) are not suitable for the magic and eyes that have only fleetingly or partly observed the desired vision will give accordingly unclear or obscured pictures.

Tiresias' lair is a dismal stone stronghold hidden in an eerie and perilous marsh; see section 10. The wizard rarely leaves his lair, but when he does so is always disguised or invisible, usually on some errand of sinister intrigue.

See pp. 13-14 for Tiresias' powers and combat abilities.

THE FIVE TREASURES

Noble Cloak of Elvenkind

As normal *cloak of elvenkind*; the wearer is also subject to *slow poison* and the cloak heals 1D4 hit points per day if worn for at least one day.

Crushing Gauntlet

This single bronze gauntlet crushes anything that its wearer grasps in it, as per the *crushing hand* spell (9th level MU spell). It takes two full rounds to release the hand from such a grip.

Isilvag

+4 bastard sword with a cold silver sheen; glows stronger within 20' of warm blood (including warm-blooded creatures other than the bearer).

Salamander Mask

This peculiar and slightly grotesque wrought-iron face mask protects the wearer as per the 2nd level cleric spell *resist fire*. If the wearer blows hard through the mouth grill, either of the mask's offensive powers can be activated:

(i) A jet of flame shoots forth 8-24' (4D6, counting 1s as 2s) inflicting 3D6 damage (save vs. breath weapon for half).

(ii) Billowing black smoke pours out to form an *incendiary cloud* (8th level MU spell) 30' × 30' × 10' (or equivalent depending on available space) directly in front of the mask.

Shadow Boar Shield

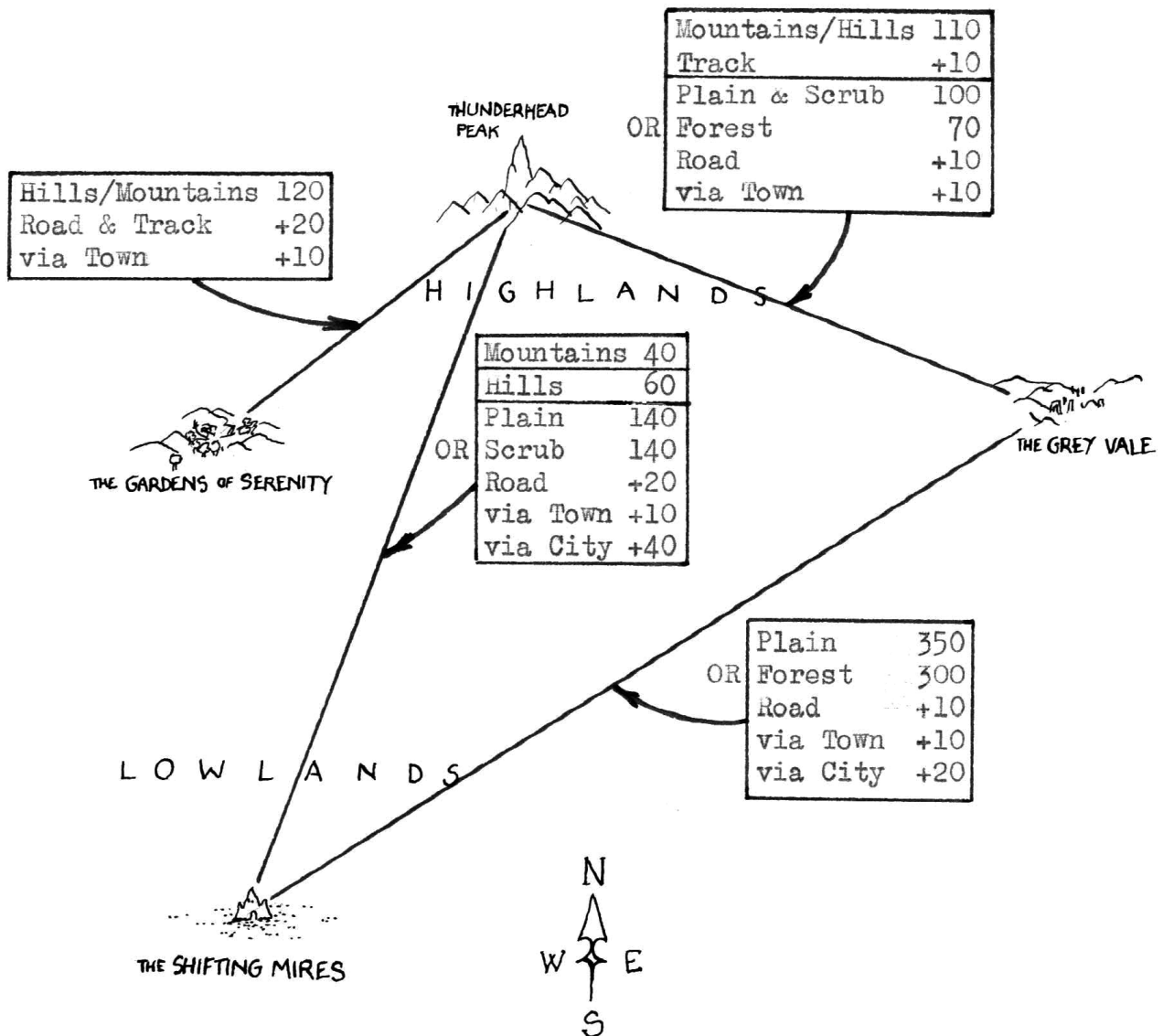
This shiny +1 shield bears a black boar's head on its surface. On command, a large shadowy boar leaps from the shield and will guard a location until recalled; it can be recalled at any distance. Whilst guarding, the shield is blank—if the boar is recalled or killed, the black boar's head emblem reappears. The creature attacks any intruder except the shield-bearer.

The Boar: AC 7, Mv 15", HD 3+3, 3D4 damage, hit only by magic weapons, appears with full HP assuming it's been at least an hour since its last summons; if "killed", a day is required instead. Immune to sleep, charm, hold, and cold; 90% undetectable in shade or darkness.

4. JOURNEYS & ENCOUNTERS

The routes chosen by the players as they travel from one location to the next will to some extent dictate the types of encounter they can expect. Use random encounter tables for Temperate Wilderness areas (*DMG* p. 184 or *MMII* p. 135), with the standard encounter rates. Additionally, the characters may hear of certain creatures or tribes inhabiting specified places as they listen to the campfire tales in the Gardens of Serenity or with travelling peddlers.

