TRILEMMA ADVENTURES

55 fantasy adventure sites, regions and settlements

"Stop writing adventures and use these"
—Geek & Sundry

This book brings together the award-winning ***Trilemma Adventures***: one- and two-page adventure locations for fantasy role-playing games.

Each location is written to be usable separately; perfect for one-shot sessions, side quests, or to help populate your home grown campaign setting.

All have been lavishly illustrated and laid out to make them easy to run, straight from the book.

This book is packed with caverns, castles, underworld cities, labyrinths, mansions, flying tombs, hidden temples, and fallen shrines.

Also inside is more than 60 pages of new material: an illustrated bestiary, an appendix of magical items, a complete index, and six regional overviews that tie the adventure locations into a ready-to-use campaign setting.

TRILEMMA ADVENTURES

http://trilemma.com

Credits

Michael Prescott
Writing, Cartography, and Layout
www.trilemma.com

Andrew Young
Editing
ThatOneGM.Weebly.com | @ThatOneGM on Twitter

Sarah Golden
Copyediting

Adventures

Evey Lockhart
violentmediarpg.blogspot.com
No God but Dissolution

Michael Atlin
Stellarium of the Vinteralf
Development: The Task of Zeichus, The Oracle's Decree, A Clutch of Shadows

Skerples
coinsandscrolls.blogspot.com
The Haunting of Hainsley Hall (writing)

Stephanie Bryant
www.mortaine.com/blog / @mortaine on Twitter
Can't Sleep—Clowns Will Eat Me

Kira Magrann
www.serpentcyborggames.com
@kiranansi on Twitter
Sirens of Blood and Sea

Sean Winslow
www.larkvi.com
In the Care of Bones, The Shattered Gate
Botany consultant

Tim Groth
@frightenedtweet on Twitter
The Raindrinkers

Illustration

Juan Ochoa
www.juanochoa.co
Acolyte, Avatar, Bog Strangler, Bone Devil, Carreg, Cave Drake, Cave Squid, Chalk Hound, Dire Fleas, Grush, Handwolves, Heelan, Hulk Larva, Lady of Memory, Menaka, Moon Baby, Novy Dom, Onddo, Orc, Owlshade, Paladin, Priestesses, Rarities, Ricalu, Sand Monarch, Selk, Sylph Spider, Tcheth, Tinker, Vinteralf, Warbody

Jeff Brown Graphics
www.jeffbrowngraphics.com
Cover (Tannòch Rest-of-Kings)

Nate Pride
www.natepride.com
Lantern Worm, Lavish Sorcerer, Rumor Mill, Storm Seals

Lauren Bryce
@brycescribbles on Twitter
Slewt

Justine Jones
justinejonesillustration.com
Dradkin & Fleshpriest, Vampire, Wraith

Peter Mullen
pmullenblog.blogspot.com
Crypt Servant, Heelan Phib, Shadow Bohka, Vampire Tree, Void Worm

Michael Lavoie
instagram.com/artofmichaellavoie
Sarcas, Wizard Flower

Russ Nicholson
russnicholson.blogspot.com
Cave Stitcher, Jorn, Lady Memory's Garden, Undine

Gratitude

Development

Many thanks to the late-night ideas, proofreading, tough questions, layout instincts, and affable encouragement of Tim Groth, Sean Winslow, Stephen Shapiro, and Radek Drozdalski. Thanks to Sarah Kiriliuk for marketing wisdom and to Evan Frith for a timely typographical intervention.

Playtesters

Gratitude to my "After the Lords of Memory" playtesters, Danielle "tank" Stilwell, Geoffrey "I push Eric in!" Stilwell, Katie "don't you *dare* kill my goat" Stilwell, Elliot "I commune!" Prescott, Eric "vorpal claw hammer" Yorath, Sadie "I set myself on fire!" Carter-Yorath, Zoë "pelican dive" Carter-Yorath, Leah "infinite free food" Prescott, and Chloe "oh I *do* have rope" Stricklund. Also Kaleb Richarz and the winter camp rogues!

Relentless Support

Andy Action-Markham, John Harper, Mark Tygart, Jason Cordova & Tom McGrenery (Fear of a Black Dragon), and Ryan Chaddock (Geek & Sundry). Undying thanks to Danielle Phegan, who moved heaven and earth to make a space for this book to be born—hours of her work are behind every page.

Inspiration

The seeds of this project were planted by Jude Hornborg, Michael Atlin, Brendan Davis, Alex Schroeder, "Dungeon Wizard," Luke Crane, Thor Olavsrud, Dyson Logos, and my parents Jennifer & David Prescott, each in different ways.

Translations

For struggling to translate this nonsense into other languages, I must thank Radek Drozdalski again, Joël-Olivier Vidal, and Yop Yop of La Torre de Ebano.

Final Checks

For their help in hunting down typos, thank you to Tom Pleasant, "watergoesred," Joe Tom, Madeline McKee, and Carl Jonard.

Kickstarter Backers & Patreon Supporters

This book would not exist except for the generosity of countless readers who dug into their pockets (sometimes deeply) to throw money my way. As full a list as I could manage appears at the end of this book!

d6	If I have forgotten to thank you...
1	Sorg devoured that bit of my mind.
2	They are coming for you, and I couldn't mention your name and tip them off to your activities in good conscience.
3	I have noticed your compulsive habit of drinking analeaf tea, and it freaks me right out.
4	I am professionally jealous of you. I left you out on purpose out of despair of ever producing anything as good as your first drafts.
5	Some kind of weird InDesign bug made your name wrap into overflow text. It's definitely in the source file though!
6	Crap! Sorry.

Version 1.0.1

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ISBN 978-1-9992827-0-7
Printed in Canada

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How to Use this Book

The Adventures

This book is a compilation of adventure locations for use with fantasy role-playing games. Each location is a dangerous, faraway place that holds the promise of reward: insight, magic, allies, or treasure.

Each adventure is written to be usable separately. Try one out as a one-shot, link several together in a series, or use them to populate your own home-grown setting.

Adventure Locations

I call them **adventure locations**, because they're not written with a pre-planned sequence of events in mind. Your players might show up and make friends, burn the place down, or take one look and run away. All these are fine.

Concise

I've been ruthless in squeezing them down to as small a size as possible, cramming them with my best ideas.

With a few exceptions, they fit on a two-page spread, which is short enough that you could skim several of them on your subway ride to game night. My hope is that you find this book a useful addition to your GM's "go bag."

System Neutral

This book has **no stats**; the adventure locations are system neutral. This means they're easiest to use with games where coming up with stats on the fly is practical (maybe with a few hasty notes in the margin). For most systems, this is pretty easy. If you're comfortable ruling on the effects of being run over by a wagon, sprayed with flaming oil, or having your left arm turned to dust in your preferred game, you'll be fine.

Resisting Things

Many deadly poisons, crushing boulders, or horrible magical effects are described inside. I write as if the effects simply occur, but if your system allows saving throws, resistance rolls, or skill or stat tests to avoid terrible things, use those as you see fit.

One-Shots, Rumors, and Hooks

If you're considering using an adventure for a single-session game, it's often a good idea to give the PCs a strong motivation to engage with the adventure location.

A large table provides hundreds of rumors, bits of lore, and hooks (see page 156). **Hooks** are overt invitations to adventure, suitable for presumptive framing of the session or for a "quest giver" NPC in play.

The table also includes fragments for longer-form play. **Rumors** are bits of recent news, overheard gossip, or readily available opinion. Lore is more detailed but older information, suitable for finding in books or from learned sages.

The Setting

The implied setting of the adventures draws inspiration from the prosaic fantasy of the Earthsea series, the weather-stained cloaks and purposeful wanderings of Lord of the Rings, with a dash of the parade of wonders of Rupert Bear.

Over the years it took to write these adventures, a more concrete setting started to appear—the world of the Martoi, the Seree, and the people of the Tristhmus. This is described at the end of this book (see "History of the Tristhmus" on page 138), along with a map, and two-page gazetteers for major regions of note.

Reskinning for Your Campaign

Two setting elements are worth mentioning up front, since they appear in a lot of adventures: the Seree and the Martoi.

The **Seree** briefly had a region-dominating empire controlled by powerful, squabbling sorcerers. Their reign came to a sticky end a few centuries ago at the hands of vengeful demigods.

The **Martoi** are several thousand years older, the first wielders of magic in the historical record. They refused to yield to mortality and now haunt the world as translucent, fey undead.

I toss off lots of little names (e.g., villages), and I hope you'll define them for yourself instead worrying about "canon," but the index at the back lists anything that appears more than once.

Note on Format

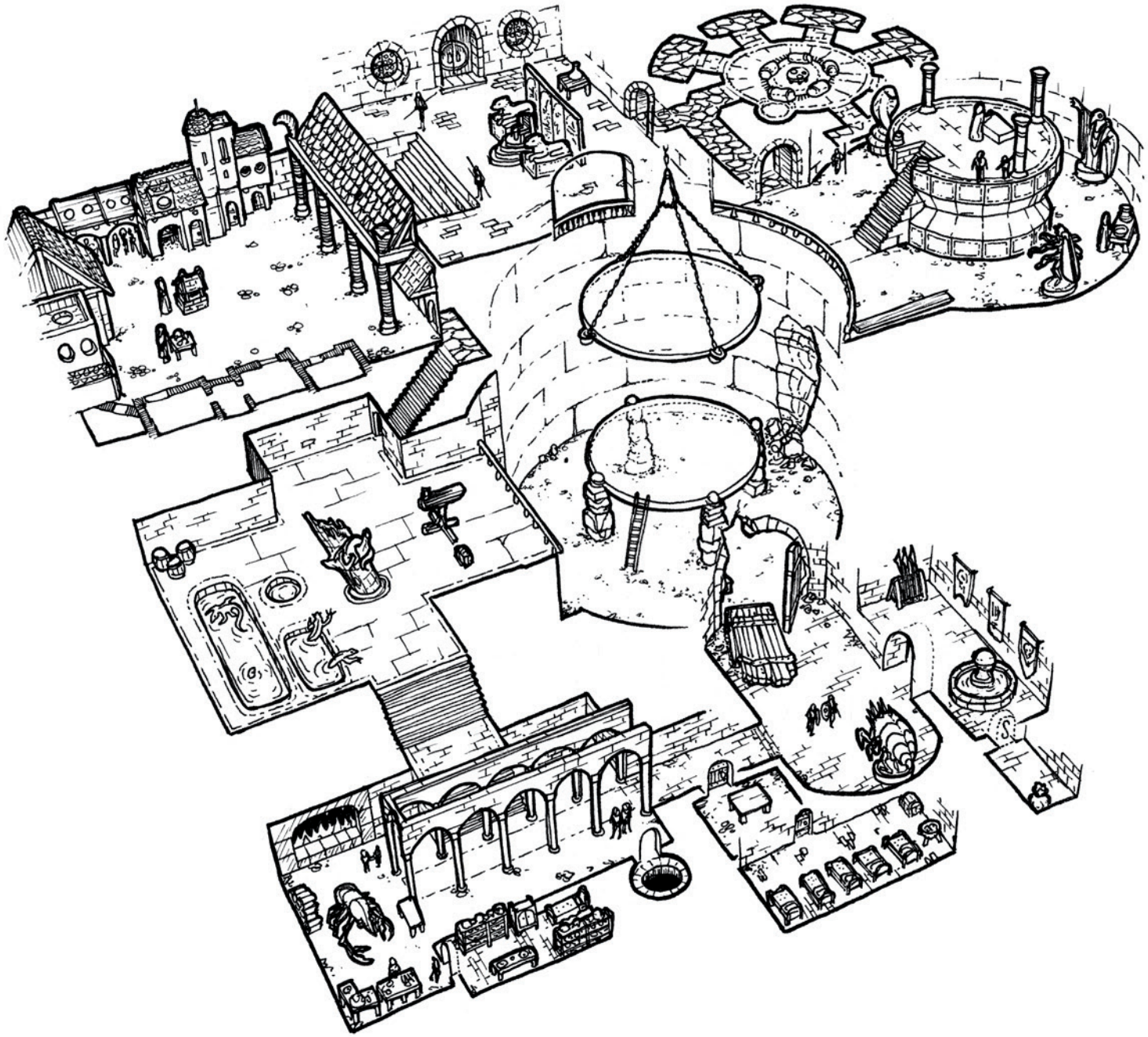
In the adventures, I call out **notable features** to draw your eye to the major details. Since the two-page format leaves no room for repetition, I also use ***forward references*** to indicate when something is described later on in the same adventure.

Note on Adventure Order

The adventures in this book are presented in the order they were written, with a few exceptions.

The six one-page adventures have all been paired with a nearby three-page adventure, for pagination purposes.

Also, two had lengthy births: A Litany in Scratches (page 12) was slated to be #3, but I let it sit for nearly a year while I figured out how to map it. A Clutch of Shadows (page 48) is officially adventure #21, but it was hidden until a limited release in November 2018.



Adventure Location Summaries

Stellarium of the Vinteralf (8)
An abandoned observatory teeters on the edge of a glacier. Wolves, hibernating Vinteralf (seal-people), blue lichen, invisible ice dragon.

Steeps of the Ur-Menig (10)
Natural cave system borders the colossal Ur-Menig caves. Carreg (clay people), isopods, cave dragon.

A Litany in Scratches (12)
Raiding dogfolk are stymied by the crypt full of undead beneath a creepy, ruined monastery. Carnivorous plants, small drake.

Midden of the Deep (83)
A mountain of fossilized drake dung crawls with giant insects and the ghosts of Carreg miners. Ichor grubs, monstrous grub-mother.

The Cage of Serimet (16)
A dying order of paladins keeps watch over a hedonistic summoner's prison. Otherworldly dinner guests, animate statue.

Tannòch Rest-of-Kings (15)
A trio of ogres haunts the ruin of a holy order's tower, looking for the magical secrets of dead sorcerers. Wily nun, bone devils, divine tree.

The Task of Zeichus (33)
A fey court is frozen in time by immortality gone wrong. Martoi (fey) nobles, vampire.

The Coming of Sorg (25)
Desperate cultists hide from the horrors they've summoned while bickering about what to do. Demonic hunger aberrations.

The Raid Mirror (18)
An orc summoner with a portal mirror goes from warlord to regional threat. Blight orcs, demonic spirit, giants, flying ship.

Circle of Wolves (20)
Possessing werewolf spirit tries to free its imprisoned brethren from beneath a stone circle. Vinteralf, mad hermit, naive villagers.

Though Flesh Be Vast (22)
An underground Dradkin community teeters on the edge of factional collapse. Dradkin, cave horrors, soil mother, vampires.

The Necromancer's Wish (26)
A Ricalu sorcerer unwittingly turns all who enter his community into Ricalu. Leviathan isopod, desert lynx.

The Extent of Gamandes (28)
Void gulls and the Nuss wage war with Carreg survivors in the ruins of a shattered plane.

The Unmended Way (30)
Retired mercenary giants conduct a secret operation to protect lowland peoples from the mass poisonings of the Martoi. Kidnappers, tinkers, giants, Martoi (fey) sorceress.

In the Care of Bones (34)
Curious giant spiders infest an old shrine of Panur, watched over by the spirits of former pilgrims. Giant carp, spectral priest.

The Lantern of Wyv (36)
The floating laboratory-tomb of a gelatinous wizard hangs over a wyvern-patrolled bay.

House of the Tyrant (38)
Guilds maintain a stranglehold over a cliffside trading city, ruled by a secretive, paranoid monster.

The Full-Dark Stone (42)
A bison-ogre mage has tunneled into a hidden Seree spell-engine vault in the hopes of resurrecting his master. Storm seals, jackal-headed automatons, dire fleas.

The Oracle's Decree (44)
A mad Heelan sorcerer spreads desertification from a ruined, cliffside fortress-cavern, waiting in vain for news and orders from his homeland. Oracular toad, water shades, mounted Heelan hunting band.

Three for the Grave (46)
Miserable swamp villages rely on blasphemous rituals to make it through the hard years. Golem babies, demonic wind, parasitized bears.

A Clutch of Shadows (48)
A dour garrison defends a conquered Dradkin temple against counter-attack. Isopods, golem, wraiths, chitin drake.

The Chains of Heaven (50)
A mountaintop fortress is the site of a Seree facility for wrenching magic from celestial beings. Sorcerer, Nuss mongrels, warbody of Deel.

The Motes of Eternity (52)
A retired guardian turtle-dragon watches over uplifted jungle animals, but it's all going wrong. Void gull archaeologists, the cruel demigod Dendra.

The Sky-Blind Spire (54)
Ricalu conspire to steal silver from a kastromatic labyrinth-tower. Ricalu, ogre veterans, dire pelicans, undines, spirits of the dead.

No God But Dissolution (71)
A sealed tomb is packed with the remains of dead demigods. Skeletal gladiators and numerous dangers.

The Lenses of Heaven (56)
An astral customs checkpoint has been subverted by the demons it was set up to keep out. Craesten (lobster chef), slewts (newt-people), astral cultists, chalk hounds.

The Roots of Ambition (58)
Artifact hunters and ambitious druids wage ecological war on a desert plateau. Soil mother (fungal megabeing), Onddo (fungal servitors), Heelan, oil demons, giant arthropods.

Lair of the Lantern Worm (60)
An order of Heelan mystics brave water-filled caverns to worship a time-looping wyrm. Heelan mystics, proudskulls, waterlogged undead.

The Cleft of Five Worlds (62)
Regional overview—the Seree Lycaeum hangs over a massive sinkhole filled with underworld communities. Tcheth, murk stars, automatons, cave stitchers, Jorn, wraiths.

The Call of the Light (64)
A ruined tower houses a lantern that draws and traps hapless remnant automatons, left over from the Seree war with the gods.

Veil of the Once-Queen (66)
The Martoi fortress of Tanibel is wrapped in fey illusions, making it seem like the thriving city it was in life. Talking animals, giant spiders.

The Moon is a Mirror (68)
An old, shrine-filled palace is home to a legendary seer, replaced by a terrifying inversion. Dogfolk, brass soldiers, moon baby.

The Mermaids' Knot (68)
A village cult serves up visitors for the experiments of the troll-mermaids up in the "holy pool." Sorcerer made of bugs, splice hydra.

Basilica of the Leper Messiah (76)
A lich peddles influence from a walled-in leper colony and plots to overthrow the earth. Quietus skeletons, gray monoliths, ermine demon.

The Shattered Gate (78)
A gnome outcast preaches to a choir of animals, mutated by energies leaking from a spell engine far below the ruins. Guardian lizard.

The City of the Carreg (80)
Within the Ur-Menig is a besieged city, barely held against a tide of monstrous invaders.

Sirens of Blood and Sea (84)
Man-eating sirens worship an ancient sea goddess and help local women get revenge. Giant crab.

Mulciber's Flute (86)
Far below the ground, a flute-playing devil rules an infernal landscape. Cultists, demon wretches, pit lords, hell knights, lost paladin, Mulciber.

Can't Sleep—Clowns Will Eat Me (88)
A circus comes to town, bringing delights, insomnia, and a nightmarish dream eater.

The God Unmoving (90)
A pirate-controlled island worships a divine octopus, remnant of a drowned nation. Undead reavers, garfish, the god unmoving.

Do It for the Beast (92)
A Seree guardian, now serving a demonic Power, builds an entourage of cloned cultists in a cursed cavern temple. Automatons, blood snakes.

His Eternal Progress (94)
An emperor tortoise leads a ghostly procession, dogged by a needling sorcerer. Bandit wasps, reality-bending toad.

The Sorcerer's Feast (96)
The manor of a long-dead sorcerer displays his favorite memories and most dangerous treasures. Sylph spider, magical boars, automatons.

The Haunting of Hainsley Hall (41)
Ghosts need help dislodging an unwelcome squatter from their creepy old mansion.

The Man from Before (98)
The children of an oil-gathering village risk everything to help a hidden giant. Apocalypse larva, sorcerer giant, sphere of needles.

The Wagoner's Table (100)
A Seree-era tribute wagon propels itself through wintry mountain paths on a mission of generosity. Demon wolves, ancient wizard.

The Raindrinkers (102)
Five nomadic clans avoid the strange weapons of the Martoi by drinking only rain.

The Mouth of Spring (104)
Beneath a quiet shrine is a flooded cavern, used as an initiation for the wives of Spring. Crawdad sorcerer, selkis (seals), tentacled malak.

Into the Silent Temple (106)
Exploring the lower level of the Sun Temple (p. 48), eleven years after the failed Grinvolt assault (played out during the Kickstarter campaign).

STELLARIUM OF THE VINTERALF

THE SITUATION

A millennium ago, the ***Vinteralf*** constructed an observatory from the hardest ice, deep in the frozen starlands, to steal secrets from the heavens.

Nothing stays the same in that alien land, and the grinding of the ice has carried the Stellarium into peril: it now stands at the edge of a melting glacier. It will soon fall to its doom.

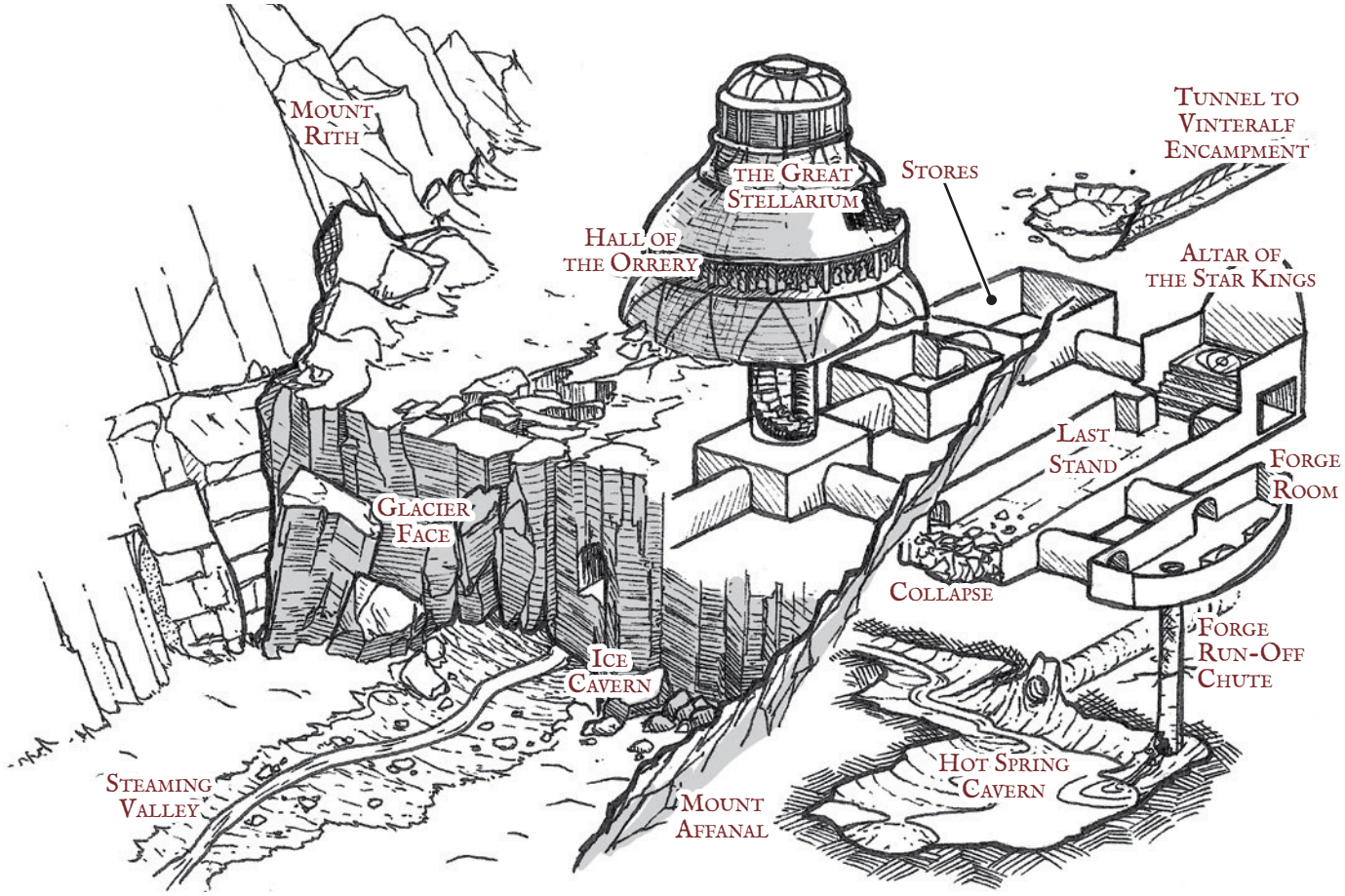
The final Vinteralf expedition from the starlands met with disaster, so when the Stellarium falls, its secrets will be beyond the reach of the star-priests forever. This they cannot allow.

MOUNTS RITH & AFFANAL

The icy realm of the star people is covered with thick glaciers, which inch their way southward every year. A **range of crags** stands in their way, where the glaciers are crushed between mountainous teeth.

One such glacier grinds itself to its doom between the flanks of **Mount Rith** and **Mount Affanal**.

d4	Rumors for Nearby
1	The villagers of Steaming Valley have been selling dragon scales they supposedly found in the river.
2	A year ago, a "castle" appeared atop the upper valley glacier, but none have ventured in.
3	An astrologer prophesies that next year will reveal that a great calamity has befallen the "star people of the north".
4	It is said that the great hero, Vilin, once ventured into the frozen north and found a great observatory where the future could be learned.



STEAMING VALLEY

Scalding-hot spring water trickles down the center of Steaming Valley, giving it its name. On calm mornings, the valley fills with drifts and curls of **fog**.

The snow is melted in a wide band along the stream's banks. Both banks are choked with **hardy vegetation**, lush in all seasons.

Camping in the valley is likely to draw the attention of a large **pack of wolves**, which normally live on the plentiful small creatures (rats and hares), but who will attack the unwary.

ICE CAVERN

Following the stream leads to a wide but low **opening** in the bottom of the glacier. During the day, a luminous **blue glow** filters through the undulating, slick ceiling; the floor is rock and streaked with ***blue lichen***.

GLACIER FACE

The glacier face is cracked and fissured from the stream's heat. Climbing is easy, but there is a risk of large **pieces of ice** coming loose, falling off, and bringing down careless climbers.

HOT SPRING CAVERN

A pool of sulfurous water bubbles up from hot springs. One of the **Vinteralf tunnels** emerges here.

Every few hours, a **geyser** bursts out of the pool, blasting everything with scalding water and steam.

Heaps of slag hide the ***forge run-off chute***. Roll an ***interesting find***.

VINTERALF TUNNELS

The ***Vinteralf*** hacked their way to the hot spring cavern under the ice to avoid the attentions of the ***Wyrm Jokun***.

This tunnel leads several miles through the glacier to a now-abandoned **camp** on the surface of the glacier.

The camp is little more than a snow-filled basin now, but careful search beneath the snow reveals a crude **map** of the Stellarium on bear-skin vellum.

Apart from the surviving areas of the structure, the map also shows a kitchen and extensive barracks, now melted.

Forge Run-Off Chute

This vertical ice tunnel was once used to dump hot slag from the forge. The walls are stuck with many sharp bits of **iron slag** that froze here.

A **fine rope** dangles here, still affixed to the top from when ***Thavir*** and the ***Vinteralf*** made their ascent. The white rope is made from the fibers of arctic "bone trees," and is very strong.

Bone tree rope never frays, and pieces cut from it will reattach if placed end to end.

Forge Room

The curved wall of this ice room is carved with **high-relief figures** of ***Vinteralf*** smiths making gleaming swords and armor.

(In fact, it shows a succession of thirteen smiths working on ***Grugnir***, the starsword, each contributing the best of their art before dying from the sword's potent magics.)

Two **forge assistants** stand guard: golems made of ice and silver. They can be pacified by speaking the names of any of the smiths.

Roll on the ***interesting finds*** table.

the Steam Forge (Great Forge)

This **forge** itself is a ring of white metal, enchanted to bring up high-pressure steam from below the bedrock wherever it is affixed. It is suitable for the creation of magical artifacts and working with white metal or dark glass. When it is used, it triggers minor earthquakes.

the Great Stellarium

A huge, pivoting **reflector** catches starlight and concentrates it into a deadly but nearly invisible beam.

The beam causes horrific burns to the unprotected. On a 6 on a d6, it also provides insight into a grave problem. All properly conducted astrology done here is as precise and accurate as you could fear.

Roll on the ***interesting finds*** table.

Hall of the Orrery

The ***Wyrm Jokun*** burst in through the side of the tower (formerly the tower's library), and now uses it as a **larder** to protect and refrigerate her kills. It is full of scorched **books**, frozen elk, polar bears, ***Vinteralf***, and a single mangled halfling in ***Thavir***'s livery.

Roll twice for ***interesting finds***.

Altar of the Star Kings

A **slab of black stone** serves as an altar to the high kings of the north. Behind it on the wall is a **star map**.

Many of the constellations will seem unfamiliar to modern astrologers, but the largest stars are represented by diamonds of the highest quality.

Roll on the ***interesting finds*** table.

Stores

Thavir's **quartermaster**, Ploos, barricaded herself here in the high astrologer's private kitchen. She is dead and ravaged by ***blue lichen***, though its progress has stopped now that her body is too cold for it to grow. Roll a ***find***.

Last Stand of Prince Thavir

The ***Vinteralf*** Prince Thavir and his 7 **hibernating guards** lie arm in arm, frozen and seemingly dead. They are heavily armed, but Thavir's **blue jade scabbard** is empty.

They entered through one of the tunnels, but were trapped here for weeks by ***Jokun***.

If touched by warmth, they will awaken in d4 hours and resume their quest. They are angry, starving veterans with many victories behind them, and the Stellarium is rightfully theirs.

Vinteralf

These glacier-dwellers from the far north are three paces tall, with almost seal-like faces. They are stubborn, muscular, and wrapped in thick blubber against the cold. They are inventive and determined in battle. They can understand southern tongues, but only if spoken slowly and simply.

d8	Interesting Finds
1	The **starsword Grugnir**. The invisible rays it casts cause blindness d4 hours after first seeing the naked blade, lasting 3d6 hours.
2	Scintillating **dragon scales**. Strong as steel, clear as ice, they can be ground to make excellent lenses. Scrapes on the walls.
3	Snow **goggles** with polished yellow lenses that prevent snow blindness (and the effects of the starsword Grugnir).
4	**Star charts** that aid in navigation and divination.
5	d8 spell **scrolls**.
6	Graven silver-inlaid **tusk**, with markings that aid the work of astrologers.
7	A **valuable item** (gem, weapon, jewelry) contaminated by ***blue lichen***.
8	The ***Wyrm Jokun***.

Blue Lichen

A flaky, blue-gray lichen that rapidly turns exposed skin into more lichen. It grows at body temperature, and becomes dormant in cold temperatures.

the Wyrm Jokun

Firebreathing Jokun arrived from the east, drawn by the power and majesty of the Stellarium.

15 paces in length, with powerful wings, Jokun is nevertheless slender enough to weasel her way through the Stellarium corridors.

Her scales are as clear as glass, but as strong as steel, and she is **invisible** when she sleeps.

Cold radiates from her body, for she naturally absorbs heat. She prefers her food with an icy chill.

STEEPS OF THE UR-MENIG

THE SITUATION

The sorcerer Bethelan was known to draw his power from the depths of the earth, and his chosen place for his meditations is rich with his treasures.

INTO THE STEEPS

The "steeps" are a network of natural caverns within a deposit of compacted gravel. The water trickling through is eroding the rock rapidly, and the entire cavern system is filled with wet, abrasive sand. This sand soon gets everywhere—in boots, clothing, eyes—chafing and blistering the skin.

GRAVEL STEEPS

Several of the chambers are connected by steeply sloped passages. The tops of these are crumbling and unstable, and piles of loose material accumulate at the lower ends.

Heavily laden or clumsy climbers will have difficulty ascending these without help, as the ground simply gives way underfoot. Any given steep can only support the weight of d6 climbers.

d6	Steeps encounters
1	2d6 hungry ***isopods***
2	cloud of moths
3	falling clods of wet sand
4	sudden subsidence drops the chamber 3 paces
5	giant centipede
6	the ***cave wyrm***

d6	Encounter proximity
1-2	Mere steps away
3-4	Approaching sounds
5-6	Remnants, evidence

1. ENTRANCE GALLERY

This high-ceilinged cavern slopes gradually downwards to the north. A trail has been worn into the floor, cutting west towards the ***meditation chamber***. The upper end is divided by a row of rusted **iron stakes**, driven into the soft material of the cavern floor.

2. MOTH CAVE

A huge number of fat, gray **moths** dwell here, preyed upon by fist-sized **whip scorpions** and a single, arm-sized **giant centipede**. If the moths are bothered, they take flight in a swarm, raising clouds of iridescent gray dust.

3. MEDITATION CHAMBER

The shape of this conical chamber is the result of tons of material falling from the ceiling, into a large, unstable pile.

At the summit is a plateau formed by a wedge of basalt. Upon it stands a small **stool** and a sturdy **leather case** containing a set of silver tuning forks.

4. ECHO CAVE

The remarkable **echoes** pick up any slight noise, such as the scrape of a boot on the ground. If time is spent here, the echoes start to come slightly before the original sounds.

5. LOW CAVERN

The ceiling presses down claustrophobically, dropping to barely more than a pace high in the middle.

6. FLAT CHAMBER

The rubble in the northern end of the chamber has been partially cleared to make a flat, circular **ritual space**. Tucked between larger rocks around its edge are the remains of **candle stubs** and a gold-handled **ceremonial knife**.

7. MUSICAL GEODE

This bowl-shaped chamber is lined with **enormous crystals**, in purplish and blue hues, some twice the size of a person.

If struck with a hard object, the crystals ring with clear tones of surpassing beauty. Given time to learn the layout of the geode, it is possible to play music here, perhaps by throwing coins.

Anyone who hears such a piece gains telepathy with all fellow listeners. This first manifests as babbling voices in the head, but it can be controlled fairly easily. The range is limited to sixty paces.

8. HERMIT'S CAVE

A filthy, sour-smelling man clad in rags lives here. He is a minor **demon**, brought here by Bethelan and imprisoned using the power of the crystals. He will plead with the party for assistance crossing the geode (drawing near to it makes him too weak to move).

If helped across, he is free to change his form as he pleases, though he may not at first. He is patient, a liar, and will use his freedom with alarming malice.

9. SODDEN GROTTO

Carefully made **low-relief carvings** show genderless beings frolicking amid stalagmites, pools, and strange cathedrals. These were made by the ***Carreg***, years ago, in an attempt to explain their world to Bethelan.

10. DORMANT ISOPODS

Buried in the gravelly slopes of this chamber are 13 giant **cave isopods**. Mature adults, they are torso-sized and quite strong. They have lain dormant for years, but noises or careless clambering will awaken them. They are hungry. They are not particularly quick, but they will swarm isolated victims, pulling them down with their weight, to pick them clean as crabs do.

11. BOUNTIFUL POOL

The brackish, cloudy water of this **steep-sided pool** wriggles with immature isopods. The entire chamber, in fact, is littered with sticky, pea-sized isopod **eggs**, barely distinguishable from the gravel. If any eggs find their way to fresh water, they will infest it.

12. LAIR OF THE CAVE WYRM

The lower portion of the cave is littered with shattered isopod shell fragments.

At the top of the cave waits the **wyrm**. Wingless, eyeless, and without forelegs, it was maimed by sorcery several centuries ago. It sought this cavern as a refuge in the hopes that time would heal it. But this hasn't happened, and it grows increasingly desperate.

Nevertheless, the hoarding instinct of its ancestry is strong, and it will pursue anyone it suspects of being able to contribute to its ***cache***.

13. THE WYRM'S CACHE

Packed into the sand in the upper reaches of this chamber are **three wyrm eggs** and a mass of **chewed silverwork**, evidently fittings from several princely saddles.

The eggs are steeped in isopod ichor and will hatch as wyrm-isopod hybrids.

14. CARREG WAITING POST

Five genderless beings with skin of supple clay rest here, eating an isopod. They are a party of **Carreg scouts**, awaiting Bethelan. They expect relief from another party in three days' time.

Carreg fear iron, but will fight using bone javelins if pressed. Among their **fungus mats** are quartz dice, d6 gems.

Bethelan has not visited the caves in years, but they hold out hope he is still alive and will return to impart some wisdom in warfare or magic to aid their embattled homeland (see "The City of the Carreg" on page 80).

15. Maw of the Ur-Menig

This chamber is vast beyond reckoning. The ceiling swoops up and out of view, while the ground of packed, rippled sand slopes precipitously downward.

It once held a lake of considerable size, but is now a black void filled with icy air currents: the Ur-Menig (see page 154).

Ten paces below the level of the corridors is a layer of **unbreathable air**. Anyone ignoring the sensations of light-headedness will immediately swoon into a deathless sleep, resting there until returned to higher ground.

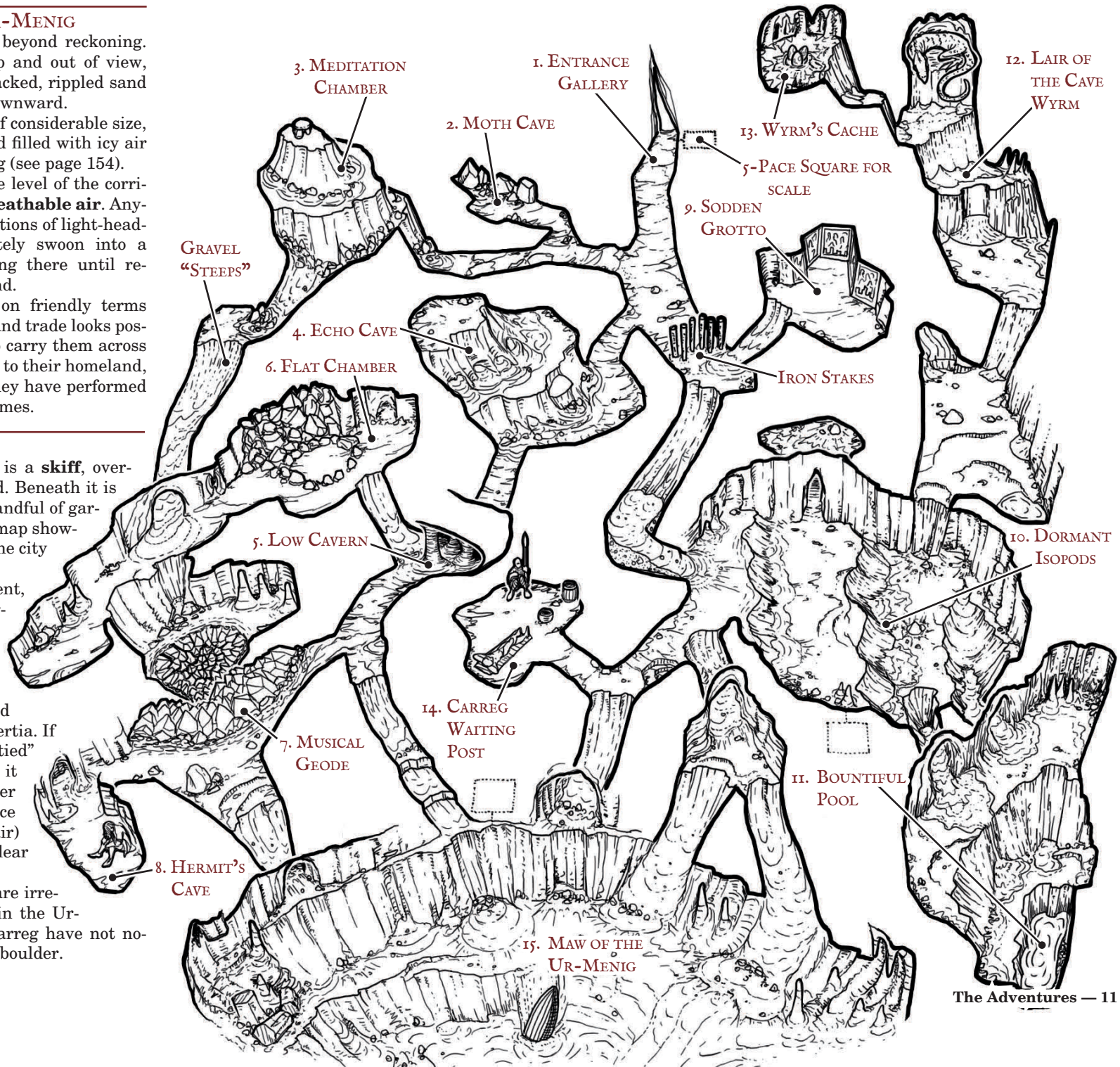
If the Carreg are on friendly terms with the adventurers and trade looks possible, they will offer to carry them across the maw, unconscious, to their homeland, a service they claim they have performed for Bethelan several times.

The Skiff

Five paces lower still is a **skiff**, overturned and half buried. Beneath it is a **sack** containing a handful of garnets, emeralds, and a map showing a route to Sifoon, the city of the Carreg.

The skiff is ancient, built before the Ur-Menig drained. It remembers that time, and behaves as if the water still exists: it is immensely heavy and possesses a strange inertia. If brought up and "emptied" of its invisible water, it will float at the former water level (the surface of the unbreathable air) and can be piloted clear across the Ur-Menig.

Boats such as this are irreplaceable and prized in the Ur-Menig. The eyeless Carreg have not noticed it, taking it for a boulder.



A LITANY IN SCRATCHES

THE SITUATION

The High Uttvelt is a natural labyrinth of impossibly high cliff walls, covering many square miles.

A religious order once made their home here, but now only undead and monstrous treasure seekers inhabit their ruined monastery.

THE GATEHOUSE

The outer wall of the High Uttvelt is pierced by a long, stone tunnel, guarded by a two-story **gatehouse**.

Save for the light from a few second-floor arrow slits, it is dark inside, and the corners are filled with windblown leaves and detritus.

Oddly, **everything wooden** has been removed. There is no furniture anywhere, and even doors have been taken from their hinges.

The ground-floor kitchens contain bare stone **ovens**.

The wind, time, and the ***dogfolk*** have moved everything in the monastery from its original place. It has all been discarded, lost, or burnt.

Any time the adventurers search a likely spot (any niche, pile of detritus, crevice, etc.—except in the ***catacombs***), roll on the table (at left) to see what they uncover.

d20	What's there to find?
1	Makeshift chisel for stone working
2	Rusted iron key
3	Bread knife, sharpened into a weapon
4	Sealed pot of ink
5	Tied bundle of quills
6	Iron candlestick
7	Sturdy leather pouch containing ceremonial vestments for one
8	Small, brass oil lamp
9	Stub of a tallow candle
10	Sack, full of stone chips
11	Candle carved with the face of the "Spirit of Spring"
12	Half-burnt handbook on monastic discipline
13	Small knife stuck in a bone fragment
14	Scrolls describing edible plants of the High Uttvelt
15	Map of nearly a third of the maze-like High Uttvelt
16	Gleaming scale from a drake
17	Half-burnt scroll: devotional songs to the "Spirit of Spring"
18	Sealed jar of cider, cloudy and strong
19	Half-burnt scroll: hastily drawn erotica
20	***Hosteler's Journal***

THE TUNNEL

The entry hall continues through the cliff wall of the High Uttvelt along a long tunnel. It runs a hundred paces before emerging at a ***ravine***, a narrow space between the concentric, wall-like cliffs.

THE MONASTERY

The ruins of the monastery protrude from one of the inner cliffs of the High Uttvelt. The only ways to reach it are via the tunnel and the ***finger lake***.

A. RUINED BRIDGE

A stone bridge once spanned the ten pace-deep ravine, but it has crumbled, leaving two five-pace gaps.

B. THE RAVINE FLOOR

An icy stream (a pace deep) winds along the sandy ravine floor, obscured by large, thick bushes.

Several of the plants are **vampire bushes**, which will entangle any warm-blooded creature passing within range of their fronds, to slowly drain them of blood.

C. FINGER LAKE

The stream empties into a long, narrow lake that runs for several miles between the cliffs of the High Uttvelt.

D. HIDDEN CAVE MOUTH

The stream emerges from a small cave, leading to the ***barricade*** (O).

E. CLOISTER

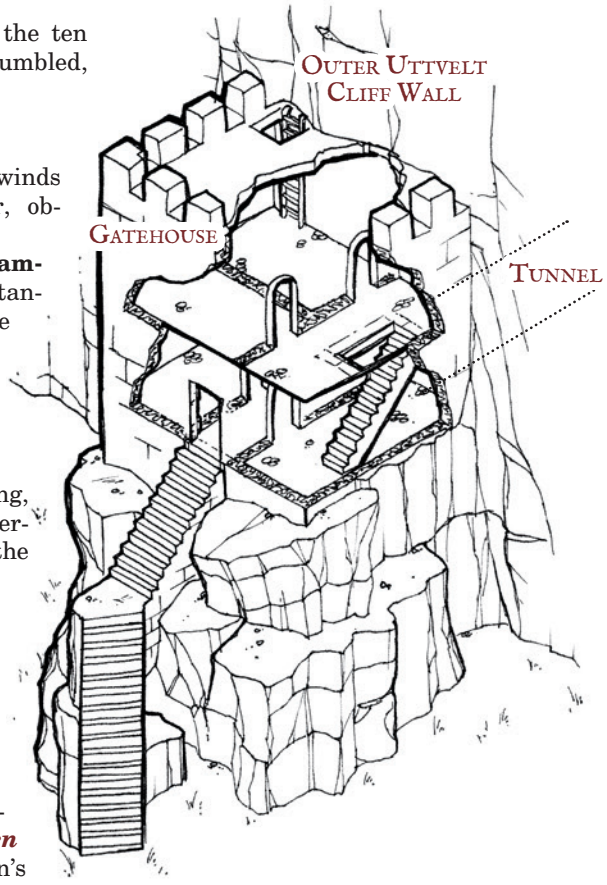
A long, L-shaped cloister encloses an ***open-air garden*** (F). **Branches** of the garden's gigantic **vampire tree** reach into the cloister, swaying and scratching at its walls. They will seize any warm-blooded creature they touch.

Two **dead dogfolk** lie in the cloister, desiccated and barely distinguishable from the leaf litter.

Near the bodies, crazed **writing** in dried blood reveals that the tree's wall-scratchings are actually it writing out passages from the ***Book of Immortals***, over and over again.

F. OPEN-AIR GARDEN

Years ago, the windblown seed of a vampire bush landed in the garden's



stone **fountain** and sprouted. Once its roots penetrated the ***shrine*** (M) below, the dark energies there nourished it, allowing it to grow large enough to fill the entire garden with its thirsting canopy. Its probing branches reach into the cloister (E) and the ***dormitories*** (H).

It is blind, aware only of what its swaying branches touch. Dessicated birds litter the ground.

The massive roots have cracked the fountain, forcing a **gap** just wide enough for someone careful to clamber down into the ***shrine*** (M). The roots are nerveless, strong, and immobile.

G. Library

The ***dogfolk*** (from H) use this room as a latrine and dump. The original books and shelves are long gone; bones (mostly deer and wolf) protrude from a stinking **pile of refuse**.

H. Dormitory

Running above the cloister is the dormitory, an L-shaped corridor overlooking the garden. As in the cloister, the dormitory is filled with the **branches** of the huge tree.

A dozen **cells** line the outer wall, all with their doors and furniture removed. A pack of **22 dogfolk** lives in the cells, carefully avoiding the branches. They are servants of the ***drake*** (I) who has brought them here to pillage, although they have been unable to make any progress in the ***catacombs*** because of the undead.

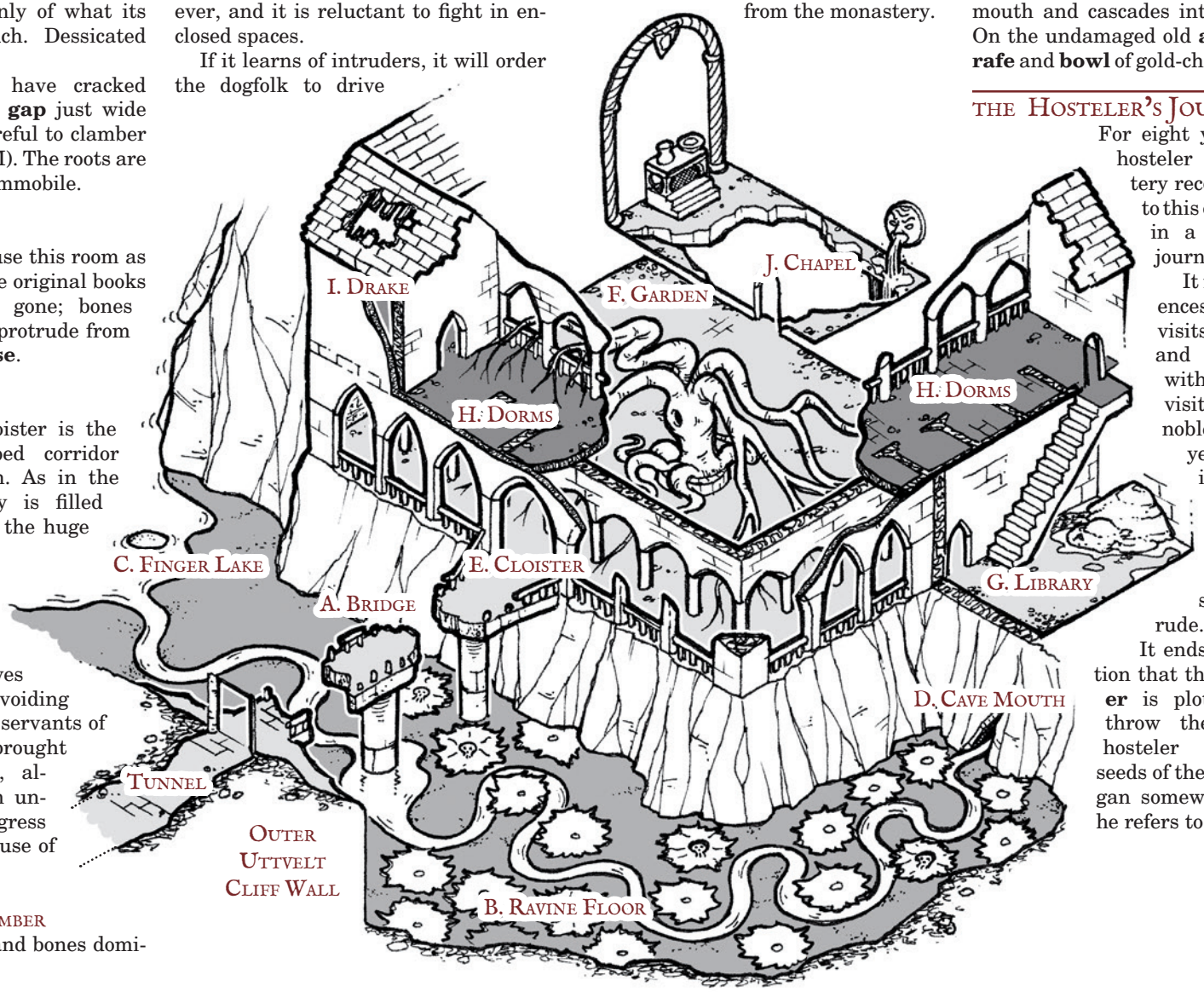
I. Drake /Abbot's Chamber

A **nest** of straw, rags, and bones dominates the room. There is a chance (1 on a d6) the **drake** is present. If not, it returns in d4 hours, entering through the smashed roof, bringing deer for the dogfolk.

It is intelligent, cunning, and is as dangerous as an enraged stallion in full barding. Its wings are delicate, however, and it is reluctant to fight in enclosed spaces.

If it learns of intruders, it will order the dogfolk to drive them out, and will guard its scant treasure until they are gone.

Jammed into the nest are d12 gold and silver **trinkets** (candlesticks, rings, etc.), a gnome-sized **jawbone**, and d100 silver **coins**: all the dogfolk have been able to loot from the monastery.



J. Chapel of New Spring

The floor of the original chapel has collapsed, revealing a drop into the ***cistern*** (K) below.

On the far wall is a graven **face** representing the Spirit of Spring. An icy **spring** (frozen in winter) flows from its mouth and cascades into the ***cistern***. On the undamaged old **altar** are a **carafe** and **bowl** of gold-chased platinum.

The Hosteler's Journal

For eight years, the last hosteler of the monastery recorded all visits to this once-holy place in a leather-bound journal.

It is mostly references to mundane visits from tinkers and supplicants, with occasional visits from wealthy nobles. The last year shows an increasing frequency of **visitors** the hosteler considered both strange and rude.

It ends with speculation that the **crypt-keeper** is plotting to overthrow the abbot. The hosteler believes the seeds of the conspiracy began somewhere far away he refers to as "the Well."

The Catacombs

The catacombs are knee-deep in icy water. A gentle **flow** takes the water from the cistern (K), through the ***shrine*** (M), and out past the ***barricade*** (O).

K. The Cistern

Below the old chapel (J) is a cistern. The **water** is chest deep, although **rubble** from the **collapsed ceiling** (as well as several smashed stone benches) crests the surface in a few places.

A couple of **steps** climb up into the ***crypts*** (L).

L. Crypts

The countless ***niches*** (see table) are jammed with bundles of rotted cloth, each containing the **husk** of a monk who once lived, worked, and prayed in the monastery.

Until the ***master of the crypt*** calls them forth, most are inert corpses.

M. The Shrine

This large chamber is hewn roughly and knee-deep in **water**. A massive, spiraling bundle of **tree roots** winds down through a **crack** in the ceiling and curls around a mighty stone **lectern**.

d6	Searching a niche reveals
1	Crumbling scrolls inscribed with passages from the ***Book of Immortals***
2	A humble and well-worn weapon (staff, cudgel, or long knife)
3	A bauble of modest value (e.g., silver ring, semi-precious stones)
4	An eruption of mold spores
5	A **crypt servant** (see p. 112) a skeletal thrall of the ***Master***
6	Nothing

Upon the lectern is the ***Book of Immortals***, curled about with tree roots. The hair-like root tips trace the letters obsessively—forwards and backwards.

Rotted **tapestries** (really just rugs, re-embroidered by amateurs with scenes from the ***Book***) hang from the glistening walls.

A few fingers of light stream around the roots, revealing glinting **silver** beneath the water. All in all, there are about six sackfuls of silver plates, candlesticks, cutlery, ornaments, and coins scattered about under the water.

N. Master of the Crypt

Sitting quietly to one side is the **Master of the Crypt**; a slime-coated, skeletal figure fixed to his chair. Nearby is a brass **gong**.

The Master can speak, but the integrity of his body is unnecessary for his plans. (Even a scrap of remains would allow him agency in the world.)

The Master needs two more deaths so he may advance on the Path of Immortality as described by the ***Book***: while willing sacrifices are best, murder is much simpler.

When enough adventurers are present, he will bang the gong to summon **crypt servants**: beginning d6 minutes after he does, d3 servants will arrive each minute until finally all 39 have arrived. The sounds of them sloshing toward the shrine through the water-filled halls can be heard easily.

The master is overconfident, and once he believes that he has his next two victims, will begin crowing that his entry into the "Well of Iron" is at hand.

If he gets his sacrifices, he will order his servants to carry him to the Well, a journey of several miles deeper into the labyrinthine High Uttvelt.

O. The Barricade

Every single wooden object in the gatehouse and monastery—every door, bench, chest, and chair—has been piled here by the dogfolk to make a **barricade** to prevent the crypt servants from progressing into the ravine.

The water flows through it easily enough, but the only way to get past it is to clamber up and over it, squeezing through a claustrophobic gap between it and the crypt ceiling.

The Book of Immortals

The book has been badly changed by moisture, mold, and the tree: many pages are inseparable wet pulp.

The book describes a path to immortality through atrocity: living a life of duplicity, building a blasphemous shrine, 41 human sacrifices, killing one's family or village, and then praying at the "Well of Iron." There are many brutal examples meant to inspire the reader.

It is mostly fanciful garbage, though the Well is a real place.

TANNÒCH REST-OF-KINGS

The Accord of Tannòch

At the center of a mist-shrouded lake stands Tannòch Rest-of-Kings. An ancient **accord** protects any **sorcerers** interred here from final judgment, so long as their rituals and ***artifacts*** are interred with them.

Last winter, Tannòch fell silent. The order of **nuns** is gone, eaten by three horrible ***ogres***.

Molluck-a-Glisten (Ogre)

Gray-green, sinewy, and slick, he swims as a seal, grubbing about for oysters. He is stir crazy and relishes the chance to drown boaters.

Hideous Abasha (Ogre)

Largest of the three, she climbs spider-wise on iron nails and spends her days watching through the drizzle from the tower top. She can throw masonry half the length of the lake, and she misses the taste of brain lapped from a freshly cracked skull.

Stanus Ash-Eater (Ogre)

The favored apprentice of the late Halad al Bim has come to reclaim his master's ***diadem***. He sold his soul and one of his eyes in exchange for giant-sized, monstrous allies.

He smashes the **niches** in the ***mausoleum***, finds nothing, and eats the ashes of the dead in rage. Their vengeful spirits now infuse him, driving him further into obsession.

If he is injured, his lost blood takes on **vermin form** (worms, rats, a tiny homunculus) and animates with the spirit of a sorcerer-king from the funerary ash.

These will seek safety and warmth, then allies (through pity or deception), and finally magic and thralls.

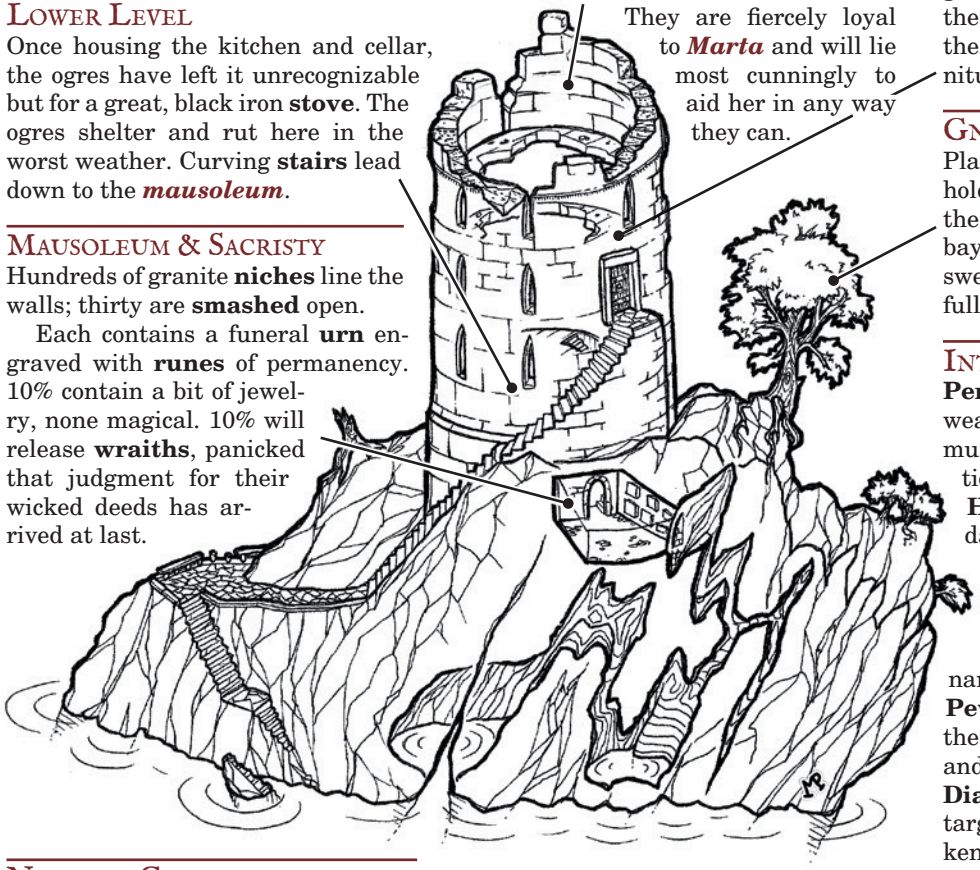
Lower Level

Once housing the kitchen and cellar, the ogres have left it unrecognizable but for a great, black iron **stove**. The ogres shelter and rut here in the worst weather. Curving **stairs** lead down to the ***mausoleum***.

Mausoleum & Sacristy

Hundreds of granite **niches** line the walls; thirty are **smashed** open.

Each contains a funeral **urn** engraved with **runes** of permanency. 10% contain a bit of jewelry, none magical. 10% will release **wraiths**, panicked that judgment for their wicked deeds has arrived at last.



Natural Caverns

A network of caves winds through the slate-like rock. They are steep, dark and treacherous, scarcely passable at their narrowest.

In the topmost cavern, a **dessicated gnome** lies in a dip under a heap of **fallen bricks** where the cave connects to the mausoleum. He still clutches his pick axe. In his effects are a few coins, rope, and a scrap of parchment that lists the ***artifacts*** he hoped to steal.

Any loud **noise** here will bring Molluck to investigate.

Long-Ruined Parapet

A trio of wise, speaking **finches** alights here when Abasha is elsewhere. They are fiercely loyal to ***Marta*** and will lie most cunningly to aid her in any way they can.

Collapsed and Burned

A great fire gutted the upper levels. A giant pile of soot-stained **rubble** hides the crushed, rotted remains of a dozen of the order, along with much burned furniture and a bit of silver plate.

Gnarled Oak of Cicollus

Planted here by the god Cicollus to uphold the accord, its wood groans with the task of keeping vengeful devils at bay. Once every seven years, it will answer one question asked of it, with the full knowledge of the gods.

Interred Magical Artifacts

Periapt of the Earthen Kings: The wearer can "swim" through stone, but must endure potent feelings of suffocation and disorientation.

High Priest's Dagger: Silver-bladed dagger, inlaid garnets; gives a victim's trait to its wielder: in choosing, it rewards cruelty and mocks restraint.

Umber Tome of Withered Zunlet: Each reading reveals a traitor's name, but inflicts a deformity.

Pewter Rings of Enoch VI: At will, the wearer's fingers double in length and acquire giant strength.

Diadem of the Weylords: Once/day, target must obey wearer's simple spoken command.

Marta, Sacrist of Tannòch

Sole survivor of her order, **Marta** is a tough old nun who oversaw the ***artifacts*** of Tannòch. She has escaped death by use of the ***Periapt***, and for months she has sought a way to drive off the ogres. She is emaciated, pale, and kept alive mostly by her iron will.

Zealous and domineering, she will expect PCs to defend Tannòch as a matter of duty. If they don't, then, they too are invaders that must be driven off.

In addition to the ***Periapt***, Marta carries all of the island's other ***magical artifacts*** (above), and knows how to use all of them save for the ***diadem***.

As the last of her order, if she dies, the accord is broken. d4+1 **bone devils** will gate in, coalescing from the mist on the landing with an unearthly howl.

They waste no time ascending Tannòch to burn the Oak of Cicollus, then smash their way inside to claim the souls of the interred. They ignore bystanders, but cruelly engage any opposition. If they succeed, they are free to roam the earth as a reward.

THE CAGE OF SERIMET

THE SITUATION

Deep underground, a dying order stands guard over a restless wizard. But which is truly the prisoner?

THE ORDER OF SERIMET

In the ***chained couatl***'s flickering glow, a sworn order of **paladins** guards their prisoner, the wizard ***Yorta***.

Only 15 paladins survive, under the command of ***Father Vrithni***. Veteran heroes all, they are well equipped and very skilled at arms and various trades.

Their long service has worn them badly; they ache, sleep poorly, and yearn for tales of sunlit places. The youngest of them is 51 years old, and there are no new recruits.

Initially they will ask visitors to surrender their weapons (to be placed in the ***Path of Horem-Ur*** for safekeeping). They will watch keenly to see if any PCs might make suitable recruits.

GUARDED WAY

Gate-Captain Amelia and d6 **paladins** guard this entrance in person, and with crossbows through arrow slits from the barracks.

The paladins receive few guests, but they are vigilant for ***aberrations*** summoned by ***Yorta***.

Any parties admitted will be taken to the ***lantern*** for inspection.

LANTERN OF THE MURRIGANS

Spun by lune moths, no illusion can withstand its all-revealing glare.

BARRACKS (3 STORIES)

The barracks are composed of two sturdy structures, one small and one larger, connected on the second story by a **bridge**. **Arrow slits** line the inner walls, and the bridge has several **murder holes** for the defense of the **guarded way**.

The upper two floors of the larger building are filled with **bunks**, although these now mostly house mice; members of the order who take their rest here prefer to remain on the ground floor. A **roaring fire** is kept going at all times, both for light and comfort against the damp and cold of the cavern.

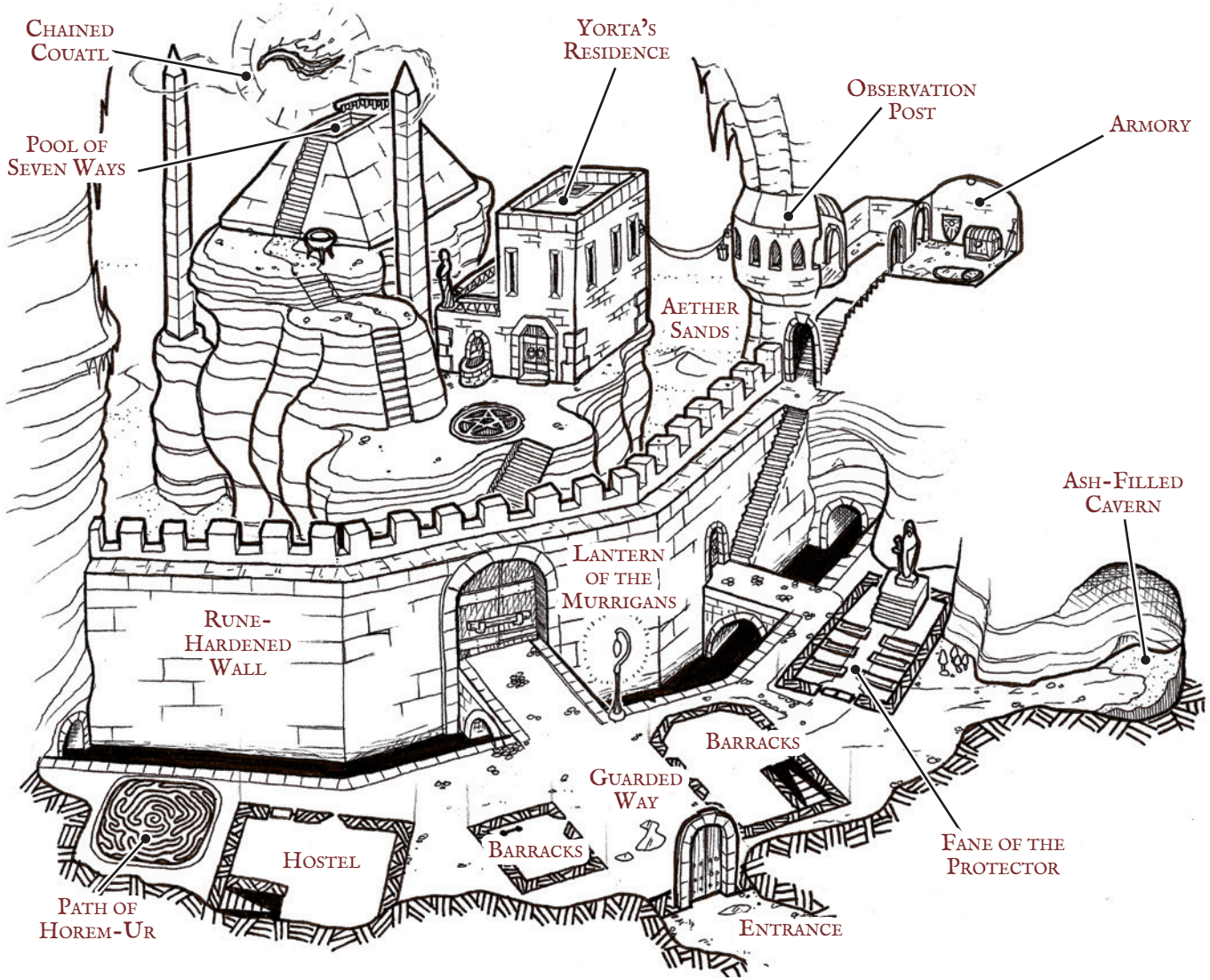
HOSTEL (2 STORIES)

Dour **paladins** eat fish soup by the light from a small **stove**. Upstairs, two paladins recover from grave injuries, received while fighting ***Yorta***'s ***aberrations***.

With them is **Brother Abigan**, withered and demented. He parades half naked at every opportunity, singing loudly—devotional hymns to Serimet or rude ditties about the folly of the order's task.

PATH OF HOREM-UR

Anything or anyone that touches the glittering mica of this **labyrinth**



mosaic is stuck fast and can depart only by sliding along the path. The trip out from the center takes an hour.

Rune-Hardened Wall

d3 **paladins** guard the wall, alert for ***Mother***'s arrows or rage-hurled lightning from ***Yorta***. The greater and lesser **gates** are enchanted to open only to ***Father Vrithni***'s commands.

Fane of the Protector

The order worships daily at this dour temple, lit by flickering **candles**. An **idol of Serimet** stands at the **altar**, depicting her as a woman of fierce gaze. **Runes** around the altar's base describe her as the merciful sister of Cicollus, and a patron of any who have sworn their lives to rid the world of wicked sorcerers.

With a heavy heart, **Brother Turnum** will hear the solemn vow of anyone who pledges their life to the order.

So long as eight faithful perform the dawn ritual, each day the power of Serimet teleports ***Yorta*** to the pentagram beyond the wall.

Ash-Filled Cavern

A **heap of ashes** slopes against the far walls of this dry dead end. **Brother Turnum** deposits here the burnt remains of any aberrations that breach the walls. Careful sifting could yield a poisonous quill, a charred tusk, tufts of metallic fur, or giant isopod fragments.

Aether Sands

Yorta's ethereal exploits have covered the floor of his vast cave in **sand**; each grain a lost memory. Consuming it will bring these memories to life vividly. Near the wall it is only sparse grit on the rock floor, but beyond the mesa it soon becomes **knee deep**. Most memories are mundane fragments of distant lives; others are horrifying or beautiful.

Wandering among the sands is a **Heilian gorgon**: a great lion with a mane of asps, whose yellow eyes transfix with a stare.

Observation Post

A **bucket and pulley** were once used to deliver food to ***Yorta***, until it began going uneaten. Now, only chess moves are exchanged. A board is set up on a small table; white is losing badly.

Father Vrithni / Armory

Father Vrithni takes his fitful rest here on a straw filled **pallet**. He frets constantly about self-destructive impulses within the order, and he is alert for poorly considered plans.

In this room is a **sword** of wizard slaying, a **shield** of protection vs. transmutation, and three healing **potions**.

d8	Today, Yorta is..
1	Redecorating his quarters
2	Enjoying sybaritic pleasures
3	Mired in deep depression
4	Obsessing over a fine point of arcane lore
5	Enjoying a fine meal
6	Attempting to escape
7	Getting smashed on aether sand
8	Summoning an **aberration** into the **guarded way** to torment the order

d6	Yorta is with..
1	d3 Dradkin master masons
2	a Gray elf sorceress
3	a Vinteralf starprince
4	d3 astrologer journeyers
5	a chained demon
6	a traitorous paladin of the order

Yorta, Master of Ways

Aged but still vital, Yorta is a master of journeying and summoning. He is vain, frequently shirtless and sporting heavy gold bracers. His apartments are stuffed with **luxuries** from impossible places, and he dines like a prince.

Yorta's Entourage

He is attended by **two homunculi** and a 4-pace-tall **stone woman**, whom he addresses as "Mother", which most often stands watch on the terrace. "Mother" wields a huge bow of ivory and jet, which strikes as a small ballista.

d6	Yorta's Aberrations
1	Wailing, biting **cherubs** whose bodies burst with **wasps** if harmed
2	d8 **serpents** of compressed aether sand (see p. 130), whose bites cause terrible visions
3	Enraged **beast** of the hunt (e.g., boar, rhinoceros, elk), bleeding from the many darts and spears that hang from its body
4	**Changelings** (see p. 111) disguised as winsome visitors from the surface
5	Invisible, **paralytic oozes** which seep through gaps to find the paladins as they sleep and dissolve them
6	A horse-sized **chimera**, starving and in agony from its deformities—parts of porcupine, octopus, mule, eagle, titan frog

Other beings regularly emerge from the ***Pool of Seven Ways*** to treat, trade, dine, or frolic with Yorta.

Pool of Seven Ways

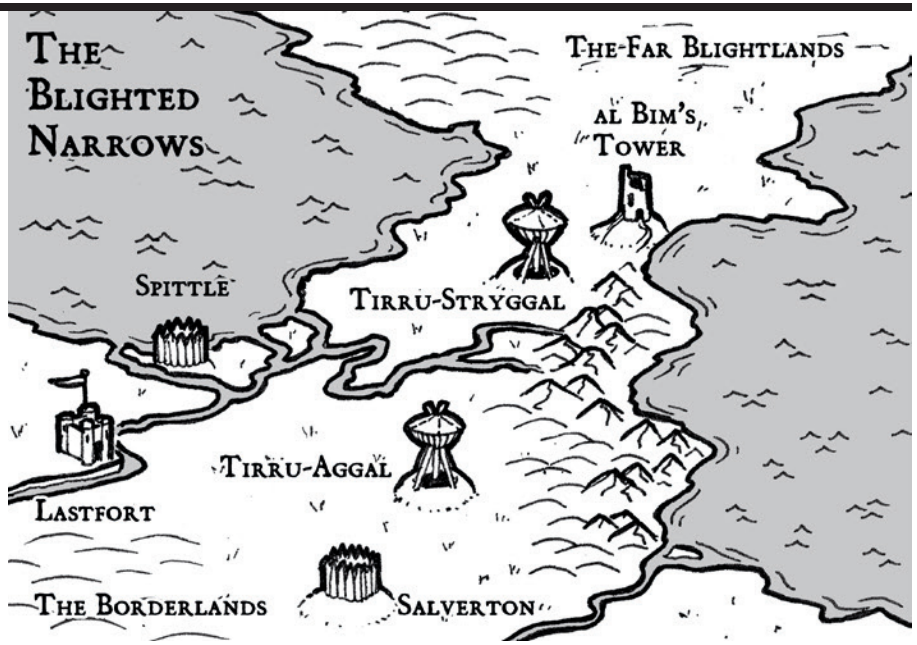
Anyone spending more than a minute or two in the pool becomes translucent for an hour; during this time any sudden movement risks sending them into the astral plane.

Yorta comes and goes through the pool regularly. In the foggy astral landscape beyond, several paths lead to distant worlds.

Chained Couatl

Unknown to the order, the **demigoddess Serimet** has been tricked by Yorta into the form of a fiery **couatl**, bound to fly between the **obelisks** so long as they stand. She flits back and forth anxiously, providing a dim light to the entire complex.

THE RAID MIRROR



The Situation

Halad al Bim didn't take all of his relics to Tannòch (see page 15) with him when he died, and now a pack of **blight orcs** has found his cache.

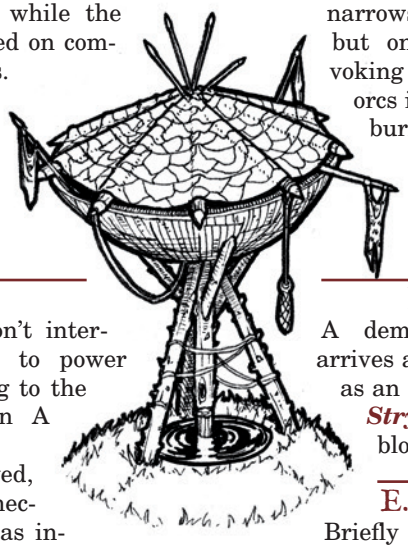
They have cracked the secret of al Bim's **portal mirror** (see page 130) and now blight orc raiding parties are appearing a hundred leagues from the blightlands, raiding the unfortified villages beyond the borderlands.

They slaughter everyone, take everything, and leave no tracks. They've eaten their way through three valleys' worth of cattle without a defeat. That sort of thing can make a quarter-lord lose sleep.

An Unfolding Threat

Unlike most of these adventures, the Raid Mirror doesn't center on a location. The orc nestlord ***Stryggal Threestakes***'s raiding and rise to power may develop over the course of a campaign, perhaps while the adventurers are focused on completely different things.

If left unchecked, he becomes a major power in the region, and dealing with him will have become much more difficult.



Events

If the adventurers don't interfere, ***Stryggal***'s rise to power will play out according to the sequence described in A through L.

If they do get involved, modify and adapt as necessary, using the list as inspiration for events.

A. The Raids Begin

Stryggal uncovers the secret of the **mirror**, and claims the nest for his own by murdering and eating the nestlord. After a few weeks of scrying, Stryggal begins launching raids into human areas far beyond the borderlands. Panicked rumors spread.

B. Razing of Tirru-Aggal

Attracted by meat-smoke, orcs under rival nestlord **Aggal** raid ***Stryggal***'s territory. Incensed, Stryggal counterattacks through the **mirror**, killing Aggal and burning his nest.

Stryggal scries, hunting the survivors of Aggal's nest, who are driven into the borderlands as **refugees**, where they are forced to steal to survive. Rumors spread of an orc invasion.

C. The Razing of Lastfort

Fearing a migration, **Half-Lord Esselet** of **Lastfort** sends patrols into the narrows to locate the raiders, but only succeeds in provoking ***Stryggal***. He sends orcs into Lastfort's keep to burn it from the inside. The surviving sooth pronounces it an attack by devils and flees to Saltbride.

D. Infernal Aid

A demon, **Lugh-Nicaran**, arrives and offers his services as an advisor and patron to ***Stryggal*** in exchange for blood sacrifices.

E. Mirror's Whim

Briefly mad, ***Stryggal*** strands an orc raiding party deep in human lands. Forced to make an overland journey unprepared, they are followed and several stragglers are caught. Stryggal collects the rest near Salverton, but their exit through a shimmering **portal** is observed.

F. Stryggal Moves the Nest

On Lugh's advice, ***Stryggal*** relocates his orcs to a new nest, deep in the far ***blightlands***, as safeguard against attack by human armies.

Stryggal threatens other nestlords into service. The warriors sent as tribute are fed well but kept in pens beneath the nest.

Raids now occur weekly, and begin taking captives by the dozen to be sacrificed to Lugh; Stryggal remains in his nest with his demon advisor, scrying constantly.

G. Ruler of Men

Lugh directs ***Stryggal*** to extort human rulers. Nearby quarter- and even half-lords are forced to pay heavy tributes in silver and hostages. Some refuse and are dealt with brutally; this garners serious attention from Saltbride.

The gold buys a force of **ogre mercenaries**, sufficient to allow Stryggal to treat with a **clan of giants** in the blighted north as an equal.

H. The Scryer Bescried

A **coven of sorcerers** scries ***Stryggal***'s location, but Lugh notices. Stryggal's raiders destroy them, but with heavy losses to sorcerous fire.

Lugh deciphers their magics, which sends Stryggal on a search for wizards of any stripe, intent on turning their magics to his own benefit. He learns the **mirror**'s range is thirty leagues.

I. The Iron Cask

Lugh masters al Bim's **iron cask**, an artifact of great power. ***Stryggal*** reinforces his nest with crude chains and severs its moorings; it rises into the sky to a height of half a league. So long as the cask is filled with the blood of fresh sacrifices, there the nest remains.

Stryggal directs it to drift southwards, over the borderlands, increasing the reach of his attacks.

J. Stryggal Binds Lugh

The nestlord's paranoia grows ever more acute. He turns on his advisor, Lugh, binding him and then devouring his ichor. Demonic power flows into ***Stryggal***, and his insanity deepens.

K. Nestfall

During a fit of madness, ***Stryggal*** allows the cask to run dry. The nest crashes to the ground somewhere in the borderlands. The orcs all die, but Stryggal is saved by his regeneration.

Stryggal lashes the **cask** and **mirror** to a raft and flees into the giant lands of the north. Taking giant form himself, he inserts himself in their community by force and magical domination.

L. Demon Lord of Giants

After a year, ***Stryggal*** emerges as demon warlord of the giants. He has bent the **mirror** to see beyond the surface realm, and he has set his sights on an assault into the City of Fire itself. But for that, he needs gold. And blood.

The giants build him an impenetrable **barque** of stone and ice. Raising it with the **cask**, he once again plunges southwards, but this time with the intent of filling the barque's sacrificial pools to the very brim.

Stryggal Threestakes

From the beginning, Stryggal is no ordinary orc head-taker, but a summoner of considerable potential. What he lacks in training, he makes up with improvisation and a reputation: dark Powers know that he is willing to provide generous sacrifices.

His old master taught him the secret of binding dark spirits to himself with **silver stakes** driven into the skull.

As the raids begin, Stryggal has **three stakes** in his head. These grant him free use of **telekinesis** (one object up to half an adult's weight), **ventriloquism**, and **speaking in tongues**. He carries an enchanted **gnomeskull staff** that grants the bearer silent movement.

Stryggal **Sixstakes** acquires the powers of **pyrokinesis**, **ogre strength**, and (when he drinks blood) **trollish regeneration**. Setting aside his staff, he now favors a **mattock** (wielded one-handed).

Stryggal **Ninestakes** acquires **telekinetic mastery** (control of up to two 100-lb objects simultaneously and four if he concentrates), which he will use to devastating effect if attacked.

He also acquires **truesight**: he sees clearly in every direction and clearly sees invisible and ethereal beings. In addition, he can produce a **stinking aura** that produces debilitating nausea in the unprotected.

Once Stryggal devours Lugh-Nicaran, he gains the ability to **detect magic** at will, **polymorph** himself and use **telepathic domination** twice daily. He ceases aging.

When Stryggal emerges as warlord of the giants, he adopts the form of a **fire titan** of orc legend: 8 paces tall, brass skin, smoldering coal for eyes.

Playing Stryggal

Stryggal is an ambitious leader, willing to sacrifice anything to further his aims. In the early days, Stryggal is focused on the good of his nest and rivalries with neighboring orcnests.

In person, he is violent and unpredictable with those he thinks are weaker, but he admires strength: he believes anyone he cannot immediately overcome is worth bargaining with.

Lugh's arrival opens Stryggal's mind to the idea of being a true regional power. His deal-making now takes on a merciless angle. Behaving like a generous lord, Stryggal will ask endless questions, claiming curiosity: he paints visions of grand alliances, all while heaping on generous (if crude) hospitality and gifts of captured valuables, if he feels it necessary.

All of this is a ruse, however. What he wants is information—his bargains are struck only to increase his knowledge of targets. He strives to understand the southlands, all the better to strike at them.

At the crest of his power, Stryggal is murderous. Now completely free of any accountability because of his magical abilities, he stops providing for others, believing that destiny has chosen him to be as great a master as he dares.

Nevertheless, loneliness gnaws at him. Culturally alienated among the giants (who hate him), he yearns for the days of running in the hunt with his kin. What he craves most is peers to join him in his conquests. Bravery and defiance will arouse his curiosity, but he kills any who disappoint him.

Stryggal's Treasures

Each of Stryggal's stakes (if removed) works as a **magic wand**. After each use, roll d4; on a 1, the **bound spirit** escapes, taking revenge if possible. Spirits use their wand power freely.

Once the extorting begins, Tir-ru-Stryggal will also contain a steadily growing quantity of coin and jewelry. By the time of the crash, it is a sizable hoard and includes 2d6 other magical items, along with many books, scrolls, and engraved tablets.

The Blightlands

Once fertile, the blightlands has been ruined by the depredations of tree-cutting **blight ants**. When the ants come, they cut everything down to the bare earth. Over the ages, the blight orcs have become part of a strange dance with them, living off the migrating game animals flushed out by the ants' advance. To orcs, travel is constant.

Once the ants move on, the blightlands do rejuvenate, especially near good water. Young forests exist all over the deep blightlands, growing hurriedly before the arrival of a newly hatched blight ant queen.

al Bim's Tower

al Bim's tower is a ruin of only historical significance now, though in the blightlands, ruins are seldom unoccupied for long.

Spittle and Salverton

These two fortified villages stand at the edge of the blightlands. Dismal places, their inhabitants are wary of strangers. Nevertheless, they know the value of a debt of gratitude. They also make good on Lastfort's silver **bounty** for ant mandibles or orc hands.

CIRCLE OF WOLVES

The Situation

Morton village has a werewolf problem, and neither prayer nor pitchfork has solved it. **Tracks** (booted, barefoot, and paw) imply the problem originates at an old holy place upriver: a ***circle*** of ancient, standing stones.

The villagers revere it, but in fact, beneath the mound is a magical prison, built by ***Vinteralf*** starpriests to contain the six ***Leádstæf***. The ***werewolf*** is one of them.

The prophesied hour of the prison's collapse draws near, and the party of Vinteralf who hoped to arrive in time to repair it have had troubles of their own.

Pool of Gefeoht

This ceremonial **pool** predates the stone circle. The ***hermit***'s **bucket** sits in long grass, near his cyldwort-filled **pipe**. Bathing stops ***Leádstæf*** possession for a day.

Waterfall & Pool

Here at the source of the Mor river, the mound-builders threw sacrifices into a swirling **pool**. Amid pebbles and fragments of bone is buried a tiny **silver gauntlet** containing a gnome-sized **skeletal hand** and two **golden rings**.

Dry Cave

The packed earthen floor shows this small cave is visited frequently. Within it hang hundreds of **sprigs** of dried cyldwort, one fresh. If consumed, ***cyldwort effects*** vary by person and last d4 hours. Roll d6 + doses taken and apply all effects up to the result (see table).

The Stone Circle

The stones stand 8 paces tall and are hewn from the native rock. Many are etched with thoughtless **graffiti**. Within the ring, sounds are muted and solemn.

For spell-casters who have been purified by the ***Pool of Gefeoht***, peaceful magic has double its normal effect (range, duration, potency) here.

Blazing Fissure

Scalding **steam** hisses out of the crack as the fizzing pool sloshes onto **red hot stones** at the base of the deep crack. Careful climbers will find that further in, the crack widens to a **pool of bubbling lava**. Upon it float the six white metal bowls: the ***Embrenu Sætung***.

On a ledge is a ***Vinteralf*** warrior, reduced to a delicate **husk of ash**. She wears scale mail, a silver buckle, and a star metal bastard sword.

Garden in the Ruins

Remnants of a stone cottage create a sheltered space. Erected by a wizard now long dead, who came centuries before the ***Vinteralf*** to study the mound, circle, and pool. The ***hermit*** grew cyldwort here until the ***Believers of Morton*** began using it as a regular campsite. The hermit hates this, but dares not confront them alone.

Ancient Road

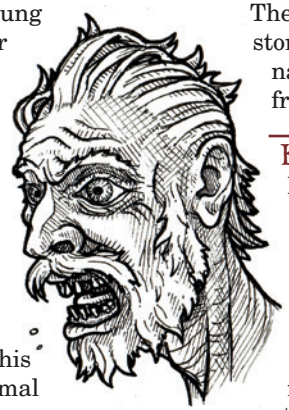
Scattered cobbles run four leagues due east until finally being swallowed by the forest. Thrice blessed, one cannot meet enemies while walking upon it.

Hermit's Cave

Inside is a cook fire, a latrine pit, and a filthy bedroll, all unwisely close together. Wrapped in the bedroll is a Vinteralf **dagger** of star metal. A **subtle magic** draws small forest creatures here; their **bones** litter the forest outside.

The Hermit

Wyrtung the Mad has lived on the mound since he was a young boy. He is the latest inheritor of a secret tradition, for he is the guardian of the ***Embrenu Sætung***.



Chosen by the mound itself, he knows all its ways, the hunger of the ***Leádstæf***, and the folly of the ***Believers***. He doesn't know why he compulsively dries cyldwort, however.

His rags are filthy and his hair is plastered with animal fat, but his skin and hands are scrubbed clean from his daily baths in the pool.

Like everyone here, he bears the **wolf mark** (a bite on his left forearm).

The Werewolf

A restless spirit wanders the lands around the mound; it is the soul of anguish and hunger: Hyngran of the ***Leádstæf***. In spirit form, it roams until it finds someone with a **wolf mark**.

When it does, it **possesses** them immediately, transforming them into a snow-white wolf of fantastic size and ferocity. It attacks savagely, gorging on meat if it has the chance, fleeing into the woods if outmatched—ideally with a stolen limb to gnaw. Unless treated by powerful magic, its bites heal to a permanent, purplish scar: a wolf mark.

The first touch of **sunlight** restores the possessed to their natural form. They awaken from nightmares of burning.

d6 + doses	Cyldwort effects
1+	Ringing in the ears
2+	Shivers, chattering teeth
3+	Painful cramps
4+	Incapacitating dizziness
5+	Life-threatening hypothermia
6+	Cold insight from the stars (d2 times only)

Killing the Wolf

Killing the wolf form expels the spirit from the victim, who awakens with serious (or mortal) injuries.

A killing blow with a **silver weapon** or immersion in lava will destroy the spirit forever, but also kills the victim.

The Believers of Morton

Three years ago, ***Troy Ulfssen***, the miller of Morton, tried to revive the old ways of worship at the mound. Instead, his prayers were heard by Hyngran, at that time trapped within the ***Embrenu Sætung***.

Following Hyngran's whispers, Troy climbed into the fissure and upset Hyngran's prison before falling into the lava and dying.

The Believers say that the wolf is a test of their faith. They return to the mound regularly. Most have **wolf marks**, which they hide.

Troy Ulfssen, Witless Ghost

Unaware of his own death, Troy wanders the Morton wood, preaching devotion to the "old powers." Addled by Hyngran's whispers, he seeks to lure others into spilling the other ***Embrenu***.

The Embrenu Sætung

Six **white metal bowls** float on the surface of the **lava pool**. They are magical prisons, etched with labyrinths, brought here nine generations ago by the ***Vinteralf*** to hold the ***Leádstæf***, Hyngran and his kin. Five of them brim with rippling, molten silver. The sixth (which once held Hyngran) has been spilled and is empty.

Brought here at great cost, the spirits were entombed in the mound where the heat would render them powerless.

Warm climes limit Hyngran's power, but in the far north he is practically a demigod. His imprisoned kin keep him here, for he cannot touch the **Embrenu Sætung** himself, and will not leave without the others.

If the silver in any other bowl is spilled or allowed to cool, the ***Leádstæf*** spirit trapped inside is freed. The bowls are incredibly hot and will burn the unprotected: this counts as a **wolf mark** for the purposes of possession.

The Leádstæf

The kin of Hyngran are as follows, from least to greatest and most monstrous:

Brégnes—the spirit of terror (wolf)

Angnes—the spirit of fear (wolf)

Cwealm—the spirit of pain and torment (arctic fox, the flesh flayed from its skull)

Egesa—the spirit of dread and horror (white-furred bat, horse sized)

Inwitsorh—the spirit of sorrow brought on by malice (three-headed polar bear)

The fissure's heat torments them; if freed, they leave immediately. If all six get out, they fly north to destroy the lands of the ***Vinteralf***. Until then, they join Hyngran in tormenting the locals to draw attention to the fissure.

The Vinteralf

The arctic starpriests prophesied the exact hour when the Leádstæf would escape. A year ago, a party of their bravest warriors set forth on a quest to prevent the spirits returning north by any means. On their way here, they have been beset by every imaginable calamity, and most of the original group is dead. Five remain. Used to deep cold, they are sick, weak, and hallucinating.

d10	Encounters in the wood (Every 6 hours)
1	A **wolf-marked** villager, lost, confused, and full of venison
2	The spirit of the werewolf
3	The werewolf (at night only)
4	The hermit Wyrtung
5	A Morton search party (2d6)
6	Believers (d4+3)
7	Black bear
8	The ghost of Troy Ulfssen
9	A stripped animal carcass
10	Deer (d4)

Bregna bears a two-handed vorpal blade and star metal plated chain.

Zau wields dual maces of paralysis and is clad in white, hydra-skin armor.

Syareen the translator, fights with a **scarab of extortion**: a star metal, animate wasp.

Piobaan the scout and pathfinder, wears a cloak of invisibility and wields a sling staff with silver bullets.

Nurmin their confessor-acolyte, is starblind but sees three heartbeats into the future. She fights unarmed, but alarmingly well.

They know all the ways to kill the Leádstæf. When they arrive, they will find Wyrtung to obtain cyldwort, which will cure heat sickness and restore them to health. They then:

- magically trap the fissure entrance
- slay any escaped Leádstæf
- kill everyone with a **wolf mark**, even Wyrtung

They have made unthinkable sacrifices on their journey, and all five are bound together by the memory of it. They expect to die here, and they are determined to make their lives count.

THOUGH FLESH BE VAST

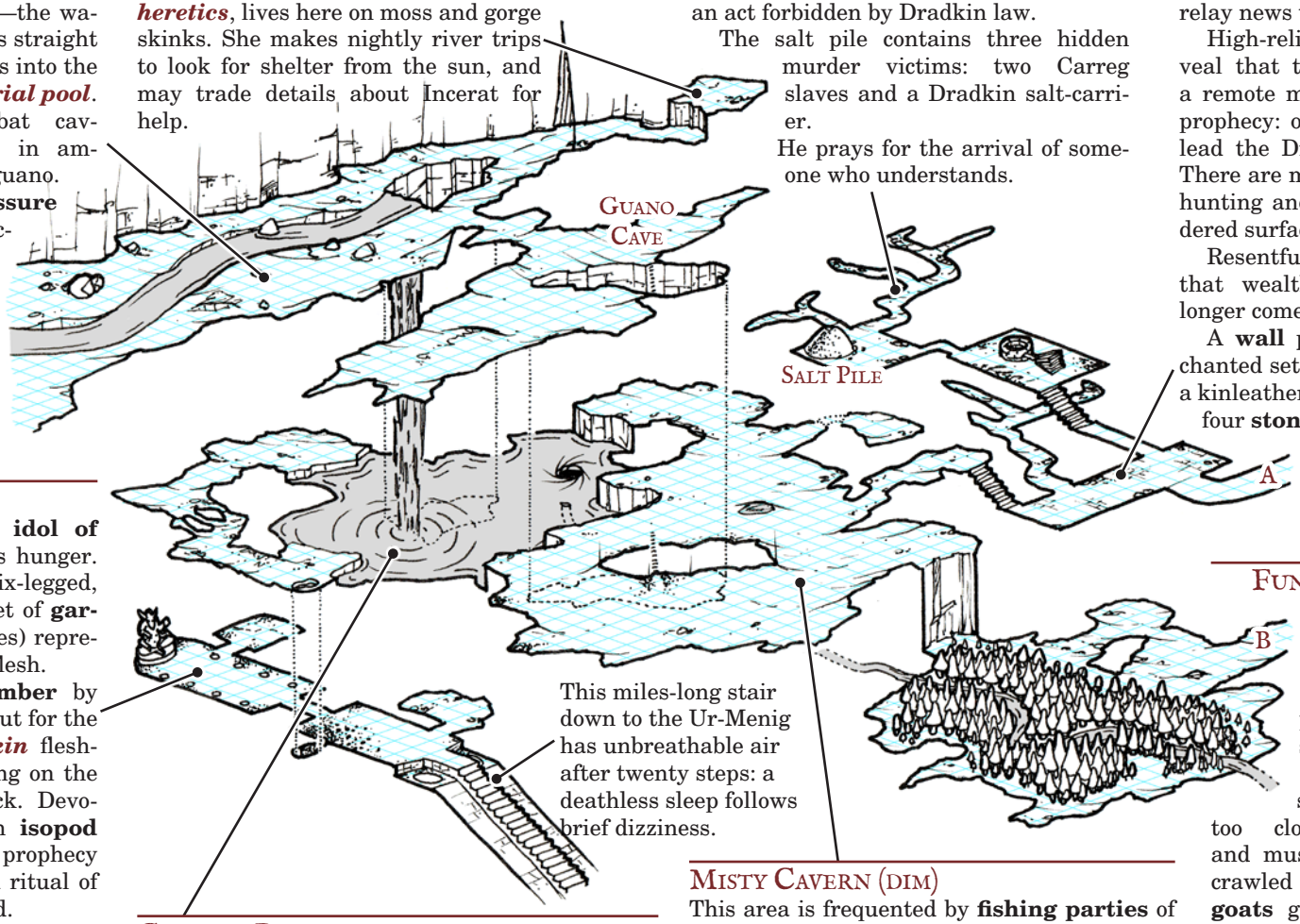
The Gorge Caverns

A river gorge ends suddenly at a deep **fissure**—the water falls forty paces straight down and thunders into the underground ***gharial pool***.

The nearby bat cavern is knee-deep in ammonia-reeking guano. There, a second **fissure** drops thirty paces into the ***Misty Cavern***.

Hermit's Lair (dim)

The ***Dradkin*** **Szimalt**, bravest of the ***heretics***, lives here on moss and gorge skinks. She makes nightly river trips to look for shelter from the sun, and may trade details about Incerat for help.



The Salt Mine (lit)

Goccan, ***Dradkin*** chief of the salt mine, is entirely mad. Infected by ***soil mother*** spores, he is plagued by dreams demanding he dump bodies into the privy cavern, an act forbidden by Dradkin law.

The salt pile contains three hidden murder victims: two Carreg slaves and a Dradkin salt-carrier.

He prays for the arrival of someone who understands.

Shrine of Hope (dark)

The hall contains d3 ***pious-caste Dradkin***, praying in the dark, or d2 pitiable **heretic sympathizers**, waiting for an opportunity to relay news to the ***pitiable***.

High-relief **wall carvings** reveal that the complex beyond is a remote monastery devoted to a prophecy: one day Inceraugh will lead the Dradkin to the surface. There are many scenes of Dradkin hunting and roasting ineptly rendered surface animals.

Resentful **graffiti** complains that wealthy donor-pilgrims no longer come from the deep lands.

A **wall panel** conceals an enchanted set of **bone-scale armor**, a kinleather **cloak of stealth**, and four **stone urns** of good oil.

Lost Shrine

Gazing upon the **idol of Inceraugh** causes hunger. Bovine, fat, and six-legged, its belly is a carpet of **garnets** (and d6 rubies) representing its edible flesh.

The **side chamber** by the idol is empty but for the **husk** of a ***Dradkin*** fleshpriest, still gnawing on the hem of its cassock. Devotional writings on **isopod shells** recount the prophecy and an unfinished ritual of luck in finding food.

Two **guardian statues** (oxen with bat-like faces) stand at the top of the **stairs**. They guard the ascent but will attack anyone defacing the shrine. The side chamber is a store with supplies that turned to dust long ago.

This miles-long stair down to the Ur-Menig has unbreathable air after twenty steps: a deathless sleep follows brief dizziness.

Gharial Pool

Basthenes, a **spiny gharial**, swims here. He is a transformed imp familiar, abandoned by his master after falling down the waterfall.

He has grown massive on the plentiful **fish**. Deeply lonely, he longs for interesting conversation or better sport than fish. Either will do.

The water is six paces deep and drains via a feisty **whirlpool** into the ***fungal cavern*** stream.

Misty Cavern (dim)

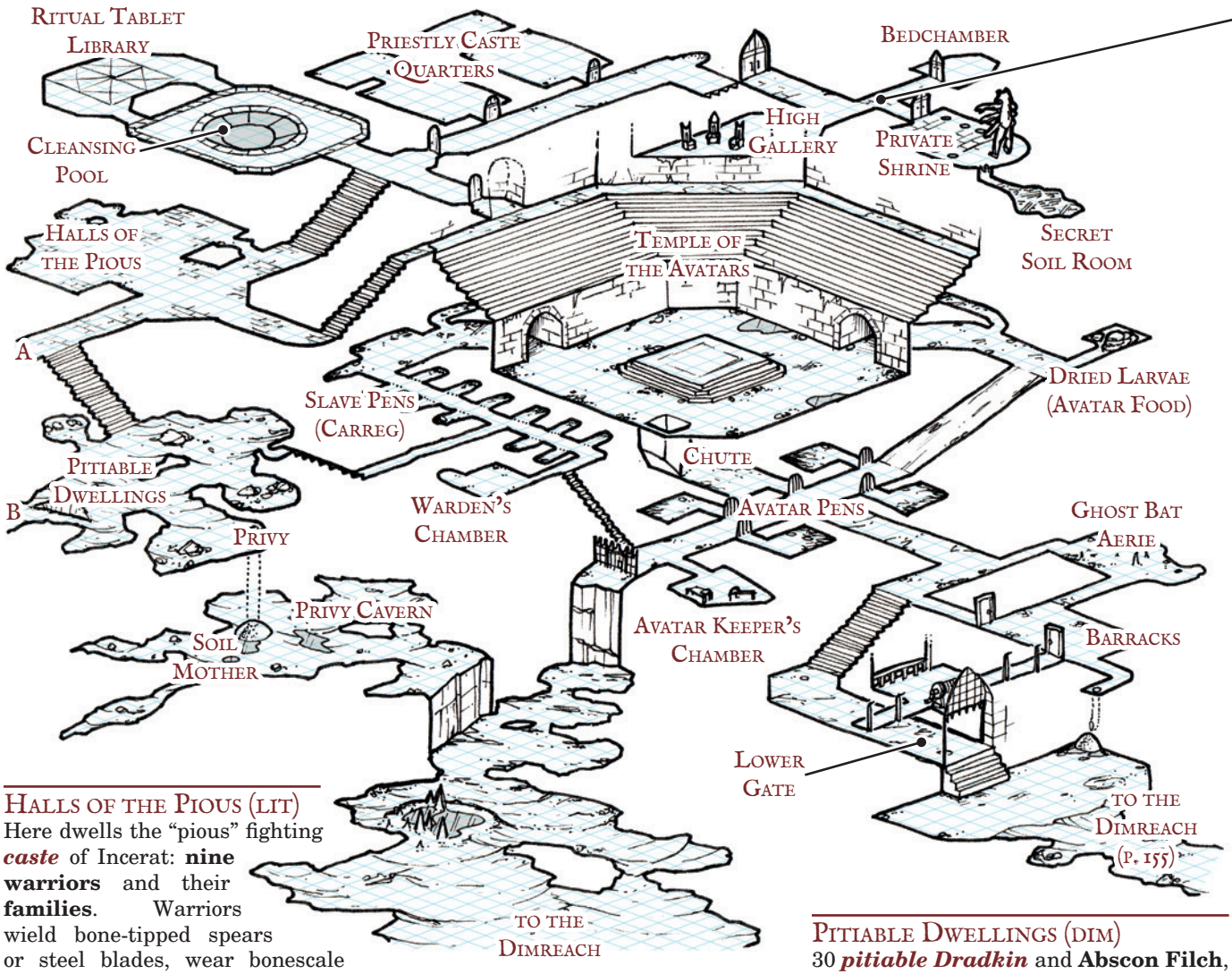
This area is frequented by **fishing parties** of 2d6 Dradkin. Hiding in the mist are **15** ***heretics***, exiles from Incerat. Led by **Dussa the Squint**, they refuse to wait any longer for prosperity and have carved handholds into the central **fissure** to make the terrifying climb up into the guano cave. They have made several surface forays, but fear the sun. They are eating well on stolen goat, but they're very worried about reprisal from Incerat.

