

ELDRITCH LAIRS

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ELDRITCH LAIRS

8 SHORT ADVENTURES
FOR 5TH EDITION

ELDRITCH LAIRS

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A NOTE ABOUT MONSTERS

Monsters in these adventures are marked with **bold text**. If a creature cannot be found within the System Reference Document (SRD), then a reference to the *Tome of Beasts* is provided.





PIT OF THE DUST GOBLINS

An adventure for five 4th-level characters set in the Western Wastes

by James J. Haeck

FOR THE GM

Pit of the Dust Goblins is a trap-laden lair set at the edge of Midgard's Western Wastes in the ruins of the town of Feycircle. It is a short dungeon that requires stealth, clever tactics, and manipulation of different factions within the dungeon to ensure survival. This dungeon can be linked to the Crypt of Green Shadows and the Carrion Shrine of Qorgeth, but it can also be used as a stand-alone dungeon.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The people of Feycircle believed the fairy ring for which their town was named protected them from the encroaching sands of the Western Wastes. When the ring withered, they learned they were right. Feycircle's dew-flecked pastures and verdant forests succumbed to the Wastes in an instant.

Feycircle sank deep into the sands and was soon occupied by a tribe of fanatical dust goblins, a herd of dogmoles, and the giant worms that caused the blight. The PCs may explore the keep—the only structure remaining in the dusty sinkhole now called the "Pit of the Dust Goblins." Inside the keep is an entrenched gatekeeper who can divulge that two children remain in town, imprisoned by the goblins.

The dust goblins have summoned and imprisoned a selang—a shadow fey—inside the blighted fairy circle. The goblins fear open combat and have laced the sunken keep with traps, and would sooner parley than fight.

BEASTS

The Pit is currently inhabited by two kinds of beasts: crusher worms and dogmoles. The crushers are the spawn of Qorgeth, Demon Lord of Worms. The worms and their dread master are the cause of the blight; they live only to feed. Were it not for a wandering pack of worm-hunting dogmoles, they would have consumed Feycircle already. Escaped from a dwarven settlement, these domesticated dogmoles sought refuge and regular meals in the ruins of Feycircle. The dust goblins treat their unlikely allies with uncommon kindness.

DUST GOBLINS

The goblins squatting in the ruins of Feycircle are outcasts from the Bloody Tusks tribe; cultists exiled for venerating the mysterious shadow fey instead of the Great Old Ones that lumber across the Wastes. The leader of the goblins is a shaman named Sisskuss, who leapt on the chance to capture the abandoned fairy ring: a nexus of power at the crossing of two minor ley lines. Sisskuss summoned a shadow fey called a selang inside the circle, hoping to court it and empower her bloodline with its dark magic.

SELANG

The selang is the goblins' unwilling captive, and is willing to strike a bargain in exchange for their total annihilation. Like all fey, however, his moods are fickle, and he is just as likely to cheat the PCs as he is to reward them.

SURVIVORS

Three humans remain in the Pit of the Dust Goblins. The first is Hana, a loyal gatekeeper who has vowed to watch the town no matter what. She is trapped within her home, hoping to find two young siblings named Rennie and Linde who were unable to flee. She (correctly) believes they are being held by the goblins as a bargaining chip.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Most of the refugees from Feycircle have pitched tents some twenty miles from the city. As your players' GM, you know best how to involve the PCs in this adventure. The following adventure hooks are provided to inspire and assist you.

- **Money.** Feycircle was not a poor village; the lord and lady lived comfortably in their keep, and a large amount of treasure is contained within. Greedy adventures may be lured by rumors of this much unattended wealth.
- **Protection.** The chief of the Bloody Tusks goblin tribe is disturbed by the success of Sisskuss and her fey-worshipping deviants, and wants them wiped out. If the PCs seek safe travel across the Wastes, he is willing to offer protection on their journey if they destroy the exiled goblins.





- **Heroism.** There are children trapped inside the village—a brother and sister named Rennie and Linde. Their distraught mother, Relimma, is a refugee in a camp some twenty miles away from the sunken village. She offers anything the PCs want—up to the 50 gp she has to her name—in exchange for their safety. The siblings’ father, Petring, ventured out to find them the day after the worms came, and hasn’t been seen since.

OUTSIDE THE KEEP

By the time you reach Feycircle, only a few shattered timbers protrude from the hungry sands, joined by a dozen decaying corpses of goblins and giant, man-sized worms. At the edge of the wreckage is a deep sinkhole—a vast pit that has devoured the town’s keep. Its crumbling walls are still visible above the pit’s edge. Looming on the horizon like a distant, black moon is the terrible silhouette of Anax Apogeion, one of the Great Old Ones that haunt the Western Wastes.

1. MAIN GATE

You descend thirty feet down the sandy slopes of the pit and find yourself before the slanted gates of Feycircle Keep. You hear war cries and animal roars from within! Just inside the walls, a battle has broken out—goblins hiding in a collapsed tower shooting at gigantic lavender worms. Both sides are too preoccupied to notice you.

A group of six **dust goblins** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 232) are defending their turf against a swarm of twelve **giant crusher worms** (use **constrictor snake** statistics). The goblins are barricaded within a fallen tower and raining crossbow bolts on the worms. They see all intruders as enemies, but a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) can convince their boss, Tummy, to ally with the PCs out of necessity. If the PCs are noticed, half the worms and half the goblins attack them immediately.

If the battle here goes south, a pair of dust goblins run to Area 3 to “release the hounds,” adding 4 **dogmoles** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 120) to the fray.

Fallen Tower. The tower is completely collapsed, but up to 6 Small creatures can squeeze inside by succeeding on a DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check as an action; failure by 5 or more means that they take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and do not enter. Creatures within the rubble have three-quarters cover.

Collapsed Wall. The sand pit that has devoured the keep has also destabilized the fortress’s walls, and a small fissure has formed in the wall just north of the gate. A character must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to slip through; failure by 5 or more means that they take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and do not enter. This fissure leads to Area 1a.

Gate Towers. The two 30-foot-tall watchtowers flanking the gate are still standing and relatively stable. They can both be ascended by climbing the ladders inside the walls.

Worm Traps. The dust goblins have spread worm traps all along the main road leading from the gate to the fortress. Each trap hides under the dust, and snaps up with iron clamps when a Medium or larger creature steps on it. The creature must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d6 piercing damage on a failed save and half as much on a successful one. On a failed save, the target is also restrained, but can end the restrained condition by making a DC 11 Strength check to remove the trap.

1A. DUSTY COURTYARD

You squeeze through the hole in the stone walls and find yourself in what may have once been a beautiful flower garden. The flowers are worm-eaten and withered. The heavy stink of death draws your attention to the western corner, where a pile of human corpses is being swarmed by maggots.

The milky-white death maggots devouring the bodies are the larval stage of the crusher worms that infest the sinkhole. A creature that investigates or otherwise disturbs the body must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be immediately swarmed by these creatures. On a failure, they must then make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw. The creature to take 28 (8d6) piercing damage as the maggots devour their flesh on a failed save, and half as much damage on a successful save.

A character investigating the bodies may make a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check. On a success, they find valuables worth a total of 50 gp, including a rosewood holy symbol.

A small alley leads along the east end of the keep towards a room that has been crushed by a fallen tower. A DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the interior of the castle is visible through the wreckage. A creature can make a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to squeeze through; failure by 5 or more means that they take 1d6 damage and do not enter. This passage leads to the keep’s bedroom (Area 9).

2. GATEKEEPER’S COTTAGE

A small cottage stands just east of the main gate. Its bright yellow paint is faded and peeling, and its front window is boarded up. Its door bears the scars of recent assault.

As soon as the PCs approach, they may make a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, read or paraphrase the following:

As you approach the door you catch a glimpse of sudden movement behind the boarded-up, smashed window. You just make out the tip of a crossbow bolt pointed through the boards—aimed at you!

Hana, Feycircle's loyal gatekeeper, was captured by the goblins when they took over, but managed to escape. She's been trapped inside her house ever since, and the stress has made her paranoid. She wants to search for Rennie and Linde, the missing children, but regular goblin patrols and dangerous worms make it impossible to leave. Hana is a **guard**.

Hana's home is sparsely decorated; she dismantled most of her furniture to build barricades inside and to board up the windows. She has a rack of four *potions of greater healing* hidden beneath her bed and an heirloom set of fine china worth 25 gp.

What Hana Knows:

- The only people who remained in town after the goblin attack, other than herself, were a handful of now-deceased guards, Rennie and Linde, and their father, a butler named Petring.
- The goblins have domesticated a herd of beasts called dogmoles and are using them to fight the worms.
- While she was the dust goblins' prisoner, she learned that their leader is a shaman named Sisskuss, and she has used the blighted fairy ring to summon a shadow fey.

3. SERVANTS' QUARTERS

This house is filled with smashed bunks, overturned lavatory buckets, and splintered mops. Worm corpses are strewn throughout the room, and several are being gnawed upon by a pack of hound-sized beasts, their tentacled mouths eagerly slurping up wormflesh.

The worm-eating beasts are 4 **dogmoles** (*Tome of Beasts*, p. 120). They arrived in Feycircle a few days after the worms appeared. They are escaped, domesticated beasts trained to track subterranean worms. The dust goblins found them easy to retrain and turn against the invading worms, and are using the servants' quarters as a kennel.

