

DUNGEON VAULT MAGAZINE

No. 16

10 ORIGINAL ADVENTURES
HIGH RESOLUTION MAPS
VTT - ROLL20 MAPS

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THE BEST CONTENT FOR THE BEST GMS



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PALACE OF THE SCARLET PRIESTS

Level Neutral

I understand you seek our knowledge and guidance. Yes, the eight numens light our way.

Scarlet High-Priest

BACKGROUND LORE

KINGS, POWERFUL FAMILIES, or large organizations keep the engines of the world running. Their influence and wealth move the strings or everything and everyone below their stations. Such is the natural order of things.

One of the strongest forces of the world is religion. It comes in many shapes and styles. From forbidden cults that strike foul deals with demons, to worldwide-reaching churches of holy knights and missionaries spreading the word of their god everywhere they go. A religious organization of great prestige is The Scarlet Veil.

THE SCARLET VEIL

FOR CENTURIES, THE Scarlet Priests have traveled around the world, spreading the word of the four pairs of deities they worship: “The Eight Numens”. They are the patrons, leaders, and protectors of the world and the universe as per The Scarlet Veil’s ancient holy texts.

The massive administrative tasks required, in addition to managing the increasing number of followers and allied parties demands a large base of operations. The Palace of the Scarlet Priests handles all these matters.

THE ORGANIZATION

THE SCARLET VEIL provides religious services, support, security, among other things to several cities and towns in the land. All important or powerful individuals are well acquainted with the Scarlet Priests. Some even know Harold in person, one of the Scarlet High Priests.

Harold has important connections with many important politicians, the royal family, wealthy merchants, and powerful mercenaries. He does great favors to close friends and allies of the organizations. For a price.

PALACE OF THE SCARLET PRIESTS

MANY CONSIDER THE Scarlet Veil a crucial ally. They have more wealth, connections, and numbers than a couple of criminal guilds combined. The organization has churches and temples in several cities. Missionaries stationed in specific locations spread the word of The Eight Numens all year long, increasing their ranks day by day. The Scarlet Veil has eyes and ears everywhere.

The Palace of the Scarlet Priests is home to more than a hundred members of the church. There are eight Scarlet High Priests, like the deities they venerate. Harold takes charge of one of the temples that surround the palace core. There are eight of them as well. The central palace is protected by an octagon of churches and gates.

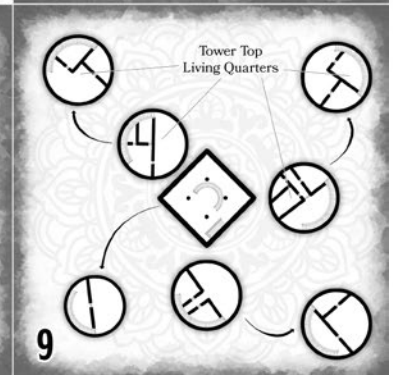
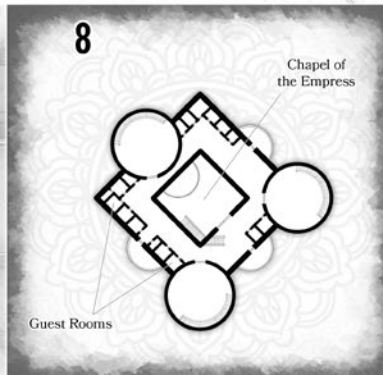
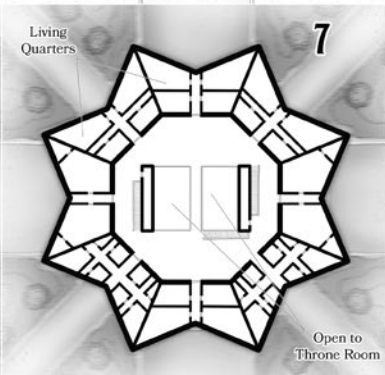
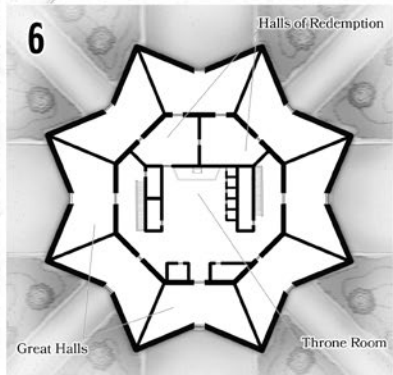
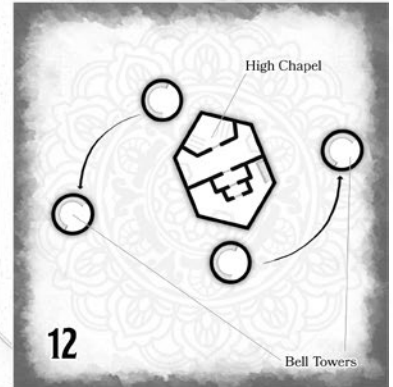
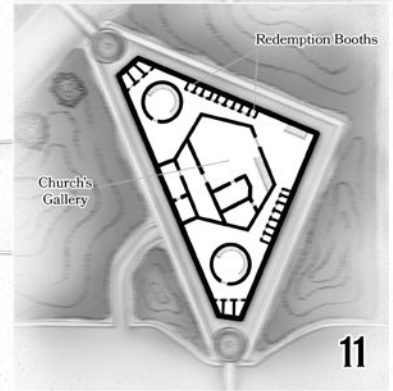
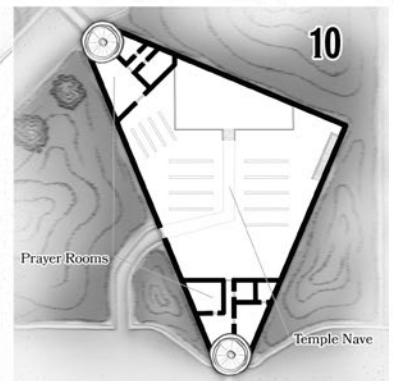
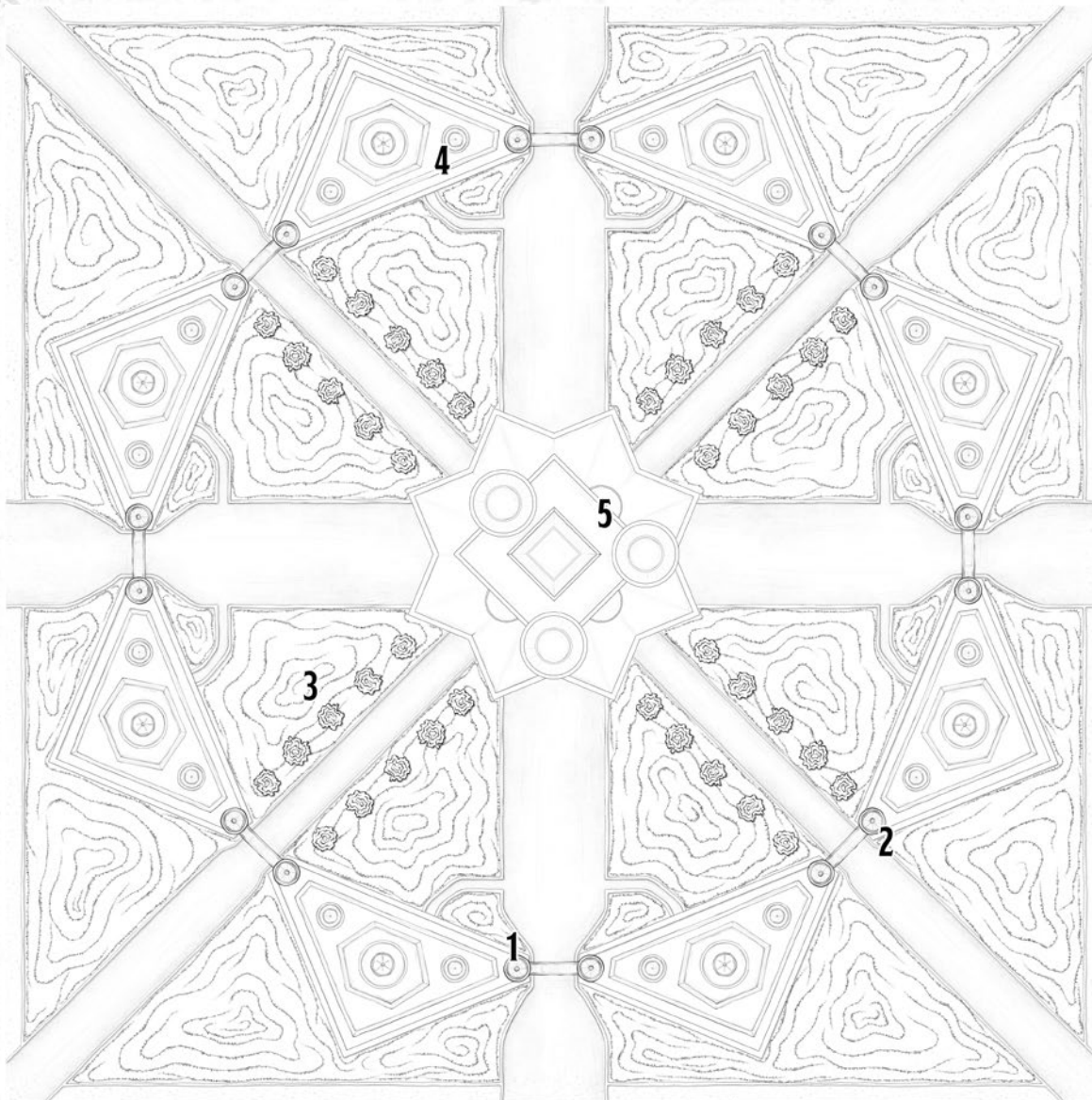
PALACE FEATURES AND ETIQUETTE

The following features correspond to all the areas of the Palace of the Scarlet Priests; areas 1 through 11.

Temples. Eight identical temples surround the palace core. The gods’ names are Utemis, Oton, Roreus, Lenia, Gadnas, Zuor, Vavdon, and Batar. Each of them represents a different value in the Scarlet Veil’s religion. A Scarlet High Priest is regularly found in each of them.

Palace Core. The leader and ruler of the Scarlet Veil the Scarlet Empress. Her identity, however, is unknown even to the organization. Despite being in her sixties, she sits on the throne room to solve important matters. She rarely grants an audience for weak reasons.

Dress Code. Each of the eight gates of the Scarlet Veil is well-guarded and under constant vigilance. No one can enter the facilities until they meet the dress code: formal clothes as in for a noble wedding and no weapons of any kind. Exceptions are made for no one.



1. MAIN GATE (SOUTH)

A massive stone gate with the Scarlet Veil's sigil engraved on its center. Scarlet guards welcome visitors from the 30-foot-tall, engraved ramparts.

Despite the fact of having eight gates, the south entrance sees considerably more affluence of visitors. This is caused by the natural flow of traffic. This gate handles the reception of important dignitaries and parties that made a previous appointment. This is standard protocol.

2. PALACE ALTERNATE ENTRANCES

The other seven gates are customarily closed off. The guards stationed at these gates kindly redirect visitors to the south gate as the protocol states. Most locals know about this so the gates see little to no activity.

Dress Code. Visitors who fail to meet the dress code cannot enter. The Scarlet Veil guards offer emergency formal clothing to visitors if they must enter the facilities for an urgent matter. The borrowed pieces of clothing are outdated for court standards but in good condition.

3. COURTYARD

The palace court is composed of eight identical gardens with lines of five trees each. A score of gardeners takes care of the beautiful courtyard at all times.

All visitors of the Palace of the Scarlet Priests are escorted through the courtyard. No one is allowed to wander alone or unguided. Members of the Scarlet Veil constantly watch and keep things in order.

Tourist Tour. People from many places come often to the palace just to admire its greatness. It is an architectural marvel to witness. The courtyard is part of the tourist tour. It is common to see groups of five to fifteen curious visitors listening to a tour guide talk about the long history of the palace and its lengthy construction.

4. NUMEN TEMPLES

One Scarlet High Priest handles the affairs of each temple. Each temple represents one of the numens, but all ceremonies in any temple are meant to honor them all.

The Eight Numens. The Scarlet Veil describes the eight gods as equals. Followers and members of the scarlet religion are taught this. The eight numens are strong together and they are always seen as a unit.

5. PALACE CORE

Three tall spires oversee the palace courtyard. Lesser members of the Scarlet Veil live here. There are also guests rooms. The central building is the home of the eight Scarlet High Priests. They are one rank below the empress, whose throne room and royal quarters are also here. Elite guards patrol the perimeter at all times.

SCARLET HIGH PRIEST - HAROLD

Human (age 47)

High Priest Harold is a man in his late forties. He has a round face, soft green eyes, and pale skin. His cheeks and nose become red like his priestly attire with any sudden change of temperature or emotions.

Harold is in charge of the Temple of Gadnas, the fourth numen of the Scarlet Veil religion. Gadnas is a god that promotes communication, languages, and connections.

Manner. Harold is always happy to meet new people, make new friends, and have more connections.

Ambition. Harold hopes to become the leader of the organization one day. He works hard to earn this honor.

6. PALACE HALLS

Silver and gold inlays adorn the walls and ceilings of these chambers. They feature fancy rugs, curtains, furniture, and eating utensils of high quality. Sigils of the Scarlet Veil appear on every surface.

Important events and meetings are held in the eight great halls. Scores of workers and stewards dressed in red and white clothes clean these chambers diligently.

Ritual Chambers. The chambers beside the great halls are reserved for high-ranked members. Divine rituals for private parties are performed in these chambers.

Throne Room. The Scarlet Empress often sits at the throne. It is almost impossible to be granted permission to see her. Rumors say that drawing her attention with exploits is easier than asking her for an audience.

7. LIVING QUARTERS

These chambers belong to high-ranked members of the Scarlet Veil, those closest to the empress. The eight Scarlet High Priests have their lavish quarters here.

Throne's View. The balcony overlooks the affairs at the throne room from above. It is customary to have observers here but they are forbidden to participate.

8. SCARLET EMPRESS QUARTERS

Only the royal servants are allowed to accompany the empress within her quarters. Red and scarlet tones adorn her room. The leader of the Scarlet Veil lacks no luxury; the best silks and linens form the royal wardrobe just like the most beautiful furniture fill the royal quarters. She lives like a real member of royalty.



9. PALACE ROOMS

High-ranked priests, missionaries, knights, and paladins work in these shrines, laboratories, and chapels of great power. The best craftsmen and journeymen work in the three palace towers; the Scarlet Veil rewards the efforts of their more diligent members on their research.

10. GADNAS TEMPLE (CLOSE-UP)

Beautiful sceneries, tapestries, paintings, and sculptures inside the irregularly-shaped church oversee people kneeling and praying with their heads down.

The eight numen temples have the same shape although their interiors look different. The decorations, colors, and style of each temple vary depending on the values fomented by the deity venerated there. 12-foot-tall marble statues represent each idol inside the temples.

Gadnas Temple. Scarlet High Priest Harold often performs masses to honor Gadnas, God of Communication. The temple displays images of people talking, sharing secrets, shouting. Making a good impression and making friends are two appreciated aspects within Gadnas' belief system. It is rumored that Harold is the most well-connected individual in the Scarlet Veil faith. Ironically, he earned the surname of Harold, the Herald.

The Rest of the Temples. Even if the eight deities are considered as equals, each of the seven other numen temples has a unique, individual atmosphere. Each deity portrays different values that are cherished by the Scarlet Veil faith. The GM is free to describe the particular characteristics of each temple, and the values that its god represents (see **Palace Features and Etiquette**).

11. NUMEN TEMPLE GALLERY

The second level of each of the numen temples features confession booths, prayer rooms, and storage rooms with supplies required by the whole organization.

12. UPPER SHRINE AND BELL TOWERS

The third story houses a shrine reserved for the highest members of the church. It features a solid-gold idol resting on a marble altar. High Scarlet Priests may allow close friends of the faith to meditate and receive the eight numens' blessings before a challenging task.

POSSIBLE QUESTS

THE FOLLOWING IDEAS should help you get your characters involved with the Palace of the Scarlet Priests.

Helping the Organization. The Scarlet Veil hires the characters to thwart a criminal faction that is about to strike the palace. The characters must investigate what they want and prepare for an imminent attack!

Investigation. The characters are told the organization known as the Scarlet Veil is suspect of fraud and multiple other crimes. The characters are hired to retrieve the palace's books as proof of this. They must infiltrate the palace and retrieve all possible documents that incriminate the powerful religious organization.

Bounty-Hunters. The characters are hired as mercenaries. They must dispose of an important figure within the Scarlet Veil organization. Their target is High Priest Harold. He has so many connections and well-guarded secrets that he must disappear. The characters must leave no trace of their infiltration and leave undetected.



ABANDONED NECROMANCY LAB

Level 3

Imbibing the Nectar of Life is required to bring lucidity once more. A delightful process...

Inscription in the Room of Life

BACKGROUND LORE

AMBITION IS THE doom of men. The desire to acquire more resources, increase one's influence, and learn the deep secrets of the world is what drives men and women to desperate actions that put their lives at risk.

An accomplished mage and researcher of the arcane arts named Vlad once fell victim to his own curiosity and desire to learn the secret of the flow of life and death. His research in necromancy led him to believe that he could master the art of recreating a dead person's body and retrieve their soul from the afterlife. Vlad investigated old elven texts and reverse-engineered a formula for a fluid that holds the essence of life and death. By imbibing inert matter with the Nectar of Life, he meant to recreate the bodies and minds of deceased individuals.

In his underground laboratory, the necromancer Vlad built a stone replica of the Tree of Life that produces an endless supply of nectar. The Nectar of Life flows from a shallow pond into a series of canals that reach the bases of six sarcophagi. Vlad led countless experiments in his laboratory. He could reanimate mindless bodies in a fashion common to lowly necromancers. He could also magically retrieve a person's soul and place it in a glass receptacle. However, as much as he tried, Vlad could not manage to combine both processes and animate the newly created body with a soul. The soul rejected the false body every time, to Vlad's dismay.

Vlad's insistence and perseverance proved to be his demise. The necromancer grew confident and careless in his laboratory. He mistimed the start of his experiment and ended up trapping himself with the reanimated undead abominations. Something worked wrong that time and the undead were not under his control. He fought but was ultimately defeated by his own creations.

POISONED WATER

VLAD'S ABANDONED LABORATORY has remained hidden for almost twenty years. The necromancer's device features a filtration system that turns it back to its base ingredients. Magical components are filtered out and the excess water is dumped into the river. Two weeks ago, the filtration system failed from lack of maintenance.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THE TOWN OF Argonnen has been affected. The foul river kills crops and poisons people. The authorities offer 1,000 gp for solving this urgent predicament. Exploring the river-lands reveals the laboratory's entrance in area 1. Following the river to the contaminant to the source leads the characters to area 6 instead.

FEATURES OF THE LABORATORY

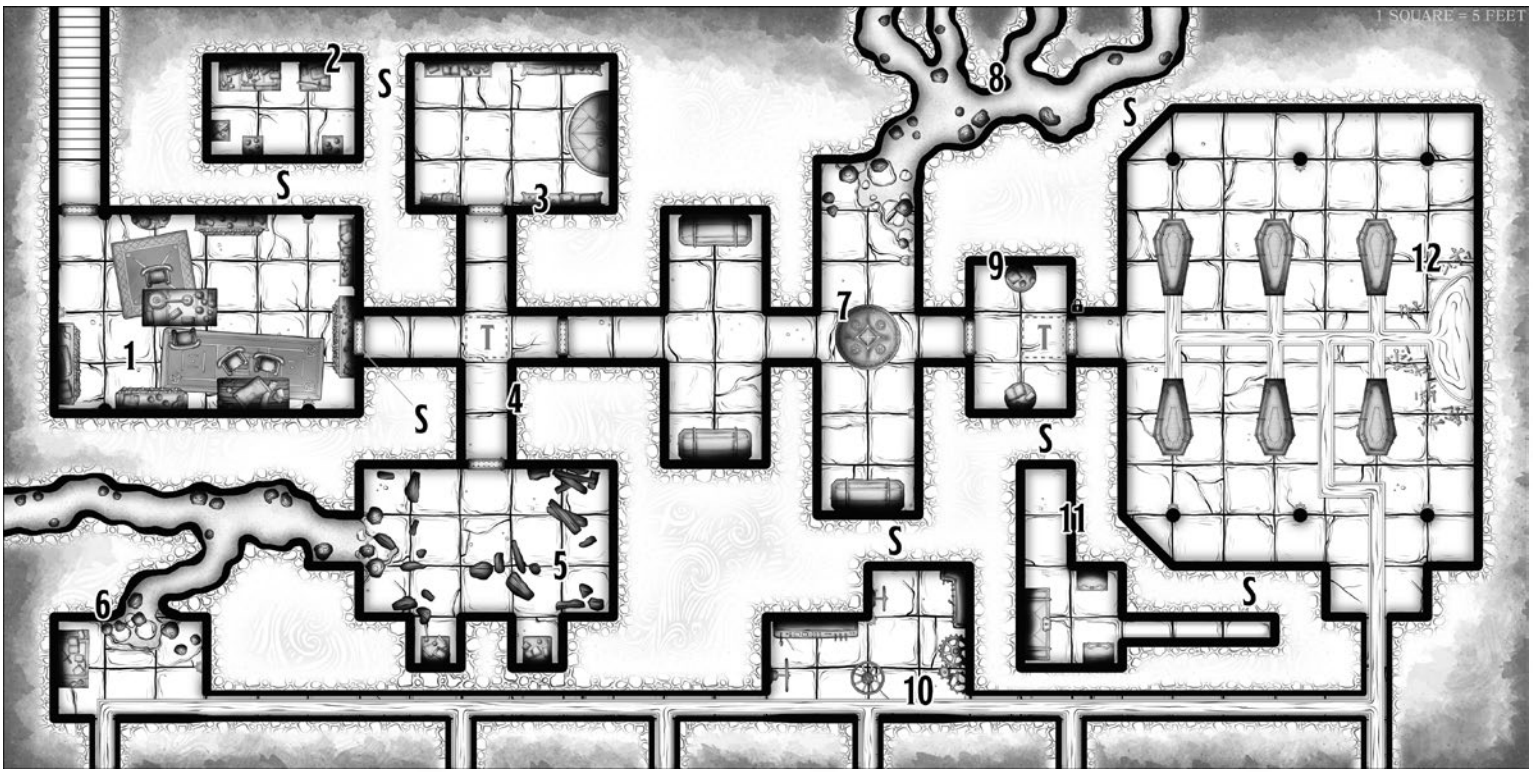
The following features correspond to the abandoned necromancy laboratory map; areas 1 through 12.