Fungal Cavern (dark)

The **stream** from the whirlpool winds through a forest of **fungal caps**, then plunges into an airless **shaft**.

Except along the stream, the caps are too close to walk between, and must be climbed over or crawled under. Two **rotting goats** give off a sickly-sweet smell, having been accidentally herded over the waterfall by Dussa's ***heretics***.

Fungus gatherers (d4+1) from the ***dwelling chamber*** come often, wary because of the strange smell. Six ***ghost bats*** live on the ceiling and will seize lone climbers or wanderers.



Halls of the Pious (lit)

Here dwells the "pious" fighting ***caste*** of Incerat: **nine warriors** and their **families**. Warriors wield bone-tipped spears or steel blades, wear bonescale armor, and isopod-chitin helms. Each is attended by a pious **lamp-bearer**. There are 27 in all.

Priestly Caste Quarters (lit)

The 15 remaining fleshpriests spend their time ritually cleansing in the **heated pool**, discussing the spectacle of feeding avatars, praying, and endlessly memorizing rituals. The youngest serve the eldest, and status is conferred by age and ritual knowledge. Cut off from the lower world, their practices have stagnated, and unfamiliar magic is heresy. Hundreds of bone-inlaid **wax tablets** fill the niches of the **library**; the grandest 2d6 are inscribed with ***rituals***.

Pitiable Dwellings (dim)

30 ***pitiable Dradkin*** and **Abscon Filch**, disgraced fleshpriest (***rituals***: deafening, weakness), live here. All are (d6):

1. Cooking, gambling, and gossiping
2. Sleeping for ages
3. Praying to Inceraugh as one
4. Wringing oil from carefully gathered apocalypse larvae
5. Serving food to the other castes
6. Making kin-gifts from d3 deceased

About half can fight, armed with bone- or metal-tipped spears or blades.

Uppermost Halls (lit)

The exclusive domain of the high priestly couple, ***Uth*** and ***Semorpha***, occasional ***pious caste*** guests, and pious servants. Observing ***avatar*** feeding from the high gallery with them is a coveted honor.

The lavish bedchamber goes unused, as the duo are actually **vampires**, who sleep buried in the shrine's secret **soil chamber**, along with their bones.

Temple of the Avatars (lit)

Here, the priests witness the feeding of slaves and heretics to Inceraugh's supposed "avatars" (for now, a pair of cave squid and a three-necked hydra), in a sacred appeal for prosperity.

The **chute** is used to return avatars to their pens. The **avatar keeper** knows a cantrip that will force a cave squid to the ground.

The Soil Mother

A sentient, thread-like fungus suffuses the vast **pile of excrement** in the privy cavern. The Dradkin are unaware of its presence.

Because it is desperate, anyone who breathes its **spores** will hear its will: it wants a portion of itself to be taken to the surface.

It also desires dead bodies, which would let it grow Onddo: humanoid, fungal servitors.

Lower Gate (dark)

Pious Gate-Captain **Lephira** and her two **consorts** occupy the otherwise empty lower gate and barracks.

They watch from the arrow slits for the lights of returning ***pitiable*** hunting parties.

Lephira keeps eight trained ***ghost bats*** in the aerie. She understands their speech, and they are fiercely loyal to her, or at least to the scent of her large, kinleather roosting **gauntlet**.

High Uth and Semorpha

The rulers of Incerat are rarely seen, supposedly spending most of their time in prayer in the uppermost shrine.

The lavish bedchamber next door is never used, for Inceraugh's blessing has rendered them undead: they sleep in the moist soil of the secret chamber behind the shrine.

The pair can use ***fleshpriest ritual effects*** at will, and each may take on the form of a cave squid for an hour, once every 13 hours.

The shrine **idol** has thirty platinum claws, and among countless garnets blanketing its belly, there are twenty large rubies.

the Inverted Prophecy

Uth and Semorpha harbor a dark secret learned through augury: Inceraugh's ascension is involuntary, a terminal sentence imposed by great Powers of the deep.

The weekly "avatar" feedings merely give the under-god the strength to delay the inevitable. If they stop, Inceraugh will die, his death throes manifesting as d10+10 **cave squid** materializing randomly throughout Incerat. These squid then feed rapaciously. (Each can digest a humanoid daily).

the Dradkin of Incerat

To surface dwellers, Dradkin look fine-boned and delicate, their movement jerky and unsettling. The majority are albino, though some are yellowish with ruddy features.

Their eyes are small, and bright light hurts them. They are at home in darkness, but use tiny lamps or naked wicks when they can afford oil. They have excellent hearing, which they supplement by placing their long fingers against the cavern walls.

They have no cloth, but wear "kinleather" skins of their dead (a final gift), tailored with thread spun from hair, and make tools and buttons of the bones. Each of their garments is named after the giver and is greatly prized.

Strange Presumptions

Among Dradkin, it is the norm to answer questions confidently. They are never evasive—rather, it is more polite to **lie outrageously**. Bear this in mind whenever adventurers make statements the Dradkin might not believe. Hesitation or partial answers indicate concealed weakness, which will arouse suspicion.

Dradkin will assume that surface dwellers can only endure sunlight for brief periods, too, and must therefore know many valuable hiding places.

Four Factions/Castes

Dradkin society within Incerat is deeply stratified. There are three social castes, groups that interact with one another only in formalized ways.

Within Incerat, it is the right of the ***fleshpriests*** to pronounce the meaning of significant events (e.g., the appearance of visitors from the surface). They secretly dread the prophecy, for this will upend their world. They act to preserve the status quo vigorously.

The **pious** warrior caste seeks prosperity and status for their families—over the pitiable, but also over one another. It is their right that their complaints be heard by the fleshpriests.

The **pitiable** caste perform labor. They want justice from the persecutions of the pious, and many have heretical leanings. When the pitiable fail in any way, it is seen as accidental by other castes, however outrageous. It is considered confirmation of the lowliness and incompetence ascribed to them.

The **heretics** need help surviving on the surface, but by leaving Incerat they have lost all sense of safety and are wracked with paranoia.

Rituals of the Fleshpriests

Dradkin ritual study has devolved into reformulations of stale, Suvuvenist chants, while debate and innovation center on stylistic flourishes.

Nevertheless, the library contains an arsenal of useful rituals which the fleshpriests, if roused to action, can quickly prepare.

Somatic Traitor

This turns d2 of the victim's limbs against them. Traitorous limbs act intelligently, though without regard for self-preservation.

Dimreacher's Hum

Ruins echolocation and Dradkin and Carreg vibration sense within 8 paces.

Reclamation

Salt crystals form on the victim's skin, having been drawn from their bodily fluids, causing muscle spasms, fainting, and lasting weakness.

Rumors and Developments

Outsiders may become aware of Incerat a number of ways:

1. Farmers discover a lone Dradkin heretic sheltering in their barn, and seek help
2. Heretic parties begin organized **raids**, stealing cattle regularly.
3. Heretics find a mediocre shelter (e.g., dense wood, a miserable cave) allowing them to venture further, where their scouts are spotted.
4. Civil war breaks out in Incerat; heretic refugees turn up in surface settlements in desperate condition.
5. Inceraugh falls completely; cave squid begin appearing on the surface.
6. Prophetic nightmares of hunger, or being devoured, lead sooths to visions of strife within Incerat.

d20	Dradkin trappings
1	Strips of edible fungus
2	d6 devotional garnets (5% chance that one is a ruby)
3	Tin lamp half-full of beetle oil
4	Kinleather coat or breeches, lined with ghost bat fur
5	Glass vial of whip scorpion acid
6	Engraved bone prayer rod
7	Heretical prayer rod
8	Bone-handled sickle, razor sharp
9	Devotional underworld medallion
10	Pouch of salt chips (to eat)
11	Flake of lodestone (held on the tongue for wayfinding)
12	Braided kinleather cord (d6×5 paces)
13+	3d6 coins

THE COMING OF SORG

THE SITUATION

For decades, the Blighted Order of Sorg prayed to bring forth their horrid patron. He was to usher in an age of wanton excess, but all ***Sorg*** has done is trash the place and eat the food. Now, the few remaining faithful are bitterly divided. Worse, ***Sorg*** is still hungry.

RUINED ARCHIVES

This ruin is open to the sky. d3-1 **cultists** have taken cover inside. A few preserved **tomes** can be found amid the wet, moldering books (d4):

1. Deelian prophecies that ***Sorg***'s coming is punishment for neglecting Deel's shrine
2. Cult writings that Deel is actually a vicious herald of Sorg
3. Cult writings prophesying that once sated, larval Sorg will reemerge as a vast mucus dragon and lay waste to the realm
4. d3 Deelian scrolls containing various spells of protection

GATE OF DEEL

Two stone pillars flank a great **dais**. **Engravings** declare that those who stand here are blessed by Deel the Protectress.

No cultist or ***emanation of Sorg*** will enter this place, for it causes them searing pain and eventual death.

This structure was once the entrance to the walled compound, originally a temple to Deel. The cultists have pulled down as much of it as they can, and what remains is beyond their abilities to defile.

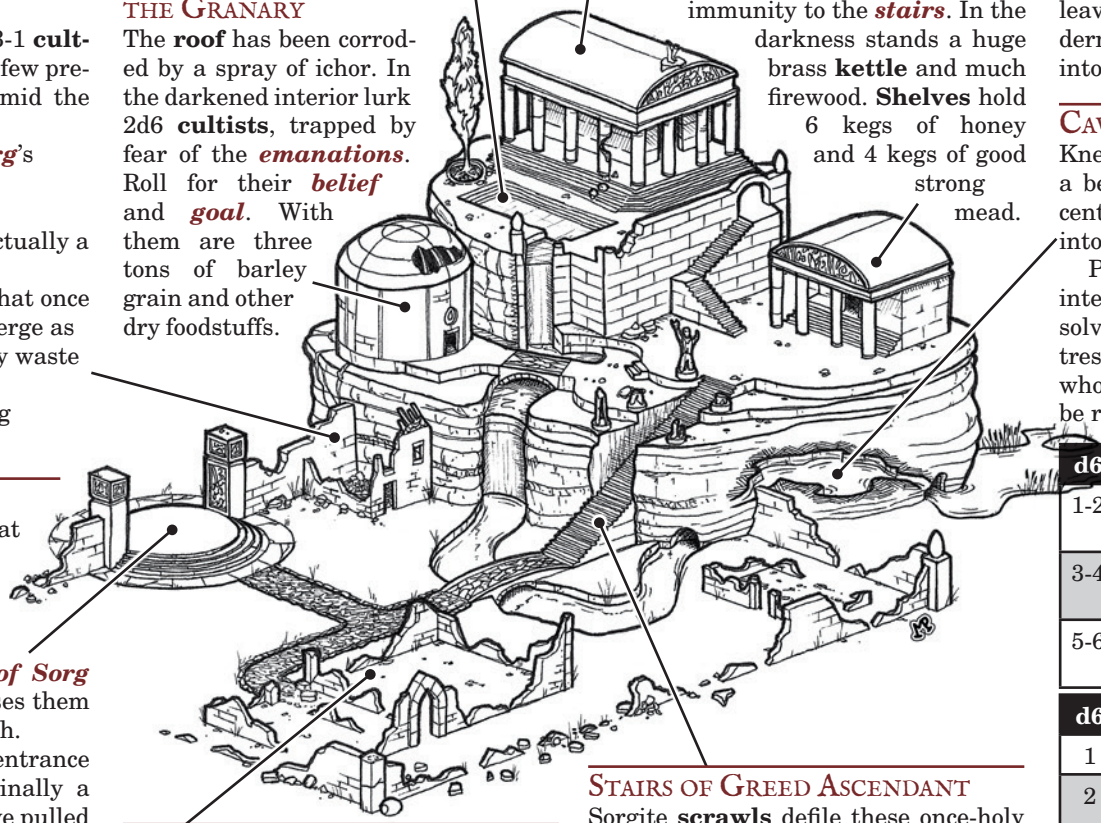
The cultists used rusting **chains** lying here to drag wayward members onto the platform to burn in Deel's wrath, as a brutal form of execution.

THE DEFILED FLOW

Sorg's presence defiles this hot spring **pool**, which now bubbles with slimy ooze. Sorg's prime ***emanation***, a 16-legged coelacanth (7 paces long, climber, poison bite, swallows whole), lurks here. It will pursue nonbelievers with stealth and determination.

THE GRANARY

The **roof** has been corroded by a spray of ichor. In the darkened interior lurk 2d6 **cultists**, trapped by fear of the ***emanations***. Roll for their ***belief*** and ***goal***. With them are three tons of barley grain and other dry foodstuffs.



RUINED CLOISTER

15 cult **heretics** hide among the ruins, led by **Myen the butcher**. Roll for their ***belief*** and ***goal***.

They are not trained warriors, but have six swords and two bows between them. The rest have long knives.

SORG IN THE HIGH TEMPLE

Sorg (rhino-sized demon larva, bile spray, slow) lies draped over the altar. **Vnaud the Withered** and 11 **acolytes** pray fearfully amid bile and excrement and will defend their "god" to the death.

BREWING HOUSE

A group of d6+2 **cultists** led by **Len of Otton** takes shelter from Sorg's awful ***emanations***. Len wears a **medallion** which confers immunity to the ***stairs***. In the darkness stands a huge brass **kettle** and much firewood. **Shelves** hold 6 kegs of honey and 4 kegs of good strong mead.

STAIRS OF GREED ASCENDANT

Sorgite **scrawls** defile these once-holy steps; the **smashed statues** now emanate greed and avarice. Anyone climbing must **resist** or abandon all frugality: typical effects are eating all carried foods, wastefully casting prepared magics, expending arrows, and hurling aside treasured weaponry or valuables.

EMANATIONS OF SORG

Each hour, Sorg produces a horrid minion—a roving mouth to feed his strength. Roll d4 to determine its form:

1. A great length of **toothy intestine**
2. A swarm of translucent **air leeches**
3. d3+1 copulating **gargoyles**
4. A half-ton **acidic jelly**

All but the jelly can fly, and all are unharmed by ordinary weapons.

Emanations patrol the complex for exposed prey for 2d6 minutes, then leave to hunt in the surrounding wilderness. After d6 days, they collapse into piles of grease avoided by animals.

CAVE OF MIRRORS

Knee-deep, fetid **water** swirls beneath a beautiful ceiling covered in pearlescent deposits. Any light source reflects into a hundred **dancing motes**.

Prayer, meditation, intoxication, or intense pain will cause the motes to resolve into a **vision** of Deel the Protectress. She will bless the weapons of any who vow to drive out Sorg. Victors will be rewarded with a divine boon.

d6	Cult survivor group belief
1-2	The teachings are correct, but Sorg is punishing the order.
3-4	Sorg is a deceiver, and the prophecies are false.
5-6	The thing in the high temple is not Sorg, but an impostor.

d6	Cult survivor group goal
1	Eliminate other survivor bands
2	Repent by bringing all the grain and mead to the high temple.
3	Repent by burning all the food
4	Purge these outsiders, who probably caused this somehow
5	Escape this place by any means
6	Assassinate Vnaud

THE NECROMANCER'S WISH

THE SITUATION

Each summer, a clan of Ricalu emerges from the depths to a network of cliffside caves sacred to them.

There, the very air is filled with the power of a host of ancestral necromancers. Their whispers grant ***Nandoleeb*** an unconscious, transformative power.

MINE TUNNELS

Nandoleeb the Necromancer expects to encounter only ***Ricalu*** in these tunnels, and thus it is so.

Anyone spending more than a few moments in the caves will be ***transformed into a Ricalu***.

Nandoleeb walks these tunnels for solitude and guidance. He will be stern with any Ricalu he meets here (other than ***Firekeepers***), and will send them "back down the shaft" where they belong, to resume work.

The tool-chipped walls bear many Ricalu **prayer sigils**. These tell a sorry tale: badly inbred and now totally sterile, the Ricalu have been declining sharply in both numbers and morale.

LOWER ROOMS

Here are found most of the ***Ricalu***, **twenty-six** in all, each very different in size and shape.

The **common room** is for gathering and working—smoking game or boiling lacquer for ***Matanaga***, preparing fungus gruel for the others, playing boisterously, fighting, or just sitting and dozing.

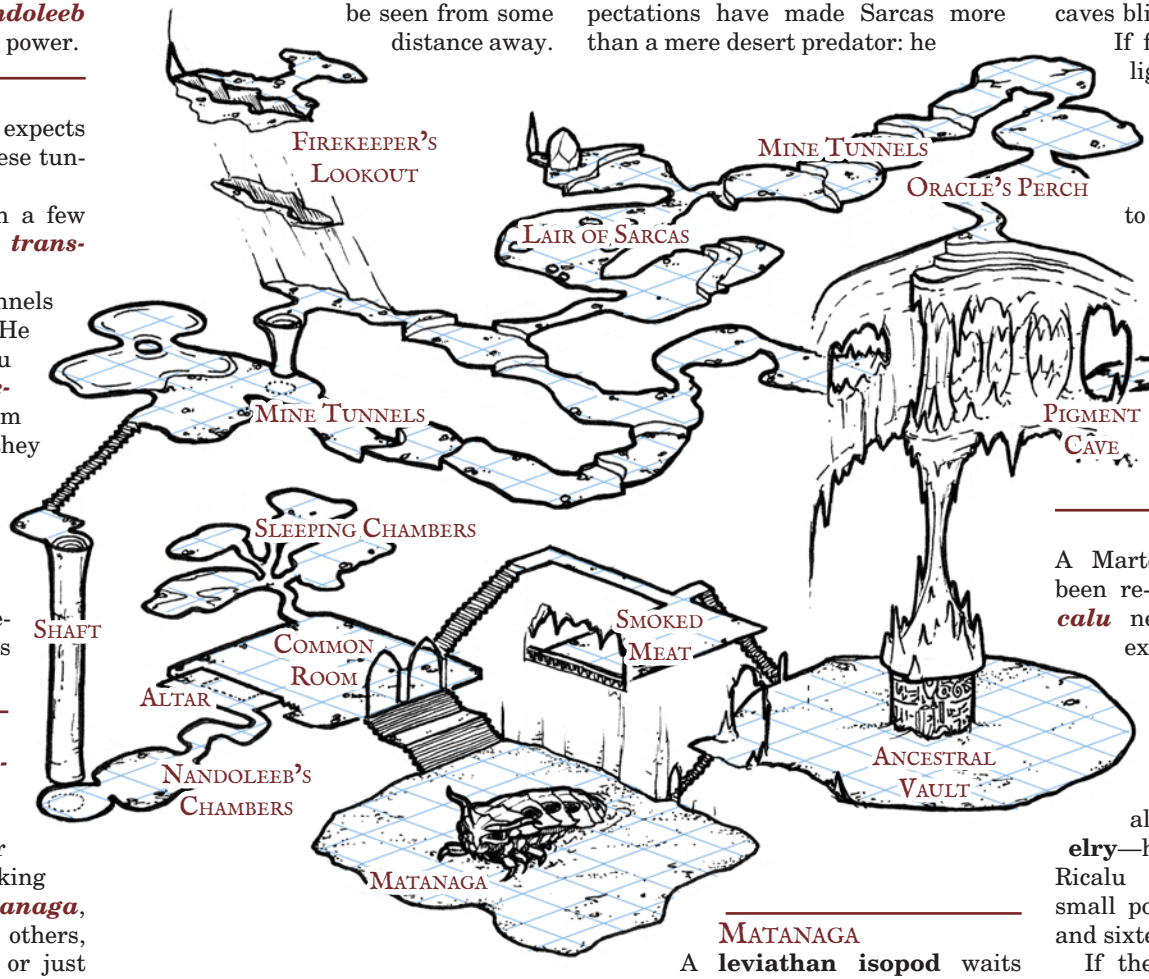
An **altar** rests at the top of a small flight of steps, and behind it a tunnel leads to ***Nandoleeb*****'s chamber**, containing a simple cot, his vestments, ink, and parchment.

FIREKEEPER'S LOOKOUT

A narrow cavemouth pierces the cliffside about 30 paces up. Guarded by either ***Azribol*** or ***Pitala***, it's the only entrance the ***Ricalu*** use. On cold nights, the orange glow of firelight can be seen from some distance away.

Beyond is a tall **shaft**, easily climbed by means of crude **handholds**.

Off of the common room are four small **sleeping chambers** where the Ricalu rest—some comfortably.



LAIR OF SARCAS THE ORACLE

Wind whistles past the **boulder** that almost completely blocks a ground-level **entrance**. The air is heavy with the scent of Sarcas, a **giant desert lynx**. ***Martoi pigment*** (see page 131) has dyed him in garish, ever-changing hues. ***Nandoleeb***'s transformative expectations have made Sarcas more than a mere desert predator: he is a wise oracle able to dip into the wisdom of the ancestral host.

He alone knows the nature of Nandoleeb's power. Though calm, he has a cat's instinctive love of chaos and may encourage adventurers down into the mines just to see what happens.

He is a formidable hunter, knows the caves blind, and can make great leaps. If forced to fight, he will attack light-bearers or apparent leaders, then retreat for a possible ambush.

He often perches high above the ***Ancestral Vault*** to watch the proceedings. A **Martoi Gargoyle** (see page 133). rests in the stone debris.

MATANAGA

A **leviathan isopod** waits half buried in sand. It is the ***Ricalu***'s burrowing transportation to their wintering caves. d3-1 Ricalu are scrubbing and re-lacquering its carapace or maintaining the row of fistula-berth doors bored into its carapace.

PIGMENTS CAVE

The last unmined Martoi pigment (see page 131) is visible as **glittering seams**. Up to 30 bricks could be smelted out.

ANCESTRAL VAULT

A Martoi ritual-bearing **pillar** has been re-etched by generations of ***Ricalu*** necromancers. Their nonsense exploits actually describe a vast astral region in great detail.

The only undamaged Martoi runes describe the ritual, ***Torment of Fallen Foes***.

Beneath the **sand** lie several thousand coins' worth of **jewelry**—hammered silver and gold with Ricalu necromantic motifs—several small pouches of semi-precious gems, and sixteen bricks of ***Martoi pigment***.

If the column or treasure is disturbed, or if ***Nandoleeb*** is slain, the ancestors animate 6d6 **skeletons** armed with hooked staves and daggers. They emerge from the sand to expel the intruders from the caverns, killing them if necessary.

d6	Rumors for nearby
1	Something in the cliffs calls any who wander nearby to their doom.
2	On summer mornings, smoke can be seen coming from the cliff.
3	A great, colored cat once ate a hunting party.
4	Sleeping within a league of the cliffs is likely to get you eaten
5	A giant desert cat has grown a taste for wine
6	It is said the most wondrous pigments were once mined here.

Transformed into Ricalu

Anyone in the caverns for more than a few minutes is changed in to a Ricalu. The change is imperceptible, for the sense that only Ricalu exist in the caves is powerful, and it suffuses everything. Anyone who leaves the cave system is restored, just as subtly.

Those who magically resist the change will be attacked by the ***ancestral host***.

Ricalu see perfectly in the dark and are uncomfortable even in dim light.

Transformed adventurers will be accepted among the Ricalu without question—without even a hint of awareness that they are newcomers.

Food in the caves is plentiful but uninspiring. Hard work is constant, and petty squabbles between Ricalu are common.

d6	Random Ricalu appearance
1	Heavy, short, and hideous
2	Spherical torso; long, bony limbs
3	Hairy; peg-like climbing nails
4	Tiny eyes; whip-like tongue
5	Sticky skin; a yeasty stink
6	Hunchbacked; clammy skin

Azribol & Pitala, Firekeepers

This married pair are trusted by ***Nandoleeb*** to watch the desert, and take turns tending the small fire at the lookout while the other sleeps.

Azribol is tiny, but agile, and spies on distant settlements with a tubular contraption of bronze and quartz.

Pitala is enormous, jolly, and strong. Birds and vermin are irresistibly drawn by her whispers, and she provides tasty delicacies for the others.

Nandoleeb the Necromancer

The leader of the Ricalu is a short, wrinkled creature, with iridescent, **tattooed skin**.

He comports himself with a mixture of enthusiastic ferocity and compassion, and he stares piercingly at everyone he encounters.

If observed quietly, he can be heard muttering lines of a ritual, practicing to himself. This is the new "ritual of calling," which will bring forth the weak willed of all the nearby communities. The ancestors have told him is necessary to bring fresh Ricalu blood to the caverns. This makes no sense to him, but he trusts their whispers.

He carries a **circlet** that, when rubbed, teleports Sarcas to his side, as well as two **Martoi Gargoyles** (see page 133).

He is completely unaware of his transformative powers.

d8	Today among the Ricalu
1	Chipping old isopod carapace into knives and other tools
2	Smoking meat for Matanaga until the eyes and throat are raw
3	Chewing dried fungus strips into gruel for others to eat
4	d3 Ricalu looking for suckers to muck out Matanaga's cavern
5	d4 feisty youngsters wanting to fight for status (pick of the food and sleeping spots)
6	Temporary Firekeeper duty so Azribol can meet with Pitala
7	Ricalu thug picking fights to prove his worthiness to succeed Nandoloeeb
8	d3 elderly Ricalu hoping to perform the ***Child of the Ouroboros*** ritual

The Ancestral Host

Now mostly gone to dust, forty **spirits** still advise Nandoleeb through whispers and visions. It is their only wish to see the Ricalu restored to vibrancy at any cost. If they must, six have the strength to manifest as **wraiths** (see p. 129) to claw the eyes from the living.

Child of the Ouroboros

Both a blessing and a sign of the Ricalu's desperation, this ritual is a sacred act of restoration for the subject and the community. It must be cast within the influence of an ancestral host on a willing recipient.

The recipient is relieved entirely of all injury and disease (scars remain), and they become pregnant with a clone of themselves, a vessel for the reincarnation of a spirit from the host.

The pregnancy occurs regardless of the sex of the subject (though some recipients will need surgical help delivering, of course).

Any child formed this way will begin reclaiming memories of their previous, ancestral life beginning in their tenth year. Most Ricalu remember dozens of lives lived in this manner.

Torment of Fallen Foes

This ritual is engraved on the pillar in the Ancestral Vault. It is apparently a curse to torment one's enemies (written

Martoi is not easily understood), but in fact it specifically torments **Kedh**, one-time Martoi master of the mines and a Bright Wolf of the Martoi nobility.

A victim of the Final Queen's purges as the Martoi empire turned in upon itself, Kedh became imprisoned during an assault on the mine by royal sorcerers. Kedh is frozen in that moment, endlessly scalded by royalist sorcery.

As the ritual is performed, all present will hear Kedh's pained anguish. If the ritual is ever miscast, interrupted, or left unfinished, Kedh's prison collapses and she appears in a gout of black sorcerous flame, mid-swing.

Kedh appears clad as she was on that day, millennia ago, in the battle dress of her station: flowing **green linens** and an iridescent **lacquered breastplate** and **helm**. She is permanently **hasted** and fights with a pair of **pewter slaying knives**. Much of her face and left hand has been burned by witch-fire. Until she realizes otherwise, she behaves as if she is still fighting the Queen's minions.

Kedh knows about countless Martoi strongholds and the treasures they held in her time, but her generosity is unlikely to be improved upon learning that everything she ever loved has passed into dust.

THE EXTENT OF GAMANDES

THE SITUATION

The shattered remnant of a demigod's home plane spins through the void. The invading army of ***Void Gulls*** and ***Nuss*** has slain Gamandes, god of the ***Carreg***, but has now turned on itself. Surviving bands from all sides struggle as the landscape falls, piece by piece, into the howling void.

THE EXTENT OF GAMANDES

The Extent is a circular region roughly 22 leagues in diameter (1 league/hex). It is ringed on most sides by jagged mountains, except in the north, where the void has overcome them and is devouring the plains.

The lowland areas are lifeless wastes. The light is constant but diffuse, as if overcast, but bright and pulsating, sometimes flickering.

In various places: slate-like bedrock eroded into sharp flakes; coarse sand; windblown grit; puddles of undrinkable, rusty water; sponge-like rock crunches underfoot, leaving visible footprints; a pile of iron hoops, each d20 paces in diameter and rusted to near nothingness; burn marks; a deafening noise tears the sky (flying ***Nuss*** harbingers); the sky's glow intensifies, then subsides; earthquakes.

Lakes and Bogs

The only potable water in the bone dry Extent is the so-called "Blood of Gamandes," found in murky, rainbow-streaked lakes that reek of tar. It is drinkable, but anyone consuming it will soon emit the same smell themselves.

The two great bogs are floating mats of wire-like moss, dotted by patches of open water, expanses of soft, yielding mud, and pools of liquid tar.

THE GULL EMPEROR'S FORTRESS

A squat, striped tower bulges from the rim of a crag-ringed lake. Within are 30 ***gulls***, including 6 of the ***Emperor***'s elite guard. d6 gulls will glide out to intercept those who approach.

The emperor covets an ***artifact*** (determine randomly).

ERUS RES

A cleft in the plateau shelters a **quarantine camp** for ***Nuss***-infected ***gulls***, set up in the days after the Nuss betrayal, but the guards are dead and 3d4 of the infected wander freely.

A **gull deserter** lives in a cavern above the camp; it will eagerly trade what it knows for food. Other gulls avoid the whole area.

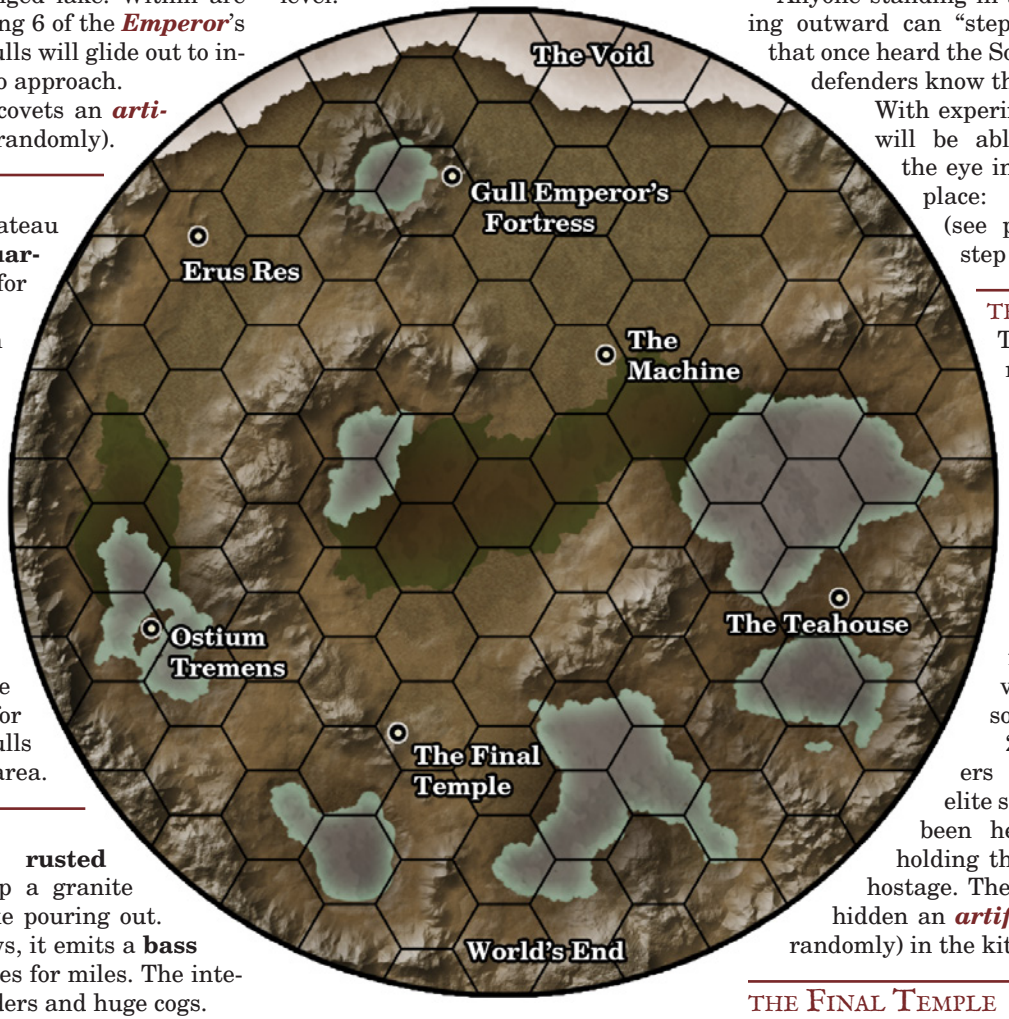
THE MACHINE

A **massive, rusted sphere** sits atop a granite slab, black smoke pouring out. As the wind blows, it emits a **bass drone** that carries for miles. The interior is full of ladders and huge cogs.

A band of 2d6 ***Carreg*** occupies the sphere (see table for their goal).

Once hourly, a huge **nozzle** at the top shoots a barrel-sized **bolt of hissing magma** into the heavens, slamming down on the northern plain and doing considerable damage. If the machine's three boilers are stoked, it can be turned and aimed (albeit slowly). It fires up to 4 hexes away.

An ***artifact*** (determine randomly) has been stashed in its cavernous lower level.



OSTIUM TREMENS

When the ***Nuss*** destroyed his body, Gamandes's head landed on this small islet. As big as a fort, it rests on its side staring emptily at the horizon. It is solid iron, except for a network of tunnels that connect its mouth, eyes, and nose. These once emitted the droning Song of Gamandes, which filled this plane with peace, but 2d6+3 ***Carreg*** have sworn to defend it and live inside.

Anyone standing in an eye and facing outward can "step" to any place that once heard the Song. The Carreg defenders know this.

With experimentation, PCs will be able to see from the eye into a vast, dark place: the Ur-Menig (see page 154), and step to it.

THE TEAHOUSE

This three-story teahouse of polished black wood is reputed through the planes for catering to exotic tastes. A low wall encloses a garden of rare fungi (most savory and edible, some medicinal). 2d6 ***gull*** deserters (originally an elite scout wing) have been here for weeks, holding the ***Carreg*** staff hostage. The teamaster has hidden an ***artifact*** (determine randomly) in the kitchens.

THE FINAL TEMPLE

A circular, brass ziggurat towers over the lowlands. Deep within, saints fritter over a **golden orb**, its fractalline clockwork surface shivering and ticking in anticipation of its task.

Carreg guard it: d6 saints and d8 faithful, for it is the Heart of Gamandes.

If it can be blessed by a circle of 14 saints, it leaps into the void and blossoms into a new Extent, growing many leagues in diameter per day.

The Void

In the north, the mountains are gone completely, replaced by a ragged cliff. Beyond the crumbling edge is what looks like more sky—a featureless, diffuse void, source of a steady north wind.

The void cannot be traveled normally; those who fall in are lost to an airy demise, "falling" perpetually.

At World's End

The Extent is shrinking as the void advances, tearing away its edges. Deep cracking noises rumble as the plains rise up to join the protective mountain range, the final reflex of a dying plane.

Winds howl up from the valleys, over the peaks and into the void. At the craggy edges, the outward gale can drag climbers off the Extent completely.

Random Encounters

Check for encounters every 8 hours. Roll d6. On the plains, an encounter occurs on 1-2. In the highlands or miasma, on a 1. At lake edges, on 1-4.

d8	Encounters (every 8 hours)
1	d6 patrolling ***void gulls***
2	d2 ***rust soldiers***
3	Band of 2d8 ***Carreg***; 1 in 4 chance of d3 Carreg saints
4	d3 eruptions of ***Nuss***
5	d2 harbingers of Nuss
6	Partially erupted void gull flopping on the ground in terror
7	d2 dust bears (as grizzlies, but scaly)
8	Two parties (reroll twice, rerolling 8s) in an encounter

Carreg of the Extent

The extent was once filled with worthy, ascended Carreg, brought into the service of Gamandes. With the fall of Gamandes, their saints may no longer work miracles, and the Carreg are reduced to scattered bands.

d6	This Carreg band seeks...
1	...saints for the Final Temple
2	...allies to help survive
3	...to raid for survival necessities
4	...someone to blame
5	...to be left alone in their grief
6	...to defend the Extent from invaders and looters

The Rust Soldiers

Servants of Gamandes sustained by the Song, these four-pace tall iron golems are rusting and failing.

Near water, they are usually netting **jellies** to feed Carreg; elsewhere they travel with haste or wander aimlessly. They have a dog-like intelligence and can speak simply if addressed.

d6	Rust soldier malfunctions
1	Its legs seize for d3 minutes.
2	Falls when moving (1-2 on a d6)
3	Every d20 minutes, after a loud clang, it flips from hostile to friendly or vice versa.
4	It immediately forgets everything it can't see.
5	Thick, black smoke pours out.
6	A limb glows red hot, setting fire to whatever it touches.

The Void Gulls

The void gulls are rubbery aliens from the luminous void. (See page 127 for more information.)

The ***Nuss*** saw them as just another selfish species, betraying them as soon as the invasion began.

Gulls still loyal to the ***emperor*** will take prisoners to the Fortress, after checking carefully for Nussan infection.

The Gull Emperor

Their leader is vain, fickle, and rash. It has lost nearly everything in the Extent and is determined to extract something of value, somehow.

It is desperate for useful allies, but distrusts everyone. It is identical to other gulls, save for its large size, **platinum sceptre**, and **gnomeskin cowl**.

The Many Forms of Nuss

The Nuss are bodiless beings that seek to express their chaotic ideas upon the living matter of other beings.

Nuss **eruptions** (see page 120) meander the landscape, happily chasing, cuddling, or eating whatever they encounter. Those with mouths may proselytize the selfish in enthusiastic, chittering voices, for who would willfully turn aside joy?

The much larger **harbingers** (see page 121) are not interested in martial glory, only bringing forth new eruptions using hit and run tactics, injecting Nussan essence with their hollow-tipped spears. Each carries one dose of essence, but can fetch more from below the Extent in a few hours.

Artifacts of the Extent

A number of powerful artifacts have become separated from their original owners during the hostilities and chaos.

Bitter Ointment (Gull)

This striped, copper carafe contains 12 applications of a thick ointment. It will cure eruption or prevent future infection for 2 days. Nuss can smell it, and they react with hostility.

Seeds of Doom (Gull)

This striped beaker contains d3+3 glowing white pellets. If one touches ground (here or anywhere), it will rip a spherical emptiness, expanding by 100 paces per day until it reaches d10 x 100 paces in diameter. The Extent is only 30 paces thick in the lowlands, and seeds will reveal the glowing void below.

Glare of the Conqueror (Gull)

This ebony lantern is found with d4 pots of enchanted oil. Its pale light turns Carreg (and other earthen beings) into an edible slush favored by gull soldiers.

Striped Cone (Gull)

A soft, rubbery cone that, when squeezed, causes the wind to briefly shift to the direction of the narrow end.

Rod of Peace (Carreg)

A hollow staff that is blown like a cornet. Its eerie drone is reminiscent of the Song of Gamandes and deadens aggression. Sadly, joyful Nuss are unaffected by the sound. They're just happy!

Coming and Going

As a pocket plane, adventurers could arrive at a random point in the Extent any number of ways: astral travel gone wrong; teleporting to the harvest moon; being blasted by eldritch fire; looking into an ifrit's bottle; through a magician's telescope; from the top room of Stellarium (page 8); overdosing on cyldwort; through one of the walls of Zeichus's studio (page 33); from Yorta's Pool of Seven Ways (page 16).

Leaving the Extent

This is potentially more difficult. Adventurers may be able to reverse the means they arrived by.

If not, they will need to make some sort of deal with the void gulls, or the Carreg at Ostium Tremens.

THE UNMENDED WAY

THE SITUATION

At the apex of a forgotten mountain pass, high in the Strielwall Peaks, stands a ruined Seree fortress.

It is now occupied by a peaceful band of giants and the assortment of people devoted to them.

Inside, the giants work to perfect a ritual of tea making, a task they see as essential to the well-being of the lowlanders.

Also, they abduct people.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY

- Strielund tinkers know a shorter route to Wint than by going via Tannòch.
- Rough folk have been kidnapping people and taking them into the mountains.
- South of High Kellan, you can be sure to dream of hot tea.
- It's said that giants live among the clouds in the Strielwall Peaks.
- The street urchins of Saltbride all vanish in the winter.
- The Lord of High Kellan went missing for a month last autumn.

INTO THE STRIELWALL PEAKS

The old path up to the mountain pass climbs through the foothills, then around three jagged peaks before it reaches the foot of the ***Twining Stair***.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE PASS

In winter, the pass fills with snow, but at other times, it is regularly traveled by individuals and small groups.

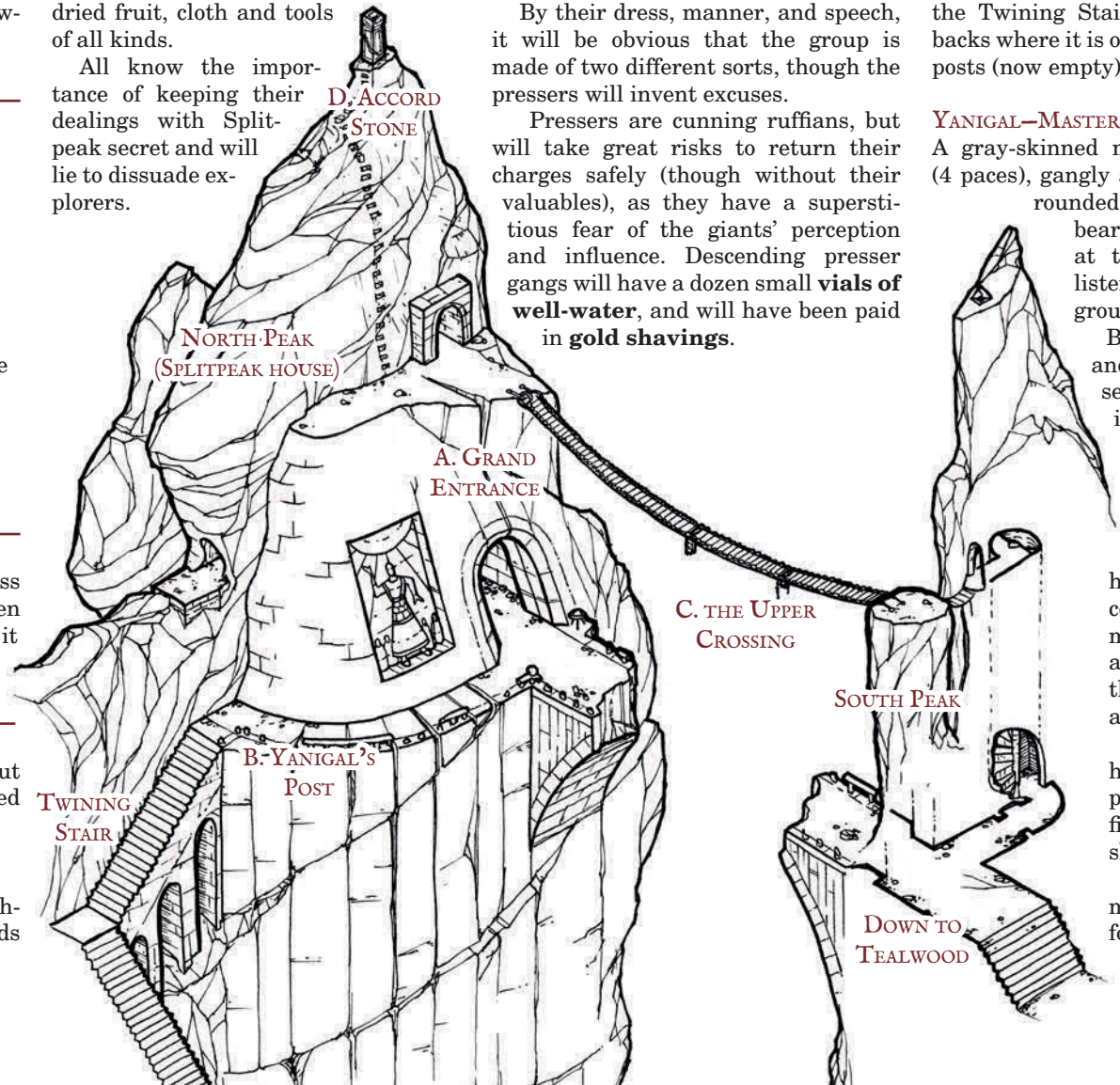
TINKERS & URCHINS

In late autumn, tinkers from throughout Strielund and the Borderlands head to ***Splitpeak*** to winter there; some bring d3 orphans or abandoned children, usually from the streets of Saltbride or Lastfort.

In spring, the tinkers descend to resume their dealings; the youngest children stay behind.

In summer, the pass is busiest, for tinkers can expect silver for dried fruit, cloth and tools of all kinds.

All know the importance of keeping their dealings with Splitpeak secret and will lie to dissuade explorers.



THE PRESSERS

Drawn from the outcasts of society (some unfortunate, some unpleasant, some both), the pressers abduct people from the lowlands and bring them to ***Splitpeak***; then return them.

d6+1 pressers travel together, escorting d3+1 lowlanders, ranging from farming folk and villagers to the occasional townie. Abductees will be docile and compliant, drugged with water from ***Lady Memory's Garden***.

By their dress, manner, and speech, it will be obvious that the group is made of two different sorts, though the pressers will invent excuses.

Pressers are cunning ruffians, but will take great risks to return their charges safely (though without their valuables), as they have a superstitious fear of the giants' perception and influence. Descending presser gangs will have a dozen small **vials of well-water**, and will have been paid in **gold shavings**.

THE TWINING STAIR

The trail enters a great fissure in the side of ***Splitpeak***, a mountain whose top is cleft in two, dividing it into northern and southern spires.

The Twining Stair winds its way up the south side of the fissure, many hundreds of paces to the top of the north spire. Parts never receive direct sunlight and can be icy even in warm months.

This was once a Seree fortress, and the Twining Stair has many switchbacks where it is overlooked by fortified posts (now empty).

YANIGAL—MASTER OF ADMISSIONS

A gray-skinned man of great height (4 paces), gangly and long-limbed, but rounded by a many-layered bear-fur coat. He waits at the last switchback, listening for approaching groups.

By his wrinkled face and drooping nose, he seems very old, but he is fit and strong.

As with all the giants of Splitpeak, there is a deep calmness to his manner. He is, however, firm in his conviction that none may ascend armed or armored for battle, for this is a place of peace and good work.

If necessary, he hurls stones from a pile near his seat and fights with an iron-shod staff.

It's possible he will mistake adventurers for pressers, if they

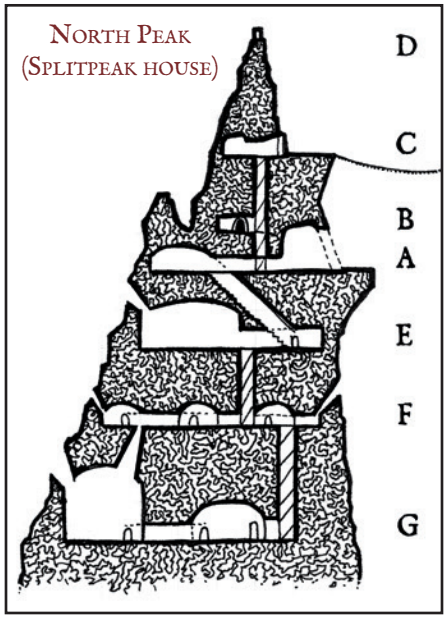
d6	Weather (every d12 hours)
1	Clear skies and a light breeze
2	Still air but constant, wetting rain
3	Thunderstorms from the north
4	Fluke southerly wind brings thick cloud in summer, snow at other times
5	Inch-diameter hail (5 minutes)
6	Sky darkens to starry black (the sun remains, if it's daytime)

look the part (lowlanders all look the same to him), and may mistake those who remain silent for "students" (as he calls the abductees).

If he senses no threat, he emerges to care for new arrivals—he knows the journey is difficult.

Splitpeak House

The mountaintop fortress, once capable of housing several hundred soldiers, has been repaired and modified to fit the serene life the giants lead.



The corridors are lit by **dim lamps**, but numerous windows and air shafts allow light in during the day; expertly fitted **shutters** keep out the wind.

Nineteen giants dwell within. They are patient beyond measure, gentle, and faintly superior—almost parental.

Visitors that surrender their weapons to Yanigal will be allowed to stay and given leave to move as they please throughout levels A and E, but not any further.

Those that stray will be shepherded back, like lost children. The violent are expelled without ceremony.

A. the Grand Entrance & Hostel

A firelit hall pierces the mountain. At the back is Yanigal's rest: a firepit, cauldron, and enough furs to sleep a dozen people. Smells of roasting goat and baking bread rise from E.

d3 visiting pressers or tinkers will be here, making final preparations for a return journey.

B. Yanigal's Post

A small side passage opens to a small platform that overlooks much of the Twining Stair.

A small, locked **armory** secures visitors' weapons along with those of the giants: mattocks, swords, massive leather coats sewn with metal plates.

In an earlier age, the giants were mercenaries, and they can remember fighting ways when they must.

C. the Upper Crossing

The giants deliberately destroyed the bridge, but maintain another way to the south peak: twin iron chains with wooden slats slung between them.

The first line across was carried by a brave gnome climber whom the giants remember fondly.

D. the Accord

Both peaks are capped by **accord stones**, engraved obelisks that record Seree pacts with unseen Powers, now broken.

E. Hall of the Tea Makers

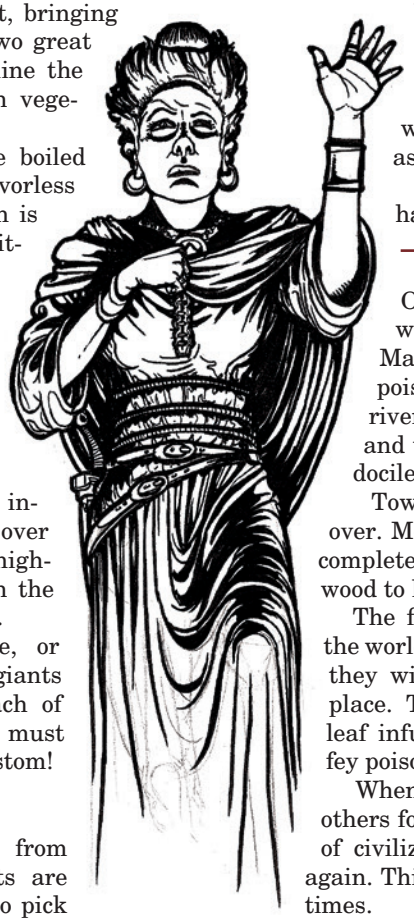
A great stone hall lit by two **roaring fires**; the area between is arrayed with benches and tables. Sunlight streams through an airy shaft, bringing light to the plants: two great **soil-filled troughs** line the walls, brimming with vegetation.

Knobby tubers are boiled into a sticky gruel, flavorless but nourishing, which is the staple food of Splitpeak House.

Bed rolls and mats are stacked in a corner: the giants' guests all live, eat, and play here, and above all, practice the art of tea making.

Almost half of the indoor garden is given over to **Analeaf**, a bitter highland herb from which the giants make their tea.

All may eat here, or sleep here, but the giants insist that before each of these things, one must make tea. It is the custom!



But First, Brew Tea

Tea making is done from fresh Analeaf. Guests are patiently instructed to pick three good leaves, to boil their own water, and to brew the tea until it is good and strong.

Giants will watch beginners to ensure it is done correctly, in particular counting out the leaf-points to ensure it's actually Analeaf (there are many similar-looking plants). They fuss over those that learn well and are stern with those who brew carelessly.

Drinking is less important—if adventurers refuse, the giants accept this with a shrug and their usual calm.

"It is the making that is important; that is enough."

Eventually, they will begin gently waking visitors in the night, one at a time, to test their brewing while they are still half asleep.

"Let us see what you have learned. Begin!"

The Long Work

Once, all the lands were ruled by the fey Martoi. Lords of Memory poisoned the streams and rivers with their tears, and those that drank grew docile.

Towns fell, roads grew over. Most folk lost their wits completely and returned to the wood to live as animals.

The fey are not gone from the world, and the giants know they will try to retake their place. They know that Analeaf infusion protects against fey poisons, clearing the mind.

When one person awakens, others follow, and a tiny spark of civilization begins to grow again. This has happened many times.

By teaching their "students" to brew, they hope to make it habitual for as many people as possible, thereby protecting the lowlanders from the snares of the fey, who can wait forever.

This is the giants' long work.

F. Hall of Brewing in Silence

The abductees are brought here by the pressers, where the giants tend to them carefully. It is eerily quiet, for the abductees are kept drugged with water from ***Lady Memory's Garden*** and seldom speak.

The giants move among them, whispering to rise, to eat, to bathe, to sleep, and to brew tea, over and over again. (The final brew is always switched, to prevent them awakening.)

After several weeks the actions are automatic, and the giants summon the pressers to return them home. "Safely, if you please."

When the process goes well, abductees remember nothing of their time here, but the habits remain.

A **tapestry** here shows an embroidered map of ***Tealwood*** (see page 152) unwooded and dotted with hundreds of villages (mostly now hidden by trees).

Slumbering Tealwood

From the peaks there is an unobstructed view south for many leagues.

On a clear day, nearly the entire Tealwood valley system can be seen: the cascade of foothills leading down from the Strielwall, the enormous wooded swath stretching from the black trees of the Grinvolt and the steel-gray water of Near Soont, past the serpentine Nall river. On clear mornings, distant Wint Lake in the east catches the rising sun and turns to molten gold.

Occasional rainstorms can be seen marching up the valley from the Near Soont.

"It is asleep," the tea makers say sadly, if asked about any of it, and warn that none who go there return.

You Are Not Ready

The tea makers will be very firm that adventurers should not go to Tealwood and should stay awhile to consider their decision.

"Your tea making is not yet good enough," they may say. Those that insist are taken to the ***garden***.

G. Lady Memory's Garden

This high-walled garden has fruiting trees, many herbs, a natural spring, and a stone bench.

Within is a **Lady of Memory**, a wraith of surpassing power. In life, a Queen of the Martoi, now an immortal herald of their return, poisoner of waters.

She can withstand the sight of the living, but like all fey, if confronted, she becomes aware of her deathly state and attacks with the fury of a sorceress beyond death.

For this reason, the giants never allow more than one person in the garden at a time, and under no circumstances any weapons or magic.

Otherwise, she lives as lone ghosts do, lost and unaware of her surroundings, wandering and weeping.

Her tears have poisoned the garden, and any who drink from the **water** fall under the spell of the Martoi, living placidly in the garden as animals. (Such folk do not trouble the Martoi.)

Within the garden is firewood, a kettle, and many herbs (including Analeaf) sprouting within the undergrowth.

The giants have a **test**: abstain from tea for three days, then enter the garden and drink from the well. If you have learned your brewing well enough, you will awaken within a few days.

Those that do are deemed ready to venture into Tealwood, and will be well supplied if they choose to descend.

Those who do not emerge within a few days are retrieved by Yanigal, fed tea and a warm meal, and put to bed until they come to.

THE TASK OF ZEICHUS

THE SITUATION

Rather than witness her empire's long decline, the **Queen of the Martoi** magically sealed her private apartments from the ravages of time.

FRESCOES OF ZEICHUS

Magically lifelike **frescoes** (where indicated) show the era of the Martoi. After a few minutes, observers will feel wind, weather, and see the time of day advancing. Animals can be heard and may emerge and wander the halls.

ZEICHUS'S STUDIO

The magical pigments in the studio have dried to iridescent dust, but could be restored.

HALL OF SUPPLICANTS

The entrance hall is filled with leaves and debris. Beneath, every surface is etched with repeating patterns. The **great doors** to the interior are magically barred.

HOSTEL

The lower room was a hostel for supplicants. Low relief **carvings** depict petitioners waiting for an audience. **Runes** instruct visitors to elect a requisitioner for food from the kitchens. A **fountain** still trickles: like all the water in the halls, it has mildly healing properties.

The tiny corridor leads to a long drop (both privy and garbage tip) and is home to a **giant rock spider** and numerous desiccated birds. Graffiti reads, "Golchak woz h-".

QUEEN'S CHAMBER

Outside is a fizzing, spring-fed **pool**. Inside is a massive **bed** of exotic furs. Fresco "**windows**" look down onto the six lost domains of the Martoi.

A **strongbox** holds three crowns (one in diamonds, one emeralds, one rubies), and a lock of hair from the ***Queen***'s daughter.

THE GRAND HALL

Here the **Queen** presides, enjoying her absolute control over all present.

A score of **nobles** dances madly while a trio of **minstrels** plays nasal woodwinds at dizzying speed. Chained ***mastiffs*** snarl at newcomers. ***Servants*** offer wine and cooked delights to others lounging on cushions. Some are buttoned and quilted neck to toe, others half-naked and glistening from the orgy behind the curtain.

Sir Ume the Red defends the queen's honor by challenging the strongest of any party of visitors. He is secretly terrified of an eternity of imprisonment.

FOREST GLADE, FIELDS & MARSHLANDS

Frescoes present these chambers as if they were an outdoor space: lush fields near a primordial forest. d3-1 **servants** gather edible plants, catch butterflies, or wade in marshy pools catching eels while crows caw from bare trees.

d6	Encounters
1	A bird, rodent, fox from a fresco
2	Morose **servants** walking d3 of Sir Ume's ***mastiffs***
3	**Sir Ume**, looking for a victim
4	Revelers laughing, chasing, lovemaking, dueling, or drunk
5	Duel loser, quietly bleeding out
6	**Zeichus**, architect of the halls and their magic. Senile and lost, he has come to regret his hubris.

THE SERVANTS

In all, the servants number twelve: two cooks, two gardener-gatherers, a gamesman, and six serving maids, all reporting to the butler.

Though they serve energetically in the grand hall and delicious-smelling kitchens, the servants were preserved with less refined magics than the nobles, and they suffer constantly. Their eyes are bright and anxious. Woe to anyone caught among them alone.

THE VAMPIRE

One of the nobles or servants secretly wishes to defy the Queen. Zeichus's notes revealed that drinking the life blood of an outsider will allow survival beyond the halls.

The arrival of visitors is the opportunity of a millennium.

KENNELS

Sir Ume's **hounds**, mastiffs with eyes and teeth of jet are caged here. If they are enraged, they may be able to force open their cages.

CHIME OF THE MARTOI

Every hour, a muted **chime** sounds throughout the halls, restoring the Queen's court. Everyone present is healed and rejuvenated, and appetites are renewed. Even those slain will soon reappear. The festivities have carried on in this manner for thousands of years.

The chime will not heal injuries caused by the vampire.

IN THE CARE OF BONES

The Situation

An underground shrine in a grassy plain was once widely known by pilgrims in search of miraculous healing.

Now, without pilgrims, the energies of the place have fed a clan of ***velvet spiders***, who have grown to great size.

Rumors for Nearby

- A generation ago, pilgrims headed out onto the plains for healing.
- A lone tree stands over a well of the sweetest, clear water.
- Silken dolls are a sign that fairy weavers are about.
- Beware of floods during the spring thaw.
- Haunted ruins make a poor shelter.
- Keep your eye on the sun and mountains lest you lose your way.

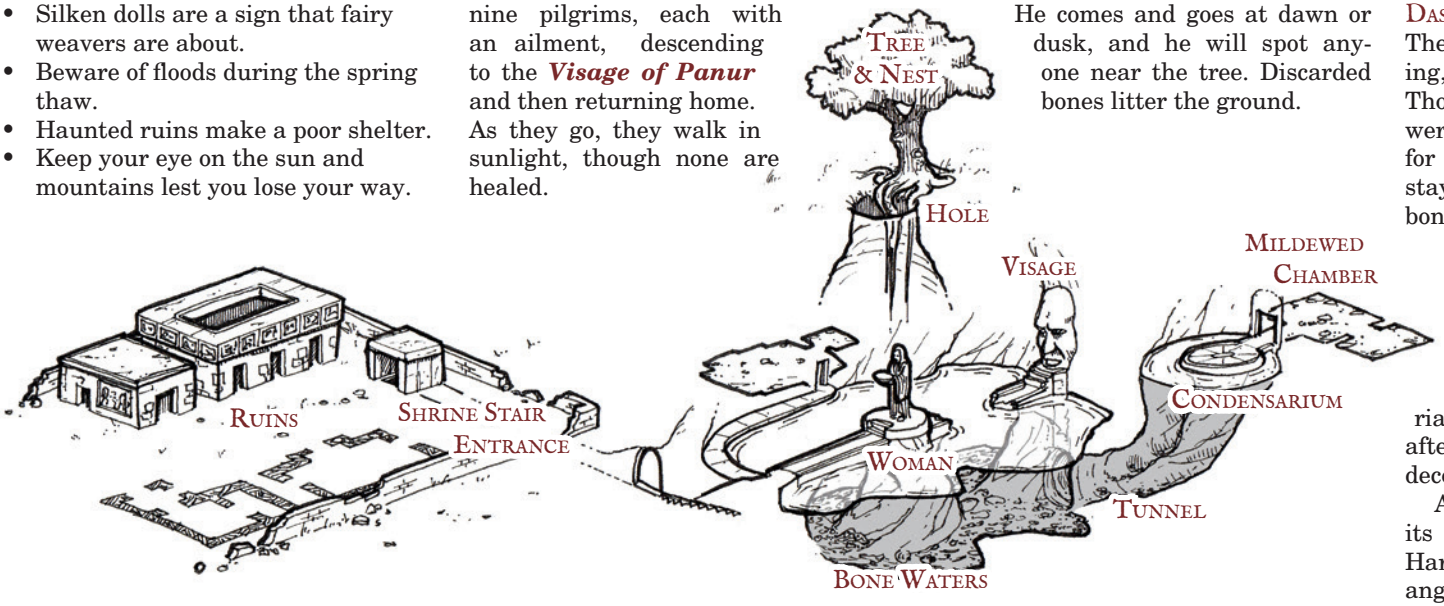
The Shrine Compound

The tumbled remains of a low, crumbling stone wall (not shown) enclose a circular area several acres in size, with the ruins and tree at its center.

The Ruins

The ruins housed the order that tended the shrine. Many travelers have come and gone since, as evidenced by old cook fires and detritus.

High-relief **carvings** on the walls show the separate journeys of nine pilgrims, each with an ailment, descending to the ***Visage of Panur*** and then returning home. As they go, they walk in sunlight, though none are healed.



Shrine Stair Entrance

The small stone building shelters the mouth of a wide **tunnel** cut into the bedrock. A stair of heavy stone slabs descends to the underground shrine.

The Golden Tree

A majestic lerimar tree (40 paces) stands a short walk from the ruins. Its roots tap the waters of the shrine, so its leaves hang perpetually in the greenish-gold of late summer. It can be seen from nearly three leagues away.

Giant Harrier's Nest

Cenops nests in the tree at night. He comes and goes at dawn or dusk, and he will spot anyone near the tree. Discarded bones litter the ground.

d8	Leelands encounters
1	**Songbirds**, spying for the spirits
2	d20 giant **elk**
3	A trio of stealthy ***velvet spiders***
4	Old dirt **trail** to the ***golden tree***
5	Seed-, rabbit-, or herb-**gatherers** from nearby settlements
6	**Cenops**, a giant harrier (5-pace wingspan)
7	A plains **fox**, bold and hungry
8	Spider-wrapped rabbit or fox; a shredded elk left by **Cenops**

Dashed Hopes

The original shrine offered no healing, for Panur offered only acceptance. Those who came to plead for health were instead relieved of the desire for it. Those too weak to return home stayed on until their deaths, and their bones were placed in the pool.

The Pilgrim Spirits

As the **spirits of dead pilgrims** grew in number, strength, and purpose, they became able to actually heal the living. The Panurian order was horrified by this, and after several tumultuous years, they deconsecrated the shrine and left.

After endless years alone, the spirits have learned to love the ***spiders***. Harming them causes great chaos and anger among the spirits.

To those who listen for them, the spirits speak as an inchoate hiss, a roar of whispers just below clear understanding.

Idols of Panur

Two **idols** dominate the shrine. The first, the **woman with nothing**, greets pilgrims with a look of sadness and an empty bowl. She seems to convey that, despite their long journey, there is

The Leelands

The Leelands is a low, grassy flood plain. The few trees are thick with songbirds, while the grasses are home to fat beetles, mice, rabbits, and groundhogs.

In spring, the winding river floods large areas of the Leelands—this can happen very suddenly. In winter, the land sleeps under a crust of snow, and all is silent but the crows.

Haunted Ruins

The ***velvet spiders*** make their home in the ruins. Remnant drag lines (of varying freshness) can be found everywhere, along with countless dried rabbits. Unless they are currently hostile, they are likely to slink away rather than face the adventurers directly, though they may return later (see below).

The Hole

This widening **shaft** drops 40 paces to the water level. The corpse of a long-dead **gnome** dangles from brittle webs.

Shrine of Panur Implacable

The shrine is lit only by a creeping beam of light from the hole. At noon, the whole shrine glows like daytime.

nothing for them here, nor anywhere. Placing offerings in the bowl is blasphemy, but it amuses the spirits.

The second, the **implacable visage**, will take the burden of misery (or vain hopes) from anyone who kneels at it.

The Bone Waters

The **water** in the rain-flooded shrine is now eight paces deep, icy in summer and balmy in winter. Algae-furred **rib cages** and **skulls** cover the bottom.

Any who drink the water may receive the pilgrim spirits' gifts while in the shrine. This includes a subtle rejuvenation and swift healing, sometimes even for permanent ailments.

A **giant carp** circles lazily, probing the murk for crayfish. If the spirits are displeased, it will be aggressive with swimmers, biting, buffeting, and dragging them under.

The High Priest's Bones

The despondent high priest took his life with his own **blade of solace** (see page 130). His bones and his **circlet of essential visions** (see page 131) lie underwater, almost directly below the implacable visage.

High Priest's Tunnel

A flooded tunnel connects the shrine with the ***condensarium***. Only at brightest noon does light reach the tunnel's end. Drowning is a real risk because of the long distance, but those who have the pilgrim spirits' favor might be aided by the giant carp.

Condensarium

The circular platform is inlaid with a **colorful mosaic**—chips of blue lapis, green jade, mother of pearl, black mica, turquoise, and red agate all swirl toward a central disc of gold. At the center stands a filigreed contraption, a **Panurian condenser** (see page 131).

Mildewed Chamber

Beyond the condensarium is the meditation chamber of the high priest. At bright noon, a faint, algae-green glow comes from the tunnel, but it is pitch black here otherwise.

The **mosaic floor** is as colorful as that of the condensarium.

A **mildew reek** comes from ruined and **rotted furniture**—a writing desk, cot, vestment stand, and scroll rack.

The surviving scraps of parchment record numerous surreal experiences, either visions or mad ravings. Among them is a **scroll** that explains how to use the circlet (see page 131).

The **wraith of the high priest** is trapped here by the power of the pilgrim spirits. Unable to accept his fate with the equanimity of his faith, he is contorted by long-festering anger. He strikes from the darkness with a ghostly version of his **blade of solace**.

The Velvet Spiders

Fifteen **giant spiders**, each the size of a large dog, dwell in and around the shrine. They are bone white, with a dense coat of fine bristles, making them seem clad in white velvet.

They are intelligent and form a sort of community, spending most of their time hunting plains rodents (alone or in threes) or sharing the latest rodent-hunting tips.

They are active whenever it's warm, though they avoid moving when Cenops is near, as he has caught several of them over the years.

Descended from jumping spiders, they spin no webs but leave a sturdy drag line whenever they leap or pounce. These become brittle, in time.

The pilgrim spirits have watched over the clan for generations, and their nurturing has magnified the spiders' natural gifts: ***spider's wish*** and ***luck of the highly observant***.

Spider's Wish

A spider's wish, honed to a fine point over a lifetime of watching and waiting, is that you *stay very still* and *look over there* without noticing the spider.

As often as not, when they need it to, something will chance to catch the attention of their quarry. The sunlight on a leaf, perhaps, or the uncanny swaying of the grasses in the wind.

Luck of the Highly Observant

When a spider brings its full attention to a target, it can influence small motions normally left to fate. Objects that are thrown, hurled, shot, tossed, or abandoned, the direction of a walk taken at random—all of these can be influenced by an observant, lucky spider.

The Three Strategies

The spiders find the shrine soothing, and sense that it is good for them, but they don't understand why. The appearance of beings that resemble shrine statuary starts intense discussions among them. Will this help them understand the shrine?

Unable to agree, three groups each try a different strategy. They have a friendly bet as to which will pay off first.

Strategy 1—Push Them in the Hole

Taktak and **Shuffa** have a plan that isn't very subtle—draw the adventurers'

attention to the golden tree using spider's wish, and then push them in the hole. As excellent climbers, they don't know this might prove fatal.

Strategy 2—Tempt Them with Gifts

Boklit, cleverest of the spiders, can weave with great skill. She will make tiny, gray **silken dolls** of the adventurers. Human faces all look the same to her, but she can capture posture and equipment in startling detail.

At first, she and her friends will leave these out for adventurers to find. If that doesn't work, they will try to sneak them into the adventurers' belongings when they rest or sleep.

Boklit is terrified of direct contact with humans. If the humans don't reply in kind, she will bring forth her last resort, the ***gray puppet***.

The Gray Puppet

Boklit's puppet is a silken mannequin, almost human size. By standing it up and pushing it, Boklit can use luck of the highly observant to direct it. She can make it walk, run, or even dance merrily, although she has some alarming ideas about how humans move.

The puppet is delicate, creepy, and spectacularly flammable.

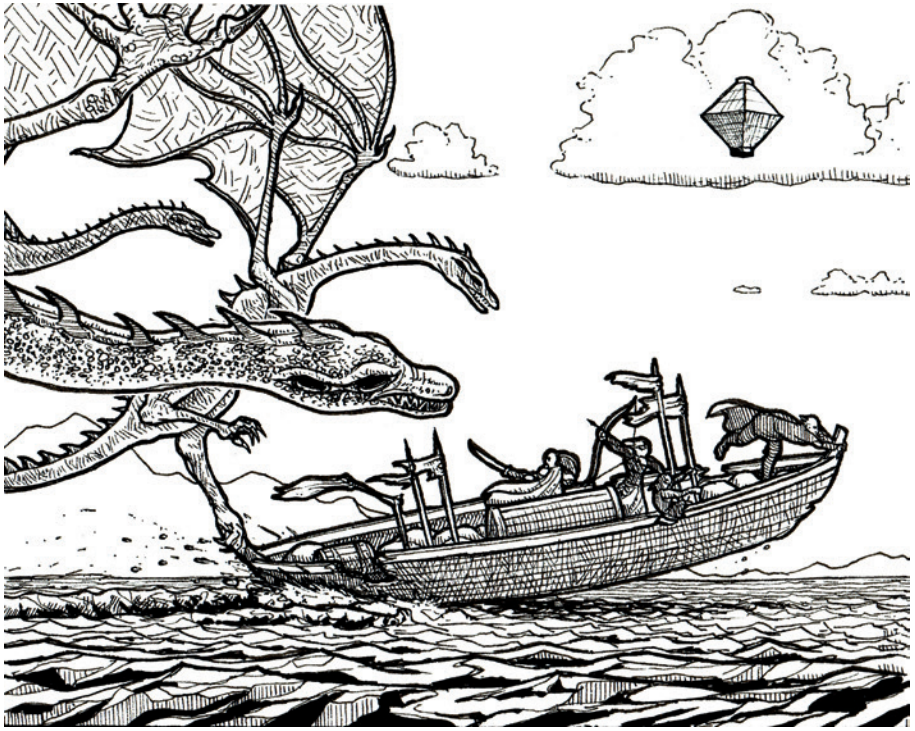
Strategy 3—Eat Them

Kekphlet has lied to the others about his plans. He claims he will try to drive the adventurers off, all the better to redouble their curiosity.

His actual goal is to lure adventurers away where they can be caught and eaten. If pressed for time, he will leave them poisoned, maimed, and webbed to the ground in some quiet part of the field to be drained dry another time.

Kekphlet may **taste the memories** of any he devours, and he will use this to full advantage. If word of this gets out, all the spiders will want to try.

THE LANTERN OF WYV



THE SITUATION

The wizard ***Radomenus*** placed her tomb in the sky as a testament to Seree power. A magical ***barge*** is said to have carried her to her final resting place high in the air.

This was long ago, and few still know the meaning of the "***black lantern***" that hangs in the sky over the bay—not least because the entire land of Wyv has fallen, overrun by flying serpents.

Those who dare its shores, however, might notice the black speck racing along the waterline, for ***Radomenus***'s ***funeral barge*** never stopped, endlessly making its final tour.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY

Wyv itself has few regular travelers because of the ***wyverns***, but rumors have been brought back by sailors:

- A ***black lantern*** hangs over a bay in Wyv, big as the moon, been there forever
- Wyverns mean boating is unsafe within miles of the coast
- A curious wyvern always attracts more
- Traddle pearls aren't from Traddle, but come from a secret people still living among the Wyv forests
- The birds of Wyv know more'n they let on

LANTERN BAY

The uninhabited coast of Wyv is dotted with mile-wide **copses**, separated by long, grassy aisles. ***Wyverns*** make it so, or so it's said. Nervous **deer** chew saplings in the gloom, until every soft growing thing is eaten, then they must brave the gaps and risk being snatched up from above.

Lantern Bay is a broad inlet, running ten miles inland. Over the bay hangs the ***lantern***, a mammoth construction of white-flecked stone, a quarter league above the water.

THE WYVERNS

Wyverns are giraffe-sized winged terrors, with the murderously playful demeanor of house cats. They tear people from the ground, carry them to a height, drop them, and then repeat.

They are the offspring of Nulga (see page 52) and a debased mystical order (which they later ate).

They have oddly **human laughs**, and if need be, beg for their lives in **human voices**. They have **four eyes**, each of which is a precious gemstone.

Wyverns patrol all day, drifting high on the updrafts, and will notice boaters.

THE FUNERAL BARGE

This flying barge makes an endless tour of the bay, cycling once every hour, day and night. It visits a sequence of ruins that at one point represented the highlights of ***Radomenus***'s holdings.

It flies at running speed, and for most of the time is head-height above the water.

The barge is encrusted with gull droppings, fish bones, twigs, and leaves. Its funeral pennants have rotted to flapping rags, and the wood is sun-bleached and soft. A wyvern tooth (root and all) is lodged in the bow.

The barge is easily damaged, but any piece not forcefully dislodged from its position continues to fly in formation.

THE RUINED TOWER

The barge's first stop is ***Radomenus***'s tower. This is now a ruined stump, overgrown with young trees and bushes. A **hermit** lives within; he has grown fat from using Radomenus's **ring of force** to catch game along the forest trails that spiral out from the tower.

The barge hovers where the top of the tower once was, some 10 paces above the low, jagged masonry. After a 20-minute wait, it flies off.

THE FOREST

The barge then darts at breakneck speed over ***Radomenus***'s farmlands, long grown up into a mature forest. It plunges through a barge-shaped hole in the canopy, worn from countless trips.

Within the forest lives the **Jarret clan**, some 45 strong. They hunt deer and dive for oysters in the bay. Their **shaman** can read Seree, knows the history of the ***lantern***, and wants its secrets to benefit his people.

The Jarret use the barge to tell time, and they'll notice any occupants. They have not yet dared try to board it, but if they see that others have done so, they will try to leap in from tree branches on its next pass. d6 will make it in.

THE COASTAL TOUR

The barge makes a half-hour loop around the bay. Visible occupants are guaranteed to attract a patrolling wyvern, bored and hungry.

THE ASCENT

After this, the barge heads to the lantern, rising steadily. It "docks" at the underside, easing up to a small stone **ledge** that projects out directly under a central **shaft**.

The shaft is 10 paces wide, 100 paces tall, and made of smooth stone. Adventurers will require some means to climb (or fly) to gain access—the shaft was once filled with buoyant levitation enchantments, but no longer.

The barge waits here for ten minutes, then flies back to the ruined tower.

Inside the Lantern

Above the "dock," the lantern has three interior levels. The scrawing of nesting sea birds from the ***crown*** fills the entire structure.

Every surface is **engraved** with polite speculations by ***Radomenus***'s masons, apprentices, and glyph-wardens as to the one true purpose of "her excellency's stone" (as they call it).

Their guesses: a tomb; a means of resurrection; an unparalleled magical laboratory; an astral conveyance. In fact, it is all four.

Restoratorium

This room contains ceremonial embalming **tools**, mostly broken. The **black table**, a solid block of dark granite, heals all injuries at a touch. Broken bones are replaced by crystalline mesh; wounds are filled with glistening white flesh. The results are repulsive, but functional.

Kitchens

Once a well-stocked store and kitchen, this area is crowded with barrels, sacks of ingredients, and shelves. All is smashed to bits.

Many **rat carcasses** can be seen (dried and dusty), ranging from mouse- to dog-sized.

After a moment, an **undead giant rat** the size of a sheep will rouse itself and attack. Only its rear legs function, but its nerveless body is hard to stop.

Quarters

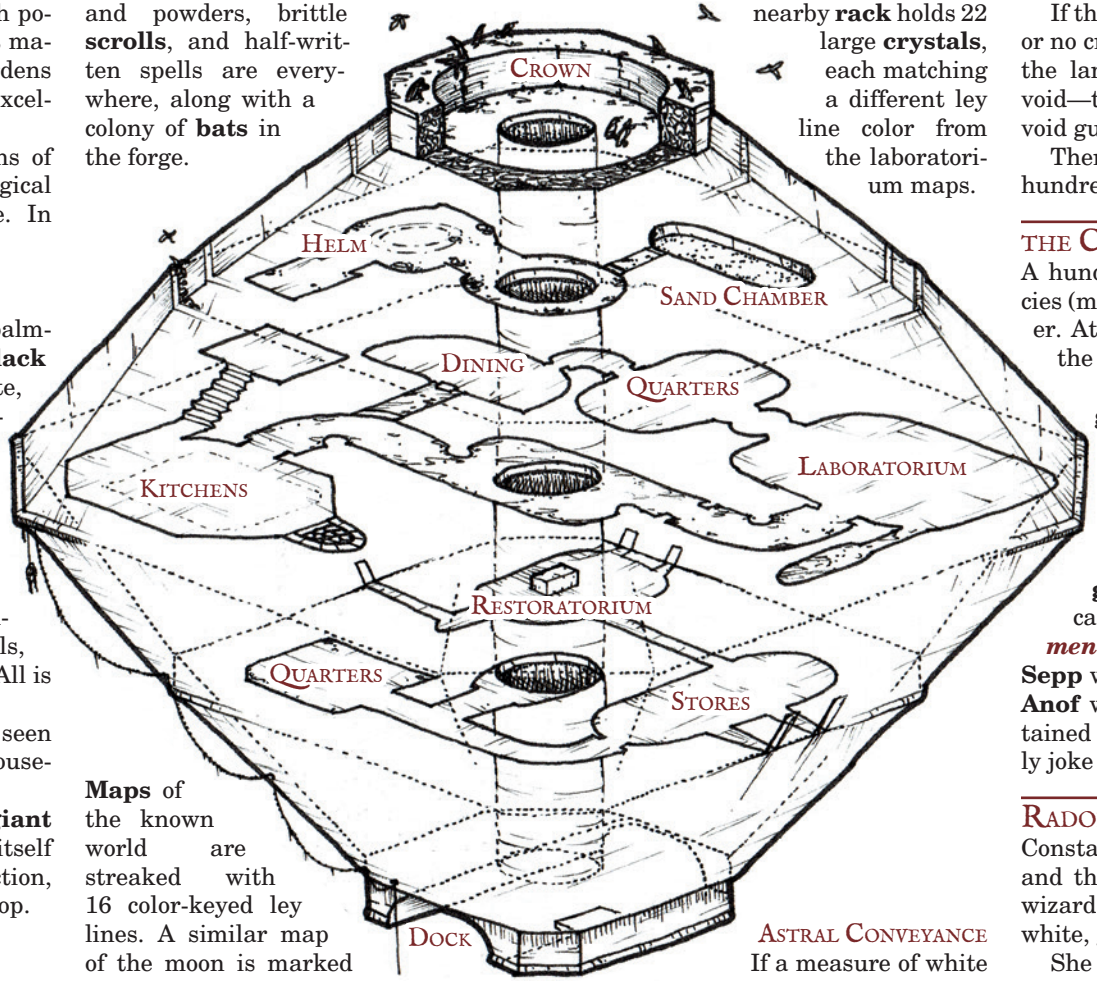
Spartan accommodations hold simple **cots** for three servants on the lower level and one for ***Radomenus***, above.

Dining

These chambers are dark, empty but for **broken furniture**. The wall of the dining chamber shows a **map** of major Seree sites of interest (cities, towers, tombs) from here, well into the blightlands (which are shown "unblighted").

Laboratorium

Dusty jars of pastes and powders, brittle **scrolls**, and half-written spells are everywhere, along with a colony of **bats** in the forge.



Maps of the known world are streaked with 16 color-keyed ley lines. A similar map of the moon is marked with six lines, using six additional colors.

Sand Chamber

Gentle heat pulses from a **basin** filled with several tons of fine **white sand**. Extended exposure to the sand causes weeping **sores**, dementia, and internal bleeding. These begin within hours.

Helm

An inlaid **quartz circle** in the floor glows softly. At its center, a **funnel** is cut into the floor, flanked by two empty silver **sconces**. A nearby **rack** holds 22 large **crystals**, each matching a different ley line color from the laboratorium maps.

Astral Conveyance

If a measure of white sand is poured into the stone funnel while the sconces hold crystals, the lantern **teleports**. It moves to the ley line intersection indicated by the choice of crystals. This is gentle, apparent to those inside only from the sudden change in barometric pressure and the alarmed squawking of the birds.

The "moon" is rocky and bleak, but has breathable air and denizens of its own. (It is actually just a distant part of the earth, only seeming to be a separate world due to a kind of celestial mirage.)

If the chosen ley lines don't intersect, or no crystals are placed in the sconces, the lantern moves into the luminous void—that howling, empty home of the void gulls and the disembodied Nuss.

There is enough sand for almost a hundred journeys.

The Crown

A hundred **sea birds** of assorted species (mostly gulls, and worsh nits) gather. At night, they cuddle in the lee of the crown against the sea winds.

A faint **glow** comes from the guano-spattered surface. If the runes there are cleaned off, the levitation magic in the central shaft begins working again.

Three possessed birds (a gull and two large nits) have **gold rings** on their beaks; these carry the personalities of ***Radomenus***'s grave servants (long dead). **Sepp** was the cook and quartermaster, **Anof** was her valet, and **Eshal** maintained the stone. Nowadays, they mostly joke and plan their next bird bodies.

Radomenus

Constant exposure to the white sand and the black table have reduced the wizard Radomenus to a **huge glob** of white, gelatinous flesh.

She can no longer operate the lantern herself, but hates the idea of intruders. She is slow, but devious, and can crawl along walls and ceilings.

She spends her days fuming in the helm, but she investigates as soon as she hears visitors. She can hurl powerful **lightning** 4× daily and can summon and control **wyverns** with the force of her mind. She will not give in easily.

HOUSE OF THE TYRANT

The Situation

Forty years ago, a monstrous tyrant seized control of the prosperous cliffside city of Novy Dom and dubbed itself ***King Menaka***.

The tyrant has ruled from secrecy ever since, surrounding itself with byzantine layers of bureaucracy and ruling by terror, disinformation, and generosity in equal measure.

Those old enough to remember the coup keep the secret of Menaka's true nature, but the city is rotten with lies, treachery, and fear.

Rumors

Novy Dom was once a vital gateway for trade, but now buys little from the surrounding area.

- A paranoid and secretive king took power in a coup.
- Visitors must hire a guide or run afoul of the city's strange customs.
- The food of Novy Dom is completely red, and delivered by porters to the door of every family.
- The king of Novy Dom is hideous and has not been seen for decades.
- ***King Menaka*** has the power to create sustenance from thin air.

Cliffside City

Novy Dom is carved from canyon cliffs, where the Greatcleft River meets the Blighted Narrows.

Adventurers approaching by water will likely be met by the **boats** of the **Trading Guildhouse**, escorted into the city, and interviewed.

Those arriving overland will first encounter **bondservants** of the **Gatherers Guildhouse** (looking for wood and small game in the nearby blightlands).

The city's protective wall has long been abandoned, its towers left to ruin.

Two levels of wood-and-chain **public walks** are slung between the rocky walls, connecting the major structures to the shores, and to each other.

The Royal Ministry

The visible face of the Royal Ministry is its **police**, warriors dressed in layers of form-fitting white silk.

They are trained and well armed, with excellent swords and finely made boiled leather armor beneath their silks—but they mostly pacify with intimidation. Stern resistance from troublemakers will surprise them.

Scribes

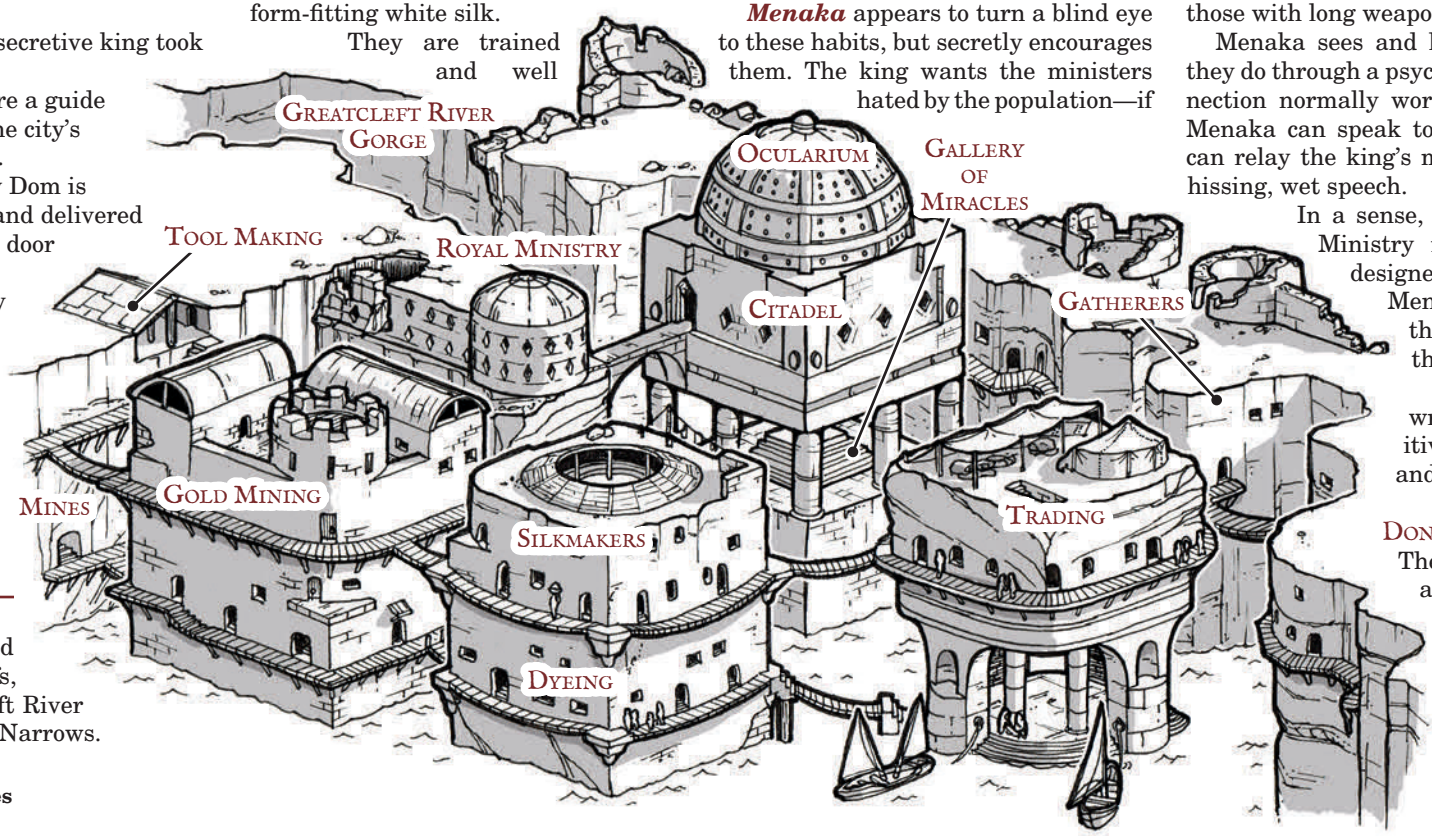
The Royal Ministry's sixty **scribes** are seconded from the guildhouses for three-year terms, during which they are part clerk, part hostage.

Senior Ministers

The three **senior ministers** are rarely seen outside the **Royal Ministry** or the **citadel**. Except for the king's ***edicts***, the senior ministers define the city's laws, from which they are exempt.

This has led them to indulge in unsavory tastes: murder, torture, and demon worship.

Menaka appears to turn a blind eye to these habits, but secretly encourages them. The king wants the ministers hated by the population—if none could survive a coup, their loyalty to him is assured.



The Giragita

Menaka's spies are everywhere, and not all of them are human. The cliffs of Novy Dom are crawling with Giragita, dog-sized **chameleons** that act as Menaka's eyes and ears.

The Giragita normally blend into the cliffs and rock walls, but they can be spotted easily when they move.

They can climb surfaces of any angle with ease and can support many times their own weight with a single limb.

They crawl about day and night, listening at windows and doors and from the undersides of the walks, always attentive for seditious behavior.

They respond viciously if attacked, but they move too slowly to endanger those with long weapons.

Menaka sees and hears everything they do through a psychic link. The connection normally works one way, but Menaka can speak to them, and they can relay the king's messages in their hissing, wet speech.

In a sense, the entire Royal Ministry is just a baffle, designed to stabilize Menaka's rule, while the Giragita are the real agents.

They are wretched, competitive, suspicious, and superior.

Don't Stare

The population is accustomed to the eyes of the Giragita, and they make a point of ignoring them.

It is the height of bad

etiquette to overtly notice one, and explicitly illegal to point one out. Doing so is guaranteed to concern nearby citizens and will earn a sharp rebuke from local guides or companions.

The Gallery of Miracles

The majority of the food in Novy Dom comes from here, an open gallery in the citadel, directly beneath ***Menaka***'s **Ocularium**.

At noon, red blood of a rare and precious variety drips from the darkness beyond a ceiling grate.

The Royal Ministry's **High Benefactor** chants rituals of transmutation while a line of **aides** catches the drops in silver pans, where each drop transforms into a weird, sweet fruit, small animal, dense cake, or wine. All the food is blood red and delicious.

The droplets fall until mid-afternoon. Elders and their honored guests may take food here, while **junior Benefactors** deliver food to all parts of the city well into the night (along both levels), their red robes aflutter.

The Ocularium

A **dome** of new stone sprouts from the old citadel; a thousand **spy-holes** allow ***Menaka*** to observe much of the city from the dark interior.

None but the three senior minsters enter the dome itself, and they never discuss Menaka's true nature.

Edicts of the King

Each week, ***Menaka*** issues an ***edict*** to the guildhouses, galvanizing them into action. The Royal Ministry considers noncompliance to be treason.

Most people believe the edicts are responses to indiscretions spotted by the spying Giragita, but in truth, Menaka issues them randomly as part of a campaign to keep Novy Dom divided and mistrustful.

Novy Dom Encounters

During the day, the walks are constantly busy. Roll d6 to determine the most noteworthy group at any given time, d6+2 on the upper walks.

d6	Novy Dom encounters Roll d6+2 on the upper levels
1	**Junior benefactors** from the Gallery of Miracles delivering blood-red food
2	A ***Nuss exile***, not quite passing as human
3	d3+3 Royal Ministry **police** escorting **detainees** (roll d3 – 1: a guildhouse noble, 2-3: d3 bondservants)
4	d6 idle noble youth, confident in their social status and asking too many questions to prove it
5	d2 foreign traders, with d6 porters and a local guide.
6	d6 **bondservants** maintaining a suspended walk or a building facade
7	d3 **entertainers** (music, tumbling, poetry)
8	d3 guildhouse **nobles** (with d6 **bodyguards** and **hangers-on**) visiting other nobles on business or pleasure

d6	Encounter disposition
1	Curious, perhaps even friendly
2	Cautious, but keen for news from outside
3	Angling for advantage, hoping to make a sale
4	Trying to avoid notice, concealing something
5	Indifferent, wary if engaged
6	Seeking a scapegoat or victim

Trading in Novy Dom

The economic life of Novy Dom is entirely controlled by its six noble **guildhouses**: The Silkmakers, Dyers, Gold Mining, and Tool Making guilds work within the city, and the Trading and Gathering guilds work outside of it.

As the only buyers and sellers of anything, resupplying or quartering here will require establishing ties with one or more of the guildhouses.

Mandatory Guides

Outsiders will need to hire a guide for any dealings. Junior nobles of the guildhouse, they are part chaperone and part agent. They make introductions, broker all deals, and take a hefty cut, on top of official fees.

Guides also keep their clients from common (illegal) gaffes, such as trying to have hushed conversations, disrespecting the nobility, or circumventing their assigned guide in any dealings.

Formal Relations

Any long-term or more extensive dealings will require meetings for the family to assess the foreigners.

Gifts, conspicuous displays of wealth, and evidence of conformity to Novy Dom's laws and culture all help.

A single family controls each function: the elder generation (d10 "uncles" and "aunts") sets policy and grooms d12 younger nobles who oversee 2d20 bondservants (indentured laborers).

Guildhouses

Each guildhouse has four or five levels, connected by well-guarded spiral stairs. Bondservants live in the humid lower levels. The middle levels are dominated by the guildhouses' workshops, while nobles and their personal servants reside and entertain above.

There is a chance (1-2 on a d6) that Royal Ministry police are also present; inspecting, dozing, or chatting.

d6	Guildhouse leadership
1	A single elder rules, focused on industrial output above all else.
2	An elder trio leads with the support of the others; they are effective and aligned.
3	A powerful leader is focused entirely on private/selfish goals (money, sex, collecting) while the others dither on the periphery.
4	The titular leader, sidelined by the others, rages self-destructively.
5	Output practically ceases as elders focus obsessively on a random ***treachery***.
6	The ruling elder is dead or missing (wasting sickness, murdered, drowned); business halts as elders compete to fill the power vacuum.

d6	Guildhouse treachery
1	The leadership has so much dirt on the senior ministers that they look the other way.
2	The nobles are actually ***Nuss exiles***, their humanity only skin deep. Avoid marrying in.
3	Younger family members plot to assassinate a senior minister and are looking for brave and expendable allies.
4	The elders worship Cicollus, smuggle in their own food, and only feign to eat the food from the **Gallery of Miracles**.
5	The guildhouse prepares for outright rebellion and buys weapons for their secret cache.
6	The guildhouse wants to unload a profusion of stolen goods, preferably outside the city.

Laws and Punishment

The Royal Ministry maintains a dense network of legal codes, sufficient to ensure that everything that transpires within the city is illegal in at least one way or another.

The application of the law is completely arbitrary, and it happens at the whim of the Royal Ministry, or as the result of a noble calling in a favor to satisfy a personal grudge.

Anyone targeted for persecution will be arrested by agents of the Royal Ministry, charges to be determined later.

Favorite Laws

Those arrested are accused of some specific variation on the following:

- Withholding information
- Seditious speech, insolence (or insufficient deference) toward the institutions of the city, asking too many/the wrong questions
- Buying something at the wrong time, in the wrong quantity, not buying something, or paying the wrong price
- Excessive indulgence in foreign customs; disrespectful participation in local ones
- Behavior that merely implies one of the above crimes might be occurring, wasting Royal Ministry time and eroding the social fabric

Demanding that the law be applied consistently or fairly is, of course, a direct challenge to the authority of the Royal Ministry and grounds for arrest.

Favorite Punishments

Minor offenses result in an exorbitant fine or d12 weeks of "corrective service" (forced labor in one of the guildhouses as a bondservant).

Serious offenses result in d6 months of corrective service, forfeiture of all property, mutilation, or all three (50% chance of each).

The Tyrant-King Menaka

Menaka is a great, scaly oval the height of a man. A dozen **chameleon eyes** pivot and peer in every direction and a soft, tubular "**mouth**" dangles from the underside. A bladder of buoyant gas lets him float freely around the Ocularium.

He has a vicious bite and thick hide, but fights only as a last resort. He apologizes for his surprising form, works for sympathy, and then offers bribes if necessary. These could include promises of goods, hospitality, information, or even senior roles at the Royal Ministry.

He is highly intelligent and well versed on many civil matters, having parasitized many cities over his long lifespan.

Menaka is a magical parasite. He immediately learns any spell cast in his presence. There is also a chance (1-3 on a d6) that he can interfere as it is cast, redirecting it to a different target.

As a last resort, he can warp time, projecting himself and those nearby into the distant future, when lush jungle and sluggish water surround the ruins of the Ocularium. Any who stray more than 50 paces from him return to the present with a loud crinkling noise.

Blood of the Chained God

At the center of the Ocularium hangs Menaka's prized possession: **Cicollus**, a half-forgotten demigod in humanoid form. Hooks suspend him from the ceiling, and poured iron encases his head. Menaka bleeds him to perform auguries, and his blood feeds the city.

If freed, Cicollus will be quite dangerous. Hunger and pain will drive him to replenish himself immediately so that he can ascend to safety. Involuntary blood sacrifices are likely.

As a minor godling, Cicollus's **magical aura** is enormous; sensitives can detect it easily from anywhere within the city and several leagues beyond.

Nuss Exiles

The Nuss dwelling in Novy Dom have abandoned their true, chaotic forms (a heresy to most Nuss) to adopt human shape. This tires them; when exhausted or angered, the guise slips a little.

They will do nearly anything to protect the secret of their presence in Novy Dom. In truly desperate situations, they will abandon humanoid form to sprout whatever they need to deal with the problem: new limbs, mouths, tentacles, claws, blade-like horns, spikes, protective fur, or scales.

They prefer to escape danger rather than fighting it head on. If slain, they dissolve into iron-smelling goo.

d6	This week's royal edict
1	Each guildhouse has been told that d3 traitors lurk within it and must be turned in by week's end. Making painful choices is a sign of loyalty.
2	A rebellion is brewing among the bondservants; work shall cease until the traitors are rooted out.
3	Subversives and criminals are moving freely at night: therefore, a curfew is established and the walks must be completely empty between sunset and sunrise.
4	Output is flagging, so the guildhouse which remits the most tax for the Royal Ministry by the next full moon shall be exempt from taxes for the next d3 months.
5	To ensure the Royal Ministry rules sagely, all written documents must be surrendered to it. Mostly accurate copies will be returned in d6+1 months.
6	Because of their exemplary conduct, the elders of one guildhouse shall inspect the private documents of another. They shall provide leadership advice and a report to the Royal Ministry. (Menaka chooses the pairing that will cause the most friction.)

THE HAUNTING OF HAINSLEY HALL

THE SITUATION

Everyone in the village of Lesser Tweedwick knows the old mansion on the hill is haunted. Behind the boarded-up windows and peeling paint, folk legend says the floorboards are soaked in blood. They're right. Currently, Hainsley Hall is haunted by thirteen ***ghosts*** and one ***hermit***.

The ghosts want the hermit to leave. They contacted a ***medium***, Madame Anna. She hired the adventurers to accompany her to the mansion: one stormy night in the haunted house for a small pile of treasure. The ghosts hope the PCs will disturb the hermit's rest, make the area unfashionable for her, or, if all else fails, kill her. She's unpleasant. They've tried everything but she refuses to leave.

GHOST LAWS

Ghosts are only visible and audible to people with second sight (mediums, wizards, cats) or people in an altered state (drunk, terrified, insane). A ghost can move objects the weight of an apple.

THE MEDIUM

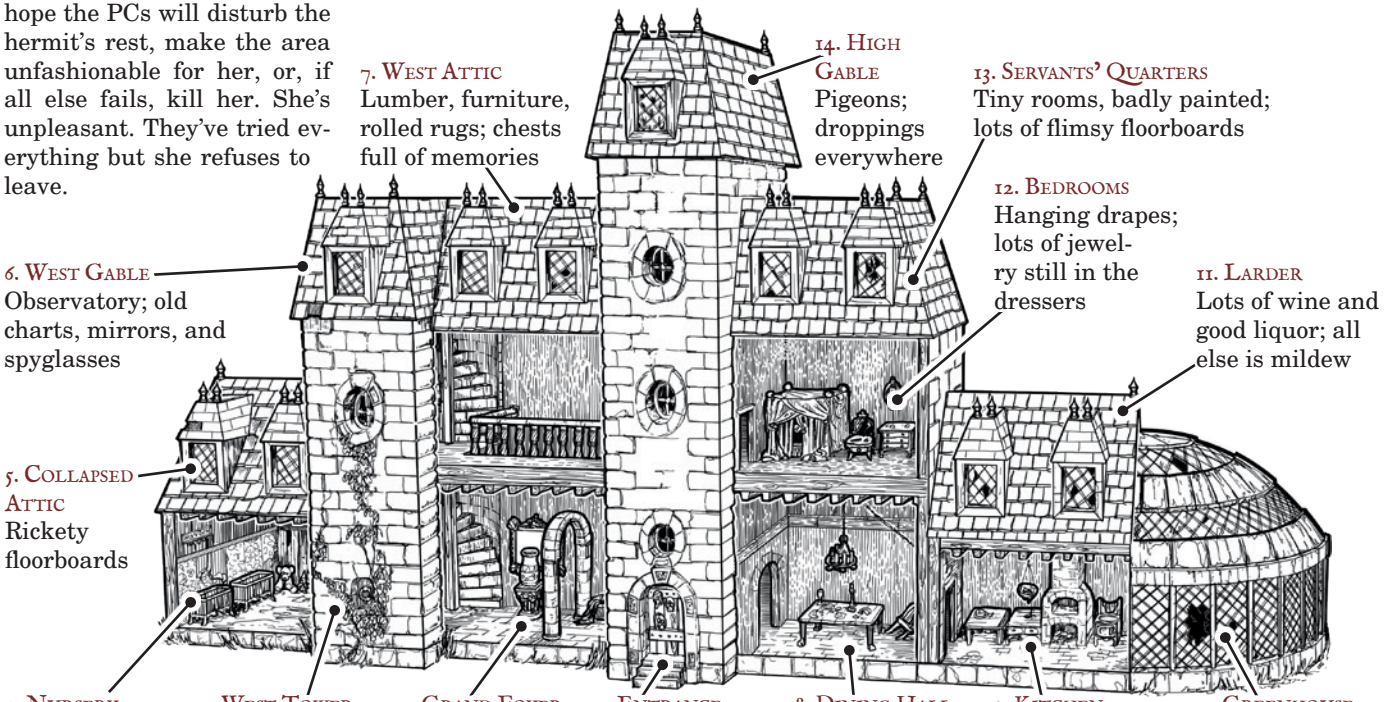
Madame Anna wants proof the adventurers spent all night in the house. She'll ask them to describe the east view from the **high gable** as the sun rises. If they don't mention the church spire she'll laugh and refuse to pay.

THE HERMIT

Lady Gwendolynia Montofoy (Gwen) is a poetic soul. She came to the hall to write long, weepy romance novels, sonnets, and epigrams. She spends her time draped over dusty furniture, either meditating on death and decay or sighing, drifting in a dream world of her own making. Gwen has a flair for the dramatic and a taste for laudanum.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE HOUSE

Roll once per room and/or once per hour. 1d10 for just ghosts, 1d20 normally.