The dogmoles lash out if a creature gets too close, but can be calmed by a DC 15 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check. A character who makes three successful checks before three failures gains the beast as an ally as if it were affected by the *animal friendship* spell. It fights independently of its master.

4. CEMETERY

Cracked gravestones lie strewn across a field of blackened grass. Bones jut awkwardly out of the sandy earth. A dogmole chews on a worm caught in an iron trap beside the only standing structure in the destroyed cemetery—a towering monument topped with the weathered statues of three knightly heroes.

The **dogmole** is busy devouring the worm, but it is still famished. It attacks anything that smells of worm—including characters with worm blood on their clothes

or weapons. The **dust goblins** manning the gate in Area 5 may also see characters in the cemetery and attack with their light crossbows. The gravestones in the cemetery provide half cover to prone creatures.

Collapsed Wall. The goblins invaded by swarming through both the main gates and a collapsed portion of the wall behind the cemetery. It faces a shallow wall of the sinkhole, and can be used to escape the dungeon by making a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

Monument. Amidst the smaller graves is a grand monument to three heroes; an elf paladin, a human wizard, and a half-elf warlock. These warriors founded Feycircle, and made a pact with the Summer Court. The fairy ring created by their pact has until now kept the town safe from the Wastes—the answer to the failure of this magic lies beneath this monument, in the Crypt of Green Shadows. A successful DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that the slab bearing the heroes' names (al-Azill, Tenebrae, and Flamesong) can be moved. A staircase beneath leads into the crypt, but opening the slab causes four **giant crusher worms** (use **constrictor snake** statistics) to surge out of the opening.

5. PORTCULLIS AND COURTYARD

Amid the keep's crumbling walls is a mighty iron portcullis. Five squat figures move about atop the battlements, crossbows drawn. To the right of the gate is a hole in the crumbling wall, wide enough to pass through. On the other side is a granite fountain, now dry and full of sand.

Five **dust goblins** stand atop the battlements above the gate and attack any humanoids or worms that draw near,





unless a truce has been made (such as with Tummy in Area 1). They can open the gate from the battlements, but a DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check can also force the portcullis open for 1 round.

Collapsed Wall. Part of the wall has crumbled just south of the gate, but it is heavily trapped. A trip wire hidden within the rubble drags a net barbed with poison hooks onto any creature who triggers it. The wire requires a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot, and a successful DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to safely disarm. A creature who triggers the trap must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the target is restrained by the net and takes 1d4 piercing damage and 6d6 poison damage.

Keep Courtyard. Two beautiful fountains flank the door; now dry and full of sand, there are heaps of money piled in the bottom of this fountain if a character takes 5 minutes to sift through each. Each dry fountain contains 40 gp in assorted coinage.

6. ENTRANCE HALLWAY

The air inside the keep's entrance hall is dry and sour. The hall extends straight for about ten yards, then turns to the right. There are two doors—a stone one on the north wall, embellished with gold, the other carved from wood and decorated with an engraving of a crown of flowers. The sweet smell of honey lingers around this door.

The entrance hall has two doors to the north and south, and bends south after 30 feet. The north door leads to the Audience Hall (Area 8) and the south door to the Shadow Ring (Area 11).

Pit Trap. At the corner of the hallway is a pit trap (marked on the map). The trap is poorly concealed and requires a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot, but cannot be disarmed, only avoided by passing a DC 13 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. A character unaware of the trap must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to avoid it. On a failure, a character falls 40 feet through the floor into a freshly-dug pit.

7. SOUTHERN HALLWAY

This hallway has two doors to the east and west, leading to the Shadow Ring (Area 11) and the Dining Hall (Area 10).

Invisible Wire Trap. The middle of this hallway is laced with dozens of nearly-invisible strings, requiring a DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot. Passing through the web of wires requires three successful DC 14 Dexterity checks. Whenever a check is failed, or if a character does not see the wires, the character triggers a wire and must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the character takes 2d6 piercing damage from a sharpened bone dart fired from a hole in the wall.

8. AUDIENCE CHAMBER

The walls of this wide chamber are covered in decaying tapestries of golden trees and crimson flowers. Against the back wall is a marble throne, and piled at its base are the eviscerated corpses of a dozen goblins. On the throne sits a bloody sword.

A **flying sword** rests on the throne, coated in dried blood. This animated object is a *dancing sword* (longsword) that has been magically bound to protect the throne from usurpers. If defeated in single combat, it acquiesces to its new master. If the sword is not defeated in a fair duel, it shatters when reduced to 0 hit points.

A short hallway in the east of the chamber leads to the lord and lady's bedchambers (Area 9).

9. BEDROOM

A tower has fallen on this once-luxurious bedchamber. The splinters of a rich four-poster bed are strewn across the floor, mingling with scattered coins and the dust of pulverized flagstones. The collapsed tower has also smashed through part of the southern wall, and you can smell burning excrement and hear the sound of low, chittering voices from beyond the wall.

This room was once the lord and lady's bedroom. It has been smashed by a falling tower, creating a passage to the outside (see Area 1a). Similarly, the tower has crushed the south wall between here and the Dining Hall (Area 10). A creature can make a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to squeeze through; failure by 5 or more means that they take 1d6 damage and do not enter. Characters who want to clear the rubble can undergo 5 man-hours of heavy labor to clear a path, but the noise alerts the inhabitants of Area 10 to investigate and sneak up from behind by way of the Audience Chamber (Area 8).

Stones from the fallen tower have left debris of crushed armoires and bedside stands. An Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals jewelry and coins worth a number of gold pieces equal to the result of the check \times 10 gp; the check can be repeated, but yielding up to 500 gp. The jewelry includes sapphire earrings and a golden heart locket.

10. DINING HALL

The culinary disaster being perpetrated in the dining hall smells like burning refuse. The body of a giant worm is turning on a spit, and several dust goblins dance gleefully around the flames, screeching cooking songs. A totem-draped shaman sits removed from the rest, meditating. A giant black stewpot is in the northeast corner, and muffled voices echo from within the pot.

The dining hall is where Sisskuss, a **dust goblin** druid and her main force of 8 **dust goblins** have made camp. The room is filled with upturned tables and chairs, and the goblins are busily figuring out how to roast worm meat, with Sisskuss deep in meditation. Stealthy PCs may be able to save the children, Rennie and Linde, without alerting the goblins to their presence.

Sisskuss and the Selang. Sisskuss wants to mate with the selang to mix her bloodline with his dark power. If she is defeated, she realizes that her dream is dead, and surrenders. She grudgingly offers to release the fey from the circle (see Area 11, Dismissing the Selang) if the PCs agree to allow her and the goblins to remain in the keep.

Children. The missing children, precocious six-year-old Rennie and steely 10-year-old Linde, are tied up and sitting in a black iron stewpot in the northeast corner of the dining hall. It is full of water, and the goblins are making preparations to boil them alive if their worm-feast doesn't pan out.

What the Children Know:

- Linde saw her father in town just before she and her brother were captured by the goblins! He disappeared into a hole in the “big statue” in the cemetery.
- Linde knows where all the traps in town are, and will help the PCs avoid them.
- Rennie says that he and Linde first snuck into the castle through a hole made by the fallen tower (Area 9), and that they could get out through there!

11. SHADOW RING

Shadow engulfs you as soon as open the door to this room. It spills from within like mist rolls from the sea. No matter how hard you try, it is impossible to see through the coiling shadows.

Light does not penetrate the darkness in this room, and darkvision cannot pierce it (see Magical Darkness, below). This room, despite the blight upon Feycircle, is full of life. It is hot, humid, and jet-black flowers bloom from vines that climb the walls and creep across the floor. The room smells of honey and chocolate. Trapped inside the fairy ring is an indistinct humanoid silhouette.

Magical Darkness. Only characters that can see in magical darkness such as warlocks with the Devil's Sight invocation can see within this room. The daylight spell can create light within a reduced 30-foot area in this room, but does not dispel the shadows that spill forth from the corrupted fairy ring.

Selang. The fey trapped inside the ring is a dark satyr known as a selang (see *Tome of Beasts*, p. 341). He lives for slaughter and chaos, but was trapped in this ring by the shaman Sisskuss, and must do her bidding while he is within the ring. He wants vengeance against the goblins, and promises to slaughter them all if the party breaks the ring and frees him.

Breaking the Ring. The selang is true to his word and helps the PCs slaughter the goblins, but he will turn on them afterward if he thinks he can overpower them. Freeing the selang by breaking the fairy ring seals Feycircle's fate; the Wastes can never be forced back without its power.



Dismissing the Selang. If the PCs defeated Sisskuss, she agrees to dismiss the selang, but does not reveal that they will have to kill him. Her dismissal ritual allows the dark satyr to leave the fairy ring without the ring being broken. As soon as the selang is free, Sisskuss flees, hoping to escape in the confusion and return another day.

CONCLUSION

If you are running this dungeon as a stand-alone adventure, defeating the selang and purifying the fairy ring sees life return to Feycircle. The worms flee and new blades of grass begin to poke through the newly-invigorated soil. Rennie and Linde may be returned to their mother, though their father may never be seen again. Depending on how Sisskuss and the goblins were dealt with, Feycircle may once again be a prosperous village—one where the PCs have many new friends.

