

Chapter III – The Dark Ziggurat

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The elf was lounging back in a large plush chair. Her elbow leaning on the rest, she was dangling a silver locket from her delicate fingers, examining it, as she had done many times before. On one side the locket held a drawing of a young innocent-looking elf girl, on the other was the name 'Elara' engraved in flowing Espruar.

A slight movement drew her gaze. Past the body of a dwarf, splayed and disemboweled on the heavy table, she saw an all too familiar silhouette. It belonged to another elf, a deadly hunter her underlings had nicknamed: The Specter. He was her brother, or so he claimed, but like so many things from her past she had absolutely no recollection of this bond they shared.

She remembered being a haunted, powerless and broken husk of a woman, ravaged by whatever had happened previously in her life. One glorious day Agelong had found her. It had spoken to her in a rush of sonorous power, promising freedom from her pain if she gave herself up to Its Majesty. And she did. Bit by bit her memories had been taken away. First the painful ones and then all the rest. Soon she remembered nothing, not even her own name. She felt a deep and sincere gratitude to her Patron. He had taken away her pain and given her Power instead. Power whose depths she had only begun to explore and the Freedom to do with those Powers as she pleased.

The Specter moved, his hands tracing symbols in a blur. The fact that she understood his sign language was the one reason she was convinced she did know him in the past. "E-L-A-R-A, she was our sister. You loved her once, Iluna..."

"Don't call me that!" The Witch's beautiful face had warped into an ugly mask of fury and hatred. He knew it vexed her if she spoke about her past, more so if he called her by name, but still he couldn't leave well enough alone. Regaining composure, she forced a calm and mocking smile upon her face. She let the locket slide from her fingers. It clattered to the ground next to the leg of her chair. Her sibling watched, unmoving.

"What news?", she asked him finally, slightly irritated that she hadn't drawn a reaction from her stoic brother.

Again, his hands moved, forming signs in rapid succession: "The work is progressing. The ritual will happen tonight, as scheduled. As agreed we will be handling clean-up." The Specter hesitated, before continuing, "There's the matter of Mugdurok. He is quite angry you interfered on behalf of Jobz. It puzzles me sister. Have you developed feelings for the human?"

The Witch laughed out loud, her mirth echoing from the dark walls of the Ziggurat. "No brother, I feel nothing. You know this. The human was a pleasant distraction, nothing more. Truth be told, I don't even remember his name. And as for Mugdurok: I was having a little fun with the dirty hobgoblin. He gets so riled up at times."

The Witch walked towards the bloodstained table and traced a slender finger around the garish wound her dagger had left in the dwarf's chest. Knowing it would upset him, she slowly and deliberately put the finger in her delicate mouth and sucked off the blood. The Specter stiffened visibly.

"Be a dear and get me a new play thing,
would you? I'm afraid I broke the last one."

The Specter was gone, her mocking
laughter following him through the
subterranean hallways.

Synopsis

Where the party explores the Dark Ziggurat on their mission to free the dwarven hostages. Where they recover Derrobane and face part of the leadership of the Five Dragons. Where the children of Nasreen and Alistair discover their father is most likely dead.

History

The Days of Thunder

The Dark Ziggurat hails from the Age of Thunder, when the creator races ruled the supercontinent Merrouroboros (which later drifted apart into Abeir-Toril). The first of these races were the sarrukh, a race of shape-shifting reptilian humanoids that dominated the world for thousands of years.

The sarrukh enslaved and created many scaled races, among them yuan-ti, naga and lizardfolk.

-34000 DR saw the birth of a sarrukh organization called the Ba'etith. Their purpose was the study and collection of all forms of primitive magic. To this end they built grand enclaves where they could experiment and gather lore.

One such enclave was Ssufaxuss, a lost city in what is now known as the High Moor. Ssufaxuss was wholly dedicated to necromancy. It's most important and grandest building, the Dark Ziggurat, the place where the Ba'etith did their work.

Under the leadership of a single sarrukh Overscribe hundreds of yuan-ti toiled to record and research arcane knowledge. When this first Overscribe died, she used her dwindling life force to cast a spell to safeguard her creation. From that day on the Ziggurat would withstand the passing of time. Matter within the Ziggurat decays at a rate a hundred times slower than elsewhere in the world.

Note on the Ziggurat's enchantment

This effect is a derived and permanent version of the 'gentle repose' spell. It does not prevent aging in any way, nor does it make time go any slower. It just prevents decay of dead matter.

Ssufaxuss's downfall

A war between evil sarrukh, followers of Merrshaulk, and winged couatl, who worshipped Bahamut, led to the downfall of Ssufaxuss. Most of the Ziggurat's servants fled immediately, but for a few dozen of yuan-ti who established a short-lived cult in the lower sections of the Ziggurat.

As time passed the city got buried until only the top of Ssufaxuss's central building, the Ziggurat itself, was still visible.

Note on Bahamut and Jazirian

The Couatl's original deity was Jazirian. Because the god could not interfere outside of his sphere of influence, he asked Bahamut to look after Echteron's small band while they hunted the Sarrukh in Faerûn.

Echteron was the leader of the couatl.

Invasion from below

Millennia later an earthquake opened up a passage to the Underdark. This passage was discovered by illithid. These mind flayers claimed part of the central complex and used it to stage raids on the surface world. They named it Ixexyn.

Their presence attracted the attention of the powerful shield dwarf kingdom of Ammarindar, who sent it's very best to halt the threat. The dwarves attacked the pyramid and used clerical magic to seal it off from all sides. The seals were constructed in such a fashion, that they could only be broken by a weapon devoted to the dwarven god, Moradin.

This act buried the illithid alive. The seals prevented them from planeshifting or teleporting out. As a consequence, the entombed mind flayers died from starvation. Since then the necromantic energies gathered by the Ba'etith have seeped into the dead of Ixexyn, returning them to a state of unlife.

Note on the Ziggurat's enchantment

As an added effect the dwarven seals prevented the working of the First Overscribe's spell within its area of effect. So, where Ssufaxuss resisted decay the illithid elder brain, the large brain like mass that ruled the enclave, calcified over a period of a few thousand years.

Recent times

Nearby and below the surface lives a duergar clan. When their gods vanished, Agelong took the guise of Deep Duerra and continued to supply the Norothor of Clan Leadhand with divine magic.

Through his clergy, Agelong has spoken of the coming of an avatar, a being of great psionic power that would lead Clan Leadhand in a grand campaign to fulfill their destiny and seize the lands above.

Recently Nasreen and her Five Dragons were sent to Ixexyn by The Agelong to find the petrified remains of the illithid elder brain. To dig out the entrance to the Ziggurat, Nasreen needed workers. To break into the complex, she needed a holy weapon devoted to Moradin. She knew she would find both in a town she visited a few decades before: Grom's Bounty.

A few days before the party's arrival, Nasreen and the Hooded Man performed a ritual transferring some of the lingering psionic energies of the elder brain to Nasreen. Her newfound abilities will allow Nasreen to become the avatar of prophecy and rally Clan Leadhand to her cause.

Nasreen has since gone from the Ziggurat but left some of her lieutenants to clear the place and make it fit to serve as a safe haven and a link to her Underdark forces.

The Witch, one of said lieutenants, has been torturing the captive dwarves for some days when the party arrives, she grows bored, however, and will soon revert to killing.

Notes

Lighting

The entire interior of the Ziggurat is dark (heavily obscured) unless noted otherwise or obvious through description.

Standard doors

Doors in Ssufaxuss are wood, moldy, closed, unlocked. Unless noted otherwise.

Random encounters

During a **short rest** in the Dark Ziggurat roll 1d20. On a result of 19 or 20 the party encounters 2d6 skeletons (19-20 on 1d20). During a **long rest** the party encounters 2d8 skeletons on a roll of 17-20 on 1d20.

Other

Note on the Ziggurat's outlook

When the Ba'etith built the Ziggurat they used the materials that were readily available in the region. The walls and ceiling of the Ziggurat are made from red granite and the floors from red marble, unless noted otherwise.

General conditions

The entire Ziggurat is dirty and moldy. Everything (furniture, tapestries, etc.) has rotted due to the warm and humid conditions. Exceptions are:

The Halls of Learning where Raye the spectator keeps everything tidy and well maintained.

The Halls of the Dead, where solid vacuum has prevented anything from decaying.

The Halls of the Suffering, which were recently tidied by the Five Dragons mercenaries and their allies.

Note on the Ziggurat's Climate System

When the Ba'etith first started to conduct magical research on a larger scale, they were faced with an unexpected problem. Whereas the scrolls and magic books they had gathered prefer cold, dry surroundings, the sarrukh themselves preferred the humid heat of the jungle.

Many of their order developed spells to deal with this issue. Some spells made the magical writings impervious to tropical circumstances, other spells made the caster comfortable in a cold and dry climate. This, however, required the constant use of magical power. This power couldn't be invested in the studies that drove the Ba'etith.

Unwilling to accept any delays to their efforts, the necromancers of Ssufaxuss came up with an elegant solution. They lured the azer siblings Heliar and Ragon to Faerûn with the promise of a reward in the form of a chunk of the rarest meteoric iron. The siblings created a climate system, but were never allowed to leave, forced to operate their creation indefinitely. The azers can be found confined in 'The Halls of Maintenance'.

The climate system is able to regulate all aspects of climate inside the Ziggurat. A central pillar conducts the air flows through the entirety of the complex. The current settings are:

- Dry, cold air in the Halls of Learning meant to preserve arcane writings.
- A solid vacuum in the Halls of the Dead meant to preserve the remains of the Sarrukh interred there. The Ba'etith also kept a store of corpses in this area to be used for experimentation.
- A tropical climate in the rest of the Ziggurat

When the couatl and their allies finally attacked, their opening assault was on the climate system. Echteron, the couatl leader, realized the climate system could be turned to terrible destruction by the Ba'etith if the need arose. Chssar Musstan, the Overscribe of Ssufaxuss, tried to undo the couatl's efforts in a last ditch attempt to regain control of the Ziggurat. He died in the Halls of Maintenance in the final struggle with his nemesis.

Note on the sarrukh language

The wizards who inhabited this place for millennia spoke **sarrukhar**, a language distantly related to draconic.

It is unlikely anyone in the party speaks Sarrukhar, since no living native speaker has set foot in this part of the world for many millennia. Only a handful of non-sarrukh scholars on this prime material plane are able to understand it without the help of magic.

The party can make use of spells such as comprehend languages to understand any and all writing they find within the Ziggurat.

Raye the Spectator in the Portal Room is also more than willing to translate any writing brought to him. His years of service in the Ziggurat has made him fluent in the language of its occupants.

Note on Sarrukh appearance

Sarrukh were shapeshifters with two forms. The first a bipedal form with a humanoid body and legs, but with a serpentine lower body. The other form was even more serpentine, closely resembling yuan-ti abominations.

Only two sarrukh are present in the Ziggurat. One is the Overscribe Chssar Musstan, whose soulless body can be found in the Halls of Maintenance. The other is Neffsirakh Tun, founder of Ssufaxuss. She is a mummy lord dormant in the Halls of the Dead.

Passages to the Underdark

In the Dark Ziggurat are a few passages leading to the Underdark. These passages are incorporated because they are logical within the story. What can be found in and beyond these passages isn't described and entirely up to you, the DM. Suffice to say that most adventurers with any common sense won't venture too far into these passage without sufficient reason.

If they do, however, you can use two common tricks to dissuade them. The first would be boredom. If you let them investigate the tunnels for days on end, without running into anything more interesting than a shriveled patch of moss, they will soon return to the surface.

The other and more difficult one is survival instinct. If you create encounters they barely survive, or need to flee from, they might decide the Underdark (or more correctly Undermoor) is too dangerous for them at this point.

Entering Ssufaxuss

Dungeon 12A – Dark Ziggurat Entrance

1. The dig site

Approaching the area, you come upon a great pit dug into the earth. In the middle of the pit you can see a golden dome caked with dirt, obviously part of a larger buried structure. Etched into the dome you are stylized snakes alternated with large square hieroglyphs. On top of the dome shines a 15-foot tall golden statue of a hooded snake, its fangs bared aggressively.

Below the dome an ornate gilded door leads into a red granite structure. A few sentries are guarding the entrance diligently.

At the far side of the pit, you can see a large campsite.

