

THE CLAWS OF MADNESS

Chris van der Linden





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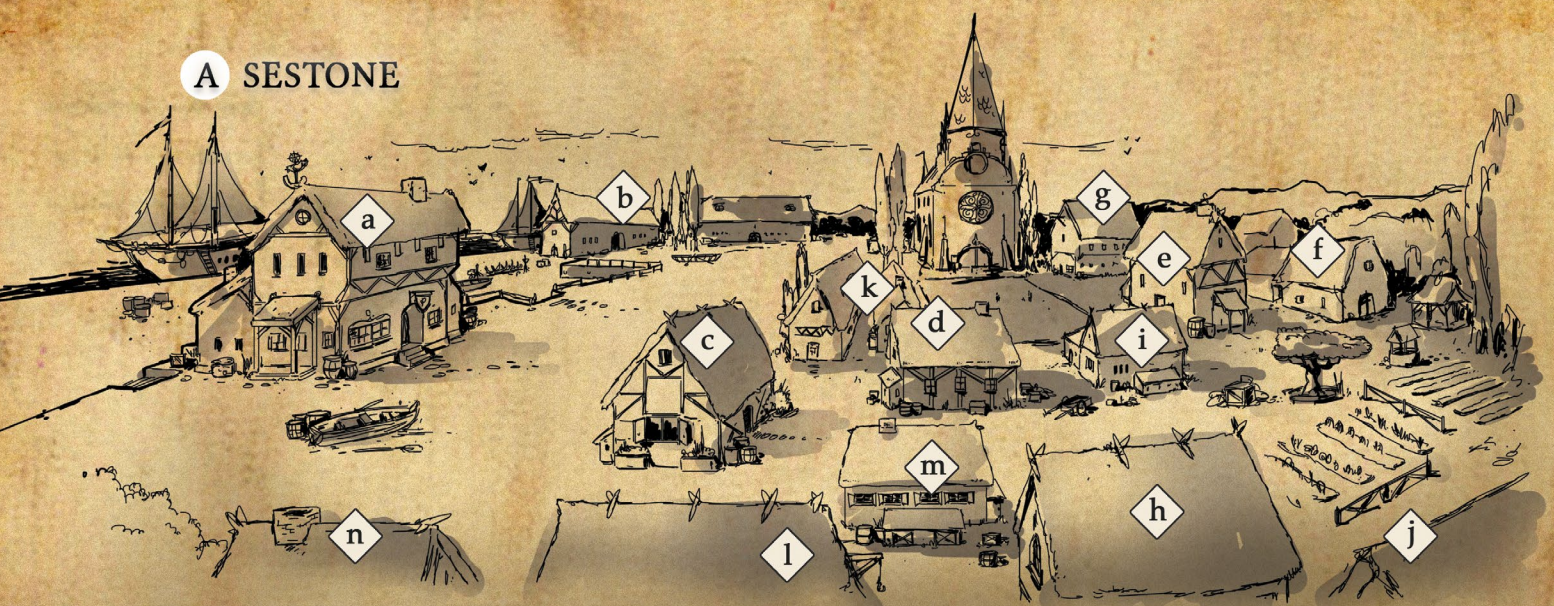
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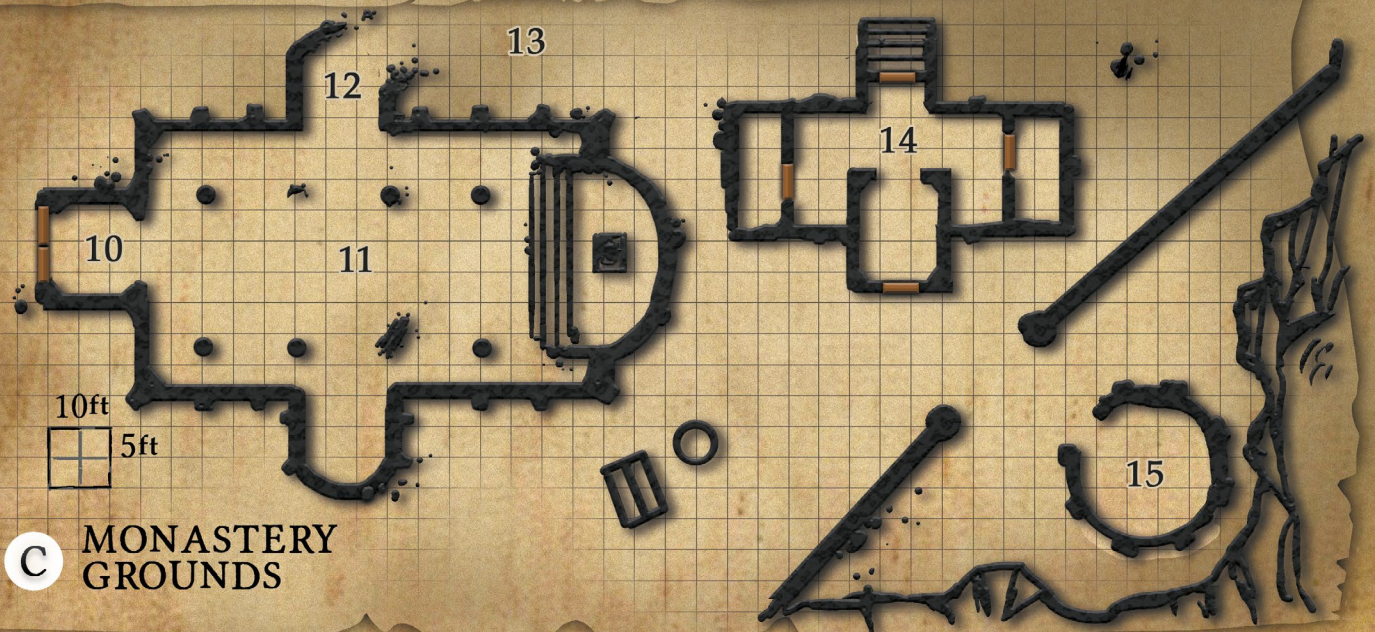
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A SESTONE



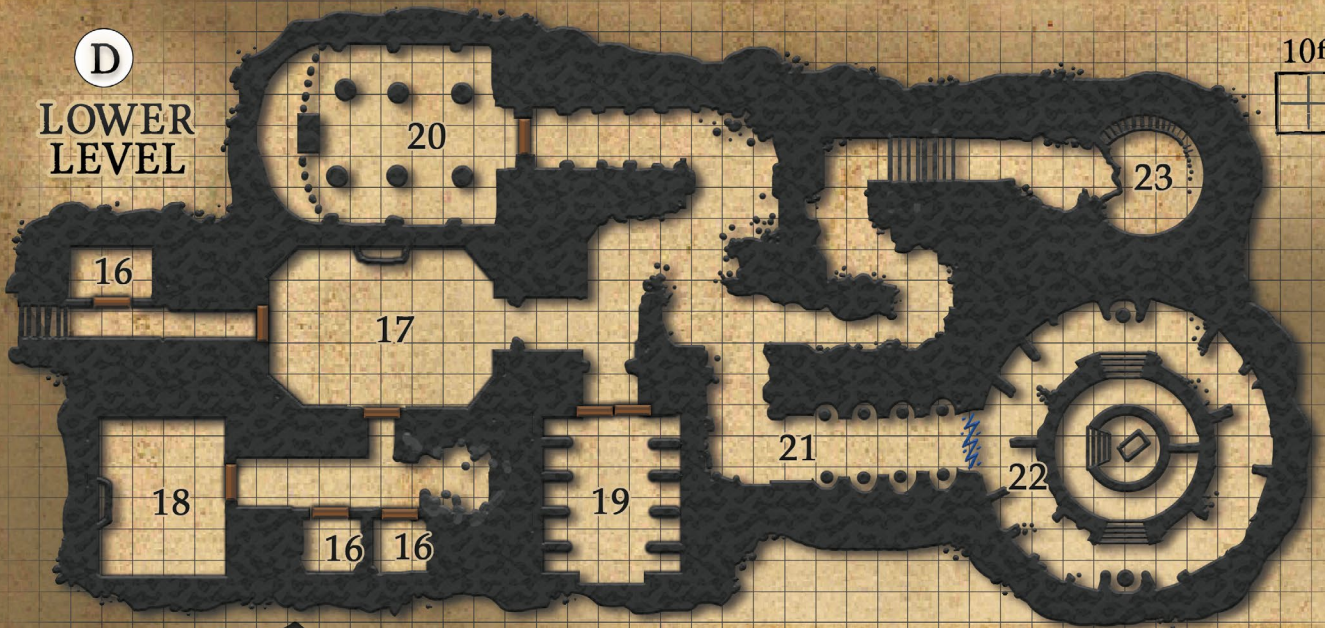
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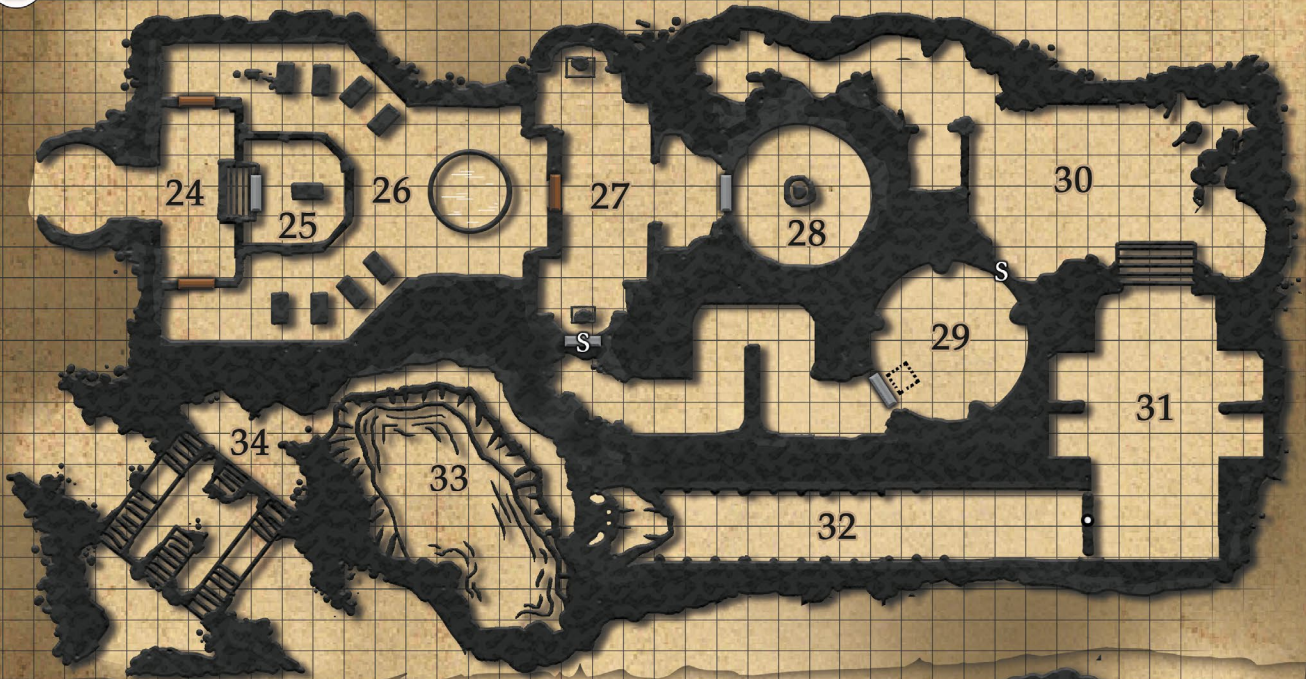
C MONASTERY GROUNDS

D
LOWER LEVEL

10ft
5ft

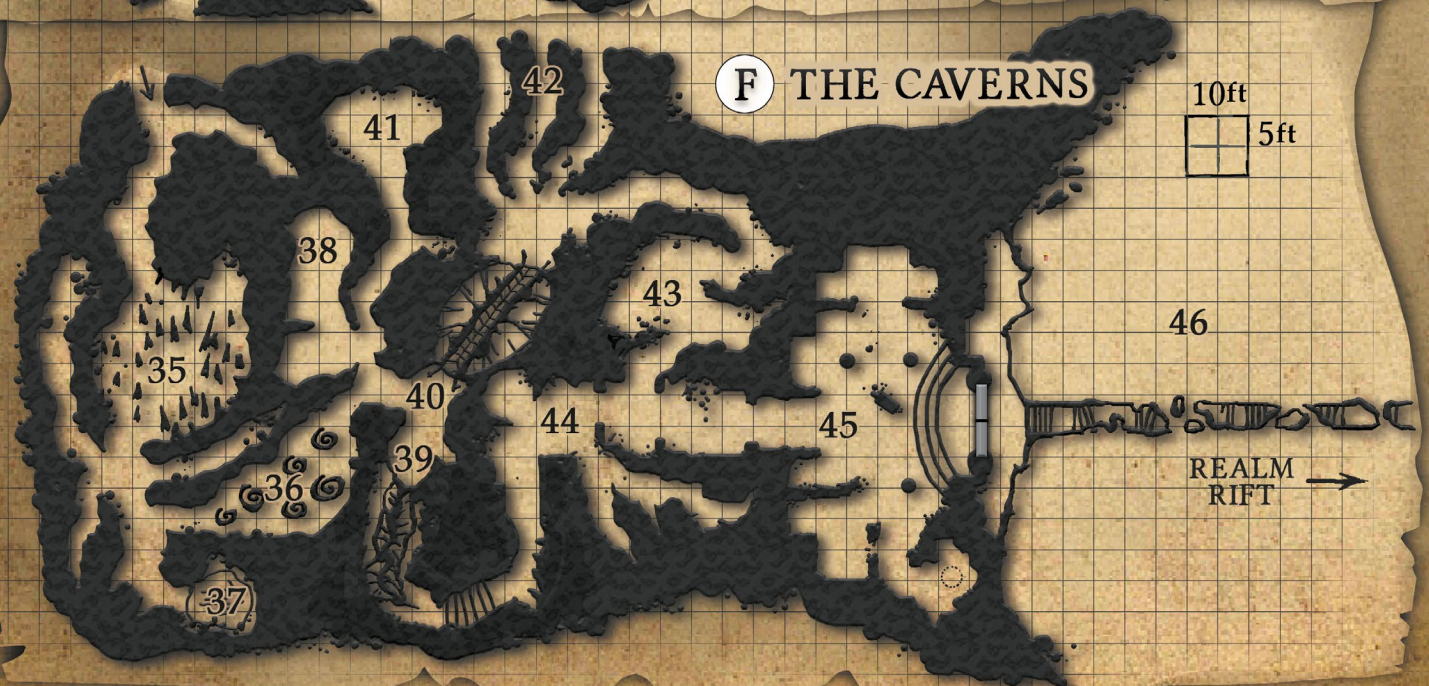


E THE ARCANIUM



F THE CAVERNS

10ft
5ft



Introduction

"Knowledge has both the power to enlighten and weigh heavy on the soul." —Otwic Anthomodus, High Scholar IV of Aelmor Monastery

The Claws of Madness is an adventure intended for a group of four 1st-level heroes. During the course of the adventure they can advance to level 2 or even 3, depending on your style of play. See the 5th Edition online System Reference Document (SRD) for more information.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Almost 300 years ago, the wise scholar Otwic Anthomodus took up leadership of Aelmor Monastery after High Scholar Uldin Neimander passed away from old age. The monastery on Aelmor Island, just off the coast of the small port town Sestone, was a proud landmark known far and wide as a safe haven for those seeking knowledge and enlightenment. Scholars and pilgrims alike found refuge on the atoll, its renowned library home to an enormous collection of ancient manuscripts, tomes, and peculiar writings.