If you plan on connecting this dungeon to the *Crypt of Green Shadows* and the *Carrion Shrine of Qorgeth*, then the PCs are not so lucky. Feycircle remains fallow until the taint of Qorgeth is eradicated.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

Petring's children saw their father disappear into a hole beneath the Heroes' Monument in the town graveyard. The PCs will learn that the desolation of Feycircle is due to Petring foolishly invoking the power of Qorgeth, Demon Lord of Worms, and creating a shrine to his dark master beneath the crypts.



CRYPT OF GREEN SHADOWS

An adventure for five 5th-level characters set in the Western Wastes

by James J. Haeck

GM INTRODUCTION

The Lord of Worms will consume all, and his feast begins in the Crypt of Green Shadows. Wormhearted invaders have breached the walls of the labyrinthine mausoleum, and their mere presence sows chaos and madness among the dead. The crypt was once the resting place of three heroes who forged peace between humans and the Unseelie fey, but the gnawing mouths of Qorgeth's worms have ended their slumber. This unholy incursion has drawn the wrath of both the spirits of the dead and the shadow fey who created the crypt.

SUMMARY

This dungeon can be used to continue the adventure in the *Pit of the Dust Goblins* or as a standalone adventure. The children from the previous adventure, Rennie and Linde, are in search of their father, Petring, who they saw disappear into the crypts beneath town.

The crypt is thick with supernatural shadow. Torches can be lit from a brazier of green *faerie fire* in the entrance that cuts through magical darkness. The torches burn rapidly, and the PCs must travel quickly to preserve their light until they reach the funeral pyre in the heart of the crypt. There they can learn the way to the Carrion Shrine of Qorgeth.

FACTIONS

Several forces, each with their own motivations, seek control of the crypt, and any or all of them may oppose the PCs on first encountering them.

Spawn of Qorgeth

Qorgeth's servants blindly consume everything they can find. Only creatures who pledge their devotion to the Writhing Prince himself are spared their hunger. In addition to the mindless worms, Petring's foul rituals have called several wormhearted suffragans to his cause. They care little for why Petring summoned them; they are far more interested in claiming the arcane relics entombed here in the name of their dark lord and letting their worms devour the rest.

Heroic Spirits

The city of Feycastle above the crypt was founded on a truce made between three knightly heroes and the courts of the shadow fey. These heroes are Krythitas,

an elf paladin, Hassan, a human wizard, and Tymande Firestorm, an elfmarked warlock. Qorgeth's worms have started to devour their bodies, sending their spirits into a murderous rage.

Shadow Fey

The three heroes shared an unbreakable bond with the Queen of the Shadow Fey. When the heroes passed, her servants created a tomb that would protect the heroes' bodies and riches for all time. When the worms invaded this sanctuary, the heroes' spirits called out for protection; a number of shadow fey warriors have answered the call, but are cornered in Area 6.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

As your players' GM, you know best how to involve the PCs in this adventure. The following adventure hooks are provided to inspire and assist you.

- **Unfinished Business.** Following the adventure in the *Pit of the Dust Goblins*, the children Rennie and Linde direct the PCs to the heroes' crypt in search of their father, Petring. Petring is in over his head and is now a prisoner within the Carrion Shrine of Qorgeth, deep below the crypt. The path to the shrine is hidden in the twisting passages of Area 3.
- **Magic.** The heroic wizard Hassan was entombed with his spellbook. Its pages are rumored to contain countless spells of unimaginable power. The wormhearted servants of Qorgeth seek its power, too, and are overjoyed to slaughter any competition.
- **Contact.** As part of an ongoing campaign, the PCs must contact the spirits of a legendary hero or group of heroes. Krythitas, Hassan, and Tymande can be used as-is or replaced with other heroes suitable for your campaign. Their spirits must be pacified before they can be contacted.

The PCs enter the crypt by descending two flights of perfectly smooth stone stairs. Petring's footprints are visible in the dust. As they near the bottom of the stairs, they are engulfed by a haze of eerie, green shadows.

Green Shadows. Shadow envelopes the entire dungeon. It is a form of magical darkness; light does not penetrate it and creatures with darkvision cannot see through it. Spectral, humanoid forms seem to move through the shadows when viewed from a distance, and unintelligible





whispering can be heard while within the haze. The shadows also create a permanent gentle repose effect within the crypt.

Navigating the Crypt. Effects that penetrate magical darkness still work within the green shadows, but have their range and duration halved. Torches, candles, and lanterns can be lit from the brazier of green faerie fire in Area 1, but shed magical light in half their usual radius. Most importantly, light sources lit from this flame burn out after 1 minute, and can be extinguished by strong wind. Because of this, tracking time is especially important in this dungeon. As each round is 6 seconds, the GM can easily track time in the dungeon by using a d10 to count up each round until 1 minute has passed.

1. HALL OF GREEN FLAMES

The bottom of the stairs opens into a circular chamber, illuminated by a brazier of green flames in the center of the floor. Three stone doors carved with delicate floral sigils impede passage to the north, west, and east. The air is dry, stale, and free from the smell of rotting flesh.

The green flames dispel magical darkness. The brass brazier holding the inextinguishable fire in this room can be moved, but the flame does not move with it, instead remaining suspended a foot above the ground.

Doors. The doors leading out of this room are covered in flowery fey designs and Sylvan script. The north door reads “Krythitas watches the Funeral Pyre,” the west door reads “Hassan watches the Hall of Secrets,” and the east door reads “Tymande watches the Pit of Undying Fire.”

2. HALL OF HOWLING SPIRITS

Wails of agony pierce your ears when you open the door. An icy wind strikes you like a charging bull, knocking the air from your lungs. Suddenly, the room plunges into darkness—the wind extinguished your flame!

The first time the PCs enter this room, their light is extinguished without a save. In the future, they may make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to protect their light. The howling spirits in this hallway are loud, but otherwise harmless.

Corpse. In the middle of this hall is the corpse of a shadow fey guardian from Area 6. Its muscular body is 10 feet tall and covered in maggots.

3. HALL OF SECRETS

Swirling green shadows fill this labyrinthine hallway. Somewhere in the maze of twisting little passages, someone hums a quiet tune. “Hum hum, by my green candle...”

A **wraith** and two **specters** drift counterclockwise around the main loop of this area. The wraith is the deranged spirit of the human wizard Hassan, and carries a green candlestick in a cracked porcelain teapot. The eerie glow only casts light in a 5-foot radius, and the wraith does not notice any creatures outside its light. Hassan’s spectral figure appears similar to his physical body in Area 4b; his thick black beard is braided into dozens of tiny strands, and his magnificent robes billow around him as if blown by a wild wind.

Hassan. The wizard’s spirit patrols these corridors and attacks all non-fey on sight, though he can only see creatures adjacent to him. He uses the *candle of daylight* to illuminate the area around him, allowing his specter retainers to see his enemies as well. This spirit can be dispelled by reducing it to 0 hit points, extinguishing the candle, or immolating Hassan’s physical body on the funeral pyre (see Area 11). Hassan cannot be reasoned with unless the PCs present one of his companions’ treasured artifacts. If this is done, he regains his senses for 1 minute and urges the PCs to seek Krythitas in the northernmost room for a way to set the heroes’ spirits to rest.

Candle of Daylight. Though Hassan is incorporeal, the candle is a solid object and can be handled by creatures living and dead. This *candle of daylight* sheds green light in a 5-foot radius when lit. By speaking “Candle, reveal all things!” the light surges outward, casting light in a 60-foot radius for 1 hour as the *daylight* spell. This ability cannot be used again until next dawn.

Secrets. This area has two secret doors; both are marked by a carving of Hassan putting his finger to his lips. A DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals how to open the door; by mimicking Hassan’s gesture and “shushing” the wall. The southern passage leads to Area 9 and emerges into an empty sarcophagus. The northern passage leads to a staircase that descends into the Carrion Shrine of Qorgheth.

Locked and Trapped Doors. Two doors in the north lead to Hassan’s reliquary and burial chamber, Areas 4a and 4b. The door to 4a displays the image of Hassan calling fire down from the sky.

Flamestrike Trap (*magical trap*)

A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that touching the door will trigger a *flame strike* trap. Creatures within 10 feet of the door must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 4d6 fire damage and 4d6 radiant damage on a failure or half as much damage on a success. A DC 15 Dexterity (thieves’ tools) check disables the trap by scratching out the runes; failure by 5 or more on this check triggers the trap.

The locked door to Area 4b requires a DC 13 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to unlock and bears an image of Hassan sleeping on a stone slab.

4. HASSAN'S RELIQUARY

A stone wall divides this chamber, in the center of which is a glowing barrier. Within the barrier is a tome upon a pedestal. Shining treasure is strewn across the floor, but from beyond the partition you can hear the sounds of steel striking stone.

The wizard Hassan desired his tomb separated in three; one half for the arcane relics he had collected throughout his life, one half for his body, and a small alcove for his spellbook in the center.

Treasure. The reliquary is filled with mundane treasure, such as gold and platinum coins, and gem-encrusted ceremonial weapons worth a total of 3,000 gp. If Hassan is substituted for a legendary hero in your campaign, this reliquary may have a signature legendary item in it; otherwise the treasure chamber also contains a *brooch of shielding* and *carpet of flying* (capacity 600 lbs.).