The campsite is where Mugdurok and his men live. The hobgoblin prefers the outside to the unsettling interior of the pyramid. If Mugdurok was killed earlier by the party, he will not appear.

Wisdom (religion) DC 15: The hooded serpent is Merrshaulk a long dead evil patron god of serpents, lizards and yuan-ti. **Beating DC 20:** Merrshaulk isn't really dead, he is now an aspect of a similar god, Sseth.

Encounter – The sentries

It is impossible to sneak past the guards, without being spotted. If the guards are allowed to act, they will immediately raise the alarm.

Guard (2), MM p. 347, treasure: 15 sp, 19 sp.

Encounter - Mugdurok and his men

If the party is discovered, Mugdurok and his men will attack from the campsite after 1d3 rounds.

Mugdurok will not allow his mercenaries to follow the party inside, fully realizing the ziggurat is very dangerous and not wanting to risk his men.

If Mugdurok realizes someone entered the pyramid, he will wait in ambush for their return.

If Mugdurok was killed before, he isn't present at this encounter. His troops are well trained, however, and will act as described anyway.

Mugdurok, NPC's & mobs, treasure: 45 gp.

Guard (10), MM p. 347, treasure: 15 cp, 5 pp, 15 cp, 21 cp, 16 sp, 18 sp, 12 cp, 20 cp, 5 ep, 13 cp.

Hobgoblin (2), MM p. 186, treasure: 8 ep, 11 gp.

Door

Into the Ziggurat (to area 2): Double door, gold plated, open, unlocked

2. The stairwell

A bronze plaque with glyphs can be seen at the top of the stairwell. Characters that can translate **sarrukh writing**, decipher its meaning: 'The Most Learned Library of Ssufaxuss - Here the living learn and the dead walk'.

A red marble column rises from a wide, square shaft in the floor. It is carved to resemble a stylized, serpent, reaching for, but not touching the high domed ceiling. From holes in the column leak wisps of grey vapor. Around the shaft is a broad walkway of smooth stone, winding down into the darkness. Enchanted glass orbs, floating above the staircase, cast the scene in a hazy white light.

The marble column mentioned above is part of the environmental system the sarrukh have installed in their stronghold. It is a hollow stone tube which transports moist, hot air throughout the complex. The devices creating the flow are located at the base of the pillar.

Encounter - Guardians of the entrance

Halfway down the walkway the party is attacked by its ancient guardians. These Gargoyles were forced into service by Nasreen not long ago.

A creature made entirely of stone swoops down from behind the magical lighting. It resembles a snake with four paws and feathered wings. How this creature is able to fly, is beyond you. In the darkness above more shadows are stirring.

Gargoyle (2), MM p. 140.

Doors

To the dig site (area 1): Double door, gold plated, open, unlocked

To the Halls of the Uninitiated: Stairs down

Halls of the Uninitiated

Dungeon 12B – Halls of the Uninitiated

These halls are where visitors to the Ziggurat are received. They were mostly used for brokering trade deals with outsiders and receive esteemed but untrusted guests. Some of these guests were scholars looking to benefit from Ssufaxuss' extensive library. Few were ever permitted.

Climate system

The halls of the uninitiated have a tropical clime due to the workings of the azer machine.

3. The bottom of the staircase

Descending you notice an increase in temperature and moisture in the air. Before you reach the bottom of the stairs, the atmosphere becomes rather tropical. Everything here is covered in a thin layer of moisture and algae, making the ground rather slippery.

A bronze plaque with glyphs can be seen at the bottom of the stairs. Characters that can translate **sarrukh writing**, decipher its meaning as: 'Halls of the Uninitiated'.

Doors

To the dig site: Stairs up

4. The waiting area

Visitors that require something from the steward, most commonly trade agreements and access to the library on the next level, were made to wait here before being allowed to plead their case in the Hall of Supplicants.

You arrive in an area that must have been plain and functional in its day. At eye height a band of stylized snakes writhes along the fitted granite walls. In this area several marble benches were placed in orderly fashion. A dried-up drinking fountain hangs from the southern wall.

Intelligence (Investigation) DC 10: This area is probably a waiting area.

Doors

East (to area 5): Double doors, bronze, locked, **dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 25; Strength (athletics)**

DC 30 breaks the lock; AC 19, 32 hp. The key can be found in the steward's office.

Before you is a bronze double door with the skeletons of large reptiles fixed in its surface.

Engraved in the double door are sarrukh glyphs. Characters that can translate sarrukh writing, decipher its meaning as: 'Hall of Supplicants'. In sarrukh writing the words for someone who asks, a supplicant, a beggar and a person on their knees are the same.

North (to area 7): Standard door.

North, stairs down (to halls of learning): Wood, moldy, double, open.

Northwest (to area 14): A gaping hole in the wall were something huge burst through.

South (to area 6): A gaping hole in the wall were something huge burst through.

5. The Hall of Supplicants

Generally the sarrukh succeeded at instilling loyalty into their servants, but the unnatural experimenting in the Ziggurat eroded that loyalty.

In preparation of the assault the Ziggurat, the couatl spent years recruiting operatives among the ranks of the Ziggurat's servants. One such dissenter was Haruch, a lizardman who was the assistant of the yuan-ti steward. When the attack came Haruch locked the pureblood, Hezgar, inside this hall before fleeing to the steward's office.

As the doors swing open the first thing you see are ancient claw marks all over the interior of the door as if someone or something tried to claw its way out. In front of you a strange scene unfolds. A delegation of humanoid skeletons are on their knees in front of a bronze throne. From the throne an undead abomination rises, its eyes pinpricks of searing white. It looks at you curiously before uttering a single word hissing word in Sarrukhar ('finally').

Encounter

Hezgar, use Wight statistics, MM p. 300, treasure: Stone of good luck, 16 sp.

Skeleton (5), MM p. 272, treasure: 16 sp, 20 gp, 10 gp, 16 gp, 12 ep

Doors

West: Double doors, bronze, locked, **dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 25; Strength (athletics) DC 30** breaks the

lock; AC 19, 32 hp. The key can be found in the steward's office.

6. The Visitors Dining Hall

Visitors to the Ziggurat and traders bringing goods could eat in the dining hall.

Some ghouls found their way here through the tunnels made by the bulette pair that breeched the complex. They often venture into the bulette tunnels in search of food, dead or living. They are currently feeding in between the benches on the corpse of an illithid they found dying in the tunnels. The illithid was mortally wounded in a fight with the female bulette that died in the storage area.

Mold covers the benches and tables of this dining hall. A large hole gapes through the northern wall where tremendous force broke the masonry apart, scattering furniture all over the place. From in between the benches a low growl can be heard.

Encounter

Ghast (1), MM p. 148

Ghoul (2), MM p. 148

Treasure

The ghouls were feasting on the corpse of a mind flayer.

On the mind flayer's wrist; Wisdom (perception)

DC10: A jeweled bracelet of alien craftsmanship worth 83 gp.

Doors

North (to area 4): A gaping hole in the wall where something huge burst through.

West (to area 9): Wood, moldy, double, closed

7. The Steward's Office

Haruch fled here after he locked the Hall of Supplicants. Loyalists found him here and killed him. They never noticed the key clutched in his hand.

This office seems to be an administrative center. Cabinets line the walls, stacked with decayed scrolls. A single fungus-infested desk sits in the middle of the room, laden with ledgers. Some of the ledgers were knocked to the ground by the long-dead lizardman laying sprawled across the desk, a long dagger pinning it to the wooden surface.

Searching the desk or body; **Wisdom (perception) DC 10:** In the hands of the long dead creature is a bronze key.

The bronze key unlocks the door to the hall of supplicants.

Most of the writing is too decayed and faded to read. The parts that can be deciphered can only be read by someone who understands the sarrukh language. The writing is purely administrative: lists of visitors and their purpose of visiting, lists of provisions bought from merchants and their costs, and registers of taxes paid by shop owners selling their goods in the Ziggurat.

Doors

Standard door.

8. Shops

The walls here are lined with red granite cubicles littered with completely decayed goods. There must have been a permanent market here, its shops catering to the pyramid's visitors. What they sold here you can only guess at.

Treasure

If the party members sift through the decayed goods; **Wisdom (perception) DC 20:** Roll once on the table: Treasure hoard: challenge 0-4, DMG p. 137, but do not roll for coin. Only a single roll allowed, no matter how many party members succeed.

Doors

Northeast (to area 13): Small wooden door, moldy, closed, locked, dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 15, strength (athletics) DC 10, AC 13, hp 3 (1d8)

9. The Honor Ward

These rooms were reserved for more distinguished members of the Ziggurat's hierarchy, and the occasional important visitor allowed to stay at the Ziggurat.

Description below applies for each of these rooms.

This room must have been opulent in its day. Containing a large bed and once-beautiful furniture, it has since fallen into decay.

Doors

East (to area 6): Wood, moldy, double, closed

A bronze plaque with glyphs can be seen next to the door. Characters that can translate sarrukh writing, decipher its meaning as: 'Visitors Dining Hall'.

North (to area 14): Wood, moldy, double, open.

A bronze plaque with glyphs can be seen next to the door. Characters that can translate sarrukh writing, decipher its meaning as: ‘Hall of Feasts’.

Other: Wood, moldy, closed, locked, **dexterity (thieves’ tools) DC 15, strength (athletics) DC 10, AC 13, hp 3 (1d8)**

10. The kitchen

Moldy and damp are the two words that are most apt to describe this large kitchen. Fungi of all kinds grow in abundance here, covering floors and walls. The huge lichen-covered stone hearth is the only thing still serviceable.

Trap

If a player wonders about the fungi; **Intelligence (nature) DC 16:** The fungi resemble a certain type you’ve seen before on the surface. If they are related, treading on them will cause a noxious cloud of spores being propelled into the air.

Passing through the kitchen will cause a cascade reaction of fungi bursting. There is no way to avoid stepping on them since they carpet the entire floor. The toxic spores thrown into the air will leave everyone in the area gasping for breath. **Constitution save DC 16:** Upon failure 2d10 poison damage and the poisoned condition for 1d6 hours.

Note: Burning the fungi eliminates the risk.

Doors

Standard doors.

11. The storage area

This must have been the pantry for the entire complex. The small colonies of mushrooms growing all over the shelves have reduced the once abundant stores to uselessness. You would contemplate the transience of life if you weren’t so distracted by the smell of rotting meat coming from somewhere near.

Doors

To area 12: Stairs down

Others: Standard door.

12. The wine cellar

A bulette, the mate of the bulette in area 16, recently tunneled into the wine cellar fleeing from a

fight with a group of illithid in the tunnels below. Soon after it succumbed to its injuries. A pair of carrion crawlers followed the stench of decay to feed. The stench is easily detected one floor up.

In the middle of the room amidst wrecked wine barrels a large decaying creature is being feasted on by what looks like a pair of tentacled caterpillars.

Encounter

Carrion crawler (2), MM p. 37

Doors

To area 11: Stairs up

13. The mess hall

Here the party find the remnants of servants loyal to the Ba’etith that fell in battle against the dissident forces led by the Couatl. After millennia the necromantic energies of the Ziggurat compelled them to rise again and re-enact the routine they were accustomed to in life.

Scores of skeletal remnants can be seen sitting at the tables in this area. One by one the undead skulls turn your way, dripping with moisture that hangs heavily in the atmosphere. Ancient cutlery falling from lifeless hands to ruined tables signals the start of battle.

Most of the skeletons that try to rise, fall apart from decay. Only a limited number is able to attack.

Encounter

Skeletons (9), MM p. 272

Doors

South (to area 8): Small wooden door, moldy, closed, locked, **dexterity (thieves’ tools) DC 15, strength (athletics) DC 10, AC 13, hp 3 (1d8)**

Other: Standard door.

14. The Hall of Feasts

This area saw use on religious holidays and special occasions when important visitors came to Ssufaxuss.

This banquet hall must have seated several hundreds of diners. Millennia later the ornate tables and benches have suffered the unstoppable ravages of time. In between the tables moldy carpets mark the passages where servants would once wait on honored guests. Scraps of large floor to ceiling tapestries still cling to the red marble walls, their design and meaning long since passed

from memory. Marring this sight of decayed opulence are the large holes in the eastern and western walls, were something sought violent entry.

Doors

East (to area 4): A gaping hole in the wall were something huge burst through.

West (to area 16): A gaping hole in the wall were something huge burst through.

South (to area 9): Wood, moldy, double, open.

