

THE DM TOOL CHEST

THE FABLE OF THE GALLOW'S TREE

WHISPERS OF THE NIGHT PART I



AN UNDERCOVER MISSION TAKES A TURN WHEN A
CORRUPTED TREE CRASHES THE PARTY



THE FABLE OF THE GALLOWS TREE

The *Fable of the Gallows Tree* is a Fifth Edition adventure intended for **three to five characters of 6th to 8th level** and optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 7**. The Zenith Revelry is tonight, and several groups are taking the opportunity to indulge and take care of some other business. Unfortunately, they are blithely unaware that another more sinister presence has chosen the Gallows Tree where the Revelry is held. This adventure takes place in the Freelands campaign setting but fits any existing campaign with only a few modifications and name changes. This adventure is the first in the “Whispers of the Night” series but can be played as a standalone adventure without any changes.

BACKSTORY

Four Lords is a hamlet at the crossroads of two major trade routes that has been established for as long as anybody can remember. Named for the four inns that sit at the intersection, it has also served as an out-of-the-way meeting place for many different societies and organizations that don't want to advertise their presence in the world. Over time, secret meetings turned into social affairs. Time diluted the passions of the moment, and discussions of ambitious subversives have mostly given way to rebellious revelers, although nefarious elements still use the cover of the legendary parties to mask their involvement.

For those with the proper invitation (or the right coin to buy one), there is a gathering at the peak of each sea-

son held at the gallows tree outside of town. It hasn't been used for its namesake in many decades, but the blackness of those deeds leached into the very soil. Eventually, a nightshade hag who was in disguise seducing a noble from Ashenvale for fun sensed that the corruption was starting to gather in the roots of the tree. So rather than let it ruin a good time, she beset the tree with an illusion and collects power from the fools that dance and plot above.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The characters have gained an invitation to The Zenith Revelry and try to obtain their required information. Things don't go according to plan, but the resulting chaos is quickly forgotten as part of the horrifying truth about the tree is revealed. The characters find their way down through a secret passage to a crypt nestled amongst the tree's roots. They discover all manner of strange things in the crypt, but none as odd as Leilatha, the nightwhisper hag who is one of four daughters of an Archfey set on taking over the material plane. Leilatha has captured powerful spellcasters and found a way to petrify them while using the tainted presence of the gallows tree to set them as anchors for the magic of her experiments. Since four has always been a problematic number for the coven, she has been seeking a way to imbue specific magics to items to aid in eliminating one of her sisters without it leading back to her. Her latest victim is the leader of one of the factions attending the Revelry, which brings the characters to her lair.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The characters attend The Zenith Revelry, undercover with one of the following “factions” - they are all together. Choose the one that sounds most likely that the characters would have been comfortable amongst, or let them choose themselves. It is acceptable for the characters to know about all of the factions.

THE SOCIETY OF THE BLACK QUILL

Originally formed a decade ago by a rejected candidate from The Great College of Magic in Haven, the members of this society all have two things in common: they have innate magical abilities, and nobody would show them how to use them. So the Society of the Black Quill works in the shadows, seeking to engineer the downfall of all “great” institutions and finally show the virtue of their self-taught knowledge. They are bitter but welcoming of any they believe share their ideology. They are staying at The Foisted Fop Inn.

NEW DAWN

The offspring of powerful generals sometimes find themselves thrust together - no more so than twenty years ago when the truce between the other two great empires of the continent was signed. The resulting banquets and diplomatic visits formed lasting bonds between many of the children that lasted into adulthood. They mainly meet in specific locations such as Four Lords, as they are constantly being dragged around the land by their parents’ assignments or their own. They are staying at The Iron Fist Inn.

THE CALL

Composed of a menagerie of youthful wealthy types, The Call is a hedonistic society. Many adolescent sons and daughters of nobles and successful merchants gravitate towards this society, their hands “forced” by an abundance of wealth, privilege, and free time. They believe in having a good time and that everybody should be allowed to have a good time by others. Despite these shallow ideals, The Call actually serves an essential function in The Freelands as there is precious little else beyond their parties to tie the diverse factions together and prevent political or business rivalries from turning into blood feuds. They are staying at The Laughing Fairy Inn.

THE ORDER OF THE ETERNAL OAK

Tending to the temples and shrines of Summerfall can be tedious for those clergy without a particularly zealous streak to them. So after a long day looking after the pilgrims, some of them sought each others’ company for drinking, gambling, or companionship away from the prying eyes of their stricter brethren. Nobody knows how the custom began, but a joint-temple delegation travels to lead The Zenith Revelry twice a year, fully paid for by their temples. They are staying at The Loosened Robes Inn.

GM NOTE

Some things in the adventure are influenced by the faction the characters select, so keep a note of it.

THE ZENITH REVELRY

The characters stayed last night at one of the inns at Four Lords before starting the four-hour trek to The Gallows Tree, where the revelry will commence a little before dusk.