Spellbook. Hassan's spellbook is on a pedestal in the center of his burial chamber. It is surrounded by a permanent translucent barrier similar to an *antilife shell*. This barrier can be dispelled as if it were a 7th-level spell, but the spellbook can also be bypassed through player ingenuity; nonliving matter passes through the barrier without resistance. The spellbook contains up to 70 levels of spells, or the following:

- 1st – *burning hands, identify, mage armor, magic missile, shield*
- 2nd – *acid arrow, darkvision, gentle repose, knock, levitate, rope trick*
- 3rd – *fireball, haste, magic circle, slow, vampiric touch, water breathing*
- 4th – *black tentacles, dimension door, polymorph, secret chest*
- 5th – *animate objects, hold monster, passwall*

5. HASSAN'S TOMB

A stone wall divides this chamber, in the center of which is a glowing barrier. Within the barrier is a tome upon a pedestal. The chamber is spattered with dark blood, and three armored warriors are mechanically hacking at six man-sized worms struggling to get inside a stone sarcophagus.

Three suits of **animated armor** tasked with defending Hassan's body are beset by six **giant worms** (use **constrictor snake** statistics), and the corpses of a dozen more are strewn across the room. The suits of armor attack all creatures who touch Hassan's perfectly-preserved body.

Secret. In the northeast corner of the room is a heroic statue of Hassan. A DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals there is a groove in the floor that allows it to be pulled 1 foot west. Moving the statue in this way opens a secret door in the wall to Area 11.

6. INSIDE THE WORM

Where you would expect to see a door is instead the toothy maw of a gargantuan purple worm! Faint slurping sounds echo from inside its gullet.

The purple worm that devoured this hallway is only 1 day dead, slain by the shadow fey in Area 6. Its gullet is still wet. Three **young purple worms** (use **giant constrictor snake** statistics) are inside its body, devouring it from within, but are hungry for fresher flesh.

Fey Door. The shadow fey have created a magical gateway between the inside of the snake and their base in Area 6. Its onyx-black archway glistens with amethyst light, and the other chamber can be seen clearly through it.



BRYAN SYME



7. SHADOW FEY CAMP

This tomb has been converted into a military camp. Two ten-foot-tall, hulking creatures with gray-black skin and glimmering chain shirts stand arguing around an unlit brass brazier. Despite their monstrous size, their speech sounds elven.

The shadow fey arrived to protect the heroes a few days ago. They were originally led by an enchantress named Xarrika, but she was ambushed by the wormhearted suffragans in Area 8 and hurled into the Pit of Undying Flame. Now all that remains is the muscle; two hulking **shadow fey guardians** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 174). They are lost without Xarrika's leadership, and are bickering in their camp about the best course of action to protect their heroes. A character may attempt a DC 14 Charisma check to convince them to go along with any plan.

Brazier. The shadow fey can see up to 60 feet in magical darkness, and have left the brass brazier unlit. It is filled with tinder, and can be lit with green flame from the entrance to create another inextinguishable source of flame.

Sarcophagi. Four sarcophagi are arranged along the western wall of this room. Inside are the corpses of Tymande's retainers, perfectly preserved by the *gentle repose* effect that pervades the crypt. Searching the sarcophagi yields 52 gp, a +1 dagger, a mithral chain shirt, and a silk burial shroud worth 50 gp.

Secret. A section of wall in the northwest corner has a picture of the half-elf warlock Tymande Firestorm with daggers crossed in front of her chest. The wall slides open if a character adopts the same pose in front of it, leading to the inside of an empty sarcophagus in Area 9.

8. PIT OF UNDYING FLAME

You stand at the top of a marble platform above a sea of fire. As you enter, a cowed figure wheezes and rises to its feet on the platform on the far end of the room. Out of the corner of your eye, you can see humanoid shapes moving within the flames.

The floor of this chamber is a sea of emerald fire. All entrances to this room are on elevated stone platforms 10 feet above the flames. A 3-foot-wide stone bridge connects north and south platforms. Meditating on the north platform is a **wormhearted suffragan** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 410), that awakens as soon as the PCs enter. It casts *command* on the first PC it sees, pointing a gnarled finger and rasping, "Approach." The PC must move towards it by the shortest and most direct route, ending its turn if it moves within 5 feet of the suffragan.

Within the pit are 12 flaming **skeletons** loyal to the suffragan. They climb up the platforms to attack the PCs in melee. They act like typical **skeletons** with the following features:

Fire Form. A creature that touches the skeleton or hits it with a melee attack while within 5 feet of it takes 5 (1d10)

fire damage. Whenever the skeleton hits with a melee weapon attack, the target takes an additional 5 (1d10) fire damage. The skeleton is immune to fire damage.

Water Susceptibility. For every 5 feet that the skeleton moves in water, or for every gallon of water splashed on it, it takes 1 cold damage.

9. TYMANDE'S TOMB

This sepulcher rings with unearthly screams as the wraith of a husky half-elf plunges its daggers into the cloaked figure before it. No blood spills from the wound as the figure turns to face you. Through rotting lips, it growls, "Hurry. Together, we can destroy this spirit."

Tymande's spirit watches over her lifeless body—interred in a sarcophagus in the tomb's northeast corner—as a **wraith**. She is locked in combat with a **wormhearted suffragan** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 410) and 4 **giant worms** (use **constrictor snake statistics**) seeking to devour her corpse. The suffragan sees the PCs as potential allies and offers them wealth or information in exchange for their aid in destroying Tymande. It honors this amnesty until the PCs have let their guard down.

Tymande. Tymande's spirit is mad with rage, and cannot be reasoned with unless the PCs present one of her companions' treasured artifacts. If this is done, she regains her senses for 1 minute and urges the PCs to seek Krythitas in the northernmost room for a way to set the heroes' spirits to rest.

Treasure. Tymande was a Pact of the Blade warlock in service of the Old Ones that wander Midgard's Western Wastes. Her pact weapon was the *dagger of venom* now laid across her chest. She wears a set of *glamoured studded leather* enchanted to look like a flowing robe with a flame-embroidered collar.

Secret. Against the west wall of the room is a heroic statue of Tymande. A DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals there is a groove in the floor that allows it to be pulled 1 foot east. Moving the statue in this way opens a secret door in the wall to Area 11.

10. RETAINERS' TOMB

The hallway before you is flanked by ten upright sarcophagi. For a tomb, the room smells surprisingly fresh, as if there were no dead interred here.

This hallway is home to the sarcophagi of eight of the three heroes' loyal soldiers. The wormhearted suffragan in Area 8 transformed these warriors into **zombies**. The zombies throw the lids off their sarcophagi as soon as the PCs fully enter the hall. Nothing physically indicates that these perfectly preserved warriors are undead other than their glowing red eyes.

Secret. The two central coffins on the east and west of the hall do not have zombies inside. If they are opened, a wall

with the carved image of a hero is revealed. See Areas 3 or 6 for their description.

Trap. When the northern door is opened, a trapdoor in the floor in front of the door falls open. Any creatures within 5 feet of the door must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or fall 20 feet into Area 10. A character can make a DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check to discover the trap, and a DC 18 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to disable it.

11. DRAINAGE DITCH

The green light pervading the crypt makes the river of crimson blood in this ditch appear to be made up of sticky, black ichor. The perfectly preserved corpses of would-be tomb raiders lie broken and mangled beneath the trapdoor. The blood of the giant worm slaughtered in Area 12 drains through an iron grate into this ditch. A door to the east carved with spiraling flame sigils leads to Area 7.

12. FUNERAL PYRE

You have found the heart of the crypt. In the room's center is a slab of white marble that shines like moonlight in the darkness. Atop the slab, a shallow basin filled with dry cedar, frankincense, and rosemary. The basin is wide enough to hold three people, side by side. A single door stands closed across from the stairs, behind the bloody corpse of a giant, milky-white worm.

The Pyre. The shadow fey that built this crypt feared that evil might one day seek the hidden crypt to corrupt its tenants, even in death. As a safeguard, they constructed a funeral pyre with which to purify their spirits by immolating the bodies of the three heroes. The sacred herbs that fill the pyre and the Sylvan runes carved around its edge help give peace to their restless souls. Only igniting the pyre with green flame from Area 1 or Area 7, or from Hassan's green candle (Area 3) will complete the ritual.

Completing the Ritual. By cremating the bodies of the heroes, their rage is abated and their spirits (regardless of whether their wraiths were defeated) appear above the flickering pyre. See "Conclusion" for how the spirits thank the PCs.

Secrets. Two secret doors open into this room from Areas 4b and 8. They cannot be opened from this side.

13. KRYTHITAS' TOMB

Two rows of decorative columns line this hall, which disappears into darkness beyond the light of your flame. Black blood spatters the floor and pillars of the hall, and the bisected corpses of dozens of worms litter the floor.

A character who makes a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check when entering the room notices a silhouetted figure hiding behind one of the pillars closest to the door. This figure is Krythitas, now a **wight** with AC 18 (plate), 75 hit points, and a +1 *longsword* and +1 *longbow*. Krythitas

retains some of her mind and sense of holy purpose, but only freeing her wrathful spirit (see Area 11) will restore her senses.

At the far end of this room is Krythitas' sarcophagus, its lid thrown on the floor. Piled in front of it are the corpses of a wormhearted suffragan and two shadow fey guardians. Nothing is inside the sarcophagus. Krythitas strikes when the PCs examine the sarcophagus.

