

# DUNGEON VAULT MAGAZINE

No. 23

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9 ORIGINAL ADVENTURES  
HIGH RESOLUTION MAPS  
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THE BEST CONTENT FOR THE BEST GMs



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<i>Level 8</i>			



# VISAGE OF SAND

Level 5

The deep lore of the desert can be read from dozens of sand-buried, eroded structures.

Old Desert-Folk Saying

## BACKGROUND LORE

**FEW PEOPLE CAN** truly fathom what it is to live in inhospitable deserts. Desertfolk make use of numerous adaptations and survival techniques to thrive surrounded by inclement dunes. What most outsiders ignore is that desert populations often move around as the desert changes its geography following the whims of the wind and the dunes. After the desertfolk leave an area that has become uninhabitable, even to them, they leave behind stone and brick structures to be devoured by the sandstorms and shifting windrows. These structures resurface from time to time in the same manner they were left behind. The locals call it the Deep Lore of the desert.

## THE SANDSTORM CELEBRANTS

**FIFTY YEARS AGO**, in the depths of the Shriveled Desert, there was a coven of snake-worshipping people. The Sandstorm Celebrants dedicated their lives to mastering obscure rituals that were meant to extend their lifetimes and make them resilient to the adverse conditions of the desert. Their leader was a fastidious mage who taught his followers strictly about the arcane ways. They mastered their life-extending incantation mere days before the Shriveled Desert shifted and buried their underground facility under tons of fine sand.

## THE VISAGE OF SAND

**TO ATTAIN ETERNAL** life, each celebrant had to stand on the rune-scribed circle, pronounce the last words of the spell, and then jump into the carved face below. If done properly, the cultist would turn to sand on impact and drench the carved visage with their fine grains. Afterward, the person reformed as an undead sand abomination. This was the ultimate fate of the whole coven.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

**THE SANDSTORM CELEBRANTS'** temple has resurfaced recently after the desert changed its geography once again. Desert scouts reported the location of an unearthed structure to the locals and caused the usual reaction: several exploration parties set out to delve into the unknown and plunder whatever is salvageable.

The problem is that none of the three parties ever came back. The few explorers that remain are now more curious than ever about the apparently dangerous location but none dare go. In this adventure, the characters receive accurate directions to the Sandstorm Celebrants' temple. Curiosity and greed are the main motivators.

## REACHING THE TEMPLE

**THE TEMPLE'S LOCATION** brings the characters three days into the Shriveled Desert. They must wear desert-appropriate clothing and equipment or suffer from one level of exhaustion for as long as they stay in the area. In addition, they are attacked by two **giant scorpions** and a **swarm of insects** (scorpions) on their way.

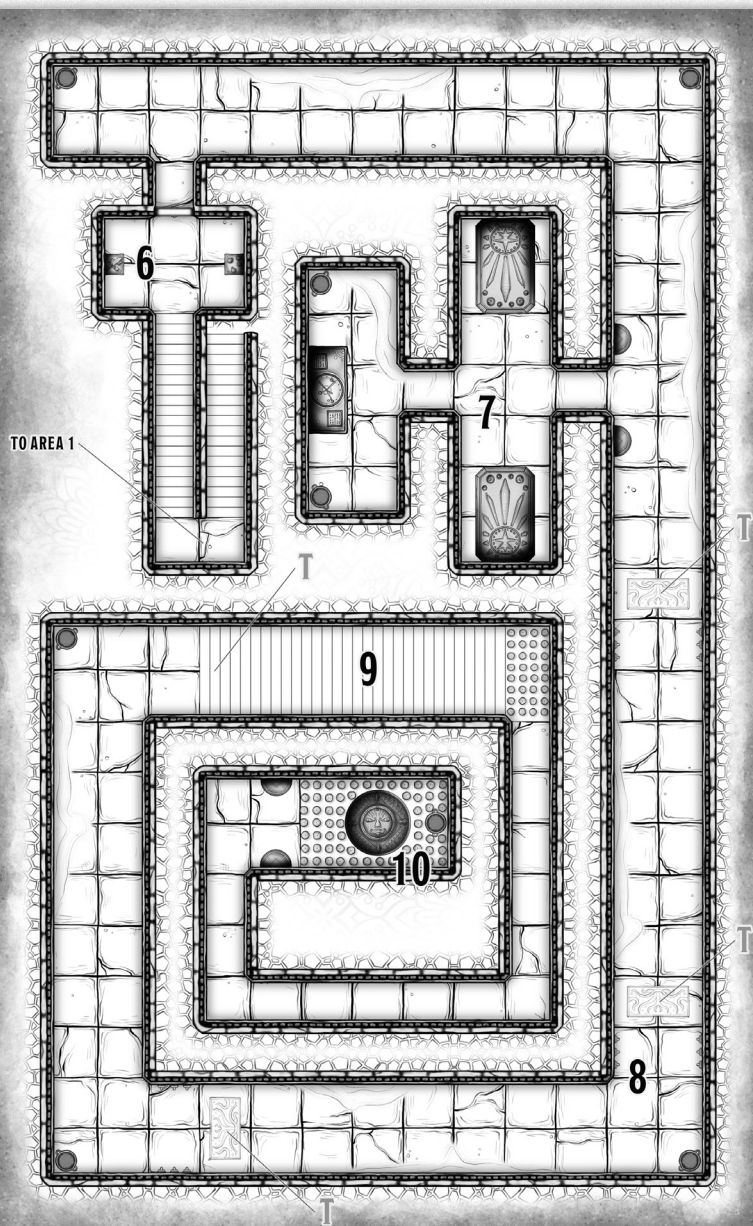
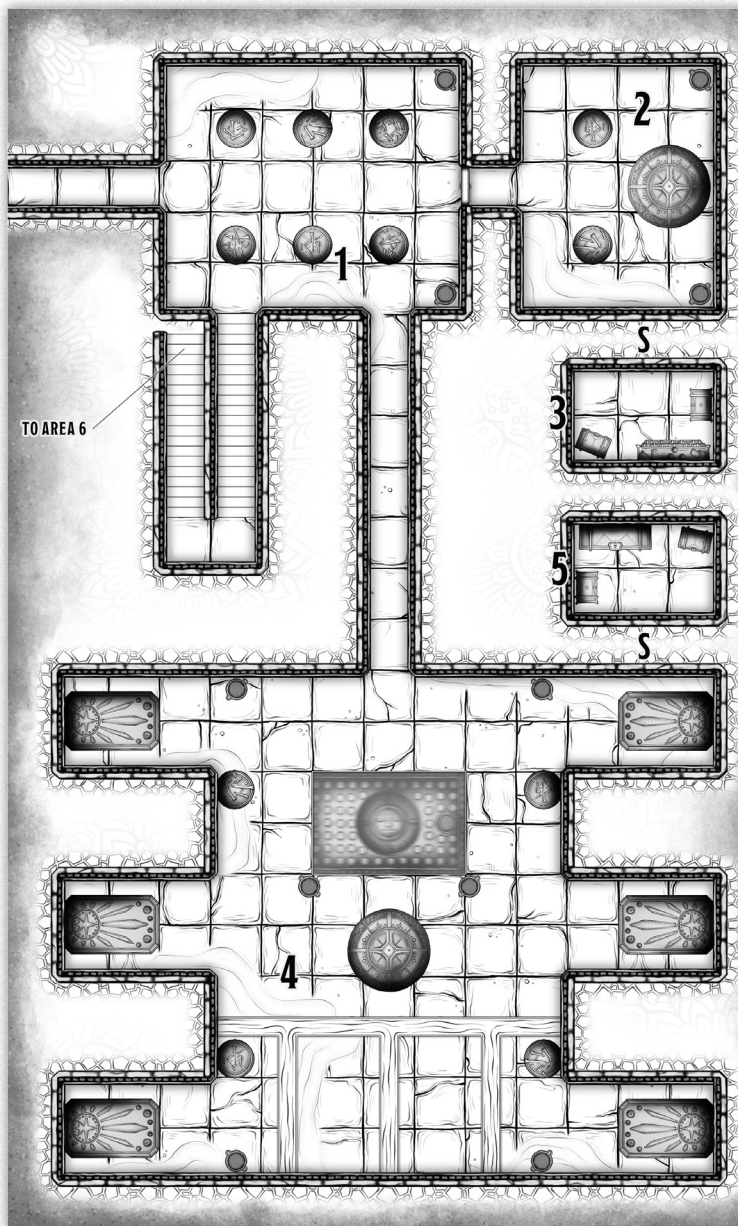
## FEATURES OF THE DUNGEON

The following features correspond to the Sandstorm Celebrants' temple in the desert; areas 1 through 10.

**Magical Aura.** A *detect magic* spell can perceive the *Visage of Sand* from a distance up to 200 feet.

**Light.** The dungeon features sconces with *continual flame* spells on them. If removed, the magic fades.

**Passageways.** An observant character finds secret doors and hidden passages in the dungeon (DC 16 Investigation). They open by pushing brick buttons.



## 1. BOUNDLESS GUARDIANS

The half-buried structure features a single entrance that leads to this chamber. Bodily remains rest on funerary plinths. The bones are eroded and covered in fine sand. There are signs of a recent battle and several corpses on the floor; members of the exploring parties who came before. The scattered bones on the plinths vibrate, float, and coalesce into five **ghouls** and one **wight**. They challenge trespassers and fight mercilessly.

## 2. MAGIC CIRCLE LANDING

Two funerary plinths stand before a one-foot-tall rune-scribed magic circle. The chamber's stone ceiling features a carved scene of a priest-like figure assisting a hooded figure who jumps into a bottomless shaft. The circle can be used as the destination for a circle of teleportation spell. Two **ghasts** are reshaped from the bodily remains on the eroded, funerary plinths.

## 3. FAKE VAULT

The room contains empty shelves and containers. One of the chests is enchanted with a *glyph of warding*.

**Explosive Runes.** Opening the lid causes the explosive runes on the chest to explode. Creatures within 10 feet take 6d6 fire damage (DC 16 Dexterity / half).

## 4. CHAMBER OF ENLIGHTENING DESCENT

Six engraved, stone, sarcophagi flank and rune-scribed magic circle and a rail-less opening on the ground. The shaft drops 70 feet to the *Visage of Sand* in area 10. Four corpses from a failed expedition lie lifeless near the circle. Approaching the shaft causes the sarcophagi to open; four **ghasts** (see illustration below), and two **specters** emerge from the enclosures and attack. These are the Sandstorm Celebrants in their still incomplete immortal manifestation. Their only objective is to deter explorers from spoiling their incantation (see area 7).

## 5. MAIN VAULT

The secret passage is located under the northwest sarcophagus. It contains three stone chests.

**Treasure.** The chests contain 2,400 gp, 11,320 sp, a collection of carved jade figurines (250 gp), a fine shortsword with an emerald pommel (270 gp), a *spell scroll of protection from energy*, and two *potions of healing*.

## 6. LOWER LANDING

A fine, ornate, brass key rests on each of the pedestals that flank the locked door. Using the right key to open the door causes the user to acquire two levels of exhaustion (DC 16 Constitution). The left key works normally.

## 7. GUARDIANS OF THE DEEP LORE

Two ghosts manifest weakly by their eroded enclosures. Their energy is low enough that they cannot directly interact with their surroundings. They signal creatures approaching the west chamber to abandon the place immediately and make empty threats. Alas, they cannot stop the characters from snooping around. An accurate record of the Sandstorm Celebrants' eons-old incantation is carved on the stone table. A spellcaster that analyses it for 10 minutes understands the nature of their ritual and knows that they must endure an undead existence for 66 years until certain astral bodies align to signal the end of their penitence. After that, they shall be reborn in new immortal bodies. They also learn that the fragile spell spoils if someone tampers with the *Visage of Sand*.

## 8. POISON DART TRAPS

The long twisting hallway features three pressure-sensitive plates that trigger independent dart-shooting mechanisms. Stepping on any of the plates triggers a barrage of poisoned darts to fly from both walls. Creatures in the area suffer multiple hits and take 6d6 poison damage and are poisoned for 1 hour (DC 17 Constitution / half).

## 9. SLIDING STAIRS

The second step is a pressure-sensitive device that causes the flight of stairs to shift shapes after a few seconds and become a 45-degree slide. Creatures on the stairs slide down to a 5-foot-deep pit with sharp spikes. They take 4d6 piercing damage (DC 14 Dexterity).

## 10. THE VISAGE OF SAND

The strange artifact radiates a powerful magical aura. It accumulates power throughout the ages to release it when the Sandstorm Celebrants become immortal in 143 years. The mangled body of an explorer lies on the carved face. It fell from area 4 at least a week ago.

## DEVELOPMENT

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

## THE END OF IMMORTALITY

Deciphering the carvings in area 7 reveals that the Sandstorm Celebrants shall return as immortal creatures in the future (in 16 years). To thwart their plans, the characters can tamper with the delicate incantation in area 10. Spells such as *dispel magic*, *protection from evil and good*, or *remove curse* ruin the ancient ritual.

The Visage of Sand becomes an inert relic and the souls of all the celebrants are released into the ether. They do not resuscitate in the far future.

## JOINING THE CULT

**AFTER ONE MONTH** of studying the *Visage of Sand*, a spellcaster learns enough information about the ancient ritual. The characters can then replicate the ritual and assist their companions on their fatal jump into the *Visage of Sand*. They join the celebrants' undead ranks for 16 years and then are reborn in immortal vessels. The state of the world after such a long time is left to the GM's discretion. It is an adventure for another time...



# A PRAYER OF DUNES

Level 4

You're in the Grand Desert. Here, we live by the will of the sands and the dunes.

Grand Desert Local

## BACKGROUND LORE

A **DESERT IS** a place with hundreds of years of lore, history, and valuable treasures. Historians and investigators cherish deserts because of this. Most research projects and ventures into unearched dungeons turn out great results. However, they come with a steep price. It is dangerous to explore miles and miles of hot sand. The buried dungeons and temples under the dunes are filled with monsters and undead guardians. To top it all, half of the tragedies that occur in the arid regions are caused by mirages... No one wants to be lost in the desert...

## LIFE IN THE DESERT

**LIFE IN THE** Grand Desert is hard. So hard that the very locals tend to question their lives there. But this fact makes the denizens of the many villages and towns stronger and more resilient. They are strong-willed individuals with a deep love and loyalty for the region they live in. Over the years, they not only adapted to the natural hazards of the desert; they also accepted a supposedly magical phenomenon as part of their lives.

## THE DESERT LAWS

**TODAY, NO ONE** can remember when all this started. But it is common knowledge that every five years, a group of heroes must delve into the Grand Desert's heart and pay a visit to the shrine. A tribute of gold and blood must be brought before the ancient gods of the desert. The Holy Prayer of Dunes must be pronounced at the altar. Only by doing this, the people of the Grand Desert may avoid the 'Grain Punishment' as they call it. The townsfolk claim that failing to recite the holy Prayer of Dunes brings horrible sandstorms that swallow entire towns. They claim this explains all the ruined structures therein.

## IN NEED OF HEROES

**THE TIME HAS** come. Five years have passed since the last Prayer of Dunes was performed. The desertfolk wonder. "*Who are the valorous heroes that shall make the dangerous journey to recite the Prayer of Dunes*".

A snakefolk named Razz'ir speaks on behalf of the Grand Desert. He offers a reward of 2,000 gp. Whoever accepts the job is granted a holy *spell scroll* to perform the Prayer of Dunes, and the tribute, which consists of varied pieces of gold and silverware, fine linens, spices, and handcrafted jewelry. The lot worth is 12,000 gp.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

A *PRAYER OF Dunes* has one main objective divided into many sub-tasks. This adventure takes the characters to the underground shrine, they must deliver the tribute, and perform the Prayer of Dunes. The dangerous dungeon chambers hide secrets and the truth about the whole situation. Unbeknown to them, there is a way to end the "curse" that affects the Grand Desert. However, finding the truth and the solution is in their hands.