READY FOR A PARTY

At the start of the adventure, while the characters are on this journey, read aloud the passage corresponding to the characters’ faction (see Adventure Hooks) as described below.

ROLEPLAYING THE START

Here, the characters learn some of the consequences of their choice of faction and what they have been doing for a short time before the adventure. If your group enjoys roleplay, feel free to ask them to give you details of some of the things hinted at in the text below to make the hook more their own.

THE SOCIETY OF THE BLACK QUILL

Magus Astigar, head of the Great College of Magic and a member of the ruling council in Haven, has heard some disturbing rumors from their spy network. What was once a few malcontent children appears increasingly well organized. They discretely sent word for some adventurers willing to find out some vital information, specifically the identity and location of The Society of the Black Quill’s leader. The magus has paid each of you an advance of 500 gp, with a promise of 500 gp more upon receiving that information. It wasn’t easy to tag along with The Society of the Black Quill, but they now all seem excited to meet their leader at The Gallows Tree for the revelry. Ahead you can see a distinctive tree that could mean they are very close at hand.

NEW DAWN

Concern and suspicion have stopped General Demosthia of Blackstone Crossing from sleeping lately. There have been rumors that the neighboring kingdoms to either side of the continent of Astaria may have used the past twenty years of peace from fighting one another to forge a plan to assault The Freelands and divide it between them. While it seems far-fetched, the stakes are too high to ignore such a threat. The General has hired you to pose as the children of military captains of small country settlements in The Freelands. He has paid each of you an advance of 500 gp, with a promise of 500 gp more upon returning with the truth. Representatives of the Phoenix (Z’hing-Tao) Empire to the West and the

Dragon (Holy Ignis) Empire to the East will likely attend. As you walk along, trying to get to know each of the other New Dawn members you met last night, you recall how welcoming General Demosthia's daughter Veriya was and how quickly she agreed to bring you along on this trip. Before you can fully determine how you feel about your deception, your attention snaps back to the present as shouts ring out that a particular tree is up ahead.

THE CALL

The vigilant Lord Modric of Ashenvale has been concerned about his wayward son Frederick for some time. It is an open secret that Frederick has arranged to attend The Zenith Revelry for the first time, and his father is worried that he might do something more stupid than usual. Lord Modric has paid each of you an advance of 500 gp, with a promise of 500 gp more upon the safe return of his son. You can see Frederick a short distance ahead of you, speaking to Lyra, a carefree noble girl from Graywatch. This job certainly would be easier if Lord Modric hadn't insisted that Frederick be unaware of this added protection—he values his safety more than his freedom. It wasn't easy to be allowed to tag along with The Call, any more than it is to endure the inane banter they seem to engage in incessantly. Fortunately, you can see a distinctive tree ahead that looks to mark the end of this short journey from the inn.

THE ORDER OF THE ETERNAL OAK

Contrary to popular belief, the thing that religious orders hate losing most is not faith. It's money. They tolerate the indulgent practices of the disaffected of their temples in Summerfall as a small price to pay. The costs for this twice-annual "pilgrimage" by The Order of the Eternal Oak are substantial. Officials from several temples concluded that the only way to ensure they aren't being conned is to conduct an audit. You have each been paid an advance of 500 gp, with a promise of 500 gp more upon your return with a complete set of accounts for comparison. Since their most creative members were likely to be the subject of that audit, they recruited you to pose as newly inducted acolytes. They suggested that this trip might be an excellent way to experience some of the more wondrous works of their respective temples. There have been a couple of close calls where the other members might have discovered you, but as a distinctive tree appears ahead on the trail, you are confident that your cover remains intact.

ARRIVING AT THE GALLOWES TREE

Once the characters have been tied to their faction, the adventure kicks off as they approach the gallows tree just outside of the town of Four Lords as depicted on the provided map.

The Gallows Tree stands some eighty feet tall and further above the surrounding canopy of the forest as it stands on a hill that rises at least another twenty feet above the surrounding ground level. In the daylight, you can see that the branches are completely bare, while there are leaves on all the surrounding trees. Despite this, the tree looks to be otherwise healthy, with damp moss growing in patches on its twisted bark. Your group is the last to arrive, with eating and drinking already solidly underway beneath the menacing boughs. Strategically placed torches have made it a little more inviting, if barely. The various groups have established positions away from one another, but some are mingling—those who have met each other before exchange warm embraces as the crowd beneath the tree grows.



A boar is being roasted surprisingly close to the tree's base on the southern side, nestled between large root structures that break out above the dry and muddied earth at the top of the hill. There are tables, benches, and large barrels around which folk stand talking. The faction the characters arrive with from the south-east is greeted loudly by some of these revelers, with ale dripping from mustaches or whatever wisps the wearer can muster.

More would-be revelers are sitting on large, flat-sided rocks that are found both under the tree and further out. Others lean up against the fence that wraps around the outside of the dirt path. It spirals clockwise up the hill to the base of the tree. As well as the attendees, each faction appears to have two guards (human *veterans*) and several human retainers and porters. The guards do not seem to be vigilant and are helping the porters to set up their faction's area. There are a total of sixty-nine people here for The Revelry in total.