15. Residents' quarters

This area is riddled with small rooms. Each of the rooms contains a bed or a cot and some form of cupboard or travelling chest. The rooms used to be separated from the hallway with no more than a simple curtain of which scraps can still be seen hanging in the doorways.

16. The landshark tunnel

A pair of bulettes settled in the area to mate. The female was mortally wounded in a recent encounter with a party of illithid looking for the ruins of Ixexyn (See the 'History' section). Mortally wounded she burrowed into the wine cellar, where she died.

The other bulette is roaming the area looking for its mate and will attack once the party enters the area.

These tunnels, dug out in dirt and rock, probably extend for many miles. In this particular spot, a shaft, eight feet across, extends downwards at an almost vertical angle. It seems impossible to say how far it goes down.

Encounter

Bulette, MM p. 34, treasure: A *Sword of Vengeance* (greatsword) is imbedded in the flesh of the bulette. This is a remnant from a previous encounter.

Wisdom (perception) DC 10: The earth is trembling slightly, something large is approaching. Players that fail the ability check are surprised.

The bulette will burst from a wall near the players using its deadly leap.

Halls of Learning

Dungeon 12C - Halls of Learning

This floor is dedicated to the study of necromancy. The Ba'etith Overscribe who constructed this pyramid firmly believed in the ghastly power of necromancy and corpse crafting. She ordered hundreds of thousands of bones and skulls embedded into the floors, walls and ceiling of this area. Most of them were the remnants of workers and slaves who died during the construction. Due to their nature the bones are believed to be excellent recipients for necromantic energies.

Climate system

To protect the library housed on this floor, the climate system ensures it is always cold and dry in this area.

Strangely clean

This area is atypically well maintained, the furniture serviceable and of superior quality. Raye the spectator has been taking care of it since before the fall of Ssufaxuss.

17. The bottom of the staircase

Arriving at the bottom of the staircase, you instantly notice this area is allot dryer and cooler than the floor above. Advancing you become slightly puzzled by the strange looking floors and walls. At irregular intervals, the smoothly fitted marble slabs are interrupted by pale looking bulges. As your curiosity prompts you to investigate you come to a horrific discovery. Thousands of humanoid skulls were used in the walls and floors of this area.

A bronze plaque with glyphs can be seen at the bottom of the stairs. Characters that can translate **sarrukh writing**, decipher its meaning as: 'Halls of Learning'.

18. The meeting area

This area must have been used for relaxation and informal meetings. Comfortable leather sofas and low tables rest atop lush carpets, forming islands of splendid luxury in a sea of blackness.

Investigation (intelligence) DC 10: In contrast to the upper levels this area is well maintained. Even the furniture looks serviceable.

Doors

South (to Central Staircase): Double doors, bronze, closed.

19. The scriptorium

The archways give way to a neatly organized scriptorium. Polished escritoirs form dark, but orderly lines, resembling tombstones in a graveyard exclusively reserved for scholars.

The escritoirs are clean and clutter free. Each has a dried-up ink well and several usable quills standing on the table top. On one of the escritoirs a saurian skull can be found. This is in fact a flameskull that will attack as soon as the party lingers in the area for a few rounds.

Encounter

Flameskull (1), MM p. 134

Doors

North (to area 20): Double doors, bronze, ajar.

West (to area 23): Wood, reinforced, closed, unlocked.

West (to corridor): Double doors, bronze, locked, **dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 20; Strength (athletics) DC 30** breaks the lock; AC 19, 32 hp.

20. The library

This must have been a grand library once, now it looks as if a tornado passed through. More than a few bookcases were toppled, their innards scattered across the floor. There is hardly a spot on the floor that isn't covered by parchment or books.

The nothics in the area have been searching the library for arcane knowledge for hundreds of years and made quite a mess.

If the library is preserved it can be a boon for spell casters. If a spell caster takes the time to move or restore a significant part of the library he or she will be able to use it for study. This means that the time spent researching a spell in this library will be halved. The library is also useful if used to research all things historical concerning the Days of Thunder and before.

Encounter

Nothic (3), MM p. 236

Fire in the library

During combat characters carrying a torch will often drop these on the floor to free a weapon hand. If this happens the library will catch fire. Spells with the fire

descriptor can have the same consequence at the DM's discretion.

If the library catches fire it deals 2d6 fire damage each round after the first on the fire starter's initiative (**Dexterity save DC 10** for half).

Smoke will make it impossible to breathe after 1d4 rounds (suffocating rules PHB p. 183).

The fire will rage for 1d4 hours. If the players close all the doors to the library the fire will be contained and die due to lack of oxygen. If not the scriptorium and the meeting area will burn down.

Doors

South (to area 19): Double doors, bronze, ajar.

21. The portal room

This octagonal room looks relatively untouched. Along its walls seven scenes made of ceramic tiles depict exotic lands. In the center of the room a coinciding number of arches connects in the rough shape of a circle. Each arch seemingly linked with the relief on the wall behind it.

A sudden sound catches your attention and your jaw drops as you look up to find a scaly green ball, studded with four writhing tentacles, floating in the air above you. The creature is humming a merry tune to itself as it blasts a cobweb with a ray coming from one of its tentacles.

Encounter

Raye, spectator, MM p. 30

Background

The spectator in this room is called, Raye. For many decades he was the servant of Overscribe Chssar Musstan. Now that his master is dead he is patiently fulfilling the terms of his contract. Normally his service would have only lasted for 101 years, but the wording of the contract was inaccurate in several places. As a consequence, he has been stuck here for more than 30 millennia. Raye went insane several times, the last period taking about 2 millennia. But insanity is tiring and eventually he grew out of it. Raye is actually more or less content in his present life. He misses companionship though. A cat would be nice.

Even if freed, Raye will stay at his station performing his assigned tasks as it gives him a sense of fulfilling. He will be forever grateful to whoever frees him though.

If asked, Raye can give a thorough description of the Ziggurat's history (see 'History' at the beginning of the

chapter). He can even confirm there are dwarven hostages in the levels below.

Raye is also more than willing to translate any writing brought to him. His years of service in the Ziggurat has made him fluent in the language of its occupants.

The arches

Raye knows the arches are magical portals. He can tell the players the activation key to the portals is a scepter (area 32), which used to be held by Overscribe Chssar Musstan. He knows one of the functioning portals leads to a place on this same plane of existence.

Examining the arches

Two of the arches crackle with arcane energy, the odd harmless spark of electricity shooting between copper studs covering their surface. The others lie dormant: **knowledge (arcana) DC 10:** These are portals. They require a password or key to activate. Once a portal is activated it can be used to travel instantly to another linked portal, which could be anywhere, even on another plane of existence.

Examining the ceramic scenes

Each of the scenes conveys the image of a landscape. There are seven scenes and seven corresponding arches.

The scene behind **the first functioning portal** is that of a temperate forest. This portal leads to the ruins of a Sarrukh Outpost in the Southwood, a few days south of the Delimbiyr River. (See Chapter IV – The South Wood)

The scene behind **the second functioning portal** depicts a bronze fortress standing in a rocky world wreathed in fire, through this portal, the azers found in the control room can return to their home plane.

The others depict other landscapes and some of them look like they are not from this world. These portals are out of commission but could be repaired and used for other adventures if the DM is so inclined.

Quest – Freeing Raye

Quest xp: Freeing Raye: 1250 xp to be divided among the party.

Raye's contract

Raye's contract can be found in a cabinet in the Overscribe's quarters (area 22).

The contract is in an ancient form of Undercommon, a language shared by the Overscribe and Raye. Anyone able to understand **Undercommon** can understand the contract; **Intelligence DC 10:** The contract stipulates Raye's service will end as soon as the sand of the contractual hourglass has filled the lower reservoir.

Note: Normally this takes 101 years, unless the

hourglass stops functioning, in which case he is stuck here for eternity.

The hourglass

The hourglass can be found in area 23 (westernmost corner). The upper half of the hourglass was shattered in the fighting between the Ba'etith and the couatl. As a consequence, the sand can't run into the lower reservoir anymore. A lot of it lies piled on the floor next to the hourglass.

Anyone recovering the sand and putting it in the bottom half of the hourglass frees Raye. Destroying the contract frees Raye as well.

Doors

East (to area 23): Wood, reinforced, closed, unlocked.

22. The Overscribe's quarters

These were the quarters of someone important. As with the rest of this area, it is uncannily clean. The entire floor is covered in thick animal fur, sewn together with proficiency. The room contains a large desk, a comfortable looking bed and a wall covering cabinet. Each of these pieces of furniture was made from reptilian bones, fused together by magic or exceptional craftsmanship. None of it seems degraded in the least.

Trap

Opening the door without speaking a proper command word will set off a trap. Raye knows the command word and will readily share it, if asked.

Life draining handle; **Wisdom (perception) DC 20**, **dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 15**: Scratching away the rune on the inside of the handle will disable the trap; Upon failure **constitution save DC 14** or receive 2d10 necrotic damage.

Treasure

Desk: Wand of Magic Missiles, the Overscribe's diary (see below)

Cabinet: Raye's contract (see 'Portal room' above). Iron Scroll Case (25 gp) containing: Spell Scroll (True Strike), Spell Scroll (Detect Magic), Spell Scroll (Hail of Thorns),

Wall: Painting depicting a giant cobra with glistening fangs attacking at the head of an army of skeletal warriors. (75 gp)

Wisdom (religion) DC 15: The hooded serpent is Merrshaulk a long dead evil patron god of serpents,

lizards and yuan-ti. **Beating DC 20:** Merrshaulk isn't really dead, he is now an aspect of a similar god, Sseth.

The Overscribe's diary

Handout 32 – Chssar Musstan's Diary

This seems to be a decaying diary. Its jacket is made of purple and green reptilian leather, the clasp a silver snake skull. Upon opening dozens of husks of tiny insects fall from the book. Most of the pages are ruined. Only a few passages are preserved well enough to read.

The diary has suffered from the attention of a small insect called a paperlouse. It can only be read by **someone who understands the sarrukh language**. The diary contains some hints of the events leading up to the rebellion that destroyed Ssufaxuss. It also provides a clue towards the opening of the Halls of the Dead.

After successfully reading the diary following ability checks could be made;

Intelligence (religion) DC 15: Jazirian is the Couatl deity of Community, Peace, Learning, and Parenthood. Couatls are sentient winged serpents. They aren't native to this part of the world. Merrshaulk was Jazirian's greatest adversary.

Intelligence (history) DC 15: The sarrukh were a race of lizardlike humanoids, who are considered to be one of the creator races that dominated the world more than 30 millennia ago. **Beating DC 20:** The Ba'etith are an order of sarrukh wizards from the beginning of time. Their work on the arcane laid the foundation for the rise of Netheril an ancient and powerful human empire. The Dark Ziggurat must have been one of the Ba'etith's places of learning its focus seems to have been the art of necromancy.

Note on Jazirian

Chssar Musstan assumed the Couatl were followers of Jazirian. He didn't realize they worshipped Bahamut instead. (See the 'History' section)

Doors

South (to area 23): Wood, reinforced, closed, unlocked.

23. The Overscribe's lounge

Although it is remarkably cold here, this red marble room seems to have a recreational purpose. The center of the room is dominated by a dried-up

fountain topped with a shimmering white crystal globe. Surrounding the fountain are piles of silken cushions, luxurious couches and large braziers. The other remarkable feature of this room is a large hour glass, its top half broken, the sand spilled on the floor. In between the shards stands a humanoid figure its single eye staring at you with all-consuming madness.

Touching **the shimmering globe** activates the room's environmental systems. In its normal setting this means the braziers will activate, bathing the room in bright light. The fountain will start running again and the atmosphere in the room will become tropical.

This is an illusory effect produced by the shimmering globe. The effect extends into the Overscribe's quarters and allows the Overscribe to live under comfortable, albeit illusory conditions, without upsetting the delicate balance of temperature and (lack of) humidity protecting the library.

Concentrating on the desired atmospheric conditions while touching the globe can alter the rooms' apparent temperature and humidity to suit one's whim.

Encounter

Nothic (2), MM p. 236

Doors

North (to area 22): Wood, reinforced, closed, unlocked, trapped (see description area 22).

South (to corridor): Secret door, **wisdom (perception) DC 15** to discover, **intelligence (investigation) DC 10** to open, AC 17, 18 hp (4d8)

Other: Wood, reinforced, closed, unlocked.

