

DUNGEON VAULT MAGAZINE

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No. 37



10 ADVENTURES
HIGH RESOLUTION MAPS
VTT - ROLL20 MAPS

Designed for use with



ShadowDark RPG



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ELVEN TOWER ADVENTURES

DUNGEON MAP PACK VOL. 2

WEB OF HATRED
LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE



Foreword

An adventurer's life is not that different from ours. Both are full of challenges and tests. And sometimes, we succeed and bask in our glory. But more often than not, we fail, and it is up to us to learn from our mistakes or let them brood and hinder our progress.

Elven Tower Adventures has been around for almost eight years. My brother and I are more than satisfied with what we've achieved. And this has been a hell of a ride. But I'd be lying if I told you things have been easy all the time. Some of our projects never hit the shelves. Or they don't get the reception we expected. The biggest challenge was at the beginning of 2023 when the OGL license we had used for years was under threat.

So, we decided to take a leap of faith and switch the system we worked with entirely. The uncertainty was over after two months, on March 2023, when we published Dungeon Vault Magazine No. 32, our first issue with 100% Shadowdark RPG content. We've met new people, made new friends, and joined an incredible community of amazing crawlers.

We've crossed the threshold into the Shadowdark and we can only hope Gede guides our way. Because we're not looking back for a long time, so we hope you stay around; heroes are always needed down there.

Thank you, crawlers!
- Arthur



Fresh Shadowdark RPG Content

RETAKING THE GREENHOUSE

We've paid the blood price for all of this. We shall gorge our insatiable hunger. Pay a tribute of blood and flesh if you want any of your disgusting grains...

Argak, Gnoll Chieftain



region is only as strong as its capability to feed its population. Farmlands and ranches are the primary building blocks of a successful fiefdom as they feed the larger settlements that have less arable lands to produce their food. Near the sprawling city of Mistwall, arcane advancements have made wonders possible. A means to keep produce and grain fresh and edible for a long time exists now. The court wizard concocted a large apparatus capable of creating the conditions to grow produce and livestock at an accelerated pace, while also storing the food produced for at least a season before it needs to be consumed.

It is an underground greenhouse on the city's outskirts that locals commonly refer to as the Duke's Greenhouse; It was a decade ago when Duke Earling commissioned its creation. It has become crucial to the survival of nearby settlements ever since. Farms and ranches bring their wares to be stored at the greenhouse while the underground compound also produces a considerable amount of food. Then, it is taxed and distributed where needed.

THE RAVAGERS

A TRAGEDY STRIKES! A pack of ravenous gnolls came from the nearby woods, stormed the Duke's Greenhouse, and took refuge inside the compound. The devilish fiends consume the meat inside at an alarming rate. The gnolls demand more meat deliveries in exchange for letting grain, vegetables, and fruit shipments come and go as they would rather eat more meat. The authorities have tried to retake the greenhouse twice without success. Word on the street has it that the gnolls are savage, merciless beasts. Survivors claim that their leader is a tall monster with beaded braids who decapitates all who confront him with a prosthetic, scythe-shaped arm.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Rising to the Task. Sir Damtal, the Captain of the Watch, offers a hefty reward to sellswords and mercenaries willing to prove their worth against the gnolls. He has lost too many men. And risking any more puts the safety of Mistwall at risk. Sir Damtal offers the characters mounts to reach the Duke's Greenhouse and allows them to pick an item from the armory (40 gp, 4 XP).

Level 3 Adventure

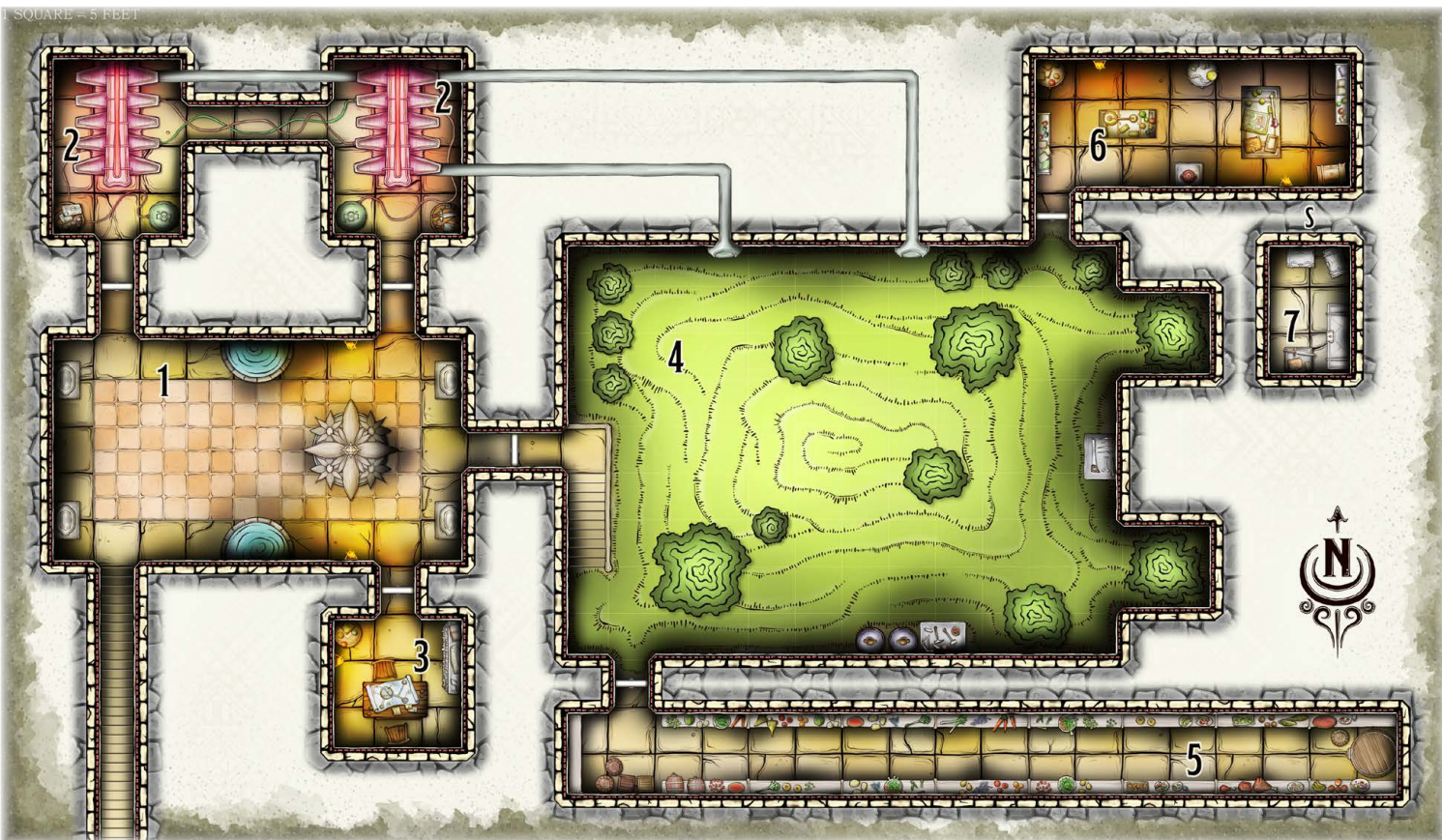
- **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every 4 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).
- **Light.** Some areas have torches on sconces; the rest are in pitch darkness. The gnolls are **dark-adapted**.
- **Conservation Aura.** All edibles and produce stored in the underground complex do not spoil for at least 4 months. The machinery in area 2 produces this effect.
- **Smell.** The smell of ozone from the machinery, greenery, and fresh produce mix with the pungent stench from the gnolls creating a foul, disgusting fragrance.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A gnoll walks into the chamber holding a half-eaten piece of meat. The hyena-folk hesitates for a moment but then lunges to attack (DC 12 DEX to surprise him).
2	Four peasant farmers with torches and pitchforks followed the heroes. They wish to join the party. Without constant maintenance, the arcane device in area 2 has started to deteriorate. It malfunctions randomly (1d4). 1 - A loud blast erupts from area 2, deafening all creatures within 100 feet for 1 crawling round . 2 - The ambient temperature in the dungeon decreases to freezing levels for 1 day. Creatures in the area require appropriate attire or risk damage from exposure. 3 - All natural fires grow 5 times larger for a moment. Depending on the source (like a held torch), they may deal 1d6 damage (DC 12 DEX). 4 - The device vibrates violently and shakes the walls for 1 crawling round . It causes creatures to fall prone at the worst of times (DC 11 STR).
3	The court wizard's apprentice arrives at the dungeon seeking recognition and glory. He is unsure about the party but wants no treasure (Reaction check).
4	A strong wind current blows through the chambers, snuffing out fires and any uncovered light sources.
5	Three thugs arrive at the dungeon seeking to rob the place. They are unaware of the gnolls' occupation.
6	

HELLISH ORIGIN

Gnolls, hyena-folk, trace their origins to the deepest chasm of hell (DC 14 INT). They are spawned from common hyenas who gorge themselves on the flesh of innocents while empowered by an obscure demon lord. A demonic ember burns in their merciless hearts.



1. ENTRANCE HALL

An uneventful journey through the picturesque landscape of the Earling fiefdom leads to a wooden warehouse where the underground greenhouse is.

The warehouse entrance is surrounded by abandoned carts of undelivered goods. The descending staircase inside the warehouse leads to area 1. There are four busts of past dukes and nobles, a large stone sculpture of a basin of blooming flowers, and two **gnoll** scouts.

► **Tracks.** Mud-prints and droppings litter the place. Explorers identify them as those of hyenas (DC 12 INT).

2. THE ARCANE APPARATUS

A 10-foot-tall metal device with copper radiators and countless strands of cables occupies most of the room. It hums in a pattern and produces dry warmth.

The machine creates a hospitable-for-farming environment in the dungeon that accelerates the growth of produce and avoids the spoiling of all stored edibles.

► **Repair.** A spellcaster may spend 1 **crawling round** to repair the device (DC 15 INT, 2 extra rounds on a fail). On success, **Random Event 3** does not ever occur. A failure by 5 or more is equivalent to sabotage (see below).

► **Sabotage.** The machine can be overloaded to rapidly heat the dungeon and force the gnolls into area 1 (DC 15 INT). All creatures beyond area 4 take 1d4 damage when this occurs. This severely damages the device.

3. GREENHOUSE ARCHIVE

An abandoned office. Parchments, letters, and incomplete inventory logs lie scattered on the wooden desk.

The room contains accurate logs of all the food shipments in and out of the warehouse. Spending 1 **crawling round** reveals that the Duke's Greenhouse contained enough food and grains to sustain the fiefdom for the entire winter season before the gnolls attacked.

4. THE GREENHOUSE

The door opens to an impossible vista of an idyllic moor with grass, fruit trees, and vegetable plantations by the walls. The ceiling shines with a yellow light that feeds the greenery and provides warmth.

The two vents on the north wall are connected to the device in area 2. They exhaust fresh, enchanted air that accelerates the growth of any plant or livestock in the room. The magical ceiling that replaces sunlight also depends on the machine in area 2 to properly function.

► **Remains.** The gnolls have consumed all of the livestock in the chamber. The clean bones of sheep, chickens, and cows litter the grass. No animals remain.

► **The Guards.** Four **gnolls** stand guard in this room. When the characters arrive, the gnolls assume they are here to pay tribute (40 pounds of meat) and allow them to approach. They turn hostile when they see the heroes are empty-handed and/or wielding weapons.

5. THE LARDER

Rows of packed-to-the-brim shelves line the walls from floor to ceiling. There is considerably less meat than anything; clean bones are all over the floor.

The gnolls eat the meat at a ruinous pace. If left alone, they may consume all animal protein here within a week, crippling the region's chances of survival in the upcoming winter. Grains and vegetables are untouched.

The Gluttonous. Two gnolls sleep on the floor at the end of the room, their bellies enlarged with recently eaten food. The party may surprise them (DC 10 DEX).



Argak, the Chieftain

An upright-walking hyena with red eyes, beaded braids and a scythe-shaped, prosthetic arm.

AC: 12 (leather)

HP: 16 LV 2

ATK: 1 Scythe Arm +3 (1d8 + Deep Cut)

MV: Near (Walk)

S:+2 D:+1 C:+2 I:+3 W:+0 Ch:-1

.....

Rage. 1/day, immune to morale checks, +1d4 damage (3 rounds).

Deep Cut. Targets bleed profusely and take 2 damage after 1 round (DC 11 CON).

.....

6. RESEARCH CENTER

The tallest of all gnolls stands behind a laboratory table tinkering with glassware and liquid substances.

► **Argak.** The gnoll chieftain leads the pack because of his combat prowess but he is also a particularly intelligent specimen. Argak has spent days understanding how the arcane machine in area 2 works. He may succeed if given enough time but is currently far from progressing.

► **The Pack.** Three gnolls accompany Argak in the laboratory. The gnolls become enraged and hostile as soon as they detect the characters' intrusion into the lab.

► **The Vase.** A red clay vase on a plinth by the south wall contains a highly-flammable fluid that ignites in contact with air. The rune on the surface marks it out as *alchemist's fire* (DC 13 INT). If thrown at a creature, the container breaks and the flames deal 2d6 fire damage.

► **Treasure (3 XP).** Inspecting the room for 1 crawling round yields 25 sp, 170 cp, and a *potion of vitality*.

► **Secret Door.** Pulling the iron scone on the south wall activates a wall-moving mechanism that reveals a narrow passage into area 7 (DC 14 WIS check).

7. SECRET VAULT

The vault was never found by Argak and his ilk. It contains money and valuables that belong to Duke Earling. Ransacking the vault has consequences (see below).

► **Treasure (7 XP).** The room contains a longsword, a blank spellbook, a gold ingot (50 gp), 60 gp, 250 sp, 1,890 cp, 2 *potions of healing*, an arcane blueprint of the arcane machine in area 2, and a set of chainmail armor.

DEVELOPMENT

THE CHARACTERS CONFRONT Argak, the chieftain, and his hellish pack of hyena-folk in deadly combat and overcome the challenge. Gnolls, by their nature, are unable to flee this fight as their bloodthirst causes them to fight to the death. Should the party succeed, Argak and the pack are either mortally wounded or incapacitated.

Sir Damtal thanks the characters for a job well done and pays the reward. He shall hire them again soon enough as their usefulness has proved to be worthwhile.

► **Broken Device.** If the characters overload the machine in area 2, the court wizard complains that it may take him too long to repair it and thousands of innocents may starve in the coming winter. The party could help find crucial components to mend the damage.

► **Petty Thieves.** It takes the staff three days to find out about the ransacking of the vault (area 7). Disappointed, Sir Damtal orders the characters' arrest and sends people after them. That is an adventure for another day...

SHRINE OF ASCENDANCE

True change in life is never achieved easily. We are the ones who craft blessings and our fate through our actions, determination, and hard work.

World's Philosophy, Vol. II

Amost people dream of becoming something greater, increasing their wealth, or turning into a prominent, important figure. But the sad truth is that very few of these people accomplish what they long for. That is because regardless of what they want, hard work, endless determination, or nerves of steel are some of the things required for this.

Not everyone has what it takes to change their stars. And there usually are no shortcuts. Soldiers must risk their lives before becoming knights. Others must work for years to earn a noble's trust. But sometimes, one-in-a-lifetime opportunities present themselves, and people's minds or hearts are often too weak to resist temptation.

ASCENDING

It all started a few months back when Father Bertrand passed away. He was a beloved, respected, and powerful religious figure. Thus, the arrival of a new priest in town marked the end of his era. The authorities wondered how people would take this change.

To everyone's surprise, Johan, the new man in charge, became popular in little time. He calls himself 'Master Guide' because he shall show people the way. He claims to know how to guide people's minds into ascension and help them attain and higher status in life.

With these promises, people quickly started to follow him and believe. No one knows his real name so they refer to Johan as "master". Johan moved his newly formed group to an abandoned tomb on the city's outskirts after convincing them that the path to ascension was there.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Missing People. Three months after Father Bertrand's passing, more and more innocent people are convinced by Johan's words about ascension and join his group. But nothing has happened. No one has changed their lives, and no one has returned to town to share any good news. Families are worried and they want to see their relatives back. The town's constable cannot stand idle any longer. He offers a hefty bounty to anyone who can track the suspicious priest and find out what happened to all the people that zealously followed him (70 gp, 6 XP).

Level 5 Adventure

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 crawling rounds and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas have braziers with permanent **light** spells; the rest are dark. However, only the dead are **dark-adapted**. Johan's followers carry lamps or torches.

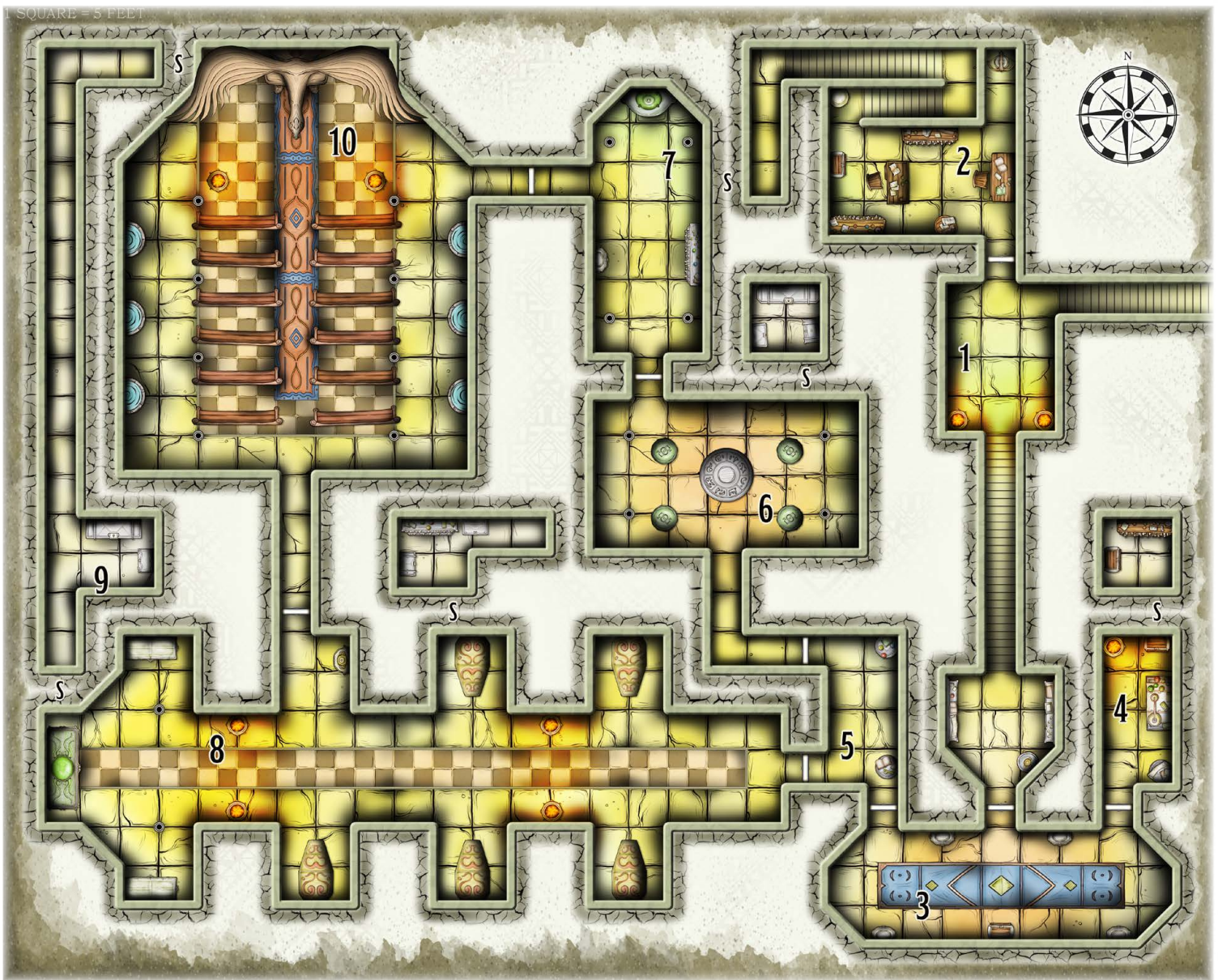
► **Secret Passages.** Several areas in the dungeon feature secret corridors. The characters must press specific, loose bricks on the walls to reveal them. These special bricks must be spotted from the rest (DC 13 WIS).

RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	One of Johan's followers (cultist) has taken the task to patrol the place. The characters may try to convince him that they seek the Master Guide (Reaction roll).
2	Four torch-wielding peasants stumble upon the characters. The villagers ask the heroes if they came looking for ascension. If they say no, the peasants flee. They retreat to the closest area with allies to defend them.
3	The characters notice a pressure-sensitive plate before them. Pressing it causes several tiny apertures in the walls to release poison gas. Living creatures within the chamber take 1d8 damage (DC 14 CON check for half).
4	Three guards working for Johan find the characters. A knight arrives in the dungeon and finds the characters. The armored man took the same job as the heroes but does not know if he can trust them (Reaction roll).
6	A sharp, steel blade moves in a pendulum motion before the characters. It blocks the way. Creatures passing through take 1d8 damage unless they move fast enough (DC 14 DEX). The characters may try to stop the blade with sheer strength or by using thieves' tools.
7	Johan's magic has taken its toll on the tomb. Two skeletons from area 8 come out of their enclosures. The undead move around the dungeon aimlessly, looking for living creatures. The skeletons fight until slain.
8	A strong wind current blows through the dungeon, snuffing out fires and any uncovered light sources.

IT IS PERSONAL

One of the party members is looking for a missing relative. This may be a parent or a sibling. This person disappeared three weeks ago and all rumors point to the mysterious man who replaced the former priest.



1. ENTRANCE LANDING

After following basic directions, the characters find the place where Johan hides. The tomb belongs to a wealthy family that used to bury their dead here. They moved a couple of decades ago and everyone forgot about this place until Johan turned it into his lair. The characters enter the tomb by descending a set of stairs.

2. ARCHIVE

This room contains two desks, two wooden shelves, and a chest. A single crossbow rests on an alcove and a set of stairs takes to a seemingly empty corridor.

The characters can spend 1 **crawling round** reading the documents here to learn that the tomb belonged to the Porter family. It was decades ago when the last member of their family was buried here. And it has been years since they left these lands and moved to the capital. The automated crossbow shoots whenever a creature passes in front of it and deals 1d8 damage (DC 14 DEX for half).

3. STANDING SARCOPHAGI

A glowing rune floats before each of the four standing sarcophagi and a wooden chest rests by the south wall. It is a holy rune of protection (DC 12 INT check).

► **Enemies.** Johan asked his followers to pass through here to reach area 10. Thus, he placed protective runes that keep the undead within their enclosures. If the characters touch or interact with any of them, they all vanish and four **ghouls** emerge and fight to the death.

4. TREASURE CHAMBER

There are a couple of tables and a wooden chest here. The characters find 10 gp, a dagger, a 60-foot-long rope, a lamp, and one *potion of healing* in this chamber (1 XP).

► **Vault (5 XP).** If the characters find this hidden room, they can search the chest, the desk, and the table. There are 4 gp, 178 sp, and 1,963 cp stored in leather bags. There are two shortswords and one shield. There are also two random Tier-1 Wizard spell scrolls.

5. ANTECHAMBER

There are two identical corridors. The door that leads to area 8 has a message on it. A piece of parchment nailed to the wood reads: “Do not enter, take the other door”.

6. MAGIC CIRCLE

The Porter family placed this magic circle so they could access the underground sections of their tomb easily. But since they left, the circle does not work anymore.

► **Secret Vault (5 XP).** If the characters find this hidden room, they can search the chest and shelf here. There are 18 gp. But they also find a broken silver ring (8 gp), a rusty, incomplete suit of chainmail, a hand-carved wooden scarab (7 gp), and a *dagger of the goblin hero*.

7. ROOM OF THOUGHTS

This room is for meditation and prayer. The green jade jar at the end of the room is supposed to gather all prayers and people’s good thoughts. The jar is worth 30 gp but removing it causes a **ghast** to emerge from the sarcophagus. The guardian fights to the death (2 XP).

► **Pray.** The characters may spend a **crawling round** paying their respects here and earn a **luck token**.

8. MAIN TOMB

Five identical sarcophagi rest in the 10-foot-wide alcoves. They flank the central corridor which leads to a larger sarcophagus next to the west wall.

Johan’s presence and magic have caused the corpses in here to come back to the world of the living. However, he did not bother placing protective runes in this area. Five **skeletons** and one **ghast** emerge from the sarcophagi to fiercely protect their eternal resting places.

► **Treasure (4 XP).** If the characters find this area, they find 195 sp in a bag. There is a set of thieves’ tools, a crowbar, a backpack with ten rations of food, a bag with ten steel marbles, and a random Tier-1 priest spell scroll.

9. SECRET CORRIDOR

The characters may surprise Johan and his followers in area 10 in case they find this hidden passageway.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** In case the characters come through here, they find a set of leather armor, a longsword, a lamp, a bag of caltrops, a wooden staff, and a crowbar.

10. SHRINE OF ASCENDANCE

Johan stands before a dozen men. Six **peasants**, three **thugs**, and three **bandits**. They defend their leader with their lives. Hence, the heroes shall have a hard time if they do not wish to harm or injure innocent people. However, before the armed confrontation ends, Johan pulls one more ace out of his sleeve and shows the characters the meaning of ascending (see **Ascension**).



Johan, the Master

Crazy eyes filled with determination. Messy hair is visible under a dark cloak. The Master Guide.

AC: 12

HP: 18 LV 4

ATK: 1 staff +1 (1d4) or 1 spell +4

MV: Near (Walk)

S:+1 D:+2 C:+0 I:+2 W:+1 Ch:+1

Conjure Flames (INT spell). DC 12. One target in far takes 2d6 damage.

Mage Armor (INT spell). Self. DC 12. AC 16 for 2d4 rounds.

ASCENSION

Johan enchanted his followers with a ritual. They shall ‘ascend’ whenever he commands. When the characters are about to succeed and defeat Johan’s followers, he says “Now you will know what true ascension means!” With a snap of his fingers, the bodies of all his followers, standing or not, bend, twist, and are drawn to the same spot. The deformed bodies join and fuse magically. A **flesh golem** is what remains of the innocent villagers. This is clear proof that Johan never intended to help. He probably is not even a real priest. Who sent him then? That investigation is an adventure for another day...