Smell. The strange fluid from the pond and canals has a repugnant stench of decay and phosphorous. It can be perceived from area 1 and grows stronger in area 12.

Light. Magical sconces on the walls produce bright light in some areas. The sconces feature *continual flame* spells. Removing a sconce causes it to fail after 1 minute.

Necromancy Aura. The pond in area 12 radiates a 50-foot-radius necromancy aura. Within it, necromancy spells are cast one level higher. A *detect magic* spell reveals this effect as far away as area 7.

Secret Doors. Pulling small levers causes sections of the walls to move aside and reveal narrow passages (DC 14 Perception). They reset after 10 minutes.



1. ARCANE STUDY

The stairs lead to a well-stocked library/study with several desks, bookcases, and implements. The study looks lived-in, as if recently abandoned.

A *detect magic* spell reveals a faint aura of abjuration magic that protects the items in this chamber and areas 2 and 3 from exposure and erosion.

Treasure. A 1-hour search turns up 255 sp, a spellbook with 3 level-1 spells and two *potions of healing*. The secret to opening the door in area 4 is revealed here too.

2. SECRET DOCUMENTATION

Vlad the necromancer kept his research documents guarded in this chamber. The papers describe complex arcane formulae and theories that would take a long time to decipher. A competent spellcaster notices errors and large assumptions in the documents (DC 18 Arcana).

Obscure Lore. The papers describe Vlad's research. A spellcaster can spend 1d6 weeks of study to understand his incomplete process well enough to replicate it.

3. ALCHEMY LABORATORY

Four-story shelves line the walls of this chamber. They contain countless philters, containers, rare substances, and minerals useful in the field of alchemy. A dried-up stone pond by the east wall shows signs of corrosive erosion from the foul recipes that Vlad devised years ago.

Treasure. A spellcaster can replenish his material components from this chamber. The rare alchemical reagents and ingredients here are worth 400 gp.

4. THE TREE DOOR

The stone door east of the four-way intersection is engraved with the image of a large leaf-less tree.

The door is designed to only let a magic-user through. The characters may bypass it altogether by crossing through the sewage lines to reach area 10 or area 12.

The Magic Door. A spellcaster must spend a level 1 slot to draw the image of a tree in the air to open the door and bypass the trap. Otherwise, stepping on the marked square (see map) causes the floor to open to a 30-foot-deep spiked pit. Creatures that fall take 4d6 piercing damage (DC 16 Dexterity save for half). A proficient locksmith can bypass the door (DC 14 Thieves' Tools check).

5. RUINED CHAMBER

The chamber's roof has partially caved in. Debris and splintered wooden furniture litter the room.

There is nothing of value in this chamber. Rust monsters came weeks ago and dissolved all metal objects. The tunnels to the west lead to their hunting grounds.

Monster Tracks. A good tracker identifies tracks and evidence of metal-eating insects (DC 16 Survival). The tracks of four creatures are at least three-weeks old.

6. SECRET EXIT

Vlad's secret exit through the sewage line was never used. The table contains traveling gear and spoiled rations. The canals lead to the river. The characters may gain access to the laboratory through here too.

7. UNDEAD GUARDIANS

Three stone sarcophagi near a rune-carved magic circle that glows deep scarlet await in the darkness.

The undead protectors of the laboratory carry their duty for eternity, unaware that their master left this world long ago. A *dispel magic* spell cast on the magic circle paralyzes the guardians for 24 hours.

Undead Guardians. Three **ghouls** emerge from their enclosures and attack any living trespasser. The fourth sarcophagus was destroyed by rust monsters.

8. RUST MONSTER TUNNELS

A sprawling network of tunnels leads down into uncharted depths. The narrow tunnels are the hunting grounds of three **rust monsters**. They are attracted by the presence of metal in the armors and weapons of travelers.

9. DOOR OF LIFE

The door features a carved circle with interconnected lines and 2-inch holes with different shapes.

The magic door features a complex riddle for students of the arcane. It can be bypassed through area 11. Dozens of trinkets of different sizes and shapes litter two stone shelves. Some of them appear to fit the holes in the door.

A faint, elvish inscription on the door reads the following: “*Careful study of the stars and the celestial movements are the key to the flow of life and death*”.

Poison Darts. A spellcaster identifies the pattern on the door as a map of the planes (DC 15 Arcana). The trinkets represent each of the missing planes on the chart. Placing the trinkets in the correct positions on the holes opens the floor. A failed attempt triggers dozens of darts to fly at the marked square (see map) and deal 6d8 poison damage (DC 14 Dexterity save for half).

DEVELOPMENT

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

THE FOUNTAIN DESTROYED

THE CHARACTERS DESTROY the Tree of Life fountain in area 12 and stop the poison from spreading further. It is necessary to defeat Vlad’s last creations first. In a matter of hours, the river is rid of the foul contaminant that damaged the crops and poisoned dozens of people. The recovery is fast; further damage is prevented. All in Argonnen town are satisfied with the characters’ actions.

10. FILTRATION SYSTEM

The chamber features a complex arrangement of apparatus designed to filter the Nectar of Life and dump clean water into the river. Rust, erosion, and abandonment have caused the system to fail.

Repairing the Device. A spellcaster can fix the filtration system to stop the contamination of the river with 4 hours of work (DC 19 Arcana). The spellcaster has advantage if he has access to the documentation in area 2.

11. SECRET VAULT

The vault contains three locked stone chests (DC 15 Thieves’ Tools). A narrow tunnel leads to area 12.

Treasure. The stone chests contain 460 gp, 4,200 sp, a *+1 spear*, a spellbook with 8 random spells, a *wand of burning hands* with 7 charges, and 1 *potion of healing*.

12. CHAMBER OF LIFE

A wall-mounted relief of the Tree of Life pours green fluid into a pond. The green flow reaches six stone sarcophagi before leaving the chamber.

The wall fountain in Vlad’s experiment room is the source of the river’s foul poison. It is shaped after a legendary tree that alchemists believe is in the outer planes.

Vlad’s Demise. The necromancer’s remains lie scattered by the foul pond; his life’s work. An observant person notices his sigil in the tattered remains of his clothing beside the Nectar of Life’s pond (DC 16 Perception).

The Last Experiment. Vlad’s last creations hide in their stone enclosures. Five **ghouls** and one **ghast** remove the lids and emerge to fight. They fight until slain.

The Fountain. The fountain over the pond can be destroyed with spades or mauls and an hour of work. It stops the contaminant from spreading into the river.

FIXING THE FILTRATION SYSTEM

THE CHARACTERS MANAGE to fix the machinery in area 10 to preserve Vlad’s work and profit from his creations later on. Unfortunately, the filtration system takes a few days to ramp up and filter the Nectar of Life completely. The harvests are lost. Countless people become sick and perish from ingesting the foul nectar. Argonnen town pays half the promised reward (500 gp). The characters have access to Vlad’s laboratory and inventions. They may refine his lifework of mastering the use of the Nectar of Life. An adventure for another time.

BITE OF WINTER

A magic item and spells by Chris Valentine

VERY FEW INDIVIDUALS contest the power of the Prince of Frost. This cold military master sits at the unseele table, exercising his right to conquer boisterously. Favored by the Queen of Air and Darkness, he campaigns against his adversaries, usually mortals, in a quest for revenge against his lover's treachery and human complacency.

The archfey was a loving prince of Summer, before his betrothed's betrayal irreversibly fractured his heart. Now that icy cavity burns with eternal hatred, empowering him to exterminate mortals relentlessly. One secret to his success is well-organized ranks. Most are familiar with his Winter soldiers, but there exists another tantamount group, a corps of spellcasters: the Frostweavers.

Frostweavers are his most powerful arcane branch, sculpting magic to soften adversaries or prepare lands for invasion. These accomplished casters are hand-picked and indoctrinated within the halls of the Fortress of Frozen Tears. Upon graduation, he awards each with a powerful conduit known as the Bite of Winter.

Embedded with the might of Winter, these books provide members the ability to wield the force of nature as a blade. Sculpted from elemental ice and containing pages made from the remains of the fabled Ivory Tree of Winter, these books are treasures and as such are not allowed to fall into enemy hands. When a Frostweaver dies, the books are returned to the Prince of Frost to reissue or destroy, as they see fit. Anyone who is not a Frostweaver caught in possession of one of these books should expect a violent visit from The Prince of Frost's emissaries.

Graduated Frostweavers attune to these tomes and take on chilling aspects of winter; for instance, they no longer feel solace in the warmth of the fire.



BITE OF WINTER

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement by a sorcerer, warlock, or wizard)

THIS LIGHTWEIGHT TOME resembles glass etched with arcane symbols. Magically constructed from the essence of pure Winter, the Prince of Frost shapes the tome's jacket using the glacial waters that surround his Fortress of Frozen Tears. The Council of Ice then seals it in elemental verglas. The alabaster pages are made from the pulp of the fallen Ivory Tree of Winter and bound with crystal thread. Each copy of it is known as a Bite of Winter.

The spellcaster attuned to this magic tome benefits from the following properties:

Adjustment. Upon attuning to this tome, the body of its user fuses with the essence of Winter. Attuned subjects take 5d10 cold damage (DC 17 Constitution for half). You gain two traits from the Cold-adapted Traits table (see below). Additionally, you gain 4 levels of exhaustion due to the extreme adjustment period for a mortal.

Spellbook. You may use this magical spellbook as an arcane focus and write spells within it. The tome and its pages can't be damaged by fire or immersion in water. A Bite of Winter book does not deteriorate with age either.

Cold-adapted. You gain resistance to cold damage. You chill liquids and metallic surfaces. The water you walk across freezes, allowing you to traverse it if you do not end your movement on it. In addition, whenever the temperature is above 15 degrees Celsius, you must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw at the beginning of each day or gain one level of exhaustion.

Spells. Each Bite of Winter book has 6 charges. It regains 1d6 expended charges daily at dawn. While holding it, you can use an action to cast *shape water*. You can spend 1 or more charges to cast one of the following exclusive spells from it: *coldfire* (1 charge), *frostshield* (1 charge), *absorb heat* (3 charges), *exsiccate* (3 charges).

Frost Fury. Whenever you cast a spell that deals cold damage, you may expend 1 charge to use the maximum possible result of the roll instead of rolling for damage.

Gift of Winter. Whenever you cast a spell with a damage type other than cold, you may expend 1 charge to change the damage type of that spell to cold.

COLD-ADAPTED TRAITS (RE-ROLL ANY DUPLICATES)

1. Your skin becomes snow-white.
2. You are cold to the touch.
3. Your eyes turn an unearthly blue.
4. The air around you is always cold; your breath is visible in the air.
5. Your hair turns white.
6. Animals avoid you and give you a wide berth.
7. Glass fogs over within 20 feet of you.
8. You reduce the temperature of rooms.
9. You feel uncomfortable in direct sunlight and avoid it when possible.
10. Your teeth become ice and are prone to shattering. They regrow a week later if broken.



BITE OF WINTER SPELLS

COLDFIRE

1st-level Evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (broken glass)

Duration: Instantaneous

You reach out open-palmed and exude ensorcelled flames in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area takes 3d4 cold damage (Constitution save for half). Additionally, creatures that took damage from this spell have their speed reduced by 10 feet until the start of your next turn.

FROSTSHIELD

1st-level Abjuration

Casting Time: 1 reaction

Range: Self

Components: S

Duration: Instantaneous

When you cast this spell, you are immediately encased in sky blue elemental ice. Until the start of your next turn, you gain a +3 bonus to AC that may counter the triggering attack. The shield grants you 10 temporary hit points but your speed becomes 0. The temporary hit points expire when the shield melts at the start of your next turn, or if you receive more than 10 damage. Your speed returns to normal the moment the shield melts.

EXSICCATE

3rd-level Evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You point at a creature you can see within range and shoot a fine blue ray from your finger to dehydrate it, fortifying your body with the frozen moisture. The target takes 3d10 cold damage and gains one level of exhaustion (Constitution save for half). You gain temporary hit points equal to half the amount of cold damage dealt.

ABSORB HEAT

3rd-level Transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (15-foot radius)

Components: V, M (3 small stones)

Duration: Concentration – 1 minute

You pull heat out of the surrounding area encasing it in three motes that orbit you. Each creature in a 15-foot radius takes 3d10 cold damage (Constitution save for half). Additionally, non-magical flames in that radius are extinguished. Until the spell ends, you may use a bonus action to launch a mote at a target up to 90 feet away from you. The target takes 2d6 fire damage (Dexterity save).

ECHOES FROM THE PAST

Level 3

I stepped through the light and came to a world where no one understands my voice...

Apoktek

BACKGROUND LORE

THOUSANDS OF YEARS ago, a covenant of elvish researchers and mages devoted centuries of their lifetimes to the study of the past. Their primary goal was to find a way to open a channel of communication with the ancient past. At first, their goal was purely academic. But as they made progress with the study of time, they discovered that through chronomancy, they would be able to send information to the past. Maybe even physically travel to old timelines. But that was deemed dangerous.

The chronomancer elves built three magical mirrors that would allow them such time-bending deeds. They were named after Adarael Gath, the leader of the elvish covenant. The Mirrors of Gath are three exquisite artifacts with intricate golden frames. They were designed to serve as doors to the present and past. The central mirror is the largest and would allow for physical travel, like an arcane gate. The side mirrors permitted the elves to glimpse past timelines and send messages.

The Mirrors of Gath had one limitation, they could only reach a past as remote enough as their creation. Thus, the chronomancer elves placed them in a vault designed to withstand the passage of time and left. They planned to return after 10,000 years to finally try out the mirrors' power. Alas, the chronomancers' fate is unknown. They never returned to use the Mirrors of Gath.

In the past 12,000 years, many creatures have stumbled upon the underground compound and have interacted with the mirrors. The mirrors have captured those interactions and, in some cases, individuals have waked into the central mirror, never to be seen again. The mirrors are powerful artifacts but their functioning is imperfect. The chronomancers never had a chance to perfect their creation. Now the mirrors may pose a threat.

THE ECHOES OF YORE

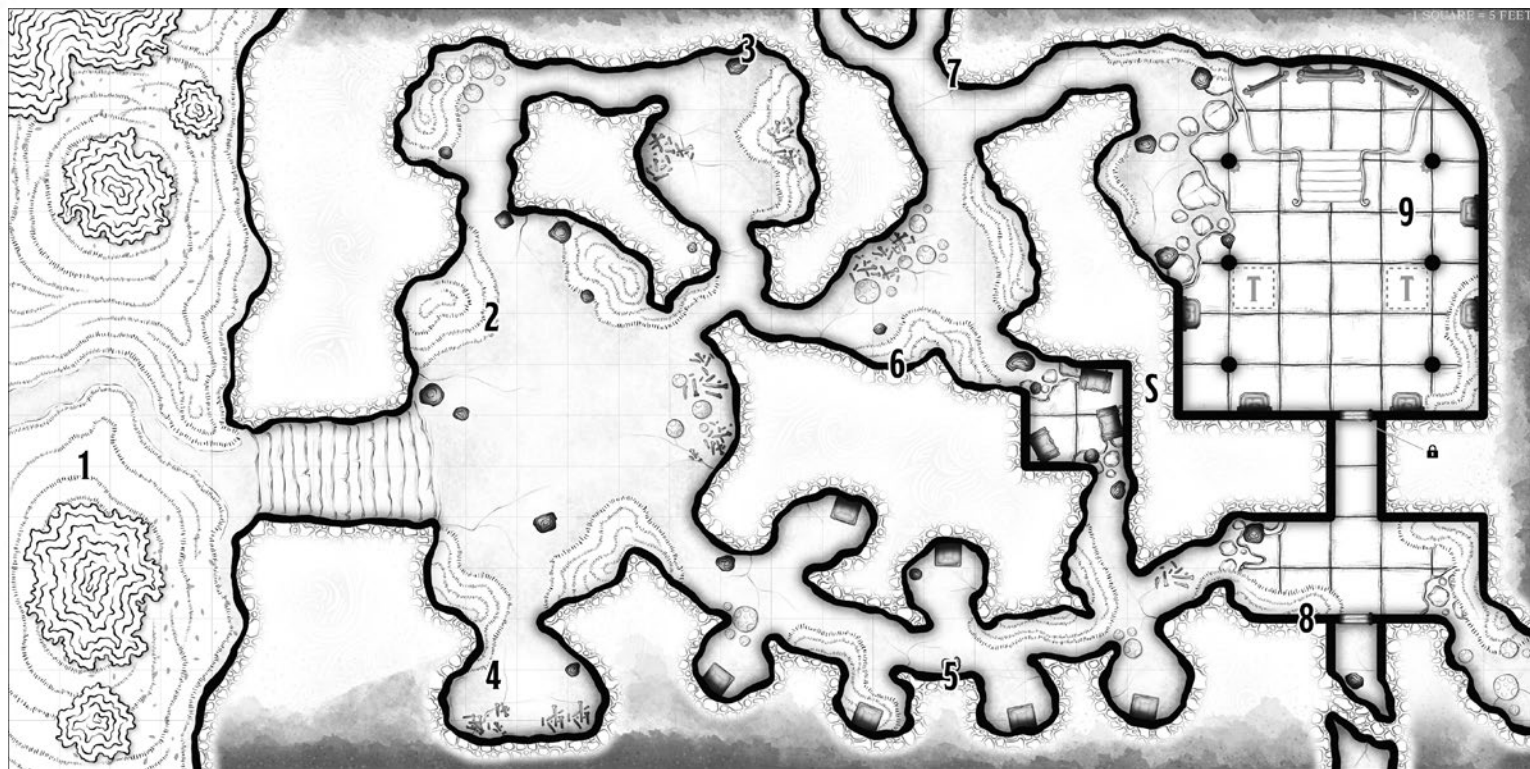
THE FUNDAMENTAL NATURE of the mirrors cannot be known. Even its creators knew they meddled with forces that cannot entirely be controlled. The Mirrors of Gath changed their behavior a year ago. Since then, echoes from the past are displayed on their surfaces; interactions with creatures from up to 12,000 years ago. At times, people or creatures emerge from the central mirror in a haze of confusion. From their perspective, they have traveled to the future. These people have visited Mossgood Town and caused curiosity to the locals who cannot understand the *visitors'* words or their origin. Some of the *visitors* have become aggressive too.

Unfortunately, the imperfect magic of the Mirrors of Gath cannot sustain their bodies for long. Most *visitors* last a few weeks. After that, they decompose into inert matter. It is impossible to know whether they return safely or they perish. An exception is an ancient man called Apoktek, who has hid in the caverns for a year.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THERE ARE RECORDS of at least twenty strange *visitors* that appeared in the last year. Most of them could not make themselves understood before vanishing. Scholars could translate some of the languages and claim that those variants are so ancient no one speaks them anymore. From the *visitors'* outlandish claims, scholars say that they may come from the distant past. A few of them became insane from the time-travel ordeal. One of the *visitors* killed seven individuals in Mossgood Town three months ago before he could be stopped.

Local authorities offer a reward of 1,000 gp for tracking the *visitors'* origin, unveiling the truth of their appearances, and putting a stop to the puzzling events.