During his daily hours poring over old tomes, Otwic came across a mention of the *Hand of Narkul*, a severed limb from a semi-mythical entity of the Far Realm. Driven by an unquenchable lust for knowledge, Otwic delved deeper into the story of Narkul, its severed hand, and the rumored powers granted to anyone wielding it. After years of searching, Otwic finally unearthed the *Hand of Narkul* and returned to Aelmor Monastery. The artifact took hold of the once-good man and turned him into something alien and dreadful: a monstrous thrall that obeyed only the commands of Narkul the Great Collector.

The monastery elders called upon a band of adventurers to help defeat their possessed leader. A desperate battle waged, until finally the last fighter standing cut Narkul's nefarious hand from Otwic's arm with one fell swoop. A terrible cry echoed across the hall as Otwic fell to his knees, shriveling back into his old self. Time and space trembled as a massive rift opened between the Far Realm and the Material Plane. The *Hand of Narkul* was trapped in stasis, bound between two worlds. The surviving scholars buried Otwic and tried to pick up the pieces. But the ominous Realm Rift and numerous raids by bandits and

other vile creatures made life hard on Aelmor Island. After a particularly fierce attack by a tribe of seafaring gnolls, the remaining inhabitants fled and the monastery finally fell into ruin, its troubled past nearly forgotten. . . .

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

Brothers Heleste and Guthber Tomund came to the town of Sestone years ago due to their interest in the history of Aelmor. They discovered the monastery long abandoned and most of its riches and valuables looted. In his studies, Heleste came across mentions of the *Hand of Narkul*. Realizing its dark nature, he chose not to dig deeper. Guthber, however, became fascinated by the rumored power of the artifact and has been pursuing it in secret ever since. When townsfolk started disappearing and returning horribly mutated, Heleste feared his brother was the cause...

Sestone: The adventure begins as the characters visit Sestone and learn of the town's troubles, Aelmor Island, and the brothers Tomund. It will not take them long to deduce that the old Aelmor Monastery might be at the center of the sinister events now unfolding.

Aelmor Island: The adventurers travel to the island and find their way to the monastery. The island is home to a tribe of marauding gnolls and a pack of bandits who raid local ships.

The Old Monastery: The monastery has been abandoned for centuries. Though slowly falling further into ruin, it's still a majestic landmark. The characters fight Guthber's devious minions the mangkoon, clear the lower levels of the monastery, and unravel clues.

The Arcanium: Delving deeper, the characters descend into ancient catacombs and long-forgotten parts of the monastery. They must find a way through to reach the caverns and learn more about Aelmor's dark past.

The Caverns: In the cold depths beneath the island, the twisted plot of a madman slowly unravels. Tunnels, rushing rivers, deep chasms, and the Rift into the Far Realm await in the darkness. Can the characters stop Guthber from executing his evil plans and resurface victorious?

Life in sestone

Sestone is ruled fairly and justly by nobleman Ulfwin Turval, who lives a few miles out of town in a mansion hidden from view amid a forested patch of hills. The villagers live simple, hardworking lives and only a handful of town guards are needed to keep order. Ulfwin is respected but rarely mingles with the townsfolk. Once a year, when winter turns to spring, a grand celebration called Targuka is held in town square, when Ulfwin toasts to the wellbeing of his town and chimes a large gong. Ulfwin collects trade taxes and oversees business relations with other towns and regions.

PLOT HOOKS

Use one of the following plot hooks to put the story in motion, or create one of your own that fits your narrative.

a town in distress

The small port town of Sestone suffers from a plague of disappearing villagers. Pirates and monsters threaten travelers and the outlying areas. And where did old Heleste Tomund go? Fear and dark rumors hurt both morale and trade. A sign is put up at the North Call Inn calling for adventurers, signed by town noble Ulfwin the Fair.

the riches of aelmor monastery

The renowned library of Aelmor Monastery has attracted the adventurers to town. The prospect of unearthing ancient knowledge and possible treasure has a strong pull on many. The brothers Tomund explored the monastery and know more about it, but Heleste Tomund hasn't been seen for a while.

BRING JUSTICE

The sister of a horribly mutated fisherman (see "Trouble in Town Square" below) pleads with the adventurers to bring justice to whatever did this to him. Similarly, the owner of the North Call Inn is worried about his daughter, who's gone missing recently.

the port town of sestone

Sestone is a port town known for its harsh weather and kindhearted villagers. The small town thrives on trade, mostly fresh fish and herbs from local hills and forests. Its welcoming attitude toward travelers keeps bringing new faces to town. As an added draw, a particular drink called Hagshot (a local spirit) seems to never wane in demand. When the adventurers reach the town, they quickly learn of its troubles. Villagers have started disappearing, some later found dead or horribly mutated, and bands of monsters are raiding nearby towns and ships.

Proceed to the first encounter, "Trouble in Town Square."

TROUBLE IN TOWN SQUARE

As the characters walk through Sestone, they notice a growing gathering of distressed townsfolk in the market square.

Cries of shock rise up into the air. A crowd gathers around a horribly mutated young man who stumbles across the town square. Squidlike tentacles protrude from his belly, and suction cups, barnacles, and gills push through his flesh. The poor young man turns his face up, gulping for air, like a fish on the dry land. A young woman cries out: "Do something! Somebody get help!"

The mutated man is a local fisherman named Harald Olnavar. Harald is Far Touched, suffering the effects of being close to the Realm Rift below Aelmor. In shock and

unable to speak due to his deformations, Harald will die in 1d3 hours unless submerged in water. Doing so delays his death for another 1d8 hours. His sister Eryn reaches out to the adventurers for help, but no one in Sestone knows how to magically (or otherwise) cure Harald's fatal condition.

✦ **Eryn Olnavar:** Harald's sister doesn't know what happened to him. He was fine in the morning when he left to try a new fishing spot on the northern coast of Aelmor Island. She asks the characters to avenge his death and recover his necklace emblazoned with their family crest. See "Resolving Side Quests" at the end of the book.

The adventurers can learn the following information from the crowd of onlookers and Eryn:

- Harald appears to have dragged himself to the town square from the docks, his clothes still wet and dripping.
- Other townsfolk have gone missing these past weeks (see "Gathering Information" below) and more than one villager fears an evil force is transforming villagers like Harald.
- Bands of feral-looking monsters have been ransacking nearby towns, driving off fishermen and traders.

BUILDINGS IN SESTONE

The following buildings are marked on Map A: Sestone:

- a: North Call Inn
- b: Kronko's Boathouse
- c: Brewe Yurd, General Goods
- d: Hamart Tolden, Blacksmith
- e: Stock & Trade Warehouse
- f: House Stock
- g: Guthber Tomund
- h: Evernald Nyrdin, fisherman
- i: Town Guards
- j: Heleste Tomund
- k: Keste Jurva, local baker
- l: Tobert Brandin's Fishery
- m: House Olnavar
- n: House Boonsall

GATHERING INFORMATION

By spending time around town, the characters can learn more about the ill fortune that has befallen Sestone. They can acquire the following information through roleplaying.

the old monastery

Everyone in Sestone and the local region knows about the old Aelmor Monastery. Situated on an island 10 miles off the coast, the once-beautiful monastery has been abandoned for centuries. When it fell into ruin, trade in the region waned for a few decades as the steady stream of pilgrims and scholars stopped. The townsfolk suggest the adventurers talk to Guthber Tomund, but warn them he is "a loner and peculiar."

missing people

Several villagers have mysteriously disappeared recently. Most of them are fishermen or sailors working on the trade ships, but the missing include Solsta Norgin (see "The Missing Daughter") and Heleste Tomund (see "The Brothers Tomund"). If the characters spend time at the North Call Inn, they learn more about the disappearances.

Gregor Stock, a respected local trader, claims dog-faced pirates are the source of the problem. He's been pestering adventurers to recover his stolen cargo for days. He's currently meeting with a group of dwarves at the North Call Inn. Most of the villagers, however, think Heleste Tomund is responsible for the recent troubles.

the brothers tomund

Scholars who came to live in Sestone long after the fall of Aelmor Monastery, the two brothers Heleste and Guthber Tomund are well known around town. Now in their sixties, they both live solitary lives, though Guthber is a bit more involved with the town. Literate townsfolk and travelers occasionally consult him on matters of arcana and healing.

The brothers are known to disappear for weeks, presumably going on journeys to uncharted regions to find new knowledge. Dockmaster Kronko says he last saw Heleste about ten days ago. He wanted a boat to travel to Aelmor Island. If the characters visit Guthber's house, they find the old scholar there.

missing daughter

Solsta Norgin has been missing since a few days ago. Her father (the innkeeper at the North Call Inn) is deeply worried and offers 100 gp to anyone who can bring him information about his daughter's whereabouts. She can easily be recognized by her flaming red hair and a silver bracelet that bears the family coat of arms: a stylized silver lion flanked by waves. Solsta was known to love watching the sun go down by the docks.

THE NORTH CALL INN

The North Call Inn, run by Ared Norgin, is a local hub of rumors and respite. The old stone building with white plastered walls sits near the docks overlooking the sea. The adventurers can learn more about Harald Olnavar and recent events, and pick up a few side quests by interacting with the regulars.

A stone's throw away from the docks, the old heavily weathered stone building stands braving the harsh sea winds. A crooked wooden sign above the entrance trembles in the wind, squeaking on rusted chains. The thatched roof has seen better days, while the spinning compass weathervane atop the chimney shines brightly in the sun. As you step inside, a warm and welcoming light spills over you, revealing a wild variety of travelers, traders, and townsfolk. The news of recent events buzzes around the room, leaving faces looking stern and troubled. A few stout dwarves in the far corner are caught up in conversation with a curious-looking man while enjoying large pints of ale. The anxious innkeeper leans against the bar, pouring another drink for a local, who coughs loudly after taking a swig.

The following NPCs of note are present when the characters visit.

✦ **Gregor Stock:** The peculiar personality and looks of the owner of the local Stock & Trade emporium are known far and wide. This short and stout man is a cunning negotiator and expert appraiser, always on the lookout to make a profit. His left eye has been replaced with a sapphire that he usually keeps covered with a fine purple eye patch. When he gets excited about a deal, he cracks his knuckles and stretches his arms out in front of him. His braided brown hair has distinctive dark orange streaks in it. His shop is one of the largest general goods stores in the region, but Gregor also has many trinkets and trophies from his past adventuring days.

Gregor is at the North Call Inn to meet up with a group of dwarves, including his good friend Kaelen of Dimhall. Both Gregor and Kaelen have a burning passion for gemstones and they are caught up in conversation about a recent find. However, Gregor is not in his usual good mood, since a band of feral-looking humanoids have been ransacking trade ships and stole one of his latest inbound shipments. Worse, his assistant Orryn Golwit, a young halfling he's very fond of, hasn't returned home for days.

✦ **Jameson Boonsall:** After seeing a strange apparition at sea years ago, Jameson became fascinated by the unexplainable. While generally reserved, he starts spinning dark, haunting tales after a few intoxicating Hagshots. Jameson lost his beloved dog while fishing during a stormy night. A few deep scars run down the right side of his face, making him slightly leery-eyed, a sad souvenir from that unfortunate night. He still visits the spot near Aelmor often to look out across the waves.

The characters can learn the following information from Jameson:

- *"Harald frequently fishes the waters near Aelmor Island. He camps out there overnight, hauling his catch back the next morning."* Jameson also claims he heard the old monastery bell toll in the distance. *"Strange, because the monastery has been abandoned for years."*
- Jameson mutters about Heleste Tomund: *"I've not seen the old crazybones for ten days."* In an increasing ominous voice he croons, *"Heleste was too curious for his own good, delving into matters best left alone."*
- Jameson heard a guard at the town garrison say, *"Ulfwin is not accepting any visitors this week because he is expecting a special guest: a young nobleman of the wealthy Vorden family."* He doesn't know more but wonders what business the Vorden have all the way out here.

✦ **Ared Norgin: The Innkeeper:** Hard looking but friendly natured, Ared speaks with a raspy deep voice and can drink anyone under the table. He has red bristly hair, bold features, and is missing two fingers on his right hand

from a dog bite. He's feared dogs ever since. Aside from being the innkeeper, Ared is the sole brewer of a unique local drink called Hagshot.

Ared Norgin's daughter Solsta was the last known person to go missing. When he realizes the heroes are adventurers, offers them a 100 gp reward in exchange for any news regarding his daughter's whereabouts. He shows them a painting he carries inside a small golden locket around his neck, a portrait of Solsta drawn by local artisan halfling Wilfur.

✦ **Kaelen of Dimhall:** Five dwarves led by Kaelen are traveling dealers in gems and other precious stones. They are intrigued by a rumor about a gemstone "hotspot" deep underneath Aelmor Monastery. Kaelen is quiet and slightly distrusting, but extremely loyal once on your side. He holds a strong grudge against spiders, that killed his family. Two of the dwarves are caught up in a game of Sea Chess, a regional favorite game of logic played with opal figurines depicting sea gods and creatures. The others are deep in conversation with Gregor Stock.

gemstone appraisals

The dwarves and Gregor are experts in appraising valuable objects and gems. However, Gregor is a much more savvy negotiator and charges a 15% cut per appraisal, while the dwarves are satisfied with 8%. The dwarves are particularly interested in strange stone work and carvings, and they buy any unique finds the characters might discover.

hagshot

An exceptionally strong (and rather foul smelling) spirit, bottled exclusively by Ared Norgin. An assortment of fermented seaweeds, rye, and citrus result in a murky brown-green fluid, with an off-white foaming fizz when





poured. Hagshot smells like seaweed left rotting on the beach and has a bitter-salty taste. Even those who drink it regularly, cough or gag on the first sip, possibly the reason for its name. Locals say the citrus helps fight off scurvy.

Hagshot inspires a short-lived, reckless feeling of bravery and confidence. Anyone who drinks a pint of Hagshot must roll a d4 and add its result to any skill check attempted during the next 30 minutes. Each additional pint consumed, adds an extra d4.

Regardless of the initial d20 result, the characters instantly fail the skill check in a ridiculously clumsy way if any of the d4 rolls includes a 1. Otherwise, add the result as a bonus to the skill check.

GUTHBER'S HOUSE

Once the adventurers learn about Heleste and Guthber Tomund's past on Aelmor, they might seek them out. Heleste disappeared and is not in Sestone (see "Heleste Missing") but they may find Guthber in his modest timber house at the edge of town.

▼ **Important Encounter:** The characters should meet Guthber at this stage of the story, to set up the plot for later events. Unknowingly, the characters are already face to face with the twisted villain behind the recent troubles.

Guthber is briefly back in Sestone and is taken by surprise by the adventurers' visit. Quickly hiding his discomfort, Guthber welcomes them inside and provides them a drink and a platter of smoked fish.

A humble stone and timber house sits on the edge of town. Smoke rises from a crooked chimney. On the wooden door a worn golden sun emblem glistens faintly in the sun. Guthber Tomund looks surprised by the visit but welcomes you inside with a friendly gesture. With his long gray mane of hair and silvery eyes, Guthber has a striking appearance and must've been quite handsome in younger years, but now part of his face droops oddly. His long green robes are frayed and faded.

A fireplace sheds a golden glow across the simple furniture and bookcases. It's obvious Guthber still enjoys studying, and tomes of all sorts and sizes stacked about. *"Please take a seat, go on now,"* he says in a raspy slur, the left side of his face oddly limp, giving him some difficulty in pronouncing certain words and a pitiful look.

the touch of madness

The left side of Guthber's face has started to droop due to spending time near the Realm Rift in the caverns deep below Aelmor. Stray energies from the Far Realm leak into the caverns below Aelmor, causing all kinds of unexpected transformations. Guthber accepts the deformity as part of a greater goal: finding the *Hand of Narkul* and gaining access to its incredible powers. Guthber spends most of his time in the caverns below Aelmor now, and is visiting back in Sestone only briefly.

Guthber tells the characters the following if asked. He is a skilled talker and twists his words carefully to hide his true intentions; Wisdom (Insight) checks against his Charisma (Deception) discern only that everything he says is true, although not the whole truth.