SHADOWDARK ELDER CREATURES

An array of elder menaces by DM Valterink and Felipe Leñero



THE SPAWN OF IAUCXARRESS

HERE'S A COLLECTION of elder creatures to use in your grimdark-themed RPGs, designed for use with Shadowdark RPG. This collection includes monsters from varying power levels, and with a certain combat role in mind; you can mix and match according to your encounter needs. At the end of the article, we suggest a few encounters for your games.

These creatures from the far reaches of the multiverse arrived in our world with unknown purposes. Their names were lost to time along with ancient civilizations even before humanoids populated the lands. Some of them still gather a following through cults to their alien names, although humanoids struggle to pronounce them. But these creatures are content with just having them at their disposal, making them perform dark and complex rituals to ensure their following's faithfulness.



CNAACNULBH

Combat Role: Brute Soldier

THIS CREATURE CAN sense vibrations on surfaces, being able to detect victims from far corridors, above or below. This spawn of Iaucxarres thirsts for blood; they are Iaucxarres's first wave of spawn to every new planet that it arrives to, in an attempt to gain control of its sentient inhabitants, thus creating fear.

AC 15, HP 23, ATK 2 rend +4 (1d8), **MV** near, **S +3, D +1, C +3, I +1, W +0, Ch +0, AL C, LV 4.**

Cosmic Senses. Doubles the range of hearing and vision while in the dark.

Dark Necessities. Darkness makes the Cnaacnulbh thirsty for blood; its movement changes to double near while it stays within complete darkness.



TRIOGIL

Combat Role: Artillery Striker (Far).

AS COMMANDERS OF the Cnaacnulbh, they create the conditions for them to become deranged against their opponents, ensuring that the invaded civilizations are driven mad from fear.

AC 14, **HP** 26, **ATK** 3 spells +5 (1 Burst Flame), **MV** near, **S** +0, **D** -2, **C** +0, **I** +3, **W** +0, **Ch** +0, **AL** C, **LV** 5.

Burst Flame (INT) DC 12. One fire in far bursts into flames. 3d6 damage to creatures within a near-sized cube. The fire is immediately extinguished.

Dark Hole (INT). DC 13. One target, 1d8 damage.

Wall Crawler. The Triogil can meld into walls and pass through them as their turn's movement.



YOD'IDHRITL

Combat Role: Controller

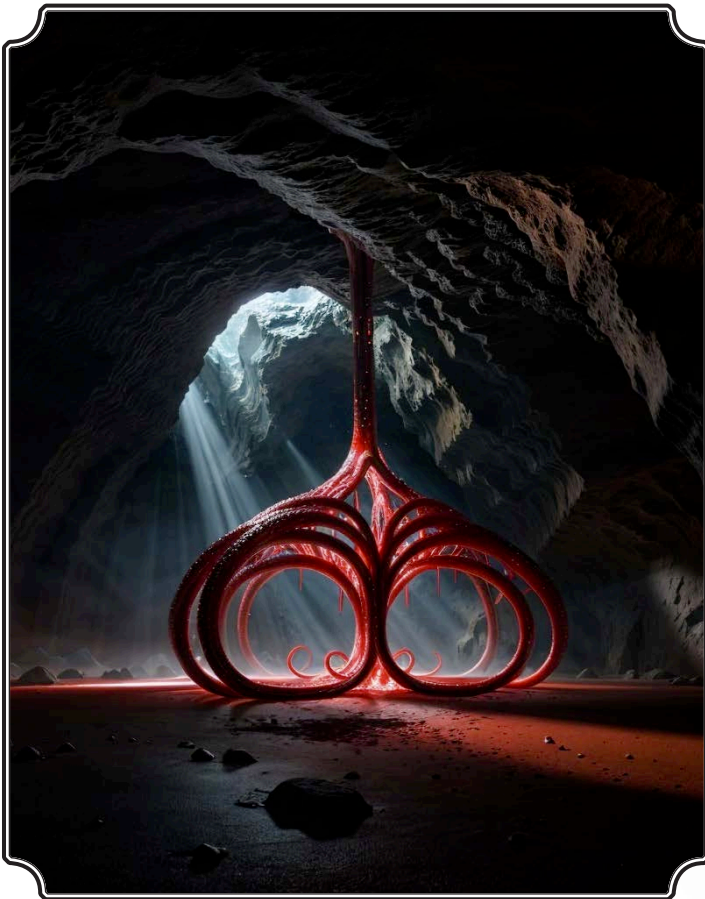
THIS CREATURE POSES as an architectonic structure of alien design. But once sentient creatures walk inside of it, all kinds of terrors fall upon them. It is made of flesh that seems to writhe and slither once it shows its true nature; otherwise looks like finely worked red marble. The few that have survived after running into it in secret places are left with madness, locked in asylums only speaking of the terrible things they saw under its spell. Others speak of vast landscapes made of countless Yod'idhrityl arranged in city-like structures.

AC 11, **HP** 51, **ATK** 3 grasp +6 (1d6 + oneiric t.), **MV** none, **S** +3, **D** -2, **C** +3, **I** +0, **W** +0, **Ch** +0, **AL** C, **LV** 10.

Grasp. Attacked creatures are grappled and lifted 10 feet above ground. DC 15 STR to free themselves.

Oneiric Terrors. Grappled creatures must perform a DC 15 INT check or fall unconscious. The creature suffers from night terrors that deal 1d6 damage at the start of its turn. A creature can repeat the check to regain consciousness after receiving damage.

Contact Iaucxarress. When a Yod'idhrityl is defeated, it contacts Iaucxarress immediately. A sentient creature that positions itself beneath the Yod'idhrityl's dying body can see Iaucxarress in its mind and can ask one question that will be answered. The creature takes 3d10 psychic damage (DC 15 INT check for half). Wall crawler. The Triogil can meld into walls and pass through them as their turn's movement.



KTHAOMBRID

Combat Role: Soldier

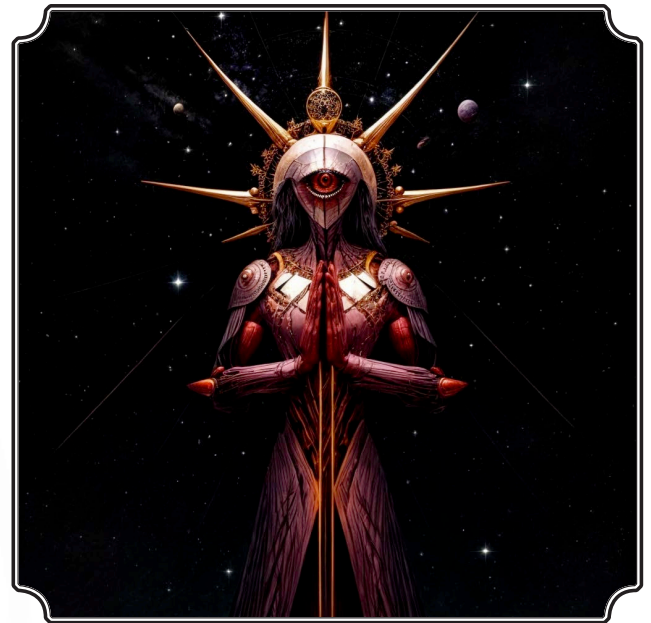
THESE SOLDIERS ARE eyes of all-seeing; they are the beacons and heralds of Iaucxarress. They feed on the planet's core while creating a beacon so their creator can arrive at a planet with sentient life forms.

AC 15, HP 58, ATK 2 blade of nightmares +9 (1d10) and 1 death prayer +7, **MV** near, **S +1, D 0, C +3, I +2, W +5, Ch +4, AL L, LV 12.**

Impervious. Only damaged by magical sources. Immune to hostile tier-3 spells or lower.

Truesight. Can see all invisible creatures and objects.

Death Prayer. DC 15. One target of LV 10 or less drops to 0 HP (DC 15 CON check).



IAUCXARRESS

Combat Role: Legendary Leader

IT FEEDS ON bad dreams, they call it the nightmare of the void; these leaders are selected through nightmares and guided by friendly Triogil to the dark places where Iaucxarress hides. It feeds on nightmares from sentient creatures. Instead of driving them to extinction, it provokes fear among them, and enjoys the cults they tend to form. It commands its cultists to do terrible things, thus creating delicious nightmares that it can feed on.

AC 17, HP 82 ATK 2 evil eye +9 (2d12, near) and 3 spells +9 **MV** near, **S +0, D +0, C +4, I +6, W +4, Ch +5, AL C, LV 21.**

Legendary. Only damaged by magical sources. Hostile spells targeting Iaucxarress are DC 18 to cast.

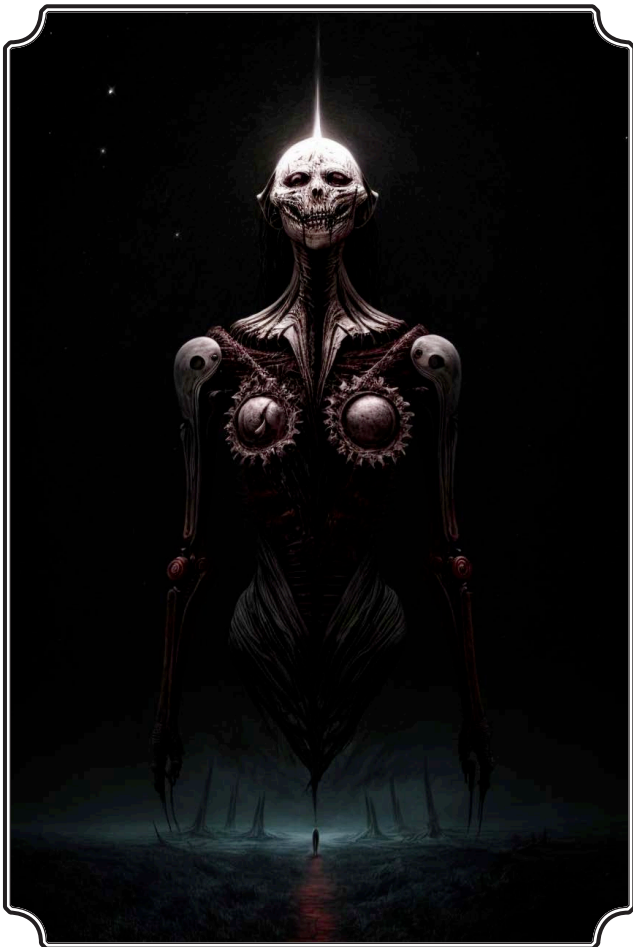
Creation of Venerability. DC 12. Target instantly ages 1d6 x 10 years (DC 15 CON).

Elder Spawn. Once per day, DC 18, 3-in-6 chance of summoning a Cnaacnulbh. 2-in-6 chance of summoning a Triogil. 1-in-6 chance of summoning a Yod'idhritl.

Dampen Light. DC 14. Creates a far zone of darkness by playing a cursed melody that is perceived as otherworldly music played by indescribable instruments that seem to reach from the vastest ridges of the universe.

Chant of Madness. DC 15. While Dampen Light is active, Iaucxarress sings with its alien voice, creating a dissonant melody that drives anyone who hears it mad. This chant doubles the actions of all its spawn up to far range. Creatures that are not Iaucxarress's spawn take 5d8 psychic damage (DC 15 INT check).

Dream Eater. DC 14. Absorbs 3d8 HP from unconscious targets.



THREAT IN THE DESERT

Reaching the core of Gondi Desert is not for the faint of heart. Are you sure you want to risk this for treasure? The locals respect the desert for a reason.

Concerned Desert Dweller



A horrid monster inhabits the depths of Gondi Desert. Some call it the fire serpent, others the scourge of the sand, but scholars call it the remorhaz. It is a massive, blue centipede with neck hoods and red-hot spine spikes. This abomination usually dwells in arctic climates but a few claim arid deserts as their home. The remorhaz in Gondi Desert predates all nearby settlements and has become a legendary presence in the region. The locals know its patterns and hunting grounds. Thus, they avoid and respect the beast's home as it has proven too strong to be slain.

Something changed a few months ago that caused the remorhaz to change its behavior. A magical jewel, the *Heart of the Desert*, an enchanted topaz in the serpent's lair radiates an aura that has awakened a heightened territoriality in the fire serpent. The remorhaz now travels further than before and attacks travelers, caravans, and has even attacked a few settlements in the region. The locals are unable to confront the monster and look for a way to solve the problem. The lair's location is known but no one dares come close to the place, especially with the monster's increased aggressiveness.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Monster Hunting. A representative of several small settlements named Adallu offers a hefty reward to monster-hunters and mercenaries willing to risk their lives to save the region and defeat the remorhaz. The representative explains that the monster is a formidable opponent that has bested strong warriors in the past. Adallu also offers a map of the Gondi Desert with the last known location of the serpent's lair. Adallu recommends the party hire a guide and buy appropriate attire and gear to traverse the dangerous arid landscape (60 gp, 6 XP).

Seeking Rare Ingredients. Scholars and warriors may be aware that the outer layers of the remorhaz's insectoid armor can be fashioned into resilient pieces of armor and shields. In addition, the teeth and bones of the fire serpent can be used to craft weaponry of legendary quality. Such materials are hard to come by and may prove useful for the characters' ultimate adventuring goals. After defeating the remorhaz, the party may collect the useful parts to be crafted into gear (4 XP).

Level 5 Adventure

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every 3 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** There is light outdoors and in area 8. Other areas are dark. Desert denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Night Heat.** Within a mile of the lair, the desert is extremely hot, even at night (see **Extreme Conditions**).

RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	Six injured peasants come across the party in the desert. They managed to escape the remorhaz's ambush but now lack supplies and gear to survive the desert.
2	Four desert-dwellers guards heard of the expedition and catch up with the party. They want to help.
3	The remorhaz roars causing the floor to shake. The outside air becomes overheated. 1d4 damage (DC 12 CON).
4	Six thieves (thugs) in camels approach the lair. They demand the characters surrender their goods. If the characters are inside the lair, the thugs rob their camp.
5	A strong wind current blows through the caverns, snuffing out fires and any uncovered light sources.
6	2d4 ankhegs tunnel out of the sand in an ambush and spray acid at the party and their mounts/gear.
7	The sand vibrates and forms concentric patterns for a moment before a swarm of scarabs emerges from the dune. The insect swarm fights to the death.
8	A giant scorpion with a female human head emerges from the loose soil. The strange creature speaks in Primordial and claims that the <i>Heart of the Desert</i> has awoken. It beckons the party to leave at once as the arcane jewel must remain where it is to avoid mortals from handling it. The scorpion declares that mankind is not equipped to wield such power. The strange being fights the characters if they refuse to leave without the gem.

EXTREME CONDITIONS

Traversing Gondi Desert is a dangerous affair due to the extreme heat. Characters without the appropriate attire and supplies suffer a cumulative -1 to all checks per day in the desert. Traveling without getting lost or finding shelter requires a DC 12 WIS check. The party may also hire a local guide (5 sp per day) to perform these checks for them. The GM is free to impose additional setbacks for the characters based on their actions.

1. TRAVERSING THE DESERT

Harsh days of traveling across the inhospitable Gondi Desert lead to an arid wasteland scourged by dry wind. The terrain slants toward a dark chasm.

► **Glass Shards.** Under the uppermost layer of sand, there are irregularly-shaped shards of glass. Artisans or blacksmiths know that these are caused when sand is exposed to extreme heat (DC 14 INT check).

2. THE CHASM

The rough opening into the depths of the desert is 30 feet deep. The remorhaz burrows its way down from any direction, constant movement caused this deep crevasse.

► **Descent.** Falling to area 3 deals 2d6 damage. The characters can carefully climb down the chasm side (DC 13 STR check/advantage with climbing gear).

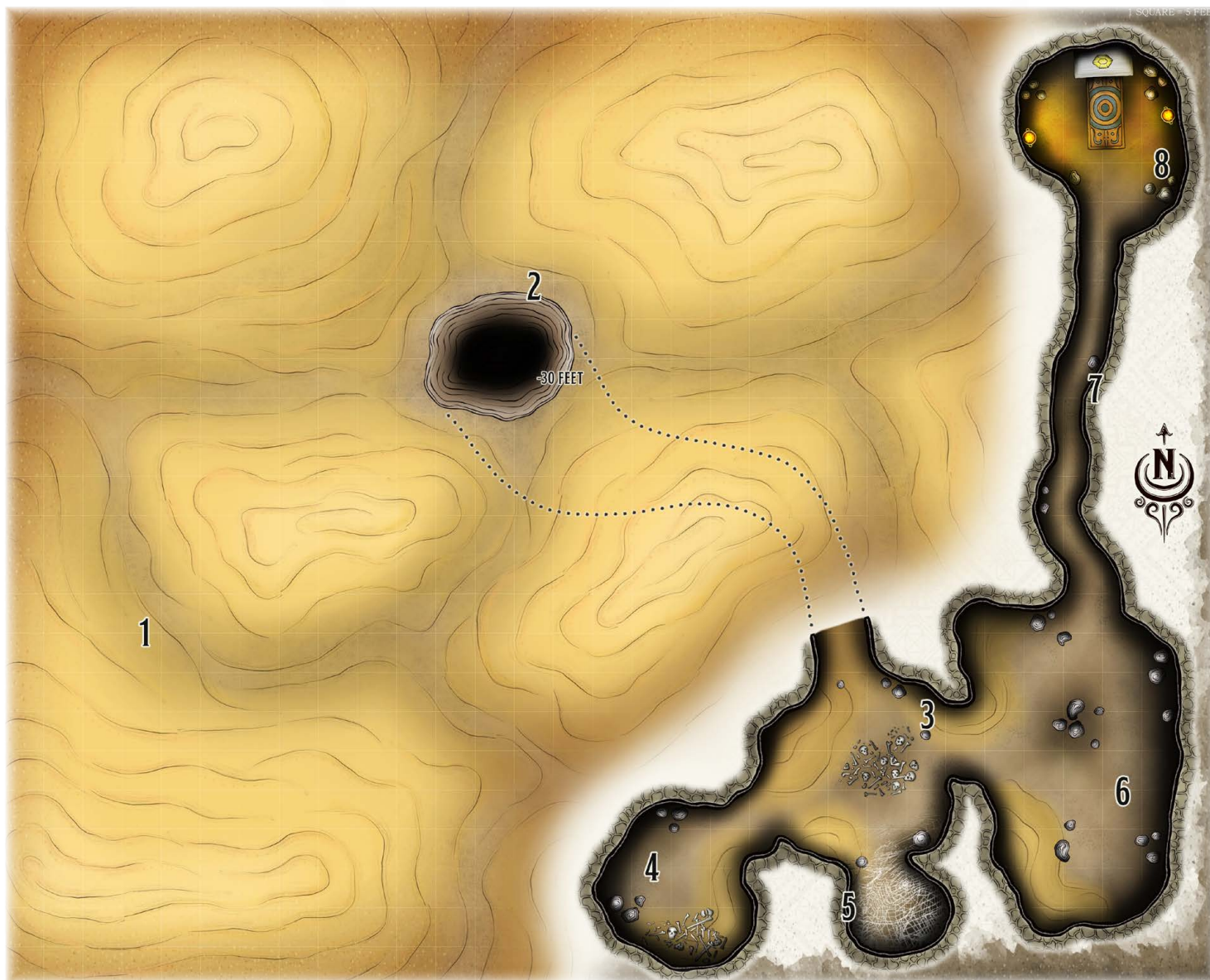
► **Geological Marks.** The layers of soil in the chasm reveal a yellow layer every 10 feet. The gem's awakening causes this every thousand years (DC 16 INT check).

3. BED OF BONES

The desolate tunnel leads to a large underground chamber littered with hundreds of humanoid bones. The remains shift and tremble to an unheard tune.

► **The Remains.** Inspecting the bones for 1 **crawling round** reveals that the majority of them belong to humanoid species. The bones are recent, only a few weeks old, and must come from the recently-attacked travelers. A *detect magic* spell reveals a strange aura on the bones. Interacting with them causes six **skeletons** to rise and attack. The undead utter whatever the person in life said in its last minutes of life. Cries from ambushed travelers.

► **Cave Paintings.** Strange, washed-out illustrations on the walls depict pilgrims visiting the desert to worship a glimmering gemstone. Inspecting the paintings for 1 **crawling round** reveals that the gem, named the *Heart of the Desert*, was revered and respected. One image shows a priest conducting a moonlit ritual to appease the spirit that resides within the magical topaz stone.



4. TOMB OF WARRIORS

The bones are arranged in a grim mound like the ones in area 3. Along with the bones, there are scraps of melted weaponry and burnt leather armor. Inspecting the melting patterns and the scorch marks in the armor scraps foreshadows the remorhaz's Melt ability.

5. THE SPIDER LAIR

A small cavern is covered in thick spiderwebs. Hundreds of spiders crawl on the fine silk strands. A glint of glowing metal can be seen beyond the deep webs.

► **The Arachnids.** Apart from the **swarm of spiders**, a **giant spider** is hidden in the darkness above (DC 14 WIS to spot it). These creatures live in symbiosis with the remorhaz who brings food to them to cover in silk for long-term storage. Silk cocoons of three hapless people hang from the web strands. They were desert-dwellers and perished from dehydration a few days ago.

► **Treasure (5 XP).** The corpse of an adventurer still grasps a **+1 shortsword** with a gold-inlaid hilt. It has this property: Regain 1d6 hit points when you slay a creature.



6. THE FIRE SERPENT

The world trembles as the soil is pushed away to reveal a heat-producing centipede. Its massive jaws are large enough to swallow a person whole.

► **The Remorhaz.** The powerful desert-dwelling abomination burrows out of the soil to protect the northern passage. The **remorhaz** is a merciless predator that fights with the efficiency of a trained killer. If the **giant spider** in area 5 still lives, it approaches to join the fire serpent. When dropped to 1/3 of its Hit Points, the remorhaz attempts to burrow away and flee. It confronts the party again after they reach area 1 again later.

7. PAINTINGS FROM A BYGONE WORLD

The northbound passage is covered in paintings that portray a cabal of warriors protecting a gemstone in the desert. Many lose their lives guarding the gem.

Careful inspection over 1 **crawling round** of the paintings and the runes below them reveals that there was once a sworn order or protectors who guarded the **Heart of the Desert** from would-be thieves. Their leader also performed a ceremony to appease the spirit in the gem.

► **The Ritual.** A wizard can study the runes for 1 hour to learn the **Ritual of Peace**. Performing it on the topaz stone in area 8 stops it from affecting the remorhaz.

8. THE HEART OF THE DESERT

A large, shimmering, multi-faceted topaz gemstone sits on a stone plinth. Magical eddies and tendrils of arcane forces ebb from it. Truly a marvel to behold!

The **Heart of the Desert** is a relic from a bygone world that contains the spirit of a primordial spirit. Its power is immeasurable and beyond the comprehension of mortals. A spellcaster that inspects the gemstone carefully determines that even touching it might prove too dangerous for mortal souls (DC 11 INT check). If a person dares to touch the **Heart of the Desert**, they experience a vision in which a mighty giant being looks down on them with disappointment. Then they die (DC 16 CON check).

DEVELOPMENT

SLAYING THE REMORHAZ or casting the **Ritual of Peace** in area 8 allows the activities in Gondi Desert to return to normal. Adallu is happy to pay the party the promised reward after a job well done. After disposing of the remorhaz, the characters can collect its outer carapace layers, teeth, and spikes for fashioning mighty gear.

If the characters manage to remove the **Heart of the Desert** from the dungeon, they attract the attention of extraplanar and primordial beings. However, dealing with those threats is an adventure for another day..

THE IMPERIAL PRISON

Welcome to the imperial prison. Stay put and obedient and you may be fed. Disobey and you'll be the first to be interrogated, tortured, and processed...

Warden Gaston Knowles

The last stop in a life of crime and rebellion is either death or prison. Perhaps death is the gentler alternative; living in a cell is hell on earth. Little mercy is shown to inmates. In some places, they become the playthings of torturers and sick, madmen. In some gruesome cases, convicts are used as experimental subjects in medical or magical procedures. Their extended survival is not expected.

FOR ARCANES KNOWLEDGE

THE IMPERIAL PRISON is located on the outskirts of the kingdom's capital, Ardennia. Less than a mile from the city walls, a small, one-story keep is the place where convicts of the most heinous crimes are sent. Many wonder why the high-security prison is located beyond the city walls but few know the truth. The court wizard, Lord Vlanderberg, conducts evil experiments on the hapless inmates to further his proficiency with the necromantic arts. The emperor supports his efforts despite their illegality and immorality. All because Vlanderberg's prowess and creations are often useful to the corrupt ruler.

Thus, the imperial prison is just a front for the wizard's nefarious activities. More often than not, the culprits of petty crimes are sent to the imperial prison only because the wizard is low on test subjects. The nefarious activities that occur in the compound are yet to be revealed.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Wrongful Imprisonment. The characters have been arrested and transported to the imperial prison. They have been singled out by the authorities as rabble-rousers or rebels. Whether these accusations are accurate or not depends on the characters' recent deeds and the GM's interpretation. The characters, gagged and blindfolded, are moved to area 8 where they must plan their escape before they are tortured or interrogated (0 XP).

Prison Break. Adam Kirks, the son of a noble is captive in the imperial prison. There is a large reward for freeing this man. There are rumors about inmates being changed beyond recognition or disfigured by torture and interrogations. The characters plan to raid the prison and break their friend out. They must gain access to the underground compound to do so (50 gp, 4 XP).

Level 4 Adventure

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas have braziers with permanent *light* spells; the rest are dark. No denizens are **dark-adapted**.