FEATURES OF THE CAVERNS

The following features correspond to the caverns and mirrors' vault; areas 1 through 9.

Smell. The fungi in the caverns produce a musty stench that dumbs the senses. Creatures have disadvantage on Wisdom related checks (DC 14 Constitution).

Light. Magical sconces on the vault's walls produce bright light. The sconces feature *continual flame* spells. Removing a sconce causes it to fail after 1 minute.

1. FOREST TRAIL

The tracks of the strange visitors lead to a barely used forest trail. It leads to a dark cavern entrance on the side of a hill with rock outcroppings.

The entrance to the caves is located a four-hour walk from Mossgood Town. The townsfolk point the characters in the right direction. A tracker finds footprints of six different people (DC 14 Survival). The most recent are a few days old and belong to Apoktek (see area 3).

2. CAVERN'S ENTRANCE

The dark cavern features footprints of several people and animals. Gnawed bones lie scattered near a group of large odorous mushrooms.

The large cavern's roof is 30 feet tall. 4-foot-long stalactites threaten to reach the ground. A hunter distinguishes evidence of honey badgers from tufts of fur and footprints (DC 14 Survival). They all come from the south.

3. APOKTEK'S LAIR

The walls of this natural cavern are etched with primitive images of a man traveling through a rectangular gate. Small animal bones litter the cave.

Apoktek (**berserker**) has lived in this chamber for a year. He is a reclusive hermit who avoids the company of modern humans. He dresses in cured leather, his hair is long and muddy, and he carries a nose-wrinkling stench.

Apoktek hides by a corner and attempts to flee if threatened. His language is so ancient no one alive speaks it anymore. He only fights in self-defense.

An Unlikely Alliance. If a spellcaster uses magic to communicate with Apoktek, the man is happy to be understood. He tells a tale of how he wandered into a large elvish vault and walked into a glowing mirror. Since then he is stranded in this world where no one speaks his tongue. Apoktek is unaware of his journey through time. He thinks he is in a different part of the world. If the characters allow it, he wants to tag along to see the mirrors again. Apoktek fears fighting the timeless guardians that guard the mirrors' chamber by himself.

4. GIANT BADGERS' LAIR

The pungent stench of animal musk invades the senses in this chamber. There are tufts of thick black fur stuck on rocks and the walls.

A family of four **giant badgers** inhabits this cave. They are territorial by nature. The fearless animals fight for their cave but retreat if the invaders leave them be.

5. TOMB OF THE SIX KNIGHTS

Six roughly-carved alcoves flank this long tunnel. Each alcove contains a stone box with an inscription written in an old form of the Common tongue.

A *comprehend languages* spell reveals that the people buried here were knights who fought in the War of Roses, almost a thousand years ago (DC 14 History). The six war heroes were interred here long before the caverns became connected with the chronomancers' vault.

Treasure. The niches contain 250 gp and 800 sp. Depriving the dead of their belongings comes with a curse: only half the hit points are regained from any healing sources. A *remove curse* spell or by returning the stolen valuables to the niches removes this affliction.

6. RAVENOUS FUNGI AND VAULT

A bed of corroded bones lies scattered among several fungal lifeforms that move as if breathing. The fungal stench is strongest in this area.

The 3-foot-tall fungal growths in this chamber are semi-conscious creatures known as myconids. They cannot help but obey their desire to consume all living matter around them. Three **myconids** uproot themselves when the characters approach; they attack. They do not pursue farther than 30 feet. If Apoktek is present, he warns the characters of the danger and suggests circling around this area through the knights' tombs in area 5.

Treasure. The four chests are unlocked. They contain 740 gp, 1,300 sp, a *+1 dagger*, and a platinum crown that had seven one-inch wide gemstones removed. Apoktek has the seven emeralds in his fur coat.

APOKTEK

Human (age 33)

Unlike other *visitors*, Apoktek's presence in the current timeline is not a temporal affair. He has been stranded for the last year in the caverns next to the Mirrors of Gath. He comes from 12,000 years in the past.

Apoktek was the leader of his tribe and feels a strong sense of responsibility to return. In his culture, precious stones are considered sacred. He took seven emeralds from area 6 and considers them a lucky charm.

Manner. The ancient man nature requires him to gesticulate and move his hands in wide movements.

Ambition. Apoktek wants to find a way back to his tribe and take the glowing emeralds from area 6 with him.

7. TUNNELS TO THE DEPTHS

Two tunnels to the north slant downward into uncharted depths. Human footprints lead down this path but none appear to have returned as of yet.

If Apoktek is present, he tries to explain that other visitors came from the mirror and walked down the caves but did not return. Apoktek has explored half a mile down the caves and found the hunting grounds of aggressive troglodytes. Apoktek never went down there again.

These tunnels lead down to the uncharted depths underground. Such a journey to the cities in the Underworld below is an adventure for another time.

8. RUINED ANTECHAMBER

The chamber was part of a once larger underground compound. Little of it remains. The walls are decorated with eroded bas-reliefs of elves performing rituals and observing the stars.

The reliefs on the walls and ceiling tell the stories of the elvish chronomancers and their millennium-sparing objective in studying how to manipulate time. Insightful people can analyze the room for 30 minutes and learn about the chronomancers and the Mirrors of Gath (DC 16 Arcana). They learn how the visitors are real individuals from the past but also that the mirrors are imperfect.

Recent Visitors. Four teenagers (**commoners**) hide in this chamber. They emerged from the Mirrors of Gath three days ago and barricaded the door to area 9. The lads come from 400 years ago and speak a dead tongue. They fight only in self-defense. The teenagers have only ten days left before they too vanish into nothingness.



9. THE MIRRORS OF GATH

Three tall mirrors rest by the north end of this chamber. Within them, the depths of the universe await. Glimpses of other places shine from time to time. Voices from the past make the air vibrate.

The three mirror relics stand by the north wall of this chamber. Their interiors shine with the light of other worlds. Bones lie scattered across the chamber; evidence of past *visitors* who could not move past the timeless guardians that guard the chamber. If Apoktek is present, he helps fight the undead guardians in the room so he can inspect the Mirrors of Gath later.

Fire Jet Traps. Stepping on the marked squares (see map) causes fire to shoot from a hole on the floor. Creatures take 3d6 fire damage (DC 14 Dexterity save).

The Timeless Guardians. Five **ghouls** in chainmail armor emerge from the standing sarcophagi to protect the Mirrors of Gath. They are mindless abominations who attack any non-elf creature. If destroyed, they reform in 48 hours. Destroying the sarcophagi prevents this effect.

The Mirrors. Understanding the mirrors is a great arcane feat. Only the most capable mages could dream to achieve this. Images from other times are glimpsed. Voices and echoes from the past vibrate through the chamber every few minutes; they're voices in dead tongues and indecipherable accents. The mirrors are indestructible and cannot be moved from the chamber.

DEVELOPMENT

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

STOPPING THE VISITS

THE CHARACTERS HAVE access to the Mirrors of Gath. A spellcaster can study the mirrors and the bas-reliefs in areas 8 and 9 to gain a passing understanding of how they work. Studying the mirrors for two consecutive weeks allows a character to spend a spell slot to deactivate the mirrors. This prevents the arrival of other *visitors*, at least until the mirrors stop being dormant.

THE STRANDED VISITORS

BEFORE DEACTIVATING THE mirrors, a spellcaster can attempt to open a portal to a previous timeline to allow either Apoktek or the four teenagers to return to their time. Unfortunately, there is no way to know for sure whether they made it back safely or to the correct time.

BACK TO THE PAST

THE CHARACTERS CAN attempt a journey to the past. Such a journey should be important in the great scheme of things for the current campaign. They can travel up to 12,000 years to the past. They have the chance to correct a mistake, save the life of a loved one, or prevent a catastrophe from happening. The consequences of changing the past shall hunt them later on, though.



MORIARTY'S HIDEOUT

Level 5

I don't know what to do anymore. This has gone too far. Please, help me stop Moriarty!

Edward Mill

BACKGROUND LORE

WIZARDS AND MAGES all over the world spend their entire lifetimes researching the arcane arts. They wish to see the unknown, discover the mysteries of the universe. This story is about Nicholas Moriarty, a sorcerer.

MORIARTY'S AMBITIONS

NICHOLAS MORIARTY SPENT most of his teenage years secluded from society. He performed simple tricks of magic alone and mastered them over time. His parents were afraid of his uncanny powers; not knowing how to deal with their son's magical abilities. The townsfolk fear the strange flames and colors that Moriarty's hands produce. The cruel people branded him a cursed child.

After his parents' passing, Moriarty roamed the world. One day, he found the essence of a demon within a statue. It lied within an abandoned underground complex in the deepest parts of Dark Willow Forest. He made it his new home and hideout. The sorcerer plans to take over all living energies in the forest. He requires lots of arcane power to bring the demon into this world.

EDWARD'S DILEMMA

MORIARTY MADE A friend one day, Edward Mill. The young man admired Moriarty and wished to learn from him. Of course, the evil mage hid his dire ambitions from his apprentice; Edward worked for Moriarty for a couple of years believing they were saving the forest from taint.

However, Edward knows of his teacher's plans now. He thinks he made a big mistake and wishes to stop Moriarty. He cannot do it alone, though. In secret, he sent a raven to nearby towns to warn them and inform them about the sorcerer's plans. He hopes to be heard.

THE WOODLANDS SPIRIT

DARK WILLOW FOREST lives and thrives thanks to the Woodlands spirit that inhabits it. All living creatures in the woods bask in the spirit's glowing aura of warmth.

This all changed with Moriarty's plans. He performed a ritual to bind the Woodlands spirit to an area within his hideout. Slowly, the sorcerer siphons the spirit's force. With this arcane energy, Moriarty plans to decimate the forest. Moriarty shall leave the spirit lifeless if this goes on. In the meanwhile, the spirit fights. It tries to free itself from Moriarty's grasp, but it needs help to succeed.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THE CHARACTERS MAY get involved in this adventure in two manners. They learn of Moriarty's plans from Edward's letters in a town close to Dark Willow Forest. Or, a character, preferably a druid or ranger, is directly contacted by the Woodlands spirit and asked for help.

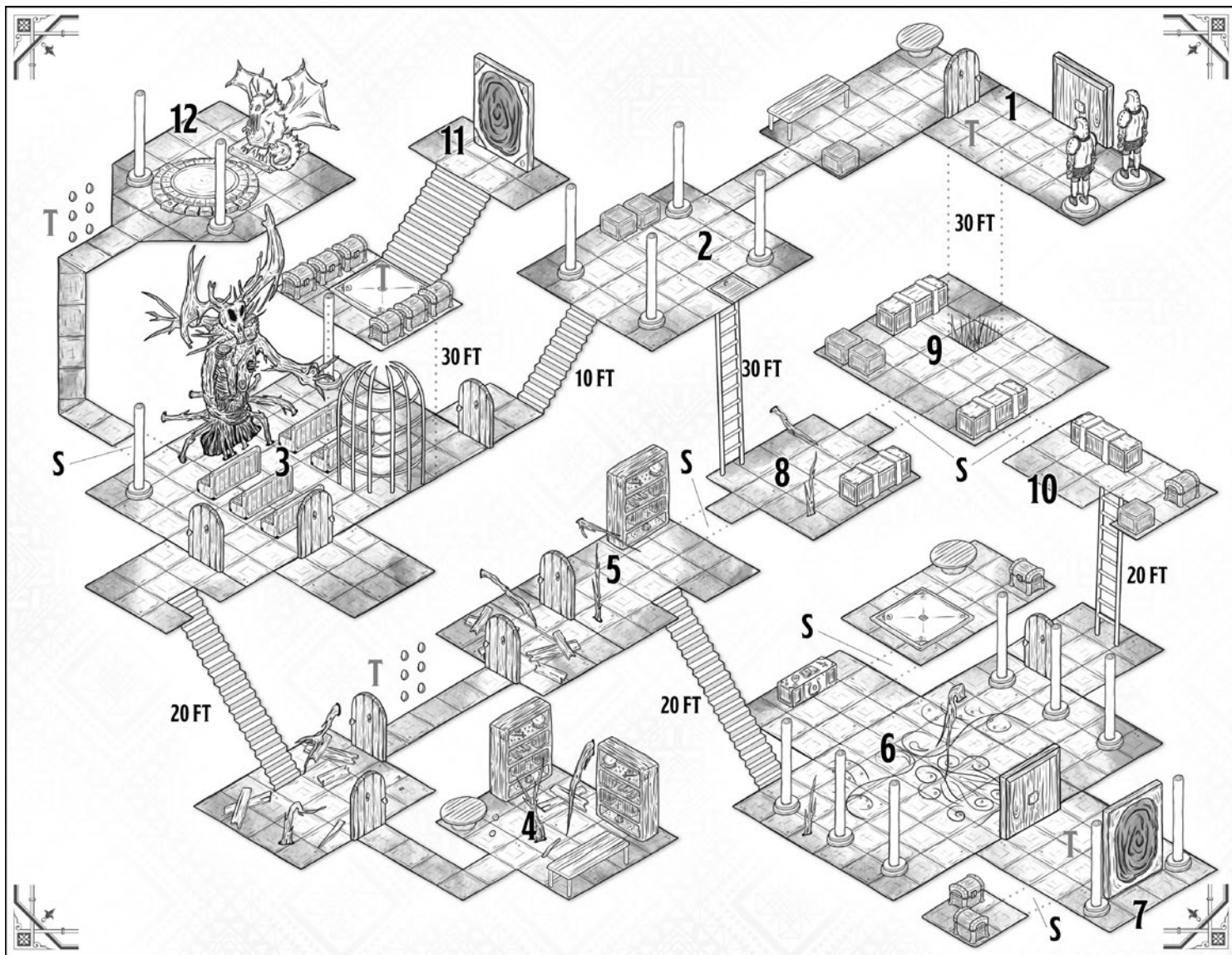
FEATURES OF MORIARTY'S HIDEOUT

The following features correspond to Moriarty's Hideout; areas 1 through 12.

Light. Sconces with *continual flame* spells in them illuminate the hideout. Their magic fades if removed.

Secret Passageways. An observant character finds all hidden levers, switches, and pushable bricks for secret passageways and doors (DC 17 Perception).

Enraged Roots. The hideout's chambers are pierced by many of the spirit's roots. In their rage, the roots attack any creature within their reach. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2d8 + 4 slashing damage. Each root has 25 hit points and 12 AC.



1. HIDEOUT'S ENTRANCE

After hours of walking in the muddy Dark Willow Forest, a trapdoor hidden beside an ancient willow takes to a double wooden door under the tree roots.

When the characters trespass the threshold, they activate a silent *alarm* spell. This informs Moriarty of their presence. The sorcerer hides in area 12 and waits to see if the intruders cross the portal in area 7.

Constructs. Two **animated armors** attempt to make a character fall through the trap 15 feet in front of them.

Trap. Characters that step on the pressure-sensitive tile fall to the spiked pit in area 9 (DC 17 Dexterity).

2. VESTIBULE

Moriarty's pact with the demon granted him the power to summon undead guardians. Two **shadows** and two **specters** come out of the columns and attack intruders.

Trapdoor. A hand ladder descends 30 feet and leads to area 8. This trapdoor is locked (DC 18 Thieves' Tools).

3. WOODLANDS SPIRIT AVATAR

A 30-foot-tall towering figure of leaves, roots, twigs, bark, fungi, and bone oversees this chamber. A large metal cage lies beside two rows of benches.

Moriarty bound the spirit of the forest here. The chamber siphons its energy little by little. The spirit fights to free itself but all attempts have been in vain so far.

Roots. The roots below the effigy pierce the ground and walls. They are the most present in this area. Five enraged roots attack creatures within 15 feet of the effigy. If destroyed, they regenerate after one minute.

Woodlands Spirit. The characters may try to commune with the spirit of the forest and calm it down. A druid, ranger, or similar can spend 10 minutes meditating before the Woodlands spirit and communicate their intentions. Roots stop attacking while this meditation takes place. If the characters state their intention to help, the spirit manages to control its enraged roots in every area of the dungeon and does not attack them.

4. LIBRARY

Moriarty keeps books and tomes regarding the arcane and old necromancy. A curious character can spend an hour studying these documents to know of the ritual Moriarty used to bind the Woodlands spirit in area 3.

Roots. Four roots attack creatures that walk within 15 feet of them. The roots do not attack if the characters made peace with the Woodlands spirit (see area 3).

Trap. If creatures fail to see the pressure-sensitive tiles under them (DC 17 Perception), the walls shoot darts and poison them for one (DC 18 Constitution).

5. ANTECHAMBER

This room is a small continuation of the library. To the east, a set of stairs descends to Moriarty's main hall.

Roots. Three roots attack creatures in this area.

Treasure. A curious character finds valuable titles among the many documents on the shelves. The lot is worth 1,250 gp to a collector (DC 16 Investigation).

6. MAIN HALL

Moriarty's undead guardians attack creatures that come here. Two **wraiths** emerge from the columns and attack intruders. The undead do their best to guard the door to area 7. They do not chase the characters further.

Roots. Three roots attack creatures in this area.

Altar. The engraved stone altar has a spellbook with five sorcerer spells of the GM's choice, one arcane implement, a steel dagger, and a pouch of rare ingredients.

Treasure. The chest inside the secret chamber beside the altar contains 1,500 gp worth of delicate silverware pieces, jewelry, and expensive fabrics and linens.

EDWARD MILL

Human (age 29)

Edward (**apprentice mage**) had no friends and spent most of his time alone when he was young. He left his home at the age of 20 and roamed the world for years. One day, he met Moriarty in Dark Willow Forest. They met by mere chance. Moriarty noticed Edward's potential and accepted him as his apprentice. They have worked together for a while now but Edward regrets this decision since the day the Woodlands Spirit was bound to the effigy in area 3. He doesn't want to be part of this.

Manner. Edward says and repeats "I'm sorry" and "this is all my fault" at the end of every sentence.

Ambition. The young apprentice wishes to stop Moriarty at all costs. He feels partially responsible.

7. GREEN PORTAL

A gate to the unknown sheds a faint green light. The liquid-like mirror's surface shows a hundred wrinkles that shift and turn over and over.

The portal does not show any sign of danger. An *augury* spell does not warn against crossing it either. This is all part of the evil sorcerer's plan, though (see area 11).

Portal. Creatures that go through the portal are immediately teleported to area 11 with all their belongings.

Trap. If creatures fail to see the pressure-sensitive tile before the portal (DC 17 Perception), the swing of an axe deals 4d8 slashing damage (DC 18 Dexterity for half).

Treasure. The chests in the hidden room beside the portal contain 3,000 gp and a *+1 dagger*.

8. LINKING CHAMBER

This secret area connects several parts of the dungeon. However, two of the exits here are secret passageways.

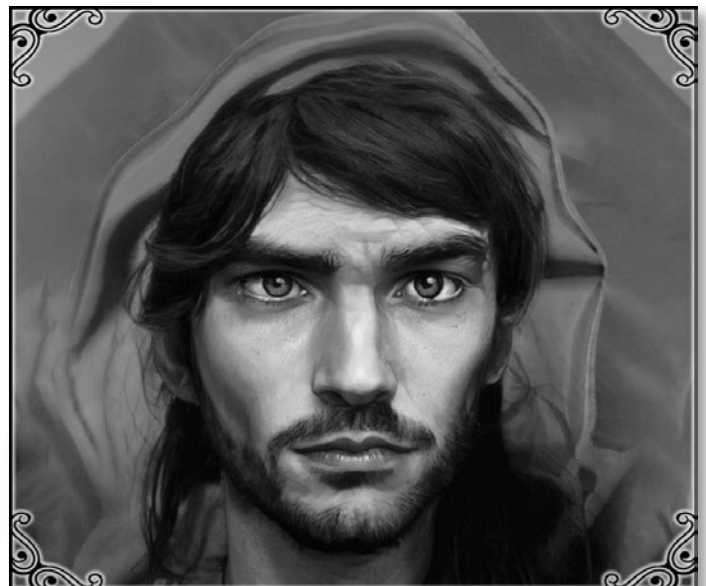
Roots. Two roots attack creatures in this area.

9. SPIKED PIT CHAMBER

Moriarty's helper and apprentice, Edward, is locked here. His teacher learned of the letters he sent and decided to put him here for a while to deal with him later.

Edward. The apprentice swears loyalty to the characters the moment he sees them. He doesn't want to help Moriarty anymore and is willing to help them stop him.

Spiked Pit. If someone falls from area 1, Edward assumes someone got his letter or came to help. He casts a *feather fall* spell on any falling creature to make a good first impression whenever he offers his help.



10. STORAGE ROOM

Moriarty uses this area of the dungeon for storage. There are wooden crates and two chests. There seems to be nothing of value in this chamber at first glance.

Treasure. If the characters spend an hour searching, they find a secret compartment in the stone chest's bottom. It contains a sturdy dragonbone circlet that hums with melodic music (900gp), a framed painting of a gryphon (180gp), and a silver ring with an amethyst (90 gp).