The journey map below shows the position of the various locations relative to each other. The tables indicate the choice (if any) of terrain reasonably available for each stage of the players' travels. Figures are in miles: the base distance depends on the environment through which the players decide to travel. This distance is increased if they wish to follow roads, or if they wish to pass through towns or cities, where available. Note that some parts of the journeys offer no alternatives.



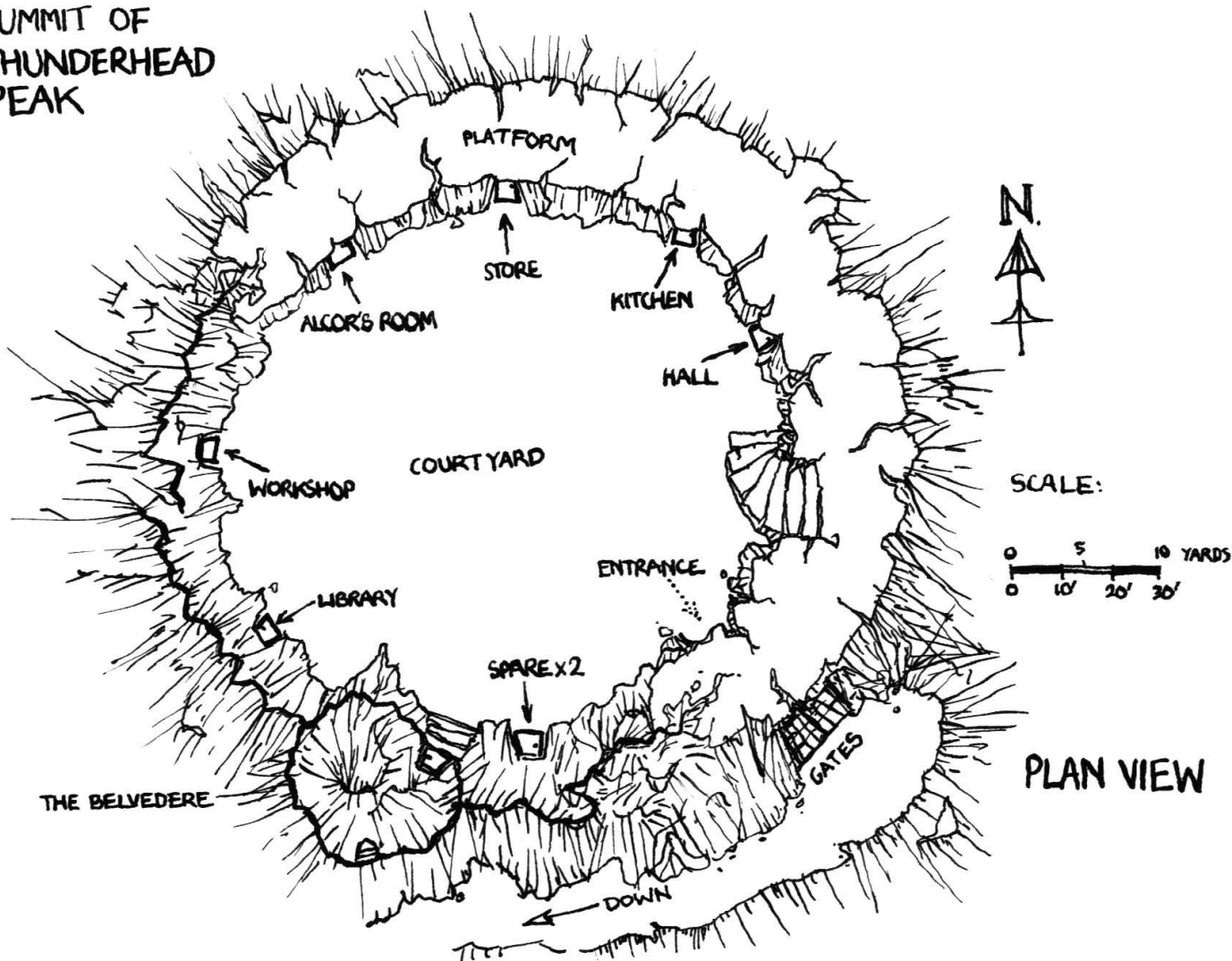
It is essential that the time is carefully recorded. The players know that they must find Tiresias within the 28 days the contract allows them. If time is running short, Alcor might consider lending them the storm giant's griffons for one flight, should the players have behaved well. Alternatively, the players may try to use magical assistance: perhaps a spell, or a charmed steed (e.g. searching the mountains for a roc's nest).

5. THUNDERHEAD PEAK

As the players ascend into the Northern Mountains, they occasionally glimpse their destination—a narrow pinnacle like a rocky finger pointing up at the spiral of dark storm clouds hanging above it. Two lesser summits can be seen on the shoulders of the sheer peak.

The slopes of these two spurs form a short valley before Thunderhead Peak through which a broken path awkwardly winds. From the path a more detailed examination of the three points is possible: the leftmost seems plain enough, central Thunderhead Peak has a path ledge snaking up to some form of construction, and on the right is a great stone turreted castle.

SUMMIT OF THUNDERHEAD PEAK



Hidden by a bluff near the top of the left summit is the entrance to a large cavern network, the lair of **2 stone giants**, accompanied by **4 cave bears**. The castle on the right is the lair of **a storm giant** and his **3 griffons**. Use the % in *Lair* chance for each giant to determine which are present—check each evening. The giants are reasonably friendly with each other as well as with Alcor the Lightning Wizard, who lives on Thunderhead Peak.

At the end of the valley the path begins to curl around Thunderhead Peak up to the gates of Alcor. The Great Wizard's abode is essentially a courtyard at the top of the thin peak, almost a flat crater with his rooms and chambers hollowed out of the living rock walls surrounding it. Half of the broad wall is flat and forms a semicircular platform of smooth stone. Alcor paces around this as he evokes his lightning magic from the brooding clouds gathered above.

Opposite this part of the mountain juts upward like a long fingernail for a further 40' or so. Stairs run steeply up inside it to a small round chamber in the very top with one iron-shuttered window facing south. This tower is the belvedere to which Maxamullion referred.