THE GALLOWS TREE

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



SPEAKING WITH THE FACTIONS

While not sporting membership broaches or other outward insignia, the members of the various factions are readily identifiable by the characters. General members make conversation if approached, but if the characters ask anything significant or probing, they are referred to one of the NPCs of Note. The Zenith Revelry is one of the most highly regarded events in the realm, so attendees are implicitly more trusting of each other, knowing what it took to get there.

THE SOCIETY OF THE BLACK QUILL

Virde Kelce is a boisterous human female apprentice sorcerer who often inserts the crystal ball she carries into conversations.

Nostariel Zadino is a thoughtful, older human male sorcerer haunted by the misdeeds of his past. The Revelry is the only time he can forget for a brief moment and be himself.

NPCs of Note:

Eckard Nake is an ambitious human male with slick brown hair and bright green eyes. He is an accomplished sorcerer and a leading light in developing ritual magic. Often found with Herenya.

Herenya Xithyl is a soft-spoken human woman with flowing red hair who is quick-witted and enjoys needling Eckard like a little sister. Often found with Eckard.

What Herenya knows:

- Their leader Jex Anlay should have arrived here earlier this morning. She should be easy to spot as there aren't many half-elves here.
- The best introduction would be to make the sign of The Society of the Black Quill - a simple hand gesture of both hands together and palms up.

- Herenya will provide an introduction to Jex tomorrow in Four Lords if the characters miss her here at the revelry.

What will persuade them to share information:

- Herenya asks what they really think of The Great College of Magic in Haven. A character who succeeds on a DC 11 Wisdom (Insight) check can hear the momentary venom in the tone of voice as she asks the question: Herenya despises the place. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check can convince her that they are also believers and can be trusted.

NEW DAWN

Veriya Demosthia is a cheerful human female noble who is an accomplished hunter.

Deana Grunlyn is a brash dwarven male brawler with no tolerance for incompetence.

NPCs of Note

The Phoenix is a flashy elf male lieutenant who is an extreme extrovert. He is very self-aware of his image and will do almost anything to maintain it. He is interested in having fun and not in severe conversations of any sort.

The Dragon is a hairy male human captain who is always wrapped up in furs and complains of how cold it is.

What The Dragon & Phoenix know:

- There is talk every other year of either a military campaign, but that is just bluster from commanders wanting to advance their careers. Nobody wants another Great War.
- There are plans for a joint exploration mission between Dragon and Phoenix in search of other continents to expand in peace.



HERENYA XITHYL



PHOENIX

- They have some rough charts they can show you back in their rooms in Four Lords, but they are encoded, so they would need to explain them to you.

What will persuade them to share information:

- A character who gives any source of warmth to The Dragon and succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check receives gratitude and information in return.

THE CALL

Lyra is a carefree human female noble from Graywatch who thinks lemons are not real.

NPCs of Note:

Frederick Modric is the wild son of the Lord of Ashenvale who gets himself into trouble because he loves to laugh at others expense

What Frederick knows:

- There are others like Piera Bayde of The Order of the Eternal Oak that don't believe in the tithes that the temple takes. He was drinking in the back room at an inn just last week and even has a price list of services from one of them back in his room in Four Lords. The list is signed by Seth Crestbough of one of the temples in Summerfall.

What will persuade them to share information:

- Pulling off a good prank on one of the other revelers is the way to Frederick's heart. He is willing to accept a wide range of things but suggests swapping the hog roast in somebody's bun for dried leaves, just as they are about to take a bite. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) pulls the prank on an NPC of their choice, but has disadvantage in social interactions with that NPC for the rest of the day.

THE ORDER OF THE ETERNAL OAK

Jerald Kyndall is a skinny human male acolyte from Ashenvale who has a habit of sighing loudly.

Piera Bayde is an aloof half-elf non-binary acolyte from Ashenvale who fancies themselves something of a philosopher despite their tender years.

NPCs of Note:

Dokora Darkwatcher is the self-aggrandizing master of ceremonies at the revelry.

Gyin Sonead is an intellectual human male cleric who is distinctive for the dragon motif on his staff. He was recently promoted from an Acolyte, but the more senior members still treat him with thinly-veiled contempt.

What Gyin knows:

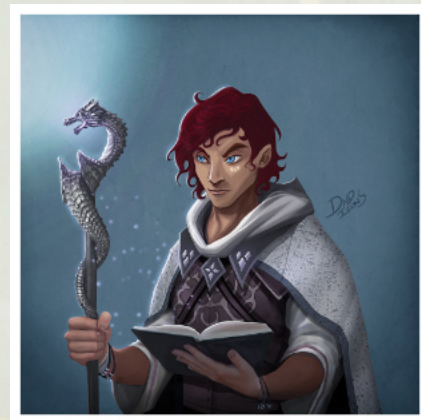
- Gyin is trip treasurer, to the amusement of several acolytes. The more senior members enjoy throwing receipts at him - sometimes when there aren't any shops around.
- He is determined to do an excellent job despite the insulting treatment. If he doesn't know the source of the receipt, he marks an asterisk in the ledger.
- The ledger is safely hidden in his room in Four Lords since the revelry is all-inclusive.