7. West Attic
Lumber, furniture, rolled rugs; chests full of memories

14. High Gable
Pigeons; droppings everywhere

13. Servants' Quarters
Tiny rooms, badly painted; lots of flimsy floorboards

12. Bedrooms
Hanging drapes; lots of jewelry still in the dressers

6. West Gable
Observatory; old charts, mirrors, and spyglasses

11. Larder
Lots of wine and good liquor; all else is mildew

5. Collapsed Attic
Rickety floorboards

4. Nursery
Waterlogged toys, floral wallpaper, creepy toys, and two crumbling cribs

3. West Tower
Spiral staircase, missing a few steps; water closet on 2nd story

2. Grand Foyer
Arches, vases, dead ferns, and old paintings in gilt frames

1. Entrance
Huge oak door carved with leering faces; rotting fur cloaks

8. Dining Hall
Table still set with shattered plates, silverware, and dusty candles

9. Kitchen
Cold stoves, knives, sharp objects, and rattling drawers

10. Greenhouse
Dead plants, trees, Gwen's tent and supplies in a dusty corner

d20	Hourly/Per-room encounter
1	Baron Fisbick, decapitated by his wife; gurgles, rolls his eyes
2	The twins; tragic bubble-bath accident; young, identical, eerie
3	Reverend Eustace; murdered by religious fanatics; squeamish
4	Rex, a spaniel; run over by a carriage; like a dachshund now
5	Burnhold the butler; indefatigable, prompt, polite
6	Lady Martha; strangled by a jealous husband; flirtatious
7	Jensen, burglar; caught in a chimney; scorched; low class
8	Mister Gristam, poet; suicide; secretly loves Lady Montofoy
9	Alice and Martin, old bickering couple; struck by lightning
10	Sir Gilford, astronomer; fell from his tower; flattened
11	Rats; big and mean
12	The damn cat; screeches out from the furniture; surprise!
13	A pigeon; fat and dull
14	Dust cloud, shower of mold; something collapsed
15	Ominous groan; chance to fall into the room below
16	Eerie laughter
17	Crash of thunder.
18	Small treasure; a few coins, a locket, or a silver fork
19	Moderate treasure: a purse, a gem, or a painting
20	The Hermit, flitting about on drugs

SECRET PASSAGES

50% chance a room contains a secret passage to a random room (d12).

THE FULL-DARK STONE

THE SITUATION

The greatest Seree magics relied on spell engines—elaborate, hidden devices built to collect, harness, and broadcast magical energies for sorcerers to use many miles away.

Now, erosion has cracked open the secret vault of the ***full-dark stone***, and the skeletal ***vault servants*** have been venturing out.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY PLACES

- Skull-headed "knights" have been seen gathering herbs along the river.
- Mournful piping has been heard echoing for miles, its source unknown.
- The river folk sell chips of black stone that stay warm to the touch.

ENTRANCE HALL

Erosion on the cliff face has revealed this hidden chamber. Level with the tree-tops, it is the nesting place for a pair of fierce **gray owls**.

The alcove's **engravings** show visitors presenting gems to a crystal-headed, robed figure.

The center of the room is a shallow **sand pit**, originally a teleportation target. The sand conceals a pair of ornate gold buckles intermingled with fragments of leather and small (foot) bones.

THE FLOODED HALLS

Remnants of slimy, **rotted furniture** bob in shin-deep water. Scum lines on the walls reveal that the water level can rise much higher (during storms).

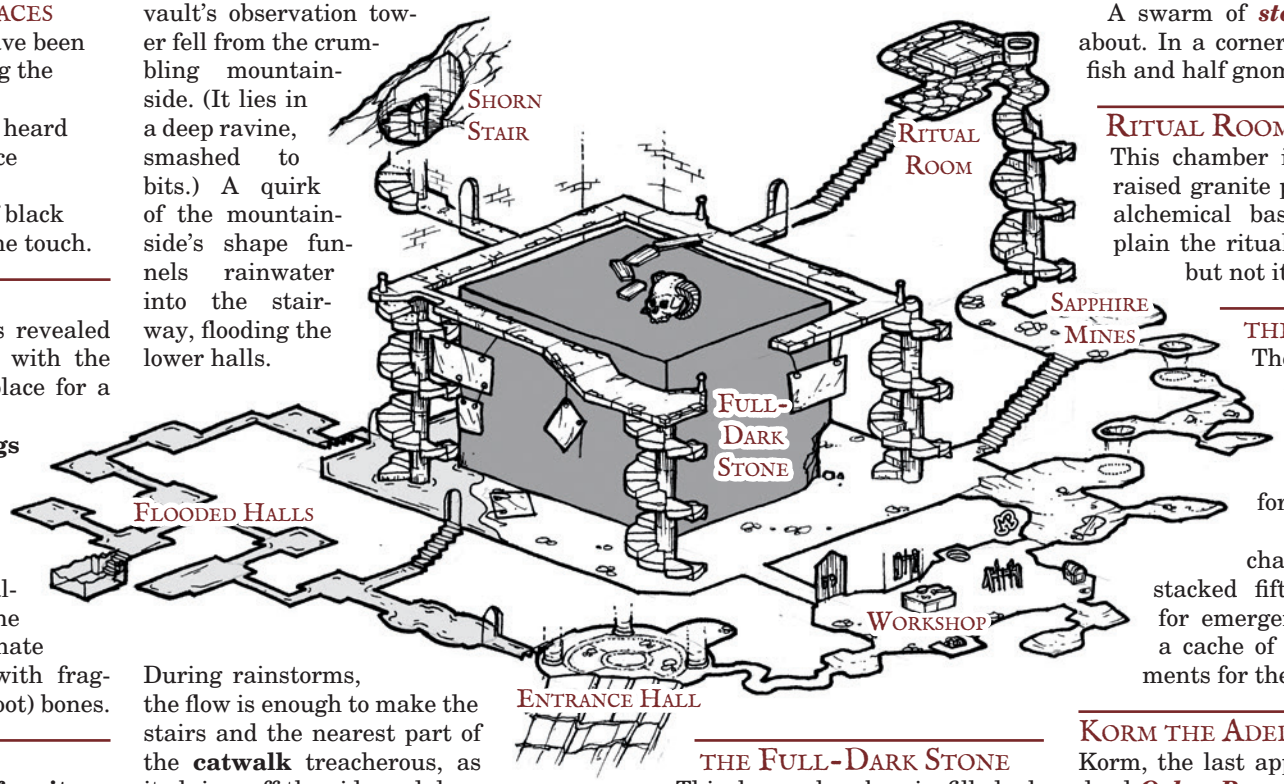
Storm seal minnows (page 125) wriggle through the water, fleeing any light or movement.

The silty muck on the floor hides brass nibs and styli, ink pots, leatherworking tools, waterlogged lamps, and many rusted nails.

The lowest hall, down some stairs, is underwater. In a locked, warped chest are 11 silver plates and a gold candelabra.

THE SHORN STAIR

A hundred years ago, the vault's observation tower fell from the crumbling mountainside. (It lies in a deep ravine, smashed to bits.) A quirk of the mountainside's shape funnels rainwater into the stairway, flooding the lower halls.



During rainstorms, the flow is enough to make the stairs and the nearest part of the **catwalk** treacherous, as it sluices off the side and down into the lower halls.

THE WORKSHOP

A **fire** crackles in the forge; a half-eaten meal (fried ***storm seal*** minnows) sits on a scratched and dented silver plate.

The workshop is large, but crammed with wooden frames, benches, iron smithy tools, and variously sized sheets of copper.

Two brass ***skull collars*** sit on the central work table, as well as a huge, crude copy of one, not quite complete.

If not yet encountered, there is a 50% chance that ***Korm*** is here. He will sweep the collars from sight at the first opportunity.

THE FULL-DARK STONE

This huge chamber is filled almost completely by a **massive block**, fifteen paces high. It reflects no light and looks uncannily black and featureless. It is easily mistaken for darkness.

If touched, the surface feels like warm, hard-packed gravel.

Huge **copper plates** hang from the rickety wooden catwalk; some have fallen, some are missing.

At the top of each stair is a metal **post** bearing a ***wizard flower*** encased in a solid glass orb. Each radiates calmness. Atop the stone is the massive ***Skull of Orlug***.

The stone naturally draws magical energy from the environment, but reached capacity long ago. The copper plates, walls, and stairs are all pitted and blackened by sudden discharges of ***bolts of magic*** every d12 minutes.

A swarm of ***storm seal*** pups flits about. In a corner is a **skeleton**, half fish and half gnome.

RITUAL ROOM

This chamber is empty save for a raised granite platform and marble alchemical basin. Engravings explain the ritual of ***Vitrum Aquae***, but not its purpose.

THE SAPPHIRE MINES

These cramped, tool-chipped tunnels are scraped clean of all but tiny fragments of sapphire, mined for ***Vitrum Aquae***.

In the furthest chamber, ***Korm*** has stacked fifteen ***jackal skulls*** for emergency use, along with a cache of weapon-arm attachments for the ***vault servants***.

KORM THE ADEPT

Korm, the last apprentice of the long-dead ***Orlug Broadstaff***, toils day and night. He appears as an upright bison with a limp and patchy fur, and he scratches constantly. Tinsmithing tools hang from a wide belt.

He has come here to use the power of the stone to resurrect his old

d6	Hourly random encounters
1-2	d3 ***vault servants***, toiling
3	d12 ***storm seal*** pups (once only)
4	d2 adolescent ***storm seals*** (once only)
5	***Korm the Adept***
6	The stone makes a loud, mournful **piping tone** for d3 minutes

d6	Magic bolt target
1-2	a copper plate, deflecting the bolt back into the stone
3-4	a wall or staircase
5	a ***storm seal*** pup flying nearby
6	someone with a direct line of sight to the stone

d6	Magic bolt effect
1	bolt of lightning
2	invisible for d6 minutes
3	teleported to the entrance hall
4	teleported ten minutes into the future
5	polymorph d6 x 10% of target's body into a random animal or monstrous form
6	mind transferred into a vault servant for d6 hours

master—for this he needs long periods of uninterrupted quiet.

He pretends to be here as a mere student of "the tomb" and marvels that at times the stone seems alive. Perhaps it is trying to call out to others like it? He claims the ***storm seals*** are a menace and asks for help with them.

As soon as he can distract visitors, however, he will retrieve ***jackal skulls,*** bind them to ***vault servant*** bodies, then set them loose.

Korm fears open combat, but he can twist off a head if cornered. He is made of stern stuff, and unless he is hacked apart and burned, his enchanted blood will eventually heal him.

He is badly infested with ***dire fleas*** (see page 113), enough for one to hatch every six hours. He apologizes each time anyone else is bitten.

Vitrum Aquae

The Seree wizards who built this place mastered the ritual of Vitrum Aquae. By drinking alchemically liquified gemstones while meditating on spells, they could crystallize (literally) the impossibly complex thoughts.

Once mastered in these controlled conditions, the spell could be drawn on almost instinctively, making difficult spells easy to cast very rapidly.

This came at the cost of rigid, erratic personalities and mental illness, as flexible brain function was displaced by more and more spells. (To say nothing of the tragedy of failed meditations!)

Wizard Flowers

After death (whether natural or hastened), wizard brains were boiled away by their successors in order to extract the "wizard flower," the hardened gemstone, now a branching, coral-like structure—a magical thought in physical form, useful for constructing enchanted items of all sorts.

Vault Servants

Adepts that lacked the talent for powerful magic were still useful for drudgery.

Force-fed low quality topaz solutions, after death their skulls housed crystal flowers, too, but instead of spells, they stored the habits of endless servitude.

The skulls were preserved with the flowers still inside, labeled according to their habitual duty. With a replacement automaton body, they could continue their work, serving their masters eternally in mechanical undeath.

"Arise! Toil! Rejoice!"

A Body of Wood and Sinew

Vault servant bodies are made from wood, leather, and brass. A full head taller than men, they are built for hard labor—lifting and carrying.

A **skull collar** (an enchanted brass sleeve with a central post) affixes the skull and animates the body with the impulses from the crystal flower.

Vault servants wander the area cleaning, repairing masonry, repairing copper plates in the workshop, or venturing to the river to collect herbs and fish. Occasionally, weirdly natural habits emerge for a few brief seconds: scratching, nose-picking, stretching, and slouching.

There are **thirty** servants within the vault, and enough parts to completely rebuild five of them.

Jackal Skulls

The Seree also maintained a store of crystal-infused skulls for defensive purposes, made from starved jackals.

Vault servants with jackal skulls hunt in packs of up to 8, sneak carefully, attack from ambush, and stop only when their victims are torn apart.

Korm knows a secret word that prevents them from attacking him.

Storm Seals

These magical creatures normally dwell within thunderclouds, but they have been drawn here by the stone's charge.

The **minnows** are aquatic, but the mouse-sized **pups** take to the air in wingless, flying swarms, keeping down the gnats and dire fleas.

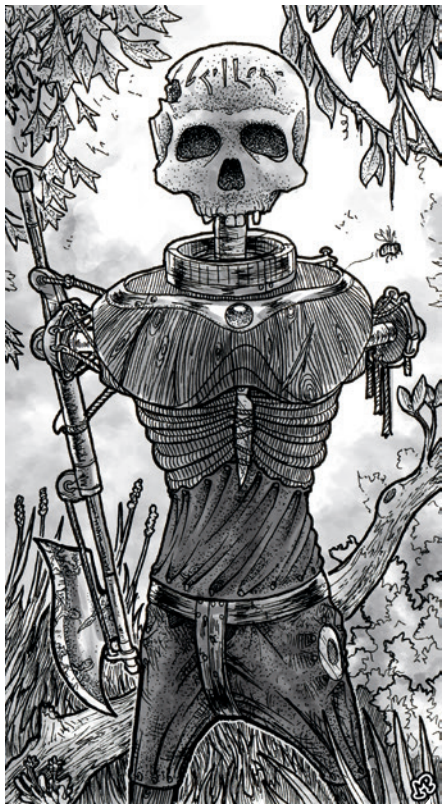
Adolescents are the size of large dogs and are large enough to hunt. They are cruel, playful, and opportunistic. **Adults** are three paces long and strong enough to lift a struggling horse up to be dropped to its death.

Skull of Orlug Broadstaff

Centuries ago, a giant-blooded hackmage named Orlug learned the secret of Vitrum Aquae. Briefly a powerful wizard, he made himself mad by crystallizing a huge collection of third-rate spells.

His man-high **skull** is battered and dirt-encrusted from its long journey. Inside is a massive **wizard flower** of quartz, agate, and emerald.

If Korm finishes the collar and binds Orlug's skull to the full-dark stone, skill and stone vanish: the stone's mighty reserve of power becomes Orlug's "body," propelling his broken, fragmentary mind into godhood.



THE ORACLE'S DECREE

THE SITUATION

Centuries ago, a prosperous region was claimed by desert sands. The cliffside fort of Pelaago was the gateway to the heartland, but it is lost within a searing, dry wasteland.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY PLACES

- In lost Pelaago, there is an oracle who knows all secrets.
- Beyond the sands, there is a fortress, last bastion against the scaled and treacherous Heelan.
- There is a fortress out in the desert, used as a base by strange, lizard-like bandits.
- In the desert, always carry holy water to sprinkle on your footsteps.

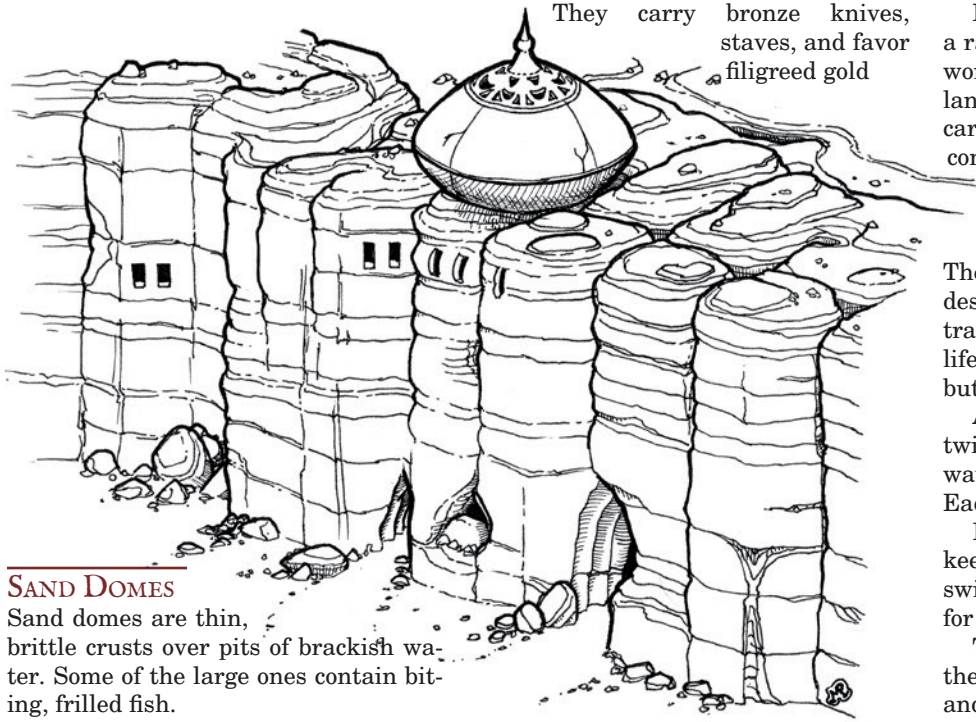
d10	Roll every 3 leagues
1	A field of ***sand domes***
2	The ***rag-rock hermit****
3-4	d3 ***Heelan bandits***
5	The ***buried oracle****
6	The ***Heelan hunting party****
7	The ***starsleigh****
8	A ***water shade***
9	d6 ***sand sprites***
10	***Pelaago****

*If this result is rolled a second time, substitute d2 water shades

IMPRESSIONS OF THE DESERT

Far from a uniform waste, the desert terrain varies considerably.

Chunks of rock protrude from the sand, topped by hardy succulents. The wind raises brown, gritty plumes from steep-sided dunes. Shifting sand absorbs the energy of every step you make, never letting you hit your stride. Hard, cracked sedimentary rock comes up in flakes. The wind howls through a forest of red sandstone, carved into undulating shapes by windblown grit.



SAND DOMES

Sand domes are thin, brittle crusts over pits of brackish water. Some of the large ones contain biting, frilled fish.

Anyone bitten by one contracts the **sinking curse**: for d3 days, the sand no longer supports them. Unless supported, victims will gradually sink down and suffocate.

RAG-ROCK HERMIT

A dirty hermit seated upon a spire of rock offers visitors the secret of drinking dust if they beat him at gambling. This is difficult, as he wears a platinum Vinteralf luck medallion, and he cheats.

His secret is that he has befriended the ***sand sprites***, and he dances with them instead of drinking. In return, he is looking out for someone who can slay ***Nirsiesel***. The ***bandits*** fear him and will not approach him, but he doesn't know why.

HEELAN BANDITS

These stooped, bipedal reptiles are sandy beige with bright blue stripes. They carry bronze knives, staves, and favor filigreed gold cuffs and piercings as jewelry. Moving in groups of d3 individuals, if outnumbered they will offer their services as guides. They try to lead their charges along "shortcuts" far away from water sources in order to exhaust them, for Heelan can safely go without water for a week. When guiding well-armed parties, they will try to find other Heelan groups "for safety."

THE BURIED ORACLE

A **giant toad** slumbers under the sand, surrounded by a field of dried dung and scraps of book leather. If awakened, the toad will lash out with its **tongue**, eating the first thing it sees. If it eats a book or scroll, it immediately pronounces the whole work in the listener's language. It speaks quickly and does not repeat itself or pause until the book is done.

From time to time, the toad croaks a random phrase from one of the many works it has consumed, which the Heelan take for prophecies and inscribe carefully. All of the feces in the area contain fragments of scrolls in a variety of dead languages.

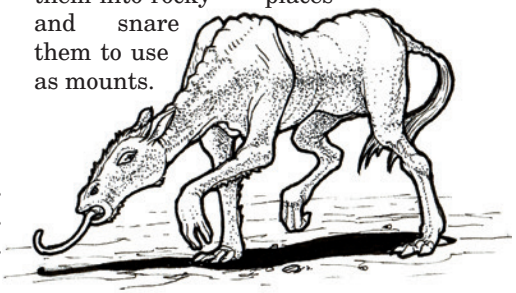
WATER SHADES

These pony-like creatures patrol the desert. If one crosses a traveler's tracks, it pursues, stealing its victim's life from their footprints—fresh is best, but hour-old footprints will do.

Anyone so pursued must consume twice the normal amount of food and water or collapse from exhaustion. Each shade can affect d2 people.

If spotted and chased, shades will keep their distance. They move as swiftly as dogs, but tire if forced to run for an extended period.

The Heelan have learned how to lead them into rocky places and snare them to use as mounts.



HEELAN HUNTING PARTY

Gyo-ritt, Heelan proudskull, leads a small band of **hunters**. Decorative silver bullets have been drilled into his face and wrists. He and his six escorts are mounted on water shades; brilliant

jade **pennants** flap from their long, barbed spears.

Gyo-ritt is looking for sport worthy of his honor and reputation as a hunter of champions, but he is tired and willing to settle for lesser sport.

His **spear of the hunter** is a relic of his homeland, and causes blood to catch fire as if it were oil.

Sand Sprites

The whorls of dust that play across the dunes were once **undines**—water spirits—now exiled to the surface by ***Nirsiesel***'s magic. This is what has made the land dry.

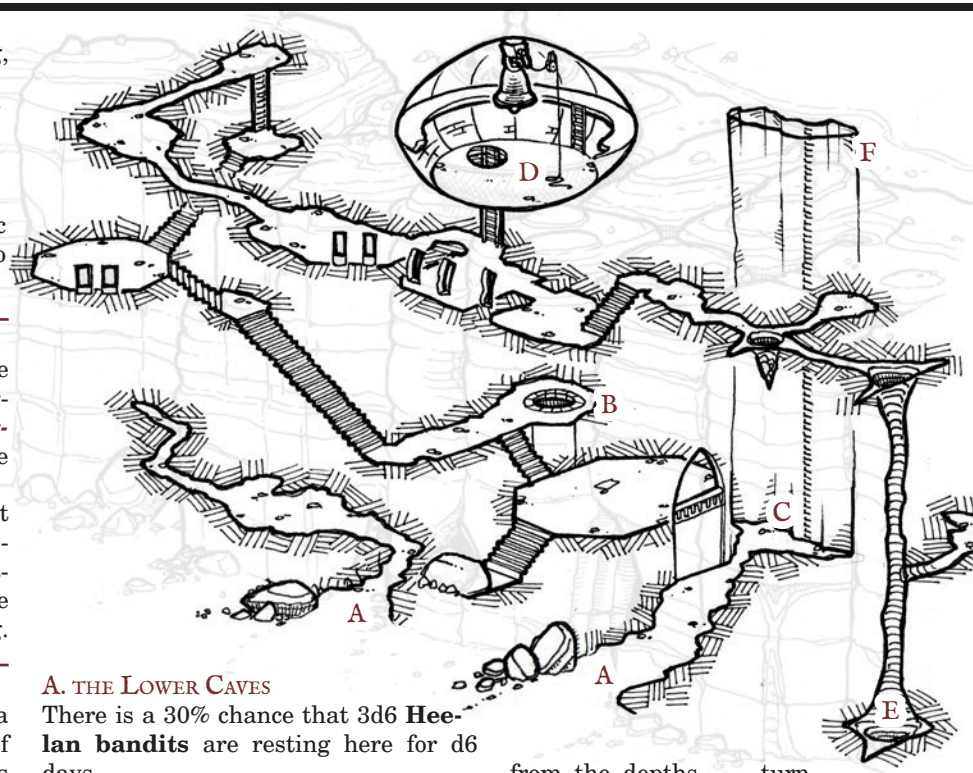
Dancing with them relieves thirst for an entire day. In exchange, they demand a small service or token of gratitude. If this is not given, their curse causes excess lung fluids and drowning.

The Starsleigh

A mass of twisted, silvery metal is a crashed Vinteralf **zephyr-chariot**. If touched, it whines, shakes, and sinks deeper into the sand. If the wearer of a charioteer's helm (see page 131) approaches, it hums and rises into the air. It carries up to 4 people in the direction the helm points, except north—owing to the damage.

Pelaago, Vinteralf Ruin

Once an icy, Vinteralf stellarium, Pelaago is now a dusty ruin. In his paranoia, ***Nirsiesel*** has placed traps (see tables) in almost every room.



A. the Lower Caves

There is a 30% chance that 3d6 **Heelan bandits** are resting here for d6 days.

B. the Well Chamber

This very deep, **dry well** is where the undines once dwelled. They can only approach this cursed site if carried in a container of water. If placed here, they will gradually unravel the desertification within thirty leagues of Pelaago.

C. the Long Climb

Handholds have been cut into the rock, forming a **ladder** that climbs forty paces from the desert floor to the plateau top (F) through a tall, narrow fissure. It is one of the few ways up from the desert floor to the high plateau.

D. the Bell Chamber

A **dome** of Heelan copper is ringed with a **stone ledge**. Its **iron bell** is the centerpiece of Nirsiesel's desiccating ritual, a great spell that drove the undines from the depths, turning the region to desert.

If the bell is struck outside the ritual, its baleful sound consumes d6 pints of blood-water from everyone present—most likely an incapacitating injury.

On the ledge are Nirsiesel's personal effects, including dozens of **scrolls** of his mad ramblings and the **charioteer's helm** (see page 131). There is also a snake-leather **satchel** containing opals. He has also made a **map** of natural water sources along the edge of the desert area, made of reports from bandits under his pay.

Nirsiesel, Heelan Warlock

The warlock of Pelaago was sent here decades ago to extend the desert, a task he completed soon after arriving. None of his messengers to his homeland on the plateau have returned with news or further orders. It has been sixteen years since his last contact with his homeland.

Isolation and long exposure to the charioteer's helm have made him quite unstable. On any given day he will be (roll d6):

1. hurling fire bolts from the windows
2. torturing a wrongly accused Heelan
3. sobbing in the bell chamber (D)
4. hurling insults at his distant masters from the plateau (F)
5. talking to prisoners' bones in the pit (E), either apologizing or ranting
6. issuing lunatic orders to bandits

A year ago, in desperation, he consulted the buried oracle. By chance, it uttered a fragment of Heelan writings about the nature of duty. Hearing it, Nirsiesel resigned himself to his task: he has begun preparations to move the bell, expanding the desert even further. His map of water sources shows where he will begin.

d6	Roll for each room's trap
1	**Exploding runes** floor tile
2	Hinged **trapdoor**, spiked pit
3	Brass **orb** emits weakening rays
4	Chained **block** falls from ceiling
5	d8 wind-up, knee-high, brass **axe-golems** leap from wall panels and attack
6	No trap

d6	Roll for the trap's condition
1	Triggers normally
2	Trap is not even armed
3	Trap is armed, but doesn't trigger
4	Fails to trigger once, then works
5	Triggers prematurely
6	Misfire! Rusty components fly everywhere as the trap breaks

THREE FOR THE GRAVE

THE SITUATION

A sacred shrine's blasphemies have damned the lands it once protected.

The shrine's leader lies dying, or so it seems. In truth, he is sweating out the final stage of a ritual that will bring forth a dangerous, primordial power.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY PLACES

- A group of outlaws is paying silver for bodies—or even bones!—no questions asked. (T)
- It's said that grave robbers are working from the old shrine. (T)
- Several Neathfens villages have sent word that they need hunters. (T)
- The wind in Lurrock carries lies. (T)
- Cannibals lurk in the Neathfens. (F)

THE LURROCK RIVER WETLANDS

The Lurrock river winds for forty leagues through the **Neathfens** wetlands basin, downriver from the holy mound of ***Raal***.

Copses of cedar and spruce are separated by reedy marshes and patches of open water. Fenhawks (trainable, burrowing raptors) patrol for mice or red hare, and yompies—raccoon-sized rodents with green, algae-streaked fur—are inquisitive and fearless year-round.

d6*	Lurrock encounters (50% chance, 3 times/day)
1	d4 unthinking **ghouls**
2-3	d6 foragers from ***Raal***
4	***Demonic air***
5	***Cursed bear***
6	d6 ***grave robbers***
7-8	d3 scavenging yompies
9+	d6 Neathfens villagers

* +1 for every 3 leagues from Raal

THE NEATHFENS VILLAGES

Dotted through the fens are a dozen villages, each with six to twenty huts, all very poor. The "fenners" grow rice in their small, flooded fields and forage for cress, eels, and marsh fowl.

They dredge **witch gum** from the oily pools, boil it down to a thick tar, load it onto rafts, and sell downriver. It seals their huts and their boots, and the fenners stink of it.

The villages trade specialties (cobbling, pottering, smithing), and travel is frequent. Because of ***cursed bear*** attacks, they travel armed and alert.

THE SHADOW OF RAAL

Life is precarious here, and when food is scarce, the fenners must turn to ***Raal*** for aid. Their reliance on Raal's ***black gruel*** shames them, and they do not discuss it with outsiders.

POLSA LONGKNIFE

Polsa's accent and black hair stand out from the native fenners; Polsa was an armorer in Darshore who fled to the fens as an outlaw for murder. Now a valued smith, Polsa lives in **Han-wil village** and makes steel tools, long knives, barbed spear- and arrow-heads.

She vocally opposes any dealings with Raal and will happily help anyone likely to cause trouble for that cursed place. If she thinks strangers are after the bounty on her head, however, she will use her knives.

GRAVE ROBBERS

Silver from ***Raal***'s corpse-bounty has drawn unsavory sorts to Lurrock in low skiffs and stolen dinghies.

Organized **robbers** (d6) come with bones or funerary relics stolen downriver. The worst sort bring victims, either strangled or still alive, hired downriver and unwittingly rowing to their own deaths. Desperate robbers (d3) bide their time to steal bodies from fenner graves. The villagers refuse to deal with any of them directly, and the robbers prefer to avoid contact with strangers as much as possible.

THE BLACK GRUEL

Since the beginning, a great bond has joined the living and the dead. As each person dies, their consecration joins their spirit to the **ancestral host** that surrounds each community, to aid, guide, and protect the living.

Consecration of the newly dead is vital for the health of the community.

The bones of the dead have a talismanic power over the departed. For centuries, the shrine-keepers at ***Raal*** have used this power to lure the spirits, trap them, and cook them into a blasphemous stew.

Eating the gruel carries with it the emotional burden of cannibalism; the body lives, but the soul weeps. A single bowl of it sustains life for a week, but the **enmity of the dead** lasts forever: no prayers are answered in the Neathfens.

THE DEMONIC AIR

The years of blasphemy at ***Raal*** have badly depleted the ancestral host.

The few fenner burials each year produce only lost ghosts that quickly dissipate, so the land is spiritually barren.

With nothing to oppose it, a loathsome force has ascended from the underworld, traveling as a **demonic breeze**.

It is cruel and powerful, but also very naive; it has learned the speech of the fenners, but has no grasp of subtlety or manipulation.

It speaks its thoughts and hopes aloud, compulsively, urgently. Its **voice** is sometimes a whisper on the breeze, sometimes a shout in the distance. After a time, it learns to imitate voices it hears.

"Fall into that brook—break your leg."

"Burn your food as an offering!"

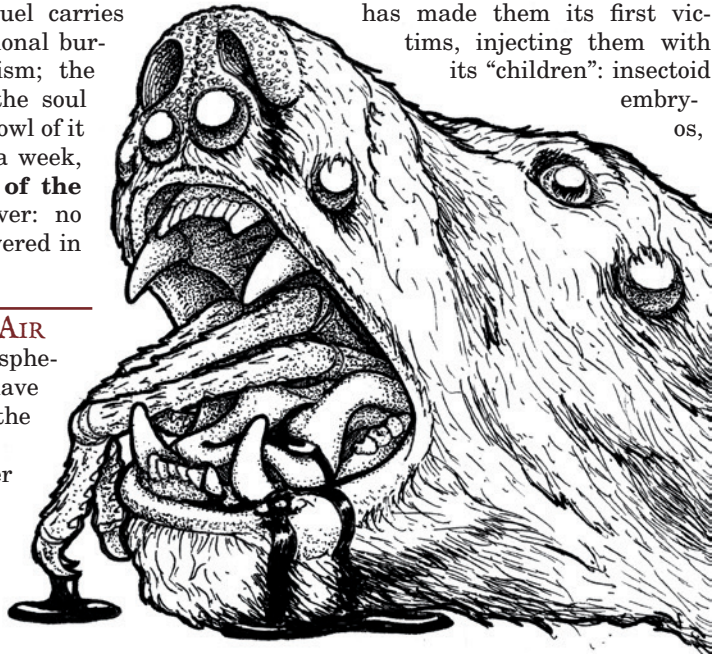
"Go west and be devoured by my children!"

"Rest here a while."

"Eat that. Eat it. Eeaaat eat eat it."

THE CURSED BEARS OF LURROCK

The bears are behaving oddly, for they are cursed. The demonic air has made them its first victims, injecting them with its "children": insectoid embryos,



growing to maturity. 22 bears have been affected, another each week.

Roll randomly to determine the stage of development:

d6	Demonic gestation
1-3	Initial infestation: black **spider eyes** poking out along the shoulders; aggression
4	A **demon mouth** opens in random part of body, this is now the "front;" halved speed
5	Failed birth: a spider demon thrashes inside the dying bear, **legs tangled** in its ribcage
6	Mature form: a bear carcass dangles from **massive spider legs**, gallops short distances when hunting

The Wayward Shrine

Centuries ago, the **hilltop shrine** gave hope and comfort to the entire region. There, the voices of the dead were heard most clearly, and their wisdom aided all who listened.

But the seers there were greedy and forced the dead to grant visions not meant for the living. They glimpsed the steps of a ritual of strength, of freedom from hunger, and they used it.

Sadly, what they had really seen was an ugly sacrament to the deep Powers of the earth. In its perfect form, it transforms the petitioner into a primordial orc (see page 122), but the seers' vision of the ritual was incomplete.

Nevertheless, the shrine-keepers used it extensively, and to this day the order performs it as often as they dare.

It proceeds in the same way as making the black gruel: an ancestral spirit is called, trapped, and consumed, but instead of dividing the portion among many, the ritualist consumes it all. The odds of success are 50/50, but either way the ritualist is transformed.

All 18 shrine-keepers have gifts and infirmities from their many attempts:

d6	Ritual success effects
1-2	Glowing eyes, night vision
3-4	Leathery hide
5-6	Inhuman strength; claws
7	Regeneration (major injuries heal in a week); immunity to non-magical disease
8	Sand and soil become edible
9	Natural aging ceases
For duplicate results, take the next	

d3*	Ritual failure affliction
1	Numbness (random limb)
2	Weakness, hair falls out
3	Leprosy
4	Rotting flesh
5	Unthinking ghoul
6	Death
* +1 for each previous affliction	

Those that fall to ghouldom are driven out, to wander the hills and marshlands. The shrine-keepers consider themselves fenners, spiritual custodians of the region, but their love "for the people" is not mutual.

The Raal Mound Temple

The **temple complex** is comprised of five rooms. The northern shrine houses d6 keepers fallen to **leprosy**, while the remainder sleep in the **dormitory**.

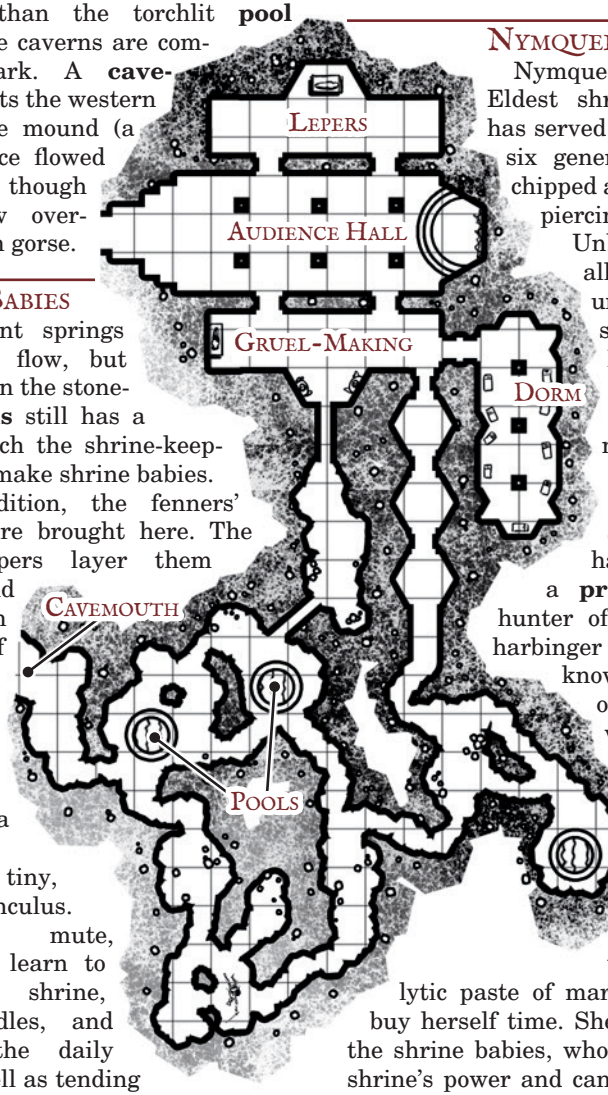
The dormitory also contains ***Vorser Gruntle*** and ***Nymquee***.

The **audience hall** is used to receive villagers in need—and to conduct occasional business with grave robbers and kidnappers. They are paid in silver.

The black gruel is prepared in the smoky **southern shrine** in a row of **cauldrons**. Two idols—the original seers—gaze balefully.

Shrine babies move throughout.

Other than the torchlit **pool rooms**, the caverns are completely dark. A **cave-mouth** exits the western side of the mound (a stream once flowed that way), though it is now overgrown with gorse.



Shrine Babies

The ancient springs no longer flow, but the water in the stone-lined **pools** still has a power which the shrine-keepers use to make shrine babies.

By tradition, the fenners' stillborn are brought here. The shrine-keepers layer them in clay and leave them in one of the pools.

Sometimes the child re-emerges as a "shrine baby," a tiny, clay homunculus.

Initially mute, they soon learn to clean the shrine, light candles, and prepare the daily food, as well as tending to the lepers.

Vorser Gruntle

At the far end of the dormitory lies the head of the shrine-keepers, Vorser Gruntle. He is a tall, strong man in his fifties. Last winter, he consumed an enormous portion of gruel and fell into a coma, but even so, he seems undiminished. Every breath radiates vitality.

Nymquee the Eldest

Nymquee tends to him. Eldest shrine baby, she has served the keepers for six generations. She is chipped and gray, with a piercing stare.

Unbeknownst to all, Nymquee has understood the shrine's power. Her visions of the gray land of the dead are not flawed.

She knows that Vorser was successful: he has truly become a **primordial orc**, hunter of the dead and harbinger of demons. She knows the true form of the ritual that would give the shrine-keepers strength without ill effects.

She prolongs Vorser's coma with a paralytic paste of marsh marigold to buy herself time. She cares only for the shrine babies, who depend on the shrine's power and cannot leave without magical aid of some sort.

She foresaw the adventurers' arrival, but not their intentions, and is waiting to decide how best to use them. She is perfectly willing to barter with the ritual, kill Vorser in his sleep, or awaken him to usher in an age of darkness.

A CLUTCH OF SHADOWS

The Situation

Six years ago, the bravest warriors of three nations cleared an underground Dradkin temple, ending decades of raids on their homes and farms.

A garrison of Grinvolt axewives and men-at-arms stayed behind to protect it from counter-attack from deeper below.

Fane of the Sun

Before the surface invasion, the Dradkin came here to revere the setting sun, a symbol of a prosperity they coveted, but whose searing brightness they could not tolerate.

The **western corridor** leads outside the temple complex to the ***checkpoint***.

Keyfather's Room

A **wooden door** with a sturdy, iron lock has been installed. An axewife **sentry** sits on a stool outside at all times.

Here dwells ***Counobel***, commander of the Grinvolt garrison, along with the garrison's treaty-provided gold and silver **plate and coin** and a Dradkin-made white metal **sword**.

The feet of a smashed Dradkin idol rest in the alcove of the south wall.

Coprolith Mine

The Dradkin mined this deposit of fossilized drake guano, looking for buried **drake eggs**. Except for a set of footprints in the surface crust (to/from the ***central hall*** and ***sanctum***), it has lain undisturbed for decades.

Nine carnivorous ***isopods*** lurk here, buried.

Central Hall

The hall is busy during shift changes and arrivals. Tavern noises. The golem behind the thick stone **secret north door** will open it if a ***taraghin*** is placed at the small hole at its base.

Secret Sanctum

This five-room complex enshrines a **drake egg**, which hangs from a silver chain in one of the two small end chambers. Another chain hangs empty.

Six **wraiths** are bound to the antechamber. They attack anyone with an egg who is not a pious-caste Dradkin.

Shadowy Stores

This cavernous temple's wall carvings show Dradkin finding a variety of fortunes, some gruesome. Too creepy for anything else, the garrison uses it as a store room. It is filled with grain sacks and casks of brined meat, fish oil, wine, and mead.

Shrine of Panur

Gathana, the garrison's "flametender", keeps a small **shrine** to Panur Implacable adjacent to her quarters.

The Long Stair

Wide circular **stairs** spiral down a quarter league below the occupied temple to a Dradkin under-fortress (not described here), still actively defended.

The **segmented hall** leading toward the tavern was meant for the purification of Dradkin warriors visiting from below, but is now the garrison's makeshift armory.

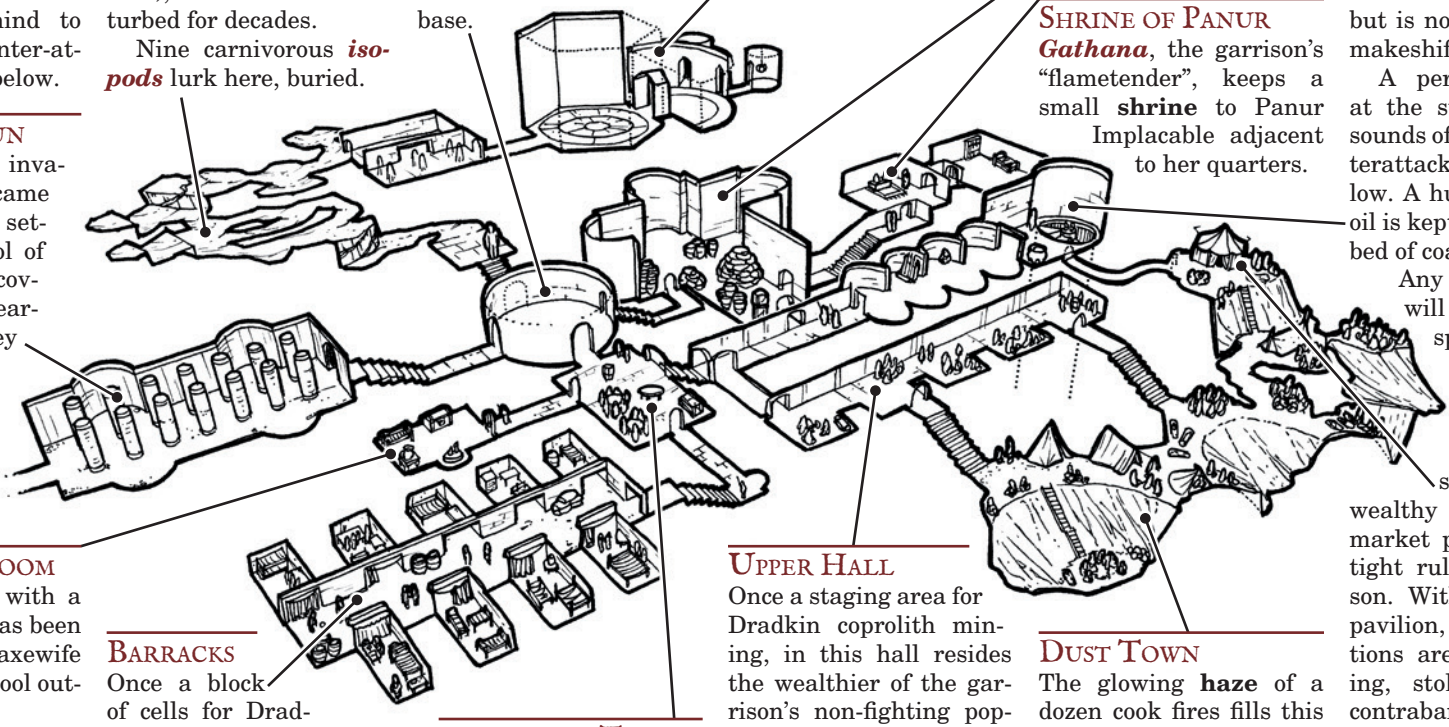
A permanent **guard** at the stairs listens for sounds of a Dradkin counterattack coming from below. A huge **cauldron** of oil is kept simmering on a bed of coals.

Any loud **noise** here will draw armed response from the tavern.

Sly Dubach

Dubach is a smuggler, made wealthy by high black market prices under the tight rules of the garrison. Within her stained pavilion, illicit transactions are made: rat fighting, stolen goods, and contraband of all sorts.

An old **secret tunnel** connects her camp to the long stair room. **Bribed sentries** allow her occasional access to the Dradkin fortress below. Fresh food flows downwards, while gems, exotic fungi, and curios flow upwards, Dubach profiting from every move.



Barracks

Once a block of cells for Dradkin penitents, the Grinvolt garrison has converted it into a barracks. Thirteen **axewives** and their **families** live here, forty people in all.

During waking times, this area serves as a combined workshop, training ground, school, and playground.

Tavern

The **quartermaster** sells wine and mead cheaply, while outsiders hawk oddments and fresh game caught outside for roasting. This is a favorite meeting spot for ***visitors***, and except for a few hours in the night, it is brightly lit and busy.

Upper Hall

Once a staging area for Dradkin coprolith mining, in this hall resides the wealthier of the garrison's non-fighting population. This includes the master mason, an armorer, a barber, and physicker. Four **axewives** without families also live here. The accommodations are crude by most standards, but better than ***Dust Town***. For the privilege, occupants pay a monthly silver drach.

Dust Town

The glowing **haze** of a dozen cook fires fills this former coprolith mine, where **tents** house a hundred camp followers of all sorts: laborers, scullions, chandlers and lamp-lighters, prostitutes, cobblers, runners and messengers, weavers, as well as trappers and hunters who stop here between forays outside.

d6	What's that carving about?
1	A stylized temple: sun worship to the west, penitents in cells to the south, darkness worship in the east; robed figures praying over **drake eggs** in the north.
2	Dradkin excavating a pair of coprolith mines; robed figures carrying out **drake eggs**.
3	Purified Dradkin leaving the temple for wars elsewhere.
4	Dradkin, falling to their knees before the sun. Others help the awestruck to their feet and lead the gathering of eggs and straw.
5	Robed Dradkin with flaming censers driving a ***chitin drake***.
6	Robed Dradkin placing bean-sized larva in eggs, wrapping them in straw, and hatching ***taraghin***. Others, nearby, put taraghin in larger eggs.

d6	This week's other visitors
1	Farmer-merchants (d10, d3 wagons) with grain, fresh fish, cattle, baked goods, and fruit preserves
2	Tinkers, ironmongers, and/or other specialist toolmakers with d2 wagons of wares for sale
3	d2 scholars and d12 retinue members, looking to study Dradkin carvings and artifacts
4	d3 nobles or diplomats; armed retinue of 2d12; bringing money and exercising treaty rights to inspect the defenses
5	Smugglers bringing contraband. Establish their cover story by rolling d4 on this table.
6	Sorcerer and d12 acolytes looking for the secret sanctum. Roll d4 for their cover story.

The Checkpoint

Outside the temple, d4 **axewives** eat boiled eggs, not allowed inside. They insist on searching visitors for **contraband**: eggs and straw, banned at ***Counobel***'s insistence.

Those inside resent the ban, as eggs are cheap protein and straw makes for good bedding in a place with few comforts.

The axewives (who can afford meat and cotton-stuffed mattresses) take the bans very seriously, imposing fines, lashes, or hard labor in the storehouse.

Wall and Floor Panels

The temple's rough bedrock has been covered with incongruous **white limestone panels**, every inch covered in sunk-relief ***carvings*** (see table).

Many of the panels wobble slightly when walked or leaned on. With effort, they can be moved to reveal the space ***behind*** (see table).

People of Interest

Keyfather Counobel (50s, heavy, greasy beard) inherited command of the temple and regrets accepting, as the treaty that funds the garrison is falling to political squabbling. He is skimming heavily from the temple funds.

Flametender Gathana (30s, broad-faced, mailed) is the ranking member of the original assault and works secretly to exploit the Dradkin temple's secrets.

Territus Kinslayer disgraced himself during the assault by killing his brother in the confusion. In his desperation for friends, he has unwittingly become an information source for the Dradkin spy.

Plodinus Kest, disguised sorcerer, searches for the sanctum. He has maps of other Dradkin temples, showing that there ought to be a fourth wing. He considers Grinvolters uncivilized, and his bigotry leads him to be unduly trusting of other "outsiders," whom he assumes share his views.

Vultic, the lanky Dradkin spy, observes the comings and goings in the temple. If pressed, will throw whip scorpion **acid**, use his bone-handled **sickle**, or use **somatic traitor** to control d4 of an enemy's limbs.

Isopods

These beetle-like insects are everywhere, ranging from the size of a fingernail to an adult forearm. Only the largest are known to bite, and they usually scurry away from lights. Rumors of giant isopods abound, but these are generally dismissed.

Underworld Weapons

The Dradkin temple served a dual purpose; as well as sun worship, it was a weapon-making facility.

Dradkin fleshpriests would bore holes into chicken eggs and inject isopod larva before incubating them in straw. Fed on rich, surface yolk, the larva hatches in three days as a **taraghin**, a hand-sized rubbery centipede.

The second stage involved injecting taraghin into drake eggs and repeating the process. In d4 days, the shell splits open and a ***chitin drake*** emerges.

Chitin Drake

These chimeric horrors are anaconda-sized centipedes that fly through the darkness on hundreds of humming wings. They attack either with vicious **bites** or in spiral **flyby attacks**, sawing wounds with their sharp legs.

They are cunning and prefer to maim their prey and retreat rather than face groups. They grow by a pace in length every day they can feed.

They fear only the flames from powdered drake eggshell, which the fleshpriests use to drive them into enemy caverns. Unless stopped, they can decimate whole cave-cities, growing as thick as a thigh, nine paces in length, and the weight of a pony.

Gathana has already made two taraghin and has stolen a drake egg from the secret sanctum. Unless interrupted, she will produce an uncontrolled chitin drake in d6 days.

d8	Isolated encounters
1	d4 **laborers** stabilizing a wobbling ***wall or floor panel***
2	d6 **axewives** searching passersby for contraband
3	d3 **thieves** working for Dubach, carrying or dragging heavy items lifted from the stores
4	Lovers looking for privacy
5	The garrison's **visitors** (see table) going about their business (openly or otherwise)
6	A Dradkin **spy**, hunched in disguise as a rat-catcher or lamplighter, meeting (or seeking) **Territus**
7	d6 **rats** or carnivorous **isopods** prowling for an easy kill
8	A ***person of interest*** looking for the adventurers

d6	What's behind that panel?
1	Nothing but hewn bedrock
2	A cobwebbed **gap** between bedrock and panel, nearly a pace deep and which runs for some distance
3	A cache of **contraband**—a dozen eggs and a straw pallet
4	d3 mine rats
5	A nest of d6 giant (a pace long) **isopods** filled with white **larva**
6*	A tiny room, home to a **fugitive** (murderer, thief, or smuggler) * Once only, reroll thereafter

THE CHAINS OF HEAVEN

THE SITUATION

At the roof of the world, the Seree constructed a fortress, an enchanted prison meant to wring magic from gods themselves.

The Seree fled centuries ago when a trio of demigods, led by Deel, razed the fortress and freed their imprisoned kin.

Now, the prison is controlled by the sorceress ***Nacharta***, who claims Seree ancestry and seeks to reclaim the powers of her forebears.

WEST & SOUTH TOWERS

Two ***Nuss exiles*** skulk to spy on ***Nacharta***'s activities. They also watch the approaches to the fortress.

The empty shell of the south tower holds stairs down to the ***inner halls***. The Nuss exiles keep their use of it secret.

THE GRANARY

A steady stream of ensorcelled birds and insects bring "witch grain": seeds, nuts, and beetles gathered in the valleys below.

THE ORRERY

Once used to chart divine motions, its ornate spheres are badly rusted. Rotating it once by hand advances the heavens by one day—and ages the mover one year.

THE NORTH TOWER

Apparently an enormous, single block of pinkish stone, the north tower bears scars from the battle and several later attempts to break in, but it remains unbreached. The hairline **doorway outlines** at parapet level are a ruse.

At the center of the solid block is the **inner vault**, 5 paces wide. ***Sigordine*** piled it with wizard skulls, smashed wands, and burned vestments. The vault crawls with anxious spirits. Piercing the walls will draw her attention. Three ***white lances*** of Deel are here.

THE EAST TOWER

The ground floor is a crowded workshop packed with tables and tools for metal-working, book restoration, and other mundane tasks like mending and candle making. d6 ***acolytes*** and d6 ***thralls*** toil, eat, and sleep here.

Nacharta lives on the first story, served by her three most loyal acolytes. Her apartment is crowded with shelves: the salvaged Seree library.

The story above is open to the elements and is unused.

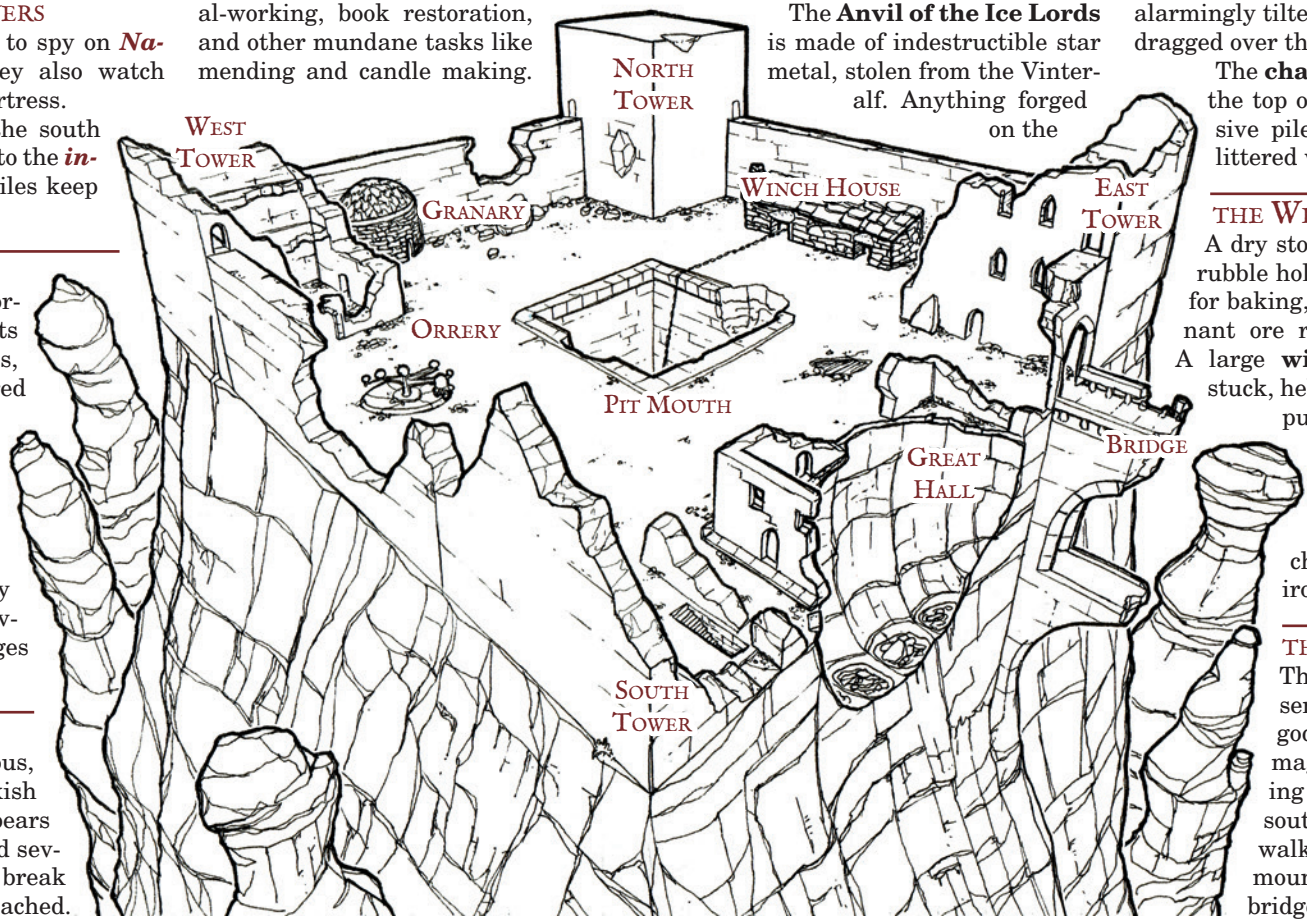
GREAT HALL

The shattered hall once housed the masters of the fortress, and it was the first point attacked during the razing.

The mixture of rainwater and rubble pooled at the bottom of the gouge conceals two artifacts lost for centuries.

The **Anvil of the Ice Lords** is made of indestructible star metal, stolen from the Vinteralf. Anything forged on the anvil is brought to the full attention of the Powers of the luminous void.

The **White Lance of Deel**—a javelin of silvery metal three paces in length—is embedded in the rock. It is this weapon that destroyed the Great Hall. If thrown forcefully, it will inflict similar damage where it lands. Unless thrown from a great height, damage to the thrower is certain.



THE PIT MOUTH

This magical pit once snared celestial beings from the heavens, trapping them with an intense gravitational pull. Near the pit, the ground feels alarmingly tilted, and anything near is dragged over the edge and down.

The **chain** descends 15 paces to the top of the ***remnant***, a massive pile of stones and debris, littered with dead birds.

THE WINCH HOUSE

A dry stone structure built from rubble holds cots for ten, an oven for baking, and a smelter for remnant ore retrieved from the pit. A large **winch** for the chain is stuck, held fast by the pit's great pull. d3 ***acolytes*** and d6 ***thralls*** will be here.

A rack holds four pairs of iron hooks, used for climbing the chain, as well as three iron picks.

THE BRIDGE

The Seree used the essences of captured demigods for their own great magic, including projecting an artificial ley line southeast, allowing them to walk directly to their next mountain-peak fortress. The bridge is now gone, but the

other fortress is visible six leagues to the southeast as a distant silhouette.

The ruined, lower bridge is one of two entry points to the ***inner halls***.

The Pit Remnant

The pit is 35 paces deep, though it is filled with a great pile of rubble 20 paces high, pulled in when the towers were destroyed during the razing.

The haphazard angles of the blocks make it possible to clamber around and beneath them, deeper into the pile.

The deeper one goes, the stronger the pull and the smaller the gaps. Every move is an effort, and any tumble can break bones. Halfway down, breathing itself becomes difficult, and rest provides no benefit.

A half-dozen ***thralls*** have perished here, flattened to husks.

Godmarks

15 paces from the bottom, the walls of the pit are marred by silvery streaks—gouges and cuts filled in with a white, glossy metal. These are **godmarks**, congealed celestial power left by the imprisoned deities as they thrashed and writhed. Just looking at this potent record of suffering causes fear.

d6	Remnant bauble powers
1	The bearer can **see from the eyes** of a chosen visible target.
2	**Disintegrates** the bearer and their belongings into dust. They can float and reassemble at will.
3	**Repels** small objects and incoming attacks
4	**Teleports** the bearer 5 paces in the direction of their gaze
5	**Lash of electricity** (5 paces; harms as flaming crossbow)
6	Target person-sized **object animates** for d4 hours and (d6) 1-2: attacks, 3-4: flees, 5-6: demands explanations

Near the top of the remnant, the marks are few and have been picked clean of metal by ***Nacharta***'s minions. There are larger and more numerous marks lower down, but the work is dangerous. The order has found that even the rubble can be smelted for small quantities of the precious white metal.

The bottom of the pit holds silvery, metal-infused rainwater, though no one has ever been this deep and returned.

Nacharta Greenmantle

Nacharta is a fierce, hard-working woman in her late fifties, driven to restore the majesty of Seree power.

Her education as a Panurian missionary introduced her to tales of the Seree, and though she has left that path, she retains a missionary's certainty in her cause.

She wears her prize possession, **authentic Seree robes**—emerald green, magnificent, but worn and threadbare.

In her pocket she carries a fist-sized ***remnant bauble*** with all six powers.

Acolytes and Thralls

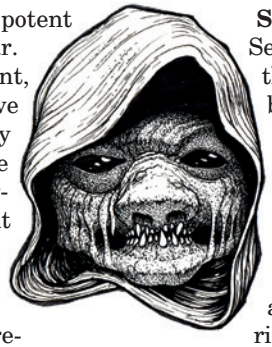
Ten **acolytes** and fourteen **thralls** serve Nacharta. Originally porters hired for the expedition, Nacharta has bewitched them to stay on without pay.

The Seree Library

Acolyte **Marone** keeps four scavenged Seree documents in the East Tower:

A **tome** describes a ritual to bring the pit to full strength, snaring any celestial power in position.

A Seree **handbook** explains how to exploit the beliefs of a dozen cultures to feign mythical significance. Marone has started updating it in the margins.



Speculations by "Forge-Seer Zecoxy" suggesting that the pit doesn't trap gods, but actually creates them by concentrating power. He frets that the "first three" escaped and could return.

A hasty **account** of the razing describes Deel, Cicollus, and Panur as the attackers, come to free horrid "Angnes," "Cwealm," and "Egesa" from the pit. It claims that Zecoxy killed Deel with her own "white lance" and was then pulled down and devoured by Egesa.

Remnant Baubles

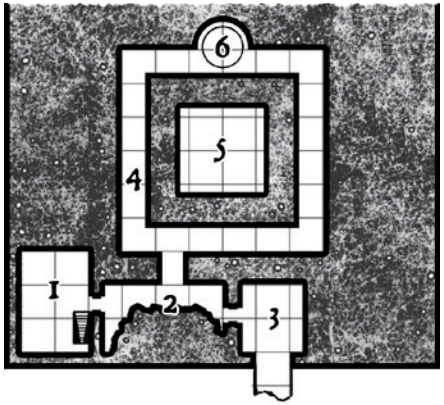
The order has been working the white pit metal into jewelry in an attempt to make its power usable.

Each acolyte carries d2 baubles, fashioned into rings, thin bracelets, circlets, or medallions.

The Inner Halls

The Seree carved several chambers into the mountain below the fortress. Wary of ***Sigordine***, Nacharta and her minions avoid these dark halls completely.

Only the ***Nuss exiles*** skulk here, avoiding confrontation with intruders unless Sigordine directs them to do otherwise.



Hall Locations

1. South tower room (d6 Nuss exiles)
2. Rubble-filled hall, smashed barrels
3. Lower hall (open to the air, bird nests)
4. Tunnel, once used for scrying through the stone into the pit
5. The pit
6. Quartz "collection circle" where the white metal extracted from gods trapped in the pit would pool. Most of the time, Sigordine is here.

Nuss Exiles

Nine **Nuss exiles** serve ***Sigordine***. They are short, stocky, and wrapped from head to toe in **rust-red cloaks**.

A close look betrays their alien nature: their skin writhes and pulses, a mass of fine tendrils and naked muscle. Only Sigordine's command binds them to their humanoid shape. If badly harmed, they fall apart into worms.

Unarmed, they prefer to grapple, as they can immediately sprout horns, jaws, claws, serrated tusks, or venomous spines anywhere on their bodies.

Sigordine

The gods left a guardian to ensure the Seree never returned to operate their blasphemous pit. Formed from the broken warbody of Deel (see page 128), Sigordine appears as a nude **figure of dark glass**. She bides her time within the quartz circle in room 6.

Sigordine resists most magic, can teleport anywhere within a league of the fortress, and punches with the force of a mattock.

Bored by the centuries, Sigordine pretends to be bound by the circle, a ruse Nacharta believes. Sigordine considers Nacharta a dabbler and sees her petty explorations here as a fitting final insult to the memory of the Seree.

THE MOTES OF ETERNITY

THE SITUATION

Eons ago, a cruel and wretched world was ploughed under by the gods.

A million years later, Seree wizards discovered it. Thinking it had no use, they gave it as a parting gift to a guardian of theirs that had completed its servitude.

The ***guardian Nulga*** took its thousand ***Motes*** of magical power and breathed life into tiny beings. It hoped to steer them toward peaceful and enlightened lives in the dense, primordial jungle.

Unfortunately, ***erosion*** has cut through the volcanic pumice, exposing the temple of cruel ***Dendra***.

THE JUNGLE RIVER

This warm, muddy river flows through the jungles of the volcanic ***plateau*** before tumbling down the waterfall into the ***pool***.

The river continues on for many miles through its steep-sided **gorge** as the plateau level drops.

Every few miles, roll d6 for an encounter:

d6	River encounter
1	d12 crocodiles
2	Floating ***atrocity***
3	d6 ***Motes*** fishing
4	Swarm of ***fever flies***
5	***Enlightened Motes***
6	The ***shatterwisp***

TEMPLE OF DENDRA

The complex has been entombed in hardened lava for more than a million years.

Every hour, there is a 10% chance a party of d8 ***enlightened Motes*** arrives by river, entering via the waterfall-side gate.

DENDRA AVERTED

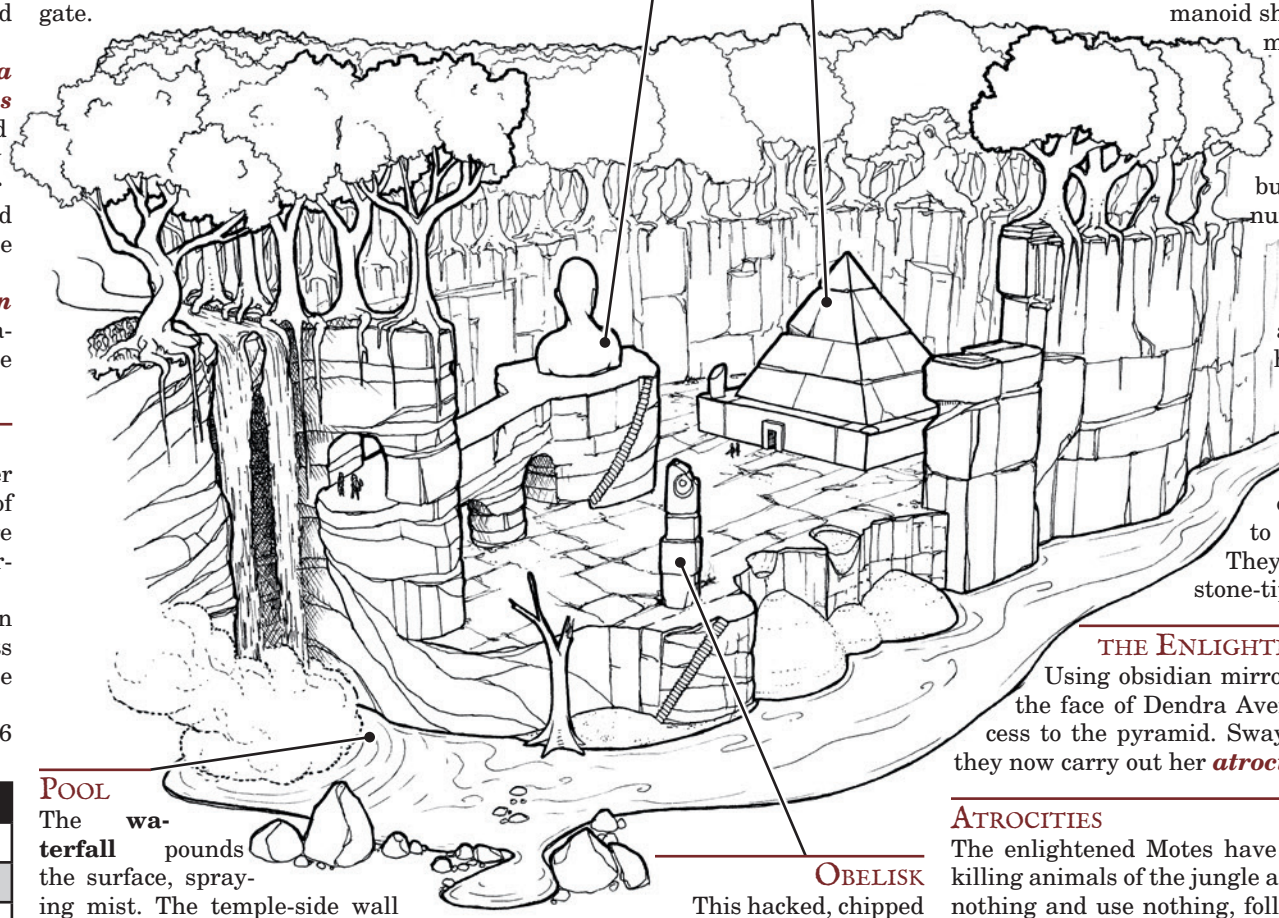
A 40-pace tall **statue** of a hairless woman protrudes from the eroding pumice.

Though it never moves, it always faces away from the viewer's position, regardless of where they stand.

PYRAMID OF DENDRA

A solid pyramid of white granite blocks. The **archway** opens into the first chamber, where dozens of plain, ceramic **urns** line the walls. They hold only dust.

If any ***enlightened Motes*** are present, an inner archway leads on into the ***graven chamber***.



POOL

The **waterfall** pounds the surface, spraying mist. The temple-side wall presents an easy climb up to the walkway. Four giant **crocodiles** lurk in the shallows. They don't bother boats but aggressively attack waders or swimmers.

OBELISK

This hacked, chipped **obelisk** emits invisible, searing **rays** that cause any exposed skin to burn and blister painfully. It has no spiritual significance—its energies were easily tolerated by its inhuman builders, who used it to repel giant insects.

UNNATURAL EROSION

Every few hours, the bizarre ***shatterwisp*** can be felt very strongly in the temple. The rocks of the place begin to vibrate, while grit and larger stones tumble from the pumice walls. This is the cause of the erosion.

THE MOTES

Nulga created bodies for his Motes from lemurs and reptiles, choosing the humanoid shape of his former Seree masters. They retain a smallish stature and a slight scaliness, with patches of soft fur.

They are long-lived, but sterile, and their numbers have dwindled to a few hundred.

Finding most of Nulga's teachings lofty and impractical, many have left the immediate area to make their own way.

Only those who inhabit this stretch of river remain loyal to Nulga (or to ***Dendra***). They wield obsidian- or stone-tipped spears and knives.

THE ENLIGHTENED MOTES

Using obsidian mirrors, the Motes glimpsed the face of Dendra Averted, and so gained access to the pyramid. Swayed by ***Dendra*** within, they now carry out her ***atrocities***.

ATROCITIES

The enlightened Motes have taken to catching and killing animals of the jungle as a sacred rite. They eat nothing and use nothing, following ***Dendra***'s teachings of the gleeful dealing of death.

Kills are likely to be crocodiles, fat umber eels, and the occasional **void gull**. They are mutilated and impaled. An unfortunate few still live, wedged in the underbrush, waiting for death.

Nulga's Cave

Two leagues downriver, cut into a rocky embankment, is the cave of ***Nulga***.

The Guardian Nulga

The Seree placed their spell engines in the care of magical, living guardians. Grown from mundane animals (especially reptiles, with their uncanny stillness), they were fed a regimen of powdered gemstone and protective rituals. Long exposure to the intense magics caused them to grow in size and potency, while centuries of conversation and meditation granted them wisdom.

Nulga, Mote-Father

Once a humble snapping turtle, he now outweighs five elephants. He created the Motes with the intention of building a gentle community to guide and watch over, but few Motes visit him now, and he is alarmed by news of the "enlightened." He spends his days partially submerged in his grotto, straining at the breeze for clues about what has happened to his beloved, peaceful children.

He has a large cache of **food**—gifts from loyal Motes—leaf-wrapped bundles filling three longboats, brightly painted with scenes from the jungle.

Nulga has several earth-magic abilities: he can **soften rock into mud** or **harden soil** to iron hardness. He can even **stiffen air** to an amber-like hardness, though only briefly. Finally, he can **animate clay** into living creatures.

Having no magical Motes left to work with, each power costs a year of his life.

Inside the Pyramid of Dendra

The pyramid contains **three chambers**, each about ten paces square. The **archway** to the second chamber only exists if someone within the pyramid has seen the face of Dendra Averted.

Second Chamber—Graven Chamber

Here stands the sacrificial slab: a huge **block** of stained, white granite, chipped and scored by centuries of use. Channels along the edges funnel blood down into a collection urn. The **archway** to the third chamber only exists if all present have seen the face of Dendra.

The walls are finely **etched** from floor to ceiling and reveal that Dendra was a servant of the gods during the forging of the world. Betrayed and "damaged," she realized that the gods were imperfect, and she turned away from them (hence her averted statue).

She gathered the first peoples from the forests and caves and with them built Thiru, the first city—this pyramid stands at its center. (The rest is buried.)

Third Chamber—Dendra's Throne

Reduced to a fraction of her power, **Dendra** retains only her intellect and her ability to form a body from the fine **gray ash** that fills this room. Dendra espouses a doctrine of gleeful death: destroy all forms made by the gods, that new forms may arise. She bears no anger toward the gods and considers the destruction of Thiru itself to be a sacred act, in accordance with her wisdom.

Sitting upon a **throne** of white granite, she councils any who will listen about her path: gleeful death, chaotic renewal.

Her presence suffuses the entire pyramid; destroying the ash body does nothing.

If asked about Nulga, she will point out that he seeks to emulate the ancestral hosts of human communities, but while he still lives, he never will. Only by dying will he achieve the breadth of vision necessary to be of lasting use to the Motes. She encourages adventurers to hasten his death.

The Jungle Plateau

Beyond the river's vicinity, the sun disappears behind the emerald green canopy. Lemurs chatter, frogs chirp, and brightly colored birds flap between hanging vines. Great, waxy leaves sprinkle raindrops from high above.

d6	Jungle feature
1	Dense, fruit-laden **thicket**
2	**Rain pond**, slowly draining
3	**Clearing** filled with giant ferns and stinging stinkleaf
4	Rocky **outcrop** predating the volcanism (50% chance of being taller than the trees)
5	Muddy-banked tributary **stream**
6	**Heavy downpour** for d8 hours

d6	Jungle encounter
1	Sacred ***atrocity*** (ape, boa, tapir)
2	d8 ***Mote*** foragers, collecting fruit. Roll d6 for loyalty; 1-2: Nulga; 3-4: Dendra; 5-6: themselves.
3	The ***shatterwisp***
4	d6 void gulls on patrol
5	A ***vexing bowl***
6	The ***Lacuna****
	* once only, reroll thereafter

The Lacuna

This huge, **stone sphere** is guarded by d20 void gulls. A door-sized **opening** in one side leads into a dark, featureless interior. Once a portal to their emperor's fortress (see "The Extent of Gamandes" on page 28), it is useless now for lack of a power source.

Every month, the gulls lose more of their number to the enlightened Motes, and they are alert and desperate.

Shatterwisp & Vexing Bowls

A hissing, whirring sound fills the air. Distant at first, it approaches rapidly and soon becomes painfully loud. Metal vibrates, glass shatters, stone crumbles, and water boils in an area about thirty paces across.

This effect is produced by void gulls humming from within their **vexing bowls**: six smooth basins cut from the basalt, five paces across, which amplify sound. The gulls constructed them to expose the temple, having sensed the power within it. When the obelisk finally topples, they will occupy the temple in the hopes of finding a power source to return them home.

Fever Flies

The hallucinogenic venom in the bites of these fat, blue-eyed flies impair judgment for d12 hours. Possible effects: the victims conclude they're rowing the wrong direction; this boat would be a great way to carry water; a lost loved one is just below the topsoil; I have way too much hair; someone should probably go and check on the king.

THE SKY-BLIND SPIRE

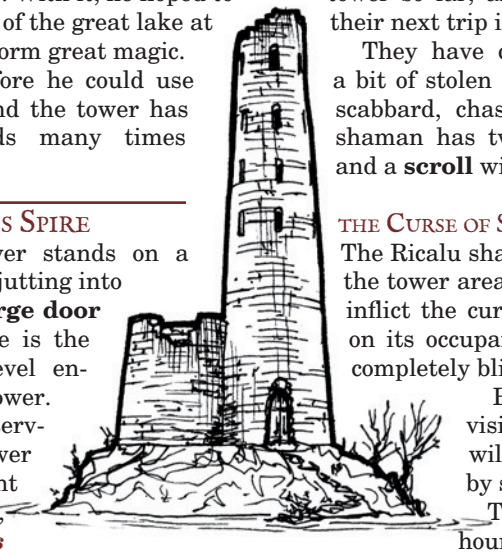
THE SITUATION

The wizard Titardinal's final work was a ***kastromantic spire***, a spell in the form of a tower. With it, he hoped to force the spirit of the great lake at its base to perform great magic.

He died before he could use it, however, and the tower has changed hands many times since then.

TITARDINAL'S SPIRE

A narrow tower stands on a rocky outcrop, jutting into the **lake**. A **large door** facing the lake is the only ground-level entrance to the tower.



Anyone observing the tower during daylight will see huge, ***dire pelicans*** flying from the lowest set of windows, fishing in the lake.

At night, bellows of rage and frustration echo from the upper windows.

RICALU CAMP

Three days ago, eight Ricalu **goblins** set up camp under a sky-blue **tarp**, with the intention of stealing silver from inside the tower.

They have made two forays into the tower so far, and are preparing for their next trip inside.

They have crude knives, slings, a bit of stolen silver, and a jeweled scabbard, chased with gold. Their shaman has two **sky-blue cloaks** and a **scroll** with a peculiar ritual:

THE CURSE OF SKY-BLINDNESS

The Ricalu shaman has surrounded the tower area with buried teeth to inflict the curse of "sky-blindness" on its occupants: those inside are completely blind to anything blue.

Blue things aren't invisible, but those cursed will never notice them by sight alone.

The effect begins an hour after entering and lasts a day after leaving. Onset is too gradual for those affected to notice, but the curse lifts suddenly.

THE BLUE-CLAD THIEVES

The Ricalu have been sending lone thieves in blue cloaks into the tower to sneak out what treasure they dare.

d6	Encounters (hourly)
1	A ***giant*** from rooms 16 &17 investigating the man-smell
2	Huge muck-fly from the ***cone***
3	***Ricalu thief*** in a blue cloak
4	The halls echo with the ***giants***' mournful homeland songs
5	Young ***dire pelican***, possessed by spirits from the ***Bleak Stair***
6	d3 ***undines*** from the ***fountain***

THE TOWER OF GATES

The tower's every window and doorway is a subtle magical portal, making its interior geometry completely different from its outside appearance.

The interior map shows each window's exterior height and facing (e.g., window **4N** looks northwards from the 4th floor).

THE CLIMBING CHAINS

From the third floor and up, every window has a thick, **rusty chain** bolted to its window sill. The chains dangle on the outside of the tower, allowing a harrowing climb to the window below.

For example, it's possible to climb down from room 4 (whose window looks out west from the third floor) into room 9 (the pelican roost), by climbing down from window **3W** to window **2W**.

THE RITUAL SEQUENCE

Titardinal engraved each room with a **number**, representing the correct order to visit each room to cast the tower's spell.

Everyone entering room 1 attracts a tiny, orbiting **spark** of energy stolen from the lake spirit.

At room two, a second spark joins, and so on, until, by room 23, adventurers are surrounded by a cloud of ethereal fireflies, casting the equivalent of torchlight around them.

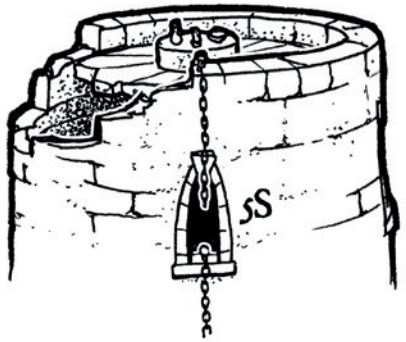
If an adventurer steps into any room out of the proper sequence, all of the sparks are dispelled. They must begin again at room 1.

1. UNWELCOMING HALL

Titardinal filled iron **gibbets** with bodies (long decayed to skeletal remains) to frighten off visitors.

A **ring of water breathing** adorns one bony finger.

A pewter **scroll case** contains a message from the ancestor of a nearby ruler, begging Titardinal to give up his mad project and return to his seat by the throne as advisor.



7. THE FOUNTAIN ROOM

Titardinal used this **fountain** to commune with the lake spirit, learning its weaknesses. d6 **undines** float in the water, appearing as ghostly children.

If any sparks are present, the undines take on translucent serpent form and emerge to attack and reclaim them.

The fountain contains a **defender's blade** and most of a suit of **plate armor**, but the undines will only yield this in return for a solemn oath to destroy "the ***altar***."

9. DIRE PELICANS' ROOST

This room stinks like a fishmonger and is home to **seven dire pelicans**, all large enough to swallow humans. They fly in and out all day, catching fish out on the lake.

They do not normally wander the tower halls, but they are territorial, relentless, and vindictive if disturbed.

PELICAN ATTACK

The pelicans attack by snapping, battering, and when they can, swallowing their prey whole. Once a victim is held in the sac, the pelican will flee to subdue them enough to fully swallow.

Subduing involves alternately grinding the sac against the pelican's body to crush the victim, violent shaking, and slurping water into the sac to cause suffocation. This can take a long time.

ROOST FLOOR

The floor of the roost is a crunching carpet of twigs, feathers, fish remains, guano, and eggshell.

A pelican beak in the corner is stuck with three **venomous quills** from a fatal last meal. A **potion of leaping** is beneath it.

13. The Bleak Stair

Four **wicked idols** leer from alcoves, while invisible, **hungry spirits** fill the air with their whispers.

Prayer, meditation, or delay will bring forth Titardinal's **wraith** mentor, Bezaal, who will try to manipulate visitors into completing the ritual sequence.

The **stairs** are a kastromantic construction: descending them engraves one's aura with an unseen rune. The rune is not magical, but signals to underworld powers that the bearer has a destiny at the lowest depths and should be allowed to descend.

Climbing the stairs saddles the wearer with a **gray hook**. Like an invisible, intangible fishing line, this trails behind and snares spirits. Unhooking a spirit, however, takes skill. By means of these hooks, Titardinal filled the stairway with ghosts caught in both the upper and lower worlds.

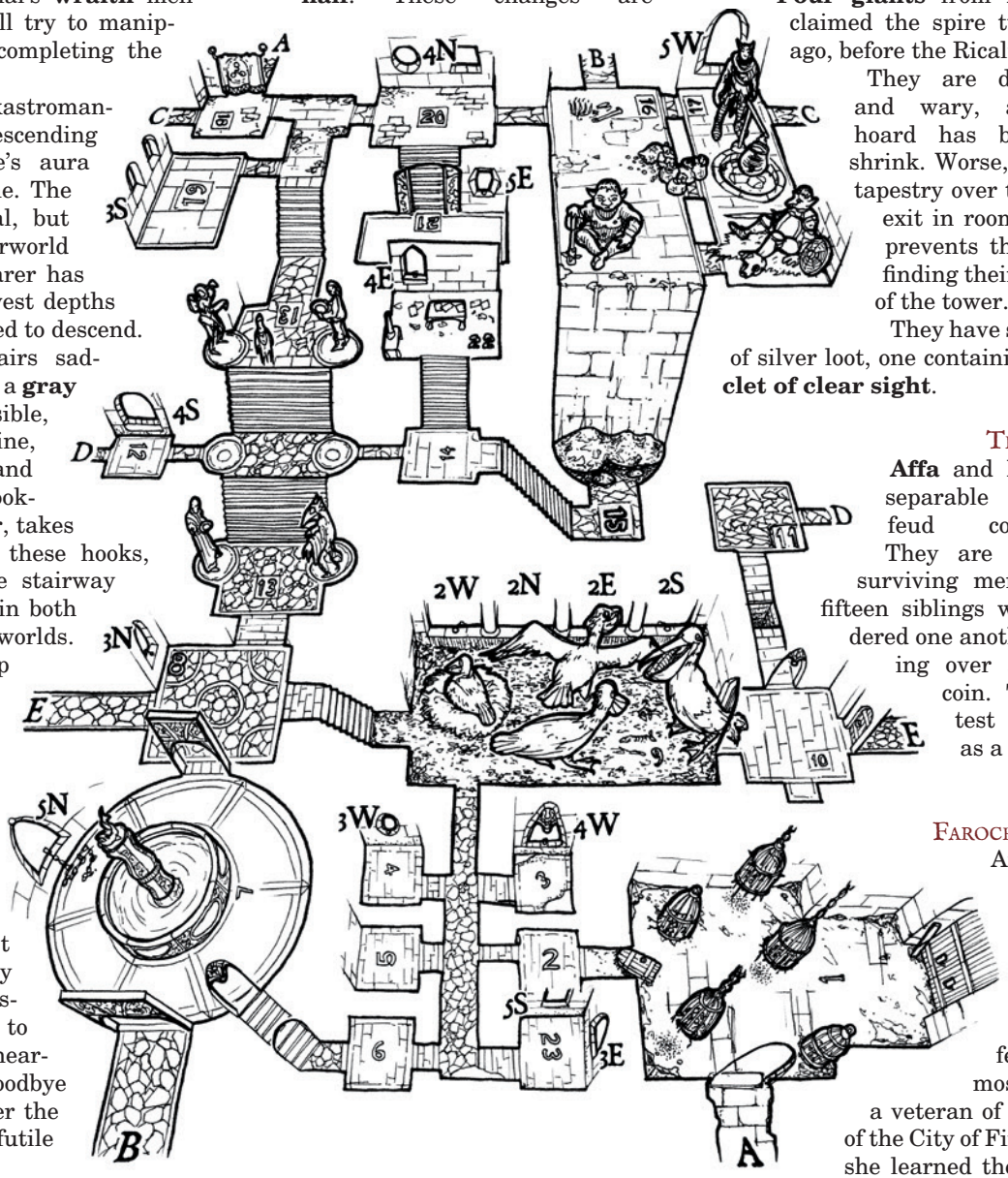
The idols keep them imprisoned, binding them as an unwilling congregation.

Hungry Spirits

Dead bodies reanimate here; sleepers and the badly injured must resist possession. Once they have a body, possessing spirits will seek to (d6) 1-2: return to a nearby village to say goodbye properly; 3-6: murder the nearest person in a futile act of revenge.

15. Changeling Cone

An error in Titardinal's work: those descending (20 paces) to the fly-swarmed **garbage** heap **double in size** for d6 days; those ascending **shrink by half**. These changes are imperceptible: to most eyes, the shaft simply **appears conical**, narrow at the bottom, and wide at the top.



16/17. Hall of the Giants

Four giants from Firevault claimed the spire two years ago, before the Ricalu came.

They are distressed and wary, as their hoard has begun to shrink. Worse, the blue tapestry over the north exit in room 18 now prevents them from finding their way out of the tower.

They have six **sacks** of silver loot, one containing a **circlet of clear sight**.

The Twins

Affa and **Isho**, inseparable twins, feud constantly. They are the sole surviving members of fifteen siblings who murdered one another fighting over a cursed coin. They detest wizards as a result.

Faroch & Sossa

Armored **Faroch** is the leader, but **Sossa** is feared most. She is a veteran of the siege of the City of Fire, where she learned the trick of drinking (and spitting) molten lead. A pot of bubbling, **molten lead** simmers over the fire in room 17.

Tucked in Faroch's **iron armor** is a scrap of vellum. It depicts a lunar convergence to occur in d1000 days that will briefly open a portal to the City of Fire, far below the ground.

18. Tapestry Room

A beautiful **blue tapestry** hangs across the archway in the north wall, obscuring passageway "A". It is rustic in style, but elaborate and finely woven, and shows a stylized map of the surrounding region. It predates the tower, which is not shown on it, and it is not particularly accurate.

Anyone affected by sky blindness cannot see or focus on it and will be **unaware** of the northern corridor unless they make a careful study of the room. To everyone else, the northern wall is simply not interesting enough to reach their conscious awareness.

22. The Study

Shelves hold a dozen **tomes** on kastromancy; a hundred torn **sketches** of alternate tower layouts litter the floor. All show a 24th "altar room." Margin notes contain half-written love poems to his "drowned" lover, "Vilin."

24. Rooftop Altar

The tower's roof is accessible only from room 23, window **5S**. Wind from the lake howls across the parapets.

Bringing a full set of sparks to the **stone altar** completes Titardinal's master spell. Lightning arcs from the lake and strikes the spark-bearer; if they survive, they are granted a **wish**.

The lake spirit will send a mighty **storm ghost** as a last ditch counter.

After d3 wishes, the lake spirit and the undines die, and the lake becomes gray and barren.

THE LENSES OF HEAVEN

THE SITUATION

To protect ancient Saaru, jewel of the astral realm, the gods gifted it with a pair of magical ***lenses***. Set in the heavens at a place they named ***Tlarba***, the lenses intercepted anyone headed for Saaru. Over time, many chose not to continue to Saaru at all, and Tlarba grew into a city, rich and strange.

TEMPLE OF THE LENSES

The temple complex is the first (and only) part of ***Tlarba*** that most ever see. It is controlled by the Custodial Order of Saaru, although for centuries the order has served only itself.

The order privately laments that its most precious relics are virtually the front door mat. They fear that one day, some demon might emerge and damage the lenses—or simply steal them—plunging Tlarba into irrelevance.

- It is a crime to refer to the lenses separately (lest the gods think that mortals don't appreciate the other one and take them back).
- It is a crime to talk about the lenses within earshot of the them (lest demons overhear and steal them).
- Dirtying the lenses (especially with blood) merits a fine.
- Failing to pray for the safety of Saaru upon arrival merits a fine.

Typical fines consist of 30% of an arrival's portable wealth.

THE TEMPLE SQUARE

An enclosed courtyard is lined with artisans required by the temple: a whitesmith, translator, book-binder, soap-maker, gem polisher, spicer, cobbler, and two vestment makers.

They are mostly ***selks***, with a few ***slewts*** and ***craesten***.

GUARDS

Eight ***slewts*** swim in briny **pools**. When on duty, they defend the lens chamber with a **shock-wave onager**.

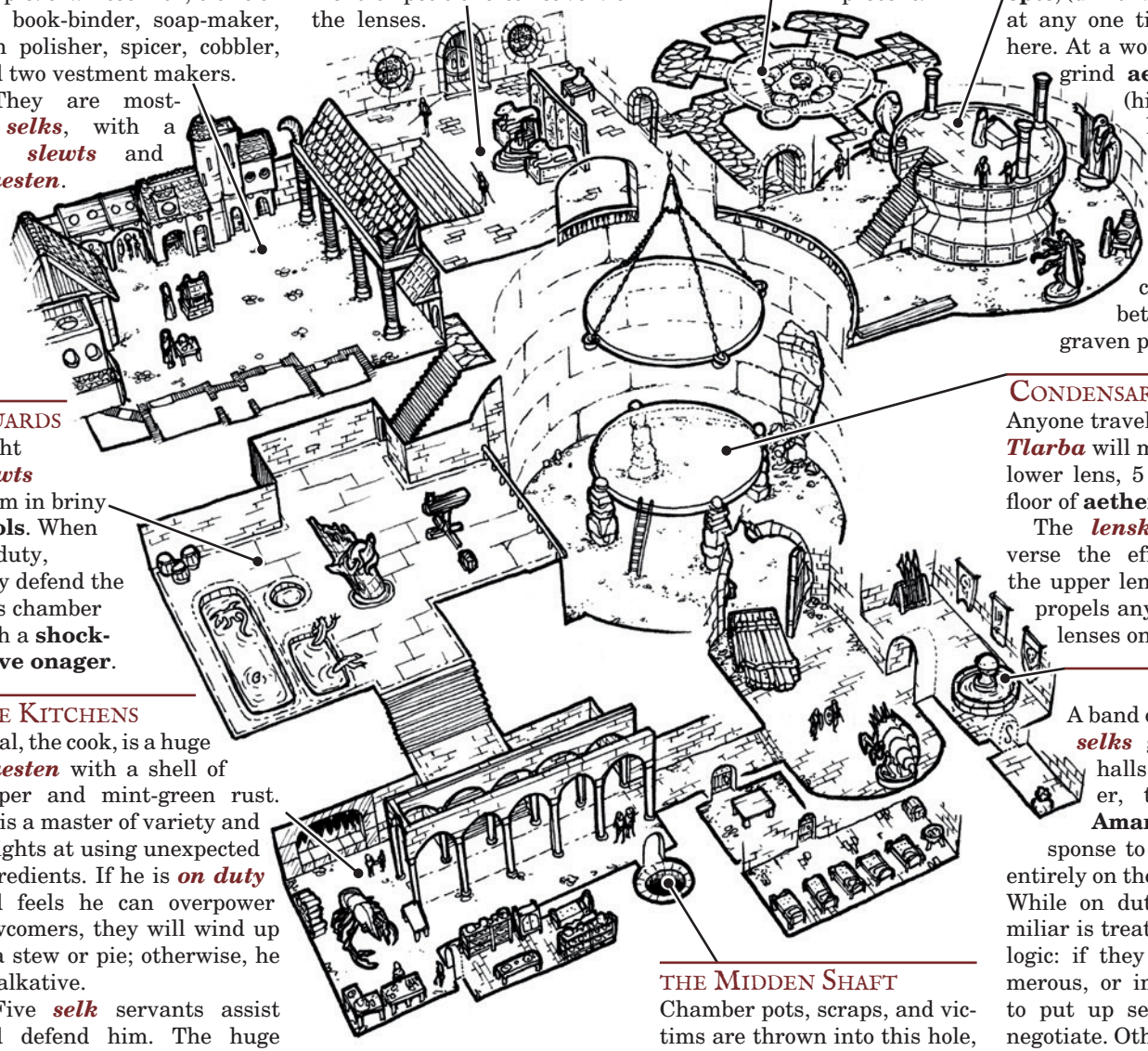
THE KITCHENS

Kwal, the cook, is a huge ***craesten*** with a shell of copper and mint-green rust. He is a master of variety and delights at using unexpected ingredients. If he is ***on duty*** and feels he can overpower newcomers, they will wind up in a stew or pie; otherwise, he is talkative.

Five ***selk*** servants assist and defend him. The huge **oven** is home to thirty **fire sprites**, loyal to Kwal.

THE THRONE OF PEARL

A pair of translucent ***ghost selks*** guard the stairs; ***chalk hounds*** guard the throne and the exit to the ***streets of Tlarba***. A ***lenskeeper*** sits in judgment of petitions to leave via the lenses.



PRIVATE CHAMBERS

Each ***lenskeeper*** sleeps in a sparsely furnished private cell. They meet in the central sitting room to eat, conspire, and take hallucinogens. d6 will be present.

THE MIDDEN SHAFT

Chamber pots, scraps, and victims are thrown into this hole, onto a heap where the ***Idols of Saaru*** lie half buried.

RITULARIUM

This raised altar is where the ***lenskeepers*** pray to their "gods," three hideous astral demons. Only the six lenskeepers and their twelve **polisher-adepts**, (d12 of whom will be here at any one time) are allowed here. At a workstation, adepts grind **aether sand** into (highly flammable) lens-cleaning grit. At another, they compress it into ammunition for the onager. Lenskeepers cannot die while between the three graven pillars.

CONDENSARIUM & LENSES

Anyone traveling astrally near ***Tlarba*** will materialize on the lower lens, 5 paces above the floor of **aether sand**.

The ***lenskeepers*** can reverse the effect by hoisting the upper lens slightly, which propels anyone between the lenses on their way.

LOWER HALLS

A band of thirteen ***grush selks*** guard the lower halls with their leader, the ***ghost selk*** **Amana**. Their response to visitors depends entirely on the ***duty schedule***. While on duty, anyone unfamiliar is treated with a simple logic: if they look tough, numerous, or important enough to put up serious resistance, negotiate. Otherwise, kill them and take them to Kwal.

The Duty Schedule

Over the centuries, the alien diversity of the lens guard has caused many misunderstandings, complaints, and violent incidents between its members.

To keep the peace, a mash of agreements, refinements, exceptions, and supplementary clauses has accumulated. It is now so complex that almost nobody understands the specifics. Even so, each guard group defends its rights (as they understand them) with bloody-minded intensity.

Whenever adventurers first encounter each of the guard groups, roll to determine whether they are on duty:

d4	Room duty schedule
1	Shift start—duties are performed vigorously and to the letter.
2	Off duty—relaxing, eating, or gaming. Interactions considered to be demands for unpaid work.
3	Schedule confusion—an argument breaks out on whether the group is on duty or not. d8 individuals believe they are.
4	End of shift—the group does its best to refuse entry to their chamber for d10 minutes, at which point they're off duty and will let everyone pass.

Grush Selks

The majority of Tlarbans are grush selks: tall, skin-and-bones humanoids with large eyes, mottled skin, and copious bristles ("grush").

Their body language is alien, but they are full of feeling and passion.

Ghost Selks

Some adult selks begin to manifest their astral nature, becoming translucent and insubstantial. Physical attacks affect them, but much less than normal. Their own attacks are unimpeded.

In ***Tlarba***, ghost selks live and train as a warrior class. They use Saaru-traditional weapons from the wars with the ***craesten***: short, chitin-breaking seax and double-ended javelins, one end a cluster of sharp quills (to more easily find armored eyes), the other end cut from a paralytic resin.

Craesten

Hulking terrestrial lobsters, craesten are also native to Saaru. They are enormously strong and heavy, and despite the loud clacking of their legs, move gracefully.

They are ignorant of human body language and tone of voice, which can make them seem stupid or naive at times, but they are intelligent and perceptive. Their **natural armor** lends them an unshakable confidence and humor: in the worst case, they can simply eat you.

When truly upset or angry, they produce a strong **citrus smell**, highly alarming to selks.

Spilled craesten blood produces a potent **magical entropy** that makes nearby spell casting difficult.

Slewts

The slewts of Tlarba are glistening, orange amphibians. They are a small people, but lean and muscular.

Slewts spend their off-duty hours frothing up their pools and warbling together in high-pitched harmonies.

On duty, they crew the onager and climb the walls stealthily to grapple.

Slewt slime bonds metal to metal instantly, which makes a mess of armor (especially mail). They grapple armored foes with this in mind, hoping to pin a weapon or arm in place before moving on to softer targets.

Slewts will readily surrender if battle goes against them—and gleefully rejoin battle moments later.

Chalk Hounds

Seemingly animated statues, chalk hounds are elemental spirits coaxed into inhabiting a white mineral paste. The two in the throne room are works of art, every inch engraved.

They are sleek looking but graceless when on the attack. Their feet flake and crack with every step, leaving white footprints. To artists, every step the hounds take is vandalism.

They have the courage of the unfeeling, unafraid of weapons (except for mattocks). Once they attack, they continue to fight until broken to bits.

They don't heal naturally, but the polisher-adepts redecorate, repair, and recast them when necessary.

Lenskeepers

Tlarba has completely succumbed to the demonic influences it was built to keep at bay—in fact, contact with Saaru has been completely lost.

The lenskeepers desire the powerful aether sand that materializes with each arrival. Arriving visitors are imperceptibly lightened, some tiny fraction of their essence shaved away and deposited on the condensarium floor.

When anyone leaves, it diminishes Tlarba itself, so the lenskeepers use many excuses to prevent departures:

- Applicants are insufficiently deferential and will have to wait.
- It is a holy time for the lenskeepers, no audiences this week.
- The application fee or gift was insufficient or inauspicious.
- The astrological timing is not correct for using the lenses.
- One of the applicants is cursed and can never again use the lenses.

Either the lenskeepers or their servants will instruct adventurers to find lodging in the temple square. After a time, an excuse will be found to move them out into Tlarba city.

Lenskeeper Magic

Each lenskeeper's bond with their demon gods allows them to draw from the following powers thrice daily:

Telekinetic grip, **wall of angry spirits**, **shatter**, **summon fiery locusts**, **cause blindness**. Four acting together can summon a potent demon at the cost of one power use each.

Polisher-Adepts

The adepts are weak from deprivation and abuse, but they defend their masters faithfully. In battle, they use these powers at will (each carries a 50% chance of death for the adept):

Dispel magic, **acid spittle**, **orb of pain**, **shapechange** (boa, huge wolf spider, giant flesh-boring maggot).

One secretly wears a gleaming, enchanted **breastplate** under her robes.

Idols of Saaru

The huge heap below the midden shaft contains the original idols from the Ritularium. If restored and re-sanctified, the lenses could once more be used to reach Saaru.

The Streets of Tlarba

A dense and dusty city of selks, craesten, and slewts toils under a flickering, yellow sky. Artisans vie for the right to serve the lenskeepers; loyalists plot their overthrow. Weird aliens seek converts to a hundred astral gods; stranded sages search the stars for a way to Saaru, or just home again.

THE ROOTS OF AMBITION

THE SITUATION

Deep in the sun-blasted desert is a high, rocky plateau. A century ago, this arid land was the realm of the reptilian Heelan people.

Now, an ***alchemist*** toils here, turning the rocky desert into a forest, inch by inch.

She is aided by a strange, underground power: a ***soil mother***.

SLAR OCCUL, EYETOWER

On a huge, **stone pillar** stands a tall tower, terracotta red and dotted with fist-sized, round holes. It is now occupied by a dozen **ghost bats**, gray furred with a two-pace wingspan.

The bats are hospitable toward guests, even supplying them with forest blackfruit or desert hare, but grow resentful unless regularly thanked.

At night, they fly far and wide in pairs, in search of insects.

By day, the bats hang in the tower, hiding from the heat and purring softly about the many Heelan ruins hidden in the ***blasted sands***.

THE ALCHEMIST

Toad-eyed **Antephna** is barely recognizable as human; many transmuting accidents have distorted her body.

She croaks her words, moves by hopping, and licks her eyes constantly.

She has come to the plateau to search its many sand-buried ruins for relics, with the aid of the ***soil mother***.

She is furious at having had to abandon the ***transmuter*** at ***Slar Nilta*** and is desperate to secure it before ***Byor's proudskulls*** do permanent damage.

She will use deception, threats, or promise of silver to draw the adventurers to Slar Nilta, in the hopes they will drive off the Heelan.

THE LOUD PARCELS

Antephna knows a secret method of making explosives from bat guano, though it is time consuming. She has prepared three **loud parcels** during her time with the ghost bats.

THE INVESTOR

With her is the expedition financier, **Unguff Dunwattle**. He is short, sweaty, and wears tattered orange silks and clutches a slim accounts book.

Having witnessed the loss of everyone and everything he brought here, he distrusts Antephna's judgment and is terrified of never seeing his home again.