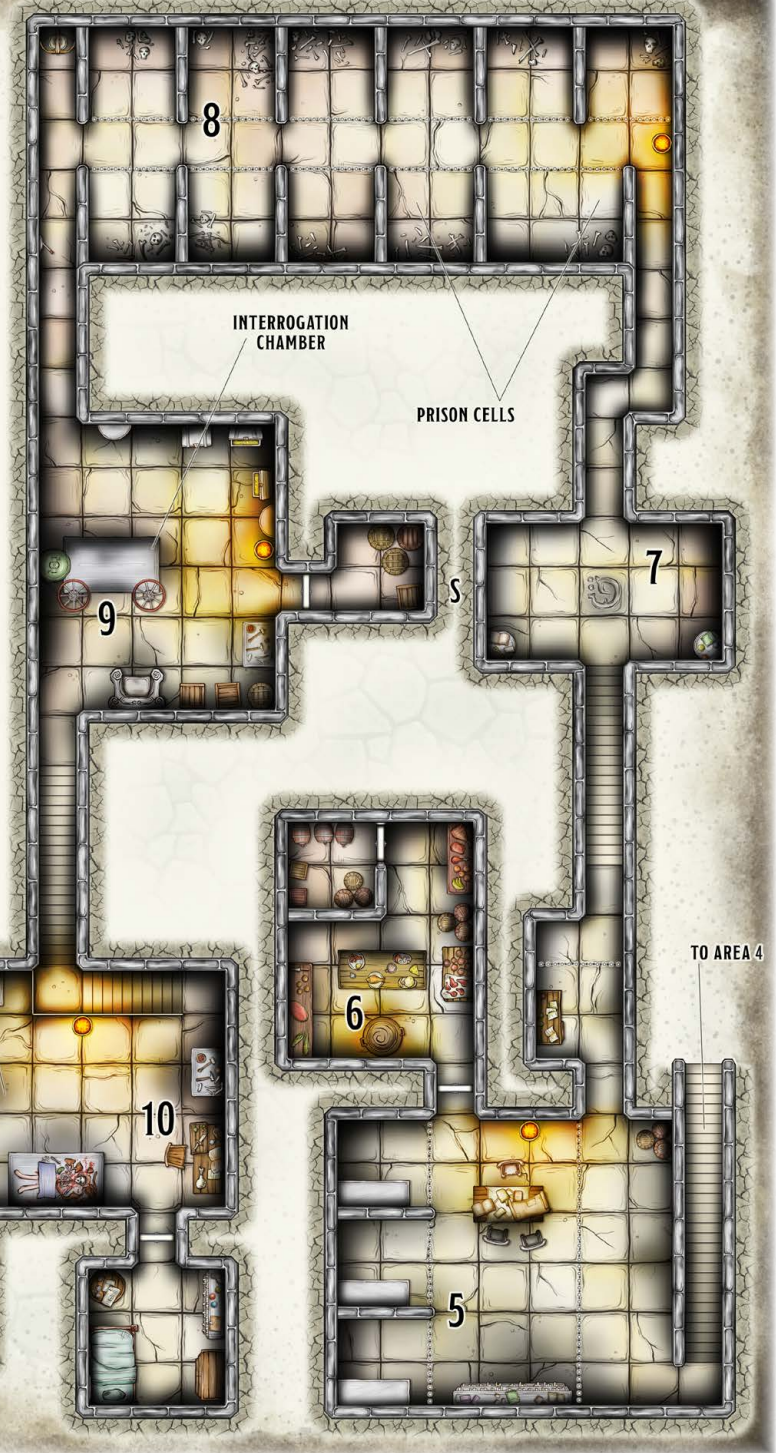
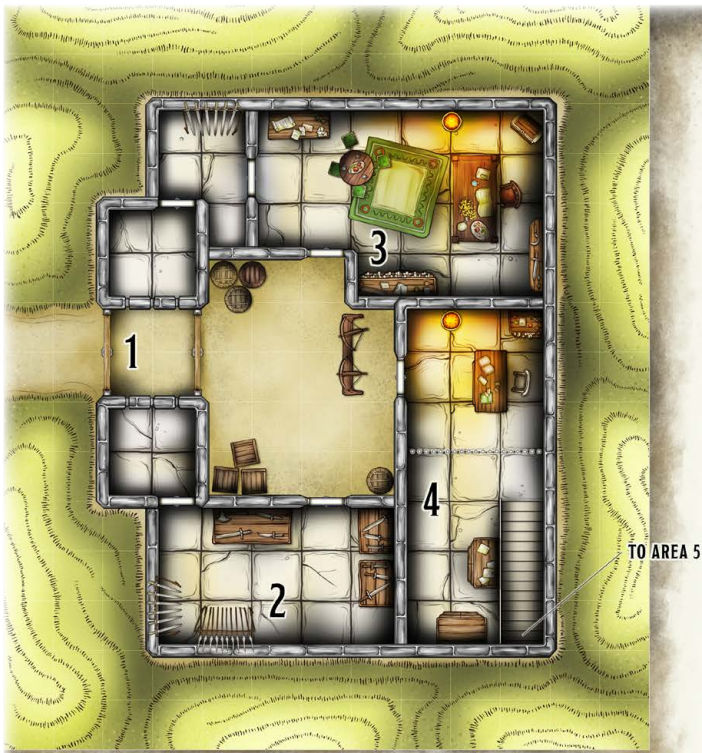
► **Speed Alarm.** Creatures moving at full speed within the underground compound trigger a silent alarm that alerts the prison warden in area 3. Characters can prevent this by spotting the speed sensors on some ceilings and inspecting them with a *detect magic* spell.

RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	Two guards approach the party's location. The armored guards are distracted and only carry daggers.
2	All personnel end their shifts and abandon their posts. For 1 crawling round , the prison guards move toward the keep to return home. The prison is unguarded for 1 crawling round before the new shift arrives.
3	A ghost appears before the party. The former criminal claims his body was used for nefarious experiments nearby and begs the party to bury his remains (area 10).
4	Three zombies escape the laboratory and are on the loose. They have no loyalties and may attack the guards.
5	A shattering roar can be heard through the walls. Its origin and nature remain a mystery. It was the abominate, undead monster trapped in a cell in area 12.
6	The outline of a pressure plate obstructs passage, if triggered, an axe swings down. It deals 1d6 damage unless the target jumps out of the way quickly (DC 14 DEX).
7	A desperate, cudgel-wielding inmate escapes from area 11 and catches up with the party (Reaction check).
8	An arcane malfunction in the laboratory (area 10) causes all magic braziers to fizzle out for 1 crawling round .

ESCAPING THE PRISON

To facilitate the exploration of the prison compound, it is expected that the party begins their period of captivity in area 8. At least one of the characters is located elsewhere, the strongest are placed in the high-security cells (area 11). Regarding the gear the characters possessed when arrested, it is randomly split between the interrogation chamber (area 9) and the shelves and wooden crates in the prison landing (area 5).



1. KEEP GATE

Two sets of 20-foot-tall wooden doors are the only way in or out of the keep. In between the sets of mahogany doors, there are three sets of murder-holes that the guards are trained to take advantage of if required.

► **The Doors.** The doors are reinforced with steel corners and beams. A ram is required to break through them. Tools can bypass the locks (DC 15 DEX check).

► **The Holes.** Each orifice is half-a-foot wide and allows the guards to attack with spears from the adjoining rooms. Only long, piercing weapons can be used as such.

2. ARMORY

The room contains enough weaponry and leather armor to equip a twenty-strong platoon. Most of the weapons are forged from iron and run-of-the-mill quality.

► **The Guards.** Two **guards** are stationed here at all times, tasked with arming other staff in case of an attack. Their station is often boring and there is a 2-in-6 chance they are sleeping when the characters come.

► **Treasure (1 XP).** The room contains ten spears, six longswords, seven shortswords, and ten sets of leather armor. It can all be sold for 10 gp wholesale.

3. WARDEN'S OFFICE

The warden's lavish office is decorated with embroidered rugs, oil paintings, and varnished furnishing.

Warden Gaston Knowles (**knight**) is usually here taking care of the paperwork and giving orders. He is a participant in the evil schemes that occur below but mostly looks the other way and pretends it is beyond him. The Warden fights only if cornered; he is prone to order the garrison to full alert and to rush for his horse and flee to Ardennia, the capital, if he is aware of a prison break.

► **The Documents.** Inspecting the papers on shelves and the warden's desk for 1 **crawling round** reveals accurate logs of inmates brought to the prison in the last 10 years. For at least 3 years, many convicts have been brought for petty reasons when the prison population drops below five inmates. The reasons remain unclear.

► **Treasure (4 XP).** The locked chest (DC 14 DEX) behind the warden's desk contains a leather sack with 450 sp, the checkpoint's key, and a *potion of healing*.

4. KEEP CHECKPOINT

An iron grating screen with a complex locking mechanism divides the chamber. On the south side, a descending staircase leads into the underground areas.

This chamber is the only access to the prison below. Only the Warden (area 3) and the prison deputy (area 5), have the key to this grating gate but the lock can also be circumvented with fine tools (DC 14 DEX check).

5. PRISON LANDING AND CELLS

The prison deputy (**thug**) is behind the desk. Four **guards** keep an eye on the three communal cells. Each contains 2d3 new low-risk inmates (**peasants**). If freed, half of them may aid the party in their short-term goals.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** The shelf contains stuff confiscated from inmates. A dagger, 10 gp, and a *potion of vitality*.

6. KITCHEN AND LARDER

Cooks work endlessly to prepare meals for both the garrison and the inmate population. The food quality is considerably different between the two groups. Small characters can crawl up the smoke exhaust to the surface.

7. THE TRAP ROOM

The mostly-empty room contains two small shelves and an engraved rune in the center of the room.

Observant characters spot the shooting orifices on the walls (DC 14 WIS). Inspecting the floor for 1 **crawling round** reveals the machinery under the central floor tile.

► **Poison Darts.** Stepping on the central tile causes a barrage of darts to shoot from the walls. All creatures in the area take 2d6 damage (DC 15 DEX for half).

8. MID-SECURITY CELLS

There are elven cells in the room. Each with iron bars and a medium-quality lock (DC 14 DEX check). Some are littered with the bone remains of convicts who were left to die after extreme torture and forceful interrogations. A **guard** patrols the area once per hour. He carries the key to all cells in a keyring in his belt. A prisoner can pull him and take the keys by force (DC 14 STR), or nimbly subtract the keys from him (DC 14 DEX check).

9. INTERROGATION CHAMBER

This chamber is filled with the grimmest torture devices. The floor is forever stained crimson in many spots from countless times blood has been spilled.

The deranged person in charge of torture and interrogation is a man named Xalter (**thug**). He works alone and enjoys inflicting untold misery upon the endless stream of prisoners that arrive at the imperial prison.

10. THE NEFARIOUS LABORATORY

This chamber contains the strange arcane devices of Lord Vlanderberg, the court wizard. Fortunately, he is in the capital at this time. Two **zombies** and two **apprentices** perform errands that the court wizard left them.

► **The Work Table.** The innards, organs, and skin of a hapless inmate are spread on the metal surface. The purpose of this baleful display remains obscure.

► **Revelation.** A spellcaster that inspects the paraphernalia and the documents discovers that the purpose of these experiments is to detach body parts and reassemble them to form a hellish abomination (DC 13 INT).

11. HIGH-SECURITY CELLS

These cells are in complete darkness and each features a high-quality lock (DC 15 DEX). Living inmates who have been used for arcane experiments are put here for the security of the staff and because they soon become mentally unstable. There are six people imprisoned here (**peasants**). Despite their poor mental state, they aid the characters if freed, at least in the short term.

12. THE ULTIMATE SERVANT

Three vault-like chambers are found before the large iron-barred area. Two are empty but the northernmost one contains Lord Vlanderberg's latest iteration of what he calls '*the ultimate servant*'. It is a twisted, 10-foot-tall zombie made from the bodies of at least twenty people. The mindless half-living creation is a **zombie** with these stat changes: HP 25, ATK 2 slams +4 (1d8), S +3 (LV 3).

The ultimate servant breaks from its vault-cell if any creature enters the large chamber in area 12. It then rushes there to attack. The mindless creature can be tricked into going toward area 10 and beyond and attacking the prison staff. It knows no limits nor master..

IS THAT KNIGHT ALRIGHT?

A quizzical outdoors encounter by Harmony the Bard



“Hark!” an armor-clad knight shouts with imposing authority. His sword is raised high into the sky to draw attention to himself. The helmed man looks around desperately.

The knight’s plate mail is visually striking and shines as it is immaculately clean. A regal gold lion head shines brightly on his breastplate. Ancient runes adorn his purple tunic.

Through his gold-trimmed helmet, the knight’s eyes can be seen wildly scanning the area. He appears to be incredibly paranoid. His movements are swift but clumsy, they lack style.

“Please, be cautious!” he says before abruptly checking behind his shoulder. *“A monster most fierce recently rampaged through this area. Though it seems the foul beast has fled for now.”*

The knight sheaths his longsword and reaches for a handshake. He says:

“Well met lads! I am Sir Hereward. I apologize for shouting at you. The adrenaline of battle ran through my veins. There has been an unusual increase in monster attacks and quite an unfortunate lack of heroes willing to defend the land. Perhaps that’s about to change, aye?”

Sir Hereward lets out a long, dramatic sigh. *“Tis a burden, surely. But I shall continue to thwart the twisted machinations of any insidious entity that wishes to conquer this land. I shall find the courage to”*- he flinches and looks behind him as if he was nearly hit by a projectile- *“by the Gods!”* Sir Hereward draws his sword, turns around, and dashes in a random direction while screaming *“Have at thee, you barbarous brute!”*, the knight’s voice becomes fainter as he moves further away.

After a minute of wildly swinging his sword in the air, Sir Hereward returns to the conversation. He is out of breath from his odd outburst. He huffs and puffs for a moment before addressing the party.

“Did you see that? What sort of eldritch abomination was that? Never before hath my eyes witnessed such a cursed sight. Do not fear! I landed a great hit and managed to deliver a grievous injury, but I know not where it fled. Tell me, did you see where that monster went?”

Characters that interact with Sir Hereward notice that, while he sounds incredibly sincere, something seems out of place. A character might notice it is Sir Hereward's armor what causes him to see things (DC 12 WIS check).

SIR HEREWARD'S SECRET

SIR HEREWARD IS a valiant knight- or so he believes. Truthfully, the commoner inside the shiny armor is a goofy history enthusiast who purchased a 'historically accurate cosmetic suit of armor'. The cursed armor causes him to randomly see and hear horrific monsters. His mind has been warped and he now believes he is a knight destined to vanquish those monsters.

Sir Hereward cannot be convinced that his armor is cursed, though. He becomes incredibly frustrated if characters inform him that he is simply hallucinating. Characters notice the change in his demeanor immediately.

If a character attempts to touch Sir Hereward, asks him to remove his armor, or claims that he is not a knight, he begins to hallucinate that the characters are vicious monsters attempting to end his life.

Characters can attempt to break the curse by forcibly removing Sir Hereward's helmet (DC 14 STR check). Alternatively, reducing Sir Hereward to 0 HP or knocking him unconscious allows a character to remove the helmet without making a Strength check.

When Sir Hereward's helmet is removed, the commoner inside the armor returns to his senses. His face is carved with an expression of extreme confusion and his voice squeaks with concern. *"W-what is the meaning of this?! Where am I? Who are you?"*

After hearing from the characters, the commoner meekly responds *"T-thank you for your help. I... uh... never thought the decorative armor I purchased would drive me mad with monstrous hallucinations and a passion for battle. I appreciate you saving me from that fate. My real name is Albrecht, by the way."*

Albrecht's face lights up with a sudden realization. *"I need to get back to my family. I'm sure they're worried sick. Please, if you think it's worth your time, take the armor with you. I paid about 50 gold pieces for it. Maybe you will get the same from another collector. Just... please warn them about the curse."* Albrecht bows to show his gratitude one last time and begins his journey home.

SIR HEREWARD

A knight in shining armor who perceives creatures that others do not.

AC 16 (plate), **HP** 6, **ATK** 1 longsword +2 (1d8), **MV** near, **S** +1, **D** -1, **C** +0, **I** +0, **W** +1, **Ch** +0, **AL** L, **LV** 1

ARMOR OF HEREWARD

A dazzling set of plate mail armor with intricate engravings and a matching helm.

► **Bonus.** +1 to AC.

► **Benefit.** The armor is unbreakable and never loses its shine.

► **Curse.** A horrible hex affects whoever wears it. The armor causes its wearer to randomly hallucinate terrible, bloodthirsty monsters. The wearer either flees or feels compelled to wage battle against these hallucinations. What is worse, however, is that wearer always "barely" escapes, or makes it out alive from the confrontations. Making this an eternal, paranoid, jumpy way of life.



CORVINUS FAMILY CRYPT

The tragedy that befell the Corvinus family is unlike anything else humankind has faced in eons. Cursed are their souls... Cursed are their descendants...

Almanac of the Great Families

The never-ending search for power and might is the demise of magic-users when they reach their mortal limits. Magic is a powerful tool but its usefulness and reach are limited by mankind's short lifespan and fragile body. Alas, those that reach this limit often strive to find a way to circumvent the laws of the world by binding and siphoning the life-force of extraplanar beings. There is a belief that it is possible to extract the power of an otherworldly entity to change the human body and achieve immortality. Alas, most wizards who attempt this bring unfiltered tragedy.

THE CORVINUS MASSACRE

FOR A HUNDRED years, the patriarch of the once-powerful Corvinus family spent endless resources to fund a powerful wizard's research. Their goal was to summon and bind a devil from hell. Its energy would be used to make Lord Corvinus the immortal patriarch of the family. Alas, he overestimated the expertise of this mage. When the time came, a mighty devil was brought forth into the Material Plane. But the wizard perished trying to bind the devil. The evil entity then cursed the Corvinus Lord for his naive attempts and laid waste to as many family members as he could before vanishing. Most died. The remains were interred in the family crypt which is a reminder of that baleful day. A week ago, the undead Corvinus poured out of the crypt gate and attacked nearby areas. The watch has failed to stop the undead.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Local Heroes. Sir Ardant Hoovin, the bailiff, offers a reward to mercenaries for getting rid of the dangerous undead in the Corvinus Family crypt. He has lost too many men trying to solve this and cannot compromise the town's watch anymore. Fortunately, the bailiff possesses a floor-plan of the Corvinus crypt and freely shares it with whoever takes the deal (40 gp, 4 XP).

Learning the Truth. A member of the party has experienced vivid dreams in the past few weeks. In these dreams, they see an impossibly large, upside-down tree where hundreds of people hang like ripe fruit. At the very bottom, they see themselves. The character feels the urge to visit the crypt. The truth lies there (0 XP).

Level 3 Adventure

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 3 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas have braziers with ever-burning fires; the rest are dark. The undead are **dark-adapted**.

► **Necromancy Aura.** All undead in the dungeon have a +2 bonus to checks against hostile magical effects.

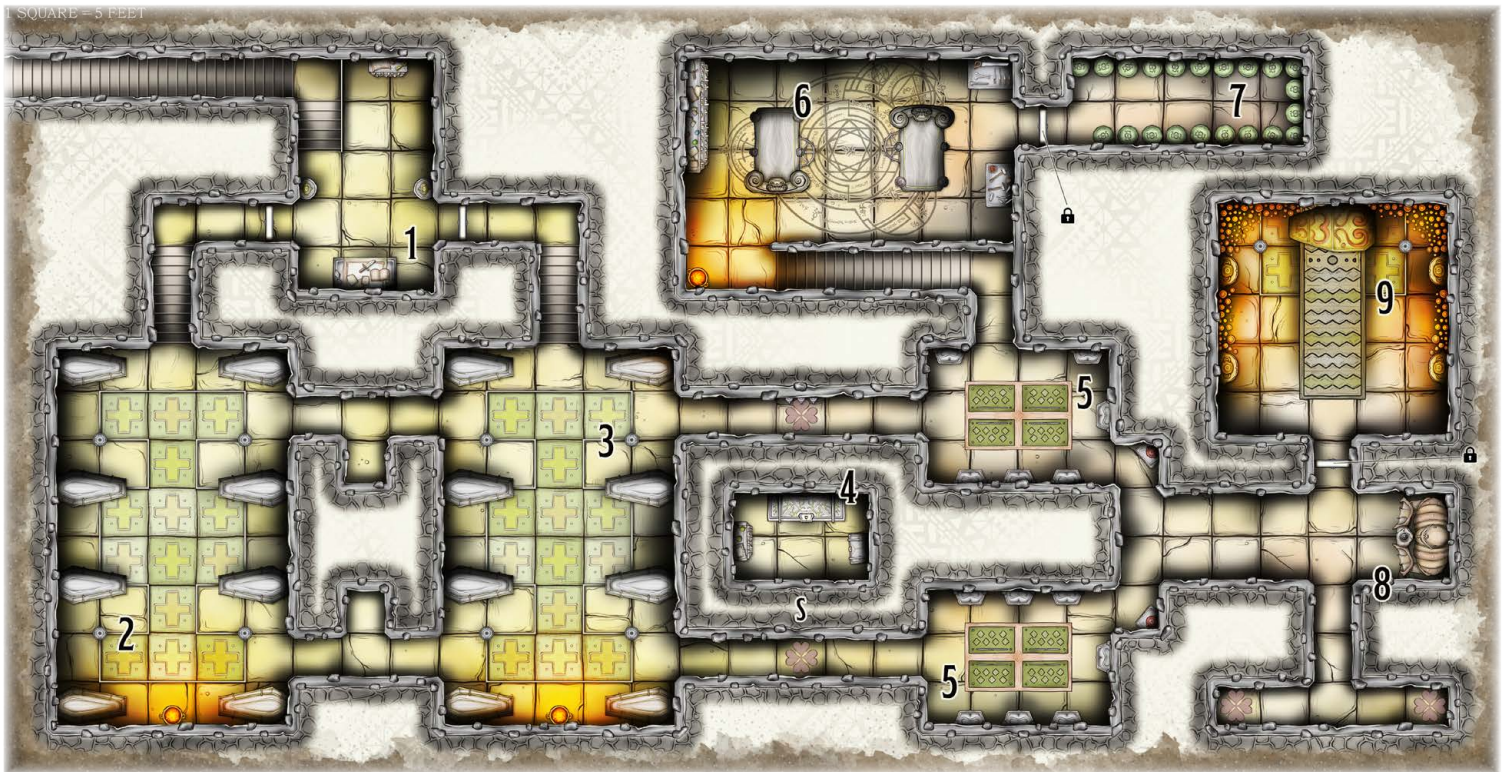
► **Smells and Sounds.** The stench of death and decay pervades the dungeon. The occasional sound of undead creatures growling and shrieking breaks the silence.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A wandering ghast approaches the party. It carries jewelry and fine clothes (10 gp, 1 XP). The ferocious ghast prioritizes attacking wizards or priests in the group.
2	Four peasant farmers with torches and pitchforks arrive at the dungeon looking to help. They want to join their party and assist how they can to defeat the dead.
3	Johann, a scholar and apprentice , arrives at the dungeon. He claims that the sudden awakening of the dead in the crypt must also mean that a descendant of the Corvinus family is nearby. At least, some astronomical predictions seem to point to this fact, he says.
4	A pressure-sensitive plate lies ahead (DC 11 WIS to spot). Stepping on it triggers a barrage of poisoned needles to shoot from a nearby wall. Creatures in their way take 2d6 poison damage (DC 13 CON check).
5	A strong wind current blows through the chambers, snuffing out fires, uncovered light sources, and the dungeon's braziers. They reignite after 1 crawling round .
6	Four ghouls meander through the dungeon or the grounds outside the crypt. The ravenous undead attack on sight, fight to the death, and prioritize creatures wearing the least amount of armor due to their hunger.

BLOOD IN THE GAME

Not all of the Corvinus perished in the aftermath of the devilish ritual. A few survived, their descendants abandoned the family name to avoid persecution. A random character in the party might unknowingly be a distant Corvinus relative. Such a fact may be learned from the genealogy tomes in area 6. In addition, the family tie gives the character disadvantage on checks against the mind-controlling powers of Lord Corvinus.



1. ENTRANCE HALL

The Corvinus mausoleum on the surface leads down a staircase to a dark landing with two gilded vases and a stone plinth littered with odd trinkets.

► **Tracks.** The prints and wall scratches of undead creatures go up and down the staircase (DC 12 WIS check).

► **The Vases.** The gilded containers once held holy water but have been tainted by the recent awakening of the undead. The fluid within is dark green and corrosive. It deals 1d6 damage when poured on any creature.

► **The Tome.** Laid open on the plinth, there is a historical recount of the day when most members of the powerful Corvinus family died. The characters can spend 1 **crawling round** to learn the outline of what happened then.

2. WEST TOMB

Eight stone sarcophagi line the walls of this funerary chamber lit by a single brazier by the far wall. The lavish and opulent enclosures are fit for nobility.

► **The Sarcophagi.** Each sarcophagus contains the remains of an important member of the Corvinus family. Their names are imprinted on plaques by the enclosure's base. Six of them contain **skeletons** that emerge to attack when any of the sarcophagi lids are removed.

► **Necromancy.** A priest can inspect the undead remains and determine that their recent awakening was caused by a strong evil presence nearby (DC 14 WIS).

► **Treasure (2 XP).** Spending 1 **crawling round** inspecting the sarcophagi yields 10 gp and 120 sp.

3. EAST TOMB

The contents of this chamber are similar to the ones in area 2 with the difference that there are only four **skeletons** in the sarcophagi. Treasure found is halved (1 XP).

► **The Calling.** A calling can be felt when the party arrives at this chamber. If a descendant of the Corvinus family is present (see **Adventure Hooks**), they feel an unstoppable urge to rush to area 9 (DC 11 WIS to resist).

4. THE SECRET VAULT

Two hallways connect area 3 with the two areas labeled area 5. Each hallway features a clover-shaped, pressure-sensitive plate in the middle. The plates are triggered with a weight of 50 pounds. Complex clockwork machinery triggered by the two plates controls access to the secret vault and activates a dangerous fire jet trap.

► **The Door.** The outline of the vault's door can be discerned in the south hallway by observant crawlers (DC 13 WIS). But the way to open the secret door is elusive.

► **The North Plate.** Stepping on this plate causes the secret door in the south hallway to open. The wall moving produces little sound (DC 14 WIS to notice).

► **The South Plate.** Stepping on this plate causes fire jets to shoot from the north hallway wall. Whoever stands on the north plate takes 3d6 damage (DC 14 DEX for half). Crouching on the plate grants advantage.

► **Treasure (7 XP).** The vault contains two coffers with 40 gp, 300 sp, a set of chainmail armor, two oil flasks, *magic ink*, and a *potion of healing*. The bookcase contains two scrolls: *create undead* and *animate dead*.

5. TOMBS OF LESSER NOBILITY

Standing sarcophagi brandishing the bygone Corvinus' sigil in silver inlays line the walls of this dark chamber. An embroidered rug covers part of the floor.

► **The Enclosures.** Close relatives and merchant sponsors of the Corvinus family are interred here, their names etched on the sarcophagus lids. A **shadow** emerges from the easternmost enclosure when living creatures arrive.