Krythitas initially attacks with her longbow and cannot be reasoned with unless they present one of her companions' treasured artifacts. If this is done, Krythitas momentarily regains her senses. She realizes that the heroes' spirits have been driven into a rage by Qorgeth's minions, and reveals that the only way to end their wrath is by cremating their corpses on the pyre in Area 12. She only remains lucid for 1 minute, after which she continues attacking anyone in sight.

CONCLUSION

If you are running this dungeon as a stand-alone adventure, defeating the minions of Qorgeth and absconding with the treasure may be enough for treasure-hunting heroes. However, cremating the corpses of Krythitas, Hassan, and Tymande grants an additional reward. When their bodies are consumed by the purifying flames, their spirits rise above the pyre and thank the PCs for setting them free from Qorgeth's madness. They offer a choice of reward:

Information. If the PCs are seeking Petring and the Carrion Shrine of Qorgeth, Hassan directs the PCs to the hidden stairs in Area 3 leading to it. Otherwise, the spirits offer one deep secret in your campaign world.

Power. The spirits offer to improve one relic of the PCs' choice; Hassan transforms the *candle of daylight* into a *candle of invocation*, Tymande improves the *dagger of venom's* poison damage to 4d10, or Krythitas transforms one of her +1 weapons into a +1 *vicious* weapon.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE.

Petring has lost control of the demonic forces he summoned. He invoked Qorgeth's power with the best of intentions, hoping to protect his home, but only brought ruin upon it and himself. He is now a prisoner in the *Carrion Shrine of Qorgeth*, and will soon be consumed by his dark master.



UNDER THE DEVIL'S THUMB

An adventure for five 5th-level characters set in the Southlands

by Jerry LeNeave

Special Thanks to: Ben McFarland, Ben Menard, Angela LeNeave, and Irish breakfast tea.

For my Dad, who I lost this year. He was always a big fan of perilous adventures. Although he never played, I know he'd have loved a good dungeon crawl.

GM INTRODUCTION

Under the Devil's Thumb is an adventure of choices, double crosses, and devious puzzles that tests the capabilities of even the most able adventurers.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Nakresh, the eight-armed simian demon-god of thieves and unscrupulous wizards, is alive and well in the Southlands. The fingers of his lower left hand are represented by five individuals known as The Exalted. These five cultists are the absolute most cunning, audacious, and devoted to Nakresh. Showing dedication to Nakresh means perpetrating some of the highest crimes, heists, and robberies in known history.

Currently the five Exalted are: Lord Vermin, a male roachling rogue; Master Kiprak, a male kobold alchemist; Mognyr Dunestalker, a male gnoll ranger; Sister Starkfeather, a female tengu cleric; and Zheita the Magicmonger, a female derro sorceress.

Every eight years the Exalted partake in their most grandiose crimes and even scheme against one another in an effort to prove which is the most pious servant of Nakresh. The outcome of this competition is determined by the monetary value of all the spoils of these heists, and a secret ballot cast by lesser cult members. Of course, the Exalted may not kill one another or turn one another over to authorities. "*Honor among thieves, and all that,*" as even the faithful of Nakresh don't turn each other in to the Law.

The winner is given the rank of "Venerated Exalted," and holds the title for the next eight years. Should one of the Exalted seats become vacant, either by death, expulsion, or capture without hope of rescue – the other four vote to raise a 5th member to fill the seat from among the capable thieves of the region.

SISTER STARKFEATHER

Of the five Exalted, Under the Devil's Thumb focuses primarily around only two of them; Sister Starkfeather, and Lord Vermin. Sister Starkfeather, an albino tengu cleric is the current Venerated Exalted of the lower left hand of Nakresh, and plans to hold that position until

she dies of old age. That eight-year period is poised to turn again in just a few months and Sister Starkfeather is already beginning to take steps to ensure her victory over her fiercest competitor, Lord Vermin.

LORD VERMIN

Lord Vermin, an ambitious roachling rogue who happens to be the newest of the five Exalted claims ownership of many subterranean lairs under the city of Highgate, as well as all of its appointed officials. He is eager to win the next contest and his devotees, known as The Umbers, are anxious to assist. Ever aware of his people's relatively short lifespan, he is determined to win the contest, as it may be the last chance he gets in his lifetime.

HIGHGATE

South of Per-Xor and just off the Lotus Trail, resting on the east bank of the River Nuria sits the city of Highgate. Standing tall, a bastion of high-walled white limestone juts upward in stark contrast to the low rolling sands of the desert.


Built hundreds of years ago to serve as a defensive station during darker times, before the taming of the gnolls, Highgate is just as formidable now as it was then. An engineering marvel, even for something built so long ago, Highgate is a rather advanced city. Resting on the River Nuria allows it to have aqueducts, and a fully functioning sewer system.

Inside though, the city is anything but gleaming. Highgate is overcome with a sickness of unknown origin that is now being exploited to keep its people obedient through fear. Once ruled by pharaohs and sultans, Highgate now rests on the backs of the meek – corrupt "elected" officials who take bribes for silence and turn a blind eye to crime. Merely puppets, the rulers of Highgate are a façade of the city's true rulers, The Umbers.

SYNOPSIS

Player characters enter the city and immediately notice that despite its outward appearance, something is wrong. Plagued by an affliction being called "stone sickness" or "the gorgon's touch" that disorients people and turns





them to stone. Those with, or suspected to have, the affliction are being banished from the city. Some demand a cure, but most are just scared for their loved ones.

A ravenfolk woman named Spinel Larkdon, mother to a child with the gorgon's touch, begs the PCs for assistance. An artifact known as the *Shroud of Tiberesh*, capable of curing any sickness, is locked away within The Umbers' vault of spoils below the city. Passionate, she is determined to save her son and all those afflicted.

She explains that the *Shroud* could heal and even completely reverse the effects of the gorgon's touch. A vocal group of citizens also believe the Umbers' treasure horde holds some magic powerful enough to rid Highgate of the disease. However, none of the aristocrats or city officials will do anything to retrieve it. Officials say that there is no guarantee raiding the Umbers' lair would produce anything useful, and drawing the ire of the cult will do more harm than good, likely costing more lives than it would save. Some of the braver residents of Highgate attempted to infiltrate The Umbers' Gauntlet themselves, but wound up either found as corpses riddled with knife wounds, or simply never seen again.

Lord Vermin and his cronies don't know that one of their seemingly mundane magical baubles among hundreds within their vault contains such power. They have so many items down there they can barely keep track of them all. It's treasure, nonetheless, and they don't like to part ways with their spoils, with one exception: a reward for those who survive the Umber's Gauntlet.

Fortunately for the player characters, completing the Umber's Gauntlet alive means they are not only entitled entrance into the cult, but also a single item from its vault of spoils. The PC's only hope of procuring the *Shroud* is by traversing this initiation Gauntlet – a series of traps, monsters, and puzzles devoted to the demon-god Nakresh – and claiming the *Shroud* as their prize.

To gain the *Shroud* from the Gauntlet, the PCs either need to enter undetected or by posing as prospective cultists themselves. Once inside the Gauntlet, should they survive and obtain the *Shroud* for Spinel, they will be rewarded handsomely for their hard work.

Only after it's too late will they realize that they've served as a pawn in a much larger scheme of Sister Starkfeather's, which in turn, could spawn an entirely new adventure!

PART 1: CALLOUSED

The adventure opens as characters traverse the Lotus Trail, headed either north toward Per-Bastet, or south toward Per-Kush. Allow the group to come up with their own reasons for traveling together. Perhaps they are a nomadic group of entertainers, or a specialized team of "tomb liberators." Maybe they formed a bond after surviving a perilous event together such as exploring the Tomb of Tiberesh or meeting an angry djinn.

In the distance ahead through the undulating heat, you see the white limestone walls of the city known as Highgate shining in the midday sun.

Allow players to introduce themselves and their characters and get acquainted briefly. Tell them that their journey on the Lotus Trail has had its fair share of hardships and that stopping at Highgate is advisable since the nearest civilized shelter and source of supply is at least 2 days' journey from here.

As they approach the city:

As you approach the looming perimeter of Highgate, you notice there are many stone statues outside its walls. Depictions of men, women, and children in various poses grow in number the closer you get to the entrance. Some in fetal positions, some on their knees, some embracing one another.

Characters investigating any of these statues do not need to make a check to notice they are immaculate depictions of the various races that inhabit this region. However, a successful DC 12 Investigation check reveals that some of the statues appear slightly moist in places, as if made from clay that is not fully dried.

If a player character gets a particularly high result (DC 20+), they believe one of the statues made a muffled sound.

THE STONE SICKNESS

Also referred to as "The Gorgon's Touch", this disease is transferred through the sharing and/or contact of bodily fluids with someone who is already afflicted. So far, there is no known cure for the disease although some in Highgate believe there is magic powerful enough within the thieves guild's vaults to help.

ENTERING THE CITY

Upon entering the city, the characters should immediately notice, amid the typical hustle and bustle of the city, everything here is not exactly as gleaming and bright as it seems from the outside.

Horse and camel-drawn carts steadily trot along the stone streets before you. The smell of freshly baked bread wafts through the air as children run about and play, and vendors boast about their wares loudly from their stalls.