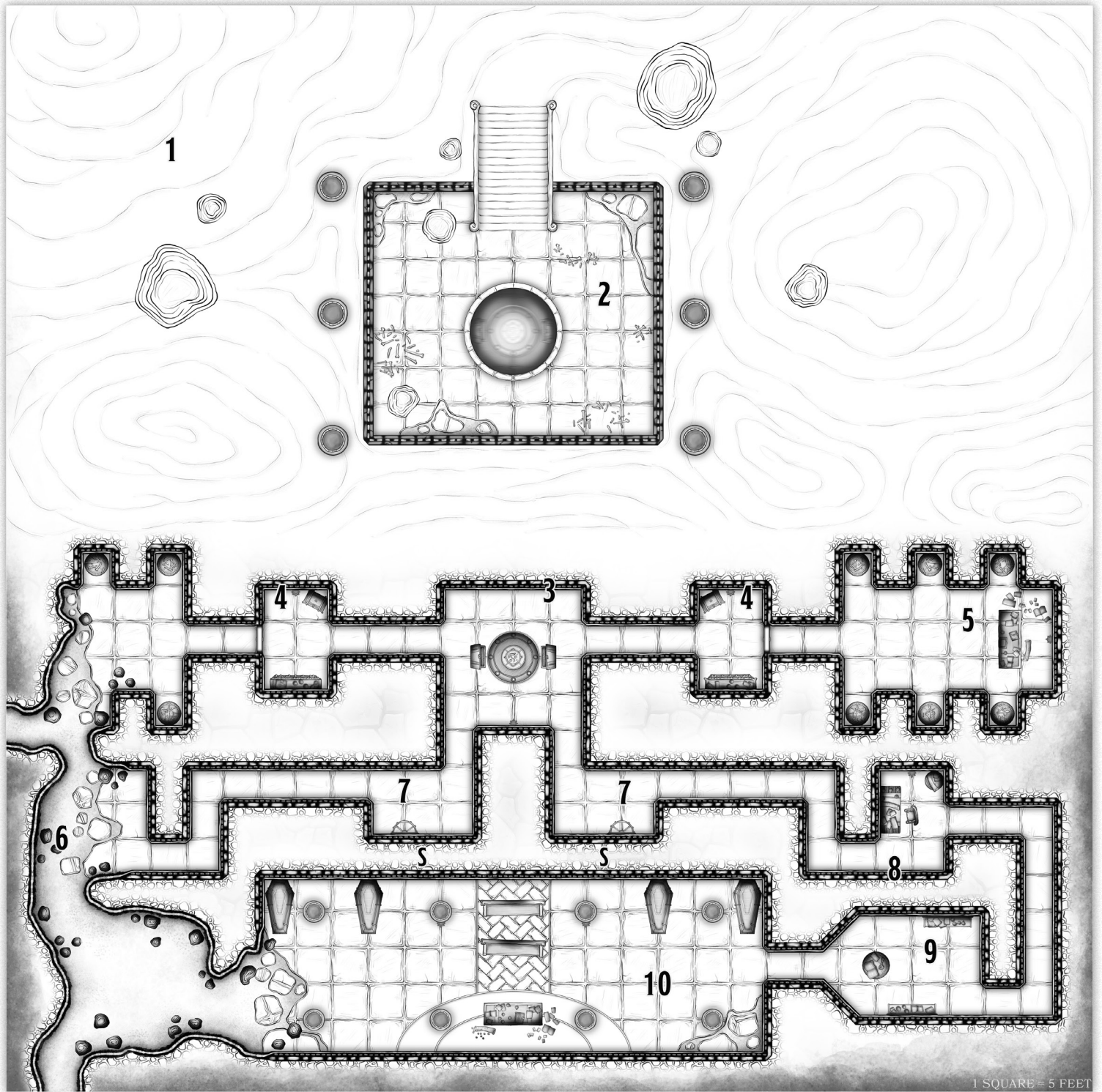
## FEATURES OF THE BURIED SHRINE

The following features correspond to the shrine and the underground structure; areas 1 through 10.

**Light.** The dungeon features sconces with *continual flame* spells on them. If removed, the magic fades.

**Magical Aura.** A *detect magic* spell can perceive the magical aura in area 10 from a distance of up to 300 feet.

**Desert.** The characters embark on a 2-day journey to reach the shrine. They gain 1 level of exhaustion if they lack the right attire and equipment for the weather.



## 1. THE GRAND DESERT

After traveling for miles in the hot sand of the desert, the characters reach a square recessed building in the core of the desert. This is where the underground shrine is located. A faint trail on the sand leads to the entrance.

## 2. THE SHRINE IN THE DESERT

A stairway descends to a dilapidated chamber littered with rocks and gnawed bones. The chamber became the home of two sand lobsters (**chuuls**). They flee by digging through the sand if reduced to half their hit points.

## 3. DUNGEON LANDING

A fifty-foot-deep shaft leads to the dungeon proper. The characters land on a stone circle marked with arcane runes; the circle's magic has faded, its purpose forgotten (DC 14 arcana). Two chests open chests on each side.

**Trap.** Both chests shoot numerous, sharp scales of gold and silver toward the center when one or more creatures land on the stone circle. They take 4d6 piercing damage. The characters might notice the clever booby-trapped chest mechanisms or the piercing marks on the circle and adjacent walls (DC 16 Perception).



## 4. TWIN STUDIOS

Partial truths about this place and the Grand Desert are here. The characters must find the hidden compartments in each chamber, though (DC 17 Investigation).

**East Studio.** If the characters spend 10 minutes reading the hidden documents in this area, they learn that:

- A sandstorm buried the shrine hundreds of years ago. It belonged to an ancient family of snakefolk. Their bodily remains still rest here.
- A snakefolk that goes by the name of In'hara, a powerful necromancer and illusionist, is the author of many letters and books here.

**West Studio.** If the characters find the hidden lore, they find an old parchment with a fragment of a letter:

*"...ill they know nothing! Their ignorant brains haven't figured it out. We can count on that gold every five years. In the long run, that boost to our economy shall fund the return of our empire!" - In'hara*

## 5. THE CURSED OFFICE

Six alcoves by the walls flank the stone altar by the chamber's east end. If the characters approach, six **shadows** coalesce from the ashes and attack the intruders.

**Ancient Magic.** The papers on the altar show incomplete formulae for powerful ancient rituals. A mage identifies the spell's objective is to implant memories or specific ideas in the minds of others (DC 15 Arcana).

## 6. UNDERGROUND CAVERNS

This area used to be identical to its eastern counterpart but cave-ins and the shifting of the dunes have caused the west side of the shrine to collapse. The dark tunnels take to the lairs of three sand lobsters (**chuuls**).

## 7. CLEVER MECHANISMS

The characters can turn with the two steel wheels here with no apparent consequence. Turning both of them locks the hidden corridors (see below), but it unlocks the sarcophagi with the guardians (see **Development**).

**Secret Corridors.** Pressing a brick on the south wall reveals a hidden passage (DC 15 Perception). The brick does not work if the steel wheels were already turned.

## 8. SECONDARY STUDIO

If the characters search the place, they learn that In'hara implanted a fake memory on the denizens of the Grand Desert almost thirty years ago (DC 16 Investigation). The nature of this memory is not detailed here.

## 9. ANTECHAMBER

The tables and shelves contain arcane components and spell ingredients. A mage recognizes them (DC 12 Arcana). Necromancy tools, ingredients, and rare spices hide in flasks with mundane labels (400 gp). Only a skilled magic-user notices the treasure (DC 16 Arcana).

## 10. THE ROOT OF EVERYTHING

When the characters arrive, a floating illusion of a cloaked figure appears. A spectral voice speaks:

*"The Prayer of Dunes must be uttered. Leave the tribute and speak the holy words. Only then, may the Grand Desert forgive and prevail!"*

## DEVELOPMENT

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

## FULFILLING THE WILL OF THE DESERT

**THE CHARACTERS LEAVE** the tribute as they were instructed and return to Razz'ir to get paid. The Grand Desert shall endure another 5 years under foul lies...

## BREAKING THE CURSE

**THE CHARACTERS REALIZE** the snakefolk are cheating the region's denizens and refuse to obey. The sarcophagi release four **ghasts**. The guardians take two rounds to destroy the enclosures' lids if the wheels were turned (see area 7). What the characters do with the truth or the tribute's money is an adventure for another day...



# ON FUDGING THE DICE

*A commentary on fudging dice and its consequences by Emmy Allen*



**IT'S BEEN A** while, hasn't it? And now ya' Girl is back with her hot opinions. I'm doing discourse. God help me.

So. Dice fudging. It has been in the conversation lately and everybody has very strong views and I can't be bothered to try to fit mine in a tweet so here we go.

First up, let's define our terms. **Dice Fudging** is when you roll dice for some mechanic, and the result is rubbish so you pretend you got something else instead. You see it discussed in the context of the GM doing it to keep the story flowing or anything too weird happening.

So, right off the bat, I'm going to say that the "never fudge, let the dice fall where they may" people are wrong. Not because that's not a valid style of play, but because they are absolutist about a matter of subjective taste. Conversely, those who say that a GM has an obligation to fudge to keep things on track make the same mistake.

In practice, how you handle this is going to vary wildly depending on tastes, priorities, the system in use, etc.

The question isn't really about the GM getting to ignore the dice and their results, it's how you relate to the game mechanics as a power structure. If following the mechanics and dice rolls to the letter results in a naff outcome, do you overrule them? I know. Different play cultures have different answers and approaches to that question. Assuming everybody else shares your culture of play, or that a single culture of play applies to all the games you use, will lead to less interesting results.

If I play *Call of Cthulhu* and fail a Notice roll to get a vital clue that moves the investigation to its next step, then the GM tweaking things to avoid stalling is pretty justified. On the other hand, if I'm playing B/X and fail a Save vs Poison and my PC dies, the GM shouldn't be tweaking that because unexpected lethality is part of the intended experience. Different priorities in different games.

I mean, hell, even as an OSR GM I've done this now and then. Mostly for random encounters, if I roll an encounter and it makes no sense for it to be there (perhaps I get a large predator in a tomb without enough prey to support it), I ignore that result and re-roll. I prioritize keeping the fiction internally consistent over obeying the whims of the dice. Isn't that more realistic and fun? Do not be afraid to switch things over. You know what's best.

On the other hand, I would never fudge things like combat or traps. If you die, you die. Play smarter next time. Otherwise, if I tweak things to save one PC, that sets a precedent for similar situations in the future. Bad vibes.

Ultimately, it comes down to having a robust social contract in place. Talk it over with your friends. If everybody's on board with that style of play, it's fine. If they aren't, it's not. Just make sure everybody's on the same page, and be open about what you're doing or will do.

## DOING THE "RIGHT" THING

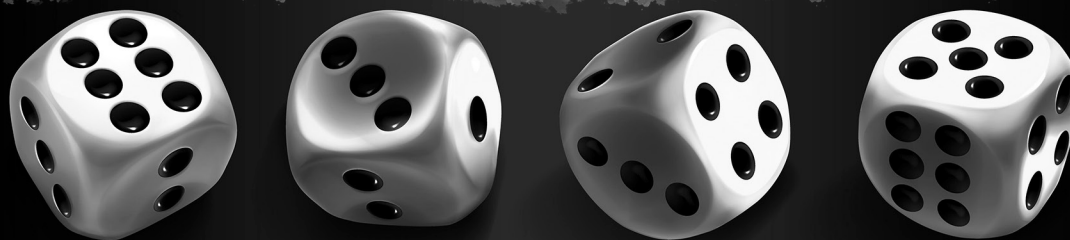
A lot of the time, fudging the dice is a corrective mechanism. Perhaps you called for a roll when you didn't need one and realized after the fact that, actually, no, you already know what should happen. Perhaps the game mechanics are flawed or don't cover this situation, and produced an inappropriate result. Nudge things back on track, and move on. The objective is to save time.

No RPG is perfect (except the ones I write, obviously). Some amount of maintenance will be needed on the fly. Be ready to improvise, think quick. Sometimes, fudging dice is just a way to account for those flaws without having to take the whole game apart and house-rule it to be better, which might be more effort than it is worth.

So far, so milquetoast...

Now, it is time for a 1000 Scoville take.

*If the GM can fudge the dice, why can't the players?*



This is one of those controversial questions that tend to get people weirdly angry. Like asking *'if you eat meat and that's okay, why isn't it okay to kill animals for the fun of it?'* The matter does expose those little irrational biases that make people uncomfortable, I suspect.

And the answers I get generally take the same form:

*"You can't trust players, they don't know what's best."*

*"If you trust the players with that, they'll abuse it."*

*"The GM's job is to make the game fun, and players don't have that responsibility."*

*"What's to stop the players fudging every roll and winning everything?"*

...And so on and so forth.

I find this perspective infantilizing. It treats players like selfish assholes with no impulse control who just want to win at all costs. The GM has this paternalistic duty over the players, who will ruin everything if you let them because they don't know what's good for them. Ugh...

Here's another thing:

*"No, the players can't fudge! That's **cheating!**"*

Is it? Is it, though? If everybody is cool with it and it is an option, then you are not violating your social contract.

What this comes down to are power structures. The GM is given power. They can ignore the rules if they want to because they are in charge and it is their prerogative. Rule 0 means what the GM says goes. Players can't, though, because we don't allow them that power...

## THE UGLY TRUTH

Do you want to know a dirty secret? I've fudged dice as a player sometimes too. And you know what is fascinating and counter to all the arguments I hear on the topic? I've never done that to make my character succeed. But sometimes, I want to fail and the dice won't let me. Sometimes I want to role-play having a trauma, and want my investigator to fail her Sanity check. Or, I think it would be more fun to fail my self-control roll and accidentally blood-bond myself. Or, I want my Dread PC to knock over the Jenga tower and go out in a blaze of glory.

Sometimes failing is fun, and the dice won't let me.

And this is a play-style that so many people just... don't seem to account for. They see it in terms of 'winning' and 'unfair advantage' because... Well, look. Because D&D is often played as a game about violence and winning, they assume that the same approach for all RPGs.

You know what? If we've decided that we are going to override the mechanics sometimes to make the game more fun, then that power probably shouldn't be centralized in the GM's hands only. Players should get their creative input too and play part in having this responsibility.

Heck, sometimes people ignore the dice because look, they've had a shitty day and they just want to feel powerful and if they do *so what?* We aren't playing poker; money isn't on the line. Heck, it probably isn't even a PvP situation. Just let them have it. It is not a big deal.

Why are people so mad about this?

Because it questions the unspoken, unchallenged assumptions about GM authority. And that makes them uncomfortable. And look, high GM authority games where the players don't have that control can work fine. Plenty of mystery or exploration games, for example, rely on hidden information to function, and the GM is making calls with information the players aren't privy to, and bringing the players behind the curtain to make these calls would spoil the process of discovery. This can work well. But it is not the *only* way of doing these things.

I feel I should probably clarify that I tend to favor games that don't fudge dice, either as a player or a GM. But also, I favor games that only roll dice occasionally, in high-stakes, uncertain, dramatic situations. Mostly, you can handle things with the conversation loop; letting the fiction evolve without needing randomness to get involved.

In conclusion, it is a complex topic that largely comes down to individual taste, and also, our default assumptions about GM authority aren't the only way to do things.

Addendum: a friend described dice-fudging (when used in healthy ways) as basically a retcon. Something went wrong - either the mechanics were flawed or a bad call was made - so we are going to go back and undo that mistake. Which I think is a good way to look at things.



# THE COST OF WISDOM

Level 5

We all heard a powerful explosion coming from Margoth's cabin. Inscrutable silence ever since.

Constable Yorkin

## BACKGROUND LORE

**THE SHORT LIFESPAN** of humans is often regarded as a source of inspiration and motivation for those who share that heritage. The limited amount of time bolsters their resolve and helps them succeed. But some mysteries, like understanding the true and deeper nature of the universe, elude even the most dedicated scholars.

It is then that human mages turn to dangerous methods and forbidden magic. They risk it all if only to achieve a level of understanding that shall allow them to do something marvelous. Maybe even surpass the limits of their species and lengthen their lives. Or acquiring the knowledge to transcend the physical limits of existence.

## THE FASTIDIOUS MAGE

**AN ACCOMPLISHED SPELLCASTER** known as Valas Margoth lives on the outskirts of a large town named Spearhome. Margoth believed that harnessing the power of natural forces and the arcane would allow him to change the world as he knew it. Margoth didn't harbor any particular courses of action for when this hypothetical scenario would come true, though. He was at heart a neutral agent that would not save the world or conquer it.

Alas, his conjectures about the future shall never be because the greedy spellcaster found his untimely demise a few days ago in his underground laboratory. The wind was strong enough that night to uproot small trees. Valas Margoth attempted an arcane ritual that would channel the wind's power through specially crafted conduits and into his flesh. If successful, he would become at least as powerful as a wind elemental. Instead, both the conduits and his body were unable to contain the wind's energy. Margoth was blown to pieces. Many dangerous devices in his laboratory became defective as a result of this.