24. The laboratory

Magical lighting slowly winks to life as you open the door to this ancient laboratory. Part of the left wall is occupied by a strange device made of glass and steel. Smaller equipment and tools are stacked in shelves and on top of boxes against the wall to your right. The far wall is occupied by a long narrow table filled with alchemist's beakers. A man-sized alembic stands next to it in a corner. Central to this room is a black iron table, on top of it stands an obsidian chest.

Encounter

Black pudding, MM p. 241

The chest is locked **Dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 15**, **Strength (athletics) DC 20**, AC 13, 4 hp (1d6).

The chest is a crystal chest containing a black pudding. If the party opens or breaks the chest, the black pudding attacks.

Investigating the chest

Investigating the chest; **Intelligence (investigation) DC 15**: The chest is actually made from what looks like black glass. **Beating DC 25**: The contents of the chest are giving it a black color. The chest is made of plain crystal.

Investigating the large device

This device has seen severe use. It looks like a large, steel bound fish tank. Several copper wires run from the ceiling to barbed copper spikes lying ready in the tank. **Intelligence (arcana) DC 20**: This device is probably used in the necromantic animation of corpses.

At the DM's discretion, this device could be used to manufacture some type of flesh golem.

Treasure

Shelves: Alchemist's supplies, glassblower's tools, tinker's tools.

Doors

East (to corridor): Wood, reinforced, closed, locked, **dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 15**, **strength (athletics) DC 20**, AC 17, hp 14 (3d8)

25. The vault

Only accessible when the party is in possession of Chssar Musstan's scepter, found in area 32. See the 'Doors' section below.

This room is heavily adorned with carvings of fanged and hooded snakes. In between the carvings you see circular hatches, three feet across, two on each wall. In contrast to the rest of this floor, everything in this room is covered in a layer of dust.

The hatches are locked; **dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 15**, **strength (athletics) DC 20**, AC 17, 18 hp (4d8).

If the players open a hatch the following happens:

You open the hatch and spy the gleam of gold. A veritable treasure lies beyond. You are still catching your breath at the sight when the other hatches swing open violently. A scraping sound is audible from inside one of them.

Trap

The vault door is trapped. Even when the door is opened in the presence of the scepter, a command word needs to be spoken or the five spoke handle used to open the door will drain the offending character's life energy. Sadly, the command word has been lost to the ages.

Life draining vault door; **Wisdom (perception) DC 20, dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 15:** Scratching away the rune on the inside of the spokes will disable the trap; Upon failure **constitution save DC 16** or receive 3d10 necrotic damage.

Encounter

Bone naga (2), MM p. 233.

Behind each hatch is a small extradimensional space. The vault is guarded by two bone nagae. The nagae can travel between the extradimensional spaces at will. Entering one hatch and exiting through another takes half of their movement.

Treasure - Behind the hatches

Behind the hatches lies a part of the wealth of the Ziggurat. It will be impossible for the heroes to carry it all out at once.

57000 cp, 20700 sp, 9100 gp, 290 pp, Leather Boots with Brass Buckles (18 gp), Silk Robe (34 gp), Python Leather Gloves (18 gp), Box of Perfumed Candles (25 gp), Fine Cloth Cloak (21 gp), Polished Stone Puzzle Box (16 gp), Pewter Bracelet (25 gp), Adamantine Armor (chainmail), Figurine of Wondrous Power (silver raven), Sentinel Shield, Staff of the Python, Potion of Healing (2)

Doors

East (to corridor): Bronze round vault door, closed, magically sealed (see above) and indestructible. Five spoke handle to open.

This door is magically sealed and virtually indestructible. It will only open from the outside when in the presence of Chssar Musstan's scepter. When a player touches the door with the scepter the door will ripple for a moment, indicating the spell holding it shut is lifted.

26. Autopsy room

This room is frigid. Two smooth white marble slabs are its main feature. Underneath each slab are compartments for medical equipment. A crystal light globe is floating above each of the slabs, shedding the room in bright, pale light.

Wisdom (medicine) DC 10: This looks like an autopsy room.

Treasure

Underneath the slabs: two healing kits.

Above the slabs: The crystal globes can be removed and taken along by the players. The identify spell can reveal the command word to turn the light on and off again. If a crystal globe is dropped it will rise or drop to 7 feet above the floor. Separate command words can be discovered to change color and light intensity. Each crystal globe weighs 30 lb.

Doors

West (to corridor): Wooden, closed, unlocked.

Central Staircase

Dungeon 12D – Central Staircase

Climate system

The central staircase has a tropical clime due to the workings of the azer machine.

27. The top of the staircase

A broad but steep staircase descends into darkness. As in the upper halls, the stone is slick with moisture, every red granite step covered in yellow algae. In a few places one can still see ancient wall carvings that must have given this staircase a grand appearance once.

After Nasreen performed the ritual on the remnants of the elder brain, she left through the Underdark with a large portion of her forces.

Wisdom (survival) DC 10: Tracks show a large group of creatures passed here in recent days. **Beating DC 15:** The tracks go down but not back up.

28. The entrance to the Halls of Prayer

A short corridor branches off towards the left. Looking in you see a gate comprised of bars made from bone. It stands slightly ajar, the corridor behind it visible in the light of your torches. The bars are magically wrought in the shape of skeletal serpents.

A small bronze plaque next to the door can be read by people who understand the **sarrukh language**: “Halls of Prayer”

Doors

To halls of prayer: Bone gate, ajar.

29. The guardians of the staircase

These ancient guardians were forced into doing Nasreen’s bidding, they will let Nasreen’s men pass, the party, however, wasn’t mentioned in the deal.

The drip-dripping of condense falling from the ceiling is clearly audible during the silence of your descent. Suddenly a scraping sound marks movement up above. A familiar but unwelcome

shape plummets down from the gloom on wings made of stone.

Encounter

Gargoyle (4), MM p. 140.

30. The entrance to the Halls of Maintenance

A short bland passage leads to an equally non-descript bronze door.

A small bronze plaque next to the door can be read by people who understand the **sarrukh language**: “Maintenance and Climate Control”

Doors

To Halls of Maintenance: Non-descript bronze door, closed, locked, **dexterity (thieves’ tools) DC20, Strength (athletics) DC25**, AC19, 14 hp (3d8).

31. Moradin’s Seal

Trap

The first adventurer(s) to come down the stairs; **Dexterity save DC 15:** On failure: An extremely slippery spot catches you off guard and sends you tumbling down, your fall only stopped by the fortunate positioning of a large anvil. 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

Bottom of the staircase

The bottom of the staircase is marked by a sturdy gate inlaid with a mosaic of bone. The mosaic depicts a scene of humanoids bowing down in terrified reverence before a central figure. This figure has been rendered unrecognizable by a newer superimposed and silvered effigy straight out of a tall tavern tale. It is the image of a mind flayer welcoming you in its hungry embrace. Compounding the strangeness of this scene is an ornate dwarven anvil, standing cracked in front of the gate.

A bronze plaque with glyphs can be seen at the bottom of the stairs. Characters that can translate **sarrukh writing**, decipher its meaning as: ‘Halls of Suffering’.

Investigating the anvil

Two seals were placed at the entrances to the illithid enclave of Ixexyn by dwarven clerics of Moradin. This act prevented the mind flayers from leaving, making Ixexyn their tomb.

Intelligence (religion) DC 15: The anvil is the seal of Moradin. It is used by powerful dwarven clerics to create a barrier that prevents magical as well as mundane passage into and from an area. **Dwarves make this check at DC 10.**

Doors

To Halls of Suffering: Sturdy gate, bronze, closed, unlocked.

Halls of Maintenance

Dungeon 12E – Halls of Maintenance

These halls house the azer machine responsible for regulating Ssufaxuss' climate.

Climate system

The halls of maintenance have a tropical climate due to the workings of the azer machine.

32. The bottom of the shaft

A thick marble column rises up through a wide square shaft in the ceiling. This must be the same pillar you saw rising from the depth on the upper levels. Countless red copper tubes protrude from the ground to connect with the base of the column, making the construction resemble a metal and stone mangrove tree. In between the tubes you can see the remnants of a scaled humanoid with a serpent's tail dressed in what once were ornate robes. He seems locked in final battle with what once was a winged serpentine creature.

Hundreds died here in the final battle for the ziggurat. Originally many dead could be found in this area. Over time the necromantic energies stored in the building caused the dead to rise. They wandered off and were ultimately dispatched by the fire snakes and water weards in the adjoining rooms.

The corpses between the tubes

The corpses between the pipes are those of the Overscribe, Chssar Musstan and his archnemesis, the Couatl Echtern, cleric of Bahamut. They died here in their final battle when Echtern sacrificed himself to destroy the soul of Chssar Musstan, preventing the powerful Overscribe from finding his way to an undead state.

To reach the corpses someone needs to crawl through the pipes. The pipes themselves will sear anyone who touches them.

Crawling through the pipes in either direction; **Dexterity (athletics)** DC 12; Upon failure: 2d10 fire damage.

Treasure

Chssar Musstan holds a scepter in his right hand and a spellbook in his left, which is plain to see for anyone crawling through the tubes. A Pearl of Power can be

found in his pockets, provided the players do a routine search of the body; **Wisdom (perception)** DC 5.

Chssar Musstan's Spellbook

Cantrip: Chill Touch

Level 1: Ray of Sickness

Level 2: Gentle Repose

Level 3: Animate Dead, Bestow Curse

Level 6: Create Undead.

Chssar Musstan's Scepter

This strange looking scepter is made entirely out of brass. It carries an inscription in the strange language that is found all over the Ziggurat.

If the players identify the item or translate the sarrukh inscription; **Handout 33 – The scepter of Chssar Musstan.**

Doors

East (to Central Staircase): Non-descript bronze door, closed, locked, **dexterity (thieves' tools)** DC20, **Strength (athletics)** DC25, AC19, 14 hp (3d8).

West (to area 33): Black iron door with no handle or keyhole, closed, magically sealed, indestructible. This door can only be unlocked by whoever holds Chssar Musstan's scepter. When a player holding the scepter touches the door it will seem to ripple indicating it has become unlocked.

33. Climate control

Behind the door you find a large machine made up of brass gears spinning slowly and unsupported in the air. Bound to the machine with luminous chains are what appear to be two dwarves wreathed in flames.

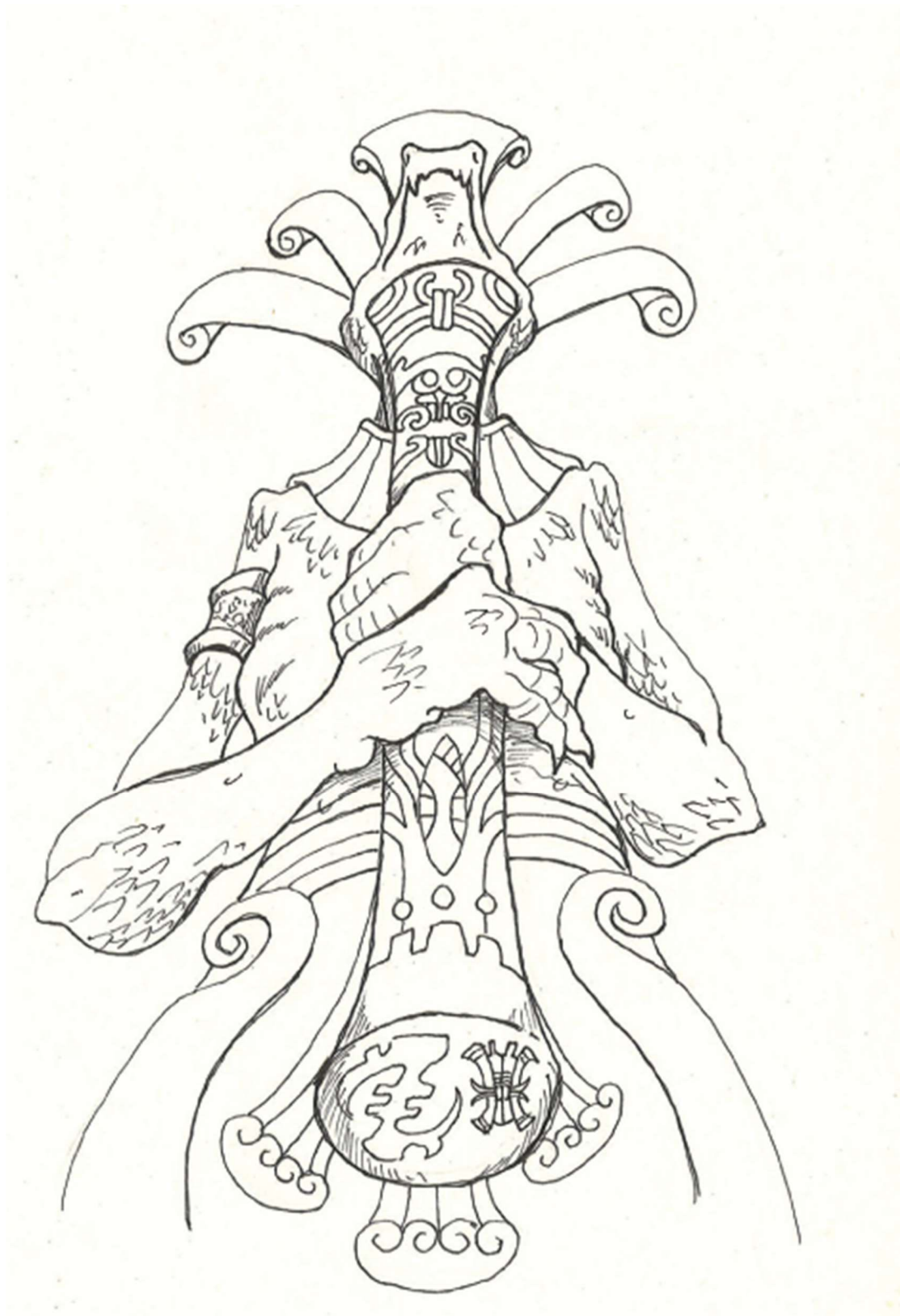
The two dwarves are actually azers, elementals from the plane of fire. They were lured here by the Ba'etith to build a to control the climate inside the Ziggurat.