What will persuade them to share information:

- Gyin is not vain but is affected by the constant put-downs of his peers. He wants the characters to help him look good in front of the others. He is willing to accept a wide range of things and suggests that one of the characters accidentally knocks over a fire somehow to let him put it out by casting *create or destroy water*. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Performance) check can do this convincingly enough, and Gyin is grateful and forthcoming.



DRAGON



GYIN SONEAD

THE FUN DOESN'T STOP!

While the characters make any inquiries they wish, the other attendees aren't waiting for permission to have fun. To add flavor between any conversations the characters have, roll a d6 and consult the Spontaneous Merriment Table to see what is happening around the rest of the site, or choose one they haven't experienced:

THE REVELRY COMMENCES

As dusk approaches, there are several castings of *dancing lights*, and the colorful orbs chase each other playfully amongst the tree's branches. The masked figure of Dokora Darkwatcher jumps up nimbly onto the table, and everybody gathers around. Dokora slowly raises their hands in the air, and a hush descends on the crowd. It only takes three words to release the pent-up enthusiasm of the crowd: "It. Is. Time!"

Music erupts, and the torches flare up in different colors. For the next hour, the revelers consume ale and wine incessantly. Then, after any particular actions the characters wish to make, read the following aloud:

A lively jig is playing, and several people are jumping up and down on the large stones next to the tree's base. Suddenly there is a harrowing cracking sound and the distinctive screams of people who have found the ground open up beneath them. A drunken throng immediately crowds around what looks like a 30-foot drop with a passageway leading on from there down underneath the tree. It is difficult to see what is going on, and the shouting of thirty people at once is incoherent. You can't tell if people are trying to make sure they are the ones to go down, or to make sure they aren't. Dokora Darkwatcher eventually takes off her mask and quietens everybody enough to ask who is missing.

The missing faction member is determined based on the characters' faction (see Adventure Hooks). Consult the Missing Faction Member Table below.

Veriya Demosthia was nearest to the faction member who fell and saw them hit the ground before rolling away. She shouts for one of the guards to bring a rope. Once it is secured, Dokora calls for brave volunteers to bring back the missing faction member. The others present at The Revelry all make lots of noise, but none will be persuaded to take on the task. Finally, Dokora turns to the characters and asks for their help as the others quickly back away.

MISSING FACTION MEMBER

The Society of the Black Quill	Herenya Xithyl
New Dawn	The Dragon
The Call	Frederick Modric
The Order of the Eternal Oak	Gyin Sonead

SPONTANEOUS MERRIMENT TABLE

d6 EVENT

- 1 An arm-wrestling bout between a Vigo, a muscly dwarf, and Veriya, a cheerful but skinny human, goes on for over a minute. A crowd quickly gathers as it is happening to shout encouragement and place bets. The dwarf eventually wins, but everybody hoists Veriya in the air proclaiming her the victor regardless.
- 2 Nostariel has sat in a jam sandwich, which just "just happened" to appear on his seat. Frederick Modric giggles between a row of mages slyly casting *counterspell*. Nostariel can't understand why his every attempt to clean the mess with *prestidigitation*, isn't working.
- 3 Jerald and Virde are playing a game of spotting the difference with illusions. First, one creates a scene, then the other copies it but with some differences for the first to find.
- 4 The crowd loses interest when an argument over a technicality breaks out between the two. The debate continues forever, with Jerald sighing loudly as Virde brings out her crystal ball to check something in it again.
- 5 A circle of friends is taking turns to create "poetry". They each build upon the sentence to that point, and so on. They collapse in collective laughter every few minutes.
- 6 Piera Bayde of The Order of the Eternal Oak gives a speech to a circle of free-thinkers. They are railing against the need to pay temple tithes and think that once the training costs have been repaid, they should be able to use their skills on their terms. They even offer their services right now at a discount since they have no intention of paying the levy anyway.
- 7 Deana Grunlyn shouts at a retainer for turning the boar the wrong way. The Dragon tries to calm him, and a scuffle breaks out. The playful scrap only ends when two other revelers pour a flagon of ale over each of their heads.



DOKORA DARKWATCHER

UNDERNEATH THE GALLOWES TREE

The area underneath the Gallows Tree consists of a small network of caverns formed within the soil. The local guard forces used it for a long time to hang those treacherous to the realm. Their bodies were left to hang until they were pecked clean by fat crows. This tree was favored for its many strong and twisting branches - it gave more room. However, times changed, and twenty years ago, the hangings became much rarer and more public. The Gallows Tree wasn't needed anymore. For the past decade, the nightwhisper hag Leilatha has made it her home after she stumbled across it and felt the cool of its necromantic power. She charmed and seduced a few traveling trades folk in Four Lords to assist with making it more homely and secret. Most importantly, they helped her lower in the heavy sarcophagi needed for her to undertake her little side project: to develop the magic necessary to rid herself of one of her sisters without any of the nasty repercussions that could result.