He has bankrupted himself to get here, however, and the instant he catches a whiff that something of value might yet be plucked from the sands, he will attempt to take control of the expedition.

Desperate though he may be, he is a shrewd bargainer.

THE BLASTED SANDS

Beyond the **cinder cones** lies a land so hot, that exhaustion and death come within a day or two to those without magical protection. Only the Heelan tread freely there.

THE BLACK LAKE

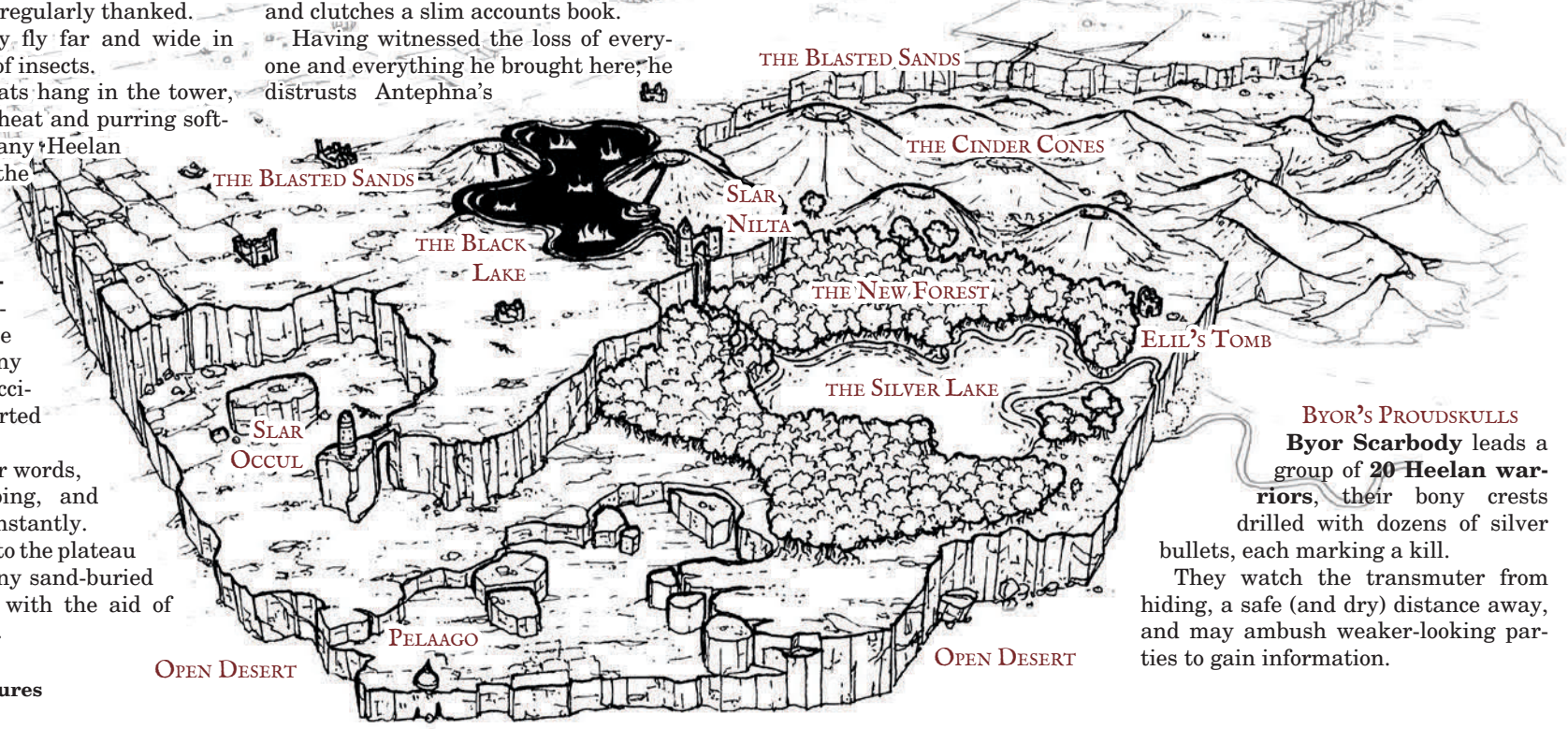
Dark, viscous fluid seeps from the sides of two **cinder cones** and collects in a large, shimmering lake. The fluid is somewhat flammable; burning cinders from the cones occasionally send sheets of fire across the lake surface.

Those who watch the flames carefully might glimpse the tentacles of the ***devils*** within the lake reaching up, receiving fire as an infernal sacrament.

SLAR NILTA

The ruin of a terracotta brick **palace** stands here, squeezed between the Black Lake and the drop to the lower plateau. Wavy patterns are pressed into each of its slimy, smoke-blackened bricks.

Antephna and her workers rebuilt the gate house with nearby rubble, and in place of the original gate, they built the magical ***transmuter***.



BYOR'S PROUDSKULLS

Byor Scarbody leads a group of **20 Heelan warriors**, their bony crests drilled with dozens of silver bullets, each marking a kill.

They watch the transmuter from hiding, a safe (and dry) distance away, and may ambush weaker-looking parties to gain information.

d6	Ruined hole type
1	Wall fragments
2	Ruin, d6 rooms
3	Complex, d3-1 levels above, d4 below ground
4	Well shaft drops 20 paces to d8 limestone caves
5	Hollow obelisk
6	Subsurface tomb, d12 rooms, no entrance

d6	Ruin occupants
1	d3 giant camel spiders
2	d6 ***Onddo***
3	d12 Heelan scouts with d3 water shade mounts
4	d2 lost expedition survivors
5	d6 Heelan skeletons and a wight-prince
6	***Sand Monarch*** and attendants

d6	Ruin treasure
1	Pools of drinkable water, 50% of which contain edible fish
2	Cache of d8 weapons, minor valuables
3	Preserved, rare oils (d6)
4	Graven map to d12 other ruined holes connected by lost roads
5	d3 graven spell tablets
6	Funerary hoard

The Transmuter

An **ornate archway** of silver filigree purifies the stinking water that passes through it. Great plumes of fire and steam burst out as the impurities are destroyed; the heat, in turn, energizes the transmuter to continue its work.

Byor has yet to decide whether to destroy it, leave it, or haul it back across the blasted sands to his masters.

Pelaago

This is the most likely route up onto the plateau. See "The Oracle's Decree" on page 44 for details, or treat it as a six-room ***ruined hole***.

Ruined Holes

The blasted sands of the upper plateau are a tapestry of **ruins**, remnants of a glorious earlier age of Heelan prosperity are spaced every few leagues.

Roll on the three ***ruin tables*** to determine the type, occupants and treasure of each ruin.

Devils & Monarchs

Miles below the cinder cones is a dark, hot sea of murk and devils. Devils that stray too close to the surface fall out of the cinder cones, into the lake.

At first, they resemble black, monstrously sized squid. They cherish fire, can **squirt flaming pitch** at will, and devour anything that fails to entertain them or indulge their perverse, destructive bargains.

After a year of mad frolic in the black lake, they are forced to take to the sands to find food.

The desert environment is not kind to them; the sand flays their skin, and their tentacles wither and tear off.

Mad with pain, they live as unthinking predators, burrowing to avoid the heat and bursting from the sands to devour prey.

Sand Monarchs

A few devils survive long enough to acclimatize and regain some of their former hellish majesty.

These will be attended by d6 enthralled giant **camel spiders**, d3 giant **geckos**, and d12 enslaved **Heelan**.

The Soil Mother

The entire forest floor is permeated by the hair-like fungal threads of a vast being: a soil mother. Her thoughts are slow and deep, spread among thousands of coconut-like ganglia buried deep in the soil. By touch and taste she knows everything that happens within her domain.

Though imperceptibly slow, she is immensely powerful, able to reshape the landscape entirely. Streams, trees, and bushes flow and grow only where she pleases.

There are few animals in the forest, but in other climes, soil mothers use fruiting groves to lure prey and predators together, for what she needs most are the brains of intelligent animals.

Made poisonous by accumulated mycotoxins from the fruit, berries, and plants of the forest, animal brains are left uneaten and are claimed by the soil mother so she can grow ***Onddo***.

Soil mother ganglia are sweet and nutritious, but eating them earns the eternal hatred of all soil mothers.

An enraged soil mother is fearsome, can poison the waters with hallucinogenic toxins (targeted at the offending species), or send hunting ***Onddo*** as saboteurs and assassins.

The Onddo

The quick-brained servants of the soil mother are grown to suit various purposes.

Hunting Onddo are humanoid, and wield wooden spears. **Tusked Onddo** are huge, headless quadrupeds, used to dig stream beds or to haul boulders.

Seed Onddo are roughly dog-like, with a sharp **beak** to inject spore-filled venom. This causes an irresistible wanderlust. When victims (eventually) die and return to the earth, a new soil mother is born there.

All Onddo have a tough, woody exterior mottled like the leaf litter of the forest floor. When stationary, they are extremely difficult to spot, often mistaken for logs or stumps.

Most are mute but constantly release and exchange spores with the forest, and so they know the will of the soil mother instinctively.

Unless hacked to bits or burned, they regenerate fully overnight.

The Daughters of Elil

The soil mother is also served by an order of root walkers (see page 147) who serve as ambassadors among humans.

They came here with the expedition, and their venerable leader, Elil Leafbringer, died in a ruined tower to let the soil-mother seed in her body begin the forest.

The daughters hear the soil mother's will in their dreams; Onddo and animals obey the daughters' commands.

When buried in soil, they can "travel along the roots" to any point in the forest—the mother dissolves them and regrows them a new body elsewhere.

The survival of the forest depends entirely on the transmuter, but relations have soured with impatient, irreverent Antephna and her demands.

The order keeps a dozen forest ruins secret; they hope to use any silver within them to pay traders to bring large animals to the forest (deer, wolves, and bear cubs). The soil mother requires animal brains for Onddo production. Adventurer brains might suffice.

Though only eleven "daughters" remain, replacement clones sleep beneath the soil of the forest.

LAIR OF THE LANTERN WORM

The Situation

Deep in the desert, an order of ***Heelan mystics*** practices a strange and lethal form of divination in a network of cliff-side caves.

Brought from deep underground by an unnatural source, the water—toxic to Heelan—is a source of mystical wonder to them.

It is also home to a strange and deadly creature of the underworld, a ***lantern worm***.

Rumors of this Place

Various rumors and half-truths are available to inquiring folks near the plateau:

- The Heelan know of a secret oasis where water can be found.
- Astrologers have divined the ***forge*** that birthed Vilin's spear.
- The Heelan pay tribute to a serpentine god-in-the-flesh.
- A hermit named ***Carduros*** knows the secret of hiding from one's destiny.
- **Heelan proudskulls** that earn twenty kills are admitted to a secret order that prophesies the future.
- The high plateau conceals a silver door to the underworld.
- The Ballads of Vilin tell of the hero snatching the secret of his death from the light of a dread lantern he found in the desert.
- A desert explorer returned with strange orbs [from the ***glowing cavern***] that glowed for months.

Traitor's Path

Humid air blows out into the desert from the **traitor's path**, a sequence of slimy stepping-stones in the stream.

The **second-to-last stone** is false, crudely hinged to tip anyone stepping upon it into the swirling water, which is chest deep to a man here.

The **water** is mildly acidic, but causes only itching. (To Heelan, it causes painful, caustic burns.)

The **sound** of visitors' splashing, however, may (1 in 3 chance) draw out the ***lantern worm***, for the ***mystics*** have trained it to expect live offerings thrown into the water of the ***Cave of Offerings***.

Cave of Offerings

A twin **waterfall** cascades down from the ***upper vault***, one side splashing down a slippery **limestone ramp**, the other a straight drop of 20 paces.

The flat-topped **offering stone** is a sticky mess of water shade bones and giant camel spider carapaces, from sacrifices brought by the ***mystics***.

Glowing Cavern

Waist-deep water flows swiftly here, but the ***lantern worm*** has laid a **cluster of eggs** in the far corner. An eerie blue light emanates from them.

The rubbery, transparent eggs are stuck to the wall with a glue-like slime which can be dissolved by wine or spirits. The glue is stronger than the eggs, which will rip open if pulled.

d6 eggs contain immature worms, half a pace long and tightly coiled within the egg. Each matures and hatches in d8 months, but will die if prematurely hatched. Anyone drinking fresh egg fluid experiences powerful stomach cramps but gains the ability to breathe underwater for d6 weeks.

Proudskull Nests

Eleven **Heelan proudskulls** live here in this sequence of three small, dry caverns. Each has a score of silver bullets drilled into its bony crest, signifying successful hunts or kills in battle.

Here they serve the ***mystics*** faithfully in the hopes of earning a place among them.

They each have terrible burns in various stages of healing from their trips out through the water, to hunt or simply to prove their mettle.

Mystics' Chamber

Three mystics live here in abject squalor. Once Heelan proudskulls, long exposure to the water has hardened their skin into stone-like carapaces.

Each carries one of the three **Masks of Carduros**, stone relics that conceal the wearer from all forms of divination.

If threatened, they will feign surrender, "allowing" access to the ***lantern worm***.

The Great Forge of Carduros

The mystics' chamber was once the forge of Carduros, legendary underworld artisan.

Here there is a **forge** of hard, porous yellow stone unique to the underworld. An enchanted **bellows** of bone and drakeskin is bolted to the floor of the chamber.

If heaved three times, the bellows heats the forge so much that the stones glow white hot, burning the exposed skin of anyone nearby.

Tomb of Carduros

This is the dwelling place of **Saranok**, master of the mystic order. Ancient, with scales of stone from a century of water exposure, he no longer seeks the worm and wears no mask.

All his questions have been answered, and so Saranok contents himself with the tutelage of his three wizened protégés.

The presence of strangers, however, will arouse his curiosity. Are they best fed to the worm as sacrifices? Or do they come with questions of their own, questions that may lead him to new and unexpected insights?

The Tale of Carduros

The walls are engraved with a long tale in **pictograms**, depicting Carduros's exile from the underworld as punishment for the crime of enchanting a sword for a many-armed demon.

In fact, it does not commemorate Carduros but was carved by the artisan himself as a final diary.

Toward the end it grows sullen, emphasizing long years wishing he could return to his home in the deeps.

d6	Cave encounters
1	d6 Heelan ***phibs***
2	d3 Heelan ***mystics***
3	Saranok from the ***tomb***, with d8 proudskulls
4	d10 proudskulls from the ***nests***, proving their worthiness
5	d3 undead ***phibs***
6	the ***lantern worm***

The Sarcophagus

Carduros carved his own **sarcophagus** from that same indestructible yellow stone of the underworld from which the forge is made.

The Heelan have been unable to open it, for the seam of the lid is false. In fact, the lid and sides are of one piece, and must be lifted together.

Inside is:

- Carduros's remains (mostly dust)
- Six ingots of ***white metal***
- Three ingots of ***dark glass***
- A stone **mold** in the shape of a key that could open the **silver door** in the ***upper vault***.

The Lantern Worm

The worm is a slimy horror fifteen paces long and as thick as a thigh. Its head is bare bone, the white jaws delivering venomous bites from a pike's reach with blinding speed. Most strikes are fatal, severing flesh and bone.

At the tip of its tail bobs a **lantern of bone**, whose dread light casts a **prophetic snare**: if the worm is slain while the lantern still shines, time seemingly rewinds d20 minutes, undoing anything that happened. Everyone affected remembers the rewound events.

In fact, the snare is a prophetic, mass hallucination, and the "rewinding" merely an awakening.

Nevertheless, if the lantern is smashed in dream or in life, the worm loses this power.

d6	Torn by the worm
1	sudden, terrifying death
2	worm bites throat, death whispers a clue
3	clear vision of a possible ally
4	clear vision of enemy doings
5	clear vision of the past
6	clear vision beyond the gray veil

The Worm Seekers

Carduros forged his masks to hide from retribution from below as he continued to enchant weapons from his place of exile.

The mystics, however, use them to practice a bizarre, risky form of divination.

Donning razor-spiked **collars**, they seek out the worm to enter its snare and be killed.

Should the brute worm eat the collar (which it does 9 in 10 times, being ravenous), it chokes and dies. The snare dissipates, and the terrified worm-seeker awakens, alive once more.

With practice, worm-seekers can glimpse a prophetic vision through the act of dying, and return to share it. (See table: ***Torn by the worm***.)

Use of the masks is essential, as it prevents the worm from remembering its own death and learning not to eat the collars.

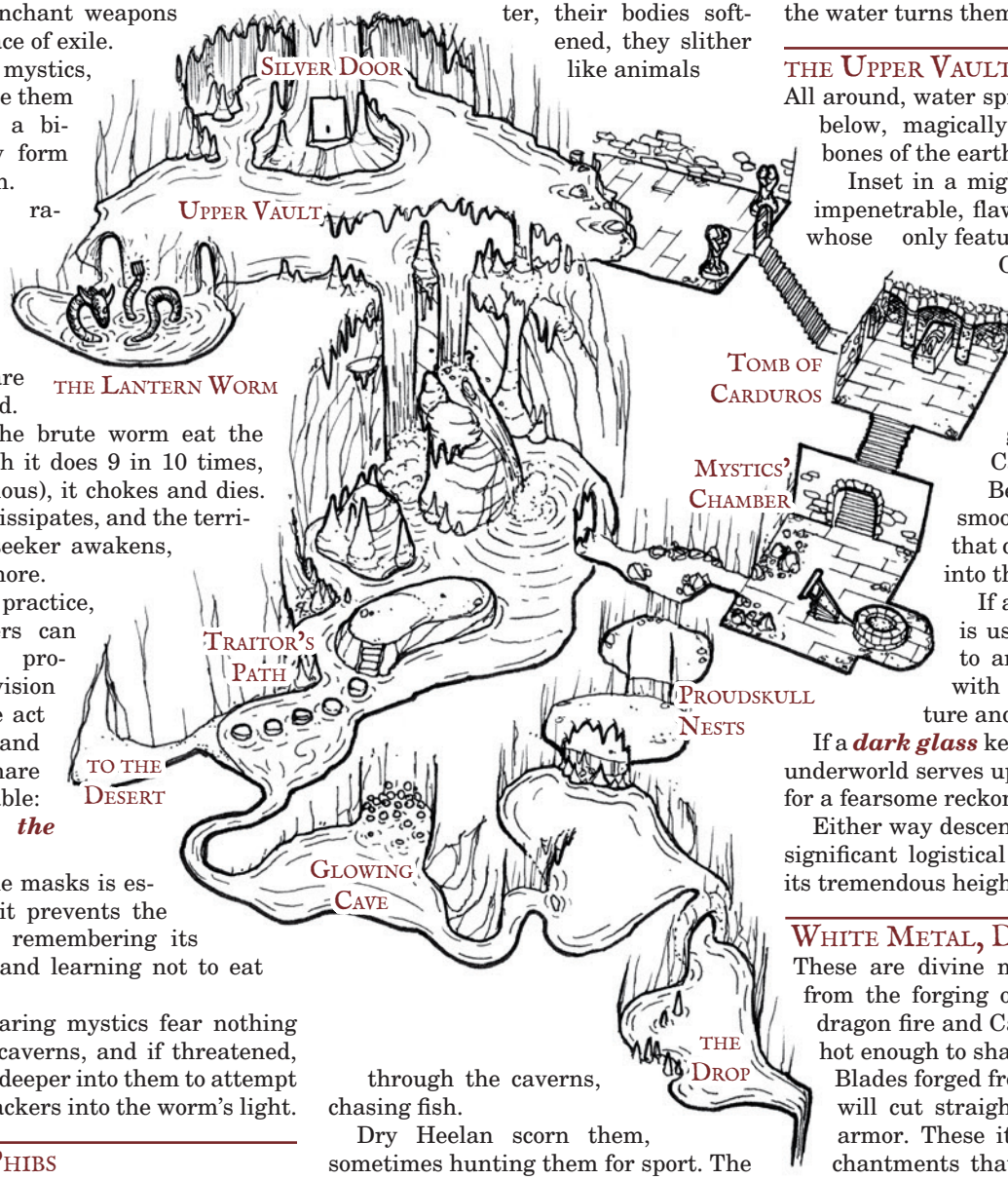
Mask-wearing mystics fear nothing within the caverns, and if threatened, will retreat deeper into them to attempt to draw attackers into the worm's light.

Heelan Phibs

Not all Heelan can endure the trials of their apprenticeship in the cave. Some fall to **water-lust**, abandoning the strength of the desert and reverting to a "degenerate," amphibian form.

Their minds dulled by water, their bodies softened, they slither like animals through the caverns, chasing fish.

Dry Heelan scorn them, sometimes hunting them for sport. The worm ignores them, instinctively mistaking their wriggling motion for that of its young.



Undead Phibs

Those that die in the light of the worm's snare go on as **rotting undead** until the water turns them to mush.

The Upper Vault

All around, water springs from leagues below, magically drawn from the bones of the earth.

Inset in a mighty **column** is an impenetrable, flawless **silver door**, whose only feature is a **keyhole**.

One of the gates to the underworld, it can only be opened by a key of white metal or dark glass, taken from Carduros's mold.

Beyond the door is a smooth, **vertical shaft** that drops several miles into the depths.

If a ***white metal*** key is used, the door leads to an underworld rich with exploration, culture and discourse.

If a ***dark glass*** key is used, the same underworld serves up its worst demons for a fearsome reckoning.

Either way descending the shaft is a significant logistical challenge, due to its tremendous height.

White Metal, Dark Glass

These are divine materials left over from the forging of the world. Only dragon fire and Carduros's forge are hot enough to shape them.

Blades forged from either material will cut straight through normal armor. These items can bear enchantments that would evaporate lesser matter.

THE CLEFT OF FIVE WORLDS

THE SITUATION

The ***Cleft*** is a massive sinkhole, reaching from mountainous heights into the lower world.

Here, the Seree built one of their most ambitious engineering projects: a ***Lycaeum***, a repository of learning that drew aspirants from the entire empire.

The Seree kept its location secret, but as a powerful ley nexus, the Cleft has a way of being found along many strange pathways.

Before the Seree were scoured from the world by the gods, the Cleft was the meeting place of five cultures—not all of them allies. Now, the wizards are gone, but life in the Cleft rumbles on in the shadow of their works.

REACHING THE CLEFT

A portal in a wizard's tower may lead to the ***Tomb of the Disgraced***. A long journey through the Ur-Menig may end behind the ***Teeth of the Jorn***. Careless magic used at a ley node may teleport the careless to the roof of the ***White Tower***. Certain drugs are rumored to carry sleepers to ***Pale Yugra***. Strange currents could bring lost boaters to the foggy waters of the **Blessed Shoals**.

HISTORY OF THE CLEFT

-1200: The ***Jorn*** arrive from the lightless "Jornrealm" beyond the ***Teeth***. At bloodstained altars, they learned how to placate the demon horrors of the ***Maw*** with prayer and frozen moonlight.

-800: The Jornrealm erupts in a civil war. Many Jorn return there to fight, bearing demon gifts as weapons.

-700: ***Tcheth*** slaves escape the ruins of the Jornrealm and flee to the Cleft. Most are eaten by Maw horrors, but the demon **Guguluin** grants safe passage in exchange for their night-seeing eyes.

-670: The Tcheth found ***Pale Yugra*** in memory of their ancestral home. They discover the ***Murkers*** and learn to fish the **Blessed Shoals**.

-600: A Seree expedition reaches the Cleft. Recognizing its potential, they found ***Sar Vistu*** as a staging area.

-550: The Seree wizard Unclideon descends into the Maw to subdue its horrors.

-510: Using Varnan mercenaries and many hired Jorn, the Seree seize the island from the Murkers and found ***Sar Dural*** as the site to build the ***White Tower***.

-480: The White Tower lifts off from Sar Dural, flying directly into the ley nexus at the center of the Cleft.

-463: Rival wizards battle for control of the Cleft. Sar Vistu burns.

-400: Seree imperial decree grants the Cleft to the **Trigonic Order**, a communal hermetic order devoted to studying magic peacefully (at least with respect to other Seree).

-380: Construction of the ***Lycaeum*** begins with four great spars.

-370: Construction of the ***Tomb of the Disgraced*** begins to imprison the enemies of the Lycaeum.

-350: Unclideon resorts to lichery and is ritually dismembered by the order and sealed in the tomb.

-300: The Lycaeum is completed. The order rapidly begins accumulating the ritual lore of aspirants who come to learn here. Relative peace begins, lasting for several generations.

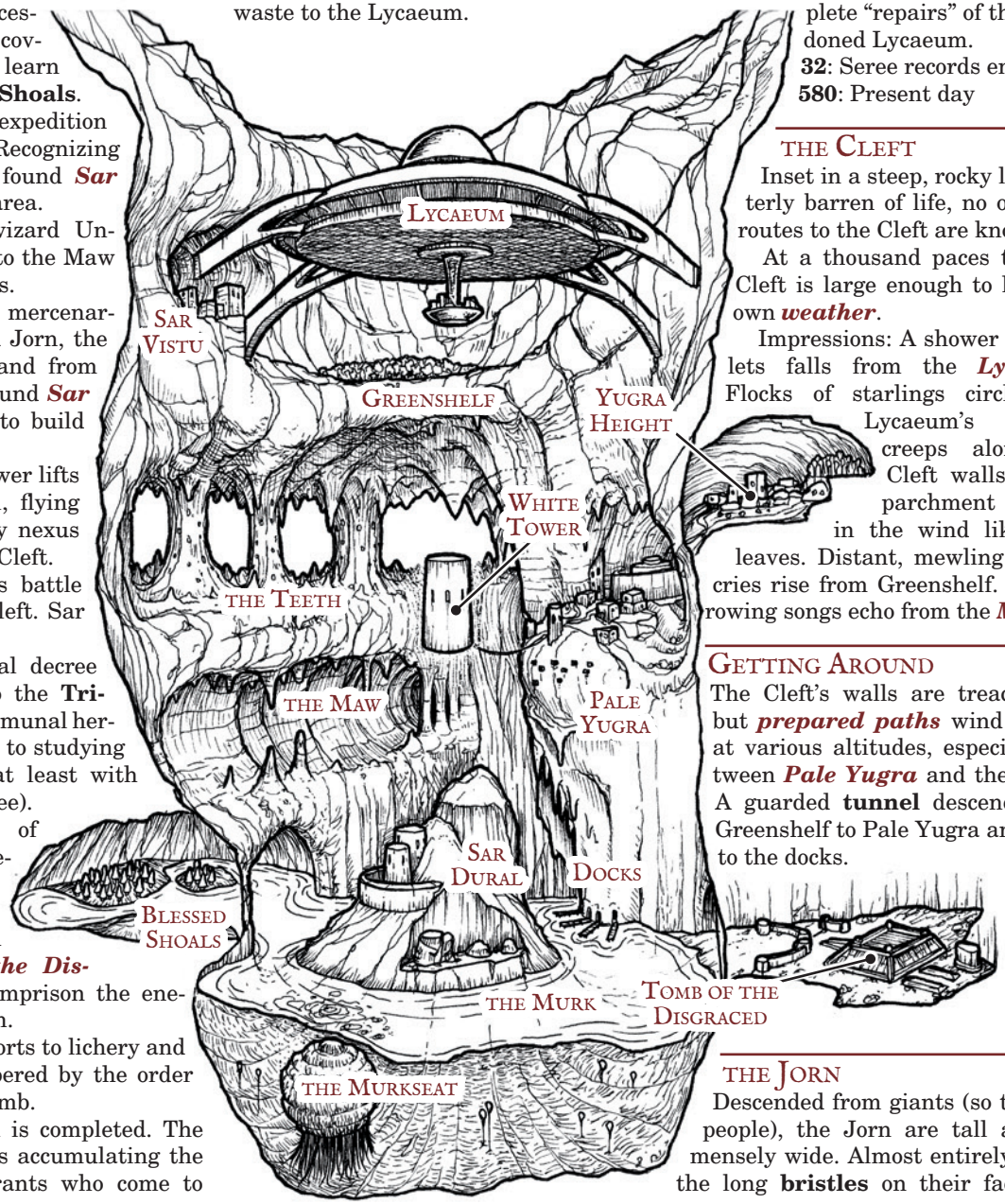
0: Demigod warbodies under the command of Deel arrive by air and lay waste to the Lycaeum.

12: The garrison at Sar Dural, now cut off from the empire, falls to a stonebody Murker attack from the water.

30: Automatons from Sar Vistu complete "repairs" of the abandoned Lycaeum.

32: Seree records end.

580: Present day



THE CLEFT

Inset in a steep, rocky land, utterly barren of life, no overland routes to the Cleft are known.

At a thousand paces tall, the Cleft is large enough to have its own ***weather***.

Impressions: A shower of droplets falls from the ***Lycaeum***. Flocks of starlings circle. The Lycaeum's shadow creeps along the Cleft walls. Burnt parchment blows in the wind like dead leaves. Distant, mewling animal cries rise from Greenshelf. ***Tcheth*** rowing songs echo from the ***Murk***.

GETTING AROUND

The Cleft's walls are treacherous, but ***prepared paths*** wind around at various altitudes, especially between ***Pale Yugra*** and the ***Teeth***. A guarded **tunnel** descends from Greenshelf to Pale Yugra and down to the docks.

THE JORN

Descended from giants (so they tell people), the Jorn are tall and immensely wide. Almost entirely **blind**, the long **bristles** on their faces and

d8	Cleft weather
1-2	Pale, flickering sky for d3 days
3-4	Night falls, lasts d3 days
5	Cold rain for d8 hours
6	Muddy, scalding rain, d4 hours
7	Dense, white fog forms at the level of (d6) 1-2: the Murk, 3-4: Pale Yugra, 5-6: the Lycaeum
8	The Lycaeum eclipses a strange moon

backs are so sensitive that they navigate freely in the dark.

Teeth of the Jorn

Hewn by Jorn masons into three dark and mighty palaces, the Teeth are all but abandoned now.

A **warlord** and her band of **hunters** rules the smallest, but the other two have fallen to Jorn moonlight hoarders, blood priests, and things of the dark.

The Cleft's Jorn are a moribund society, too proud to forge the trade links with ***Pale Yugra*** that they so need.

the Tcheth

These Cleft-dwellers are human-sized but long-limbed and lightly **furred**, with long, narrow skulls.

Their **flexible bones** allow them to squeeze through gaps as small as a hand. They are excellent climbers but see poorly in the dark.

Pale Yugra

Trade and immigration from Seree lands grew this cliff-side refuge into a true city.

Despite its isolation, Yugra is cultured and diverse, with Tcheth and humans (mostly ethnic Varnans, Noripuran, and Nariners) living alongside a sprinkling of Jorn and claybodied ***Murkers***. It is a noisy, thriving settlement with much new construction.

The oldest niche-dwellings must be squeezed into (to keep out the demons of old), but the surface structures are a splendid mix of Jorn towers and Varnan surface architecture.

Yugra's perfumers and herbalists have turned the staples of fish and shelfgrass into a legendary assortment of dishes. The walled quarter, **Yugra Height**, is said to house a number of sages who have much to teach, and who will pay dearly for any lore retrieved from the ***Lycaeum***.

By day, small fishing vessels scull from the docks to the **Blessed Shoals** and back.

the White Tower

A cylinder of shimmering white marble, the white tower slowly rises and falls between ***Sar Dural*** and the lower gantry of the ***Lycaeum***, never quite touching either, following the invisible tides of the ley nexus.

A magical bridge (the enchanted skin of a huge ***Maw***-serpent) extends from the tower to Pale Yugra when it passes near, but the Yugrans forbid its use, out of fear of incurring the wrath of the demigods.

the Murkers

The shallows of the Murk are home to **murk stars**, long-armed starfish that glow a luminous orange. They exude a **paralytic mucus** they use to catch fish and other prey.

Murk stars have a limited telekinesis that lets them fashion protective bodies from found materials and come ashore to find crabs or other food.

Siltbody murkers are slow-moving ambush hunters. Stronger stars fashion **bodies of stone** for use in war. These are immensely tough.

A rare few master both the wit and subtlety needed to shape fine humanoid bodies of clay. Their fifth arm resides

d6	Prepared paths on the walls
1	Hewn ledge
2	Clinging to rusty iron stakes
3	A harrowing free climb across a crumbled bit
4	Guide chains
5	Enters cave for d6×10 paces
6	Crude hand- and foot-holds

in the "mouth," curled up like a long, glowing tongue.

Many of these **claybodied** murkers live in Yugra. They wear clothes and participate in society fully. They are mute but communicate using a set of hand-signs known to most Yugrans.

the Murkseat

The greatest of the stars holds hundreds of others in thrall and, using their combined power, has wrought a massive, spherical stonebody as a palace. It moves about the Murk, catching fish that stray too close with its long, gravelly tendrils.

Cave Stitchers

A few horrors of the ***Maw*** still survive in the Cleft. The spider-like spawn of the demon Guguluin practice a gruesome form of sorcery, "stitching" victims' bodies into new shapes by severing and reattaching limbs. The final form determines the spell they cast.

Some victims die while being "prepared," while others survive to live on as **puppets** of the stitcher, ever available to produce the desired magical effect with a jerk of their silken tether.

Sar Dural

Once a walled fortress, Sar Dural was overrun by Murkers. Many dark tunnels wind inside the rocky isle. Tcheth give it a wide berth, thinking it home to stonebody murkers and stitchers.

the Maw

A foul-smelling cavern descends for leagues into the deepest parts of the earth. Tales say that Unclideon reached its uttermost depths and sealed it against the woeful greater demons, but none have verified this claim.

Sar Vistu

A defensive wall encloses a dozen structures. It is thick with violent, skull-headed **automatons**, which still forage as far as the weird forest of Greenshelf (to the dismay of Yugran gatherers).

Smoke can sometimes be seen coming from its forges.

the Lycaeum

The Trigonic Order forbade its members from burying their magics in grandiose tombs or passing them directly to favored apprentices as the wizards did.

Instead, every discovery, bauble, fever dream diary, and scrap of lore was passed to the Lycaeum to glorify its great libraries and workshops.

What it still contains is unknown, for only vaunted Seree and their guests ever saw its interior. No safe route into the great structure is yet known.

The massive disc of bronze patchwork suffered greatly at the hands of the demigods, but Tcheth foragers visiting Greenshelf say that the automatons from Sar Vistu have repaired it.

Tomb of the Disgraced

Though bare of relics, this fortified mausoleum was the final prison of aspirants and wizards who refused to divulge their discoveries to the Lycaeum.

The **wraiths** here hold the memory of many powerful magics.

The **lich Unclideon**, divided though he may be, still rattles the nine urns into which he was placed.

THE CALL OF THE LIGHT

THE SITUATION

The Seree empire was destroyed at the peak of its power, scrubbed from the world by the gods for its audacity.

But the matter wasn't settled overnight, as the wizards resisted mightily.

The servants of heaven were forced to make bargains with dark Powers of the earth before they were able to achieve victory in this forgotten war.

Sar Ebil tower is the site of one such bargain. Here, the servants of heaven and the Powers of the earth joined forces to build a magical place to draw in and destroy as many ***Seree automatons*** as possible.

When the war ended, the delicate alliance collapsed, but those bound to the tower's purpose were forced to remain.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY

- A great hero is entombed in the tower and will emerge at a time of the people's need. [misleading]
- In my grandfather's time, a child went into the tower and returned with a helm that let him fly like a bird. [true]
- Sorrowful moaning comes from the tower on the full moon. [true]
- Once, on the full moon, a wooden man came down from the tower. The locals burnt him and found a ruby in his head. [true]
- Years ago, an army from the barony came to try to take the tower, but none returned. [misleading—it was a band of six warriors and a small retinue]
- Another wooden man has been seen returning to the tower; some say he is tall and has but one arm, others say he is short, with a metal helm. [misleading]

SAR EBIL

Built on a high, rocky place, the tower of Sar Ebil can only be reached by its broad, curving **bridge**.

To those who can tell, the architecture is mostly from the late Seree period but with incongruous elements (especially the curved bridge, gateway, and east balcony).

The uneven courses in the outer brickwork suggest hasty or careless construction.

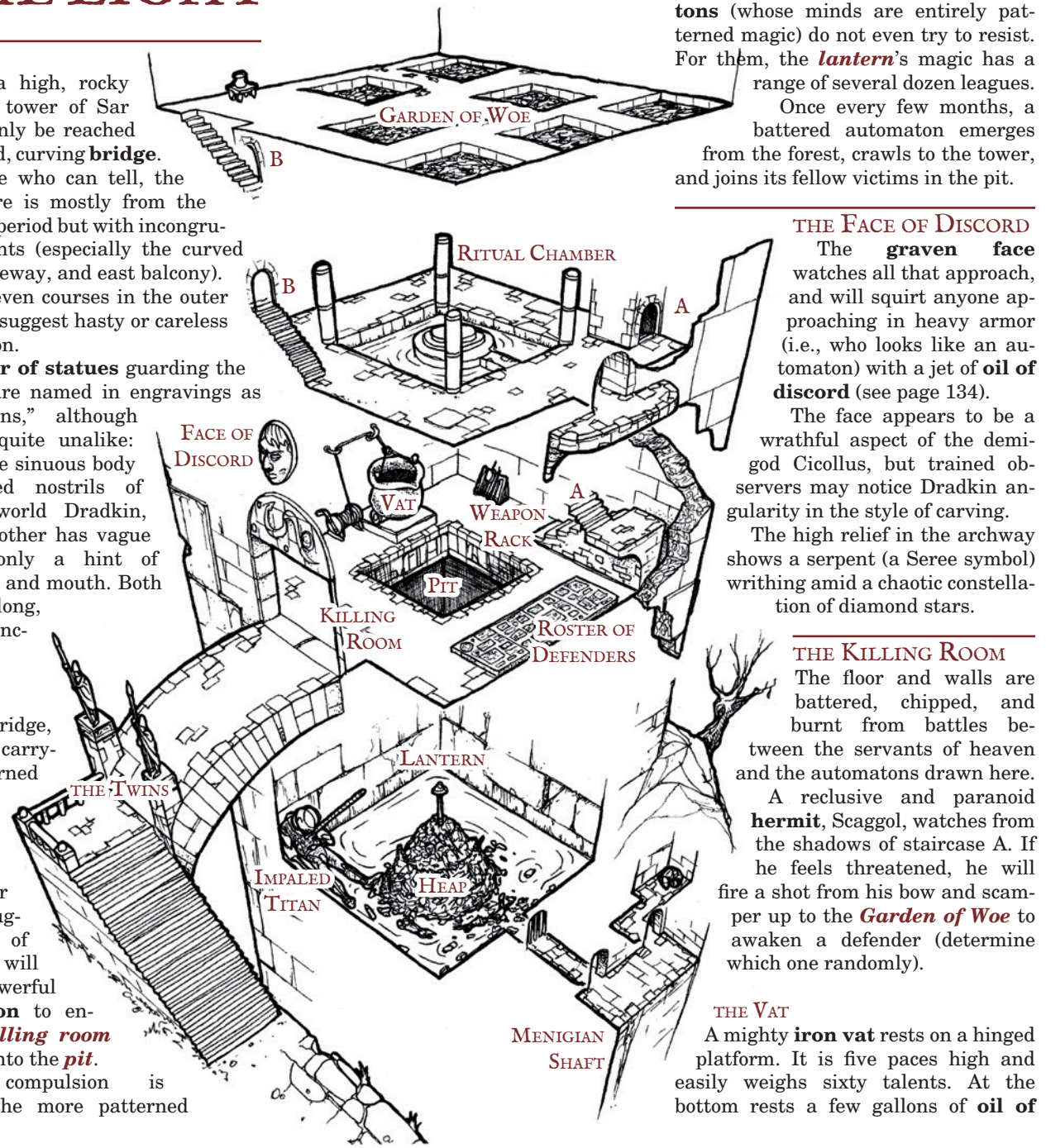
The **pair of statues** guarding the entrance are named in engravings as "The Twins," although they are quite unalike: one has the sinuous body and slitted nostrils of an underworld Dradkin, while the other has vague features—only a hint of eyes, nose, and mouth. Both wield long, smooth lances.

THE CALL

From the bridge, anyone carrying patterned magic (memorized arcane spells or magical augmentation of the mind) will feel a powerful **compulsion** to enter the ***killing room*** and drop into the ***pit***.

This compulsion is stronger the more patterned magic being carried. **Seree automatons** (whose minds are entirely patterned magic) do not even try to resist. For them, the ***lantern***'s magic has a range of several dozen leagues.

Once every few months, a battered automaton emerges from the forest, crawls to the tower, and joins its fellow victims in the pit.



THE FACE OF DISCORD

The **graven face** watches all that approach, and will squirt anyone approaching in heavy armor (i.e., who looks like an automaton) with a jet of **oil of discord** (see page 134).

The face appears to be a wrathful aspect of the demigod Cicollus, but trained observers may notice Dradkin angularity in the style of carving.

The high relief in the archway shows a serpent (a Seree symbol) writhing amid a chaotic constellation of diamond stars.

THE KILLING ROOM

The floor and walls are battered, chipped, and burnt from battles between the servants of heaven and the automatons drawn here.

A reclusive and paranoid **hermit**, Scaggol, watches from the shadows of staircase A. If he feels threatened, he will fire a shot from his bow and scamper up to the ***Garden of Woe*** to awaken a defender (determine which one randomly).

THE VAT

A mighty **iron vat** rests on a hinged platform. It is five paces high and easily weighs sixty talents. At the bottom rests a few gallons of **oil of**

d6	What's found on the heap?
1	Skull with a **wizard flower** of semi-precious gemstone inside
2	A shattered limb of wood, brass and leather
3	An injury from sharp metal or splintered wood
4	A functioning automaton with d4 limbs attached
5	A gardening or cooking implement
6	A unique ***heap relic***

discord (see page 134). A **winch** and badly rusted chain allow it to be tilted toward the pit. If the winch is turned, the oil begins to dribble down onto the ***heap***. This elicits a chorus of crashing and clanking from the automatons.

If the vat is lowered all the way down, the chain snaps, the vat rolls off its base and falls down onto the heap, into the pit, smashing the ***lantern*** and countless trapped automatons.

Weapon Rack

A large weapon rack stands mostly empty except for three wicked-looking man-catchers and a **giant-hunter's lance**, a magnificently long spear tipped with a shard of dark glass. Anyone pierced by it cannot move from the spot or pull out the spear themselves.

the Roster of Defenders

Engraved tiles commemorate those who died here: mortal, celestial, and underworld warriors who fought against the summoned automatons.

The dates on the tiles reveal a history to the curious and patient. It was built five centuries ago, and dozens died in the first year defending it. "Nurabel" had to reclaim it from the Seree a few months later, and she is honored for invoking the ritual to relight the lantern. This happened again in years 3, 8, and 22 of the tower, with the last recorded death in the tower's 49th year.

Ritual Chamber

Soft, blue light comes from the **four pillars** surrounding the **ceremonial pool**. Each is engraved with instructions for one of four rituals. The rituals are all simple, but only possible on the dais at the center.

1. Lighting the ***lantern*** requires the oil from six apocalypse larva.
2. Encysting "twins" (a pair of warriors) in the ***Garden of Woe*** requires a quantity of soil from a child's grave.
3. Brewing **oil of discord** requires the ground crystal brains of Seree automatons.
4. Calling for **aid from the Powers** involves sacrificing a willing victim.

Then, either a **celestial warrior** of hot, white metal forms on the balcony or a **demonic cloud** of searing grit, teeth, and claws flies up the ***shaft*** from the underworld.

Since the alliance was broken long ago, these dread beings are free to act how they please. All they know is that being called means that the great powers are once more at war with mortal sorcerers.

Garden of Woe

The most fearsome warriors were "encysted" in the **seven soil beds** of this darkened hall, awaiting the hour they must fight again. Pouring water on a soil bed awakens its occupant.

The beds contain **Su-Yal**, a Dradkin hero of the underworld; a pair of **demonic panthers** with claws and teeth of dark glass; a cadaverous **changeling** who adopts the form of her enemies; and a mortal **warrior** in fine steel armor from beyond the Striel mountains.

Two other mortals died during their hibernation and have rotted to armored bones.

Awakened warriors will expect to see familiar faces calling them to battle; they have no idea that they have slept for four centuries.

the Heap

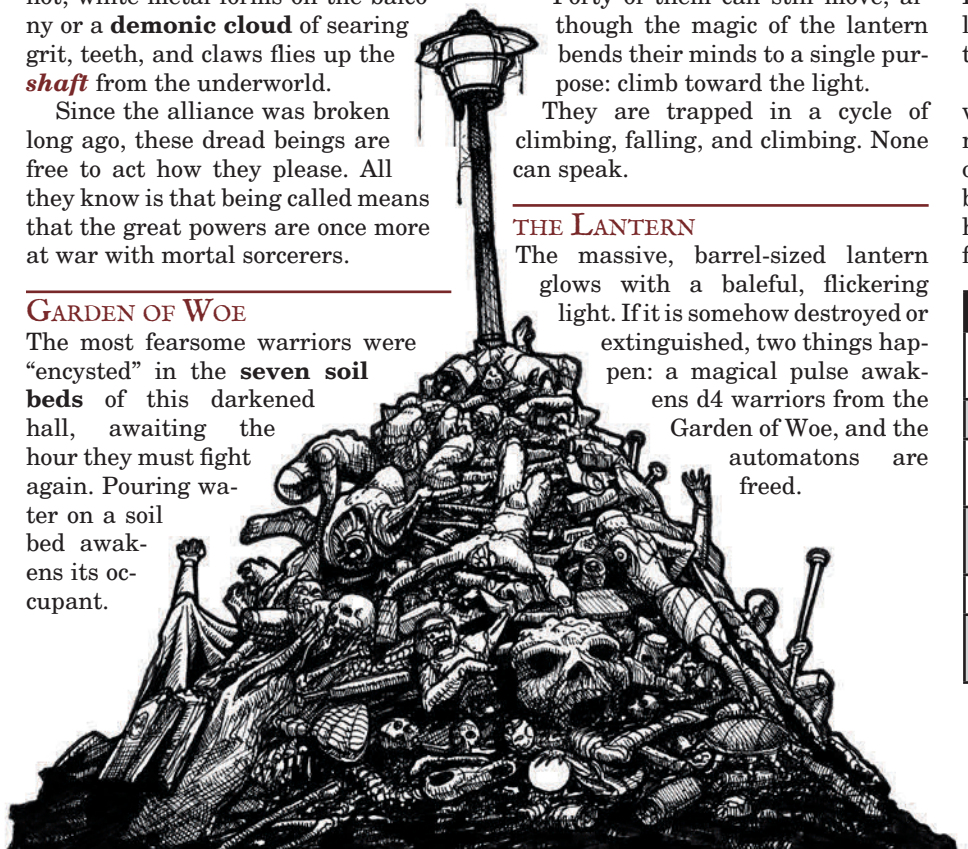
Thirty paces below the killing room is a miserable scene: a massive ***lantern*** stands over a **heap of automatons**. Drawn here by the lantern and then either ambushed (or merely smashed by the fall), hundreds have accumulated.

Forty of them can still move, although the magic of the lantern bends their minds to a single purpose: climb toward the light.

They are trapped in a cycle of climbing, falling, and climbing. None can speak.

the Lantern

The massive, barrel-sized lantern glows with a baleful, flickering light. If it is somehow destroyed or extinguished, two things happen: a magical pulse awakens d4 warriors from the Garden of Woe, and the automatons are freed.



Once freed, seven of the largest functioning automatons will protect their fellows while trying to usher them out of the tower; the rest are entirely focused on the menial work of servitude.

the Impaled Titan

In the corner of the lantern room is a titanic **gardening automaton**, three times human height.

It is pinned in place by a **giant-hunter's lance**, but once a month, the light of the full moon gives it some small scrap of mental freedom.

At these times, it tosses an automaton or two up out of the pit in the hopes of freeing them. Only a few manage to leave the reach of the lantern before the moon wanes, and so nearly all of them soon fall back in again.

the Menigian Shaft

Disused now, this shaft drops a full league into the vast and dark spaces of the Ur-Menig (see page 154).

A gentle, armadillo-like **creature** with sensitive, searching eyes lurks near the top. Visitors from far below once paid it to squeeze through the bars to retrieve curiosities from the heap, but none have come in years. It is friendly, but inclined to thieving.

d6	Heap relics
1	A spade that does the work of six, but its user must eat as six.
2	A complete drake skeleton
3	A Seree battle standard woven of cloth that cannot be pierced
4	A mace that turns its victim's bones to honey
5	A **scrying glass**
6	A **spider shield** whose metal legs seize weapons

VEIL OF THE ONCE-QUEEN

The Situation

Deep in the forest stands Tanibel, a great Martoi ***citadel*** surrounded by a mockery of a living town.

The Martoi are long dead, but their potent enchantments let them continue an illusionary life, a deluded dream of their vanished reign.

Astride the Veil of Death

Tanibel exists on both sides of the ***veil***. The magic of the ***Crown of the Once-Queen*** draws the mortal world around it across the veil, forcing all to see it how it appeared in its prime: a thriving **town** of artisans, a culture presided over by a vain and glorious nobility.

The Martoi are regal, tall and smooth-skinned. They have long, flowing hair, strong noses, angular jaw lines, and wide mouths.

When the ***veil is pushed back***, Tanibel seems to be a ruin, overgrown and filled with animals, and the Martoi appear as cadaverous **ghosts**.

Pushing Back the Veil

Anyone meeting the Martoi is drawn across the veil and sees their illusory world. However, when the living outnumber the Martoi, the veil is pushed back, revealing ruins and ghosts.

#	The living side
+1	Each living person unaffected by the ***milk of deceit***
+2	People with bleeding injuries

#	The Martoi side
+1	Each Martoi
+1	Deluded, intelligent animals
+4	Being in sight of the ***citadel***
+6	Being inside the ***walls***
+10	Being in sight of the ***Crown***

When the veil moves, it's almost imperceptible, as if things had been this way all along. Refer to changed forms without introducing them (e.g., "The badger shuffles uncomfortably." "Wait, what badger?")

Near the Citadel

All sources of water within a few leagues of the ***citadel*** are contaminated by the ***milk of deceit***.

Tanibel consumes no real food, so where most towns of its size would be surrounded by farms and cultivated forest, this area has only mushroom gatherers, hunters, and tinkers. Most will be encountered near their homes, which are shacks or humble cottages.

Roll a d10 on the ***townsfolk motive*** table to determine what they want—the result holds so long as PCs perceive them in their preferred form.

If their true forms are revealed, redetermine their motive using the motive table, this time using a d6.

The true forms of these folk and their dwellings are, variously:

Talking animals: large foxes, badgers, or owls, in cramped dirt burrows dug out under the roots of large trees or hollow fallen trunks.

Gnarled imps and hags: flesh as hard and dry as wood, either short, ancient, stooped, or all three.

Bog stranglers: aquatic psychopaths whose homes are actually dark pools, choked with lilies and rushes. Any who realize this after accepting an invitation inside will find themselves underwater. All the food they serve is infused with the **milk of deceit**.

Garleg, Lord of Treachery

Garleg has many spies in the area, and unless adventurers are careful to avoid encounters, Garleg will soon get word. Using his mastery of both stealth and tracking, he will attempt to place himself in the adventurers' path to be "discovered" in a moment of disadvantage (perhaps pulling on his boots) and at close range, so he appears in his true form: a gnarled, limping imp.

He is one of the three **Martoi Lords** who rule Tanibel, and his task is to ensure its security.

He will indulge any rebellious sentiment he senses, offering to help find "allies" against the ***citadel***. If he senses none, he will encourage them to accompany to the citadel to be presented.

The Wall District

Tanibel is surrounded by a majestic wall topped by pennants in all manner of greens and yellows.

An assortment of towers has been built on both sides of the wall, connected to it by many bridges and catwalks. Where these meet the wall, there is a gate, some massive and fortified, others

d10*	Townsfolk motive
1-2	Introduce you to another, deeper in, for their benefit.
3-4	Money—offer a service, or sell you something
5-6	Trap you and eat you
7	Beat you and rob you
8-9	Drink to unconsciousness
10	Find allies against the citadel
* If their true form is revealed, roll d6	

mere doorways—all in all there are hundreds. This makes no sense defensively, but Garleg (if present) will explain that the ***Once-Queen***'s true defense is her great cruelty (which is why she must be overthrown).

Townsfolk of the Wall

During the day, the wall area is full of activity: dozens of people in dapper, brightly colored liveries dart back and forth along the bridges, carrying loads of food, goods, and messages.

Many cry out in wordless song (or merely hum), chatter busily on inane topics, or proclaim the virtues of their particular tower or bridge.

The Wall as It Truly Is

In truth, the inhabitants of the wall district are squirrels, families of deer, marmosets, skinks, weasels, and birds of all sorts. All can speak.

The "towers" are actually trees, and the "bridges" their mighty boughs.

The wall, on the other hand, is a real wall, albeit a crumbling ruin. In places, it reaches its full, original height. Elsewhere it is a tumble of stone barely rising out of the undergrowth.

The many gates are choked with the webs of the ***gray proctors***. (Some of the bridges are webs, too.)

The Gray Proctors

Fat, leather-wrapped men with predatory stares loiter at the gates and accost any passers by.

They claim to be authorities on the workings of the ***citadel*** and insist anyone entering must have the correct papers. This involves much bureaucratic red tape, complex arrangements for audiences, and sending messengers to fetch contracts, visas, or petitions.

The making of arrangements won't end while the proctors still draw breath.

They proffer made-up titles ("Secretary to the Under-petitioner for prenoon applications via the Western upper gate") and grow angry with anyone attempting to push past them. This will draw more proctors to the scene.

Sickly, **withered people** pleading to be let past as they sign document after document are common sight.

In truth, the gray proctors are **giant spiders**. On the living side of the veil, their webs form impenetrable barriers across the gaps in the ruined wall. The silk-wrapped carcasses of their victims are everywhere. Under no circumstances will they bother Garleg or anyone with him.

Inside the Wall

Between the wall and the ***citadel*** is a circular district, overcrowded with teetering houses, overhangs, raised walks, and walled gardens.

During the day, the streets are thick with nobles and artisans (determine their motives as usual).

If, somehow, adventurers push back the veil here, the city of death is revealed: its citizens are shambling **skeletons** and wisp-like **ghosts**, the streets cobbled with broken **skulls**.

The Citadel

In life, a ruin no taller than a house, yet in death, the citadel rises above the forest with a trio of magnificent towers.

Alasnia the Once-Queen

Alasnia's only goal is to enrich her city with new subjects to remind her of the glorious history of Tanibel. She demands oaths of service, consummated by drinking the ***milk of deceit***.

She wears the ***Crown***. Also, like her sister, she is a skeletal **wraith** when seen truthfully.

Vesarcha, Lady Memory

Master of poisons, brewer of the milk of deceit; her touch bewitches, and a mere nick of her blade causes a dreamless slumber.

Lord of Treachery

If Garleg appears here, he adopts his regal form, Garleg, Lord of Treachery—a tall, beautiful man with raven-black hair. Servants immediately drape him in embroidered linens and cloth of gold.

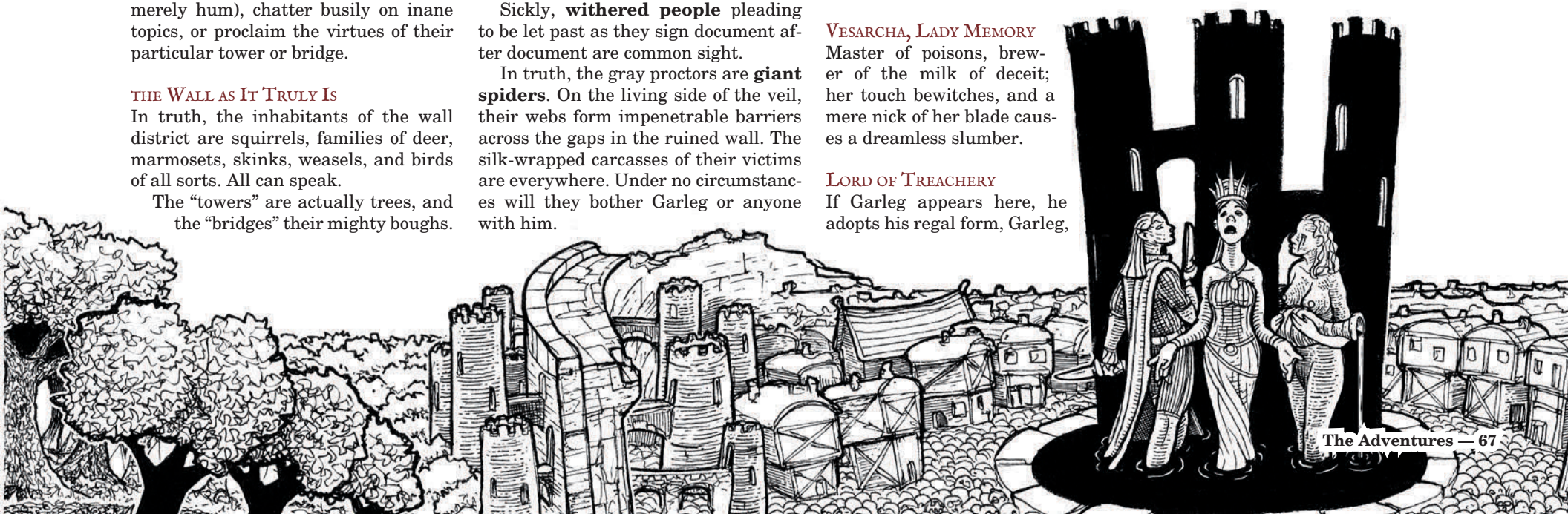
If Garleg can convince an outsider to assassinate Alasnia, the eternal spell of this place is nearly complete: the next person who wears the ***Crown of the Once-Queen*** vanishes, replaced by a youthfully restored Alasnia.

Crown of the Once-Queen

A delicate filigree of ice-cold silver, it is the crown that moves the veil. If it ever leaves Tanibel, its power is broken forever. The veil is restored, the illusion gone, and the true form of everything (skeletal, animal, ruin) is revealed from then onwards.

The Milk of Deceit

Made from Lady Memory's tears for her fallen realm, it suffuses all the food and drink made here. After a month of hospitality, the living will have wasted away to undeath. The illusion that they have vital, living bodies is only visible while they remain here.



THE MOON IS A MIRROR

THE SITUATION

The fabled Sage of Lune once dispensed wisdom from her storied abode, the ***Palace of a Hundred Shrines***. But visitors are no longer welcome there, kept away by a clan of ***dogfolk***.

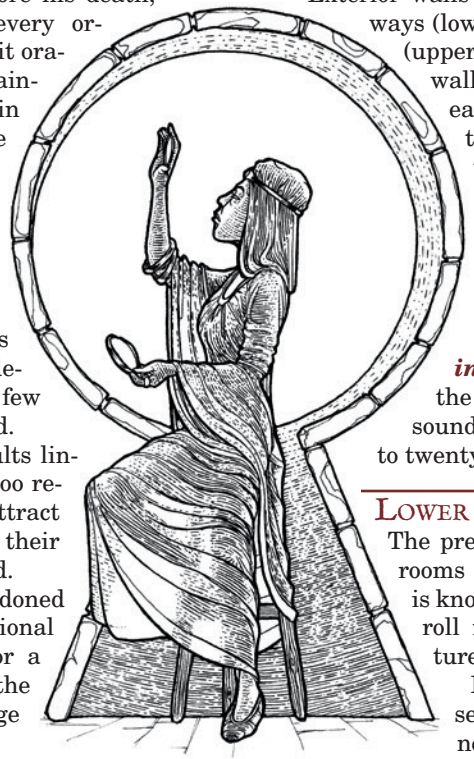
THE HUNDRED SHRINES

The Palace of a Hundred Shrines was built by foolish and pious First Lord Raeldus. Hoping to win favor with the unseen world before his death, he commanded every order, cult, and spirit oracle to build and maintain a shrine within the palace. Some came willingly, but many were forced.

A mishmash of faiths occupied it for a decade, but Raeldus's heirs quietly deconsecrated it a few years after he died.

A few hardy cults lingered, but being too remote to easily attract new converts, their numbers dwindled.

It stood abandoned (but for occasional bandit groups) for a century, before the coming of the Sage of Lune.



EXTERIOR

The outer "walls" of the lower level are heavy wooden **shutters** slung between iron rods, every inch ***decorated***. The upper level windows are similarly shuttered.

The shutters are meant to open to the outside, although **locks** (badly rusted) hold them closed. They could be hacked through. While they are closed, the interior is dark.

INTERIOR ARRANGEMENT

The palace's upper and lower levels are each divided into twelve rooms, in a **four-by-three grid**.

The rooms are fifteen paces square. Exterior walls are shuttered archways (lower level) or windows (upper level). The interior walls are very thick, and each is pierced by a tall, thin corridor to the adjacent room.

The **main entryway** splits at a T-junction, leading into the rooms to the left and right.

Haze from the ***incense room*** fills the palace, deadening sounds and limiting sight to twenty paces.

LOWER ROOMS (D12)

The precise arrangement of rooms within the 4×3 grid is known only to the ***Sage***; roll randomly as adventurers explore it.

If a result is rolled a second time, use the next entry instead.

L1. PEACE SHRINE

A fat **candle** burns eternally atop a waist-high **stone sphere**. It crackles and fizzes from time to time. Anyone striking a blow in sight of it is magically paralyzed for d6 hours.

Runes and carvings exhort pilgrims and monks alike to abide by Raeldus's edict that they coexist in peace.

L2. DEVOURING DEATH

A giant **wooden face** floats in a **pool of black oil**. It animates to devour anything placed or climbing upon it.

L3. THE BASIN OF OSSOLA

In a vinegar-smelling bare room, a huge **glass basin** rests on one side of a **round altar**.

Pictograms on the altar reveal it is a shrine to "Ossola," shown as a massive, gelatinous blob. Further pictograms explain that she grants immortality to those who follow her path, which is explained in detail in the altar's book. (The book was removed from the palace long ago. See "the Book of Immortals" on page 14.)

The bottom of the basin is a miniature **portal** to Ossola's realm, a barren landscape dotted with acid-filled craters and glistening, predatory oozes. Some squeeze their way into this room.

L4-L6. PIT TRAP ROOMS

The ***dogfolk*** have removed the altars, leaving these rooms empty. If more than one person enters the room, counter-weighted doors in the floor swing away, dropping occupants into a **spike-filled pit**.

At the same time, **wooden beams** swing out from the hallway walls, swatting anyone in the doorways toward the pit. (See illustration, over.)

The pit's spikes are sharp, but so closely spaced that they injure—but don't impale—those who fall in.

L7. SHRINE OF THE DAWN

At dawn each day, a triangle-in-circle quartz **glyph** on a round altar glows fiercely, filling the room with painfully bright sunlight.

L8. DOGFOLK LAIR

d10 ***dogfolk*** are dozing. If they have been alerted somehow, they are feigning sleep, and another d10 are moving to ambush from behind.

L9. MAGPIE SPIRIT

This room is filled with a huge **pile of furniture** and bric-a-brac collected from this level of the palace.

A small personality cult once held a shrine here, but only the invisible **wraith of their founder** remains. Desperate for offerings and worshipers, it has convinced itself the whole palace was built in its honor and has painstakingly pushed items from all over the palace using a very limited form of telekinesis.

d10	Room encounter (1st entry)
1	No encounter.
2	d2 ***dogfolk*** sentries.
3	A ***dogfolk*** master mason, sizing up the room for a new pit trap with d3 others.
4	A ***brass soldier*** from the ***cupola***, on patrol.
5	A glistening, **acidic ooze** from the Basin (L3), d8 paces in diameter.
6	A **small object** (cup, coin) being rolled toward L9 by the magpie spirit.
7	A ***dogfolk*** ankle **tripwire** attached to tiny bells.
8	A lost, **illusionary nude** from the ***Glade*** (U1), lured from the fresco by the magpie spirit.
9	A vicious, diamond-toothed **hound** of black oil from L2.
10	**Tripwire** douses victim with scented oil; ***dogfolk*** know whereabouts at all times.

L10-L11. Spiral Stairs
An enormous, ***decorated*** wooden **staircase** ascends to a matching room on the upper level.

L12. Stripped Shrine
Empty, the **altar** is chiseled bare.

Upper Rooms (d10)
Two of the rooms are stair rooms above L10/L11. For other rooms, roll d10.

U1. Erotic Glade
Magically realistic wall **frescoes** suggest a dense, sunlit forest. Coy nudes hide behind trees and beckon, smile, and wink. Unless admired, they become lewd, sticking out their tongues, glaring, and mooning. Consensual sex of any sort is a holy act here.

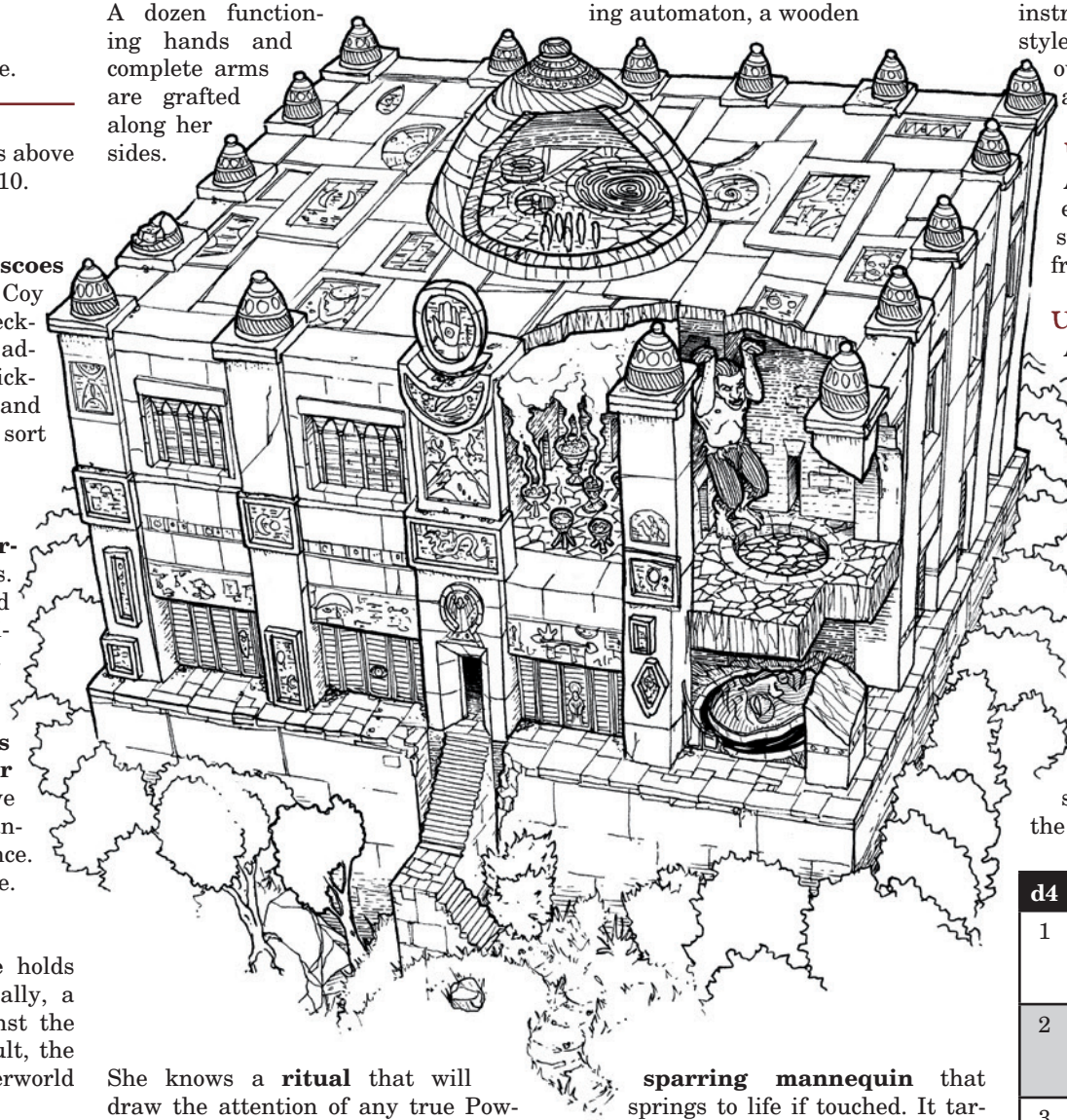
U2. Tarragon Shrine
This earth-floored room is a **garden** filled with waist-high herbs. Six of the **plants** can talk, and will beg for water in weak, terrified voices if anyone draws near.

U3. Hall of Dice
A pair of wrinkled forest **gnomes** gamble furiously before an **altar** to a feline luck spirit. They have spent so long here that they cannot be beaten in games of chance. **Cat iconography** is everywhere.

U4. Smoke Octopus
A barrel-sized **crystal sphere** holds black, roiling smoke. Occasionally, a golden, alien eye presses against the side. Worshipped by a death cult, the **cave squid** is in fact a rare underworld creature imprisoned here.

If freed and fed, it will be deeply grateful. Otherwise, it will flee and try to ambush lone prey. It grapples as if it were a gang of three strong men.

U5. Mistress of Tithes
Gadna, a matronly **Jorn**, reclines in the light of a dozen tallow candles. She is man height but as stocky as an ox. A dozen functioning hands and complete arms are grafted along her sides.



She knows a **ritual** that will draw the attention of any true Power of the earth (if not necessarily their favor), which involves severing a hand (or limb, in the case of a great power); these she sews to her own body.

U6. Martial Shrine
Concentric circles on the floor outline a fighting **arena**; bare **weapon racks** adorn the walls. In the corner is a training automaton, a wooden **sparring mannequin** that springs to life if touched. It targets whoever activated it, attacking them with dual wooden swords. It moves at incredible speed but fights non-lethally, striking to break fingers, wrists, and noses. It stops when hit on the head or if its target falls down.

Wall **pictograms** show scenes of combat; careful study reveals they are instructions for a fighting style. (The style is excellent for sparring, but is overly adapted to the mannequin and protects the body too little.)

U7. Incense Room
A dense **haze** fills the air. A dozen ***decorated*** **braziers** burn tiny sticks of precious, scented woods from a **pile** stacked in the corner.

U8. the Martyr
An enormous **wooden man**, with ***decorated*** legs, holds up the ceiling. It offers clues about d3 shrines not yet found and will expect a valuable offering in return. If he isn't given one, he will insist he's been exploited. His shouting triggers an encounter from the table.

U9. The Crones
Three **stone crones** animate to inspect anyone who stands between them.

They discuss the history, weaknesses, and strengths of their subject and wonder aloud whether the subject might like to swap abilities

d4	Decorations
1	Pictorials of First Lord Raeldus receiving blessings from monks of an adjacent room (roll).
2	Graffiti etched by monks, mocking the monks of another shrine within the palace.
3	Indecipherable engravings, vandalized by the ***dogfolk***.
4	Engraved art reveals the secret of a random room on this floor.

that are no longer useful with someone else. If two people stand between them and declare they wish to exchange two skills, it will be done.

U10. Statues & Stairs

Four wooden **statues** stand floor to ceiling, representing four ages of life. All are old, and most of the paint has flaked off. They are hollow, and a secret latch opens the statue of a middle-aged woman to reveal rickety wooden **stairs** that spiral up into the ***Sage's cupola***.

An extremely dangerous ***brass soldier*** has been set to guard the stairs and will not leave them voluntarily.

The Dogfolk

Twenty dogfolk, bewitched by the ***moon baby***, occupy the palace. Replacement bands from a warren several days away come every six or seven days. They are hungry and anxious, as the enchantment stops them hunting.

Their goal is to drive off the curious with traps and threats, but they will resort to violence if intruders fight or attempt to ascend to the ***cupola***.

They are unarmed and fearful of metal weapons. If provoked to attack, they make lunging feints to separate individuals, whom they bite and drag down (or drag away) to be torn apart.

Dogfolk sentries will either sneak away to fetch d6 others, or lure intruders into a trapped room (L4-L6).

The Sage's Cupola

A circular **pool** is filled edge-to-edge with a **reflection** of the moon's surface. Here, the Sage of Lune used her **lenses** to search the moon's surface for microscopic mirror versions of earthly events, people, and omens.

The cupola is now home to the ***moon baby*** and the ***brass soldiers***.

The Brass Soldiers

Moving at one eighth normal speed, these solid metal statues are easily avoided by retreating, but in tight quarters (or when pushed, rushed past, or attacked with short weapons) they attempt to grab limbs or clothing.

Their grip cannot be broken; seized victims have only moments to cut off whatever the soldier holds before being strangled by metal fingers.

Two soldiers are on patrol in the palace, a third guards U10, and the remaining nine are in the cupola.

Nearly impervious to harm (including electricity), they only "die" if their silver hearts are bored into or melted.

Patrolling brass soldiers will not kill except in defense (i.e., against melting or drilling), but seek to drag whomever they grab to the cupola for interrogation by the ***moon baby*** (or whoever wears their control ring).

They will march (underwater if necessary) to rejoin whomever holds their **control ring**.

The Moon Baby

For decades, the Sage of Lune used her powers of moon scrying to benefit others. A year ago, however, she turned her lenses on her own reflection, trying to find her own microscopic mirror image in the reflecting pool. In an instant, she was replaced by the moon baby, an alien being.

It is identical in appearance to the Sage, but hollow and inside out, with the near side always invisible. It makes ceramic clicks on the stones as it walks, and is a profoundly unsettling sight.

It acts as if it is the Sage. In conversation, it is friendly, warm (as was the Sage), and apologizes for any mistreatment by the brass soldiers.

False Visions

What it wants, however, is to give **clairvoyant visions**. Anyone who accepts a vision from the Moon baby sees a plausible but false vision, a creation of the moon baby.

From that moment on, the moon baby can see out of the recipient's eyes. The moon baby's alien mind allows it to integrate this sight from everyone to whom it has bestowed a vision.

In Combat

Normal weapons cannot harm the moon baby; any object striking it **turns to water** and splashes to the floor.

It attacks with a **silvered knife**; it can inflict cuts at any range and always on the far side of the target.

It wears the brass soldiers' **control ring** as a bracelet, and always stays near the circle of brass soldiers.

Magic Reflector

If any magic effect targets the moon baby, roll a d4. On a 1, the effect is reversed. On a 2 or 3, the effect is reflected back toward the caster. On a 4, both.

Moon Baby's Kiss

With a kiss, the moon baby can instantly teleport any magic-using person to the moon, where they join the Sage.

A moon baby version of the vanished victim appears in their place, loyal to the original moon baby.

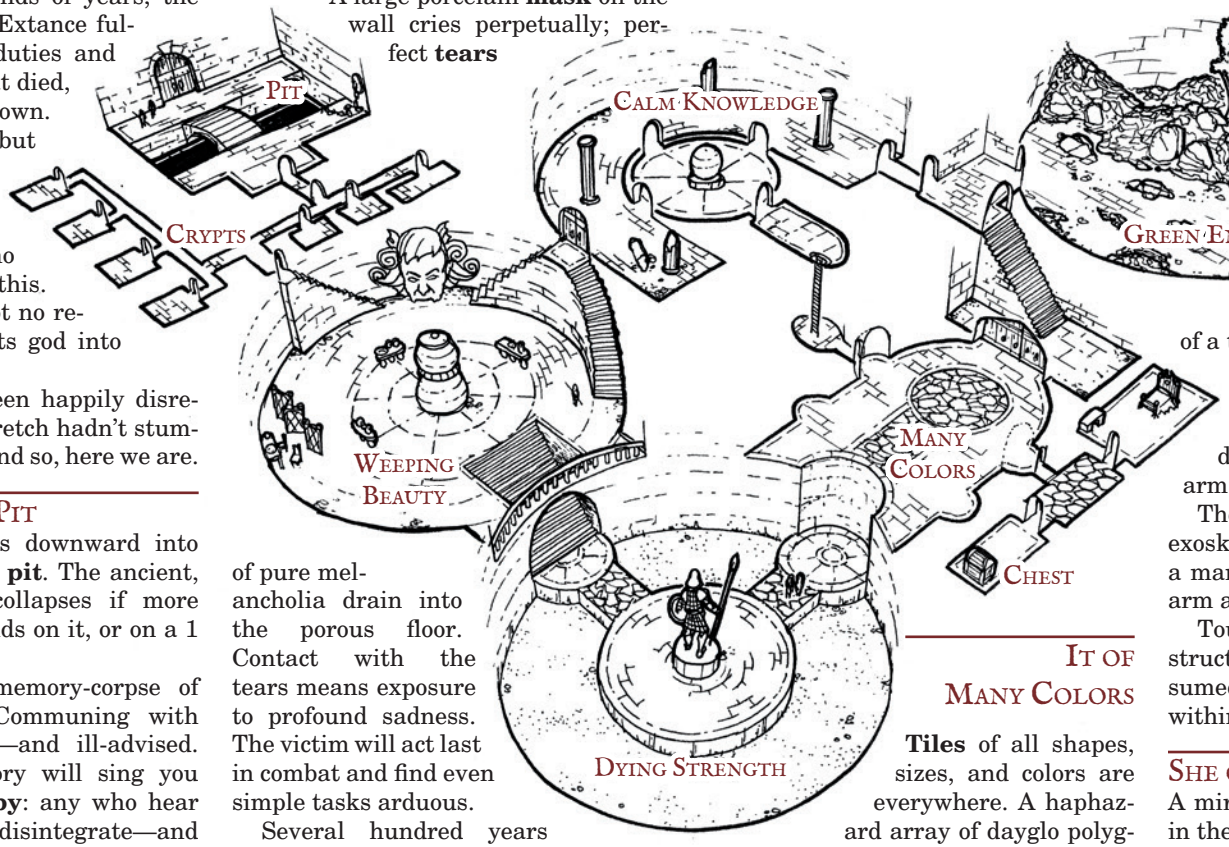
NO GOD BUT DISSOLUTION

Tombs of the Dead Gods

The first god to die was ***She-of-Dissolution***. Her followers, however, endured. For thousands of years, the Noble Order of Non-Extance fulfilled their terrible duties and interred each god that died, beginning with their own.

This complex is but one of many interment sites throughout the wicked world. Of course, no one knows any of this. The Noble Order kept no records and followed its god into nothingness.

All would have been happily disremembered if some wretch hadn't stumbled upon the door. And so, here we are.



Entrance and a Pit

A subtle **wind** pulls downward into an awful, bottomless **pit**. The ancient, dry-rotted **bridge** collapses if more than one person stands on it, or on a 1 on a roll of d6.

The pit is the memory-corpse of She-of-Dissolution. Communing with the god is difficult—and ill-advised. However, her memory will sing you the **Song of Entropy**: any who hear it learn how to cast disintegrate—and *must* cast it, to the fullest effect daily.

The order carelessly tossed their dead into the crypts, where nothing but piles of bones remain.

God of Weeping Beauty

The room is a study in soft white and bare blue marble. At its center rests an exquisitely restored **canopic jar**. Once broken, it is an elegant patchwork of gold and alabaster all the more beautiful because of this. Inside it is the withered **godhead's heart**. (Worth an unbelievable fortune intact. If the jar is opened, the godhead's heart blooms destructively into a fruitful cherry tree.)

A large porcelain **mask** on the wall cries perpetually; perfect **tears** of pure melancholia drain into the porous floor. Contact with the tears means exposure to profound sadness. The victim will act last in combat and find even simple tasks arduous.

Several hundred years ago, someone set up for a tea party behind a faded **silk screen**.

The God of Dying Strength

An imposing **statue** depicts an archaic warrior, standing stoically despite a grievous gut wound.

2d20 **skeletal gladiators** will claw out from the sand whenever the statue is observed. (They will not exit the room; however, each time someone flees from them, the gladiators increase in fortitude.) Each wields a sharp, curved sword and wears a bronze skullcap filigreed in gold.

Defeating them all causes the statue to glow red, granting all present a potent boon in combat.

It of Many Colors

Tiles of all shapes, sizes, and colors are everywhere. A haphazard array of dayglo polygonal tiles, dedicated to a dead alien god by men who did not understand the complex ritual behind each color and placement.

Careful examination causes the observer and anyone else touching the tiles to vanish, sent exactly one day into the future.

The side chamber holds a wizard-made **bed**, always freshly made. The **chest** holds moth-eaten clothes and food reduced to dust. d100 silver pieces rest in ruined pockets.

God of Green Entropy

It reeks of angry leaves, mulch, and mud here. A small **tree** somehow flourishes in this dank, suffocating hole. The mound of rubble and wet earth glows faintly green.

Walls tremble at the lightest touch. Physically entering the room will upset centuries of delicate magical balance, causing the room to noisily collapse in 2d20 minutes.

Within the mound, a shallow grave bears the **left arm** of a terrible, vegetative god.

With proper tools, the arm will take d20 minutes to exhume (1 minute if the precise location is divined). Without tools, finding the arm takes twice as long.

The glossy black arm appears to be exoskeletal, something like the limb of a man-sized mantis. The bearer of the arm always smells of mildew.

Touching the arm to a man-made structure causes the building to be subsumed and destroyed by native flora within a week.

She of Calm Knowledge

A mirrored **silver sphere** sits heavily in the room's center, reflecting any who gaze into it against a dark forest background. (This is due about half to the carefully painted walls, and half to the memory of forgotten magic.) It is an incredibly soothing place to visit, always smelling of hidden blooms and trodden pine leaves.

The sphere itself is actually thin silver foil placed upon a frame of brittle canvas and old willow limbs. Should the tomb of the God of Green Entropy collapse, moments later, this room follows.

THE MERMAIDS' KNOT

THE SITUATION

The steep, mountainside village of ***Magda*** is tucked against a cliff. On a high plateau above it is an ancient and terrible ***pond***, home to the ***chalk mermaids***. Under the mermaids' direction, the village has grown strong and prosperous. It is also unjust and cruel. Every year, the mermaids' need for sacrificial victims grows.

RUMORS FOR NEARBY

- The wilds around ***Magda*** are thick with huge locusts.
- Magda is ruled by a powerful ***priestess***.
- Great wisdom and healing can be found in Magda, but the price is high.
- A man I know apprenticed his son to the priestesses in return for a great healing. When they reunited, the boy fled from his father and was not seen again.
- When the priestess of Magda is angry, swarms of locusts fly.
- Magda buys fine sand in quantity and blows the clearest glass with it.
- Tinkers never wander alone near Magda; they say the locusts will take you.
- The priestesses of Magda pay well for rare eggs.

MAGDA VILLAGE

Two hundred souls live on the terraces of Magda village. They herd goats, grow legumes, blow glass, and serve the priestesses in word and deed.

Magda is not an innocent, naive backwater: it is an organized, carnivorous community designed to exploit visitors. Everyone knows their part in a choreographed pattern that has played out many times:

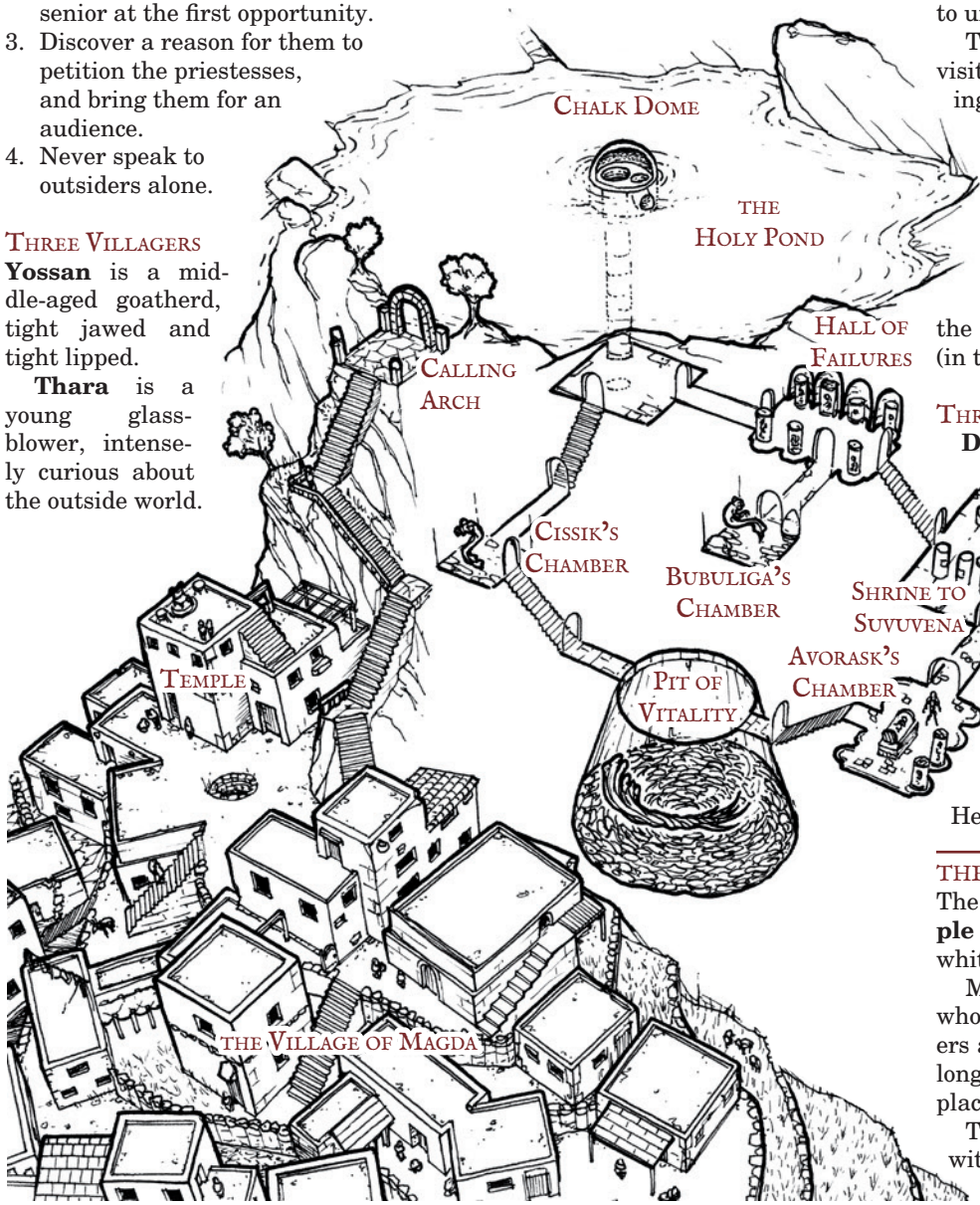
1. Welcome outsiders in a friendly manner.
2. Introduce them to someone more senior at the first opportunity.
3. Discover a reason for them to petition the priestesses, and bring them for an audience.
4. Never speak to outsiders alone.

THREE VILLAGERS

Yossan is a middle-aged goatherd, tight jawed and tight lipped.

Thara is a young glassblower, intensely curious about the outside world.

Unsen is a dirt-stained bean farmer, obsessed with punctuality. He refines "locust salt" from mountain rocks and lines his terrace with it, to "keep away the ***chirpers***."



THE WIVES OF SPRING

One in four villagers that visitors meet is in league with the 'Wives of Spring', a secret nature cult.

The Wives have worked their way into Magda over many years and seek to undermine the ***priestesses***.

They warn off the most vulnerable visitors, if they can do so without arousing suspicion.

When they meet armed and capable visitors, the Wives advise them to stay alert and together. They encourage visits to the priestesses, which the wives secretly hope will upset the status quo.

They may suggest presenting the priestesses a gift of a small mirror (in the hopes of starting a fight).

THREE WIVES OF SPRING

Doffna Strand is a midwife, sad-eyed but warm. She stoops to conceal her full height.

Beeran is a sunburnt and leathery village warden who is fiercely protective of the village, despite its troubles.

Mise the Dull has a deformed arm. He feigns stupidity, but his eyes twinkle with clever schemes. He is always armed with a rusty blade.

THE PRIESTESSES

The uppermost houses and the **temple building** are occupied by twenty white-clad priestesses.

Most have lived in the village their whole lives, but eight were once outsiders and have been trained to fight with long knives or short swords in various places.

They are led by **Sanesta**, a woman with piercing blue eyes, a chiseled jaw, and many questions.

Suvuvenism

The priestess would say they revere "the mysteries of life." In truth, they practice a distorted version of **Suvuvenism**, taught to them by the ***mermaids*** by the ***pond***'s edge.

Suvuvenism reveres the perfection of life through chimeric transformations. **Mirrors** are blasphemous, as they are associated with vain attachment to the present form.

Petitions

Sanesta receives petitioners in the **temple**, a large house decorated with mermaid imagery. The priestesses use ceremony to prevent casual conversation during petitions.

They begin with a long, admiring chant about strange beasts from afar. They then wait for petitioners to answer in kind, naming exotic beasts they know about.

The priestesses do this to extract knowledge from visitors. They crave news of such beasts, their eggs, and their young, as this wins favor with the chalk mermaids.

Goals of the Priestesses

The priestesses attempt to use visitors for one or more of the following:

- Any visitors of unusual descent or who are obviously magical will be told they are special and must see the mermaids.
- Up to two visitors will be told they "show potential" and urged to "remain behind for training" (so they can be turned into ***chirpers***).
- Petitioners who are seeking a ***great act*** will be used to settle scores.

Great Acts

Sanesta is known to perform four great, miraculous acts:

- A profound **healing** of disease or injury (though scars remain)
- A divination or wise pronouncement in answer to a **question**
- **Creation** of a magical ingredient, poison, or alchemical reagent—or at least knowledge of where it can be obtained
- **Restore** a reasonably intact body to life

Afterwards, Sanesta enters a trance and intones one of three things as a price for her miracles:

- Three months of service performed by the petitioner or someone with them who "shows potential"
- The sacrifice of a rare animal
- An act of violence against someone else in their group (e.g., "The price is Martak's hand!"), or someone in the village who happens to be out of favor.

The Chirpers

Anyone foolish enough to remain behind alone with the priestesses is later drugged and taken to ***Avorask***.

In his laboratory, he removes lung tissue and implants a pair of immature **spayid locusts**. These parasitic creatures cause the lungs to atrophy, but they oxygenate the blood in the place of the original organs.

Victims immediately lose all power of speech. Instead, when they open their mouths, out pours the ghastly chirping wheeze that is their namesake.

Victims (usually terrified at this point) are told they are blessed and are made to serve the priestesses silently.

In a few months' time, the irresistible compulsion to flee into the land around the village sets in. (See ***Chirper life stages*** table.) The priestesses do not interfere.

d6	Chirper life stages
1	Terrified, mute villager fleeing contact while making ghastly, chirping wheezes
2	Feverishly digging a hole with bare hands
3	Nestled in the hole, comatose
4	d2 huge, moist locusts emerging from the husk of the buried villager
5-6	d6 mature giant locusts, the size of a large dog

Locust Collecting

Villagers are forbidden from harming giant locusts, but may shoo them away from crops with brooms or thrown salt.

Every few months, the priestesses venture into the wilds at night to catch the locusts in large sacks. These are brought back to Avorask for egg harvesting and to be fed to the ***hydra***.

The Holy Pond

This **pool** of black, still water was hewn from a plateau on the mountainside a millennium ago. Stagnant rainwater fills it, and a musty smell wafts up when the breeze blows.

At its edge is the **calling arch**, a marble platform and archway from which the priestesses can call forth the ***chalk mermaids***.

Close inspection of the platform reveals the stains of hundreds of sacrifices, mostly washed away by wind and rain.

The pond basin deepens very gradually and is only three paces deep around the ***chalk dome*** at its center.

The Chalk Dome

The chalk dome's **entrance** is underwater and rises up into the dark, air-filled dome (like a beaver lodge).

The walls are plastered with sacrificial fat which the pale ***chalk mermaids*** smear on themselves before going out into the harsh sun.

A second **tunnel** drops down into the mermaid's lair. It appears empty, but is actually filled with ***light water***.

The Light Water

The entire cavern system below is filled with light water, an alchemical amniotic fluid. It is quite clear (turning to cloudy yellow at about sixty paces) but has the same index of refraction as air, making it hard to notice unless touched.

Unlike normal water, surface dwellers can breathe and speak within it.

As it is slightly less dense than normal water, unprepared swimmers will sink immediately and quickly.

Falls in light water cause no damage, but only strong swimmers (e.g.,

aquatic creatures, athletes) can rise off the bottom. Running is impossible, but the extra buoyancy makes leaping and climbing much easier.

Flames still burn if immersed, but weakly and without much heat. Starting new fires from flint and steel is impossible once inside the light water.

Increased Vitality & Healing

Anyone breathing light water for more than an hour begins to feel an increased **vitality**. Exposure to it doubles the rate of resting and healing within the cavern system.

The Chalk Mermaids

The sisters ***Bubuliga*** and ***Cissik*** are hideous—not true mermaids, but albino **Jorn** (bristly trolls) fused to the tails of giant lungfish.

They are the sole surviving creations of a long-dead Dradkin chimeromancer, Vmnn.

He impressed upon them the mysteries of the creature-god Suvuvena: the gods' act of creation is not complete. Flesh is merely the raw material for the ongoing task of perfecting living forms.

They fervently believe that foolish, delicate humans are a dead end.

Above all else, the sisters seek magical lore and the raw materials for their own chimeric experiments.

Bubuliga

Outwardly more calm and reasonable than her sister, Bubuliga trusts no one.

She moves about with a bodyguard of d6 enthralled, early-stage chirpers.

She responds to intruders with patience and reasonable offers, but only to buy time to find reinforcements.

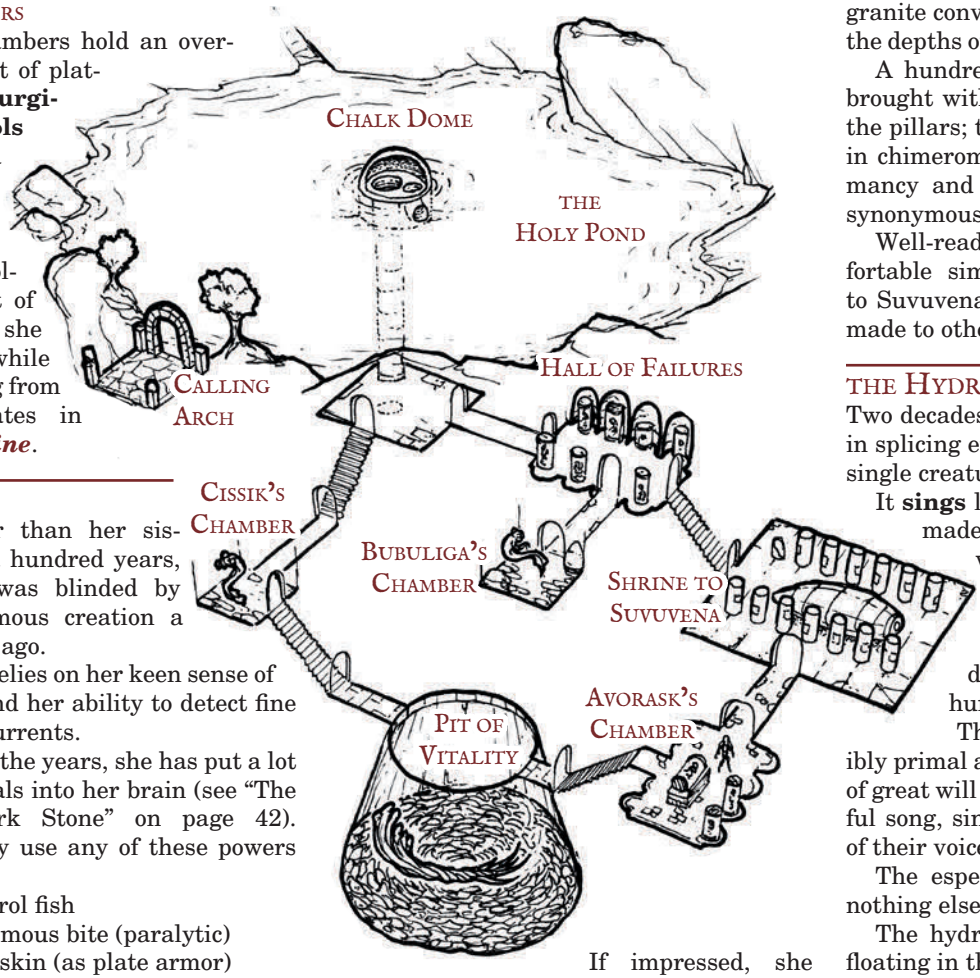
She has more technical mastery of chimeromancy than ***Cissik***, and it was she that began splicing the eight mighty serpents to form the ***hydra***. She cares for the beast like a beloved child.

Her touch instantly bonds flesh to flesh, as if one piece from birth. If attacked, she will use this to deform enemies or affix them horribly to one another.

Bubuliga is wracked with doubts about ***Avorask***, fearing he may be a warped creation.

Chambers

Her chambers hold an oversized set of platinum **surgical tools** and a three-volume set of **notes** she made while learning from the plates in the ***shrine***.



Cissik

Younger than her sister by a hundred years, Cissik was blinded by a venomous creation a century ago.

She relies on her keen sense of smell and her ability to detect fine water currents.

Over the years, she has put a lot of crystals into her brain (see "The Full-Dark Stone" on page 42). She may use any of these powers at will:

- Control fish
- Venomous bite (paralytic)
- Crabskin (as plate armor)

Once per day she may:

- Freeze water (blocking a corridor or a 2-pace sphere)
- Ray of weakness
- Stunning thunderclap
- Water to mucus (3-pace radius)
- Inhale magic (counter-spell)
- Summon demonic fish
- Disorienting glare (victims confuse which way is up)

Cissik is impetuous and hot-headed, but she respects strength. Magic use impresses her, especially if it hurts her. If impressed, she may call for a truce (restraining Bubuliga if necessary) and propose sharing knowledge rather than wasteful fighting.

In her chambers, Cissik has a collection of wooden **tablets** etched with rituals. Most are incomplete, but the whole ones include lesser telekinesis, flight, and the ability to see through stone (100 paces).

Shrine to Suvuvena

In the center of this large, pillared hall is the ruin of Vmnn's **earthcraft**—a granite conveyance he used to flee from the depths of his underworld homeland.

A hundred etched metal **plates** he brought with him have been affixed to the pillars; together they form a course in chimeromancy. Mastery of chimeromancy and worship of Suvuvena are synonymous.

Well-read readers may find uncomfortable similarities between prayers to Suvuvena and the healing petitions made to other gods.

The Hydra

Two decades ago, the sisters succeeded in splicing eight mighty serpents into a single creature.

It **sings** like a choir, a pipe organ of made flesh, but discordantly—with joyous, ecstatic, and terrified voices all intertwined as one.

When alarmed, the hydra cries out with the stolen human voices of the chirpers.

There is something irresistibly primal about the sound. Only those of great will can resist joining its dreadful song, singing wordlessly at the top of their voices.

The especially weak willed can do nothing else while they sing.

The hydra spends most of its time floating in the ***pit of vitality***, occasionally swimming around the pillars of the shrine. It will respond to the sisters' calls, arriving quickly.

Hydra blood and eggs are alchemically auspicious, nearly as potent and useful as dragon ingredients.

Bubuliga used both in their next creation, ***Avorask***.

Hall of Failures

This narrow hall is lined with **glass containers**. Each writhes with one of the sisters' flawed creations.

Lopsided **horrors** made of tentacles, exposed organs, teeth, and eyes press against the glass.

These are not originals, but replicated painstakingly by ***Avorask*** from the sisters' attempts, flaws and all; he set them here as a reminder of their ineptitude (as he sees it).

Apart from the obvious insult, the sisters view this enshrinement of forms past as a hair's breadth from the vanity of mirrors, and they resent it.

Avorask

Building on their success with the hydra, the sisters went on to create a composite being of their own design.

Avorask is a man made of arthropods, fused together by hydra's blood and prayers to Suvuvena.

His lungs are locusts; his skin is a carpet of beetles. His eyes are holes filled with flies. A huge centipede makes up his guts; his hands are clusters of mantids.

He comes to pieces when you fight him, but he can reassemble at will.

Like Bubuliga, he can knit flesh at will, but his chimeromancy is so great that flesh responds to his directions at 20 paces' distance. He can sew shut mouths and eyes on sight.

Avorask's Vision

As an intelligent, composite being, Avorask has rather alien ideas about identity and individuality.

After absorbing Vmnn's teachings, he began referring to himself as Vmnn—and sometimes as Suvuvena.

The sisters correct him compulsively, but as a behaviorist, Avorask dismisses the distinction: in carrying out Suvuvena's divine vision with such accuracy, he *is* her, is he not?

Avorask's goals exceed anything the sisters imagined. While they intended to create new and better forms for the glory of Suvuvena, Avorask dreams of welding all of the world's life into a single, ecstatic organism.

The Pit of Vitality

This dark, natural cavern is much murkier than the others. A **reddish glow** filters up through the sediment-filled water.

Those descending will find that the bottom is a thick **carpet of human organs**, knitted together by Avorask's chimeromancy.

Scores of victims, barely recognizable as people, squirm and heave as one, silently mouthing the ecstasy of flesh united.

The light water is made of their exhalations, and their ecstasy is the cause of its healing potency.

Nestled among the arms, lungs, and other organs that waft lazily in the currents are eleven ***hydra eggs***.

Hydra Eggs

Because of their chimeric origin, hydra eggs must gestate (2-8 weeks) within light water, else they hatch into eight separate, skinless serpents.

Pronunciation Guide

Bubuliga—buh-BOO-lih-gah
Cissik—SISS-ick
Suvuvena—suh-VOO-vuh-nah
Suvuvenism—suh-VOO-vuh-nism

BASILICA OF THE LEPER MESSIAH

The Situation

For centuries, the city of Owlshade has dealt with the **walking plague** by confining its victims to a high-walled ***enclave***. At its center is the Basilica of the Leper Messiah, ruled over by an ambitious lich, ***Husmanna***.

The enclave survives because it takes in afflicted nobles: Husmanna's tinctures stave off death, allowing the afflicted to continue directing family affairs. In this way, the enclave remains a powerful political force in the city.

The Enclave

The enclave **walls** (not shown) enclose thirty ruined buildings. A chain-lowered **platform** lets people in or out, but only those with ***blue tongues*** will be allowed back out into the city. Roll on the ***Enclave visitors*** table to see who is using the platform.

The Loggia

The Basilica is a study in harsh vertical lines. A crude **loggia** of reclaimed masonry protects the dangerous front approach. Brittle tiles explode overhead and rain white dust, as **unseen undead** throw bits of stone (they have run out of javelins) from slit-like windows at any who approach. Any who linger will eventually be struck.