Anyone passing through the valley will be investigated by the griffons: if the party has horses, these will try to bolt. The griffons are not hostile—though they will chase and devour loose horses—unless either of the giants' lairs is threatened. Likewise the giants will not hinder them unless the players act aggressively or trespass within their lairs; they will readily give Alcor assistance should he need it.

The gates into Alcor's dwelling are closed. Unless the party is acting particularly hostile, a pair of visiting dwarves—Dimri and Thork—will let them in and introduce them to the Great Wizard. Aggressors will be repelled.

Main gates: Stout oak reinforced with iron.

All other doors: Wood, strengthened by bronze studs.

Rooms are lit by candles or a tiny flare of ball lightning in a glass sphere, which Alcor can brighten or dim at will.

The two small spare rooms: These are occupied by Dimri and Thork. Alcor relies on dwarves like these to bring him supplies and welcomes their company. He will make space to accommodate the players with similar hospitality.

The workshop: The door delivers an electric shock to anyone opening it (1D8 damage; 3 rounds to recharge; Alcor is immune). Inside is a laboratory crammed with strange objects and oddments as well as more familiar clutter such as bottles, flasks, bowls, retorts, etc.

All other rooms are plain and simply furnished.

THE BELVEDERE

Inside the belvedere the stone stairs climb very steeply, before coming to a locked wooden door. The circular chamber beyond is empty but for a wooden chair and an old empty chest. The room is quite dusty and wispy cobwebs hang from the edges of the ceiling (about 9' high). On the south side is an arched window.

The players will likely be expecting at least signs of the troubadour's captivity, but it is clear that the room is all but disused. The chamber is wholly unremarkable—except for the view through the window. Perhaps some latent magic of the high mountain is at work, for it seems that an observer can see all the lands spread out beneath him. Rivers, mountains, cities, hills, lawns, forests; all are minutely clear, remarkably distant but nevertheless visible with breathtaking clarity. The horizon is almost invisible; the view seems to go on and on, further over yet more and more countries....

This fantastic sight, of course, is the vision that Tiresias desires, the reason he sent the players to this place. Pholas the Troubadour has never been here.

6. ALCOR

Alcor the Lightning Wizard is one of the Great Wizards because of his mastery of lightning. Thunderhead Peak is always under the shadow of storm-clouds from which Alcor draws his spectacular powers. He can control lightning from small sparks to huge forks, evoking all manner of forked, sheet or ball lightning.

Like Tiresias, Alcor has studied his craft for several lifespans. He is however quite youthful in appearance, with flowing dark hair and a clean-shaven face. He dresses smartly in deep blue robes embroidered with silver stars and sickle moons. Alcor is not unfriendly, but his isolation and devotion to his magic is easily misinterpreted as such.

If the players explain why they have come, Alcor will deny even having heard of Tiresias or a troubadour named Pholas and will insist that the belvedere is empty—all claims are true, and Alcor will be affronted if he is not believed. Otherwise, they are likely to attempt to get to the tower without consulting him: the wooden door can be broken with reasonable force. Clearly this is not the proper way to behave and Alcor will demand an explanation.

ALCOR THE LIGHTNING WIZARD

Treat as 6th level Magic-User with only 1st level spells.

STR: 8 INT: 18 WIS: 18 DEX: 10 CON: 7 CHA: 14

AC 8 HP 14

Alignment: LN

No weapons; wears +2 *ring of protection*

Performs *shocking grasp* at will; *call lightning* as if 12th lvl druid and functions as if armed with a *wand of lightning* of double effect; throws metal objects as a *javelin of lightning*; can shield against missile weapons with sheet lightning, etc. Other relevant abilities as DM sees fit: Alcor is very powerful in his own field.

Dimri & Thork

Fighters AC 1; lvl 5; alignment CG; HP 38 & 49

Dimri: +1 shield, Hammer +3 Dwarven Thrower, short sword

Thork: +1 plate mail, +2 battle axe, hand axe × 2



Once it becomes clear that the players have had a wasted journey, Alcor will try to help them as far as he is able, presuming the players have not been uncivil. After several hours spent searching through his library, he will be able to give the party some information concerning the Lute of Ages:

The Lute is well-known amongst learned musicians, and is reputed to have awesome magical powers which only function when the correct melody is played upon it. The instrument is said to be powerless in the hands of an untrained musician. It was last owned by a minstrel-king some hundred years ago, and is believed to have been buried with him in his tomb. His tomb is believed to be one of several barrows in the Grey Vale, east, on the edge of the great Tree-Plains.

Alcor does not know the king's name, but he can direct the players more or less to the Grey Vale. The Vale also can, with sufficient patient scanning, be seen from the belvedere if the players themselves suggest this course of action.

7. TOMB OF THE MINSTREL-KING

The players arrive at the Grey Vale as the sun is setting beyond the west end of the valley. The countless standing-stones and barrow mounds throw long shadows over the wispy grass, and a chill mist gathers in the hollows. This is an ancient burial site, a still and windless valley housing the tombs of forgotten lords and champions. The whole place is quiet and lifeless, and pervading is a strange feeling of emptiness. Most of the graves have been ransacked and fell beasts lurk amongst the broken tombs.



The search for the minstrel-king's tomb could (unless Locate magic is used) be a lengthy one. Most of the barrows have weathered inscriptions; some have name plaques within, but others are unmarked and unopened.

Roll 1D6 every three hours. On a 6+, the tomb is found. Add 1 to the roll for every three hours spent searching beyond the first. Each three-hour block also occasions one wandering monster check (Temperate Hills and Rough Terrain, (DMG p. 184 or MMII p. 135). Merely encamping in the area occasions one check in the day, and one at night.

Players can search by night so long as they have adequate lighting of their own. Should the search take the players through the night (three or more rolls), in the half-light of dawn the party hears haunting music. The tune begins slowly and gradually grows to a complex melody before ceasing. The notes are drawn from a lute, but are purer than any the players have ever heard. The music is Pholas playing the Lute of Ages to restore life to his empty body (see *Pholas' Tale*, p. 9).