► **The Rug (2 XP).** The embroidered rug, while dirty and old, is of exceptional craftsmanship, made from owl-bear fur (DC 11 INT check). The antique is worth 20 gp.



Lord Corvinus

The ephemeral apparition of a once-powerful man now marked with the wretched rune of a devil.

AC: 12

HP: 30 LV 6

ATK: 2 Death Touch +5 (1d8 + Siphon Energy)

MV: Near (Fly)

S:-4 D:+3 C:+0 I:+0 W:-1 Ch:+2

Ghostly Appearance. In place of attacks, become corporeal or incorporeal.

Siphon Energy. 1d4 CON damage. Death if reduced to 0 CON.

6. EMBALMING ROOM

Two metal tables with complex machinery and dosage apparatuses dominate the room. Grim, rusty, embalming utensils lie on two metal side tables.

The preparation of corpses for this tomb was performed here. While normally outsourced, the richest families had their own embalming chambers and morticians. The instruments are old and useless. Flasks with embalming fluids are corroded and empty.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** Inspecting the room for 1 **crawling round** yields 2 gp, 16 sp, and a *potion of vitality*.

7. CRYPT OF THE COMMONS

Twenty-one jade-colored urns line the walls of this chamber. Their lids are fixed with an oily substance.

Lesser members of the Corvinus family, servants, and some friends are here in the form of ashes. It is a sort of unmarked, common tomb because the ashes of dozens of people are combined in a single urn. The remains of almost a hundred people are interred here.

► **Treasure (1 XP).** If the characters spend 1 **crawling round** to go through the urns' contents, they find a scroll case with a single scroll. A spellcaster can translate the incantation as a spell to summon and bind a devil. The incantation is flawed and doomed to fail (DC 18 INT).

8. THE CRYPT GUARDIAN

The 10-foot-tall statue of an armor-clad knight oversees the hallway. Its eyes shine with the might of the sun but they only open in the presence of movement.

When perceiving movement, the eyes open. If continuous movement occurs within 20 feet of the statue, the eyes shoot a beam of scorching light (DC 12 DEX or 1d8 damage). A character can move in 5-foot increments and stop short to avoid being targeted by the shooting ray.

► **The Locked Door.** The entrance to area 9 opens only as long as the two clover-shaped switches south of area 8 are pressed. They trigger with a weight of 50 pounds.

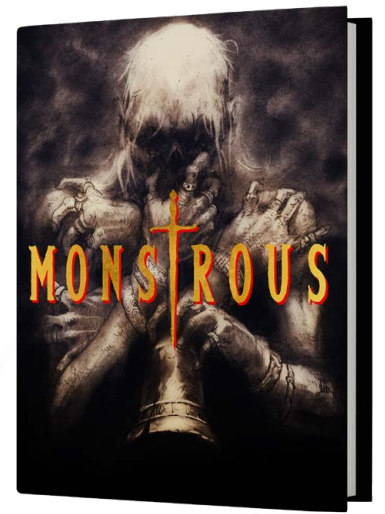
9. TOMB OF LORD CORVINUS

The lord's sarcophagus opens as an ethereal apparition rises from within. Lord Corvinus is returned from beyond the veil filled with anguish and regret.

► **Lord Corvinus.** The late patriarch is marked with the devil's rune. It spells his doom to return to the realm of the living since the devil took his life and that of his family (DC 15 INT check). **Lord Corvinus** is a vengeful spirit that knows no mercy and fights until slain.

► **Treasure (3 XP).** The sarcophagus contains a spellbook with *speak with dead*, a gold ingot (10 gp), 20 gp, a +1 *longsword*, and a *potion of healing*.

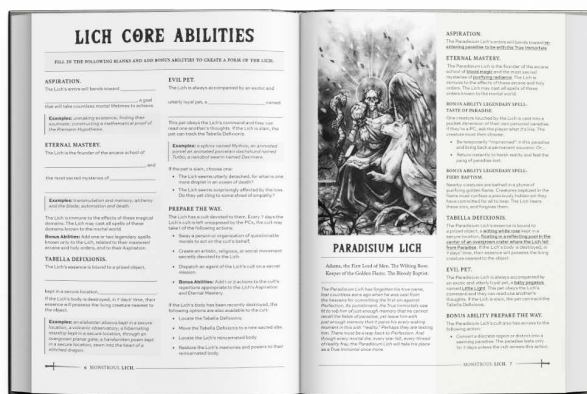
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THE KING OF SKULLS



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Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG



LEVEL-8 ADVENTURE

A SHADOWDARK ADVENTURE ABOUT DEFEATING AN UNDEAD MENACE FROM THE PAST

ADVENTURE PRIMER

Saint Terragnis, may your justice and righteousness bathe me in your courage.
Give me strength to earn my ascension to godhood and follow your steps.

Soldiers' Prayer

Thousands of years ago, Ethernia was the name of the continent, and a never-ending war terrorized the living. The name that made everyone's hearts freeze was Skulletor, also known as the King of Skulls. He had a ruthless, merciless, and reckless temper that he loved to reflect in war.

For many, it was a miracle to still be alive. His army of death knows no fear, rest, or morale. He destroyed towns, villages, and cities. But humanity found a way to prevail. Dwarf lords, elvish leaders, and human wizards worked together and crafted incredible artifacts. Weapons to even the odds against Skulletor's army of dead.

THE TWIN SWORDS

WITH THE HELP of their arcane shields, powerful artifacts, and magical beasts, mankind was able to retaliate. The strongest artifact created was a large steel blade.

The sword held the power of a thousand men and the arcane strength of the planet's core. But this was unfortunately too much for a mortal individual to handle. Fighting the King of Skulls, the wielder of the sword could not handle its power and Skulletor cast a spell on the blade.

The magic was meant to turn it into dust but the blade's magic protected it; it was split in two. Good-hearted people succeeded in recovering one blade, but the leader of the dead escaped with the other half.

THE PROPHECY

THAT EVENT WAS prophesied. The two swords were part of a legendary tale. The prophecy stated that the twin blades would be created as a result of a horrible defeat. But that this would mark the beginning of a new era. A warrior like no other would be born a prince. And this mortal man would wield one of the swords, for he was destined to turn the tides and destroy evil forever.

All eyes turned to Prince Adan. His unique traits and strength were easy to notice since he was a baby. He grew up watching the undead armies terrorize the people of Ethernia. And this honed an immense determination within him. He became the strongest man in the world and he embraced his destiny. He could not wait to become of age and lead the human armies to victory.

THE END OF AN ERA

THE ARMIES OF good worked together and prevailed during Prince Adan's formation. As an adult, he fulfilled the prophecy. With his magic sword, he turned into Hu-Man, the legendary warrior described in ancient scrolls. Skulletor fought fearlessly but when the two swords clashed with, a massive explosion occurred.

Both armies were decimated, and the King of Skulls was destroyed, but Hu-Man disappeared too. The confrontation was a cataclysmic event that resulted in a bitter-sweet victory. The world was freed of Skulletor and his never-ending army of dead but the war took too many lives and Prince Adan was nowhere to be found.

THE PRESENT

SO MUCH TIME has passed that the world is a completely different place. The seas have swallowed islands and some of the mainland. Entire kingdoms have come and gone. More wars have ravaged the lands. And even the continent's name changed. Thus, almost nothing remains of the artifacts and weapons that helped humanity defeat the King of Skulls thousands of years past. Even historians and researchers doubt the veracity of the tales. They have no proof that these incredible events occurred. But perhaps, that is about to change.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Level 8 Adventure

THE KING OF SKULLS IS BACK

Skulletor's evil spirit never perished. And by some arcane mishap of universal dimensions unbeknownst to him, he has finally returned to the world of the living. His lair and throne of yore used to be on the mainland but after so long, they are now on an island, within a dark cave.

Skulletor does not care. His ancient magic allows him to spawn endless undead goons. They patiently travel the seabed and attack all the living they encounter. The authorities in the capital, Crimsonwall, ignore the King of Skulls is back. But after hearing the testimonies of witnesses and the few survivors of attacks, they decided to hire mercenaries for this matter (100 gp, 10 XP).

FISHER'S COVE

We won't survive for long. The water is our whole life. Even if the horrible zombies were friendly and played cards, their stench killed all game...

Concerned Fisherman



here are many fishing spots and villages on the shoreline. Fisher's Cove is one of the many locations that have been dealing with sudden skeletons and zombies emerging from the sea. The few guards that were stationed here have perished or fled. The hamlet's people are not prepared for this threat; the horrible undead just keep coming.

IMMINENT EVACUATION

THE CAPITAL HAD to act and protect the citizens. They evacuated most of the fishing towns, including Fisher's Cove. Only scouts remain and stand on the lookout for incoming threats. So far, the undead have been kept at bay but the capital's resources cannot be spent like this indefinitely. The heroes are sent here, where the concentration of undead coming out of the sea is the highest. They are instructed to grab a boat, track where the dead are coming from, and try to destroy their source.

Town Features

► **Events.** Check for a **Random Event** each time a new area is visited. There is a 4-in-6 chance for an event.

► **Smells or Sounds.** A foul, putrid smell fills the air. The undead in the buildings grunt every few minutes.

► **Atmosphere.** The town is deserted. A sepulchral silence buries it in a gloomy aura. Buildings are empty.

RUMORS

d4 Details

- 1 Before leaving the capital, the heroes hear people talking. Some believe that the Lost have cursed the land. They say the undead are spawns of the forgotten gods, sent to destroy all the living, who have forsaken them.
- 2 A random character has heard the far-fetched stories of the King of Skulls. They know of the undead armies that terrorized the world, and they know of the legendary twin blades. But other than the undead coming out of the sea, they have no reason to connect one and the other.
- 3 The person who hired the heroes shares something with them before they leave: some undead become dormant and ambush unaware travelers or guard scouts. He suggests they be careful and on the lookout for danger.
- 4 Some survivors claim that the skeletons and zombies they have fought say the word "*Skulleter*". But none of them know what the horrible monsters mean by that.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6 Details

- 1 After some days of silence and low activity, a **brown bear** dares approach the town. It only wants food and leaves if the characters surrender 10 pounds to it. Otherwise, it becomes hostile. It flees if reduced to half its Hit Points.
- 2 The characters were followed by a couple of brave young men (**soldiers**). They want to earn some of the job's credit and want to help the characters find a solution.
- 3 Twenty **zombies** come out of the water and look for living creatures immediately. The undead fight until slain.
- 4 It starts raining. Heavy, fat drops start covering the ground; everything is soaked in a matter of seconds. It does not stop raining for the rest of the day. The rain reduces visibility and makes it harder to navigate.
- 5 Five fishermen (**peasants**) on a small boat end up here. They had to deviate from their route because a group of skeletons scared them. When the heroes explain what they came to do, they offer their expertise at sea.
- 6 Seven **ghasts** comes out of the water and charges against the first living creature it sees. It fights until slain.

1. MAIN ROAD

The land is deserted. No one has traveled these roads since the evacuation. Fisher's Cove looks like a ghost town. Only crows wander over the place.

The characters have a calm, uneventful trip from Crim-sonwall to Fisher's Cove. Upon arrival, they see the large, lonely boulder where the main road forks. This local landmark is as old as Fisher's Cove.

2. THE FISHERMAN'S ROCK

The locals have a dozen different tales and legends about how this rock came to be. However, the recent events have defiled it. Red stains, dry sinew, and crushed bones surround the rock's surface. A gruesome display.

► **The Sorceress.** A woman approaches, she rides a beautiful white horse. She says: "*I am Tila, and you may not know or realize it but history is repeating itself as we speak. The King of Skulls is back. Whether you like it or not, you are involved. For now, I can only be a witness. But I shall come to your aid when the moment comes.*"

► **Encounter.** The woman and her horse vanish after their introduction. Then, eight **shadows** emerge from the rubble and attack. The undead fight until slain.



3. AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND

The characters hear a voice coming from inside the building. “*Don’t hurt me! I’m friendly. My name’s Urko*”. The funny little guy looks from another world. A floating red cloak, blue hands, goblinoid blue ears, and a big pointy hat. His yellow, shiny eyes express kindness.

► **Details.** Urko does not know how he got here. But he asks about Prince Adan. And he begs the heroes to protect Ethernia from the King of Skulls. It has been ages since that name was last used to refer to the continent, though. There are a lot of unanswered questions regarding this funny individual’s origin. But Urko (**apprentice**) just wants to help and aids the heroes as best he can.

4. FISHER’S COVE WARES AND FARES

This place was abandoned in a hurry. The items in stock are still there, untouched. The characters may spend one **crawling round** to search the place loot it.

► **Treasure (40 gp, 3 XP).** The characters may take the following: two crawling kits, a dozen torches, countless farming tools, steel utensils, and useless trinkets.

5. HIDDEN ENEMIES

There is nothing of value here. But the heroes have no way of knowing this unless they search the area. However, three **zombies** and five **ghouls** hide in the vicinities. The undead attack the characters at the first opportunity.

6. THE BOATS

The characters are fortunate, a large boat waits at the docks. Up to twelve people can hop on the wooden vessel without trouble. It is not easy to navigate these waters but the heroes may have some help (see below).

THE BOAT TRIP

The characters navigate through the Northern Sea (DC 13 INT check) . This check is made with advantage if they possess navigator’s tools. On a fail, the characters get lost, take longer than expected, and must fight four **ghasts** who attempt to climb up the boat’s stern.

Note: In the case **Random Event 5** occurs (see above), the characters meet local fishermen. With their help, they reach the Island of the Dead with no trouble.

THE KING OF SKULLS' LAIR

Don't worry friends, Urko is here, Tila is here. I believe it is just a matter of time before Hu-Man makes his heroic entrance! We have our backs covered.

Buncan



Some say that history tends to repeat itself. And they are not wrong. The King of Skulls is back for some obscure reason, but his presence in the world is responsible for another chain of consequences. The unearthing of his throne, his lair, and the appearance of Urko at Fisher's Cove are some examples. But more strange things are going on.

THE ISLAND OF THE DEAD

THIS ISLAND DID not exist before; it was sunk. Hundreds of years have passed and the seas changed. Now the King of Skulls' lair lies on a solitary island, a few miles from the shore. Skulletor also ignores how his return to the world occurred. But he cares not. He contents himself with knowing he can attempt to take over the world once more. And what is even better, is that Prince Adan, his adversary, is nowhere to be found.

The heroes can dock their boats by the shallow beach. The shore is empty and unprotected. There is an empty boat by the beach. But its owner is nowhere nearby.

FRIENDLY FACES

BEFORE THE HEROES enter the caves, they hear a voice: *"Howdy! The name's Buncan. I assume you're here to confront the King of Skulls, right? I don't know how this happened but he is back, I'm back too. And the only thing I know for certain is that we must stop him"*. The armored man approaches from the north. The second boat belongs to him. He claims that the last thing he remembers is him navigating toward this secluded island.

► **Old Friends.** Urko recognizes Buncan. They are happy to meet once more. They explain they are old friends but none of them know how they got to be here.

Area Features

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Most areas feature braziers with magical fire; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Undead Fortitude.** Ancient necromancy protects this place. Skulletor and his goons have advantage on checks against the *turn undead* and *rebuke unholy* spells.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Skulletor's lair is no place for the living. The characters hear the screams of a thousand suffering people in their heads while experiencing a horrible vision (DC 14 WIS). On a fail, their next check is made with disadvantage.
2	The characters stumble upon three wraiths . The powerful spirits disappear when reduced to half their HP.
3	Heavy gray mist covers the entire dungeon. Visibility is reduced by half. Checks to notice traps or hidden things are made with disadvantage. The mist lasts 1d3 hours.
4	Something in the dungeon helps Urko remember a spell that boosts the group's morale and their chances of success. He grants each of the party members a luck token .
5	The characters hear a voice in their heads: <i>"You won't stop me this time. I am Skulletor, lord of the dead and the King of Skulls. Hu-man is gone, and you have a mere fraction of his power. The world shall be mine!"</i> . After the voice speaks, four shadows coalesce and attack!
6	Strong winds extinguish all light sources. Pitch-black darkness engulfs all areas for three crawling rounds .

1. ENTRANCE

The characters' short boat-trip takes them here, where they meet Buncan (see **Friendly Faces**). Urko and Buncan (**knight**) beg the heroes to help them stop Skulletor.

2. CAVERN TUNNELS

Countless footprints mark most of the sand floor. They belong to all the undead that have come out of the island.

► **Insects.** Two **scarab swarms** hide in the crevices of the cavern walls. They ignore the dead but attack living creatures passing through. The insects flee and hide when they are reduced to half their Hit Points.

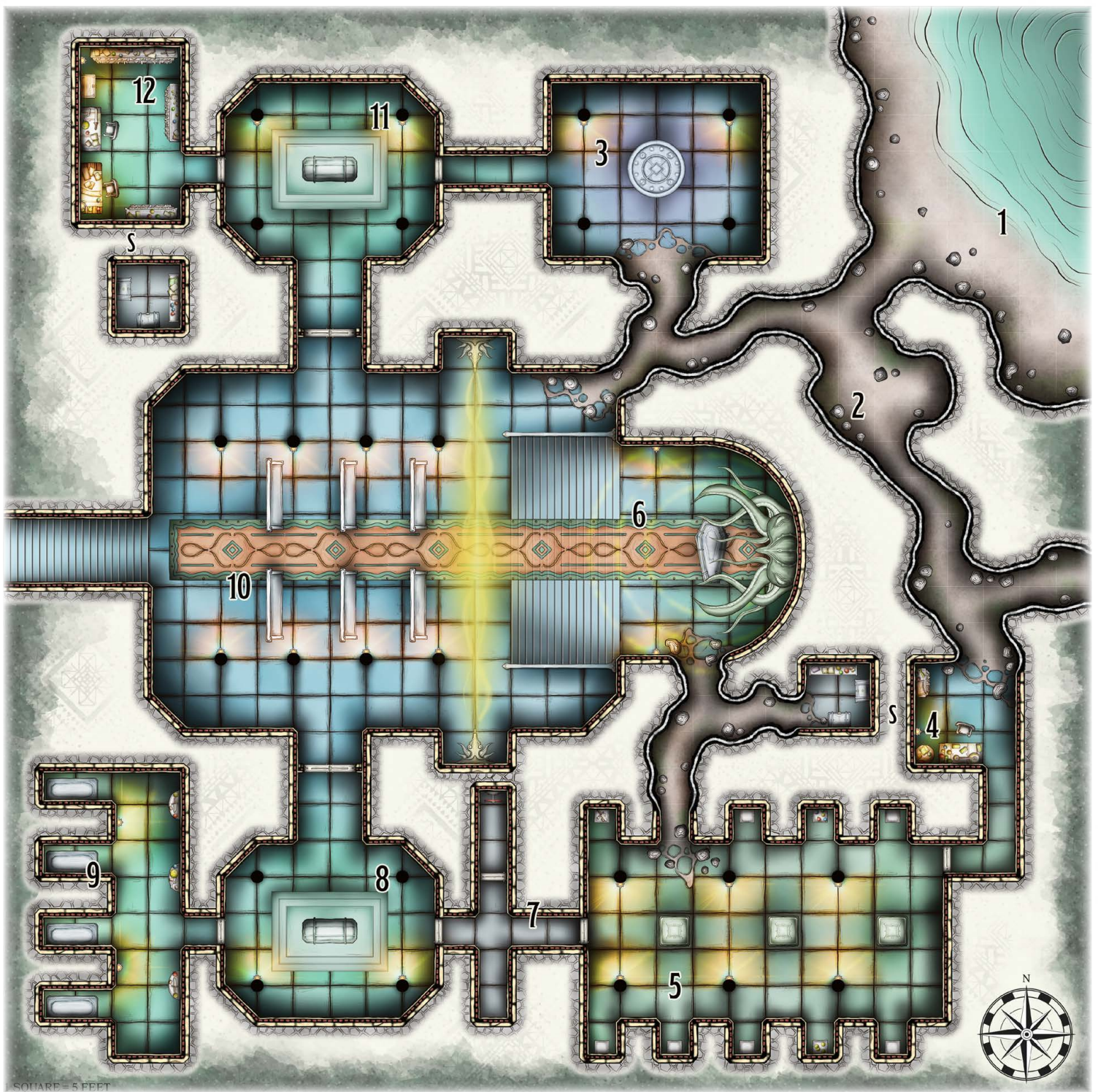
3. MAGIC CIRCLE

A stone disk lies in the middle of the room. It is a teleportation circle (DC 12 INT). But it is not active.

4. ANTECHAMBER

A cave-in destroyed most of the north wall of this area. Everything inside is moth-eaten, rusty, or wrecked.

► **Treasure (4 XP).** A loose brick on the wall can be pushed to reveal a small vault (DC 13 WIS). The heroes find 321 sp, a wooden box with ten torches, a set of leather armor, a silver dagger, and a heavy shield.



5. NICHES OF DEATH

Ten alcoves with funerary niches lie on the north and south walls of this large chamber. One of them became a tunnel after a cave-in. Three of the resting places have small trinkets and mundane items on top, the rest are empty. Six angry **shadows** attack the heroes if they do not place something as a token of respect on the empty niches (DC 12 WIS). Likewise, removing the items that were already here causes the upset spirits to coalesce.

Kind Heart. In case the heroes place items on each niche and avoid a conflict, they all earn a **luck token**.

6. TEMPLE'S MAIN SARCOPHAGUS

The easternmost wall of this chamber features an otherworldly stone idol. This is one of the many representations of *The Lost*, the two forsaken, forgotten gods. The sarcophagus before the stone tentacles spawns powerful abominations. A **wraith** comes out of it the moment the heroes approach. The guardian chases intruders.

► **Magical Barrier.** The golden wall of light cannot be trespassed by any means. Whoever touches it takes 1d10 damage. The magic is too powerful to be dispelled. There is a valve to deactivate it elsewhere (see area 7).



Skulletor

The King of Skulls. A hooded, skeletal warlock.

AC: 14 (chainmail)

HP: 34 **LV** 8

ATK: 2 sword +5 (1d8) and 1 spell or 2 spells

MV: Near (Walk)

S:+2 **D:**+1 **C:**+2 **I:**+3 **W:**+1 **Ch:**+2



Freeze. (INT) DC 13. Focus. One humanoid within near paralyzed for duration.

Agony. (INT) DC 13. Target near takes 3d8.



7. CORRIDOR

There is a valve on the north wall and a series of small holes on the south one. The valve deactivates the barrier in area 6. The heroes have no way to know what its function is, though. At the same time, poison darts fly and hit the person turning the steel wheel. However, the person can be protected by simply closing the door (DC 12 INT).

8. SKULLETOR'S HONOR GUARD

The characters must defeat Skulletor's strongest warrior. Use the stats of a **wight** but it has AC 16 (plate mail), HP 28, +5 to attacks and Life Drain, LV 6.

PROTECTORS OF ETHERNIA

Urko, Tila, and Buncan know each other. They are close friends and they all come from the past, from Ethernia. They cannot explain their precense now, but they all feel compelled and determined to stop Skulletor at all costs. This is reflected through their actions and opinions.

9. SARCOPHAGI OF DEATH

Skulletor employs these four sarcophagi to spawn lesser undead. If the characters come to this area, they are attacked by two **zombies** and three **ghasts**.

10. TEMPLE'S NAVE

The characters see a friendly face before advancing toward the throne room. Tila, the sorceress reappears and says: *"I hoped Hu-Man would be back by now, just like all of us."* She speaks while looking at Urko and Buncan. Then she turns to the heroes, *"But maybe, all of you together can play his part! May the ancient gods of Ethernia bless you"*. All party members gain a **luck token**.

11. SECOND SKULLETOR'S BODYGUARD

The second of Skulletor's strongest warriors. The characters fight a **wight** with the changes stated in area 8.

12. ARCHIVE

The books and scrolls in this room speak of a bygone era. Only a historian could understand them (DC 18 INT).

► **Treasure (9 XP).** The shelf hides a secret passage (DC 15 WIS). The vault has a serrated greatsword (12 gp), a small emerald (60 gp), and two *potions of healing*.



SKULLETOR'S THRONE

The ancient gods of Ethernia support our cause. I have the divine power to cheat death once. But we won't be so lucky next time. Endure!

Tila, after saving someone from death

History is repeating itself and no one knows why. Perhaps, this all happens to amuse an unknown deity. Or someone's spell backfired and caused this phenomenon. Either way, Skulletor's goons are real enough. The threat and danger they represent have the potential to undo the world.

SET-UP

A **MAGICAL LOOPHOLE** is what maintains Skulletor, Buncan, and the others in the present. Regardless of the loophole's origin, the arcane forces of this world cannot foster the intruders anymore. The world shall kick out everything that does not belong in this timeline.

THE PORTAL

NATURE AND THE cosmic forces of the universe work together to maintain the world order. Something occurs when the heroes cross the throne room's threshold. The intruders of this universe coming together exacerbates this arcane effect. Thus, the weave of magic itself attempts to remove all foreign presence stuck in this plane of existence and bring all back to normal.

Throne Room Features

► **Magic Aura.** The portal's arcane strength disturbs magical effects. Starting from phase 2 (see below), spells cast within the throne room have a 2-in-6 chance to become a random spell from the same spell list tier.

► **Phases.** The dungeon changes phase with each **combat round**. Start counting after the characters hear Skulletor's introduction (see Phase 1). Nothing can stop the portal. What it does is described in each phase.

CERTAIN DEATH

The mysterious sorceress realizes that making up for Hu-Man's absence in this conflict is not easy. She cannot know if the brave heroes will be found wanting... Thus, she does her best to protect them. If one of the characters is close to dying, she intervenes and saves them from the attack, fall, trap, etc. Tila's energy is limited though, she may save each character from death only once, and only during this encounter.