GENERAL FEATURES

These general features are prominent underneath the Gallows Tree unless otherwise noted in the area descriptions.

Ceilings, Floors, and Walls. The caverns underneath the Gallows Tree are carved directly from the unyielding soil on all sides—patches of moss mark the otherwise unremarkable soil and roots breakthrough in various places. There is approximately 6 feet of headroom.

Lights. There is no natural light underneath the tree.

Climate. The air is stale and humid, with a faint acrid smell. The temperature is cool but not cold.

FEY MIASMA TABLE

d6	Visual Effect	Mechanical Effect
1	A shock wave pulses out violently from the character but dissipates rapidly, leaving them looking visibly drained.	The character loses their highest available spell slot. If no spell slots are available, they lose half of their available hit dice.
2	As the magic surges from the character, ripples of black energy swirl backward from it and strike at their skin.	The character takes 7 (2d6) necrotic damage.
3	A harrowing crack is heard as the very air rends around the character momentarily.	All creatures within 30 feet of the character must save against deafness as if struck by the <i>blindness/deafness</i> spell (save DC 15).
4	Droplets of arcane energy coalesce in the air around the magic and fall to the ground.	<i>entangle</i> (save DC 15) is cast on the ground, centered on the character.
5	As the magic surges from the character, ripples of black energy seem to add to it.	The target takes an additional 7 (2d6) necrotic damage. Where there was no target creature, this will instead strike the nearest other creature.
6	The air folds around the character, and they disappear.	The character becomes invisible as if targeted by the <i>invisibility</i> spell. This does not require concentration.

Fey Miasma. Here, the weave is turbulent and chaotic, with magic seeming to be spontaneously absorbed in some areas. This effect permeates throughout the entire caverns and affects all of the characters (but not enemies) until the hag leaves the caverns or is killed. Spellcasters sense this innately with their powers, while those without magic feel uncomfortable cramps in their stomachs - as if they haven't eaten in several days. When a character casts a spell or uses an attuned magic item's abilities, they must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, and on a failure must roll a d6 and consult the Fey Miasma Table to see the effect. This effect is resolved after the triggering spell or ability. Additionally, any roll made on the table wakes up Leilatha as she is the one who has been trying to manipulate the weave here and is very attuned to it.

COMBAT IN A CRAMPED SPACE

The difficulty of any combat in this area can be significantly affected by how static or dynamic the enemies are. For less challenging combat, don't have the enemies engage outside of where they are first encountered. To increase the challenge of combat, allow some of the monsters to be more mobile - several of them even have teleporting abilities. Remember that creatures can squeeze through passages one size smaller than themselves.

Leilatha is the ultimate example of this. If awakened (see Fey Miasma in the General Features above), Leilatha could, for instance, choose to join into any encounters in an attempt to finish off the characters, she could taunt the characters using *message*, or she could just pretend to be still asleep. Leilatha and her **blink dogs** will use their abilities to teleport through the blocked passage (area 7) into the crypt (area 2) and block the exit should the characters attempt to leave without encountering her.

BENEATH THE GALLOWS TREE

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the keyed locations on the provided map of Underneath the Gallows Tree.

1. ENTRANCE FROM THE SURFACE

The characters climb down the 30-foot rope without issue and continue through a twisting downward sloping tunnel a further seventy feet before turning a corner to arrive at the Crypt (area 2).

2. CRYPT

Around the last corner, you can see the soft glow of candles barely illuminating the bottom of the stairs as they emerge into some sort of a cavern.

There are four burial sites in the open crypt. Two have piles of rocks over them but are empty, though it is clear that there was a body there once. A character who spends 5 minutes removing the stones from either of these burial sites discovers that they are empty. Two others have rock slabs sealing them shut, but one is broken. One of the latter has a pair of candles half-burned resting on top of them, emitting 10 feet of bright light and 10 feet of dim light. There are several large roots that are part of the corrupted Gallows Tree.

Encounter: *Something Grabbed Me!* Four large tree roots (*awakened trees* that cannot move as noted on the map) are part of the corrupted Gallows Tree. They wait until the characters are entirely inside the chamber and look around before attacking. Characters who succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check avoid being surprised by the sudden movement of the roots. The locations that the large tree roots act from are marked on the map.

Treasure. A character who succeeds on a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check to open the rock slab burial site finds a folded set of priestly robes with angular features (10 gp).

3. GRAND TOMB

Guttering candles cast a warm glow over an alcove where a large tree root has grown into an oversized stone sarcophagus with its lid sitting slightly ajar. A pair of empty bottles lie on the floor nearby.

The guttering candles provide 10-foot of dim light. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds stone dust on the floor, indicating that the lid has been opened recently. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check can lift the lid and turn it to open the sarcophagus without too much noise with a failure resulting in the character

dragging the cover across the edge, making a loud grating sound.

