

The Darkness in Shadowturrets

An Adventure for Master Characters



Chaos reigns in the Grand Duchy of the West. Great, clattering, moving heaps of animated bones, known locally as “prowling bones,” emerge from the duchy’s deep forests to terrorize the outlying villages and towns. The people have begun abandoning their homes as the body count rises, and the appearance of these horrors becomes ever more frequent. The Grand Duke sent his best warriors to defeat the undead threat. The few survivors who returned reported the foes were coming from Shadowturrets, an abandoned keep in the back forests of the Grand Duchy of the West. The New Followers of the Seer, a cult that dabbles in necromancy and forbidden magic, took the keep and are believed to hold the place still.

Not wanting to lose his entire duchy, the Grand Duke offered a reward to anyone who can destroy the prowling bones and secure the safety of the region. In addition to a land grant that includes Shadowturrets and the newer fortified manor of Hultrest, he also offered three villages and all the rents they can bring when repopulated: the abandoned Culthaera, Frelbrot and its three mills on a good fast stream, and Ithynn’s Bridge. Wild rumors abound, but no one in the wider Duchy really knows if the New Followers are responsible for the prowling bones or whether the cultists fell victim to the monsters or their creators.

The Darkness in Shadowturrets is an adventure for master characters that can serve as a standalone challenge or launch a long-running campaign plot, pitting the player characters against either the things infesting the keep or the Grand Duke who hired them.

Let the fun begin . . .

~CREDITS~

WRITING AND DESIGN: ED GREENWOOD

EDITING AND DEVELOPMENT: ROBERT J. SCHWALB

PROOFREADING: KARA HAMILTON AND DAN HEINRICH

ART DIRECTION AND GRAPHIC DESIGN:

HAL MANGOLD, KARA HAMILTON, AND ROBERT J. SCHWALB

LAYOUT: KARA HAMILTON

CARTOGRAPHY: CECIL HOWE

ILLUSTRATION: JACK KAISER, BRITT MARTIN,
AND MIRCO PAGANESSI

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PO Box #12548, Murfreesboro, TN 37129
info@schwalbentertainment.com www.schwalbentertainment.com

GETTING STARTED

The adventure assumes the characters have already agreed to undertake the mission on the Grand Duke's behalf. If you want to expand the adventure, you can play through their recruitment and the audience with the noble. The Duke seeks a capable and experienced group to deal with the threat, so the characters might be recruited based on their reputations or through contacts they made with the Empire's disintegrating nobility. The Duke's offer should be tempting enough, bringing far more wealth and power than a chest of coins, but the Grand Duke has no intention of letting the characters keep their well-earned fortunes, as you'll see in the Aftermath.

The adventure leaves several details for you to define. The source of the troubles stems from a band of alien reen that are using a spindle of magic that transforms living creatures into bone machines. If the reen were not responsible for creating the unholy magic, perhaps the cultists they defeated created it. The radiance could be the result of the Demon Lord's growing influence or a powerful incantation that went awry. It could also emanate from a device that empties an area of living creatures to make room for the reen to settle when they come through the Void.

In addition to the usual considerations you ought to make when setting up an adventure, it's important to note that *The Darkness of Shadowturrets* is an extremely challenging scenario, even for the highest-level groups of master characters. Such groups would do well to pad their numbers with henchmen, mercenaries, and other servants if they want to survive.

ITHYNN'S BRIDGE

On the way to Shadowturrets, the group comes upon abandoned Ithynn's Bridge, the village nearest the ruined keep. The residents hastily fled the prowling bones with what they could carry, leaving the place eerily quiet, except for birds and a few wild dogs. Ithynn's Bridge consists of sixteen wooden cottages huddled on the shores of a wide river spanned by the simple but massive stone clapper bridge for which the place is named.

At one end of the bridge stands the tavern, Drowning the Bridge. It has two upstairs sleeping rooms and used to serve meals in its common room. Thaerlo's Waystables (and smithy and seconds shop) and Maerald's Sundries (a bakery and spices and seconds shop) are the only other places of interest and are similarly emptied of valuables and useful items.

EXPLORING THE VILLAGE

A few minutes spent searching the community makes it clear the locals fled in haste. Characters find casks of ale in the tavern too large to shift with anything short of a wagon, some mildewed sacks of grain, withered apples, and a few dates. There are no useful tools—Thaerlo (the smith who currently suffers in Shadowturrets) took his anvil, bellows, tools, and every other scrap of metal in his smithy with him. And not a wagon, cart, sledge, scrap of harness, beast of burden, or riding mount can be found.