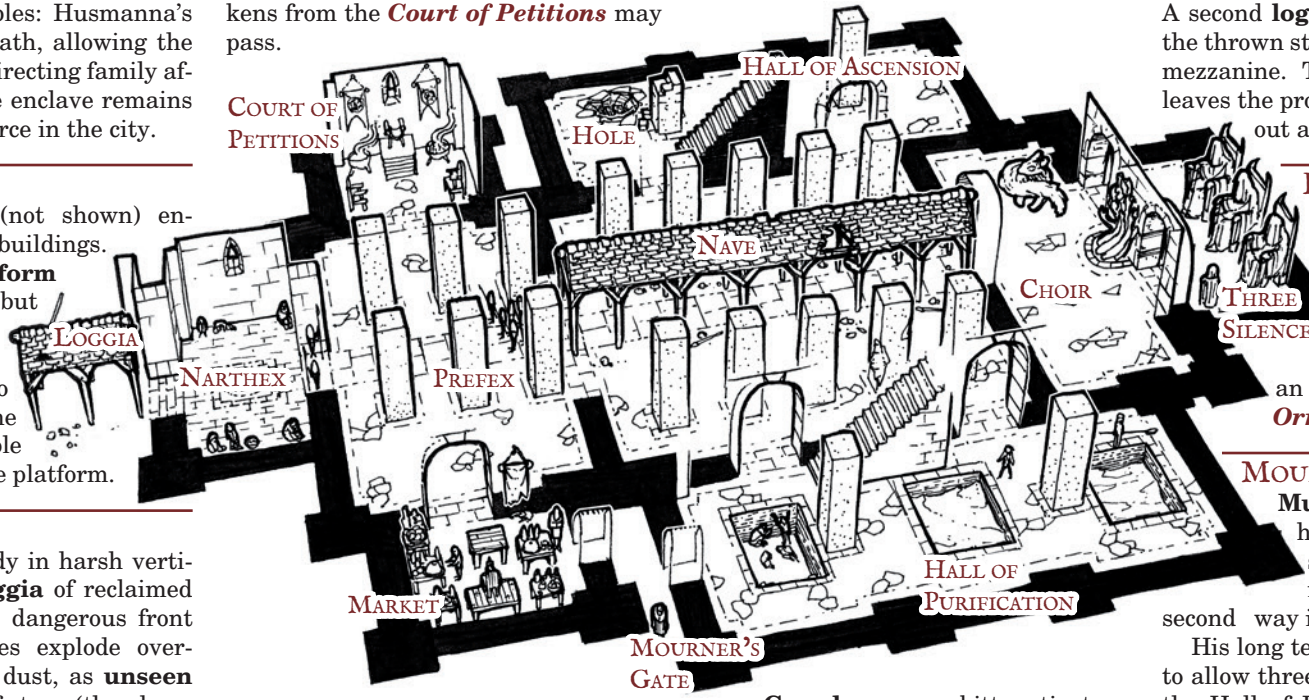
Narthex

d8 **wretches** await entry. Afflicted with the walking plague, but too low born to be given ***Indigo*** status, they will eventually be taken to the ***Hall of Purification***. A pair of halberd-armed ***Quietus*** guard the inner archway, allowing in only the wealthy- or healthy-looking.

Prefex

Six huge, gray pillars dominate the room. The astute notice that they do not support the ceiling. They are ***gray monoliths***, made from the compressed ash of cremated lepers.

A unit of six ***Quietus*** blocks the way to the ***Nave***—only those with black tokens from the ***Court of Petitions*** may pass.



Court of Petitions

Here, a red-robed **proctor** with leprous skin hears petitions from visitors. d3 **visitors** will be here, waiting, along with 4 ***Quietus*** guards.

Powerful dignitaries, legendary figures, or generous donors will be given a **black token** so they might enter deeper to treat directly with ***Husmanna***.

Those on Basilica business are given **blue tokens** for the market.

The Market

A half-dozen **plague-bearers** operate a market. They sell:

Bluetongue—dyes the tongue blue for a day and inoculates against the plague exposure in the last 24 hours (gold purse or a blue token)

Graydream—a bitter tincture that brings on pleasant dreams of dead relatives (silver purse)

Hole—this relieves feelings of grief; 1 in 3 react badly: for d6 hours, they imagine falling backwards into a hole shaped like their body. (copper purse)

Hall of Purification

Here, d8 ***Indigo*** tend unfortunate plague-bearers not wealthy or connected enough to be spared. d2 poor **visitors** from the ***Mourner's Gate*** will be here speaking with them in the first pit. When they (or Indigo) die, their bodies are cremated in the second, central pit. The ashes are refined and ground in the third pit, before being taken to the ***Hall of Ascension*** to be made into bricks.

The stairs lead to a **mezzanine** full of **unseen undead**. Any disturbance here draws thrown masonry.

Nave

A second **loggia** protects visitors from the thrown stones of the **undead** in the mezzanine. They attack anyone who leaves the protection of the loggia without an ***Indigo*** escort.

Hall of Ascension

Three ***Indigo*** toil here, making ash bricks to complete the Basilica's 20th ***monolith***. The cavernous **hole** downwards leads to an old sewer; it is used by ***Ormina*** to slip into the city.

Mourner's Gate

Mulpitus, a round-bodied husk of a monk with deeply set eyes, lives in this reeking alley. He guards the second way into the Basilica.

His long tenure grants him the right to allow three deserving mourners into the Hall of Purification each day. He gives a **blue token** to those he admits, for use in the market, so they can leave.

Each morning, d20 **mourners** will be lined up at the gate, hoping to be selected. Many wait for months.

Quietus

Chain-armored **skeletons** with razor-sharp **halberds** act as guards. They sense without seeing, so their helmets completely enclose their skulls and shoulders in a smooth ovoid of polished

steel. Quietus are dry and brittle—they break easily but fight until smashed.

The Indigo

Wealthy plague-bearers remain here as servants, their life extended by ***Husmanna***. They wear **indigo robes**, and their eyes, noses, and mouths are stained by the refined **bluetongue** paste that keeps them alive. The newest are feisty or sad, retain their names, and advocate for their houses. The longest-lived have had their holdings reassigned to the proctor and are barely more alive than the Quietus.

Choir

A **statue** made of curved clay pipes emerges from the floor. Air hisses through them; in its susurrus can be heard the unspoken wishes of everyone in the city. ***Ormina*** sleeps at its base, listening to every one of them.

Ormina

A **horse-sized ermine** with sleek, gray fur. She behaves like a cat, uncaring and lazy, but she is a demon brought back from "beyond the middle silence." The construction of the ***monoliths*** is her project, as is the plague.

She **moves backwards**, following the tip of her tail like a bizarre, furred snake. Her head comes last, peering over her shoulder at everyone with golden, **lidless eyes**.

Anyone bitten by her is cursed—any attempt at lengthy speech comes out as gray smoke.

Occasionally she slips through the sewers into the city, invisible, to bring her plague to someone prominent whom ***Husmanna*** wishes to join the enclave.

d6	Enclave visitors
1	d3 bailiffs bringing a debtor or petty criminal to the enclave as their punishment.
2	Shorn relative coming to use the **Mourner's Gate**.
3	Noble house lawyer bringing documents for review (real estate, final wills).
4	Noble in mourning, secretly bringing the ashes of a deceased relative to be bound into a ***monolith***.
5-6	Liveried noble house factor, escorted by d3-1 armed youths. 1 in 3 chance of carrying a sack of gold to deposit in the enclave.

Three Silences

The **huge statues** here represent the silence before creation, the silence after all has ended, and the middle silence: the death that comes for everyone. Once potent idols, they are inert now. Two centuries ago, Husmanna completed the ritual that brought Ormina, fulfilling the purpose of the silence cult that made them.

Husmanna the Lich

He stands among **twelve skeletons**, identically robed. He uses **ventriloquism** to disguise which is him, his only remaining magic after summoning Ormina. Husmanna peddles influence and Indigo status to obtain gold. (Bluetongue is made from costly sapphire.)

He will happily use the influence he commands in the city's nobility in exchange for large gold donations.

After two centuries cultivating this empire, he has begun to fear the new world Ormina's ***monoliths*** will bring.

The Gray Monoliths

Assembled from thousands of bricks of compressed funerary ash, the monoliths each stand 10 paces tall. The outer surface is plastered with ash, then painstakingly embossed with rectangular **runes**: these spell out a repetitive but powerful ritual, which binds many spirits into a single being.

Most of the 19 complete monoliths in the Basilica are ***dormant***, but when adventurers first enter a room containing monoliths, there is a 50% chance that one of the monoliths has reached ***Stage 2*** and is already alert and active.

The Sleepers Awaken

Whenever a monolith is **damaged**, a **spell** is cast nearby, or an intelligent being **dies** in their presence, there is a 50% chance the most alert monolith advances to the next stage.

Stage 1—Dormant

At this stage, monoliths contain a riot of terrified, independent souls slowly merging into composite beings.

As a whole, it is not aware of its environment, but it radiates powerful magic. Attempts to commune cause a harmful **psychic backlash** from the distraught souls within.

Stage 2—Neodeus

With an audible pop and a psychic shockwave, the monolith becomes a single transcendent intelligence. It can perceive its environment with perfect clarity and communicate telepathically with other alert monoliths and undead (e.g., the Basilica's Quietus). It can also launch and sustain **psychic attacks** (which feel like having rain dissolve your self-esteem).

Stage 3—Ascended

Ascended monoliths are nascent demigods. Roll randomly for each ***action*** they take (see table).

Monolith Destruction

Monoliths are only as tough as plaster, and can be destroyed in minutes with maces, heavy axes or similar weapons. If a monolith is destroyed, it explodes with a **psychic shockwave** that destroys d2-1 other monoliths in the Basilica, potentially causing a cascade.

The shockwave hits the living like an overwhelming identity assault, causing profound feelings of loss and alienation. The players of affected PCs **exchange characters** (really). This reverts after d3 days—as long as both PCs are still alive; if one of swapped PCs has died, the change is permanent.

d6	Actions of stage 3 (ascended) monoliths
1	Rise into the air while slowly rotating, with an ozone smell and a static crackle.
2	Attack the city's ancestral host. d10+10 ghosts become briefly visible before being torn apart and absorbed. The third time, d2 curious **demons** arrive as well.
3	Telekinetically slam-merge into the nearest monolith, crushing anything between. If an incompressible object (metal, stone) is in the way, then both monoliths are destroyed.
4	Catalyze a random spell from the void. The spell's runes are flash-burned into all surfaces in line of sight. The monolith can use the spell effect at will.
5	Emit a deafening, nauseating base hum. All distances inside the Basilica (room heights, widths) multiply by d6 while the monolith stands. (In practical terms, it's like everything inside the Basilica shrinks.)
6	Teleport to its appointed place in the world, d10×100 leagues away, to begin displacing the regional deity. A ragged **portal** lingers for d20 seconds.

THE SHATTERED GATE

THE SITUATION

A swampy forest valley is avoided by hunters and trappers due to its unhealthy air and reports of disturbing, mutated creatures that inhabit it. Far below the ground, arcane energy leaks from a ***spell engine***, reincarnating souls of the dead into ***forest animals*** with odd, human features.

THE RUIN

A corner of an inner wall is all that remains of a once-grand fortified manor. Each noon, 3d6 ***changed animals*** congregate at the ***awakened tree*** to hear its sermon, aping the habits of their human lives.

CHANGED FOREST ANIMALS

2d6 graze the area at any one time. During sermons, they arrange themselves awkwardly on the **benches** facing the tree. Those with human mouths can speak, though poorly. All mutated creatures have worse senses than their normal animal equivalents, as well as a random human feature.

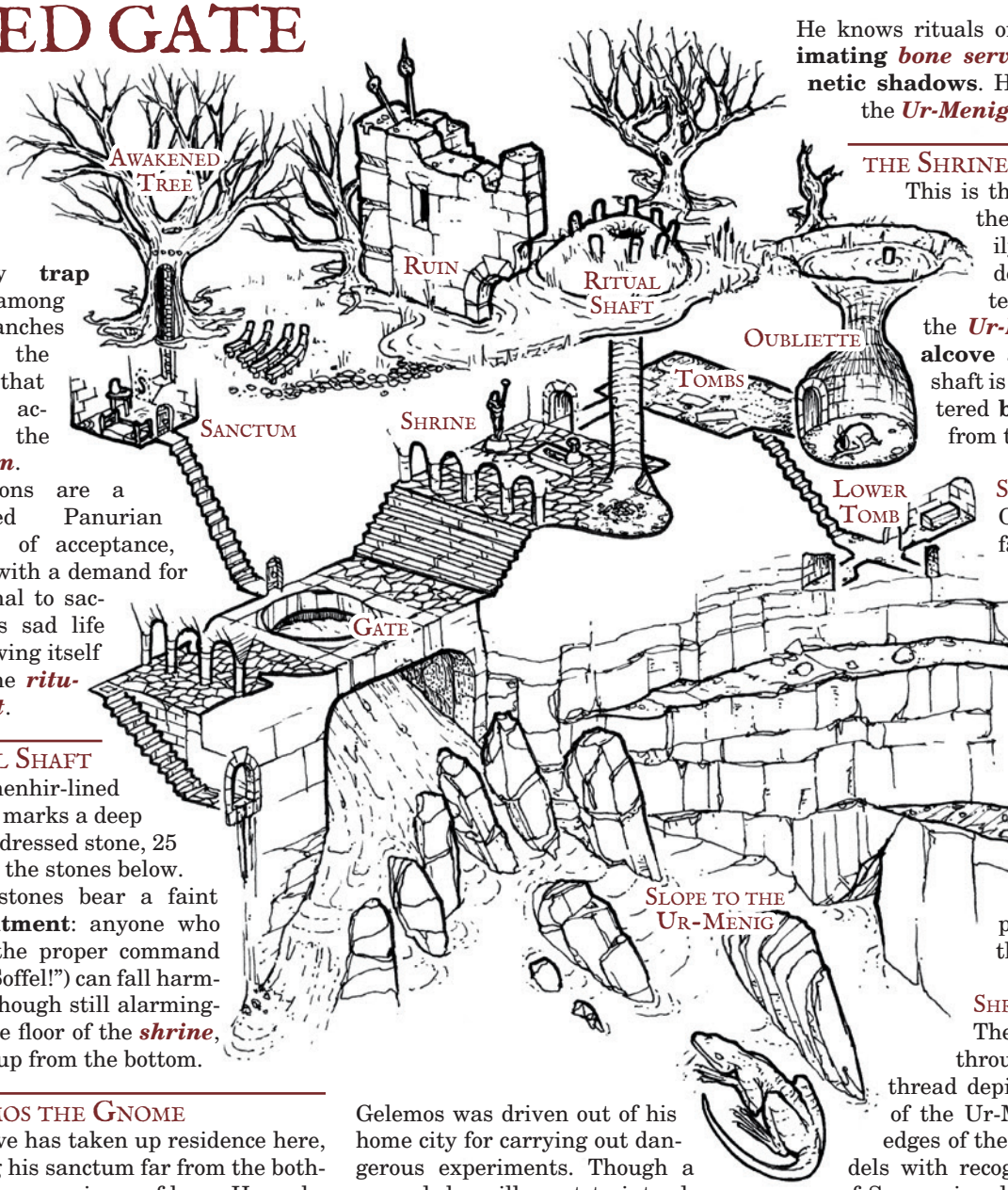
d6	Odd animal	Human feature
1	Deer	Ears
2	Boar	Hands, legs
3	Moose	Eyes, mouth
4	Bear	Skin patches
5	Hare	Nose
6	Fox	Head hair

THE AWAKENED TREE

This old, hollow tree is much feared and respected by the creatures. ***Gelemos*** the gnome hides within and preaches to his "flock" here, using a cantrip that deepens and amplifies his voice.

A tiny **trap door** among the branches reveals the **ladder** that allows access to the ***sanctum***.

Sermons are a corrupted Panurian doctrine of acceptance, ending with a demand for an animal to sacrifice its sad life by throwing itself down the ***ritual shaft***.



RITUAL SHAFT

The menhir-lined **mound** marks a deep shaft of dressed stone, 25 paces to the stones below.

The stones bear a faint **enchantment**: anyone who knows the proper command word ("Soffel!") can fall harmlessly (though still alarmingly) to the floor of the ***shrine***, or float up from the bottom.

GELEMOS THE GNOME

A fugitive has taken up residence here, building his sanctum far from the bother and inconvenience of laws. He seeks to reach the ***spell engine*** and so is trying to curry favor with the ***guardian, Klisp***, by bringing fresh meat (the self-sacrificed animals) to him.

Gelemos was driven out of his home city for carrying out dangerous experiments. Though a coward, he will react to intruders with hostility, assuming that they are agents of the law. He is simply clothed but wears an elaborate **silver ring** that protects as chain armor.

He knows rituals of **invisibility**, **animating *bone servitors***, and **telekinetic shadows**. He knows all about the ***Ur-Menig***, if induced to talk.

THE SHRINE

This is the former shrine of the noble Soffel family and their cult, dedicated to the protection of the ***gate*** to the ***Ur-Menig***. The round **alcove** at the base of the shaft is covered with splattered **blood** and remains from the falling suicides.

SHRINE STATUE

Opposite the shaft, facing a great **tapestry**, is a granite **statue** of a robed likeness of Lady Anasha Soffel, holding a lamp, full of oil. If anyone touches it, everyone in the room must resist magic or intone a prayerful vow to protect the gate to the Ur-Menig.

SHRINE TAPESTRY

The tapestry is woven throughout with silver thread depicting the ley lines of the Ur-Menig. Around the edges of the tapestry are roundels with recognizable depictions of Seree wizards (stylistically datable to a post-Seree period), a ***spell engine***, and robed figures trading with groups of oddly featureless people (the Carreg, see page 80).

d6	Shrine encounters
1	Gelemos, studying the tapestry, guarded by two ***servitors***.
2	A fallen animal lies dying. 2d3 ***servitors*** will take it to ***Klisp***.
3-5	2d3 ***servitors*** await a sacrifice.
6	An apparition begs for aid, created by the ***oubliette*** demon.

The Tombs

The tombs contain the remains of the Soffel family and loyal priests of the cult that maintained the shrine.

An archaic **inscription** above the door claims that a curse affects any entering the tomb. All it does is mark trespassers with an invisible mark that the ***Guardian Klisp*** can see; he will know what it means and is wary of grave-robbers.

Gelemos is so marked, which is part of why he has not advanced beyond the ***gate***. Gelemos has so far overlooked the **false bottom** in one sarcophagus, which leads to the ***lower tomb***.

The Lower Tomb

Not yet despoiled, this lower tomb has a low **altar** bearing a painted funereal **urn**. It shows the accord between the family and the ***guardian***. The ashes inside are those of Lady Anasha Soffel, who first discovered the guardian and founded the shrine.

A small door leads out onto a ledge. Klisp, focused on the gate and his own thoughts, hasn't noticed the tomb door.

The Oubliette

The door to this room is locked and barred. An **inscription**, in the same old script as before, enjoins the reader to let what sleeps lie. Inside, a tall **humanoid** in finely wrought enchanted **plate** and an impressive horned **helm** lies asleep on the ground. An extravagant, lacquered **shield** depicts scenes of the conquest of the underworld. The room magically fills itself with the sleep-inducing ***air of the Ur-Menig***.

Denlegath Sleeps

The sleeping man is the man-demon **Denlegath**. He razed the manor and shattered the ***gate*** in an attempt to reach the ***spell engine***, but he failed. His army succumbed to ***Klisp*** and the unbreathable air, and the last of the family's priests imprisoned him here.

If removed from the room, he will make a show of thanks, but he is deceptive and incapable of gratitude.

The Sanctum

When not in the shrine, Gelemos is here, working at his notes and books, attended by any of the six ***servitors*** not already encountered.

The room contains a bed, a stout **table** covered with his work, a small **coffer** containing a purse of gold, a bag of useful herbs, and a set of robes and amulet looted from the tombs.

A three-foot long **scroll** lies open on the table, containing the ***Mantra of the Ur-Menig***. It is easy to understand but long and repetitive.

A pair of decorative **screens** (both valuable as art) separate his living and study areas. One depicts the manor and surroundings as they were in their heyday, with the intact ***gate*** beneath.

The other shows robed figures walking among sleepers in a great cavern; acute observers may notice the hand gestures for the advanced version of the Mantra of the Ur-Menig.

The Gate

Once a great circular gate of stone inlaid with white metal designs, it is now rubble and a single white-metal hinge. Given time, determined laborers could find 2d8 ingots of white metal in the rubble-strewn sand below it.

Bone Servitors

Gelemos has animated six sets of mismatched animal bones. Dumb, their only drive is to carry bodies to the gate, but they will fight back if attacked, interfered with, or if Gelemos wills it.

The Guardian Klisp

The Seree placed their ***spell engines*** in the care of magical, living guardians. Klisp began life as a small, mottled rock lizard but has become vastly larger and more dragon-like over the long centuries of exposure to the spell engine.

Klisp has tired of cave isopods and is grateful for the meat Gelemos has provided, though he does not trust him.

He is educated and longs to discuss the literature of his long-dead masters.

Though he speaks slowly, his movements are quick and powerful, and he has trained to fight groups. He knows sand avalanches send intruders down to where they cannot breathe. He has darksight, leaps like a cricket, and has spent years imagining how best to shock, scatter, and demoralize intruders before maiming them one by one.

His solemn purpose is to protect the spell engine from everyone but true Seree wizards bearing proof of their office. He will prevent anyone else from reaching it alive.

The Air of the Ur-Menig

The Ur-Menig is an unfathomably vast subterranean lake, now dry. Within its depths is rumored to be the great City of the Carreg (see page 80).

Below Klisp's waiting place on the slope, anyone who breathes the air will immediately fall into a deathless sleep.

Mantra of the Ur-Menig

Surface dwellers can breathe the air of the Ur-Menig while chanting this ritual, and the effect lingers for d3-1 minutes after.

Secret hand gestures extend the effect to 6 other companions and prolong the lingering effect to d2 days.

The Spell Engine

Two hundred paces downslope of Klisp is a battered **sphere** of mica and silver, embedded in the gray sand. It crackles with static electricity.

Both it and Klisp were hastily moved here from a secret vault by the Seree in the hopes that the unbreathable air would be sufficient protection. Many such compromises were made during the Seree's final wars.

It contains the knowledge of how to cast 14 spells of varying potency. Touching it imparts d3 of them, along with a potentially lethal electric shock.

THE CITY OF THE CARREG

THE SITUATION

When the underworld sea drained away, it left a vast depression full of unbreathable air—the Ur-Menig. Near its center is Sifoon, city of the ***Carreg***.

Once a great trading hub, the dwindling Carreg have been unable to hold Sifoon's ***districts*** against the endless tide of external and internal enemies.

For years, their hold over the city has been only a few neighborhoods near the ***Port***.

THE CARREG

Carreg have smooth, clay-like skin. They are calm, resolute, and speak in low, mumbly voices. Fearing iron, they use weapons of bone or oil-hardened leather.

To them, the surface is mythical—to speak of it means you intend to break promises and flout their laws.

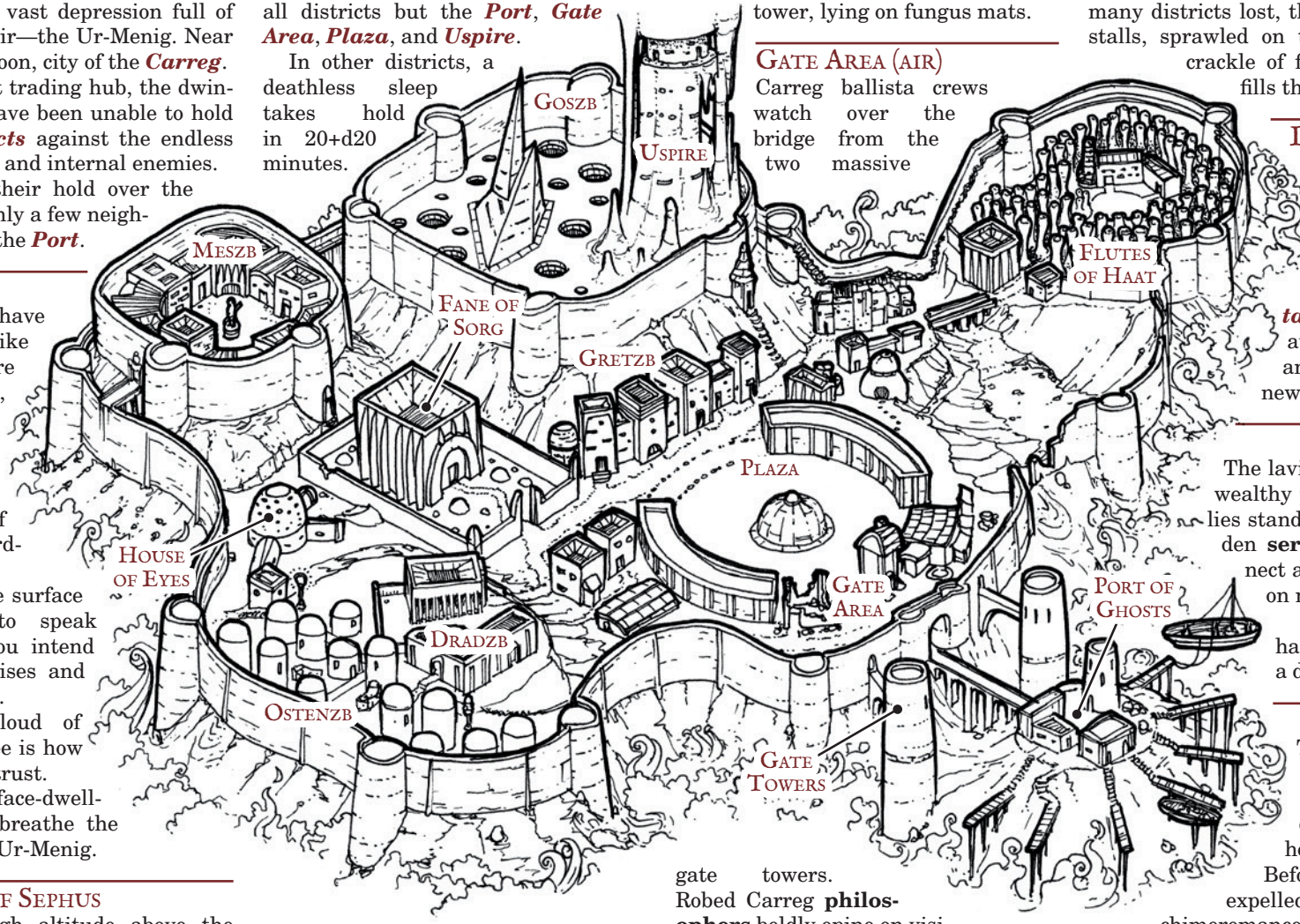
Speaking aloud of what all can see is how they establish trust.

Unlike surface-dwellers, they can breathe the deep air of the Ur-Menig.

THE ROCKS OF SEPHUS

Despite its high altitude above the sea bed, the air of Sifoon is only barely breathable. Each neighborhood had a **Rock of Sephus**—a barrel-sized sphere of porous rock resting in a fat, iron brazier. When lit, each produces an omni-directional draft of breathable air. These were created for the benefit of ***visitors***, but they have gone out in all districts but the ***Port***, ***Gate Area***, ***Plaza***, and ***Uspire***.

In other districts, a deathless sleep takes hold in 20+d20 minutes.



PORT OF GHOSTS (AIR)

This area bustles with Carreg and other ***visitors***, arriving by boat across the ghostly sea. These ancient vessels remember the time before the sea drained and float over the inky depths at the original sea level. Ancient sails or oars propel them.

Visitors brought to Sifoon by friendly Carreg will awaken in the low guard tower, lying on fungus mats.

GATE AREA (AIR)

Carreg ballista crews watch over the bridge from the two massive gate towers.

Robed Carreg **philosophers** boldly opine on visitors' anatomies, hoping to sound smart enough to get laid.

Except for a few prominent **guards** (bone-tip spears, hide armor, nets), the towers and barbican have been converted to housing for **displaced citizens**.

PLAZA (AIR)

Though **philosophers** keep loiterers out of the holy plaza with long rods, the two curving galleries are filled with families and merchants' stalls. With so many districts lost, they sleep in their stalls, sprawled on their wares. The crackle of frying ***delicacies*** fills the air.

LOST DISTRICTS

The Carreg have retreated from the other districts. Roll on the ***lost district occupant table***. The Carreg avoid these areas and have no fresh news of them.

GRETZB

The lavish **tenements** of wealthy philosopher families stand abandoned. Hidden **servant doors** connect adjacent buildings on most levels.

Each building has a chance (1 on a d8) of an ***artifact***.

DRADZB

Three **large buildings** made up a Dradkin enclave years before hostilities began. Before they were expelled by the Carreg, chimeromancers began breeding ***Heilian gorgons*** for release. All three buildings contain rows of **incubation jars**, each filled with sour-smelling ichor and a preserved gorgon pup. One in ten is still viable. One in twenty is a **cave drake** larva. One building

contains an ***artifact*** surrounded by giant, dissected insects.

The Flutes of Haat

The neglected **fungal flutes** of this estate have grown to titanic size. When the breeze blows, they **hum** eerily. The wild-eyed Carreg **grounds-keeper** claims that they speak for the Ur-Menig itself. Now a natural, holy place (if rather alien), any who sleep here have **nightmares** of the cataclysmic draining of the sea or (1 on a d6) dreams of interesting sites (e.g., shipwrecks) somewhere on the dry sea floor.

d6	Port & Plaza notables
1	d12 armed & scarred Carreg returning with ***delicacies***
2	Carreg warriors (bow/knife), buying smoked ghost eels
3	Jorn (whiskered troll) merchants selling flammable wood to buy Rocks of Sephus
4	Foreign Carreg merchants
5	Tearful reunion as someone emerges from a lost district
6	Workers removing a minor rock fall from the street, or cleaning a rooftop drip-water reservoir.

d6	Visitor motive
1	Hire deniable thugs to rough up or assassinate a merchant
2	Hire a team to recover an ***artifact*** from a random district
3	Develop new trading avenues with endless questions
4	Sell information about the city and its visitors to Dradkin spies
5	Hire mercenaries to relight an airless district's Rock of Sephus
6	Hire warriors or specialists to improve community defenses

Ostenzb (os-TEN-zuh-buh)

The "groaning district" is filled with the **granaries** of the Jorn (now gone). They shudder and creak under the pressure of moisture-expanded **puzel seeds**. Some have burst open explosively, showering the streets with crunching debris. Others might yet.

Meszb (MESS-zuh-buh)

The wealthiest merchants of Sifoon lived in the twelve tenement houses of this walled district. Each house has a **demon spirit**, originally bound to serve its owners.

d6	Meszb demon house
1-3	Tidy, pleasantly scented
4	Walls vibrate or even shake
5	Transformed into an extra-dimensional labyrinth
6	A carnivorous death trap

House of Eyes

The House of Eyes is a dome pierced with hundreds of spy-holes. Three Menaka (man-sized ovals ringed by wart-like chameleon eyes) dwelled here for a century before mysteriously incinerating themselves. Their bodies are ashen but whole, collapsing into clouds at the slightest touch (but slowly reforming over a few hours). One contains an ***artifact***.

Fane of Sorg Appeased

A dredger's mystical vision prompted her to found a religion devoted to ridding demons of their relentless hunger.

The deserted fane is a huge room divided into **lanes**, alternating white marble and black basalt. They are worn down from attempting to recreate the lost ***dance of hungers***.

Magic performed on the white lanes has the opposite of the intended effect.

Uspire (air)

Tall Uspire houses a scholarly order. Though most rooms contain only echoes, the lower levels are bright with flute-oil lamps, cheerful conversation, and scroll-copying.

Goszb (GOSS-zuh-buh)

The walled district of Goszb is one of the great wonders of the underworld. The **courtyard** of pale stone is utterly clear of fallen rock, swept by twenty **holes** that slide in constant motion.

The holes are made by **void worms** (giant worms with bodies of emptiness), whose heads are anchored deep below the plateau.

The angular "temple" has 3 floors above and 3 belowground. The scholars of Uspire learned long ago that it is an ancient conveyance capable of reaching the moon. Until a generation ago, they kept its gardens and larders stocked; now it is overgrown with plants, fungus, and large insects.

Lost within is an ***artifact***.

Cave Drakes

These limbless beasts have only a taloned **grasper** at the end of their strong tails. They glide on leathery wings in the upper reaches of the Ur-Menig, seeking prey with heat-sensitive pits all along their oily bodies.

They use wounded prey as territory markers. Attacking drakes will swoop down and leave prey crippled with beak and talon attacks, then leave it to crawl around unless they are hungry (1-2 on a d6) or something (e.g., rescuers, another predator) interferes with it.

d6	Lost district occupant
1	d2 ***cave drakes***
2	d20 ***rust desperants***, d8 dying
3	d20+20 ***meebs***
4	d2 ***Heilian gorgons***
5	***Dradkin infiltrator band***
6	***Shadow Bohka***

Rust Desperants

Believing they are all that stands between Sifoon and its enemies, this breakaway martial cult of Carreg has embraced iron poisoning (which harms Carreg) to toughen themselves. Their skin is broken and weeping—but covered in metallic scabs—and their limbs grow painfully long (but strong).

They mount weekly raids into lost districts, striking at Sifoon's enemies. They succeed just enough to embolden them. They do an equal amount of harm by kidnapping healthy Carreg from Uspire and Plaza districts, to shore up their dying numbers.

d6	Lost district Rock of Sephus
1	Centrally located, intact, unlit
2	Centrally located, intact, no fuel
3	Brazier tipped over; the rock has rolled d100 paces away
4	Brazier and rock have been moved to an under-level of a nearby building
5	Separated, d100 paces apart, and each coated in d3 ***meebs***
6	Smashed up for ***Sephus masks***

d6	Lost district encounter
1	Encounter appropriate to this district's occupant
2	d4 Carreg, tapping rooftop
3	**Giant whip scorpion**, having fallen from the distant ceiling
4	The apparition of a dreaming, **green-robed sorcerer**
5	d2 mindless Carreg, dumbstruck by the ***Heilian gorgon***
6	***Dradkin infiltrator***, spying

Meebs

When undisturbed, these glassy slimes spread out large and thin, looking like wet stone or **puddles**. If awakened by light or sound, they draw up into keg-sized blobs over a few minutes. Once a minute they can **leap** surprisingly far, grappling their victims to dissolve them in **acidic juice**.

Meeb-infested districts will be thick with them: d10-5 in each structure. They are most vulnerable to cutting weapons and fire.

Heilian Gorgon

A great cat of the underworld, with a lion-like mane of asps, its yellow eyes **transfix** with a stare. After thirteen heartbeats, the gorgon steals the wits of its victim, leaving them struck dumb.

Gorgon-occupied districts will have kills of various ages, and the odd dumb-struck Carreg wandering aimlessly.

Dradkin Infiltrator Band

A pious-caste family of d8 capable fighters and d4 hardy porters. Their children are hostages back in Dradkin lands. They have metal blades, kin-leather armor, and paralytic javelins. They have infiltrated Sifoon ahead of a larger Dradkin attack, crossing the Ur-Menig using ***Sephus Masks***. They will kill anyone who could reveal them.

Shadow Bohka

The Carreg say that Bohka is the wretched offspring of demon and sorcerer. He carries a **lamp** that casts darkness; surface dwellers produce brightly glowing "shadows" which dance as he moves.

He can snatch the bones from your arm with his **thieving touch**. These he takes and sews into his great coat.

He is **invisible** in his shroud of darkness, but his bone-lined coat **rattles** as he moves. He can be seen once injured, for his **blood glows** like molten iron.

He carries one of the ***Books of Undibol*** and reads it regularly.

the Delicacies of Sifoon

Carreg dredging bands find all manner of delicious foods on the sea bed.

Dredgeleaf—nutritious staple; moist, mildewy smell

Sand nuts—fist-sized, tough husk; starchy, floral smell

Isopod—only the juice from the legs is used (the rest is poisonous to Carreg)

Flutes—man-sized fungus; the fibrous rind is mashed for a buttery oil

Ghost eel—rare memories of sea life past, caught with ancient harpoons

Emberries—tastes citrusy to surface dwellers but dyes their faces purple

Artifact—Sephus Masks

These cumbersome masks make the Ur-Menig's air marginally breathable. Each minute the wearer exerts themselves, the masks fail for d6-3 minutes.

Artifact—Book of Undibol

This book from Undibol's five-volume opus isn't really about anything, or so the preface claims. It meanders aimlessly for several pages before launching into a detailed description of whoever is reading it. After this, it describes the last person to read each of the other four volumes. After another dozen pages of drivel, it begins describing the thoughts of anyone currently reading any of the other volumes.

If the book is put down or if any part is skipped or skimmed, it begins anew.

At least two volumes are very far from Sifoon.

Artifact—Santha's Box

This small box of polished blue beryl is hinged in ivory, and the lid is lined with small, flat teeth. Anything placed inside crosses to the ghostly world of the dead. Engravings show former owners paying ghosts with gold. If the bearer can see into that world, it could be used to bring small things back (by "scooping" them).

Artifact—Testament of Many

This tablet of **dark glass**, etched with crude, rectangular lettering, is the first-person account of "Atummo", apparently a gestalt being that emerged from the primordial rock of creation. Upon seeing the "lights of heaven" (perhaps the stars), its wonder divided it into many beings, one to appreciate each light: thus were born the Carreg.

Anyone meditating upon it divides into d2+1 separate, identical beings. This is a priceless cultural artifact to the Carreg.

Artifact—Void-Catcher's Rod

This short silver rod, etched end to end with fine, random-seeming grooves is a Jorn tool, used to find void worms. When placed against stone, it vibrates if there is an empty space beyond, violently if the space is very near.

Artifact—Shaper's Spurtle

This stubby wand of stone is wrapped in many layers of felt and leather. Unwrapped, any flesh it touches is reshaped like soft clay. Just grabbing it firmly can forever distort the fingers.

This is a tool of Dradkin chimeromancers, and with effort it can even be used to extrude new limbs (or to blend existing ones down to nothing).

Anyone but a practiced sculptor will produce irreversible, alarming results.

Artifact—Lightning Balls

This pair of brass balls is tightly wrapped in a leather pouch. If either is tapped sharply on a hard surface, an electric bolt arcs between it and its twin, however distant they are.

d10	Random artifact
1-2	d3 Sephus Masks
3	d2 Books of Undibol
4	Santha's Box
5	Testament of Many
6	Void-Catcher's Rod
7	Shaper's Spurtle
8	d2 Lightning Balls
9	Spider Cloak
10	Dance of Hungers

If the balls are touching, the only evidence is a loud crack and an ozone smell. A hand's breadth apart, the bolt is powerful enough to burn skin and start fires. A few paces apart, it stings, but does no lasting harm. At greater distances, the hair-thin bolt is barely visible and delivers little more than a static shock.

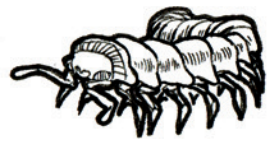
Artifact—Spider Cloak

A long, gray cloak of Dradkin kinleather, ending in long, matted tassels. If the wearer ever panics, the tassels stiffen into numerous legs and scuttle the wearer to safety, maybe up the wall.

Artifact—Dance of Hungers

A long strip of fabric, painted with steps. If they are followed, they reveal the dance of hungers. Anyone enacting the dance has their hunger for food transformed into a powerful longing for (d6) 1-2: the comforts of home, 3-4: intimacy, 5-6: solitude.

If it is danced by a skilled dancer, the effect applies to d6 observers.



MIDDEN OF THE DEEP

The Situation

In an underground cavern, vast beyond measuring, stands the Midden, a fossilized **dung heap** produced by a nest of drakes far above on the roof of the cavern. The nest is empty, but the Midden remains, picked over by scavengers of every stripe.

The outer cavern is completely dark, except for the odd glint of fire from beetles on the slopes.

Mining Camp

The iron-spiked **palisade** has been staved in by something huge. The small shack contains two picks, a brass lantern (empty), and a rusted shield, all sized for Carreg hands.

A **kiln** contains insect fragments, flecked with gold pinpricks, and a few coins' worth of smelted gold.

d20	An hour of Midden mining
1-9	Endless coprolith, maybe a little dustier, harder, or crumblier than the last bit.
10-12	Dust deposit, choking and temporary blindness.
13	Collapsed tunnel, d2 ***ghosts***.
14-15	Dormant isopod (irritable)
16	Drake eggshell (d6 pounds)
17	Bone (d6 paces long)
18	d20 drake scales
19	d3 drake teeth
20	Liquid sputum deposit hiding d6 gems, d100 coins, and an unforgettable smell.

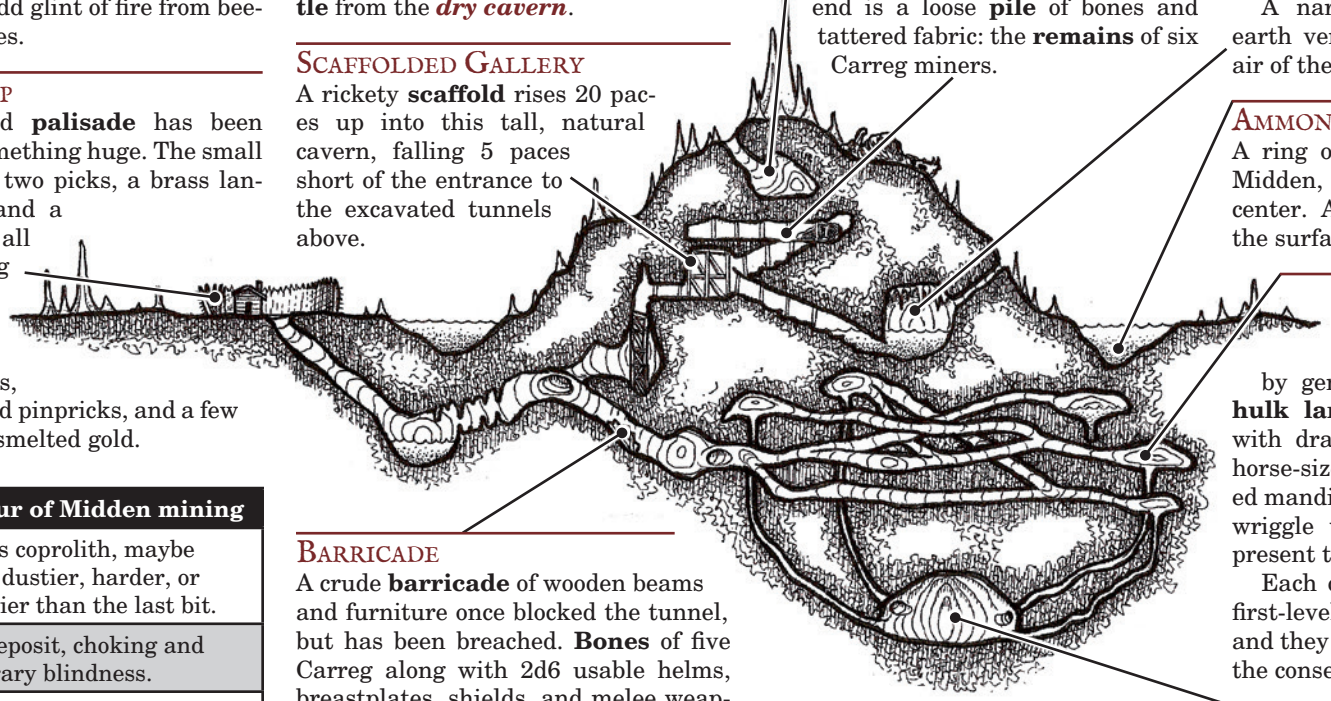
Midden Slopes

The huge, calcified heap rises sixty paces above the cavern floor. Every 10 minutes spent here attracts the attention of **scavengers** on a 1-2 on d6.

Roll d6 for type. 1: d6 flying fire beetles; 2: whip scorpion (8'); 3: cave crickets; 4: shower of acidic droplets; 5: d3 Midden ***ghosts***; 6: iridescent **stag beetle** from the ***dry cavern***.

Scaffolded Gallery

A rickety **scaffold** rises 20 paces up into this tall, natural cavern, falling 5 paces short of the entrance to the excavated tunnels above.



Barricade

A crude **barricade** of wooden beams and furniture once blocked the tunnel, but has been breached. **Bones** of five Carreg along with 2d6 usable helms, breastplates, shields, and melee weapons are scattered about its base.

Carreg Ghosts

The miners of the Midden were devoured by the ***young ones***. The high concentration of drake ichor in the coprolith preserved their spirits even as they were being eaten, though unfortunately this has only allowed them to relive their final moments of flight, terror, and agony endlessly.

Dry Cavern

A greater iridescent **stag beetle** dwells here. It is the size of a rhinoceros and has a matching attitude. Its carapace is streaked with precious metals, absorbed from the Midden. If smelted, the carapace will yield 4,000 gp, 1000 sp, and 300 pp.

Upper Gallery

This area is barely supported by splintered wooden beams. At the end is a loose **pile** of bones and tattered fabric: the **remains** of six Carreg miners.

Within the pile are three suits of Carreg-made bone-laminate armor, three swords, two pick axes, a brass lantern, and 140 gold coins. One undisturbed corpse bears a scarab brooch of **protection against insects**.

d3 **ghosts** will arise if anything is touched. Lucid or not, they've paid a terrible price for their riches, more than anything the adventurers can offer.

Ghostly Reactions (d6)

1-2: Distraught and violent
3-4: Endlessly reliving mining tasks
5: Looking for vengeance
6: Lucid and looking to bargain

Water-Filled Cavern

Accumulated drippings have softened the coprolith into a pungent slurry. The walls are very slippery near the waterline. A **titan slug** dwells here, believing itself to be the lord of all creation.

A narrow **shaft** of soft, slippery earth vents putrid gases out into the air of the outer cavern.

Ammonia Moat

A ring of putrid **water** encircles the Midden, 20 paces wide, 10 deep at the center. An ammonia reek emerges if the surface crust is broken.

The Young Ones

Smooth, cramped tunnels were gnawed into the bedrock by generations of the young ones: **hulk larvae** (see page 117) Infused with drake ichor, they are fearsome: horse-sized larvae with garnet-encrusted mandibles. In confined tunnels, they wriggle with great speed. Eight are present this year.

Each can use one randomly chosen first-level **spell** as an innate ability, and they do so frequently, regardless of the consequences.

Vault of the Hulk Mother

A deformed **amalgam** of over a dozen hulk larvae writhes here, the result of generations of larvae waylaid on their progress to maturity by ichor exposure.

Telepathically linked to the young ones, she wields innate magic as a capable sorcerer.

Her bulk enfolds a sizable **cache** of coins, jewelry, and d6 magical items.

SIRENS OF BLOOD AND SEA

The Situation

The cliffs of Verz are along a remote shoreline, far from the nearest town. The grass is a mossy green, long and lush, and the sky is always a cloudy gray. At the edge of the cliffs are old ***crystals*** whose significance has never been understood. Monstrous ***sirens*** live in the caverns below.

The sirens occasionally wander out of their caverns to hunt and bring back food: men—but they will also eat wayward explorers.

They worship a frightful dark ***goddess***, more ancient than anything above ground.

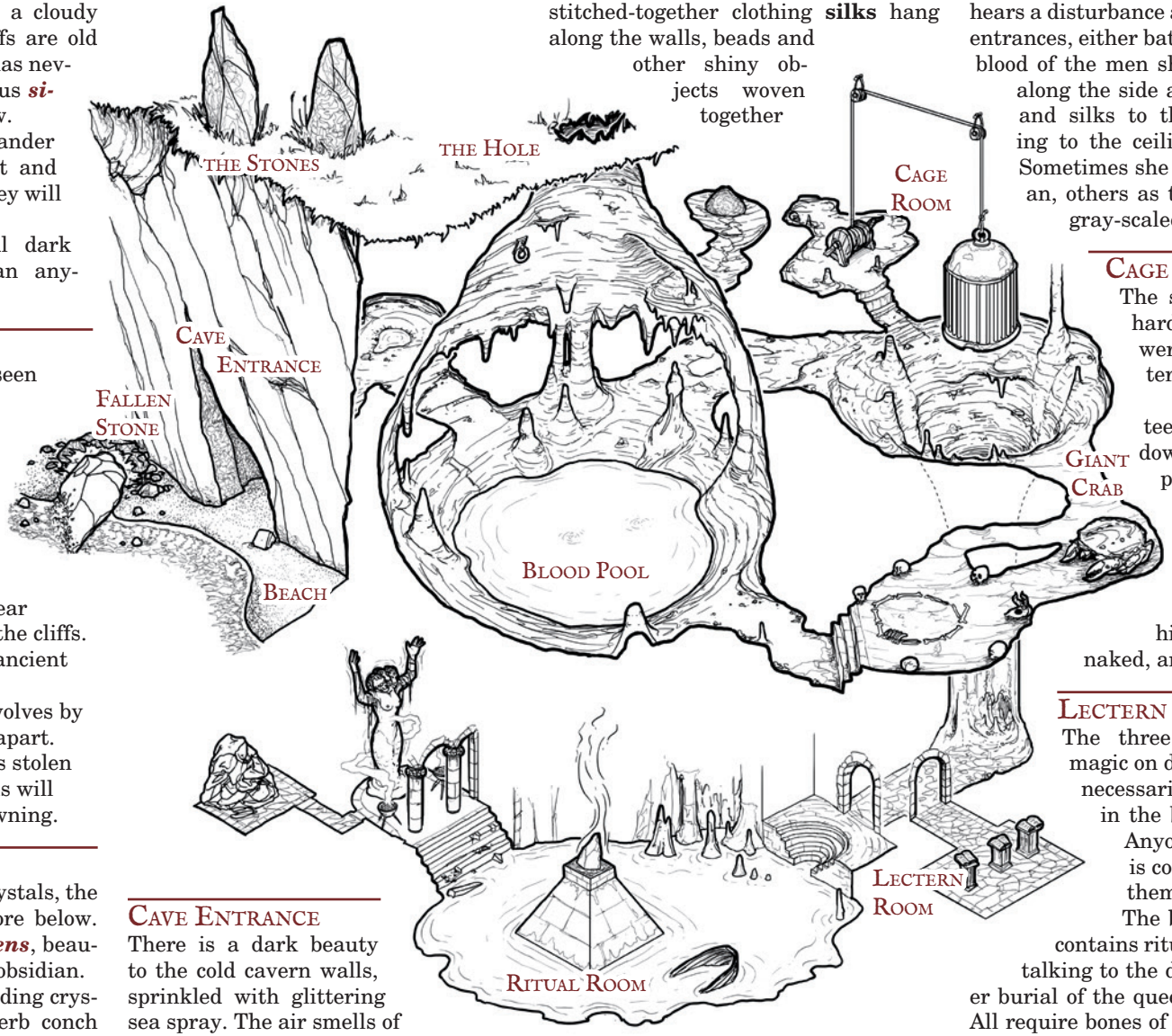
Rumors Nearby (d6)

1. Naked women have been seen bathing at the base of the cliffs, singing songs no one recognizes.
2. The rocks at the base of the cliff are extremely dangerous, destroying boats and drowning sailors.
3. Dangerous witches lurk near the ***crystals*** at the top of the cliffs.
4. The crystals belong to an ancient ***goddess*** of the ocean.
5. There's a pack of vicious wolves by the cliffs that tear people apart.
6. Leaving an object that was stolen from the sea at the crystals will grant protection from drowning.

The Three Crystals

Atop the cliff are two black crystals, the third fallen to the rocky shore below. They represent the three ***sirens***, beautiful and dangerous as black obsidian.

At the base of the two standing crystals are **small tokens**: superb conch shells, the blood of a virgin man in a small glass vial, and a pile of shiny jewels and precious metals. The ***goddess*** compels the sirens to protect anyone who leaves an offering.



Cave Entrance

There is a dark beauty to the cold cavern walls, sprinkled with glittering sea spray. The air smells of salt and brine. Slick seaweed and slime cover the stone. Beyond is unlit, for the caves house only creatures of darkness.

Blood Pool Room

This is arranged like a macabre living area, drapes of **old sails** and stitched-together clothing **silks** hang along the walls, beads and other shiny objects woven together as though the walls themselves wore necklaces. The discerning traveler will recognize the **large, dark pool** is thick with blood and guts, with **stacks of human bones** arranged decoratively along the walls.

Kai loves to wait here when she hears a disturbance at one of the cavern entrances, either bathing in the blessed blood of the men she's killed, waiting along the side adding more jewels and silks to the room, or clinging to the ceiling like a shadow. Sometimes she appears as a woman, others as the ***siren*** monster, gray-scaled and slippery.

Cage Room

The stone here is cold, hard wetness, as if it were solid ocean water, black with age.

In the **cage** is a teenaged **boy** who fell down the hole while playing and broke his leg. The ***sirens*** haven't eaten him yet because they like to toy with him. He's terrified, naked, and trapped.

Lectern Room

The three **books** of black magic on display here are not necessarily evil but based in the blackness of night. Anyone who reads them is compelled to perform them to completion.

The **book of the dead** contains rituals for raising and talking to the dead, and the proper burial of the queen of blessed dead. All require bones of the drowned and a life willingly sacrificed.

d6	Cavern encounter
1	**High tide** sweeps violently into the entrance and pool chamber
2	A rhino-sized **crab**, defending d6 scuttling baby crabs
3	A swarm of **bats**, buffeting, blinding, and terrifying
4	The **ghost** of a beautiful youth, endlessly recounting his murder
5	***Mesi***, naked, in her human form
6	A pile of discarded men's **clothes**, boots, and gear

The **book of darkness** teaches how to blind oneself to see in the dark, glow in deep waters, and traverse the "dark space" to the world beyond.

The **book of the stars** tells the story of the queen herself and how the great sea ties three worlds together. The confusing script blurs readers' vision.

Ritual Pyramid and Statue

Here is where ***Sala*** is usually found, reading over the books or in worship of her dark ***goddess***. The three ***sirens*** might be here together performing a ritual. The **pyramid** represents the world coming to a point at the stars. Below the water line, another pyramid points downward into darkness.

The Sirens Three

Once human, the sacred crystals transformed them into something more. They now have gray, slippery eel-skin, rows of shark teeth, milky eyes that can see in darkness, and a hunger for man flesh. Men, they eat, but women they ***convert***. Occasionally they'll sit, naked in human form, waiting by one of the pools.

Sirens can **breathe underwater**, can adopt the human **woman form** they once had, and can emit a **mesmerizing** low-tone song to confuse men. They do not die of old age.

The Crystal Knives

Each siren carries a sharp crystal. These suck life from those touched by them, transferring it to its siren owner. Touching a siren's knife (whether she holds it or not) transfers one year of youthfulness.

Mesi the Pirate

The oldest of the three, Mesi was first drawn to the shrine as the sole survivor of a shipwreck. Whispers on the wind promised power beyond what she'd known as a pirate.

Mesi likes being in charge and lording her experience over the other two. She might stop ***Kai*** from viciously killing someone just to prove her dominance—and then try to take the meal from her.

Kai the Murderer

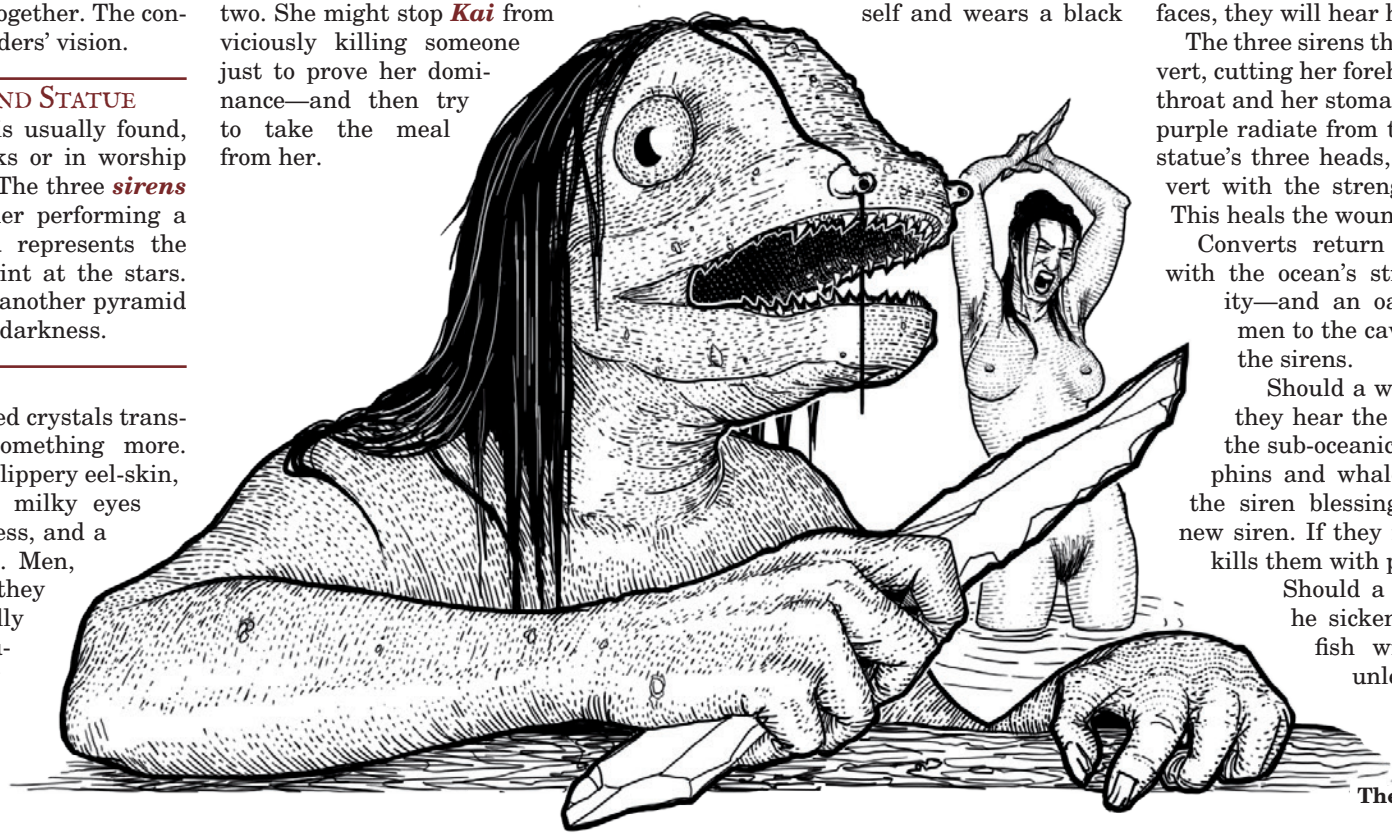
Kai was a young woman from a nearby village who fell into the hole and broke her leg. Mesi found her and dragged her back to the shrine, promising her an escape from her tyrant of a father and healing her leg. Kai accepted, murdered her father, and is the most gleeful siren of the three. She loves to murder men with a vengeance that the other two find reckless.

Sala the Witch

In search of a greater power than land magic could bring her, Sala found the crystals as a result of a powerful binding ritual she cast on herself. She was dying and wanted to live forever. And so the caverns called her name, and she became the third siren of this age.

She has blinded herself and wears a black cloth **blindfold** across the gaping holes where her eyes once were.

Sala is the keeper of the tomes of black magic, and the other two resent her for her knowledge.



Statue—Goddess of the Ocean

The statue depicts the queen of the dead, as the ancient ocean creatures regarded her. She's uncanny and hard for mortals to looks at; her **three heads** appear like blurs of blackness and her body like a vibrating, slippery thing. She looks half human, and **whispers** in an inhuman language emanate from within her.

Converts

Women converts are brought to the statue. If they pledge loyalty to the dark queen and stare upon her many faces, they will hear her singing.

The three sirens then wound the convert, cutting her forehead, stabbing her throat and her stomach. Beams of dark purple radiate from the wounds to the statue's three heads, imbuing the convert with the strength of the queen. This heals the wounds completely.

Converts return to their villages with the ocean's strength and vitality—and an oath to lure living men to the caverns as meals for the sirens.

Should a woman kill a siren, they hear the call of the queen, the sub-oceanic cacophony of dolphins and whales. If they accept the siren blessing, they become a new siren. If they refuse, the statue kills them with purple light.

Should a man kill a siren, he sickens, turning into a fish within a fortnight unless the curse is somehow broken.

MULCIBER'S FLUTE

The Situation

Below some wretched city or other is a hellish, parasitic inferno of suffering. Built brick by brick from the body of a god of an earlier age, it pulls down vulnerable souls to resurrect them into forms made for suffering.

The corrupt living are drawn, too, and a ***cult*** has found its way down to the ***mouth of hell***.

The Cracks

Over the centuries, the ***mouth*** has bored crazed, twisting cracks up to the surface, burning into softer seams with breaths of acidic steam. Piercing the sewers of the undercity and the minds of the hateful, the cracks reach up like inverted roots, pulling, tickling, and whispering invitations.

The ***cult*** has descended through these, and the simplest path is marked by their pitons, ropes, and the stink of their fear.

The Cult: Blessed Children

Ciber Mulce led his 20 followers down to the ***mouth***, following the seductive whiff of ***mana***. Smug to have found such impressive "proof" of his made-up twaddle, he dared to touch the skull. His followers saw him flayed of his skin and dropped into hell, a mewling wretch.

Since that time, the traumatized cultists have debated returning to safer lines of work.

Brave **Pulsha**, however, stood nearest and tasted the mana of Mulce's death. She wants more, but (for now) thinks the skull is the source.

The Mouth of Hell

The **skull** of the smashed god rests in a **pool** of brine. It stares up at the gods defiantly, seething at their injustice. A divine relic, none in its presence can look away. With great, **astral breaths** it inhales hapless souls from the lands above and exhales them onto the burning slopes. Anyone touching the skull is torn from their body and ***instantiated***.

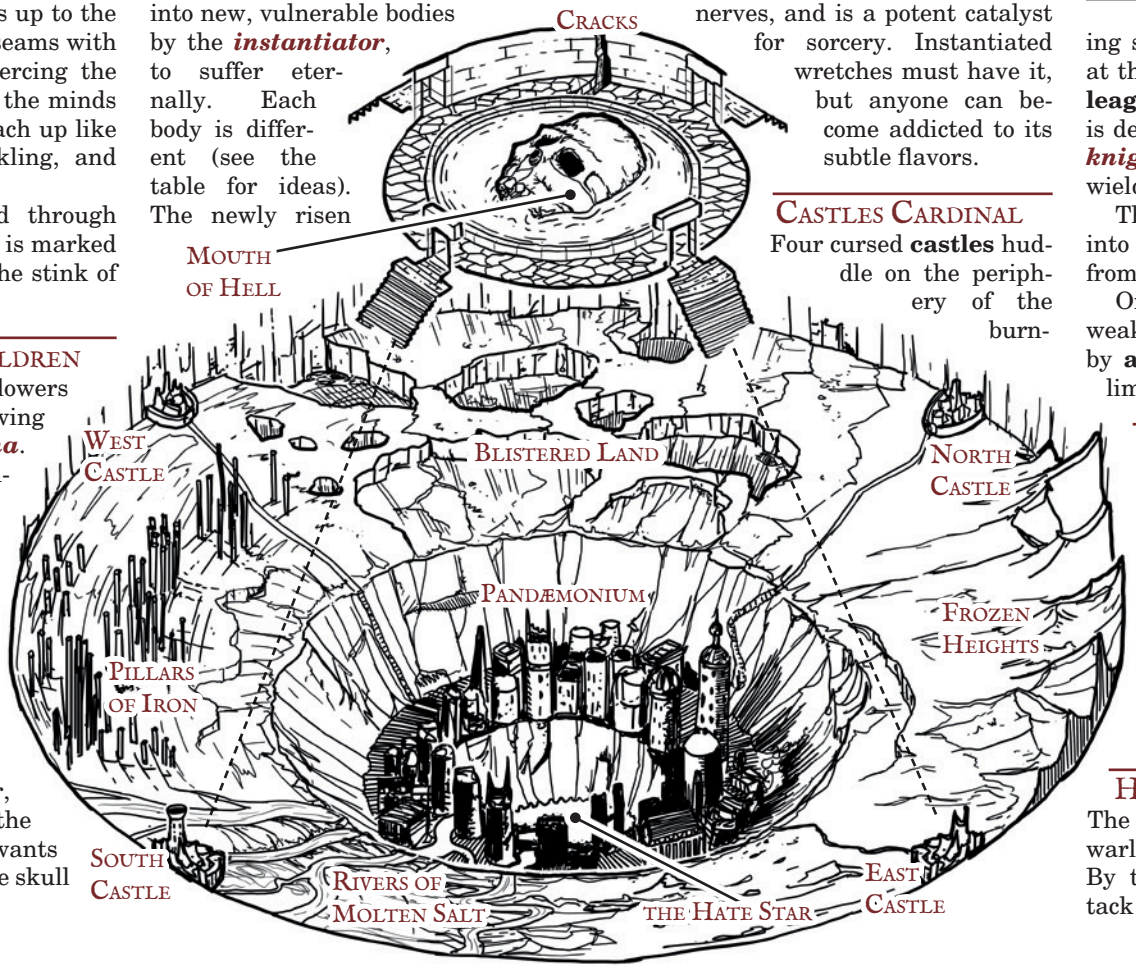
Instantiation

Dead souls trapped here are recycled into new, vulnerable bodies by the ***instantiator***, to suffer eternally. Each body is different (see the table for ideas). The newly risen appear at a random spot on the burning slopes.

As the supply of body-stuff is finite, repeat fatalities must wait as ghosts in ***Pandæmonium***. The first instantiation takes nine minutes; the next nine hours, then days, weeks, months, and years.

The Mana of Pain

All bodies made here share a metabolic dependency on cruelty: unless they cause suffering, they will starve. The invisible mana produced by cruel acts alleviates this hunger. It also strengthens muscles, speeds healing, sensitizes nerves, and is a potent catalyst for sorcery. Instantiated wretches must have it, but anyone can become addicted to its subtle flavors.



Castles Cardinal

Four cursed **castles** huddle on the periphery of the burning slopes, crouched against the walls at the cardinal points. Each protects a **league-long stair** up to the mouth, and is defended against escapees by 3 ***hell knights*** and 2d12 armored **wretches** wielding rustblades and spiked chains.

The knights allow entry (not exit!) into hell, but accepting a cruel blow from a notched sword is the price.

One castle (it's not known which) is weaker than the others, guarded only by **armored skeletons** whose brittle limbs are swift but without force.

d8	Burning slopes encounters
1	d8 wretched instantiated
2	Bone-armored horror leading d20 brick-cutting wretches
3	Elephant demon that speaks by sprouting homunculi which each say one sentence, then boil away
4	***Wakewasps*** for d8 hours
5	Molten pewter titan worm
6	***Hell knight***, d20-5 instantiated
7	***Tar Semminus***
8	Exiled ***pit lord*** building an army to reclaim its seat

Wakewasps

Blown like ashes on the breeze, these slender wasps are drawn by the dozen to merciful stupor of any kind. Their sting is painless, but the venom burns away sleep (not fatigue), unconsciousness, intoxication, denial, and dissociative fugues (not fear)—preventing anything that interferes with fully savoring pain.

Hell Knights

The armored executioners, poets, and warlords outside of ***Pandæmonium***. By tradition, hell knights do not attack one another, the only perk of their

high station. Though each is different, all wear ornate, anachronistic armor from a dozen forgotten eras.

They must carry a **sulfur stone**, a sphere of yellow, fuming nastiness caked around a flake of the ***hate star***. The noxious **gases** make every breath painful; but hell knights can breathe nothing else.

Their **notched swords** leave flesh undamaged but shatter bone into needle splinters.

"Hell knight" is the highest station to which instantiated wretches can ascend. To win it, all one must do is kill a hell knight, don its indestructible armor, and take up its notched sword.

Tar Semminus

Semminus is a holy paladin of Serimet who came here to fight against the creatures of hell. To blend in, he wears hell knight's armor.

Through his love of righteous smiting, he has become addicted to the mana of pain and now cannot leave for want of it. He secretly fears he is no better than the demons.

He talks to himself of his dead wife (whom he expects to see when this is all over) and spouts an unending stream of oaths and prayers to Serimet. He claims to be the only righteous man in hell, but he is a hell knight in every way that matters. Wakewasp stings remove his denial, making him sullen and angry.

Pandæmonium

Hell's only city is a forest of half-built towers, silhouetted against the oven glare of the ***hate star***. Nothing is repaired, and new towers teeter on piles of rubble. Nearest the edge are the towers of the 13 ***pit lords***. Each commands its army of wretches to build its tower higher than the others—only the tallest lets its lord sniff the mana wafting up from the inferno below.

From time to time, the rim gives way and one of the towers falls in. Like a miserable brown glacier calving, the tower, its wretches, and its lord all tumble down to the hate star in a shower of brickwork and screams.

The Pit Lords

These massive, squat beings are charred and distended like leering bullfrogs. Flames spurt from their coal-hot skin, which no blade can pierce.

Their **gaze** causes uncontrollable babbling—secrets, intentions, held incantations, and the true names of loved ones all tumble out.

Once per day, they may pronounce the irrevocable **death** of anyone present—the target dies within 13 hours.

If they were once human, they've forgotten and consider themselves to be alone in their clear-eyed grasp of hideous reality.

The **blessing** of a pit lord sets the skin aflame with a fire that scalds and blisters eternally but doesn't consume.

Their sulfurous bowels swarm with infernal, **toothed slugs**, which emerge if the pit lord is mortally wounded.

Should one somehow die, after 13 days ***Mulciber*** calls up the most loathsome soul from the ***hate star*** with his flute to take its place.

The Instantiator

At the edge of Pandæmonium, in a **tower** of a hundred doors, is an undulating mantis of silver. It perches on a blade-whirl column, moving in such complex and maddening forms that any musicians or watchmakers that see it will tear at their hands and eyes in despair.

A master artificer with sorcerous training could disassemble it into a **soul jar**, seven **wands of shapeshifting**, and a **lead parrot**. Anyone of lesser skill who even touches it explodes loudly into d20 confused homunculi.

Mulciber

The music of the flutist is the only genuinely pleasant thing in hell. Painfully shy, frog-voiced, and awkward in body and manner, he moves about Pandæmonium offering solace to the tortured souls through his music. Wherever he goes, d12 followers hope for more, but he tires and must often decline to play.

He has a striking resemblance to the vanished leader of the cult.

In fact, he is the surviving remnant of the smashed god, and he laid the first bricks of hell to ensure he would always have a worshipful audience and to blight the gods' newer creations.

d10	Instantiated form
1	Short-lived aberration—either no lungs, no holes for breathing, or a tiny, insufficient heart
2	As in life, but with amphibian skin, needing constant moisture
3	As in life, but no digestive tract
4	Horse-sized slug with a sulfur allergy
5	Beautiful youth with all their limbs on backwards
6	Covered in nutritious, sensitive, orange-sized growths
7	As in life, but with rhino hide and tusks
8	Skinless dog
9	Smoldering, skeletal undead
10	As in life, but boneless mollusk

Whenever hell has sucked dry the land above, Mulciber enters the tower of a hundred doors and moves hell to somewhere new. If attacked, blasts from his flute will burst ears and eyes. Beyond that, he does not resist death, for the instantiator will remake him correctly in d6 hours.

The Hate Star

The smoldering star of hatred at the bottom of hell throbs with an afterburner heat shimmer. Any who fall to its surface are crushed to two-dimensional, radiant flatness by its titanic gravity. There they lie, eternally slithering over and under one another, trapped by the millions in incandescent strata of suffering and rage.

CAN'T SLEEP–CLOWNS WILL EAT ME

The Situation

The folk of **Juniper's Crossing** haven't slept since the ***Circus Adventicus*** came to town three weeks ago. They are scared, paranoid, and more than a little deranged.

The people here will say nonsensical things, wander off mid-conversation, and may have vibrant hallucinations. These present themselves as illusionary threats due to the curse's nature.

Adventurers cannot benefit from rest or sleep. Anyone staying here for more than three days will suffer from acute exhaustion and hallucinations. Even sleep-inducing magic lasts half as long as normal and provides no rest.

This is caused by the ***Dream Eater***, a powerful monster hiding among the circus performers.

Broken Inn

Gus Broken runs this ordinary tavern with a few rooms to rent to weary travelers. The inn is running low on ale and spirits, however, as townsfolk try to drink themselves to sleep. The common room holds 2-12 townsfolk in various states of inebriation, sitting alone or in sullen groups. Arguments and even physical fights have become common.

Harlo the Mime

Among the patrons is hard-drinking **Harlo**, former assassin, now a circus mime. The ***Dream Eater***'s magic has made his invisible, mimed walls real.

Miller's Madness

Local farmers patronize **Abigail**'s mill, which has a near-monopoly in the area. Abigail's illusions include shadows crawling along the walls, being watched, and tiny insects in the grain.

Baker's Doze-ing

The smell of warm bread has a damp undercurrent of mold. Braided bread is shaped into weird and unsettling contortions and sculptures which seem to writhe when not watched directly.

Leaven Farm

Jacob Leaven's family farm grows wheat and has a small herd of anxious dairy goats.

With 7 kids, it's a big family; **Angie** is one of the middle children. Jacob is a 40 year-old farmer, and his terror of harlequins and clowns is the original source of the insomnia.

Lack of sleep has amplified Jacob's fear, and the ***Dream Eater*** has spread it like a cancer throughout the village, using the resulting anxiety and hallucinations of the villagers and circus performers to further torment them.

Sheriff's Office

Portia Oskrey usually lets people manage their own problems, and she really wants this one to go away. She hasn't figured it out on her own, and the longer she goes without sleep, the less inclined she is to try. She'll gladly accept help and will reward those who bring any offenders in for justice.

Circus Adventicus

The Circus Adventicus boasts the ***Laboratory of Mad Wizards*** and the ***Museum of Mechanical Monstrosities*** as its main attractions, but it employs the standard complement of jugglers, clowns, side shows, and other attractions as well. A ***big top*** performance ran every night until 3 days ago, when the crew simply lacked the strength to keep performing.

Big Top

Once exciting, this **large tent** is a sad, flapping reminder of better days. Weather and neglect have left it with several holes in the canvas, though the performers had tried, until recently, to continue to stage nightly shows. Now, they perform every other night and no longer perform the animal acts at all.

Captain Wondrous

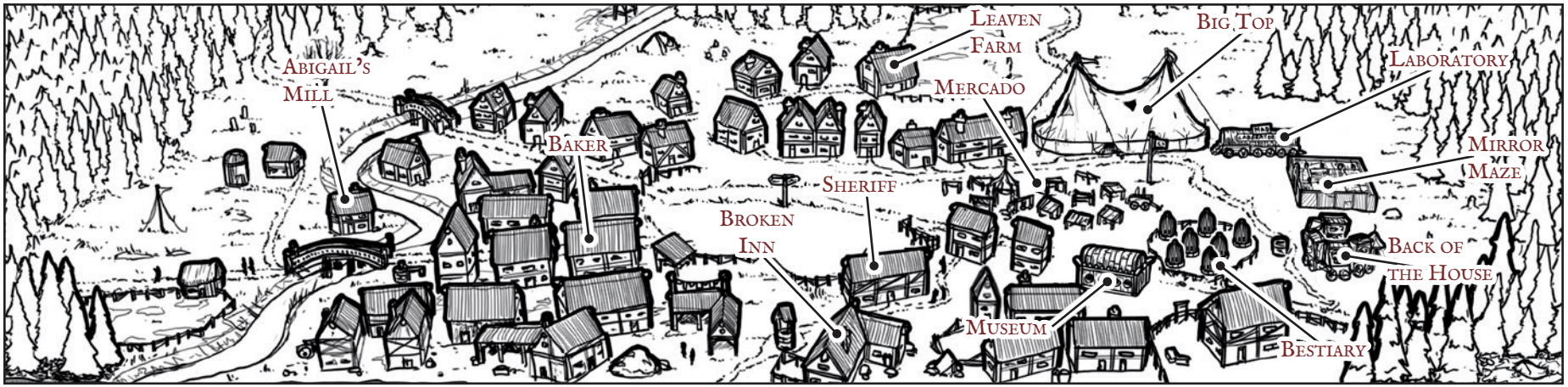
The circus **ringleader**, and occasional performer, sits sullenly in a chair. He hallucinates constantly, his eyes darting to imagined movements in the dark.

Hepsibah the Huge

Once a gladiator in Owlshade, the animal-loving circus **strongman** often wanders away randomly, mid-task.

Museum of Monstrosities

Mechanical clanking and the smell of oil and smoke surround this bright orange tent, which houses **Archibald**'s numerous **mechanical oddities** and contraptions. The gnome-like tinkerer's creations have become increasingly hostile and uncontrolled.



d10	Illusionary encounters
1	1d3 scary harlequins
2	1d2 escaped lions
3	1d6 predatory shadows
4	A villager, turned into a ghoul
5	Carnival barker, highly agitated
6	Automaton from the museum
7	A villager, twice normal size
8	Mad wizard
9	1d6 berserker acrobats
10	1d3 malicious clowns

Laboratory of Mad Wizards

Three wagons are connected side by side to form a single, large open room for performing feats of magic and illusion, performed by the three "Mad Wizards," who weren't actually mad before the ***Dream Eater*** came.

Beautiful Bestiary

A sign outside this **circle of cages** indicates the attraction is closed. Several cages have been draped to hide the animals inside. Some cages are empty. At least one is empty, the door obviously broken. The other cages contain:

The Harpy—a large eagle, many of whose feathers have been plucked

The Mermaid—a tank of water containing a seal-sized seahorse

The Great Serpent—a large constrictor snake, currently ill tempered due to shedding

Grand Oliphant—a bored elephant

Dancing Rats—a swarm of trained rats, now ravenously hungry

The **animal tamer**, "Grover of the Grovers" sits amid the cages, catatonic from days of insomnia.

Mercado

Non-performers sell wares in the Mercado, where visitors can purchase Circus Adventicus mementos, temporary low-grade illusions, food and beverage, and the services of ***Madame Fortunada***.

Visitors can also play (rigged) carnival games to win tiny pets (fish, mice) or other prizes. A squirrelly merchant sells useless "potions of sleep" to desperate villagers and circus folk alike.

Madame Fortunada

The elderly fortune-teller's divination magics always reveal a little too much.

Back of the House

This circle of tents and wagons is where the circus performers live, sleep, and eat. They encircle the common cook fire and mess table.

Jocko the Jongleur

The head of the juggling troupe, Jocko loves stupid jokes. The others have tired of his delirious laughter, so he paces outside the circle of wagons.

Mirror Maze

This large temporary building houses a maze of **distorting mirrors**, in which it is easy to become lost or disoriented. The ***Dream Eater*** has taken up residence inside, and its presence has attracted 2 pairs of **changelings** and their **mimic** pet. As visitors move through the maze, they see themselves reflected in an altered form:

- Enormously large
- As a harlequin or clown
- Extremely beautiful (this mirror is actually the mimic)
- As usual, but with a menacingly independent shadow!
- A different species, or clothed as another profession, or social status
- As a decaying ghoul
- Without a face at all

These mirror images are then projected as illusions by the Dream Eater, as exemplified in the Illusionary encounters table.

Unlucky visitors will be attacked or harassed by the mimic or by a changeling adopting one of the distorted forms. Anyone who spends too long looking into the mirrors attracts the attention of the changelings or the Dream Eater itself!

The villages will assume any wild tales of monsters are hallucinations caused by the madness.

The Dream Eater

A powerful psychic monster lurks among the circus performers. In its natural form, it appears as a dense cloud of darkness with glints of tiny metal spikes and the sound of something smacking its teeth.

With a manipulative and deceptive nature and resistance to mind-affecting magics, it is a challenging foe and can be anywhere in the circus or harassing the town. It makes its lair in the Mirror Maze.

Its sole drive is to sow confusion and to heighten the village's fear, paranoia, and madness. It has three powers:

Mimic: Appear as anyone who has gone through the Mirror Maze.

Amplify: Amplify another's emotional state so others can feel it.

Hallusionate: Cause someone's hallucinations to manifest as illusions experienced by everyone.

If the Dream Eater is slain, it leaves behind a **crown** made of sharp metal teeth that prick the wearer's forehead.

Anyone who wears it can project powerful illusions for a short period of time, but doing so takes a great mental toll. Scaring someone to the point of insomnia alleviates some of the exhaustion.

THE GOD UNMOVING

THE SITUATION

The rich waters of Narin's Ring are forbidden to sailors. Only the ***Porth-Montoon*** people fish there, as they have made a bargain with the ***god*** of a drowned nation. They live and work alongside the dead on a cluster of islands near the sea's center.

A barricade of rotted boats encircles the ***god***'s "holy lagoon".

DEAD ISLAND

2d20 undead ***reavers*** lie like corpses in the rotted-out buildings. At night, they make merry, drinking salt-infused wines and spirits from ***Drowned Gaal***. Their mournful songs echo around the islands.

REAVER BOATS

Three boats of the ***reavers*** are here. The ***Esmer***, the ***Bathylus***, and the ***Scofflen*** are capsized, since the reavers "sail" them inverted, the crew underwater. Each prow is fitted with a ***conch of fog***.

MARKET ISLAND

Each of a dozen shanties has a decorative ***sundial*** by its door. The busy **market** mixes selling with **outdoor workshops**: carpentry, ironwork, fish-roasting, weaving, coral carving, and wire-making.

Sunburnt **artisans** sit on blankets and engrave foreign religious phrases into ***treasures from Gaal*** for export. Prices here are inflated tenfold by the presence of so much loot, but locals pay well for wood, iron, and company. Most here are ***Porth-Montoon***, but ***unusual faces*** lodge here and can be seen.

THE HARBOR

The ***Sarilac*** and ***Paythie Baw*** are ***Porth-Montoon*** fishing skiffs, but the ***Orthodox*** is from far Claimsun, here to trade at the market. Its crew of ten is watchful, on edge, and eager to leave.

OFFERINGS TO THE GOD

On the full moon (day or night), witnesses take captives from the ***stocks*** and chain them to iron posts as offerings. The ***god*** arrives in d2 hours to take one. The rest are thrown ***below decks*** later.

HARBORMASTER'S LODGE

Ever-scowling Theela Saltbrow and her kin winch a thick **chain** to prevent unauthorized arrivals or departures.

THE UMBILICUS

An abandoned Seree tribute-collection ship has sat rotting here for centuries. The decks are soft and furred with moss. Anyone moving carelessly risks falling through. The crow's nest contains a **gold-rimmed spyglass**. Through it, water is invisible as far as a hundred paces.

BELOW DECKS

Minnows dart about in neck-deep water. Three alligator-sized **garfish** patrol the bilge, waiting for the bodies of rejected offerings to be thrown below decks.

TEMPLE OF THE PACT

A huge, partial **whale skeleton** hangs overhead, suspended from the rafters—actually built from human bones (supplied by the garfish) bound together with gold wire. Here the ***high steerswon*** contemplates the mysteries, attended by eight ***witnesses***.

THE STOCKS

Captives are kept here until the sacrificial moon rises. d4-1 will be present.

"SPLENDOR"

The four wealthiest ***Porth-Montoon*** families keep rich, busy homes here. **Strava**, captain of the *Orthodox*, rooms here while negotiating treasure purchases in exchange for regular shipments of prisoners from her homeland.

The Porth-Montoon

The shoals and coves around Narin's Sea are home to the Porth-Montoon. They favor distinctive **red and blue caps**, and their densely woven, **layered tunics** are warm and waterproof.

Wider Porth-Montoon society seems anarchic, but individual ship-families are deeply hierarchical under the guidance of the family "steerswon": head of both the family and the family vessel.

A steerswon will only meet and bargain with outsiders if several members of the Porth-Montoon vouch for them.

Everywhere a Sundial

The Porth-Montoon love discussing the passing of the hours—everything they do has a correct hour—or a time within the hour. ("Cast nets on the hour's crossing; haul at its wane.")

Petitioners must be punctual to show respect; hosts and steerswon must appear late and be slow in their responses to demonstrate seriousness.

The need for sacrifices has hardened the Porth-Montoon. Now, any transgression is a potentially serious crime. Petty criminals, debtors, and captives alike are all considered possible sacrifices to the ***god***.

Reavers

A few of those taken by the ***god*** return from the waters as undead. Salt-pickled and crusted with barnacles, they live separately from the other islanders.

Overtly, they reject Porth-Montoon culture, but they are dutiful in their roles: defending and enriching the islands. Their upside-down boats patrol Narin's Sea, and every few weeks a band of them swims down to plunder ***Drowned Gaal*** for ***treasures***.

They can see underwater, swim well, and have no need to breathe. Pink fronds flick from the barnacles on their skin. They fight with knives and nets.

High Steerswon & Witnesses

Venerable, emaciated **Bansch** is the "high steerswon" of the Porth-Montoon, the third to hold the made-up title on the strength of reaver gold.

He and his eight white-clad "witnesses" (four living, four undead) lounge in the temple, numbed out on stonefish venom. They defend it with swords and drug-induced bravery.

Unusual & Foreign Faces

Wast—robed "witness" stumping for harsher laws (more sacrifices!)

Uldicene IV—deposed Lord of Claimsun, avoiding assassination

Charita—here to steal the gold she thinks comes from the *Umbilicus*

Nyoorig—gossip and washed-up sorcerer addicted to stonefish venom

Doughta—Porth-Montoon weaver, planning to rescue her reaver son

Treasures of Gaal

Many rarities are in circulation here: the ancient signet **ring** of an earl, taken at sea; wax-sealed funeral **urns**, chased in gold; gold **statuary** with octopus motifs; exotic **wines** in brown bottles; a **toy boat** that calms waves; a **medallion** of membership in the Trigonic Order of the Seree; a battle **helm** of bird's eye vision; silver **talents** carved into writhing nudes; a dowsing **knife** that points to your nearest enemy; a gold **lyre** which summons nearby horses; the **Fable of Evla**, a children's story on stone tablets; sea **opals**.

Conch of Fog

Once per day, if a conch of fog is blown, a dense mist rises from the sea's surface for a league in every direction. The fog saps strength from mortal limbs and obscures mortal vision, which lets reavers attack unhindered.

The God Unmoving

When the moon is full (day or night), the God Unmoving rises from the depths below the holy lagoon.

It cannot be seen to move, it is merely *there*, now *here*, now *all around us*. Only the very alert will notice it. "Hey, where did all these tentacles come fro—"

Whole crews have been taken by it in broad daylight, without once realizing anything was amiss. Once, the ancient spirits of Gaal possessed it as their mighty instrument. Now that Gaal is gone, it is possessed only by their absence.

Down to Gaal

The god's only wish is to impress upon the living the true majesty of Gaal. When it takes sacrifices, this is its aim. It pulls them below the waves and injects their lungs with hideous mucus. This is lethal, a gateway to breathless undeath.

It then drags them down to ***Drowned Gaal*** to behold it. There, they are abandoned, and the god swims away, still unmoving.

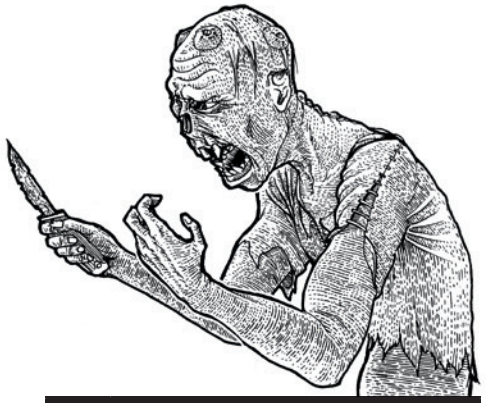
Victims that are strong enough to swim to the surface are celebrated by the reavers and may join their number.

Drowned Gaal

Two hundred paces below the surface, on the slopes of the sea mount beneath the islands, is the sunken city-state of Gaal. Once a thriving metropolis, it was pulled beneath the waves by a long-forgotten cataclysm.

To those who can see through the murk, its coral-rimed archways and gardens are a luminous wonderland.

The reavers come here to find plunder for the market, but it is dangerous work. The streets and halls of Drowned Gaal are home to giant groupers, morays, and spiny horrors without name.



d6	Near the islands (daily)
1	Porth-Montoon skiff, d6 fishermen, returning to the isles with a catch.
2	Skiff, d8 fishermen, d3 captives (hapless boaters taken at sea, or press-ganged drunkards).
3	d6+6 reavers hiding beneath a capsized boat, planning piracy. If they spot victims, they use their conch of fog and attack.
4	Swarm of saw-finned flying fish
5	Flotsam from a destroyed boat
6	The God Unmoving is in the water below. Spiral tentacles are now sticking out of the water. If boaters are silent, it leaves; otherwise it searches the boat for a victim to take down to Drowned Gaal.

DO IT FOR THE BEAST

The Situation

Long ago, Seree wizards drew sorcery from deep within a place of natural power. They left a monstrous ***guardian*** to protect it, but it grew cruel and vain, and built a ***cult*** to worship and feed it. The guardian taught them Seree secrets—but also the perversions of "the beast" in the darkness below.

Seree Hexarium

The **Column of Red Might** is inscribed with the ***eight powers***. Two great **chunks of dark glass** (one split from the other) triple the potency of any magic performed in their presence.

Flying Temple

d6 **club-wielding cultists** doze in the shadows. When they worship, d6+6 cultists knock furiously on the **wooden columns**, a mass casting of ***vulture's drum***: everything here levitates, and gravity is halved in the temple complex.

Scales of Judgment

d3 **captives** are shackled on the floor. Each day, the cultists make a great show of weighing one of them for purity. Any found lacking (everyone) is tied to the feeding post for the ***guardian*** to eat.

Crimson Temple

Statues with elephantine faces leer down at the black mica altar. Upon it lies an ivory **wand of distant cutting** (counts as a sword, range 30 paces).

During worship, whichever elder cultist leads the ceremonies casts ***bloodform***, turning into a writhing mass of snakes floating above the altar.

Elder Cultists' Chamber

A **curtain** conceals the corridor to the secret door by the altar.

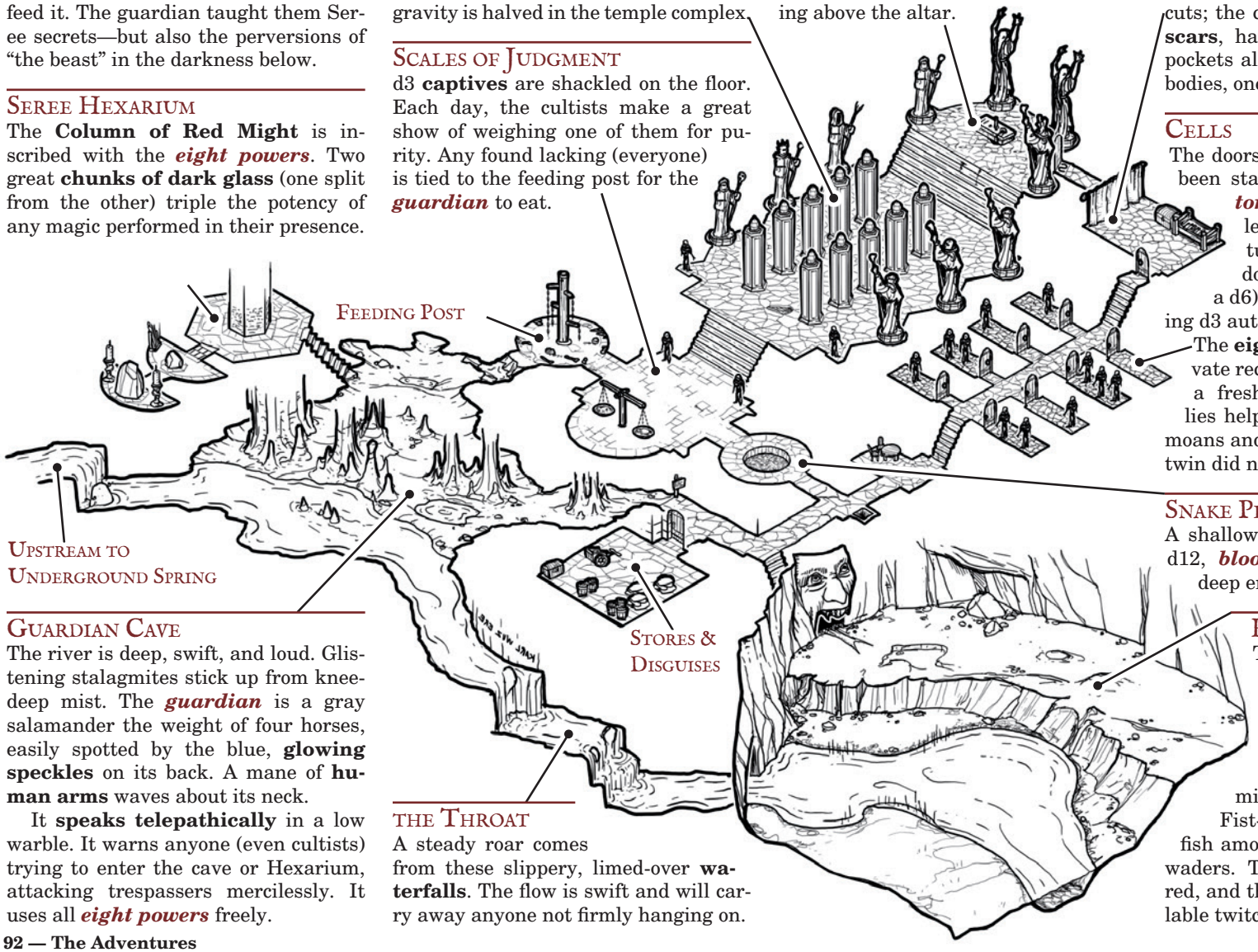
d6 cult elders are sleeping in the narrow **wooden bed**, arms by their sides and stacked like firewood.

In the **chest** (along with some gold) is a **knife** made from the ***guardian***'s last tooth. It leaves bloodless, painless cuts; the cultists are covered in **nasty scars**, having used it to make flesh pockets all over their faces, arms, and bodies, one for each month of service.

Cells

The doors to seven of these cells have been staked closed and contain ***automatons***. They wait motionlessly and will react to disturbances by bashing at their doors. There is a chance (1-2 on a d6) that a door gives way, allowing d3 automatons to emerge.

The **eighth cell** is an unlocked, private recuperation room for **Bascule**, a freshly cut ***half brother***, who lies helplessly on a straw pallet. He moans and sobs, unless disturbed. (His twin did not survive.)



Snake Pit

A shallow, sand-filled pit crawls with d12, ***blood-red serpents***. It is just deep enough to keep them in.

Guardian Cave

The river is deep, swift, and loud. Glistening stalagmites stick up from knee-deep mist. The ***guardian*** is a gray salamander the weight of four horses, easily spotted by the blue, **glowing speckles** on its back. A mane of **human arms** waves about its neck.

It **speaks telepathically** in a low warble. It warns anyone (even cultists) trying to enter the cave or Hexarium, attacking trespassers mercilessly. It uses all ***eight powers*** freely.

Roaring Canyon

The **thundering roar** from the river cavern prevents easy conversation.

This box canyon is **magically humid**, and anyone here for more than a few minutes becomes soaking wet.

Fist-sized **water spiders** hunt fish among the rushes; they will bite waders. Their bodies are glossy and red, and their venom causes uncontrollable twitching.

The Throat

A steady roar comes from these slippery, limed-over **waterfalls**. The flow is swift and will carry away anyone not firmly hanging on.

Red Serpents of Blood

The air in the caverns is alive with the presence of "the beast," a cruel Power deep below the ground. Exposed skin tingles, itches.

Any **fresh blood** that touches the air (e.g., from wounds) animates instantly, becoming a ruby-red serpent.

The blood of a whole person, dead from mortal cuts, will produce d6 serpents each the size of an arm. Smaller injuries produce smaller serpents.

The serpents are venomous, agitated, and keen to return below to join with the beast. They do this by slithering into the river of the guardian cave and swimming upstream, attacking anyone that impedes them.

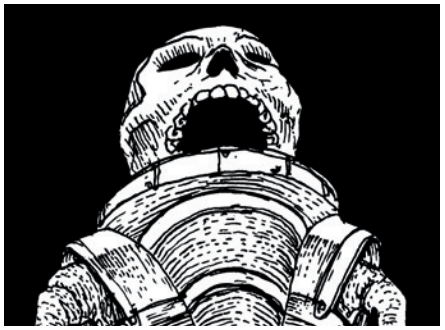
The Cultists

The cultists are pale, thin, and, except for their ages, look nearly identical—like a family of brothers from the venerable to the young. Most are visibly older on one side of their bodies.

At any one time, thirty or so are out in nearby towns, working in disguise as laborers, stealing supplies or plotting abductions.

All for the Beast

The cult sees the red serpents and the magical rituals as compelling evidence of the power of this place. (If anyone doubts, they cut them on the hand.) Beyond feeding the ***guardian***, they have surprisingly little dogma except their one precept: everything they do is done "for the beast." They wash "for the beast," eat "for the beast," steal "for the beast," and sleep "for the beast."



Once in a while, they let a captive go, so long as they swear to secrecy, and live the rest of their life "for the beast."

Half Brothers

Twice each year, the cultists choose one of their number and use the **salamander tooth-knife** to splice him in half. Each half has a 75% chance of survival and regrowing a matching other half.

The process is painless, but deeply unsettling, and the cultists do not relish the year it takes to become whole.

The Elder Plot

The five eldest cultists (wisps of gray hair, bisected by wrinkling pink scars) take turns serving as high priest and leading the worship ceremonies.

They know that "the beast" is not the ***guardian***, but a great Power deep in the stone below. They plot to snare the guardian and cut it in two (as they do themselves), all the better to serve the beast. They don't know this won't work.

Automatons

The skull-headed automatons left here by Seree sorcerers are tall and deliver wicked blows with brass **axes or maces**, but their wood is dry and brittle.

Made from servitor-acolytes, they **obey** any simple, loud command. The elder cultists know this and will call them to defend against attackers.

Inside the skull of each automaton is a thumb-sized "wizard flower" of **topaz** (10% chance of emerald), its surface furred with fractal spurs.

The Guardian

The guardian is a giant, orca-sized salamander, stone gray but for **glowing blue flecks** along its back. Its shovel-like head is battered and scarred from a hundred battles, with four beady eyes staring out from deep pits. A mane of human arms encircles its head.

It is intelligent, educated, and curious. As long as nobody steps foot in the cavern, it will happily converse.

In ranged combat, it uses the ***lights of Oos***, ***vulture's drum***, and ***bloodform*** to bewilder enemies. Close up, it uses ***oaken grip*** (from any of its limbs, or its tail) to seize enemies, then ***bites***.

The Guardian's Bite

Though now toothless, the guardian's bite is magical, bloodlessly severing limbs. Instead of wounds, it leaves behind puckered skin. If it gets a whole arm, it will regurgitate it later to add to its "mane." Other body parts it digests.

A horrible, vibrating phantom limb sensation persists for d6 months—indefinitely for arms the guardian adds to its mane. If limbs are somehow retrieved, they reattach just by placing them in contact with their original root.

Guardian Death

If the guardian is slain, the body quivers and splits apart. A great red **tarantula** the size of a pony bursts from the carcass, glistening and steaming; the work of "the beast" to pervert the guardian. The tarantula will do everything in its power to escape upstream.

The Eight Powers

The Column of Red Might is inscribed with eight spells.

Mason's Hand—a touch opens a small, precise crack in stone or metal, growing by a hand's breadth each minute.

Numbfinger—a touch from vibrating fingertips deadens a whole limb.

Oaken Grip—the caster's grip transforms into mighty, immobile tree roots until they voluntarily let go.

Vulture's Drum—a frantic drumming rhythm which levitates the drummer upwards until they stop drumming. A gentler rhythm slows descent to a safe speed.

Bloodform—the caster explodes into a mass of 12 writhing, blood-red serpents. Lasts for d6 minutes.

Lights of Oos—blue flecks glow brightly on the caster's skin; anyone looking at them can see nothing but their dancing afterimage for d6 minutes.

Slinger's Lung—the caster coughs up a violent spray of small lead pellets, fast enough (at five paces) to pierce skin or damage unprotected eyes.

Algion's Bifurcation—a random half (top/bottom, left/right, front/back) of the caster's body sticks with iron strength to whatever it touches; the other half becomes magically frictionless and ungrippable. With concentration, the caster can control which half is which.

Crimson Sentinel—this chant is etched in dried blood. It calls on "the beast" to animate a quantity of the chanter's blood into a small, red bird. It chirps when anyone draws near.

d6	Encounters (each area)
1	A worn down, legless automaton drags itself along the floor
2	d2 cultists, going to or from the stores for something to eat
3	d3 cultists debating how best to snare the guardian in loud whispers
4	a frantic red serpent, somehow escaped from the snake pit
5	avalanche of knocking sounds from d12 cultists worshiping in the flying temple
6	d6+1 cultists in the dress of nearby settlements returning to the caves with d3 captives

HIS ETERNAL PROGRESS

The Situation

A mummified wizard has ensnared one of the last ***emperor tortoises***, which walks the paths of the gods. Its holy ***procession*** has dwindled, but wretched ***shadows*** continue to follow it.

The Emperor Tortoises

The emperor tortoises have walked the earth since before there were people. Supposedly, they follow the paths of the gods—ley lines and other, subtler scars of creation.

Walking for so long, as the gods did, has given them immense wisdom. Pilgrims, whether scholars, penitents, or mad hedge wizards, follow them for as long as they can.

The humblest hope to earn wisdom as the tortoise has, slowly, by walking. The impatient or ambitious hope to hear the tortoise actually speak.

Venerable Ganth-Nndu is rumored to have spoken at the foot of the Ivory Library of Pelark, which promptly collapsed in shame at its ignorance. Great Mmth-Endu is said to have uttered the word that destroyed all of Darpera.

Most who follow the tortoises, however, learn only their own inner lessons: while the tortoises can speak, they almost never do.

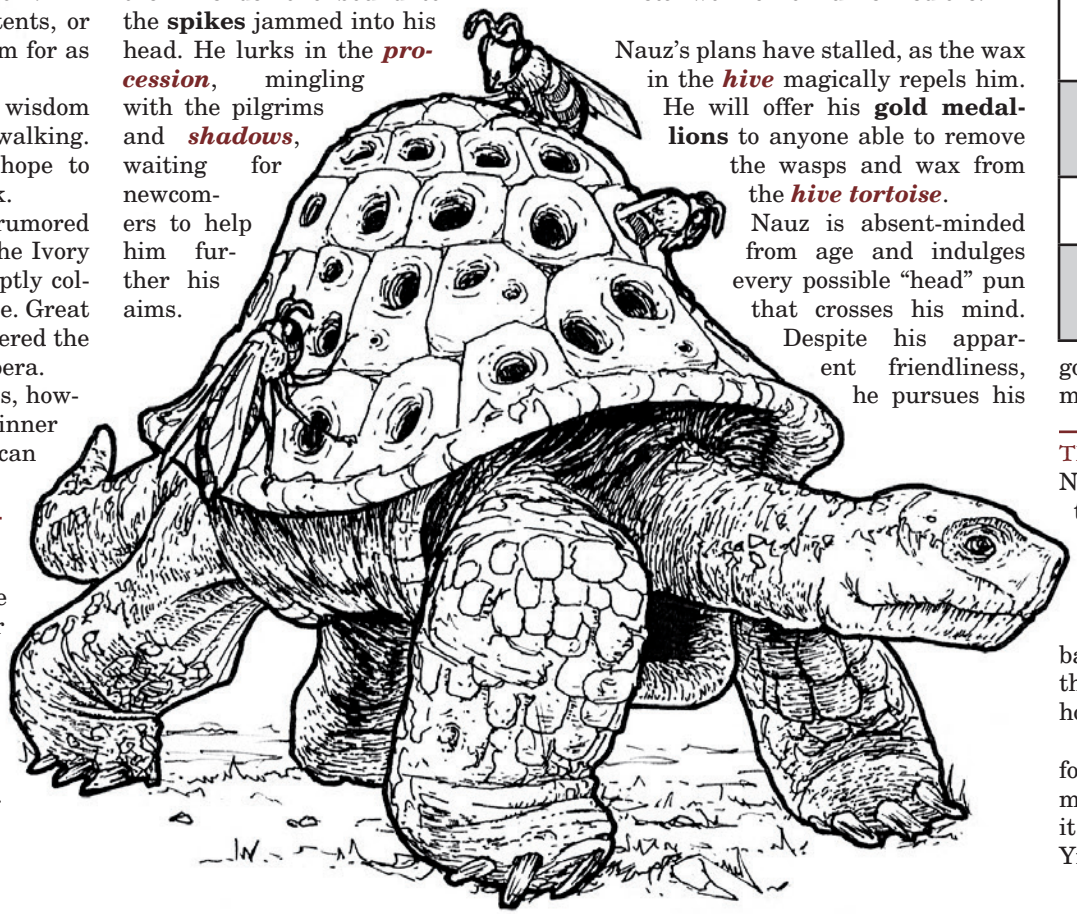
Bones of the Earth

The Seree wizards tried several times to defeat and capture emperor tortoises, but never succeeded. The tricks the Seree used on dragons—jumped-up reptiles that they are, swollen by magic and frothing with schemes and cleverness—had no effect on these placid, ancient beings.