Once the search roll is successful, the players discover a stone bearing a lichen-encrusted inscription:

THE RELICS AND TREASURES OF OMARIC
SILVERHEART

—
UNCROWNED MINSTREL-KING

The stones and earth that sealed the opening to the tomb have long since been removed. An unwelcoming dry and earthy smell comes from within.

The burial chamber is tunnel-like, about 30' long and 10' wide. The dusty bones of the minstrel-king lie on and around a central granite slab. There is absolutely nothing else in the chamber. Careful scrutiny of the earth walls will reveal marks where brackets and hooks may have been attached, but clearly the barrow was robbed years ago.

As the party begins their investigation of the mound's interior, Pholas will approach them leading his ghostly horse. He will watch the group impassively and avoid confrontation unless attacked. The lute he is holding has glowing silver strings—the Lute of Ages.

8. PHOLAS THE TROUBADOUR

Pholas has come to the Grey Vale mainly because he by turns fears and loathes the living. He will not give up the Lute, without which he would become totally undead and mindless. He will always try to remain distant so that he can use the Lute before being struck—atop a mound or lintel-stone for instance.

Daytime Negotiations: Once the dawn arrives, Pholas appears as a pale and gaunt man. He is vulnerable to normal weaponry, is discomforted but not repelled by a cleric's turning and speaks normally.

Pholas is amenable to casual conversation during the day and will sadly tell his tale, revealing how he was duped by Tiresias and bemoaning what he allowed to happen to his horse to assure his own escape. He is aware of the malevolence of his night-time aspect and so will resist attempts by the party to recruit him at this time, instead volunteering information as to Tiresias and the contracts. He knows of the demon-summoning aspect of the contracts, but nothing of Tiresias' combat capabilities or the layout of his lair beyond the front hall, though he does recall the presence of a half-dozen or so lizardmen scurrying about there.

Night-time Negotiations: If the players encounter Pholas at dusk or later, his black mask and shadowy hat conceal his skeletal face, likewise the travel-stained cloak; boots and gloves hide his bony body. As he walks he leads his phantom steed—a grey eyeless horse that weeps tears of blood. In his deathly state he speaks with a cold, rasping voice. His touch is icy cold, and he despises the company of living souls. He is undead and can be turned by a cleric. He can only be harmed by magical or silver weapons. If likely to be overpowered he will not hesitate to flee into the twilight mists.

During the night Pholas is haughty, unstable, and dangerous. He has little patience for conversation and will attack if the party seems weak. However, if the players quickly get to the point and, in particular, mention Tiresias, he can be persuaded to accompany the group to Tiresias' lair in search of revenge, but is neither friendly nor trustworthy.

Pholas' Steed: Unlike its master, the phantom horse has a single constant form. It is non-corporeal. If threatened it will blindly lash out with its hooves and has a chilling touch. It can also emit a shrieking neigh that terrifies all but the stoutest of hearts.

Journeying with Pholas: This will be trying and dangerous. There is no guarantee that he will remain the entire way without being angered after dusk, at that point either departing for his home in the Vale or attacking the party. During the day Pholas will be doubtful and concerned for the players, and may also leave if not convinced. Playing on his desire for revenge is the best way to keep the troubadour around.

PHOLAS THE TROUBADOUR

STR: 11 INT: 16 WIS: 15 DEX: 15 CON: 10 CHA: 15 (day) / 3 (night) HP 28

Carries dirk, penny whistle, etc., Lute of Ages

DAYTIME: AC 8, fight & saves as 4th level fighter, alignment NG

NIGHT-TIME: AC 2, fight & saves as 4 HD monster, alignment NE

Chill touch inflicts 1D10 hit points (weapon or hand); save vs. paralysis or be *slowed* for 2 rounds. Turned as wight. Magic or silver weapons to hit.

Pholas' Phantom Horse

AC 2; move 18" but rarely faster than 9" due to blindness; HD 7; ATT 1-6/1-6, hooves at -4 to hit due to blindness; hit only by magic or silver weapons; turned as spectre. Shrieking neigh as *fear* spell (cast at 7th level) three times/day. HP 32.

The Lute of Ages

Powers at DM's discretion, as a skillful musician can draw almost any effect from the instrument. The magic, like the music describing and controlling it, is usually improvised; only a few functions (such as Pholas' revitalisation) are used repetitively and are thus well-practiced. Music affecting those hearing it can be countered by blocking the ears before it is too late.

Consider the following powers as a guideline to Pholas' expertise. Note that precise powers (i.e. spells) are not in accordance with the fluid nature of the Lute's magic.

Enchanting Listeners: Revitalise, draw nearer, weariness & sleep, misty vision, remoteness, fascination, etc.

Enchanting Objects: Metals become heavier and heavier, small objects tremble or dance, shatter fragile items, weaving or mending, disturb or calm water, flames leap and dance, etc.

PHOLAS' TALE

Until his involvement with Tiresias, Pholas was a wandering troubadour of great renown. Maxamullion approached him with an offer from his mentor. Pholas could have the legendary Lute of Ages, provided that he agreed to perform firstly before the court of Sorian Crownstealer—an infamous master thief—and secondly, before Tiresias himself. Pholas supposed that the wizard was offering the Lute because of its worthlessness to a non-musician. He gratefully signed the contract confirming the agreement.

After initial suspicion, the Crownstealer received the troubadour with rich hospitality. Pholas repaid him with a night of breathtaking music, unknowingly acquiring a sight that Tiresias greatly desired: the Crownstealer's lair and activities, which had so far eluded him beyond guarded doors. Pholas took his leave the next day. On the road he chanced to meet another troubadour who enquired how he had come by such a fabulous treasure. With horror he listened to Pholas' tale; for he had heard of Tiresias the All-Seeing Eye and his wily snares. Suddenly aware of his dilemma, Pholas continued his unavoidable journey.

As soon as he rode over Tiresias' dark threshold, Pholas began to play the Lute, calling upon all his skill and experience. The tune of bewilderment and confusion wove around the wizard, blurring his mind. Thus Tiresias and Pholas met. The contract fulfilled, Pholas fled with the lute, leading his screaming horse away into the marshes, and leaving the cheated wizard clutching the horse's bloody eyes.