The wall behind the bar in the tavern's common room bears a magnificent painted map of the immediate area. It's limned on the various boards of the wall and is not something that can be removed intact. It shows roads and tracks, Shadowturrets and Hultrest, and the three villages, with Ithynn's Bridge shown as the largest. The map is otherwise accurate and shows all woodcutting clearings in the forested areas.

Characters can readily glean large pieces of furniture, boards, cedar shakes, and the like if they pry and bash them free of their current uses as part of buildings. And if they search thoroughly, they find an old mallet, rusty tools, and a 50-yard-long coil of old rope in a sleeping loft in one of the largest cottages.

EXPLORING OTHER VILLAGES

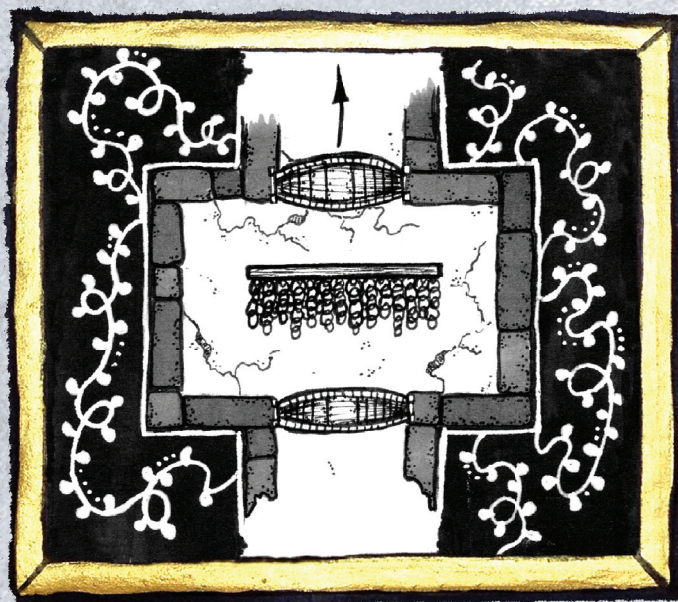
Before heading on to Shadowturrets, the group might decide to explore other communities near the ruins. Such ventures are beyond the scope of this scenario but could feature witnesses able to give the characters more information about the prowling bones, offers of assistance in the forms of healing and equipment. It could also feature dangers, such as packs of wild dogs, opportunistic ghouls, or bands of orcs attracted by the region's unrest.

BONES IN THE AIR

If the characters tarry in Ithynn's Bridge overnight or longer, a "prowling bones" comes for them. The prowling bones is a **bone machine** that attacks when the group emerges from a building. If the characters don't rest in the village, they instead encounter the creature on their way to Shadowturrets, either when they round a blind turn on the path in the forest or as they prepare to camp for the night.

When the bone machine appears, it rises up into a tottering humanoid form that towers over the characters as it advances, reaching out with limbs made of crazily braced and bundled bones of all hues and origins. It seeks to destroy any living thing it can reach and uses the Assimilate Bones special action whenever possible.

SHADOWTURRETS



The Ruined Entry

Shadowturrets looks more like a wild stand of trees than it does a stone fortress. Most of it is roofless, and leafy canopies of soaring trees overhang it while creepers cloak its crumbling walls. A trail of crushed undergrowth pierces the brambles and saplings until it reaches a gaping arch-topped opening where double doors once stood.

If the characters venture behind the thick tangles of vines and tree trunks, they find that some foul magic has fused the crumbling walls together into a dull, pitted mass like black glass. This vitreous substance is incredibly durable; it can be chiseled but won't shatter or cleave, so digging through it is a matter of tens of days. Magic, fire, or lightning hurled at it rebounds at its source. These same properties apply to all of the interior stonework of Shadowturrets.

Locations throughout the ruin are shadowed by day or dark by night. Walls tower about 10 yards above the floor to crossbeams and rafters overhead. Characters searching an area have a 1-in-6 chance of finding something interesting. If so, roll another d6. An odd number indicates the characters find coins, gems, and other valuables worth $1d6 \times 10$ gc. An even number turns up an enchanted object.