Inside the sarcophagus is a statue of a half-elf, with their hands held together palm-up. They are dressed in the same priestly robes as the statues in the Ancient Gallery (area 5).

Treasure. On the statue's left hand in the sarcophagus is a *ring of protection* that can be noticed by a character with a passive Perception (Wisdom) score of 15 or higher or who succeeds on a DC 15 passive Perception (Wisdom) check. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check can slide the ring off easily. On a failure, the finger breaks at the uppermost knuckle and comes away in their grasp with the ring still attached. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a faint inscription on the inside of the ring, which has the letters "J.A." and a tiny engraved image of two hands together, side by side, shown with palms facing up.

4. WEBBED NEST

Sticky webs cover the whole chamber, and you can see many oddly misshapen eggs against the walls. Sitting among the webbing is a humanoid spider-like creature that hisses at your approach. Behind the bulk of the creature, is an large fresh-looking silk cocoon.

The cocoon contains the missing faction member. They are unconscious, poisoned, and on 0 hp. They die if they do not receive any healing within an hour of the characters entering the Crypt (area 2) or if they take any damage before being healed. While inside the cocoon, they are unaffected by any Fey Miasma effects.

Hazard: *Webbing.* The entire chamber is filled with sticky webbing. Creatures entering a webbed area for the first time on a turn or starting its turn there must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or become restrained by the webs. A restrained creature can use its action to try to escape, doing so with a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. Each 5-foot cube of webs has AC 10, 5 hit points, vulnerability to fire, and immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, and psychic damage.

Encounter: *What is Worse than Spiders? An ettercap* tends to the eggs in the nesting chamber and hisses menacingly at any threat to their eggs. They attack at any act of aggression. Three *phase spiders* are on the ethereal plane and use their Ethereal Jaunt ability to appear on their turn after combat is initiated, one as close to each exit tunnel as possible and the last next to the ettercap.

5. ANCIENT GALLERY

Five of the six alcoves in this chamber contain stone statues of humanoid figures cloaked in matching angular priestly robes. Most figures hold various weapons in their hands and their expressions range from rage to resignation. One statue alone has an expression of hope while gripping an ornate box.

The rock in the center of the chamber has several candles providing 15 feet of bright light and 15 feet of dim light. A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check notices that all figures have a puncture wound depicted on the left breast.

Trap: Explosive Glyph. There is a 10-foot diameter *glyph of warding* set to *explosive runes* immediately in front of the statue holding the box that can be discerned with a successful DC 17 Intelligence (Arcana) check or *detect magic* spell and disarmed with a *dispel magic* spell.

Treasure. The weapons held by the statues are separate cast, decorative pieces worth 25 gp each. A character who has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notices a bold necklace of teeth and glass beads (120 gp) adorning the statue holding the ornate box. The box itself is empty.



DRAGONBONE NECKLACE

6. FLOODED CHAMBER

The cavern floor has broken through into the water table, flooding this lower portion of the caverns with water made murky by the soil.

Encounter: Under the Surface. A *water elemental* and two *giant octopus* lurk beneath the surface and attack any characters who enter the water. The octopi are hidden on the chamber walls beneath the water, requiring a character to succeed on a DC 19 Wisdom (Perception) check to detect them. The water elemental is indistinguishable from the water around it.

Treasure. The unmistakable glint of a large gem (a diamond worth 300 gp) can be noticed with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check sitting in a small nook on the cavern floor if the characters provide any illumination.

7. BLOCKED TUNNEL

This tunnel is impassable due to the collapsed rocks, but a small patch on the other side of the barrier can be barely seen. A character with a Strength score of 20 or higher who takes 30 minutes can clear this passage enough to make it passable; doing so is loud and attracts attention from the *water elemental* in the Flooded Chamber (area 6) or the *ettercap* and *phase spiders* of the Webbed Nest (area 4).

8. HAG'S CHAMBER

Leilatha is one of the four daughters of Mother Nightwhisper, a powerful Archfey intent on the downfall of the mortal races and seizing the material plane for themselves. While Leilatha wholeheartedly agrees with this notion, she has forever bickered with her foul sisters. Over time this sibling rivalry has led Leilatha to conclude that things would be much better if their coven were a more traditional trio. She has been trying to blend different magics to imbue weapons with power sufficient to put an end to one of her sisters without it leading back to her.

You see before you the only semblance of civilized dwelling you have encountered in the caverns. There is a rickety table cluttered with paper and books, a low bench being used as a shelf for jars and lanterns, a scratched cupboard, a single straw bed, and a large bubbling cauldron full of a maroon-colored liquid that is giving off a faintly acrid smell.

Any creature that drinks the liquid in the cauldron must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or gain one point of exhaustion and be incapacitated for 6 seconds as they retch uncontrollably. The scratch marks on the cupboard are from the claws of Leilatha in her hag form. It contains a single large flowing black garment and three neatly-folded sets of priestly robes identical to

those worn by the statues in the Ancient Gallery (area 5) and the Grand Tomb (area 3).