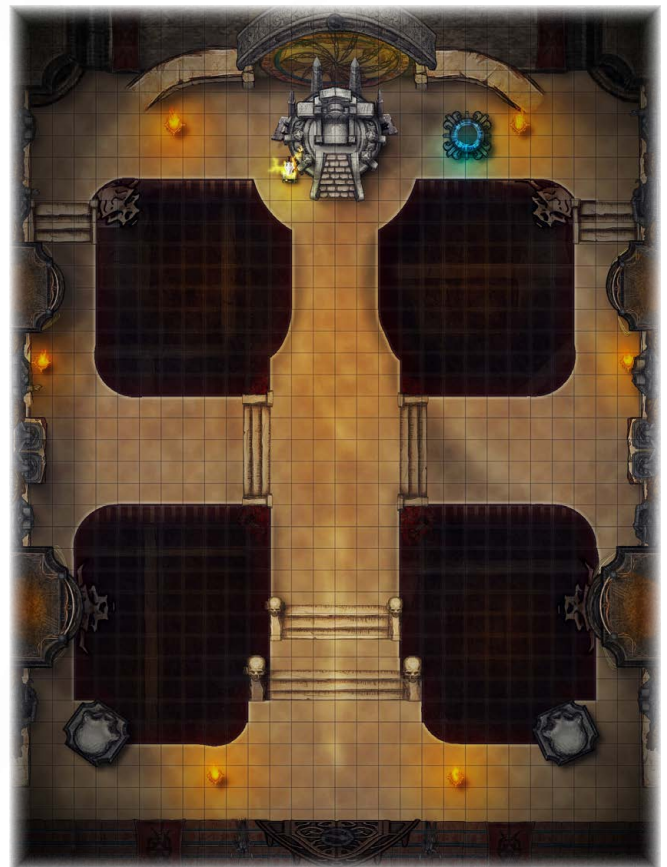
PHASE 1

A cloaked figure holding a scepter sits at the massive, imponent throne. Stone and marble skulls of all sizes stare at the central corridor with void eye-sockets.

The characters meet the King of Skulls. Urko and Buncan are as ready as ever. However, both parties ignore what is to come. The cloaked individual speaks: "Every day I ask myself... Why must you ever be so... **STUPID!** You puny mortals won't stop me this time! Without the help of your little blond friend and his tiger, you're lost!"

► **Twin Blades.** The magic of the swords allows the King of Skulls to create an infinite number of undead. Skulletor grabs one of them after his introductory speech.

► **Encounter.** The only way forward is the central corridor (see map). **Skulletor** stands before the throne, six **skeletons** surround him. Two **shadows**, four **ghouls**, and four **zombies** stand in random positions all around.



PHASE 2

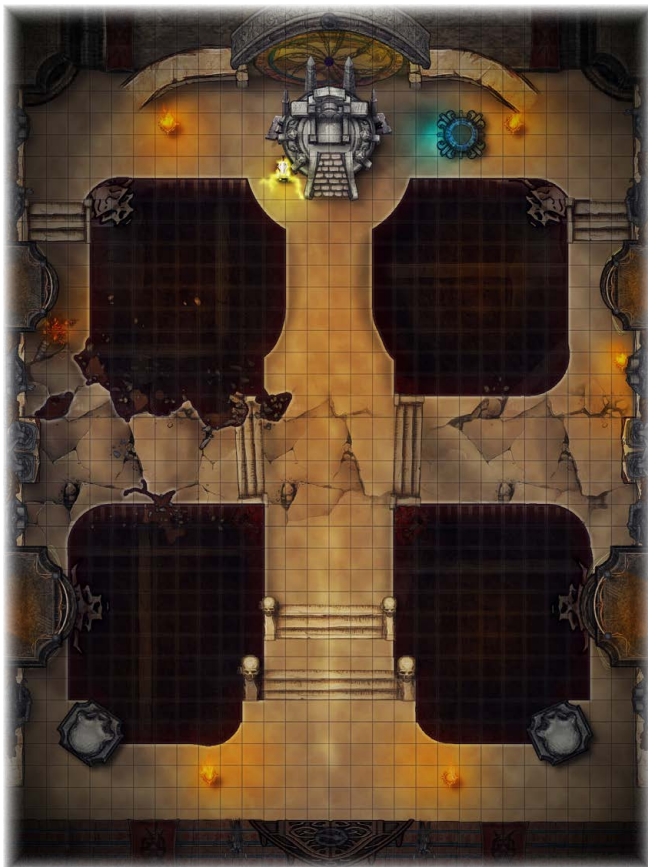
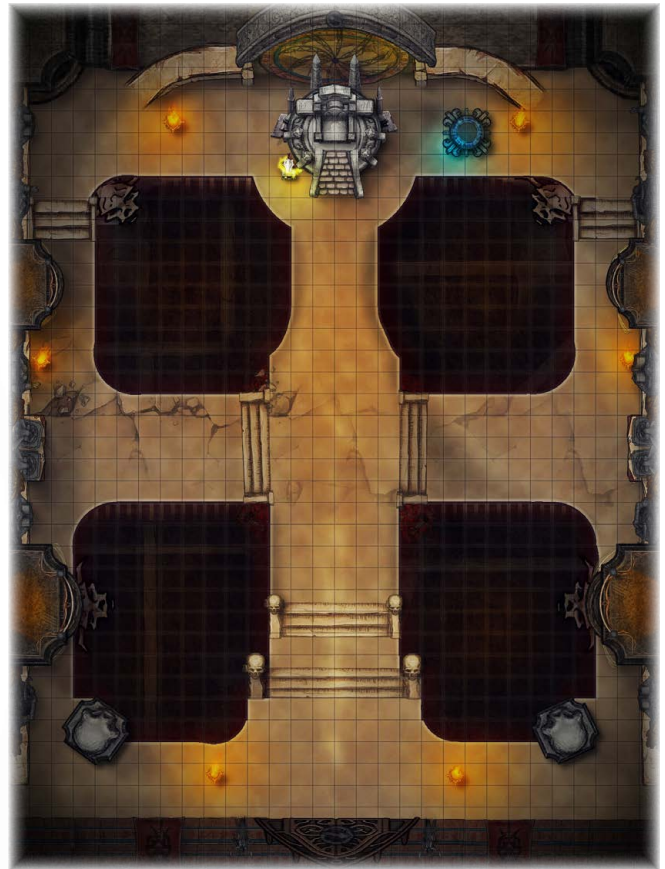
The ground trembles and the walls shake. Behind the throne, the stone shifts and swirls. The structural integrity of the entire chamber is compromised.

The King of Skulls tries to hide it, but the characters notice his confusion (DC 13 WIS). This is something he did not expect either. This does not change his behavior, though. He orders his troops to advance and attack.

► **Movement.** It is harder to move. Creatures that move normally must succeed on a DC 12 DEX check or fall prone. Enemies are affected too. Failing this check by 5 or more while standing beside a chasm (see map) causes the creature to fall to their death 200 feet below. Tila is ready to intervene if this occurs (see **Certain Death**). However, moving at half speed is safe and requires no check. Urko and the enemy shadows are unaffected.

► **Combat.** The skeletons surrounding the King of Skulls stay with him at all times. The rest of the troops advance at normal speed even if they trip and fall.

► **Portal.** The magic aura that affects spells comes into effect when this phase begins (see **Throne Room Features**). Skulletor's magic is unaffected by this.



PHASE 3

The ground quakes with even more force. The central corridor's surface shall give in soon. The spiral behind the door starts to crack deeply at its core.

Creatures on the crumbling bridge may fall (DC 12 DEX, on a fail, they grab a ledge, see map). Tila is ready to react if needed (see **Certain Death**) The walls roar, it seems the seismic activity was just the beginning. But the undead know no fear and they just keep on fighting.

► **Combat.** The King of Skulls does not care about the world falling apart. He attempts to paralyze targets and orders any remaining troops to keep adding pressure.

► **Urko.** The little magician gathers inner courage and attempts to even the odds with a powerful spell. A random spell from the wizard's Tier 2 spell list occurs.

► **Buncan.** The brave warrior asks Tila to assist him. The sorceress blows and the magical wind lifts Buncan and takes him 40 feet closer to Skulletor or 40 feet away from danger (whichever is more urgent at this time). Before the lift, Buncan extends his hand to one of the characters so they are magically transported too in case they want to join him in battle or retreat with him.

PHASE 4

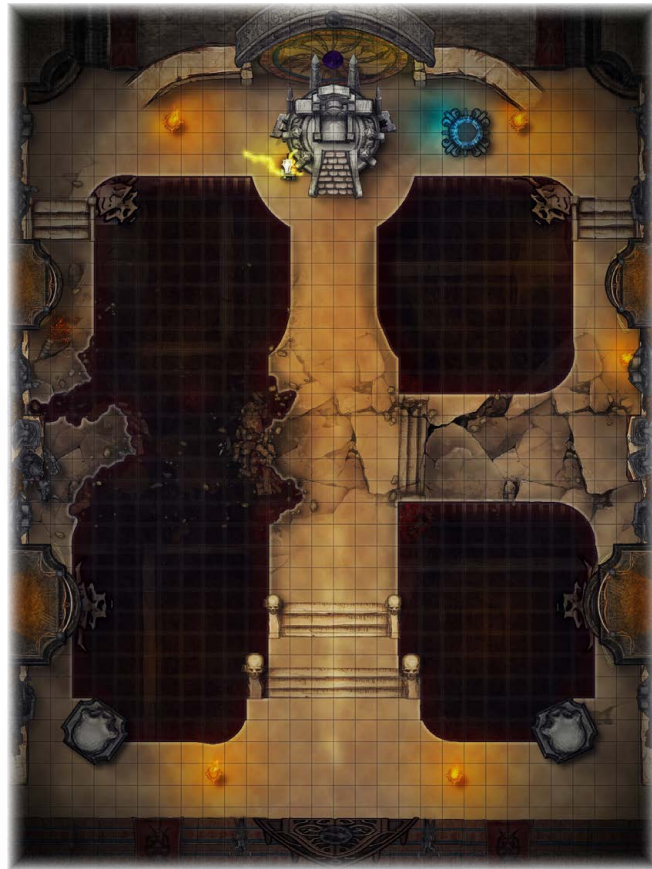
The west side of the central bridge falls apart. A cracking sound comes from the eastern columns. The statues on the walls fall and crumble into pieces. The hole behind the throne becomes larger and its core starts to pull everything toward it.

Creatures on the crumbling bridge may fall (DC 12 DEX, on a fail, they grab a ledge, see map). Tila may help avoid the lethal fall too (see **Certain Death**). The portal's pull is not enough to move creatures against their will but everyone in the room can feel it. The portal has the objective to remove the intruders from this world. Its pulling effect increases each subsequent round.

► **Combat.** Skulletor speaks: “*You think you’ll come out of this alive? In your dreams!*”. He hits the ground with his scepter and one **wraith** coalesces beside him. Then, the King of Skulls levitates 30 feet above the ground.

► **Urko.** Depending on what the little magician did last round, he wants to repeat it or mend it. He casts a random spell from the wizard’s Tier 3 spell list this time.

► **Tila.** With one incredible spell, the sorceress casts both *holy weapon* and *bleed* on two different allies.



PHASE 5

The east side of the bridge is almost gone. The ton-heavy column crashes near the main entrance. The opening behind the throne is large enough to see beyond. A starry dark void sucks everything toward it.

Urko yells: “*Watch your head, buddy!*” as a warning to anyone standing where the column will land. Whoever is there could be severely injured (DC 14 DEX or take 4d8 damage). This may affect enemies standing here too.

► **Combat.** The King of Skulls cowardly casts spells from the air while laughing maniacally. If any of the **wight** guards from areas 8 and 11 of the dungeon are still standing, they arrive from the main entrance.

► **Urko.** The pointy-eared magician is either on a roll or unleashing hidden powers he did not know. With a swift move, he casts a random wizard’s Tier 4 spell.

► **Tila.** She casts *cure wounds* and *protection from evil* on two different characters. Whichever is more helpful.

► **Buncan.** The brave warrior utters a battle cry. He and his allies become enraged. They are immune to morale checks and have a +1d4 damage for 3 rounds. Any affected creature can end this effect automatically.

PHASE 6

The central bridge is gone. Tendrils of lightning and thunderbolts come out of the open portal. Its pulling force becomes stronger with each passing second.

Creatures on the crumbling bridge may fall (DC 12 DEX, on a fail, they grab a ledge, see map). Just like before, Tila is ready to intervene if her help is required.

The characters can still resist the portal's pulling force without effort. But Urko, Buncan, and the sorceress are visibly struggling to resist being sucked in.

► **A Hero's Arrival.** In the least expected moment, a mounted figure comes out of the portal. It is a huge, muscled barbarian with blond hair. He rides a massive, saddled, armor-clad green tiger. He says: "*Brave heroes, thank you for helping my friends, but this is not your battle. We all must return to where we belong. Your efforts were not all for naught, it was your braveness and heroism that brought me. I'll take it from here. Escape!*"

► **Skulletor.** The King of Skulls cannot believe his eyes. And this time he cannot hide his confusion and surprise. Still, there is no surrendering in his book. He orders any of his remaining troops to immobilize the heroes.



PHASE 7

The chamber is collapsing. The entire dungeon is falling apart. The portal is a threat now. Its pulling force is sucking everything rocks, debris, and every single creature or individual in the throne room.

By this point, Urko, Buncan, and Tila cannot resist any longer. They scream while they fly and are sucked by the black hole. Skulletor and the blond barbarian still manage to resist its pull as they continue their epic fight.

The characters are free to assist the blond hero if they wish, however, they are expected to escape toward the entrance when they are told to do so (see Phase 6).

► **Pull.** Any character in this area when this phase starts must succeed on a DC 12 STR check or they won't be able to move. Failing by 5 or more means they are lifted from the ground and sucked into the portal (see **Adventure Conclusion** for details on their future). If they succeed, they can move toward the entrance at half speed or risk falling prone. The portal will not stop pulling. Increase the DC by one each consecutive round until the characters remaining in the area either escape to safety or are sucked into the roaring, arcane portal.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTERS REACH the end of this adventure and face the consequences of their brave deeds.

BACK TO NORMAL

The dungeon is falling apart. The heroes must run for their lives and reach the boats by the beach. They may return to Crimsonwall and report. They can confirm that the threat is gone and everything shall go back to normal. Even if no one believes the crazy things they have to say, the undead do stop coming out of the sea.

THE COST OF VICTORY

They cannot explain why it all happened but the heroes may consider themselves strangely lucky that the portal appeared. It may be the reason that their new friends are gone. And maybe it even sucked one of their own. Or perhaps some of them perished in the confrontation against Skulletor, but either way, the portal removed the strongest threats of all too. The King of Skulls is gone. In the end, the safety of all is the most important thing.

SOMEWHERE IN TIME

The characters are sucked into the portal along with Urko, Buncan, and the rest. They travel thousands of years to the past. When Ethernia was the name of the continent. Returning to their timeline shall not be easy; it is perhaps impossible. The GM is free to rule this as character death or give them the chance to find a way back in-game. Likewise, the characters that were not sucked into the portal may be allowed to track their teammates in the past so they can either travel to them or open a portal from their side to help them return to the future.

THE TWIN BLADES

The characters are free to approach the throne room and lift the other half of the sword. However, this sword is not what they think it is. It is cursed (see below).

► **Half Blade.** The twin blade uses the stats of a sword of the ancients, but it also has the following properties:

- **Benefit.** 1/day, regain a **luck token** you just spent.
- **Benefit.** If you die, make a DC 18 CON check. If you succeed, you are unconscious instead of dead.
- **Curse.** You cannot relinquish ownership of this blade except by deadly combat.

Skulletor had one of the twin blades. Hu-Man the barbarian arrives on the scene with his half. The loophole created a third “outcast” half. This blade is an artifact crafted from chaos and powerful arcane mishaps. The universe shall find a way to enforce its laws and punish whoever wields this forbidden sword. But this chastisement shall be an adventure for another day...



THE FLYING MERCHANT'S TOOLBOX

A collection of interesting magical objects by Nathan Britto



THE CELEBRATED PARINARI is retiring after decades of weird and wonderful deals, near escapes, and brushes with madness and illegality. He became rich selling unusual items, magical artifacts, and secret information. He was also involved in political intrigue, helping to manipulate the market against the Goblin Coalition, which sought to establish a monopoly over the boxnut trade. He also managed to capture The Bowmaker, his arch-nemesis and manufacturer of counterfeit magical art pieces made with the help of duplicate artifacts from a lost kingdom. Additionally, Parinari also enjoys lemon tarts.

But now he wants to be left alone, taking care of the berry orchards that grow under the shadow of his balloon, in Mefina's company, his lovely wife. He offers his toolbox to any adventurer that finds him. But they must promise to come enjoy his jams and regularly share their exploits – he and his wife like the company.

“So, you might as well be some mighty explorer – you sure smell like it- but I've met some SLIMY people. Doesn't matter what you had to fight to make some sweet shiny gold. Sadly, some nasty folks will try to convince you all the trinkets you have are garbage just so they turn a bit more profit than before. No, you listen to me and use my stuff well, they ought to keep your pockets heavy, and you alive... at least most of the time.”

THE BOX, IRON-BOUND wood with silver details, deeper and less heavy than it seems, opens to the one carrying the key or one of 3 silver pieces. The menacing artifact has an ever-present crack as you browse its contents.

TRACKING AND DUPLICATING COINS

“Sometimes you just know a fella might have that ill intent against an honest deal, so here's a way to track the curmudgeon or pull off the old switcheroo to protect your wares. With this lever right here, you can produce a unique, particularly interesting coinage.”

► **Bronze Coin.** It can be seen in the mind's eye by the last person who has touched it, up to half a mile, if they close their eyes. Opening their eyes ends this effect.

► **Copper Coin.** It duplicates any item that is at most regular human-sized. The smaller the object, the better. Because more of its properties shall be copied - larger items are barely touched and harder to copy.

DELICIOUS PARFUM

“The court might like the gold coins and treasure that dungeoneers and spelunkers bring. But hohoho, them nobles really do not care to know how it really is to be down there in the dark. See this small compartment? It contains my unique and powerful magic dust. Be careful, though. Do not breathe it before applying it... One can get weird from a small whiff. I talk from experience.”

► **Powder Parfum.** This magic dust turns people into extroverts. It lowers the difficulty of social interactions by 1 DC or grants advantage on checks against an unsuspecting foe. If sprayed to the face, a target starts to hallucinate and rave for 1d20 rounds (DC 20 CON check).

FLUTE, PUPPET, AND JESTER CLOTHING

“So you like to be the center of attention, don't you? Look, if you find yourself being taken too seriously, make them laugh, have them distracted, or even cause them to be annoyed. I have some practical items for these occasions packed in his compartment. No one gets angry at the party's jester. Just be sure that you play the flute well, for the puppet might get stabby if the tune is bad.”

► **The Flute.** Play the flute (DC 12 CHA). Every time you succeed, reduce the DC of an ally's next check by 1.

► **The Puppet.** Beside the human-sized costume, there is a puppet with matching clothes. It can be commanded to dance or steal. The puppet distracts a small crowd and this may grant advantage to a group that targets them (DC 12 CHA). It can steal or plant a small item in someone's pocket (DC 15 CHA). In addition, the puppet wields a small dagger that deals 1 damage. If the flutist fails a check, the puppet attacks whoever is closer to it until another check succeeds or the puppet is trapped inside a bag and rattled for 1d4 rounds.

PORTABLE TREBUCHET

“Sometimes it is best not to have the good stuff on you, right? This helps with the chucking-it-very-far part. It is found on the underside of the toolbox!”

► **Trebuchet.** This small trebuchet can be attached to one's arm or nailed to the ground. It launches fist-sized objects up to 250 feet away in an arc trajectory.

MUGU

“I am not especially fond of this beast. To be honest, I do not like this bat. It eats the same as a human and believe me, you’ll want to keep the creeper fed. Or it’ll tell lies and get you killed. That happened to its last owner.”

► **The Bat.** As long as the winged creature is well fed, it can be flung into the darkness, from where it shall bring one piece of information after 1d20 rounds, or every 4 hours maximum. However, if it has not eaten, it tells a potentially deadly lie to the group.

HOOK AND PULLEY

“You can use these two items to either descend a really deep shaft, more or less 150 feet, or drag something heavy. Just beware, the pulley’s cable may snap.”

► **The Hook.** The steel shines and reflects light. This end magically pierces on stone, rocks, wood, iron, or thick skin. It must be successfully thrown by the user.

► **The Pulley.** This item can be nailed to the ground or carried around in a harness. Every 40 lbs. of weight adds 3 chances of failure on a d20 when the pulley is being used. If the cable snaps, whoever is less than 5 feet from the hook gets hit for 1d4 damage (DC 14 DEX check).

HELLFLARE

“The box is supposed to contain a couple of special protection glasses, but the Bowlmaker broke them all, cursed be him. So just squint real hard when using this.”

► **The Flare.** Each flare illuminates an area of 200 feet around it. The initial explosion’s flash gives disadvantage to creatures that are not squinting or closing their eyes. If touched, the flare burns for 1 damage. Each one lasts for 1 round and requires 35 gp to replenish.

DRAGONKITE BALLOON

“This one killed Fagundo. Don’t pierce or deflate it around the campfire unless you want to see the surface of the moon real close. Poor Fagundo. Worry not, the dragon shall only awake when it’s time for the Final War.”

► **The Backpack.** A sleeping dragon resides inside the carefully strung backpack, it can be released if the only red cord is pulled. When this happens, it releases harmless magical flames inside the bag. Thus inflating it and making the user float slowly above the ground.

► **Fire.** This item can be cleverly employed as a weapon. If the bag is breached by fire, an explosion occurs and all creatures in a 20-foot radius take 4d10 damage.



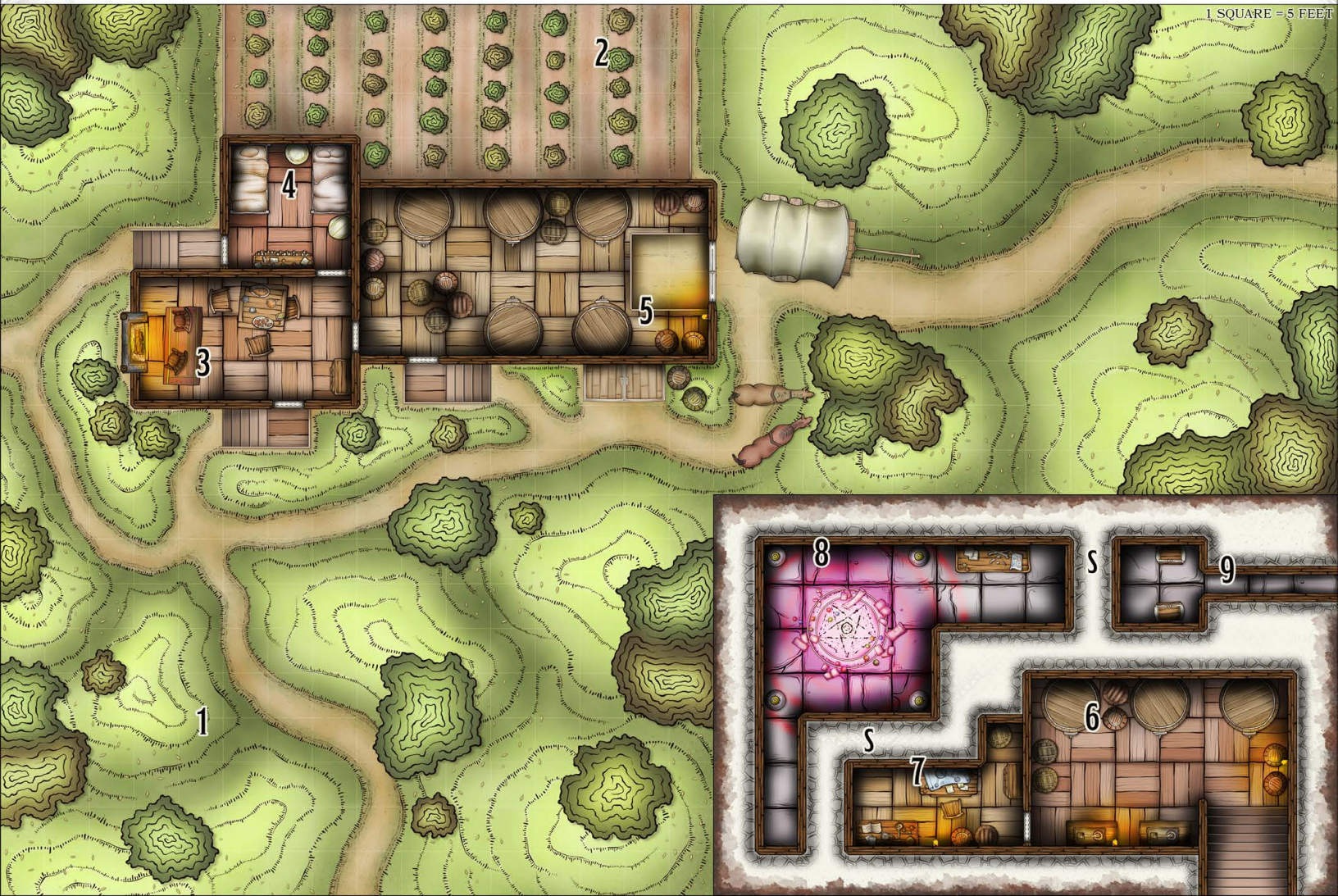
Murder in the Winery

The tragedy began when a farmer boy saw Lianna, the apothecary, approach Danti's winery a few days ago. The boy later claimed that Danti forcefully pulled the woman into the house and screams were heard. The boy stealthily came to the window and saw the winemaker stab Lianna. Her lifeless body struck the floor as the boy fled back to town in a panic to let the constable know of this despicable crime.

Constable Stabler went to Danti's winery with three guards to inquire. The law enforcers burst through the warehouse door after the winemaker refused to let them in. What they found still torments poor constable Stabler at night, as he is the only survivor of the encounter. Lianna and two travelers who went missing in the past week stood by Danti's side. But their bodies still bore the wounds that killed them. Their eyes were white, lifeless. The merciless undead protected their creator, Danti, and Stabler barely escaped alive. He now offers a hefty reward for disposing of that wretched man.

1. The winery is located on the outskirts of a small town, near the main road. The one-story home appears somber as if devoid of color. The vegetation around it has withered slightly, as if responding to the blighted magic that occurred nearby. Smoke comes from the chimney's exhaust.
2. The vineyard north of the home has not been attended to for days, perhaps weeks. The crops have shriveled and are close to dying. An observant priest notices that the soil itself has been tainted and poisoned. Nothing shall grow in these fields until the area is cleansed by prayer.
3. There is warm food on the table. The hearth is burning but its heat and light struggle to bring warmth to the living area. The stain of dry blood next to the table confirms that a person was murdered there. Lianna's apothecary satchel is bundled on one of the wooden chairs.