Apparent doors throughout the complex are illusions masking a 1-foot-thick field of magical darkness that swallows sound completely, preventing noises from reaching through the openings. As well, the illusion keeps air from moving through, so characters won't smell anything from beyond the doors. Creatures and objects can move through

these openings unimpeded, and the illusions can be destroyed by magic as if they were created by a rank 5 spell.

THE RUINED ENTRY

Inside the entrance waits dusty darkness, no sign of what happened to the doors that once stood here. A curtain of massive chains hangs across the 15-yard-square area about 3 yards in from the entrance. Each link is as large as a horse's head, is oiled against rust, and is thickly shrouded in dusty cobwebs. At either end of the curtain is a 3-yard-wide gap, making it possible to go around it. There, old bird droppings, fallen nest refuse, and the rotting remains of roof beams litter the floor. Two sentinels block the way to the doors concealing access to the Great Hall beyond.

SENTINELS

Two **chainbound** guard the area and advance when the characters appear. The chains bind their moving corpses, and they shriek with each lumbering step. The chainbound are too tall to fit through the closed pair of tall, arched double doors in the wall behind them or through front entryway, so they remain in this room.

If any characters retreat, the chainbound use actions to bash the hanging curtain to send the chains flailing. Each character within short range of the curtain must get a success on an Agility challenge roll or take 3d6 damage.

Animated corpses expelled from the chainbound linger here until destroyed.



THE WATCHER IN THE RAFTERS

As the fallen roof beams attest, no roof remains above this chamber, just a few crossbeam rafters. A character who looks up catches sight of a tangle of metallic, segmented, claw-ended tentacles centered on a single malevolent red eye. Clinging aloft like a spider, it watches them. This creature is a **reen**, and it watches the combat for 1 round before going over the top of the back wall, moving deeper into the ruins to warn its fellows.

THE GREAT HALL

The Great Hall is a windowless chamber, 24 yards wide and 40 yards long. Darkness occludes the ceiling. The collapsed and decaying litter of feasting tables and chairs covers the cracked, heaved floor. Stumps of hacked-off trees that sprouted up through the flagstones are scattered like tombstones across the floor.

Against the left-hand wall stand six stout, iron-barred cages, many of which hold hunched figures. On the wall opposite where the characters entered is another pair of double doors granting access to the Smithy. Everywhere the characters look, they see nightmarish scenes. Shrill screams fill the air.

This complex room has many components, all of which can be challenging to run and lethal to an unprepared group.

CLEARING

The first 10 yards into the hall feature a mostly clear area of flagstones broken by the few stumps of trees. If the **reen** are aware of the intruders, **4 bloody bones** wait here wearing the tattered remnants of cultist regalia—full-head owl masks and long, torn robes. Unlike other bloody bones, these wretched creatures were once humans and thus do not have the bloody bones' immune or iron vulnerability traits. They were transformed into their horrid forms by the vile experiments of the **reen**, creatures that can be found deeper in the hall. The bloody bones attack the characters and pursue them tirelessly until destroyed.

EIGHT TREES

The remains of eight trees rise from the broken floor in the next 10-yard section of the hall. Unlike the others, these weren't hewn off low to the floor. They were left as 6-foot-high spikes on which the **reen** impale their victims to await their transformation into bloody bones. Currently, dead humans hang on them while flies fitfully buzz around the blackened dried blood. All are dressed in owl-head masks and torn robes. Characters who see this grisly scene must get a success on a Will challenge roll or gain 1 Insanity.

THE CEILING

The ceiling is made in a horizontal layer of magical, sound-swallowing darkness. A group of **3 reen** cling to the intact rafters, creeping through the gloom and



The Great Hall

watching the characters. Their glowing, red eyes flicker when the **reen** hang down from a rafter and gutter out when they retreat back up into it. If the characters defeat the bloody bones, the **reen** manipulate long, metal wall-rods protruding from the tops of the cages to release the occupants as described under The Cages, following.

THE CAGES

Each of the six cages holds a brooding, massive **ogre**. Each has a great hammer that it uses as a seat while confined. The ogres are hungry and eager to devour the characters because every intruder they slay earns them freedom to forage in the Duchy before the **reen** recapture and cage them here. The ogres know better than to attack a **reen**, or try to eat any captive strapped to the tables in the Laboratory, but they attack the treasure chest guardians or any other edible-looking creature in the hall. They pursue possible meals anywhere.