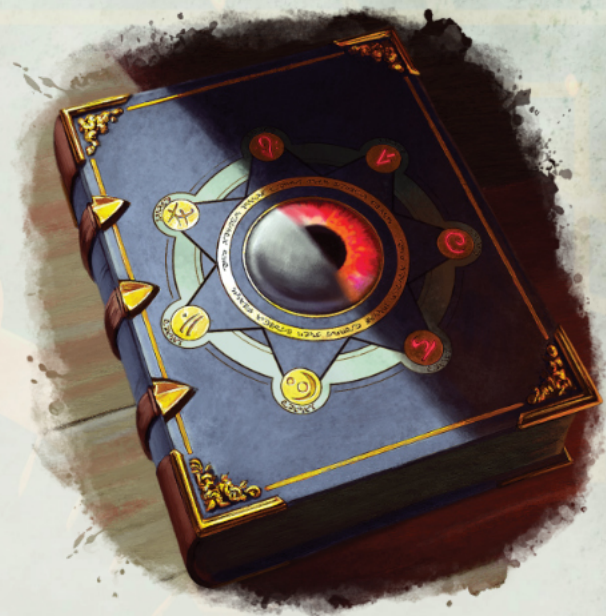
Encounter: Who, me? Unless the characters draw them into another encounter, Leilatha (a *nightwhisper hag*, see Appendix) and her two faithful hounds Fangstriker and Woofy (*blink dogs*) are resting in her chambers. Leilatha is in human form, with tousled red hair contrasting with her striking green eyes. She is wrapped in a cloak with a sparkling silver broach securing her cloak. She wears no armor but has a fine dagger on her belt and several vials with colorful liquid in an open component pouch. She introduces herself as Jex Anlay (leader of The Order of the Black Quill, whom the characters may have discovered at The Revelry is actually a half-elf) and greets the characters, claiming to have just woken up with no memory of how she got here. She attempts to move without arousing suspicion to where she can see further down a corridor. She praises the characters for their prowess to rescue her from wherever befell her, and requests they return to The Revelry at once.

Treasure. There are loose notes, scrolls, and some books on the table, including a *scroll of blindness/deafness*, a *scroll of entangle*, a *scroll of inflict wounds*, and a *scroll of invisibility*.

Most of the books are simple journals, but one appears to be a spellbook that, in bright light, has a cover of a moon with gold sigils surrounding it, and all the pages are blank. However, in dim light or darkness, the cover shows a red eye, and the sigils glow crimson. Any creature who attempts to read the book in this state sees a myriad of moving arcane sigils and must make a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw, losing their memory of the past 5 minutes on a failed save. On a successful save, the creature learns that the large sarcophagus petrifies creatures using the latent necromantic potential of The Gallows Tree.

A creature who can read Elvish or Sylvan and takes 10 minutes to read the piles of loose notes on the table learns the following:

- The book owner is a hag called Leilatha, who has a complicated relationship with their family.
- Leilatha has been experimenting with combining different magics to imbue powers into a weapon.
- Creating the statues was key to providing the magical anchoring to distill the resulting chaos into liquid form.
- She wants to use that weapon to kill one of her sisters and finally bring peace to their crowded coven. It would never be traced back to her.
- She refers to herself and her three sisters as “Daughters of Mother Nightwhisper.” and speaks of them being spread out on the material plane to facilitate its demise.
- She knows that Alanis is somewhere in The Shimmering Forest because a dark unicorn tends to get noticed by even the most dim-witted commoners.



LEILATHA'S SPELLBOOK

Development. If the characters are proceeding to “rescue” Jex Anlay, she attempts to recruit the characters on the way for a task since they have shown themselves to be so capable. She tells of three power-hungry leaders of large subversive guilds that have become embroiled in a war for territory and must be stopped. One must fall so that the others may thrive; otherwise, they are all doomed to be crushed under the heel of the ignoble government of the land. There have been tales of a dark unicorn seen in The Shimmering Forrest, which is just the sort of thing that one of the leaders, Alanis, would be involved in. Jex Anlay is prepared to pay the characters 8000 gp to find the truth of these rumors and put an end to whatever nefarious plots Alanis may have. In the meantime, Jex will look for any sign of the other leaders. She will give them a magical dagger to aid the characters and act as an advance if they accept.

Treasure. If the characters accept the task offered by Leilatha, she pours a vial of red liquid onto a dagger, which flows into the central groove on both sides of the blade. The blade transforms in seconds and becomes wreathed in magical fire. She tells the characters that this is *Truthburn* (see Appendix) and then hands them a magic stone capable of casting a *sending* spell once per day.

CONCLUSION

The characters’ success or failure is based on the mission given to them by their faction (see Adventure Hooks).

THE SOCIETY OF THE BLACK QUILL

The characters meet with Magus Astigar back in Haven. If the characters credibly relay who and where the Society of the Black Quill leader is, they are given the promised 500 gp each. If they provide evidence of their

demise, they are also given an additional 250 gp each as a bonus. Before the characters leave, the magus asks if they learned of anything else that could be considered essential to the realm.