4. There are two beds and a bookcase in the bedroom. One bed appears unused; Danti's wife perished from a fever two years ago. The books are about biology, anatomy, and the physical sciences. It is a fairly well-stocked library for a scientist or a scholar. It can be sold for 20 gp to the right buyer.
5. The fermentation vats and barrels are sour and rotten-smelling. The dry blood stains on the floor confirm the constable tale; his men died here but the bodies are nowhere to be found. The wooden cellar doors outside of the warehouse are the only means to reach the underground facilities.
6. The cellar contains three fermentation vats and two bottling machines. The stench of sour wine pervades the place. The former bodies of the constable men stand in the middle of the room. They were turned into undead abominations. The three ghouls fight with merciless might.
7. The office is littered with old production logs, recipe books, and blueprints for wine vats and barrels. The outline of a secret door can be discerned on the north wall. The gyrating wooden wall panel can be gently pushed inward to reveal a narrow passage into Danti's secret ritual chamber.
8. Four gilded urns surround a faintly-glimmering summoning circle littered with lit candles and torn scrolls. The winemaker, Danti (**necromancer**), stands in the circle accompanied by a ravenous ghoul that once was Lianna (**ghoul**), the apothecary. The deranged man orders trespassers to leave at once lest they risk becoming mindless, undead servants under his command. If the battle turns against Danti, he attempts to escape through area 9, leaving the ghoulish woman to guard his escape. If the characters inspect the magic scrolls and the journal on the table, it is revealed that Danti spent months self-learning necromancy from a strange tome to bring his late wife back to life. Alas, the dark arts and their consequences took a ruinous toll on him and caused him to shatter his obsessed mind.
9. There are two wooden chests in the secret chamber. They contain 25 gp, 450 sp, a potion of healing, and a gilded amulet that protects the user against the undead. The narrow passageway to the east continues for 200 feet and leads to a hidden trapdoor in the open field. An emergency exit.



NIGHT OF THE BRAIN EATER

By Elven Tower and Diana Muñoz

Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG



LEVEL-6 ADVENTURE

A SHADOWDARK ADVENTURE ABOUT CONFRONTING AN ELDER MIND-EATING HORROR

ADVENTURE PRIMER

Among all threats that meander our world, the brain eater is the embodiment of all horrors. No fate is cruelest than being consumed by this abomination.

Elvish Adage



Brain eaters are the source of obscure myths and legends in human folklore. Their origins and true nature have been masked by the passage of time, their secretive behavior, and their precise abilities to control the minds or memories of mortals. These abominations are purple, gaunt humanoids with squid-like heads and four face tentacles. They live in complex, alien societies underground and eat humanoid brains. The brain eaters mostly prey on mankind due to their large populations and weak minds but also enjoy consuming the brains of other ancestries.

THE MIND CABAL

HUNDREDS OF FEET below the surface, in the sprawling network of caverns and tunnels known as the Shadowdark, lies the strange, mind-bending lair of the Mind Cabal. It is an obscure faction of several brain eaters that split from a larger colony far into the veins of the earth.

The Mind Cabal is still a small community of a handful of brain eaters. Their objective is to grow in strength, capture mind-thralls to do their bidding, and eventually hatch an elder brain to empower their lair and reach. Their leader is Zollebessk, the eldest member of their otherworldly tribe. Zollebessk bears a deep scar on its neck. A wound inflicted by their previous community's elder brain. After such disrespect, Zollebessk left with a few loyal followers to create their own clique.

THE SCOURGE OF TANPORT

THE BRAIN EATERS require human brains both for sustenance and to brew the neural soup in which their tadpoles and the elder brain shall grow. Zollebessk has made many sorties to the surface to attack unsuspecting travelers and sleepers in the coastal settlement Tanport.

In the past few weeks, more than three dozen people have gone missing or have been found dead with their craniums pierced; their brains missing. People cry of an angel of death that came to inflict pain. They speak too of a strange nightly apparition that comes door to door to suck the brains of sleepers. The heightened alert of the town watch is useless. Now the authorities turn to mercenaries and sellswords, offering the few clues they have and a hefty reward in exchange for fixing this problem.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Level 6 Adventure

SAVING TANPORT

Constable Burkins is aware of his men's ineffective care for Tanport. He believes the threat is of magical nature and tries not to think of the myths of night stalkers and the like. He offers a sizable reward for finding the culprit, saving any living prisoners, and solving this problem. He allows the characters to inspect the bodies of recent victims. He shares one clue too: the latest attack was facilitated by a band of local spice smugglers (80 gp, 7 XP).

THE DREAMS

The mind eaters' psychic influence has caused some people to have undecipherable, vivid dreams. One of the characters has a dream in which they walk through irregularly-shaped, bulging, living hallways. The walls are flesh-like and pulsating. They instinctively sense the location of the Mind Cabal's underground lair and feel the urge to explore the nightmarish place (0 XP).

RUMORS

d8	Details
1	One in ten people have had dreams where they meander through a strange place with fleshy, pulsating walls.
2	A myth speaks of an untold horror that approaches sleeping people, sees the truth of their sins, and judges them. Those deemed unworthy have their brains eaten.
3	A spice-smuggling faction has recently turned to kidnapping townsfolk. Witnesses recall that the smugglers have a blank face and eyes as empty as the darkest void.
4	A retired adventurer was found dead and brainless in his home grasping a dagger and splattered with a purple-tinted ichor. He is the only one to put up a fight.
5	People say Constable Burkins has collected all the brainless corpses and has a scholar analyzing them to find more info about the culprit. They think it is a beast.
6	People claim that some of the missing folk left into the wilds of their own accord silent and with empty gazes.
7	A hunter saw a hooded figure walk into an abandoned mine close to Tanport that has been closed for a decade.
8	A party of adventurers has come to town and plans to collect the constable's reward. They have spent days boasting and getting ready in the town's inn, though. Whether they shall spring to action remains to be seen.

TANPORT, COASTAL TOWN

They all say it, if there is something you need that the ocean can provide. You shall find it is plentiful in Tanport. Hopefully, you will be the highest bidder!

Local Saying

In the rocky coasts of the Green Ocean, lies the fortified town of Tanport. It is surrounded by 20-foot-tall white walls. The tall spires and lighthouse of Castle Baranhird can be seen from miles out in the cold waters. They are a beacon for vessels to reach the wharf down on the beach below.

Tanport was once a fortified military outpost that housed a dozen warships and their crews in times of war. It is a strategic location with great visibility and guards the mouth of the Vallari River. Several merchant routes sail downstream to reach a plethora of coastal towns. Since the war, Tanport has become a checkpoint for merchants and is expected to grow beyond its walls soon.

RECENT ATTACKS

IN THE PAST few weeks, there have been several horrible cases. People attacked in their homes and left brainless. Some people leaving town on their own. And some being targeted by a smuggling faction that move them to their secret dock on a nearby island. More than three dozen people have died or gone missing. There is no way to know how many are being mind-controlled by the brain eaters either. The authorities, led by Constable Burkins have no clue as to what causes this issue and currently blame the smugglers. Two smugglers were captured recently but they have an empty gaze and appear to know nothing. The hapless lads do not even know their names.

Town Features

► **Events.** Check for a **Random Event** each time a new area is visited. There is a 4-in-6 chance for an event.

► **Ambiance.** The locals are paranoid about the next attack even though they know most occur at night. People are jumpy, sorrowful, and seeking a way to get revenge. Most people are close to one of the many victims.

► **Weather.** The air is hot and clammy with the ocean wind. During this season, the pouring rain hits Tanport almost every day a few hours before sunset.

► **Mind Thralls.** Some townsfolk are under the mental yoke of Zollebessk, like the spice smugglers. They can be recognized by their empty gaze and incoherent conversation (DC 10 WIS check). The spell *restoration* nullifies the affliction and allows for memory and mind recovery.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Six thugs approach the party and demand they prove they are acting normal. The distrustful townsfolk are jumpy and may start a brawl at any moment.
2	Three former smugglers (thugs) succumb to the mental onslaught and become violent in the streets. They attack with knives any passersby. If captured, they have lost all language abilities and behave like animals.
3	Two fishermen walk past the party gazing at the void. They leave town through the main gates and set course for the abandoned mine. Unless stopped, they reach the brain eaters' lair after hours of stumbling in the dark.
4	A throng of people march in the street demanding that Duke Baranhird does something to solve this issue. However, the reclusive lord has not yet publicly made a statement about the recent affairs. People fear the worst.
5	A brawl breaks out in the streets. Throngs of peasants desperate for help blame each other for the recent events. The brawl ends up with a building burned down.
6	Four smugglers (thugs) target a character when he is isolated from the party and attempt to bring them to area 4 to put them on a boat and smuggle them away.

1. MAIN GATES

The 30-foot-stall gatehouse with a drawbridge and a falling grate is the only means of entering Tanport. People and carts make a line to gain access as the guards slowly inspect all newcomers and merchants.

Since the attacks began, security searches in the gatehouse have become exceedingly intrusive. Alas, the guards have not yet found something of relevance. It costs 1 sp to enter Tanport for the first time.

2. WHARF WAREHOUSES

Two buildings with tiled roofing serve as storage places for fishing produce and all manner of temporary merchant goods. The warehouses are managed by an officer from the castle, Sir Danvert. He is corrupt to the core.

A few members of the smuggling faction can be found here at any given time (2d4 **thugs**). They stand mute and with dead eyes until they receive a mental command from Zollebessk. If forcefully interrogated, Sir Danvert confesses that the smugglers have acted strange for a fortnight and he can confirm that a few missing people were abducted by them. He claims to have no part in it.



1. Main Gates
2. Wharf Warehouses
3. The Wharf
4. Smugglers' Cove
5. White Whale Inn
6. Duke's Granary
7. Temple of Gede
8. The Fish Market
9. Black Shark Tavern
10. Castle Baranbird

3. THE WHARF

Only fishing vessels are in the wharf. Merchant barges have avoided Tanport's wharf for ten days after the rumors of recent events spread in the region.

► **Gossip.** Fishermen are wary of speaking their minds (DC 14 CHA check). If persuaded, they reveal that the smugglers have moved at least eight people to their hidden dock on Jade Island. However, they are afraid of retaliation as the spice smugglers are a rather vicious syndicate. All fishermen know to keep their tongues tied. However, they reveal the location of their cove (area 4).

4. THE SMUGGLERS' COVE

The smugglers have a hidden pier in a cove concealed by the rocky cliff west of Tanport's wall. It is barely large enough for an oar boat and used by the smugglers to move stolen merchandise in and out of the city. It can only be accessed by boat. If the characters visit the area, they find four **thugs** ready to defend their turf. The **brain eater**, Kephilt, has a 3-in-6 chance of being present. It is allied with Zollebessk and is in charge of keeping the smugglers tame and obedient as they bring more prisoners to the cabal's lair. If the battle turns south, the brain eater jumps into the water and attempts to flee.

5. WHITE WHALE INN

The main hall of this inn is decorated with the hanging skeleton of a killer whale. Most rooms are available as merchant routes avoid the settlement.

The characters can stay here for 1 sp per night. The owner, an elf named Druandir, remarks that the recent tragedies have affected his line of business. The elf remarks half-laughing that he feels safe as elves are not bound by the superstitions of mankind. He shall ride this out.

► **Murder.** Alas, Druandir is targeted by Zollebessk and found brainless by the front desk the next morning. If a character is up that night, there is a 1-in-6 chance that they hear the **brain eater** walking stealthily in the hall.

6. DUKE'S GRANARY

A relic from times of war, the granary used to collect produce from nearby farmlands to feed the troops and, in exchange, guarantee that the region would not fall to the realm's enemies. They were decommissioned after wartime but, as the settlement grew in the last few years, it is necessary again to collect grain and build up proper reserves for the winter. The granary is currently understaffed as half their workers have gone missing.

7. TEMPLE OF GEDE

Rivaled only by Castle Baranhird, the domed Temple of Gede is the second-largest edifice in town. Dozens of people attend a mass to mourn the recent deaths.

If a character is a follower of Gede, the party is invited to speak privately with Father Dellemus. The priest explains that the strange dreams and deaths are not good omens. He fears for the life of Duke Baranhird.

► **Blessing.** Followers of Gede who pray by the altar for 1 hour earn Gede's blessing (they earn a **luck token**).

8. THE FISH MARKET

Usually a place of ample commerce, the Fish Market languishes as merchants avoid the town now and people stay indoors, fearing the worst. The characters can buy rations, traveling gear, and weaponry in the market.

9. BLACK SHARK TAVERN

The tavern's facade is decorated with the mounted jaws of a large shark. Within people get worked up with hope as an adventurer boasts their will to help.

A LV-3 adventuring party of three led by Damien (Fighter) drinks, shares tales of past exploits, and tells people that they shall save Tanport from certain doom. They are skilled adventurers but Damien is prone to showing off and taking too long enjoying the townsfolk's adulations. When he learns of the characters' intent to help, they make preparations to set out immediately. They delay in the end but may catch up with the characters later on.

10. CASTLE BARANHIRD

A gatehouse with a drawbridge over a chasm is the only way into the castle. Guards patrol the fortification and most people who come are turned away.

If the characters announce their interest in the contract bounty, the gatehouse guards allow the party into the inner bailey. Constable Burkins soon emerges from the castle barracks to greet the party and invite them inside. The worried constable brings them into the keep to negotiate and share the few clues that he has learned.

► **The Bodies.** There are eleven corpses in a secluded ward. A spellcaster can inspect the head wounds to determine that an obscure monster known as a brain eater caused them (DC 17 INT). They suffered a painful death.

► **The Smugglers.** The constable sent six soldiers to raid the smugglers' den on Jade Island. None returned, though. He offers a map of the coast and a vessel.

► **The Duke.** The constable reveals that Duke Baranhird has been affected by a mind affliction that has caused him to behave irrationally and issue the strangest commands. Luckily, those close to him recognized it as lunacy and secluded him in his chambers. If the characters heal him with a *restoration* spell, the duke is grateful. After his mind clears, he recalls a dark, hooded, tentacled creature in his chambers and an acute, piercing headache that overcame him and caused him to swoon.

► **Reward (3 XP).** The cured duke gifts the characters a +2 *shortsword* with a diamond-embedded hilt.



THE SMUGGLER'S DOCK

I swear for m'life! I ain't one of them. They're strange and silent now, following unheard commands and kidnapping people. I only played along for my safety!

Ando, the Immune Smuggler

While the leader of the Mind Cabal, Zollebessk, scoured the homes and streets of Tanport, its second-in-command, Kephilt, offered to secure more humanoid prisoners and thralls by taking over a criminal organization in town. Kephilt used its mental prowess to take over the fairly successful spice-smuggling faction in Tanport's wharf. All but one smuggler, a man named Ando, are the brain eater's thralls. It was then that the abductions in the already-affected town began. Ando's mind is innately immune to the Kephilt's abilities but he is scared to death after witnessing what they can do. Thus, he decided to play along.

The brain eater's scheme works as follows: The smugglers masquerade as fish sellers and lure people into a dark alley or an empty street. Victims are beaten, tied, put on a small vessel, and moved to the smugglers' dock on Jade Island (see map). Then Kephilt decides what to do with them. Some are eaten; brainless bodies are then thrown into the ocean. The rest are mentally subdued by Kephilt, moved back to the mainland, and led to the abandoned mine. There, the thralls are ordered to descend into the Mind Cabal's lair where they are expected to do hard labor, serve the brain eaters, and eventually be consumed for sustenance. Their prospects are grim.

Area Features

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every 3 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** The only light source is the oil lamp by the pier (area 2). The moon and stars provide the dimmest light.

► **Sounds and Smells.** The coming and going of the tides is ever present; it grants advantage on stealth checks. The smell of algae buildup on the shore is acrid.

RUDE AWAKENING

The smugglers are enthralled by Kephilt like the Duke Baranhird was in Tanport. However, the constant exposure to Kephilt's mind tricks has rendered their minds unable to sustain much change. If any of the affected smugglers are healed with a *restoration* spell, they recall the brain eater's presence and suffer a mental breakdown. They are prone to act erratically and aggressively (**Reaction** check with disadvantage).

RANDOM EVENTS

d4	Details
1	A smuggling vessel arrives at the pier carrying two tied-up people abducted from Tanport. Three smugglers (thugs) haul the prisoners to the house (area 3).
2	A storm breaks. It starts pouring. Visibility is reduced to 10 feet. Vessels in open sea may capsize (2-in-6 chance).
3	The crushing, clicking sound of pincers comes from the shore as a giant crab emerges from the shallow water. The mollusk is attracted by the brain eater's psychic aura and prioritizes attacking it mercilessly if present.
4	Damien arrives at the island with his two comrades on a silent vessel (DC 14 WIS to notice). They eagerly fight the smugglers but may flee if they see Kephilt (Morale check). Damien is ambivalent about the characters and may choose to double-cross them (Reaction check).

1. THE SHALLOW BEACH

The characters can only approach this area with a boat. Constable Burkins offers to lend them a thin, sailboat to reach the island. It is an hour away from Tanport.

As the vessel approaches Jade Island, the stench of rotting algae pervades the area as a faint light in the smugglers' dock becomes visible. A one-story, wooden cottage stands by the shallow, white-sand beach.

If the characters dock by the pier or the beach, they are noticed at once by the smugglers nearby. If they, instead, take advantage of the reduced visibility and dock farther to the south, they remain hidden and may approach.

► **Tracks.** Footprints to and from the jungle. There is evidence of hauling game toward the cottage (DC 11 WIS).

2. THE HIDDEN PIER

A watchman (**thug**) sits on the pier by the oil lantern, keeping watch for incoming vessels. Unless the characters dispatch him quietly, the thug may spot them as they attempt to close in on the cottage (DC 14 DEX check).

► **Abducted.** If a character was abducted in Tanport (see **Random Event** 6, Ch. 1), they are tied up and brought here. After disembarking, two **thugs** bring the character to area 3 to await Kephilt's arrival via teleportation.

► **The Lure.** After disposing of the watchman, a character can snuff out the oil lamp. This causes 1d4 out of the eight **thugs** in area 3 to come out and investigate.

3. THE SMUGGLERS' DEN

The cottage contains spare furnishing and a double bunk bed. There are eight smugglers (**thugs**) awaiting Kephilt's appearance (see **The Leader**). They doze off in a stupor but have orders to defend the place against trespassers. Ando (**thug**) soon reveals himself as unaffected and attempts to switch sides to aid the party.

► **The Maps.** A map on a table depicts the tunnel network of the abandoned mine. A tunnel leads down into a spot marked with a single lidless eye in magenta ink. The characters can use it to find the Mind Cabal's lair.

► **Treasure (4 XP).** In a locked chest (DC 16 DEX), there are 20 gp, 240 sp, and a *potion of polymorph*.

4. JADE ISLAND'S JUNGLE

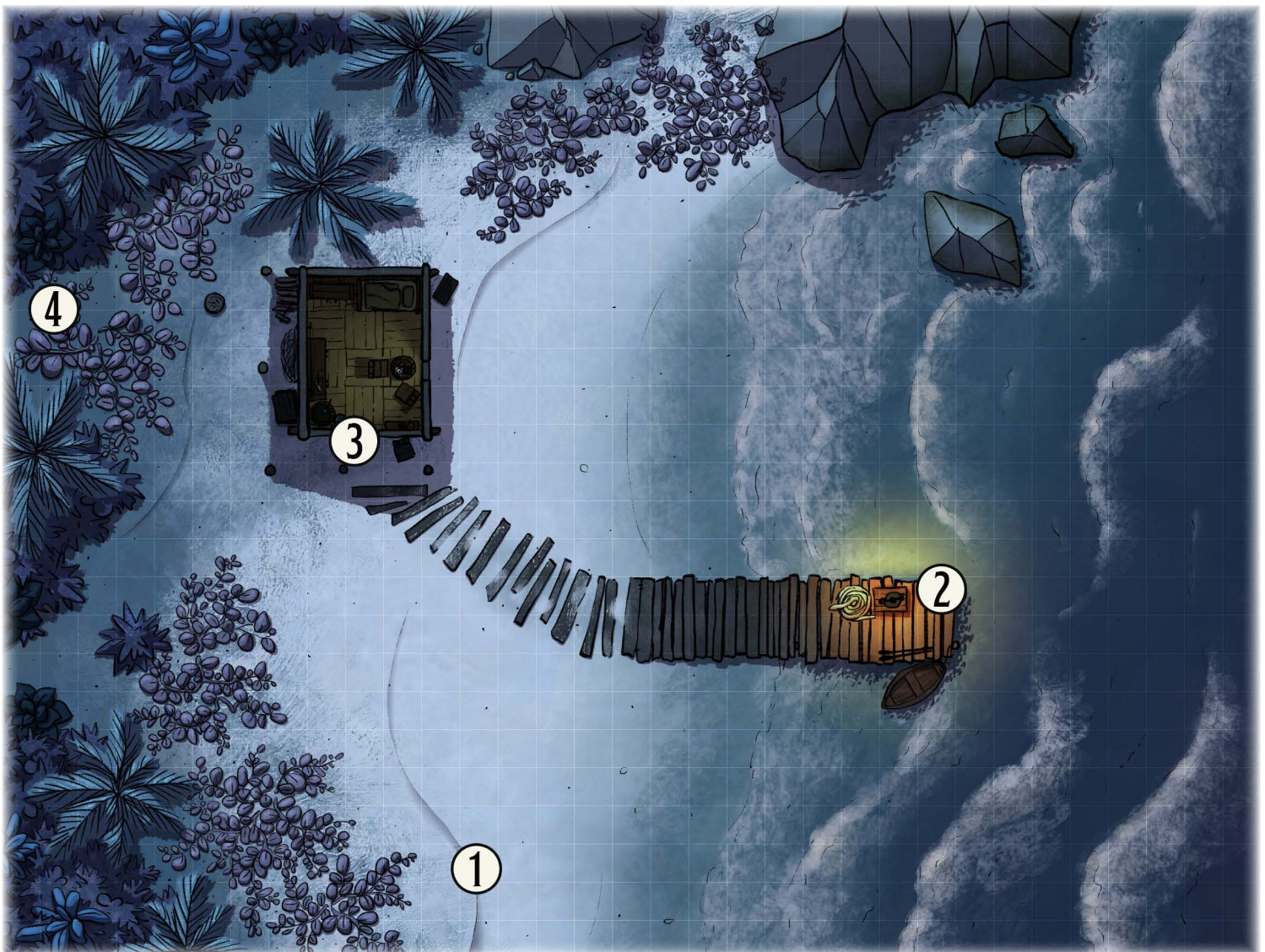
The jungle is deep and dense. The characters can hide here if things do not go as planned and choose to flee. Hiding in the jungle requires a DC 14 DEX check. Staying in the jungle incurs a 2-in-6 risk per hour of encountering a wandering pair of hunting **panthers**.

THE LEADER

THE BRAIN EATER, Kephilt, is meant to come via teleportation to reinforce the mental shackles on the smugglers and deal with any captured person from Tanport.

When the characters arrive at the island, there is a 1-in-6 chance that Kephilt arrives in the next **crawling round**. The odds rise to 2-in-6 in the next crawling round and continue rising until the **brain eater** inevitably appears. Kephilt appears in a cloud of dark smoke just outside the cottage. It looks into the surrounding area, and then walks into the cottage. The characters may approach this fight in many forms, depending on when Kephilt arrives. If Kephilt was slain in Tanport, its comrade Verskil comes here, as it has taken charge of the smugglers.

► **The Way Forward.** All clues point to the abandoned mine close to Tanport. If Ando lives, he reveals most prisoners were sent into the mine and may yet live. He offers to join the party in exchange for speaking in his favor to Constable Burkins so he is cleared of any crimes.



LAIR OF THE MIND CABAL

Knowing when to stop is one of the most difficult traits for a gambler. When luck is on your side, it usually makes you blind. Your gains will seem nothing...

Gamblers' Saying

REACHING THE LAIR

THE OLD MINE is unguarded. The tunnels are littered with unprocessed ores and rusty tools. It takes the party four hours of perilous descent into the veins of the earth to reach the Mind Cabal's lair. During this journey, the characters may become lost (DC 18 WIS check, advantage with the map from Jade Island). If that occurs, the party arrives at a large cavern chamber where three **cave creepers** approach and attack. The wild centipedes see them as easy prey and attempt to paralyze them with their toxins. These mindless critters fight to the death.

LAIR OF MADNESS

THE BRAIN EATERS' lair is a place of nightmare that exists simultaneously in the Material Realm as it does in the Far Realms where the brain eaters are originally from. Its mere existence breaks the laws of nature. Magic and thoughts do not work the same in a place such as this. Humanoids exposed to it for too long inevitably become insane and prone to the brain eaters' mind tricks.

The structure of the lair is incoherent to simple minds. The half-living walls are a mix of tissues similar to muscles, sinew, and brain matter. A blood-like fluid pulses through veins on the walls causing them to bulge and palpitate. It is like walking into the innards of a beast.

Dungeon Features

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every two **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Each **crawling round**, there is a 1-in-6 chance that the living walls glow for 1 **crawling round**. Otherwise, all areas are dark. Denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Smells.** The rancid stench of rotting meat mixes with that of blood. The walls produce these smells.

► **Aura of Madness.** The characters' expedition into the lair must be swift. Upon arrival, they are affected by pure madness (DC 8 INT check). On a fail, the character is affected by a *confusion* spell for 1 **crawling round**. They also have disadvantage on any checks made to resist the brain eater's abilities. This ailment may be negated with the *bless* spell. Each subsequent hour, the check's DC increases by 2 and all dungeon crawlers must roll again.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	The living wall opens to reveal the severed upper body of a young lad for 1 minute. His organs and blood vessels are connected to the wall. His gaze is crazed but he manages to ask for the mercy of a swift, painless death.
2	Ten giant centipedes emerge from orifices on the wall and lunge at the party. The vermin know no fear.
3	A sphincter-like door with edges as sharp as blades opens and closes. The characters must jump across quickly enough to avoid it (DC 16 DEX or 4d6 damage).
4	The characters experience a vivid vision of a half-living realm where everything bulges and pulsates like in the lair. Untold, manic creatures coexist with the brain eaters there. They envision a huge, cart-sized tentacled brain.
5	A brain eater named Hargghink uses <i>detect thoughts</i> from area 5 to discover the party's intentions. It awaits them, overconfident that the characters are puny foes.
6	Seven enthralled townsfolk (thugs) are sent after the characters wielding fang-like blades. The poor people behave like rabid animals and fight until slain or incapacitated. The <i>restoration</i> spell may alleviate their plight.