THE LABORATORY

Screams echo through the hall from the area beyond the Eight Trees. Occupying the next 20-yard length of the hall are five sturdy wooden tables. Each is a 3-yard square plank platform set on a trio of tree-trunk legs arranged so their surfaces gently incline, with the head

two feet higher than the foot. Terrified humans in motley homespun, villagers from Ithynn's Bridge, lie spread-eagled, one to a table. They are held in place by means of gleaming metal staples driven into the planks. Two of them shriek and slobber mindlessly, and the other three scream for help. Swarming over and experimenting on these terrified people are another 3 reen. They fit the humans with newly made, oiled metal pincer-ended limbs after chopping off their arms to accommodate the fittings.

The reen continue their grisly surgery as the characters battle the bloody bones and the ogres. But if the characters defeat the reen or attack them outright, they swarm swiftly up cages and the door-opening rods, to join their brethren in the rafters.

Freeing a prisoner requires one minute of work using a tool kit. The prisoners are useless, having been driven mad by fear and pain.

THE TREASURE CHEST

In the most distant section of the room stands a huge treasure chest. A rectangular, hoop-topped chest made from blackened wood and reinforced by metal strappings, it measures 3 yards deep, 12 yards wide, and 6 yards high.



The Smithy



A group of 3 **bloody bones** defends the chest fanatically, fighting to the death.

Characters lifting the chest's lid encounter the stink of human blood and the sound of endless, overlapping whispers. These whispered words are coming from the moving mouths of a sheet of human faces down inside the chest, their gazes flicking back and forth as they whisper these phrases, endlessly repeated:

- "There is no oblivion, only torment and restless slavery, dead but not dead, serving fell masters."
- Doom, cursed doom awaits you!"
- There is no escape; even now, you hasten towards your inescapable fate!"
- We are all doomed to exist forever, in torment beyond death, cursed to vile slavery!"
- "Cursed, cursed, never to be free!"
- "Serving evil, tainted by evil, twisted into madness!"
- "Foul perversion that none escape!"
- "There is no eluding the shadow, the shadow that eats us all!"
- "Blood! Rot! Decay! Doom For All!"
- "You shall die, you shall yet be aware, though your body rot and fester and liquefy, sloughing off bones, as you feel every agonizing moment, trapped and suffering, oh, yes, you shall die!"

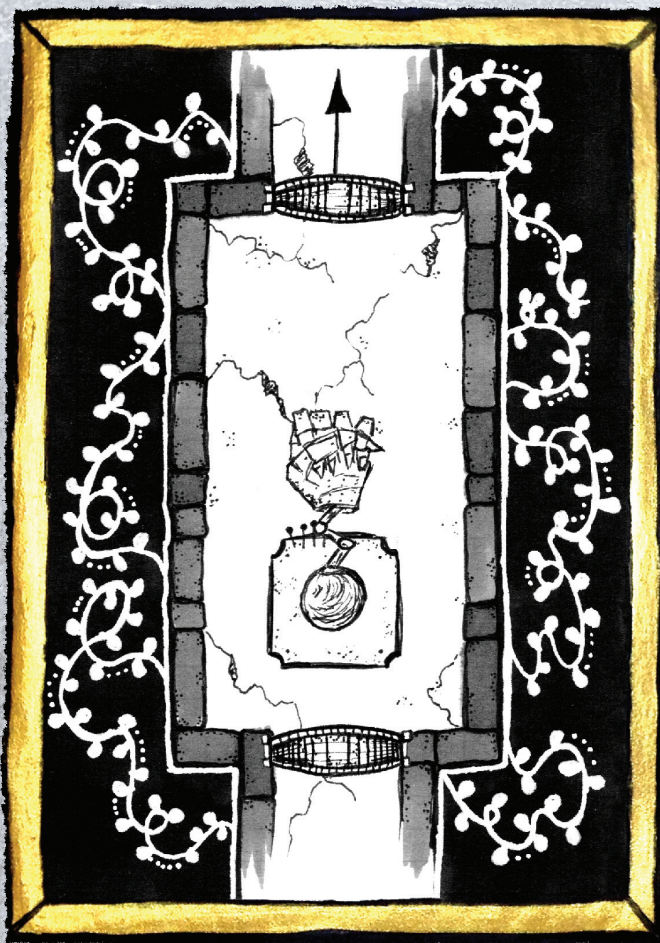
This creature is a **ghastly chorus**. Prevented from coagulating by dark magic, the blood floats on a pool of blood that fills the chest. The chorus rises up, hanging on a blood-dripping, but otherwise invisible, animated sheet of magic that grants the creature the flier trait. The chorus initially rises up from the chest to hover upright (vertically) in the air, turning so its heads can best survey the room, and then it swoops down to attack the characters, biting and grabbing with its mouths.