- **Brothers:** Guthber is friendly but blunt: *"My brother and I don't get along. Heleste likes to poke his nose in matters best left alone. We came to Sestone years ago, both interested in visiting the renowned Aelmor Library, to find it was abandoned and mostly robbed of its valuables. We decided to stay in Sestone, but we led separate lives."*
- **Missing:** Guthber has not seen Heleste for weeks and he does not know where he is. He suspects Heleste might have returned to Aelmor. He's known to venture back there occasionally.
- **Obsession:** Guthber tells a story about an ancient artifact of power resting underneath the old monastery. He and his brother discovered mention of it in a few fragmented manuscripts, one of the few things they

discovered during their scouring of the abandoned library.

- **Aelmor Map:** Guthber or any sailor in town can provide the adventurers with a crude map of Aelmor Island and the monastery. He's been traveling himself recently, now back in Sestone to stock on some supplies. He's not interested in taking the heroes to Aelmor himself, though.

If the adventurers ask about his facial droop, Guthber says it's due to an unfortunate stray magical effect encountered during one of his research journeys.

heleste missing

If the characters visit Heleste's house in Sestone, they find no one there. A passing local shares, *"He's not been seen for days. Last time I see 'im he was talking to Kronko at the boathouse. Trying to get to Aelmor by boat, it looked like. Why would anyone want to go there these days? I tell ya, old Heleste is crazy."*

THE PIECES ARE SET

By this time the adventurers have some understanding of the troubles in Sestone, and many leads point toward Aelmor. When the characters are ready to continue their investigations on Aelmor Island, proceed to the next part of the adventure, "Travel to Aelmor." They can choose to stay in Sestone to fill up on supplies and spend the night at the North Call Inn before departing.

MORE VICTIMS

If the characters seem reluctant to spring to action, they find more victims washing ashore in Sestone and hear the monastery bell toll in the distance. The once-lively bustle and trade of the port town vanishes and a grim atmosphere takes hold. For each day the adventurers stay in Sestone, there's a chance (day or night) that another victim appears or is found near the docks. On a roll of 3 or higher on a d6 the adventurers hear about another victim, chosen randomly from this list:

- Gurkk Silvyin, a local fisherman
- Keste Jurva, a local baker
- Evernald Nyrdin, a local fisherman
- Tobert Brandin, a local fisherman
- Antine Jurva, a worker at the docks
- Uma Nyrdin, wife of a local trader

travel to aelmor

Kronko the dockmaster manages incoming and outgoing trade and repairs. He can provide the characters with a keelboat (holds six passenger and one crew) and offers himself as navigator at 25 gp for the trip. If Kronko joins the characters, they reach their chosen destination without issue.

Kronko knows the following information (see Map B: Aelmor Island):

- **The beach (A)** gives easy access to the Pilgrim's Path, which ends at the Stone Stairs, a steep set of steps etched into the cliff face leading up to Aelmor Monastery.
- **The old docks (B)** in the western cove have been abandoned since Aelmor fell into ruin. It's a longer route around the island but has fewer currents
- **Razormouth Pass (C)** to the north is treacherous and Kronko advises the characters to stay clear.

Some adventurous fishermen in Sestone fish the waters near Aelmor. Because of the distance, they usually camp out there for a day or two before hauling their catch back. Kronko doesn't know that the Pilgrim's Path and the old docks in the western cove are now overrun by bandits and gnolls. Alternatively, the heroes can talk to Gregor Stock of Stock & Trade to convince him to make the journey by sailboat. Doing so will be challenging in light of the recent raids and his stolen goods. If they succeed in striking a deal with him, Gregor provides a fully crewed sailing vessel that can sail all day, including a navigator, ready to go at dawn. The trip takes about 3 hours and drops the characters safely at the beach landing.

The seas in this region are rough, with strong cold winds, occasional snow, and unpredictable currents. If the adventurers decide to go on their own, bringing along a navigator is advised to help them steer clear of local sandbanks and treacherous currents. This increases their chances of quickly reaching one of the landing locations of the island.

You can make the trip to the island eventful by rolling on the table below, or roleplay as you see fit.

Sea Travel

D6 Event

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Heavy snowfall hampers travel, causing quicker fatigue and increasing the chance of getting lost. |
| 2 | Strong currents push the boat off course. The navigator must make a successful DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or the boat drifts toward the north side of the island. |
| 3 | Heavy winds hamper travel, causing quicker fatigue and making navigation more difficult. The characters hear a bell toll in the distance. |
| 4 | High waves risk toppling the boat. Each character must make a successful DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or fall into the water. See the "Frigid Waters" sidebar under area 33. |
| 5 | A sudden fog makes it hard to navigate. Wisdom (Survival) checks to track direction increase by 5. |
| 6 | Sudden clear skies give a distant view. Characters can see Aelmor island directly ahead. |



Aelmor Island

"The currents are treacherous, but riches in fish and pearls have an even stronger pull."

—Kronko, Boatmaster of Sestone

Aelmor Island is located 10 miles off the coast of Sestone, taking about 4 to 6 hours of rowing or 3 hours by sailboat with the aid of a navigator. If the characters took a navigator with them, they avoid the treacherous currents and land at a point of choice.

If the adventurers refuse the help of a local guide, the trip can take up to 12 hours and they have a chance of landing at a random point. See Map B: Aelmor Island for areas 1–9.

Landing points

When the adventurers arrive at one of three starting points on the island, continue to the relevant encounter to proceed. Once on the island, traveling back and forth to Sestone might be cumbersome. The adventurers can find several abandoned shacks and caves to set up camp.

High cliffs and craggy mountains leave only three easily accessible entry points to Aelmor Island:

- The beach (area 1)
- The old docks (area 4)
- Razormouth Pass (area 6)

1. BEACH LANDING

At the southern end of Aelmor Island, a sandy beach grants access to the island, and from it springs a long winding road called the Pilgrim's Path. In the past, pilgrims took this road because of its cathartic qualities, as opposed to using the more comfortable route from the docks on the western cove.

The boat plows onto the sandy beach and halts with a jolt. As you step onto land, you scan the landscape. Rugged hills loom in the distance, gradually climbing to almost 600 feet high, with patches of snowed under trees here and there. Hardy bushes, wildflowers, and huge stone boulders litter the landscape. About 150 yards ahead, a small path starts twisting and turning up into the island's sloping hills.

The players can attempt a Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the following:

- **DC 10:** Heavy footprints in the wet sand lead into the direction of the path. These belong to the bandits who lurk farther up the Pilgrim's Path.
- **DC 15:** Two rowboats are hidden in the bushes just to the left of the trail, camouflaged with a rope net and leaves and branches.

2. PILGRIM'S PATH

A long path steadily ascends into the hills of the island. It runs about two miles (due to its twists and turns) and goes all the way to the top of the island where the Stone Stairs lead up to the monastery.

Life of a pilgrim

The entire path is lined with stone pilgrim mileposts, each bearing a sun emblem. You may choose to adopt Pilgrim Sun emblems in your campaign world. Whenever the characters encounter such an emblem in Sestone or other towns (often found on farmhouses), they can sleep and eat a modest meal for free. However, they are expected to help out with basic chores for their lodging, and if the characters look like they are too prosperous they will be denied the pilgrims' hospilities.

3. SMOKE AND FEATHERS

♥ **3 Bandits (SRD)**

♥ **1 Swarm of Ravens (SRD)**

As the adventurers follow the path toward the top of the island, they come across a group of bandits who have recently set up camp. If the characters discovered the footprints or the hidden boat at the beach, they might have guessed they are not alone.

One of the bandits is on guard duty, scouting the area about 200 feet ahead of their camp. The adventurers can attempt to make a Dexterity (Stealth) check against the scout's passive Perception to move closer undetected. If the bandit discovers the characters, he alerts his companions so they are ready for a fight.

Up ahead on the road, a savage-looking man leans against a large boulder, burnishing a scimitar. His bald head adorned with bright red markings gives him an outlandish, menacing look. A thin spire of smoke rises just beyond the next rise of hills.

The bandit scout avoids engaging directly. Instead, he sounds the alarm and falls back to a small camp farther up the path. Once alerted, his comrades release a swarm

of ravens onto the characters and hang back to attack with their crossbows until the adventurers enter melee range. If the characters silently eliminated the bandit scout, they might be able to catch the remaining bandits by surprise.

The hillside path slopes up and out of view. As you turn a corner you see a small encampment along the wayside, about 40 feet ahead. Several wooden crates are stacked up, upon which two shabbily dressed men sit drinking by a small fire.

The bandits release their ravens before engaging in melee with their scimitars. If the adventurers capture and interrogate any of the bandits, they divulge the following information:

- We've been hanging around the Aelmor waters trying to steal a shipment of goods from a local trader named Gregor Stock. Rumors whispered it was a valuable shipment.
- Four of our comrades died when we were attacked by a pack of gnolls a day ago, so we had to retreat. They're using the old docks to the west of the island as a base.
- The clan leader of the gnolls is called Turek. He was missing a leg—limping on a metal rod—but he was a tremendous fighter and took out two bandits single handedly.

✧ **Treasure:** Five sacks of wheat, four crates of fruits and vegetables, a barrel of salted fish, a felt pouch with 10 gp

4. OVERRUN DOCKS

♥ 2 Gnoll Raiders (NPC, Appendix I)

A band of gnoll raiders has started using the old Aelmor docks as a base of operations. Led by Turek, the gnoll clan master, they pillage and plunder nearby towns and seafarers. The gnolls have nothing to do with the townsfolk disappearances or mutations. When the characters encounter them, two gnoll raiders are unloading loot from a recent raid.

A decayed and overgrown dock rises from the cold waters inside a small cove. Three slanted wooden walkways lead across the water onto the beach. A sizeable boat lies tethered to the middle pier, and a smoking campfire on the beach shoots red-hot embers into the wintry air. Two large, feral looking beasts stomp up and down the pier, unloading heavy crates and sacks. Vapor clouds escape from their gnarled muzzles as they grunt at one another.

Smoke from the campfire has shrouded the cove in a light obscuring haze, and because the gnolls are busy unloading goods they have disadvantage to notice the characters.

The vicious gnoll raiders engage on sight, defending their camp and stolen goods. Alerted by the fight, another gnoll (guarding Turek's Throne, area 5) might join the fight in 1d3 rounds. Clan master Turek is rather lazy and used to noise so stays put in his hideout, ignoring the racket.

Some of the many crates and sacks of loot carry Gregor Stock's trade logo. The players may decide to return these to collect a reward. See "Resolving Side Quests" at the end of the book.

✧ **Treasure:** A stolen shipment of crates containing an assortment of dried fruits, wheat, corn, clothing, farming tools, and smoked fish, worth a total value of 400 gp.

5. TUREK'S THRONE

♥ 1 Gnoll (SRD)

♥ Turek, Gnoll Clan Master (Appendix I)

Turek, the gnoll raiders' clan master, has claimed a small nearby shrine as his home and is planning to expand his marauding tribe. He usually resides in his hideout, letting his henchmen do the hard work.

A small stone shrine lies half sunken into looming mossy rocks, as if the earth is slowly trying to reclaim it. Its rusted front gate hangs skewed in the archway, where another gnarling beast stands guard. A dim orange glow flickers behind ornate stained windows.

When the adventurers enter his shrine, Turek fights to the death, defending his hoard:

strong sea winds

Heavy winds coming from the sea make keeping steady footing occasionally difficult on Aelmor Island. The island's sloping and rocky terrain is blasted frequently by strong gusts of wind. At the GM's discretion, as characters travel the few beaten trails or the Pilgrim's Path, they're pummeled by a strong surge of sea wind on a roll of 4 or higher on a d6.

After a while the characters might begin to anticipate and hear the winds coming and brace themselves. Those caught in a blast of sea wind need to succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw to keep their footing. On a failed save, the PCs are pushed 5 feet in a randomly determined direction.

Surrounded by stacked up loot and trophies, an imposing red-furred beast sits atop an old prayer bench. Where his lower right leg should be, a rusted metal pin points out at an awkward angle. The chains on his three-headed flail rattle as the monster grunts and pushes itself to stand up.

Feigning Weakness: Turek lost his lower right leg in a fearsome battle and limps a little when walking with a crudely made metal prosthetic limb. He fools new adversaries into thinking he is weak, but in fact Turek still is a formidable, merciless fighter.

✧ **Treasure:** Small oak chest containing 35 gp, a longsword with an onyx gem in the hilt, a quiver holding fifteen longbow arrows and a leather belt with a silver dragon's head clip.

6. RAZORMOUTH PASS

If the characters access the island from the northern side, they find the only route is Razormouth Pass, a treacherous gorge filled with razor-sharp rocks. The area is difficult and dangerous terrain, requiring constant care to keep a steady footing. The slightest misstep can cause harm, and the heavy sea winds and snow battering the area make it even more hostile.

See the "Strong Sea Winds" sidebar).

7. HOWLING CAVES

The sea winds create a low moaning resonant sound throughout a set of naturally eroded caves on the northeast side of the island, earning the nickname Howling Caves. Tunnels gradually descend deep below Aelmor Island, ending in area 42 (Map F: The Caverns). Guthber and the mangkoon clan use these tunnels to enter and exit the island unseen.

8. THE STONE STAIRS

♥ 2 Mangkoon (Appendix I)

The Pilgrim's Path ends in a clearing, where a set of stone stairs ascends the steep cliff atop which the monastery is located. Amphibious creatures called mangkoon guard the area. Guthber uses them to aid him in his evil practices, promising treasure in reward. In addition to the creatures, strong gusts of wind come from the sea, make climbing the stairs challenging.

When the adventurers read the end of the Pilgrim's Path read the following:

The path suddenly opens up into a clearing and ahead steep cliffs rise, atop which you can see the monastery walls. A large set of stone stairs ascends the 60 feet high rock face, going back and forth a few times. The stone steps look worn and treacherous, especially since strong gusts of wind from the sea howl across the rocks.

If players indicate they are on the lookout, they might spot the mangkoon at the top of the stairs. When the characters first see the mangkoon, read:

You see two obviously amphibious creatures with bulging eyes and dark scaly skin. Their large mouths lined with hundreds of razor-sharp teeth and the spears they point in your direction make it clear they're not interested in talking.

As the characters ascend the stone stairs, the mangkoon fight with nets and spears. When the adventurers advance too close, one of the mangkoon runs to the bell tower to sound the alarm. In 1d3 rounds two more mangkoon arrive at the scene, coming from the bell tower (area 15).



throwing nets

The mangkoon throw nets at the characters in an attempt to slow them down and hamper their travel on the stairs. A Large or smaller creature hit by a net is restrained until it is freed. A creature can use its action to make a DC 10 Strength check, freeing itself or another creature within its reach on a success. Dealing 5 slashing damage to the net (AC 10) also frees the creature without harming it, ending the effect and destroying the net.

rocky plateau

The summit of the stone stairs opens up into a small rocky plateau near the monastery's outer walls. It gives a grand view of the island below and the surrounding sea.

The stairs end in a rocky plateau atop the cliff face. An archway flanked by two statues leads through the battlements surrounding the massive courtyard of the monastery. Years of strong salty sea winds have smoothed out the stone completely, like the dry bones of a skeleton. Several nets, fishing utensils, leather bags, and knives lay abandoned against a large boulder.

Once the adventurers have ascended the stairs and defeated the mangkoon, they can continue into the monastery grounds. Proceed to the next section "Inner Grounds".

a reluctant pact

Led by a revered mangkoon seer, the mangkoon were drawn to Aelmor Island by the magical energies emanating from the Realm Rift. The seer hoped to find new powers to aid his tribe, but they were caught by surprise to discover they were not alone.

Guthber Tomund killed several mangkoon in a brutal fashion before offering them a deal: help him investigate the Rift (mostly by kidnapping hapless townsfolk), and he would spare their lives and grant a share in the riches found inside the Rift. The mangkoon seer agreed, realizing their chances of escape looked grim and still greedy for the promise of power.