## THE AFTERMATH

**THE EXPLOSION** IN Margoth's laboratory was heard by hundreds of people on the east side of Spearhome. The townsfolk correctly assumed it came from the mage's estate since his experiments and their results are somewhat commonplace. Valas Margoth, despite his quirkiness, is a loved member of the community who has assisted Spearhome's inhabitants more than a few times.

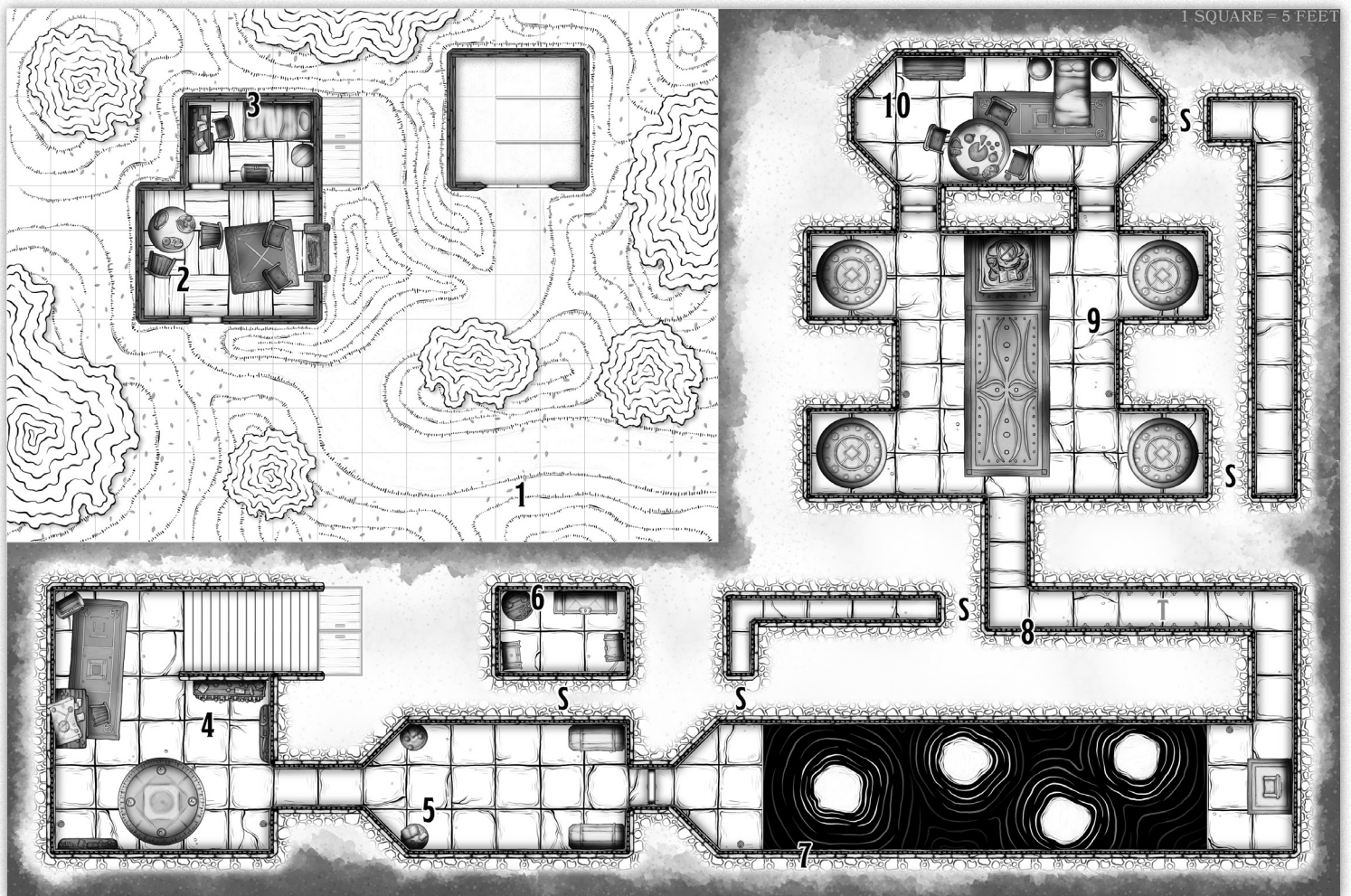
Constable Yorkin, who considered Valas a friend, went to explore the mage's home with a squad of six volunteer guards. They witnessed strange strands of magic energy around the house that would react to their approach. One of Yorkin's men was electrocuted by the free-floating strands. The house was abandoned and in disarray but they found other strange arcane phenomena occurring in Margoth's underground facility. Yorkin ordered his men to retreat after an incorporeal being attacked them.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

**CONSTABLE YORKIN SHALL** not risk the lives of more townsfolk. He offers a reward of 1,500 gp to passing sellswords and mercenaries for investigating Valas's home and the underground laboratory, finding out what happened, and aiding his dauntless friend if possible.

## REACHING MARGOTH'S HOUSE

**THE CHARACTERS ARE** given clear directions to the mage's estate. It is located on the outskirts of Spearhome, a 1-hour walk from the easternmost gate. Mid-journey, a group of six **ghouls** from the dark pool in area 7 catches up with the characters and attacks. Fortunately to the locals, this is the first incursion of undead abominations but more shall come if nothing is done to prevent it.



## FEATURES OF THE DUNGEON

The following features correspond to the abandoned mausoleum by the mountain; areas 1 through 9.

**Magical Aura.** A *detect magic* spell can perceive the arcane rip in area 9 from a distance up to 200 feet.

**Light.** The dungeon features sconces with *continual flame* spells on them. If removed, the magic fades.

**Passageways.** An observant character finds secret doors and hidden passages in the dungeon (DC 16 Investigation). They open by pushing brick buttons.

### 1. CABIN'S SURROUNDINGS

A one-story, wooden, cabin and a small stable await in sepulchral silence. The stable doors are ajar, the horses missing. Grass and greenery around the area lie flattened down as if pushing away from the cabin.

### 2. LIVING AREA

The cabin appears lived in but plenty of small objects or fragile furniture lie scattered on the ground. It looks like the aftermath of an earthquake. There is a notepad with arcane diagrams on the table. A spellcaster identifies them as elemental binding spells and rituals.

### 3. SLEEPING CHAMBER

The room contains a bed frame, a night table, a wooden chest, and a desk. Things are in disarray just like in area 2. The books on the desk are literary classics from the past century but nothing related to Margoth's craft. An insightful person determines that the mage must have a study or library somewhere else (DC 14 Insight).

### 4. BASEMENT LANDING

The chamber contains a private library on arcane subjects and a *circle of teleportation*. Studying the documents for 10 minutes reveals that Margoth's research was about harnessing the power of the wind and storms. The explosion activated Margoth's magical defenses, which are now out of control. Two **shadows** and one **invisible stalker** form on the magic circle and attack.

### 5. ETERNAL GUARDIANS

Margoth was a private person and very secretive about his research. In his early attempts, he bound one **fire elemental** and two **magma mephits** and stored them in the stone enclosures. They can only emerge momentarily to defend Valas's facility, which they do gladly after years of confinement. Alternatively, destroying the stone containers (40 hp) makes the elementals free and grateful.

## 6. SECRET VAULT

The vault contains three stone coffers and a wooden shelf. A thick layer of dust covers everything in the room.

**Treasure.** There are 1,245 gp worth of silverware and precious stones, a *spell scroll of burning hands*, a *spell scroll of dispel magic*, a *spell scroll of hold monster*, a *mithral chainshirt*, and two *potions of healing*.

## 7. THE DARK POOL

Valas Margoth created this 15-foot-deep pool of originally iridescent fluid. The strange chamber had many uses: summoning creatures, accelerating healing, and even divination incantations (DC 16 Arcana). The explosion in area 9 imbued the pool with waves of raw necromancy and turned it dark. This caused the spawning of undead abominations. Four **ghasts** and six **zombies** emerge from the pool and attack. Paralyzed characters are thrown into the agitated pool (see below).

**The Pool.** Creatures that fall into the pool are grabbed by undead hands spawning from the pool's bottom (DC 14 Dexterity). The hands pull downward and attempt to drown their target. Creatures that die in this manner become mindless ghouls. New undead are created at dawn.

## 8. HALLWAY OF POISON

Stepping on the pressure-plate (see map) triggers a barrage of poisoned darts to emerge from the walls. Creatures in the area take 6d6 poison damage and are poisoned for 1 hour (DC 16 constitution / half). The trap resets after 10 minutes. The characters can bypass this hallway altogether by taking the secret path that connects areas 7 and 8. Valas Margoth used this passage to avoid his own traps which are always active.

## 9. THE RUINED LABORATORY

The large chamber contains four stone circles and a statue of Margoth reading a tome. All other furnishings and devices in the room were destroyed in the explosion. There are scorch marks all over the floor, walls, and ceiling. Margoth's spirit (**ghost**) emerges from the statue, it has been invaded by remorse, fear, and regret. The hatred-filled spirit and eight **shadows** attack the characters. The only way to free Valas Margoth from his current state is to defeat this evil manifestation.

## 10. MARGOTH'S PRIVATE STUDY

Studying the contents of Margoth's private research papers reveals the nature of his experiment. A spellcaster finds the calculation error he made in the journals and knows that the poor man died in a fiery explosion (DC 18 Arcana). The spellcaster may replicate the experiment.

**Treasure.** The wardrobe contains 1,278 gp, six rubies (120 gp each) a *+1 dagger*, and an *everlasting lantern*.

## DEVELOPMENT

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

Defeating Margoth releases the man from his painful existence and dulls down the arcane auras in area 9. The undead in areas 4 and 7 stop appearing but the elementals in area 5 and the trap in area 8 remain. The characters collect the reward from a sorrowful Constable Yor-kin after he learns that his mage friend has perished. The characters may attempt to replicate the storm-harnessing ritual with some modifications to make it work. However, that is an adventure for another day..



# SPEARHOME

Level 1 - 2

Only by performing a great service will you earn the right to purchase an estate here...

Duke Harling Fedokku

## BACKGROUND LORE

**THE WAR MACHINE** feeds on the region and consumes the kingdom as the war progresses but it also creates good and lasting things after the conflict ends. Such is the case for military settlements that grow to support and maintain permanent outposts or forts. Small farming communities thrive next to important military holds and often grow into full-fledged towns after the worse part of the war fades away with time. A small farming settlement known as Spearhome was born this way. It owes its name to the Upward Spears, a famous battalion in the last war where all soldiers fought with spears and shields. They were renowned for their abilities with their weapons. The Upward Spears were stationed in a double-walled fortification named Summer's End.

After the war, half of the Upward Spears' members remained with the growing population around the fort. They became the first permanent settlers in what was later named Spearhome. A duke was appointed to rule over the land and to command the crown's banner-men. He must keep Summer's End in good condition should the need arise to once more keep the king's peace.

## A SPRAWLING SETTLEMENT

**SPEARHOME'S PEASANT POPULATION** has risen for the past twenty-five years. Now, half of the townsfolk live outside the stone walls and would be vulnerable if an enemy force attacked the settlement. These people own the territories around town. Most of them are farmers and herders. Their work has improved the town's economy and made it self-sustaining whereas it was dependent on the capital's supply lines long ago. After two generations, the locals are not interested in wars and have become accustomed to a simpler, more calm life.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

### LONG-RANGE SCOUTS

Duke Fedokku has heard troubling reports of enemy activity 10 miles east of Spearhome. He doesn't have men to spare so he offers a reward of 150 gp for accurate reports of foreign activities near the kingdom's border.

### SUDDEN NIGHT RAID

While the characters stay at the Varnished Spear Inn (area 6), the settlement is attacked by a band of highway brigands. Should the characters help the townsfolk, they may earn Duke Harling Fedokku's favor.

### FOREST VERMIN

Old Johanna (area 4) offers a reward of 75 gp for controlling and eradicating the ravenous vermin pests that come from the forest and eat her farm produce.

## FEATURES OF SPEARHOME

The following features correspond to Spearhome and the adjacent farmed territories; areas 1 through 10.

**Terrain.** The settlement is surrounded by forested areas and farmlands. The tree-lines were cut within 200 yards of the fort in olden times but now only the roads are kept clean from the natural verdant growth.

**Population.** The village has a population of almost 600 people. About a third of them live outside the walls.

**Walls.** A 20-foot-tall stone wall surrounds the settlement. The walls are repaired and patched up every two years. The inner wall in areas 9 and 10 is 15-foot-tall.

# Spearhome



## 1. VINCENT'S APOTHECARY

Herbs, chemicals, and strange forest ingredients pack the stalls and flasks in the apothecary shop. Vincent is a capable healer and potion maker that often has work for valorous travelers willing to search for rare components.

## 2. FARMERS' MARKET

Spearhome's eight farming families sell their produce to locals and itinerant merchants alike. This market is the heart of Spearhome's bursting economy.

Phil Don offers a 75 gp reward to strong individuals for escorting a small produce caravan to the nearest city.

## 3. VARG'S TANNERY

The pungent stench of the tannery can be perceived from the river. Varg's family settled here before the town existed. They provided leather goods to the Upward Spears during the war. Now, they make boots and belts.

Varg offers 50 gp for an owlbear's pelt. Owlbear leather wear is a sought-off commodity in nearby regions.

## 4. OLD JOHANNA'S FARM

The 75-year-old woman farmer owns the largest farmlands in the area. She remains strong and works in the fields to this day. Lately, they struggle with the presence of strange insect-like vermin that eat the harvests and damage their crops (see **Adventure Hooks**).

## 5. SPEARHOME'S FORGE

Most common iron items and tools are on stock at the forge. Rudimentary weapons and a few relics from the settlement's warring days are sold at a markup. The town's blacksmith lacks the training to make weaponry.

## 6. VARNISHED SPEAR INN

The settlement's only inn is famed for its spiced ale and a home-brew spirit they call Spear's Rage. The owner, Rollo, is the grandson of a renowned war hero and a member of the Upward Spears. Alas, Rollo's talents are brewing spirits and playing his lute. Rollo notifies Duke Fedokku of interesting folks showing up at the inn.



## 7. HOUSE OF THE SUN

The large church is the second tallest building in Spearhome, next to Summer's End. Its single bell tower signals the loyal churchgoers about an upcoming religious meeting once a day at sunset. Within, the opulent decoration and religious paraphernalia dedicated to the Sun God makes the duke's fortified estate pale in comparison. Everyone in Spearhome is associated with the church and expected to perform church activities twice per week. Religion is the social glue that brings people together and gives them a sense of community.

Pastor Tarenni is friends with Duke Fedokku and advises him on all matters. The humble servant of god attempts to convert any character who is not already a follower of the Sun God. Thankfully, he gives up after any significant resistance. He does not believe in forcing anyone into the church as that only causes resentment.

## 8. THE HEROES' PLAZA

Statues, effigies, and monuments to past war heroes populate the otherwise empty plaza. Most heroes are the grandparents of the current generation. Flowers and offerings are placed before the effigies once per week.

## 9. SPEARHOME'S BARRACKS

By order of Duke Harling Fedokku, all people of fighting age are to train once a week with spears and shields at the barracks. The barracks' commander is a veteran named Gargo, he believes a war might spark at a moment's notice and takes good care to train his men and the peasantry as well as he can. He constantly struggles with the locals' skepticism about the town's future. They follow the Duke's order but don't train as if their survival depended on it, which is how Gargo feels about it.

## 10. SUMMER'S END

The town's main fortress and the estate of Duke Fedokku and his predecessors. The main tower is four stories high. There is a large larder and granary in the compound under the fortress; it is designed to withstand a 3-month siege but the supplies are often not full and the population has increased. There is no way to know how long it could last. Duke Harling has the power to bestow land ownership but he only does so for those who do a great service to Spearhome. Should the characters earn his favor, they may once day call this town home and establish a base of operations. The town may soon require brave heroes if the border problems escalate.



# HOW TO RUN AN INFILTRATION

*A GM supplement for stealth missions by Jordan Blackman*

**H**ave you ever watched a great heist movie or played an amazing stealth game, and had the urge to recreate it in TTRPGs? The problem is that a lot of the things we see on the screen do not translate well to a tabletop setting. Regardless of which one you play. That's what this article aims to fix.