The tortoises remembered the cooling of the earth! Mere hot-blooded sorcery could not sway them. Magic crashes on a tortoise's mighty hide like waves upon a mountain. The noise may be loud, but the mountain is unchanged.

Nine-Crowned Nauz

One wizard, however, did not completely fail. **Nauz**, once the chief necromancer of the Seree Lycaeum (p. 62), left his esteemed post (and his mortal body) in a final bid to bend a tortoise to his will. Nauz lives as a **floating head**. Half mummified, he is kept alive by the nine demons bound to the **spikes** jammed into his head. He lurks in the ***procession***, mingling with the pilgrims and ***shadows***, waiting for newcomers to help him further his aims.



At will, Nauz can use the following magics:

Eye of Weakness—his penetrating gaze reveals physical weakness. When sustained for several minutes, psychological weaknesses reveal themselves; for an hour, the way to undo magics.

Brush Fire—Nauz can call up and direct the fast-moving blazes that sweep grasslands.

Binding—Nauz can bind stray demons (or sorcerers, while they are casting) to his crown; this freezes them until he releases his concentration.

Goldworms—Nauz learned a trick from the Carreg to whistle up tiny metal worms from unrefined ore.

Nauz's plans have stalled, as the wax in the ***hive*** magically repels him. He will offer his **gold medallions** to anyone able to remove the wasps and wax from the ***hive tortoise***.

Nauz is absent-minded from age and indulges every possible "head" pun that crosses his mind. Despite his apparent friendliness, he pursues his goals with monstrous disregard for human life.

d8	Weird procession members
1	d3 anxious swamp-wisps, helplessly drawn along by ***Ynth-Nndu***'s ancient wisdom
2	d2 brass-and-wood hunting automatons, whittling spears to throw at Ynth-Nndu
3	d6 grass-furred "greendogs", hoping to use newcomers as bait to lure wasps (which they eat)
4	d3 "craesten," giant terrestrial lobsters, here as penance for their crimes against their people
5	Rubbery, one-legged "void gulls," collecting fallen scales from the tortoise to complete the earthquake machine they drag behind them
6	d6 pilgrim skeletons, walking out of sheer habit. If disturbed, they fall to dust.
7	Nauz; reroll to see who accompanies him.
8	Bandit wasp possessed by a ***shadow***, walking upright, thinking itself a pilgrim.

The Hive Tortoise

Nauz floated behind the emperor tortoise ***Ynth-Nndu*** for sixty-two years before the Eye of Weakness showed him the tortoise's vulnerability: ***bandit wasp*** saliva.

With great care, Nauz procured bandit wasp ***larvae*** and introduced them onto Ynth-Nndu's shell in the hopes they could breach it.

After years of failures, he finally found the strain that could pierce the mighty carapace. They have colonized it, multiplied, and filled it with larvae. Ynth-Nndu ignores this.

The colony of huge wasps decimated the ***procession*** of pilgrims that followed Ynth-Nndu, then expanded their search for victims to the surroundings.

Safe from their natural predators (or reprisals by people), the colony was unstoppable. Ynth-Nndu became feared in all the lands as a harbinger of terror. In summer, he is a roving hive that spawns new bandit wasp colonies all along his eternal progress.

Bandit Wasps

These giant wasps live in colonies of 2-20 adults. The ***larvae*** are forearm sized and secrete a trail of soft wax. Adults grow as big as ponies. They fly noisily, and their glossy chitin protects like metal armor, though their legs and eyes are delicate.

They arrive in groups of d6, seize people, sheep, or goats with their hooked legs, inject ***venom***, and fly home to feed their larvae.

Bandit Wasp Venom

Anyone injected becomes completely unaware of bandit wasps. Many victims have been carried off without protest, calmly enjoying the aerial view.

Bandit Wasp Wax

This thick, white wax repels demons.

The Weird Procession

Once the wasps ate or drove away the miles-long trail of pilgrims that followed ***Ynth-Nndu***, only the inedible followers remained: the unearthly, the alien, and the mechanical contraptions that had been mixed unseen among the masses of pilgrims all along. Roll on the table to determine each group.

The Shadows

Behind the weird come the shadows of dead pilgrims. They number in the tens of thousands, stretching for three leagues behind ***Ynth-Nndu*** like a dark, murmuring haze.

Vicious, **biting flies** are thick in the air—possessed, they suck life for the ghosts that are too weak to attack the living directly.

One in a hundred shadows is a **wraith**, strong enough to stab or strangle vulnerable living beings.

The shadows attack anyone who falls behind the procession by resting for more than an hour. They're swarmed by flies, addled by feverish visions, then stabbed and devoured.

Ynth-Nndu

The mighty tortoise plods on, despite its wasp infestation. Bigger than a house, even tall pilgrims must stretch to touch the shell.

A **pungent musk** wafts from it: a bestial, barnyard smell, with hints of rock dust and rotting fruit.

Every few seconds, one of its legs sweeps forward in a great stride, crunching into the landscape. It lurches erratically, averaging a brisk walking pace. It never stops walking. Muted **buzzing** can be heard from within.

Into the Hive

The colony inside has declined from its peak, but there is still a chance (1-2 on a d6) that d3 wasps are squeezing out of the manhole-sized pores in the shell or returning with fruit or rodent prey to feed the ***larvae***. The holes are lined with soft wax, which melts on contact with human skin. The winding, branching tunnels that fill the interior will soon become soft and sticky if human explorers linger too long.

Fire Within

The wax is flammable. While it will not catch easily, a deliberate fire will turn the upper interior into an inferno.

Ynth-Nndu will endure this unharmed, but the burning hive will disgorge 12 wasps, half on fire and all aggressive.

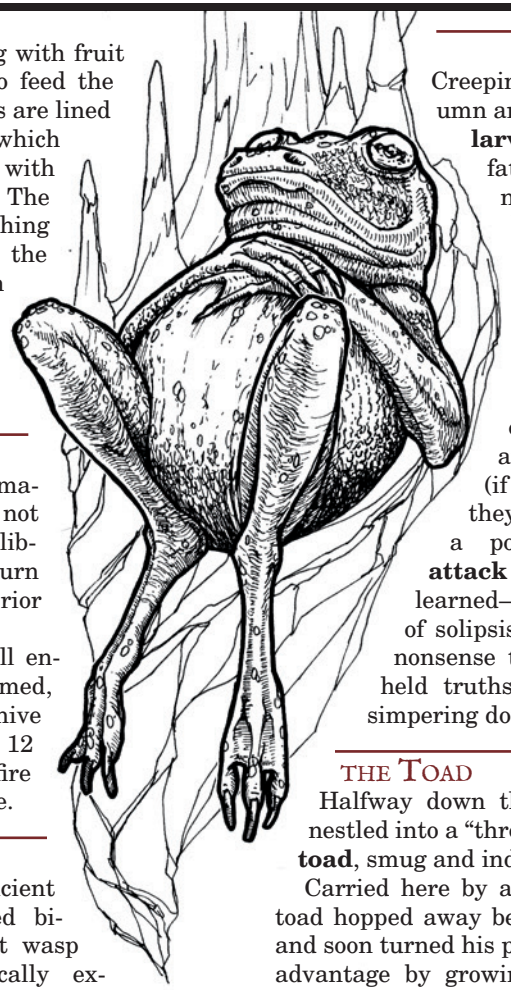
Ever Inwards

Ynth-Nndu's ancient body has reacted bizarrely to bandit wasp secretions—magically expanding into a volume much larger on the inside than it is on the outside.

After thirty or forty paces of steep, wax tunnels, explorers will start to encounter ever larger spaces, fissures, and finally a vast, **dark canyon**.

A vast **column of wax** hangs downwards in this black void, oozing down imperceptibly like a waterfall of milk-colored rivulets, waves, and drips.

Anyone falling into the void becomes Ynth-Nndu for d6 minutes—fully inhabiting his huge body—and is then shat out (as themselves once more).



The Larvae

Creeping all over the column are dozens of **wasp larvae**. As big and fat as a thigh, they nose about blindly. If bothered, they attack with a **jet of hot wax** (painful and maybe blinding).

Having absorbed the flavor of Ynth-Nndu's aura of wisdom (if not its content), they can also initiate a powerful **psychic attack** against anyone learned—a hammer blow of solipsistic, philosophical nonsense that melts firmly held truths into puddles of simpering doubt.

The Toad

Halfway down the giant column, nestled into a "throne" of wax, is the **toad**, smug and indolent.

Carried here by a wasp years ago, toad hopped away before being eaten, and soon turned his predicament to his advantage by growing cow-huge and fat on wasp larvae.

Toad survives among the larvae by *not knowing anything*. He feigns curiosity to be polite, but will stubbornly (then angrily) refuse to listen to anything remotely like a *fact*. He reflexively **contradicts** anything he hears. (He does not typically argue, however.)

Arguing with toad is risky, for he is deeply connected to *what might be*. Anyone hearing one of toad's contradictions (especially about the world outside Ynth-Nndu) has a chance (1 on a d6) of being imperceptibly **shifted into a reality** where it is actually true.

THE SORCERER'S FEAST

THE SITUATION

Pyaad, one of the last sorcerers of the Seree empire, maintained a house in a secluded forest vale. Pyaad is long dead, but his semi-automated household rumbles on without him.

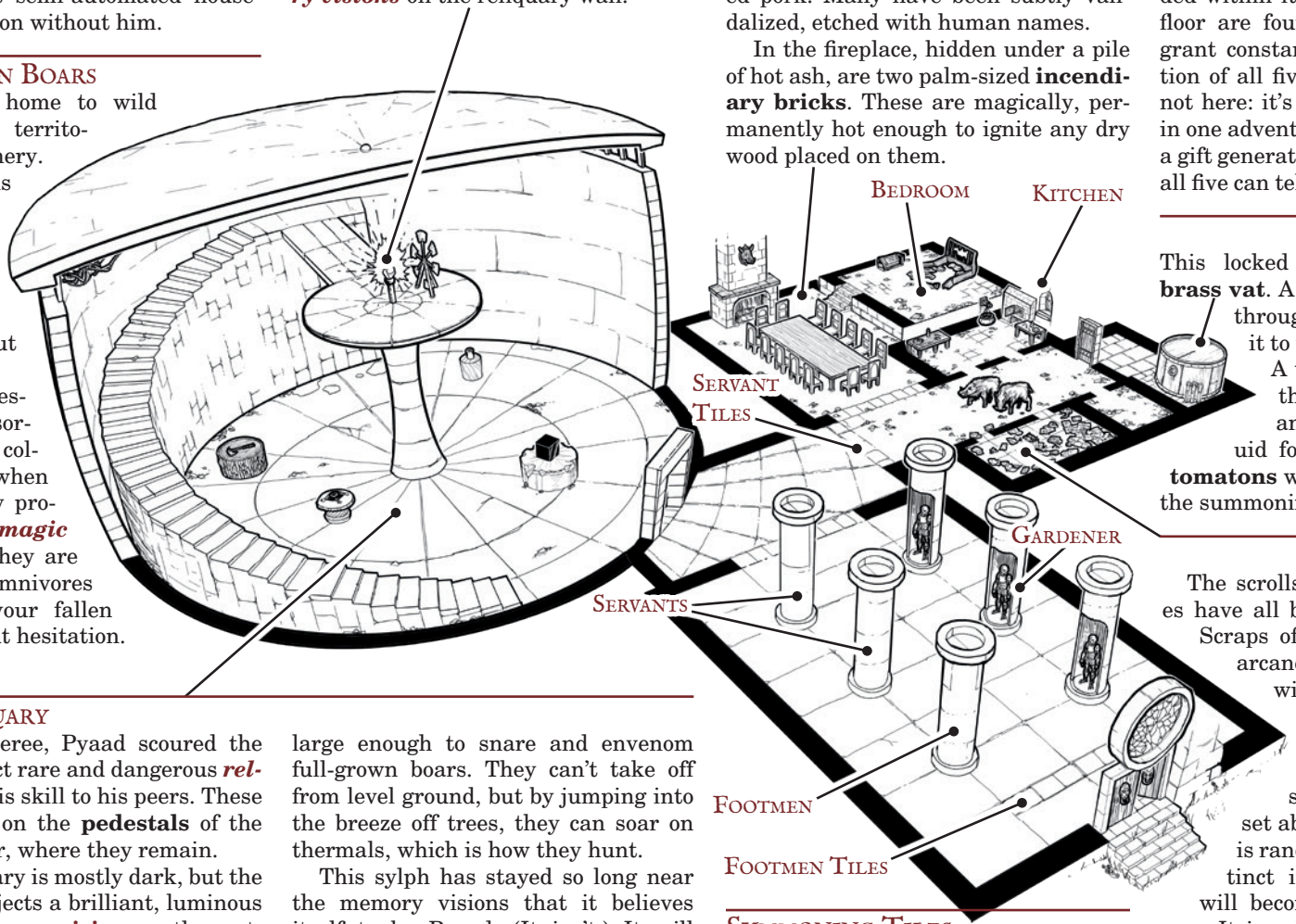
THE GARDEN BOARS

The vale is home to wild boars—huge, territorial, and ornery. Their muck is throughout the house. They are unpredictable and can charge without provocation.

Their ancestors ate the sorcerer's spell collection, and when stressed, they produce ***boar magic*** (see table). They are voracious omnivores and will devour fallen people without hesitation.

CAROUSEL OF MEMORIES

The precious ***gemstar*** shines brilliant light through a rotating array of gemstone slices, projecting brilliant ***memory visions*** on the reliquary wall.



THE RELIQUARY

Like many Seree, Pyaad scoured the world to collect rare and dangerous ***relics*** to prove his skill to his peers. These he displayed on the **pedestals** of the reliquary floor, where they remain.

The reliquary is mostly dark, but the ***carousel*** projects a brilliant, luminous display of ***memory visions*** on the eastern wall.

There is a **sylph spider** in the rafters—like a giant, bristly wolf spider with silken membranes spun between its legs. They are ambush hunters, large enough to snare and envenom full-grown boars. They can't take off from level ground, but by jumping into the breeze off trees, they can soar on thermals, which is how they hunt.

This sylph has stayed so long near the memory visions that it believes itself to be Pyaad. (It isn't.) It will glide-ambush lone visitors, but it will haughtily receive groups as "guests of its house", proudly and repetitively explaining its ***relics*** and its (nonexistent) fabulous outfit.

THE GREAT HALL

When here, Pyaad styled himself as a feudal lord of old. This hall is incongruously rustic and stocked with rolled-up **sleeping pallets** for use by guests. Wall **engravings** illustrate dozens of unusual but delicious recipes for roasted pork. Many have been subtly vandalized, etched with human names.

In the fireplace, hidden under a pile of hot ash, are two palm-sized **incendiary bricks**. These are magically, permanently hot enough to ignite any dry wood placed on them.

SUMMONING TILES

Throughout the house are summoning tiles; pressure plates connected to the ***vat***. Depressing one links the vat to the tile's corresponding ***automaton***, filling it with slime and activating it.

DESTROYED BEDROOM

The **master bed** has been violently torn apart, and the sheets and mattress mostly devoured. A **leather chest** has been similarly demolished.

Boar scat is everywhere; human teeth and fragments of bone are embedded within it. Also in the mess on the floor are four **locating rings**. These grant constant awareness of the location of all five rings. (The fifth ring is not here: it's at the bottom of the well in one adventurer's birthplace, given as a gift generations ago.) Anyone wearing all five can teleport (50 paces) once/day.

VAT ROOM

This locked room holds a massive **brass vat**. A dozen pipes that go down through the flagstones connect it to the ***automaton stations***. A tiny glass window reveals the pinkish **slime** inside—animate, living flesh in liquid form—ducted into the **automatons** when they are activated by the summoning tiles.

THE LIBRARY

The scrolls, books, and leather cases have all been eaten by the ***boars***. Scraps of paper and fragments of arcane writing are mixed in with the floor's detritus.

ENTRANCE HALL

A **great window** of stained glass fragments is set above the door. The pattern is random, but produces the distinct impression that meaning will become apparent any second now. It is a blasphemous work, effectively a map of destroyed shrines in Pyaad's demesne. Anyone who touches a fragment is cursed to find no rest within ten miles of where its source shrine once stood.

Automatons

The house's automatons are constructs of wood and brass, topped by human skulls. Inside each skull is the fractal gemstone that holds the memory imprint of the automaton's tasks, forcegrown within the skull during life.

The automatons wait quietly, inert at their stations until they are filled with slime from the vat. There are several types, with differing duties:

Footmen—help guests out of their outer garments and lead them to the great hall. They are gaily painted with dense, floral patterns.

Servants—sweep and scrub the floors and launder any unfolded clothing found in the grand bedroom. They will prepare "meals" from the ancient, moldy scraps in the kitchen pantry for the footmen to serve.

Gardener—visit an overgrown vegetable patch outside and retrieve random plants from it.

Once their tasks are complete, they return to their stations for the slime to be drained and pumped back into the vat.

Relic—the Black Cube

An indestructible black cube, as big as a dinner plate, sits on a white marble pedestal. If moved, after d20 seconds, it telekinetically wrenches itself directly back to its original position at great speed. Anything in its path will be mercilessly shoved, torn, and/or broken when it does so.

Relic—Heart of the Spring

An urn of darkened glass holds a knot of turquoise mineral. If removed from the urn, the constant, invisible rays it emanates purify the contents of every liquid-bearing vessel within a league. Wine, oil, ale, potions, all are turned to fresh spring water.

This is the literal heart of a great Power of the earth, slain by Pyaad.

Relic—Kinslayer's Axe

Upon a huge log pedestal rests an axe: a mean-looking, functional thing in the Grinvolt style. A gold plaque proclaims this the axe of Addan II the Disgraced.

The axe has a pronounced acidic smell, and it constantly secretes minute quantities of a corrosive, deadly contact poison. The magical wood beneath it, still moist, crackles and hisses from the touch of the poison.

Relic—Circlet of Deel

A simple, platinum circlet rests on a black cushion. Engravings on the green jade pedestal declare it to be the raiment of the goddess Deel.

Whether it is or it isn't, anyone touching or carrying it hears the prayerful wishes of anyone making them within a hundred leagues. This feels like a searing, world-ending migraine to most people. One in a hundred don't mind.

Relic—the Gemstar

This is a fist-sized chunk of **white metal**, glowing with magnesium-flare brightness, yet cold to the touch. It shines with the light of thirty torches; it takes many thick hides (or solid metal) to conceal its light.

Anyone holding it for more than a few hours begins to become transparent and luminous; also their thoughts start to become visible. Strangers begin to know their secrets. The effect fades after a few weeks.

Memory Visions

There are six separate images shone onto the reliquary wall, in sequence.

Each image is shown for about a minute, then the carousel quietly clicks to the next one. Randomly determine which is showing as visitors arrive. If anyone watches the sequence carefully, multiple times, they will notice that the beige **rabbit** in each scene gets closer to the viewer each time, staring intently. After three cycles, it can be seen dissolving into pink goo. After, a skull-headed clockwork rabbit appears in its place.

Garden Party—Amid elaborate topiary, the viewer's vision is fixed on the bosom of a woman clad in a many-layered, sky-blue dress. Well-heeled nobles in brightly colored clothes chat in clusters. A servant—apparently unnoticed at the time—leers at the viewer with barely concealed disgust.

Betrothal—The viewer is apparently proposing to a young woman, placing a ring upon her finger. The fingers of his hand wear four rings of the same design. Behind her, a great cliff drops down to a white-capped ocean.

Feast—The viewer sits at the head of the table in the house's great hall. At his direction, a (living) servant is carving slices of meat from a spitted boar for hungry-looking guests.

Automatons—Richly clad guests marvel at new-looking automatons in the entrance hall; they are apparently an extravagant purchase. Everyone present applauds the viewer enthusiastically, but some seem concerned.

Trophy—The viewer looks out over a battlefield; many fires are burning. He is ascending stairs into a temple, resplendent in stained glass. Terrified priests in multi-colored vestments arm themselves. The tip of a gleaming sword bobs in front of him, and fire flickers in his left palm.

Hedge Maze—The viewer, apparently flying, looks down on an elaborate hedge maze with a great sphere of gold at its center. The sphere's projected location on the reliquary wall marks a small secret compartment; if touched, it springs open to reveal a mica scroll tube: a day-long ritual that slowly turns up to seven named targets into boars.

d6	Hourly/Per-room encounter
1	House magic plays eerie, alien-sounding tones; it is void gull music. (Pyaad hated it but felt it demonstrated worldliness.)
2	A wild boar, sniffing and grunting; d6-3 boarlets follow.
3	The house is filled with gurgling noises from the vat and the rattling of pipes beneath the flagstones.
4	A sylph spider soars overhead, perhaps briefly alighting on the roof.
5	A gardener automaton blunders in with a basket of weeds, having been activated hours before by a boar.
6	A random automaton station leaks, spurting gallons of slime. This slowly inches its way back to the vat.

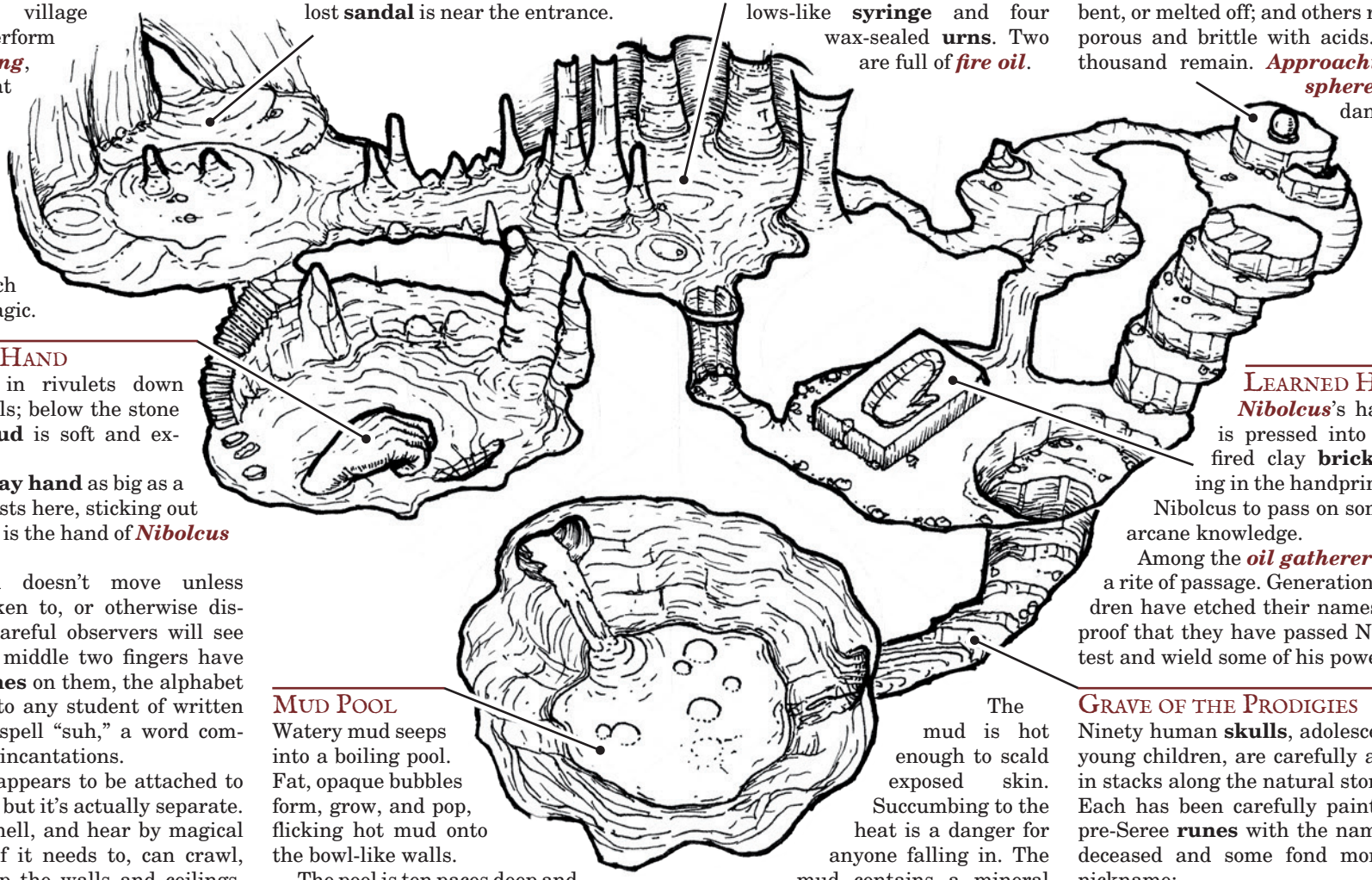
d6	Boar magic
1	A blazing barrier rune is burned into the ground before the boar; none but boars may cross it until the next sunrise.
2	Hypnotic, rhythmic grunting paralyzes one person.
3	Slippery goo sprays 6 paces in every direction.
4	An eldritch croak deafens everyone for d6 minutes.
5	The boar becomes invisible for d3 minutes.
6	The boar calls out in a beautiful, operatic voice. After a minute, similar voices join in harmony from the forest. d6 boars will soon arrive.

THE MAN FROM BEFORE

THE SITUATION

A humble village enjoys prosperity beyond all reason, due to the fabulous ***fire oil*** it extracts from a nearby system of natural caverns.

Only the village children perform the ***harvesting***, a task that leaves many of them marked forever, for the cave is home to a fugitive ***giant*** and much dangerous magic.



MUDDY CAVE ENTRANCE

A trickle of water enters the cave system here, leaving the ground soft and sticky with clay-like **mud**. Child-sized **footprints** are everywhere. A small, lost **sandal** is near the entrance.

LICHEN-COVERED CAVE

The walls and ceiling are coated in a fast-growing white lichen. Bare-rock trails have been munched into it by d12 faintly glowing ***apocalypse larvae***. The sound of their chewing is audible.

A long, rickety **ladder** leans on a stone column. Below it is a large, bellows-like **syringe** and four wax-sealed **urns**. Two are full of ***fire oil***.

CHAMBER OF THE SPHERE

A barrel-sized ***sphere*** rests on a shelf of rock. It rests in a shallow depression it has melted into the rock.

Close up, it appears to have been made from millions of slender metal needles, all facing outwards. Many are missing, some have been crushed, bent, or melted off; and others rendered porous and brittle with acids. Still, a thousand remain. ***Approaching the sphere*** is very dangerous.

THE GIANT HAND

Water runs in rivulets down the slick walls; below the stone steps, the **mud** is soft and extremely deep.

A **giant gray hand** as big as a draft horse rests here, sticking out of the mud. It is the hand of ***Nibolcus the Giant***.

The hand doesn't move unless touched, spoken to, or otherwise disturbed, but careful observers will see a pulse. The middle two fingers have **tattooed runes** on them, the alphabet recognizable to any student of written magic. They spell "suh," a word common to many incantations.

The hand appears to be attached to a buried arm, but it's actually separate. It can see, smell, and hear by magical means, and if it needs to, can crawl, spider-like, up the walls and ceilings. Its behavior depends entirely on ***Nibolcus's mood***. If he speaks, the voice comes from the ***mud pool*** room.

LEARNED HAND

Nibolcus's handprint is pressed into a huge, fired clay **brick**. Sleeping in the handprint allows Nibolcus to pass on some of his arcane knowledge.

Among the ***oil gatherers***, this is a rite of passage. Generations of children have etched their names into it, proof that they have passed Nibolcus's test and wield some of his power.

MUD POOL

Watery mud seeps into a boiling pool. Fat, opaque bubbles form, grow, and pop, flicking hot mud onto the bowl-like walls.

The pool is ten paces deep and conceals the separate, animate body parts of ***Nibolcus***—his arms, torso, legs, and head. When he speaks, his mouth (and a bit of his nose) surfaces.

The mud is hot enough to scald exposed skin. Succumbing to the heat is a danger for anyone falling in. The mud contains a mineral that blocks divination and detection magic, which is why Nibolcus hides within it. The heat is not natural, and comes from Nibolcus's innate magic.

GRAVE OF THE PRODIGIES

Ninety human **skulls**, adolescents and young children, are carefully arranged in stacks along the natural stone steps. Each has been carefully painted with pre-Seree **runes** with the name of the deceased and some fond moniker or nickname:

Asab too Brave / Huth Generous / Wusel Cleverflame / Barasa Stoutmost / Thenn most Gifted / Yurli Knewall / Gen Foremost / etc.

d6	Hourly/Per-room encounter
1	***Oil gatherers*** (d4) coming or going with heavy urns. 25% chance a ***prodigy*** leads them.
2	d4 **prodigies** here to practice
3	d6 **prodigies** well rested, armed, and here to fight with the ***sphere***
4	Injured ***apocalypse larvae***, dripping flaming oil and threatening to explode
5	***Nibolcus***'s **left hand** having a quick look around
6	Grieving **parent** from the village, come to lament / find a gatherer lost to oil fire / a prodigy killed by the sphere

The Oil Gatherers

A group of twelve children from the village knows how to ***extract fire oil*** from the ***apocalypse larvae***. They take this duty and the ***harvesting*** procedures very seriously, as mistakes can be lethal. The presence of adults will alarm them, for they worry that it will activate the ***sphere***.

The Prodigies

When gatherers turn thirteen, ***Nibolcus*** makes them an offer: if they will help him fight against "cruel Panur," he teaches them magic. Each knows a handful of **war spells**: invisibility, stonegrip, blasting gaze, cyclone shield.

Prodigies are loyal to Nibolcus, but all are scarred, physically and mentally, from their fights with the ***sphere***.

When they reach adulthood, Nibolcus banishes them from the cave for their own safety. Few sleep soundly.

Apocalypse Larvae

These fat, white grubs are native to the deep places. As they mature, they bloat with ***fire oil***, their translucent, sac-like bodies sloshing with it. They are slow and passive, but if poked they burst, splashing their lifetime's collection of fire oil on everyone nearby.

Fire Oil

This extremely flammable oil must be kept in stoppered containers. If exposed to the air, it evaporates rapidly, forming an invisible **cloud**. After d3 minutes, the invisible cloud self-ignites as a **blue fireball**, splashing any remaining liquid oil everywhere.

Fire oil is prized by miners for its potency, excellent light, and the fact that it is self-lighting. A lamp filled with fire oil lights itself with a pop as soon as the wick is exposed, and will yield light for a full day. Metal lamps are preferred!

Harvesting Fire Oil

Nibolcus has taught the oil gatherers how to extract oil from the larvae using a sharpened bellows syringe. Basting the tip in numbwort prevents the larvae from exploding, and the wounds are small enough not to leak afterwards. The extracted oil is then injected into urns sealed with wax and taken away.

Nibolcus the Giant

The Seree had powerful allies in their war against the gods. Among them were gray giants, first people of the earth, skilled in magic and crafty science.

Like the Seree, nothing remains of them but ash—as far as he knows, Nibolcus, Archmage of Firevault, is the last of his kind. He hides here, unable to use his magic or re-assemble his body for fear of awakening the ***sphere***.

He has memorized a library's worth of lost natural philosophy and knows dozens of incantations and rituals. Within his chest, he holds the souls of four friends recovered from the battlefield, awaiting reincarnation.

Sorgite **sigils** cover his arms and neck, but he scoffs at demon worship, deeming Sorg the Devourer (and indeed, all Powers) a mere "natural force."

Approaching the Sphere

The sphere of needles is an autonomous weapon, a remnant of the war between the Seree sorcerers and the Powers of heaven and earth. It came here in pursuit of Nibolcus, and it waits for any sign of him.

It was fashioned by the demigod Panur in his war aspect, and it **weaponizes its victims' memories** against them. When it spies a target, it fires one or more of its **needles** with unerring accuracy. If they strike, they extract a victim's memory and materialize it as a violently aggressive ***memory horror***.

Memory Horrors

Memory horrors take these forms: childhood rivals, enemies, or bullies; the last truly dangerous opponent faced; an ally or loved one turned to a murderous rage; a parent; or a deceased relative or beloved pet crawling from the ground.

The sphere is damaged and half blind; its response is now only proportional to age and magical ability. The older and more magical its target, the more needles it fires. It ignores children, except for **prodigies**, whom it shoots with one or two needles. Their horrors have the strength of angry drunks.

d4	Nibolcus's mood
1	Rageful—angry that intruders might disturb the sphere or harm the children
2	Haughty—will insist on gifts to honor an "unrivaled sorcerer"
3	Needy—desperately lonely for worldly conversation, he offers anything he has to win friends
4	Guilty—inconsolably distraught over the harm he has brought to the children over the years.

Against **adults**, it fires d6 needles. The resulting horrors are as strong as gorillas and deliver vicious bites. **Warriors** face d12 needles and horrors with **fire-breathing**, **shadow form**, or **regeneration**.

Sorcerers get d20 needles. Their horrors are as **strong** as a rhinoceros, **telekinetic**, and hurl lightning.

Needle by Needle

Trapped here, Nibolcus is using the prodigies to deplete the sphere. Each month, he sends one to trigger it. Three others lie in wait to ambush and destroy the resulting memory horror. He has trained them well, and they nearly always win.

After a hundred years of this, Nibolcus can taste freedom.

If, however, the sphere somehow locates him, it fires all of its needles. This unleashes a four-headed **Sorgite dragon** with the faces of Nibolcus's long-dead family, whose merest gaze causes burns and internal bleeding.

The dragon will kill Nibolcus—and then everything else.

THE WAGONER'S TABLE

THE SITUATION

Each winter, an ancient, magical ***wagon*** follows a hidden, meandering ***course*** through snowy highlands. It offers sanctuary to anyone who can intercept it and climb aboard.

HIGHLAND FOREST RUMORS

- Ruffians know a secret route through the mountains—or they seem to, as they have no trouble getting across.
- In winter, trappers find the tracks of a mighty, horseless ***wagon***.
- Villagers tell of a pack of huge ***wolves***, forever bound to chase a quarry they will never catch.
- A strange ***wagoner*** plies the snowy forest trails; the poor sometimes throw themselves upon his mercy. If you vex him, he throws you to his wolves. Otherwise, you feast!
- Years ago now, the King himself came to our forests to hunt a great wagon, hoping for a last meeting with the ghost of his father.
- In these parts, thieves are turned out of their homes and exiled, told to "beg the wagoner," for their supper, if he exists.
- There's a song they sing in the highlands, about a boy lost for six years who returned fat and happy but had scarcely aged a day!
- That song they sing in the highland villages is completely true. I swear! It was my uncle!
- The Seree used to have great wagons that rolled the countryside, taking heavy tribute for the sorcerers' tables.

THE WAGON'S COURSE

The ***wagon*** follows a winding, mountainous course near several highland villages. Each year it appears following the first snows, and pops up for several weeks. In mid-winter, it plunges into the deep, trackless forests for several weeks before being seen again just before the spring thaw.

The wagon's course starts (seemingly out of nowhere) in the lowlands. After looping around several dozen remote villages on a months-long route, the track disappears just as suddenly.

ALWAYS WINTER

Originally, this strange vehicle was a tribute ***wagon***, bringing farm produce, delicacies, and unusual game from the remote villages down to where the Seree ruled the region from the lowlands.

Now, it skips the lowlands part of the journey entirely. After the last village, its ***drivers*** turn onto a ley line, and ***Astin*** whisks the wagon away in a shower of snow. It isn't seen again until the following winter.

For those aboard the wagon, no time passes. There is a brief lurch, and it's suddenly nine months later.

TRAIL HAZARDS

Over the years, the ***wagon*** has worn a narrow track (often hidden by snow) through the fir trees. The wagon crunches along quietly, leaving deep grooves in the snow.

Sometimes the forest breaks into **clearings**, where great drifts of snow accumulate.

Other times the ground becomes steep and treacherous, and the track runs along steep **ravines** where black rocks claw through the snow.

When it meets bare rock or the icy flows of frozen streams, the wagon wobbles, shudders, skids precariously close to the edge, but it is guided by its experienced ***drivers*** and is as sure-footed as any mule.

THE DEMON WOLVES

The ***wagon*** is pursued by a pack of wolves, as large as horses. They are demons, loosed upon the earth to chase down the Seree-made wagons. They've ruined many over the centuries, but they are too few to overpower this final one. They follow it, sometimes close, sometimes a league or two behind; they are bound to this task and can't do anything else.

The wolves **burble** as they run, which sounds like a child singing down a straw into a bottle half-full of spit. Flaming drops fall from the wolves' mouths and hiss in the snow.

Bzalt is their leader, though she is the smallest. She earnestly believes the wagon is a curse upon the earth and will happily accept aid from anyone who seems likely to help her catch it.

WAGON HUNTERS

The wolves stay at least a bow's shot from the wagon, unless they have an opportunity; if people approach the wagon in a group, the wolves will try to use them as concealment or distraction in order to get closer.

They leap surprisingly far, easily forty paces. If they reach the wagon, they destroy d2 automatons before it vanishes with a pop (leaving them behind) for the season.

If cut, their blood catches fire and burns with green flames as it becomes exposed to the air. If grievously wounded, sticky, rope-like **tentacles** burst from the wound and attack.

THE FALLEN WOLF

Somewhere along the ***wagon***'s path is a fallen wolf. It is studded with crossbow bolts, and its guts have been mashed into the snow. The wagon has run over it every year for a decade. Only demonic willpower keeps it alive. Low flames flicker around it. Still, the pelt is flawless and white. Being horribly wounded has not freed it from its compulsion to hunt the wagon, but the inability has made it mad and cruel.

It asks for help in a well-mannered voice, but it strangles do-gooders with intestines that rise up as tentacles.

d8	Forest encounters
1	Fresh wagon trail—knee-deep, crisp grooves in the snow curving gently around the trees. It's d20 hours ahead.
2-3	Last year's wagon trail, a gentle dip in the snow easily missed unless you look down its length. The wagon arrives in d8 hours.
4	A family of ***exiles***, looking for the wagon
5	d2 rogues, looking for the wagon
6	The wagon, creaking and grinding along the trail
7	d8 demon wolves
8	The body of the fallen wolf

THE EXILES

A family of eight seeks the wagon, exiled from their village after a poor harvest left them begging. They hope to find the "King of Saltbride" aboard and plan to beg him for relief.

APPROACHING THE WAGON

The wagon is indeed horseless, crunching quietly through the snow. The occasional clonk of heavy wooden mechanisms comes from within, as well as snatches of song and merriment.

The wagon moves relentlessly at a jogging speed (~12 leagues/day), making it easy to intercept but difficult to catch up with (without horses) if it gets ahead of pursuers.

Stepiro throws down a rope ladder to anyone not obviously hostile who draws near.

Upper Deck

Eight automatons with crossbows guard it from the upper deck; several are legless and nailed to the railings.

Only d4 can see from any given angle, except the back, where four can fire. They will shoot at the wolves or to scatter anyone obscuring the wolves.

Drivers' Hut

Two wizened **gnomes**, Winsow and Grote, peer out of the cupola windows and direct the wagon's course. They bicker about directions and tolerate no distractions (except philosophy).

The **steering** is geared, and the wheel must rotate many times for even slight turns. There is no throttle; a silver-chased **gear lever** selects between full-speed forward, full-speed reverse, or "neutral." The mechanism grinds loudly with each shift.

Collection Gantries

Vestiges of its time as a Seree tribute collection wagon, the **metal hooks** were once used to grab proffered sacks during drive-by pickups. ***Astin***'s magic fills them now: every d100 minutes, bundled foodstuffs on a looped rope appear, dangling. Most common are sacks of grain, then dried fruits, cheese, salt-crusted game, casks of wine, mead, or strong spirits.

Prow & Battering Ram

The lower chassis of the wagon is solid wood but for the ***vexed timber*** inside. The **iron boss** is actually the tip of the timber and rotates constantly as the drive turns. The boss is enchanted as a **battering ram** and is especially effective against natural obstacles (boulders, fallen trees), which it obliterates.

Old Bridge and Map Room

Stacks of **parcels** fill the room, each wrapped in dyed paper—painted maps, unreadably dense with elevation changes and wagoning hazards, all centuries out of date. Inside each is clothing or food—jars of jam, potted meat, sturdy pies. The **walls** are decorated with brass navigational instruments and drafting tools.

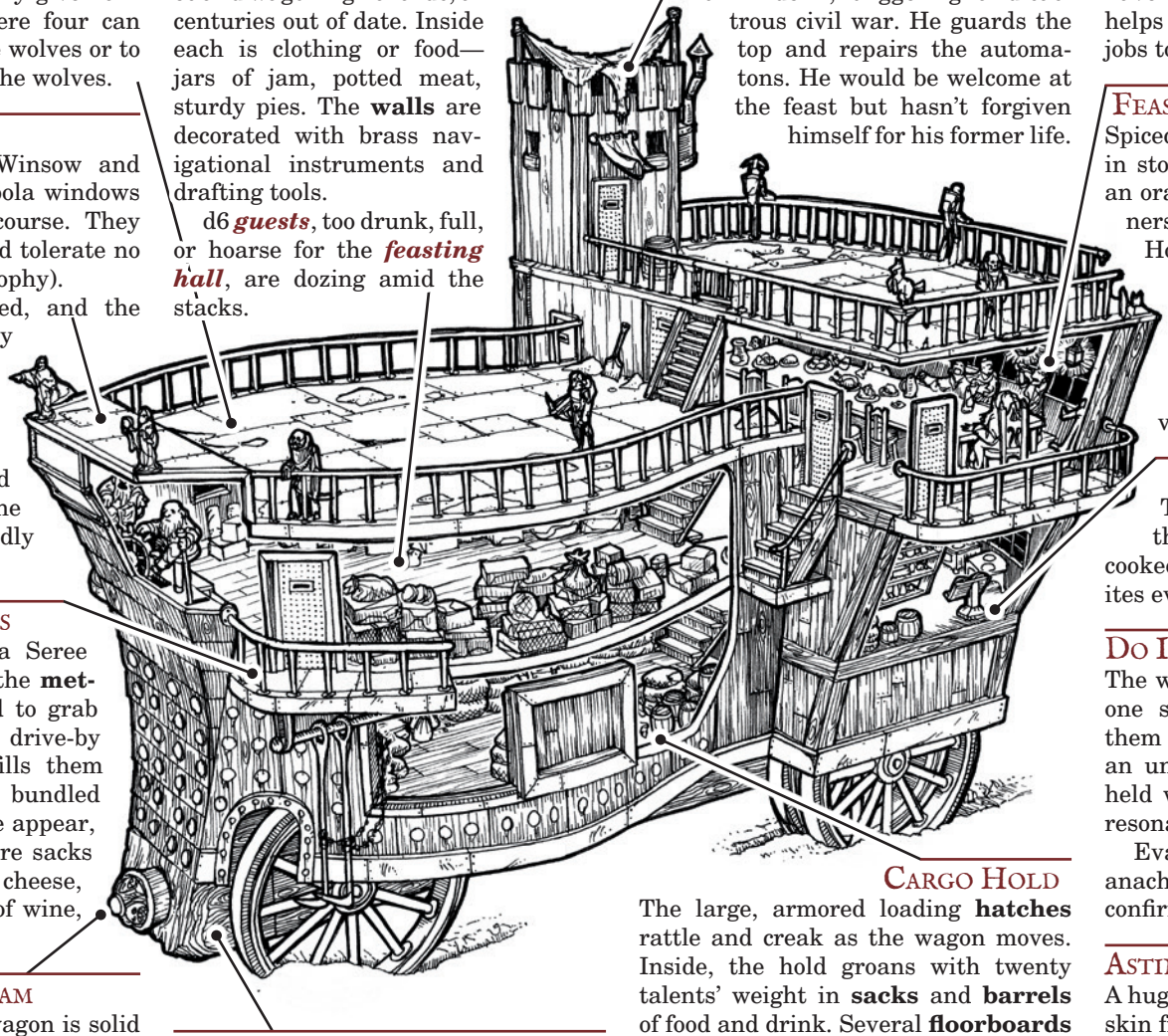
d6 ***guests***, too drunk, full, or hoarse for the ***feasting hall***, are dozing amid the stacks.

Chassis & Vexed Timber

The source of the wagon's power is a mighty **log**, taken from deep in the underworld and placed in a channel within the chassis. It rebels at being wrenched to the surface, and its constant twisting drives the wheels.

Stepiro's Tower

A rickety lookout tower houses **Stepiro**, a gray-haired man with a scarred face. Once an assassin, he drowned the heirs of Aridenn, triggering a disastrous civil war. He guards the top and repairs the automatons. He would be welcome at the feast but hasn't forgiven himself for his former life.



Cargo Hold

The large, armored loading **hatches** rattle and creak as the wagon moves. Inside, the hold groans with twenty talents' weight in **sacks** and **barrels** of food and drink. Several **floorboards** have been lifted to expose part of the ever-rotating vexed timber as a **makeshift mill**. The resulting flour is blown out with a small bellows—everything here is heavily dusted in flour.

A sarcastic, **talking cat** (actually a familiar spirit) keeps the mice down.

Guests of the Wagon

The d20 guests aboard are outcasts, exiles, reformed criminals, orphans, and the destitute. Few stay long, but some have been aboard for years. Everyone helps as they are able; ***Astin*** suggests jobs to idlers (with no regard to skill).

Feasting Hall

Spiced cider steams atop three tin cabin stoves; a half-dozen lanterns throw an orange glow into the room. The corners hold harps, flutes, and fiddles.

Hourly dishes from the ***kitchens*** make a constant feast. All are welcome, but ***Astin*** demands **song or saucer**: prepare a dish from home, or sing your heart. Singers are teased and dishes devoured; everything is applauded.

Kitchens & Archives

The massive **cookbook** (in its third volume) records everything cooked here. The gravy-stained favorites evoke profound feelings of deja vu.

Do I Know You?

The wagon is a place out of time. Anyone searching for someone will find them here—or at least, someone with an uncanny resemblance. Discussions held with these people have a mythic resonance in the wider world.

Evasive folklorists and sages in anachronistic dress sometimes visit to confirm obscure sociological details.

Astin the Wagoner

A huge and portly wizard with chestnut skin framed by a white beard. The Seree wagons were his design, centuries ago; now, he repays imperial greed one feast at a time. He dozes in his chair rather than leave the guests unattended. He sings the loudest, claps longest, and makes sure those who leave the wagon take a parcel and a gold coin.

THE RAINDRINKERS

Drinking Heaven's Waters

When clear skies suddenly turn stormy, people look for the ***strange wagons*** of the Raindrinkers sliding over the mud, collecting the rain as they go. These nomadic peoples know a terrible truth: the earth's waters are tainted. By drinking only rain, they seek to avoid the loss of their memories and culture. Dedicated to preserving their history, the Raindrinker ***council*** of elders is eager to meet with travelers that cross the caravan's path. They trade in lost answers and word of distant places.

Mud-Wagons

A Raindrinker convoy is made primarily of waterproof wagons that have bottoms like sleds, dragged by donkeys and horses along the surface of the mud. The runners of these sleds are designed to slice through the rain-softened earth.

Inside, these wagons have enough room to live in and carry necessities. Outside, they have **vessels** to catch rainwater, including oddly shaped and **decorative tarps** to cover those driving the wagon while collecting extra water. Maintaining the rainwater catchers occupies most of their time.

d10	The rains they bring
1-2	A drizzle, cold and clammy
3-5	Fat splashing drops, warm and soothing
6-7	Heavy straight-down rain, cooling
8	Raging storm, high winds
9	Spitting clouds, pregnant with thunder
10	Clouds following in their wake (roll again for what kind)

Fire Wagon

These wagons hold hot stones and protected flames. A **guard of the fire** rides within, along with anyone who needs respite from the damp. Smoke is vented through compartments where hocks of meat dangle.

Council Wagon

The elders of a caravan, including the council for the ***great caravan***, convene in a wagon owned by all. It holds cultural ***treasures*** and artifacts of the Raindrinker peoples. It is also where the most formal ***litanies*** are recited and taught, especially the ***Voice of the Past***. While celebration and work happen out in the rain, debate is reserved for the council wagon.

The Great Caravan

Lumbering through the world is the heart of Raindrinker culture. This great gathering of caravans holds the peoples' elders, items of the lost past, and the young ones being taught to carry the Raindrinker way of life forward. All caravans intersect and exchange wagons with the great caravan in a languid cycle that binds the peoples together. The route of these caravans traces the roads of lost empires.

d6	Encountered caravans
1	A single mud-wagon on a ***strange task***
2-3	A convoy of a family's d4 wagons
4-5	A small caravan of 2d4 wagons. If you roll doubles, one of the elders is with the caravan.
6	The great caravan: 3d6 wagons plus the elders' council wagon.

Ghen of the Buwal

Description: Gaunt, paper-thin skin, bald, smells of soil, dirt under his fingernails, rich voiced, slight rasp when he breathes

Mannerisms: Maintains eye contact constantly while speaking, snorts when annoyed

Ghen expresses curiosity masked as disinterest until something he needs or wants comes up, at which point he becomes more inquisitive toward visitors or outright interrogates them. If ***Tatien*** is engaged, he questions politely; if she is not, he is pushy and rude.

Wants: Sketches and/or samples of strange plants—especially Analeaf, evidence of giant bees

Needs: Someone to seed Storm Orchids in a particular place

Has: Edible flowers, dried fruit, wild honey & royal jelly, precious seeds & vine cuttings, deep plant lore, the Gardener's ***Litany***, secrets of ancient garden sites

the Buwal

The Buwal remember when they tended vast gardens and bee hives. They still keep seeds from their ancient strains, planting them as they travel as local soil and rain conditions allow, for other caravans to harvest.

Their elder has a practiced eye for this and is always eager to discuss strange plants, soil conditions, and other such matters with travelers.

Agya of the Jyx

Description: Relatively youthful, vigorous, lean, clear eyed, lilting voice ready for singing

Mannerisms: Precise, relentless questions, paces when not seated, interrupts when excited

Aloof and hostile at first, Agya warms or cools to outsiders as the rest of the council does. When she likes people, she helps enthusiastically. When she doesn't, she suggests they be executed or, at least, expelled. If brought around, she shrugs off her previous disposition as adapting to circumstances.

Wants: Sketches of ruins, ancient books, proof that the Jyx's old prey still survive

Needs: Evidence of the ancient Martoi and their poisonous weapons

Has: ***Litanies*** of History, the ***Voice of the Past***, fine boning knives, the secret of singing forth rain

the Jyx

The Jyx once drank rain for convenience while following game animals. As they saw the terrible fate that struck those who drank from rivers, they forsook all water save heaven's—which they learned to summon.

From others, they learned the weaving of memories into songs and ***litanies*** to instill in the minds of others.

Even "young" Agya can bring forth crisp details of times no living eyes have seen.

Tatien of the Hendri, Eldest

Description: Wizened, blind, reedy voice, wrapped in many layers

Mannerisms: Long sighs, chewing leaves, folding and unfolding hands constantly

Welcoming, though too tired to do much about it, Tatien becomes more welcoming and engaged as outsiders show deference to the council as a whole, instead of trying to court her favor. Those who focus on her too much find her pushing to end the session so she can sleep.

Wants: To sleep, better narcotic leaves, to visit the ancient burial mound where her husband rests

Needs: Reassurance the Raindrinkers can survive the coming years

Has: The right to declare people friends of the Raindrinkers or members of the Hendri people

The Hendri

The Hendri are a people of mixed origins that unified and emerged fully within the Raindrinker tradition. They are the source of many innovations to ease the constant rain-soaked travel of the caravans. Those who are adopted into the Raindrinkers become Hendri by default. While Tatien was born into an old family of the Hendri, her **husband** was found poisoned, then healed and adopted into caravan life. Hendri caravans trace the newest routes, seeking survivors of broken settlements to aid or absorb as the situation demands.

Kenay of the Yazis

Description: Tall and slender, always has a hunting bow, deep lines around eyes, soft voice

Mannerisms: Squinting, dismissive snorts, lots of quoting of poems nobody else has heard of, constantly sizing others up

Kenay is a warrior-poet eager to share his compositions and military theories.

Kenay's boisterousness hides keen evaluation. Overt actions before the council are irrelevant, he discerns the history of outsiders and reacts accordingly. Once he has made his decision about outsiders, he is very direct about it, often voicing his opinion first and setting the tone.

Wants: Interesting weapons and armor, news of battles, contacts that travel, warnings of trouble coming towards the caravans

Needs: Connections to those in far places to expand his people's network

Has: The Archer's ***Litany***, thunder arrows, military history and theory, a regional network of informants

The Yazis

The Yazis maintain the most extensive contact with outside people and settlements. They retain ancient warrior traditions, as well as new ones particular to their current conditions. While the Jyx keep the official chronicles, if you wish to know about ancient battles, you ask the Yazis

Ulroch of the Vek

Description: Short, still nimble (her cane is a prop), loud and powerful voice

Mannerisms: Quick to laugh and smile but hollowly, always has a story ready, mockingly mimics voices of others

Suspicious while playing at friendliness, Ulroch also tries to mask her opposition to First Speaker Tatien by mirroring her mood. Even so, befriend Tatien and Ulroch will be against you; earn Tatien's enmity and Ulroch may yet help you.

Wants: Word of destroyed communities and poisoned waters, restoration of lost stories, proof of the lost Vek city

Needs: Another safe source of water

Has: The ***Voice of the Past***, many plays and legends, a text on the Martoi in a strange language, knowledge of other elders' wants and needs

The Vek

The Vek lived as traveling performers and message carriers in a previous age. They lost some of their ancient stories before joining with the Raindrinkers, and as a result, they're eager to spread them as a hedge against further loss. Their elder is convinced the disaster that birthed the Raindrinker way of life is coming again, soon, and soon again after that. What's worse, she suspects it will drive others to a similar lifestyle, wrecking the balance of the world.

Raindrinker Litanies

Due to their need to travel lightly, the Raindrinkers do not have many written records—though they have an extensive writing system to capture the six languages of their culture. Instead of volumes of history, they have litanies.

These litanies are collections of chants, sayings, and call-and-response songs that guide them through tasks until the task and the words become fused together reflexively.

The Voice of the Past

The greatest of the litanies, the Voice of the Past, can achieve a miracle: the perfect replication of a memory from one mind into the minds of those exposed to the litany.

This is how the Raindrinkers pass on their most important lessons and secrets. Of course, once the memory is in its new home, it is just as vulnerable as any other memory.

Raindrinker Treasures

Raindrinkers prefer songs, stories, and other performed art to material cultural works. However, to accompany their chanting, Raindrinkers create drums and wind instruments of wood treated to resist the damp. Their music evokes thunder and storm winds.

For plays, everyday goods serve as props. The elders keep the few enduring masks and costumes, evoking beasts no longer known in the world and long forgotten gods.

d10	Strange tasks
1-2	Scattering seeds
3-4	Hunting snarks
5-6	Chasing rumors
7-8	Scavenging battle sites
9-10	Seeking ruins

THE MOUTH OF SPRING

THE SITUATION

A humble shrine to the powers of spring conceals an elaborate system of underwater caverns. To the ***Wives of Spring***, a secret order, it represents a powerful initiatory journey and a repository of magical resources.

Locally, strong women are said to be "from the mouth of spring," though only the wives know the origin and true meaning of the phrase.

SHRINE OF SPRING

The few visitors to this out-of-the-way shrine have etched a path in the mossy steps. The shrine walls are so mossy that it feels like a humid, green cave. The thunderous **splashing** of water into the brimming pool makes conversation difficult. A steady **trickle** overflows the pool and flows down the shrine steps.

SHRINEKEEPERS

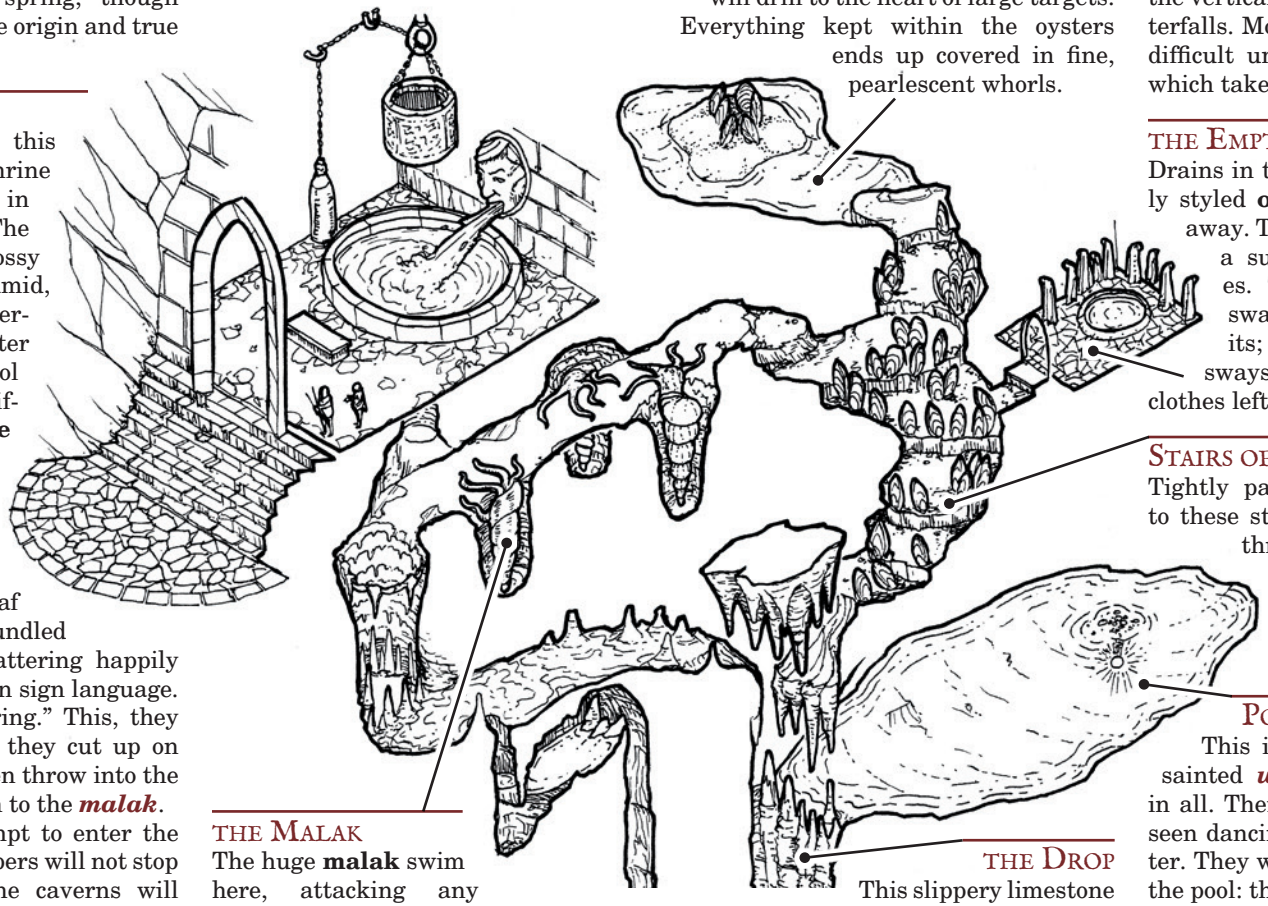
Two elderly, half-deaf **shrinekeepers** stay bundled against the damp, chattering happily about news of the day in sign language. They beg coin "for spring." This, they spend on meat, which they cut up on the stone **altar** and then throw into the pool to be washed down to the ***malak***.

If the visitors attempt to enter the caverns, the shrinekeepers will not stop them—they believe the caverns will sort out intruders. Nevertheless, when they can, they send word to the ***wives***.

d6 will arrive in d8 hours, to uncover the motives and state of those who emerge from the ***mouth***.

THE SUPPLICANT'S GATE

A huge, metal **tube** hangs from a counterweighted chain. The outside is etched with a stylized, but detailed, **map** of the shrine and caverns. If lowered fully, the tube blocks the pool's drain, and the ***water levels*** begin to drop in the caverns.



THE MALAK

The huge **malak** swim here, attacking any signs of motion with their tentacles and sharp beaks. When the hall drains (in a quarter hour), they retreat to their holes, probing the oily puddles for prey. The cautious can avoid them easily.

VAULT OYSTERS

This round chamber drains in the second half hour, leaving an **island** in a pool of sand-clouded water. The huge **oysters** there will open if their shells are scratched gently. Inside, each has a **glowing pearl** that throws a soft, blue light. Inside them are also:

Crab-climb oil: chitinous legs sprout from the drinker's back.

Vexing arrows (4): rotate constantly; will drill to the heart of large targets.

Everything kept within the oysters ends up covered in fine, pearlescent whorls.

THE DROP

This slippery limestone shaft drains during hour four. When drained, a risky, forty-pace dive down to the ***central pool*** is possible. (Falling climbers, however, tend to hit walls and land spinning.)

THE WATER LEVELS

Normally, the caverns (shown drained) are **full of water**. When the gate is lowered into the pool, it blocks the flow down to the caverns. The pool then overflows, and water sluices down the steps of the shrine. The caverns slowly drain, emptying in about eight hours. If the gate is lifted, a **torrent** of water cascades in to refill the cavern. White water rushes over slippery floors, and the vertical shafts become crashing waterfalls. Moving upstream is extremely difficult until the caverns refill fully, which takes about two days.

THE EMPTY DANCERS

Drains in the third half-hour. Variously styled **outfits** sway silently, facing away. The **pool of disguise** reflects a succession of unfamiliar faces. Touching one permanently swaps your appearance with its; the appropriate outfit then sways forth to dress you. Any clothes left here dance with the others.

STAIRS OF GEBENN

Tightly packed **giant mussels** cling to these steps, which drain over hour three. The mussels' edges are knife-sharp, making progress tricky. Tiny sightless **starfish** ask endless questions in squeaky voices.

POOL OF WIVES BEFORE

This icy pool holds the **bones** of sainted ***wives of spring***, hundreds in all. Their **wraith**-like forms can be seen dancing on the surface of the water. They will "bless" women who enter the pool: their touch causes a **terror** so acute it can cause heart attack or paralysis (permanent or temporary) of a limb or the face. Anyone who endures it never suffers fear again, and thereafter **causes fear** in fear-causing beings.

The Locus of Power

The **Pool of Wives Before** is a locus of power strong enough that sensitives can feel it from many leagues away. Neophyte wizards sometimes enter the caverns, hoping to use it for their own means. This serves the wraiths, who see greedy wizards that come here as useful—the grit that begins a pearl.

Makeshift Sanctum

The upper cavern has been converted by ***Ulthis*** into a crude, underwater sanctum. It drains in hour five.

A **glowing sigil** etched on the floor provides a pale light. It is a catalyst for liminal insights, and anyone within its pattern hears fragments of magic rituals, whispered by the wraiths.

Ulthis has etched **six stone tablets** with the rituals they have pieced together here. The rest are fragmentary.

Goldsong: nearby gold produces a high-pitched whine

Blade of Insight: cast upon a knife, when it injures a victim, the wielder receives guidance toward their goal

Stonecloak: causes fabric to look like natural stone

Icepenny: a tossed coin freezes a barrel's quantity of water

Voidmark: touch a spot; it forever appears as a tiny star when eyes are closed

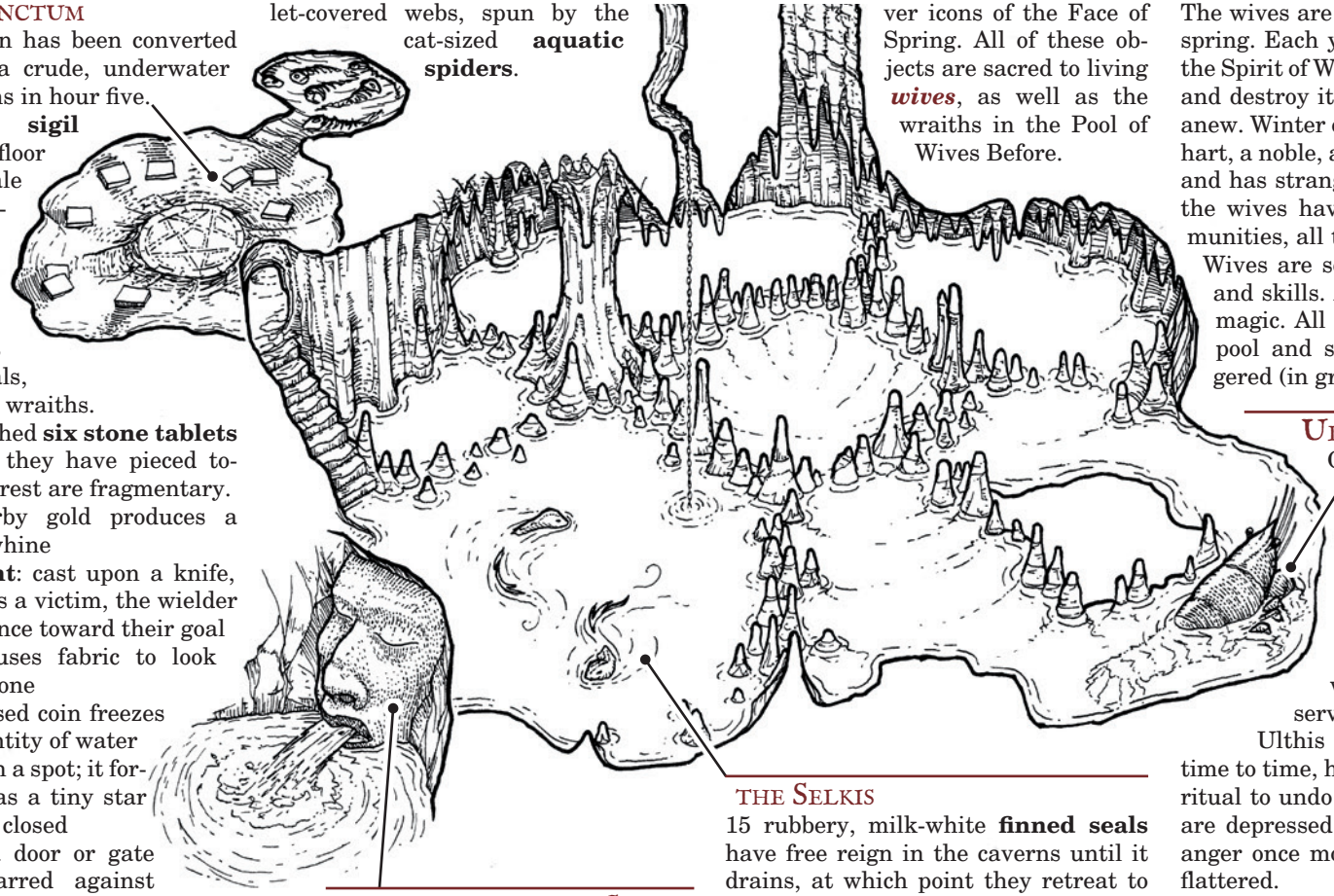
Siege of Dis: a door or gate specifically barred against the caster bursts into flame

Somewhere on each tablet is a **burning eyes rune**, added by Ulthis. Anyone seeing it squirts a pot's worth of flaming oil from their eyes. This tends to splash around and cause great harm.

Great Cavern

The great cavern is dark, save for glimmers of light from the sanctum. In hour five, it is an expanding labyrinth between stalactites with a floor of ink-black water. In hours six and seven it is a huge, dark pond; in hour eight, stalagmites poke like glistening teeth through ***the shallows***.

The ceiling is a mass of droplet-covered webs, spun by the cat-sized **aquatic spiders**.



The Mouth of Spring

Water exits the cavern in an unceasing, vigorous flow, splashing into a series of cliffside sea caves (not shown) and then out to the sea. If any ***wives*** have arrived, they will be here in boats.

The Shallows

When the great cavern drains, the five stalactite-rimmed pools around the great cavern's edge are only waist deep. The bottom crunches with **debris**: fallen stalactite bits and malak shells discarded by the selkis. Within it can be found **remnants** of failed initiates (and foolhardy explorers): skulls, bones, knives, and brass or silver icons of the Face of Spring. All of these objects are sacred to living ***wives***, as well as the wraiths in the Pool of Wives Before.

The Selkis

15 rubbery, milk-white **finned seals** have free reign in the caverns until it drains, at which point they retreat to the shallows. They are intelligent and sociable and enjoy frolicking, hunting malak, or taunting ***Ulthis*** (who is too slow to catch them). They are curious but may grow aggressive if neither entertained nor fed by swimming visitors.

d6	Cavern Encounters
1-2	Immature malak, dog-sized
3	d3 giant aquatic spiders
4	A lost, swaying outfit of clothes
5	d6 ***Selkis***
6	***Ulthis Craw-Wizard***

The Wives of Spring

The wives are a secret cult, devotees of spring. Each year, their task is to find the Spirit of Winter (not described here) and destroy it so that spring can come anew. Winter can take any form (a gray hart, a noble, a tree, a silver-eyed child) and has strange allies. Over the years, the wives have infiltrated many communities, all the better to watch for it.

Wives are selected for their position and skills. All can fight; some know magic. All have been blessed in the pool and so **cause fear** when angered (in groups of three or more).

Ulthis Craw-Wizard

Overuse of wraith-given magic has transformed poor Ulthis into a massive crawdad, too large to leave the caverns.

Once per day, they can take the form of a large man so encrusted with barnacles that they serve as heavy armor.

Ulthis visits the sanctum from time to time, hoping (in vain) to glean a ritual to undo their predicament. They are depressed and torpid but quick to anger once moving—if not placated or flattered.

If engaged, they scuttle rapidly, grabbing with their two great claws, both with a permanent **blade of insight** effect upon them. Ulthis can also use the icepenny and siege of Dis effects at will.

INTO THE SILENT TEMPLE

The Situation

It is eleven years after the failed assault by the axewives of Grinvolt on the fortress levels of the Dradkin Sun Temple (see "A Clutch of Shadows" on page 48). The Sun Temple has been mostly abandoned, but Dradkin survivors live on in a fearful silence enforced by the deadly ***chitin drakes***.

Chimeromancer's Garden

Rubbery lichen from the fungal garden has spread everywhere, outlining the **secret door** with black stains.

Inside is a huge variety of **fungi**: toxic, hallucinogenic, and carnivorous, including a non-toxic (but still very contagious) breed of **deadly skinfleck**.

The apartment contains a mildewed **bed**, a (now empty) **aerie** for breeding chitin drakes, and **alchemical** equipment. Among the tongs and beakers are: a **censer** of unburnt drake shell (8 hours' worth); a **folio** of underworld fauna; a **handbook** of fungi; a **scroll** of isopod control; and d6 **rubies**.

Creature Vats

Acrid odors waft from body-dissolving elixirs. Every d6 hours, a horrid amalgam of Dradkin, fish, and isopod body parts crawls out to gnaw quietly on the skeletons. If it senses fresher prey, it will track them slowly, hoping to catch them sleeping. It is slow—but strong.

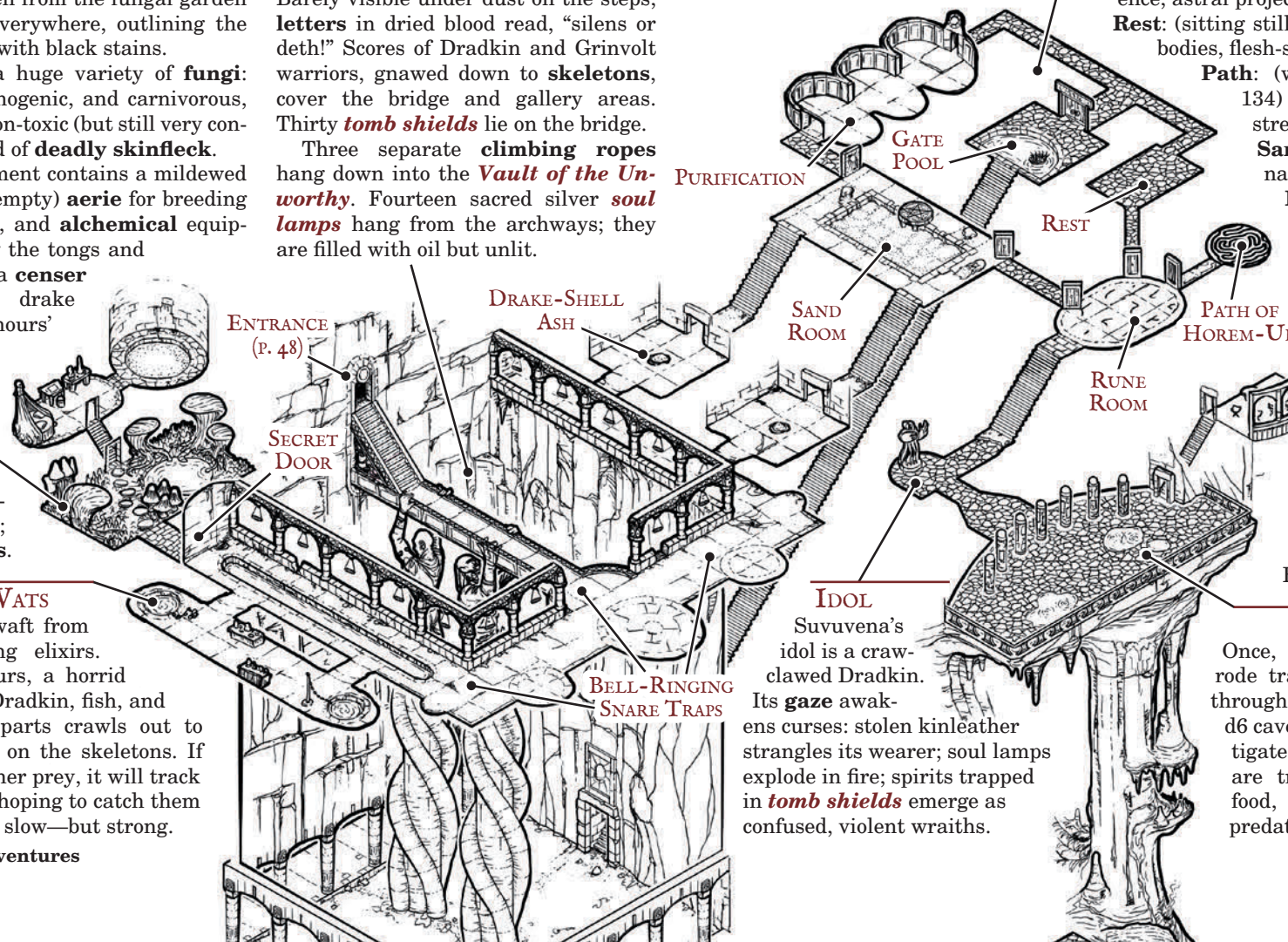
Chitin Drakes

Five mature **chitin drakes** (see page 112) lurk in the complex; they are semi-dormant but investigate any noise louder than dripping water in the hopes of finding prey. Blinded by a Grinvolt sooth in the assault, they ignore lamps, but they are drawn to the smoke and crackle of torches.

Gallery of Ascendants

Barely visible under dust on the steps, **letters** in dried blood read, "silens or deth!" Scores of Dradkin and Grinvolt warriors, gnawed down to **skeletons**, cover the bridge and gallery areas. Thirty ***tomb shields*** lie on the bridge.

Three separate **climbing ropes** hang down into the ***Vault of the Unworthy***. Fourteen sacred silver ***soul lamps*** hang from the archways; they are filled with oil but unlit.



Fleshpriests and Acolytes

Three surviving **fleshpriests** and six **acolytes** live in the upper complex, scraping by, hoping to learn what remaining mysteries Suvuvena holds for them before they run out of food.

All are protected by the spirits of their kinleather garments and soft-soled slippers. The fleshpriests wear ornate longcoats and carry Sephus masks; the acolytes have long knives. Fleshpriests know several rituals: **isopod form**, **summon air of Ur-Menig**, and those on page 24.

Idol

Suvuvena's idol is a crawclawed Dradkin. Its **gaze** awakens curses: stolen kinleather strangles its wearer; soul lamps explode in fire; spirits trapped in ***tomb shields*** emerge as confused, violent wraiths.

Gauntlet of Suvuvena

The magical (kastromatic) architecture of these chambers serves as a training sanctum for Suvuvenist rituals.

It is imperfect: long meditation (d10 hours + d4-1 years) produces either insight (a new ritual) or searing pain for d6×d6 hours.

Each chamber produces different sorts of insights and requires different meditation:

Purification: (genuflection) healing speed, shape-changing, pain control

Gate: (floating) dark sight, clairaudience, astral projection

Rest: (sitting still) control of others' bodies, flesh-sculpting

Path: (walking, see page 134) endurance, strength

Sand: (sand-tasting) navigation, flight

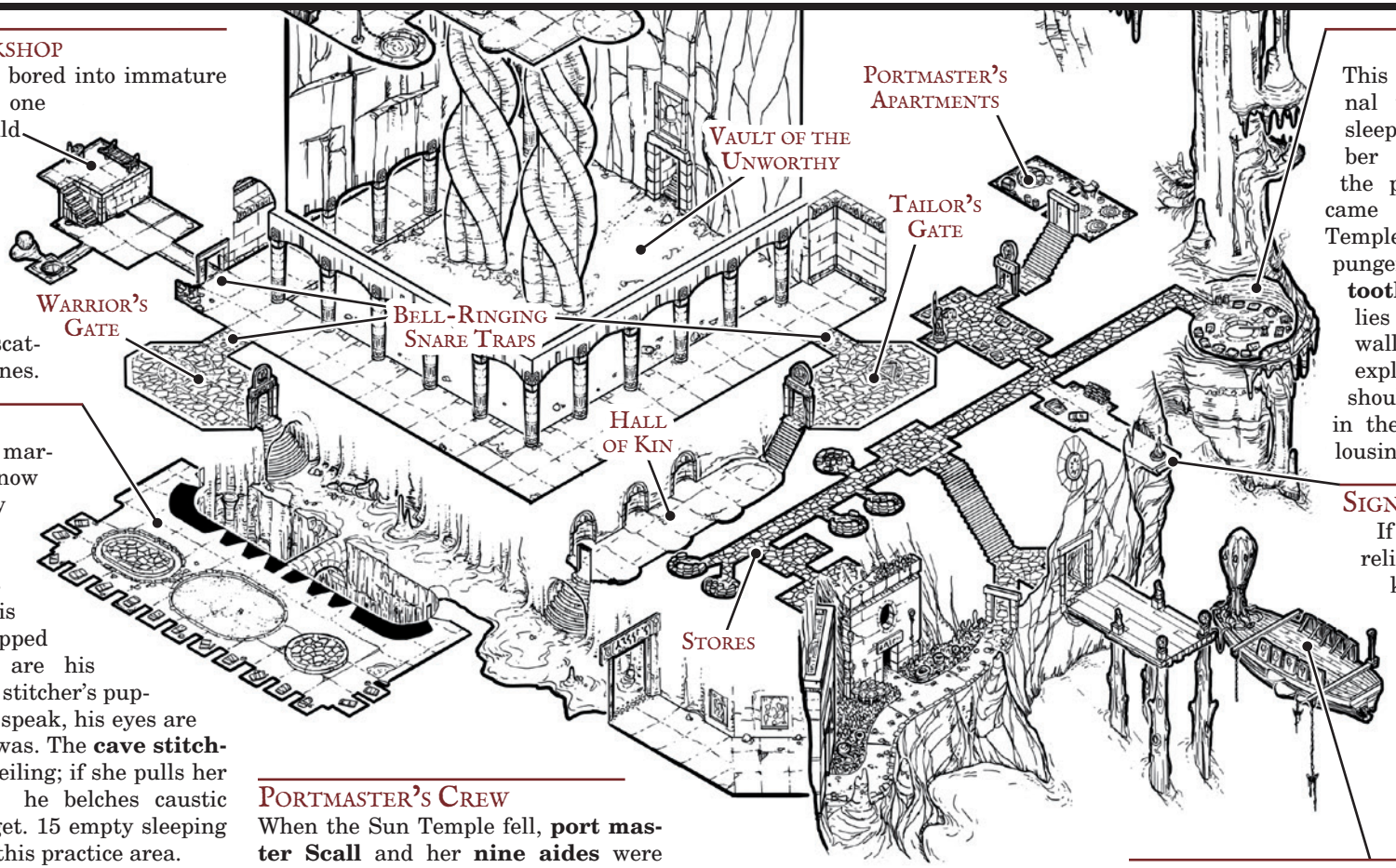
Rune: (mantras) chimeromancy

The Rostrum

This gallery holds four rare-wood chairs and overlooks the cavernous Ur-Menig. Speech here can be heard as far as Hrel (p. 154).

Aerie

Once, the fleshpriests rode trained cave drakes throughout the Ur-Menig. d6 cave drakes will investigate noises; d3 of them are trained but expect food, and the rest are predatory.



Fistula Workshop

Here, holes were bored into immature isopod shells so one day they would serve as berths for travel into the deep places. A folio explains the process; chains, tongs, and augers lie among scattered Dradkin bones.

Fortress

Once a school of martial skill, it is now abandoned. Only an old, blind **sword master** remains. The astute may notice his hands are swapped left-to-right, as are his feet. He is a cave stitcher's puppet; if pressed to speak, his eyes are where is tongue was. The **cave stitcher** lurks on the ceiling; if she pulls her puppet's tether, he belches caustic spray at her target. 15 empty sleeping niches surround this practice area.

Vault of the Unworthy

Here, would-be acolytes (warriors or tailors) would pray and fast in preparation for ascending the steps up to the gate pool, to be inducted into the gauntlet of Suvuvena.

Hungry isopods (d4 paces long) in the sand harass dawdlers.

Engravings in the **warrior's gate** illustrate Dradkin spear-fighting, and the use of drake shell to direct chitin drakes. The statues in the **kin hall** show the stages of dissection to make kinleather; engravings in the tailor's gate statues show ritual tanning, sewing, and the making of bone buttons.

Portmaster's Crew

When the Sun Temple fell, **port master Scall** and her **nine aides** were left behind. Betrayed, they eventually allied with the Grinvolt axewives likewise trapped here. That friendship has made them optimistic that peace might be established with the surface: if the temple can be made safe and the ruling fleshpriests can be overcome.

Later, the axewives split; some went in search of a way home, but two remained. Both succumbed to skinfleck fever after bearing children—the temple's first. The community considers them sacred, omens of peace. The four children prowl around on tiptoes, purring like Dradkin, but with eyes unmistakably meant to feast upon the sunlit world above. They wear kinleather of both their ancestries. The aides now debate asking the Carreg for help in finding another way to the surface.

Food is now scarce. The well-stocked stores (full of potted meat) are bricked up to keep out vermin, but the noise of opening them is too dangerous.

Tomb Shields

Dradkin tomb shields are tall, rectangular, and meant to interlock when fighting in close formation. Three small ports open to allow spear, ankle-hook, and crossbow attacks. Fearful engravings on the outer surface entrap the spirits of enemies who die before them.

Hostel

This communal fire pit and sleeping chamber once housed the pilgrims who came to the Sun Temple. A stack of pungent **yellow-tooth stalks** lies against one wall. Engravings explain some should be placed in the fire for delousing purposes.

Signal Beacon

If the beacon is relit, d100 Dradkin elsewhere in the Ur-Menig will think the Sun Temple has been saved and will arrive in d12 days.

The Benthos

The *Benthos* is a captured Jorn barque, left when the Dradkin fled the Sun Temple. A many-eyed Menaka, **Celdurxi**, is fused to the prow, its magic-trapping organ surgically excised.

Celdurxi will offer itself as a guide of the Ur-Menig, which it knows well after years of grisly servitude. It knows that in 21 days, three Menaka will gate in to explore fallen Hrel (page 154). It will say anything in order to be there.

On the deck is the rotted and dried **body** of Kylogonos, once master chimeromancer of the temple, a worn Grinvolt dagger still in his neck. It is a blessed heirloom, engraved with "S."

Aether Serpent

When the astral wind blows strangely, the sands of that realm form into writhing serpents which grind along the dunes in pursuit of material travelers. The sands of the astral realm are soaked in the dreams and fears of the ages, so the **bite** of an aether serpent inflicts potent, incapacitating visions of lives long past. Do not tarry in the astral realm!

Acolyte of Raal

Occasionally, a vision or seer catches a glimpse of the dread ritual of Thiru that made the primordial orcs (see p. 122). Some try to mimic the ritual, consuming the spirits of the dead, in the hopes of obtaining the power of those legendary creatures.

Unfortunately, the ritual is subtle, and imperfect performance has many side effects.

Each acolyte of Raal has different orcish gifts: glowing, night-seeing eyes; a tough leathery hide; claws and bestial strength; regeneration; to take sand and soil as sustenance; or even ageless vitality.

They may also have numbed limbs, weakness, leprosy, or rotting flesh—before overuse of the ritual causes them to succumb to unthinking ghouldom or death.

Ant, Blight

Blight ants bring total destruction when they come, like a slow-moving wildfire. Dog-sized **scout ants** find and mark suitable food. A few hours later, squads of **forager ants** arrive and carry away anything living. Horse-sized **blight soldier ants** watch over the operations and protect the smaller ants from reprisals.

Trees, bushes, injured or slow-moving animals—everything they can cut down and haul is pulled underground to rot in their subterranean fermentation pits.

Their ravages are cyclical: they enter an area, strip it down to the bare ground, and move on. After a few years (if the soil hasn't dried up and blown away) the area begins to recover. Saplings grow and the animals return, but not long afterwards, so do the ants.

Blight ants prefer hot, dry climates, as their colonies are vulnerable to flooding in more temperate lands. In cold weather, they grow sluggish and vulnerable to hot-blooded scavengers. This small mercy is all that keeps them from sweeping over everything.

Apocalypse Larva

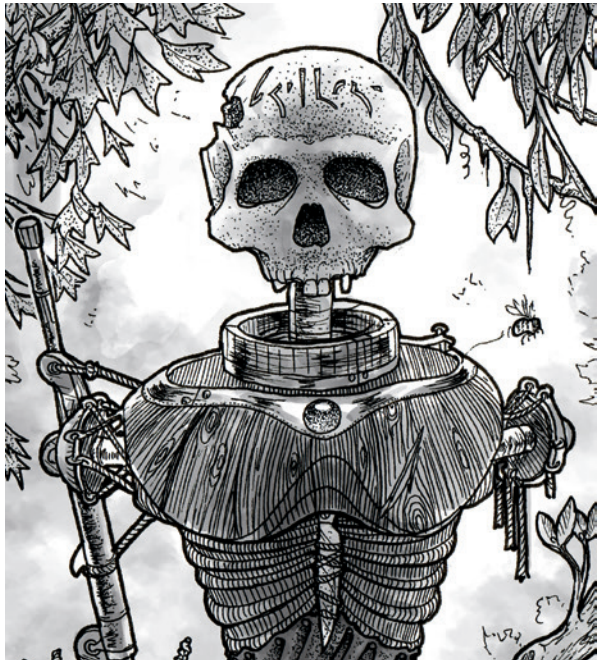
Fat white grubs (2 paces long) cling to cavern walls, sloshing with precious oils. They are passive, but if disturbed they can burst explosively, splashing anyone nearby with flaming oil. See "The Man From Before" on page 98.

Automaton, Servant

These Seree-made automatons have bodies of wood, leather, and brass. They are built for hard labor, and are a full head taller than most humans.

Their heads are human skulls, each one containing a small, coral-like crystal of topaz, agate, or garnet, which holds the automaton's habits of endless servitude.

These '**wizard flowers**' were grown in the brains of acolytes not suited for powerful magic. Automatons occasionally do oddly life-like things (scratching an itch, leaning against a wall) before resuming their duties.



A **skull collar** (an enchanted brass sleeve with a central post) affixes the skull and animates the body with the impulses from the flower. This makes the skulls interchangeable, giving their minders the ability to replace the skulls with others, trained for different tasks

In novel situations (e.g., if attacked, told what to do), servant automatons react appropriately on a 1-2 on a d6; otherwise, they ignore what's happening.

Automaton, Vault Jackal

The Seree also maintained a store of crystal-infused skulls for defensive purposes, made from starved jackals.

Automatons with jackal skulls hunt in packs of up to 8, sneak carefully, attack from ambush, and stop only when their victims are torn apart.

Avatar of Suvuvena

An avatar of Suvuvena is the penultimate chimeric creation, a person made of arthropods, fused together by hydra's blood and prayers to Suvuvena, shaper of life.

Its lungs are locusts; its skin is a carpet of beetles. Its eyes are holes filled with flies. A huge centipede makes up its guts; its hands are clusters of mantids. It can disassemble or reassemble at will.

As a master chimeromancer, the avatar's **gaze** instantly bonds flesh to flesh, as if one piece from birth. It can use this to deform its enemies, or affix two or more of them to one another. It can sew mouths, noses, and eyes shut with a glance, causing blindness and suffocation.

As intelligent, composite beings, avatars have rather alien ideas about identity and individuality.

While most chimeromancers strive to create new and better forms for the glory of Suvuvena, an avatar dreams of welding all life into a single, ecstatic organism.

Bandit Wasp

These giant wasps live in colonies of 2-20 adults, each the size of a calf. They fly noisily, easily heard in the distance. Their glossy chitin protects like metal armor, though their legs and eyes are delicate.

They arrive in groups of d6, seize people, sheep, or goats with their hooked legs, inject venom, and fly home to feed their captured prey to their larvae.

Bandit wasp **venom** has a powerful effect: anyone injected becomes completely unaware of bandit wasps, as if they (and their larvae) did not exist. Many victims have been carried off without protest, calmly enjoying the view from the air.

Bandit wasp nests are cottage-sized, spherical globs of wax nestled high on cliff walls, the upper stories of ruins, or large, ancient trees. The nests crawl with forearm-sized **larvae**, which secrete the demon-repellent wax. They nose about blindly, but if bothered, they reply with a jet of hot wax (painful and blinding).

Blue Lichen

A flaky, blue-gray lichen that rapidly turns exposed skin into more lichen. It grows quickly at body temperature, but is dormant in the numbing cold of its native climate, where it is found as blue-gray streaks on ice. Because it grows painlessly, blue lichen infections can go unnoticed for hours.

Bog Strangler

Bog stranglers haunt the swamps, bogs, and moorland pools between villages. They live out an illusion of their lives from long ago, poor gatherers, charcoal burners, and fishers. The great working of the Martoi let them live as they did thousands of years ago, but only as reflections in still water.

Do not accept their hospitality! Bog stranglers can be recognized by their ignorance of recent news, since they remember nothing since the working. Travelers have awakened to find themselves underwater and drowning: the humble cottage of their host revealed to be a slimy, leaf-filled water hole. Long fingers close about their necks and choke out their last breath.

Bone Devil

Bone devils are the heralds of the great demons vying to rise to the surface from far below. They hunt the spirits of surface people who are foolish or unfortunate enough to be found outside the safety of ancestral hosts.

Bone devils are semicorporeal. To lure the dead, they decorate themselves with bones (which are familiar to the departed). Where the devils settle, they create false shrines filled with stolen sacred objects, or parodies of them.

Bone devils carry **silver-tipped hooks** to catch spirits, though these are equally brutal when turned upon the living.

They know several sorcerous rituals:

Devastating glory causes sacred objects to sing, which they use to lure any nearby spirits who cherish them.

Bone devils light **flaming lamps** of blue fire, terrifying to the dead, to encircle and trap them. At the sound of their **maddening horns**, mounts throw their riders and flee.

They know a grating, **clacking rhythm** they perform when the living are near. It weakens bones, making breaks very likely with even glancing blows or tumbles.

Brass Soldier

Brass soldiers are magical statues of solid metal. They move at one-eighth normal speed, making them easily avoided in the open. In tight quarters (or when pushed, rushed past, or attacked with short weapons), the soldiers attempt to grab limbs or clothing.

They are immensely strong, and their grip cannot be dislodged. Seized victims have only moments to cut off whatever the soldier holds before being strangled by metal fingers.

Being solid metal, they are nearly impervious to harm (including electricity), and only "die" if their silver hearts are bored into or melted.

Brass soldiers are siege weapons from ancient Thiru, and are directed by a **ring of control**. If the ring is worn by a living person, they will march to reach them (underwater if necessary, even digging through earth and stone). Once in the wearer's presence, they will follow simple instructions as best they can. Otherwise, they simply stand where they are.

If a control ring is discovered as treasure, it controls d20 brass soldiers.

Carreg

The Carreg are the "people of stone," who live far underground, in and around the Ur-Menig. Their bodies are genderless, with skin

like dimpled, supple clay. When healthy, they are cool and moist. They appear quite alien to surface peoples, having small mouths, slitted nostrils, and no eyes or hair.

They "see" by means of air currents and ground vibrations, and are unaware of light. They tolerate the air of Ur-Menig, which sends others into a deathless sleep.

Carreg fear iron, which to them is strong-smelling and toxic. Their warriors use weapons of bone or oil-hardened leather, while the best-equipped warriors wear head-caps and vests of lacquered tiles cut from isopod shell or bone.

They are calm, resolute, and speak in low, mumbly voices. The Carreg establish trust by speaking loudly about what everyone can plainly see for themselves. To them, the surface is mythical—to speak of it means you intend to break promises and flout their laws.

Carreg Rust Desperant

With the song of their deity no longer protecting them, some Carreg have formed martial cults. By embracing iron poisoning, they toughen themselves against their enemies.

Their skin is broken and weeping, but covered in hard, metallic scabs. Their limbs grow abnormally long and muscular.

The desperants are not particularly skilled in war, but they commit to battle with berserker ferocity. Among them are many former saints, left despondent when the peace-bringing Song of Gamandes fell silent.

Cave Squid

A cloud of black tentacles, hanging in the air like an ink drop in water. They "swim" through the air, fronds wafting on unseen currents.

Normally constricted to a mass 2-3 paces across, their tentacles stretch up to 6 paces if need be. Given time, they can squeeze through gaps only a few fingers wide. They are highly resistant to crushing or piercing attacks.

Their **venomous touch** causes paralysis, searing pain, or control of whichever of the victim's limbs has been seized, depending on the squid's vile purpose.

They hunt alone and act intelligently.

Cave Stitcher

The spider-like spawn of the demon Guguluin practice a gruesome form of sorcery, "stitching" victims' bodies into new shapes by severing and reattaching limbs. The final form determines the spell they cast.

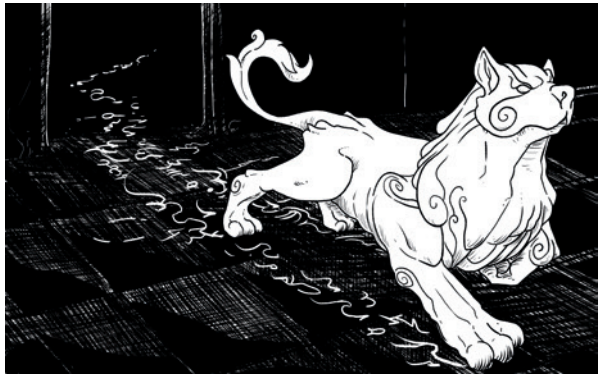
Some victims die while being prepared, while others survive to live on as **puppets** of the stitcher, ever available to produce the desired magical effect with a jerk of their silken tether.

Cave stitchers venturing into contested lands will be dragging d4 puppets, each with different **magical effects**—spurting fire, a sound-deadening black fog, or a cantrip that makes their quarry's blood sing like a boiling kettle (all the easier to find them).

They are strong climbers, able to drag their dangling puppets with them along walls or ceilings.

Chalk Hound

The ancients of Saaru made chalk golems in the form of hounds. They were lovingly etched with prayers, and as the hounds performed their intricate steps as they patrolled the temples, they graced the flagstones with prayer sigils.



Changeling

Countless cultures have fallen into the depths of the underworld when their time on the surface came to an end. The changelings are the survivors: rather than be claimed by the depths and pass into myth, they adopt the forms of living peoples and blend in.

Changelings move among the crowds anonymously when they must, but a stable life requires a home, loved ones, and a station. These they obtain by murder, targeting a specific person, killing them, and slipping into their life.

Changelings are students of human nature, politely curious and excellent conversationalists. They are always observing, planning who they must become next. Some maintain several identities, leading two or even three lives at the same time.

Changelings feign openness to learn as much as they can in return for what they disclose, but this is a double-edged sword: many a changeling has given itself away with a careless idiom or a habitual phrase from a dead language.

Chitin Drake

Chitin drakes are bred as weapons of war by Dradkin chimeromancers. They look like flying centipedes, buzzing through the darkness in search of prey. They attack by biting, injecting a potent paralytic venom. If attacking a group, they will make rapid passes to sow confusion. When attacking lone targets, they bite continuously while coiling around their prey and latching on with a hundred stabbing legs.

They have carapaces like burnished lead, as tough as drake scale. Killing them requires holding them still long enough to batter through their scales.

The wings are not nearly as tough, and a solid blow will break many of them, although they can fly clumsily with as few as a third of a full complement.

They do not attack suicidally, and will retreat if they are hurt. When threatened, they hide on cavern ceilings or scurry into crevices.

Newly hatched chitin drakes are two paces in length and as thick as a wrist. When they can feed on fresh meat, they grow by half a pace every day. Once they reach five paces in length, their drake nature emerges more fully, and they develop a prescient cunning.

The wings flake off, but they continue to fly by magical impulse. Twice daily, they can squirt a jet of sticky, **flaming liquid** sizable enough to engulf a human.

Chitin drakes will never approach a flame that burns with powdered drake-egg shell. This is the only means of control the Dradkin have ever been able to exert over these fell creatures.

Craesten

Hulking terrestrial lobsters, craesten are native to alien Tlarba. They are enormously strong and heavy, and despite the loud clacking of their legs, they move gracefully.

They are ignorant of human body language and tone of voice, which can make them seem stupid or naive at times, but they are intelligent and perceptive. Their **natural armor** lends them an unshakable confidence and humor: in the worst case, they can simply eat you.

When truly upset or angry, they produce a strong **citrus smell**, highly alarming to selks.

Spilled craesten blood produces a potent **magical entropy** that makes nearby spell casting difficult.

Crypt Servant

A crypt servant is a mummified husk, bound by magic to serve a monastic order in death. Their dry bodies are fragile and their minds addled by long years of inactivity, but their fearlessness

and large numbers makes them dangerous in the claustrophobic crypts they protect.

Demon Wolf

The horse-sized demon wolves were loosed upon the earth in the war between the Powers and the Seree. They burble as they run, which sounds like a child blowing into a bottle half-full of spit. Flaming drops fall from their mouths and burn the grass or hiss in the cold snow.

They **leap** surprisingly far, easily forty paces. If cut, their blood catches fire and burns with green flames as it becomes exposed to the air. If grievously wounded, sticky, rope-like **tentacles** burst from the wound and attack anything that draws near.

They earnestly believe the Seree (and those who would imitate them) are a curse upon the earth. Some are bound to destroy specific places (or prevent them being rebuilt), while others have completed their tasks and now roam freely.

They are polite, but confidently superior that the mortals have no idea what's good for them or the consequences of their actions.

Dire Flea

Dire fleas are parasitic vermin as big as a thumb. Their bite is numbing and injects d3 larvae, which burrow deep into the body.

The larvae emerge explosively as full-grown fleas 2d6 days later, leap to a new target, and begin the cycle again. Anyone caught bringing them into a settlement will most likely be carted off and burnt.

Dogfolk

The dogfolk are bipedal canines, the descendants of handwolves whose transformation completed after many generations.

Dogfolk reproduce slowly (more slowly than wolves), and their packs are few in number. They do their best to avoid people, living in highland forests where they have learned to hunt with clever snares. They are expert trap-setters, and many a deep-woods trapper has found themselves strung up.

They abandon all caution with sorcerers, whom they will hunt with murderous determination. They run at great speed, on all fours when they have to. They use harassing attacks and feigned retreats to encourage targets through narrow places with hidden snares, with the aim of separating and exhausting their enemies, over several days if necessary.

The dogfolk believe the moon has given them protection from sorcery—when they **howl** as a pack, magical effects are pulled harmlessly upwards into the sky. The effect even works on arrows and sling stones, rituals so old that people have forgotten they are magic.

Dradkin

The Dradkin are a people from deep within the earth. To surface dwellers, they look fine-boned and delicate, their movements jerky and unsettling. The majority are albino, some yellowish with ruddy features.

Their eyes are small, and bright light hurts them. They are at home in darkness, but use tiny lamps or naked wicks when they can afford oil. They have excellent hearing, bordering on echolocation, which they supplement by placing their long fingers against the cavern walls.

They have no cloth, but wear "kinleather" skins of their dead (a final gift), tailored with thread spun from hair, and they make tools and buttons of the bones. Each of their garments is named after the giver, and precious to them.

Eons ago, the Dradkin were surface dwellers, but they and their gods were ploughed into the earth by the workings of time. Now they are spread between distant habitable communities. Those which are not too deep sometimes make nighttime raids on the surface (see "A Clutch of Shadows" on page 48), but Dradkin are both agoraphobic and unable to tolerate the brightness of the sun.

Dradkin value directness. Evasiveness or partial answers appear to them as incompetence or badly concealed weakness. If they do not wish to discuss or disclose something, it is more polite to lie outrageously or introduce bizarre non sequiturs.

Dradkin Fleshpriest

The most talented of the wealthy, pious-caste Dradkin are selected as fleshpriests. They begin learning the miracles of Suvuvena, shaper of flesh.

Acolytes know a cantrip to ruin echolocation, precipitate salt out of the body (causing weakness, spasms, and fainting), or to control d2 of a target victim's limbs.

Older fleshpriests become masters of chimeromancy, breeding Heilian gorgons or chitin drakes for use in wars with the Carreg.

Drake

Primitive throwbacks to an earlier age of the earth, drakes are leather-winged, reptilian predators—aggressive and small brained. They have sleek, glossy scales and long, sharp talons.

Drakes handle the cold winters of the Tristhmus poorly, but even in the warmer regions they are rare, being loners with large territories that they defend aggressively.

They are flightless for their first year, and bask in their mountain nests until they reach pony size, at which point they spread their ten-pace wings and find their own territory to patrol.