11. BLUE PORTAL

Use the description of area 7 to describe this area.

When the characters get here, Moriarty patiently waits in area 12 until they fall for the illusion (see below).

Illusion. The treasure here is a *major illusion* spell. The platform before the six chests breaks when two or more Medium creatures stand on it. Falling creatures take 4d6 slashing damage from the bars at the top of the cage and 3d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall.

12. DEMON'S STATUE

The statue of a 10-foot-tall winged demon rests on a pedestal. An aura of uneasiness and nausea strikes those that stare at the demon's eyes for too long.

This statue is a physical representation of a demon from the Abyss. The sorcerer has heeded the demon's evil advice for months. Moriarty is beyond salvation now; his sole goal is to absorb the energy of the Woodlands spirit and end with all life that comes with it. The energy acquired would allow Moriarty to perform a powerful ritual, capable of bringing the demon to this world. Edward does not know about this. He just knows of the possibility of destroying Dark Willow Forest as it exists now.

Final Confrontation. Moriarty (**mage**) waits for the intruders to fall into the trap in area 11. If that occurs, he comes out of this chamber and blasts the injured intruders in the cage with his powerful spells. Otherwise, if the characters find the secret passage in area 3, Moriarty fights in this chamber. The sorcerer does not fight alone. He summons one **invisible stalker** and two **shadows** to fight alongside him. All of them fight until slain.

Magic Circle. Moriarty uses this chamber to perform his most powerful rituals, like the one he used to bind the Woodlands spirit. An arcane spellcaster can spend 10 minutes attuning to the circle. Doing so allows the caster to maximize the effects of a single spell they know. Material costs for this spell are reduced in half if any.

Unexpected Ally. If the characters made peace with the Woodlands spirit, and the final confrontation takes place in area 3, the roots attack Moriarty and his goons.

DEVELOPMENT

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

THE WOODLANDS SPIRIT IS SAVED

THE CHARACTERS DEFEAT Moriarty. The Woodlands spirit is freed from its binds and leaves the dungeon. The effigy in area 3 decays and so do the roots that pierced several areas of the hideout. The spirit rewards the characters with a *staff of the woodlands*. The demonic statue is harmless without anyone to corrupt. It can be destroyed or abandoned. In the end, Edward's letters and his involvement in this adventure have made a difference. It is up to the characters how to judge him.

MORIARTY DESTROYS THE FOREST

THE CHARACTERS FAIL to stop Moriarty. They die in combat or must flee to save their lives. The evil sorcerer siphons the last remnants of the Woodlands spirit's life force and acquires the energy to bring the demon to this world. The aftermath of this ritual is a cataclysm that destroys Dark Hollow Forest by withering all life in it. The demon, named Ba'Hazsha, kills and consumes Moriarty on the spot after setting foot on this world. The demon shall remember those who tried to stop his coming...



OVERHAULING INITIATIVE

System-neutral initiative Variants by Chux (TheDeathDieClub)

WHEN I STARTED playing D&D, one of my biggest headaches was managing initiative. Keeping track of it was a nightmare, especially when you try to avoid a mess behind the GM screen. I thought I did a decent job at keeping notes, dice, and books, organized, but everything went south when we started combat. To make things worse, we used to roll for initiative EVERY ROUND!

Aside from changing initiative rolls to once per combat, the rules haven't changed. As a result, many GMs struggle to keep track of them in a simple manner. If you don't believe me, just look at the number of apps, online tools, and trackers created during the past couple of years.

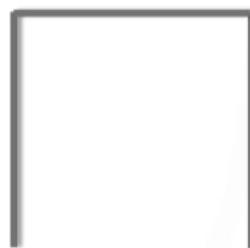
Since I would rather spend money on RPGs than on apps or gimmicks, I decided to compile a list of some great tools and tricks to help you track initiatives.



1 - THE "N" TRICK

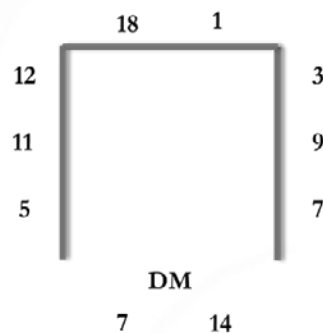
IF YOU OR your players feel comfortable using the standard rules but you are looking for an easier way to keep track of initiative, then the "n" trick is for you.

In short, before any combat, you just draw an "n" shape on a piece of paper or dry erase board. This "n" represents your current gaming table and players.



DM

As each player rolls for initiative, you write down the results in a place analog to their position at the table. You can keep track of your NPCs at the bottom of the figure.



Once you have logged in all the roll results, you can track whose turn is it by placing a bead or token on top of the active player's position. You then move the bead to the next player until everyone takes an action.

Having the initiative numbers aligned to each of the players' seating arrangements makes it easier for you (and them) to identify who goes next. This is especially handy if, just like me, you have a difficult time remembering the names of all the characters and/or NPCs.

2 - ABOVE AND BELOW

NOW, IF YOU want to take a bold step toward simplifying it all, the Above and Below method is for you.

I first came across it in the Mothership RPG, and it works as follows. The GM is the first one to roll for initiative, followed by all the players. Once this is done, the GM classifies each roll into one of two categories: either “above” or “below” the GM’s roll (ties count as “above”).

Once all the rolls are classified, the players in the “above” category resolve their actions, followed by the NPCs, and finally, by the players in the “below” category.

By grouping players into two groups, there is no longer a need to keep track of individual rolls. This allows the GM and players to focus more on describing the actions rather than on bookkeeping activities. The downside to this is that it can be chaotic at first, possibly stressing out some GMs who like to have full control off the table. But like all things, try it out and hone the way you do it over time. This method may be swift and practical for many.

3 - SINGLE DICE ROLL

SO, YOU ARE feeling adventurous? Simplify the process even one step further. If you have played any OSR games in the past, you’ve probably heard about **Black Pudding**, a fanzine originally designed as a supplement for Labyrinth Lord and Dungeon Crawl Classics. In one of their first issues, they boldly suggest adjusting the initiative to a single die roll, yes, that’s right, a single one.

Before combat starts, roll a single die and subtract 1 from the roll. This roll determines the number of players who get to act BEFORE the NPCs or monsters. The die used must reflect as closely as possible the group size: d4 for 1-4 players, d6 for 5-6, d8 for 7-8, and so on.

To stir things up, you can roll every round, thus allowing for a more “organic” combat (the ones who acted last may be the first in the following round). This forces players to think strategically and to pay close attention to all the actions. This is great for parties with creative spellcasters, who shift between attack and support spells. Or clever melee combatants with varied abilities that switch between full-aggressive and defensive fighting styles.

The main downside is that this option forces the GM to quickly assess the impact of the PCs’ actions on the battlefield: narrate everything that happens every round and describe every attack, spell, or combat move from both sides. This can be quite stressful, especially if narrating encounters is not your area of expertise. Or for newer GMs, who may not be experienced at describing things. Don’t despair if not everything works as planned at first, keep trying and you will see the benefits of this method.

4 - NO INITIATIVE

THE LAST OPTION is based on the system used by the Demon Hunter RPG. There are no initiative rolls made. In any combat situation, the first one to declare their action goes first (thus rewarding quick thinkers). Once they are done, they can “pass the turn” to another PC or NPC, who shall then take their action and will repeat the whole process until everyone gets to act once.

You might think: *Why would I pass the turn to an NPC?* Here is the catch: Whoever gets the last action, decides who goes first on the following round (they can choose themselves). Thus, if you leave the NPCs at the end, they could choose to act twice, so you need to be careful.

To avoid confusion (since there is no fixed order) each player should have a token or a card with them. Once they take an action, they flip over the token/card, meaning they are done for the round. Everyone flips up their tokens/cards and when a new round starts.

Although it might sound complicated, I’ve found that this method gives players a whole new level of flexibility. It forces them to be more conscious of their actions, forcing them to act more strategically. It also forces them to leave their phones and encourages them to pay attention, since they never know when they will get to act next.

EDITOR’S NOTES

I ENJOYED READING these alternatives to tracking initiative from another experienced GM and from games we have not had the chance to play.

The way I do it has changed over the years. I currently employ the OSR method found in B/X D&D which people refer to as “Group Initiative”. You can see it in [Old School Essentials](#), by Necrotic Gnome. With it, each side (good guys and bad guys) rolls a 1d6 and whoever rolls higher goes first. It promotes teamwork while providing the possibility of things changing around from one round to the next because the rolls are made each round. Our combats are fast, hectic, and deadly!

Anyway, one of the best cases for this initiative system is made by Professor Dungeon Master from the [Dungeoncraft channel](#) on Youtube. He’s got a [full video](#) dedicated to explaining this. Enjoy!

The Vermilion Vault

Few people become storytellers. Even fewer get to be great ones. The tale of the Vermilion Knights and their sad demise is known by almost none. Their deeds and exploits remain in the memories of the most curious historians, scholars, or the verses of minstrels who learned their sad ballad.

Many centuries ago, the Vermilion Knights were betrayed by their peers in a horrible manner. The knights' leader ordered them to smite away malign spirits that delved within one of their mausoleum. He claimed that the ashes and bones of other knights could be tainted by evil. He told them to protect their fallen comrades.

Once inside, dozens of mercenaries blocked their way out and fought to impede their escape. The knights shall never rest. Even less so after being interred as war heroes and faithful servants of the crown. A wretched lie that binds them to this world through hatred and grudge. The Vermilion Vault holds great treasures but the knights shall not part with the last physical remnants of who they were in life.

Those that learned about the vault became curious. Some hired people to look for it. Others went to search for it themselves. People's curiosity paid off in different manners: parties of mercenaries never came back while some groups returned scarred, maimed, or traumatized by the ordeal. One thing was certain: all those who set foot inside the Vermilion Vault regret it with all their hearts.

Area Descriptions

1. The stairs descend to a vestibule with two stone tables. The books and several mundane objects in them are moth-eaten. They turn dust when touched.

2. The vestibule door is locked. There are six niches in small alcoves to the east and west of the hall. Eight columns flank the delicate silk rug with a circular stone pedestal at the south end. This area is protected by six Vermilion Ghosts. Standing on the marked floor tiles activates a magical trap: ghostly translucent hands descend from the dark ceiling to drain the life energy of intruders and tomb-robbers.

3. The wooden furniture here remains intact; protected by abjuration magic. The documents reveal the story of this mausoleum and the Vermilion Knights.

4. The mundane objects on the tables did not survive the passage of time. However, there is a magic spell scroll hidden in the pile of trash and papers.

5. Cave-ins destroyed some sections of the walls and ceilings. The seismic movements blocked some corridors but created new connections between areas too.

6. Three mounted crossbows shoot at the person who first enters this chamber. Then, three Vermilion Ghosts coalesce and attack in a hateful frenzy. Four shadowy figures traverse the ground to attack as well. They wear the vaguely recognizable sigil of the Vermilion Knights. They fight until slain protecting their treasure.

7. Creatures that venture into these dark tunnels encounter natural predators of the underworld. A band of six savage troglodytes prepare an ambush.

8. This area was formerly a library. Cave-ins have destroyed most of it. Searching through wreck reveals some salvageable tomes and a magical dagger.

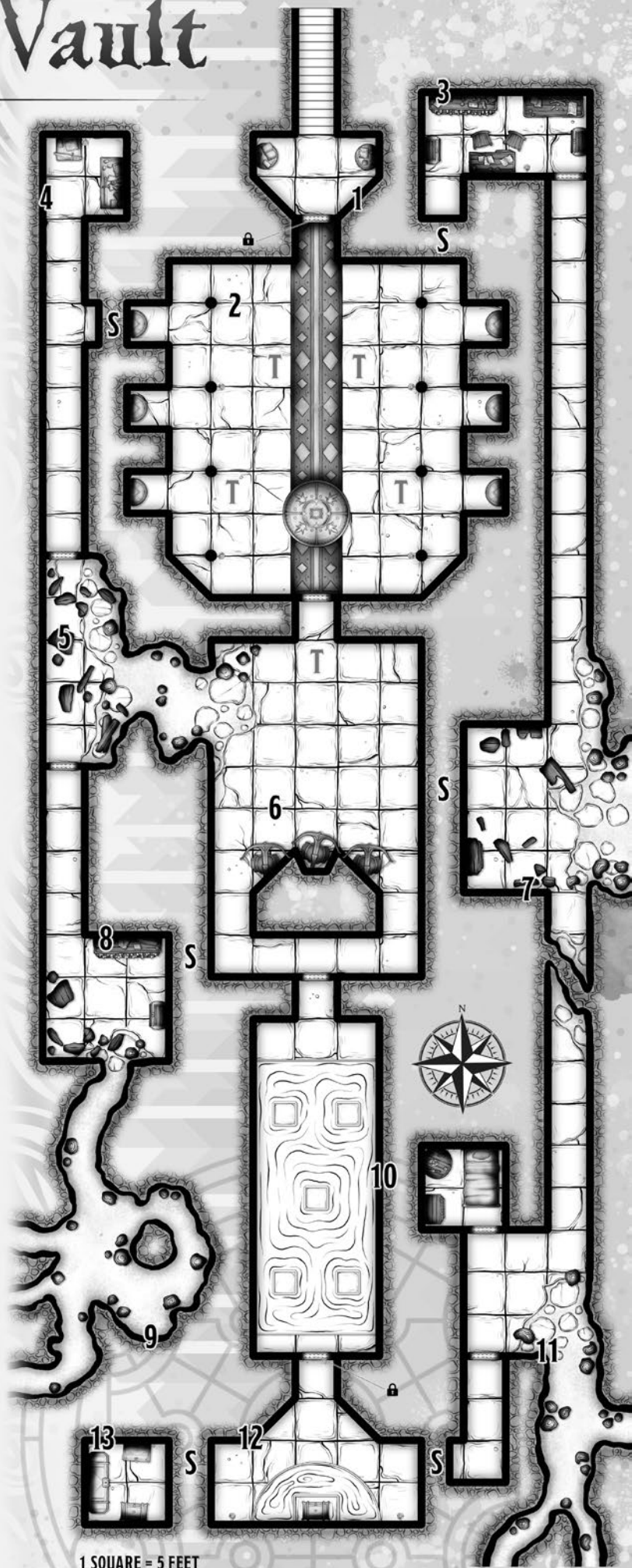
9. Swarms of spiders and centipedes roam these caves. There is nothing of value here. The westbound tunnels lead to uncharted and unexplored depths.

10. The walls of this chamber feature detailed paintings of Vermilion Knights in their prime. Three Vermilion Ghosts attempt to push intruders into the lava.

11. Cave-ins destroyed this antechamber but the single bedroom remains intact. Abjuration magic protects the furniture here. Searching the room reveals the diary of the former mausoleum's keeper. He wrote the truth about the knights there.

12. A locked door leads to the fake vault. A circular-shaped pond of lava features a pedestal with a stone chest. Opening the chest triggers a trap. Creatures fall to the lava as the platform descends into the molten rock. Two Vermilion Ghosts emerge from of the walls and attack when the chest is opened.

13. This is the real treasure vault of the Vermilion Knights. A hidden lever in area 12 must be activated to reveal a narrow tunnel to this place. The stone chests contain thousands of gold and silver coins, a collection of fancy silverware, a set of royal linens and fabrics, a box of alchemical ingredients, and a magic longsword.



SHRINE OF THE BLUE DRUIDS

Level 4

Growth and decay form a repeating cycle. One cannot exist without the other.

Annals of the Blue Druids

BACKGROUND LORE

LIFE AND DEATH. Light and Darkness. Heat and Cold. Those qualities are opposites. Yet none can exist without the other. For they are a reflection of one another; the two sides of a coin. This is a truth that the Blue Druids understood thousands of years ago. They are the shepherds of the flow of life and death in the Great Forest. They guide the forest through the inescapable cycle of growth and decay. The forest cannot exist without either. Yet both of them can get out of control and cause terrible consequences. Uncontrolled growth can lead to an unsustainable ecosystem and the mutation of indigenuous species into more aggressive variants. They are usually known as dire animals. On the other hand, decay without measure produces a taint that poisons the water sources and all plants. It starts to kill lifeforms and replace the forested land with swamps and bogs.

THE BLUE DRUIDS' DUTY

A COVENANT OF human druids takes it upon themselves to oversee the cycle of verdant growth and taint. They understand that both things are needed to keep the woods healthy. They built a shrine in the depths of the forest. Underneath the forest soil, they created a magical pond that can be used to perform the Ritual of Reversal. Done properly, it stops the current cycle and reverts it. The druids use it to stop the uncontrolled taint or growth.

The druids have determined that performing this ritual every 120 years keeps the forest in great condition. It avoids the inconveniences of either extreme while allowing all the natural expressions of the woods to thrive. When the Ritual of Reversal succeeds, a pillar of greenhued light appears over the shrine. It caresses the clouds above and shines throughout the following five nights.

THE MISSING DRUIDS

THE DRUID RITUAL should have been performed seven years ago but the Blue Druids have not been seen in the Great Forest in 50 years at least. Their delay caused the taint to spread. It's killing plants, animals, and fostering the appearance of dire creatures that threaten the area.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THE CHARACTERS BECOME involved in this adventure when the foul taint that envelops the forested region becomes too dangerous for the forest dwellers and the settlements beyond the tree line. Oral tradition has it that a shunned temple in the forest holds the secret to restoring the forest's verdant self. The characters are hired by the local authorities to search the forest for this ancient shrine. There is a reward of 1.200 gold pieces for fighting back the taint that has enveloped the forest.

FEATURES OF THE SHRINE

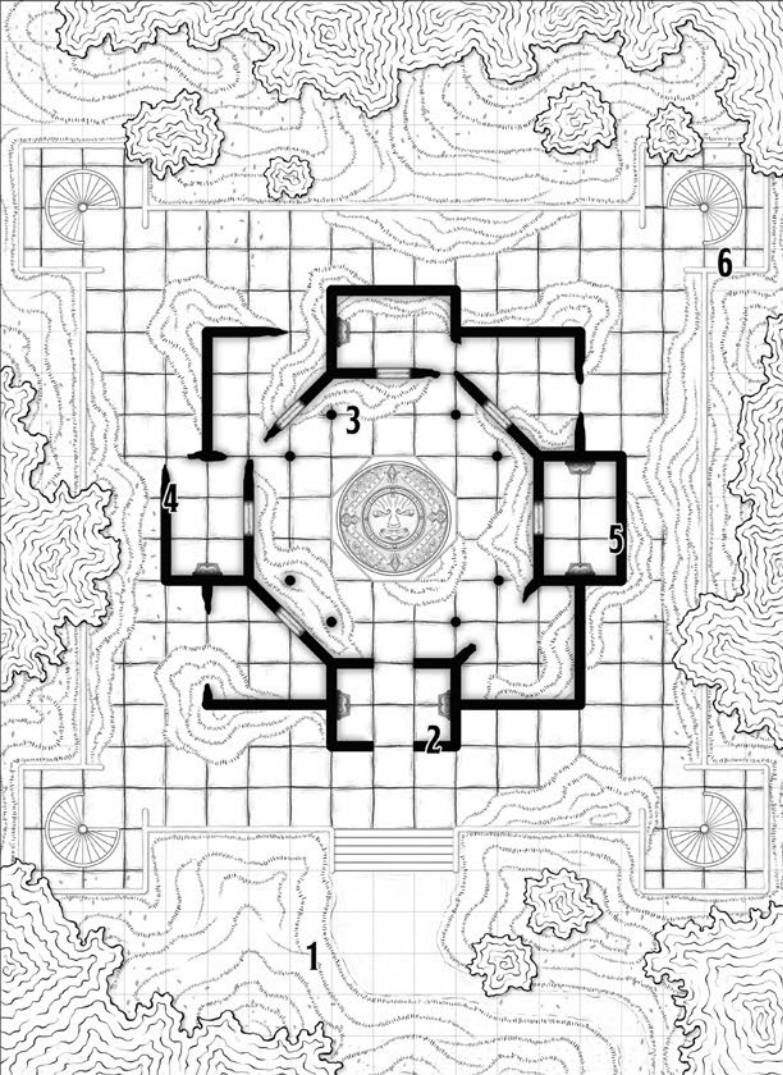
The following features correspond to the forest shrine and the dungeon below; areas 1 through 11.

Smells and Sounds. The verdant greenery of the forest is ever-present in the shrine and dungeon. Below, a clear fragrance of roses comes from the pond in area 9.

Light. Sconces with *continual flame* spells provide bright light in some areas of the dungeon. Removing them from the walls spoils the enchantment.

Secret Doors. Hidden levers cause sections of the walls to slide aside when pulled to reveal the secret passages to areas 10 and 11 (DC 16 Perception).

Enhanced Healing. Creatures healed with magic within 50 feet of area 9 regain 4 additional hit points.



1. THE SHUNNED TEMPLE

A rarely used forest trail leads to a dilapidated structure in the depths of the forest. Erosion caused some of the walls and ceilings to collapse.