But if you should remember anything from this article, remember this: Infiltrations call for a good mix of problems that are designed for your players, making them feel smart and cool when they do their things, and problems with no solution tailored to them, so they have to plan things out and improvise. If that advice isn't specific enough and you need more of a step-by-step guide, then read on. We'll divide a heist quest into easy sections.

## FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first decision you should make is about the target that the players are going after, as that dramatically changes the level of movement for them, the type of defenses built around them, and what they do with the target in case the players are discovered. Let your imagination fly and come up with a difficult-to-forget character.

The most common type of target is a person, either to be kidnapped or assassinated. The following examples work on that assumption. Make any changes needed to suit your needs, your setting, and the target you chose.

The level of defense surrounding a target varies depending on the situation the players are in. There are going to be fewer guards at a masquerade ball than there will be at a political gathering. Start by figuring out how much the main target trusts the situation they are in, and picking a proper number of bodyguards for them.

Next, separate the areas of the building by what type of person is allowed into it. For example, the general area of a bank is available to the public, but guards will draw their weapons and shoot on sight if the players are sighted in the vault area. A research department in the backrooms of a corporation won't be a shoot-on-sight situation, but any intruders are stopped, required to show any kind of identification, and questioned. This allows the players to mend their mistakes in case they almost blow their cover in an area. If you want to be forgiving, layer the sections of the area by how high-security they are.

## DEFENSIVE MEASURES

An infiltration is uninteresting without defenses or traps, though, so now it's time to make some. Defenses are largely based on the genre of the game and the location where the infiltration takes place. For example:

In a High-Fantasy setting, defenses should be designed in a way that encourages both martial and magical characters to assist the operation. A door frame with an anti-magic enchantment on it prevents any magical interference and brings the party's Rogue, Scoundrel, or Thief to the forefront. Perhaps a crowded room with an important item calls for the Bard or someone with an Entertainer background to cause a distraction.

For Sci-Fi or Cyberpunk games, a computer or door that needs to be hacked allows the Computer Expert/Hacker to shine in a situation that wouldn't normally call for their skills. The sky is the limit for your imagination.

In a Modern game, the defenses should be easier to design compared to any other genre. Watch any Heist movie, play a Stealth game, read a cool spy book; or shamelessly steal anything from it that you deem noteworthy. Invisible laser tripwires are a particular favorite trap of mine for these types of games, for instance.

## EXAMPLE OF PLAY

To show how this advice works in practice, I have designed a small assassination mission that can easily be retooled to fit into several different settings.

The target has set up a large masquerade party to show off his wealth and power. It just happens to be the best time to take him out. Each player is searched upon entering the masquerade party. No weapons are allowed to the guests on the premises, though. In this case, the stealthiest of the characters might manage to sneak a small blade or pistol incognito. Be mindful to let the heroes excel at the things they are good at. After all, this is most likely one of the only ways the heist may succeed.

## AREAS OF THE MASQUERADE

The following descriptions contain the level of security and specifications for each area within the masquerade party. Use these as examples or references to prepare a similar list of areas for any other kind of heist you plan.

### THE BALLROOM

The party is held entirely in a large ballroom. Lost of people dance at the music's pace. A large spiral staircase at one end of the room leads up to the 2nd floor. It is entirely off-limits. Two guards are posted at either end of the staircase holding weapons. They have a specific style of clothing to denote that they are security personnel. There are several side doors in the Ballroom. They are off-limits but unguarded. This is where the kitchen is.

### THE KITCHEN

Cooking for this many people takes a large amount of kitchen space and a large staff. Too many employees to know individually. Anyone with the right attire blends right in. The kitchen staff wears white uniforms, hairnets, and face masks, just like the guests. The kitchen staff is allowed to carry knives and other cooking tools.

### THE 2ND FLOOR

The 2nd floor has a balcony that overlooks the entire ballroom and a large set of double doors that connect to a private sitting room. In addition to the two guards at the top of the stairs, there are also two guards outside the doors. No one is allowed in or out other than the target and anyone that the target gives verbal clearance.

For a High-Fantasy game, this door can only be opened by walking through with an amulet the target possesses.

For a Cyberpunk game, this door features a complex computer system programmed to listen to and verify the target's speech patterns. It must be hacked somehow.

### THE SITTING ROOM

No one is allowed into or out of this room other than the target and those they bring along. In this chamber, there are two couches facing one another with a table in the middle, windows that face outwards over the garden, and a small bathroom through a side door.

### THE TARGET

They often wander through the ballroom and occasionally step into the kitchen to deal with staff. About an hour into the party, the target grabs someone from the party and brings them upstairs. He comes back alone. The target repeats this behavior every other hour until stopped. No one knows what happens to the invitees that are brought upstairs. The heroes must decide when to act.



## EDITOR'S NOTES

**THIS ARTICLE IS** a treat to read. I think it hits the nail. Dividing the heist into easy-to-comprehend sections makes its RPG integration smoother. We also liked how Jordan included many examples, taking into account different types/genres of games. That is the key to a useful toolbox.

Once you decide the type of defensive measures you need for the setting you play in, it becomes easier to put the target in a specific location, which is in place cut into separate sections, to work and observe from. This helps give the characters, who are the protagonists of the story, the very needed feeling of thrill, danger, and pressure.

# THE DEATH'S PASS

Level 8

It has been like that for decades. Those who venture there only add skulls to the piles...

Common Warning

## BACKGROUND LORE

**AN ABANDONED CASTLE** used to be a well-defended, cherished location once. The ruins of a city do not necessarily mean war. People move due to a lack of good soil to harvest crops, game to hunt, water, or wood. These resources are not infinite; to have a self-sustainable community takes more than a few years. But conflicts or people abandoning their homes for better lands are not the only reasons that make a place change forever.

## THE STORY OF THE BRIDGE

**ABOUT A HUNDRED** years ago, the people of the Stone Hill region built a bridge to cross a long chasm that divided their lands. The construction of such a bridge changed many lives; the journeys through the bottom of the canyon were dangerous and three times as long. The Connector was the name the builders gave it.

## A NEW NAME

**IT WAS FIFTY** years ago when the tragedy occurred. No one knows what caused the strange event. In the blink of an eye, the fabrics of the Material Plane were torn and a portal between worlds appeared. A storm giant crossed the gate, chased by a foul demon from the Abyss. They held an epic battle but the giant's wounds were too deep. He was aware that he would lose the battle. Instead, he sacrificed himself to empower a spell and banish the demon from the Material Plane forever. Nevertheless, this had unforeseeable consequences. An arcane wave of mixed energies damaged the Connector. All life in a 3,000-foot-radius perished instantly. Since then, crossing the bridge became a dangerous task with gruesome outcomes. Today, it looks like a graveyard where two armies clashed. *The Death's Pass* was born.

## THE PRESENT

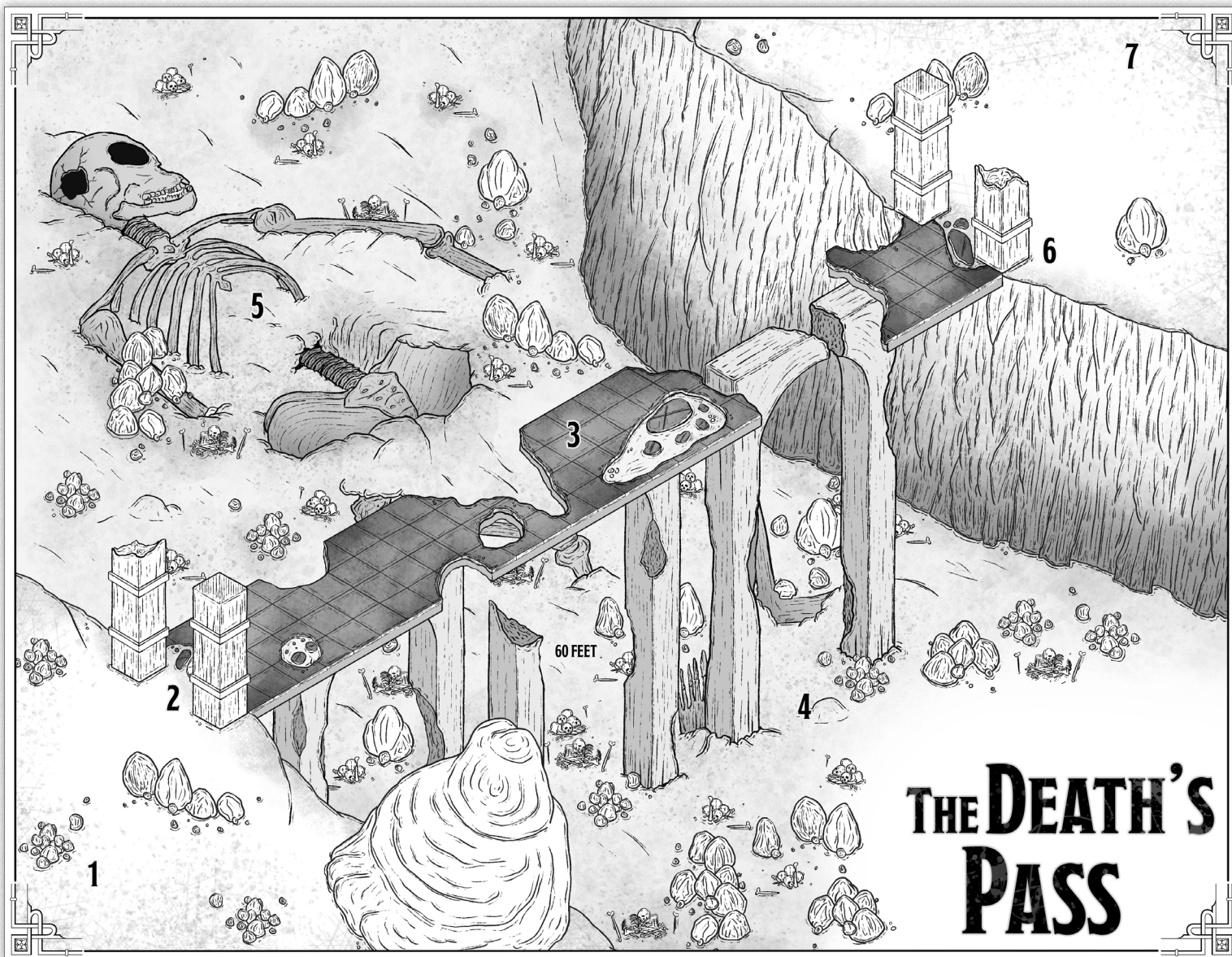
**FOR FIVE DECADES**, travelers, adventurers, or even historians and researchers who approach this place are faced with strange magical phenomena, monsters, visions, and waking nightmares. No one understands why this occurs. But the parties of explorers or people sent to investigate more about the zone never came back. Their bones and remains lie at the bottom of the canyon. Little by little, the bridge once called the Connector became a shunned location. The Death's Pass has been the reason for several myths and stories. Today, it is still used, but only the strongest and bravest warriors dare cross it. This is because it remains the fastest way to cross the canyon and the quickest path to several settlements.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS / SET THE SCENE

**TO USE THIS** module, the characters must have a place to get to. They are summoned by an influential individual who lives on the other side of the Death's Pass bridge, perhaps. Maybe, they must cross because they are on their way to see a friend in need. Alternatively, the characters need to cross the dangerous bridge because a dungeon filled with treasure waits on the other side. The GM is free to apply any other reason to cross.

## REACHING THE BRIDGE

The characters travel through the Stone Hill region for several days until they find the Death's Pass. The closer they get to the bridge, the more common it is to encounter monsters or evidence of strange happenings. There is a 4-in-6 chance that the heroes encounter a group of eight **ghasts** on their last day of travel. The undead show no mercy, chase their prey, and fight until slain.



## FEATURES OF THE BRIDGE

Some people would say it is an architectural miracle that the bridge still stands. The structure of the Death's Pass shows damage, erosion, and entire missing sections.

**Condition.** The entire surface of the bridge is considered difficult terrain. Stone columns hold most of its center. However, the bridge's edges are weak. These tiles collapse and make creatures moving at normal speed fall 60 feet (DC 16 Dex to hold the edge for dear life).

**Atmosphere.** Living creatures that approach are struck by an aura of uneasiness. This feeling makes the characters believe they should not be here.

**Magical Blockade.** The ancient arcane forces that remained here after the death of the giant impede the use of any spell that allows the characters to teleport, fly, or improve their movement in any way. The caster is warned before casting such a spell (DC 15 Arcana). Otherwise, or if the caster insists, the spell does not work.

### 1. SURROUNDINGS

The closer the characters get to the bridge, the stronger they feel they should turn back (see **Features of the Bridge**). A thick gray mist blocks the bottom but the grunts coming from below foresee what lies there.

### 2. STONE BRIDGE

Crossing the bridge causes the characters to have a vision (DC 16 Wisdom) of them dying horribly at the bridge, either by a fall or killed by undead. Creatures affected flee in a random direction, including the precipice, for 1d6 rounds. They repeat the saving throw each turn.

### 3. BRIDGE'S MIDDLE SECTION

The characters must defeat three **wraiths** to continue. During the fight, two **zombies** climb the pillars each round. A squad of three **wights** shoots their bows from area 6. The zombies never stop spawning. Their objective is to overwhelm the heroes and make them fall.

## 4. THE BOTTOM

The mist floats 20 feet above the bottom of the canyon, creating an ephemeral ceiling. Endless piles of bones, and rubble make it hard to walk in a straight line. From here, the giant's skeleton may be studied.

**Falling.** Creatures take 6d6 bludgeoning damage (DC 15 Dex / half) if they fall from the bridge above.

**Undead.** There is a 3-in-6 chance every minute that random enemies appear, created by this unhallow land.

- Four **ogre zombies** and one **barlgura**.
- Two **invisible stalkers** and **twelve** zombies.
- Sixteen **skeletons** and six **wights**.

## 5. THE DORMANT GIANT

If the characters approach the skull of the giant out of mere curiosity or to investigate, they trigger a magical effect. The giant's spirit is aware of what happened here after his demise. He begs the heroes to eradicate evil from this place so he may finally rest (see **Development**).

## 6. REACHING THE OTHER SIDE

The three **wights** draw their swords if the characters get to them. The heroes must jump across or use climbing gear to reach the other side since most magical means are not possible (see **Features of the Bridge**).

## 7. THE OTHER SIDE

The characters made it! They crossed the deadly bridge and they are one step closer to their destination. The dangers and mysteries of the canyon are left behind.

## DEVELOPMENT

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

The characters' destination after crossing the bridge depends on what their objective was (see **Adventure Hooks / Set the Scene**). The GM decides how to proceed regarding the details of the rest of their next journey.

## MORE BONES FOR THE GRAVEYARD

**IF THE CHARACTERS** fall into the canyon and fail to climb up (DC 18 Athletics), they must run or fight the endless waves of monsters that spawn (see area 4). The monsters stop spawning once they get 500 feet away.

## HEALING THE LAND

**IF THE CHARACTERS** interacted with the giant, they have the choice to please the giant's spirit and find a way to remove the evil from this area. It might not be wise to ignore the giant's wish. The GM determines how to lift the land's curse. Alas, this is an adventure for another day...



# HALL OF SPHINXES

Level 8

A mortal's darkest wish always betrays their despicable nature. It speaks their demise.

Haruv-Den, the Great Sphinx

## BACKGROUND LORE

**GREED AND AMBITION** are the greatest defects of mortal beings. Indulged responsibly, they become the strength and motivation with which an individual can change their station and that of their offspring. Mortals always aspire for more and exercise their power to get it. However, indulging in these two descriptors without understanding their consequences leads to evil behavior.

An overly greedy or ambitious person may step over others' aspirations and destroy their lives. They care not for others and take what they want whenever they want it. When offered a quick path to richness and success, they often step through without thinking of the cost.

## THE COST OF POWER

**IT IS COMMONPLACE** fantasy that some fantastic creatures such as genies, fey, or even dragons wield the power to grant wishes to those who earn them. Some bestow these gifts in good faith, others twist the supplicant's wording to create a despicable imitation of what they really wanted. Some take the wording to the letter and interpret it in the most direct way possible, discarding any context outside of the words, such as sphinxes.

Sphinxes are mythological creatures prone to pose word riddles and create strange rhymes with their speech. In the Material Plane, three immortal winged lions inhabit the Hall of Sphinxes. They must do so for at least a few more thousand years; such is their duty. For millennia, they have granted countless wishes to hapless individuals. They have caused havoc and despair to those unfortunate enough to not think about their phrasing carefully before begging Haruv-Den, the Great Sphinx, to grant their wish. The sphinxes take no pride or joy twisting wishes out of their intended meaning, though.