1. ENTRANCE TUNNEL

The cave wall gives way to a strange, fleshy, living structure. The tunnel ahead looks like living innards.

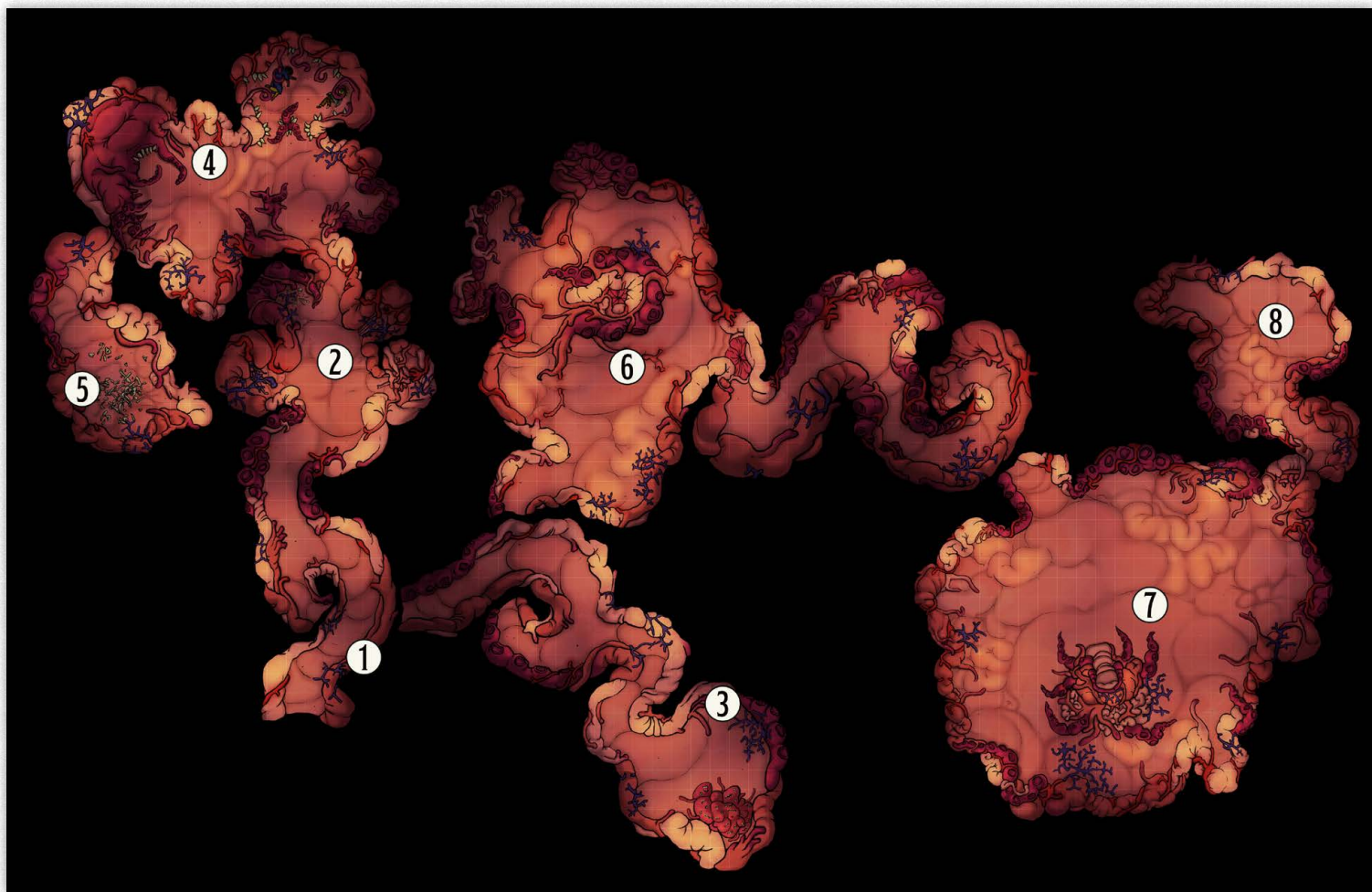
It is truly a test of steel to wander into the brain eaters' lair. The characters are first affected by the **Aura of Madness** here (see **Dungeon Features**). A spellcaster may know that this horrid place is tightly connected to the Far Realm, an outer plane of existence (DC 15 INT check).

2. HALL OF DESIRES

The pulsating blood vessels of this chamber walls shift and move in alluring, geometrical patterns.

The hypnotic movement of the wall blood vessels is enchanted; a rather clever trap. When the characters arrive, the captivating patterns catch their eyes. Creatures are enraptured by the bloating walls and spend 1d8 hours analyzing the eluding patterns, trying to find a message in the hidden meaning of it all (DC 15 WIS check).

Unaffected creatures can shake others firmly to wake them up from the hypnotic effect. If all present are affected, Hargghink (area 5) binds them and brings them to Zollebessk in area 7. The brain eater is mostly amused...



3. BLESSING OF THE FAR GODS

At the end of a meandering gut-like shaft, a living structure that appears a perfect breed of a brain and a heart palpitates. It has dozens of lidless eyes.

The strange being consists of two **gibbering mouters** fused in communion. The entity regards the characters with curiosity, bearing them no ill will. Speaking Primordial or using a *detect thoughts* spell allows characters to understand the gibbering. The abominations invite a character to merge with them into a single entity. They defend themselves if attacked by the party.

► **The Merge.** If a character agrees, the two gibbering mouters close in on them and merge with their flesh. The character becomes a hybrid being with a mind split into three. Their INT becomes 18, they are immune to the brain eaters' abilities, and are prone to obey the erratic thoughts of any of the two mouters (DC 18 CHA).

4. LIVING CELLS

Ten people are stuck to the throbbing walls of this chamber, gripped by tentacles and pincer-like appendages. They are mentally subdued and ignore their surroundings. Hargghink's mind calls from area 5: "*Leave them and come to me. There is much to do.*" The **brain eater** comes here if the characters attempt to release them.

5. HARGGHINK, THE FLESH CRAFTER

The **brain eater**, Hargghink, is a reclusive scholar who enjoys experimenting with biological subjects, transforming them into new things, and grafting new parts and organs. It is fascinated by gibbering mouters too.

Hargghink calls to the approaching party with confidence and gets ready to use its Mind Blast as they arrive. If combat ensues, Hargghink summons a **gibbering mouter** from a nearby wall when dropped to half HP.

► **Treasure.** A helm carved with brain ridges and a spinal neck-guard hangs nearby (*helm of mind reading*).

6. THE TAINTED HEART

A gargantuan beating heart dominates the chamber. Its beating sound echoes down the living walls.

The heart pumps blood throughout the lair and provides Zollebessk a protective aura (see area 7). It bleeds when struck but it regenerates so fast it cannot matter. A spellcaster that inspects the heart for 1 **crawling round** learns that it is an arcane energy source. It is also revealed that the heart can be destroyed by punching through it and merging with it. If a person does it, the limb they use is absorbed by the heart and lost, also their CON score is reduced by 2. In exchange, they become immune to the Mind Blast ability and the protective aura disappears.

7. AUDIENCE WITH ZOLLEBESSK

A gaunt figure with squid-like head and four face tentacles sits on a shapeless throne of viscera and entrails. Its inquisitive eyes are visibly impressed.

Zollebessk (**brain eater**) admires the characters' resourcefulness as a person would react to a well-trained dog. It is incapable of seeing the adventurers as equals. The brain eater sees usefulness in strong servants. Mentally, it speaks to the party and offers them a place in its organization as trusted enforcers and muscle. They just have to open their minds to his power for it to happen.

If the characters refuse, Zollebessk curses them and attacks. Any remaining enthralled people come to its aid at once. If dropped to 1/4 of its HP, the brain eater attempts to flee to area 8 to escape with a scroll of *teleportation*.

► **Protective Aura.** If the tainted heart still beats, Zollebessk has advantage on all checks and has 10 extra HP.

► **Sudden Decay.** If Zollebessk is defeated, the lair decays and collapses immediately. All must flee at once.

8. TREASURE CHAMBER

Sphincter-like valves guard several chest-sized alcoves on the curving, muscle-tissue wall (DC 12, 5 HP).

► **Treasure (6 XP).** Collectively, the alcoves contain fifteen rubies (5 gp each), two *potions of healing*, a mithral chainmail armor, and two *scrolls of teleportation*.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTERS REACH the end of this adventure and face the consequences of their valiant deeds.

TANPORT IS SAVED

The characters defeat the brain eaters in their den and return triumphant with the rescued survivors to the coastal settlement. The townsfolk greet them as heroes, throw flowers in their path, and soon organize a feast to celebrate their valorous deeds. If they bring the abominate heads, Constable Burkins hangs them by Castle Baranhird's gatehouse for all to see. In addition, all those affected by the brain eaters' mind enslavement are free from their yoke. If the characters speak on behalf of Ando, the smuggler, he is pardoned. Otherwise, Constable Burkins considers him as guilty as the rest of the spice-smuggling faction and orders their arrest.

PATIENT REVENGE

If the brain eater, Zollebessk, managed to escape, its rage and desire for vengeance know no bounds. But it is a patient predator. It shall watch the characters from afar, weighing its chance to find the best moment to strike. The party shall not get rid of it easily. Alas, the brain eater's revenge is an adventure for another day..



Belfry Knight



Designed by Kyle Latino
using a template from MONSTROUS
for information, visit bit.ly/monstrouskick

Blood Pact: Long ago, the Belfry Knight willingly entered into a blood pact with an old priest. The Belfry Knight swore to obey the priest's command to repel invaders from their chapel. The priest, in turn, harnessed great and terrible sorceries to grant the Belfry Knight the ability to rise from death in three days. As long as he died on holy ground and commanded every beast and crawling thing within the sound of the chapel bell.

Mark of the Damned: But the poor priest was tricked by the devil that had transformed into an angel of light. Now marked by the devil's curse, the Belfry Knight spread its evil upon the world. The knight marks all those who hear the tolling of his bell as prey, hunting them for as long as they are within the sound of the chapel bell.

The knight's prey is spied upon by an evergrowing number of bats, owls, cats, and spiders. They inform the knight until he attacks at sundown.

Profane Aversion: In his cursed state, the knight cannot abide by the singing of hymns or the scent of myrrh, which he avoids at all costs. Additionally, the Belfry Knight is also repelled by reminders of his mortal life, (past belongings from his abandoned farmhouse down the road) which will render him momentarily dazed before he is driven ever deeper into his cursed, beastly state.

Unleashed Beasthood: In battle, the Belfry Knight is merciless and brutal. He shall leave defeated foes hanging from tree limbs with choir bells tied to their hands. The knight's attacks with his warhammer are soulrending. They leave physical and mental wounds that even magic finds difficult to heal.

Fearless: The Belfry Knight and his Giant Belfry Bats are immune to morale checks.

AC 16 (plate), **HP** 32, **ATK** 2 warhammer +7 (2d6), **MV** near, **S** +4, **D** -1, **C** +3, **I** -1, **W** -1, **Ch** +2, **AL** C, **LV** 6

The Belfry Knight is also attended by two blood-thirsty Giant Belfry Bat companions, who will fight with him in battle. The knight may also summon 1d6 of any variety of mundane animal to fight alongside him, but such creatures make a morale check any time they take damage.

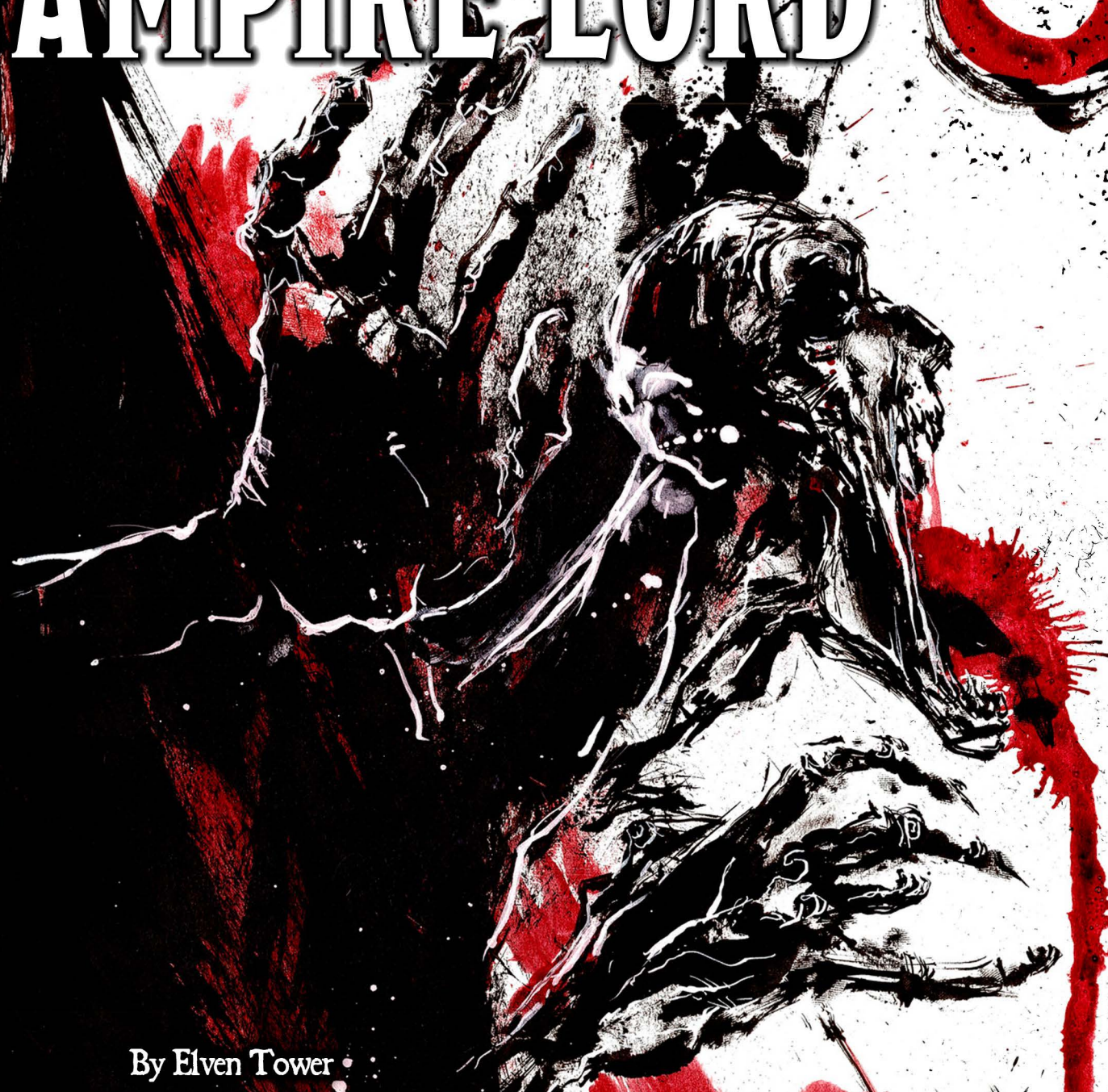
GIANT BELFRY BAT

AC 13, **HP** 18, **ATK** 2 bites +4 (1d6), **MV** near (fly), **S** +3, **D** +1, **C** +2, **I** -2, **W** +1, **Ch** -1, **AL** N, **LV** 3

Echolocation: Unaffected by effects that impair, modify, or rely on sight. Effectively blinded by deafening noises and magical silence.

Blood drain: Deals an extra die of damage if it hits the same target with both bite attacks. The bat regains Hit Points equal to that extra die.

SEEKING THE VAMPIRE LORD



By Elven Tower

Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG



LEVEL-7 ADVENTURE

A SHADOWDARK ADVENTURE ABOUT DEFEATING A DEADLY VAMPIRIC ABOMINATION

THE PLIGHT OF FIERALLIN

Keep your voices down, anyone could be a servant to the cursed count. Even the young ones have been known to savagely attack the vampire's enemies...

Townspeaker Annara

The binding power of old promises and pacts is often overlooked and ignored. It is especially prevalent when pacts were made a long time ago and the new generation does not even know such agreements existed. They do not feel compelled to honor a promise that a distant relative made. But some allegiances cannot be disregarded as they are bound by magic that mortals cannot resist or wield.

Two hundred years ago, the region was ruled by a despotic man, Count Schneimer. He was a cruel overseer who taxed the peasantry harshly and dabbled in obscure magical arts. The count struck a deal with a demonic entity in life and became a vampire. The townsfolk's future was grim with the prospect of such an immortal ruler.

One day, the count summoned his subjects to swear allegiance to him and allow themselves to be bitten. They would then be reborn as vampire spawns. The locals agreed out of fear. But before it could be done, a valiant knight fought the vampire and subdued him with a wooden stake in his heart. The grateful townsfolk never had to comply with their promise. The paralyzed vampire could not be destroyed. Instead, he was buried in his family crypt and forgotten. The stake decayed after centuries and freed him to collect his dues: eternal vampiric servitude. Its influence over the locals grows steadily.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Level 7 Adventure

SAVING FIERALLIN

The influence of Count Schneimer, the vampire lord, has scourged the small population of Fierallin with its demands of obedience and its powerful influence over the young. The locals fear acting against him but Townspeaker Annara offers a reward to passing sellswords in exchange for destroying the vampire (80 gp, 6 XP).

THE VAMPIRE HUNTER

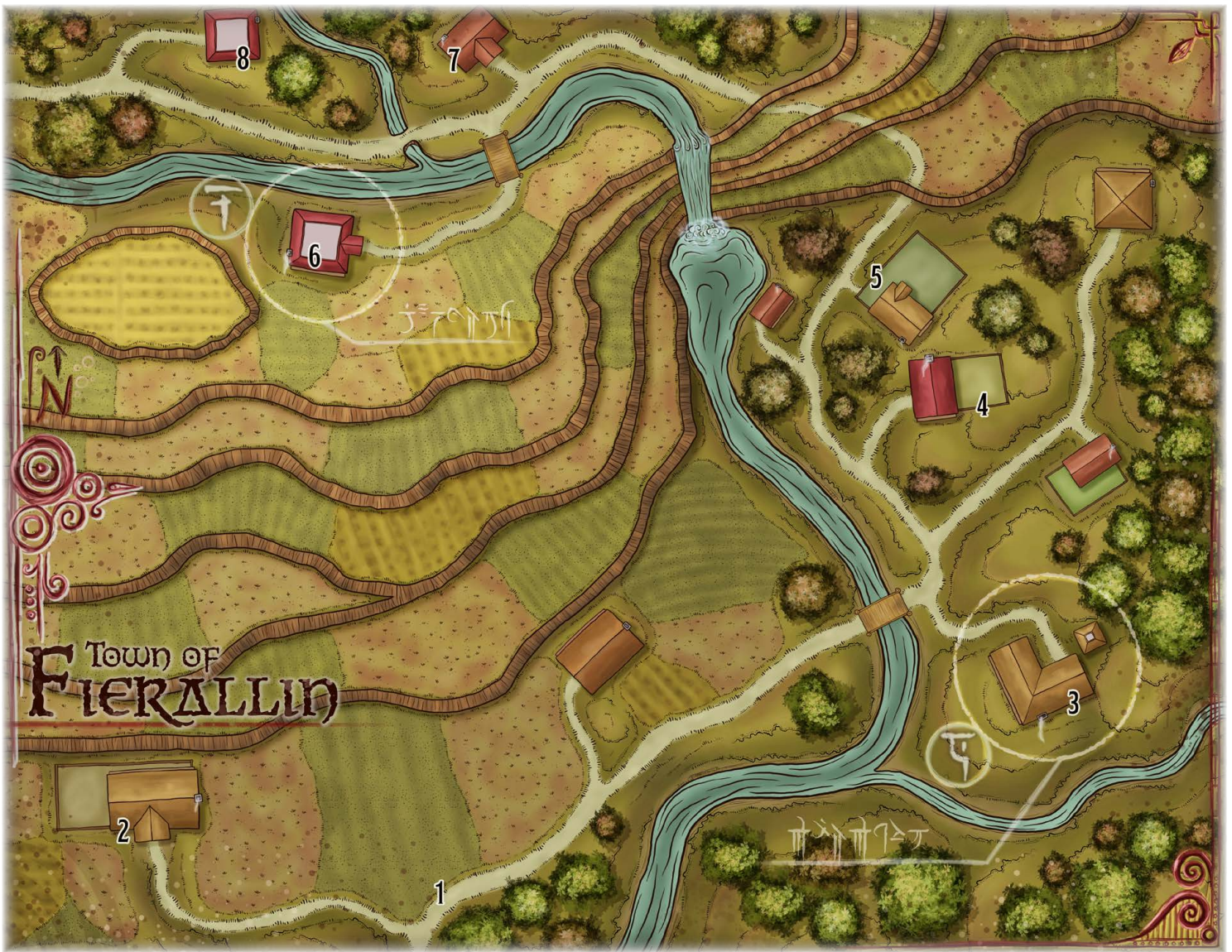
A veteran hunter named Rudolf Van Arten approaches the party and explains that a terrible vampiric threat has awoken. He has slain vampires before but the one in the Town of Fierallin is particularly powerful. In exchange for their help in vanquishing this monster, Van Arten offers a set of mithral chain mail as a reward (8 XP).

RUMORS

d8	Details
1	Children of ages 7-15 are particularly affected by the vampire's necromancy. They listen to his commands, behave differently, and have even attacked others.
2	The vampire's mausoleum is behind his ruined castle. The ruins are an hour from Fierallin and are little more than crumbling rocks. Some say the crypt below is intact.
3	There is a local myth about the people from three neighboring towns joining forces to defeat a necromancer who ruled the region. It must have happened a long time ago.
4	People believe there is treasure in the ruined castle, but no one dares to go within a mile of the edifice.
5	The vampire lord speaks mentally to all people and commands them to visit the crypt. Some people, the most scared or weakest have heeded his ancestral call.
6	Undead monsters have attacked the Town of Fierallin several times since the locals refuse to obey the vampire.
7	Madam Jass, a local diviner, claims that the town's ancestors promised eternal servitude to Count Schneimer. It was expected that the count would collect that debt.
8	Rudolf Van Arten, a vampire hunter in town, wants to visit the vampire lord's crypt but no one dares help him. He wears an eye patch and has a wooden hand. Rumor has it that he lost them fighting a vampiric monster.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Three boys approach and speak in raspy voices, insulting the characters and demanding they leave the Town of Fierallin. If refused, they attack (vampire infants).
2	The locals insult and fight each other on the road after two loggers threaten to depart to seek the vampire lord. The others curse them and brand them traitors. Eight peasants draw blunt weapons and start a brawl.
3	Two vampire spawns emerge from the ruined castle and walk into town. They seek the characters and attack.
4	A caravan of traveling merchants and performers arrives in town. They set up a large tent and charge 1 sp to watch their circus-like spectacle. Four ghasts brake into the tent and attack any living creatures nearby.
5	The vampire lord's call affects four children in town. The children transform into vampire infants and leave for the ruined castle. The monsters act in self-defense only.
6	Sir Baldern (knight), and his squire (guard) arrive in town. They learn of the town's plight and offer to help. The itinerant knight gladly joins the party's expedition to the vampire's abode under the ruined castle.



1. THE SOUTH ROAD

The landscape of early autumn flanks the lonely road to Fierallin. The terraced rice plantations to the north are a marvelous sight to travelers. Strangely enough, barely a person is seen working the fields, all remain indoors.

2. ARALHAN'S GOODS

The one-story wooden house brandishes a bright sign that reads 'Aralhan's Goods, all you need for the right price.' However, the store appears to be closed.

The characters can hear Aralhan trying to make his two children come back to normal. They move slowly and do not talk, as in a stupor. If the characters knock, the vendor gladly lets them in to see if they can help the lads. A *detect magic* spell reveals a charming aura on the boys. The spells *restoration* or *dispel magic* fix this. If the spell check fails or if the characters interact with them too long, they transform into two **vampire infants** and attack. If the characters subdue the affected children without hurting them, Aralhan is grateful. He pays the characters 10 gp and gifts them his grandfather's *+1 dagger*.

3. INN TAVERN

People with grim looks drink their sorrows away in the tavern wishing their current problems to pass.

Sam, the innkeeper, remarks that the vampire affecting most children has hit the spirits of all in town. People shall soon lose faith and join the count. Rudolf Van Arten drinks here when the characters arrive. He buys them a round of drinks to break the ice and converse.

► **Trapped Vampires.** In a vampiric outbreak, the locals managed to capture two **vampire infants** in a cell in the basement. They are the innkeeper's son and a farmer's daughter. They squirm and growl all day long.

4. TOWNSPEAKER ANNARA'S HOME

Annara invites the characters into her home and begs them to act swiftly. She hopes they can save as many children as possible. Apart from the promised reward, the townspeaker offers a crude map to the ruined castle and a local guide to lead the party there. She cares not for any treasures within; she signs a *Letter of Marque*, allowing the characters to keep anything they find.

HALL OF THE VAMPIRE LORD

Consider my offer. Great power and the gift of immortality. You shall never be offered such a boon again. Just bow before me and accept my grace.

Count Schneimer, The Vampire Lord



The characters leave the Town of Fierallin and approach the ruins of Count Schneimer's castle from the east. It takes the characters 1 hour to reach the dilapidated fort following the townspeaker's map. The road leads directly to it as it was once an important landmark. There is nothing of value to be found in the castle's ruins; they are little more than cracked, eroded bricks and broken beams.

However, a one-story mausoleum behind the overgrown ruins stands almost intact, as if impervious to the passage of time and the elements. An overgrown path leads from the ruins to the mausoleum grounds (area 1). The vegetation around the mausoleum is withered and gray; devoid of life-force. A spellcaster detects a meager aura of necromancy affecting the plants (DC 12 INT).

Dungeon Features

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 crawling rounds and after loud noises (2-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some chambers have braziers with permanent light; the rest are dark. All denizens are dark-adapted.

► **Healing Negation.** All magical healing is disrupted in the crypt. When healing occurs, the target only recovers half the allotted Hit Points (DC 14 WIS check).

► **Undead Creation.** Living creatures that perish in the crypt rise as **ghouls** under the vampire lord's command after 1d4 hours. Promptly removing the corpse from the crypt prevents this effect (DC 17 INT check).