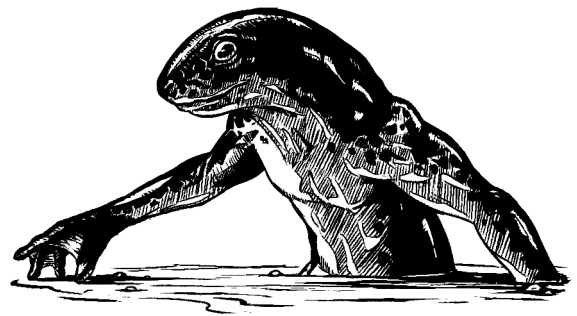
The troubadour floundered in the Mires for many days. Whenever death neared, he played a revitalising tune on the Lute and so kept life within his body. When he finally clambered onto secure ground even he no longer knew how many times he had died.

Each dawn, the tragic musician plays the mournful tune to restore his body, and by day he is more than half in the land of the living. But as the day wears on the magic fades, and by night he is more than half in the land of the dead.

9. THE SHIFTING MIRES

Of all fens and marshes the Shifting Mires are certainly amongst the most eerie. They form an ever-changing pattern of bogs, pools and sodden islands. The quaggy ground is rumoured to sink and rise in a most treacherous way: hummocks that submerge into the green-grey water and dripping mounds that rise up elsewhere. Murky rivulets change course, gurgling springs and murmuring whirlpools suddenly appear.

This is to say nothing of the fauna lurking therein. The sentient Mires support a host of dangerous and dreadful swamp creatures all vying for survival. Strange inhabitants live remote and inaccessible lives. In particular, there is a clan of slimy lizardmen who live in a village of primitive stilted huts and travel the marshes on rafts.



Because of the dangers of the marsh itself, encounters will tend to be brief. Disturbances, such as splashing or floundering, are likely to attract the attention of the otherwise dormant or sluggish marsh. Attacks will be accordingly sudden and most of the monsters will withdraw almost as quickly after 1D6 rounds.

The players soon see Tiresias' abode on the horizon, but it almost seems to move away from them as they trudge towards it. As the darkness recedes at the end of each night, there is no telling in what direction it will lie, or how far away it will be. In this manner the group's progress will be slowed so that they do not arrive at Tiresias' door until the evening of the expiry of the contract.

If not all the group signed the Beholder Contract then, mysteriously, those who did not will find that they are almost singled out by the marsh's attacks (not creature encounters; see callout box on next page).

ENCOUNTERS IN THE SHIFTING MIRES

Use a Temperate Swamp and Marsh encounter table (*DMG* p. 184 or *MMII* p. 135); there are no very powerful monsters (catoblepas, sphinxes): giant leeches and shambling mounds are good substitutes for such. There are also no undead; re-roll any such results. All humanoid encounters will be with 1 or 2 rafts of 1D4+1 lizardmen each.

2D10 rounds after a disturbance the marsh awakens (roll percentile):

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 01-08 | Ground ahead submerges |
| 09-16 | Ground beneath submerges |
| 17-24 | Ground behind submerges |
| 25-36 | 1D6 tentacles (HD 2+2; AC 6; as octopus) rise from water |
| 37-44 | Sleep gas |
| 45-52 | Dizzy gas |
| 53-60 | Sicken gas |
| 61-68 | Sudden strong undercurrent pulls away |
| 69-72 | Whirlpool forms and drags down |
| 73-76 | Ground swallows up (treat as trapper) |
| 77-80 | Spindly treant (HD 7) emerges |
| 81-88 | 1D4 mouths/cracks appear: spit green slime |
| 89-96 | 1D8 toothed mouths/cracks open: bite for 2D4 damage |
| 97-00 | Turmoil: water bubbles & seethes, boils for 2 rounds |

Gases rise as bubbles (75%) or out of widening cracks (25%)

10. TIRESIAS' LAIR

The rocky exterior of Tiresias' lair is dark and wet and supports all manner of unpleasant mosses and slimes. Although the rock is creviced and rough, its surface is slippery and almost impossible to climb. It rises straight out of the murky waters of the Mires and, excepting a small landing before the gates, there is no ledge around its base at the waterline.

THE GATE

The gates are huge rusty iron doors. They are operated mechanically from the far end of the passage that leads away from them. They slowly grind open or shut via great rusty cogs and gears above them. Long clanking chains rim along the length of the corridor high above the smooth floor, suspended from the 30'-plus-high ceiling.

The passage is level and (like the rest of the lair) damp. On either side, a straight ledge slopes upwards to openings in the walls well above the level of floor. The passage terminates with more iron cogs and wheels and the stout winch that moves the chains and, ultimately, the gates. A large pair of manually-operated rusty double doors leads into the hall.

THE HALL & COLLECTION

By day, shafts of light cut through the long narrow open windows around the peak of the conical hall and by night the stars shine in. The hall is always wet and echoing to the sound of dripping. The wide stone floor is sunken by about 10' except for a raised walk around part of it (see plan).

The walls are covered with shelves and ledges supporting Tiresias' collection of disembodied eyes. There are large eyes, dark eyes, loose eyes, eyes in jars, eyes in boxes: but always in pairs and neatly labelled. The labels list the places, people, or objects that the eyes have seen.