## HARUV-DEN'S ANCIENT HALL

**THE DECREPIT COMPOUND** where the three sphinxes await was created by an otherworldly fey entity to bring success and advancement to mortal beings. A covenant of loyal sphinxes pledged to bring his vision to reality. That is how Haruv-Den and his two companions, Dargen and Firifay came to be in the Material Plane. The altruistic fey entity was slain by his enemies hundreds of years later but the sphinxes, loyal as they are, were committed to completing their quest. Since then, they set trials and grant wishes to those who earn them. Alas, they take the wording to the letter despite the strange consequences this might cause in the world, as instructed.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

**A GROUP OF** prospectors found the Hall of Sphinxes near a large forest two centuries after its last discovery. The poor miners were killed by the undead guardians. Local authorities offer a reward of 2,500 gp and a nobility title to whoever investigates the scene and clears the area from whatever killed the poor prospectors.

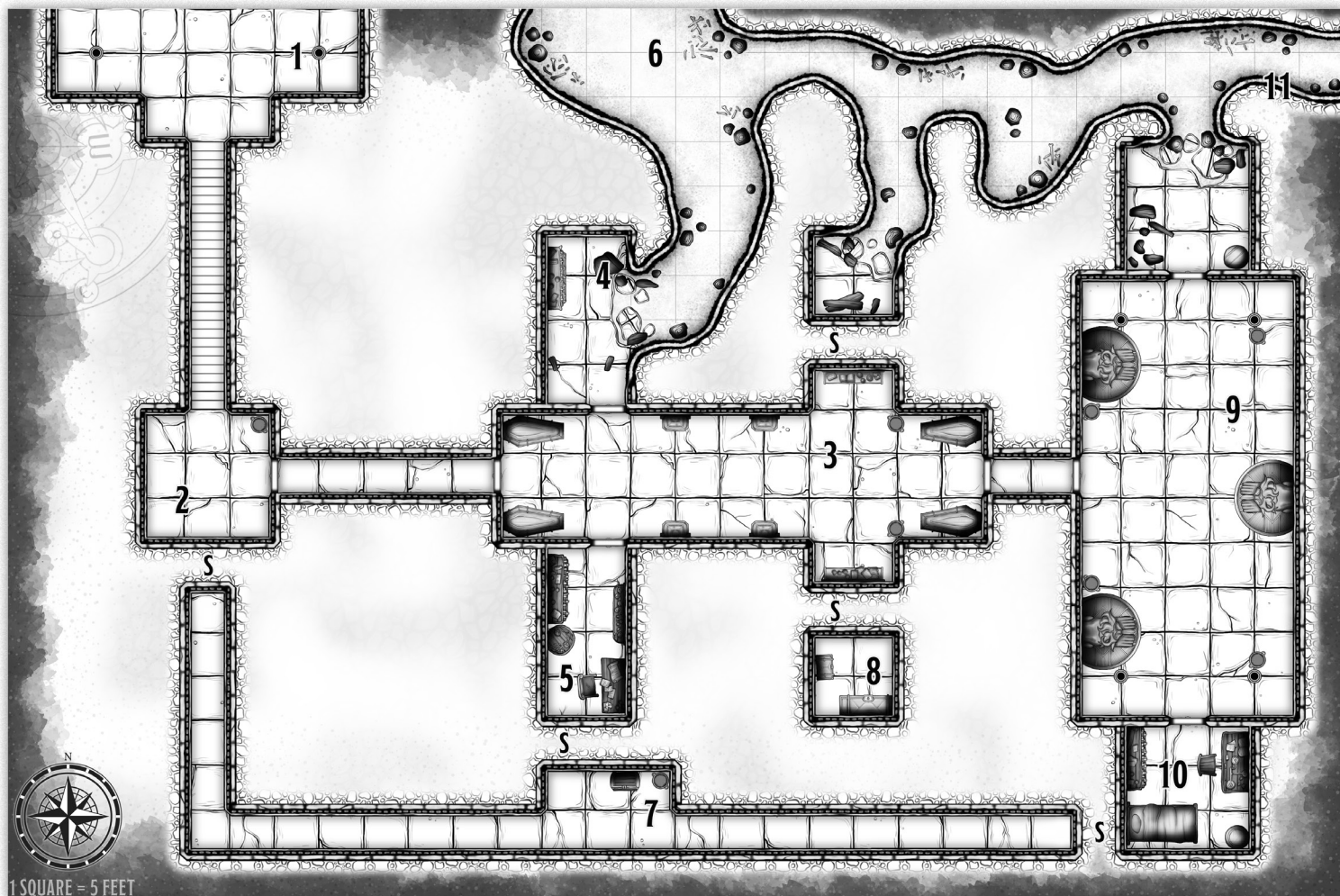
## FEATURES OF THE HIDDEN HALL

The following features correspond to the Hall of Sphinxes underground compound; areas 1 through 11.

**Light.** The dungeon features sconces with *continual flame* spells on them. If removed, the magic fades.

**Magical Aura.** A *detect magic* spell can perceive the sphinxes' presence in area 9 from up to 100 feet.

**Passageways.** An observant character finds secret doors and hidden passages in the dungeon (DC 16 Investigation). They open by pushing brick buttons.



## 1. ENTRANCE HALL

The entrance hall was sacked. It is now empty. There are signs of erosion on the sculpted wall that still feature imagery of flying sphinxes and riddles that make no sense. In the bas-reliefs, a sphinx grants wishes to those strong enough to fight the hall's humanoid guardians.

## 2. DOOR OF THE SPHINX

The room's steel door features silver inlays and a sculpted sphinx effigy. When a creature enters the room, the sphinx says with a mocking voice: *"I wiggle my tail and I have a head, but I lack a body. A snake I am not. What am I?"* If a character speaks the answer (a coin), the door opens. Otherwise, the sphinx breathes fire and deals 6d6 fire damage to all creatures within 15 feet (DC 17 Dexterity / half). The fire reveals strange cracks on the south wall and the presence of the secret passage.

## 3. THE UNDEAD SUPPLICANTS

Those killed by poorly-worded wishes remain in Haruv-Den's hall as undead guardians. Five **ghasts**, two **zombies**, and six **shadows** emerge from the enclosures in the room to attack the characters. Defeating all undead opens the door to area 9. They reform at dawn.

## 4. DESTROYED LIBRARY

Cave-ins destroyed this repository of knowledge. The few documents that remain here are damp and unreadable. A strange vapor comes from the northern caves.

## 5. HARUV-DEN'S ARCHIVE

Most documents and information from area 4 were moved to this archive to preserve them. A magical aura keeps scrolls and tomes in a good state. The archive contains an accurate account of past visitors to the hall, their actions, and what happened to them after. Reading the documents for 30 minutes reveals the location of the three sphinxes, their ability to grant wishes, and that more than 350 wishes have been granted as far back as 15,000 years ago. A quick-witted person sees that some wishes ended up in terrible mishaps because the wording was taken too literally (DC 17 Intelligence).

## 6. HUNTING GROUNDS

A pack of ravenous chuuls inhabits the meandering network of natural caves. Three **chuuls** emerge from the darkness and attack trespassers with their pincers.

**Vapor.** A noxious, light gas causes humanoids to become poisoned for 1 hour (DC 16 Constitution).



## 7. SECRET PASSAGE

This large secret hallway connects areas 2, 5, and 10 and serves as a way to bypass the trap in area 2 and the undead in area 3. The chest close to the secret passage to area 5 features a sphinx-shaped lock. It speaks a riddle: “*What rooms can’t you enter?*” If a character speaks the answer (mushrooms), the chest opens. Otherwise, the sphinx-lock explodes and deals 4d6 thunder damage to all creatures within 15 feet (DC 17 Dexterity / half).

**Treasure.** The chest contains 2,600 gp, 17,500 sp, two *potions of superior healing*, and a *+1 shield*.

## 8. SECRET VAULT

The ancient vault contains two stone coffers. They are engraved with runes and imagery of sphinxes.

**Treasure.** The chests contain 10,000 gp, 4,500 sp, a diamond-engraved belt (980 gp), a *figurine of power* (random) three *potions of superior healing*, and a *+2 dagger*.

## 9. THE THREE SPHINXES

The three sphinxes, Haruv-Den (**androsphinx**), Darggen and Firifay (**gynosphinxes**), and an elf await in this chamber. They welcome the characters to the hall. If the characters approach from area 10, before defeating the undead in area 3, Haruv-Den announces that they are not worthy of being granted a wish. They must return and defeat the undead. Otherwise, they can play the riddle game. If they guess all three, defeating the undead guardians is not necessary to be granted a wish.

The sphinxes relish the opportunity to use their riddles with visitors. Each sphinx poses a riddle while Agadamon, the elf clerk, keeps a record of the characters’ right and wrong answers.

**Haruv-Den.** What pine has the longest and sharpest needles? (The porcupine)

**Darggen.** What turns everything around but does not ever move? (A mirror)

**Firifay.** A long snake with a stinging bite, I stay coiled up unless I must fight. (A whip).

## 10. THE CLERK’S QUARTERS

Agadamon’s quarters have nothing of value. He helps the sphinxes keep the archives up to date in exchange for knowledge. He teleports in once a month.

## 11. NOXIOUS CAVERNS

The uncharted cavern network is the home of chuuls, troglodytes, and other underground denizens. The caverns slant downward into the veins of the earth.

## DEVELOPMENT

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

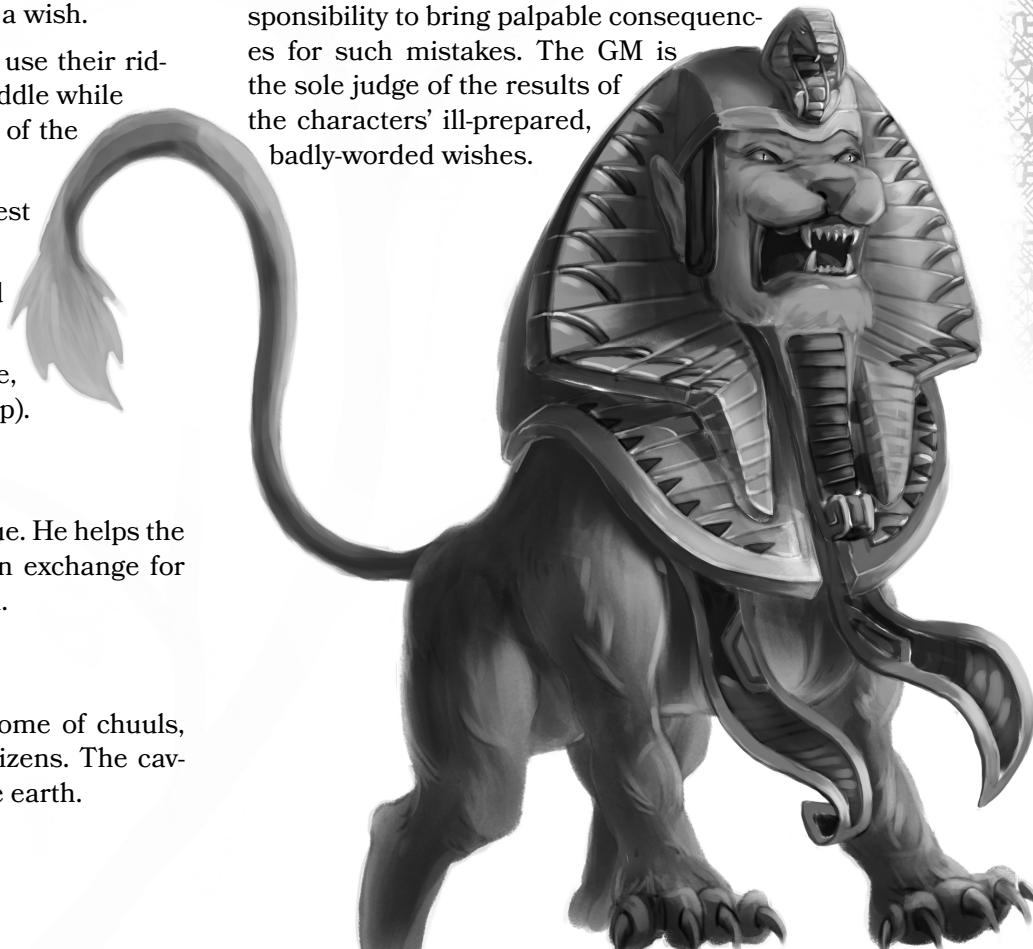
## CONFRONTING THE SPHINXES

**SHOULD THE CHARACTERS** antagonize the mellow sphinxes, Haruv-Den warns them once that their presence here conforms to an ancient commitment to help the mortals. However, he shall not suffer fools. If the characters insist, the three sphinxes fight mercilessly.

## WORTHY OF POWER

**THE CHARACTERS DEFEAT** the undead guardians in area 3 or partake in the sphinxes’ riddle game (guessing right bypasses the undead encounter). Haruv-Den announces that according to an eons-long contract the characters are now worthy of a magical wish. Haruv-Den announces that they can ask for anything they want but they shall have a single chance to state what it is.

Haruv-Den can cast a *wish* spell once per year. He considers the characters as a single entity. The sphinx refuses to elaborate on any limits or rules for this offering. Each character has a single chance to announce their wish. Haruv-Den is not evil and does not purposely twist the meaning of a wish to cause unintended results. His work is to interpret the wish exactly as it has been asked. Often, greed and ambition cause a person to be precipitous and make a mistake. It is the sphinx’s responsibility to bring palpable consequences for such mistakes. The GM is the sole judge of the results of the characters’ ill-prepared, badly-worded wishes.



# MAKING A MONSTER HUNT

A GM supplement for monster-hunting missions by Michael T. DeBondt

**I** love the concept of monster hunts. Researching, specializing, and gearing up to take down a single terrifying beast. Something only possible because of the time hunters spend preparing. The cool calculating mentality of going in for the kill, only for things to go inevitably wrong at the last moment; where victory is suddenly snatched from the jaws of defeat because of a piece of crucial information discovered while researching the target.

This is something I have experimented a lot with over the years so I can provide such experiences to my players. And in this article, I share what I have discovered.

A good monster hunt comes in three distinct phases, the **research**, the **hunt**, and finally the gathering of **resources**. Though because I am writing an article about this, I think it would be fun to make a memorable acronym. So, after a visit to *Thesaurus.com*, how about we use; **Preparation, Execution, Gathering**. But before describing those, let's talk about the monster!

## THE MONSTER

**FIRST AND FOREMOST**, you need to make the monster and environment. The enemy should be dangerous to encounter, and much more to slay. However, it should be easier to kill if enough time is spent preparing to fight it. The three types of creature design for this are:

**Phase-Based:** After it is "killed," it changes its style and fights on with a second health total.

**Damage-Based:** The damage output is increased significantly while also having a major weakness.

**Mechanics-Based:** The only feasible way to slay it is by fulfilling a specific requirement or condition rather than damage. These might be the hardest ones because muscle is not enough. Research is absolutely required.

I won't explain the complexities of each creature's design here, but the principle is the same with each. To make sure the party doesn't survive combat if they are not prepared. This might seem harsh, and it would be if you were just dropping the creature on them. They should have ample chances to plan before they encounter the creature. The quality of their research may help them.

Once the monster is made, it must feel connected to its environment. So, when you create its home, make sure to think about how its abilities and weaknesses might be reflected in the surrounding area. Like how a dragon's breath weapon might leave scars on the land or how a troll's footsteps would tear up the underbrush. The best lairs have plenty of evidence in sight to gather information about their dweller and to provide insight into who or what lives there. That is part of the research too.

## 1. THE PREPARATION

Now, you may be asking what preparation you need to do for this section. Good news, you did most of it when you created the monster. All its strengths, weaknesses, attack methods, and other mechanics are in the stat block. All you need to do is to decide how that translates in-game. "*I once saw it incinerate a dozen soldiers with fire*" could mean an attack deals 12d6 fire damage. "*You watch the beast glide lazily through the clouds*" can be interpreted as a solid fly speed of 40 feet per round. How exactly the party finds more information is up to them, and they likely shall display unparalleled creativity when asking the locals, or any eye-witness about the elusive monster. But it is a good idea to have about three on hand to suggest in case the party struggles. Have an NPC who is looking for help approach the heroes and ask for their aid.