THE SMITHY

Through the illusory doors is a 24-yard-square windowless room with an intact roof of overlapping tiles pegged atop boards nailed to openwork roof trusses. In its far wall is another closed pair of arch-topped double doors that are illusions like the other doors in this place.

This room is full of the din created by human smiths hammering out metal tools on anvils and the roaring of their bellows. A huge hearth stands at the center of the room, and **2 horned ogres** work the bellows behind it.

Three blacksmiths share the hearth, one right in front of it and one to either side, each with an anvil, a hammer, tongs, a scorched and scarred wooden workbench of massive construction, and a slake-bucket. They wear locked metal collars connected by long chains to different anchor points in the rafters.



The Amory

The horned ogres are also captives, tethered to anvils by 24-yard-long chains. When not working the bellows, they act as guards. Each wields a hammer and carries a long blade thrust through a wide waist-and-shoulder-belt harness. When the character appear, they abandon the bellows as they lumber forward to attack.

All of this occurs under the watchful eyes of **4 reen** who peer out from the rafters, well out of reach. They have bolt holes at the ends of the room that allow them to scuttle freely into either the Great Hall or the Armory, and they won't tarry when battle goes against their captives.

The smiths were taken from the three villages: They are Andeimus Thaelro from Ithynn's Bridge, Imthur Dereth from Culthaera, and Ostrar Waerel from Frelbrot. They fashioned all the chains, manacles, and cages in Shadowturrets, as well as the gigantic arm in the Armory (see The Armory, following). They are weary and won't fight the characters. They are grateful if helped to escape and can explain to the group what's going on in Shadowturrets. Namely, the reen control everything after having defeated and captured the cultists they found here. The smiths were brought in hooded and bound, and they don't know the layout of the place because they have been confined in this room.

The heat of the forge is everywhere; it's fueled by cut and split wood that lies heaped against the side walls beyond the hearth. Ogres thrust it into the forge with long metal rods, and the smoke of the fires rises up into a weirdly flickering, blue-green cloud that vanishes, as if sucked up.

THE ARMORY

Through the next set of doors is another room 12 yards wide by 24 yards long. It has the usual illusory 6-yard-wide, closed double doors set in its rear wall.

THE FIST

A 6-yard-square stone base stands 3 yards in front of the doors; its two side walls support a huge, greasy hemisphere of metal in which a smooth metal sphere sits. It's the swivel joint of a huge mechanical arm that looks like a gauntlet-clad, plate-armored forearm of a giant. The arm has a swivel-jointed wrist and elbow, metal fingertips, and exposed control rods that make it turn, grasp, and punch. Its forearm utilizes expanding "scissors" construction to enable the arm to lengthen or retract; it can just reach the front of the room where characters enter. Within the "scissors" sits a cage of closely spaced metal bars with interlocking teeth that close between those bars like a Venus flytrap. Boiling and seething inside the cage are **16 lash crawlers**, which serve as fuel—each punch or grasp of the arm causes a magical flash to vaporize one crawler.

MECHANICAL ARM

Size 10 Construct

Perception —

Defense 5; **Health** 100

Strength 0 (-10), **Agility** 0 (-10), **Intellect** —, **Will** —

Speed 0

Immune attacks against Perception or attributes; gaining Insanity; all afflictions

Accursed Transformation A living creature that takes damage from the mechanical arm must make a Will challenge roll. For each time the creature makes the roll after the first, it makes the roll with 1 bane. On a failure, the creature suffers one of the following permanent effects, progressing in the order listed:

- The creature loses its hair and begins to exude slime from its body.
- The creature becomes thickset, its legs go squat and thick, and its feet shift to elephant-toed stumps.
- The creature's arms become thick and club-like, hands change to have only three strong, stubby opposed fingers.
- The creature's genitalia melt away.
- The creature's head melts down into its torso, making its neck disappear.
- The creature's eyes and nose disappear and are slowly replaced by the ability to see and smell through the continually renewed layer of body slime.
- The creature's mouth shifts and enlarges, until it splits most of the torso, opening where the neck was and becoming a huge maw. At this final change, the creature fully becomes a **muttering maw** and retains none of the capabilities it had before its transformation.