Encounter

Azer (2), MM p. 22

The azers are called Heliar and Ragon. They speak ignan and a heavily accented undercommon they learned during their stay in Ssufaxuss.

Heliar and Ragon consider themselves to be siblings. They weren't born to the same parents but came from the same production batch and gained awareness together.



Overscribe Chssar Musstan

Concept Drawing

Quest – Access to the halls of the dead

Heliar and Ragon can explain the function of their invention. They can also tell the party that the machine isn't working properly anymore. They will also readily share that the Halls of the Dead are only accessible when normal atmosphere is restored in that area. This can only be done once the azer device is made to function again.

The azers know the system was sabotaged by the couatl and presume there is some kind of malfunction preventing the devices in both the water storage (area 34) and the heating system (area 36) from working normally. If the party wants control over the system, they will need to remedy the situation.

The large machine in this room is the control center for the Ziggurat's climate system. To understand its workings and operate it without the azers requires an **intelligence check DC 20**. If tried **without knowledge of the ignan language, this check it at disadvantage**.

Quest – Freeing the azers

Quest xp: Freeing the azers: 2500 xp to be divided among the party.

The azers will only help the players work the machine if they release them from the chains holding them there. Touching the chains with Chssar Musstan's scepter breaks the chains. These chains are highly enchanted and breaking them any other way is impossible. When a player touches the chains with the scepter they will seem to ripple for a moment before ceasing to exist.

Aftermath

Eventually the azers will find their way to the Portal Room and return from whence they can.

Doors

West (to area 32): black iron door with no handle or keyhole, closed, magically sealed, indestructible. This door can only be unlocked by whoever holds Chssar Musstan's scepter. When a player holding the scepter touches the door it will seem to phase out of this dimension for an instance.

34. Water storage

A steep curving ramp takes you up to a domed hall. A clear pool takes up the entirety of this room. A clockwork contraption is floating three feet above the far end of the pool, its gears jammed by a strange looking weapon. A trickle of water pours from the contraption into the pool. It is impossible to distinguish where the water is coming from, since the contraption isn't connected to any tubes or ducts. The surface of the pool undulates faintly

and at times it appears disturbed by small vortexes.

The pool is three feet deep, making it difficult terrain for medium sized creatures. Small creatures have to swim if they want to enter the water.

The clockwork contraption is a valve regulating a small portal to the elemental plane of water. It is jammed by a strange looking weapon put there by one of Echteron's lieutenants, an asabi female, called Chimalli.

Encounter

Water Weird (3), MM p. 299

Three water weirds were trapped here long ago. They have since turned evil, corrupted by the necromantic influence of the Ziggurat. Hoping the party will open the portal to their home plane they will not attack until the party removes the strange looking weapon.

Treasure

The strange looking weapon is an ancient type of battleaxe. It consists of a wooden haft with shards of obsidian imbedded as a cutting edge. **Handout 34 - Chimalli's battle axe**

Quest – Access to the halls of the dead

Removing the strange looking weapon will set the gears in motion, closing the portal and making the device in this area operational again.

Once the devices in both the water storage and the heating system are working again, the azers can operate the climate control system in area 33.

35. The hatchery

The passages slope down until you arrive in a domed hall. The walls, floor and ceiling are made of brass and radiate a dull heat. Scores of small tubes run across the walls and floor and into the ceiling. A narrow passageway crosses the hall and leads down into the next room. The passageway itself appears to be the only part of the room not blistering to the touch. Several large black spheres are spread across the floor. In between them you register movement.

The spheres are salamander eggs. The eggs hatch on a regular basis to provide fresh fire snakes to heat the system.

Encounter

Fire snake (7), MM p. 265

The fire snakes attack on sight.

Stepping off the passageway deals 3d10 fire damage. No save allowed.

36. The heating system

Perspiration runs across your face as you enter the next room. The heat is almost unbearable. A huge machine floats high above the ground hiding most of the ceiling from sight. A part of the device is whirring like crazy, its brass gears almost spinning out of control, while another part sits idle and unmoving. From the middle of the room a cross between a woman and a snake gazes at you, its whole body wreathed in flame. Strapped across its chest is a large burning cogwheel.

Hura, the salamander living in this room has gone mad long ago. Obsessed with holding on to the little power she has in her small domain she devours all fire snakes that threaten to grow into salamanders. Every now and again she lets one of them mature long enough for them to mate, after which she will lay a fresh batch of eggs.

Encounter

Hura, Salamander (1), MM p. 266, treasure: A cogwheel, see below.

Fire snakes (4), MM p. 265

Quest – Access to the halls of the dead

The cogwheel strapped to Hura's chest is the part that's missing from the device. It was knocked clear by the insurgents upon teleporting here at the start of the uprising. Tossing the cogwheel high into the air is enough to have it soar into place and have the machine working properly again.

Contact with Hura's body has made the cogwheel searing to the touch. Touching it without precautions causes 1d6 fire damage, no save allowed. After being removed from Hura's possession for half an hour, the cogwheel will have cooled enough to be handled safely.

Once the devices in both the water storage and the heating system are working, the azers can operate the climate control system in area 33.

Halls of Prayer

Dungeons 12F – Halls of Prayer

Foreseeing the coming war with Jazirian, its sibling god, Merrshaulk spread several artifacts among his followers ordering them to keep the items safe. These artifacts are akin to phylacteries in that they contain part of the essence of Merrshaulk and will allow him to be resurrected if slain.

One of these artifacts was kept in the Temple of the Fang in the lower levels of the Ziggurat. Since Jazirian never succeeded, the artifacts went unused and were all but forgotten.

After the invasion of the couatl, five score loyal yuan-ti stayed in the Ziggurat to guard the artifact. Eventually, however, disagreement between the faithful of Merrshaulk and more independent yuan-ti, who had grown accustomed to being free from sarrukh leadership, caused a fatal clash between both factions. The loyalists were slaughtered and left behind with their artifact, while the dissenters left the Ziggurat to pursue their own goals.

Over time the necromantic energies stored in the works of the sarrukh raised the loyalist yuan-ti from the dead, but left them wandering without purpose.

During the fall of sarrukh civilization, Merrshaulk slipped into torpor and was eventually transformed into the winged serpent, Sseth.

The Time of Troubles saw Sseth captured by a rival deity while he slept. Dormant Sseth has been communicating through the artifacts in an attempt to instruct his followers in a method to free him.

Ever since the hissing started the undead servants of the Temple of the Fang found renewed focus. These past decades they have been recording the dictates of their deity by carving them in the walls of the temple and the bones of the deceased kept there.

Not knowing of their deities' transformation, the undead of Ssufaxuss still worship Sseth as Merrshaulk.

Climate system

The Halls of Prayer have a tropical clime due to the workings of the azer machine.

A strange sound

Throughout the exploration of the Halls of Prayer, have the party make the occasional **wisdom (perception) DC 15** to detect a heavy, but irregular pounding sound, coming from somewhere not too far off. This sound is made by the undead in area 45.

37. The skull gallery

Thousands of inscribed scaly-kind skulls are filling alcoves along this corridor, dripping with the tropical humidity that also permeates this area. Each of the skulls stares at you with the vacant gaze of the long departed.

These skulls are the work of the pureblood wights chiseling away in area 41. Each of the skulls is inscribed with fragments of the dictates passed on through the Sibilant Fang.

Encounter

Flameskull (2), MM p. 134

Wisdom (perception) DC 13: In the eye sockets of one of the skulls a faint flickering of light can be seen; Upon failure the character is surprised at the beginning of combat.

Doors

South at the end of the corridor (to area 41): Standard door.

38. The poisonous corridor

The carvings on the walls of this corridor have been cleaned not too long ago, their design again apparent after millennia of neglect. On the left the carvings tell a tale of tall snakelike humanoids bearing a cup of poison to the primitive people of the world, enslaving them or killing them outright. The carvings on the right-hand wall show a scene of wanton carnage and murder on top of a great pyramid, of blood flowing in rivers to the greater glory of a cruel and hooded snake god.

Trap

When a party member steps on the pressure plate in between the carvings a cloud of poisonous vapor will spew forth from the mouth of the depicted snake deity.

A breath of fresh poison trap; **Wisdom (perception) DC 15, dexterity (thieves' tools) DC10:** wedging the pressure plate into place will disable the trap; Upon failure **constitution save DC 10** or receive 1d10 poison damage and damage vulnerability to poison for 24 hours.

Note to DM: Remember to incorporate the vulnerability to poison in the coming encounters.

39. The Temple of the Fang

For the last couple of decades, the undead of the Halls of Prayer have been patiently waiting for more clear directives from their deity. Each day they organize several services to Merrshaulk beseeching him to show them a clear path of action. At present the pureblood wights are chanting a litany of purification to prepare the assembly for the beginning of the coming service.

The malevolence of this temple is obvious to even the most naive observer. Great stone statues of serpentine gods loom threateningly over you, casting dancing shadows in the green light of enchanted torches. In front of a sacrificial altar several skeletal figures are attending a religious service. Two of them, dressed in tattered priestly robes, are arranging golden ornaments on the altar, all the while chanting a droning hymn. The only thing they are lacking, it seems, is a living, breathing sacrifice.

Lighting

The Temple of the Fang is dimly lit.

Encounter

Pureblood wight (2), NPC's & Mobs

Abomination skeleton (1), NPC's & Mobs

Skeleton (4), MM p. 272

When fighting breaks out the skeletons will be instructed to screen the pureblood wights, while the abomination skeleton will start pinning as many of the players down in melee combat as possible.

Once combat has been engaged, the abomination will be joined by the other skeletons, who will choose their approach carefully to give as much protection to the pureblood wights as possible.

The pureblood wights will join in the melee when holes start to appear in their skeletal screen.

Reinforcements

If after 1d4+3 rounds the fight hasn't ended yet, the occupants of area 40 will appear on the balcony, roused by the commotion.

Treasure

On top of the altar: ornate golden bowl, inlaid with rubies (190 gp) and a snake headed silver dagger with emeralds for eyes (160 gp).

Doors

West to corridor: two double bronze gates, closed, unlocked.

Others: standard doors.

40. The vestry

If the occupants of this room have joined the fight in the Temple of the Fang, this room will be empty except for the wardrobe and a tattered curtain.

Standing next to a moldering wardrobe, drawing two ancient scimitars, is a disturbing sight, the skeleton of a man, with the skull of a cobra prepares to attack you. Obeying a hiss and a flick of the snakeman's imperious bone hand an undead minion jumps forth from behind a ragged curtain to protect its better.