How in-depth and granular you want to make each act of research is up to you. Make it a full-on side quest or have it done during downtime; it doesn't matter. Just allow the characters to prepare as much as they want. Let them discover every aspect of the creature's statblock if they want to spend that much time. Good preparation should be rewarded because they will most likely need it during the hunt. Preparation might also require the expenditure of money for bribes, information, acquiring books, or getting gear necessary for the hunt. For cohesive missions, the expense should not be more than 10-20% of whatever reward the party was promised. Otherwise, missions like this would not be profitable.

## 2. THE EXECUTION

The party is ready to slay the beast, there is nothing else to do, right? Wrong. You still have a destination. And this destination is indeed something to worry about. The dangers in making the journey to this location, any changes since the party learned about it, and lastly, the creature's lair. All of this plays a part in the second phase of a hunt.

You prepped the environment when you made the monster, and each of these things can and may have been learned in **Preparation** by your party. But even the most recent information can become unreliable in mere hours. Once your party decides to move out, it is up to you to determine what, if anything, has changed in the environment. Will they encounter any other creatures along the way? Will the combat area be dry, or muddy and flooded. Will the monster stumble upon them earlier than expected? All up to the GM to decide. The characters' decisions and the amount of time they spent researching the monster should influence the encounter as well. Be sure to punish a stalling attitude from the heroes, if needed.

You should alter or add a spark of difficulty to one of the location's elements to add some tension to the party's **Execution**; keeping them a little unsteady and causing them to focus as they need to adjust their plan on the fly. Maybe, they arrive at their confrontation with the dangerous beast hurt, tired, or poisoned. What kind of hunt would it be without one or two complications?

The important part is the party finally encounters the fated creature and survives the encounter against it.

## 3. THE GATHERING

Whether it was for fame, fortune, or favor, a deadly monster always has its tangential rewards. This is your opportunity to fill it with adventure hooks, or just more treasure. The players may come up with more ideas, too.

A well-rounded bounty monster has three diverse components to scavenge from its corpse. A red dragon, for instance, has scales that may be fashioned into armor, teeth that a blade could be hewn from, and a flammable fluid sack that can be used as a magical component for alchemist's fire or other arcane rituals. Though you can make components for anything, a material to craft a weapon, an enhancing component, and a spell/utility ingredient make a good default trio for any slain monster. It is not recommended to ask for a check to gather materials from the carcass as the challenge was slaying the beast, not skin it. Do not spoil well-earned treasure.

There is of course always the question of more immediate rewards. A dragon's hoard, a troll's corpse pit, or the gut of a Sarlacc have a certain stigma for holding valuable artifacts. Seeding your monster with nearby riches is fine and sometimes expected, but not always required. If you do leave some additional treasure behind for your players, I encourage you to attach some history to it. A sword with a family crest on it or gold with an unfamiliar mint mark can add to the history and mystery of your now slain monster. Brewing more adventures or future quests from the encountered treasure is a great way to tie the end of one adventure into the next. After all, heroes need ever-growing amounts of funds.



# KINGS OF YORE

Level 10

This hall belongs to the kings that once ruled over Galzeaga. They are the Kings of Yore.

Tomb Inscription

## BACKGROUND LORE

**POWER IS A** dangerous thing. In the wrong hands, it often leads to violent conquest and domination, war. This does not mean that power in the right hands means success. There shall always be evil organizations, entities, or parties seeking the wealth and power of others. This translates into kind-hearted leaders becoming targets. That is why, on some rare occasions, the power to rule is divided equally into two, three, or more parts.

## THE NINE KINGS

**THE WESTERN TERRITORIES** of Galzeaga were conquered by the Crimson Army a hundred years ago. The lands were so large and so vast that it took several weeks to traverse them. It was decided that one leader could not oversee such a large territory. The power to rule over Galzeaga was equally given to nine royal families with the same blood heritage. Nine crowns and scepters were forged. The legend says each king possessed a unique item, crafted to fit their varied personalities. Alas, little is publicly known about the quirky artifacts.

## THE END OF A KINGDOM

**THE NINE KINGS**, in the end, could not overcome the natural desires of men. Two of them were good kings. And they fought against the others' ambition, envy, and thirst for more wealth. But little by little, the nine kings destroyed themselves. Their reign was swift.

Their most loyal followers did not fail to respect them after their deaths. A marvelous, lavish tomb was built for them. Religious ceremonies to honor them were performed routinely. However, the last prayer that appeased the frustrated kings' spirits occurred three decades ago.

## POWERFUL GRUDGES

**UNBEKNOWN TO THE** former followers of the nine kings, their prayers and religious ceremonies kept their spirits calm. But the nine kings were ultimately forgotten; only their bones remain. The lands of Galzeaga fell to enemy hands after their demise. Most of their subjects surrendered and now pledge allegiance to new banners.

The kings want vengeance, they do not accept their current fate. At night, their hate and frustration materialize into evil spirits. The shapeless undead terrorize travelers and villagers from nearby towns. Crimsonwall is the largest settlement dealing with the angry ghosts.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

**THE CHARACTERS REACH** Crimsonwall after a long journey of adventures. However, the town authorities request their immediate help. They are offered 5,000 gp for investigating what causes the spirits to come, and to eradicate the source of this preternatural evil.

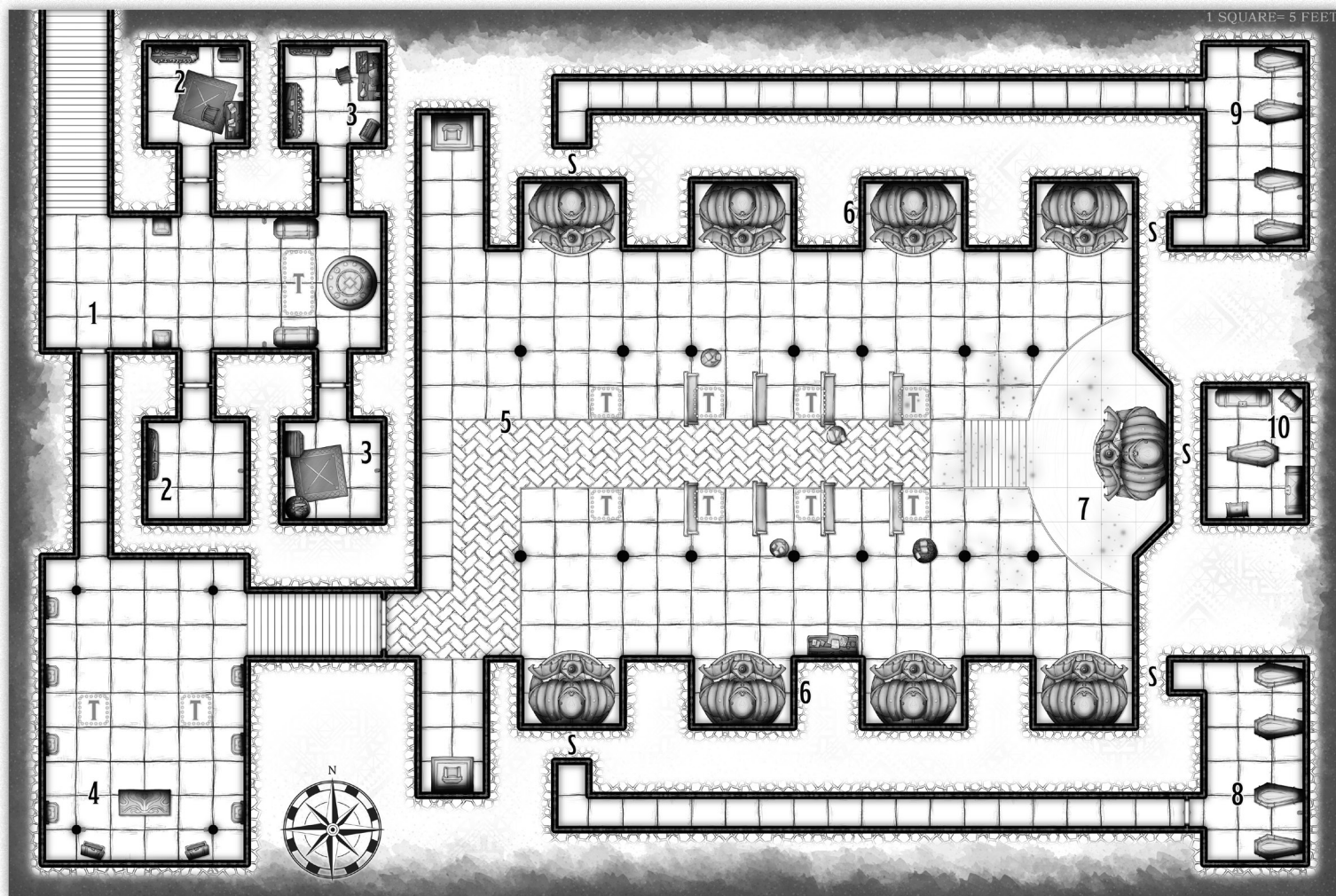
## FEATURES OF THE TOMB OF KINGS

The following features correspond to every room within the dungeon and the Tomb of Kings; areas 1 through 10.

**Light.** The dungeon features sconces with *continual flame* spells on them. If removed, the magic fades.

**Traps.** The characters may avoid the traps in the dungeon if they notice the pressure-sensitive plates that trigger most of them (DC 17 Investigation). A capable mechanic may disarm them (DC 20 Thieves' Tools).

**Immortal Grudge.** All undead enemies reform every 24 hours. This effect stops only by appeasing the kings' spirits or by destroying them (see **Development**).



## 1. ENTRANCE / LANDING

From Crimsonwall, the characters make a half-day journey to reach the forlorn tomb. The entrance, partially covered by leaves and twigs, is not hard to find. Two **wights** and two **invisible stalkers** protect this area.

**Trap.** The magic circle was once used to protect this place. It has no use anymore. If the characters trigger the trap, darts are shot from the walls. They take 4d6 poison damage and are poisoned for 1 hour (DC 18 Con).

## 2. SECONDARY OFFICES

These rooms contain wooden desks and shelves. At first glance, there seems to be nothing of value. However, a ring with a small jet is hidden below the rug (DC 18 Investigation). It is a *ring of resistance* (necrotic).

## 3. MAIN OFFICES

Both of these chambers contain many books and journals. The characters learn the story of the nine kings if they spend 10 minutes reading the documents here.

**Treasure.** If the characters search the place (DC 18 Investigation), they find a small ruby (500 gp), a golden ring (250 gp), and a *spell scroll of freedom of movement*.

## 4. ASHES OF THE ROYAL FAMILIES

The door to this area reads “*May the royal families rest*”. Standing sarcophagi rest by the walls. A central coffin rests by the south end of the chamber.

The characters can explore this area freely. The double doors to area 5 are locked (DC 18 Thieves’ Tools). Triggering the traps or descending toward area 5 causes the undead guardians to emerge from their stone enclosures. Seven **ghasts**, four **shadows**, and one **wraith** do their best to stop the valorous heroes’ advances.

**Trap.** The shining coins within the chests are an illusion (DC 19 Wisdom). They shoot 30-foot-long jets of fire if the characters step on the marked tiles or interact with them in any way. Creatures in the line take 6d6 fire damage and are knocked prone (DC 16 Dex / half).

## 5. TOMB OF KINGS - VESTIBULE

A thick layer of dust covers everything in this area. There are two alcoves, north and south. Each holds a stone seat waiting in the darkness. Each of these seats has a hidden button in the back (DC 18 Investigation). Pushing both unlocks the north and south passageways behind the statues in area 5. They lead to areas 8 and 9.

## 6. STATUES OF THE KINGS

The walls of this large hall feature 15-foot-wide alcoves where eight statues stand impassive. The eastern end of the chamber holds the ninth of the king's statues. The chamber's marvelous architecture is a thing to behold.

**Traps.** Stepping on any of the marked floor tiles (see map) causes eight of the statues' bases to open. An armored **wight** comes out of each base. The eight warriors stand before the ninth king's statue to protect him.

## 7. THE KINGS OF YORE

The ninth king's statue is identical to the others, yet, it seems larger, more prominent. An aura of great power comes from its interior. A magical shield (*wall of force*) protects it against any physical or magical damage.

**Blocked Way.** The characters cannot access the treasure chamber (area 10) until they visit both areas 8 and 9. A spectral voice whispers in their minds: "*Find the kings, hear our words. Make the world remember us*".

## 8. SOUTH SARCOPHAGI

Four of the nine kings' remains are here. It is the first time someone visits them in such a long time. Grateful for this gesture, the kings' ghosts appear before the characters, managing their anger, and speak. The four voices speak as one and say: "*Respect our dead, our people, our lives. Do not pillage our tomb, and make others remember us, visit us. Speak of our past and our lives. We were good kings. We just want to be remembered.*"

The characters know this is not entirely true if they read the documents in area 3 or if they knew the story of the nine kings in Galzeaga already (DC 18 History).

**Treasure.** If the characters ignore the ghosts and open the sarcophagi, they find 8,000 gp worth of coins, small gems, silverware, fancy fabrics, robes, jewelry, and more.

## 9. NORTH SARCOPHAGI

Use the same description from area 8 for this area. The characters hear the ghosts' wishes again here. The treasure here is similar to the one described in area 8.

## 10. TREASURE CHAMBER

The characters cannot enter this area until they listen to the kings' ghosts in areas 8 and 9, and once they make a choice (see **Development**). If they choose to help the kings, they cannot take any of the treasure here.

**Treasure.** The king resting in the sarcophagi wears 5,000 gp worth of jewelry. A hoard of 10,000 gp worth of expensive fabrics, spices, and silverware lies inside the chests. A *rod of alertness* rests on top of a chest.

## DEVELOPMENT

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

## REMEMBER THE KINGS!

**THE CHARACTERS DO** not pillage the tomb and pay respect to the kings. They ask Crimsonwall to remember the kings who once ruled over Galzeaga. And to visit their tombs from time to time. If they succeed, the dead finally rest. The characters are paid the agreed-upon amount.

## THE PAST IS DEAD

**THE CHARACTERS IGNORE** what the kings want or feel. They know the truth about their greed. They loot areas 8 and 9. Back at the main hall (area 7), the nine kings' anger takes the form of an **erinyes** devil. It defends the kings' vault along with one **wraith** and two **shadows**. If the **wights** in area 6 did not fight before, they emerge from their enclosures now as well. The incorporeal undead reform after one round until the erinyes is defeated.



# THE STARRY VOID OF FATE

High Tier

You may stare at your fate in the starry void.  
As scripted, you shall never come here again.

Elvish Warden

## BACKGROUND LORE

**PEASANTS IN THE** Material Plane worry not about the infinity of the multiverse and the countless planes that surround their existence. Ultimately, most of them are fated to remain near the place they were born without ever experiencing a planar shift. Eons ago, elves, dragons, and fey creatures built arcane passageways across the planes. Some were destroyed or stopped working, but some of those gates remain operational to this day. However, sometimes there is no way to know where a portal might go. Careless interaction is a grave mistake.

## THE FABLED STARRY VOID

**A CABAL OF** elves and dragons took on the mission of opening a permanent portal to a place they named the Starry Void of Fate. For them, it was a theoretical concept that their arcane formulations suggested might be true. They used their joint magical powers to create a demiplane. Their purpose was to create a hub that would connect relevant locations in the planar multiverse.

They crafted eleven planar portals and linked them to faraway locations in other planes of existence; places interesting or important enough to require a way to travel to them fast. The Cabal of Planes counted twelve elves and four dragons among its members. With time, they managed to open a portal to what they called the Starry Void. It is an ephemeral substance and location in the multiverse that leads whoever jumps into it to the prime moment of their lifetime. To the moment where they shall do something that forever changes their world and those around them. The Starry Void of Fate transports them across time and space to where they are most needed so that they can fulfill their destiny once and for all. However, though many have gone there, no one has returned.

## THE LOST CABAL

**THE STARRY VOID** demiplane is the home of several sages and researchers that dedicate their lives to maintaining it in exchange for access to its resources. Out of the Cabal of Planes' original members, only an elf remains, Saradish. The 3,500-year-old elf's memories are fractured at best as he cannot recall most of his life. The sages in the demiplane believe that the frequency of planar shifts he endured deteriorated his mind. The rest of the cabal founders, along with countless others, jumped into the Starry Void. The records of them describe amazing feats in historical records but none of them ever returned to the demiplane. The sages believe that it is a universal impossibility to return because one can only have a single grand purpose in one lifetime. Returning, thus allowing someone to jump again, would create a paradox.