The characters search the Great Forest for two days before finding the forest trail that leads to the Shrine of the Blue Druids. The stone structure has seen better days. Due to exposure to the elements and lack of maintenance, some of the walls and roofs have collapsed under their own weight. In addition, the forest has reclaimed part of the structure as vegetation and fungi grow on the walls and granite floors of the temple. A druid realizes that the temple's state and how the forest partially grows within is most likely the druids' intention. A way to be in balance with the forest and its growth (DC 14 Nature).

2. ERODED ANTECHAMBER

The chamber contains two standing stone enclosures that appear to be sarcophagi. The lids are cracked and missing a few pieces. The caskets are empty.

Vague Inscriptions. The inscriptions on the lids in Druidic are eroded and unreadable in some sections. They reveal that the enclosures were meant to contain non-tamable fey spirits from the Woodlands. The ones contained here escaped long ago. A grim misfortune.

3. THE FACE OF THE FOREST

The central chamber is open to the elements from above. A 15-foot-wide copper disk dominates the center of the chamber. It is inscribed with druidic runes and the face of a tree-shepherd.

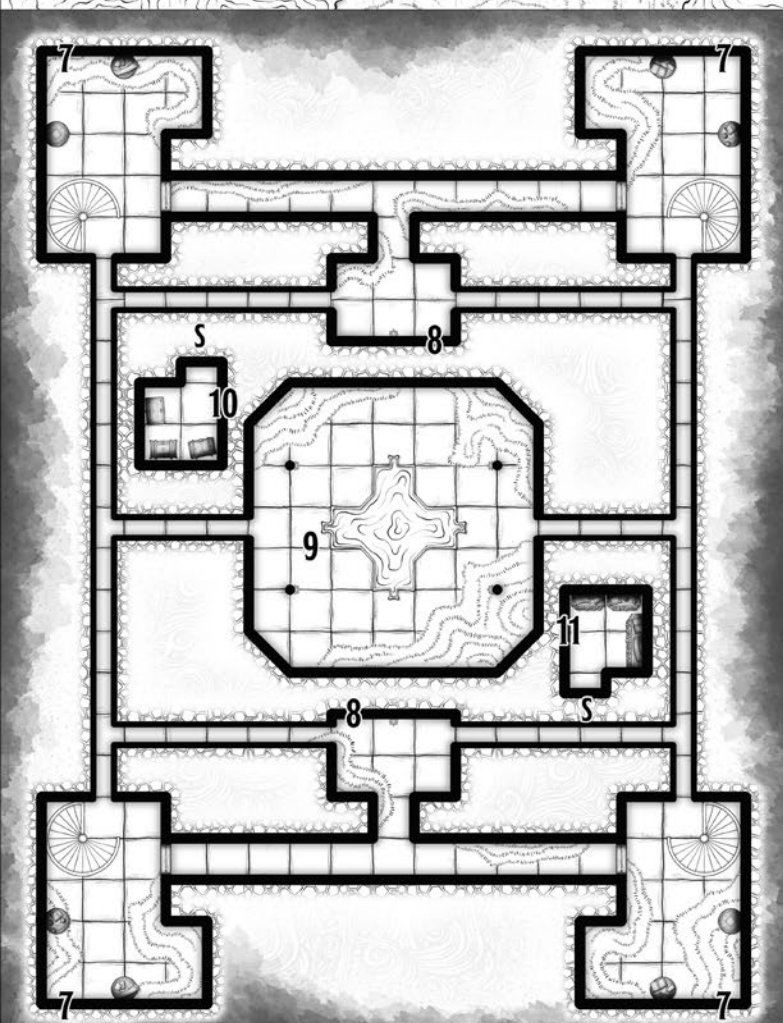
The copper disk is a magical focus that produces a pillar of light when the Ritual of Reversal is performed. It channels the ritual's power and shifts the current state of the Great Forest. The metalwork is of exquisite quality.

Tainted Guardians. When the characters approach this area, two **dire wolves** and four **wolves** jump from the hole on the roof and attempt to drive off the characters. The taint of the forest has sent them to stop the characters from performing the Ritual of Reversal.

4. THE LONELY SATYR

There is a spent fire on the floor and some items of clothing hanging from the wall. It looks lived-in.

A gentle **satyr** named Gerdagh has lived here for months. He says this place is a refuge from the forest taint. Gerdagh claims the Blue Druids last visited the shrine fifty years ago before parting to a faraway forest. Gerdagh is cowardly in nature and only fights in self-defense.



5. A TALE OF THE CORPSE FLOWER

The standing stone enclosures in this chamber are well preserved from the elements. Fragrances of flowers and rot permeate the chamber.

The south enclosure contains a fey spirit from the Woodlands. In the wild, the spirit manifests as a 10-foot-tall flower with crimson petals and a stench of rotting meat.

Druidic Inscriptions. The inscriptions on the lid in Druidic say that the spirit trapped here embodies the forest taint and grows on rotting matter and carcasses. A spellcaster understands that the Blue Druids performed a ceremony known as the Ritual of Reversal to trap the spirit here and allow the forest to thrive (DC 15 Arcana or Nature). The inscriptions say that the spirit is neither good nor evil, only a representation of a force of nature.

An Untimely Release. Should the characters open the enclosure, the stench becomes so strong it may cause people to vomit (DC 18 Constitution). The fey spirit is free. It shall spread its corruption in the forest and feed the next taint cycle decades after its release.

6. SPIRAL STAIRS

Four sets of spiral stone stairs surround the dilapidated temple in the forest. Each of the stairs descends 40 feet to a landing in the structure below. The first time the characters approach any of the spiral stairs, a pack of six rabid **dire rats** emerges from the thickets and attacks.

7. DUNGEON LANDING

The dungeon has been partly reclaimed by moss, grass, and other vegetable lifeforms. The stone walls are etched with bas-reliefs of druids caring for the forest and fighting off the taint that threatens it.

The dark landing has a smell of moss and fungi. A student of nature recognizes the fungi on the walls as edible (DC 12 Nature). There are enough for two daily rations.

Each of the landings features two stone pedestals. There are trinkets scattered on the surfaces: copper and brass implements, rotten roots, pieces of decayed paper, etc. None of the trinkets are valuable in any form.

Story of the Druids. The bas-reliefs on the walls reveal crucial lore about the Blue Druids. Studying the reliefs for an hour reveals that the druids considered themselves the overseers of shepherds of the forest. The Blue Druids performed the Ritual of Reversal to guide the forest in the right direction. Their actions fostered life and death alike. To them, this was part of the cycle of life.

Shadow Guardians. Each landing is guarded by four shadows. They embody the forest taint and corruption.

8. ROOM OF PREPARATION

A rune-carved stone slab under the magical sconce describes a magical formula to perform a complex ritual. Parts of the formula are missing from the inscription but the omissions are intentional.

The formula to perform the Ritual of Reversal is divided into two parts, each inscribed in a stone slab in each of the rooms of preparation. A spellcaster requires the information in both chambers, and a means to understand the Druidic language to attempt the ritual.

9. CENTRAL POND

A two-foot-tall, cross-shaped pond of crystal-clear water takes up the chamber's center. Lights shine above the water and meander through the air like fireflies. The images on the walls appear to move.

After the characters have the information necessary to perform the Ritual of Reversal and visit this chamber, they are greeted by a plant-like abomination. A last-ditch effort of the natural force of decay that scourges the forest. A **shambling mound** emerges from the mossy thickets accompanied by eight **twig blights**.

Ritual of Reversal. A spellcaster with the information from both rooms of preparation forgoes all of their spellcasting abilities for a month and a half of their remaining lifetime to summon forth the power of nature and revert the current trend of decay that sickens the region. Having access to the druidic texts in the secret library in area 11 alleviates some of the setbacks of this ritual.



10. SECRET VAULT

The narrow tunnel leads to a secret chamber with three stone coffers. The chests brandish the inscription of the Blue Druids on their granite lids.

Each of the coffers features an old and weak lock. An initiate locksmith can bypass them (DC 12 Thieves' Tools).

Treasure. The chests contain 1,500 gp, 4,750 sp, two *potions of healing*, and a *wand of speak with animals*.

11. SECRET LIBRARY

The narrow tunnel leads to a secret library. Despite the abandonment, the bookcases and documents are in pristine condition. There is an open journal on one of the shelves. The script is in Druidic.

The druids kept this library with their journals and accurate records of their actions in the Great Forest. Studying the documents for two hours reveals the following:

- The druids left north 50 years ago to deal with a demonic threat in the tundra forest. Their fate is unknown. They meant to return decades ago.
- A calendar of their rituals reveals that the Ritual of Reversal is performed roughly every 120 years. It should have been performed seven years ago.
- Records of past rituals and slight modifications to the formula allow a spellcaster to reduce the time without spellcasting abilities to one week, and the expenditure of lifetime to a third (instead of half).

DEVELOPMENT

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

THE TAINT STOPPED

ONE CHARACTER PERFORMS the ancient druidic ritual and unleashes the Shrine of the Blue Druids' power. A column of green light rises from the pool and drives off the foul taint that envelops the forest. The locals recognize the light from old myths and oral traditions.

The taint recedes and the forest is back to normal within a couple of weeks. This equilibrium shall last at least 100 years before the taint returns and the Ritual of Reversal is needed once more. Hopefully, the Blue Druids shall be back by then to take care of the matter.

A SELFISH REFUSAL

IF THE CHARACTERS refuse to perform the ritual to avoid the setbacks, the taint is not stopped and the dangerous creatures increase in numbers and aggressiveness. Several settlements are overrun by them and hundreds of lives are lost. Three Blue Druids return 6 months later to attempt the ritual but the dire animals slay them.

If the characters wish to locate the Blue Druids before the taint devours the Great Forest, they must travel to the frozen tundra, find the druids, and journey back to the forest in time to perform the Ritual of Reversal. To guarantee their swift return, the characters must help the Blue Druids solve the problem in the north too.



WAYPOINTS

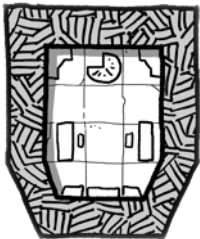
A system-neutral add-on by David Lombardo and Maps by Dyson Logos

Waypoints are leftovers of an ancient civilization. Tucked into out-of-the-way or unexplored places, these ancient towers use powerful, complex magi-tech to map surrounding areas, administer medical care, or even act as teleportation stations... but only if they're working. Years of dereliction have left most of them mostly, or entirely, nonfunctional. The characters can find them and repair them to gain access to the incredibly useful features of the Waypoints.



FIFTH FLOOR

Controls on wall panels for the field projector, which opens access to the cache with the glittering black void. It is capable of creating glowing gates for transport across the Waypoints.



FOURTH FLOOR

Mapping and Linking modules are embedded into two large tables, information from both of them is projected from the holographic wall display.



THIRD FLOOR

Sleeping area with bunked beds in alcoves closed with curtains. Kitchenette and lounge area opposite stairs.



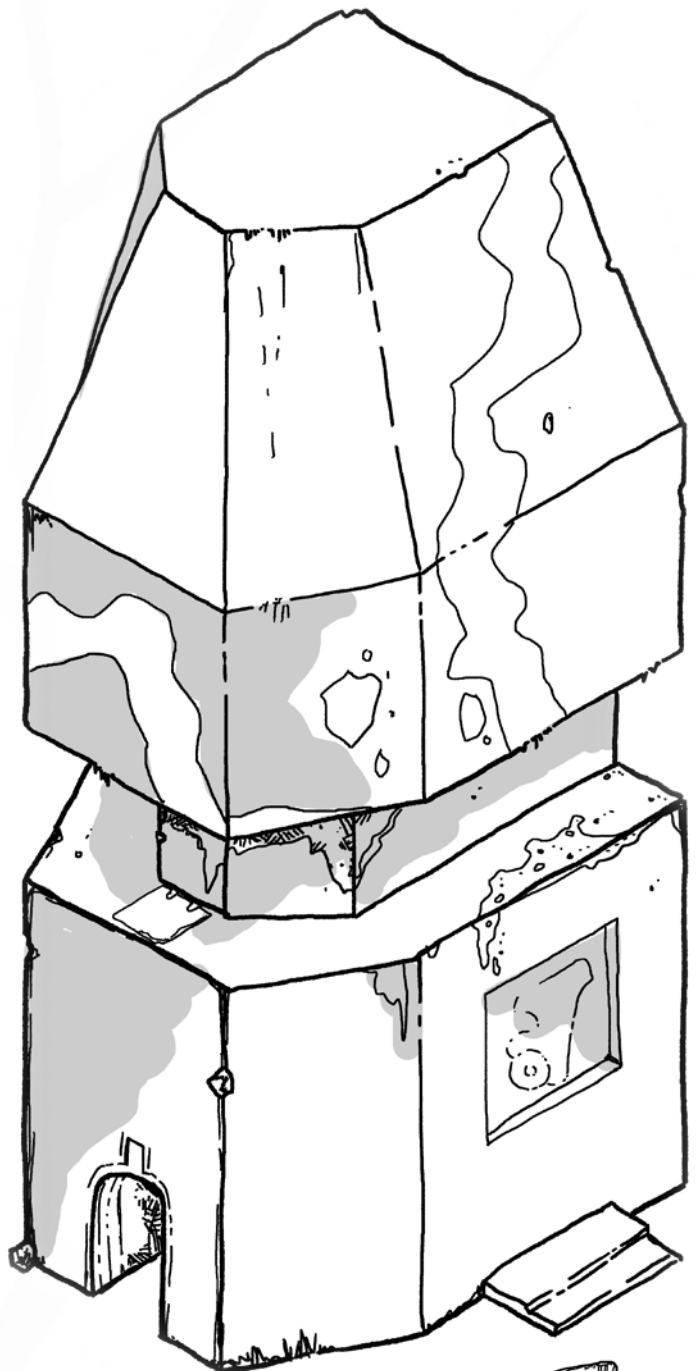
SECOND FLOOR

Two Medical beds in wall alcoves, automatic diagnosis projected on nearby wall displays. A spiral staircase leads to higher floors. The ladder leads to a trap-door access to the balcony.



FIRST FLOOR

Environmental controls in both alcoves. The sloped ramp to the second floor wraps around the Power Source which has failed (unless triples are rolled, see Module Condition).



MODULES

There are six Modules found in each particular Waypoint. However, each of the ancient towers is hundreds of years old. As long as they are in reasonable conditions to work or function properly, they can do any of the following:

1. MAPPING

Displays long-range geography information, nearby points of interest, and other Linked Waypoints.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL

Provides clean food, air, and water.

3. MEDICAL

Doubles normal healing rates, purges poisons and diseases, and heals severe injuries given time.

4. LINKING

PCs are scanned to register. Registering in other Waypoints links them.

5. CACHE

Pocket dimension for storing nonliving matter. Cached items may be accessed from any Linked Waypoints.

6. TRANSPORT

Teleport between Linked Waypoints.

GENERATION

TO KNOW THE condition of each Module, roll 6d6 and order the dice from highest to lowest. They correspond to each Module starting from Mapping and ending with Transport. The die assigned to each Module determines its condition.

To make conditions more likely to be better (or worse), roll additional dice and drop the lowest (or highest) results.

Don't forget to check for Doubles to see what has happened to the Waypoint during the intervening years. If there are no doubles, the Waypoint is fully sealed. (To unlock or open a sealed Waypoint makes for a great side-quest).

Finally, check for Triples to see what the Power Source has been replaced with. If there are no triples, the original Power Source has failed. In that case, no Modules are active (regardless of Condition) until the power source is repaired or replaced. Use the Rumors table below to come up with creative ideas to link a Waypoint and its surroundings.

MODULE CONDITION

1. Nearly destroyed, the repair shall be difficult and time-consuming.
2. Damaged, needs replacement parts and significant effort.
3. Nonfunctional, but relatively easy to repair with time.
4. Lightly damaged, only works at limited capacity until repaired.
5. Functioning but will require maintenance to stay that way.
6. Completely intact and working, albeit without the instructions manual.

DOUBLES

11. A group of ne'er-do-wells currently uses it as a hideout.
22. A large, and dangerous local predator uses it as a lair.
33. A family of mundane animals currently uses it as a den.
44. One random module has been jury-rigged in the past (+2 Condition).
55. One random module is missing (signs of removal).
66. One random module has been repurposed for a different function.

TRIPLES

111. Water-Wheel: Uses flowing water if nearby or a rainwater reservoir.
222. Magical Crystal: Nearly empty, needs replacement.
333. Hell Portal: Summons gremlins into a hamster wheel.
444. Crank: Provides power as long as someone is turning it.
555. Bio-engine: Strange organic mouth turns food into power.
666. Bottled Ghost: Causes nightmares while nearby.

RUMORS

1. "My momma has always told me to stay out of those places. She said that her dad went into one and never came back out! I miss my grandpa, though... Help me!"
2. "You saw the structure that surpasses the tree-tops did you not? I heard the ancients used those towers to commune with spirits and to send messages straight across the ocean! Can you imagine? I wonder if this is true..."
3. "Traveling archivist came through recently, wanted any stories we had about those weird towers. Said they were called Waypoints and had all sorts of incredible abilities. Although she was pretty deep into her cups at that point..."
4. "You know that new cartographer with the super-accurate maps? Greg saw her walking to that weird old tower on the ridge. She claimed it was a quiet place to work, but something tells me there is some other reason..."
5. "If you're exploring up in those mountains, keep an eye out for the shrine if you need shelter. Which god? No idea, but someone must have blessed it to keep fresh food and water appearing there night after night."
6. "Me ol' pop swears by sleeping in the beds in that tower after a crazy night on the town. Says he never gets a hangover the next day! I'mma try it next time me gets wasted!"

THE DEED TO THE MILL

Level 2

Rumor has it that a warlock lived there a long time ago. But now, all we see are giant rats!

Concerned Farmer

BACKGROUND LORE

“**THE CURSED WINDMILL**” they call it. The townsfolk believe that the old mill half a mile from the city is home of home to a witch, or a troll, or three faeries, depending on whom you ask. Only one thing is certain among the varied versions people tell: no one goes near the windmill.

Those who live closest to the mill know that the place is not what people say it is. It is not nearly as dangerous as the superstitious townsfolk would have outsiders believe. But it is not harmless either. For some reason, packs of enormous rats live in the tower. The rats guard the area against outsiders and sometimes make forays to nearby farms. These rats cause considerable damage to harvests and kill small livestock from time to time.

THE MILL'S PAST

THE WINDMILL WAS once the home of a warlock and his family. The mage was named Hardell. He devoted his life to the study of the arcane. In particular, he studied the art of transmutation of living creatures into different shapes and sizes. His experiments were considered immoral by most other mages; they caused insurmountable suffering to the subjects of his foul spells. Such experiments from 50 years ago fuel the stories about the old windmill today. Hardell abandoned the mill long ago but people refuse to explore the warlock's former home.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THE WINDMILL AND the land are valuable but the authorities would rather pass the giant rats problem to someone else. As payment for services offered to the city, the characters receive the deed to the warlock's former home. The characters can settle in the windmill as their base of operations afterward but they must clean it first.

FEATURES OF THE WINDMILL

The following features correspond to the cursed windmill map; areas 1 through 12.

Furniture. All objects within the mill and the adjoining house are protected from the passage of time by an abjuration spell. The ancient place remains as it was 50 years ago, when Hardell, the warlock, abandoned it.

Smells and Sounds. The stench of rat droppings and rot is present in all areas of the mill and the dungeon. The chirping sound of rats comes from below. In addition, the low-pitched sound of the machinery moving when the wind blows echoes throughout the tower.

Doors. Each door has a standard lock (DC 14 Thieves' Tools). The command word “*erandi*” unlocks all doors.

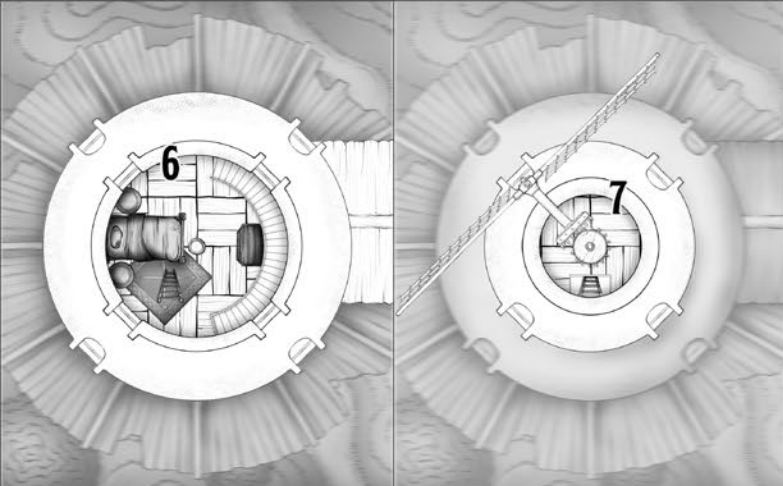
1. SURROUNDING AREA

Rolling grassy hills with sparse peach trees surround the old windmill. Its sharp profile against the horizon is a landmark impossible to miss. Rat burrows and narrow tunnels surround the mill. After dusk, the rats meander through the area; unthreatened by outsiders. A competent tracker finds the burrows and multiple sets of rat footprints marking the soil (DC 13 Survival).