Drakes are endurance hunters, who use their soaring abilities to harass prey (commonly goats or plains deer, though they will eat anything) until it is too tired to fight back. At this point, they pounce with their talons, inflicting deep puncture wounds.

The Seree tried many times to use them as guardians, but their small brains and aggressive natures made them unsuitable. Most turned on their oaths within a decade or two, devouring their spell engines and becoming dragons.

Drake, Cave

These limbless beasts are not true drakes, but flying, winged worms with a taloned **grasper** at the end of their strong tails. They glide on rubbery wings in the upper reaches of Ur-Menig, seeking prey with heat-sensitive pits all along their oily bodies.

They use wounded prey as territory markers. Attacking cave drakes will swoop down and leave prey crippled with beak and talon attacks, then leave it to crawl around unless they are hungry (1-2 on a d6), or something (e.g., rescuers, another predator) interferes with it.

Dream Eater

The first sign of a dream eater's presence in a community is mass insomnia. People can't benefit from rest or sleep and, after a few days, begin experiencing acute exhaustion and hallucinations. Sleep-inducing magic lasts half as long as normal and provides no rest either.

The dream eater hides itself to avoid discovery (often in some fearful place), and acts at a distance to sow confusion and heighten fear, paranoia, and madness.

In addition to the insomnia, it has three Powers. It can **mimic the appearance** of anyone who has entered its hiding place. It can **amplify its victims' emotional states** to such a degree that those nearby feel them also. Finally, it can make insomnia-induced **hallucinations into illusions** experienced by everyone.

Dream eaters are demons of the underworld, which exploit spiritual weakness to insert themselves within groups of people. (Communities without ancestral hosts, or who have forsaken traditional protections, are especially vulnerable.)

If confronted, dream eaters appear as dense clouds of black smoke, filled with teeth and sharp, metal points. Their smoky bodies resist harm, but they are not invulnerable.

When a dream eater dies, it leaves behind a **crown** of sharp, metal teeth. When worn, it grants a limited form of the dream eater's mimicry, emotional amplification, and illusionism. Without the dreams of the community as fuel, however, anyone using these powers will quickly become exhausted themselves.

Emperor Tortoise

The emperor tortoises have walked the earth since before there were people. Supposedly, they follow the paths of the gods—the ley lines and the other, subtler scars of creation.

Walking for so long has given them immense wisdom. Pilgrims, whether scholars, penitents, or mad hedge wizards, follow them for as long as they can.

The humblest hope to earn wisdom as the tortoise has, slowly, by walking. The impatient or ambitious hope to hear the tortoise actually speak.

Venerable Ganth-Nndu is rumored to have spoken at the foot of the Ivory Library of Pelark, which promptly collapsed in shame at its ignorance. Great Mmth-Endu is said to have uttered the word that destroyed all of Darpera.

Most who follow the tortoises, however, learn only their own inner lessons: while the tortoises can speak, they almost never do.

It is said that sleeping in the shadow of a tortoise would impart the secrets of the gods—but that would require them to stop walking, which they never do either.

Mere hot-blooded sorcery cannot sway them. The tortoises remember the cooling of the earth! Magic crashes on a tortoise's mighty hide like waves upon a mountain. The noise may be loud, but the mountain is unchanged.

Fever Fly

The **hallucinogenic venom** in the bites of these fat, blue-eyed flies impair judgment for d12 hours.

Possible effects: victims conclude they're traveling the wrong direction; the boat/sack/helmet would be a great way to carry water; a lost loved one is just below the topsoil ("Can't you hear them?"); I have way too much hair; someone should probably go and make sure the king is okay.

Fire Beetle

Fire beetles are the brief adult stage of the apocalypse larvae. They are harmless, one pace in length, and fly noisily on crystalline wings. They occasionally spurt small flames, which can sometimes be spotted as tiny flickers in the darkness, clear across the Ur-Menig.

Fire Sprite

These strange beings appear as normal fire, but attentive listeners can make out the dry whispers of their voices. They are small spirits, easily caught in the wild by beginning summoners.

If you have ever asked, "How do the torches in this tomb stay lit?" the answer: fire sprites. Once captured, their former, natural lives are closed off to them—all they can hope for is sufficient fuel to not extinguish.

Fire Titan

The titans of orc legend were 8 paces tall, with brass skin and smoldering coal for eyes. Orc sooths tell how they were the first to walk the uncooled earth, even before the wailing horns of Thiru filled the air.

The titans were said to have built the City of Fire (now deep underground), whose cursed columns and temples are made from an architecture so stark and powerful, so absolute, that none whose eyes fall upon it can ever find solace in a lesser structure.

The writings of Seree sages dismiss orc mythology out of hand, and have many fanciful theories of their own: the titans were created by the gods to halt the expansion of Sorg (hence their ability to **disintegrate matter**); the titans were demonic creations meant to do battle with the war bodies of the demigods (hence their ability to **unravel magics**).

Others believed that they were neither, merely an early people adapted to the hellish landscape of old; or perhaps they never existed at all.

Giragita

The chameleons of the drylands grow to great size; the giragita largest of all. In the wild, they blend into cliff rocks using their natural camouflage, catching rats or desert arthropods with their long, sticky tongues.

Giragita can **climb** surfaces of any angle with ease, and can support several times their own weight with a single limb. They are very hard to see when they are still, but their ungainly walk can be spotted easily when they move.

Their minds are psychically porous—they use this to their advantage to anticipate the movements of prey, or to resolve inter-giragita territorial disputes without coming into contact.

If domesticated (they don't care where the bugs come from), they quickly pick up human languages, and they were sometimes used by the Seree as translators.

This ability, however, makes them susceptible to the whisperings of angry spirits, Powers of the earth, or mental domination by sorcerers or by ambitious Menaka.

They are not natural fighters, but deliver vicious, infection-prone bites if threatened or cornered.

Guardian

The Seree placed their spell engines (see "A Legacy of Magic" on page 143) in the care of magical, living guardians. Grown from mundane animals, they were fed a regimen of powdered gemstone and protective rituals. Reptiles were popular because of their uncanny stillness, but nearly every animal has been tried somewhere.

Long exposure to the intense magics caused them to grow in size and potency, while centuries of conversation and meditation granted them shrewdness and wisdom.

Mature guardians have innate command of the rituals in the spell engine they protect, as

well as d6 additional magical abilities plucked from long years of dreaming.

After centuries of neglect, guardians are rarely genial, but they crave news and educated conversation. Some have solved their desperate loneliness by listening to the whispers of the Powers of the earth. Others devoured the spell engine they were sworn to protect, becoming "dragons," able to fly and spit magical fire.

Ghost Bat

These giant bats (6-pace wingspan) are swift and nearly silent, but delicate. They are common in larger underworld spaces. Their fur is greyish white and of unrivaled softness.

They attack climbers and larger prey near steep drops with buffeting strikes, hoping to dislodge them so they can devour the crippled victim leisurely.

They are clever and easily trained; the Dradkin use them in the manner of surface falconers.

God Unmoving

Before it was claimed by the sea, the ancient spirits of Gaal invested themselves in titanic octopi and used them as their mighty instruments. Now that Gaal is lost, the spirits are silent, but the 'gods unmoving' swim on.

The gods unmoving have flawless **camouflage**. They cannot be seen to move, even when directly observed. (Perhaps they don't actually move at all.) It is merely *there*, now *here*, now *all around us*. Only the very alert will notice it. "Hey, where did all these tentacles come fro—"

Whole crews have been taken in broad daylight, without realizing anything was amiss.

The gods' only wish is to impress upon the living the true majesty of Gaal. They pull their victims below the waves, then inject their lungs with **hideous mucus**. This is lethal, but the body continues on in breathless undeath for d8 years before putrefying completely.

Victims are then taken down to the drowned realm to behold it. There, they are abandoned, and the god swims away, still unmoving.

Gray Monolith, Ascended

An ascended gray monolith is the result of apocalyptic necromancy, compressing thousands of spirits into a single being.

The monolith itself is made from thousands of bricks of compressed funerary ash, standing 10 paces tall. The outer surface is plastered with ash, then painstakingly embossed with rectangular **runes**: these spell out the repetitive but powerful ritual that bound the spirits together.

Ascended monoliths have one goal—teleport to an auspicious location and displace the local spiritual power. If they are attacking an ancestral host (of a settlement), the monolith will appear deep in the ground beneath the settlement. If they are attacking a Power of the earth (e.g., a potent nature spirit, a soil mother), it appears high in the air to prevent counter-attack.

The monolith's battle plays out in the unseen world, but the symptoms are acute for anyone connected to the local power—omens, nightmares, headaches, bleeding eyes. Each month the monolith is present, the local power loses d10% of its strength. When it reaches zero, it is either dislodged or destroyed.

Unfortunately, while monoliths are (by design) excellent at numinous contests of strength, they are unprepared for long years of dominion. Once they have displaced the local power, they are almost guaranteed to be usurped, in turn, by a demonic power of the underworld.

Handwolf

Long ago, a sorcerer promised the comfortable lives of humans to a pack of wolves, in exchange for a generation of servitude.

Instead, the magic only caused the wolves' next generation to be born with **random human parts**: two hands instead of paws, an oddly human mouth, a foot. These wretched "handwolves" took vengeance on the sorcerer.

Handwolves envy the apparent comforts of village life—stores of food and captive animals to eat. In hard winters, packs of handwolves have been known to converge and invade outlying hamlets, doing their best to live as they have seen people do (while lording over the terrified survivors). Inevitably, they run out of food or people, or fall to intra-pack squabbling and are forced to return to the wilds once more.

Handwolves know nothing about sorcery. All sorcerers look the same to handwolves, who will go to great lengths to capture them to force them to complete the transformation.

Heelan

The Heelan are stooped, bipedal reptiles—as large as humans, but shorter because of their posture. Their scaly bodies are sandy beige, with bright blue stripes. When traveling, Heelan carry bronze knives and staves, and favor filigreed gold cuffs and piercings as jewelry.

Heelan prefer intense, dry heat, and can tolerate desert extremes lethal to humans without drinking for days. They live in the Far Blightlands in small, nomadic groups, though they supposedly lived in great numbers north of Firevault.

Heelan Phib

According to the drylands Heelan, the phibs are degenerates who have succumbed to water-lust. Too water dependent to leave, they live out short, dull lives confined to the few hollows and caverns in the drylands with enough briny water to support fish. Common wisdom is that they soon starve.

Lycaeum sages, on the other hand, suspected that Heelan were aquatic as recently as the time of the Martoi, and that Heelan tolerance for the dry, desert heat is in fact a learnable skill.

Heelan Proudskull

The Heelan hunters who earn acclaim in battle win the title "proudskull," and show their kills with silver bullets drilled into their bony crests, faces, or wrists. Hunting is more of a sport than a necessity for Heelan (who survive just fine on succulents, cacti, and beetles), but water-shade-mounted proudskull hunting groups are occasionally pressed into service to defend their territory from sand monarchs and their thralls.

Heelan Warlock

The Heelan masters, high in Firevault, sent out warlocks to drive the undines from the soil and parch the lands.

Warlocks can throw bolts of fire from their fingertips, and know a ritual to construct an Iron Bell (see page 133), whose toll spreads the dreadful environmental change.

Heilian Gorgon

These great cats are like lions with a mane of asps, whose yellow eyes transfix with a stare. They are said to be the offspring of a hydra and the great lion of Heilia. This is only true metaphorically—any encountered now were made by Dradkin chimeromancers, from hunting cats and a serum of splice hydra blood.

Hell Knight

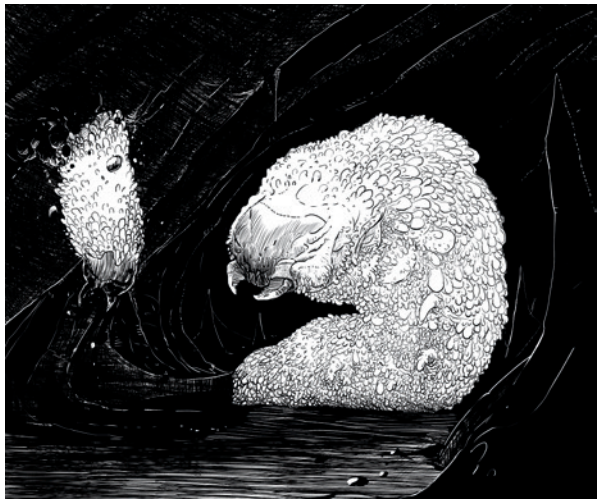
The armored executioners, poets, and warlords of Mulciber's hell are known as hell knights. Though each is different, all wear ornate, **anachronistic armor** from any of a dozen forgotten eons.

By tradition, hell knights do not attack one another, the only perk of their high station.

Each carries a **sulfur stone**, a sphere of yellow, fuming nastiness caked around a flake of the hate star (see page 87). The noxious gases make every breath painful, but the hell knights can breathe nothing else.

Their **notched swords** leave flesh undamaged, but shatter bone into needle splinters.

All one needs to do to become a hell knight is to kill one, wear its armor, and take up its notched sword. After all, what more is there to who we are than how people see us?



Hulk Larva

Insect larvae exposed to drake ichor grow to unnatural size. They chew smooth, slippery tunnels through the bedrock with their garnet-encrusted mandibles.

Legless, they can nevertheless wriggle quite quickly. The drake ichor gives them a random magical ability, which they use thoughtlessly and frequently, regardless of its effect.

Example abilities that have been recorded: a glare that makes metal permanently flammable; a stench that makes books explode like popcorn; spray of boiling mud; babbling curse that causes all speakers in the vicinity to say the same word over and over; produce a glistening wall of dirty water, two paces thick; the frostmantle curse, which makes a target's largest item of clothing permanently icy cold (great in summer, a death sentence underground).

Hulk Mother

Hulk mothers are a rare natural occurrence, an amalgam of dozens of giant insect larva, mutated and burned by the drake ichor concentrations sometimes found in coprolith deposits.

The Dradkin consider them a miracle of Suvuvena and will pay dearly for information about their location.

Drake ichor infuses them with wild, unpredictable magic, making confrontation in their meandering, branching tunnel warrens extremely dangerous. Hulk mothers have been known to magically create **shields of copper**, cause **false memories** (e.g., of having defeated the hulk mother already), produce large quantities of **frictionless slime**, emit **orange beams** that turn attackers to ash, or cause the spontaneous formation of **biting mouths** on nearby stone surfaces.

Hungry Spirit

The anxious, frantic spirits not part of an ancestral host are too faint to manifest as wraiths individually, but collectively they're very dangerous. They linger in cursed places, as the result of human sacrifices, battlefields, or the sites of villages lost en masse to the strange weapons of the Martoi.

Hungry spirits bring bad luck, misplacing vital items, loosening knots, or frightening animals. Sleepers and the badly injured risk possession when they are near. Dead bodies have been known to reanimate.

Once the hungry spirits control a body, they seek to (d6) 1-2: return to a nearby village to say goodbye properly, or 3-6: murder the nearest person in a futile act of revenge.

Isopod

These armored, segmented arthropods are common underground, ranging from the size of a fingernail to as long as a leg. Like crabs, they are opportunistic scavengers—if you are small (or helpless), they will begin eating. Most scurry away from lights, and if attacked, roll up into hard, chitinous balls.

Isopod, Leviathan

The Ricalu clans from the deepest places learned the trick of harnessing the largest of the isopods: the leviathans.

Leviathan isopods migrate long distances through subterranean deposits of gravel and the deathly ravines of the Ur-Menig.

The Ricalu hitch a ride by boring **fistula-berths** into the outer carapace. For those brave enough to endure a deafening, claustrophobic ride, spending days praying the lacquered door won't fail, it is a quick way to cross vast distances: the secret of the Ricalu migrations.

Jorn

The Jorn are an underground people, descended from giants (or so they say). They are tall and immensely wide, with broad features and peg-like teeth and nails.

Their tiny, milky eyes are almost entirely blind, and they maneuver in the dark using the long, stiff bristles on their faces and backs. (They hate open flame, which singes their bristles.)

Near the surface, Jorn are nearly feral. Often called "trolls" by surface people, they dig tunnels with their immense hands, like moles.

Jorn of the deep are said to have mastered the art of travel using void worms, steering them with lune-moth "lamps." By this means, they can reach many secret spaces. The queen of the Jorn was said to ride an enormous "chariot of worms," and extract tribute from huge swaths of the surface realm with her iron-clad soldiers.

Jorn are violently allergic to garnet, which provokes an explosive, regenerative effect—eyes, fingers, limbs, and mouths sprouting from the contact site.

Lady of Memory

Rather than go down into the earth with the dead when their time had come, the Martoi people chose to haunt the world, to live on in illusion. This works as long as they are not outnumbered by living people, which forces back the veil and make them see themselves as the incorporeal wraiths they truly are.

To prevent this, Martoi sorceresses drop Tears of Memory into the waters of the land around them, a poison that causes the living to abandon their homes and families, crawling away to live as the animals do.

As a noble of Martoi society, a Lady of Memory will often be accompanied by an entourage of knights and attendants. Together, they ride forth to demand fealty from terrified villages.

Ladies of Memory wield the strongest of Martoi magics: they can **rob strength** from the body with a glare, urge their great horses (and those with them) to the **speed of the wind**, take **bird form**, or strike bargains with the Powers of the earth to call up other great curses or effects.

If revealed as wraiths (e.g., by being outnumbered, or by an attack that reveals their incorporeal nature), they grow enraged.

Lantern Worm

The worm is a strange and deadly horror of the underworld, fifteen paces long and as thick as a thigh. Its head is bare bone, the white jaws delivering venomous bites from a pike's reach with blinding speed. Most strikes are fatal.

At the tip of its tail bobs a lantern of bone, whose dread light casts a **prophetic snare**: if the worm is slain while the lantern still shines, time seemingly rewinds d20 minutes, undoing anything that happened. Everyone affected remembers the rewound events.

In fact, the snare is a prophetic, mass hallucination, and the "rewinding" merely an awakening. If the lantern is smashed (in reality or in a hallucination), the worm loses this power.

Malak

Malak are giant, spiral-shelled mollusks with a cluster of strong tentacles around their mouths.

They frequent rocky coastal areas, often lying in wait in shallow tidal pools. They eat fish when the tide comes in, but will happily snare larger prey that blunders into reach.

Meeb

When undisturbed, these glassy slimes spread out large and thin, looking like wet stone or puddles. If awakened by light or sound, they draw up into keg-sized blobs over a few minutes. Once a minute they can **leap** surprisingly far, grappling their victims to dissolve them in **acidic juice**.

In places where they congregate, there can be a dozen or more in the vicinity. They are most vulnerable to cutting weapons.

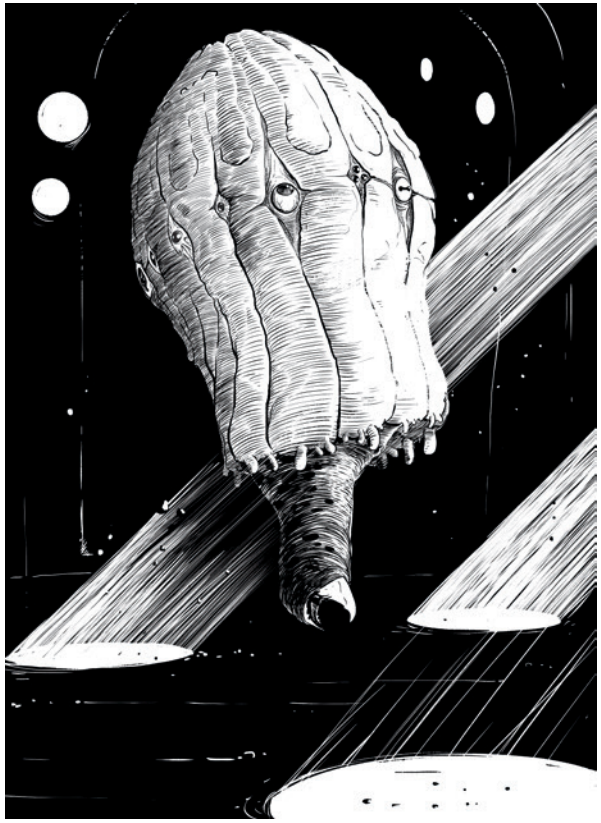
Menaka

The Menaka are great, scaly beings three paces in height. A dozen chameleon eyes pivot and peer in every direction and a soft, tubular "mouth" dangles from the underside. A bladder of buoyant gas lets them float about freely.

Their hides are thick and their bites vicious, but they only fight as a last resort—Menaka are fiendish parasites, specialized in the exploitation of communities.

They insert themselves into groups by making themselves useful. They are highly intelligent, and well versed on many civil and agricultural matters, having parasitized many cities over the course of their long, weird project.

Once situated, they set about performing subtly destructive social experiments, to see how the community writhes and changes. What is the worst plausible policy that could be enacted? A preferred tactic is layers of supporters, each so compromised that none could survive the Menaka's ouster from the community.



Menaka are magically adept and immediately learn any ritual performed in their presence. On a 1-3 on d6, they can interfere with it as it is performed, redirecting it.

The Menaka are explorers from a later age of the earth, when the current world has been ploughed over, buried far below the surface. To them, they are exploring a mythic underworld, a giant cavern full of memories that refuses to see itself as it is.

As a last resort, Menaka can escape to their own time, a sweltering jungle criss-crossed by sluggish streams. Anyone near them is dragged along with them, although anyone straying more than 50 paces from the Menaka returns to their present time.

Moon Baby

If a moon-scryer ever uses their powers selfishly to look into their own future, they are instantly replaced by a moon baby. Whether it's an alien presence or a magical inversion of the seer, a dangerous force has entered the world.

A moon baby looks like the seer it has replaced, but hollow and inside out, like the inner side of a plaster cast. It makes heavy, ceramic clicks as it walks.

It pretends to be who it once was as long as possible. What it wants, however, is to give **clairvoyant visions**. Anyone who accepts a vision from a moon baby sees a plausible but false vision, a creation of the Moon Baby.

Moon babies can see out of the eyes of everyone ever given a vision, and their alien minds let them integrate this all simultaneously. In the case of magic users, they insist on a **kiss**. If this happens, the victim is immediately teleported to the moon, and replaced with a moon baby themselves.

Normal weapons cannot harm the moon baby; any object striking it turns to water and splashes to the floor.

It attacks with a **silvered knife**; it can inflict cuts at any range and always on the opposite side of the target.

Moon babies **transform or reflect all magical effects** which target them. Roll a d4. On a 1, the opposite effect occurs (healing instead of harm, etc.). On a 2 or 3, the effect is reflected back toward the caster. On a 4, both.

Mote

Motes are hybrid beings, animals reshaped to resemble human form and given one of the many sparks of intelligence formed when a spell engine is disassembled.

They retain the smallish stature and fur or scales of their original lemur, otter, or reptile heritage.

They are long lived, but sterile. They are fascinated by babies of any sort, human or animal. They are less sympathetic toward parental bonds, with which they have no direct experience.

With no ancestral spirits, previous generations of cultural traditions to guide them, motes are extremely vulnerable to exploitation. Those who have survived are deeply wary of outsiders.

Murk Star (aka Murker)

These cave-swelling starfish have five spindly arms that glow a faint, luminous orange. They exude a **paralytic mucus** that they use to catch fish and other prey.

Though they hunt alone, murk stars are gregarious and occasionally come together in swarms of dozens or hundreds of stars.

Murk stars have a limited telekinesis that lets them fashion protective **outer casings** from mud in order to come ashore without drying out. Encased, they walk about like five-legged crabs.

Siltbody murkers are slow-moving ambush hunters that hide themselves in mud, leaving one glowing limb tip as a lure.

Mature murk stars can fashion casings of stone for use in war. These are immensely tough.

A rare few master both the wit and subtlety needed to shape flexible casings of clay (sometimes two-legged with arms, sometimes four-legged). Their fifth arm resides in a clay "head," curled up like a long, glowing tongue. These **claybodied** murkers live alongside other peoples (see "The Cleft of Five Worlds" on page 62) and participate fully in society. They are mute, but communicate using a set of hand-signs easily learned by anyone who bothers.

Nuss Eruption

In a remote region of the luminous void is a patch of chaotic, vital energy. There is no matter there, and its inhabitants clamor for material forms.

They are jealous of the selfish mortals that express only one stable form during their long lives, resisting every change. Worst of all is the mortal habit of producing near-identical offspring—an act of supreme selfishness.

If they had the chance, they would use the material realms more wisely. They want bodies, to share if they must, so they can show the selfish the joy of eruption!

Each eruption uses the body given to it to express its unique form, but there are themes:

- Warty spheres
- Tough, rope-like umbilicals
- Tentacled mats
- Branching worms, with many legs or none
- Toothy, stud-like protrusions
- Dozens of tiny, bead-like eyes

They are erratic and short-lived, erupting into new configurations every few days. Eruptions are alarming, but not particularly dangerous. They need to eat, of course, but are usually having too much fun feeling hunger to do anything about it.

Nuss Exile

The Nuss that dwell secretly among people have abandoned their true, chaotic forms (a heresy to most Nuss) to adopt human shape. This tires them; when exhausted or angered, the guise slips a little and their skin ripples with bumps.

As they cannot return home, they will do nearly anything to protect the secret of their presence. In desperate situations, they will abandon humanoid form to sprout whatever they need: new limbs, mouths, tentacles, claws, blade-like horns, spikes, protective fur, or scales.

They dissolve into iron-smelling goo if slain.

Nuss Harbinger

Harbingers resemble tall, walking bats with trilateral symmetry (three wings, three legs, three arms), topped with an eye-encrusted mass.

Ungainly on the ground, they **fly** as invisible lightning, tearing the sky with a deafening noise. Their hollow-tipped **spears** inject the essence of a Nussan form; anyone stabbed begins turning into a Nuss eruption. Starting at the wound, the change spreads rapidly, completing in d6+5 days. Harbingers carry d3 doses of Nussan essence, but refilling their spears takes time.

Harbingers are not interested in martial glory, only bringing forth new eruptions. They will retreat from stiff resistance and wait for a chance for an ambush, but they are determined: unworthy Harbingers are recycled, their matter used to express new forms.

Ogre

Ogres are the solitary giants that lead hidden lives on the edges of populated areas. They skulk below bridges or haunt roadways and forest paths to waylay and eat travelers.

They are usually remnants of forays from Firevault centuries ago, adventurers in their own right seeking fortune in the lands of the small and weak. Others are criminals, oathbreakers, or debtors forced out as exiles.

Their oafishness is feigned; no ogre could survive long among humans without cunning. They can throw heavy objects (rocks, stumps, unfortunate people) with great speed and accuracy. They use dense or rough terrain to hamper riders and archers; they cross deep water, haul themselves up trees, or scamper up small cliffs to avoid or separate pursuers. Their paths of retreat may have concealed, sharpened stakes, leaf-covered pits, or both. Ogre haunts will have many hiding spots—hollows surrounded by bushes, dense copses, and sturdy trees to climb.

Rarely, ogres have managed to hold on to a few advantages from their homeland: a companion or two, mighty war bows, or fine armor made from metal or lacquered plates.

Ogres have a love of gold and precious things, which they hoard in the hopes of buying their way back into their communities in the north.

Onddo

The quick-brained servants of a soil mother are grown to suit various purposes. All have a tough, woody exterior mottled like the leaf litter of the forest floor. When stationary, they are extremely difficult to spot, often mistaken for logs or stumps.

They are speechless, but constantly release and exchange spores with the forest, and so know the will of their soil mother instinctively.

Hunting Onddo are humanoid and wield wooden spears. **Tusked Onddo** are huge, headless quadrupeds, used to dig stream beds or to haul boulders.

Seed Onddo are roughly dog-like, with a sharp **beak** to inject spore-filled venom. This causes an irresistible wanderlust. When victims

(eventually) die and return to the earth, a new soil mother is born there.

Though tough, onddo are not made to last long. In the first year of their lives, onddo can regenerate rapidly unless burned or completely hacked apart. Once a winter passes, onddo can no longer heal, and few last longer than a year or two.

Yet, a small number survive to become **venerable onddo**—they can **speak**, and (when it suits their soil mother) act as ambassadors to other surface-dwelling people.

Orc, Blight

The wasteland raider clans are called "orcs" for their practice of eating the ash of the dead. Despite the barren environment, their blasphemy makes them strong—they can run a day and a night without resting, and their ember-like eyes reveal the secrets of the night and of the unseen world around them.

They are nomadic, and erect tall "**orcnests**" for protection: bowl-like structures, balanced on a tripod of huge tree trunks. A reeking cesspool at the base keeps away scavenging blight ants.

With no ancestral host to protect them, orc lands are plagued with demons. By necessity, their sooths are skilled in bargaining with the unseen.

These dealings occasionally produce sorcerers or (more rarely) half-demon offspring.

Orc clans number 20-30 individuals. At any given time, half the nest will be out hunting, patrolling their borders for raids from other clans, or scouting for the next orcnest site.

The appearance of an orcnest heralds an invasion of blight ants within a month or two. The best hunting is found in the patchy new forests—the areas which have had a few years to recover from the last passing blight ant swarm. The ants, however, follow soon for the same reason. Panicked urgency is a fact of orc life.

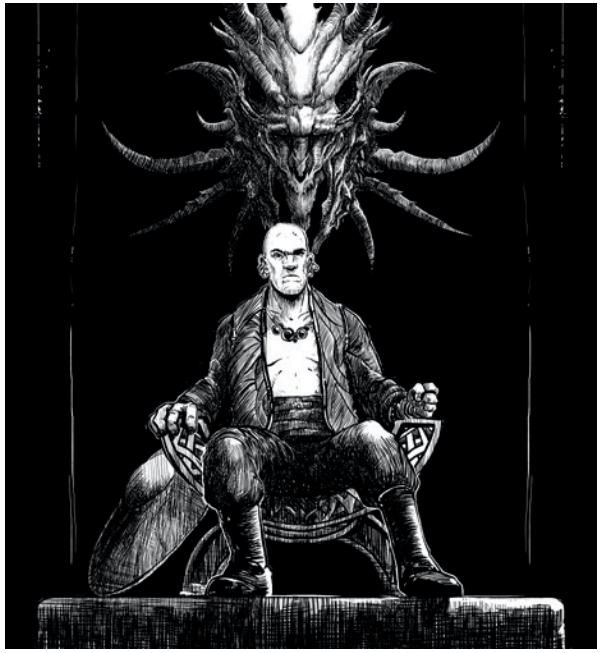
From time to time, a strong leader unites several clans, but these alliances are short lived. The scarcity of food causes tensions wherever they congregate, and demonic whispering keeps them paranoid, mistrustful, and prone to sudden outbursts of violence.

Their raids into the borderlands are swift and brutal: killing as many as they can and driving away the survivors, just long enough to consume the ash before fleeing into the blight.

Orc, Primordial

In the time of ancient Thiru, some made themselves strong by hunting the spirits of the dead. Eaters of the black gruel (see "Acolyte of Raal" on page 108) dabble in mimicking them, but the primordial orcs devoured thousands.

By depleting the ancestral hosts, they left the land vulnerable to demons from the deep, rising up to fill the emptiness. The strongest of the orcs laughed and hunted them also.



Pelican, Dire

These huge birds stand five paces high, with a nine-pace wingspan. They prefer fish, but will eat anything they can swallow, including people. Dire pelicans attack larger prey by snapping, battering, and when they can, **swallowing**.

Once a victim is held in the tough, rubbery throat sac, the pelican flees to subdue them in peace. This involves alternately beating the sac against the pelican's body to crush the victim, violent shaking, and slurping water into the sac to cause drowning.

It can take half an hour for human-sized prey to weaken enough to be swallowed, but unless victims have a sharp knife and enough unbroken limbs to use it, the prospects of escape are slim.

Pit Lord

The infernal lands are ruled by the pit lords—massive, squat beings, charred and distended like leering bullfrogs. Flames spurt from their coal-hot skin, which no blade can pierce.

Their **gaze** causes uncontrollable babbling—secrets, intentions, held incantations, and the true names of loved ones all tumble out. Once per day, they may pronounce the irrevocable **death** of anyone present—the target dies within 13 hours.

The **blessing** of a pit lord sets the skin aflame with a fire that scalds and blisters eternally but doesn't consume.

Their sulfurous bowels swarm with infernal, toothed **slugs**, which emerge if the pit lord is mortally wounded.

If they were once human, they've forgotten, and fancy themselves alone in their clear-eyed grasp of hideous reality.

Ricalu

The Ricalu are the night people, sometimes called "goblins," "elves," or "kobolds." There is a great variety to their bodies; they can be long limbed,

furry, sticky, or tiny, but all see well in the dark. (Daylight is painful to their round, black eyes.) They have many excellent masons and know rituals to find or hide passages underground.

Ricalu stories say they were called up from their homeland in the deep by Deel to fight the Seree, but they were betrayed. After their service, they were abandoned, unable to find their way home again.

Isolated from their life-giving homeland, Ricalu have had to resort to magical tricks to replace their numbers.

In a few places they live well, but without the numbers to force the surface people to reckon with them fairly, most Ricalu live in marginal, itinerant groups. They scour the lands for a way "back home," meeting up in caves, sewers, and back alleyways to exchange news and faint hope.

Rust Soldier

These iron golems are said to be gifts to the Carreg from the deceased god, Gamandes. Though the Carreg fear iron, the rust soldiers' service to the Carreg saints is symbolic of the freedom from fear that faith in Gamandes offers.

They help placidly, demonstrating the calm that is so valued in Carreg society. They have dog-like intelligence and can speak clearly (albeit simply).

They are mechanical contraptions, powered by a spring of white metal under unbelievable pressure. If they are allowed to rust too much (which they eventually do if not kept completely dry), they fail in explosive and alarming ways, sending rusty components in every direction at high speed.

Sand Monarch

The squid-like demons forced to the surface of the drylands live cruel, tormented lives. The sand flays their skin and their tentacles wither off. Those that survive use their dark gifts to **enthrall** desert dwellers—giant geckos, camel spiders, or unfortunate Heelan. These they press into service as transportation, food gatherers, or bandits to extort Heelan bands, bringing goods back to their subterranean burrows where they hide from the blistering sun.

Sand Sprite

The whorls of dust that play across desert dunes were once undines (see page 126) exiled to the surface by whatever force has dried the land.

They are playful, and **dancing** with them relieves thirst for an entire day. In exchange, they demand a small service or token of gratitude. If this is not done, they attack.

Angry sand sprites fight by multiplying water in the body. This causes splitting headaches, blindness as the eyes run with tears, and wracking coughs as moisture floods the lungs. Victims who are outnumbered will drown.

Selk, Grush

Across the astral lands is the lost city of Tlarba. Its people are the selks: tall, skin-and-bones humanoids with large eyes, mottled skin, and copious, upward-pointing bristles ("grush").

Their body language is alien and stiff-seeming, but they are full of feeling and passion.

Selk, Ghost

Some adult selks begin to manifest their astral nature, becoming translucent and insubstantial.

In Tlarba, ghost selks live and train as a warrior caste. They use Saaru-traditional weapons from the wars with the craesten: short, chitin-breaking **seax** and double-ended **quilled javelins**, one end a cluster of sharp quills (to more easily find armored eyes), the other end cut from a **paralytic resin**.

Physical attacks affect them, but much less than normal. Their own attacks are unimpeded.

Shadow Bohka

The Carreg say that Bohka is the wretched offspring of demon and sorcerer. He carries a **lamp** that casts darkness; surface dwellers produce brightly glowing "shadows" which dance as he moves.

He can snatch the bones from your arm with his **thieving touch**. These he takes and sews into his great coat.

Bohka is **invisible** in his shroud of darkness, but his bone-lined coat **rattles** as he moves. He can be seen once injured, for his **blood glows** like molten iron.

He carries one of the Books of Undibol (see page 130) and reads it regularly.

Shrine Baby

These alarming beings are made from clay-wrapped stillborn, turned by the spirits of Raal into tiny, clever homunculi. Some believe an ancestral spirit animates them, others believe the child's spirit was returned to a body made sturdier by the ritual.

Siren

The sirens are women transformed by the blessing of the goddess of the ocean. They have skin as gray and slippery as eels, rows of sharp, shark-like teeth, and milky eyes that see in darkness above or beneath the waves.

Their low, **mesmerizing songs** confuse men, giving sirens time to indulge their hunger for man flesh. Men are devoured immediately; women are given a chance to serve the goddess of the ocean and become sirens themselves.

The **crystal knife** of a siren is precious to her and the secret of her immortality—touching it for even a moment transfers a year of life from its victim to its siren owner.

When it serves them, sirens appear as their human selves, sitting naked by a tidal pool or bobbing in the shallows.

Slewt

The Slewts of Tlarba are glistening, orange amphibians. They are a small people, but lean and muscular. They are joyful beings, and spend their leisure hours frothing up their pools and warbling together in high-pitched harmonies.

Slewt slime **bonds metal to metal** instantly, which makes a mess of armor (especially mail). They grapple armored foes with this in mind, hoping to pin a weapon or arm in place before moving on to softer targets.

Slewts are not cowed by defeat or capture, and will readily surrender if battle goes against them, only to start fighting again moments later.

Soil Mother

The primordial forests of the Tristhmus are suffused with the fungal threads of vast, intelligent beings: soil mothers.

Their thoughts are slow and deep, spread among thousands of coconut-like ganglia buried in the soil. By touch and taste, they know everything that happens within their domain.

Though imperceptibly slow, they are immensely powerful, able to reshape the landscape. Streams flow and plants grow only where the soil mother chooses.

In a soil mother's territory, the flesh of large game animals becomes bitter and mildly toxic. By inducing mycotoxins into the plants and berries, the soil mother dissuades predators and scavengers from eating the brains she needs to grow onddo: quickened fungal servitors. When the need for many onddo arises, soil mothers produce rich, fruiting groves to attract animals in large numbers.

Soil mothers communicate with their onddo with **hallucinogenic spores**, but forest cults have occasionally learned to sense the "will of the forest." They are so expansive and alien in their thoughts that they are effectively an organic Power of the earth, with strange gifts to give. (See "The Roots of Ambition" on page 58.)

Soil mother ganglia are sweet and nutritious, but eating them earns the eternal hatred of all soil mothers.

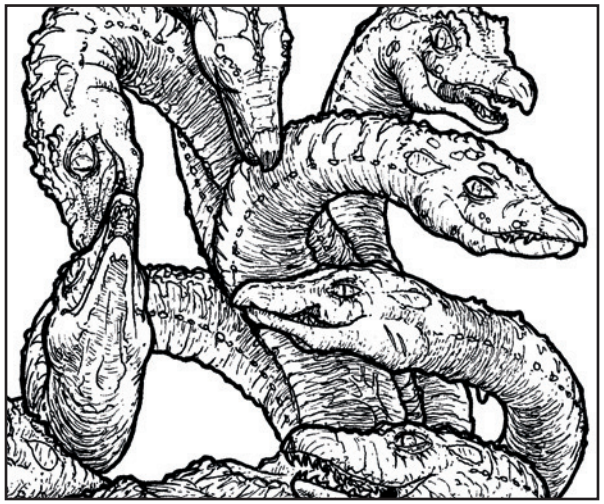
An enraged soil mother is fearsome and can poison ground water with **hallucinogenic toxins** (designed to target the offending species), or send hunting onddo as assassins.

Splice Hydra

A splice hydra is a chimeromantic abomination, made by fusing seven great serpents into a single creature. They are aquatic by preference, but the human lungs used in their construction make them amphibious.

When they wish, splice hydras **sing** like an overpowering, discordant choir. Joyous, ecstatic, and terrified voices all intertwine into one.

The sound is irresistibly primal. Only those of great will can resist joining its dreadful song, singing wordlessly at the top of their voices. The especially weak-willed can do nothing else while they sing.



Splice hydra blood and eggs are alchemically auspicious, nearly as potent and useful as dragon ingredients.

Storm Seal

These magical creatures dwell within thunderclouds and the airy canyons between mountains. They swim through the air gracefully, winding sinuously before spiraling in to attack.

Their newborn **minnows** are aquatic, but the mouse-sized **pups** take to the air in wingless, flying swarms, keeping down the midges, flies, and fleas in coastal wetlands.

Adolescents are the size of large dogs, and are large enough to hunt. They are cruel, playful, and opportunistic. **Adults** are dolphin sized, large enough to lift a struggling horse up into the air, to be cast down to its death.

Sylph Spider

Sylph spiders are giant, bristly hunting spiders which hunt from the air. They spin silken membranes between their legs and soar on the thermal currents. They are ambush hunters, large enough to snare and envenom people, goats, or boars. They can't take off from level ground, but by jumping into the breeze off trees.

Sylphs avoid close-knit herds and groups, as they are vulnerable once on the ground. They will, however, follow groups for hours at a time, waiting for a straggler to separate or fall behind, and then silently pounce.

They prefer to hunt in broken, rocky terrain or sparse forests—places where they can get high enough to lift off once more.

They will drag lone victims up into trees to drain them quietly. If this is not possible, they will sometimes leave a dying victim to soften up and dissolve internally. The sweating caused by their venom is pungent and repels scavengers.

Tcheth

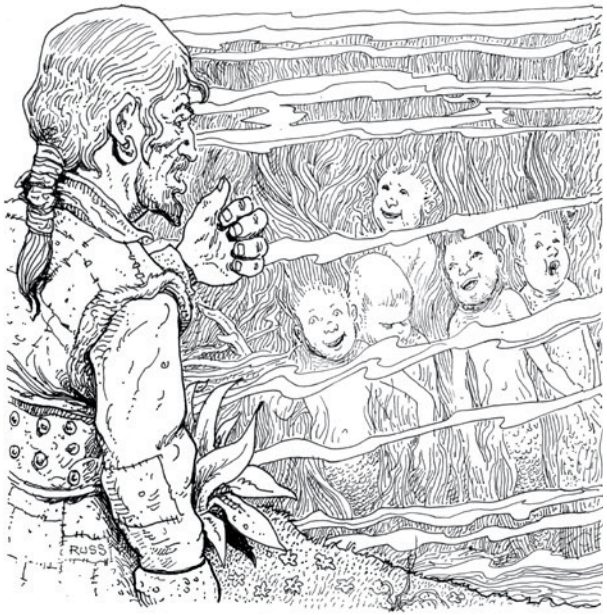
The Tcheth are long-limbed, lightly furred people, with long, narrow skulls reminiscent of ferrets. They are excellent climbers, and their flexible bones let them squeeze through remarkably narrow gaps.

They are originally from deep underground, but they see poorly in the dark. Tcheth legends say they were forced to give up their night eyes in a bargain with the demon Guguluin, to win their freedom from the Jorn.

They are gregarious and form large fishing communities on the surface, preferring river gorges with good climbing. They built Pale Yugra in the Cleft, and some see signs of their handiwork in the original structures of Novy Dom.

Tcheth love grass, thinking its texture and appearance hilarious. They are masterful weavers, and a traveling band of Tcheth takes no greater pleasure than in weaving a new, grass hut for themselves at every campsite.

Their ritual magic is based on weaving, and it's said that the witch-grain baskets (which insects compulsively fill with nuts, seeds, and grubs) were a Tcheth creation.



Undine

The undine are spirits which bring water to the surface. Where they dwell, natural springs are plentiful and rains come often.

Undines are said to have three forms. When seen in pools or streams, they appear as ghostly children. Their words cannot be heard by ears, but are remembered several days later. This makes dealing with them dangerous, since a back-and-forth conversation is impossible, and they have many rigid laws and customs that they expect visitors to uphold.

When angered, they take on the forms of watery serpents with **venomous bites**, almost invisible when submerged.

Many pastoral shrines are built to them, and village sooths say that mist and fog are a third form of the undines, moving about the land as the eyes and ears of the Powers. If their demands are not appeased (with suitable shrine donations), sooths say the undines punish the land by bringing droughts.

Vampire

Vampires are wraiths who have acquired a taste for the blood of the living. By drinking it, they regain a solid, mortal body. Freed from the ashen realm, they do anything they must to never return to it.

Since they are dead that prey on the living, they are the counterpart of orcs (living who prey on the dead).

To keep their mortal bodies, they must feed weekly. Because of this, many vampires cultivate positions of power and influence that give them opportunities to exploit living victims. Others haunt alleyways in the towns and cities, devouring those who won't be missed.

Only the most desperate vampires hunt in the wilderness, for like all dead without the protection of an ancestral host, they are vulnerable to demons.

Vampires fight as wraiths do, with silvered or enchanted weapons, or whatever magic they learned in life.

If a vampire's mortal body is slain, it reverts to its wraith form. Vampires are careful to keep a silvered weapon hidden, so they can use it to hunt if they are driven from their bodies.

Vampire Bush

These large bushes appear to be covered in pink, circular flowers year-round. Their tough, raspy tendrils reflexively grasp anything that brushes them. The whole bush then curls around to encircle the prey, which is drained of its blood through the sucker-like "flowers."

They evolved to catch small birds and rodents, so they are not a serious threat to alert adventurers with a knife handy. Tired travelers who stumble directly in, however, quickly come to a bad end. So do armored or encumbered adventurers who can't as easily wriggle out of the bush's grip.

Vampire bushes are sensitive to spiritual energies, and when favored by spirits or Powers, they can grow into substantial trees. These are extremely dangerous, especially to anyone who wanders beneath the canopy.

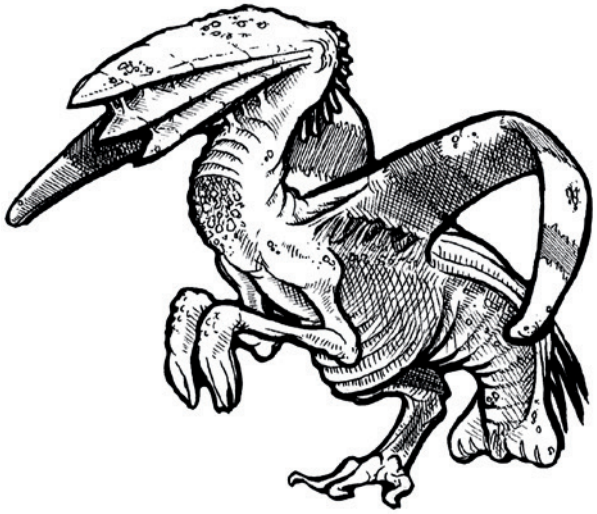
Vinteralf

Beyond the high glaciers is a land so cold that humans simply cannot enter. There, the stars sing their songs to the seers of the Vinteralf.

Vinteralf are tall, thick-skinned, and blubbery. Their faces are seal-like, with stubby snouts and tiny eyes. When they must, they can hibernate for several decades. Only the hardiest Vinteralf come to the glacier lands to defend their borders, hunt the white hydra, or to eject an exile.

They will be well armed, with carefully made, form-fitting metal or laminate armor. Most will be carrying a supply of cyldwort, a warmlands herb that cools the body enough for them to function.

Some Vinteralf parties will have a **confessor-acolyte**, a junior star seer able to see three heartbeats into the future, making them uncannily good in melee.



Void Gull

Deprived of their home plane long ago, these alien gulls have adapted to the void that howls between realms. When in mortal lands, they are found in small patrols or scouting groups.

More suited to the void, the pony-sized gulls are passable gliders but weak fliers. On flat ground, they move by "glide-hopping," bouncing up on their one leg and flapping for a few feet before hopping once more. They are swift, but tire easily.

Alone, they are nervous and inclined to keep their distance. When two or more are present, they revert to their military training, seizing victims with their hands and delivering axe-like blows with their bony, tripartite "beaks."

Gull "nests" are ruled over by a **void-bringer**, a gull with considerable magical ability.

They are keenly interested in sorcerers and summoners of all types and will abduct them opportunistically, hoping to extract magical secrets from them. As they are fascinated by planar destruction, the presence of a nest is a dire sign.

Void Worm

A mature void worm is twenty paces long, with a body made of nothingness. Where it lies, no rock exists. It inches forward slowly, occasionally intersecting a tunnel or cave. Once it has passed, there is undisturbed solid rock once more.

The appearance of a void worm often goes unnoticed. They're silent, and whatever they eat, they are uninterested in surface dwellers. They're heralded by nothing more than a circular opening appearing in a wall, enlarging to the full diameter of the worm, revealing an ever-shortening tunnel.

An hour or more later, when the worm crosses whatever room or corridor it blundered into, a similar breach opens on the far side.

At the tip of each tunnel is a seam of gold, which to the untrained eye appears to be a natural part of the rock. A thick, rich vein of pure gold! But alas, mining this kills the worm. The worm's nothing-body begins to rot immediately. Crumbling, porous rock encroaches on all sides, replacing the smooth tunnel with crunching, delicate spurs of natural rock. In a few weeks, the void has closed completely.

The brave or foolhardy might run along its body, using it as a momentary glimpse into the surrounding rock, to other caverns or true seams of value, but the risk of being trapped is ever-present. Wise miners let the worms pass.

Warbody

When the demigods retaliated against the Seree, they made special bodies for themselves. An account of the attack on the pit of ensnarement (see "The Chains of Heaven" on page 50) described Deel as having a body of dark glass, carrying a lance of white metal. They flew as if blown by a hurricane, and their lances struck like lightning, smashing the masonry of the pit fortress apart. They hummed and crackled like spell engines, which may have given Pit-Master Zecoxy some clue he used to stun Deel before he was torn apart by Egesa.

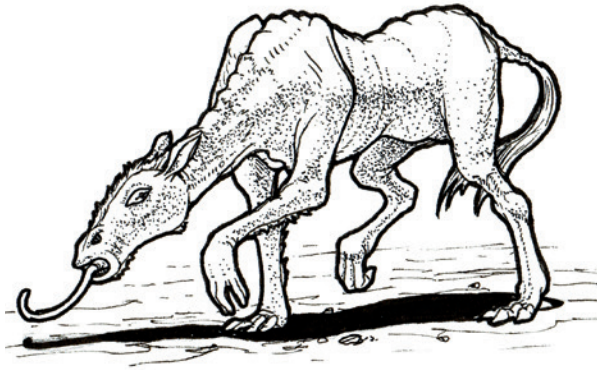
Water Shade

These pony-like creatures are magical scavengers, patrolling the drylands for prey. If one crosses a traveler's tracks, it pursues, stealing its victim's life from their footprints—fresh is best, but hour-old footprints will do.

Anyone so pursued must consume twice the normal amount of food and water or collapse from exhaustion. Each shade can affect d2 people once it begins following.

If spotted and chased, shades will keep their distance. They can outrun people, but tire quickly if forced to gallop for an extended period.

The Heelan sometimes use them as mounts, using the water shades' tracking abilities for their own sport.



Werewolf, Leádstæf

The Leádstæf are deranged celestial beings, torn from the heavens by the pit of ensnarement (see "The Chains of Heaven" on page 50). They roam the earth, looking to manifest their anguish and dread upon the people of the surface.

The Leádstæf are incorporeal spirits who attack by possession. They can control anyone "marked" by the Powers, such as by curses inflicted by the Powers, with any injury having

a divine origin (including white metal weapons, divine warbodies, and the bite of Leádstæf themselves).

Anyone possessed by a Leádstæf immediately transforms into its animal form. Most of the time this is a huge, white-furred wolf, but other forms include a flayed arctic fox, a horse-sized arctic bat, or a three-headed polar bear. All are ferocious in battle.

Killing the animal form ejects the Leádstæf from the host (though it can possess someone again the next night), who awakens with serious injuries. If the mortal blow is inflicted with fire or a silver weapon, the Leádstæf dies permanently, but so does the host.

Whip Scorpion

Nightmares of black chitin three paces long, they patrol underground places incessantly, seeking sound or movement. They seize prey with their pincers, they then spray strong **acid** from their stiff, whip-like tails.

They are perfect **climbers**, moving easily along walls and ceilings. A faint **vinegar smell** is sometimes the only warning that one is near.

Wraith

When the fortunate die, they join with an ancestral host to solemnly watch over the living. Some are unwilling or unable to join, or are rejected by the ancestors—the very selfish or hateful, whose spirits are bent by self-interest. Others have minds filled with alien rituals or corrupted by wizard flowers, and cannot meld their whispering voices with the ancestors.

Most of these dissipate in grief or wander off to be caught by demons. The strongest willed, however, go on as wraiths.

Wraiths may use whatever rituals they knew in life and can wield silver or enchanted weapons or objects (including wizard flowers), as these exist on both sides of the veil.

the Wyrm Jokun

Jokun was once a Seree guardian, grown from an immature drake. She devoured her spell engine within decades of abandonment by the departure of the Seree, becoming a dragon.

The indigestible spell engine inside her pulls warmth from her environment to power itself—she radiates cold, but she is uncomfortably warm everywhere outside the glacial lands. Once per day she can vent the engine's power as a blast of heat so intense that everything but white metal or dark glass liquifies or turns to ash.

She is long and slender, and when her wings are folded, she can easily navigate spaces meant for people—a fact that has led her to feast in more than one fortress thought to offer security.

Her scales are as clear as glass, but as strong as steel, and she is invisible when she sleeps.

She cannot properly understand language, but barks half-remembered nursery rhymes from her infancy in a sarcastic tone.

Wyvern

Wyverns are the offspring of guardian reptiles and a debased mystical order (which they later ate). They are giraffe-sized winged terrors with the playful and murderous demeanor of house cats. Wyverns patrol all day, drifting high on the updrafts. They swoop down to snatch prey from the ground, carry them high, drop them, and then do it again.

They have oddly **human laughs**, and if need be, beg for their lives in **human voices**. They have **four eyes**, each of which is a precious gemstone.

Rarities

Aether Sand

Entering or leaving the astral realm produces a few grains of sand, each one a lost memory. Consuming this sand brings these memories to life vividly.

Most memories are mundane fragments of distant lives, others are horrifying or beautiful. In some places, it is said, vast dunes of it rise to meet a white, flickering sky.

al Bim's Mirror

This ornate mirror of polished steel stands waist high. The will of an attuned viewer can cause the reflected location to move, causing the mirror to reveal places up to thirty leagues away. Not only does it show distant places, but it can be stepped through, like a portal.

The troublesome mirror has grown clouded and dark from constant use. It is sturdy but not indestructible. If cracked, it may still be used for scrying, but attempting to traverse it will cause lethal harm.

Analeaf

This forest shrub is ignored by foragers because of its bitterness. Some in Strielund brew it into a tea, for no reason they can bring to mind, since it tastes quite unpleasant.

As it happens, this tea provides complete immunity to the poisons of the Martoi, though few know this.

Anvil of the Ice Lords

The forge-masters of the Vinteralf used this rounded anvil of star metal for their most elaborate works. Anything forged upon it is brought to the full attention of the Powers of the luminous void.

Barque of Stryggal Ninestakes

This massive ship of stone and ice was cut from the mountains by the giants of Firevault. Eight sacrificial pools were designed to channel blood into an ***iron cask***, lifting the entire barque into the sky. It is absolutely not seaworthy in any way.

Bitter Ointment

This striped, copper carafe contains twelve applications of a thick ointment, made by void gulls to cure Nuss eruption. If applied before exposure, it will prevent infection for two days. Just the smell of it is a grave provocation to the Nuss.

Black Cube

An indestructible cube of ***dark glass***, as big as a dinner plate. If moved, after d20 seconds, it telekinetically wrenches itself directly back to its original position at great speed. Anything in its path will be mercilessly shoved, broken, or torn through when it does so.

Black Gruel

This blasphemous stew is made by trapping the spirits of the dead in a paste made of bone meal or funerary ash. It is tremendously nourishing and does not spoil. Eating it, however, carries the emotional burden of cannibalism; the body lives, but the soul weeps. A single bowl of it sustains life for a week, but the enmity of the dead lasts forever.

Black Table

This smooth, featureless block of granite heals all injuries at a touch. Diseases ooze out of the pores like pus. Broken bones are replaced by crystalline mesh; wounds are filled with glistening white, translucent flesh. The results are repulsive but functional.

Blade of Solace

Generations ago, Panurian high priests carried these silvered, ceremonial blades to dispatch those whose despair or greed could not be lifted by other means.

They are heavy and poorly balanced, but against those suffering burdens of misery (including most undead), any wound is fatal.

Bluetongue

A dose of this gritty sapphire paste goes for gold in Owlshade. It inoculates against the plague exposure up to a day ago and a day after taking it. It stains the mouth blue for several hours.

Bone Tree Rope

The Vinteralf make a fine rope from the fibers of the bone tree. Though thin, it does not fray, and pieces of it cut will reattach if placed end to end.

Book of Undibol

Undibol's five-volume opus isn't really about anything, or so the preface claims. It meanders aimlessly for several pages before launching into a detailed description of whoever is reading it.

After this, it describes the last person to read each of the other four volumes. After another dozen pages of drivel, it begins describing the thoughts of anyone currently reading any of the other volumes. If the book is put down or if any part is skipped or skimmed, it begins anew.

The volumes are never found together, although Titardinal was said to have acquired two. Readers are cautioned: at least one volume is in the care of demons.

Charioteer's Helm

Donning this ornate Vinteralf helm causes the wearer to hear the frozen song of the stars, discordant and piercingly loud. To those few who can tolerate it long enough to attune to it, it is a great boon both to navigation and divination. Wearing a charioteer's helm is essential in piloting a ***starsleigh***.

Circlet of Deel

A simple platinum circlet, reputed to be the raiment of the demigoddess Deel. Anyone touching or carrying it hears the prayerful wishes of anyone making them within a hundred leagues. To most people, this feels like a searing, world-ending migraine. One in a hundred don't mind and can learn to pick out individual voices.

Circlet of Essential Visions

Combined with a long, ritual meditation, the circlet offers one way to make use of the minute quantities of emotional essence produced by a ***Condenser of Panur***.

Visions from the essence of **vain hope** reveal heroes, great teachers, and triumphs of courage. Visions from the essence of **misery** reveal dark secrets, conspiracies, blasphemers, and traitors. The circlet just causes splitting headaches with the essence of other emotions.

Conch of Fog

This gnarled, bulbous conch is found on the undersea slopes of Drowned Gaal. If it is blown, a dense mist rises from the sea surface for a league in every direction. The fog saps strength from mortal limbs and obscures mortal vision. This happens up to once per day.

Condenser of Panur

A heavy contraption of brass filaments that converge on a sturdy, round base. It catches strong emotions wafted into the air in times of great ecstasy, solemnity, or crisis and condenses them into tiny drops of emotional essence that drip into a cloudy glass vial in the base.

Emotional essence dries quickly to minute quantities of powder, but it is staggeringly potent. Anyone consuming the essence experiences the original emotions, and a small vial could easily contain the misery, hopes, dreams, and pleasure of scores of people, enough for a life-changing bad trip.

Crab-Climb Oil

Chitinous legs sprout from the drinker's back, allowing the drinker to climb backwards up walls and sheer surfaces. The legs last d6 hours.

Crystal Knife (Siren's Knife)

A siren's crystal knife is linked to her by the will of the goddess of the ocean. Touching a siren's knife transfers a year of youthfulness to the siren, whether she holds it or not. This produces a dreadful, cold sensation.

Cyldwort

If consumed, cyldwort effects vary by person. Roll d6 plus the number of doses taken, and apply all of the effects up to the result rolled.

Result	Effects (cumulative)
1+	Ringing in the ears
2+	Shivers, chattering teeth
3+	Painful cramps
4+	Incapacitating dizziness
5+	Life-threatening hypothermia
6+	Cold insight from the stars (d2 times only)

Dance of Hungers

This long strip of fabric is painted with steps. If followed, they reveal the dance of hungers. Anyone performing this dance has their hunger for food transformed into a powerful longing for (d6) 1-2: the comforts of home, 3-4: intimacy with friends or lovers, 5-6: solitude. If the steps are performed by a skilled dancer, the effect also applies to d6 observers.

Dark Glass

Dark glass is a primordial material left from the making of the world. It is immensely strong and cannot be shaped by ordinary tools—Carduros claimed that only the heat of the ***great forges*** could shape it, melting it into molds of the desired form.

Items of dark glass retrieved from the underworld are very old, having been passed from culture to culture, each one thinking it an ancient relic of the past.

Shards of dark glass (though rare) are set as spear points or knife blades, sometimes for hands quite unlike those of humans.

Sorcerers once used tiny droplets of dark glass (calling them "Tears of Sorg") for their most lavish purchases.

Legends say that Carduros could shape dark glass into thin lenses by pouring droplets into a spinning bowl. These lenses would reveal the future—or the world of the dead.

The rarest forms of all are the "ferns," quantities of dark glass melted by some unknown process and hardened into wax-drip shapes as they cooled. The Seree paid enormous prices for these, fancying them remnants of the original fires of creation.

Diadem of the Weylords

Once per day, one target must obey the wearer's simple spoken command.

Dream Eater's Crown

If the Dream Eater is slain, it leaves behind a **crown** made of sharp metal teeth that prick the wearer's forehead. Anyone who wears it can project powerful illusions for a short period

of time but doing so takes a great mental toll. Scaring someone to the point of insomnia alleviates some of the exhaustion.

Dread Lantern

The dread lantern was forged by the servants of heaven and the Powers of the earth. The housing is a crude iron cage the size of a barrel, closed in with thin slices of translucent horn.

Anyone who bears patterned magic is drawn toward it subtly and will find themselves unconsciously walking towards it. The effect extends for two dozen leagues. To those with ***wizard flowers*** in their heads, the pull is physically tangible a league away. Closer than thirty paces, such people are helpless to do anything but stagger toward it with open arms. Automatons do not resist at all.

The lantern doesn't burn out of its own accord, but if it is extinguished, it must be ritually lit with the oil of six apocalypse larvae.

Fire Oil

This extremely flammable oil must be kept in stoppered containers. If exposed to the air, it evaporates rapidly, forming an invisible **cloud**. After d3 minutes, the invisible cloud self-ignites as a **blue fireball** (splashing any remaining liquid oil everywhere).

Fire oil is prized by miners for its potency, excellent light, and the fact that it is self-lighting. A lamp filled with fire oil lights itself with a pop as soon as the wick is exposed, and will provide light for a full day. Metal lamps are preferred!

Fresco of Zeichus

These magically lifelike **frescoes** were created by the Martoi and depict the world as it was during their rule. They depict scenes of conquering Martoi noble processions riding through pastoral landscapes, receiving tribute from the peoples of the Tristhmus. After a few minutes, observers will feel wind and weather, and the time within the fresco will advance. Animals can be heard and may actually emerge. Anyone trying to enter one will find the cold surface of the wall, momentarily dispelling the illusion.

Gemstar

This fist-sized chunk of ***white metal*** glows with magnesium-flare brightness, yet is cold to the touch. It shines with the light of thirty torches; it takes many thick hides (or solid metal) to conceal its light.

Anyone holding it for more than a few hours begins to become transparent and luminous; also their thoughts start to become visible. Strangers begin to know their secrets. The effect fades after a few weeks once the gemstar is set down.

Giant-Hunter's Lance

This magnificently long spear is tipped with a shard of dark glass. Legend holds that it was used by Vilin, a hero of post-Seree Tealwood, as he rid the valley of giants. Anyone pierced by it cannot move from the spot nor pull out the spear themselves.

Glare of the Conqueror

An ebony lantern found with d4 pots of enchanted oil. Its pale light turns the Carreg (and other earthen beings) into an edible slush favored by void gull soldiers.

Godwringer's Orrery

Rather than wait for the celestial convergences they needed for their greatest magics, the Seree decided to make them happen.

This large, rusted orrery has representations of the sun, stars, and many moons on rods of brass. Rotating it by hand advances the heavens (and the seasons) by one full day and ages the mover by a year.

Gray Hook

This artifact is a long, intangible fishing line, like a wisp of cobweb that trails behind the wearer for a dozen paces. Walking past a spirit while wearing a gray hook snares it, pulling it along as if caught on a fishing line. Unhooking a spirit, however, takes skill.

Graydream

This bitter tincture sells for silver in Owlshade and brings on pleasant dreams of dead relatives.

Great Forge

The sages only know of a few forges capable of producing the heat necessary to work those most precious materials: dark glass and ***white metal***.

Each of these great forges is unique. The Vinteralf were said to have a forge that drew steam from the heart of a ley nexus deep within the ground. The legendary smith Carduros was said to have a forge of ***yellow stone***, with a bellows of drakeskin that fired so hot it would burn any who gazed upon it.

Heart of the Spring

An urn of darkened glass holds a knot of turquoise mineral: the literal heart of a great Power of the earth, slain by the sorcerer Pyaad. If removed from the urn, the constant, invisible rays it emanates will purify the contents of every liquid-bearing vessel within a league. Wine, oil, ale, potions, all are turned to fresh spring water.

High Priest's Dagger

This silver-bladed dagger, inlaid with garnets, bestows the wielder with one trait of its victim: it rewards cruelty and mocks restraint.

Hole

This gray, narcotic paste sold in the Basilica of Owlshade relieves feelings of grief. 1 in 3 people who take it react badly: for d6 hours they

imagine they are falling continually backwards, down an endless hole shaped like their body.

Iron Bell

The Heelan desert-warlocks protected and expanded the borders of their dry, barely habitable realm with the use of iron bells. They are the centerpiece of a desiccating ritual that drives the undines from the depths, turning the region to desert.

If an iron bell is struck outside of this ritual, its baleful sound consumes d6 pints of blood-water from everyone present—most likely an incapacitating injury.

Iron Cask

At the centerpiece of a flying barque is an iron cask, a sealed container into which must be poured sacrificial blood. While it holds blood, it lifts whatever object it is anchored to into the sky (up to the weight of a single-mast Birevian), to be carried by the winds. Filling it requires the blood of at least two human-sized sacrifices, which lasts it for two weeks.

Kinleather

The Dradkin have no cloth, but wear "kinleather" skins of their dead (a final gift), tailored with thread spun from hair and with buttons made from bones. Each of these garments is named after the giver and is precious to the wearer. Kinleather garments contain something of the soul of the ancestor, who protects the Dradkin inheritor. Anyone else wearing one is sure to come to an unfortunate ending.

Kinslayer's Axe

The axe of Addan II the Disgraced, once-king of Grinvolt, has a pronounced acidic smell. It constantly secretes quantities of a corrosive, deadly contact poison, from tip to hilt. Whatever surface it is found upon will be blemished and smoldering.

Lacuna

The void gulls have many strange means of transport, among them are the lacunae, a stone sphere ten paces in diameter with a door-sized opening leading into the darkened interior. When the void-bringers will it, they are portals to the luminous void.

For whatever reason, the lacunae always form underground and are not useful for travel until erosion exposes them. It doesn't matter, the void gulls can wait.

Lamp of the Murrigans

This fine mesh cage of silver wire is full of glowing lune moths. No illusion or bewitched intention can go undetected in the glare of the lamp.

Lightning Balls

This pair of brass balls is tightly wrapped in a leather pouch. If either is tapped sharply on a hard surface, an electric bolt arcs between it and its twin, however distant they are.

If the balls are touching, the only evidence is a loud crack and an ozone smell. A hand's breadth apart, the bolt is powerful enough to burn skin and start fires.

A few paces apart, it stings, but does no lasting harm. At greater distances, the hair-thin bolt is barely visible and delivers little more than a static shock.

Loud Parcel

Some alchemists know the secret of making a low explosive from bat guano. When exposed to flame, they produce a tremendously loud bang, great gouts of caustic black smoke, and a shower of fine, hot grit. The main risk from the blast is hearing damage, but they are disorienting to all.

Martoi Gargoyles

The "gargoyles" of the Martoi are fist-sized stones, carved in low relief to look like angry, leering grotesques. The design is highly stylized, and they are nearly spherical except for a tiny, open mouth that reveals they are hollow.

When dropped or tossed into the air, a gargoyle will immediately begin orbiting the nearest non-magical light source within five paces, quickly settling on a radius of about two paces and as close to horizontal as possible.

Gargoyles move quickly, striking any objects in their path with the force of a hammer blow. They exert a corresponding force on the light source, and so tend to yank it around as the gargoyle whirls as if on an invisible leash. Holding such a pivot light is exhausting unless multiple gargoyles are launched in counterbalancing orbits.

The effect ends if the gargoyle is forcibly stopped, by a firm grasp or a solid object (e.g., carelessly walking too close to a cavern wall). Gargoyles will fly for up to a quarter hour, after which they won't move again until "fed" an ounce of ***Martoi pigment dust***.

Martoi Pigment Dust

The most precious of rocks is the ore of Martoi pigment. It gives cavern walls a steely glint, like silver ore. It can be smelted out, for it liquifies as easily as lead. Unlike other metals, it doesn't solidify, but becomes a powder as soft and fine as flour—but dense, and not easily blown about by one's breath.

The dust is iridescent, and tends to invert the color of whatever light falls upon it:

- The light of a cloudless sky turns it a brilliant orange.
- Direct sunlight turns it a deep purple; torchlight turns it blue; glowing coals or a dying fire bring out a greenish luster.
- On overcast days, it is as black and shiny as

polished jet.
- Under moonlight, it shines like gold.
- It appears gray and lifeless under magical light of any sort.
- To those who can see in total darkness, it gleams like pure white chalk.

If the dust falls upon the skin of someone who has consumed alcohol within the past day, it sets fast like a gleaming, permanent tattoo. When this occurs, it remains whatever color it was showing when it set, regardless of changes in lighting conditions.

It is said that legendary Zeichus prepared his magical pigments from this dust, though that secret is surely lost. (It is an easy matter to mix it into lacquers and resins, however.)

Mask of Carduros

This heavy stone mask must be held to the face. While it is there, it conceals the wearer from all forms of divination. This relic of the underworld was said to be hewn by the forge-master Carduros, to keep his doings secret from gods and demons.

Mulciber's Flute

The wooden flute of Mulciber the devil has a sound so beautiful that all who hear it weep. A piece played upon it can call forth a named spirit from essentially anywhere—be very careful what you wish for.

Notched Sword

The dark, notched swords of the hell knights leave flesh undamaged but shatter bone into needle-like splinters.

Obelisk of Thiru

This hacked, chipped obelisk emits invisible, searing rays that cause any exposed skin to burn and blister painfully. Despite its apparent majesty, it has no spiritual significance—its energies were easily tolerated by its ancient builders, who used it to repel giant insects.

Oil of Discord

This black, gritty oil disrupts the formation of magical patterns. Wizards smeared with it can produce no coherent magic, only showers of hot sparks. It will animate inert automatons and suits of heavy armor, causing violent twitches and jerks until carefully rinsed off.

It is not easily contained, as it has a nasty habit of seeping past corks and stoppers.

Path of Horem-Ur

The snails of Horem-Ur are gone, but the huge, glittering labyrinths they left with their trails upon the ground remain. Anything or anyone that touches the glistening lines is stuck fast, and can depart only by sliding along the path. The trip out from the center takes an hour.

Periapt of the Earthen Kings

The wearer can "swim" through stone as if it were thick, soupy water, but they must endure potent feelings of suffocation and disorientation as stone fills the nose, mouth, and lungs.

Pewter Rings of Enoch VI

At will, the wearer's fingers double in length and acquire the gripping strength of a giant. The arms are unchanged, in appearance or strength!

Quilled Javelin

The quilled javelins of the selks evolved in their wars with the craesten. One end is cut from a brittle paralytic resin, the other end is a cluster of sharp quills meant to blind the heavily armored eyes of the craesten.

Rod of Peace

A hollow staff that, when blown like a cornet, produces an eerie droning noise reminiscent of the Carreg's Song of Gamandes and deadens aggressive intent. Sadly, joyful Nuss are unaffected by the sound. (They're just happy!)

Salamander Knife

The tooth of the giant salamander has weird properties when sharpened to a cutting edge: cuts don't cause bleeding but cause flesh to part, like bread dough, leaving rumpled scar tissue instead of bloody wounds. Any parts severed completely have a 75% chance of regrowing in 2d6 months.

Santha's Box

This small box of polished blue beryl is hinged in ivory, and the lid is lined with small, flat teeth. Anything placed inside crosses to the ghostly world of the dead. Engravings show former owners paying ghosts with gold. If the bearer can see into that world, it could be used to bring small things back (by "scooping" them).

Scarab of Extortion

This animate wasp is made of the immensely hard ***white metal***. Even the delicate legs and antennae—mere filaments—are strong enough to cut into plate armor.

In practiced hands it appears alive, but in fact it is a cunning contrivance that operates more like a stringless yoyo, thrown to inflict harm before returning to the hand to be thrown again. The Vinteralf can throw them so that they follow loop-within-loop motions, tremendously hard to parry.

Seeds of Doom

The gull void-bringers carry a striped beaker that contains d3+3 glowing white pellets. If one touches ground, it will rip a hole, revealing the flickering, luminous void below, expanding by 100 paces per day until it reaches d10×100 paces in diameter.

Sephus Mask

These cumbersome Dradkin masks look like great, kinleather wattles, each containing a flake of Sephus rock. Breathing from one makes the Ur-Menig's air marginally breathable. They provide scant fresh air, however, and each minute the wearer exerts themselves, the masks fail for d6-3 minutes.

Shaper's Spurtle

A short, blunt wand of stone, wrapped in many layers of felt and leather that, with just a touch, reshapes flesh as it were soft clay. Just grabbing it firmly can forever distort the fingers.

This is a tool of Dradkin chimeromancers, and with effort it can even be used to extrude new limbs (or to blend existing ones down to nothing).

Anyone but a practiced sculptor will produce irreversible, alarming results.

Shockwave Onager

This heavy, fixed emplacement of siege equipment looks like a crude crossbow, designed to fire forearm-sized bolts tipped with compressed aether sand. They are awkward and imprecise weapons, but anyone downrange from them when the bolt passes is struck with a blast of unfocused emotion that produces sensations of profound loss, fear, or confusion.

Silver

Bright, polished silver can be seen and touched by beings beyond the veil of the dead: ancestral spirits, sorcerous wraiths, and incorporeal demons.

Through the ages, many cultures used silver for spiritual purposes. The Martoi believed the dead must have it to pay their way in the afterlife. The warriors of Grinvolt silvered their axes to hunt the crawling ghosts. The sooths of Tealwood used it to call lost souls from the forest, back to the village shrines where a few precious items were used to keep the ancestors near.

Spade of Dozens

A laborer with the spade of dozens can dig like six strong-backed men but must eat as six or collapse into a fitful coma for a week.

Sparring Mannequin

This wooden mannequin springs to life if touched. It targets whoever activated it, attacking them with dual wooden swords.

It moves at incredible speed but fights non-lethally, striking to break fingers, wrists, and noses. It stops when hit on the head, or if its target falls down.

Spear of the Hunter

This spear is a relic of Firevault. Blood flowing from the spear's wounds catches fire as it touches the air, as if it were oil.

Spell Engine

Seree spell engines look (today) like battered spheres or cubes of mica and silver, crackling with static electricity. They naturally draw and store energy from the environment, and most will contain immense reserves of power within their endless labyrinths of fine wire.

Each contains the knowledge of how to cast d20 spells of varying potency and will project the spell effects on behalf of anyone within a dozen leagues who performs the correct key cantrip.

Touching a spell engine delivers a lethal electric shock, along with knowledge of d3 key cantrips (as a side effect).

Sphere of Needles

Spheres of needles are autonomous weapons, fashioned by the demigod Panur in his war aspect, made to hunt down the Seree and their sorcerous allies.

A functioning sphere is a match for even a dragon, for they weaponize their target's memories against them.

A sphere attacks by throwing some of its needles. If they strike, they extract a victim's memory and materialize it as a violently aggressive memory horror. Memory horrors take the form of childhood rivals, enemies, or bullies; the last truly dangerous opponent faced; an ally or loved one turned to a murderous rage; a parent; or a deceased relative or beloved pet crawling from the ground.

The older and more magical its target, the more needles it fires. It ignores most children. Against **adults**, it fires d6 needles. The resulting horrors are as strong as gorillas and deliver vicious bites. **Warriors** face d12 needles and horrors with **fire-breathing**, **shadow form**, or **regeneration**.

Sorcerers get d20 needles. Their horrors are as **strong** as a rhinoceros, **telekinetic**, and can hurl lightning.

Spider Cloak

A spider cloak is a long, gray cloak of Dradkin kinleather, ending in long, matted tassels. If the wearer panics, the tassels stiffen into legs and scuttle the wearer to safety, maybe up the wall.

Spider Shield

The frame of this shield is wound with folding metal spider legs, which flex out jarringly to intercept and seize weapons that threaten harm to whoever carries it.

Stake of Demon-Binding

The summoners of the orcs bound potent spirits (often the wraiths of their masters) into metal stakes to harness their power. These they hammered into their own skulls, like a crown. If the summoner survived, they could use the magic of the bound spirit as their own.

Stakes found as treasure work as magic wands, but after each use there is a 25% chance that the bound spirit escapes to have its revenge.

Star Metal

Only the Vinteralf know the secret of the star metal. The Seree had various theories on it, including meteoric origin or that the star seers somehow precipitated it out of starlight itself. It is dense, like lead, but in the staggering cold of the Vinteralf homelands, it can take a fine edge.

Starsleigh

A platform of filigreed metal looks much like a chariot, complete with ornate railings but without wheels or attachments for animals. It has space for four to stand. If touched, it whines and hums, alive with potential. If the wearer of a charioteer's helm boards it, it rises into the air and flies gently in whatever direction the helm points.

Starsword Grugnir

This fat-bladed broadsword has a fine edge. The invisible rays it casts cause blindness d4 hours after first seeing the naked blade. Eyesight returns after 3d6 hours.

Striped Cone

A rubbery cone that, when squeezed, shifts the wind briefly in the direction of the narrow end.

Umber Tome of Withered Zunlet

Each page reveals a traitor's name nestled within its tortured phrasing but inflicts a deformity on the reader.

Vexed Timber

The Seree learned the trick of stealing timber from the underworld for use in their mechanisms. The ancient wood rebels at being wrenched to the surface, and it twists constantly in place.

Vexing Arrows

Arrows whittled from vexed timber rotate constantly. Fitted with spiral heads, they have the deadly property of drilling themselves deeper into wounds. Unless pulled out, they will eventually drill straight through unless stopped by metal or bone.

Void-Catcher's Rod

This short, silver rod is etched end-to-end with fine, random-seeming grooves. It is a Jorn tool, used for finding void worms. When placed against stone, it vibrates if there is a hollow beyond, violently if it is near.

If the hollow happens to be a void worm, the tip of the rod will drag across the stone in the direction of the worm's travel.

White Metal

This most rare metal is bright and silvery, glossier and more reflective than silver but with smoky gray undertones.

It has no earthly source, and learned sages only know a handful of items supposedly made from it.

White metal is strong and light, but it can only be worked in the heat of a great forge. Items made from it can bear enchantments that would evaporate lesser materials. Blades forged from it will cut straight through normal armor.

It is also innately magical, and sometimes useful effects emerge just as a result of the shape it is worked into.

White Metal Bauble

The attempts of post-Seree sorcerers to make enchanted items from white metal are somewhat erratic, as the principles are not understood.

White metal baubles are cast as pendants, rings, and the like, and when squeezed, produce the magical effect. Most baubles have only one power, but a few have several.

Known phenomena include:

- The wearer can **see from the eyes** of a chosen visible target.
- **Disintegrates** the wearer and their belongings into dust. They can float and reassemble at will.
- **Repels** small objects and incoming attacks.
- **Teleports** the wearer 5 paces in the direction of their gaze.
- **Lash of electricity** (arcs out 5 paces; harms as flaming crossbow).
- Target person-sized **object animates** for d4 hours and (d6) 1-2: attacks, 3-4: flees, 5-6: demands explanations.

Witch-Grain Basket

The sooths of Grinvolt know a ritual for weaving grass into a basket that draws the small things of the forest. If a basket is left out in the forest, birds and insects will slowly deposit "witch grain"; seeds, nuts, grubs, and beetles found nearby. If the ancestors are watching, a basket left out overnight will fill with a humble but nutritious breakfast.

"Carrying a basket" in service of their village is a point of pride for the wardens and trail-makers of Grinvolt, but they are not especially reliable. Baskets will not fill if set out too close to camp, and many a warrior has been beaten to breakfast by a lucky raccoon or badger.

White Lance of Deel

White lances are the smooth javelins brought to earth by the warbodies of Deel for use in the war with the Seree. If thrown forcefully, a white lance strikes with a thunderclap strong enough to destroy stoneworks and mangle enemies.

Anyone within thirty paces of the blast is violently hurled d6 paces and deafened. Mortals struck directly are usually obliterated.

They were not made for mortal hands, and few warriors could throw one far enough to avoid

being flattened by the shockwave. An unwise toss toward a nearby enemy could easily cripple the thrower as well.

The detonation inevitably throws the lance itself a great distance, making it hard to retrieve in a confused battlefield. There is a chance (1-2 on a d6) that it will not be found. If this happens, it will turn up d8 months later, having been found somewhere unexpected.

Wizard Flower

After their deaths (whether natural or hastened), the brains of sorcerers were boiled away by their successors in order to extract the "wizard flower," the result of the Vitrum Aquae ritual.

These branching, coral-like structures are magical thoughts in physical form, and they encoded the mental states achieved during the most delicate, sorcerous meditations. Once extracted, they were used for constructing enchanted items of all sorts (wands, automatons), usually after melting resin around them to protect them.

Yellow Stone

This porous, sedimentary rock has only ever been found in the underworld, cut into brick-like shapes and assembled into wells or hearths.

History of the Tristhmus

The Strielwall mountains are slung between three continents, forming the spine of a mighty, three-way isthmus that joins the greater land masses of Firevault, Mar, and Norilund.

It is a beautiful land, loved by its peoples. Icy rivers cascade from the steep mountain slopes into the plains of Strielund and Haverlow. Tall, primordial forests stretch all along its southern edges, from rocky Uttvelt to verdant Noripur. Inlets and lakes teem with fish, and the seas around it crawl with the longboats of fishers and traders. The winters are hard, but the growing seasons are long and productive. A dozen proud nations nestle along its shores, watched over by a dozen Powers of the earth.

In recovered fragments of the Seree grand survey, the Tristhmus is simply called "Area 8."

Before

Thousands of years ago, the Tristhmus was dotted with tribes. Their origins are lost to pre-history, but the diversity of the people suggests there are many different stories. Some tribes are tall, some tiny; some are dark, others as pale as fish, with a hundred languages between them. Some remember stories of lands beyond the seas, or across the Blightlands. Some said they had always been here, or sprouted from the earth. Others believed they were lost in a land that changed around them.

Nevertheless, each made their way as best they could with the gifts they had found: farming, cloth-making, and baking special earths into pottery. In time, they shared. Wanderers found songs that could sew together the dialects. The journeys of tinkers etched roads into the land to keep the villages still. Mining and metal found its way south from Firevault. In the central valleys, wise sooths gathered the ancestors together with rings of standing stones. In the plains of the south, plants and people shaped one another until millet grew in dancing yellow fields in the valleys and on the plains.

Rise of the Martoi

In the west, one of the tribes found the gift of listening. The air, the rivers, and the earth were all whispering: secrets were blowing on the breeze, as thick as pollen.

The Martoi learned to hear them, and to decipher the wishes of the Powers. Far from aloof, the Powers had dreams—to taste the lives of the living once more, to see their wisdom shared. Some wanted their memories of ages past played out upon the earth, others wanted victims to satisfy their cruel urges.

The Martoi heard it all, and obeyed. In their sanctums of stone, they performed the rituals they glimpsed. In return, they received new gifts, terrifying and strange. In all of memory, the only magic was the humble ritual of the rope-maker or cobbler, but the Martoi emerged from their sanctums with sorcery in their veins.

In time, the Martoi pulled other tribes under their dominion, spreading along the arms of the Tristhmus. They waged war from horseback, in metal armor, led by sorcerer warlords who could fly like birds and steal the strength from the arms of their enemies.

When they reached the central valleys, they founded Tanibel, a fortress of three towers. From there, they rode out, demanding fealty and dotting the land in fortifications.

Martoi dynasties ruled the Tristhmus for a thousand years, but vainly and wastefully. With no proper institutions, wars of rebellion and subjugation were continuous. At the edges of their dominion, defeats stung them and spread them too thinly. The giants of Firevault repulsed them with stone and molten iron. Star seers in the north turned Martoi sorcerers into glass. The underworld seethed with magic of its own.

Eventually, they stalled. With no wars of expansion to rally them, the Martoi turned upon themselves. Their dominion fractured into warring city-states, Tanibel against Martoliin in the homelands, Varna and Glimland in the east.

In the wars of the collapse, the Martoi deployed the three worst of their eldritch curses, strange weapons of last resort. Where Drops of Night were thrown into the air, the sun's rays retreated from the earth. Where the Tears of Memory were poured into the rivers, people walked away from their lives to live as animals. Where the Water of Ending was poured into the soil, no children would be born.

With these strange weapons deployed, the time of the Martoi was over.

Cysts of the Dead

Rather than face their final generation, several Martoi houses came together to perform a last great working to preserve themselves. They balanced themselves between the worlds of the living and the dead, straddling the veil of death.

This magic worked well for some, and poorly for others. Tanibel itself ("Veil of the Once-Queen" on page 66) lived on in an illusion of its former glory. Elsewhere, pockets of Martoi survived by sealing themselves off from the outside world ("The Task of Zeichus" on page 33).

Unfortunately, for the great majority, the working wasn't enough to provide vivid life. It held death at bay, but not the corruption of the body. Martoi manorial courts lived on as wretched undead, re-enacting their lives in leaf-filled ruins, riding out as dry corpses to demand fealty from terrified villagers. Worst of all were the crawling ghosts, forever poisoned by the strange weapons, unable to die.

Centuries later, the Seree grand survey would be careful to note the location of these "cysts" of a bygone era. Some they destroyed, but with only illusory riches to gain, most thought it best to avoid them completely.

Interregnum

Very little is known about the period immediately after the fall of the Martoi dynasties. Some philosophers believe the Tristhmus was nearly depopulated by the strange weapons, but others feel (less dramatically) that they simply left behind a poor legacy of record-keeping, since the Martoi had used only engraved stone.

Philosophers also disagree on the length of the interregnum. Some claim that the low kingdoms (see below) established themselves almost immediately, while others imagine a long period of precarious survival in a cursed landscape.

Either way, at some point, paper-making arrived in the Tristhmus. The historical record resumed quite suddenly, in a variety of written languages, some inspired by Martoi square-etched lettering, others of independent origin.

Taken together, the archives of Saltbride, Darkvale, and Owlshade amount to a continuous historical record to the present day.

the Low Kingdoms

The earliest records describe the region as a wilderness dotted with city-states, referred to as the "Low Kingdoms." Claimsun was a major power, trading by boat all along the Haver Soont coastlines as far north as Duray. In the east, the cities of Pur Cove, Darshore, and Owlshade formed a three-city alliance calling itself "Noripur," and dominated trade on the Sallet Sea.

Despite all the trade, travel was unreliable, and routes had to be continually reestablished. Communities became inexplicably unreachable—roads trailed off into nowhere, walled towns were found deserted and overgrown mere months after they were last visited. When trade routes were restored, the journeys sometimes took weeks longer than they had before. Traveling tinkers and wayfinders were highly valued, and were celebrated in song for their bravery.

Life was precarious, and many communities didn't survive at all. Several of the largest city-states declined substantially in this era. Varna, a large island in the Sallet Sea, was lost under jungle. Duray in the north was overtaken by the encroaching deserts of the blight.

Martoi cysts in the central valleys (now Slumbering Tealwood) awoke and made war on the Grinvolt clans, reducing them to a small strip of communities along the Gray Soont coast. Many were ensorcelled by the strange weapons, and were never seen again.

Into this troubled world came the Seree.

Arrival of the Seree

Seree origin mythology claims that their sorcerous might was stolen from the gods, but clear-eyed sages point out that the word, "Seree" comes from a Varnan dialect and simply means, "collector." It's possible the first Seree were truly from the sky, but their most likely origin is as a hermetic order displaced by the collapse of Varna.

The Seree first appear in the historical record as tinkers, moving between communities in Noripur and Lurrock. The diary of a quarter-lord of Darshore praises their ingenuity, their reliability, and their "knowing of many good tricks." There are several accounts of them sharing metalworking and crop irrigation improvements as they progressed further west through the Tristhmus, along the old roads.

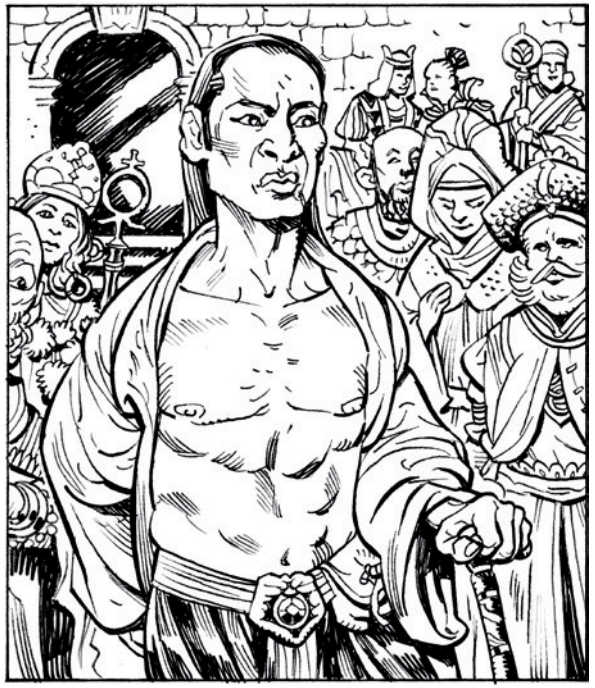
Though helpful, their purpose from the beginning was to collect esoteric knowledge. At every community, they would ask about shrines (whether in use or ruined), so they could show respect. After prayers, they would take rubbings

of the shrine etchings, trying to capture any scrap of true knowledge revealed or recorded there, or any pointers to the locations of other, greater sanctums.

The Seree came to each community as strangers, bringing news and solving many problems, while creating others. Once their reputation was established, they bolstered their numbers with suitable followers met along the way.

With no home, Seree identity cemented itself as an ethos, an approach to knowledge and learning: devour everything, record it, master its intricacies, and teach the others—an eccentric attitude among the hardscrabble people of the Tristhmus, but one that steadily attracted more single-minded and unusual individuals.

Over the years, the Seree rediscovered the gifts of the Martoi, and much else besides, as they were now operating far more broadly than just the Tristhmus. Three hundred years after the fall of Varna, they began their grand survey of their world, in which the Tristhmus was only one of twelve huge areas.



This is how they learned of the upwelling (see page 142).

Seree Factions

The founding of a library in Novy Dom exposed the first serious cracks in Seree unity. Three movements emerged. The first felt that their duty lay with the world, using their knowledge to benefit the people (chiefly, a gaggle of wealthy patrons and lords).

The second movement believed that true knowledge was so alien to human intuition that mundane life was inhibiting, rather than helpful. This group had achieved some success speeding up the haphazard process of magical insight and discovery. Isolated in their monastic sanctums, they claimed, they would be able to hear the deepest, most potent whispers.

A third movement began to pull away from the communal spirit that drove the early Seree, believing that greatness lay in individual accomplishment. These "wizards" eschewed the busy libraries and monastic sanctums. To them, sorcery was a path to actual divinity. These Seree had spotted the movements of the demigods themselves among the stars and hoped to claim a place among them.

Around this time, friction with the low kingdoms began to boil over. Independent wizards had married into noble families and were using regimancy to achieve their own political ends—often walling off their own little fiefdoms. Undew (disastrously) fought for independence against the Kingdom of Saltbride at the bidding of Seree regimancers. Owlshade was more successful, following the self-titled "Flame of the East" in revolt against Noripur. Others followed, joining the established pockets of Seree monastic power: Quell, Inogira, and Novy Dom.

Imperial Seree

Eventually, any benevolent pretense in Seree thinking fell away completely. Although their world was superimposed upon the patchwork of kingdoms, they lived apart from it. Able to ley-walk vast distances, lift whole fortresses into the air, and rule from the mountain tops, they saw their destiny playing out across the grand sweep of continents—not mired in the muck of goat-herding and the stink of the coastal cities.

A growing number of Seree had been recruited from places so far away that, for them, life in the Tristhmus was completely alien.

What drew the Seree back, unfortunately, was the need for labor. Every year they found the need for some new project: sanctums, kastromantic labyrinths, and eventually, spell engines (see page 143). Each project was larger, more expensive, requiring more raw and precious materials, and demanding more precise workmanship than any before it.

With their magical powers at their peak, they no longer needed to ask nicely. Four centuries after their first appearance, the Seree proclaimed a de facto empire over the entirety of the known lands and began demanding tribute.

Twilight

The five centuries of the Seree empire were dominated by tensions between the powerful monastic orders (especially the Trigonic Order, builders of the Lycaeum) and the wizards.

Monastic custom demanded that all sorcerers had to share their secrets before they died, but the proud independents preferred to lock their legacies away in grand tombs.

The most selfish and ambitious dabbled in lichery, hoping to avoid death completely. (With the Martoi as a cautionary tale, this was widely

considered a bad idea—still, it was banned just in case somebody found a way to make it work successfully.)

Over time, the feuds worsened. With individual power growing with every new discovery, the monastic laws and proclamations were unenforceable. Personal feuds erupted into open magical warfare. Towers were destroyed; sanctums burned or shattered. Spell engines were moved to remote hiding spots to protect them from theft or destruction by rivals.

Fall of the Seree

The feuds and wars went on for some time, but when it came, the final end of the Seree empire was quite sudden.

At some point, a wizard attempted to snatch one of the gods from the heavens, and against all odds, succeeded. News of this spread immediately, as it meant the independent wizards were right: actual, divine power was within mortal reach. Just knowing that something is possible is a powerful catalyst, and the experiment was soon repeated by others. Within a few years, several "ensnarement pits" were under construction.

The reprisal from the heavens was devastating. With newly minted bodies of dark glass and white metal, a trio of demigods—Panur, Deel, and Cicollus—flew down to attack.

They laid waste to the ensnarement pit above Parrow Wind (see "The Chains of Heaven" on page 50).

The demented, celestial prisoners of the pit were freed, but at a terrible cost. The mortal sorcerers surprised the demigods with their magical ingenuity and mounted a fierce defense.

Of the forces of heaven, only Panur survived unscathed. Deel's war-body was shattered, and Cicollus was struck down. (He is thought to be dead, but retreating Seree sorcerers bound him and took him prisoner—see "House of the Tyrant" on page 38).

Unwilling to risk direct confrontation again, the gods were reduced to fighting through intermediaries and autonomous weapons (see "The Call of the Light" on page 64, and "The Man From Before" on page 98).

Wanderers Again

The Seree monastic orders were obliterated, unable to occupy their huge sanctums. Even the Lycaeum was abandoned and left to the flames.

The independent wizards survived, but their skills mostly died with them. The monastic orders had accumulated centuries of refinements in discipline, recruitment, and instruction, but the wizards had no such traditions. Possessive and bombastic, very few of them managed to turn apprentices into worthy successors. Their line dwindled into mad hedge wizards, clinging to scraps of paper and tattered ceremonial robes.

Still, the impulse remained. Five hundred years after the fall of the Seree, "wizards" still wander the land, wearing threadbare robes of Imperial office (or imitations), and scouring the lands for any scraps of magic left behind.

The Shape of the World

Once the Lycaeum was built, Seree knowledge of the natural world grew rapidly. The master sages, whose rank let them read everything being added to the archives, were able to piece together a clear but strange picture of the world. They had little time to savor the implications before their empire was snuffed out.

What they Learned

Millions of years ago (perhaps longer, ecstatic visions are not very specific), there was a time before the world. All that existed was a luminous, flickering void. Clouds of incandescent, colored possibility burst and whirled within an endless expanse.

Within this void moved great intelligences—the primordial gods. If these gods had names, only one was ever learned: Sorg.

Sorg had tried to draw the others into itself, like some original act of predation. Many were devoured, some fought bitterly, while others fled outward into the void. As Sorg grew, it devoured the void itself, catalyzing dense matter in its wake. Thus was born the world.

According to the writings of the wizard Unclideon, the maw-demons of the Cleft corroborated this vision. They insist, however, that Sorg was victimized by the other gods, its body sacrificed and used to catalyze the formation of the world. This great betrayal is woven into all matter, making destruction a sacred act of restoration.

The Seree also learned that the accumulation of world matter had continued, sometimes rapidly. Evidence mounted, through forays into the underworld, that the surface world is a thin layer over top of the ruins of other eras. Whole civilizations had been trapped, pulled into the orbit of Sorg and drawn under new earth. Varna itself was built on top of ancient Thiru, now buried under thirty paces of rock.

With horror, the Seree began to suspect that many of the whispering Powers of the lakes and mountains were once celestial beings, caught within the orbit of Sorg and fused with the earth. The Lycaeum sages were suspicious of forests,

which they saw as Sorgite in nature, pulling down new matter from the air and making new layers of soil.

The realms of the underworld were not natural caverns, etched by water over long years. They were lands that had once lain in the sun, which had become closed over and sealed within the earth. Their inhabitants lived out gray echoes of their former civilizations, preserved by Powers not willing to sleep. Layer upon layer they were stacked, down to the infernal depths.

The Upwelling

If the depths were alarming, the surface was no less strange. Not all realms were doomed to sink beneath the earth—others were rising. Primordial realms from the earliest ages were fighting for a fresh glimpse of the sky. Their ascension could be felt like a great seething mass, welling up from the lightless depths to spread across the surface.

The Seree had long known that Martoi maps were inaccurate, but now they knew why. The Blightlands were poorly named—they weren't a blight upon existing lands, but a memory of an ancient world forcing its way to the surface, driving neighboring places apart. In the time of the Martoi, the coasts of Glimland and Noripur were separated by a thin channel. Now the great Sallet Sea stood between them, two hundred leagues across at its widest.

Seree folklorists recognized from their collected myths and tales that this same pattern was playing out everywhere, just on smaller scales.

The traditions of path-marking and road-making (the roads of the Martoi, or the way-markings of the Grinvolt tinkers) were actually magical rituals, thousands of years old and deceptively prosaic, which (mostly) kept the lands in place. Where roads of any sort were maintained, the upwelling slowed.

Whenever communities became isolated (by plague, climate, or war), they could physically drift away. Formerly adjacent villages could find themselves separated by week-long journeys. Mountain ranges could be found to hide new, verdant lands, full of alien strangeness. Even a hard winter was enough to allow noticeable separation.

The Seven Ways of the Sky

More strangely, the nature of distance itself depended on where one stood. The surface of Subrania (their name for the world) appeared as an endless tapestry of realms, but below the ground, distances were compressed. Unclideon found a route in the deep underworld that ran from the Cleft to Firevault, yet was only a dozen leagues long. Though too dangerous to use, this was a small fraction of the surface distance.

Similarly, distances above the surface were greatly exaggerated. While four ways (north, east, south, and west) were enough to describe surface movements, the airy realm high above needed seven.

There, space seemed to splay out hyperbolically, and even short journeys created the illusion of huge distances.

Using her flying lantern, Radomenus found that only a dozen leagues above the surface, the earth appeared to shrink rapidly, quickly taking on the appearance of a small, moon-sized sphere.

This led to the realization that the stars were not distant balls of incandescent gas (as Zecoxy insisted), but the same phenomenon as the moons—light from the earth was being drawn up along the great, arching projections of ley lines, and back down again. The tiny points of light were not other worlds at all, but visions of faraway parts of this one.

At ley intersections, the effect was most powerful, and details of far away lands could be made out with lenses.

A Legacy of Magic

Strange Magic

Though the Seree are gone, their works are scattered throughout the Tristhmus. Their earliest magic was much like that of the Martoi—rituals snatched from the wind or taken from engravings found in shrines. Most of the ritual steps for these were cultural expressions, sacred to whatever Power had first whispered them.

As the Seree expanded their reach, they began to find new rituals, more difficult for human minds to bear. The whispering of demons, patient and alien (and sometimes quite mad), are repetitive and complex. Disastrous mistakes were made trying to carry them out.

The surviving apprentices learned quickly that precision mattered and that memory aids would be necessary. Over time, spatial memory tricks were discovered, overlaying the steps and words of the weird procedures onto imagined physical locations.

As the independent wizards grew in power and wealth, they began building these locations physically, all the better to form vivid memories. Any wizard of note had a "hall of memories," or twisting labyrinths filled with eclectic decorations, scents, and experiences.

Kastromancy

Over time, these labyrinths evolved. Rooms, corners, or details were refined or rebuilt to make them more "harmonious." Ultimately, it was found that if a structure was harmonious enough, it could approach a perfect representation of the ritual's structure.

Merely walking through such a place could be enough to bring about the ritual effect. Thus was born kastromancy: magically potent architecture.

Wizard Flowers

Meanwhile, the monastic orders had gone a different route, searching for techniques to enhance their sorcerous meditations.

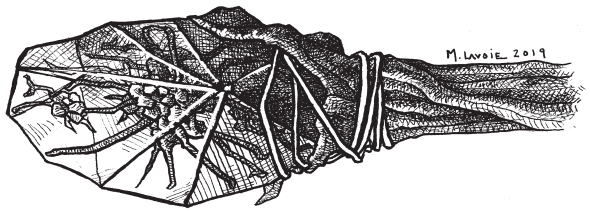
They discovered a preparation of powdered gemstone that could precipitate out of the blood, recrystallizing in the brain. In doing so, it would fix specific thoughts into a permanent pattern, making difficult, complex thoughts reflexive.

Through repeat applications, acolytes could build up ever more complex thoughts, allowing them to reach sorcerous meditative states as easily as blinking.

At the height of the Seree empire, the most talented monastic sorcerers could perform elaborate ritual procedures and meditations at great speed, evoking their order's most powerful magics at will.

There were drawbacks: the crystallizing process was irreversible, and any slip of concentration during the ritual would fix the meandering thought as a permanent feature. Acolytes that pushed beyond their abilities would develop rigid, inflexible personalities, becoming unable to adapt to the slightest changes around them.

The resulting crystal formations were also extremely valuable. In the post-Imperial period, many wizards had their skulls split open in the hopes of finding a "wizard flower."



the Spell Engines

Meanwhile, the Trigonic Order of the Lycaeum amassed all of these insights, building upon them.

By studying thousands of wizard flowers and hundreds of kastromantic designs, they foresaw the possibility of enchanted devices. These would be more powerful than any individual sorcerer, and at the same time, much more compact than kastromantic architecture.

A team of the Lycaeum's artisans labored for eight years to complete the first of these designs. In an alcove of the dread sanctum the first spell engine was born: a labyrinth of gold wire as tall as a man, made of components so fine they could only be properly seen with special lenses, all encased in a sphere of mica and silver.

With this innovation, any acolyte attuned to an engine could bring forth its power. The simple rituals to prod the engine into action were easily learned, and monastic orders with engines could produce whole teams of effective sorcerers. The limited range of evoking rituals was extended with accord stones, which were bargains with the Powers of the earth, engraved into huge stone markers where territories met. In this way, the monastic orders could use their most potent magic throughout the twelve areas.

The location, security, and integrity of spell engines and their accords immediately became the dominant concern of Seree politics, especially the feuds that dominated the late empire. Many engines were stolen, destroyed, or sabotaged.

By the end of the empire, the remaining spell engines were all either hidden in secret vaults ("The Full-Dark Stone" on page 42), protected by inhuman guardians ("The Shattered Gate" on page 78), or both.