The Old Monastery

"The haunting presence of Narkul could be felt still, lingering in the cold corridors. But he was gone now. . . ."

— Belis Woldren, Aelmor kitchen servant

The old Aelmor Monastery is situated atop the island overlooking the sea. A large grassy courtyard is encircled entirely by massive walls to shield it from the heavy sea winds. On first glance, the large chapel with two transepts seems to make up the entirety of the monastery. However, the largest section of rooms lies beneath the surface, dug deep into the island. To the right the adventurers see the bell tower on a cliff outcropping overlooking the sea.

9. INNER GROUNDS

The top of the Stone Stairs gives access to the Inner Grounds, a large courtyard encircled by large walls. The monastery lies directly ahead, and behind it to the right, an old bell tower looks out onto the sea.

A massive grassy courtyard stretches before you, lined all the way by massive walls. A path of shells and pearly white stones leads to the old monastery, branching off in places to meet crumbling shrines. Sturdy grasses, bushes, and wildflowers accustomed to the harsh weather grow everywhere, giving the place a peaceful look. Overhead flocks of seagulls swirl and cry shrilly, while a low thunderous roar of wind and the sea below drums in your ears.

Greenery and well

The remains of a completely overgrown vegetable patch and well lay to the right side of the chapel. The monastery residents used the garden and well to provide for themselves, growing an assortment of vegetables. A rickety greenhouse stands remarkably unscathed, and a few huge bright orange pumpkins inside flourish in rays of sunlight. The well's shaft runs all the way down into the caves below Aelmor Monastery (area 37).

Living quarters

Just behind the chapel and hidden from view lay the old living quarters. Inside it a staircase leads farther down into Aelmor (Map D: Lower Level). To the right of the living quarters, a small path leads to the greenery and well and the bell tower on the cliff outcropping.

Eight shrines

Eight high-ranking Aelmor residents lay buried in shrines on the inner grounds. A stone statue atop each one depicts the person interred here. Covered in grasses and moss, the stone tombs have worn smooth from years of salty sea winds and rain. Most scripture has eroded, but one tomb remains readable: *"Remembering Otwic Anthomodus, the Enlightened."* The statue atop this shrine has been defaced.

See Map C: Monastery Grounds for areas 10–15.

10. GATECRASHING

1 Far Touched Villager (Appendix I)

The large wooden door at the front of the monastery is closed but not locked. Directly behind the door in a small ante room is a mutated townsfolk trying to get out. Read the following aloud to the heroes as they approach the door:

An old wooden door with rusted hinges trembles in the heavy winds that sweep the island. From behind the door you hear a wailing moan, and suddenly the door crashes open and a half-mutated man staggers forward. Tentacles lash out from various parts of his body and his glassy eyes are wide, staring into nothingness.

The mutated local is a fisherman caught by Guthber's minions about a week ago and exposed to the Realm Rift

maddening whispers

An aural assault of twisted voices, crooning whispers, and alien sounds from the Far Realm assault the characters, drifting on the tides of stray energies emanating from the mutated fisherman.

Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of a Far Touched creature must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or take no action on its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the Far Touched's maddening whispers for 24 hours.

Use the maddening whispers to create interesting, spooky, or outright frightening roleplaying situations and put seeds of doubt and devious mystery into your storyline. Are the PCs hearing the whispers because they are nearer to the Hand of Narkul? Is it Narkul speaking? Are the effects dangerous and possibly permanent for the characters?

below Aelmor. His bizarre mutations were caused by stray energies leaking from the Realm Rift. Guthber let the mutation roam free, interested in studying what it might do and as a deterrent to anyone with an interest in the monastery. The monster instantly attacks the characters, making tentacle slam attacks. If spared by the characters, he dies in 1d3 hours from his malformations.

When the characters press forward into the ante room, read the following:

A musty smell clings to the air of the anteroom, and fragments of plaster, dust, and rubble litter the floor. Directly ahead the room opens into a large hall lined with pillars, evidence of old battles everywhere. Overhead, an ancient and crumbling fresco depicts an alien figure drifting in midair, its six arms folded in a meditative posture. One hand is missing, cut off at the wrist.

A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals a pair of nonhumans passed through the room recently, and a pair of wet human footprints. Several nets and a few crude spears are cast into a corner, still damp to the touch. A successful DC 25 Intelligence (History) check reveals the fresco depicts *Narkul, the Great Collector* of the Far Realm. Tales describe the entity as an oracle with divine powers, wielding knowledge beyond imagination.

11. THE CHAPEL

Aelmor Monastery was once a magnificent building and still bears some of its majesty. However, many attacks left it battle scarred, after which the teeth of time further gnawed away at its splendor.

The old chapel is lined with ornate pillars, rising high up into the arched ceiling. Despite heavy scars from numerous raids, the imposing hall is still magnificent. Smashed furniture, rubble, and bloodied dirt remain as silent reminders of past battles. Pale light filters through the colored glass, touching upon a large marble statue at the back of the chapel. Two transepts extend sideways from the main hall.

The adventurers can attempt a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check to notice the wet footprints across the hall leading up

to a wooden door at the back, accompanied by two pairs of nonhuman footprints.

If the characters take special note of the stained glass windows, they see that the windows that line the chapel are mostly broken, but intact panels depict various scenes, including a council of wise men in robes, a blazing sun with rays of light touching the heads of pilgrims, and scholars studying in a library.

A large stone statue on a granite square pedestal looms overhead, bathed in a glorious light that falls through the high-arched windows behind it. A savage attack in the past left the robed figure damaged beyond recognition, its face smashed. Chiseled lettering covers the front of the pedestal, but erosion has made it difficult to read.

The statue depicts Otwic Anthomodus, former High Scholar of Aelmor monastery. Aelmor residents defaced his statue after Otwic became a servant of Narkul. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check can decipher the faded engraving on the pedestal:

Seek to find knowledge where no light shines.
—High Scholar, Otwic Anthomodus

✧ **Treasure:** Ten blue quartz gemstones are set into the pedestal's edge, miraculously having escaped past robberies.

A successful DC 10 Dexterity check is required to remove the gemstones from the pedestal. Any failed roll damages one of the ten gemstones, negating all its value. Gregor Stock or the dwarves in town can appraise the stones, assessing a value of 10 gp each.

12. TRANSEPTS

Two transepts branch from the main nave. One is intact and contains nothing of interest. The other has partially crumbled, giving access to the desecrated graveyard outside.

Lavishly decorated glass windows hang broken in the wind. Prayer benches lay toppled, and scattered candles and a pile of brown robes rest against the wall. The back of the left transept has crumbled, opening into the outer grounds. Grasses and wildflowers have found their way into the room, eerily contrasting with the cold gray stones.

When searched, the mass of old robes turns out to contain the (inert) skeleton of a monk. Its skull falls to the ground and rolls across the stone floor, echoing through the chapel. The sound alerts the undead skeletons in the desecrated graveyard outside.

✧ **Treasure:** The monk's remains hold a leather pouch with 13 sp, a small iron knife, and a carved obsidian statuette in the shape of a young woman with an eye symbol on her chest (art object, worth 25 gp to an interested buyer).

13. DESECRATED GRAVEYARD

♥ 4 Skeletons (SRD)

Twelve graves of past monastery inhabitants lay here, but the stirrings of evil from below have tainted the site. When the characters set foot in this area, several skeletons move to attack.

A mossy, overgrown gravesite has suffered from a past tremor, leaving the ground cracked and uneven. Most of the tombstones lay toppled and broken. A pearly white mist clings low between the cracks and crevices, when suddenly with a foul breath it swirls as several decayed bodies rise from the earth.

✧ **Treasure:** 14 gold pieces, a silver necklace inlaid with azurite. A bone horn engraved with entwined fish (35 gp).

14. LIVING QUARTERS

♥ 2 Mangkoon (Appendix I)

The living quarters situated on the outer grounds behind the chapel served multiple functions in years past: living, eating, study, and seclusion. Two mangkoon now camp here and might be alerted to the characters' presence if they do not take care to enter silently.

Furniture lays smashed and rotted. Broken pottery, rusted silverware, and a few old books lay scattered across the room. A large brass chandelier hangs from the ceiling in the middle of the room. Shrieking in high pitched, stuttering tones, two amphibious creatures jump up, readying their spears.

Among the rubble the characters can find several decayed books, hacked and bloodstained. If investigated closely they might yield bits of useful information. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals a few intact pages, that recollect part of the monastery's history. Dated 300 years ago, a passage reads: "Otwic today faced an inquiry by the monastery elders to elaborate on the nature of his recent research. The tribunal was not pleased with his cryptic answers."

A wooden door and staircase give access to the lower levels below the monastery. The door is unlocked, its lock forced open in the past.

15. HAUNTED BELL TOWER

♥ 2 Mangkoon (Appendix I)

♥ Ghost of Anthomodus (Ghost, SRD)

A large stone tower looks out onto the sea, majestic and silent. Hanging in the shadows of the domed ceiling, you can discern a large bell. Seagulls circle the skies above. At the base of the tower, an arched doorway reveals a spiraling stairway inside.

The stone tower stands 150 feet tall. Its circular flagstone walls are worn by ages of cold harsh weather. Two mangkoon stand guard here. They are not particularly at ease, since the ghost of Otwic Anthomodus frequents the area, occasionally chiming the monastery bell. The mangkoon attack when the characters enter the tower.

The staircase ascends to the bell tower and a wooden hatch opens up into a room with a domed ceiling, ornately carved windows lining the top. The air is cool and dank, the smell of seagull droppings mixed with rain and salt. Every 20 feet or so a small window grants a majestic view of the island. Heavy winds mixed with the thunder of the sea howl through the tower, reverberating like a giant horn.

A thick rusty iron chain hangs down from the bell. The smoldering ashes of a recent campfire and some beaten cooking supplies and fishing utensils can be found unattended at the top.

ghostly encounter

At the GM's discretion, the characters have a chance to encounter the ghost of Otwic Anthomodus here. His appearance still reflects the afflictions of being turned into a Narkul slave. Tentacles burst from his torso, twisting and writhing. His face is gaunt and bears a blank stare, devoid of any human emotion. Characters might notice the ghost of Otwic is missing his right hand.

At the bell tower the ghost is not hostile, ignoring all creatures to ring the bell, but his appearance serves as a great potential scare and a warning of his presence.

✧ **Treasure:** Hidden behind some loose stones in the wall is a leather pouch with 15 sp, 2 gp, and a potion of healing.

16. STORAGE ROOMS

♥ 3 Giant Rats (SRD)

See Map D: Lower Level for areas 16–23.

Several identical storage rooms are located in this area. Giant rats have nested in these rooms. When the characters enter, the starving rats attack. The contents of the wooden crates have long been eaten or rotted away. Nothing of value remains.

17. COMMON ROOM

A large hearth set in the northern wall is the only notable feature of this common room. Its furniture has long since decayed and crumbled. On the right side a wooden door leads to the kitchen and storage rooms. Directly ahead a hallway leads to the oratory and sleeping quarters. The wooden door lays smashed and crumbled. Together with the kitchen, these rooms might serve as a good resting place for the party once cleared.

18. THE KITCHEN

♥ 2 Mangkoon (Appendix I)

Wooden racks line the walls, and ceramic pots and cooking utensils lay lifeless and dusty. A large oak table in the center has escaped most of the savagery, but the stools lay in smashed and broken splinters. A large stone chimney with a copper cooking pot sits against the back wall.

The chimney reaches up to the surface and can still be used. Two mangkoon patrol this area. When alarmed by noises, they investigate.

✧ **Treasure:** Several crates and casks line the walls. Most contain fossilized remains of food. If the containers are searched thoroughly, characters discover a potion of climbing, a bundle of sturdy rope, a pair of silver daggers, and a torch.

19. SLEEPING QUARTERS

♥ 3 Giant Rats (SRD)

♥ 1 Corpse Mold (Appendix I)

Several spartan stone sleeping quarters lay in darkness. A couple of giant rats have nested amid the remains of the beds, attacking when the adventurers enter.

A foul smell lingers. Sleeping bunks have long rotted away and a thick layer of dust and grime drapes over everything. Light filters down through several narrow slits in the ceiling that lead up to the surface. Two decomposed bodies lay slumped against the back wall, arrows embedded in their chests. One of the corpses grips a small decayed book in his bony fingers.

corpse mold

The corpses in the back host a hazardous spore called corpse mold. The corpse mold spores trigger and burst into the air upon the slightest of tremors. A single touch is enough to make it erupt.

✧ **Treasure:** After characters deal with the corpse mold, they can retrieve the small leather-bound pocket diary, clenched between the bony fingers of the corpse. Amid his rotted robes characters can also find a felt pouch containing 12 sp, 1 gp, and 14 cp and a magic ring: Orulin's Ring of Curiosity (see Appendix II).

pocket diary

The decayed pocket diary gives a glimpse into the daily life at the monastery. Notes detail days filled with prayer, eating, pruning the vegetable patch outside, and tending to pilgrims visiting. A particular passage of interest reads:

"I always thought Otwic's desire for knowledge was dangerous. Curiosity is not a sin, but where does one stop? Today, the Council of Elders demanded a full account from Otwic, on the meaning of his research and why he removed certain books from the library."

20. THE ORATORY

♥ 2 Mangkoon (Appendix I)

♥ 1 Mangkoon Seer (Appendix I)

This private oratory was used solely by the monastery residents, who could retreat here and devote themselves to their prayers in peace. Now a group of kidnapped townsfolk is held captive here, bound with rope to an old prayer bench. When the adventurers arrive, the door is slightly ajar. Two mangkoon lurk in the shadows to the sides behind the pillars. A mangkoon seer hides on the balcony above the prayer bench, waiting to ambush the characters.

You step onto the white marble floor of an oratory. Its vaulted ceiling arches overhead. The faintest remnant of incense tinges the heavy smell of cold stone. A single oil lamp, resting on an altar in the back, casts a low light around the room. Against it, several villagers sit huddled and bound. Their

soft weeping bounces off the walls. Above them, an ornate balcony looms. To your left and right, gold-plated pillars run the length of the room, glistening faintly against the black shadows behind them.

When the characters enter, roll to check if the characters notice the hiding monsters. If the adventurers did not take precautions to move stealthily in the previous areas, the mangkoon are alerted and ready for an ambush.

Once the characters have defeated the monsters, they can talk to the prisoners. They gather the following information:

- The villagers are sailors and fishermen, captured while venturing near Aelmor Island. The monsters who captured them were led by a beautiful druid clad in robes, her hair braided and a strong smell of herbs surrounding her.
- The captives heard parts of a conversation between the druid named Zaharel and a grizzly looking elderly man: *"Ready the next one for me, Zaharel. It's a matter of time now. We will find the Hand."*
- The villagers heard Zaharel say *"The Realm Rift is dangerous. You're sending them to their doom,"* sensing a sliver of guilt in her cool voice. The old man snarled, *"Don't tell me you care for these beggars, stop wasting my precious time!"*

captive townsfolk

The townsfolk are terrified and tired and plead to be taken home. It is up to the players to decide how to handle the situation. The adventurers can choose to leave the villagers behind, at the risk of being captured again (or worse), or make the effort to return them to Sestone.

The captured villagers are commoners from Sestone and nearby towns. They are not brave or skilled fighters and will be a burden if the characters decide to take them along on their quest.

If the players take the villagers back to Sestone safely, Zaharel notices they are gone and briefs Guthber that "they've got company." The GM may choose to double the amount of mangkoon in each following encounter to represent Guthber's heightened awareness of intruders.

21. GALLERY OF SCHOLARS

A on crumbled flagstone hallway leads up to the renowned Aelmor Library.