If successful, it isn't long before the town criers are praising the resourcefulness of Magus Astigar and how he single-handedly located one of the most elusive enemies of the realm.

NEW DAWN

The characters report back to General Demosthia in Blackstone Crossing. If the characters provide written evidence that there is *not* an alliance between the Phoenix (Z'hing-Tao) Empire and the Dragon (Holy Ignis) Empire, they are given the promised 500 gp each. If they credibly relay evidence of what either of the empires is focused on instead, they are also given an additional 250 gp each as a bonus. Before the characters leave, the general asks if they learned of anything else that could be considered vital to the realm.

In the weeks that follow, the general's mood improves considerably—a welcome relief that flows down through the whole town.

THE CALL

The characters return to Lord Modric in Ashenvale. If the characters return Frederick without any lasting injury, they are given the promised 500 gp each, and Lord Ashenvale asks if Frederick caused any diplomatic incidents that require cleaning up. If the characters report the indiscretion of Lyra from Graywatch, they are also given an additional 250 gp as a bonus.

Before the characters leave, the lord asks if they learned anything else that could be considered vital to the realm. Lord Modric seems unphased as the characters give their report, slowly pouring himself a cup of tea from an ornate set on his desk. The only sign that any of the news concerns him is that his spoon pauses its stirring motion momentarily.

THE ORDER OF THE ETERNAL OAK

The characters report secretly to the temple officials in Summerfall. If the characters provide written evidence that unreasonable or fraudulent expenses have been claimed for by the "pilgrimage," they are given the promised 500 gp each. In addition, the officials ask if the characters saw any other corruption from temple members. If the characters can credibly report that divine magics were charged for without the revenue being reported to the temples, they are also given an additional 250 gp each as a bonus.

Before the characters leave, the officials ask if they learned anything else that could be considered essential to the realm.

As the characters leave the room, a dozen voices are already raised at once as the temple officials try to figure out what to do next. It seems like it might take some time to reach a consensus!

IT ALL WENT HORRIBLY WRONG

If the characters do not make it out from underneath The Gallows Tree, their bodies are recovered three days later from a now-empty set of caverns under the tree. After that, the members of The Order of the Eternal Oak resurrect you one by one, and are happy to offer a discount for their services. The faction has paid for this service in light of your extraordinary bravery, but there is now a debt to the faction leader of 500 gp for each character.

WHISPERS OF THE NIGHT

If the characters accept Leilathas offer: they are contacted a few days later with rumors of the whereabouts of one of the subversive leaders - Alanis.

Otherwise: the characters are relaxing between jobs. They have coin in their pockets, food in their bellies, and drinks in their hands. Over the course of a few nights, they start to hear the same rumors repeated of some new upstart group causing trouble. So the characters begin to make some inquiries to find out the real story.

NIGHTWHISPER MAG



APPENDIX

TRUTHBURN

Weapon (dagger), rare (requires attunement)

While simple in design, this dagger has a red liquid that is constantly wet filling a central groove on both sides of the blade. The liquid does not drip or shed or mingle in any way. You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

While attuned, you can use a bonus action to speak the magic dagger's name, causing flames to engulf the blade. These flames cast bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light for an additional 20 feet. While the dagger is ablaze, it deals an extra 2d6 fire damage. The flames last until you use a bonus action to speak the magic dagger's name again. While the dagger is not ablaze but held, the wielder gains advantage on Wisdom (Insight) checks except against its creator, Jex Anlay.

Curse. This dagger is cursed. Attuning to this item causes the character's first thought each morning when they wake up to complete the mission Jex Anlay gave them. Their actions are not compelled in any way, but the following morning the thought will return.

Casting *dispel magic* on this dagger causes the red liquid to evaporate and permanently transforms this blade into a mundane dagger with no additional properties.

NIGHTWHISPER HAG

Medium fey, neutral evil

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)
Hit Points 97 (15d8 + 30)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +6

Skills Deception +7, Insight +6, Perception +6, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances cold, fire; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Abyssal, Common, Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Proficiency Bonus: +3

Innate Spellcasting. The hag's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *disguise self*, *magic missile*, *message*
2/day each: *plane shift* (self only), *sleep* (9d8)

Magic Resistance. The hag has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Claws (Hag Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8) slashing damage and 17 (2d8+4) psychic damage.

Change Shape. The hag magically polymorphs into a Small or Medium female humanoid, or back into her true form. Her statistics are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. She reverts to her true form if she dies.

Nightmare Whisper. Two target's of the hag's choice within 30 feet of her must make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw, taking 18 (4d6+4) psychic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. An uncounscious target that takes damage in this way gains 1 level of exhaustion.

Night Flit. The hag magically teleports, along with any equipment she is wearing or carrying, up to 60 feet to an unoccupied space she can see. Both the space she is leaving and her destination must be in dim light or darkness.



TRUTHBURN

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