The doors to areas 2 and 3 are inscribed with draconic runes that read “*Keep out! This is Hardell's home*”.

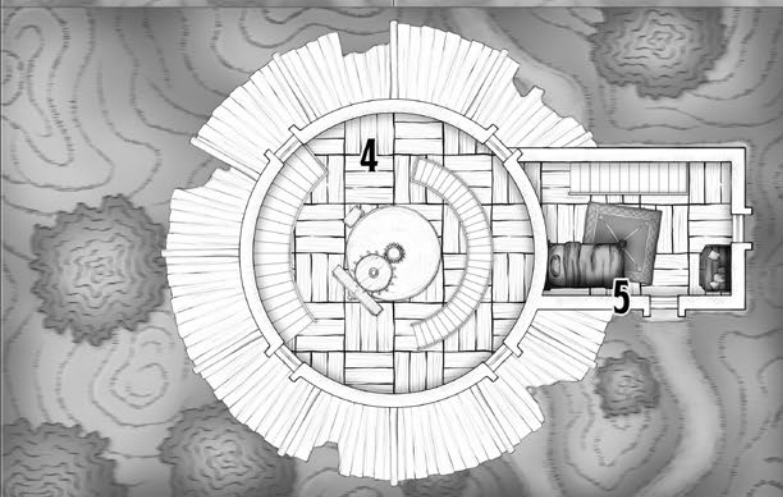
2. LANDING

Wooden crates, barrels, and a table with an assortment of implements and tools surround the windmill's center shaft. The shaft rotates slowly, proof that the machinery above works, despite the lack of maintenance. The wooden crates contain fresh food, enough for two weeks. The metal trapdoor by the south wall leads to a narrow ladder. It descends to the dungeon landing near area 8.



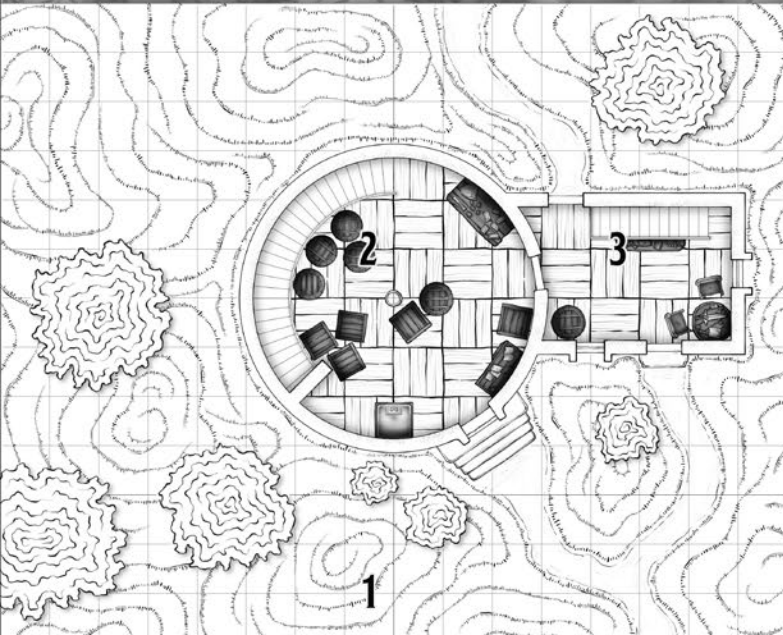
3. LIVING ROOM

The side house attached to the mill features a living room area. There are kids' toys and trinkets on the shelves and a small wooden table. Two clay horses are etched with the names of Hardell's children, Sarah and Daneel. It appears that whoever lived here abandoned the place in a hurry. Magic runes adorn the east wall. A *detect magic* spell reveals that the runes provide the abjuration magic that protects the windmill from the passage of time. Erasing them causes time to affect it normally.



4. MILL MACHINERY

The whole second story is devoted to the mill. A 10-foot-tall millstone is attached to cogs and wheels. They are in good condition and rotate slowly when the wind blows. Due to friction, a few parts of the machinery must be replaced so that the mill performs its function. Pouring grain into the contraption as it is now would not produce flour. The stones are too far apart to grind anything.

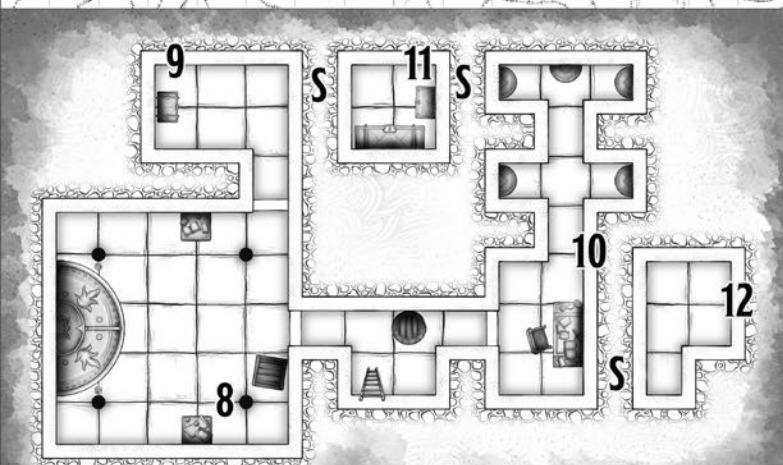


5. BEDROOM

The side-house bedroom contains a double bunk bed, a rug, and a wooden wardrobe. The room belonged to Hardell's children. There are several toys tucked under the bed. The wardrobe contains several clothing changes for teenagers, a small wooden chest, and a diary.

Sarah's Diary. The notebook reveals that Hardell and his two teenage children traveled west 50 years ago to visit an old friend on the other side of the ocean. Hardell's friend was an alchemist and he claimed in writing that he found a map to retrieve a powerful staff. The warlock decided to go meet him. They never returned.

Unruly Rodents. Three **giant rats** hide on the upper bunk bed. They jump on trespassers as soon as they enter the room. They flee if dropped to half their hit points.



6. HIGH BEDROOM

The warlock, Hardell, lived here. He only used the chamber for rest. The wardrobe contains three robes and a pair of leather boots. Hardell kept a backup spellbook in the wardrobe, it contains seven level 3 warlock spells.

The spellbook contains snippets of Hardell's research and a glimpse of the nature of his experiments. It mentions two objects: a powerful magical artifact that Hardell needed for his lifetime work, the *staff of flesh*, and a map to its remote location. Unfortunately, the map is not here. Hardell's portrait by the north wall depicts him as a tall, slim man with a black beard and an inquisitive gaze.

Treasure. Apart from the spellbook, there is a secret compartment within the wardrobe (DC 16 Perception). Pushing a small button opens it. It contains 90 gp, 80 sp, two *potions of healing*, and a *spell scroll of polymorph*.

7. MILL BLADES

The windmill blades slowly rotate and power the mechanical contraption. An observant person notices that the blades' lining is damaged and needs repairing. The mill should move half as fast if the blades are repaired.

Unwelcome. The highest part of the roof is home to an aggressive **swarm of bats**. The critters drop down to attack any trespassers until slain. This is their territory.

8. MAGIC CIRCLE

Hardell performed his experiments in this chamber. The granite magic circle by the west wall features dark red stains; blood from creatures that perished during his foul, arcane experiments. The one-foot tall magic circle doubles as a *teleportation circle*. A mage can copy the rune sequence to teleport back to the windmill later on.

Enhanced spellcasting. Spells cast while standing on the magic circle are considered one level higher.

The Rat Burrows. The rats are attracted to the arcane auras in this chamber. Dozens of burrows pierce the stone walls of the chamber. Two **swarms of rats** and four **giant rats** protect this chamber from trespassers.

9. FALSE VAULT

The chest features a poison gas trap. If opened, creatures within 10 feet of it take 4d6 poison damage (DC 16 Constitution save). The contraption can be disarmed by a mechanically oriented person (DC 14 Thieves' Tools).

Secret Door. A hidden lever on the wall can be pulled to reveal a dark, narrow passage to area 11.

10. UNDERGROUND STUDY

Hardell's research papers and magic scrolls are on the desk. They depict evil transmutation experiments meant to fuse different creatures and species. As recorded, Hardell was never fully successful. He coveted the *staff of flesh*; he believed the relic would allow him to achieve his goal of mastering a perfect forceful transmutation.

Secret Door. A hidden lever on the wall can be pulled to reveal a dark, narrow passage to area 12.

Treasure. A hidden compartment under the desk contains six vials of lethal poison (DC 10 Constitution).

11. SECRET VAULT

This secret chamber connects areas 9 and 10. The two stone chests are unlocked. It appears the mage meant to return one day; he left a bountiful hoard behind.

Treasure. The chests contain 2,100 gp, 4,200 sp, and the location of Hardell's alchemist friend. Daneel placed a silent *alarm* spell on the chest. He knows the characters have trespassed their home (see **Development**).

12. HIDING ROOM

This chamber is a secret hiding place meant to be used in emergencies. The secret door can be barred from within to prevent others from accessing the chamber. Shelves on the walls contain dried rations, enough for a week. A pocket on the north wall contains a leather pouch of material components and two *spell scrolls* of *teleportation circle*. An observant person notices that the room was not used by the past owners (DC 14 Perception).

DEVELOPMENT

THE CHARACTERS SHALL own the windmill but it is necessary to clean it from the rats and bats. The rat plague proves to be difficult to deal with. They return every five days to area 8 at least four times before they decide to look for a different home. After that, the windmill can be the characters' base of operations. The circle of teleportation in the dungeon shall be most useful to them.

Hardell left 50 years ago for the *staff of flesh*, it is unlikely he is still alive. His children, Sarah and Daneel, are now warlocks. Daneel knows from the *alarm* spell that someone has visited their home. The siblings shall return soon but that is an adventure for another day.



POISONED FAITH

Level 4

'Tis the right way of things. Step aside, leave this place. Otherwise, embrace the change.

Tainted Church-goer

BACKGROUND LORE

THE WORLD HOUSES a plethora of civilizations with varied cultures and traditions. Religions in particular go back centuries; their root beliefs are thousands of years old. But there are new faiths. Contemporary versions of long-dead religions return once more. Revolutionary thoughts strike the mind of an individual and kindle a spark of motivation to change the world's view.

Morally evil faiths and cults are born the same way. More often than not it is a demon or a devil's doing. They manifest in the material world and possess the body of an individual to exert their will while in disguise. However, these entities are sometimes able to influence weak-minded mortals remotely, from their plane of existence. Father Winfred and his faithful followers are an example of a cult created by a distant demon.

FATHER WINFRED AND THE CHURCH

THE COMMONFOLK KNOW Father Winfred. They admire the religious man who guides their hearts to salvation. His church is a 10-minute walk away from Redhills Town in a peaceful clearing. The local graveyard is there too.

THE EVIL WITHIN

FATHER WINFRED HAS a horrible past. He was a criminal. He committed many atrocities and wishes to atone for his sins. He decided to devote his life to the faith many years ago. At the same time, he buried his past deep within his mind and heart forever. Alas, he ignores that an otherworldly demonic entity has contacted him. The demon named Blagg'zur felt attracted by the poor man's past and poisoned his heart with horrible thoughts of domination, cruelty, and power. The reformed Father Winfred could not help succumbing to his darkest self.

A NEW RELIGION

WITH FATHER WINFRED under its power, Blagg'zur became a master of puppets from afar. With his foul magic tricks and lies, the religious leader of Redhills Town and many other smaller communities duped dozens of people and turned them into angry cultists. They became the Pilgrims of the Abyss, a deluded cult. What's worse, is that the demon accumulates power through Winfred's actions. The altar of his church is now a cradle of filth; an otherworldly cocoon of meat clinging from thin tendrils beats like a heart. Blagg'zur shall come to the Material Plane unless someone stops this new faith.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THE CHARACTERS MAY know Father Winfred and people from Redhills Town. They receive a letter claiming that church-goers have been acting strange. Otherwise, they stumble upon the church and the Pilgrims of the Abyss on their many travels. They shall be converted too.

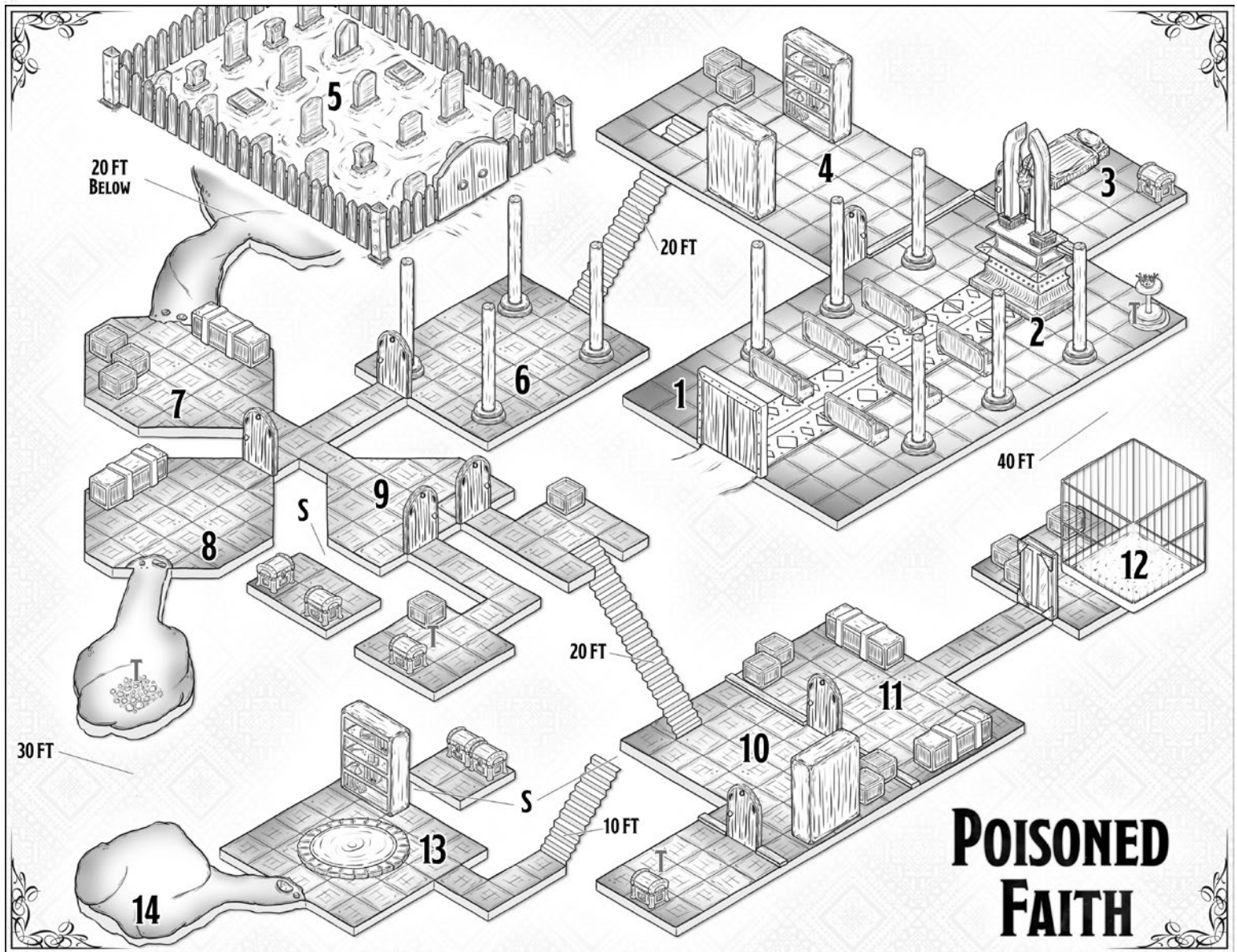
FEATURES OF THE DUNGEON

The following features correspond to the church and the dungeon below; areas 1 through 14.

Smells and Sounds. The Pilgrims of the Abyss do not care much about their hygiene or cleaning chores. The church is filthy and smells of urine and putrefaction.

Anti-divine Aura. The demon's cocoon in area 2 fills the church nave and the dungeon below it. Divine spells take twice as long to be cast (DC 12 Constitution).

Demon's Blood. The cult's initiation requires drinking the blood that pours from the cocoon. The tainted liquid turned simple farmers and peasants into evil cultist murderers. They are the demon's pawns now.



1. CHURCH NAVE

The central rug that covers the entire hall is dirty and stained. Two rows of benches, flanked by six identical columns, lay before a tall stone altar.

The characters find Father Winfred's church a 10-minute walk from Redhills Town. Farmers and people in general from nearby towns and small hamlets claim foul things occur at the church. They'd rather avoid it.

The church is in poor condition. It has been months since proper cleaning duties were performed. This is where Father Winfred performs foul rituals of initiation. Corrupted followers observe as innocent people drink the demonic liquid that poisons their hearts and minds.

Tainted Folks. A group of focused followers contemplates the altar by the end of the church's nave. Four **cultists** and six **bandits** stand up and attack intruders at the first sign of danger. These people are beyond verbal reasoning. They fight until slain or incapacitated.

2. DEMONIC COCOON

A mound of flesh and pulsing matter hangs from fine threads of pale skin. It causes a nauseating feeling of uneasiness and despair with each beat.

The demon's cocoon feeds from the life force of all his followers, including Father Winfred. At this rate, Blagg'zur shall set foot on this plane in a matter of days. Destroying the cocoon is no easy task (see **Conclusion**).

Trap. Interacting with the silver crown triggers a pressure-sensitive plate. Creatures fall 40 ft. to area 12.

3. FATHER WINFRED'S QUARTERS

If the characters search the place, they find Winfred's diary under the smelly linens (DC 17 Investigation). The last comprehensible pages talk about a dark, deep voice resounding in his head in his sleep. It issued foul orders.

Treasure. The wooden chest in this bedroom contains 250 gp, a silver holy symbol, and two flasks of holy water.

4. CHURCH LIBRARY

Two shelves filled with religious tomes and books hug the walls of this chamber. Empty spaces on the walls show where holy symbols were removed.

Helped by the demon's power, Winfred performs feats of necromancy. He desecrated the graves of many people to create undead guardians. These poor souls came back from the realm of the dead full of hatred and grudge. Four **skeletons** and four **zombies** attack intruders here.

Lore. Most of the books on the shelves are worthless history tomes or popular literary books. If the characters search the place thoroughly, they find 180 gp and one random arcane *spell scroll* (DC 16 Investigation).

5. GRAVEYARD

Bones on the ground surround several rows of graves. Their varied shapes pierce the hard, cold soil. Some of their epitaphs are eroded, illegible.

Father Winfred made use of the corpses in here to strengthen his numbers. The graveyard connects to area 7 from below, where the dead are buried. This allows Winfred to keep guards within his hideout unseen.

Undead. If the characters approach the graveyard from the surface, four **ghouls** and two **ghasts** raise from their graves and attack them. The six undead guardians also protect area 7 as long as the characters did not dispose of them previously. They chase intruders until slain.

6. DUNGEON LANDING

The stone pillars by the corners of this chamber feature carvings of arcane runes. An observant spellcaster notices they are proof of necromancy (DC 13 Arcana).

Father Winfred performed a blood ritual to bind four undead guardians here and ambush intruders. Two **shadows** and two **specters** coalesce from thin air and attack simultaneously when a creature approaches the center of this area. They chase enemies until slain.

7. WEST WING

The narrow tunnel by the end of the chamber leads to a cavern. Befouled wails come from the dark.