On both sides of the hallway, four large marble statues stand in alcoves: robed scholars, each holding a stone book on outstretched hands. One book is missing. At the end of the hallway a stone archway gives access to the library. A magical barrier quietly sparks and fizzes, shedding a faint purple haze across the room. Beyond it you can see the library, or what's left of it.

entering the library

A magical barrier sits in the archway. Only those who carry one of the eight stone books with them can walk through it without getting shocked. One of these stone books is already in use by Heleste, who is in the library when the adventurers arrive.

Those who try to cross the threshold without carrying a book take 1d6 lightning damage, but they can cross nonetheless. If the players take a moment to investigate, a successful DC 12 Intelligence check reveals the stone books can be picked up, and they look worn from being handled frequently. In addition, water seems recently spilled on the floor, running through the magical barrier into the library.

22. FORLORN LIBRARY

♥ **Heleste Tomund (NPC, Appendix I)**

♥ **1 Far Touched Villager (Appendix I)**

Aelmor Library once held a magnificent collection of ancient manuscripts, tomes, and peculiar writings. After suffering numerous raids, most of the library's books and manuscripts have been looted or destroyed.

Before you lies what's left of the once fabled Aelmor Library. Massive oaken bookcases line the large circular room. Robbed of their contents, most stand empty or have toppled over. Heaps of decayed books, torn pages, parchment, and rubble are scattered about. Several small steps lead down and up the elevations of the library and more bookcases circle inward, like a labyrinth. A huge milky glass globe set into the ceiling casts a warm golden light. Splashing and low thumping sounds echo off the walls.

In the center of the library underneath the large globe light, the characters find Heleste Tomund.

A frightened scholarly-looking man with old robes and long gray hair is poring over the books and papers scattered across the wooden table. To the side, in a toppled bookshelf filled with water, a mutated man lies partially submerged, mournfully wailing, his tentacles splashing about. A dead halfling lies slumped on the ground next to him. After smelling an uncorked flask and eyeing a fish tail up close, the scholar suddenly turns your way, eyes wide.

Heleste is keeping the Far Touched mutant crudely bound for further study. He has known of his brother Guthber's plans to unearth the *Hand of Narkul* for some time and returned to Aelmor in hopes of stopping him.

Unfortunately, Heleste is no match for Guthber and his mangkoon henchmen, so instead he searches to find an antidote to cure the mutation victims. So far Heleste is at a loss, since he doesn't know the mutations are caused by the Realm Rift. Tired and distraught, Heleste comes across as slightly delirious. He has a few deep gash wounds on his arms and legs from a fight with the mangkoon on the way to the library. Bloody wounds show through his torn robes. Heleste's halfling companion did not survive the fight.

If the characters met Guthber Tomund in Sestone, they notice just how much the brothers look alike. The PCs can talk with Heleste and get the following information from him:

- **Who are you:** "My name is Heleste Tomund. You might also have heard of my brother Guthber. We came to explore Aelmor Monastery many years after it was abandoned."
- **Captive Mutant:** "I am trying to find an antidote to these horrible mutations. It's unlike anything I've seen, not even in the darkest of scriptures. It's as if they have been touched by something from another world."
- The dead halfling is young halfling Orryn Golwit, running boy of Stock & Trade in Sestone. He agreed to help Heleste travel to Aelmor using a keelboat. They were attacked by the mangkoon and Orryn died from his injuries, leaving Heleste stranded on Aelmor.
- **The Hand of Narkul:** Many years ago Heleste came across the diary of Otwic Anthomodus. Otwic had found an artifact: a severed hand that gave him unimaginable powers, divine knowledge, and transformation into a higher state of being. The diary was missing many pages but other documents implied that Otwic befell an ill fate.

- **I am innocent:** Realizing the dark nature of the *Hand of Narkul*, Heleste decided to let matters rest, but his brother Guthber became obsessed with it and has since worked to retrieve it. Through years of searching, Guthber learned fragments of the *Hand's* past and last known location. It's a matter of time now before he succeeds in getting it.

- **Where is Guthber?** Heleste suspects Guthber is deeper below Aelmor but has not seen him recently. He knows a spiraling staircase leads down into what scholars called "the Arcanium." Heleste has never been beyond the catacombs down there, but he remembers notes left behind about a secret passage in the area.



The Arcanium

"Ungodly whispers gnawed at my mind. We had to push on. It had to be killed. But how?"

—Odron, dwarf mercenary

Heleste tries to convince the characters he is innocent and asks them for help. Heleste does not willingly join the party to find Guthber, but he does offer to return to Sestone and inform Ulfwin of the transpiring events. If the villagers are still present, Heleste can take them home.

✧ **Treasure:** Heleste has found several magic items, which he offers to the PCs if it's clear they intend to pursue Guthber: a scroll of mending, a scroll of disguise self, and a locked chest containing three potions of healing, a potion of water breathing, and a potion of feather falling.

Who to Trust?

Depending what information the players acquired before they arrive at the library, they might have every reason to believe Heleste Tomund is the one causing trouble and kill him on the spot. If they do, they likely return to Sestone, only to realize they were wrong when more people keep disappearing.

If the adventurers met Heleste's brother Guthber before traveling to Aelmor, the seed of doubt is likely planted. Who's to be trusted? Guthber is skilled in deception and tried his best to trick the characters into believing Heleste is the one they're after...

23. SPIRAL STAIRCASE

The damp hallway opens onto a small rocky outcropping that hangs over a deep shaft. A rickety wooden staircase spirals down into darkness, descending deeper below the monastery and leading to the Arcanium. The area is completely dark and requires darkvision or a light source to see.

The adventurers will have to descend to enter into the next area: The Arcanium.

At first glance, the Arcanium appears to be the ancient catacombs filled with tombs honoring past Aelmor scholars. But further exploration reveals a secret area known only to Guthber, Zaharel, and the long dead who lay there. To continue their adventure, the characters must discover how to access it. The catacombs area is completely dark (unless otherwise stated) so the characters require a light source or darkvision to see.

See Map E: The Arcanium for areas 24–34.

24. CATACOMBS ANTEROOM

A small anteroom serves as the entry into the catacombs. On the left and right, two wooden doors lead into a U-shaped room filled with sarcophagi. A small flight of stairs directly ahead leads down to the Crypt of Anthomodus. A ghostly presence can be felt in this area. See the "Ghostly Presence" sidebar for more information. If the characters investigate the stone door, read:

As you walk down the steps, you notice it's turned very cold all of a sudden. A sensation of sadness and anger manifests. Sudden bursts of rotten smells and the sound of waves mixed with shrieking seagulls echo off the walls. Then all is dead silence again.

▼ **Deadly Threat:** This area presents a deadly threat for unwise low-level characters. The ghost does not have to be defeated to advance the adventure.

The ghost generally haunts the bell tower or stays inside room 25 unless provoked.

25. THE CRYPT OF ANTHOMODUS

♥ Ghost of Anthomodus (Ghost, SRD)

The crypt is sealed by a stone door with a fist-sized hole in its center. There's no trap (although the characters might suspect one) and the door opens by simply putting a hand inside the hole.

ghostly presence

When Otwic Anthomodus, High Scholar of Aelmor Monastery, turned into a pawn under Narkul's command and was slain in battle, his body was entombed here. His ghost haunts the area 25, not ready to surrender just yet. At the GM's discretion, a ghostly presence (creating all sorts of strange phenomenon) manifests in areas 24, 25, and 26. Characters experience sudden bursts of cold, sounds of waves and shrieking seagulls, hideous otherworldly laughter, moving objects, and an awful stench. Sensations of deep sadness and anger can be felt, after which loose objects start floating silently in midair.

A sober stone tomb rests on a dais. A relief sculpture on the lid depicts a robed scholar, hands folded across his chest. A thick layer of dust covers everything. Suddenly the room goes very cold and eerie whispers swirl around you. With a deep boom the dirt explodes into the air, then drifts weightless, as if frozen in time. A ghostly figure materializes and floats toward you.

The ghost of Anthomodus attacks only if characters actively disturb his final resting place. When looking at the ghost, the characters notice his right hand is missing.

26. THE KEEPERS

♥ 3 Skeletons (SRD)

The U-shaped room houses several tombs. Eight prominent scholars known as "the Keepers" lay buried here. A thick layer of dust covers everything. Five tombs are closed and hold the remains of the Keepers, former high ranking scholars of Aelmor Monastery.

Several tombs lay in darkness, faintly lit only by patches of blue glowing fungus on the ceiling. The tombs are covered in thick dust, some lids broken and toppled. A round basin filled with putrid water lends the air a decayed smell.

The fungus on the ceiling is harmless and emanates a faint light. Three tombs are open and lay empty, save for ages-old dust, grime, and rubble. Its undead residents now lay submerged in the 2-foot-deep murky water of the basin, their clothes rotted, bones covered in moss and barnacles. The skeletons rise and attack when the water is disturbed or the basin edge is touched. They otherwise remain slumbering. When the sealed tombs are searched, a few valuables can be found. The wooden door leading to area 27 is stuck, not locked, and can be bashed open.

✧ **Treasure:** 4 gp, 12 cp, 34 sp, gold brazier, copper short sword, brass cup inset with blue opals.

27. LANTERN AND FEATHERLIGHT

A beautiful checkered marble floor lies in shadows. Its white and emerald colors have faded over the years, glowing ghostly by light filtering down from a hole in the ceiling. To the left and the right, two large stone statues of a man and a woman stand in alcoves. Books and papers lay covered in dust, as if frozen in time. A stone door in the far wall appears to be the only way out.

The hole in the ceiling runs up all the way to the surface. Depending on the time of day, light filters down and a stream of fresh air can be faintly felt, a welcome sensation for those who have been underground for some time.

opening the secret passage

The stone door appears to be the only exit at first glance. However, a secret passage is hidden behind the woman's statue in the south alcove. This passage opens only when the characters manage to solve a series of puzzles, which starts when characters access area 28 and continues with the two statues in the alcoves in this room. Once solved, the passage opens and the characters can progress deeper below Aelmor Monastery.

To complete the puzzle, characters must take these steps:

- Swinging the male statue's lantern in area 27 opens the door into area 28.
- Manipulating the Moon and Owl symbols in area 28 opens the statue's lantern, revealing a feather inside
- Placing the feather in the open hand of the female statue in area 27 opens the secret door behind her.

lantern

The alcove to the left holds a statue cut from dark marble, featuring an elderly man gripping a book at his side and one arm outstretched, holding out a lantern. The lantern

is made from solid cast iron, though the gilding on it has weathered and cracked.

Swinging the lantern on its hinge opens the stone door leading into area 28, allowing the characters to proceed to the next part of the puzzle. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals very fine lines on the back of the lantern, indicating a panel of sorts that cannot be easily pried open. The lantern opens only by solving the puzzle in area 28.

Inside the lantern is a single white bird's feather, which serves as a key needed to open the secret passage behind the woman's statue in the south alcove. An incredibly perceptive character might hear it when shaking the lantern. If the characters use brute force to pry the lantern open, they risk damaging the feather inside.

featherlight

The alcove to the right holds a statue hewn from white marble of a beautiful woman in a flowing half-drape. One hand rests across her naked bust, while the other stretches forward with an open palm. When the characters investigate the woman's statue, they find a small scripture on its pedestal reading:

"Light is the Weight of Wisdom — May it Open Your Doors."

The woman's statue hides a secret door in the alcove behind it. Once the feather from inside the lantern is placed in the statue's open palm, part of the wall slides away and the statue shifts sideways. Placing any other object there will not work. If the characters investigate the walls and floor close to the woman's statue they discover scratches behind the statue, indicating something has moved there.

28. SINGING MERMAID

The stone door to this room opens when the lantern in area 27 is swung, or it can be forced open with brute strength: DC 25 to break it down (or when enough time is spent). The noise alerts Zaharel and the mangkoon in area 31 to the presence of intruders.

This small circular room holds a puzzle and trap in the shape of a mermaid's statue holding a glowing orb.

A sudden flood of bright light fills the entire room. After your eyes have adjusted, you discern a marble statue in the center of the room, a young mermaid holding a bright glowing orb aloft. Six carved symbols line the circular walls. Hauntingly beautiful singing fills your ears and you feel the overpowering urge to touch the orb.

The mermaid statue's singing entrances the characters, luring them closer to touch the glowing orb. Every round the door is open, each character must succeed on a DC

15 Wisdom saving throw to resist or break free from the entrancing singing. On a failed save, the character walks toward the orb, and if in range touches it, taking 1d4 lightning damage. The characters can take an action to cover their ears, granting a +3 on their saving throws to resist.

light and shadow

The light from the orb and the symbols on the circular walls are keys to open the secret door behind the woman's statue in the previous room. The characters must block the light beaming from the orb, so that the correct symbols are in shadow, while keeping the others bathed in light.

▼ The six symbols are Moon, Sun, Seed, Flower, Owl, and Candle.

All six symbols are related to light except for the two associated with darkness: the Moon and Owl. The sun and candles cast light, a seed needs light to grow, the seed turns into a flower. The moon and owls come out at night. When the Moon and Owl are blocked from light simultaneously, the orb dims briefly and the mermaid stops singing.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check allows characters to hear a soft metal click sound from the previous room. When approaching the statue with the lantern, they discover the back of the lantern has opened, revealing a small white feather. When the characters complete the puzzle, read:

A soft click echoes through the room. After a brief silence, a thunderous grinding fills the room as the woman's statue moves sideways, revealing a narrow set of stairs leading down. A heavy, dank smell assaults your senses.

The secret door opens into a passage that leads down into the Arcanium, an even deeper mysterious area that was unknown to the previous Aelmor residents.

29. DROWNING SCREAMS

♥ Ice Mephit (SRD)

Designed to strike fear into the hearts of trespassers, this room features a (harmless) trap that can cause a good scare. A hidden stone door set into the opposite wall exits the room, which slides sideways with a grinding noise simply when pushed.

You step into a circular flagstone room, its high, vaulted ceiling covered in an ancient mural depicting a cavernous lake and a giant water monster. Several gargoyle heads look down from the ceiling, water dripping from their jaws.

When the characters set foot into the room and step onto the pressure plate directly inside, the stone door they entered through closes behind and an illusion triggers. It appears as if the room is rapidly filling with water, spouting from the gargoyle heads. At the same time, an ice mephitis descends from the ceiling to pester the adventurers.

Each character must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be terrified for 1 round. Those who fail the save are unable to act on their turn, watching in terror as the room quickly fills up with rushing water (an illusion). In addition, everyone hears the real scream of a man in the distance, a villager held captive in the Aquan Laboratory (area 31).

30. BARRACKS AND ARMORY

In times past, this room served as a barracks and armory for the Aelmor Monastery. Large sections of the room lay crumbled, with benches, tables, and racks toppled and smashed. When searched, the room yields some weapons and outfitting, all in a poor state.

❖ **Treasure:** Amid the rubble a number of usable items can be salvaged: three daggers, two short swords, four spears, and two crude wooden shields.

31. AQUAN LABORATORY

♥ 2 Octopus (SRD)

♥ 2 Mangkoon (Appendix I)

♥ Commoner (restrained, SRD)

♥ Zaharel (NPC, Appendix I)

The characters stumble into large laboratory, stacked floor to ceiling with bottles and canisters. When the characters arrive, Zaharel, a druid reluctantly in Guthber's service, is busy drugging one of the captured townsfolk. Guthber has tasked her with giving the captives a concoction of mind-numbing herbs to make them more docile. They are then brought below Aelmor Monastery to retrieve the *Hand of Narkul* from the Realm Rift—a dangerous task Guthber doesn't fancy doing himself.

This laboratory is filled with cabinets stacked with hundreds of bottles, canisters, and boxes with unknown contents. A sulfurous smell stains the dank air. Several huge glass containers filled with murky water loom in the shadows. Inside each one floats an octopus. Restrained on a stone slab in the center of the room, a captive villager lies writhing and moaning woefully. A woman in brown robes with flawless pale skin and braided hair looks up briefly. She then forces a concoction down the gurgling throat of her victim. Two mangkoon stand guard behind her.