Louder however, is the voice of a dark-skinned dwarven man standing atop a barrel. Ringing a bell and holding a bold statement on a sign that reads, "ANU-AKMA COMES."

Allow the characters to briefly soak in their surroundings. Interacting with the dwarf man should clearly let the players know:

- His name is Badul and he believes the city is succumbing to a divine plague.
- He declares people are slowly turning to stone, it starts with a small patch of dry skin but quickly spreads and turns their entire person to chalky white stone within a few days' time.



- The city officials are doing almost nothing to help, and simply urging citizens to stay indoors until the sickness runs its course.

Whether interacting with Badul or not, after being in the city for a few moments read the following.

The bazaar at the city gates is peppered with various statues like the ones outside. Some lay in corners, others lie prostrated on the sandstone streets. People bustle past the statues while avoiding looking at them, many covering their mouths with handkerchiefs or wearing makeshift masks.

MEETING SPINEL (HOOKS)

Whatever the player characters decide to do next should be interrupted by Spinel Larkdon, a tengu woman with reddish-grey plumage, and a beak that has a deep gouge in its left side. If the players decide not to approach or interact with Badul, the same information is relayed to them after speaking with Spinel.

“Travelers!” A somewhat shrill and fragile voice erupts from the hum of the city. “Please, a mother begs of your aid. My son suffers with this terrible sickness. A mother cannot simply stand by and watch her only child slowly turn to stone! No one in this forsaken

city of thieves will risk their own neck to help, but perhaps you will? I can make it worth your while.”

Spinel is dressed in sandy-colored hooded robes tied with a simple white sash. Her eyes are a pale blue, and filled with desperation. Allow the player characters to question her as they see fit, while doing so keep the following in mind:

- Spinel is genuinely concerned about **saving a young boy** named Etiryp (Et-rip) who has the stone sickness, although he is not actually her son. He is the son of a friend of hers, Galena, who came to her for help, and is in the middle stage of the disease’s progression. He only has about 24 hours before it consumes him.
- The **Umbers have a hold over the city**, they are a guild of thieves dedicated to a cult of the demon-god Nakresh, devoted to thievery and magic. Any character succeeding a DC 10 History check reveals whatever portions of the History section you’d like to relay.
- She is familiar with the cult of Nakresh and its Gauntlet because she is a member herself, she serves Sister Starkfeather. Although she passes this knowledge off with a convincing story about how **Lord Vermin’s**



associates troubled her family for decades. (Insight DC 25 reveals she's telling a partial truth. Her clan skirmishes with Vermin.)

- She claims that a **family heirloom artifact** (the *Shroud of Tiberesh*) was stolen by **The Umbers** several years ago, and without its healing properties, her sister passed away. This story is absolutely false, but Spinel shares it with the conviction of one who's told a lie so many times that they themselves believe it. An Insight check (DC 25) reveals this. Spinel refuses to acknowledge the falsehood.
- She has more than adequate monetary and magical resources to **pay the characters handsomely for the artifact's return** (within reason), a paltry price to pay for aiding Sister Starkfeather while simultaneously avoiding risking her own life.

THE JOB

If the players show interest, Spinel asks them into her home, which is nearby, to speak more privately, though she doesn't insist. In either case, have her direct them toward a secluded space to discuss the job more in depth.

“Thank you, thank you so much. Now, we’re going to need to recover a magical artifact that once belonged to my family. Stolen by Lord Vermin’s filthy little insects, it is a burial shroud of a once powerful sorcerer-king that has immeasurable restorative and preservative powers.”

Spinel explains this artifact is hidden within the Nakresh Guild maze, with powers capable of saving her son. The item is known as the *Shroud of Tiberesh*. Not only will it help save Etiryp, but it could also save and potentially reverse the effects of the sickness on other citizens.

She explains those who survive the Gauntlet are not only granted entrance into The Umbers, but may claim a single item from the hoard at the end of the trial. This treasure serves both as a prize and as proof of survival. This of course is not the only way, as breaking in and finding a way to the hoard is also an option. She laments, she would do it herself, if she were the bird she once was 20 years ago.

She offers to pay 300 gold pieces per character, and she has a small cache of minor magic items for them as well (GM's pick), one for each of them, to divide among themselves as they choose. If the players agree to meet in her home, she shows them the cache by motioning toward a locked chest and showing them a sample from within (your choice as DM). Otherwise she does not specify which items, but assures the characters they are worthwhile.

Spinel is wealthy, though she doesn't really look the part, and can be bargained with. A successful DC 16 Persuasion check convinces her to pay more; she offers an additional 100 gold pieces per character. A result of 20 or higher causes her to offer the characters the option to keep the *Shroud of Tiberesh* after it is used to cure Etiryp, should they do a particularly efficient job of acquiring it. Checks failing to meet the DC by 10 or more cause her to become

irritated, and she'll no longer increase the reward.

If pressed for provisions, Spinel can offer to provide two *potions of greater healing*, basic ammunition, rations, and torches.

For combat purposes, should less wise characters attempt to cross or harm Spinel, she is a Tengu **archmage**. Additionally, her friend Galena is a crimson-feathered Tengu **assassin** and will arrive to assist her 1 round after combat begins.

Characters who attempt to make checks to detect deception fail automatically, Spinel has had a lifetime of practicing her craft. Repeatedly prying or accusing her of falsehood will only anger her; each time a player character does so, decrease the amount of gold rewarded to them by 10% and remove a minor magical item from the treasure cache. Additionally, each time this happens, reassure the players that Spinel seems genuine. Proceed to Part 2.

PART 2: THE VARIOUS ROUTES

Once the characters have agreed to help, whatever their motivations, Spinel provides them with a means to escape the Gauntlet swiftly once they've obtained the shroud.

“Take this scroll, it was a gift from a mother’s grandfather many moons ago. It was he who planned to infiltrate the cult’s Gauntlet and steal their most prized possessions and whisk himself away. The spell inscribed herein will teleport your group to safety once you’ve got what you need.”

The *scroll of word of recall* only functions to return its travelers to the permanent circle within Spinel's home.

“Now, as for gaining entrance to The Umbers’ Gauntlet and claiming its prize, you can either sneak your way in or pose as initiates. The Umbers have little faith in outsiders who wish to prove themselves, assuming they’ll perish almost instantly, and so they let most anyone into the trial.”

If the PCs pose as cultists, they can approach the guards directly through the entrance below the Bazaar at the center of town. Spinel tells them:

“Have your wits about you, you’ll need to give the impression of utmost devotion to the ‘8-armed Demon God Nakresh, his hands grasp all there is to take and hold’. Head straight to the Umbers’ Gauntlet foyer by speaking with Corvus, one of their fences who runs a shop as a cover, set up in the bazaar.”

However, if they opt to avoid interacting with the Umbers, there are two little-known routes through the sewer that can conceal their entrance into the Gauntlet, and Spinel can direct the PCs to either.

If the characters decide to break into the Umbers' Gauntlet, Spinel tells them:

You’ve two options for sneaking in; either through the Dead Man’s Slough in the graveyard district, or Geb’s Maw. The graveyard is a bit less conspicuous, but beneath is surely guarded by something undead.

Characters inquiring about Dead Man's Slough hear:

"Beneath a grate near the back of the graveyard district near the old king's tomb, lies a tunnel that should lead you directly into one of the chambers within the Umber's Gauntlet."

Characters inquiring about Geb's Maw hear:

"Between the stables and the slums, a massive sinkhole breaches the city streets. Not many go near it for fear it will widen and swallow them whole. At its bottom is a sewer tunnel that lead to the Umber's Gauntlet."

After speaking with the characters about their approach, she takes a few moments to provide them with a rough hand-drawn map indicating where to find Corvus, and the entrances she's described.

Allow the characters to make any final requests, ask questions, etc., before they set out to enter the Gauntlet. Proceed to the appropriate entrance chosen by the group.

GAUNTLET FOYER

Characters seeking out Corvus will easily find him marked on Spinel's map in an octagonal black tent with gold trim, each side having an embroidered shape of a hand on it. Upon entering, read the following aloud to the characters:

Standing inside and idly admiring his own jewelry is a finely dressed roachling man with a pompadour haircut of thick, wiry hair, and well-polished shoes. He regards you with a wide smile, as his antennae stand up from his well-groomed coiffure. "What can I do for ya?"

Corvus' Tent

This is the characters' chance to roleplay a bit, allow them to interact with Corvus and guide those interactions based on the following:

- Corvus is a roachling of stature within Lord Vermin's ranks. He is a faithful and tenured guild fence. He is primarily concerned with the moving of goods, and his own self-importance.
- He does not know of Spinel personally, all of Sister Starkfeather's acolytes are all the same to him.
- He does not know of the *Shroud of Tiberesh* or many specifics of the guild Gauntlet beyond being glad he was grandfathered in before the trail became mandatory.
- He takes the intake of initiates into the Gauntlet very seriously, and only allows those who prove their true devotion to Nakresh to pass.
- He knows that, typically, Umber initiates come one or two at a time, an entire party of initiates is uncommon, and often a red flag.
- When taking payments being shown as devotion to Nakresh, Corvus doesn't care about the source, so long as they have some value. Every little bit helps Lord Vermin's cause.

If the characters approach Corvus as an entire group, they must prove themselves worthy. Doing so requires each of them to succeed a DC 15 Persuasion or DC 14 Deception check to even have him begin considering them for admission. Characters may intimidate him by succeeding a DC 20 Intimidate check instead, but these checks are made with disadvantage.