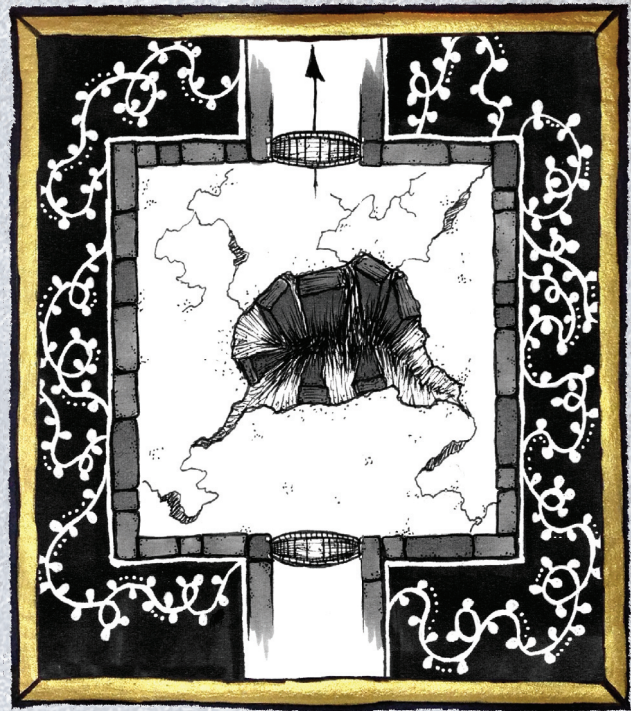
SPECIAL ATTACKS

Mechanized Fisting It takes at least four creatures using an action together to control the arm and make it attack everything in a 4-yard cube centered on a point within 10 yards of the arm. Each creature in the area must make an Agility challenge roll with 2 banes. A target creature takes 6d6 damage on a failure or half the damage on a success. A living creature that takes this damage is subject to Accursed Transformation.

If the total of a creature's challenge roll is 0 or less, it flies 2d6 yards away from the arm and falls prone. If the creature's movement would send it into another creature's space, it and the creature take 1d6 damage and the creature whose space was entered must get a success on an Agility challenge roll or fall prone.

The great mechanical arm is a prototype. The 8 reen swarming over it enthusiastically experiment with it on any handy characters. It takes 4 reen using an action together to attack with the giant arm.

The reen in this room stand and fight the characters rather than retreat. Regardless of any movements of reen to depart previous rooms, the characters face only the 8 here.



Fallenwell

FALLENWELL

Through the doors from the Armory is a square chamber, about 24 yards on a side, with a deep, yawning pit at the center, a hole created by the collapse of several rooms into a great cavern below. Walls and columns lean and groan perilously all around the hole's edges.

The intact floor around the pit is cracked and broken, typically about 6 yards from the wall to the ragged edge of the pit. Across the pit is the room's far, rear wall with the familiar 6-yard-wide opening but no darkness or illusory double doors: Through the archway characters can see a bright, eerie, flickering, emerald-green radiance in the shape of an upright spindle in midair.

From high up, 4 reen watch the characters. In the pit, 14 lash crawlers scuttle about, boldly rushing at the characters to swarm any isolated from the rest and extract their eyes.

Area spells cast here have a 2-in-6 chance of collapsing the walls and dragging the group and anyone else in this room into the pit. A character in the room must succeed on an Agility challenge roll with 2 banes or fall into the pit.

Anything that falls into the pit takes 8d6 damage upon landing on the debris at the bottom. If the room collapses, falling debris inflicts 8d6 extra damage. Characters in the pit can make Agility challenge rolls to halve this extra damage.

REAR HALL

If the characters get past the great gulf of Fallenwell and move through its open rear archway, they come to a 24-yard-square room. A 3-yard-wide archway lies in the center of the right-side wall and opens into another 24-yard-square room. Both have intact roofs and no other windows or doors.

Dominating the first room is an upright spindle-shaped area of flickering emerald-white magical radiance that fuses together captured humans, giants, and oxen thrust into it to create bone machines.

Here, 4 reen tend and feed the unholy magic by forcing creatures into it. They keep their victims as captives in the second room by means of a welded iron gate that stretches across its entrance. An additional 2 reen cling to and flail at any creature trying to move past it. When the characters enter the room, the reen have just thrust two oxen into the magical radiance, which stumble out as 2 bone machines.