Zaharel is a strong-willed female druid and exceptional herbalist whose life path took an unpredicted turn. Stoic and calm, she rarely rushes into action. Her looks are striking: hair braided elaborately, flawless pale skin, and piercing green eyes which appear to read people.

The mangkoon engage the characters on sight, giving Zaharel time to cast spells from a distance. In the extremely crowded laboratory the characters risk toppling racks or breaking bottles, causing all kinds of unpredictable effects.

In addition, Zaharel casts *gust of wind* to topple racks



and glass containers with the octopuses. When released from their containers, each octopus attacks the nearest target. The murky water floods the stone floor and the creatures slither and thrash about. The octopuses cannot use their ink attack because the water on the floor is only 2 inches deep.

watch out!

Each time the characters miss on their attack roll by 5 or more during combat, they bump into a cabinet or water bowl. Roll on the Aquan Laboratory table to determine the results.

Aquan Laboratory

d6 Event

- 1 Each creature within 5 feet must succeed a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d8 fire damage. The burst of random chemicals burns several scattered books and papers in the process.
- 2 One of the large glass containers topples and breaks, releasing the water and an octopus into the room.
- 3 A cloud of rotting stench bursts from an unknown substance, lingering for 1 round. Everyone within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or fall prone.
- 4 Each creature within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d8 acid damage as acid burns through clothes and fragile materials.
- 5 A box of magical powder scatters, causing a 10 foot radius cloud of utter darkness. Everyone caught in its radius can't see, even with darkvision. The cloud dissipates after 1 round.
- 6 You bump into a cabinet or octopus bowl. It wobbles precariously for a moment but doesn't fall or break.

If the characters fail to defeat Zaharel, or if she manages to escape the scene, she flees Aelmor and abandons Guthber. If captured and questioned, Zaharel knows the following information:

- The effects of stray energies leaking from a Realm Rift below Aelmor cause the bizarre *Far Touched* mutations. Guthber is sending the townsfolk into the Rift to fetch the *Hand of Narkul* for him. Zaharel realizes it's a suicide mission, since the effects of the Realm Rift make it incredibly dangerous.
- She feels increasingly guilty about this and regrets having made a pact with Guthber. Zaharel doesn't know who or what caused the Realm Rift. She assumes it's been there for decades, unnoticed by anyone.

CRISIS of faith

Zaharel was one of the youngest members of a group of druids called the *Monosis*, named after a revered ancient

druid. Devoted to the Circle of the Land, its members are devout, unseen, and unsung protectors of the coastal area including Sestone, Aelmor Island, and the nearby region. With a deep knowledge of the rich local wildlife and fauna, the Monosis were often sought after by the Aelmor scholars, but they rarely granted an audience.

The young and naive Zaharel mingled freely with outsiders, much to the distaste of her peers, who felt she risked the safety of the group. She was eventually expelled after the Monosis were attacked, and they judged that she had revealed their presence to hostile forces. Now an outcast and feeling distrusted, Zaharel lives a solitary life.

During her wanderings she discovered the existence of a dangerous breach in nature's status quo underneath Aelmor Monastery. Meaning to warn the Monosis about her findings, she met Guthber Tomund, who persuaded her to research the anomaly with him. Once Zaharel started realizing Guthber's true intentions, he threatened to kill her and expose the Monosis' secret sacred site.

FRIGID WATERS

The water in the natural caverns below Aelmor are extremely cold. When a character falls into frigid water as noted in the text, use the following rules: A creature can be immersed in frigid water for a number of minutes equal to its Constitution score before suffering any ill effects. Each additional minute spent in frigid water requires the creature to succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion. Characters or creatures with resistance or immunity to cold damage automatically succeed on the saving throw, as do creatures naturally adapted to living in ice-cold water.

32. SERPENT'S HALLWAY

A revolving stone door at the back of the Aquan Laboratory leads into a rounded hallway, hewn from dark marble. Support beams like ribs line the walls every 5 feet, making the tunnel look like being inside a snake. Stone carved into the likeness of a large open snake's mouth gives access to a large cavernous room where the heroes hear the rushing of water.

33. NARROW LEDGE

♥ 2 Mangkoon (Appendix I)

After a few feet the floor drops away sharply in this large cavern, revealing a body of water deep down below. A precarious narrow ledge appears to be the only way to the other side, where a small opening leads into the rock face.

The characters have to carefully balance themselves to move across the narrow rocky ledge. Successful DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks keep them from falling off.

Two mangkoon lurk on the other side, throwing spears and nets at the adventurers. Characters who fall off the ledge tumble into frigid cold waters below (see the “Frigid Waters” sidebar). Small carved hand and footholds run back up the walls, requiring a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb.

The Caverns

“Reality as we knew it lost all meaning. I was staring into a far realm beyond comprehension.”

—Tuonela Bornn, cleric in service of Sestone

A large network of natural tunnels crawl the depths beneath Aelmor Island. Some collapsed when the Realm Rift tore apart the fabric of reality, but some can still be followed all the way up to the surface. Guthber and his mangkoon are in area 45 and use the tunnels to enter and exit Aelmor unseen (from area 7 on the Aelmor Island map to area 42 on the Caverns map). Complete darkness, fissures, flowing subterranean rivers, and slippery fungus-covered rocks make the area challenging to traverse.

See Map F: The Caverns for areas 35–46.

34. WATER WORKS

A massive cavern reverberates with the sound of a rushing river. Several stone causeways arch over to the other side. Water spills and sprays over the stone bridges, making them glisten in the darkness. Cracks in the ceiling high above let through slivers of cool blue light.

Crossing the stone causeways requires slow going to keep a steady footing. Characters require successful DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks or they might slip and fall. The water below is ice cold as described in the “Frigid Waters” sidebar. To complicate the situation, sudden bursts of water pummel the characters. Each round roll a d6: on a result of 1 or 2, a heavy wave of water spills over the bridges, requiring characters to succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or slip and fall off.

The rushing stream down below washes anyone who falls down onto a rocky embankment to the west. Bones of past unlucky travelers lay glistening amidst the stones. A careful search reveals a rotted rope leading up to the ledge at the west side of the causeways, near the exit of the room.

35. DARKMANTLES

♥ 2 Darkmantles (SRD)

This irregularly shaped cavern looks like the earth has torn apart from top to bottom. Its rough floor makes it hard to keep a steady footing. The cavern is completely dark and requires a light source or darkvision to see. Mounds of accumulated flowstone and stalagmites rise upward. Together with clusters of stalactites spiking down from the ceiling, the cavern looks like a giant gaping maw frozen in time.

Two darkmantles hang motionless from the rocky ceiling, indistinguishable from stalactites. They descend onto unsuspecting characters with their crushing attack.

36. STEAM VENTS

♥ 1 Steam Mephit (SRD)

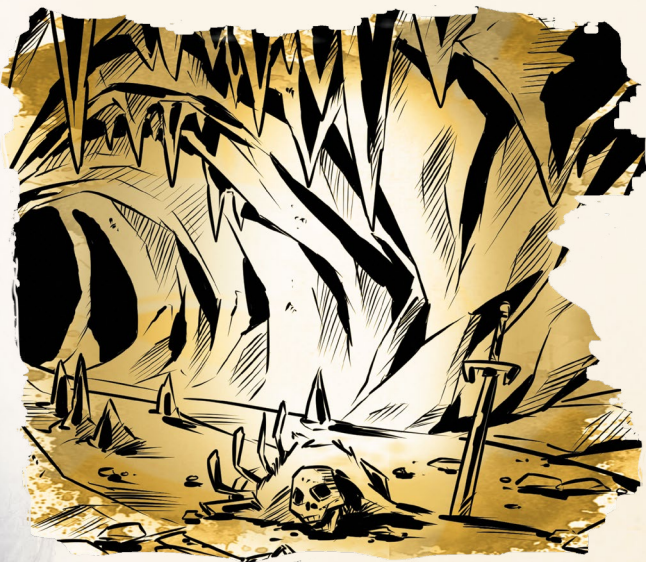
After the characters follow the dark natural tunnels for some time, the passage suddenly widens into a low-lit cavernous area. Small cracks in the ground occasionally let out a wailing burst of hot steam. The hot humid fog from the geysers lightly obscures vision. Patches of sparkly green fungus covers the ceiling, shrouding the cave in an eerie glow.

The characters can navigate between the cracks without problems, if they take care not to rush; a misstep causes 1d6 fire damage from the steaming hot blast.

A bored steam mephit lurks here to ambush creatures that don’t amuse it.

37. BOTTOM OF THE WELL

The tunnel leading to this cavernous area first climbs steadily upward. Depending on the time of day, a faint light



filters down into the cave from the shaft of the monastery's well. A bucket on a rusted chain dangles in the center, leading all the way up to the surface (area 9).

Cool air flows through a rocky shaft that seems to lead all the way up to the island's surface. Dangling on a rusted chain, a bucket encroached in twiggy vines hangs above a knee-deep pool of water. Reflecting dimly are hundreds of coins underwater and on rock outcroppings, cast down by wishers over the years.

Perceptive characters can pick up the faint rushing of the sea echoing down the shaft. Climbing the rocky shaft all the way up to the surface is virtually impossible.

✧ **Treasure:** 12 gp, 23 sp, 38 cp, and a silver butterfly pendant (Art Object 15 gp)

38. FALLEN HERO

The skeletal remains of a fallen dwarf adventurer lay half buried in the rubble. A broken longsword and scraps of leather and some copper coins are all that's left. A DC 15 Intelligence (History) check reveals the body suffered severe deformations before its death. The remains are of Odron, the dwarf fighter who fought in the battle against Otwic.

39. GEMSTONE FISSURE

A past tremor has torn a large fissure into the cavern, cutting off direct passage. A narrow ledge runs along the side, requiring a successful DC12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to traverse.

Perceptive characters might notice the glistening of red-flecked gemstones in the crevice below, but getting to them is difficult and dangerous. Anyone who falls down the 20 feet deep crevice, risks taking 2d6 falling damage and needs to climb back up against the ragged rockface.

✧ **Treasure:** Up to 2d6 Bloodstones (50 gp per piece) can be mined from this area.

40. ROPE BRIDGE

A rickety rope bridge spans another treacherous 15-foot long crevice. It can hold only one person at a time, or snap. Anyone who falls down the 20 feet deep crevice, risks taking 2d6 falling damage and needs to climb back up against the ragged rockface.

41. ANKHEG LAIR

♥ 1 Ankheg (SRD)

An ankheg accustomed to the cold subterranean temperature has burrowed its lair in this area, 5 feet under the ground. Its antennae stick out, waiting for prey to pass by, alerted by its excellent tremorsense.

The rocky terrain changes to loose, fragrant soil in this area. Toward the center the earth appears to be recently disturbed.

The ankheg burrows its way up to attack, first using its acid spray and then its mandibles to grab potential prey. If combat ensues in this area, Guthber and his minions are alerted, readying themselves for battle in area 45.

42. SURFACE TUNNELS

A series of winding natural tunnels leads up to the surface to area 7. A character adept in tracking can discover a multitude of footprints in the area, some human, others amphibian. The most recent footprints are just a day old.

43. FLAMING RED

The remains of a small fire lay cold. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check reveals it's about a day old and that several mangkoon and one human have passed here recently.

If a character beats DC 20 or higher on this check or an Intelligence (Investigation) check, strands of flaming red hair can be found, possibly dropped intentionally.

44. TRESPASSERS

The mangkoon have set up a trap in this area, using thin fishing lines spun low across the cavern floor. When sprung it rings a bell, alerting Guthber to intruders. Guthber and his mangkoon henchmen know how to carefully go around it.

Characters who take specific care to investigate the area before crossing it have a chance to spot the trap and can attempt to disarm it and avoid alerting the mangkoon and Guthber in area 45.

☞ **Bell Trap:** DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot, DC 20 Dexterity check to disable

45. AT THE GATES

♥ 4 Mangkoon (Appendix I)

♥ 1 Mangkoon Seer (Appendix I)

♥ Guthber Tomund (Appendix I)

♥ Solsta Norgin (NPC, Appendix I)

Guthber is awaiting the characters here. If he was alarmed to the characters' presence, he has changed his appearance

into Solsta Norgin (the captured innkeeper's daughter) to mislead the characters using *disguise self*. The real Solsta is being held captive by two mangkoon, hidden from view in a rocky alcove to the south of the hall.

The caverns open up into the remains of an underground chapel. Dark marble pillars and granite walls still stand under a stalactite roof. Crumbled and cracked flagstone floor tiles hint at a glorious past long gone. Across the hall a large stone door looms in the shadows, a flight of stairs leading up to it. An exhausted-looking woman with long red hair leans against a toppled pillar. She looks up in tears and cries out, "Heavens bless, quick. He's in there. Stop him!" and points at the stone door.

evil in disguise

Guthber has been further affected by the stray energies leaking from the Realm Rift, something the characters might notice if his disguise drops. In addition to his face going limp, small tentacles now sprout from his forehead and neck. Disguised as Solsta using the *disguise self* spell, Guthber tries to trick the adventurers into entering the dangerous cavernous (area 46) beyond the stone door. If they pass the threshold, Guthber tries to push the heavy stone doors shut, leaving them trapped on the other side.

Once inside, the characters have to deal with the dangerous effects of the Realm Rift.

tactics

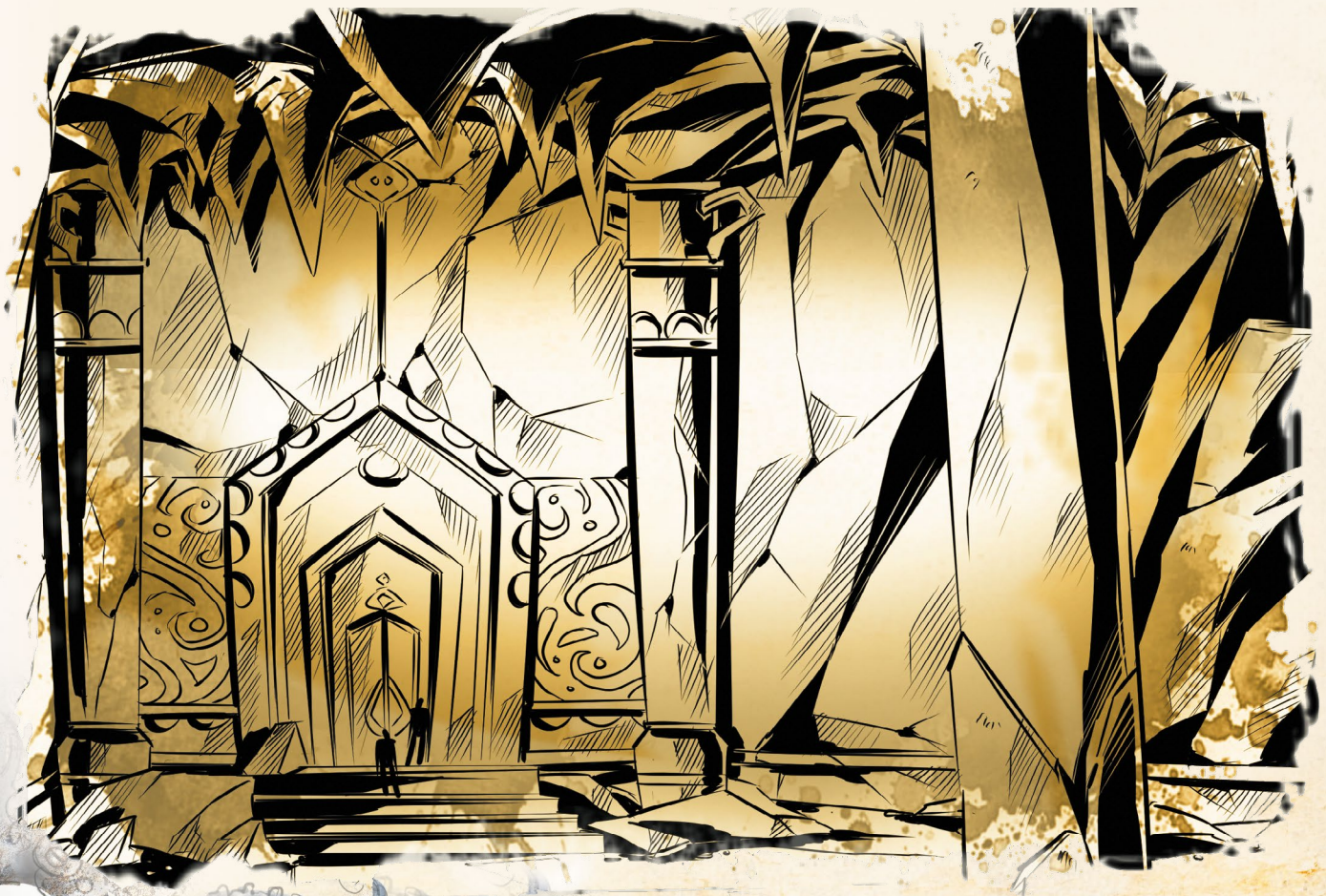
Guthber has instructed his mangkoon clan to hold back in the shadows until he calls for them to attack, feeling confident his lure will work. When exposed or forced to enter the fight, Guthber calls for the mangkoon to attack, springing from the shadows to engage. A mangkoon seer hangs back to attack the characters with its spells. Guthber casts *mage armor* on himself, then fires his ranged spells at the adventurers from a distance. In close combat he fights using his magical *dagger of revealing* and *burning hands* and *touch of fatigue*.

guthber's last stand

If the odds turn against Guthber, he attempts to flee into the cavern area and onto the stone causeway toward the Realm Rift. If pursued, he jumps into the Realm Rift as a bizarre act of madness and the final, fatal act of his lifelong obsession.