Encounter

Malison wight, NPC's & Mobs, treasure: leather +1, spell scroll (Melf's acid arrow)

Pureblood wight, NPC's & Mobs

Doors

South (to area 39): standard door.

41. The bone carvers' workplace

In between piles of humanoid skulls, a pair of undead creatures is sitting, scraps of snakelike skin still clinging to dead flesh. Each of the creatures is holding a cranium in one hand, while scratching deep furrows in it with the claws of the other hand.

The piles of skulls were gathered from across the entire complex.

Encounter

Pureblood wight (2), NPC's & Mobs

Doors

North (to area 37): standard door.



The Sibilant Fang

42. The Sibilant Repository

An unearthly voice is talking in a hissing language almost too painful for your mind to endure. It seems to be coming from a stone chest standing in a tattered leather tent at the far end of the pillared room.

Trap

If a living being touches the stone chest a trapdoor will open, dropping the unfortunate fellow and his companions into the room below

Golden cobra trap door; **wisdom perception DC 20 to detect the trap:** the gold colored cobra-shaped carvings in the stone lid flare with subtle light when someone reaches for the chest, **intelligence (thieves' tools) DC 10:** there is no non-magical way to disable the trap; Upon activation of the trap everyone standing on the mosaic in between the pillars (see map) **dexterity save DC 15** to jump clear of the trap door once it opens. Upon failure 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall (20 feet) and ending up prone on the floor of area 43.

Encounter

Pureblood wight (1), NPC's & Mobs

The pureblood wight hid behind the pillars as soon as it heard the commotion in the temple.

When a character comes within 10 feet of the stone chest; **wisdom (perception) 15 at disadvantage** to spot the pureblood wight. The wight is staying in the shadows of the pillars, avoiding the light the adventurers bring along.

As soon as the trap is triggered, or it risks being discovered, the pureblood wight attacks. The pureblood wight knows the adventurers have had to pass the trap in the poisonous corridor and will favor its innate spellcasting ability, poison spray, if party members are out of melee range.

At this point the party will probably be split up, as one part is fighting the pureblood wight and the other part is fighting the swarm of poisonous snakes in area 43.

Treasure – Minor Artifact: The Sibillant Fang

Inside the chest the party will find the Sibillant Fang, an artifact of Sseth, holding a piece of his essence. Upon identification: **Handout 37 – The Sibillant Fang**.

The Sibillant Fang has hidden properties and will try to bestow a type of geas upon its wielder at certain intervals. More on this in the 'Ongoing Quests and Events' section of Chapter IV.

Doors

West (to corridor): standard door.

43. The snake pit

Dazed from your fall, you are suddenly aware the ground around you is moving, several venomous snakes are lifting their upper body into the air to strike at you

Note: Dungeon 12F – Halls of Prayer is marked twice with the number 43. Once to indicate the location underneath the Sibillant Repository, once to illustrate the lay-out of the room.

Encounter

Swarm of poisonous snakes (1), MM p. 338

Treasure

When searching the area; **Wisdom (perception) DC 10:** Among the partial remains of hundreds of sacrifices you find a necklace with a silver feather pendant (12 gp)

Doors

North (to area 44): Secret door, **wisdom (perception) DC 15** to discover, **intelligence (investigation) DC 10** to open, AC 17, 18 hp (4d8).

44. The passage to the Halls of the Dead

Entering this corridor, you can hear a loud, irregular thumping sound, as if a large creature is trying to beat through a wall. With each thump drops of condensation fall from a ceiling rife with fungal vegetation.

Trap

At the entrance to the southern corridor is a trap. When a party member steps on the pressure plate a hail of darts will shoot from hidden holes in the wall.

Hail of poisoned darts; **Wisdom (perception) DC 15, dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 10:** Plugging the holes will disable the trap; Upon failure: Ranged attack. Poisoned darts, 20 ft., one target, +6 to hit (1d10 piercing damage and 2d6 poison damage).

Doors

South section of the wall (to area 43): Secret door, **wisdom (perception) DC 15** to discover, **intelligence (investigation) DC 10** to open, AC 17, 18 hp (4d8)

45. The gate to the Halls of the Dead

Trying their best to free the Sarrukh mummy lord, Neffsirakh Tun, the undead of the Halls of Prayer have been attempting to beat down this gate for years. Their efforts have been in vain so far.

The thumping sound is getting louder every step you take. As you round a bend, you are suddenly confronted by a strange sight. Several large snakelike skeletons are beating their fists on a large bronze gate, as if trying to get through, meanwhile smaller humanoid skeletons are doing their futile best to scratch their way in.

Encounter

Pureblood wight, NPC's & Mobs

Abomination skeletons (2), NPC's & Mobs

Skeletons (3), MM p. 272

Quest – Access to the halls of the dead

Quest xp: Opening the large bronze gate: 2500 xp to be divided among the party.

The gate is held shut by the vacuum created on the other side by the azer climate system. Having the azers establish normal air pressure on the other side is the first step to opening this gate.

The gate is also sealed by magical means. Only the Overscribe's scepter can open it. When a player touches the gate with the scepter it will seem to ripple for a moment, signaling the gate can be opened. This completes the second step needed to open the large bronze gate.

Doors

To halls of the dead: Large bronze gate, closed, magically sealed (see above), indestructible.

A small bronze plaque next to the door can be read by people who understand the **sarrukh language**:
“Halls of the Dead – Enter only with permission of the Overscribe and after living conditions are established.”

46. High Priest quarters

You have no time to take in the decayed grandeur of what once were opulent quarters. Stirring from their undead prayer, two snake headed corpses are rising to meet you, twin scimitars drawn. Scraps of priestly vestments fall from undead flesh as they hiss with hatred for the living.

Encounter

Malison wight (2), NPC's & Mobs

Treasure

One of the wights: A fine silver cloak clasp depicting a jaguar's head (130 gp)

Doors

West (to corridor): standard door.

Halls of Suffering

Dungeons 12G – Halls of Suffering

Climate system

The halls of the suffering have a tropical clime due to the workings of the azer machine.

47. The entry hall

A clash of cultures is obvious in the hall. Oldest and most worn are the sarrukh glyphs you have become accustomed to. Those carvings cover the walls from floor to ceiling. Chiseled into the Sarrukh glyphs at eye height are glistening illithid effigies and writing. Growing over it all, feeding on the moisture dripping of the wall, are patches of white and yellow moss.

People who understand **undercommon** can translate the silvered writing: “Rejoice, thrall, for in Ixexyn you will find Noble Destiny.”

Doors

To central staircase: Sturdy gate, bronze, closed, unlocked.

East (to corridor): Double door, wooden, moldy, closed, unlocked.

48. The common room

Silvered tables, remnants of the illithid occupation, are awash with spilt ale and empty mugs. Several duergar and five dragon mercenaries have gathered here to drown their boredom. A couple of barrels filled with ale are stacked against the back wall beneath the black banner of the Five Dragons.

Encounter

Duergar (2), MM p. 122, treasure: 11 cp, 2 pp.

Veteran (1), MM p. 350, treasure: 9 gp.

Thugs (4), MM p. 350, treasure: 8 ep, 5 gp, 12 cp, 6 gp.

Treasure

Three full barrels of duergar mushroom ale are still untouched. (5-gallon barrels weighing 80 lb. each, worth 150 gp a piece; Drinking the ale has an effect comparable to that of heavy liquor.)

The heavy silvered tables (3) are of poor craftsmanship. The silver is flaked in several areas. (210 lb. each and worth 15 gp)

Doors

East (to corridor): Double door, wooden, moldy, closed, unlocked.

North (to corridor): Standard door.

West (to corridor): Double door, wooden, moldy, closed, unlocked.

49. Hot baths

This used to be the pool where the illithid tadpoles matured.

A large, steaming, shallow pool occupies the bulk of this. Apparently the Five Dragons and their allies use this area for bathing. A rotund Duergar is soaking at the far edge, his beard wet with soapy foam, but his weapons close at hand. Another duergar is having a heated argument with one of the human mercenaries. The human accusing the other one of stealing a precious necklace.

Encounter

Duergar (2), MM p. 122, treasure: 16 gp, 10 gp.

Veteran (1), MM p. 350, treasure: 5 pp.

Treasure

If they search the drain of the shallow pool the party will automatically find the lost necklace: A rabbit's foot anchored in a gold and platinum necklace. (110 gp)

Doors

West (to corridor): Double door, wooden, moldy, closed, unlocked.

50. The room of experiments

From the next room comes the clanging of steel on steel followed by the sound of bellowing laughter. "You've grown rusty Hamid! Maybe I should give your blade to Charlie over there. I'm starting to think he would be more of a challenge." A grunting reply is uttered by a second man's voice: "I'm sure you two would make a lovely couple. He already looks a damn sight prettier than your last woman."

Encounter

Veterans (2), MM p. 350, treasure: 23 cp, 9 gp.

Investigating the glass cylinders

After combat read the following:

Against the walls in this room several strange looking glass cylinders are mounted. Four of them are broken, the fluids in them dried up long ago. The fifth one is filled with a murky yellowish liquid. Through the liquid you can see the shape of a dwarf. The figure seems to be screaming soundlessly, preserved arms beating uselessly against the inside of its glass coffin. A prankster has chalked a message on the wall next to the cylinder. “Feeding Charlie is at your own peril.”

Charlie is in fact a dwarven cleric, called Beldoom Thunderson. When the dwarves came to seal of Ixexyn, Beldoom bought his comrades sufficient time to seal the gate to the rest of the complex. Cruel as ever, the illithid sealed him in a tube to punish him for all eternity, his body unable to degrade, his soul unable to leave.

Quest - Freeing Charlie

Quest xp: If the party frees Beldoom from the cylinder: 1250 xp to be divided among the party.

Quest xp: Burying the dwarf: 800 xp to be divided among the party.

The tube is made of enchanted glass; AC16, 3d10 hp.

If the glass is broken, Beldoom will slump out. After vomiting a cascade of yellow liquid he mutters a single word of thanks in old dwarven and collapses to the floor. His soul finally leaving his body after millennia of imprisonment.

Out of his hand a medallion will slip; **Intelligence (religion) DC 15:** reveals the medallion not only marks the dead dwarf as one of the Sonnlino, the clerics of Moradin, it also marks him as part of the order of the Hammers of Moradin, an elite military order devoted to the defense the swarven race. For dwarves; **The DC drops to 10.**

Quest – Reporting Beldoom’s faith

Quest xp: Delivering the amulet and leather-bound bundle found in area 53 to Kromdir Anvilsplitter: 1250 xp to be divided among the party.

Kromdir Anvilsplitter is also one of the Hammers of Moradin, delivering the amulet and the leather-bound bundle to him, will earn his personal gratitude. Kromdir knows the story of the brave dwarves, who went to entomb the illithid in their own city well enough to recount the details listed in above in ‘History – Invasion from below’.

51. The Five Dragon’s quarters

A group of five dragon warriors is sitting on makeshift beds, engaged in casual conversation. Several weird mind flayer contraptions have been shoved into one of the corners and are now being used to dry the mercenaries’ laundry. Pieces of unwashed laundry and discarded armor are strewn all about the floor.

Encounter

Thugs (7), MM p. 350, treasure: 9 ep, 16 cp, 16 sp, 14 sp, 12 sp, 13 sp, 15 sp.

Doors

West (to corridor): Double door, wooden, moldy, closed, unlocked.

52. The Duergar quarters

Half a dozen folding beds stand organized in an orderly row. Above them a heavy tarpaulin was stretched to catch the condensation dripping of the ceiling. A handful of Duergar are gathered around a folding table to play a game of dice.

Encounter

Duergar (6), MM p. 122, treasure: 16 sp, 14 sp, 12 gp, 12 ep, 22 cp, 6 pp.

Doors

East (to corridor): Double door, wooden, moldy, closed, unlocked.

To Slave Pit – level 1: Double door, bronze, closed, unlocked.



The Slave Pit

Concept Drawing

The Slave Pit

Dungeons 13A – The Slave Pit – Level 1

Dungeons 13B – The Slave Pit – Level 2

Dungeons 13C – The Slave Pit – Level 3

Dungeons 13D – The Slave Pit – Level 4

Note: The highest level is level 1, the lowest is level 4. Level 4 will also be referred to as the ground level.

Climate system

The halls of the suffering have a tropical clime due to the workings of the azer machine.