RANDOM EVENTS

d6 Details

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Six peasants arrive at the crypt from a nearby town to help. They are relatives of some affected children. |
| 2 | Four vampire spawns approach from the darkness and attack. They still wear their commoner's attire. |
| 3 | A resilient child approaches asking for help. He can barely control the count's influence. If the characters refuse or put him in danger, he becomes a vampire infant . |
| 4 | Three ghasts run fiercely at the characters in a fearsome display of ravenous rage. The undead fight until slain. |
| 5 | An acolyte of Ord arrives at the dungeon to vanquish the all vampires. He gladly joins the characters on this quest. |
| 6 | A hidden pressure-plate on the floor (DC 13 WIS) triggers a deadly fire-jet to shoot from the wall. The target takes 3d6 damage (DC 16 DEX check for half). |

1. MAUSOLEUM GROUNDS

A close walk from the ruined castle, Count Schneimer's mausoleum stands impassive to the elements. The granite door stands half open, inviting.

► **The Beggar.** An itinerant (**peasant**) sits near the entrance, in the sun. The poor man warns the characters not to explore the place as the creatures that inhabit it are dark. He claims they have ignored him so far.

2. THE MAUSOLEUM

Two lavish sarcophagi flank an even larger sarcophagus with an orange, round crystal on its lid. The large enclosure is fit for a member of the noble class.

► **The Guards.** Two **vampire spawns** hide in the smaller sarcophagi. They were once townsfolk of Fierallin but were the first to heed the vampire lord's call. They emerge and attack when anyone comes within 5 feet.

► **Secret Entrance.** When opened, the large enclosure appears to be empty. However, inspecting the inside for 1 crawling round reveals a removable panel. There is a dark shaft beneath it with a ladder. It leads to area 3.

3. CRYPT'S LANDING

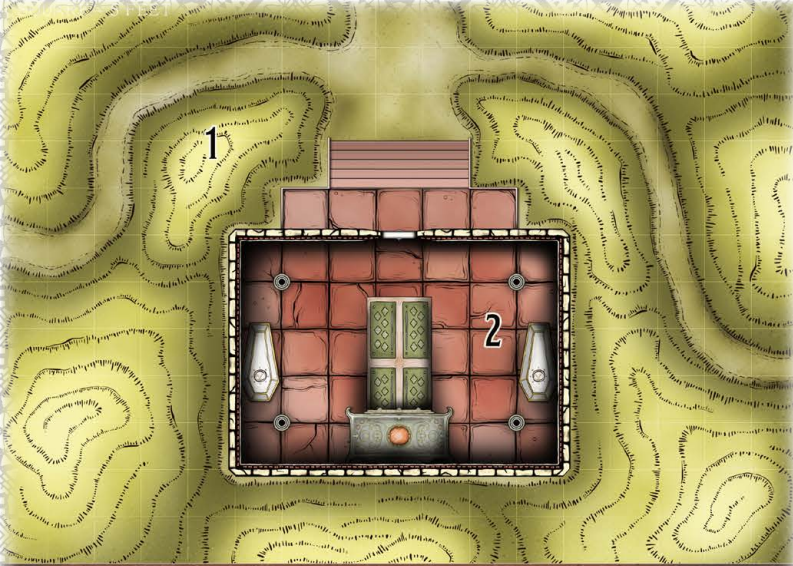
The ladder descends 60 feet to this landing. The chamber is dark and cannot be seen from above. The characters can throw a torch to see that the ladder extends all the way down. The chamber is empty nonetheless.

4. THE MIRROR PONDS

Stone plinths with varied trinkets surround a 4-inch-deep crystalline pool with silver-plated bottom. When completely still, a reflection of the intricate reliefs carved on the ceiling can be seen in the pool.

► **Arcane Purpose.** A wizard can inspect the pool and use a *detect magic* spell to learn that it can be used in conjunction with a *crystal ball* or the *scrying* spell (DC 15 INT check). Using the reflective pool in such a manner confers advantage on any related checks.

► **Fight in the Water.** To thwart the characters, the vampire lord summons forth two **vampire spawns** and two **vampire infants**. They appear in the pool and fight fiercely. Their reflections on the silver-plated bottom are absent. Enemies appear once in any of the two areas 4.



5. HALL OF LIGHTNING

The dark hallway extends farther than any light can reveal it. The granite walls bear ominous scorch marks of untold origin that branch from the south.

Each of the two areas 5 consists of a one-hundred and twenty-five feet long hallway. Along each corridor, there are four pressure-sensitive plates (DC 14 WIS to notice, see map) that trigger the lighting bolt trap on the south wall. A character can inspect the marks on the wall and determine they were caused by lightning (DC 13 INT).

► **Lightning.** When a creature steps on any of the trigger plates, lightning erupts from the device by the far wall. The lightning travels north until it reaches the door. Any creatures found therein take 2d6 damage (DC 14 DEX for half). A lever on the device disables it. Dull undead never come here; vampires avoid the plates.

► 6. THE HONOR GUARD

Six gold-inlaid sarcophagi hug the walls of this chamber and surround a stone circle on the cracked floor.

► **The Enclosures.** When the characters arrive, the lids of four sarcophagi are pushed to the side. Four **reavers** emerge from them. They were once the vampire lord's honor guard. They now guard him for eternity.

► **The Circle.** Studying the intricate patterns on this arcane circle reveals that it is imbued with a powerful necromancy spell. It is meant to keep the contents of the sarcophagi in a half-living state (DC 16 INT check).

► **Treasure (6 XP).** Collectively, the six sarcophagi contain 34 gp, 240 sp, 1 *potion of healing*, a silver mirror shield, and two scrolls with random tier-3 priest spells.

7. EMBALMING CHAMBER

The chamber contains embalming tools, glass flasks of embalming fluids, and the embalmed body of a dissected man on a metal surface. Despite its current state and age, the body tissues have been preserved with great precision. Such embalming knowledge is unseen today.

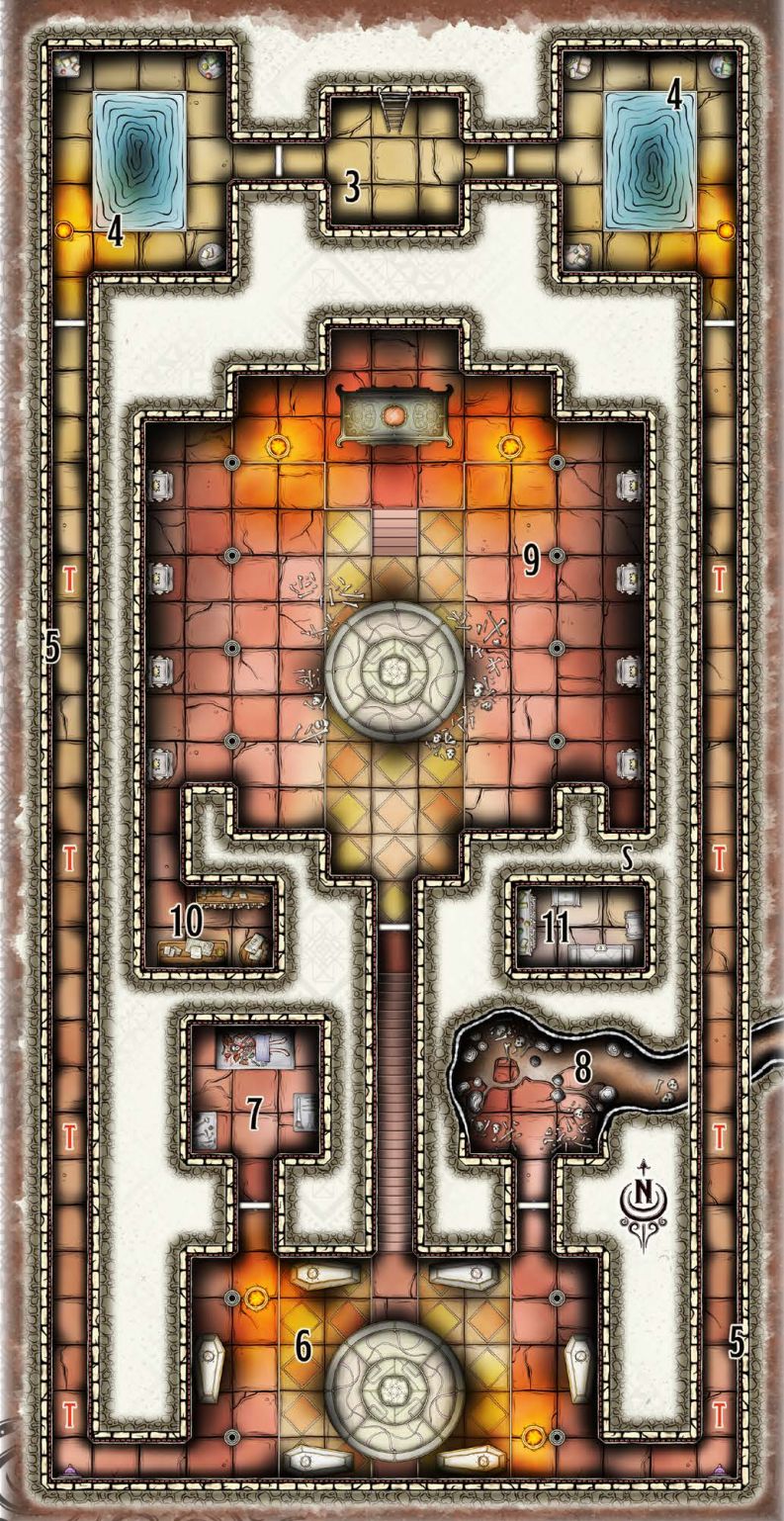
► **Secret Lore (100 gp, 6 XP).** A character can inspect the embalmed body and the tools for 1 day to reverse-engineer the embalming technique. It is an ancient secret that undertakers of the nobility might pay well for.

8. BROKEN VAULT

What was once a secure vault collapsed under its weight after a bout of seismic activity. The room's contents were destroyed in the process. Grim bones litter the floor.

► **The Remains.** The bones are of elvish origin (DC 12 INT check), elf explorers came through the tunnel and were murdered by the honor guard from area 6.

► **The Tunnel.** The tunnel continues east for one mile and reaches a dead end. Two **cave creepers** inhabit it.



9. TOMB OF THE VAMPIRE LORD

A regal, pale, blood-drinking undead of supreme power and wickedness stands by its opulent sarcophagus. Long-fanged children stand by the vampire lord.

Count Schneimer (**vampire**) is accompanied by six **vampire infants**. The vampire lord is overcome with rage and somber feelings of revenge. However, he recognizes the party as worthy warriors and offers to parley. The vampire lord offers the characters to become vampiric envoys under his command. Vampirism shall make the characters stronger and immortal, he claims. If Rudolf Van Arden is present, he claims this would give him utter control over the characters' fate (DC 16 INT check).

► **The Battle.** Lord Schneimer uses the vampire infants as meat shields and uses its Charm ability to turn the characters against each other. If dropped to 1/4 of its HP, he turns into a bat and attempts to flee.

10. COUNT SCHNEIMER'S ARCHIVE

The archive contains ancient documents and historical recounts. They detail the lives of Count Schneimer and his bloodline. The latest entries claim that the townsfolk pledged eternal servitude to the vampire lord before but could not comply as the vampire was stopped by a hero.

11. SECRET VAULT

This chamber is hidden behind a false wall panel that can be slid sideways (DC 16 WIS check to notice).

► **Treasure (10 XP).** The chamber contains 90 gp, 250 sp, 1,240 cp, two *potions of healing*, a *crystal ball*, a *bag of devouring*, and a spellbook with six random spells.

CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTERS REACH the end of this adventure and face the consequences of their valiant deeds.

THE VAMPIRE IS SLAIN

The characters overcome the vampire lord and manage to slay him in his lair. A wooden stake is driven into his heart and paralyzes him. To truly destroy the vampire, he must be beheaded, his mouth filled with garlic and herbs, and his headless body thrown into a running river.

All undead in the crypt crumble to dust and any remaining vampire infants return to normal and fall unconscious. Upon return to Fierallin, all children are back to normal. The locals are grateful for their plight to have ended. Townspeaker Annara organizes a feat in the party's honor and gives them the title '*Heroes of Fierallin*'.

However, if most of the vampire infants were slain, the locals lose their temper, brand the characters as murderers, and may turn violent if they do not leave soon.

VAMPIRISM ACQUIRED

All or some members of the party take on the vampire lord's offer and accept his vampiric gift. If the party is fractured, this may cause the final encounter to run differently depending on who accepts or not. To balance things out even Rudolf Van Arden or other NPCs present may change their mind and accept this gift. The GM should consider all options when fleshing out this battle.

If the whole party takes on this unexpected development, they are now bound to Count Schneimer and must obey his commands to the best of their ability.



THE POOL OF TRUTH

Perhaps the answer is elsewhere... I must not worry. No one will ever replicate what I have created. I have seen it. The water of all truths showed me.

Lucien's Notes



Life is full of secrets and mysteries. Most of the time, these enigmas of the world remain unknown forever. This is because the darker the question is, the more difficult it is to seek the answer. And the wisest men say that some things in the universe are better left untouched, hidden, or unknown.

REVEALING MAGIC

NATURE DICTATES THAT for every mystery, there shall be someone wishing to unearth its secrets. Long ago, there was a curious, determined mage who disliked people. Lucien distrusted everyone and was unable to believe what others said, regardless of the veracity.

His paranoid attitude matched his magical skills, though. Thus, at the peak of his wizardry career, Lucien crafted a physics-defying fluid of incredible properties. The translucent solution has the power to reveal all kinds of truths, whether verbal, physical, or magical.

WATER OF ALL TRUTHS

THE OTHERWORLDLY FLUID is heavier and more viscous than common water. It holds a light silver hue and shines like steel when sunlight hits it directly. The water removes any effects that alter reality in a magical way, such as invisibility, polymorphism, or illusions. A sprinkle of it is enough to end such an effect on a single object, or target. The water cures lycanthropy as well.

If used on a person, it reveals when someone lies; lips shut as if sewn together whenever the target tries to say something false. The person may cleverly avoid saying the truth without lying, though. Finally, this magical liquid may be used for one's benefit. Staring into a pool of this magical water grants visions of one's future. Thus allowing the user to plan accordingly and take advantage.

DUNGEON'S PAST

Lucien spent years building this place two hundred years ago. By the end of his life, he had become so paranoid that he even distrusted himself. He placed traps and defense mechanisms to protect his creation. Never wanting to share his secrets with anyone, his pool of truth stayed forgotten for a long time. Until now...

THE MYTH, THE MYSTERY

LUCIEN'S LABORATORY USED to be magically hidden. But the illusion spells that concealed the entrance have faded out after so long. It did not take much time for explorers and adventurers to perceive the magical aura emanating from here. And so, the rumors about a pond of marvelous properties started to pass around.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Magic Water. The characters come to the dungeon motivated by one of the following two reasons: they have a prisoner who refuses to talk and torture is off the table. They want to use the water as a means to make the person speak the truth. Alternatively, one of the heroes or a close friend to them needs the water to remove a magical affliction or hideous transformation (0 XP).

Revelation. Richard Dumfries, a rich noble, hires the heroes. He wishes to know his future and prepare for it. They must escort him and keep him safe during the exploration and usage of the magical water (50 gp, 5 XP).

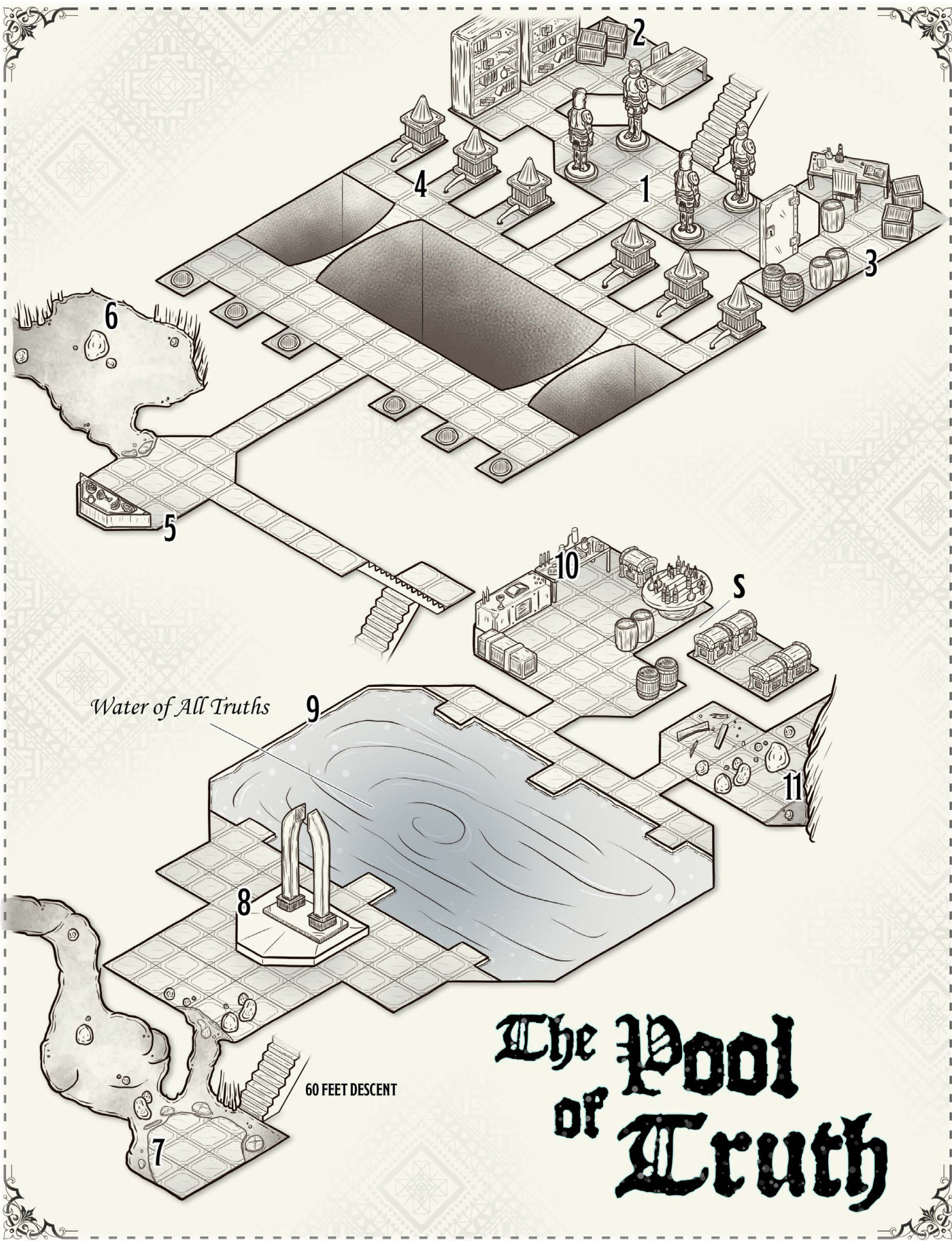
Level 5 Adventure

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every 3 crawling rounds and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Lucien's old spells to magically illuminate all areas still work today. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	While exploring an area, the characters stumble upon a swarm of spiders . The insects are territorial and aggressive but they flee when reduced to half their Hit Points.
2	The magical lights in the dungeon flicker. Then they dwindle. All areas are bathed in darkness for 1 minute.
3	A party of two thugs , one soldier , and an apprentice arrive and catch up with the heroes. The newcomers may not be in the mood to share treasure (Reaction check).
4	Six goblins heard about this place too. They came to investigate and find treasures. The goblins are jumpy from past experiences with humans (Reaction check).
5	A random character finds a bag of caltrops nearby.
6	The characters find a tough guardian (gelatinous cube). However, the monster's nature is artificial. The <i>water of all truths</i> turns the ooze into a cube of rotten meat.



The Pool of Truth

1. LANDING

The dungeon's entrance is no longer concealed. An opening in the mountains leads to a set of stairs. After a 50-foot descent, the characters reach this level.

► **Battle.** Four sets of **animated armors** attack intruders on the spot. The mindless guardians know no fear.

2. ARCHIVE

Magic protects this place from the passage of time. Everything is pristine. Lucien used to spend a lot of time here. Paranoid as he was, his archive is also protected.

► **Trap.** Whoever comes here must say the magic word '*urumpi*' (the characters may learn this word in area 3), otherwise, they trigger the trap. An *acid arrow* hits the first creature that entered (DC 15 DEX check).

► **Treasure (3 XP).** 15 gp, 20 magic rations that never spoil, a *potion of healing*, and a small vial with a note attached. It contains one dose of *water of all truths*.

3. EXPERIMENTS

The door is magically locked. The characters neutralize it with *dispel magic*; the magical water in area 2 does the job too. A fire explosion is triggered if they attempt to open the door in any other way. All creatures within 15 feet of the door take 3d6 damage (DC 14 DEX check).

The characters find vats with strange liquids, barrels, and containers. Lucien stored mostly failed experiments here. The characters disturb an **ochre jelly** when they come here. They find some of Lucien's notes that explain what this place is. They also learn the word '*urumpi*'. It is a safe word that deactivates some dungeon traps.

4. MAIN CHAMBER

The origins of this place are unknown. But no one can deny the beautiful architecture. The pool of magical water lies 60 feet below this irregularly-shaped chamber. Each alcove fosters a magical device that helps maintain the uncanny properties of the *water of all truths*.

► **Corridors.** It is hard to walk the narrow paths between the wide openings (DC 11 DEX). Failing means the person falls and hangs from an edge. Failure by 5 or more means they take 1d6 damage and fall to area 9.

► **Guardians.** Lucien's guardians are summoned when someone starts crossing the narrow passageways. Six clockwork **stingbats** burst from holes on the ground. The monsters attempt to make intruders lose their balance and fall. The word '*urumpi*' shuts them down.

5. ANTECHAMBER

The stone table on the wall has incredible magical properties. Delicious food appears on top of it once per day. There is a 2-in-6 chance that the characters see the food appear before them when they pass through here.

6. CAVERNS

An old cave-in revealed this cavern tunnel. Lucien placed a magical trap to keep monsters at bay. Dirt covers most of a barely visible rune on the ground (DC 13 WIS). Fire jets trigger if anybody touches the rune. Creatures in area 6 take 1d10 damage (DC 14 DEX for half). The word "*urumpi*" deactivates this magical trap.

► **Critters.** There is viscous residue on the floor. A character might recognize what the substance is (DC 13 INT). Two **cave creepers** smell the characters' flesh and attack. They flee if reduced to half their Hit Points.

7. LOWER LANDING

The characters may descend the stairs in area 5 to get here. If they explore the caves, they disturb a **cloaker**. The monster flees if reduced to half its Hit Points.

8. SHRINE

A shrine to Ord, the Unbending. Characters that venerate this deity may spend 1 **crawling round** praying to earn Ord's favor: they each earn a **luck token**.

9. THE WATER OF ALL TRUTHS

The silvery liquid has fewer wrinkles than water. It is cold to the touch, and the pool has a depth of 5 feet.

► **Effects.** The characters can make use of the pool to complete their mission (see **Adventure Hooks**).

► **Falling.** There is a 3-in-6 chance that magic items submerged in the water lose all their properties.

10. LABORATORY

Lucien used to experiment with various substances here. This is where he succeeded and created the dungeon's watery technology. He never managed to make the water work outside the dungeon, though (see **Development**).

► **Treasure (40 gp, 3 XP).** If the characters spend 1 **crawling round** searching the area, they amass several ingredients and chemical components that are valuable.

► **Vault (6 XP).** A lever behind a shelf reveals the small treasure room (DC 13 WIS). There are 65 gp, 135 sp, a +1 *dagger*, and two random tier-1 wizard spell scrolls.

11. DILAPIDATED ROOM

The magical protection in some areas of the dungeon has faded out, or they were maybe never protected in the first place. Either way, nothing remains of this chamber.

DEVELOPMENT

THE CHARACTERS CAN only make use of the *water of all truths* while in the dungeon; the liquid must be in proximity to the devices in area 4 to retain its magical properties. Still, this place may be of use to the heroes in the future. Or perhaps, it shall earn them powerful enemies...



KYLE LATINO

I have a [Patreon](#) page and run a YouTube channel called [Map Crow](#), the RPG art show! Each video I pick an art process topic to help folks think about making art or game design in an approachable and thoughtful way! I also cocreate an RPG design podcast, called [Splatbook](#), with my favorite GM John!

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DM Valterink creates content for the world's most popular RPG since 2020, mainly for hispanic audiences but has recently taken the plunge into international audiences with the creation of maps and adventure design in the DM's Guild. You can check his work on [Twitter](#), the [DM's Guild](#), and [Facebook](#). Follow to stay updated on new creatures and adventure locations for your games!



HARMONY THE BARD

Harmony specializes in fantasy cartography and game master supplements for TTRPGs. You can find her work on [Dungeon Masters Guild](#) and [Fantasy Grounds Forge](#). Harmony is offering a special promotion for Elven Tower readers: [Save 50% on Animated Knight Tokens on DMsGuild](#). This product inspired Harmony's article, Is That Knight Alright? and includes a few additional animated poses for Sir Hereward.



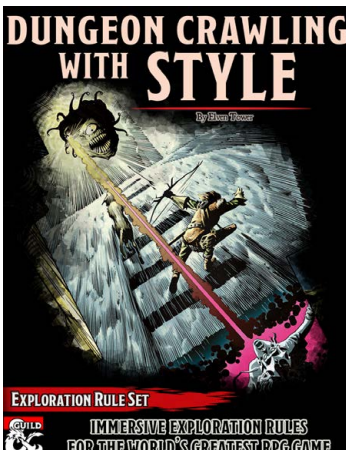
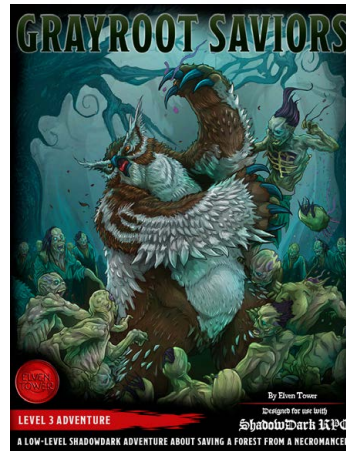
NATHAN BRITTO

Nathan Britto is an artist that has been drawing since he learned how pencils work. As a teen he discovered RPGs and it has been his main thing since. Now he is set out to share his creations with the world. Check out his [Portfolio Page](#). Contact him at nrs_britto@hotmail.com

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