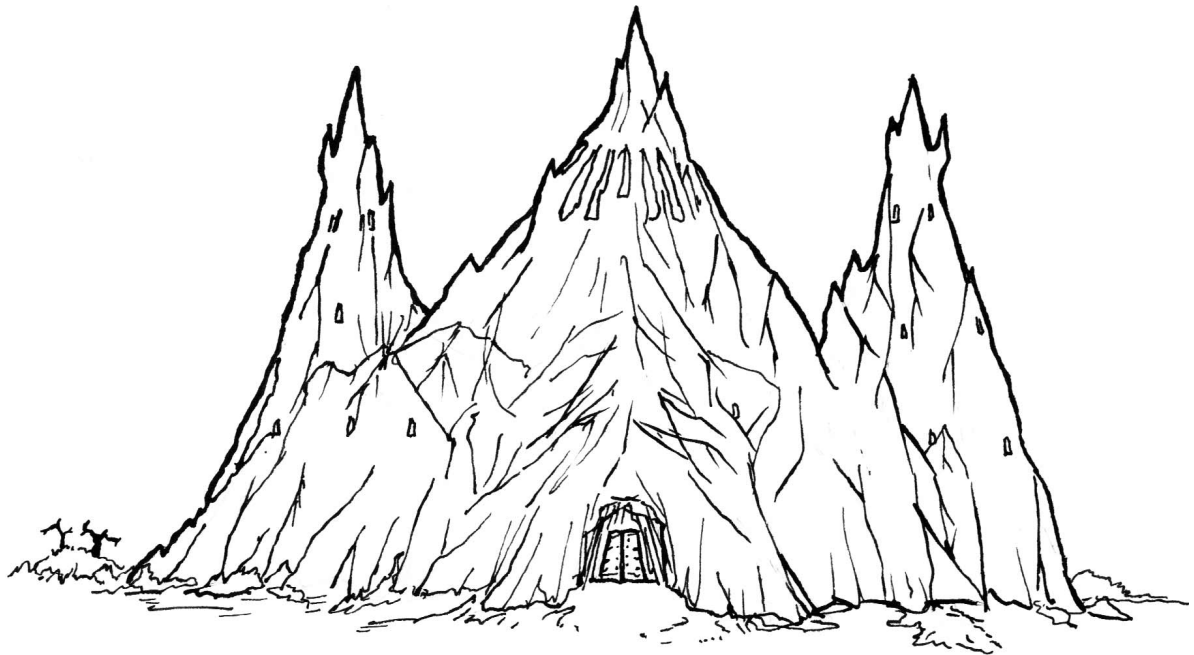
In the centre of the hall is Tiresias' Crystal Globe (see p. 15) on a tall brass stand. To one side of this is an elaborate throne-like chair and on the other is another brass stand supporting a shallow dish, which holds a pair of eyes.

THE SINISTER TOWER

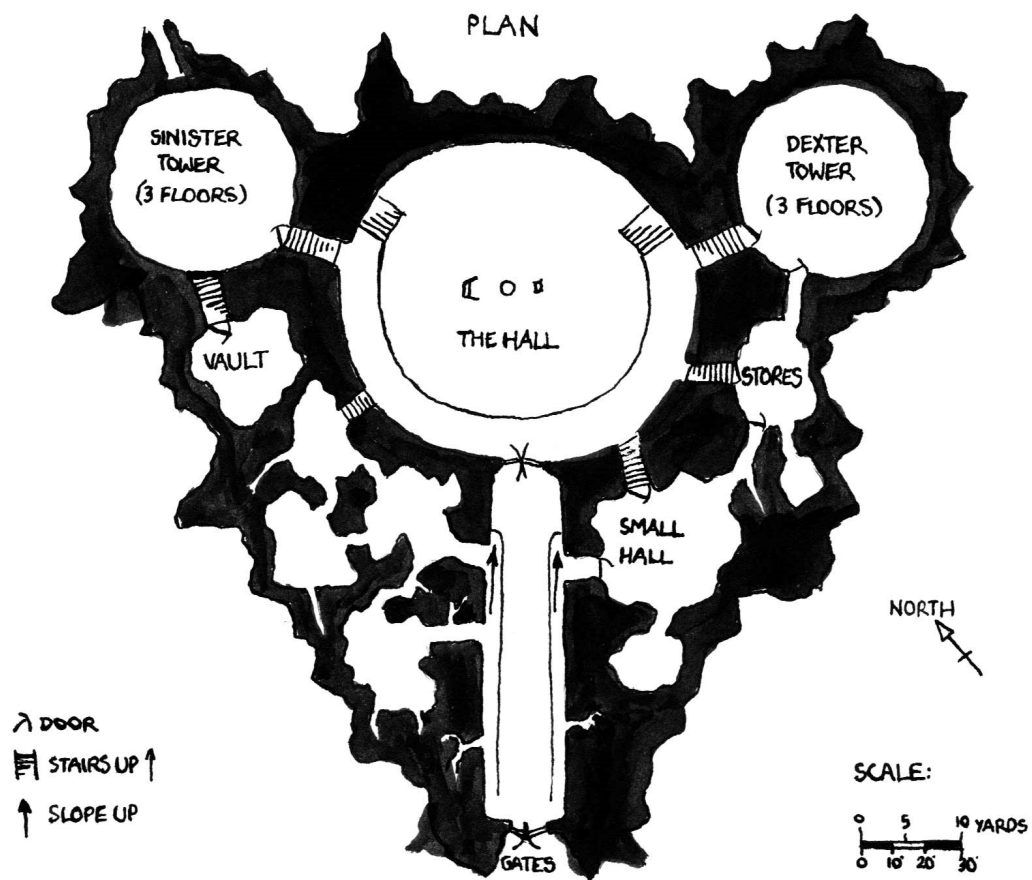
First floor: Has a bloodstained floor and several cages, cells, and chains. A locked wall-cabinet contains fearful surgical equipment (Tiresias uses sharp and precise scalpels to ensure he recovers intact eyes and not for any reason of kindness to his hapless victims).

Second floor: The wizard's personal apartments. Richly furnished, although not even the fine tapestries can disguise the dank stone walls. Considerable ornamental wealth is on display (total value: 2D6 × 1,000 gp). Favoured designs of jewellery and tapestry are those demonstrating Tiresias' symbol: a pair of staring eyes.

Tiresias' personal spellbook is here: in addition to the spells he has memorized, the large tome contains 1D6 other illusionist spells, none of which are general (see Tiresias' description on p. 15). The spellbooks of his apprentices are also stored here: no additional spells are contained in these beyond those they have memorized.



ELEVATION



Third floor: A single chamber, plain other than its central table, upon which rest the Beholder Contracts currently in effect. There are three at the moment, one of which is that signed by the players. Each contract is secured by bejewelled paperweights (200 gp each), and above each is a dim form: the beasts being summoned by the contract's magic. The shape above the players' contract is pawing at the air and staring at them in a most disturbing way. Tiresias carries both the keys for the complex silver locks that secure the strong door, which is also *wizard locked*.

THE DEXTER TOWER

First floor: An arcane library, workshop and laboratory fills the floor, used mostly by Poggot and Gudge, Tiresias' two wizardling henchmen. Both are dull and almost foolish magic-users, the unimaginative and burnt-out dregs of a magicians' guild that were sold as servants to Tiresias.

Second floor: Houses the private apartments of the two magicians. Unlike their master, the pair of them has hardly any personal possessions.