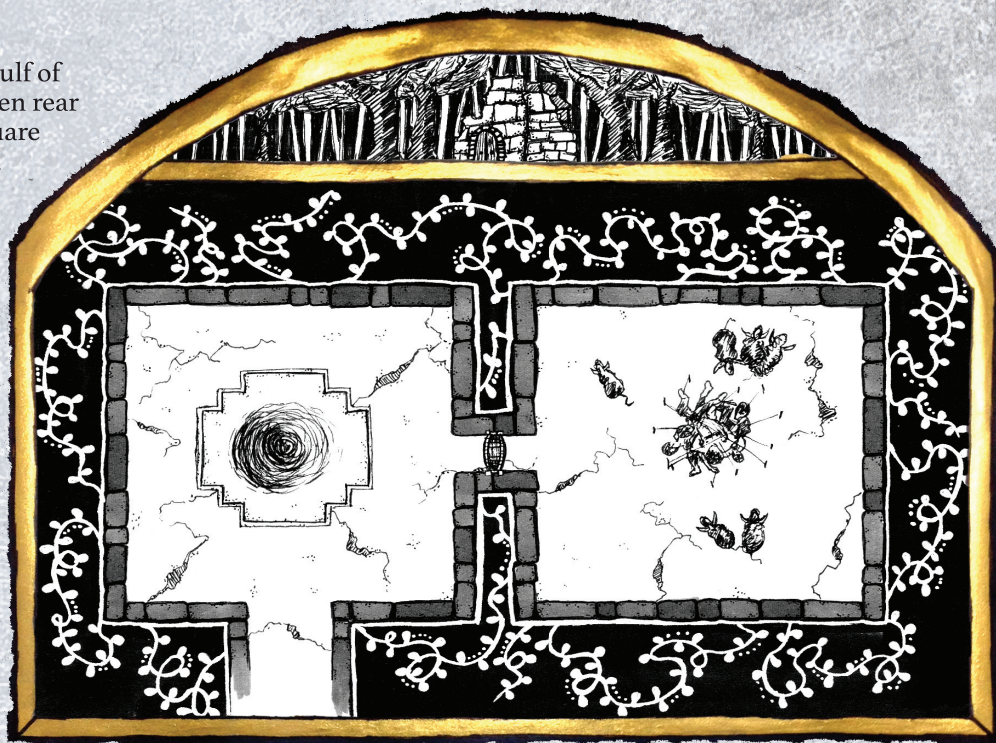
The second room is crowded with 12 milling, bawling oxen and 5 captured humans, including 2 New Followers of the Seer cultists, who cry out for rescue and offer to lead the characters to the riches of their cult. They can explain what's happened in Shadowturrets. The characters also find a helpless heap of 7 naked giants; the reen broke their joints so they can't walk or fight.

AFTERMATH

Not all of the reen stay to fight the characters. If the characters defeat the majority of the reen, the rest slip away and spy on the characters, thwarting their doings or manipulating them into conflict with other reen targets. If the reen retain the smiths and the spindle, they ignore the characters as an annoyance. They don't fully understand the spindle and want to continue experimenting with it.

The spindle of magic can't be readily or easily destroyed—the methods by which the group would make the attempt are left to you. The radiance occupies one of the few useful and intact areas of Shadowturrets. If the characters abandon it, the reen attempt to repossess it to continue generating and sending forth bone machines to wander this part of the Duchy of the West. You can improvise other powers and uses for the spindle if the characters experiment with it—or the Grand Duke takes possession of it.

If the characters succeed and don't immediately hasten to claim their reward, the Duke's spies bring word of the group's success to him. The Grand Duke



Rear Hall

has no intention of allowing anyone to gain control over so much of his Duchy, so success in this adventure plunges the characters into trouble of a different kind.

Grand Duke George Vanderbrun expresses delight and confirms their land grant with splendid-looking documents. He confers them in a long, tiresome ceremony of much pomp that includes marching soldiery and music and odes about the heroism of the characters. After the public performance, the Duke attempts to poison the characters at the following feast. If the characters survive, they encounter desperate outlaw attacks whenever the Grand Duke's spies inform him they're exhausted, asleep, or split up.

A few members of the New Followers of the Seer escaped the debacle at Shadowturrets and try to covertly recruit the characters, who are now privy to their secrets. The cultists offer dark magic secrets to lure the characters. If any character accepts, he or she instantly becomes a foe and target of any other sects and rulers y desire.