If the characters approach Corvus individually, or after the group has proven themselves to him, they must simply show their "devotion" to Nakresh by "donating" an item of their own or by procuring one from a stranger in the bazaar.





Once this has been done and Corvus decides to let the characters through, read the following aloud:

Corvus pulls back the fine gnollskin rug on his floor, revealing a hatched sewer entrance. Well-kept and relatively free of grime, you descend directly down into a foyer where four heavily armed guards, two roachlings and two gnolls, stand watch over the Gauntlet's entrance. The hatch closes and seals above you.

Development. If the party attacks Corvus, he flees, but tells no one in order to save face. He is there when they return and congratulates them on their success.

If the party pursues Corvus, they will face the guards in the Vestibule (**Part 3, Area 1**).

GRAVEYARD

Marked with a skeletal hand on Spinel's map, the Graveyard district holds the most discrete entrance to the UMBER's inner workings, however, it is dangerous. Should the characters decide to go this route, read the following:

The limestone streets here are cracked and choked with brambles and loose sand. At the base of a tall marble statue depicting an old king lies a simple brass grate and ladder. Hollow whispers of air bellows from beneath.

King's Antechamber

This entrance leads way into the old king's tomb, guarded still by undead servants. The ladder descends into a small 10 ft. by 10 ft. featureless room that smells of rot and dust. A simple wooden door here gives way to a much larger 30 ft. by 30 ft. antechamber filled with monsters and crumbling limestone that's strewn about the floor.

Beyond this room lies a narrow, linear series of hewn stone crypts that lead to a dead end. The dead end is actually a secret revolving door (Perception DC 13) which leads into the Gauntlet's chapel.

Creatures. The antechamber contains a **wraith**, a **ghoul**, and 2 **zombies** that attack on sight.

Treasure. The creatures have no treasure, as the guild regularly cleans out this area and dresses it to appear abandoned and unused.

Proceed to **area 5, Chapel of Chance** in **Part 3**.

STABLES

Not long ago a sinkhole opened up just within the city's walls near the stables. Many locals thought this was a sign from the gods. In reality, the subterranean foundation of the city was merely settling and unfortunately swallowed up a nearby homestead from the adjacent slums district.

The Sunken Homestead

At the bottom of this massive sinkhole, roughly 20 feet in diameter and 150 feet deep, lies a shattered home, its debris strewn and stretched across a natural chasm.

Should characters decide to enter this way, they may draw a crowd of onlookers swept up in fear and awe. They will also require climbing tools, magic, or some other means of securing themselves as they travel downward.

If traditional climbing tools are used, know that the earth here is unsettled, ask for DC 10 Athletics or Acrobatics checks every 50 ft. If one of these checks fail, explain that they lost some footing but manage to steady themselves. Two subsequently failed checks, or a die result of 1 results in the character falling the remainder of the distance.

The bottom of the sinkhole is effectively in darkness. Once a light source is used, or for characters with darkvision, read the following aloud:

From the bottom here, you find a short dog-leg tunnel, and far down it, perhaps 100 yards, you see a natural chasm approximately 10 feet wide, separating you from the other side where a torch lit entrance to the sewer ducts gleams. This jagged tear in the earth descends to further unknown depths. Across it lies splinters of the broken home, and a ruined support pillar from the city walls above.

The chasm is a straight drop for another 300' and what lies at the bottom is certain death. Characters who further inspect the boards and succeed on a DC 12 Investigation check should be read:

The boards that stretch across are unfit for supporting even the weight of a dog without crumbling.

Characters may determine their own solution or use the crumbled support pillar to form a makeshift bridge to cross the gap. If so, one character must succeed on a DC 16 Athletics check to move the pillar, and each must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity check to cross without falling. Other precautions can be taken, such as the use of ropes, to increase the chance of success.

After half of the party has crossed the gap they encounter 3 hungry **gricks** hiding amid the rubble (Perception DC 16 to spot). Read the following aloud:

The silence here is suddenly pierced by chittering and suckling sounds as 3 tentacled snake-like creatures slither outward. Their body's colors shifting like chameleons as they detach from the rubble they in which they were hiding.

After crossing the chasm, Proceed to **area E, Demon's Gambit** in **Part 3**.

Creatures. The gricks are trained to remain in this area and do not pursue parties out.

Treasure. The creatures have no treasure, as the guild regularly cleans out this area and dresses it to appear abandoned and unused.

PART 3: THE GAUNTLET

All who wish to serve The Umbers, and in turn, Nakresh, must complete this Gauntlet in order to become a member. Located deep below the city, within segregated sections of decommissioned sewer, lies a series of linked chambers filled with traps, challenges, and monsters. No matter which path is taken, all 5 trials must be completed in order to unlock the vault of spoils and prove themselves worthy. Each chamber contains one of the 5 keys required to open the vault.

Each key should have a different description, and feel free to be creative with the shapes, like a skeletal hand, or a shooting star, or a dragon. However, the portion of each true key to be inserted is triangular in shape. Keep the descriptions filled with details, and only include this if the group asks for specifics about that portion.

Unless otherwise noted, throughout the Gauntlet all the doors are unlocked, and not trapped. All rooms are lit by torches in sconces.

Additionally, taking a rest is not an option during this event, as saving the boy is time sensitive, should characters consider taking a rest, remind them that it will cost Etiryp his life.

1. VERMIN'S VESTIBULE

Descending from Corvus' tent is a short trip. Once characters reach the bottom, read the following aloud:

This massive cave holds a gigantic carving of a demonic baboon face, its tongue sticking outward. A half dozen armed guards stand before you, seeming completely ambivalent to your presence. Flanking a sturdy iron door with pull-rings, the gnolls brandish polearms. The roachlings each wear a bandolier of daggers and shortswords rest at their hips. None of the guards speak or make much eye contact.

Interacting with the guards here won't elicit much of a response. They tell the characters to move into the Gauntlet or get out. The guards here assume, like most, the characters will not survive long.

Creatures. The two roachlings are **assassins**, and the four gnolls are **gladiators**. This is a deadly encounter that would make short work of the PCs should they pick a fight here. Alternatively, the guards could opt to subdue them and let them live, delivering them to some other portion of sewer, the desert wastes, or whatever you prefer.

Treasure. The creatures have their gear. However they represent a challenge which should be beyond most parties. If defeated somehow, they have an uncommon magic item each, and 50gp.

2. NAKRESH'S GRASP

The iron doors creaks shut with a low rumble of metal against the stone floor. From the other side you can hear the muffled sound of a board being slid across the door, barring you inside.

Five bronze keys lay within plain sight, but four of them are false, and they are all guarded by very real traps.

The relief on the floor represents Nakresh and his eight arms, grasping all that he can hold. The pillar in the center holds one of the five keys in this room, although it is false. The true key lies on the shelf of the pillar (4) to the southeast that Nakresh's lower-left hands are grasping.

This chamber of smooth stone is home to a carved relief of a massive beast upon its floor. At its center, a simian face with its mouth agape holds an octagonal pedestal that rises about three feet from the floor. Two bodies lie propped up against it. Directly across the way, you see another door.

Characters who inspect the bodies and succeed a DC 10 Medicine check reveal that they have both been dead for approximately 1 week. Both halfings, one appears to have been killed by a crossbow bolt to the head. The other, who is much older, remains unknown. A successful DC 11 Perception check reveals that among them is a hand crossbow, 4 bolts, a small pouch filled with sand, 2 daggers, and each wears leather armor and plain iron wedding bands.

Once the characters have been in the room for a minute read the following aloud:

You notice that the relief includes eight arms that snake along the floor in pairs of two, each set branching toward four separate columns that run floor-to-ceiling at the north and south ends of the room.

These 4 columns are at the northwest, northeast, southwest, and southeast attached to the walls, flanking both doors. Marked on the map as 1-4, each is painted with a different scene, and each contains a small shelf holding an identical triangular bronze key. Column 4 holds the real key.

The columns each depict an aspect of Nakresh's aspects:

1. **Brazen Theft:** Hooded figures stealing from paupers and the elderly.
2. **Magical Treasure:** Piles of glittering gold, wands, weapons, and baubles.
3. **Power:** An insect, holding a blade in its pincers and sitting atop a throne.
4. **The Exalted:** One hooded figure, stealing from another dressed identically.



Each is also trapped. DC 15 Perception to spot irregularities, DC 14 Investigation to assess the mechanism and discover how to disable each trap:

The Columns

1. Necrotic Trap (*magical trap*)

A DC 15 Perception check notices a fine white hair about 3 inches in length lying under the key. The column is infused with necromantic magic that can be detected with detect magic, or a successful DC 15 Arcana check. Removing this key will instantly age the first person who touches it 3d6 years. (DC 15 Wisdom save to resist, but the creature's hair turns white on a successful save). A DC 15 Arcana check can temporarily bypass the trap.

2. Poison Gas Trap (*mechanical trap*)

A narrow slot just below the shelf can be detected with a DC 15 Perception check. A DC 10 Investigation check determines that there isn't a sure way to deactivate the trap, but succeeding by 5 or more on the check reveals that standing back some distance and using an object to remove the key might avoid whatever effect it has. A burst of sour-smelling, yellow gas sprays from the slot. Creatures adjacent to the pillar must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution or become poisoned for 1d4 hours.