Third floor: In contrast, Maxamullion's chambers are adorned with prizes and trophies of a warlike kind. He is usually away for long periods, so his rooms are kept tidy and undisturbed. They are unlit. A poorly taxidermied minotaur head mounted upon a wooden shield on the wall conceals an alcove in the stone, into which a chest has been slid containing Maxamullion's wealth—platinum coins from many widespread lands—amounting to 3,000 gp in value.

STORES

The cluttered store-rooms hold up to six month's supply of provisions in casks, crates and barrels. Most hang just off the floor from ropes passed through hooks or rings in the ceiling, as protection from the damp and the rats.

SMALL HALL

The cavern-like hall has a motley collection of tables, stools and benches around an open hearth. This is the living-hall, favoured for meeting or eating over the other hall because it is drier and warmer. It is brightly lit by several *continual light* spells cast by Gudge (4th level).

VAULT

The flight of stairs running down to the vault is hidden by a concealed door in Tiresias' chambers on the second floor of the sinister tower. It stops at a black *wizard locked* door with a strong steel lock. The intricate steel key is held by Tiresias. Any attempt to pick or force the lock will immediately succeed by design; such an entry causes the trap within the vault to be activated.

The unlit damp vault is in places ankle-deep in water. Around the walls are five gargoyle heads. Normally, their jaws are closed: if the trap is activated, they drop open as the door opens and release a colourless, odourless gas. This persists for 1D4+1 rounds. The gas is lethal if inhaled—save versus poison or die for each round of exposure. It quickly disperses, dissolving into the water (consuming the water at this point has the same effect as the poison; save at +4).

All the items in the vault are protected with *magic mouths* that shriek loudly if picked up by anyone not holding a colourful fan. Many of the items are obscure and useless to the average possessor, but others are powerful magic items. These include boots, rings, wands, scrolls, armour, swords, etc. There are no magic-user-only items, as these are all carried / used by Tiresias and the wizardlings. The hoard has been accumulated solely for the use as bait for victims to sign the Beholder Contracts—hence there are no cursed items or minor objects such as potions.

OTHER CHAMBERS, CAVERNS & TUNNELS

The remaining chambers are home for Tiresias' main guards: a force of **8 lizardmen** who protect the lair in return for shelter and an occasional feast of the wizard's discarded victims. They are all armed (see p. 14) and are sly and cunning. Nothing of value can be found amongst the bones and dirt in the rooms.

Furthermore, there are a myriad of tunnels and crawls, some submerged and others blind cul-de sacs, which are infested by a small colony of **kobolds** of undetermined number, who scavenge off the lizardmen and creep and scuttle amongst the shadows both inside and outside the lair. Some of the tunnels are exits to the outside, but these are too small or difficult for all but the smallest of intruders. The kobolds know that their existence relies on them being tolerated, so they are sympathetic the wizard's cause and do not steal from his stores. They also serve to keep a check on the population of **giant rats** that share the tunnels as unwelcome pests.

CONFRONTING TIRESIAS

Unless the players have taken anti-scrying precautions, Tiresias will be forewarned of their arrival, and well prepared. Obviously he is aware of the players' strength whilst they have his loaned items, so his gates will remain firmly shut until the contracted 28 days are almost over. He intends to force them to surrender his items and thus render themselves helpless. Then his guards will pounce to capture or if necessary kill the players (they have been warned not to damage the precious eyes).



The players are likely to wait in desperation on the “doorstep”. With less than an hour to go, the doors begin to open. Two of the lizardmen are operating the winch, and they will run to the hall as soon as the gates are open. Another two crouch just inside the raised openings leading off to the left of the main passage, guarding their rooms. The rest of the lizardmen, and the two winchers, lurk on the five flights of stairs that rise away from the hall. Tiresias waits invisibly by his throne, with a large open metal casket in front of him. Poggot and Gudge cower in their respective chambers; Gudge has *wizard locked* the two first-floor doors into the Dexter Tower. 1D4+1 kobolds watch eagerly from dark corners amongst the lizardmen’s quarters and the small hall / stores area; they will not engage unless attacked themselves.

Tiresias: The wizard intends the party to make their way to the hall, where he will announce his presence. The wizard cuts a striking image in his scarlet robes and goat-horned head-dress. He is very old indeed but, like many other magicians, his arcane studies have taken him well beyond the term of his natural life. He is gaunt and sinewy with an appropriate lack of vitality. In contrast, his piercing and mostly unblinking eyes are uncannily active.

He often wears jewellery of exceptional craftsmanship chosen from his hoard of payments made by his “clients”. At any time, Tiresias will be adorned with 1D6 pieces of typical value (p. 26, *DMG*). Also he always carries two other items: an envenomed crystal dagger and a shimmering fan.

The dagger is kept concealed in his robes. The venom is barely adhesive and will run off the point almost as soon as it is unsheathed. It is a rare and horribly painful lethal poison. The transparent blade is hard to see clearly, and will shatter into many razor-sharp shards as it delivers a successful blow.

The fan, when opened, scintillates with an ever-changing pattern of colours. The effect of this can be merely attractive or, at the holder’s desire, hypnotic, blinding or illuminating. The surface of the fan facing the operator is always “safe”—only the outward side can produce these extra effects.

The players have the Lute of Ages: Rather than being happy, Tiresias will be greatly unnerved. The wizard last saw Pholas floundering in the deadly Shifting Mires and believes him to be dead. That the players would actually recover the Lute of Ages (supposedly sunk deep in the marsh), let alone meet the troubadour, was never a consideration. Such an accomplishment speaks to unknown capabilities and unusual skill (over and above the power of the Lute itself, which Tiresias has some knowledge of), and will serve to throw off Tiresias’ performance.

Pholas has accompanied the players: The meeting with Tiresias takes place during the day, and so Pholas is amenable to direction and suggestions. He will follow the players’ lead, but will suggest concealing himself before the meeting, the better to throw off the wizard. If his presence is revealed before Tiresias has completed his speech about the completion of the contract, Tiresias will immediately grasp that the plot has fallen apart and will order his minions to attack. His only personal concern will be to reach for nearby candles and begin stuffing the wax into his ears as protection against the power of the Lute of Ages.