If the characters manage to capture and interrogate Guthber, he can be forced to divulge the following information.

- The artifact he's after is called the *Hand of Narkul* and Guthber believes it is somewhere inside the Realm Rift. He's learned a great deal about how the *Hand* works, some of its origins, and its current location.



- The Realm Rift is very dangerous and the *Hand of Narkul* is trapped inside. Guthber knows the Rift is very old, possibly created the moment Otwic was defeated as the *Hand of Narkul* was cut from his wrist.

- Guthber sneers that his brother Heleste was the first to learn about the history of the *Hand of Narkul* but didn't dare to search any further. He pleaded with me to forget about it, the pitiful fool!

- The *Hand* requires a sacrifice: cutting off one's own hand. The *Hand of Narkul* then attaches itself, becoming one with its new host. It's said it gives the wielder exceptional knowledge and power. Its last owner was Otwic Anthomodus, who was killed in battle years ago.

- Through years of research Guthber learned the *Hand* was first in possession of a man called Aurelius Vorden, a nobleman from a long family line of wealthy aristocrats who lived almost 500 years ago.

If Guthber dies in combat, the players still have a chance to acquire this information from a leather-bound stack of research notes he keeps with him. Alternatively, the players can discover some of his life's research back in his home in Sestone.

zaharel's redemption

If Guthber disappeared into the Realm Rift, the players might also collect fragments of his motivations from Zaharel. If she's still alive, Zaharel enters the scene after the final battle, offering to aid the characters. She pleads for forgiveness and asks for a chance "*to make things right.*" In an attempt to garner trust, she shares parts of her troubled past with the characters.

the defeat of otwic anthomodus

When Otwic touched the severed Hand of Narkul, sudden flashes of an alien realm shot through his mind. Looming in the distance, a twisted yet eerily beautiful creature floated. A blissful feeling of nothingness engulfed Otwic as he gazed upon the majestic Narkul. Slowly Otwic's thoughts and memories left him, assimilated into Narkul's ever-growing thought-fabric, becoming one with the undulating, twisted mind of the Great Collector. Otwic had become a Void Servant, a dreadful thrall obedient only to Narkul.

Wreaking havoc on Aelmor, he killed nearly everyone. The remaining Aelmor scholars called upon a band of adventurers to defeat him. A desperate battle waged until finally the last man standing severed the Hand of Narkul from Otwic's arm with one fell swoop. A terrible cry echoed across the hall as Otwic fell to his knees, shriveling back into his old self. Time and space trembled for a moment as a great rift seemed to tear apart reality. Gripping his bleeding cut limb, he whispered in a final breath, "*You think you've won. But Narkul can never be defeated.*"

solsta's silver bracelet

Solsta wears a bracelet on her left arm. The characters can return Solsta's bracelet with family crest to her father, Ared Norgin in Sestone, to complete the "Missing Daughter" side quest. If the characters save Solsta and return her to Sestone, Ared Norgin is indebted to them for life.

✧ **Treasure:** Three potions of greater healing, two scrolls of *thunderwave*, one scroll of *comprehend language*, a +1 crossbow and a +1 longsword, a pouch containing 85 gp.

46. THE REALM RIFT

▼ This area is not mandatory to complete for *The Claws of Madness* story arc.

This large cavern (roughly 200 feet across) is entirely filled by a subterranean lake. It once featured a majestic hall lined with pillars, but the Realm Rift tore apart the fabric of time and space and the entire area was ravaged. Pillars toppled, statues and walls crumbled to pieces, and huge rocks ripped from the earth's core, flooding the entire area. The *Hand of Narkul* was sucked into the void.

bring me the hand

Guthber is sending the captured townsfolk into the Realm Rift in an attempt to find the *Hand of Narkul* for him: a dangerous task, since the twisted energies from the Far Realm cause the townsfolk to mutate in all kinds of horrible ways. Many have gone in never to be seen again. Several of the bodies have been swept out to sea, washing up in Sestone.

The Realm Rift is 50 feet wide and runs 30 feet underwater. Highly dangerous energies from the Far Realm leak into the area, affecting anything and anyone with 80 feet of it. Its strange phenomenon and destructive power should be a clear warning sign.

As the characters enter the area, read or paraphrase the following:

An expansive natural cavern stretches out before you, bathed in a sickly green light. Before you a rocky embankment drops away into a massive subterranean lake that stretches out as far as your eyes can see, its far side shrouded in darkness. A past disaster has left the location utterly ravaged. Shattered rocks, pillars,

and pieces of wall float suspended in midair, as if frozen in a time. Emanating an otherworldly glow, a massive dimension rift runs across the cavern. The air ripples strangely and occasional bursts of distant voices escape into the cavern, echoing into a haunting chorus. Parts of a crumbled stone causeway runs up to the barrier, beyond which you make out a bizarre alien world.

The narrow embankment is littered with shattered stonework, pillars, and debris. It runs up to the water's edge, where a partial crumbled stone causeway raised above the water leads up to the Rift, about 100 feet away. With care the area can be traversed normally, save for the risks of the stray energies tainting the area.

❖ **Treasure:** A careful search of the embankment reveals a snapped necklace among the rubble: Harald Olnavar's family heirloom. The characters can return the necklace to Eryn in Sestone to finish the "Bring Justice" side quest. Harald's necklace is inlaid with the family crest and adorned with azure gemstones (fine art object, value 85 gp).

BECOMING FAR TOUCHED

If the characters move onto the causeway, they step within the 80-foot range of the Realm Rift's dangerous energies and risk becoming *Far Touched*. See "Appendix III: The Realm Rift" for more information and ask the players to make saving throws against its effects or acquire a *minor mutation*. If the characters continue to move closer, they risk being increasingly affected. When the characters approach within 30 feet of the Realm Rift, they must succeed on another saving throw or acquire a *major mutation* as described in the Appendix.

EXAMINING THE RIFT

If they wish, the characters can examine the Rift from a distance. With time, they discover the following:

- The Rift appears to be a gateway of sorts into another realm. Time seems to sometimes move at a faster or slower rate. Distances and object dimensions appear different than what they really are.
- A number of bodies (apparently fighters and a wizard) surrounded by weapons and debris float suspended high up in the air, bathed in a sickly green light. Judging by their relatively mild state of decay, time must move extremely slowly there.
- If they study intently, characters can catch brief glimpses of the *Hand of Narkul* floating inside the Realm Rift. Distorted and shimmering, the severed hand looks surprisingly human, with slender fingers and flawless pale skin.

It's hard to guess the *Hand's* true form and location, since the Rift distorts the senses. One would have to enter the Rift in hope of retrieving the *Hand*. If a character wishes to move inside the Realm Rift, consult "Appendix III: The Realm Rift" for details. Doing so is extremely dangerous to even high-level characters.

Conclusion

Did the adventurers emerge victorious from the depths below Aelmor Island and stop Guthber Tomund's sinister scheme? If they managed to defeat him, Sestone and nearby towns are spared further harm, at least for the time being. Peace slowly returns and trade picks up again.

If Guthber is still alive he is more committed than ever to finish what he started. If the adventurers came to Aelmor Monastery in search of ancient knowledge and treasure, they find that not much was left. Still, they might have unearthed a few interesting items and some coinage along the way.

RESOLVING SIDE QUESTS

The characters can now resolve any side quest storylines they've pursued and claim the rewards. Each side quest also provides a starting point for continuing your campaign narrative.

A town in distress

If victorious, the characters are welcomed back to Sestone as heroes and a celebration is held in the market square that very day. Ulfwin the Fair personally thanks the heroes for their valiant efforts. He pays out his promised reward of 150 gp. A local bard puts the heroic story to song, which soon becomes popular in the region.

Clear Heleste's name

The heroes can take effort to cleanse Heleste Tomund's bad reputation in town (regardless if Heleste survived or not). This provides a roleplaying opportunity. At the GM's discretion, the heroes can gain additional XP for making this effort. If still alive, Heleste thanks the heroes for doing so and gives them one of his dearest tomes: *Monosis' Folio of the Sea* (see Appendix II: Magic Items).

BRING JUSTICE

When the characters have defeated Guthber Tomund, they may explore the caverns and Realm Rift area to retrieve the late Harald's necklace with its emblazoned family crest and return it to his sister Eryn in Sestone. She rewards the characters with a *bag of beans*.

In addition, the characters can inform Ared Norgin (the innkeeper) about what happened this daughter Solsta. He rewards them with the promised 100 gp. If the characters

save Solsta from the mangkoon's claws and return her safely to her father, Ared is indebted to them for life. Whenever the heroes visit town they can get a room and meal free of charge. He also gifts them with another 150 gp lump sum and an oaken +2 shield decorated with a golden lion's head.

stock & trade's stolen goods

If the heroes return the stolen goods to Stock & Trade Warehouse in Sestone, they are rewarded 150 gp in total. The value of the goods is 400 gp. Gregor Stock also give them a partial ancient map with a rumored location of a treasure hoard in a far away desert, he obtained during one of his many adventures. This can serve as a hook for continuing the campaign.

WHERE TO NEXT?

Many opportunities await the players to continue from here. Use one of the following ideas to continue the narrative of your campaign, or craft one of your own liking. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

the hand of narkul

Where did the mysterious *Hand of Narkul* come from? What is its past and true power? Did Guthber manage to get the *Hand* from the Realm Rift? If he didn't, some other villain might. Should it be destroyed, if so, by what means? And what about the Realm Rift? Dangerous energies keep leaking into the Material Plane, possibly allowing otherworldly monsters to enter through it. And just who is the Vorden family that Guthber talked about?

restoring trade

The characters can aid Ulfwin in restoring the trade in town. They can deliver good news of the villain's defeat to nearby towns, influential traders, and bards. The heroes could escort several trading expeditions to restore the shaken faith of local traders and fishers.

restore aelmor's glory

Ambitious players might look to restore Aelmor Monastery to its former glory, working alone or together with Ulfwin. What would it take to achieve such a goal? Would the restoration see Sestone blossom with trade and wealth? Would Sestone become a hotspot for pilgrims using the docks to visit Aelmor once more? Would the heroes become part of songs sung by local bards?

other directions

Pushing the narrative into a new direction, maybe the players discover the gnoll raiders were just a small band operating under a much larger reign. Threatening to overrun the region, the gnoll raiders need to be taken care of. Alternatively, the players might be interested in investigating the clues on Gregor's ancient map. What ancient treasures lay buried in the desert sands?

IT'S NOW UP TO YOU TO DECIDE WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. HAPPY GAMING!

Appendix I: Monsters and NPCs

Guthber tomund

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic evil

Armor Class 11 (14 with *mage armor*)

HP 31 (7d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Skills Arcana +5, Deception +5, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Undercommon

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spellcasting. Guthber is a 4th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch*, *mage hand*, *message*, *minor illusion*, *ray of frost*

1st level (4 slots): *burning hands*, *disguise self*, *mage armor*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *scorching ray*

actions

Dagger of Revealing. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4+1) piercing damage. Glows faintly green when pointed in the direction of invisible creatures or characters.

Turek, gnoll clan master

Medium humanoid (gnoll), chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (hide armor, shield)

HP 33 (6d8+6)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+1)

Skills Athletics +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Gnoll

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Feign Weakness. Turek has advantage on his melee attack rolls until the end of his first turn.

Limp. Turek has disadvantage to Strength and Dexterity checks and saving throws made to avoid being knocked prone or maintain his balance.

actions

Triple-Headed Flail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10+3) piercing damage.

THE MANGKOOK

The mangkoon are amphibious creatures with a stooped humanoid posture. They have large mouths lined hundreds of razor-sharp teeth and a pair of bulging eyes angled to the sides are adjusted to seeing underwater and in darkness. Their scaly skin is lined with tiny venomous barbs covered in a thin layer of toxic secretion on their lower arms, legs, and back, and their colors vary from deep greens to dark blues.

The mangkoon are fast, devious and cunning and favor ambush tactics in combat. Given the slightest chance, they can quickly overpower unsuspecting foes. The mangkoon are excellent swimmers and favor underground locales, such as caves, grottoes, and subterranean lakes. The mangkoon are scavengers, highly proficient in finding and excavating gemstones and minerals.

Some mangkoon tribes are led by a mangkoon seer that can be recognized by red skin, brightly colored markings, and collected trophies adorning its attire. The seer is revered and respected shaman within the tribe.

A modest scholar in his younger years, Guthber turned onto a dark path when he learned of the *Hand of Narkul*. Obsessed by the mysterious artifact, Guthber spent years unearthing knowledge about the *Hand's* past, its rumored powers and whereabouts. In his research Guthber has managed to discover substantial evidence that the Hand is inside the Realm Rift below Aelmor. However, getting to it has proven much more difficult than he first imagined.

mangkoon

Medium humanoid (mangkoon), neutral evil

Armor Class 12

HP 16 (3d8+3)

Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	2 (+1)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Athletics +3, Perception +2

Damage Resistance cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Undercommon, Aquan

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Amphibious. The mangkoon can breathe air and water.

Dirty Fighter. Once per turn, the mangkoon can deal an extra 1d6 damage to one creature it hits with a melee attack if it has advantage on the attack roll.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the mangkoon has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

actions

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+1) piercing damage.

Net. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 5/15 ft., one target. *Hit:* A Large or smaller creature hit by a net is restrained until it is freed. A net has no effect on creatures that are formless, or creatures that are Huge or larger. A creature can use its action to make a DC 10 Strength check, freeing itself or another creature within its reach on a success. Dealing 5 slashing damage to the net (AC 10) also frees the creature without harming it, ending the effect and destroying the net.

mangkoon seer

Medium humanoid (mangkoon), neutral evil

Armor Class 12

HP 16 (3d8+3)

Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	12 (+1)	2 (+1)	9 (-1)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)

Skills Medicine +4, Nature +2, Perception +4

Damage Resistance cold

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Undercommon, Aquan

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Amphibious. The mangkoon seer can breathe air and water.