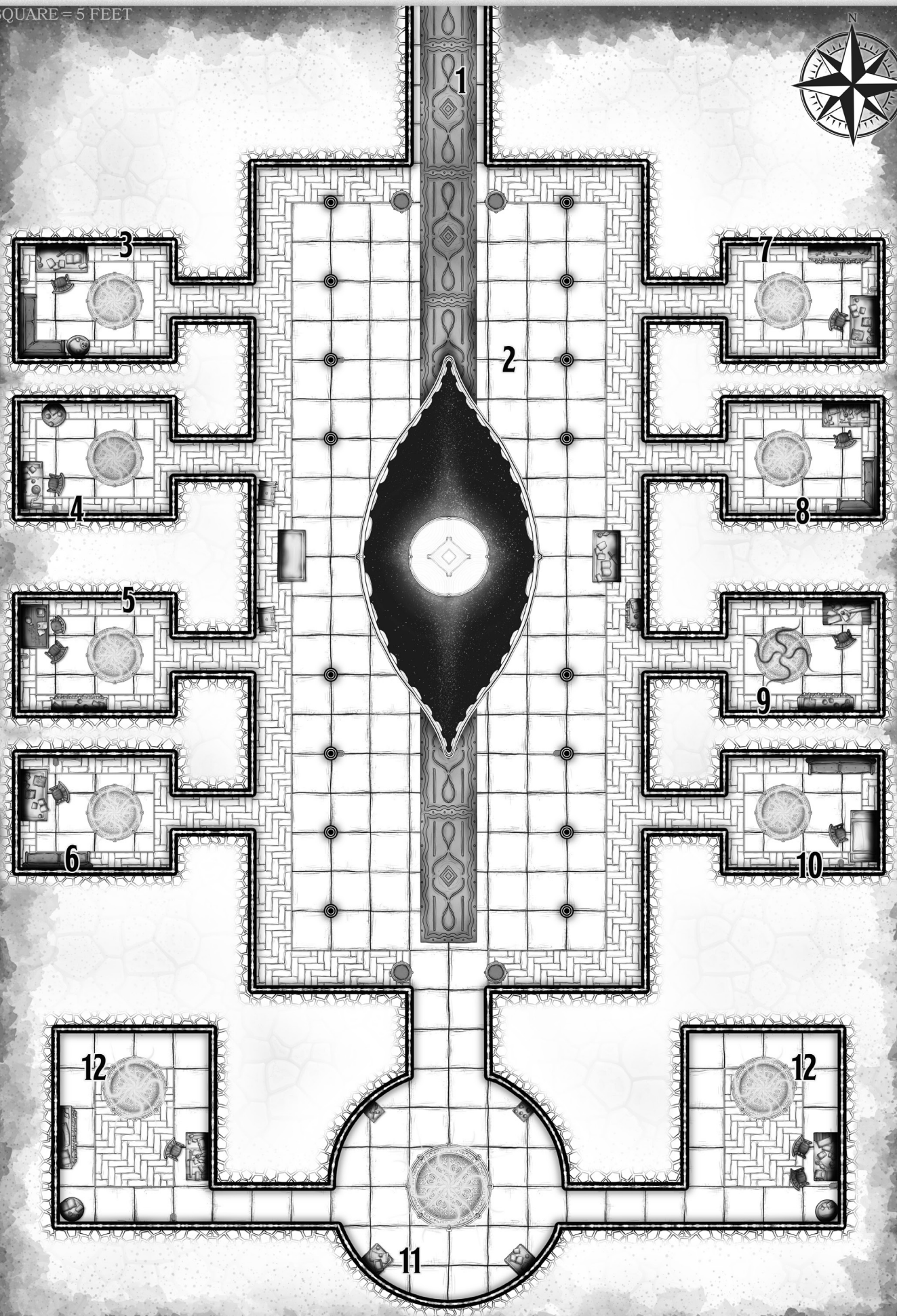
## ADVENTURE HOOKS / SET THE SCENE

**THIS SUPPLEMENT IS** best used as a hub between planes that the characters can use to prepare for a grand quest. The portals and the sages in the demiplane lead them toward places of power where they can become powerful and acquire artifacts and magical items. In the end, the characters reach their destiny by jumping into the Starry Void in area 2 (see **Development**).

## REACHING THE DEMIPLANE

**THE HIGH-LEVEL PARTY** learns of the Starry Void of Fate and the stories about how brave heroes in the past first went there to get ready to embark on a perilous mission. Investigating the subject turns up intricate rune sequences for a *plane shift* spell that the characters can use to reach the grand entrance hall in area 1.

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET





# FEATURES OF THE DEMIPLANE

The following features correspond to the Starry Void of Fate's demiplane, areas 1 through 12.

**Condition.** Numerous *invisible servants* keep the place in great shape. They clean, polish, put books away, even cook meals for visitors twice a day.

**Atmosphere.** The Starry Void in area 2 pulls light and sound into it, creating a palpable void in the air. This effect causes a feeling of unease in most creatures.

**Magical Blockade.** A permanent anti-magic field permeates the demiplane. Saradish, the remaining founder is immune to it but he hasn't cast a spell in years. Sometimes, in a bout of lucidity, the elf appoints a trusted sage as a new exception to the anti-magic field. At this time, only the sages in areas 6 and 10 can cast spells.

## 1. GRAND ENTRANCE HALL

When a creature uses the intricate rune sequence for a teleportation spell, they experience a moment of synesthesia (a criss-cross of the senses) before finding themselves walking through a great hallway. The entrance hall has a 30-foot-tall, arched, ceiling with detailed architecture and fresco paintings of strange landscapes.

The creatures appear 100 feet from area 2. To the north, the hallway appears to continue as far as the eye can see. This is an infinite hallway that leads nowhere. There are several framed portraits hanging on the walls. They depict twelve elves and four dragons. The elves wear purple tunics and the dragons brandish pieces of jewelry embedded on their scales. A well-informed historian knows that they form the Cabal of Planes, they are responsible for creating this demiplane (DC 19 History).

## 2. THE STARRY VOID

The largest chamber in the demiplane houses the eye-shaped opening into the Starry Void of Fate. Two rows of eight pillars flank the endless well and hold an arched ceiling with elaborate arches and convoluted architectural features. A pearl-white sphere floats just above the starry abyss. The sphere rotates slowly and reflects closely by individuals on its glossy surface. The sages claim that looking into those reflections might yield some insight into what awaits those who jump into the Starry Void.

A snakefolk sage named Dirir'Talhis stands by the void and warns visitors against jumping into it. The sage claims that ill-prepared individuals taking the plunge might just find themselves in the jaws of death. Still, she claims that even those unprepared may end up performing great deeds. It is all up to fate. Dirir'Talhis speaks slowly and in riddles, but tries to be helpful to others.

## 3. GATE TO THE WOODLANDS

The portal in this chamber leads to a location in the Woodlands forest where a council of dryads lives. Meren, the elf sage here claims that the dryads possess knowledge that dates back to the birth of existence. They may answer questions that no one else can.

## 4. GATE TO THE SHADOWS

This portal leads to a deep cavern network in the Shadow Realm. The records say that a powerful magical aura can be detected there but the indigenous, mutated, cavern denizens have deterred any exploration attempt. The sages believe the aura belongs to a draconic artifact.

## 5. GATE TO THE ENDLESS HELLS

This gate has only been used twice in the past. It leads to layer 344 of the hellish planes. The destination is hot enough to melt iron; few individuals possess the magic protections to explore it. The only record says that a brass castle is located five miles from the entry point.

## 6. GATE OF THE ARCHFEY COURT

A drow sage named Il'Vadhiss and Saradish, the elderly founder, work here. The gate leads directly to an archfey court in the Woodlands Realm. It is the court of a venerable fey entity that embodies the power of the storms and wind. Il'Vadhiss is a folk hero of her people and claims to know that her ultimate fate is to save her home city from an incoming invasion. She is ready to jump into the Starry Void. She wishes to return to the demiplane too, something that the sages insist is not possible. She wants to make a deal with the archfey to see if they can help with her predicament. She is looking for companions.

## 7. GATE TO THE GREAT MOUNTAIN

The gate leads to a location in the Material Plane near a grand volcano's crater. The records say that the locals made gruesome sacrifices in the fiery place.

## 8. GATE TO THE ENDLESS DEPTHS

This portal leads to the ocean in the Material Plane. The entry point is 30,000 feet deep and requires special preparation because of the overwhelming pressure. Countless shipwrecks rest within three miles of the gate.

## 9. GATE TO THE VEINS OF THE EARTH

The portal leads to a cavern thousands of feet under the Material Plane's surface. Vadanni, a gnome sage, claims that the cavern is dangerous and constantly changing from the sudden seismic activity in the area.

## 10. THE RADIANT GATE

This gate leads to one of the higher planes of existence. The one many know as the Radiant Fields. It is the home of an almighty entity that most people in the Material Plane know as the God of the Sun. It is believed that followers of that god reach the Radiant Fields after they die. Brock Amin, a satyr sage in the area, suggests that those claims are unsubstantiated. Still, the kind satyr warns those planning to use the gate to be ready as the inhabitants of the Radiant Fields do not suffer fools. Their law system is fast, straightforward, and unmerciful.

## 11. THE GATE OF SURPRISE

The records in this chamber detail that the gate does not have a single destination. Instead, there is a log of seventeen different locations that the gate randomly connects to. Some sages say that it is not random and that the chosen destination has some relevance to the creature's ultimate fate. But not all agree with this hypothesis.

## 12. UTILITY PORTALS

A capable spellcaster can configure any of these portals to function as a *planar shift* spell that allows the user to open a door to any place in their plane of origin. It is the only means to abandon the demiplane to a custom destination. In addition, spellcasters standing on the circle bypass the demiplane's magical blockade.

## STEPPING INTO THE VOID

**THE CHARACTERS GAIN** use of the Starry Void demiplane and use its resources to empower themselves for the future. Diri'Talhis, the snakefolk sage, recommends speaking to other sages and visiting some of the other portals' destinations to become stronger before considering the Starry Void. The other plane gates lead to strange locations in the multiverse that are meant to strengthen and prepare them to withstand anything they find on their paths. All sages in the demiplane are eager to hear the story and make recommendations on what gates to visit based on their needs. The sages have a scholarly curiosity about all visitors and their quests and wish to see them succeed so that they can unearth more information about the Starry Void of Fate's nature.

When the characters approach the Starry Void of Fate they get closer to the campaign's end. This requires preparation on the part of the GM as they must plan ahead for the party's end-of-campaign quest. Due to the nature of the Starry Void of Fate, when the characters take the plunge, they are transported to wherever they shall fulfill their final mission. They appear before their archenemy's lair, they find an obscure dungeon where an item of great power is located, or they are transported to somewhere they are needed the most. The exact nature depends on the campaign and the great evil that threatens the existence of the characters and their world.



# THE PRICE OF POWER

A world-building supplement about warlocks by Vladimir “El Vlado” Rodríguez

## FLESHING OUT WARLOCK PACTS.

**SINCE THEIR CONCEPTION** as a full-base class in 3rd edition, warlocks have gained many adepts, being similar in concept to clerics but without being part of a religion. Their 5e incarnation further developed warlocks' identity, giving them a very different source of power from their arcane peers. It is the only class that has two character-defining options: a Patron and a Pact boon.

Unlike clerics, warlocks have a closer, more personal relationship with their masters. Below are several considerations and options to flesh out warlock characters.

## THE PRICE

**A WARLOCK RECEIVES** most of its power from a pact, but at what price? Depending on the Patron, warlocks may have to do something to further their Patron's plans every now and then to maintain or increase the benefits gained by such pact. For example, an Archfey warlock may have to perform a ritual every solstice and equinox, while a Fiend warlock may have to leave some meat to rot in the streets every Monday to please Baalzebul, the Lord of Flies. Another possibility may be the need to ingest something as part of spellcasting, like eating a consecrated wafer for a Celestial warlock or smoking a herb or incense for a Noble Efreet servant. Finally, getting the benefits of a new warlock level or feature may require a new negotiation of the pact or even a brand-new pact with a more powerful being of the same type.

## TABOOS

The opposite of price, a taboo is something prohibited as part of the pact. A warlock of a powerful Leprechaun must avoid all unlucky situations, like crossing under a ladder or touching wood after seeing a black cat. A Fiend Patron prohibits the warlock from ever stepping into a church of a good deity. Consider adding two or three taboos that are consistent with the Patron's alignment and worldviews. The GM and warlock PC must agree on this and decide on taboos that fit the character.

## MAGIC

The greatest customization of a warlock comes from spells. A Bard might recite a poem to cast *charm person*, a Sorcerer may only need the arcane magic in their veins, and a Wizard recites words of power and makes grand gestures. A Fathomless warlock's eyes may turn into pitch-black pools as if staring into the depths of the ocean, while an Undead warlock briefly gets elongated canines for a minute, like those of a vampire. A Fiend warlock opens his robes to show a pentagram that spews fiends after casting *summon lesser demons*, while an Archfey one causes flowers to bloom from where fey creatures are instantly born when casting *summon fey*.

The Pact Boon also should differ for each Patron. A Pact of the Blade may appear as an old, bloody scimitar when summoned by a Fiend warlock, or it might look like a shadow given substance when summoned by a Hexblade. Again, it is recommended that the GM and warlock PC in question should agree upon these visual characteristics together to obtain the best results.

## REQUESTS FOR HELP

The warlock may need his Patron's help someday. A good rule of thumb to get help from a Patron is to roll percentile dice and obtain a result below the warlock's level plus their Charisma modifier. The help can come in the form of a spell working much better than normal or affecting multiple targets, or it can come in the shape of other Patron servants helping the warlock. Such help doesn't come without a steep price for the warlock, but even the entire party may have to pay it. Some Patrons or extraplanar entities place a high value on their time and power. Such extraplanar interventions are considered to be legally binding by some of those entities. This rule can also be used by clerics, druids, and other divine characters. Change the ability score above as needed.

Conversely, the patron may give a special quest to the warlock, according to its interests, like a Fathomless warlock having to recover an idol from a museum and send it back to the ocean during a starless night.

## FAILURE OF COMPLIANCE

**FAILURE TO COMPLY** with the Patron's requirements is meant to cause immediate and long-term consequences. Some people in the TTPRG hobby agree that the pact's benefits cannot be removed by the Patron. Once given, they cannot be taken back. But the Patron can and will send other followers to exact immediate revenge against the one warlock that chose not to comply. The penalty is death. That is one school of thought, the other side believes that the Patron does have the ability to impair the warlock's magic casting abilities, up to the point to revoke the pact and remove the powers entirely. The warlock may have disadvantage on spell attacks, some spell slots do not return after rests, the Pact Boon does not work, a familiar becomes angry and won't follow orders, or a pact blade becomes flaccid, or loses its sharpness.

The seriousness and severity of the warlock's Patron is something that should be agreed upon when making the character. Still, disobeying the Patron's commands should bring immediate peril to the warlock.

## WARLOCKS IN THE CAMPAIGN WORLD

**THE WARLOCK'S MOST** important aspect is the fact that all of his power was given to him by a Patron. Not by study, not by inheritance, not by faith, but just by paying the price. Answering the following questions will help you decide the role of warlocks in your campaign:

- **How are warlocks seen by the common folk?** Maybe they are distrusted and considered agents of evil, or some may treat them with fearful respect and call them a special name, like Sha'irs, Diabolists, or Fey Mages.

- **How are warlocks seen by other mages?** Wizards may look at Warlocks with disdain and mistrust. Clerics of all religions may treat them as apostates, heretics to be hunted down, no matter their alignment or Patron.

- **Who are the most common Patrons in the campaign world?** The genie races already have four rulers according to D&D lore, and there are both celestial and infernal rulers who can take that role. Popular culture is full of beings that can serve as inspiration for them, as the Lovecraftian Mythos' beings for Great Old Ones. But they can be more mundane at the beginning, like the local forest's dryad, who can power warlocks from levels 1 to 4, and pointing the Warlock to a nymph that can share the secrets of level 5 to 8, going up on a chain of command structure and ending up with an audience with a powerful Archfey when reaching epic levels. It is recommended to follow such a structure with other Patron pacts. This helps with world-building and develops the world into a more believable system where lowly Warlocks are first noticed by low-power entities.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

In conclusion, Warlock is the best-suited class for experimentation in D&D 5e. Don't be shy! Try to come up with new Patron types, like Slaadi or Inevitables. Create new Pact Boons, like musical instruments or staves; examples which abound in literature. Just remember, the acquisition of great power comes with a steep price!