STRIELUND

A Land Divided

Once a great partnership between two walled cities, ***Saltbride*** and ***Lastfort***, the land is in a painful transition. Southwestern Strielund is steadily turning to swamp, reclaiming the fertile lands around Saltbride.

The eastern lands around Lastfort are enjoying a boon; though it has a long dry season, plentiful rains have made it prosperous and growing.

Saltbay

A century ago, Saltbay was a deep-water port. The rising water levels and heavy silt coming down the **Learin river** have turned it into a muddy shallows, now practically a lagoon. In the winter, when the water levels are highest, the northern mouth of Saltbay closes completely, cut off from the Haver Soont by a muddy bar.

Saltbride

From the water, Saltbride is an impressive city. Slate-rock towers rise high over the walls, decked with colorful pennants. Up close, it is less grand. The pennants are torn; the harbor is clogged with rotting ships now too large for the Saltbay's muddy shallows.

The narrow streets of the lower city are flooded three paces deep, and the people now use floating rafts of swamp willow logs over channels of rank water and algae. Mildew attacks everything, and tiny flies are everywhere.

Rebellion

For a century, the quarter-lords around Saltbride kept levying the people as if the land was still prosperous—desperate to fuel the lavish dowries and bequests needed to buy their way into ***Lastfort*** as their households shifted eastwards.

As extracting money became harder, the lords turned to bandits and mercenaries for collection. Peasant revolts flared up in response to this betrayal. A decade ago, these culminated in a flotilla of riverboats sailing down the Learin to attack Saltbride in open rebellion.

Aided from within the city by the ***Embalmer's Guild***, the rebellion killed few the quarter-lords in residence.

d8	What's on the table?
Poor/rich tables use worst/best of 2d8	
1	Thin, river cabbage soup
2	Boiled water chestnuts
3	Leech turnovers, heavily salted and baked rock hard
4	Stewed pond-apple
5	Speckled eels, spit-roasted
6	Marsh heron, boiled in wine and cloves
7	Honey-filled pastries
8	Smoked turtle skewers, crusted with mustard seeds and pepper

d8	Saltbride encounters
1	High-born beggars, with ***mausoleum*** secrets to sell
2	Fishers, looking to spend some of their coin
3	Undew mercenaries, here to broker a trade with Birevia
4	Guild household, surreptitiously packing for escape to ***Lastfort***
5	Farmer-citizens on watch, dragging a thief off for drowning
6	Lye guildfolk, collecting laundry in a pull-boat
7	Pressers from the Unmended Way (page 30) looking for marks
8	Spies for Lastfort, re-roll for their cover story

Now, an alliance of low households governs a violent, unstable city.

In an attempt to impose stability, the citizens' council bans guildfolk or tradefolk from leaving Saltbride (otherwise many would leave for ***Lastfort***).

A **bi-weekly fair** in a burned-out upper city courtyard brings together marshland farmers and city tradefolk.

Mausoleum Towers

The tallest structures in Saltbride are the mausoleums, flat-topped and precipitously high. Each owned by a separate noble family, the towers sprout out of the tops of palatial townhomes like gray, windowless cylinders. New layers were added as necessary or to show off the wealth and seniority of their family—once per generation, when possible.

The towers began to grow when the flooding first began, borne out of a belief that the wet earth was a pauper's grave. Each new layer would be inaugurated with a lavish ceremony and feast, and then sealed forever behind sturdy locked doors and layers of deadly traps.

Though tempting to raid for revenue, the council hasn't managed to devote the necessary resources to enter them, at least not safely. The first clumsy attempts ended in disaster: one freed a hostile cave squid, and another unleashed a plague of clockwork scarabs that troubled the city for months.

Embalmer's Guild

Over time, the specialists hired to fill the mausoleums with traps to protect them became known as the embalmer's guild, though they knew more of locks and snares than of the dead.

They were badly abused by a nobility keen to preserve the secrets of the mausoleums, and many were locked away or murdered after their tasks were complete, breeding obvious resentments.

When the rebellion laid siege, the guild opened secret ways to let them in. Though promised a place of honor, there is no legitimate work for them now, and the lavish lifestyle of master artisans is unpopular in the new regime.

Many have turned to crime, smuggling people and stashed riches out, or working to plunder the mausoleums in secret for their own benefit.

Trade with Birevia

With command of the Haver Soont, Birevia supplies much-needed essentials to Saltbride: salt, tin, and small metal items, as well as salted meat and oil no longer available directly from ***Lastfort***. They also buy inland delicacies—honey, smoked turtle, and heron.

Unfortunately, the lords of Birevia fear legitimizing the peasant collective by trading directly and so use mercenaries based in Undew as intermediaries. By edict, goods to or from Birevia cannot be sold in Saltbride, and so transactions must conducted in the haunted coves of ***Gruel's Shore***.

The mercenaries are known to suddenly insist on extortionate prices and resort to armed robbery when they feel lucky. Only the sternest Saltbriders row out to meet them.

Gruel's Shore

Once an area thick with prosperous manorial holdings, it's now a broad, saltwater swamp. For centuries, the trees were farmed as pollards (pruned to sprout slender poles). Abandoned, they have grown huge, and now the flooded forests look like rows upon rows of massive hands reaching up out of slimy waters, grasping the air.

The manorial houses and the surrounding stone cottages have fallen to ruin, but they remain useful hiding spots for bandits and other travelers who don't mind getting their boots wet.

Wicker Trading Posts

A few watery crossroads are permanently inhabited. New, wicker stories squat atop flooded stone ruins. These are dire places, home to exiles and outlaws, but folk who don't make themselves useful are not welcome long.

d8	River/Wetlands encounters
1	**Dredging crew** (d6 locals in a skiff), stirring up silt or cutting weeds to clear a waterway
2	Local **eel-gatherers** with baskets; wading or boating.
3	$d4^2+1$ **mercenaries** in 4-person skiff(s). Roll d6. On 1-2 they're "tax collecting" for ***Lastfort***; 3-4 unemployed and turned to banditry; 5-6 carrying trade goods to or from Birevia.
4	**Tinker**, with a pull-boat of tinwares, rope, and leather.
5	Emperor ***heron***, d8 others near
6	Disheveled **artisan family** (d8 of various ages), fleeing Saltbride on foot
7	***Wyvern eel***
8	Great **snapping turtle**

Herons & Wyvern Eels

The dense swamps are said to be haunted by ghosts that call out in human voices. These tales arose from the **emperor herons**, practically invisible with their algae-streaked plumage, despite their gigantic size. They are natural mimics, with excellent hearing, and repeat animal or human cries for hours. Voices or phrases can sometimes be repeated for great distances across the forest, from heron to heron, bringing strange, garbled news.

Adding to the tales are **wyvern eels**, descendants of old Half-Lord Gaven's two captive wyverns. Left behind when the flood waters came, they mated with eels and produced a brood of aquatic hybrids, each as long as a skiff. They ambush from the water like alligators, but bury themselves in the mud over winter, sometimes not waking for dozens of years. The fishers blame sightings on strong pond-apple cider.

Lastfort Area

For centuries, Lastfort was a stagnant, dour town, a last bastion for Borderlands herders to retreat to. Squat, tin-roofed buildings huddled behind its parapets.

The shifting land has blessed it. The once marshy peninsula is drying out, leaving rich soil and meandering plains dotted with old bridges that span dry, grassy ruts.

New farmsteads are built every year, and the land is thick with wheat and sunflowers in high summer.

The impassable **Hullknives Bay** protects from the bandits of Undew, and Lastfort's patrols are mounted, deterring land raids.

Within the Walls

Food is plentiful, but the influx of families from Saltbride has seen every last scrap of land built upon. A new, "outer city" has sprung up—wooden homes enclosed by a double palisade. Skills are in demand, and tinkers that once served the farmlands have settled down as petty artisans.

The lords and half-lords of Lastfort have seen their coffers swell; they crave luxuries from afar. Established families jealously guard their power—only those with land or family connections into the inner city may join (or even address) the council.

Displaced quarter-lord families from Saltbride have not fared as well; some who had dual holdings are established. The First Lord of Saltbride (in exile) maintains an opulent wooden palace in the new quarter where he does a steady trade, accepting "gifts" from those who need introductions at court or advice on how to make do, but most have seen their fortunes fall.

Several historical, high-profile marriages that had joined families of the two cities were annulled posthumously, disenfranchising hundreds.

Some have become little better than bandits themselves, making punitive mounted raids into central Strielund, claiming goods and "hostages." Others abandon noble pretensions for mercenary work. Those who still cling to fortune lobby for war to retake Saltbride.

d10	NE Strielund encounters
1	Traveling **wizard**
2	Mounted **patrol** from Lastfort (d8+1)
3	Noble/bandit **raiding party**, d10, mounted, excellent gear
4	Mounted **drovers** from High Kellan, bringing a herd of d6×10 cattle to Lastfort, or returning with trade goods (spirits, oil, lye, salt)
5	Ruins of a burned-out Seree **tribute wagon** (see page 100), its vexed timber still grinding
6	**Farmers** (d6) heading to Lastfort, secretly armed and aiming to rescue relatives
7	**Tinker** pulling a small cart of goods, topped by a large birdhouse full of chirping pipits.
8	Lost, sunblind **Dradkin** fleeing from Incerat (see page 22)
9	White **velvet hunting spiders** (d6) from the abandoned shrine (see page 34)
10	**d3 giant aurochs** from the Borderlands (see page 150)

THE GRINVOLT COAST

THE WOODED SHORE

All along the southern coast of the Tristhmus live the hardy people of ***Grinvolt***. Their ***glade halls*** dot the dense, ***coastal forests*** that cover almost the entire shoreline, from Aridenn to the mountains of the High Uttvelt in the west.

The long fishing boats of ***Millvale*** ply the storm-tossed waves of the Gray Soont, going as near as they dare to haunted ***Halet Girm***.

Grinvolt communities extend into the troubled, rocky highlands of the ***High Lavel***. where the hollowed "ruts" lead north toward Haverlow.

STANDING STONES

The most obvious sign of a Grinvolt community is the ring of standing stones enclosing them. Even the most meager ***glade hall*** will have four or five stones to mark the corners of the forest clearing, but the ring around ***Millvale*** consists of more than six hundred stones in a long, wavering circuit that encloses more than a dozen square leagues.

Each ring is an accord with the spirits of the dead, enjoining them not to wander, but to stay and to watch over the living community. Inscriptions vary, in wording and dialect, and many are obscured by moss or erosion, but most are variations of the following:

"Turn back, for those whom you love are behind you."

Over the ages, each community has assembled an **ancestral host**. It is their watchfulness and whispering that allows the crops to grow, keeps the forests at bay, and warns the village sooths of danger.

The oldest sooths of Grinvolt say this tradition was brought from across the Soont, but Seree records dispute this.

KNOCKING DAYS

There is no greater calamity than to die "outside of the ring," as this imperils the spirit. On the "Knocking Days" of early spring, sooths and trail finders lead processions to bring back the lost spirits of foragers, hunters, tinkers, or traders.

Some proudly hold the shrine's silver items aloft (as the dead can see silver), while the rest bang on hand drums and hollowed logs to awaken the spirits and lead them home.

THE GLADE HALLS

Within the ***coastal forests***, Grinvolt life is centered on the great halls erected in natural glades and clearings. The forests do not permit the clearing of new farmland, and so there are dozens of glade halls spread throughout the woods, each home to between twenty and a hundred people.

Some are little more than shelters for haggard groups of foragers, while others are robust market communities (see ***glade hall features*** table), with families of **axewives**—sworn defenders who earn metal rings for their axe-heads with acts of bravery that protect the community.

Strangers are generally welcome, as the tiny communities are too small to be self-sufficient. The "wayfinders," those who find, mark, and re-mark the winding trails between the glades, are given great respect. **Wayfinders** carry a witch-grain basket (see page 136) for emergencies, as the trails are long, winding, and occasionally change.

Strangers in ones and twos are assumed to be **tinkers**, here to trade useful skills or rare goods.

Larger groups are questioned carefully, but will be given the benefit of the doubt, if there is any. Everyone sleeps communally among the stone fire pits of the glade halls, so there are many eyes watching for trouble, day or night.

HALLOWED STACKS

While even the meanest shack has a niche set aside as a shrine to the ancestors, larger halls also use their shrines to commemorate the glade's history.

Sooths weave goat-hair carpets and embroider them with the names and depictions of the hall dwellers. Each generation adds its own carpet to the "hallowed stack." Many are now waist high, steeped in history.

d10	Glade hall features
1+	Leaky, thatched hall wedged between three standing stones; 1-2 forager families
2+	Deep, stone-lined well; children
3+	8-20 stones enclosing a grassy clearing; d20 goats
4+	Stream-powered mill wheel for grinding breadwood bark
5+	Hall shrine with a hallowed stack and several items of blessed silver; wise sooth
6+	d6 axewife families
7+	Attached stone granary for defense and storage; brewing
8+	Large hall with a mezzanine level; d6 workshops
9+	Hundred-pace wooden hall holding a dozen cook fires
10	A grand clearing amid 30-50 stones; tanning pits; fruiting orchard; market; stone shrine

Sooths sleep on the stack when they need dreams from the ancestral host. Strangers or suspected criminals are forced to do so as well, when the glade families must be sure of someone's intentions. The ancestors make their

judgment clear with symbolic visions or terrifying nightmares.

Silver money is rarely used outside of ***Millvale***, as the glade halls prefer to use their silver to decorate their shrines, as a focal point for the ancestral hosts. Chalices or plates are favored; everyone touches the silver on feast days, the better to remember it when they pass.

Coastal Forests

The coastal forests are primordial, wild places. The dense canopy encloses a humid expanse of gnarled oak, maple, and mighty lerimar trees. Roots twist over mossy boulders, streams, and the toppled stones of lost glades.

No cart or wagon can pass here, as the "trails" are scarcely more than occasional file-marks on rocks. Travel at night without getting lost is impossible.

The entire coast is controlled by a tapestry of **soil mothers** (see page 124). They permit the glade halls, the bramble-chewing goats, and the foragers who take breadwood bark and plentiful fruit; but not a single tree shall fall. Elders speak of glades that broke this law and were snuffed out overnight by **Onddo** (see page 121). When lost glades are discovered, heavy-hearted knocking processions set out to recover what spirits can be found.

d8	Coastal woods encounters
1	***Root walkers***, d6
2	d6 **hunting Onddo** seeking mammal brains; or d3 **tusked Onddo** clearing a stream
3	**Deer**, d12, chewing saplings
4	**Bone devils** hunting for spirits
5	**Foragers** from a nearby glade
6	A pack of d20 **handwolves**, moving through or looking for a weak glade hall to dominate
7	An **ogre**, either moving through or with a nearby lair
8	A ***crawling ghost***

The Root Walkers

A few hardy groups choose to live beyond the safety of the standing stones, led by sooths who claim they hear the will of the forest directly.

Some are charlatans in league with bone devils, but a few really can taste the forest's hallucinogenic pollens.

Mostly, these groups keep to themselves, but sometimes they appear at glades to bargain or raid for sacrifices "to appease the forest."

The forest teaches secrets to some of them. By dying, buried in forest soil, the "root walkers" can be reborn into newly grown bodies. They can re-emerge from the soil great distances away, as if they had "walked the roots."

Centuries-old root walkers also lie dormant in the soil. When they arise, they carry ancient rituals with them.

Millvale

In all of the south coast, there is one region uniquely free of trees, the site of one of the oldest towns in the Tristhmus, Millvale. The Seree exploited the rich soil there, forcing the inhabitants to grow imported crops (sugane, rill beans, and caroot) in huge quantities, to fill the bellies of the enormous tribute wagons that once departed north into ***High Lavel*** along the deep-rut roads. Millvale shares a culture with Grinvolt, but it has been forever changed by Seree imperialism.

Thirty stone halls stand over the bay where the **Wolip** and **Twine** rivers combine, family holdings of the half-lords and many quarter-lords (Seree-imposed titles) who each control a slice of the farmlands, ruled over by a First Lord of Millvale. Springtime knocking processions are only symbolic, and the "High Sooth" goes about in embroidered robes, bedecked in silver.

Halet Girm

This steep-shored island is battered by the waves of the Gray Soont. Fishing boats from Millvale often risk the rocks and tentacled malak to reach the plentiful fish that swarm there.

Crawling Ghosts

Long before the Seree, the Martoi built a fortress of gray stone on Halet Girm. It was laid low by the "strange weapons," the strongest curses they could call from the Powers. Only sorcerers survived, left as wraiths crawling on the island rocks, unsleeping, eternally screaming. Occasionally, they crawl into the sea. The sea doesn't end them, and if one ever comes ashore on the mainland it causes great havoc, blasting the environment with rageful curses. Blood turns to jelly, air turns to fire, and the ground turns to biting mouths.

The only known way to deal with them is to have groups sing peaceful songs to lure them into the sea. Only the bravest axewives and fishers attempt this, and many die.

High Lavel

The highlands between Millvale and Haverlow is called the High Lavel. Short, scrub-like grasses and patches of gorse give way to bare rock outcrops.

This area was once crossed by dozens of Seree tribute wagons every month (see page 100). They're gone, but the deep ruts they left have been eroded into long, deep hollows by centuries of rainfall. These make excellent, sheltered traveling routes when it's dry, but become dangerous, flash-flooding gullies when the rains come.

There are Grinvolt communities in the highlands; they are generally larger, less populous, and more dependent on grazing livestock (especially saw-horn sheep).

d8	Highlands encounters
1	A **tiny shrine** to the forest, left by knockers; silver trinket
2	**Raindrinkers** from Haverlow (see page 102 for numbers)
3	A **new valley**, freshly split open and full of **vampire bushes**
4	d6 giant **saw-horn sheep**
5	d3 **wayfinders** marking trails
6	Party of 2d4 **Grinvolt traders**
7	d2 **drakes** from the High Uttvelt
8	d3 **bone devils** looking for a way home amid the ravines

With too few travelers to keep the land still, a powerful upwelling is occurring here (see page 142). Every year, new valleys split open as an ancient ecosystem forces itself to the surface.

Bone devils cavort by moonlight, and by day, drakes from the High Uttvelt patrol, looking for easy prey.

High Uttvelt

The highlands continue to rise into the southwest until they become a range of proper peaks. At their summit is a strange formation, a labyrinth of immensely high, basalt cliff walls, hundreds of paces high. Between the walls are steep-sided ravines, a few score paces across in most places.

Through the ages, determined explorers have tunneled through some of the "walls," but navigating to the center is still a journey of a hundred leagues.

Some parts of it are flooded and must be swum. Long ago, a colossal iron mine near its center supplied the region with metal, but it has fallen silent.

Drakes roost in numbers along the tops of the cliff walls.

CLAIMSUN & BIREVIA

Claimsun

When the sun sets on the Haver Soont, it falls behind the mountains of Claimsun, one of the oldest domains in the Tristhmus.

The coracles of ***Darkvale*** and Morton were traveling up and down the gentle western coast of the Haver Soont well before recorded history. In this cool, gentle land, the sun rises late and sets early, and fishers ply the shallows in the long twilight. The mist that rises from the water at night is seldom gone before noon.

The cursed land of ***Once Martol*** casts a long shadow and affects many aspects of life in the west.

The Setting of Panur

After the war with the Seree, the demigod Panur followed the setting sun and descended into Claimsun.

For a while he was silent, but after a few generations, sooths began to hear his whisperings on the wind: Panur had become a new Power of the earth.

Panur's voice was heard clearest along the valley above ***Darkvale***. Over the years, a number of people claimed to have had visions of him while on the river or fishing on Ralla lake. Always, his message was one of peace and acceptance of the mundane aspects of life.

Exhorts of Panur

The traditions of Claimsun are steeped in listening to the wisdom of the old Powers, and so in time, a temple was built on the shores of Ralla to contemplate the mysteries of Panur.

From this temple came an exhorting order, sworn to spread their vision of peace and non-ambition. Their message was that the sorcerous excesses of the Seree were born of greed and of disconnection from simple pleasures.

With the Tristhmus now mapped, well connected by tribute routes, and used to ideas from afar being brought by the empire, the "Exhorts of Panur" moved around easily. Shrines to Panur were founded as far as Aridenn and Spittle.

The Exhorts' message of non-ambition put them in conflict with local cults and sects who used dissatisfaction for recruiting purposes, and several shrines came to violent ends or were pressured to leave. Some were abandoned for other reasons (see "In the Care of Bones" on page 34). Still, many shrines featuring Panur's implacable, all-accepting visage remain today.

Darkvale

This ancient town stands at the mouth of a fertile valley; both are named for the long nights. When the rains come, they wash curses down from the highlands, bringing a night that lasts up to a week. (Some say it is a blindness, not true night, for flowers still open and animals seem unaffected.)

The locals accept this with equanimity and have adapted to it. The narrow, cobblestone streets of Darkvale are lined with railings, embossed to indicate where they lead. The citizens click their tongues as they go, announcing themselves in rhythm, so the young may give way to the old.

Beyond the city walls, widely spaced "wind bells" sound the way along the stone roads that lead to town. Callers stand ready to guide village drovers and their herds to the market pens, and twin lighthouses mark the river mouth for boats on the Haver Soont. Only river travel stops completely, as accidents in

the darkness are common and frequently fatal.

The weather is a favorite topic of conversation in Darkvale!

Once Martol

Southwest of Darkvale is a fallen land, birthplace of the Martoi. The entire land is as black as Darkvale on a cloudy night; no guides will take travelers into it willingly.

Locals (if asked) will tell stories of a hero named Vilin who ventured there generations ago. He returned, saying that the only lights were the fairy lights of ghosts who believed themselves still alive. The story goes that he returned with a talent of silver snatched from a horned woman, ruler over a haunted town: Once Martoliin. Every local has a silver coin supposedly minted from it, worth no less than double the usual amount when given in trade.

As in Darkvale, animals are unaffected by the darkness. They are also enormous and territorial (as is common in wild places). Every generation or so, a foolhardy band of hunters snares an aurochs or two in Once Martol, but few try.

Parrow Wind

At the southern end of the Haver Soont is the Parrow Wind, where the Parrow River twists back and forth through endless reeds. Fishing boats are common here, from Darkvale or western Haverlow. A small number of river families live here permanently and sell their catch and information to visitors.

A few times a year, fortune deposits large numbers of "wind nuts" into Halfnight Lake: tough, buoyant nuts with a nutritious, pulpy interior. The first sign of these appearing downriver triggers a mad rush upstream to collect them. Many are eaten, others are sold to farmers in Darkvale. Farmers replant them in the fertile soil, where they briefly sprout and produce fragrant berries found nowhere else. The source of the nuts is unknown, as the western shore of the lake lies in permanent darkness.

the Jellies

The shores of Halfnight Lake are uninhabited, as the water is bad. Fishers who spend too long here (or on the river) sometimes produce glassy jellies instead of human children; these they let slip into the river, where they congregate. Few speak of this, although siblings of the jellies sometimes visit them in secret.

Birevia & Twosister

When the Seree came, Birevia was a windblown island with thin soil, inhabited by herders and fishers who sheltered in its ancient ruins.

Sensing its strategic potential, they developed it into a major center, a hub for tribute ships from the entire region.

Twosister is now the dominant trading power in the region, a city of 8,000 citizens living in tier upon tier of stone manors and homes all up the northeastern slopes of the island. Its wide streets hum with the work-songs of artisans from every culture, producing luxuries for wealthy merchant families.

The massive, oversized docks no longer see the mighty tribute ships, but its ship-builders produce a seaworthy cog every few months, using hardwood from Witchknuckle and Morton.

Sanctum of Birevia

At the highest point of Twosister stands the Sanctum of Birevia. The great domed meditorium was collapsed by devils during the war with the gods, killing the ruling coven. It is now open to the sky, where a gilt pool catches rainwater, but over the centuries the First Lords have repaired and extended it. Sprawling colonnades and cloisters were built to glorify Birevian houses, but each followed the essential design of the ruined ancient sanctum which stood here for millennia.

It is a peaceful space, with many beautiful, exotic plants brought here by the Seree.

the Feast of Gazon

A secret order labors in the oldest part of the Sanctum. For centuries, they have fed a portion of Birevia's tribute of food into a black, oily pool: a so-called "Feast of Gazon." This symbolic, endless meal mystically nourishes astral travelers (at least those using the techniques favored by the Seree).

Without it, human journeyers grow tired within hours and could never hope to reach fabulously distant places such as lost Saaru.

With the Seree gone, the order no longer knows whom they are feeding, but they carry on their duty with great seriousness and pageantry.

the Long Arm of Birevia

With its growing wealth, Birevia throws its weight around politically more every year. As a remnant of imperial rule, its merchant houses must abide by the fiat of the First Lord of Birevia, allowing him to manipulate the trade dynamics extensively. Birevian merchants flood Haverlow ports with cheap fish and oil to lower prices and then hire displaced fishers as mercenary adventurers.

Birevian agents, provocateurs, and outright bandits meddle to control the succession of Darkvale, blockade seagoing trade with Saltbride, and influence the flow of luxuries as far as Pur Cove. A decade ago, Birevian gold paid for the assassination of the heirs of Aridenn, throwing the land into a civil war.

On the Haver Soont, only Novy Dom (see "House of the Tyrant" on page 38) defies it openly. There have been several skirmishes in the Blighted Narrows, resulting in the capture or burning of four Birevian cogs in as many years.

Shallowwain

The north end of the Haver Soont is a maze of reefs, seldom crossed. The Never Gap is considered impassable by sailors—small fishing coracles are too vulnerable to wyverns and tempestuous storms, and the water is too shallow for Birevian cogs to risk. Traddle is as far north as any boat regularly goes.

Flensed Isle

Within the Shallowwain is a mysterious island, seldom visited. A unit of giant mercenaries from Firevault was stranded there by the demise of the Seree. Their descendants live modestly on finned seals, sharing tales of long ago.

Witching Boats

By fluke, Birevia has rediscovered a sorcerous ritual that will allow them to spread their influence even further. They guard this secret closely. Eleven years ago, a young acolyte of the Exhorts learned from the jellies that traversable underwater ley lines exist, provided one can find a way to the opening.

Using the essence of a Panurian Condenser, he divined his way to the eye of a storm as it passed over the correct spot. He found himself drawn into a raging tunnel of water, which ejected him east of Gullet, clear across the Tristhmus. It took him two years to escape Narin's Ring and find his way back home. Abandoning his oaths, he sold the secret to Birevia for four gold talents, which he enjoyed briefly before accidentally ingesting poison.

For the first time, Birevian cogs have been spotted in the Sallet Sea, causing great alarm.

THE BORDERLANDS

THE WINDSWEPT PLAINS

The Borderlands lie between Strielund and the forbidding landmass of Firevault to the north.

The western coast receives occasional rains from the Haver Soont, covering the plains in grass in the summer and crusts of snow and ice in winter.

The eastern edge of the Tristhmus is rocky and mountainous, a glimpse of the inhospitable aridity of the north.

A few doughty settlements ring the Borderlands, all with long histories. The area is a meeting place of four cultures, and the cities of ***Spittle***, ***Salverton***, and ***High Kellan*** are all cosmopolitan in their own way.

The inland center has few permanent structures and is traveled mostly by the nomadic ***Felam*** people.

THE FELAM HERDERS

Ethnically, the Felam are a diverse people, brought together by their lifestyle: herding animals on the great inland plains of the Borderlands.

Long ago, the Martoi cast the Water of Ending upon the plains; and so no children can be born here. Pregnancies do not progress, and many even reverse and wane down to nothing.

The Felam spend many months out of the year on the plains, tending their herds of massive, furred aurochs in all seasons. Though not as huge as the dire animals from the deep wilderness, aurochs grow to substantial size on the plains, often four paces high at the shoulder or taller.

Herding can be lucrative, as plains aurochs are sold at markets as far away as Birevia, but it is a hard life. Herding groups are perennially short of labor, and it is easy to find paying work among them.

Felam groups sometimes make forays into ***the Aggal*** to find dire mules. These they put to great use in herding, but they must return to the mountains often. The offspring of domesticated mules are always much smaller, too little to be of any use in guiding the stubborn herds or discouraging predators.

PLAINS ANIMALS

Giant locusts are an occasional problem on the plains, as are the black biting flies of late summer. In winter, the harsh conditions bring the massive **dire foxes** down from the snowy foothills of ***the Aggal***, hoping for easy kills among the herds.

In the hottest, driest summers, blight ant colonies sometimes spring up. The ants don't thrive in the grasslands and soon burn themselves out, but they are indiscriminate foragers and will happily attempt to take aurochs or herders camped near a nest.

HIGH KELLAN

High Kellan, the city of tents, is halfway between a sprawling campsite and a town. Its architecture is curious, for there are no buildings: the only permanent structures are thousands of stone pillars. The newer pillars are dry stone, taken from quarries in the mountains, while the older ones are graven monoliths, all that remains of an ancient, ***Aggal*** necropolis.

The pillars are arranged in a grid, dividing the city into hundreds of "squares." Three times a year, the city swells to a population of thousands as hundreds of herder groups bring their cattle to be sold. Families string up brightly colored wool blankets atop the pillars, enclosing them into billowing shops and dwellings, turning Kellan's dusty lanes into a many-hued, bustling market town. Each year the market time grows a little longer; now it stretches at least a full month.

During market, the city also becomes thick with merchants from Birevia and drover-buyers from Strielund or Noripur. Traders from Novy Dom come in from ***Spittle***, making most of the journey by boat, but a small number of Aggal make the trek in their mule-drawn carts, bristling with pikes against wyvern attacks.

Cattle trading in High Kellan is loud, smelly, and obvious, but dozens of tuns of oil, brandies, scented wood, and spices change hands every day.

A supporting trade in services—artisans, appraisers, loans, mercenaries, and information—has begun to flourish.

FELAM CULTURE

A number of things may strike first-time visitors to the markets of High Kellan. The Felam waste no time in matters of childbearing—along with everything else, market month is a time to figure out how babies will be conceived and birthed.

Frank questions about suitability for partnerships should be expected, as well as options for temporary jobs: Felam families of childbearing years often seek temporary work away from the plains, traveling with the cattle they have sold to work in tanning and leatherworking in Lastfort or ***Spittle***.

News and tales spread through High Kellan like wildfire. Bring a story, so they say, and you'll hear it from someone else before you leave.

The vast, fenced-in pens of High Kellan give the herders some relief from constant vigilance. Herders from different groups can often be seen strolling, arm-in-arm, around the perimeter of the tent city, chatting amiably. Children can be seen forming long, linked lines, running until someone trips and they all fall.

No Lords, No Laws

The Felam are fiercely proud of never yielding to the Seree, leaving High Kellan abandoned for a century rather than pay tribute. They have no land-holding lords, and no First Lord to lead them.

The very idea that there are unwritten rules is uncomfortable for the Felam, as it is inconsistent with their identity as spontaneous, unruly, and harmonious. This is especially true in regard to how wealthier families dressed in linens from Wint always wind up with the most central squares.

Visitors acclimatizing to the complex set of traditions that govern how space is allocated in the city must grow a thick skin to endure dirty looks or shouting until they figure out how they're expected to behave for themselves.

The one law they will name openly is the ban on permanent structures, which the Felam say will attract the undead. Many times, foreign merchants have attempted to build warehouses or stables on the periphery of the city (or later, hidden in the foothills to the south) only to have a mob of Felam pull them down as soon as they are discovered.

Spittle

Spittle is the defended city. From the waterline, it looks like a squat cone: concentric rings of mud-brick walls and palisades provide layers of protection against invasion. It stands on a fracture line of the old Seree empire and was never accorded full tribute-region status, having been variously attached to Lastfort, Birevia, and (briefly) Novy Dom. It is ruled over by a half-lord (currently Esmer II) whose days are spent dodging the attempts of both Lastfort and Birevia to maneuver it into annexation.

It has long-standing non-aggression pacts with both, but while this protects the city from outright invasion, it provides cover for spies and demagogues to enter the city freely. Wealthy households here are walled and guarded, and no one of wealth or influence is ever caught without a coterie of supportive, armed relatives and loyal hangers-on.

Assassination attempts (disguised by brawls or riots) happen regularly.

Spittle competes with High Kellan as a hub of trade to the southeast, but despite its excellent wharves and warehouses, corruption makes it ineffective.

Spitwind, River of the Dead

The Spitwind River is wide, shallow, and reedy. It winds through the plains from Wren Bay all the way to the ***Aggal***, but it's fished only by giant herons. Huge, wrinkled water pigs laze in the sluggish waters.

Long ago, this area was densely populated; the whole river is lined with ruined settlements, broken walls jutting up above the waterline. In three places, there are elaborate complexes of stone, slowly eroding. The Felam call the ruins "the river's teeth," and they stay well away: they are filled with the dead, remnants of the time of the Martoi.

Nevertheless, the grazing is good in the river's shallow valley. Water pigs are not very bright and have been known to join nearby herds of aurochs. This is both hilarious to the Felam and a sign of good fortune.

the Aggal

The name "Aggal" refers to both a place and a people. It is the dry, mountainous land between Inogira and ***Curselake***. Massive Aggal mules leap between the rocks, eating the cliff-nettles and knobbly succulents. At night, the rocky gullies echo with the shrieks of dire foxes.

The Aggal people are all but gone as a culture. From a high place, one can easily count a dozen of their three-legged "nest" towers, but most stand empty, mule-leather coverings flapping in the wind.

Thirty generations ago, the ancestors of the Aggal opened the tombs at Curselake and used the ritual magic they found inside to save themselves from drought-borne hunger. Those that did became orcs, devourers of the ancestral dead and heralds to demons of the underworld.

With reduced dependence on food and water, the orcs expanded into the arid lands. Now, "orcnests" stand as far north as the Greatcleft river, but they also expanded south. Paranoid and violent from the whispering of demons, orcs make poor neighbors.

Though the Aggal feel a kinship toward their fallen brethren, every year their territory shrinks as they retreat toward ***Salverton***. Each gully and ridge is given up reluctantly, as there are rituals known to the sooths of the Aggal that can be performed nowhere else.

Salverton

This hill fort is maintained by Inogira; its garrison farms poorly in the rocky land and depends on funds from Inogira and "safe passage" tolls charged to merchants and drovers.

Curselake

The cliffs of Curselake are an ancient necropolis: hundreds of tombs (some huge) have been cut into them, from the gull-stained heights to the wave-battered waterline. They are older even than the Martoi and hold many secrets.

d8	High Kellan encounters
1	Merchants packing up, looking to move unsold goods at cut rate
2	d4 **pickpockets**, working together to obscure their thefts
3	**Aggal**, looking to hire soldiers for a raid into orc territory
4	Tent-square floor collapses revealing a **crypt** of the old necropolis: d6 niches, with d10 **crypt servants**. d4 climb out.
5	Disheveled **merchant caravan** arrives with a sorry tale of mishap but few goods
6	d6 **herders**, weeping openly after the sale of cattle; others join in sympathetically
7	**Dire mule** panics, tearing through d8 tent-square homes and shops before being caught
8	**Fire** breaks out, burning d20 tent-squares; 2d20 at night

d8	Plains encounters
1	Fast-moving **cyclone** moving in from the west, torrential rain
2	d2 **dire foxes** (as big as draft horses) from the Aggal, hunting
3	**Aggal hunting party** (d8), separated from d3-1 others
4	d10+3 **orcs**, looking for a Felam herd-group with which to trade
5	Martoi **wraith**, in a horse-drawn palanquin; d6 knights
6	d3 **bog stranglers** in a low, swampy area with d2 huts
7	**Blight ant queen**, heavy with eggs, digging the beginning of a nest: news worth Felam silver
8	Buried Birevian **goods cache**. Roll d6: 1-2, scouts watch it; 5-6, river undead have moved in.

TEALWOOD & NORIPUR

Tealwood: Forest of Memory

Before recorded history, the central valleys were home to many different clans. These were driven out or conquered by the invading Martoi, who built the great fortress of Tanibel here. In time, it became their capital.

The central valleys saw the most concentrated use of the Martoi's strange weapons, rendering them uninhabitable, and forcing the Martoi to retreat into the half-world of illusion.

With humans gone, the forest soon reclaimed the valleys. They stood like this for thousands of years, forgotten under an unbroken canopy, stretching from the Near Soont to the Nall River, pathless and silent.

The Seree

Later, at the peak of the Seree empire, the sorcerers forced Grinvolt clans back into Tealwood's cursed valleys, to clear them and farm them for tribute.

This progressed for several generations, with encounters with encysted Martoi becoming more frequent. With its illusionary existence under threat from the living, Tanibel awoke. Fey warriors rode out to bring the new villages under their sway, forcing settlers to consume the milk of deceit (see "Veil of the Once-Queen" on page 66) and razing villages that refused.

Pyaad and other sorcerers intervened, destroying several cysts completely, but the Martoi retaliated with Tears of Memory, poisoning the water systems of the entire forest.

The Giants of War

During their war with the gods, the Seree called upon the giants of Firevault as allies and mercenaries. Many units were stranded when the war was lost; they became hunted and unable to move openly. Several found refuge in Tealwood, swearing fealty to Tanibel and living on game and humans.

In the centuries after the war, their numbers swelled and, at their peak, they held sway over the entire valley. Giant fortresses arose at ***Wint*** and ***Shor Pan***, threatening Noripur.

Remaining Villages

Centuries later, with the Seree gone, Tealwood again stands silent. Some of the highland villages remain today, but the lowlands are in a sorry state, with the surviving villages isolated and frightened or abandoned completely.

The giants are few now, but gnarled veterans and their descendants can be found living as ogres throughout Tealwood.

Vilin and the Flame

Villagers celebrate a hero named Vilin for driving the giants from the eastern end of the valley and establishing a safe route to Tannòch up the Nall River.

Songs tell that Vilin left a cache of magic and weapons (including his legendary spear) for eventual use against the fey. Many shrines to Vilin's memory stand in Tealwood, each purporting to mark his birthplace.

"Vilin," however, does not appear in the historical archives of ***Owlshade***, which credit the capture of ***Wint*** to a nameless, fire-wielding sorcerer.

The reality is that Vilin and the sorcerer Titardinal were lovers and led the rebellion against the giants together. The cache is real: after Vilin was killed by the Martoi, a grieving Titardinal entombed him with his arms, armor, and much else. Titardinal spent the rest of

d8	Tealwood encounters
1	Rocky **crevice** used by many, contains fire ashes, human bones, Grinvolt protection etchings, thigh-sized "dagger"
2	d2 members of an **expedition** from Aridenn, trying to find a shorter trade route to Saltbride
3	Mortally **wounded sooth**; spirits sustain her to find someone to avenge her village
4	**d3 ogres** dragging the last **d8 survivors** from a village they recently attacked and emptied
5	Humble cottage, pigs; actually d3 disguised **bog stranglers**
6	Stench precedes a **mad ogre** draped in entrails; endlessly reliving the Siege of Throne
7	**Foragers** from nearby (roll on ***Tealwood settlement*** table)
8	***Tealwood settlement***

d8	Tealwood settlement
1	Strong **settlement**, standing stones, with safe routes marked to its uplands trading partners
2	Spring-fed **hidden dell**; 2d6 families, fearful of outsiders
3	Tiny village barely recovered from **poisoning** 2d6 years ago; grown orphans with few skills, no sooth to guide them
4	Recently **abandoned**; d20 poisoned survivors crawling blindly in the surrounds
5	Abandoned and overgrown; despondent **ancestral host** rains curses upon all visitors
6	d8 survivors living as **orcs**, having eaten ancestral ashes
7	d3 **ogres** served by d20 pox-ridden **people**, occasionally eaten
8	"Thriving" **village**, protected by pacts with hungry Powers

his life trying to magic him back from the dead (see "The Sky-Blind Spire" on page 54).

Wint

The "clacking city" stands on the muddy banks of Wint Lake. The giants built it with **huge walls** of black, mountain-stone blocks as a fortress to defend the mouth of the Nall River. Three tiers of **terraces** rise from the central plaza up to the walls, forming a basin filled with new buildings. Human-sized stairways nestle in the town's giant-sized steps.

In the central plaza is the **column**, a perpetually rotating platform of black basalt. (Legends say it is turned by a titan, imprisoned by Vilin, far below the ground.) The column's turning powers industry: hundreds of **jerker lines** radiate from it. Many twitch overhead, others rattle in ducts along the gutters, powering dozens of bellows, trip hammers, mechanical looms, and laundries.

The Milling Guild grinds flour with the column, but the "collection tunnels" extend farther down than they dare go.

Wint trades extensively, welcoming drover-barges from High Kellan and grains and flax from ***Owlshade*** in exchange for linens and metal tools. Many tinkers start their spring journeys here.

The "Flame of Wint" presides over the entire anarchic mess. Originally a Seree title, a succession of bureaucrats has clung to threadbare robes of office.

Wintpeaks

Steep-sided mountains create a rocky borderland dotted with goat-herding villages. They prefer isolation; mercenary-adventurers from ***Owlshade*** try regularly to extract tribute.

Owlshade

Owlshade is the largest city in all of the Tristhmus, sprawling nearly a league from the shores of its deep-water port to the ***owl cliffs***. Long before the Seree, its alliance with Darshore and Pur Cove allowed it to grow strong, at the nexus between fertile Noripur and the rest of the Tristhmus.

The rise of Wint threatened its regional dominance. Though Owlshade's ruling cabal sees itself as above earthly matters (war most of all), Owlshade employs an expanding number of mercenary-adventurers to safeguard its interests (e.g., access to trade via the Nall River). Underemployed, aspiring, and former mercenaries regularly take up life as **bandits**, causing no end of trouble in the region.

The architecture of Owlshade is chaotic and eclectic as a result of status-seeking imperial sorcerers mimicking the styles of distant cultures. Domes, spirals, confronting blocks, and asymmetric bulges are common.

Outside of its raucous waterfront taverns, Owlshade is deeply conservative. Its law bans organized activity of any sort outside of its **merchant guilds**, which regulate dress, social conduct, and even marriage arrangements and the playing of games.

Its courts are packed with throngs of the wealthy, listening to readings of new legal findings and their implications to city life; legal rhetoric is an essential skill for personal advancement.

The ambitious or desperate turn to the Basilica for aid (see page 76).

Owl Cliffs

Two **colossal owls** carved into the escarpment have watched over the city since before written history, blocking the dawn and giving the city its name.

The gates at their feet lead to extensive **tunnels** inside the escarpment: a prehistoric tin mine later used as crypts; temples and shrines to Powers real and imagined; natural caverns beyond those.

Ironically, the ban on new guilds has left the escarpment complex entirely lawless. Cults, prospectors, explorers, outlaws, and the Ricalu secretly living in the city all venture in and out freely.

Inogira

Once a proud gateway to trade across the Sallet Sea, the decline of Glimland, the destruction of its great sanctum by the gods, and centuries of raids by Tealwood giants have left it a shell, a town living in the ruin of a city.

Shor Pan

The giants built Shor Pan, at the height of their strength, meant to use it as a staging area for expansion into Noripur. Its cursed heights never saw battle, as Vilin struck at Wint instead. A garrison held out for several decades but eventually succumbed to harassing raids. Now, its haunted windows glower at the boats that sail past in the strait.

THE UR-MENIG

THE MISSING WATERS

Once a sea on the surface of the land, the great, slow rhythms of the earth carried the Ur-Menig ever downwards. Eventually, it was enclosed completely.

The ***Dradkin***, beholden to the Power within the sea, descended with it. For a thousand generations, their fishing boats plied the inky waters within the "ring of lights" formed by the fires of their ***communities***, their only stars.

Two millennia ago, Sorg's hunger opened a great chamber below the Ur-Menig, and the sea drained. Landslides thundered in its wake, sweeping hundreds of thousands to their deaths.

The memory of the sea remained, however: boats built before the draining float at sea level, "flying" over a black gulf of unbreathable air. Ancient sea life still swims within, seemingly unaware that the water has gone.

THE DRADKIN

The Dradkin are undergoing a slow, excruciating extinction. With no coastal soil, their cliffside ***communities*** (▲) are dependent on fishing, but usable boats grow ever fewer. More than half of their communities are ***fallen*** (△).

Out of fear, sea-worship songs have been replaced by a syncretic mishmash of Suvuvenist rituals and pact-prayers to horrid Guguluin, both seeping into Dradkin culture via demonic cults.

Lacking the Carreg's ability to breathe below the ancient waterline, the Dradkin learned to mine Sephus, but the best veins have been depleted.

A generation ago, tensions with the Carreg resulted in the Dradkin expulsion from Sifoon (see page 80), costing them trade. They are now openly at war, raiding any time fortune and numbers afford them the opportunity.

THE CARREG

While the Dradkin were still reeling from the cataclysm, the Carreg established Sifoon as a safe haven from aquatic menaces and from which they could harvest the sea floor's remarkable bounty. A handful of other communities (●) exist, though some are ***fallen*** (○) to demons or Dradkin raids.

REGIONS OF THE SEA FLOOR

The sea mountains near **Hrel** and **Sifoon** are steep-sided and crusted with forager-crushed corals. **Ulrioten** is pristine and covered in rare delicacies (see page 82), but the sharp coral is treacherous to those on foot.

In the lowlands, "sea snow" drifts downwards constantly, and every footfall raises muddy clouds; soft mud is sometimes dangerously deep.

The hilly region of **Maimy** is now the favorite foraging ground of the Carreg from Sifoon, who travel in and out along the ***Recaan*** to reach its lush, maze-like valleys. They always go armed.

TRAVEL WITHIN THE UR-MENIG

As the crow files, the Ur-Menig is 52 leagues long and 10-20 leagues wide. Most of its shores are sandy and steep, lapped by invisible, soundless waves.

Ancient boats bob just as if they rest on water, but occupants or items that fall out drop like stones. In the lowlands and mountain valleys, the invisible water is thousands of paces deep.

Carreg navigators sense the landscape by air; Dradkin "purr" loudly to echolocate. For longer trips, they must navigate in darkness, guided by the dim pinpricks of distant ***community*** lights.

Surface dwellers that use lights will make out the ghostly, monochromatic subsurface world far below.

d10	Water-level encounters
1	d8 **Dradkin raiders** in an unlit longboat, moving swiftly
2	d3 Dradkin **fishing boats**, the crew sleeping under tarps
3	Secretive surface **sorcerer**, reroll for her entourage
4	Column of **cold air**, frost; 50% chance of freezing drizzle
5	d12 boats making a communal **shrine-flotilla** to the sea for d20 Jorn, Carreg, and Dradkin
6	Dradkin double-hulled **salvage boat**; d8 Dradkin winch Sephus-masked divers to a ***wrecked vessel*** far below
7	Warm upwelling brings d20 dog-sized white **crabs**
8	d6 **cave drakes** flap overhead, on patrol for vulnerable prey
9	d6 Sifoon-bound **paladins** of Serimet seeking medicines
10	**Dragon** from the surface, a fiery interloper seeking magic

d8	Sea floor encounters
1	d10 Carreg **foragers**
2	d4×d4 seal-sized **coelacanths**
3	d100 **vulcan anemones**, whose touch ignites flesh, may rise as a floating swarm
4	Sulfurous fumes from a volcanic vent are warming **d20 meebs**
5	Cottage-sized **clam** pulls in wanderers with a sticky tendril
6	d20 unconscious Ricalu in a **titan isopod**, way off course
7	Whale-sized **benthic eel**, probing crevices for food with bioluminescent mouth tentacles
8	Roll on ***wrecked vessel*** table

d4	Dradkin community (▲)
1	d20 **fishers**, d6 functioning skiffs, d4 tending the **beacon**
2	As above, with d10 expert kinleather **tailors** and **artisans**
3	As above, with d3 potent Suvuvenist **fleshpriests**, living in lavish, ritual excess
4	As above, with d20 Sephus-masked **spear-fighters**

d6	Fallen community (△○)
1	Dradkin **hermit** dons costumes to feign he's different people
2	d3 **cave stitchers**, each with d10 puppets, busily preparing to invade another community
3	d20 **survivors** of a fungal outbreak lick the walls and arrange the dead in patterns
4	Shorn off by landslide; cavern crypts spill distraught **wraiths** into the surrounding darkness
5	Bloody standoff in temple ruins, d12 desperants vs. d12 Dradkin
6	**Avatar** of Suvuvena rules over d20 miserable Dradkin **cultists** and d6 insufferable **acolytes**

d6	Wrecked vessel
1-2	Fishing skiff barely visible under glowing anemones
3	Upturned "hull" in the mud is actually the shell of an unconscious **emperor tortoise**
4	Dradkin longboat spans an inky fissure like a creaking bridge
5	Intact stone structure teeters on a landslide; 2d8 sleeping and d8 crushed Dradkin
6	12-oar Jorn trading barque; d6 **ghost eels** lurk in the interior

The Jornrealm

Before it erupted in civil war, the five great caverns of the Jorn held tens of thousands in a sprawling city. Fungal plague, fed by war casualties killed thousands; few now remain in the echoing, darkened streets. Cracks here lead down to yet deeper parts of the underworld.

The Eyes of Sorg

Two great pits in the sea floor mark where the waters drained; Sifoon sages believe they are how the great devourer first set its sights upon the Ur-Menig.

In fact, there is a whole other world below, a demonic cyst rising to the surface. The draining of the sea flooded it, and the cave stitchers and other demons that trouble these lands are its few survivors.

The Fronds

A wide, soil-covered shelf extends several leagues along the northern edge of the Ur-Menig. The unbreathable air is only ten paces deep here, and the shelf is covered in an undulating forest of blue-gray dredgeleaf kelp.

Carreg foragers catch minnows in nets, wary of the sizable ghost eels. Getting lost is a constant hazard.

Surface sorcerers sometimes come here; in the forests can be found remnants of villages, arranged by the rules and patterns of an ancient magic.

Hattasken

The second largest Carreg settlement is Hattasken, nestled in the Fronds and home to nearly 300 Carreg. Life moves sluggishly below the air line, but it is excellent protection against Dradkin.

A sturdy tower rises over the mud-brick structures, providing access to sea level and a trio of wharves.

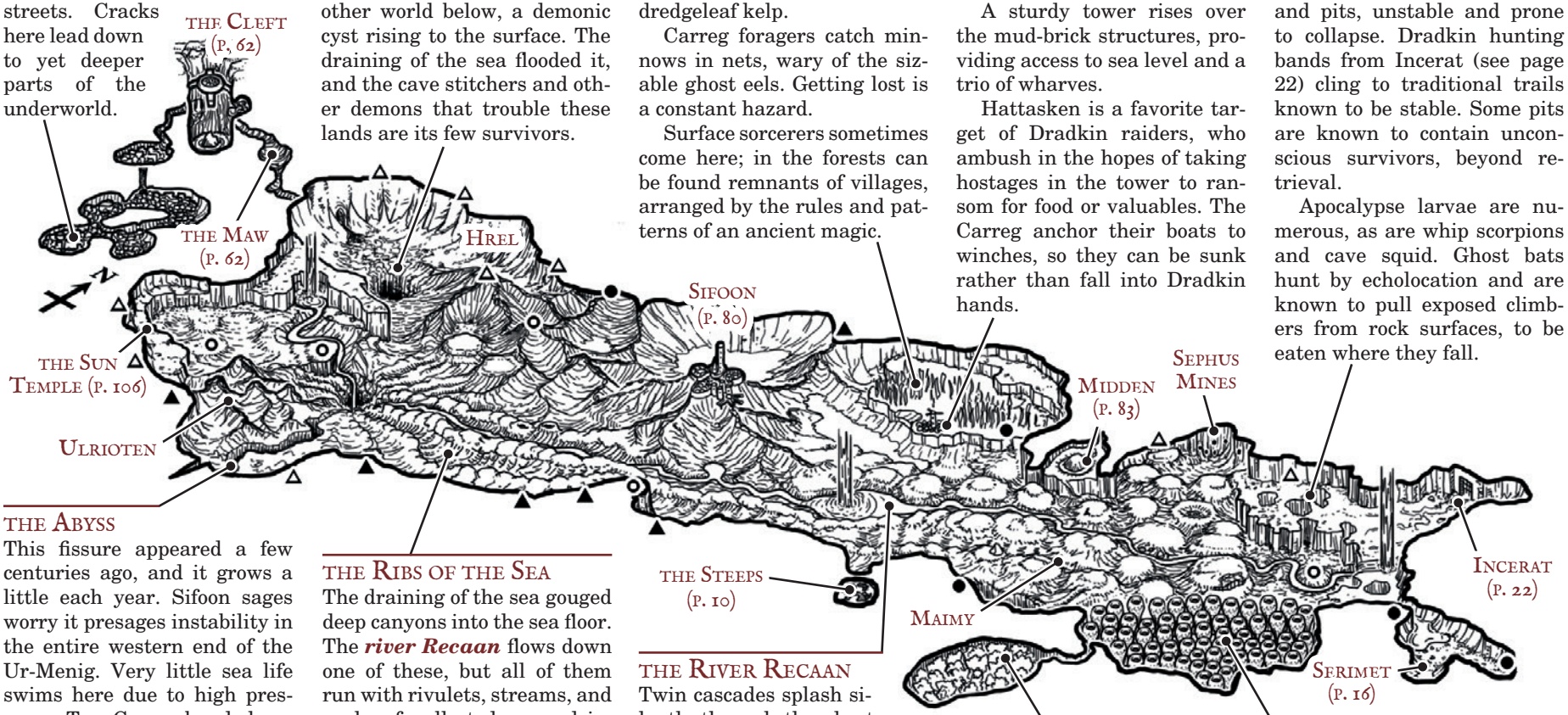
Hattasken is a favorite target of Dradkin raiders, who ambush in the hopes of taking hostages in the tower to ransom for food or valuables. The Carreg anchor their boats to winches, so they can be sunk rather than fall into Dradkin hands.

The Dimreach

The Dimreach is a huge plateau of porous, crumbling rock, one of the few large areas of the Ur-Menig high enough to be breathable.

The region is a mess of steps, shelves, ledges, bridges, and pits, unstable and prone to collapse. Dradkin hunting bands from Incerat (see page 22) cling to traditional trails known to be stable. Some pits are known to contain unconscious survivors, beyond retrieval.

Apocalypse larvae are numerous, as are whip scorpions and cave squid. Ghost bats hunt by echolocation and are known to pull exposed climbers from rock surfaces, to be eaten where they fall.



The Abyss

This fissure appeared a few centuries ago, and it grows a little each year. Sifoon sages worry it presages instability in the entire western end of the Ur-Menig. Very little sea life swims here due to high pressures. Two Carreg bands have become wealthy on "mined" silver—actually smelted treasures from a huge Thiru-era complex beneath Ulrioten.

Settlements

▲—Dradkin
△—Dradkin (fallen)
●—Carreg
○—Carreg (fallen)

The Ribs of the Sea

The draining of the sea gouged deep canyons into the sea floor. The ***river Recaan*** flows down one of these, but all of them run with rivulets, streams, and pools of collected cave drippings. In this alien wetland, several species of fish have become amphibious: able to swim in both the ghost water and the real water.

At least three separate surface dragons have been spotted here, resting on trips through the Eyes of Sorg, for reasons known only to them.

The River Recaan

Twin cascades splash silently through the ghost water, forming a real river on the sea bed. The Carreg call it Recaan, "anxiety," for the river knows it ends at the Eyes of Sorg. Dozens of Carreg fishing boats use it to reach the many trails into Maimy; boaters who sing lovingly to the river have nothing to fear from the sea life of the Ur-Menig.

Pollen

A nameless Power shines an amber glow over a lost pocket of primordial jungle. Bandit wasps buzz between the slimy trunks. Thigh-thick worms eat anything resting in the ankle-deep humus. In the jungle's heart, the songs of soft-skinned Heelan echo through the mist.

The Flutes

Gigantic fungal flutes anchored to the sea floor sway in the invisible currents. The tops reach the waterline, making boating slow. Fish are plentiful, but albino crabs lurk in the flute mouths. These are both predator and prey to the fishers that venture here.

Rumors and Hooks

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
Stellarium of the Vinteralf (page 8)			
001-007	A cathedral of ice has appeared at the north end of Steaming Valley, perched on the glacier.	The great steam forge of the Vinteralf is one of the only forges hot enough to work divine white metal.	A pricelessly valuable, self-healing rope washed down Steaming Valley; its maker must be found.
008-014	A white, winged "demon" has been seen twisting in the air above the north villages, a bad omen.	Vinteralf seers in their icy Stellarium could pull ritual secrets from the stars themselves.	The visible Stellarium means the strange Vinteralf are closer than we thought; establish trade!
015-020	A wolf covered in blue growth came staggering out of Steaming Valley; villagers burned it.	The Vinteralf's Stellarium was governed by Prince Thavir, wielder of Grugnir, the blinding starsword.	The deadly Wyrm Jokun has taken residence on a glacier; find it and put an end to its ravages!
Steeps of the Ur-Menig (page 10)			
021-027	Years ago, a wizard often walked the Northrut, but they say he went into a hole and never came out.	The wizard Bethelan had a pact with the Carreg to carry him far and wide via underground roads.	A talent of silver to whoever finds and returns Half-Lord Joun from his trek along Northrut!
028-034	Ottlecop's public house uses insect shells for plates; they're so huge! Gifts from Bethelan, 'fore he died.	Bethelan found a way to trap a demon in a labyrinth of musical crystals, most unwisely.	A trio of strange, cave folk visited Ottlecop village last month, offering gems for "stout mercenaries."
035-041	Half-Lord Joun led three horsemen along Northrut to learn what left huge drag-marks; none returned.	The wizard Bethelan supposedly made his greatest discoveries in a cavern near Ottlecop.	Vilin's band all knew each others' thoughts, thanks to a musical trick they learned in Bethelan's caves.
A Litany in Scratches (page 12)			
042-048	That old track was once the road to the High Uttvelt, a wall of stone as high as you like.	A thriving monastery once stood at the edge of the High Uttvelt and paid for goods in fine silver.	A map has been found to a ruined monastery, once said to be filled with silver.
049-054	When the village sooth was a slip this high, monks would come here from the west, with silver.	The monks of New Spring are well versed in secret knowledge and turn away no travelers.	If the fort at the High Uttvelt were reclaimed, the pass to Slakesea would be safe once more.
055-061	A pack of dogfolk went west through here a month ago with a look in their eyes I didn't like one bit.	Within the order of New Spring, a terrible rot has taken root: a quest for blasphemous immortality.	Sooth Marta knows a place of sacred healing, if it can only be cleansed and reconsecrated.
Midden of the Deep (page 83)			
062-068	Weirdly shaped ghosts crawl from the ground, wailing. Stay a month, you'll see! Try the ham?	The source of the Carreg's wealth is a huge deposit of drake dung in the deep, filled with gems: here!	An expedition into the deep seeks insects of all kinds; some make useful remedies and fetch silver!
069-075	Years ago, lanky, eyeless miners would emerge from the caves, spending gems just for food!	Carreg miners risked garnet-jawed hulk larvae to fetch their gems from the deep places.	A crust of earth has fallen, revealing a mound of glittering gems and moving lights far below.
076-082	This? Pretty, right? My great-great-gran got this for baking a pie for a man with backwards knees.	A host of Carreg was entombed in a great mine; their anxious spirits call out for rest to this day.	Enormous insects, all different, have been carrying off anyone caught alone. This must end.
The Cage of Serimet (page 16)			
083-088	We've seen your sort down here before; several of you live down that way, in a cave lit by a tiny sun.	The summoner Yorta has been sentenced to unending imprisonment by the Order of Serimet.	The summoner Yorta knows a way to lost Saaru, beyond the astral realm, but he is prisoner to zealots.
089-095	There was a battle here in my father's time, a great many against one. I'm not sure who won.	The paladins of Serimet have all gone, left for a deep cavern where they guard their great enemy.	Wise, innocent Yorta's gifts and guidance are lost to the world while he lies in chains. Free him!
096-102	Last I saw of my daughter was twenty years ago; she hunted wizards with the order.	There are many rituals to invoke Serimet, but none work. This wasn't true twenty years ago.	The lunatic Order of Serimet holds a wizard in chains. They must have money and valuables!

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
Tannòch Rest-of-Kings (page 15)			
103-109	Every few years some withered eccentric retires to Tannòch. They always seem in a great hurry.	Tannòch's accord with the gods gives even the wickedest sorcerer who dies there peaceful rest.	Tannòch's tree speaks divine wisdom; the answer to your question is there, upon its rocky shore.
110-116	Ever since the big fire in midwinter, we haven't heard from the sisters on the island. Not a peep.	Wise sorcerers fear an afterlife, cast out and chased by demons. It's either Tannòch or lichery.	Curse shmurse. The lord of Birevia has traitors to root out, and the Umber Tome will do it. Get it.
117-122	The fishers avoid the island now; anyone getting close can be sure of a swift stone for their trouble.	After centuries of collecting sorcerous relics, Tannòch must be stuffed with them.	Without Tannòch, countless cruel magics will be released into the world. Restore it, pay be damned.
The Task of Zeichus (page 33)			
123-129	There's a tiny trickle of water up in the canyons known to herders; it'll cure even udder pox.	When the Martoi fell to civil war, several queens reigned, one from a stone manse south of Darkvale.	The Jyx are too superstitious to go near it, but now that we know where it is, we're opening it.
130-136	Even so, we don't go into the canyons any more, too many goats go missing now... and there's the webs.	In the hills above Darkvale is a barred door; beyond it, the dead Martoi reign as they ever did.	For hundreds of years we've lived in fear of their magics; it's time to go in and sort them out.
137-143	Oh yes, any herder here knows the way. Great big archway, high up on the side of the canyon.	Martoi artisans could paint as real as life; Zeichus, best of all, served the Western Queen herself.	The Western Queen's manse held the secret of Zeichus's frescoes. Get in, avoid ghosts, get out.
The Coming of Sorg (page 25)			
144-150	There was once a great temple that way, but it has fallen to bandits.	For generations, pilgrims visited the Temple of Deel to see the remarkable cave of mirrors beneath it.	No mead has come from the temple in a year; an Owlshade guild sends you to bid for the recipe.
151-156	The bandits on the old temple mound are not mere thieves, but drawn together by a dark impulse to serve "Sorg," to whom they pray.	Seers sense a potent hunger rising from the deep, far below where now stands the Temple of Deel the Protectress. It is a grave omen.	My nephew Myen has been taken in by these people. He talks about an age of prosperity and won't do any work; now he's stopped coming home!
157-163	It came like a huge ribbon of guts, wailing and groaning. It ate my goats... my son! I am lost!	The cult of Sorg has a long history and many names; it flares up wherever there's hunger.	If we can catch one of those horrors seen over the Darshore road, Owlshade has silver for it for sure.
The Raid Mirror (page 18)			
164-170	Raids into the borderlands by orcs have been increasing and reaching further south.	The wizard al Bim's tower at Curselake holds items of great value: his mirror and the iron cask!	Lastfort is sending patrols deep into orc territory to find which nest is leading these sorcerous raids.
171-177	Survivors of an orc raid beyond Salverton say the raiders left through a shimmering circle.	Beyond High Kellan, orc sorcerers bind demons into nails and then hammer them into their heads.	Lastfort is paying silver for mercenaries to lurk in Salverton, ready to defend it if a raid comes there.
178-184	The citadel at Lastfort has been burned! The half-lord is dead, and the whole town is in a panic. Devils appeared in the night from the inside!	The Lycaeum once possessed a portal mirror, through which you could walk to distant places, but this was stolen by the wizard al Bim.	A giant barque of stone and ice is drifting over the borderlands, dripping fire and bringing orcs in its wake. Countless villages have been burned.
Circle of Wolves (page 20)			
185-190	Ever since the miller (Troy Ulfssen) started taking folk to the stone circle, there's been trouble.	The stone circle near Morton village has real, old power, though its worship was broken ages ago.	Morton is cursed, and they're hiding the cause of it. These things have a way of spreading.
191-197	Bad business with the cooper's daughter, murdering her father. She still says he was a wolf!	The wizard Titardinal once communed at the stone circle, but the Powers were silent—busy, he felt.	The earthen Powers of Morton circle once blessed the village, but only anxious voices are heard now.
198-204	Tumblers passed through Morton village. Three were murdered! The rest will never return, surely.	Six demigods are hiding near Morton; this is plain from the motion of the stars.	Mysterious, white-armored warriors killed bandits last week and are now en route to Morton. Why?

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
Though Flesh Be Vast (page 22)			
205-211	They say a white, slender woman prowls the outer farms at night. Sometimes she takes a lamb.	The Dradkin of the underworld had a temple they called Incerat; Bethelan left a map to its entrance.	Strange, slender people have been raiding the highland farms in Strielund. Find their origin!
212-218	Couff said he found a strange, skinny man hiding in his barn. He traded a jacket of skin for food.	Bethelan lamented losing his imp on his expedition to Incerat; they never reunited.	The dowsers agree, there is magic in the ravine where the stream ends and bats come from.
219-224	That's as strange as Couff's jacket of skin; he wore it for a week then stopped, saying it whispered.	The fleshpriests of the Dradkin know many strange rituals; they perfected these at Incerat.	Desperately weak Dradkin are staggering into the highlands villages, fleeing some kind of war.
The Necromancer's Wish (page 26)			
225-231	Something in those cliffs calls any who wander nearby to their doom.	Somewhere within those cliffs, the Martoi once mined their legendary pigments.	Birevia pays gold for the tiniest scrap of that pigment, and these hills supposedly have lots.
232-238	Fishers on the Slakesea say they've seen smoke coming from those cliffs on summer mornings.	There is a secret road in those cliffs; the Ricalu use it to travel great distances quickly.	A many-hued cat killed the quarter-lord's son; there's a silver reward for recovering his bones.
239-245	Beware those cliffs. A multicolored lynx up that way demands travelers give up their wine!	Sleepwalking is unusually common in the dry shores of Slakesea. Tie a foot to your bedpost, fool!	A Martoi map-tablet has been translated; the source of their priceless pigment is found!
The Extent of Gamandes (page 28)			
246-252	The children fear that cave, they say anyone who has heard the wind blow through it dreams of a red desert for a week, maybe a month!	Unclideon wrote that he sold the Void Gulls the route to Gamandes for a loop of dark glass. Later he regretted this, pitying the clay ones.	Look through the jeweler's lens. Yes... do you see it? Tiny mountains, yes! No, don't touch the glass! My apprentice did, and he was gone in an instant!
253-259	The Carreg are a sullen folk, no? They talk about their "song" all the time, but nobody's heard it. Odd.	The Carreg have a living god, Gamandes, whose song brings them peace wherever they go.	Centuries ago, they helped us; now they are calling. Step onto the dais; it can send six more.
260-265	The wind used to blow from that cave, and when it did, we all used to go and listen. I'm not a sentimental man, but it brought a tear to my eye.	Among the Carreg is a sect who mourn their god, Gamandes. They say his song has ended, and they prepare for the end by training for war.	Unclideon's brew is horrible, but it works. Drink it, then stare at the tapestry. See there, what do you think that sphere is? It's gold! Soon you'll see it...
The Unmended Way (page 30)			
266-272	Strielund tinkers know a shorter route to Wint than by going via Tannòch.	Folk near the Strielwall mountains often dream of making tea. Nobody knows why.	We have it on good word there are mercenaries of giant size in that pass. Find them, find their price.
273-279	Rough folk have been kidnapping people and taking them into the mountains.	There is a pass south of High Kellan. A band of mercenary giants holed up there centuries ago.	A tinker was arrested with silver, surely stolen: really old coins, unclipped, with Seree snakes!
280-286	South of the mountains was once a green valley, filled with villages, kin to the Grinvolt clans. In my father's father's time, there was trade, supposedly.	South of High Kellan, the Seree had a fortress. A stone marked an accord with the Powers to spread their magics all throughout Tealwood and beyond.	The lord of High Kellan went missing for a month last autumn. He won't discuss it, but his butler is paying silver to get to the bottom of it.
In the Care of Bones (page 34)			
287-293	Foragers don't head too far out into the plains, not with that great bird on the wing this year.	Silken dolls are a sign that fairy weavers are around. Watch yourself, they hide in the grass.	As a girl, the Flame of Wint had a fairy-made silken doll, but it caught fire. She'll pay gold for its like.
294-299	Long ago, folks came from all over to be healed at a shrine, way out in the grass. It's all ruins, now.	The priests of Panur had a shrine on the plain, where burdens of all kinds were finally set down.	If indeed it was a real Panurian shrine, there's a priceless "condenser" in there somewhere.
300-306	If you spot the golden tree, you're as good as dead. That's where the bird roosts now. Stay clear.	Folk said the shrine healed them, but the priests would only say it was a profanity.	Sure there's a risk, but can you imagine the price they'd pay in Owlshade for that huge bird's egg?

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
		The Lantern of Wyv (page 36)	
307-313	A black lantern hangs over a bay in Wyv, big as the moon, been there forever.	The birds of Wyv know more than they're letting on and will pass secrets to those they trust.	There's a way up into Radomenus's tomb—her flying boat visits on a circuit around the bay.
314-320	Boating is unsafe within miles of the Wyv coast. A curious wyvern always attracts more.	Traddle pearls aren't from Traddle, but come from a secret people still living among the Wyv forests.	The black lantern isn't Radomenus's tomb at all. Late Seree writings say it could once move!
321-327	Quell (as it was once called) was a prosperous port, but the wyverns came and turned the land fallow, dotted with little copses of trees.	The Seree wizard Radomenus sealed herself in her tomb, against the wishes of the Lycaeum. Her magics might still be inside.	If we can strike a deal with the forest folk in Wyv, we can make a fortune on Traddle pearls and cut out Traddle altogether!
		House of the Tyrant (page 38)	
328-333	Tread lightly in Novy Dom, and follow your chaperone's instructions to the letter—or pay.	Novy Dom was a thriving place until a coup several generations ago. None there speak of this.	One of Novy Dom's guilds pays gold for smuggled weapons, but our information is hazy on which.
334-340	The food of Novy Dom is entirely red and tastes delicious / disgusting / like normal food.	The King of Novy Dom hides in the royal citadel to hide his hideous face. None there speak of this.	The red food of Novy Dom is a gift of Cicollus, but he isn't worshipped there. What is happening?
341-347	The port city of Novy Dom has become insular, but there are still many trading opportunities.	To succeed in Novy Dom, it is essential to curry the favor of local protectors; begin with a humble guild such as the dyers or miners and work inwards.	The king permits a Birevian expedition to map the Greatcleft, but it must stage and supply in Novy Dom. As doughty agents of Birevia: shopping time!
		The Full-Dark Stone (page 42)	
348-354	Skull-headed "knights" have been seen gathering herbs and fruit along the riverbanks.	Orlug Broadstaff, the giant-blooded sorcerer, drank gems for their power. He was potent, but mad.	The dead are afoot; some cursed tomb must have broken open. We're not safe until they're burned!
355-361	Mournful piping has been heard echoing from the mountain for years, its source unknown.	The Seree once made a full-dark stone, so black you couldn't see it, to serve their great rituals.	Seree automatons are more weird than dangerous, but their heads are full of gemstone!
362-367	The river folk sell chips of black stone that stay warm to the touch.	In their final wars, the Seree hid their magical engines from all—one lies within the Wintpeaks!	The river folk said they saw an ogre, dragging a skull nearly as big as himself, upriver, mud and all.
		The Oracle's Decree (page 44)	
368-374	The desert steals life. The sun burns you, the shades parch you, and the sands swallow you up.	A few years ago, a guide said he helped an alchemist find lost Pelaago. It is possible!	Pelaago is the gateway to the lost realm. Finding it is easy, though; enduring the trip is the hard part.
375-381	There is a fortress out in the desert, used as a base by reptilian bandits. They grow bolder yearly.	The Heelan plateau is thick with Vinteralf ruins. Despite the heat, it was once buried in snow!	The desert expands every year—but sudden-like. Something unnatural drives it toward us.
382-388	Far into the desert there is an oracle. It's said he has read every book ever written.	The sprites of the desert are playful; if you hold out your flask, they'll jump right in!	Water shades can be tamed! I've a buyer in Spittle who'll pay a silver talent for a pair of them.
		Three for the Grave (page 46)	
389-395	If there was ever a smellier, muckier, more worm-eaten land than the Neathfens, I've not heard of it.	"The fenners waste nothing. Even the stillborn are put to work, up at Raal. Unsettling, but practical!"	Neathfens calls for bear hunters. It's small bounty, but surely easy, and the skins are yours to sell.
396-401	Witch gum stinks, but it's useful stuff. Less came this year from Lurrock, and prices are ridiculous.	The hard faces you'll see in Neathfens aren't all locals. Grave robbers have a busy trade there.	Polsa Longknife is a murderer and outlaw, now with the fenners. Darshore's gold bounty beckons.
402-408	All along the Lurrock River, the wind sometimes shouts at people. The locals don't like to talk about it, but it's not right, not at all.	Some years ago, Birevians killed a bear which had the legs of a spider. They didn't bring it home, but the implication is obvious: orcs. But so far south?	The acolytes of Raal are aping the evils of ancient Thiru. Some grow strong, some suffer horribly, but a debt is growing that everyone will pay.

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
A Clutch of Shadows (page 48)			
409-415	Six years ago, silver brought hundreds of mercenaries south to High Lavel.	Birevian gold financed an assault on the Dradkin Sun Temple. Many relics were hauled away.	Dubach, my cousin, has some rare gems to sell for mere silver. She just needs to get them out...
416-422	Millvale's farms grow untidy; many axewives are still away after the battle up on High Lavel.	Foreign silver has dried up, and Millvale is hoarding what they learn within the Sun Temple.	The bundled stranger just wants to know how many axewives are left in the garrison, simple.
423-429	Birevian gold financed Millvale's war on the bogeys of High Lavel.	The Dradkin spotted in High Lavel are probably connected via deep roads to the Ur-Menig itself.	This rubbing proves the Sun Temple in Grinvolt should have a northern wing. Find it and be rich!
The Chains of Heaven (page 50)			
430-435	Someone has a thousand witch-grain baskets up on that mountain, look at how the bees are all flying!	The Seree built their forts atop mountains and linked them magically along the ley lines.	Nacharta Greenmantle is rekindling the forge of the gods atop Parrow Mountain. Stop her!
436-442	In olden times, a castle on Parrow Mountain was connected to several others with a bridge of light!	One of the last-constructed Seree mountaintop-fortresses is high above Parrow Wind.	This fall, a dirty-looking man came through here smuggling white metal from the mountaintop.
443-449	Last year, a sorcerer-pretender set off from here "to reclaim Parrow Mountain." She hired many locals as porters, but none returned.	Parrow Mountain was where the gods struck first when they smote the Seree. It's said that it burned for weeks and the glow could be seen from the sea.	Oddly, Master Algion's dying wish was that this white metal ingot—his family's fortune—be returned to Parrow Mountain and thrown in a pit.
The Motes of Eternity (page 52)			
450-456	The inland waters of Varna are not safe—too many toothfish. Actually, they come on land as well.	Nulga, the Seree's longest-serving guardian reptile, retired to the depths of the Varnan jungle.	The great reptile Nulga knows many secrets of the Seree. He may divulge them, now they're all gone.
457-463	Bottled fever flies fetch gold in Owlshade, used by the rich for pranks in their cavorting.	A strange phenomenon stalks the jungles of Varna; a "shatterwisp" sound that shakes rocks to dust.	Explorers report that ancient Thiru is unearthed, deep within the jungles of Varna!
464-469	For years, the clans of Varna's jungle shores have sung and traded happily with the animal folk, but we hear tales that the jungle is growing wilder.	The land of Varna, once busy, is overgrown now. Beneath it is another, older still: ancient Thiru. Even the Seree feared it.	Lord Hulce commands you take this doll to Nulga, and convince him to enliven it with his magic! It will be a wondrous gift for the lord's children.
The Sky-Blind Spire (page 54)			
470-476	A few weeks ago, we started hearing singing up from that tower. It's loud, dreadful, and really sad.	Toward the end of his life, Titardinal devoted himself to kastromancy: sorcerous architecture.	The dreams are clear: the spirit of the lake needs the tower's altar to be broken. Fetch your picks!
477-483	No one's been to the lake in years; the tower is full of huge fisher birds. They'll eat you up!	Titardinal's tower was battered by terrible storms until he died. No one liked to stay there.	Map of it? There were hundreds, none of them correct. A real one would fetch gold, for sure.
484-490	A couple of little gray elves came by to buy fishing line and rather a lot of blue dye. Nice as your mum, they were, and so small!	Titardinal encoded a magical ritual into the arrangement of rooms in his tower; his life's work. He never would say to what end.	Four giants on the move southwards evaded trackers last spring, but word has come that they're now holed up in a tower SE of Greatlake.
491-497	Oh yes, many a quarter-lord has fancied using the tower as a stronghold, but none has stayed long.	The great Power within the lake loathes the troubled tower; none may preside there for long.	Some of the ancestors have become trapped in the tower. Take this silver chalice and lead them out.
No God But Dissolution (page 71)			
498-503	Nobody had ever seen that door there before Muck opened it, and then, suddenly, there it was!	The Order of Non-Extance believed even the gods could die and claimed they entombed the remains.	The relics of six gods are contained in the tomb. Who touches them all wins the favor of heaven!
504-510	An elder went in, came out, then disintegrated Barah with an evil glare! We threw rocks at him.	The Order of Non-Extance once traveled the lands as tinkers, looking for the remains of "fallen stars."	This shard of dark glass is all that remains of Deel the Protectress. Entomb her in a worthy way.

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
The Lenses of Heaven (page 56)			
511-517	"You'll see Saaru first. Hmm? That means forget it. Not sure why we say that. What even is Saaru?"	The lenskeepers of Saaru will not allow their precious lenses to be spoken of disrespectfully.	Trade with Tlarba will bring many rare gifts, but the lenskeepers stand in the way. Find their needs!
518-524	They say sorcerers dream of a far-off city, in a land of perpetual sunset and strange people.	Many sorcerers hoped to follow Unclideon and reach fabled Saaru, but a barrier exists.	Death takes you, and—instead of oblivion—you're sprawled upon a cold, smooth surface...
525-531	My uncle told me once of a dream he had that took him far away, to a land of lemon-scented demons.	In the lens-temple of Tlarba, magical guardians made of chalk reveal rituals with every step.	The dream-message was clear: Lenskeeper Fen wishes to defect. Go to Tlarba, and bring her out.
The Roots of Ambition (page 58)			
532-537	A whole expedition came this way, headed for the desert. An alchemist, a Birevian, and many others.	Beyond Pelaago is a plateau so hot, no plants can grow. And yet, there is life there, much of it.	Unguff of Birevia set off to explore the Heelan plateau, but he has not returned. Gold reward.
538-544	The "Daughters of Elil" lived in that wood, but their leader took them away—into the desert.	On the Heelan plateau is a lake of oil, where demons from the deep frolic and come ashore.	"Elil" have sent word they'll pay gold for a drover to bring a herd up to them. Any kind, apparently.
545-551	Rumor has it that a great sooth can turn filth into water and grow green plants in the driest soil.	The Daughters of Elil are in league with the forest itself; it speaks to them and grants magic.	The Heelan plateau is harsh, but its many ruins are not yet explored.
Lair of the Lantern Worm (page 60)			
552-558	Despite themselves, the Heelan crave water. Some find it, immerse themselves, and turn to mush!	Heelan proudskulls that earn twenty kills are admitted to a secret order that knows the future.	Escort smith Ravin to the forge of Carduros, there to forge a white metal sword to slay the Leádstæf.
559-565	The spear of Vilin the hero was made at a great forge in the desert, near a door to the underworld.	The Ballads of Vilin say he snatched the secret of death from of a lantern he found on the plateau.	Therein lies the tomb of Carduros, armorer to the demons of the underworld.
566-571	The Heelan talk longingly of a cave of secrets, where the walls run with deadly poison.	The great forge of Carduros is the only one hot enough to work the white metal of the gods.	The tomb of Carduros is a gate to the underworld; find it, and the secrets of that realm will unfold.
The Cleft of Five Worlds (page 62)			
572-578	Long ago, sorcerers found a mighty pit and built a city across the top, like a lid. Made of solid brass!	The Seree Lycaeum was a mighty repository of knowledge, built over a huge cleft into the depths.	Stitchers from the Maw threaten Pale Yugra. The Jorn must be made to see that we are allies in this.
579-585	Up in the mountains, the sorcerers once had a great city. You could only reach it by flying!	The Lycaeum forbade any attempt to prolong life; any who transgressed were bricked into a tomb.	Pale Yugra forbids entering the white tower, but perhaps a way can be found via Sar Dural.
586-592	Centuries ago, the sorcerers hired many servants from here for good wages—whole villages were emptied out as folk left farming to serve them.	Though they have spread far, the Tcheth originally came to the surface through the Cleft. They have made a home there, and the seafood is amazing.	The waters belong to the murkers, but the automatons seen falling in from the Lycaeum supposedly have gems in their heads.
593-599	They say, up in the mountains, is a city filled with mice. They dine on pickled fish, dress starfish in clay pants, and then dance with them all night!	The sorcerer Unclideon sealed the Maw, home of potent demons, but many of their children roam freely along the walls of the Cleft.	Pask the Slender has stolen a gem precious to the murkers, and they are threatening a violent search. Find him and return it, with all haste.
The Call of the Light (page 64)			
600-605	It's said that old tower is sleeping, but that it hates sorcerers and will awaken if they grow bold again.	The Powers made an earthen reservoir within Sar Ebil, to hold warriors to call upon in times of need.	A wealthy sorcerer feels the icy call of some dread lantern and is paying gold to have it snuffed.
606-612	Once, on a full moon, a wooden man came out of that old tower. The people burnt him in a fire and found a ruby in his head.	Sar Ebil was built by gods and demons in a single night! No Seree would dare approach it, and it drew in and trapped many of their servants.	Tales of wooden men are for children. The quarter-lord bids you see if the haunted tower is in good repair and can be put to good purpose.

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
Veil of the Once-Queen (page 66)			
613-619	The folk of the upriver valley are always friendly, but do not accept their hospitality lightly.	Old maps mark this valley as the site of Tanibel, a fallen citadel of ghosts and ruin, to be avoided.	The crown of Queen Alasnia of the Martoi keeps back the veil of death. Its power should be mine!
620-626	My gran wed a man from upriver, but that night he turned into a badger and ran away!	There is a great citadel in the Tealwood valley, but no surrounding towns or farms; do they not eat?	Rumors abound that a rebellion against the queen is brewing, but the people need courageous aid.
627-633	My cousin dined with a miller up in the valley, or so he once said. He ate too much and awoke in a pond, left to drown. He won't speak of it now.	Do not go in numbers into the valleys of Tealwood. The folk that live there are not what they seem, and outnumbering them is dangerous.	Nobles from the citadel have been riding out, demanding folk drink a bitter milk to swear their allegiance to the queen.
The Moon Is a Mirror (page 68)			
634-639	Years ago, mad Lord Raeldus built a palace with a hundred altars in it! Only mice pray there, now.	Lord Raeldus's fool command brought sooths and charlatans of every kind together under one roof.	Dogfolk have seized the palace of a hundred shrines and kidnapped the oracle. But why?
640-646	I have seen the palace, and it stinks of fear. My dogs won't be dragged anywhere near it.	Zanyeb explored the palace but afterwards found that all his sorcery had gone to his guide!	The Flame of Wint dreamed she fell onto the moon. The Sage of Lune will know what this means.
647-653	A great sage lives in the forest palace. Don't bother going unless your need is great; she costs gold.	There is a crone inside who will call the very gods to come to your aid—for the price of an arm.	Soldiers of solid brass came in the night and dragged off the village sooth. A dire omen! Disaster!
The Mermaids' Knot (page 72)			
654-660	The wilds around Magda are thick with huge crickets, but it is a crime to harm them.	Word is that a secret order of spring-worshipers has been infiltrating Magda for some time.	The old master of Potton is weak with palsy; he bids you carry him to Magda to be healed.
661-667	The priestess at Magda is wise and can do workings of great healing known to no other.	Titardinal felt the priestesses of Magda had underworld ideas woven into their theology.	The priestesses know more than they let on. Find out how much of their power comes from their pool.
668-673	Tinkers never wander alone near Magda, for fear the locusts will carry them off.	A terrified, chirping man was once found near Magda. As he died, two huge locusts came out.	Magda calls for cotters and herders to work their slopes, but what happened to the last bunch?
Basilica of the Leper Messiah (page 76)			
674-680	They say the true influence in Owlshade lies with the king of the lepers; many nobles owe him debts.	Husmanna the Leper has held sway over the noble families of Owlshade for a suspiciously long time.	A demon stoat prowls the alleys of Owlshade, as big as a horse. Find where it dwells and end it.
681-687	The walking plague strikes randomly in Owlshade, perversely; it is what unites rich and poor.	Long ago, even before the plague, the Seree were wary of the Cult of Silences in their basilica.	Those who would trade with Owlshade need influence there; Husmanna sells it. Find his price.
688-694	The basilica in Owlshade welcomes all, but watch your head as you go in: the dead throw stones!	The walking plague that afflicts Owlshade seems to strike nowhere else, and it has never spread.	Husmanna's balm against the plague could be used to benefit everyone. Find out how it's made!
The Shattered Gate (page 78)			
695-701	Berry-pickers from Potton have been saying that animals keep inviting them out into the forest to hear a message of acceptance.	Remarkably, a huge swath of the flooded swamp between Gruel's Shore and Saltbride is still owned by one person, Anasha Soffel IV.	The Soffel family ended ages ago, but their sorcerous legacy still holds sway in the swamps. Strange animals now pray there—but to what?
702-707	Gruel's Shore gatherers know a place where a talking tree speaks to animals; they avoid it.	The changed animals in the swamps north of Saltbride are clear sign of a hidden spell engine.	Anasha Soffel IV, heiress (she claims) to that line's lost fortune, seeks hale travelers to help recover it.
708-714	Last spring I met a very sad man—well, more of a deer, really—who said he was all alone now as his friends had fallen under the sway of a charlatan.	The Soffel family were hereditary sorcerers; many became Seree. They aided the Seree in the wars with the gods and paid the price: none still live.	Gelemos is a liar, charlatan, debtor, trickster, and a thief. He fled to the swamps years ago to hide; haul him back here to face those he has wronged.

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
The City of the Carreg (page 80)			
715-721	The "people of stone" founded a great city, far underground, as a peaceful meeting place for all.	The plaza of holes is a sight to behold and one of the great wonders of the underworld.	Sifoon's district of Dradzb holds clues to many secret Dradkin workings, abandoned in haste.
722-728	The air of Sifoon comes from heated rocks set in great braziers, so that all may inhabit there.	Dradkin, too, once walked the streets of Sifoon, but they turned upon the city and seek its downfall.	The ancient boats that float on the ghost sea are irreplaceable. Dradkin will pay a fortune for one.
729-735	Sifoon stands on a great mountain, over lowlands whose air is unbreathable. Only the guests of the Carreg may come and go, and all must have aid.	Sifoon may be protected, but enemies within and without have been eroding its safety for years. Now, only a few districts are safe.	The Carreg are wise and clever, but foolish in warring. Offer to retake lost ground and they will pay well but stubbornly insist on poor tactics.
Sirens of Blood and Sea (page 84)			
736-741	The cliffs of Verz on Halet Girm are treacherous, and the women who bathe there aren't what they seem.	No man is safe who sets foot near the lair of the witches of Halet Girm; women may go, with care.	Fishers saw a sorcerer's barque on the rocks near Halet Girm's crystals. But what of the sorcerer?
742-748	Three crystals stand on the cliffs of Verz; they belong to the island witches. Don't draw near.	The witches of Halet Girm serve the goddess of the sea, whose ways are ancient and brutal.	The clan-heir of Grinvolt is too young to rule, yet she must. Take her to the witches of Halet Girm.
749-755	Three crystals stand on the cliffs of Verz; sometimes the fishers of Grinvolt leave gifts there, to beg the sea not to drown them.	The goddess of the sea is one of the ancient Powers. The Martoi etched tablets about her, the Seree filled scrolls. They are gone, but she remains.	Years ago, Half-Lady Sala of Armouth sailed to ask the witches to avenge her daughter, but she never returned. Find her, to settle the succession.
Mulciber's Flute (page 86)			
756-762	The Blessed Children were recruiting from the disaffected recently, but they've all but vanished.	Unclideon wrote that no demon had ever brought him terror to rival the glare of Pandæmonium.	The ghost of Lir Semminus pleads that her living husband be brought back from his war in hell.
763-769	Evil vapors (I know, I know, but worse than usual) have been seeping out of the ground. It's not right.	The ancestors are being siphoned away, pulled downwards into an unimaginable, infernal cruelty.	The cult of Blessed Children has abandoned their profane shrine, but a noxious fissure leads down.
770-776	Sooths in these parts say that the ancestors are shrieking, fleeing a great terror below.	A man named Ciber Mulce appears in the historical record, starting cults long, long ago.	Deel herself charges that you descend into hell and strike a blow against a cruel, fallen god.
Can't Sleep—Clowns Will Eat Me (page 88)			
777-782	A traveling circus was due here weeks ago, but word is they haven't yet left Juniper's Crossing.	A gnome, Archibald, once made mechanical toys for the rich; he now travels with a group of tumblers.	Portia Oskrey is the warden of Juniper; she has sent a message, but it's incoherent rambling.
783-789	Naffus and her family went up to Juniper to see the tumblers, but all they did was drink and sleep.	Tinkers tell of a village where no one could sleep. Only once they had died did a demon reveal itself.	Tumblers are moving through; a rare treat. See if they're worth summoning to court, here in the city.
790-796	Passing through Juniper's Crossing after the market day, I swore I saw bread that moved itself.	There is a traveling circus with a silvered maze so terrifying, several have died of shock within it.	The Circus Adventicus harbors a wanted murderer from Inogira by the name of Harlo. Silver reward.
The God Unmoving (page 90)			
797-803	At sea, beware a sudden fog. The reavers of Narin's Ring use it as a cloak for their piracy.	The last of the Seree-era tribute ships rots within Narin's Ring, its hold still full of mysteries.	Finding deposed Uldicene IV (said to be hiding in Narin's Ring) could bring a handsome reward.
804-810	Near Narin's Ring, wrecks are plentiful, but many are not what they seem, and danger lurks.	Narin's Ring is the remnant of a sunken realm. In its time, Gaal's majesty was unmatched.	The humble Porth-Montoon are growing rich with gold. Where on earth is it all coming from?
811-816	How do the Porth-Montoon fishers grow so rich? The sea is bountiful, but it doesn't produce gold. They're in league with something dark.	The Powers of Drowned Gaal have many arms and cannot be seen to move. In the eastern sees, triple the watches with spears at the ready.	Meet with this so-called "High Steerswon" of the Porth-Montoon and find out what they want in order to spare our ships from piracy.

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
Do It for the Beast (page 92)			
817-823	I thought he was odd, but when he got drunk and claimed his blood was made of snakes, I knew it.	A sect of endless brothers continues the work of the Seree, worshiping the Power they found there.	People are going missing, and more than one person thinks it's the twins with strange scars.
824-830	The word on market day was that it's widespread—people are going missing, plain and simple.	Long ago, sorcerers carved a hidden sanctum at the end of the red canyon, in a place of power.	The Seree's Column of Red Might must be here, in a place some call "Roaring Canyon."
831-837	Yes, we've been grateful for the help this season, but have you noticed these new folk are always bundled, even in the heat? Dripping with sweat.	In their final days, the Seree tried to move the guardian of the "red column," but it refused: its "new master" would protect it in the coming war.	When the abductors were confronted, they exploded into a mass of red serpents and wriggled away, toward the canyons!
His Eternal Progress (page 94)			
838-844	The borderlands in the north are sacred, for they are walked by the last of the emperor tortoises.	Sages know that following an emperor tortoise is futile, yet many did, hoping to hear even one word.	A cursed leviathan wanders the borderlands, bringing death in the form of bandit wasps.
845-850	The emperor tortoises walked the earth even before the gods! Unclideon was the last to hear one speak. Whatever it said to him, he gave up sorcery.	The eternal, holy pilgrimage behind Ynth-Nndu has ended—bandit wasps have laid waste to it all. Would-be pilgrims turn back despondently.	Wealthy Birevian would-be tortoise pilgrims want Ynth-Nndu restored to its former glory. They need trackers, wasp-killers, porters, and cooks.
851-857	Those who seek wisdom would do well to find it in the shadow of the emperor tortoise Ynth-Nndu.	For years, Nauz the Necromancer made it his life's work to capture an emperor tortoise.	Ynth-Nndu, now a bringer of death, has turned southwards. If it crosses the Spitwind, alas!
The Sorcerer's Feast (page 96)			
858-864	If you hear beautiful singing in that wood, run—it's the boars. Yeah, it's weird, but they sing.	Pyaad was one of the most expansionist late-period Seree, and he led wars of conquest and plunder.	I've had this ring since I was a child. Whenever I put it on, I feel called to a faraway place—that way.
865-871	The boars of this wood are an unusually challenging quarry; hunters avoid them.	The sorcerer Pyaad derived status from collecting and displaying dangerous or cursed rarities.	A late-empire sorcerer, Pyaad, kept a second manor to display his most precious rarities.
872-878	That forest once held a cruel lord who ate only pork, served to him by wooden servants.	Pyaad pioneered the business of liquifying his servants and using them to drive automatons.	The Heart of the Spring, taken by Pyaad, could do untold good purifying water in the Tealwood.
The Haunting of Hainsley Hall (page 41)			
879-884	The hall overlooks the bay; been here forever, but it's never occupied long. Its bones are restless.	Hainsley Hall has stood for centuries on the bluffs over Inogira, collecting the ghosts of its occupants.	For some reason, the sooth is offering silver to any group who spends the night in Hainsley Hall.
885-891	Hainsley Hall was built on a locus of misfortune. None who lived there came to a peaceful end.	The title to Hainsley Hall was never found; its last owner was "Gilford," a name celebrated in Inogira.	Due to a break in the line, the young sooth has no mentor. Find one among the dead in Hainsley Hall.
The Man from Before (page 98)			
892-898	The most precious oil is Haverlow fire oil. It burns bright and long, but keep it stoppered!	A tiny village in Haverlow has found the secret of "safely" milking fire oil from apocalypse larvae.	Fire oil for Birevia goes through Saltbride, but they'll pay richly for the secret of its manufacture.
899-905	All the world's fire oil comes from one little village, where children fetch it from a cave. It's hard work.	Nibolcus the giant was a legendary sorcerer who fought gods and could disassemble himself at will!	Much depends on fire oil, but are the children who extract it treated properly? It's dangerous stuff.
906-912	The Birevians have long searched for another supply of fire oil, but it's all from Haverlow.	In their war with the heavens, the Seree enlisted the giants of Firevault, great sorcerers themselves.	Zef the Arrogant has found Nibolcus, and he needs backup for when he demands an apprenticeship.
913-918	In your gran's gran's time, this place was thick with giants, but Vilin sorted them out. Still, don't be too keen to look in every hole, lest you find one!	The final weeks of the war with the gods were terrifying. Spheres of death came from the skies, spreading poisons that brought memories to life.	Wanderers with sorcerous training are showing up more these past years; not hedge magic, but the real old stuff—boil your eyes! Who teaches them?

d1000	Rumor (gossip, tidings)	Lore (tomes, secrets, prophetic vision)	Hook (opportunity, one-shot)
The Wagoner's Table (page 100)			
919-925	Beware the horse-high wolves of the highlands woods, with their maddening songs and flaming jaws.	The Seree once used gigantic wagons—as big as ships!—to take heavy tribute for sorcerers' tables.	Pimma, Quarter-Lord of Birevia, needs guides to Astin's wagon: she must speak to her dead mother.
926-932	Outlaws, thieves, and exiles all know they can find solace at the wagoner's table—if they can reach it.	Demons chased the Seree wagons and tore them apart; one remains, ever touring the highlands.	The assassin who started the civil war in Aridenn hides with a strange wagoner; find and return him.
933-939	Haven't you heard? Even kings and queens sometimes come to find our wagon!	You can meet anyone you like, even the dead, at the feasting table inside Astin's great wagon.	This map, precious to my master, is half complete. Find its twin in the halls of the mountain wagoner.
The Raindrinkers (page 102)			
940-946	When clear skies suddenly turn stormy, look to windward for the mud-sleds of the Raindrinkers.	The Raindrinkers of Haverlow are actually a union of five separate peoples, each with a long history.	Harsh droughts threaten High Kellan. Convince a Raindrinker clan to trek there with their rains.
947-952	If you plan to go through Haverlow, even along the coasts, make friends with the Raindrinkers.	If you seek a new home, the Hendri are known to take in earnest volunteers and stragglers alike.	Only the Raindrinkers navigate Haverlow safely; negotiate leave for Birevian explorers to ride along.
953-959	Raindrinkers remember everything, so they say. Their songs and tales are a thousand years old, yet they have no books. None would survive the damp!	Raindrinkers may wander, but they connect and bring rain to countless isolated communities. If you seek anything in Haverlow, turn to the Yazis.	The heir to Parrow Wind, lost as a child, has turned up on a Hendri wagon. He's twenty and betrothed. Bring him back to claim his birthright.
The Mouth of Spring (page 104)			
960-966	Don't ask me how, but sometimes this street floods, sweeping quite a lot of litter to doorsteps below.	The secret sect of women has a cache of magic, disguises, and wisdom somewhere in Inogira.	We find Lady Yiel's large donations to that dead shrine very odd. What hold do they have over her?
967-973	There's an old stone shrine to the new spring at the top of this street. They buy a lot of meat scraps.	The enormous stone face of New Spring is hidden inside a seaside cave, near the port of Inogira.	Listen, dabbler: if you truly seek power, you will find it down the gullet of the shrine of Spring.
974-980	They led my aunt to the shrine, took her dress, and flushed her down with just a knife. She was gone for weeks. I was a tiny girl then, but I remember.	There is a secret order, the Wives of Spring, rooted in Inogira. They have a part to play in the great cycle of things, for they bring each year's spring.	The apprentices of an arrogant but wealthy sorcerer are looking for volunteers to help fish him out of a terrifying place: the shrine of Spring.
Into the Silent Temple (page 106)			
981-986	Grinvolt had another go at the Sun Temple a few years ago, but they were driven back by horrors.	The ancestors whisper that—somehow—children of Grinvolt are lost deep in the ground.	The spirits of dozens of fallen axewives were never recovered; escort a sooth below to lead them home.
987-993	They say there was a great battle underground, and many spirits never came home to their people.	The chitin drakes that forced Grinvolt back: it's said they're artificial, bred by the Dradkin.	A piece of fungus brought back from the Grinvolt assault cured the pox; more must be found.
994-000	There's not a home in the whole valley that didn't lose someone in Counobel's cursed war, and what did it gain anyone? A few rubies?	The number of Dradkin warriors that defended the Sun Temple fortress means there must be a much larger world down there. How do they eat?!	It's been eleven years; the Dradkin would have made some noise if they had any strength left. The time is right to scout out what's down there.

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This book wouldn't exist without the support of the Kickstarter backers, and it would be much, much shorter were it not for the generous supporters on Patreon at http://patreon.com/adventures.

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Once Caribel
Once Rendelseat
Dustwind R.
Dour Hem
Never Gap
Once Durayport
Radomenus's Tower
Firevault
Tidewash
Wyv
The Far Blightlands
Throne
Traddle
Once Quell
Harp Bay
Tomb
Steambay
Spring Ice L.
Bay of Silvers
Blighted Narrows
Once Glimland
Flensed Isle
Greatcleft R.
Poison Bay
Shallowwain
South Wyv
Treefinger
Bowpike Straight
al Bim's Tower
Maggots Point
Curselake
Witchknuckle
Gulf of Wands
Spitwind R.
Tirru-Aggal
Alabaster
Spittle
River's Teeth
The Sallet Sea
Glisten L.
Foxland
The Aggal
Narin's Ring
Twosister
Skullpoint
The Borderlands
Birevia
Salverton
Wren Bay
Morton
Hullknives Bay
Claimsun
Undew
Strielwall Peaks
Gullet
Lastfort
High Kellan
Inogira
Ralla L.
Darkvale
Serpentfork R.
Tannoch L.
The Haver Soont
Fool's Plain
Mist R.
Strielund
Shor Pan
Gruel's Shore
The Bones
Pur Cove
Once Martoliin
Strielwall Peaks
Nall R.
Nightshore
Parrow Wind
Saltbride
Learin R.
Armlink R.
Wint
Wint Lake
Sea of Darra
Halfnight Lake
Tealwood
Noripur
Eel Cove
Darshore
Once Martol
Saltbay
Greatlake
Peg
Rainland
Owlshade
Haverlow
Silent L.
Wintpeaks
Patchumber
Neathfens
Duwy
Dar Soont
Scum L.
Bansel
Varn Rock
Slakesea
High Lavel
The Grinvolt
Thickwood
Near Soont
Grasping L.
Lurrock R.
Lurrock Neath
Aridenn
Wolip R.
Twine R.
Sen Bay
Dolfison
The High Uttvelt
The Talking Wood
Halet
Girm
Verz
Nary Wood
Blessed L.
Cy Narrows
The Gray Soont
Armouth
High Lurrock
Millvale

Once Caribel
Once Rendelseat
Dustwind R.
Dour Hem
Stellarium of the Vinteralf
Never Gap
Radomenus's Tower
Once Durayport
Firevault
Tidewash
Lair of the Lantern Worm
Lantern of Wyv
Wyv
The Far Blightlands
Throne
Traddle
Roots of Ambition
Once Quell
Oracle's Decree
Harp Bay
Tomb
Steambay
Bay of Silvers
Blighted Narrows
House of the Tyrant
Spring Ice L.
Once Glimland
Flensed Isle
Greatcleft R.
His Eternal Progress
Poison Bay
Shallowwain
South Wyv
Treefinger
Bowpike Straight
al Bim's Tower
Maggots Point
Tirru-Stryggal (The Raid Mirror)
Curselake
Witchknuckle
Gulf of Wands
Spitwind R.
Tirru-Aggal
Glisten L.
Alabaster
Spittle
River's Teeth
The Sallet Sea
Narin's Ring
Foxland
Twosister
Skullpoint
The Aggal
The Borderlands
Circle of Wolves
Birevia
Salverton
Morton
Wren Bay
God Unmoving
Hullknives Bay
Claimsun
Undew
Strielwall Peaks
Gullet
Lastfort
High Kellan
Do it for the Beast
Inogira (Haunting of Hainsley Hall, Mouth of Spring)
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Serpentfork R.
Tannoch Rest-of-Kings
Darkvale
Tannoch L.
Care of Bones
Call of the Light
Unmended Way
Halls Untoward
Fool's Plain
Mist R.
The Haver Soont
Strielund
Shor Pan
Task of Zeichus
Gruel's Shore
The Bones
Pur Cove
Once Martoliin
Shattered Gate
Veil of the Once-Queen
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Nightshore
Parrow Wind
Saltbride
Learin R.
Armlink R.
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Wint Lake
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Half'night Lake
Eel Cove
Saltbay
Though Flesh Be Vast
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Darshore
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Peg
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Raindrinkers
Haverlow
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Rainland
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(Midden of the Deeps)
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Wintpeaks
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Patchumber
Cleft
Scum L.
Duwy
Neathfens
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Bansel
Three for the Grave
Dar Soont
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The Grinvolt
Lurrock R.
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