This huge granite hall contains several galleries, one above the other. The atmosphere is oppressive, and like in most of the complex, the air is hot and humid. You are on the top floor. A large tree must have burrowed down here at some point. Vinelike roots are growing across the ceiling all the way to where you stand.

Looking down into the galleries you see rows upon rows of rusty cell doors. This must be where the sarrukh imprisoned their slaves. The most obvious way to get down is by using the rickety ropebridges spanning across the hall, connecting the middle level with the lower and upper level.

At the end of the hall on the bottom floor is a stone platform. In the dim light of a giant brazier you see several five dragon mercenaries dragging an unconscious dwarf down from the platform before shackling him to a thick wooden pole.

There are four such poles on the lowest level, a dwarf now fastened to each of them. They appear to be surrounded by a low but thick mist, clinging to the floor at about ankle height. In the center of the mist rests a large, strangely rippled rock. It seems to be split in half and surround by what look to be fragments of a glass dome.

The woman on the stone platform is a radiant elven beauty, but your admiration turns to sudden horror as you see her lick blood of her slender fingers.

Encounter

The Specter, NPCs's & Mobs, treasure: Ring of protection +1, boots of striding and springing.

The Witch, NPCs's & Mobs, treasure: Chain shirt +1, 97 ep, potion of climbing, freshly embalmed human hand

with steel ring (see below: Quest: The perfumer's children).

Thug (6), **MM p. 350**, treasure: 15 sp, 20 cp, 18 sp, 9 ep, 10 ep, 17 sp. **Note:** These thugs have no ranged weapons.

Zombie (6), **MM p. 316**

Able-bodied Dwarves (4), use commoner statistics, **MM p. 345**; **Note:** to reflect their Dwarven constitution they each have maximum hitpoints (8).

The Witch

The Witch (W) will aim to target the closest threats to her own wellbeing. In most cases this means she will choose the target closest to her. This will not change if her brother is in trouble. His job is to protect her, not the other way around.

The Witch can push adventurers of the bridge with successful hits of her eldritch blast. Treat those falls as unsuccessful jumps. (see below)

She will also instruct the thugs on the platform with her to release 'her pets', this happens as soon as she gets the chance and does not require an action. One of the thugs will release the mind flayer zombies (lever 2) on his initiative, threatening the dwarves chained up on the ground level.

The Specter

The Specter (S) will target the other way around, trying to split up the party. He will target the creatures on the higher bridge first, then the creatures on the lower bridge, then the creatures on the ground. If his sister is engaged in melee he will try to assist her first.

As soon as the party engages him in melee he will use his boots of striding and springing to safely jump away. Landing on the bridges or on the ground means he will have to make a **dexterity (acrobatics) DC 10** check or land prone. Landing on the platform or in the galleries won't require a check since neither landing spots are difficult terrain. If possible, the Specter will avoid fighting near his sister, forcing the party to split up.

If his sister is killed the Specter will throw all caution to the wind and engage the adventurers in melee combat.

At the start of the combat, you can find the Specter on the rope bridge between levels 1 and 2. From this point he is able to target the players from the moment they enter the Slave Pit.

The thugs

Two thugs (T) are on the top level playing cards near the door where the adventurers enter. The other thugs are on the platform, assisting the Witch in her blood sport. **The thugs have no ranged weapons** and will rush up to meet the players on the bridges. The thugs will not

enter the lower area of the ground level fearing the mind flayer zombies.

The mind flayer zombies

The mind flayer zombies are regular zombies. For dramatic effect and intimidation purposes, it is advised to keep this fact from the party.

Once the mind flayer zombies are released they will move on their next initiative. They will advance on the nearest creature – probably the chained-up dwarves - to feed on their brains.

The mind flayers are locked in a cell at point M until released.

The able-bodied dwarves

On the south end of the platform is a lever that opens the portcullis to where the able-bodied dwarves are held (lever 3). If that lever is pulled four dwarves will rush out to help their kin. Threat those dwarves as commoners with maximum hitpoints. The dwarves use bones and debris found on the ground as clubs.

If the party arrives too late in the Ziggurat. Most of the dwarves will have been killed by the Witch and no able-bodied dwarves will be left to assist the party. (see area 53 – Arriving too late)

The able-bodied dwarves are locked in a cell at point D until released.

The chained up Dwarves

Each of these chained-up dwarves (C) has 8 hp. They are conscious, but as a result of the recent torture they endured they suffer from the incapacitated condition for the entire encounter (no actions allowed). As long as they are chained up they can't move either.

To free a chained-up dwarf: **dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 15, strength (athletics) DC 20**, AC 19, 5 hp (2d4).

The levers

There are three levers on the platform:

- Lever one opens the northern cell block, which is empty.
- Lever two will open the eastern cell block which releases the mind flayer zombies.
- Lever three opens the southern cell block and releases the able-bodied dwarves mentioned above.

One of the thugs on the platform will be instructed by the Witch to pull lever two in the beginning of combat.

Navigating the terrain

The lowest level (except for the platform) counts as **difficult terrain**. The ground is covered with bones,

refuse and broken glass. The thick mist makes it nearly impossible to see where you place your feet.

There are 4 levels. The vertical distance between the levels is 12 feet.

Jumping from the high bridge to the lower one

For game purpose there is 7 feet of horizontal distance and 10 feet of vertical distance between the high bridge and the low one.

- Characters with STR 14 or above automatically succeed in landing on the bridge: **Dexterity (acrobatics) DC 10**: to avoid landing prone
- Characters with STR 13 or below; **strength (athletics) DC 15**: to land on the bridge. Upon failure they fall to the ground below: 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and land prone automatically. Even when successfully landing on the bridge they still need to make a **dexterity (acrobatics) DC 10**: to avoid landing prone.

Jumping from the high bridge to ground level

Dexterity (acrobatics) DC 20: to land on the ground safely. Upon failure: 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and land prone automatically.

Jumping from the lower bridge to ground level

Dexterity (acrobatics) DC 10: to land on the ground safely. Upon failure: 1d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and land prone automatically.

Swinging to the platform from the highest level

The vines (R) near the entrance can be used to swing down to the platform, consuming the character's entire round. This requires a single **dexterity (acrobatics) DC 15 check**. Upon failure: 3d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and land prone automatically. The vines can be used once in this way, but up to two creatures can attempt to swing together. (separate checks for both swashbucklers). Characters succeeding in this acrobatic maneuver successfully land on the platform in a space of their choosing.

Jumping from the galleries to ground level

- Highest level – Level 1 (entrance); **Dexterity (acrobatics) DC 30**: to land on the ground safely. Upon failure: 3d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and land prone automatically.
- Level 2; **Dexterity (acrobatics) DC 20**: to land on the ground safely. Upon failure: 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and land prone automatically.
- Level 3; **Dexterity (acrobatics) DC 10**: to land on the ground safely. Upon failure: 1d6

bludgeoning damage from the fall and land prone automatically.

Note: The ground level is level 4 on the maps.

Quest – The perfumer’s children

Around the Witch’s neck hangs a freshly embalmed human hand with a steel wedding band on its ring finger.

Alistair’s children will immediately recognize this ring as their father’s wedding ring.

Intelligence (investigation) DC 10: This hand was hacked off with one fell chop. A very sharp-edged instrument was used, probably a sword.

Alistair tried to dissuade Nasreen from performing the ritual on the elder brain. Finally tired of his devotion, Nasreen drew her rapier and chopped of the hand that lay on her shoulder.

The Witch was so delighted by this cruel turn of events that she embalmed the hand and kept it as a memento.

Doors

Cell doors: Steel portcullises, closed, locked, operated by the levers on the platforms, AC 19, 23 hp (5d10).

Level 1 to Halls of Suffering: Double door, bronze, closed, unlocked.

Level 4, south (to area 54): Sturdy gate, bronze, closed, unlocked.

53. The dwarven cells

Victimized for days on end, these dwarves look like they were chewed on by hill giants. As you enter several of them start to rise, a glint of stone and iron in their hard but unbroken faces. Others lie unmoving on the cold granite floor.

Arriving too late

Under a few select circumstances the players arrive too late to save most of the dwarves.

- If they let Jobz or one of his men escape (See Chapter I – The Stubborn Pony)
- If the players tell Mugdurok they were sent by the Grom’s Bounty officials, or if they tell him they killed Jobz and his men (See Chapter II – Lakeside Camp)
- If the DM deems the party has been procrastinating to an extent that damages the mission.

In this case only three dwarves will be left alive in the dwarven cells, and no able-bodied dwarves are left to

help the party in the fight. The only other living dwarves at the beginning of the encounter are the dwarves chained up on the lowest level.

From the twenty-four dwarves kidnapped from Grom’s Bounty only seven will be left alive at the beginning of the encounter in the Slave Pit.

If the party arrives in time

Nine dwarves are imprisoned in these cells by the five dragons. Four Dwarves were chained up by the witch and four more able-bodied Dwarves were held on the lowest level.

From the twenty-four dwarves kidnapped from Grom’s Bounty 17 will be rescued from the clutches of the Five Dragon mercenaries.

Assisting the wounded Dwarves

If the adventurers assist the wounded dwarves, read the following:

You do your best to help the wounded dwarves. Secretly praising dwarven constitution, you realize most will come out just fine. One of them, however, was tortured more severely than any of the other dwarves.

The other captives tell you he is Gromson Anvilsplitter, son to Stern and grandson to Kromdir Anvilsplitter, the leader of Grom’s Bounty. While tending to his wounds you notice he is feverishly clutching a piece of ancient writing, something old and precious he found down here, lending him strength even as their fate was looking grim. The outside of the leather-bound bundle is marked in dwarven script, of the inside not allot is left.

Wisdom (medicine) DC 15: Gromson is suffering from internal injury, his liver is swollen considerably. If not treated immediately, he will not live to see the next day. A cure wounds spell will heal Gromson, but as his physician you must advise him to cut down on alcohol for the next two tendays.

Quest – Reporting Beldoom’s faith

More details on the completion of this quest can be found in the description of area 50.

If any in the party understands **the dwarven language** they can read the leather-bound bundle; The outside of the journal is marked with dwarven letters pressed out in gold leaf. It says: “Beldoom Thunderson’s Journal”; **Handout 39 – Beldoom’s journal.**

Quest – Returning the hostages

More details on the completion of this quest can be found in Chapter I - Grom's Bounty – The Hall of Moradin.

The dwarves are not in any shape to make their way back on their own. On top of that most of them have no combat experience and are poorly equipped for the trek, even when taking into account the weapons and food they can pillage from the Five Dragons and duergar.

If the party leaves the dwarves to fend for themselves, none of them will reach Grom's Bounty alive. You may point out this fact as a DM, since it should be more than obvious.

If the party decides to escort the dwarves back, the dwarves will suggest the party scouts ahead to keep the untrained dwarves from stumbling into any traps.

In game terms this means the party handles random encounters and rests with the dwarves in a communal camp site during the night.

Alternative - Allies

If the party can bring the dwarves to any of their allies. They will offer to see the dwarves home safely. (See Chapter II – The High Moor – Synopsis).

Alternative – Portal Room

The Portal Room contains a working portal to the Southwood (See Chapter IV – The Sarrukh Portal). This route is a lot safer, meaning the dwarves would be able to make their way home without further help. (Chapter III – The Dark Ziggurat – Area 21)

Quest – The perfumer's children

If asked about Alistair one of the surviving dwarves remembers the following:

Aye, I remember someone fittin' that description. Just a couple of nights ago, all them that was important among those slaver bastards gathered over there, in the pit. They were standing around the dead elder brain weaving their magics when the man you described came down from the upper levels, all the while shoutin'.

The man grabbed the woman that was leadin' the ceremony by the shoulder and she just drew her sword and lopped off his hand. Her face impassive as a sphinx.

He dropped to the ground and lost consciousness I reckon. She then motioned to continue the thing they'd been doin'. I was sure them was gonna sacrifice us all to some demon o' the Nine Hells. My

ol' pappy used to tell me of drow doing that kinda thing.

Anyway, a few minutes later it just all went to the Abyss. It felt like a soundless explosion. We were all tossed around like snowflakes in a blizzard. When I came to, they were all gone. Only that arrow tossin' elf and his crackpot sister remained.

Unknown to the dwarves, Alistair survived after receiving this rude wake-up call and was able to escape the Ziggurat.