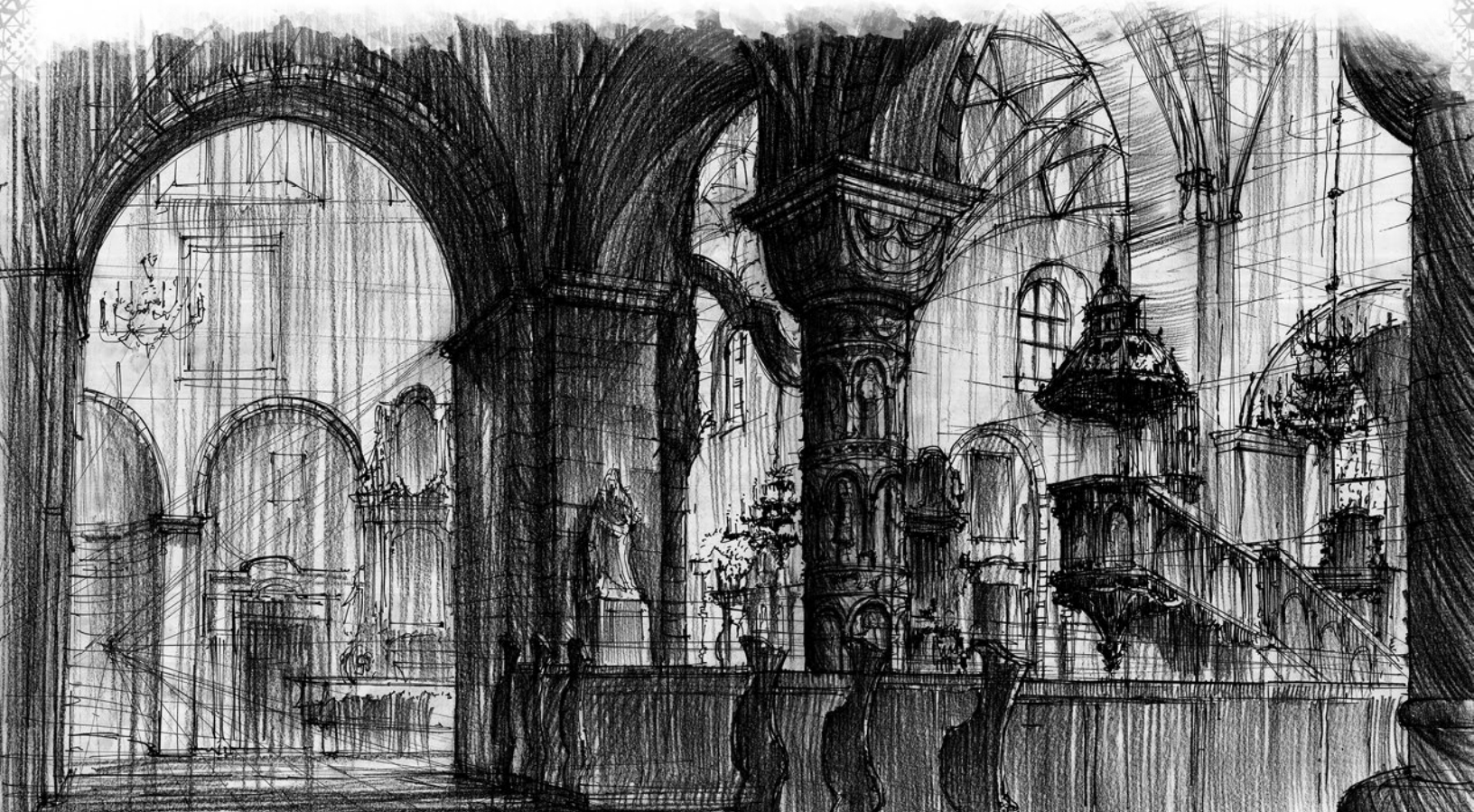
This chamber connects to a cave below the graveyard. Father Winfred has direct access to corpses. The demon's magic allows him to create soldiers from them.

Undead. If the characters did not disturb the dead in the graveyard, the four **ghouls** and two **ghasts** hide in the dark cave. They attack living creatures foreign to the Pilgrims of the Abyss cult that approach.

8. SOUTH WING

The door to this chamber is locked. There is nothing of value here. It connects to a small cave. Two **swarms of bats** live here. They hide if reduced to half their hit points and they do not chase creatures outside.

Trap. The cave's floor is unstable. A 30-foot-deep tunnel sucks creatures that step into the middle of the room.



9. EAST WING

Several bloodstained tunics and robes hang from the walls of this room. One of the two wooden doors at the end of this area leads to a fake chest (see below).

Treasure. An observant character finds a pushable brick that slides a section of the wall inwards (DC 15 Perception). The chests within contain 1,250 gp, 500 gp worth of silverware, and three *potions of healing*.

Trap. Darts deal 4d6 poison damage to anyone who opens the booby-trapped chest (DC 14 Constitution).

10. BOTTOM LIBRARY

Four **thugs** and six **cultists** guard this place and viciously attack intruders. They are charged with protecting the live subjects being held in area 12; they are prospects for a dark ritual that shall advance Blagg'zur's plans.

Lore. Upon searching this place, the characters find books and scrolls that talk about dark rituals and necromancy. These papers and documents seem to have been recently written by the same individual and in a rushed, imprecise manner (DC 15 Investigation). It is indeed Father Winfred's handwriting. The demon wrote everything through the poor mortal man's eyes.

Secret Area. A perceptive character notices a lever behind the shelf. A section of the wall moves upward to reveal a secret passageway to area 13 (DC 15 Perception).

Trap. Darts deal 4d6 poison damage to anyone who opens the booby-trapped chest (DC 14 Constitution).

11. LARDER

There are several wooden boxes and containers in this chamber. Father Winfred has wasted all food, wine, and dried meats stored in this room. The cultists ate it all.

Treasure. The characters find expensive salt and spices if they take a moment to search the piles of spoiled food and empty wooden crates (DC 14 Investigation).

12. HOLDING CELL

Beyond the reinforced door, the sad faces of several people see through the bars of their cage. A few strong enough attempt to speak with faint voices.

A reinforced door protects this chamber. Only an expert locksmith can bypass it (DC 18 Thieves' Tools).

Cage. Creatures that trigger the trap in area 2 take 4d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall. There are eight people trapped in here. Only a few of them are strong enough to stand or speak. The cultists imprisoned them when they refused to join the Pilgrims of the Abyss.

13. MAGIC CIRCLE

Father Winfred (**cult fanatic**) is here. Two **thugs** and three **cultists** protect him. The fallen priest won't allow intruders to stop his plans. He fights until slain.

Demonic Circle. Father Winfred's spells are considered one level higher when he stands on the circle. This benefit is granted only to the person attuned to the circle.

Secret Area. An observant person notices the marks on the floor that show the shelf has been dragged before. (DC 15 Perception). The chests in here contain 2,400 gp, a *+1 longsword*, and five random arcane *spell scrolls*.

14. CAVE

Creatures that fall from area 8 land here and take 3d6 bludgeoning damage. If this occurs, Father Winfred approaches and casts *hold person* on the target to slit their throat before the others arrive to help.

DEVELOPMENT

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

THE FAITHFUL ARE SAVED

THE CHARACTERS SUCCEED in destroying the demon's cocoon and therefore the corruption within Father Winfred. They were mindful not to use brutal force on innocent people and saved the prisoners in area 12. Without the demon's presence in the church, all people go back to normal but remain sick for one week (two levels of exhaustion). The characters are proclaimed heroes and saviors in Redhills Town and the region.

The Cocoon. The demon's chrysalis has 35 hit points and an AC of 15. It is resistant to cold, fire, and lightning damage; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. The cocoon loses all resistances if Father Winfred dies (see below). If the characters attack the cocoon in area 2, the demon teleports Winfred and his guards in area 13 within 30 feet of it.

A HORRIBLE MASSACRE

THE CHARACTERS DETERMINE Father Winfred and his followers are a threat to others and eliminate them. They save the prisoners in area 12 but kill every single Pilgrim of the Abyss in the process. The characters are branded murderers, not heroes, and the angered people of Redhills Town put a hefty bounty for their heads.

The characters' disregard for life does not go unnoticed by Blagg'zur, who despite being defeated in this realm, remains strong and healthy in the Abyss. The characters' hearts are better candidates for gullible pawns...

PATRON'S FATE

A Tavern game of chance by Mark Q Anderson

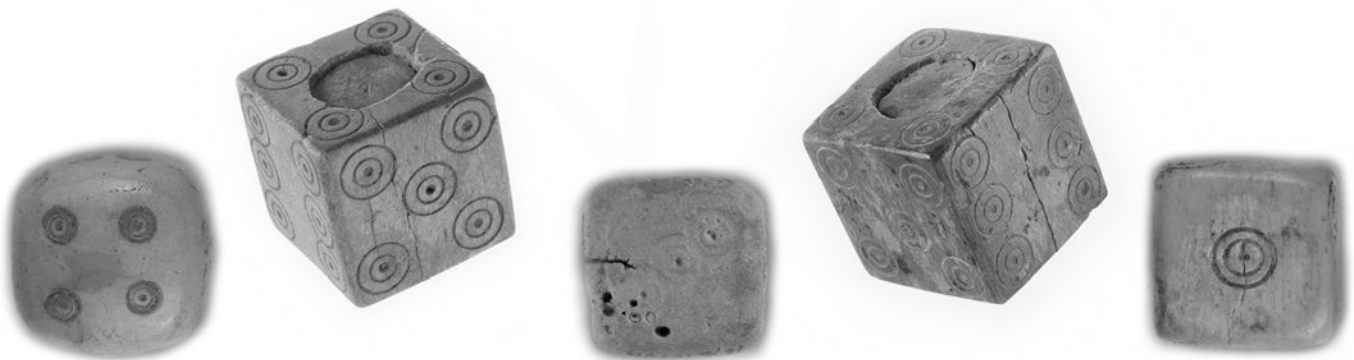
Sweat builds up in Damaran's fist and the dice stick to his palm as he rattles them for good luck. The bone-carved stones click and clack against each other with a familiar sound.

"Guide my hand, oh Bornless One," Damaran thinks to himself in hopeful prayer to his patron, *"you've guided me thus far, and it's my last gold piece."* The crowd of warlocks stands over the crouched man in the alley. His arcane focus burns in his pocket as if to respond to his wish for a successful roll. The sly goblin in charge of the dice game, referred to as a Cutter, grins as he stares at the various stacks of coin spread across the leather rolled out on the cobblestone.

"No time like the present, outsider. Cast the dice!" the Cutter exclaims as Damaran releases the blood-stained white dice, and the crowd of spectators holds their breath. The numbered stones roll against the leather, bounce off stacked bets of the Layers, and spin toward a single gold coin laid over the number 20 painted on the brown hide. A quiet clang of bone on gold sings as the die shows its face, the number 10. Damaran smiles with a sigh of relief.

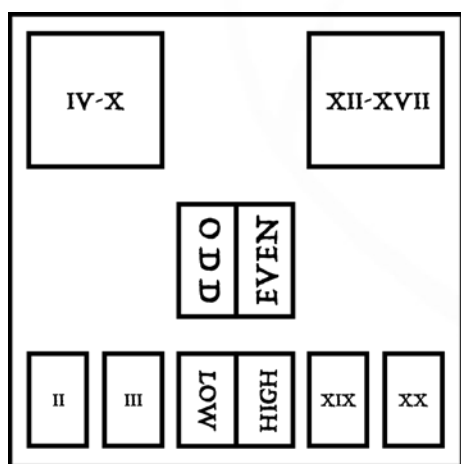
"He gon' get dem dubs and make twice that gold, he will!" Shouts an orc through snaggle tusks. The second die finds its resting place near the copper coins laid over the painted words *"Odd"*; bets wagered by spectators hoping for an odd result. The crowd hushes briefly as they focus on the number staring back at them, and the Cutter peers suspiciously down at the two dice – twin tens reflecting one another.

"Looks like you owe your Patron a favor, outsider," The goblin grunts as he digs another gold coin out of his purse to match the one laying on the game hide. *"That's the game, ya fiends! Now which one of you winning warlocks is gonna buy an old Cutter a drink?!"*



PATRON'S FATE IS a common game of chance popular among warlocks. The game is simple enough to be enjoyed by both beggars and royals alike. All one needs is two ten-sided dice and anyone daring enough to wager a bet. One risks losing their purse or turning their copper to gold in a short time. The rules are pretty straightforward, with some technical variations on the betting structure, depending on who runs the game.

The "Shooter" is the player throwing the dice. These dice are commonly made of carved bone, wood, or stone marked with numbers in any language. The spectators place bets based on the roll results. They are known as "Layers." Shooters and Layers throw their bets down and put their fate in the dice. The results are counted and cashed by the Cutter, who sets up and runs the game.



The "Cutter" is the most important person in a Patron's Fate game as they are in charge of organizing the game itself. They are in charge of collecting bets, calling the dice results, and paying out winners or taking from losers. Cutters often have specially made wooden dice trays or hide rolling mats. They serve as a surface to roll dice and place coins. Painted on the surface are square boxes with numbers displaying the bets available to the players. Before the Shooter rolls, everyone places their coin on the corresponding squares to signify their wager for the current toss. The Shooter rolls the bone dice and the Cutter calls the results: winners win, losers lose, and the bets keep going until the night is through.

It is somewhat common for Cutters to offer out weighted dice or have an uneven rolling surface to gain an advantage. Thus rigging the game to make losers out of as many Layers as possible. Hired muscle often accompanies a Cutter to assist in... "crowd control," helping with unruly losers, the occasional cheater, and any would-be thieves. This is why the Gilded Gallery alehouse is a great place to find looming Cutters looking to hire anyone willing to help secure their Patron's Fate game.

BASIC RULES

- The Cutter provides two ten-sided dice (2D10) and assigns a rolling surface
- Collection of buy-in from Shooters and Layers
- Shooter buy-in: 2 silver
- Layer buy-in: 1 silver
- The Shooter and all Layers place their bets as speculation to the results of the roll
- The Shooter throws the dice on the assigned rolling surface (dice tray, rolling hide, table, etc.)
- The results are called out by the Cutter, the results are laid out on the rolling surface. Add both dice to get the result and compare with the table below
- Shooters are traded when the Shooter chooses, if they run out of coin, or if the Cutter kicks them out
- Shooter and Layer bets are paid out between rolls

WAGER LAYOUT

- **Big Spender:** Dice land on 12-18. With no doubles, 1:1 payout in copper. With doubles, 1:1 payout in silver
- **Small Fry:** Dice land on 4-10. With no doubles, 1:1 payout in copper. With doubles, 1:1 payout in silver
- **Odd:** Dice land on an odd number; 1:1 payout in copper
- **Even:** Dice land on an even number; 1:1 payout in copper
- **Low:** Dice land on 2 or 3; 1:2 payout in gold; Specific number bets payout 1:3
- **High:** Dice land on 19 or 20; 1:3 payout in gold; Specific number bets payout 1:4

The standard layout of a Patron's Fate rolling surface displays betting options (see image).

DESERT DRAGON LAIR

Level 7

The dunes belong to me. All creatures in my territory shall pay tribute to me or else!

Kieldrith, the Dragon

BACKGROUND LORE

THOSE WHO LIVE by the Northern Desert are rugged folk who are accustomed to harsh lives and even harsher rulers. In such regions, the peasantry knows that there is no alternative to a life of hard work and submissions to those above one's station. Alas, the toughest of rulers has claimed the desert as its home: a blue dragon.

THE DRACONIC OVERLORD

TWO YEARS AGO, a juvenile blue dragon named Kieldrith left its infancy home in the Bloodstained Mountains and settled in the Northern Desert. Kieldrith found an old human temple in the depths of the desert. The half-submerged compound was connected to a network of slithering caverns where a tribe of kobolds lived. The kobolds pledged their loyalty to Kieldrith at once, fearing the dragon's retaliation should they refuse to obey her.

Since then, Kieldrith has expanded her territory and influence in the desert and the human settlements that surround it. The blue dragon escorts a group of kobold envoys who deliver terms of surrender to a town or hamlet. Kieldrith has avoided all confrontations. She flies over the town or hamlet and breathes lightning over their heads to show off her power. The settlement leaders surrender at such display and agree to pay the kobolds a monthly tribute to ensure the safety of their townsfolk.

Four months ago, Kieldrith and her kobolds played the same game with the capital city of Goldenspear which is a few miles away from the Northern Desert. The city tried to resist by attacking Kieldrith with wall-mounted scorpions. It was an utter failure. The blue dragon destroyed the siege weapons and vaporized parts of the outer wall. As a punishment for their disrespect, Kieldrith imposed a steep tribute to the capital.

RESOURCES RUNNING LOW

THE UNFAIR TRIBUTE that the city must pay to keep Kieldrith at bay is unsustainable. The city coffers and the grain silos empty at a rate that shall leave the city in ruins before long. The city officials sent a party of negotiators to Kieldrith's lair to convince the dragon of easing their tribute or else the city would collapse into civil war. Half the negotiators survived. Their cracked voices explained that the dragon overlord ate the rest of them.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THE CAPITAL CITY, Goldenspear, offers a sizable reward of 5,000 gold pieces to brave adventurers who manage to put a stop to Kieldrith's reign of terror in the Northern Desert. The city stopped paying tribute to the dragon's kobold lackeys two weeks ago. They are sure to retaliate soon. Other adventuring parties have failed to achieve this quest. The characters are the city's only hope.

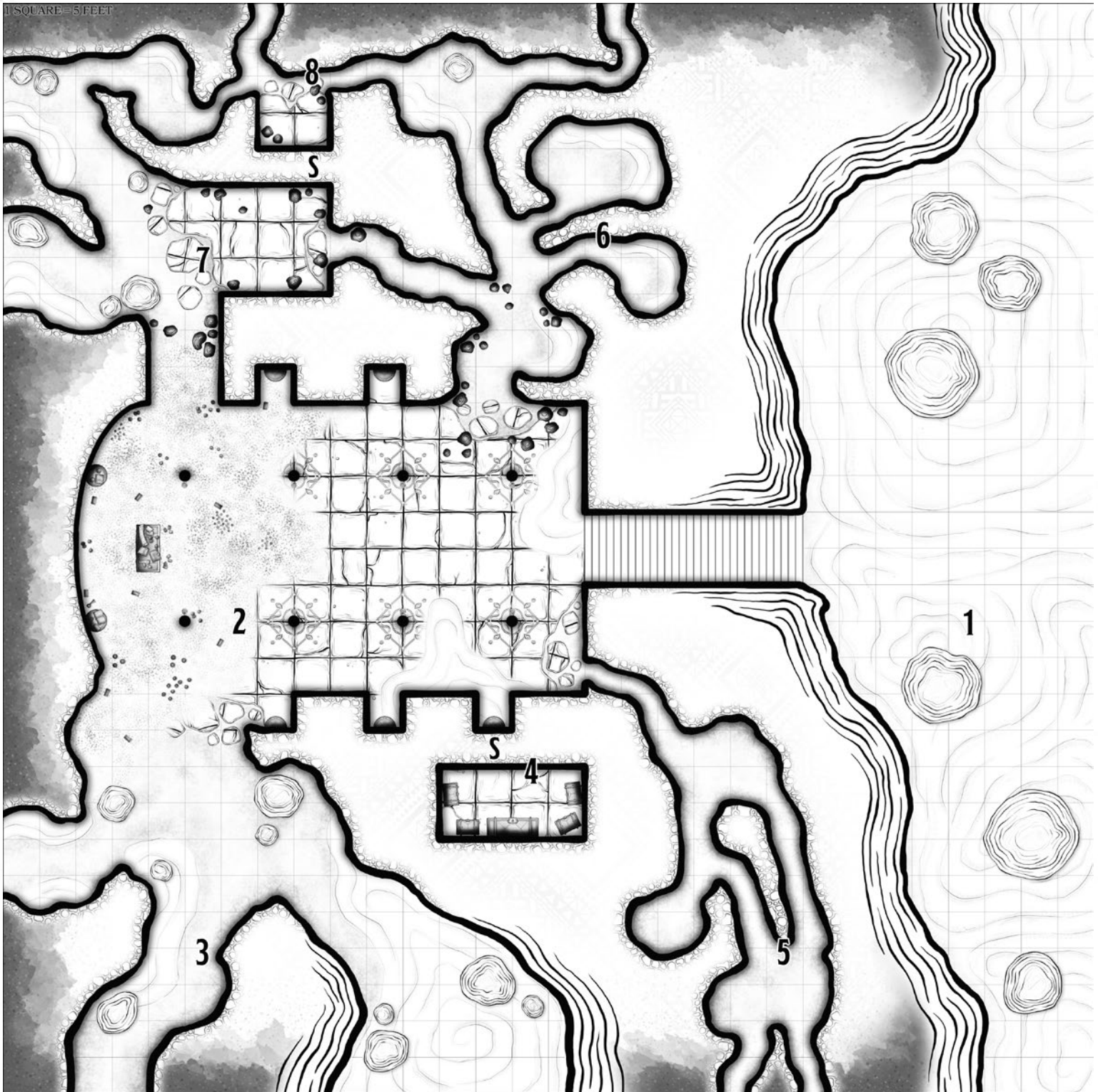
FEATURES OF THE LAIR

The following features correspond to Kieldrith's lair in the desert; areas 1 through 8.

Temperature. The weather in the Northern Desert is dry and hot enough to require clothing appropriate to the region. Characters in plate armor or without the correct attire for hot weather acquire one level of exhaustion.

Smells and Sounds. The stench from the kobolds' filth and detritus is evident in any part of the dungeon. A competent tracker identifies the droppings (DC 14 Survival).

Structure. The thousand-year-old temple maintains a stoic rebellion against the harsh wind of the Northern Desert. The underground temple complex is in a severe state of erosion and disrepair but it is stable.



1. THE DESERT SHRINE

After a one-day journey through the inclement desert, the dunes give way to a descending stone staircase. Large dragon footprints lead in and out of it.