Aura Sight. Living creatures gain no benefits against the mangkoon seer when in areas of dim light or darkness, and when invisible.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the mangkoon seer has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Spellcasting. The mangkoon seer is a 4thlevel spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). It has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, mending, shocking grasp*
1st level (4 slots): *charm person, entangle, faery fire, thunderwave*

2nd level (3 slots): *heat metal, locate object*

actions

Quarterstaff. *Melee:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6+1) piercing damage.

far touched villager

Medium humanoid (human), unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural)

HP 38 (7d8+7)

Speed 30 ft., swim 35 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	6 (-2)	9 (-1)	5 (-3)

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Understands common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Limited Amphibiouness. The mutated human can breathe air and water, but starts suffocating after 1d3 hours without being submerged in water.

Maddening Whispers. Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of the mutated villager must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or take no action on its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the mutated human's maddening whispers for 24 hours.

actions

Multiattack. The mutated human can make two tentacle attacks.

Tentacle. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6+2) bludgeoning damage.

moldy death (disease)

This insidious disease causes green-yellow mold to gradually spread on the body of an infected creature. A beast or humanoid that is exposed to the spores of a corpse mold (see above) risks becoming infected. Symptoms manifest 1d4 hours after infection and include fever and dizziness. The infected creature gains one level of exhaustion that can't be removed until the disease is cured. At the end of each long rest, an infected creature can make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a successful save, the DC for this saving throw drops by 1d6. When the saving throw DC drops to 0, the creature recovers from the disease. A creature that fails three of these saving throws dies and becomes a patch of corpse mold.

There is no natural cure for moldy death, though some insects are known to eat the mold. If an infected creature spends the entire day recuperating next to the nest of such insects, the creature has advantage on its next Constitution saving throw against the disease.

NAMED NPCS

Ared Norgin (male human commoner, SRD).

Innkeeper. Possessions: silver locket with portrait inside, +2 oaken shield, dagger.

Brewe Yurd (male human commoner, SRD).

General Goods store keeper. Not on friendly footing with Stock & Trade. Thinks Gregor is too aggressive in trading.

Brottor (male dwarf commoner, SRD).

10 gp, pink pearl (120 gp), *Cloack of Protection*

Egren Brynd (male human commoner, SRD).

Blacksmith's assistant.

Gardun (male dwarf, commoner, SRD).

130 gp, white pearl (50 gp), banded mail.

Gnoll Raiders (gnoll, SRD).

Gnoll raiders are normal gnolls with a +4 bonus to their Strength (Athletics) checks, having trained their "steady feet" from life on boats. When fighting on water, they can use their action to push tougher opponents off boats (see "Shoving a Creature" in the SRD).

Gregor Stock (male human commoner, SRD).

Stock & Trade warehouse master. *Headband of Intellect*

Hamart Tolden (male human commoner, SRD).

Blacksmith.

Heleste Tomund (male human commoner, SRD)

Former Aelmor scholar, now living in Sestone. Brother of Guthber Tomund.

CORPSE MOLD

Corpse mold feeds on the decaying flesh of the dead. A patch of corpse mold typically covers the entire corpse of a creature that succumbed to it, and it can be identified by the meaty scent it gives off with a successful DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check.

If the creature corpse mold has infested is touched, the mold ejects a cloud of spores that fills a 10-foot cube originating from the mold. Any creature in the area must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or take 7 (2d6) poison damage and contract the moldy death disease (see below). A successful saving throw halves the damage and the creature isn't infected with the disease.

The corpse mold is otherwise an ordinary fungus. Any effect that deals fire, cold, or radiant damage, and any effect that specifically damages plants or fungus destroys the mold.

Jameson Boonsall (male human commoner, SRD).

Kaelen of Dimhall (male dwarf berserker, SRD)

Possessions: 120 gp, brass mug with jade inlays (100 gp), freshwater pearl (4 gp).

Kronko (male human commoner, SRD).

Dockmaster in Sestone.

Orryn Golwit (male halfling commoner, SRD).

Stock & Trade warehouse assistant.

Sestone Town Guards (6) (male human guard, SRD).

Shortswords, shortbows, chainshirt.

Solsta Norgin (female human commoner, SRD).

bag of beans, silver bracelet bearing the family crest

Tonga (female dwarf commoner, SRD).

Bag containing: three flasks of *holy water*, coral (140 gp), star rose quartz (80 gp).

Ulfwin Turval (male human noble, SRD)

Possessions: 200 gp, masterwork heavy steel shield, half-plate, golden necklace with Sestone coat of arms (40 gp), *steel longsword +2, ring of protection*.

Urdin (female dwarf commoner, SRD).

Carries: 40 gp, amber (50 gp), malachite (5 gp).

Zaharel (female human druid, SRD).

Zaharel is identical to the druid in the SRD with the *gust of wind* spell prepared instead of *animal messenger*.

Appendix II: Magic Items

THE HAND OF NARKUL

Wondrous item, artifact (requires attunement)

"Aurelius swiftly rearranged his richly decorated veil. Hiding his face from public had become more than second nature. It was needed to survive in his position of power. He knew the revulsion, the reactions of disgust. No one understood his otherworldly deformations. No one understood his sacrifice. Escaping from Narkul in the Far Realm was an unbelievable feat, but the struggle left him scarred. Forced to spend his days as a masked and distrusted stranger. . . ."

The *Hand of Narkul* is a mysterious alien artifact. Its origins are largely unknown. Severed from the arm of a mythical creature from the Far Realm, it's rumored to yield

unfathomable power and knowledge. Lost into the Realm Rift after the defeat of Otwic Anthomodus 300 years ago, none have seen it since.

Attunement: To attune to the hand, you must cut off your right hand at the wrist and then press the artifact against the stump. The hand grafts itself to your arm and becomes a functioning appendage. If the hand is ever removed, you die and a new Realm Rift is torn between your current plane and the Far Realm.

When you first attune to the artifact, you immediately gain the adjusted ability scores and the *Fount of Knowledge* properties and your alignment changes to chaotic evil. You then gradually progress through the stages of Narkul's Command as your bond to Narkul strengthens (see Stages 1, 2 and 3). How quickly you acquire them depends on the GM's discretion.

Adjusted Ability Scores. Your Strength score and your Intelligence score increase by 2, to a maximum of 24.

Fount of Knowledge. You add your proficiency bonus to any Intelligence checks made to recall a piece of knowledge, or twice your proficiency bonus if you are proficient in the appropriate skill.

Narkul's Command. The moment you attune to the *Hand*, you immediately begin to experience the symptoms of a split personality as Narkul's gradually replaces yours. At the beginning of each day, you must succeed on a DC 10 Charisma saving throw. On a failed saving throw, Narkul's personality overwhelms yours and you lose control of your mind and body for 24 hours (you become an NPC under the control of the GM).

stage 1: whispers of the void

You begin to physically transform into an alien creature, a servant of Narkul. Your arms transform into a myriad of tentacles and the features of your face start to disappear.

The DC of the Charisma saving throw to resist Narkul's Command increases to 15. You can use an action to cast the following spells (save DC 18):

3/day: *dream*, *modify memory* (as a 7th-level spell), *telekinesis*

1/day: *disintegrate*, *feeblemind*

stage 2: acolyte of the hand.

Your physical transformation continues and accelerates, as does your bond and obedience to Narkul. Your torso grows translucent, showing your internal organs. Large air sacks bulge from your belly and back, lifting you 10 feet into the air, providing the ability to fly 60 feet (hover). Your head completely changes into a slimy, lizardlike eyeless cranium, and your legs morph into a tangle of slithering tentacles.

Your type changes to *aberration* and you gain resistance to psychic damage. The DC of the Charisma saving throw

to resist Narkul's Command increases to 20. You can use an action to cast the following spells (save DC 18):

At-will: *dream*, *modify memory* (as a 7th-level spell), *telekinesis*

3/day: *disintegrate*, *feeblemind*

1/day: *reverse gravity*, *time stop*

STAGE 3: AVATAR OF NARKUL

You can no longer make Charisma saving throws to resist Narkul's Command. Narkul's personality devours your own. You become an alien entity entirely under the control of Narkul. You can move between the Material Plane and the Far Realm freely. Doing so ignores any negative effects of a Realm Rift.

Your physical transformation and obedience to Narkul is complete and irreversible. Any trace of your past nature is gone. You can communicate telepathically with Narkul and can understand its foreign speech.

DESTROYING THE HAND

The *Hand of Narkul* is indestructible for as long as Narkul lives. The only way to destroy it is to kill Narkul. If anyone is bearing the *Hand of Narkul* when the Collector dies, the hand withers and falls off harmlessly after a week.

ORULIN'S RING OF CURIOSITY

Ring, rare.

Wrought from pure silver with a faint blue sheen, the two thin bands of this ring intertwine, holding an amethyst. The ring grants the wearer advantage on Intelligence (Investigation) checks. Once per day, *Orulin's Ring* can grant the wearer an epiphany, allowing any roll to be treated as a natural 20.

MONOSIS' FOLIO OF THE SEA

Wondrous item, uncommon.

This collection of manuscripts in a prussian blue leather binder describes a myriad of aquatic creatures and plants. A character in possession of this book receives advantage on Intelligence (Investigation) checks when able to reference it to identify and learn more about aquatic monsters, creatures, or plants. If a character spends 48 hours over a period of 6 days studying the book's contents, the effect becomes permanent and no longer requires referencing the book.

Appendix III: The Realm Rift

A RIFT BETWEEN PLANES

When the *Hand of Narkul* was severed from its bearer, a massive tear in the fabric of reality opened a Realm Rift between two worlds. Rippling and twisting like liquid glass, time and space tremble under the savage force of two planes of existence pulling against each other. The rift appears to be a gateway into the Far Realm. To an unsuspecting eye the threshold appears to be only a few yards deep, beyond which an inconceivable alien world sprawls as far as your eyes can see. Upon setting foot into the Rift, however, all normal laws of physics, dimension, and perception suddenly melt away and the distance to cross it turns out to be much farther and more difficult to navigate.

FAR TOUCHED

Dangerous stray energies leaking from the Realm Rift into the Material Plane distort the physicality of everything around it, endangering anything and anyone near it. The effects of being *Far Touched* start subtly, such as a finger turning into a small tentacle momentarily or body parts becoming translucent and showing their internal bones and organs. Prolonged exposure can cause severe and even permanent mutations and impacts the way others interact with the victim.

STRAY ENERGIES

Each round a creature spends near the Realm Rift, it must succeed on a Constitution saving throw to avoid suffering physical mutations. These effects stack, so it is possible to attain more than one mutation over time.

Any item carried or in the vicinity also has a chance of being affected, such as a sword suddenly becoming wobbly and jellylike or potion flasks becoming weightless, floating into the air.

Minor Mutation. Each round, a creature within 80 feet of the Realm Rift must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it acquires a Minor Mutation lasting 1d10 days. You may randomly determine the mutation from the table below or invent one of your own. In addition, there is a 20% chance the creature suffers 1d10 damage.

Major Mutation. Each round, a creature within 30 feet or inside of the Realm Rift must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it acquires a Major Mutation lasting 1d20 days. On a roll of 1, the mutation is permanent. In addition, there is a 50% chance the creature suffers 1d20 damage.

Resist Polymorph. A creature's mutations persist even

when under the effect of shape-changing magic such as an alter self spell. The mutations reappear on the new form 3d4 minutes after such magic affects the creature.

Social Stigma. A mutated creature has disadvantage on Charisma checks when socially interacting with others, often triggering reactions of disgust and hostility.

Minor Mutations

d8 Mutation

- 1 One of your fingers turns into a tiny squidlike tentacle.
- 2 Parts of your skin become translucent, revealing your bones, muscles, and internal organs.
- 3 A random body part goes limp and becomes twice as heavy. You have disadvantage on any Dexterity-based action.
- 4 Your skin turns photosynthetic, requiring large amounts of sunlight to sustain. Every hour spent in low light or darkness inflicts 1d6 damage.
- 5 Several frothing mouths grow from your face and neck, and sickly green colored flecks dot your entire skin. You have disadvantage on Charisma checks.
- 6 Gills grow on the side of your ribcage and your skin secretes slimy goo. You can breathe air and water but suffocate after 1d3 hours without being completely submerged in water. You gain a swim speed of 30 feet.
- 7 Your arms and hands turn into undulating, gelatinous tentacles. You lose the ability to hold objects, but you can make unarmed slam attacks at 10-foot range.
- 8 The voices of dead foes and loved ones whisper endlessly in your mind. You have disadvantage to your Wisdom (Perception) checks.

inside the rift

Making progress inside the Realm Rift isn't a matter of simply stepping through and exiting into the Far Realm on the other side. Once inside, a creature experiences a multitude of severe spatial and perceptive distortions: it might think it's walking straight when in fact it's running in circles; it might take a step forward and move away from its destination. Gravity changes in unexpected bursts, structures shape shift, and what had seemed close only a moment ago suddenly turns out to be miles away.

Limited Movement: As a result, creatures inside the Realm Rift can move a maximum of 5 feet per turn, regardless of skills, bonuses, or magical aids. Strong-minded creatures can attempt a DC 18 Intelligence check to mentally adjust to the utterly bizarre environment. Each turn on a successful save, the maximum movement distance

increases to 15 feet.

the other side

What awaits a creature that has crossed over into the Far Realm is unknown to most and therefore left to the GM's discretion. Voices whisper of an ever-changing realm beyond human comprehension, fluctuating to the sound of a brooding alien heartbeat. But few have come back, and even fewer still had the sanity to tell what truly lies beyond. . .

Major Mutations

d8 Mutation

- 1 A giant freckled air sack grows from your belly, lifting you into the air. You gain a flying speed of 60 feet (hover).
- 2 Large snail-like eyestalks sprout from your head, shoulders, and back, providing advantage to Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.
- 3 Your mouth turns into a gaping maw with hundreds of tiny slithering tentacles. You lose the ability to consume normal food. Instead you must feed on rotting flesh. Each day you fail to do so, you take 1d6 damage.
- 4 Becoming translucent and emanating a sickly purple light, your body becomes immune to gravity and floats weightlessly 10 feet above ground. You lose the ability to move. You take double damage dealt to you from any source.
- 5 Your legs turn into a swirling tangle of tentacles that can't support your weight. You lose the ability to walk and can only crawl using your arms.
- 6 Massive throbbing bulbs grow from your back, emitting a gray toxic gas. Any creature within a 10-foot radius must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 1d10 damage.
- 7 Thousands of black poisonous thorns sprout from every part of your body, dealing 1d8 damage every turn to you and any creature you touch.
- 8 A swirling vortex opens from your belly, spewing a constant stream of incomprehensible maddening screams and alien sounds. Any creature that starts its turn within 30 feet of you must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or become disoriented and take no action on its next turn. On a successful saving throw, the creature becomes immune to the effect for 8 hours.

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WHAT SINISTER TIDINGS ARE AFLOAT?

For centuries, Aelmor Monastery near the port town of Sestone was a safe haven for scholars, monks, and pilgrims seeking enlightenment, its renowned library home to an enormous collection of ancient manuscripts, tomes, and peculiar writings. After suffering a devastating attack at the hands of a possessed monastery elder, Aelmor fell into ruin, its troubled past forgotten. When villagers start disappearing and turn up horribly mutated days later, fear takes a grip of Sestone. What sinister forces are at work? And to what end?

*The Claws of Madness is a standalone 5th Edition adventure carefully designed for a group of 1st-level heroes, including new monsters, magic items, and a thrilling story arc. Edited by Michele Carter (co-editor of the 5th Edition *Player's Handbook*), this dungeon crawl combines the best elements of classic adventures with fresh new exciting avenues. The story in this book also provides the perfect base for an epic, long-running campaign suitable for higher-level characters, in which the heroes unravel the dark mystery of the mythical *Hand of Narkul*...*



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