## EDITOR'S NOTES

**IT IS A** pleasure to read another of Vladimir's great articles. I completely agree that Warlocks may be one of the most flexible classes. The addition of other kinds of Patrons sounds great to me. In the end, there is no difference in-game. It is all descriptive and flavorful details. And this actually got me thinking. Even if other classes are not as flexible, some class abilities or Feats could be visually re-adapted to make them more appealing.



# SECRET IN THE FARM

Level 5

Since he donned that blasted hat, strange stuff occurs at his farm. We barely see him anymore.

Concerned Peasant

## BACKGROUND LORE

**SOME THINGS ARE** not always what they seem. The world's mages and historians understand the deep meaning of this sentence. In a world of magic and different planes of existence, almost anything is possible. To remove the veils of mysteries and myths, one must see beyond the ordinary. Follow the clues left by the arcane...

This adventure describes the poor fate of Old Wilfred. A simple farmer whose wife passed away some years ago. He had a quiet life for a few months until a cloaked man visited the lonely farmer. Old Wilfred welcomed the stranger and even offered him food; a friendly, smiling face hid under the thick fabrics of the man's robe.

## WORKING THE MIND OF A VICTIM

**THEY HAD A** nice and fulfilling conversation. After so much time of solitude, glasses and mead did not take long to appear. The visitor's name was Zypho. He and Wilfred chatted for hours until midnight, to be precise. Under the effects of alcohol, Wilfred did not fail to share his deep sadness and feelings of melancholy. He missed his wife very much. Some days, he wishes it had been him and curses the disease that took her life. Of course, Zypho lent a comforting shoulder to cry on.

## NOTHING TO LOSE

**AFTER A FEW** more glasses, Zypho's words became more persuading. He explained he is a mage, with the power to make Wilfred's depressing existence thrive once more. He claimed everything would be all right and that he would even help him get his wife back. Just like in the fantasy stories that peasants hear from heroes and minstrels "What's there to lose?", naive Wilfred thought.

## LIKE TAKING CANDY FROM A BABY

**IT WAS ALMOST** as if Wilfred were a paid actor. "You just have to don this magical hat, and voilà", is all the mage said. The poor farmer put it on, quick as a wink. The fool. The hat looks like any other traveling leather hat. However, while Wilfred wears it, Zypho can dematerialize, mentally inhabit the hat, and possess the user's body.

Zypho did not target Wilfred's home randomly. For months, he tracked great arcane energy coming from these lands. His research concluded there was a hidden, underground compound below the farmer's home. A scapegoat is required in case someone interrupts his investigation. Hence, the use of the magical hat.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

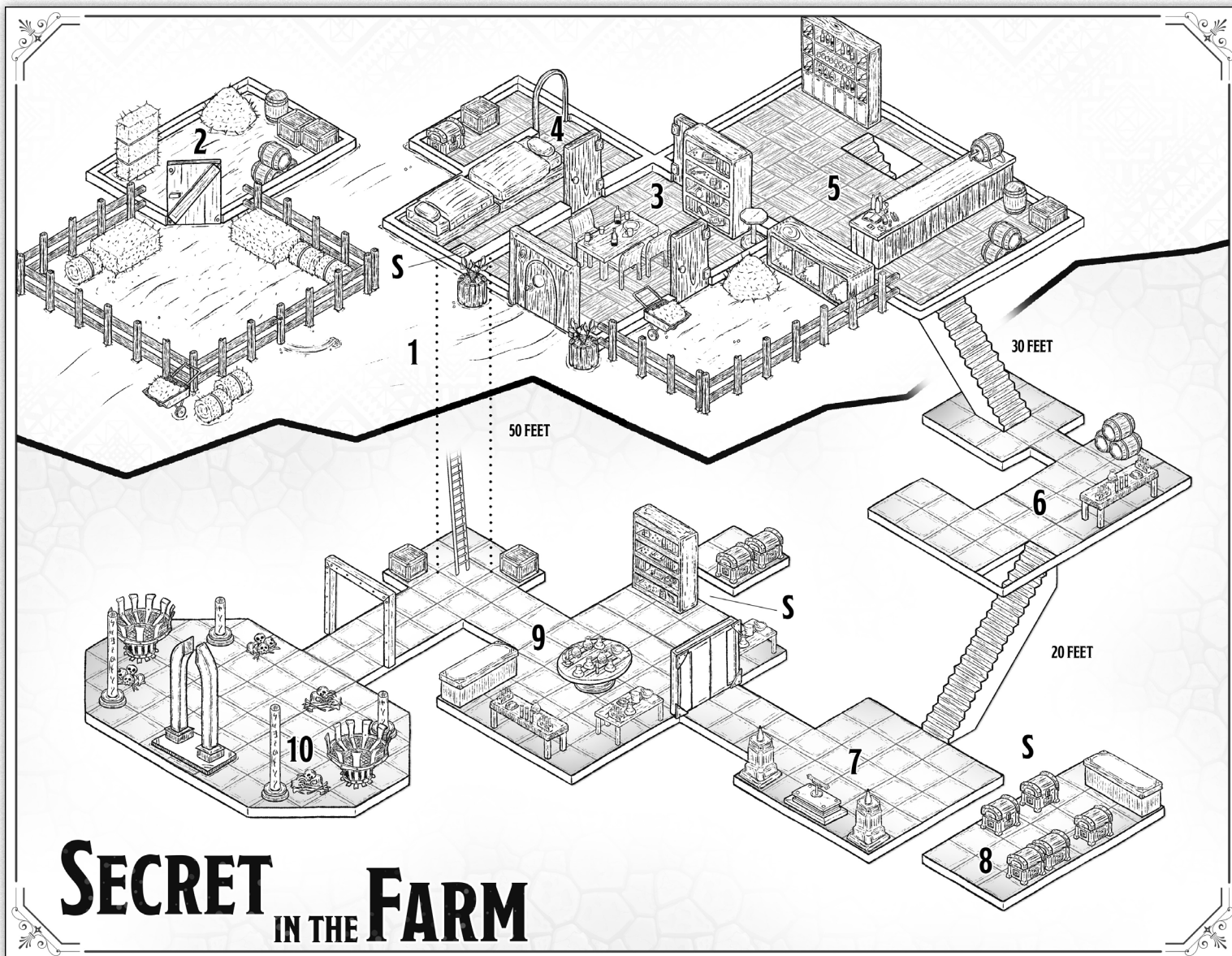
**SEVERAL WITNESSES CLAIM** they have heard screaming coming from Wilfred's farm. There are fewer animals each day, which is uncommon for a good farmer like Wilfred. Some people say he has finally lost it after the loss of his wife. But they concur unusual stuff occurs. An entire group of travelers went missing last week and that was the last straw. Constable Jaime has no men to spare for now. A bounty of 500 gp is offered to heroes who can investigate the farm and bring any survivors back.

## FEATURES OF THE FARM AND DUNGEON

The following features correspond to Wilfred's farm and the underground complex below; areas 1 through 10.

**Aura.** A *detect magic* spell perceives the necrotic aura coming from area 10 from a distance of up to 1,000 feet.

**Smells and Sounds.** Death's stench is the strongest in area 10, where Zypho's screams freeze the blood.



# SECRET IN THE FARM

## 1. FARM SURROUNDINGS

When the characters arrive at Wilfred's farm after following Constable Jaime's directions, they notice the farm's neglect and lack of maintenance. Animal droppings are everywhere. The stench is bad. The main door is ajar.

**Hens.** Most of the hens are filthy, unhealthy, and weak. They won't last another week like this.

## 2. WILFRED'S BARN

The old farmer owns three cows and one horse. At least that is what the characters were told. The barn houses two cows. They look frightened and, like the poor hens, the animals lack food, care, and possibly, medical attention. Wilfred's horse is nowhere to be found.

**Arcane Evidence.** A *detect magic* spell reveals that necromancy was employed inside the barn. An avid wizard may notice this without using magic (DC 16 Arcana). Blood runes hide beneath the hay (DC 13 Investigation).

## 3. LIVING ROOM

Wilfred's home looks as if someone left in a rush a while ago. Abandoned food rots on the table. There is nothing of value here, only mundane objects and trinkets.

## 4. WILFRED'S ROOM

The clean bed belonged to Wilfred's wife. The other one, in contrast, is filthy and smells bad. Poor Wilfred, possessed by Zypho, has been sleeping here.

**Ladder.** Zypho created this secondary entrance to the dungeon when he took over the farm. The mage hid the trapdoor with an illusion spell (DC 15 Wisdom).

## 5. FARM'S BAR

Since his wife's passing, Wilfred transformed this part of his house into a bar. There is enough beer and ale to host a great party. The innocent farmer never imagined a set of stairs lying below the floor's wooden planks.

## 6. UNDERGROUND LANDING

The underground compound is covered by a fine layer of dust that only Zypho's footsteps have disturbed in a long time. The dungeon walls and flooring appear to be of recent construction but nothing betrays their origin.

## 7. DEFENSIVE MEASURES

An illusion spell makes this chamber look square (DC 15 Wisdom) hiding the door and corridor that lead to area 9. The room is guarded by a **flesh golem**. It screams "*Why did you do this to me!?*" before charging. It fights until slain. The illusion fades after the golem is defeated.

**Scroll.** The pedestal contains what seems a *spell scroll of protection from evil and good*. It is a trap. When used, a *confusion* spell is cast, centered on the caster.

**Potions.** Two *potions of poison* are hidden behind the seemingly harmless flasks of red ink on the plinths.

## 8. SECRET TREASURE

A secret switch behind a pedestal in area 7 causes a wall to move and reveal a passage here (DC 16 Investigation).

**Trap.** One of the ornate chests has a needle trap. The creature that opens it takes 4d6 poison damage and becomes poisoned for one hour (DC 16 Constitution).

**Treasure.** The other chests contain 1,500 gp worth of expensive fabrics, silverware, and varied coinage.

## 9. LABORATORY

Equipment, ingredients, and laboratory accouterment litter the room. A mage may spend 10 minutes searching the place to gather 500 gp worth of arcane components.

**Vault.** The treasure vault hides beyond a secret door behind the shelf (DC 18 Investigation). The chests contain 1,000 gp, a *+1 shortsword*, and a *wand of secrets*.

## 10. ZYPHO'S MADNESS

When the characters get here, they see Zypho is completely out of his mind. Viscera and guts hang from his shoulders while he flails his nude torso with a chicken corpse. It is too late to save any of the missing people. Bones and skulls lie scattered all around, mixed with feathers, blood, and geometrically-arranged entrails.

Zypho (**mage**) controls Wilfred's body through the hat. He summons two **ghasts** and four **zombies** to aid him in combat. When reduced to half his hit points, Zypho fights against the hat, manages to remove it, and says "*By the gods! Stop this madness, you need to...*". He interrupts himself, stops talking, and then dons the hat once more.

## DEVELOPMENT

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

## THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL

**IF WILFRED DIES** in combat Zypho does too. In the end, he was also a victim, controlled by the hat (see below).

Casting *protection from good and evil* on the hat frees Wilfred and Zypho from its nefarious influence for one hour. Wilfred is free and Zypho's body reappears beside him. The farmer remembers nothing. The mage recalls finding hat months ago in a crypt. He didn't know it was cursed. He is aware of the terrible crimes committed.

## THE CURSED HAT

**TOUCHING THE HAT** triggers direct communication with its creator. A diabolical voice persuades mortal minds and compels them to obey (DC 20 Charisma). Those affected must create a portal to allow the demon to cross worlds. The consequences of failing this save, or any quest to destroy the hat, are adventures for another day...





## EMMY ALLEN

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Author of various RPG books including [The Gardens of Ynn](#), [Esoteric Enterprises](#), [The Dolorous Stroke](#), and the Ennie Award-winning [Stygian Library](#). Emily has been designing and publishing RPGs for five years. When she isn't working, she relaxes by making little models and doing special effects makeup. You can find faer on faer [TTRPG blog](#) and [Twitter](#).



## JORDAN BLACKMAN

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Jordan Blackman is a young indie TTRPG creator centering on 5e 3rd party content and little indie games with very specific themes. You can find his content at [Itch.io](#)

His current project, Tella: The Weird World is a rules-lite, low fantasy, folklore inspired game.



## MICHAEL T. DeBOND

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Michael T. DeBondt (he/him) has been a Game Master since he first started playing TTRPGs a decade ago. Having enjoyed running and playing in numerous different systems, from Dungeons & Dragons to Stars Without Number, Michael has decided to share his experiences, ideas, and accrued thoughts on TTRPGs with everyone. Hopefully someone will find them useful.

Michael runs professional games on [StartPlaying.Games](#), is actively building several worlds on [World Anvil](#), is getting ready to publish his first D&D 5th Edition module within Summer 2022, and collects all his work & thoughts on [MichaelsMind.Online](#).



## VLADIMIR “EL VLADO” RODRIGUEZ

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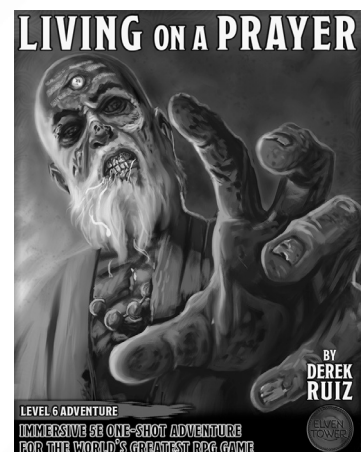
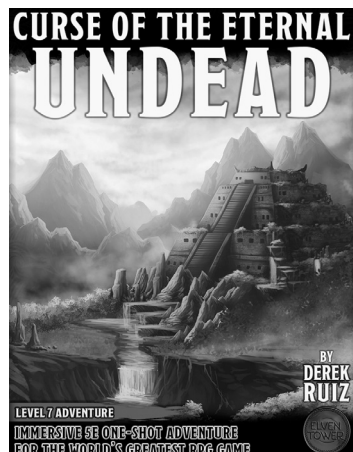
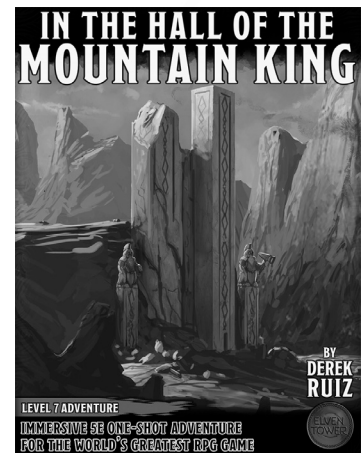
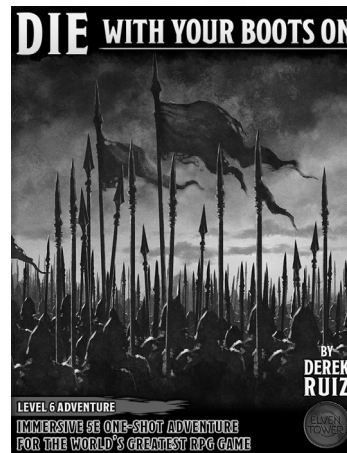
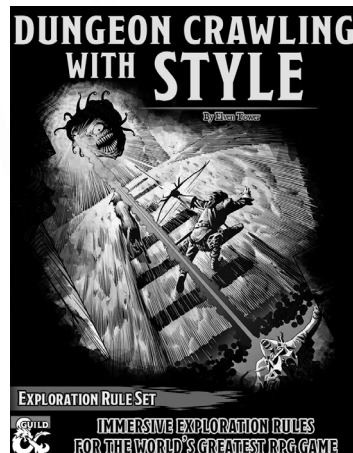
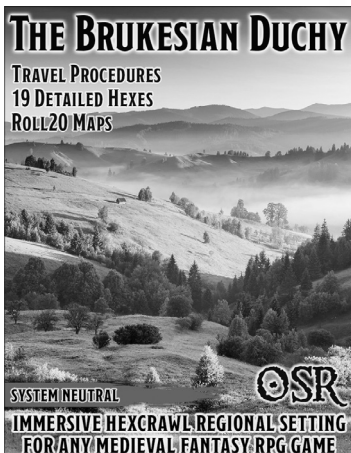
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