While the Lute is powerful and Pholas’ wrath great, it is strongly suggested that Pholas not simply clean house for the party. The DM should carefully consider what Pholas and the Lute can accomplish at this stage beforehand, with the idea that the players should be rewarded for their skill at shepherding Pholas to his revenge. At the same time, care should be given to ensuring that the party is not given a dull and anticlimactic victory via the actions of an NPC; the game is about the players, after all.

The reward money: None of the promised reward money will be in view. Should the players raise the point, Tiresias will not know precisely what they are referring to and will attempt to improvise (he knows that Maxamullion promises gold to his dupes, but since the amounts are never intended to be paid out, Tiresias has never bothered with the finer details of the scam).

The Trap: Tiresias tells the players that the contract will be fulfilled when all of the loaned items lie within his casket. The casket is a *casket of holding* (as *bag of holding*) that shuts and locks, or flies open, only at the command of the holder of its token gold key. Its lock cannot be picked, and for the purpose of *knock* spells, it is 12th level *wizard locked*. The loud slam as the lid shuts is the signal for the scaly guards to appear from hiding and attack. Tiresias will not put himself at risk unless hard pressed to do so.

Players who consult the contract or who have a good memory will note that the wording only specifies the “return” of the items; nothing about placing the items in the casket is written. Dumping the items on the floor within a few feet of the wizard is in fact enough to fulfill the terms.

TIRESIAS THE ALL-SEEING EYE

Treat as 5th level Illusionist who cannot create general illusions (i.e. no *phantasmal/spectral forces*, *hallucinatory terrain*, etc.).

STR: 6 INT: 18 WIS: 17 DEX: 19 CON: 6 CHA: 6
AC 10 HP 10; Alignment: CN

Spells memorised:

Blindness, darkness, detect illusion, detect invisibility, hypnotism, invisibility, non-detection

Crystal Dagger

+1 dagger; venom counts only in 1st round of use. First (and only) hit shatters for double damage. Negates opponent's DEX defensive adjustment if favourable.

Crystal Globe

Specialist use restricted to Tiresias; see p. 3 for its powers. In addition, the globe has strength properties as per *glassteel* spell; radiates strong magic; feels very cold to touch. About 2' diameter.

The Scintillating Fan

Requires operator's concentration and one hand. Casts at will: *colour spray, gaze reflection, light* (as if cast upon the fan), *hypnotic pattern*

The effects of the *colour spray* & *hypnotic pattern* can be avoided if the victim looks away from the fan before the functions are performed. Only one function per round.

Poggot – 2nd lvl magic-user

AC 9; HP 6; + 1 ring of protection

Spells: *Read magic, write*

Gudge – 4th lvl magic-user

AC 10; HP 9; wand of fear (5 charges)

Spells: *Affect normal fires, mending, unseen servant, magic mouth, wizard lock*

Lizardmen

AC 5; Mv 6"/12"; HD 2+1; ATT 1-2/1-2/1-8 or wpn:

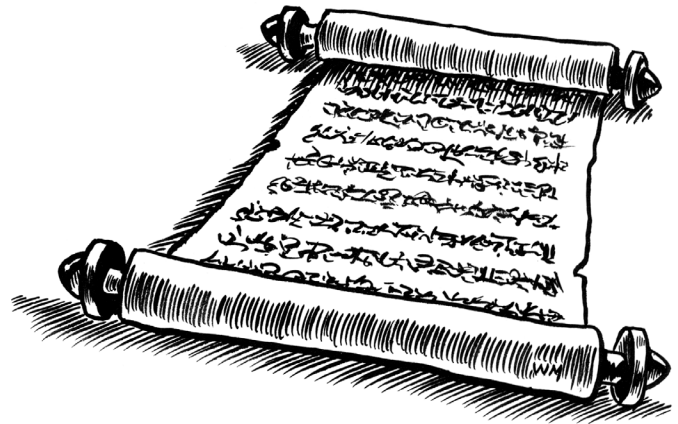
Javelin/barbed dart/club

HP: 17, 16, 15, 15, 12, 11, 11, 8

11. THE BEHOLDER CONTRACTS

The contracts that Tiresias uses to snare his selected victims—beholders of sights he wishes to add to his grisly library—are inscribed on specially prepared vellum with an expensive, magically-formulated ink.

The contracts are always written in strange stylised characters. If detected for, the contract will radiate strong magic. The terms of the agreement are inscribed as well as the length of time (in lunar cycles—28-day months) in which the contract must be satisfied. Failure is always “under pain of fear and death”.



The contract must be signed with the special ink in an unflinching hand—uncertain or shaky letters writhe and smoke and disappear immediately from the vellum. Allow characters who try to forge a false name or mark to save vs. their Wisdom (less than WIS on 4D6) to succeed without detection. In addition, a spot of the signatory's blood is required alongside the name.

If the contract is completed, it is consumed in a flare of coloured flame. If, however, the time limit expires without the fulfillment of the contract, a demon-like creature of ever-changing size and form is evoked (see p. 15). The beast, once summoned, will track down and slay each and every person whose name and blood appear on the pact. Death is then inevitable unless powerful magic is used (i.e. *wish*), the contract is destroyed, or the victim's name and mark is removed from it (e.g. via an *erase* spell). Killing the beast only postpones the matter: its body will disappear only to reform 1D4 days later to resume its hunt.

THE CONTRACT STALKER

No. Appearing: 1 (summonation)

Movement: 12" (18" fly)

Armour Class: 5

Hit Dice: 5

Attack: 2-8 / 1-6 / 1-6 or other

Defences: +1 or better weapons needed to hit

Alignment: NE

Intelligence: Very

Treasure: Nil

Tracks unerringly, has 6" infravision, can smell blood clearly, can polymorph at will to a shadow or any creature from rat-sized to man-sized.

The stalker may choose to strangle, poison, or otherwise attack unconventionally; normally this will be when the victim is off guard.

The beast's usual form is that of a distorted demon with a gaping mouth and long claws. However, it can polymorph to any creature ranging from the size of a rat to a man. When it wishes to pass unnoticed, it can assume a shadowy appearance (as per a shadow). It can levitate and fly when in its natural form, and moves silently as a matter of course.

The contract itself is the key to the stalker's existence. As soon as it is able, the monster will take it to a safe and secret place.



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