In the coming months Alistair will do his best to find out anything he can about the Hooded Man and his hold over Nasreen. The adventurers will receive a message explaining this at the beginning of Chapter IV.

Doors

Cell doors: Steel portcullises, closed, locked, operated by the levers on the platforms, AC 19, 23 hp (5d10).

54. The second seal

A second anvil stands on the other side of a sturdy gate. Imbedded in the anvil is an ornate dwarven axe. Beyond loom the dark passages of the Underdark. The scent of burnt flesh is overpowering here.

The ornate dwarven battleaxe is Derrobane, the axe stolen from Grom's Bounty, as explained in Chapter I – Moradin's Gaze. (**Handout 38 - Derrobane**)

Doors

To lowest level of the slave pit: Sturdy gate, bronze, closed, unlocked.

55. The petrified elder brain

During the ritual, the Hooded Man used his necromantic powers to syphon the psionic energy remaining in the elder brain to Nasreen.

A large rippled and petrified brain lies amidst the shards of what once was a protective glass dome. A deep crack splits the dead brain in two, separating the frontal lobe from the rest.

Intelligence DC 10: The elder brain is the leader of an illithid community. It is a being of immense psionic power. This one is dead, however, and not so powerful anymore.

If the players use **detect magic** traces of necromantic energy can be detected deep within the frontal lobe;

Intelligence (arcana) DC 10: Someone tried to take something from the dead brain, using necromancy to bridge the gap between life and death. What was taken and if they succeeded is unknown.

56. Burnt corpses

Following the stench, you arrive in a side passage. Here dozens of bodies were burnt in large forgotten piles. Some of them were defeated undead from the Ziggurat, others were dwarves that died under the cruel ministries of the Witch. Among the dead seem to be some humans as well, possibly mercenaries that fell into disgrace.

Halls of the Dead

Dungeons 12H – Halls of the Dead

The Halls of the Dead contain the oldest part of the Ziggurat. Originally areas 60, 62, 60 & 63 were part of a small temple dedicated to a forgotten god. When the ambitious young Neffsirakh Tun arrived here, she unexpectedly discovered a precious cache of necromantic knowledge.

It didn't take a lot of effort to convince her superiors the fragile scrolls could not be moved safely. Sarrukh generally had a disdain for necromancy. Slaves and servants were in abundance throughout the empire and the raising of such slaves as undead was as unnecessary as it was distasteful. As bad as the scaleless ones smelled in life, their scent didn't improve in death. As a consequence few sarrukh wished to learn the dark arts and no supervision was sent. To study the scrolls it was decided the proper equipment was to be brought to the temple itself. Neffsirakh became ruler in her own domain.

Over the centuries Neffsirakh Tun and her servants built on top and around the temple. Piece by piece a great city grew, the original sandstone temple structure encased in an imposing red granite central building, the Dark Ziggurat.

At the end of her lifespan Neffsirakh Tun named Chssar Musstan, her trusted apprentice, as her successor. She then enacted a ritual that fed her life essence to the Ziggurat, slowing decay and degradation of her life's work.

The new Overscribe, Chssar Musstan, however, couldn't bare the loss of his mentor and lover. He arranged a costly ritual that turned her into a mummy lord.

From this state Neffsirakh Tun, together with Chssar Musstan, kept on steering the efforts of the Ba'etith until Ssufaxuss was overthrown by the Couatl rebellion.

Unable to leave the Halls of the Dead, Neffsirakh Tun retreated into torpor, waiting for the day she would be free to exact revenge on the hated couatl.

Climate system

Once they are opened the Halls of the Dead have a cold dry climate due to the workings of the azer machine.

57. The burial procession

As the gates open, cold vapor clouds your vision for a second. Beyond you see an ancient burial procession stopped in its tracks when the Halls of the Dead were put into a sudden state of vacuum.

Your actions have caused a drastic change allowing the preserved undead to move once more.

Encounter

Pureblood wight (2), NPC's & Mobs, treasure: 8 ep, silken burial clothes (120 gp), a small golden wedding band (8 gp).

Undead slaves (8), use zombie statistics, MM p. 316

This is the burial procession for an unnamed yuan-ti scribe who died from natural causes. It is indeed quite natural in Ssufaxuss for an unnamed scribe to be knifed in the back by a more ambitious underling.

When the attack on the Ziggurat took place, the procession hurried back and was unpleasantly surprised when the gates to the Halls of the Dead appeared to have been closed off. It was an even more unpleasant surprise when the sabotaged azer device started to drain all the air from the hall of the dead.

Note: Since they were stored in a vacuum, these corpses will look almost alive.

58. Cold storage

The Ba'etith were experimenting with ways to use corpse crafting in conjunction with necromancy, hoping to make their undead more resistant to divine magic (and less offensive to olfactory senses). A few rooms in the Halls of the Dead were reserved for the storage of raw materials for these experiments. The conditions required to preserve honored dead turned out to be the same as those required to prevent second hand body parts from decaying.

Swinging from rows upon rows of chains are the preserved corpses of the Ziggurat's last victims. For the first time you realize the sheer horror of this place. In its heyday Ssufaxuss was a grizzly machine, devouring scores of lives on a daily basis. All of this was done in the name of research, the gathering of arcane knowledge and the greater glory of the sarrukh.

Intelligence (investigation) DC 10: With nobody to disturb them in millennia the chains shouldn't be swinging like that; Upon failure the character is surprised in the first round of combat.

Encounter

Animated chains (4), NPC's & Mobs.

Note: The chains hang densely packed. Unless the characters leave the room, there is no way to avoid being attacked.

59. The abattoir

This place looks like a slaughter house in which nobody ever bothers to clean. Humanoid body parts are heaped together in chest high piles. A large chopping block is sleek with dark blood. The strange conditions preserving the Halls of the Dead, left it all looking quite fresh. From behind the chopping block a figure approaches, its body cobbled together with meticulous stitches of copper wire. Where its right forearm should be is a long narrow cleaver, bolted to the elbow joint.

The flesh golem was created with one purpose only: Severing limbs and heads from torsos. It plans to do just that.

Encounter

Flesh golem, MM p. 169. **Note:** this flesh golem does slashing damage instead of bludgeoning damage.

60. Old passage

This area is in worse shape than the other areas you have visited in the Ziggurat. The masonry consists mainly of hewn sandstone blocks fitted together with expertise. Strangely enough it seems to have suffered from erosion. This should be impossible considering the climatological circumstances that prevailed in the Halls of the Dead these past millennia.

Intelligence (mason's tools) DC 15 or intelligence (history) DC 15: This area has the appearance of the entrance to an ancient sepulcher. The rest of the complex must have been added later. The erosion marks are those made by wind-carried sand. A dwarf may apply his stonecunning trait as if making an intelligence (history) check concerning stonework.

Trap

From the ceiling a stone block falls down, crushing the unaware. A single stone stepping stone is the trigger to this trap. To determine which party member steps on it, if any, we will need some randomization.

Ask the party to set up in marching order. Let every character in the party roll a d4 in sequence of marching order. Front players first, etc. The first player to roll a four triggers the trap. If no player rolls a four, the trap isn't triggered. If the trap is triggered every player within five feet of the triggering character is caught in the effect.

Falling block trap; **wisdom (perception) DC 20:** You discover a stepping stone that is connected to a

mechanism in the ceiling, **dexterity (thieves' tools) DC 25:** Wedging the stone step into place disables the trap. Marking the stepping stone guarantees nobody will step on it; Upon failure receive 4d10 bludgeoning damage, **dexterity save DC 15 for half.**

61. The place of purification

This room is small and unadorned. Most of the colored plaster has fallen of the walls long ago. In the middle stands a stone bier containing several corroded bronze drains. A handful of snake-headed jars are on the ground to the side, next to a basket filled with linen wrappings.

This is where the priests of old embalmed the honored dead. Although the discoveries made by the Ba'etith rendered mummification rather obsolete, it still held a deep religious significance and the practice was not abandoned.

Encounter

Mummification wraps (3), use rug of smothering statistics, MM p. 20

The wraps in the basket are enchanted mummification wraps, fabricated by the priests to facilitate the swathing of bodies. They will not attack priests of Merrshaulk or Sseth but will try to wrap up everyone else.

Treasure

Next to the stone bier: Three canopic jars with snake-shaped heads worth 45 gp each.

In the basket: Set of silver tools for mummification worth 55 gp.

62. Crypts

Two-foot wide square niches were carved out of the walls in several places. Peering inside, you see the debris of a wooden panel. Beyond the debris a family of mice has made its home in a bunch of discarded linen, wrapped around a desiccated humanoid leg.

Encounter – First wave of mummies

Lesser mummy (3), NPC's & Mobs, treasure: 11 ep, 12 sp, 10 gp, 10 sp.

From out of the square niches three lesser mummies crawl forth. They will be combat ready before initiative is rolled.

Encounter – Second wave of mummies

Lesser mummy (4), NPC's & Mobs, treasure: 9 gp, 13 gp, 19 cp.

After 1d3+1 round the second wave of lesser mummies arrives in the room.

63. The sepulcher

Wide steps descend to a floor covered in rust colored dust. Three austere sarcophagi rise from the powder. One behind the other they stand, leading to a small altar. On top of the altar is a golden statue of a cobra poised to strike. Wrapped in the coils of the serpent you can see a golden necklace. The stone sides of the altar are chiseled in the shape of a stylized heart. Beyond the altar an ornate sarcophagus stands against the wall. The lid is carved in the likeness of a woman with a broad serpentine tail, her every curve heavily adorned with gold filigree.

Trap – rust colored powder

The rust colored powder is hematite powder, a mineral containing iron. If a character steps into the hematite powder it throws up a cloud of choking dust, enveloping everyone in a 5-foot radius. Effects like gust of wind can be used to clear a path through the powder safely.

Hematite powder; **Intelligence (insight) DC 5**: Stepping into the powder is probably hazardous to your health. Every time a character steps into the powder everyone within a 5-foot range has to succeed on a **constitution save DC 12** or suffer 1d4 constitution damage as they choke on the powder filling their lungs. The effect is not cumulative. The constitution damage will disappear after a short or long rest.

Encounter

As soon as the necklace is lifted from the statue, the mummies awaken and attack.

Mummy (3), MM p. 228, treasure: see below.

Treasure

On the altar:

On the altar: golden statue of Merrshaulk (370 gp), necklace of adaptation.

To reach the necklace safely a character can jump from sarcophagus to sarcophagus until he reaches the altar. He will need to succeed in a separate **dexterity (acrobatics) DC 15** to keep his balance every time he

jumps to a new sarcophagus. Upon failure he falls into the hematite powder.

Donning the necklace makes one immune to the effects of the rust colored powder it also relieves any constitution damage caused by the hematite powder immediately.

The austere sarcophagi

These are the final resting places of Neffsirakh Tun's apprentices. Each apprentice is buried with some of his personal treasures.

In the first sarcophagus: A gold pectoral in the likeness of Merrshaulk with malachite eyes (60 gp), spell scroll (thaumaturgy), spell scroll (silent image).

In the second sarcophagus: A chased silver scepter crowned with a large eye agate (90 gp), spell scroll (spider climb), potion of climbing.

In the third sarcophagus: An obsidian coiled cobra bracer (110 gp), driftglobe, potion of healing.

The fourth sarcophagus

The lid contains an inscription in the sarrukh language: "Here lies Neffsirakh Tun, she whose beauty knew no peer in life. She whose wisdom knows no bounds in the unlife beyond. She who will pursue the enemies of the Slitherer Supreme until the end of their days."

Intelligence (religion) DC 15: The Slitherer Supreme is one of the many names of Merrshaulk, the evil patron god of serpents, lizards and yuan-ti, another name is Sseth.

From her torpor the mummy lord can sense the characters' intrusion, but it will take a long time for her to awaken once more. If the characters open the sarcophagus, they will find an ancient sarrukh mummy. Detect magic will reveal the mummy is permeated with necromantic magic. The adventurers can destroy the mummy at their leisure but gain no xp for doing so.

If they destroy the corpse their efforts will be in vain, since a mummy lord can only be destroyed by burning its heart. Neffsirakh Tun's heart is encased in a lead box inside the small altar. Detect magic will not reveal the presence of said heart. The heart can only be found by someone who destroys the altar.

After a considerable amount of time, Neffsirakh Tun will rise again to seek out the characters and exact her revenge. This, however, is a story best kept for Chapter VI.