The characters find Kieldrith's lair in the desert and can approach the exploration as they see fit. If the characters take spend an hour to explore the area, they find an alternate entrance to the underground chamber between the rocky crags in area 3 (DC 14 Investigation).

The compound is buried under the dunes. The eroded stairs lead down into the dragon's lair. Intricate runes and hieroglyphs decorate the walls. They are a testament that humans built this structure centuries ago. A scholar knows that the construction was made by humans at least 1,000 years ago (DC 16 History).

Loyal Guards. A band of ten **kobolds** guards the main entrance to Kieldrith's lair at all times. If the characters ask politely to speak with the dragoness, the kobolds oblige and let them descend to area 2. The kobolds giggle mischievously while the characters descend.

2. KIELDRITH'S LAIR

Eight carved pillars lead the way to a grandiose chamber with a 40-foot-tall domed ceiling. An enormous pile of gold coins, gems, and treasure litters the far end of the large nave-like chamber.

The dragoness, Kieldrith awaits the characters lying on her treasure hoard. She is arrogant and self-confident enough to receive all visitors and have them here near her treasure trove. She intends to eat half the adventuring party and let the rest of them return to Golden-spear to send a message; just like she did with past envoys. If a character proves to be a fun person in conversation, Kieldrith might choose to keep them alive as a buffoon.

Draconic Rage. In combat, Kieldrith (**young blue dragon**) fights alongside her loyal **kobolds**. There are four kobolds with the dragon, including Farken (see area 7); more come from area 6 in waves of 2 every other round. The dragon flees if reduced to a quarter of its hit points. If Kieldrith is defeated, all kobolds flee.

Treasure. The hoard contains 7,000 gp, 21,000 sp, eight platinum ingots (200 gp each), a collection of antique books (30 gp total), a deed to a tower in Golden-spear, a bone chalice (40 gp), a mithral chainmail, and an assortment of seven random level 4 arcane *spell scrolls*.

3. ALTERNATE ENTRANCE

Two tunnels lead down into uncharted depths. The third one leads to an entrance in between the rocky crags in the desert. The sands burn in the sunlight.

If the characters reach area 2 from here and attempt to make a silent approach, they may find Kieldrith sleeping on her gold coin hoard (DC 16 Stealth). A geologist determines that these tunnels are a recent addition. They were most likely dug by the blue dragon herself as a means to enter and exit her lair. (DC 15 Arcana).

4. SECRET VAULT

Four stone chests and a large stone coffer stand in the dark room in stoic patience; oblivious to the dragon and the kobolds' presence for centuries.

Despite Kieldrith's two-year-long presence in the dilapidated temple, neither she nor the kobolds found this vault. Its contents reveal that the place was devoted to the worship of the Lord of Suns, a human deity.

Treasure. The vault contains 7,400 sp, twenty silver chalices (40 gp each), a set of silver quills (100gp), a *spell scroll of polymorph*, a *spell scroll of locate object*, a *spell scroll of suggestion*, and two *potions of superior healing*.

5. VERMIN WARRENS

Slithering tunnels meander through the hard rocky ground. A multitude of 6-inch-wide tunnels pierces the walls and floor; evidence of burrowing critters.

A large community of rodent-like critters lives in these caverns. They hunt in the area and steal food from the kobolds and the dragon. The kobolds avoid the area because the rats are ferocious enough to pose a threat to them. The rats fear Kieldrith but the dragon cannot access these tunnels due to her large size.

Territorial Vermin. Four **swarms of rats** attack any trespassers and steal food from their bags, if any.

6. KOBOLD QUARTERS

The pungent stench of reptilian filth permeates these caves. The sickening smell is strong enough to make the strongest stomachs hesitate.

The kobolds sleep on the sand and have little to no possessions; they have surrendered all they had to Kieldrith. More than half the tribe consists of non-combatants and young offspring. In case of attack, these kobolds flee with as many eggs and younglings as they can carry.

Kobolds Galore. Sixteen **kobolds** defend their caves ferociously. They flee if the Kieldrith is defeated, though.



7. THE BROKEN CHAMBER

The chamber contains a single straw bed and piles of scrolls and pieces of scribed parchment.

Kieldrith's taught some magic tricks to her favorite kobold, Farken. Farken is a level 3 wizard who carries his thick spellbook wherever he goes. The other kobolds consider him their leader. After Kieldrith, of course. Farken aids the blue dragon defend the lair in area 2 or helps the rest of the kobolds fight in area 6.

8. COLLAPSED VAULT

The broken remains of stone coffers litter the room.

The kobolds emptied this vault from its valuable contents and left several of their red-hued eggs incubating on a stray bed. Some eggs have hatched.

This was once a secret chamber similar to the one in area 4. The walls caved in ages ago and all the treasure from this room fell into the kobolds' possession. They surrendered it to Kieldrith two years ago. The room is now a hatchery with a permanent burning fire and at least ten or twelve eggs. Broken eggshells litter the floor.

DEVELOPMENT

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

KIELDRITH SUCCEEDS

THE CHARACTERS ARE defeated in combat. Kieldrith chooses the quirkiest one to keep as a buffoon. Half the party is devoured and the rest are sent back to Golden-spear to tell the authorities the following: "*Try me once more and I shall lay waste to your beloved city*".

KIELDRITH IS DEFEATED

THE CHARACTERS ACHIEVE victory. Kieldrith is either dead or she has been driven off the Northern Desert. The authorities are true to their word and pay the characters the 5,000 gp reward. They agree to let the characters keep half the treasure hoard retrieved from Kieldrith's lair. The remaining half shall serve the city refill its coffers and make sure that the peasants are taken care of in the following times of need. Should Kieldrith survive, she flies away and holds a deep grudge. She shall return one day to take revenge against the city of Golden-spear and the characters. That is an adventure for another day.



MYSTERY BY THE LAKE

Level 2

My cousin is missing! If you ask me, that fisherman by the lake is most suspicious.

Concerned Farmer

BACKGROUND LORE

THE SPARK OF evil lives anywhere, even in the least likely of places. Appalling events can trigger an individual's darkest instincts or break a goodhearted soul. Life is cruel and hard; the purest warriors of light admit that evildoers and criminals have it easy. It is always harder to protect the weak and fight for what is right.

THE LONELY FISHERMAN

THE HOUSE BESIDE Silvermoon Lake belongs to a solitary individual. People call him many names: "the fisherman", "the fish" for he never speaks, or simply "the old man". His real name is Phaendar Naeven. He is, in fact, a 25-year-old elf. However, his hair and beard are so long and entangled they cover his pointy ears completely. He smells of fish and filth which drives people away.

A DARK PAST

NOBODY KNOWS WHAT happened to "the fisherman" to become what he is. 17 years ago, Phaendar's tribe was attacked by rabid orcs and goblins. He lost his parents that day and for years the poor orphan elf roamed towns, dangerous roads, and farms to survive. When he turned 12, an old fisherman named Barry took care of him for longer than any other who ever helped. Phaendar learned to fish and hunt. He wouldn't have to fight for food or suffer cold nights anymore. He felt safe for once.

However, not everything was perfect between Barry and his adoptive son. Phaendar felt pleasure at killing fish and other animals, up to the point of torturing the poor beasts. Barry made efforts to correct this behavior through the years but it only got worse as Phaendar grew older. When he turned 22, Barry tried to stop him from beheading a fox pup with an axe. Barry died that day.

THE PRESENT DAY

KILLING THE MAN who took care of him after he suffered so much was the point of no return. Phaendar's soul and heart became dark and rotten. Phaendar roamed the land for a couple of years. He hunted, he pick-pocketed, then he robbed others and amassed wealth. With enough gold, he procured a house by Silvermoon Lake that once was a small military outpost with an underground level.

He settled there after two years in the wild. Phaendar didn't care, though. He kept his tangled hair and unwashed looks even after six months of living in a house. He even delved into the dark arts of necromancy and warlock sorcery. Phaendar fishes, he comes and goes, but he speaks with no one. People call him many unsavory names. Alas, they all ignore the old fisherman is the one responsible for the recent wave of disappearances.

ADVENTURE HOOK

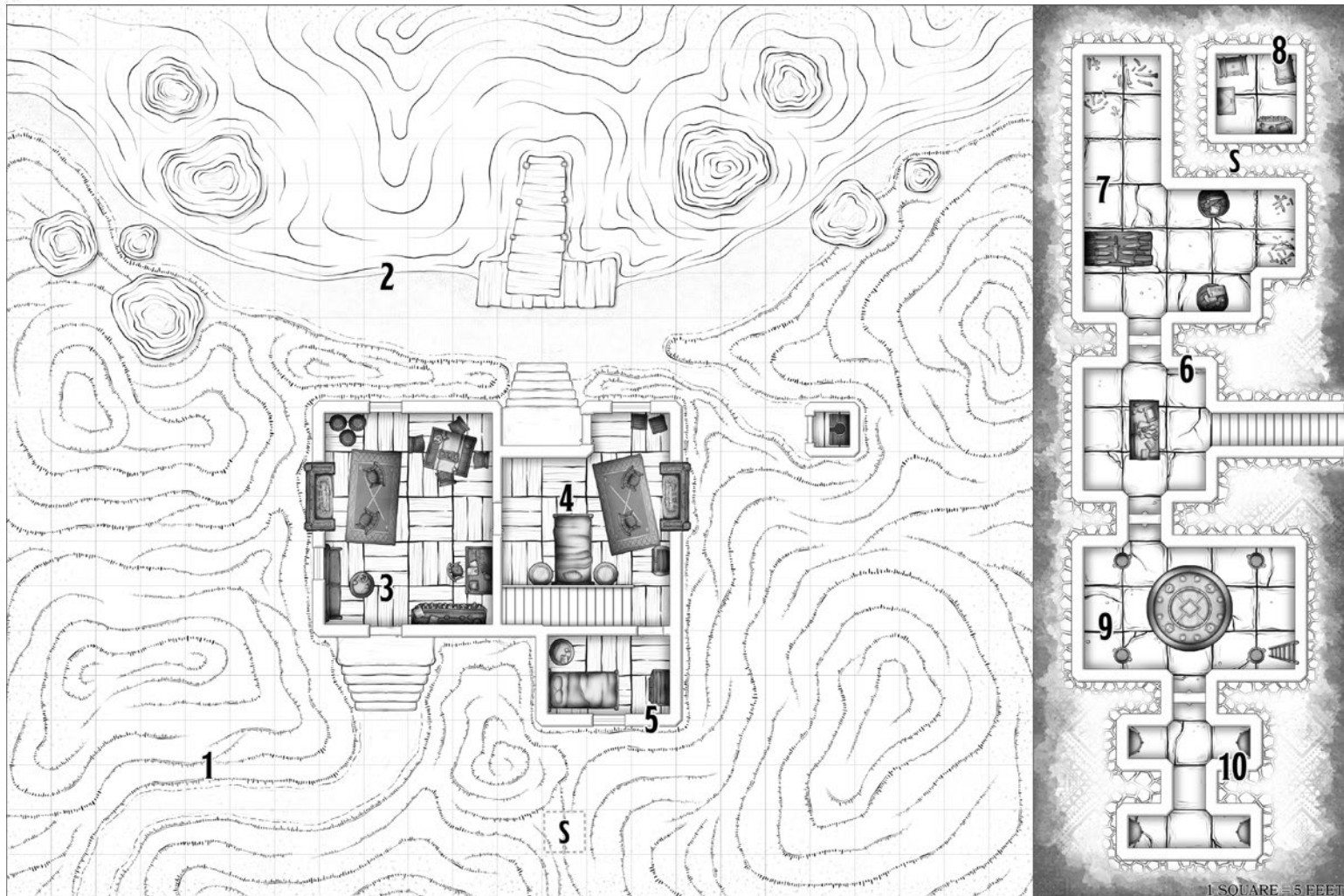
MANY PEOPLE HAVE gone lost near Silvermoon Lake for the past few months. No one has proof of anything but all fingers point to the suspicious old man who moved to the former military outpost half a year ago. The characters are hired to investigate and find clues.

FEATURES OF THE HOUSE BY THE LAKE

The following features correspond to the house by the lake and the dungeon below; areas 1 through 10.

Dark Powers. A *detect magic* spell perceives the strong necromantic energy from the magic circle in area 9 from a distance of 300 feet and across obstacles.

Screams for Help. The characters hear the calls for help from the prisoners in area 7 if they approach the grass-covered trapdoor above (DC 15 Perception).



1. ROAD

The grassy hills make way for the deviation in the main road which eventually ends at the porch of a small house by the shore of Silvermoon Lake.

No sound comes from the house. No lights are on. If the characters walk around the area, they find the grass-covered trapdoor that leads to area 9 (DC 12 Perception).

2. BEACH SHORE

A moth-eaten, pathetic pier barely remains afloat by the shore. There are no ropes or boat moorings.

3. LIVING ROOM

The dining room has a hearth, several chairs, a desk, and a bookshelf. The food on the table looks fresh and the burnt wood is recent. Everything looks worn and uncared for. A thick layer of dust covers every surface of the house. If the characters search the place, they find a blood-stained booklet with names of people and specific dates written beside them (DC 12 Investigation).

Treasure. A knowledgeable character recognizes titles in the book collection that are valuable to the right collector (DC 14 History). The book lot is worth 1,000 gp.

4. MAIN BEDROOM

The single bed and its linens reek. Hair tufts, nails clippings, and human filth stain the floor. Burned morsels of spoiled meat decompose in the hearth.

Phaendar never cleans. Everything in the room is filthy and covered in spider webs. A perceptive character notices marks on the stairs that descend to area 6. People were dragged against their will (DC 13 Investigation).

Distant Screams. The people trapped in area 7 scream for help every few minutes. A keen-eared person discerns the heart-wrenching sound (DC 14 Perception).

Treasure. If the characters search the room, they notice that the wooden chest has a secret compartment (DC 14 Investigation); there are 350 gp stored inside.

5. BEDROOM

The house has a secondary bedroom that Phaendar has never used. The furniture here is in better condition. The bed and wooden shelf are moth-eaten but still usable.

Treasure. Phaendar barely checked this room when he bought the house. He never found the *+1 dagger* forgotten by the soldiers in the military outpost years ago.

6. DUNGEON LANDING

The set of stairs descend to a dark area. Voices of scared people come from the door to the north.

The iron table in the middle of this room displays iron and stone torture implements along with other bloodstained rusty tools. Phaendar used them all before.

7. CELLS

Bloodstained torture implements rest on the tables. Scared faces see through the cells' rusty iron bars.

There are six people and two corpses in the cells. They are afraid of Phaendar coming back and torturing another poor person. They weep and cry when they see the characters and beg for their help. This alerts Phaendar, who performs a black magic ritual in area 9.

Secret Passageway. A curious character finds a small lever by one of the cells which slides a section of the wall inward to reveal a path to area 8 (DC 16 Perception).

Cells. Both barred doors can be opened by a skillful locksmith (DC 13 Thieves' Tools). The people are scared and famished. Two of them need help to walk.

8. SECRET VAULT

This secret chamber was of great use to the military outpost years ago. There are three stone chests and a shelf.

Treasure. The chests contain 1,000 gp, 450 gp worth of fancy silverware, and three *potions of healing*.

9. MAGIC CIRCLE

Four braziers illuminate the steel disk that dominates the chamber. Four arcane runes glow faintly. An aura of uneasiness permeates this place.

During his years in the wild and the months alone in this house, Phaendar learned simple spells fast and noticed he had a knack for magic. He then delved into black magic and necromancy. Making use of everything he learned, Phaendar (**cult fanatic**) summons one **shadow** and one **specter** to fight alongside him. They confront the characters before the prisoners are freed. If things go south, Phaendar attempts to flee through the hand ladder.

Magic Circle. Necromancy spells cast within the circle are considered one level higher. A divine spellcaster knows this effect can be nullified or reverted. Attuning to the circle for 24 hours reverts its effects: divine spells cast within the circle are considered one level higher. Good-aligned creatures regain 1d8 additional hit points from healing spells cast within the circle when reverted. A *dispel magic* spell rends the circle useless for one day.

10. NICHES OF POWER

When the building was a military outpost, the commander designated this room as a small mausoleum, to respect the souls of those who died for the cause. Four squad leaders were buried here almost 50 years ago.

Undead Energy. Phaendar's summoned undead allies are the souls of these poor men. A *protection from evil* spell helps these souls rest in peace once more.

DEVELOPMENT

THE CHARACTERS DEAL with Phaendar Naeven. They kill him, deliver him to the authorities, or force him to flee. Either way, the mysterious old man near Silvermoon Lake is gone. He is responsible for the deaths of 12 people but at least the six prisoners he kept are saved.

The authorities pay the characters a 1,000 gp reward for their services and grant the heroes the possibility of having a new base of operations: the house by the lake. The characters may buy it for half its base price. Or, a high-ranked individual offers them a deal. He promises the house as a reward, but the characters must do him a favor. That shall be an adventure for another day...





CHRIS VALENTINE

Chris Valentine is an author of RPG adventures and supplements, including the bestselling starter campaign, [Lost in Shadow](#), and nautical trilogy, [Tendrils of Saltmarsh](#).

He was born in Phoenix and has lived in the Sonoran Desert most of his life. When not worldbuilding, he can be found at conventions running tabletop games to help bring new players to the RPG space, or at home drawing or reading.

You can speak with Chris on [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) at @cryptwright or visit his website at www.cryptwright.com.



DEATH DIE CLUB

CHUX (THEDEATHDIECLUB)

Longtime role-player, finance guy, teacher, and forever GM. Founding member of the Death Die Club in the 80s. We've organized & participated in multiple conventions including Gen Con, Goodman Games, Origins, Enrolate, Roll-A Game and Mega XP, to name a few. Creating official TTRPG content since 2017. Our works include the [Demon Hunter RPG](#) in Spanish, as well as several self-published adventures for Demon Hunters, Call of Cthulhu, D&D, and GURPS.

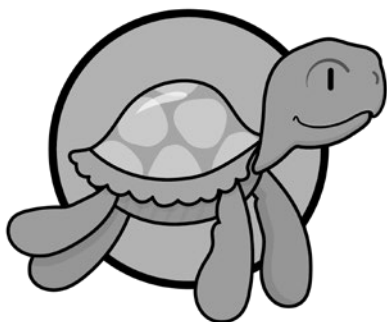
Currently working on version 2 of the Demon Hunter RPG manual (Spanish), plus a new RPG inspired by Ghostbusters. You can check out our material at <https://thedeathdieclub.com/>



MARK Q ANDERSON

Mark Q Anderson is the Co-Founder and Director of Operations for the New England, USA-based game development company, Mondo Cane Publishing. It is dedicated to bringing evocative games and providing unforgettable experiences with valuable tools for stories and compelling systems for the intrigue of everyone at the gaming table. His writing can be found in [The Red Opera](#) from Apotheosis Studios as well as Penny For A Tale's [Necrobiotic](#), and he can be seen as a player and GM on many streamed TTRPG campaigns on YouTube and Twitch. Mark's passion for tabletop games and storytelling has been his one star in sight for well over 15 years, exploring many tabletop games such as Dungeons & Dragons, KULT, Vampire: The Masquerade, and many indie tabletop games with a focus on dark, emotionally charged, and macabre themes. His experience in running visceral games supported by formalized consent and safety has informed his efforts to facilitate others to create impactful experiences through collaborative storytelling environments.

You can find him on [Twitter](#), on the [Mondo Cane Publishing](#) website, or [email him here](#).



DAVID LOMBARDO

David Lombardo is an indie RPG writer by day, and a photonics research engineer by night. He likes rules light RPGs with chunky dice systems tacked onto the side.

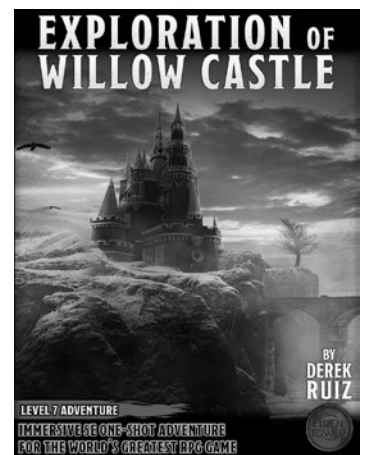
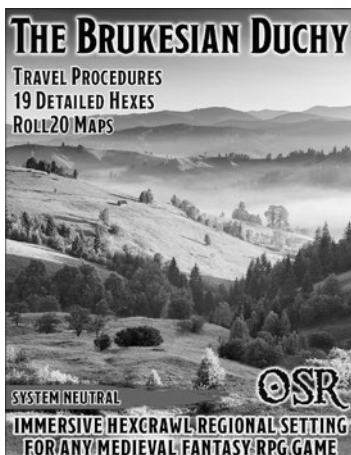
He recently released a zine titled [Not A Place Of Honor](#), which combines real life nuclear waste storage and dangerous magical artifacts.

Check him out on [Itch](#) or [Twitter](#) to see more of his stuff.

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