3. Spear Trap (*mechanical trap*)

A spear bursts from a hidden recess in the column (+6 to hit, range 5 ft., one target. Hit: 11 (2d10) piercing damage). It thrusts forward five feet and then retracts back into the pillar.

4. False Trap (*mechanical trap*)

Characters hear a deep metallic “click” followed by a faint rumble from somewhere deep within the walls. Nothing happens.

Removing the key from this pillar causes the weight-sensitive plate it rests upon to trigger the crushing ceiling trap.

The Pedestal (crushing ceiling trap)

(*mechanical trap*)

A DC 15 Perception check is required to spot the seam around the plate. With a successful DC 14 Investigation check, a PC can determine that removing the key without triggering the trap requires something else of similar weight (4lbs) be placed here when the key is removed.

The ceiling of this chamber is 20 feet high, and the crushing ceiling trap descends at a rate of 5 ft. per round, each round after being triggered on initiative count 20. If the key or an object of the same weight is placed back upon the pedestal the ceiling trap stops, remains still for one round, and recedes another 5' back toward its initial position until back in place, or until the trap is triggered again.

Once the ceiling has descended 15 ft., all creatures medium sized or larger must succeed a DC 15 Athletics skill check or fall prone. If the ceiling manages to descend fully, it crushes and instantly kills any living creature within the room.

3. MAGIC-MONGER'S MENAGERIE

The central chamber to the Umber's Gauntlet is in dedication to the arcane and strange magical puzzles that wizards of Nakresh adore.

A massive obsidian skull sits in the center of the room, faux gemstones made of glass are set into the stone floor below it. Adorning its third eye with a proper gemstone will relinquish the key held in a protective stasis above it. Using the wrong gemstone may result in certain death, or mighty amusement.

Regardless of the entry point into this chamber, read the following aloud:

This perfectly square chamber has a high ceiling and doors on each wall. At its center, sitting in a shallow pool cut into the floor is a huge obsidian skull. Floating high above it within a small magical force field is a triangular bronze key.

The skull itself was carved from a single chunk of obsidian. Its mouth frozen in a grin, it has two massive cannonball-like gemstones for eyes. Its left is made of ruby, and its right sapphire. Each gemstone weighs 85 lbs, and can be removed using an adequate metal instrument after succeeding on a DC 20 Strength check. At the center of its forehead is a third eye, carved depicting eyelashes and a centered gaze. Characters succeeding on a DC 12 Investigation check notice that there is a shallow divot in this center eye where the pupil would be.

The key is suspended in midair, 10 ft. above the skull. The skull itself is roughly 4 ft. tall. Characters attempting to climb, fly, or otherwise reach the key cannot interact with it; the magical barrier surrounding it is far too strong. The barrier radiates abjuration magic (Arcana DC 14). The only way to dispel the barrier is to pluck the proper gemstone from the floor and put it into the inset of the skull's third eye.

Read the following aloud when characters take a closer inspection of the area surrounding the skull:

The skull sits in a shallow pool of water cut a few inches into the floor here. Beneath the calm ripples, you notice a series of colorful, fist-sized gemstones, which are also set into the floor.

The gems are arranged in a straight line from left to right under the shallow water: quartz (clear), red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, black. Each of these “gemstones” are simply cut and dyed glass made to resemble similarly colored gems such as ruby, citrine, onyx, and have no value. This can be deduced via a successful DC 15 Investigation check, but only after one of the gems has been removed from their inlays and properly inspected. They can easily be pried up from beneath the

water with a dagger, knife, or anything thin enough to wedge between them and their inlays in the floor.

The combined colors of the skull's eyes provide the solution to the puzzle, so **purple** is the correct gemstone to remove and place in the skull's third eye. Upon doing so, the force field from above flickers out, and the key falls to the ground with a metallic *clang*.

When other gemstones are removed and placed within the eye, other effects take place. They cannot trigger more than once, and removing the gemstone will not reverse its effects once triggered:

- **Quartz.** The character who placed the gemstone has its lungs immediately filled with water and begins suffocating. (A DC 13 Constitution check to vomit out the water and remove the condition)
- **Red.** A portal opens from the back of the skull and a **cambion** crawls forth, attempting to drag a character back into the hells with them. It fights to the death.
- **Orange.** A **fireball** explodes from the skull's nostrils as if cast from a 5th level spell slot, delivering 35 (10d6) fire damage.
- **Yellow.** Lightning leaps out in all directions, filling the room and affecting every creature inside per the effects of **lightning bolt** (DC 14 Dexterity save for half damage). Creatures standing in the shallow pool around the skull take an additional 2d6 lightning damage.
- **Green.** **Cloudkill** erupts from the skull's mouth as if cast from a 6th level spell slot (20-foot radius, 27 (6d8) poison damage, DC 15 Constitution for half damage).
- **Blue.** The entire room is temporarily plunged through the arcane veil as 3 **nothics** skitter into existence and **Evard's black tentacles** (DC 15 Dexterity to evade, or 3d6) erupt around the skull for 5 rounds. Fighting to the death, the nothics use their weird insight power to taunt the party in uncommon.
- **Black.** Unnatural darkness dims the torchlight in the room. Three **night scorpions** flicker into view and immediately attack.

Creatures. The creatures do not leave this room.

Treasures. The creatures have no treasure.


If the Wrong Gem is Chosen. Luckily, the characters won't be without at least a little help here. A sentient magic mouth dwells on the north wall of this chamber. It can be easily spotted by anyone looking on the north wall near the door. It triggers after the first time the wrong gem is inserted into the skull's third eye. Read the following aloud when this happens:



Sprinkles of rock and dust crumble to the ground as an animated mouth on the north wall opens with a yawn. It speaks to you. "Travelers, perhaps I may be of some assistance?"

The **magic mouth** does not operate per the standard rules for such a spell. It promises to answer two "yes-or-no" questions from the party, and it bluntly tells them that one of the answers will be true and the other will be a lie.

After being asked its two questions, the wall recedes and doesn't reappear until the next set of hopefuls traverses the Gauntlet.



Development. As the core of the test, the party may pass through this area several times as they complete the other tests. As long as they do not reset the gems, they do not trigger further effects. Proceed to the appropriate areas.

4. DEMON'S GAMBIT

This chamber is also the byproduct of the Umbers being resourceful with the natural areas of their subterranean Gauntlet. This chamber holds its key atop a specialized bolt thrower that rains death onto those who enter the room, trapping its occupants inside.

Any characters entering this room from either entrance may immediately notice that the ground near the chasm is covered in a translucent brown liquid on a successful DC 11 Perception check. This is grease, set to make traversing the chasm even harder.

Entering From Geb's Maw

If characters are entering from the east, read the following aloud:

After traversing the sewers for some time, you find your passage widens and gives way to a room carved from a natural cave.

At the center of this chamber a precipice of rubble-strewn rock runs its entire width. Across it, you see a wooden door flanked by carvings of demonic simian faces. At the center of the precipice sits a cylindrical post with a bronze key atop it, glinting in the torchlight of the room.

Once characters step far enough into the room, a pressure plate (marked by PP in the dotted area on the map) (Perception DC 20 to spot) will send a portcullis from a recess above slamming down into the rock, trapping the characters inside the room. It is immensely heavy and requires a DC 26 Athletics check to pull up. Once this happens, the **flechette volley trap** activates.

Entering From Magic-Monger's Menagerie

If entering from the west read the following aloud after all characters have crossed into the room:

*Just as the last of you steps into this room, the door behind you emits a deep *click* that reverberates through the chamber, locking you inside. The door is flanked by carvings of demonic simian faces, and directly across from you is a wide chasm interrupted by a thin precipice of rock, across from that the room continues off into a perilous tunnel of darkness.*

Approximately one round after the characters have taken a few moments to take in their surroundings and potentially notice the grease on the floor or take a closer look at the demonic faces on the walls, the **flechette volley trap** activates.

The chasms (indicated by the heavily shaded dark areas) are over 200 ft. deep and filled with jagged rubble at the bottom. Any creature falling into this chasm is killed outright from the fall.

The ground in the areas adjacent to the ledges (indicated by dotted lines, lightly shaded) are regularly greased by cultists, and are for all purposes under the effect of a permanent grease spell.

The precipice at the center of the chasm is littered with rubble from bolt impacts and the natural degradation of the cave, and it is considered rough terrain.

Each demonic simian face carving adjacent to the door (A, B) is a relief, depicted with its mouth agape. The tongue of each relief serves as a button, if both are depressed simultaneously, the flechette volley trap stops for 1 full round before resuming. The buttons are rather obvious, and only require a successful DC 12 Perception check to notice.

Flechette Volley Trap

Once the **flechette volley trap** is activated, read the following aloud:

*A metallic *SHING* echoes sharply as mechanical grinding sounds fill the chamber. The cylinder at the center of the precipice whirs to life and begins launching thick iron quarrels in all directions, their impacts biting tiny chunks out of the walls with each volley.*

The bolt thrower is a specialized mechanism, loaded with special flechette munitions. Every other round (1,3,5, etc.) on initiative count 20, it fires 4 heavy crossbow bolts in orthogonal directions. Each bolt is tipped with a glass bauble filled with acid that does an additional 1d4 acid damage in a 5-ft. radius sphere from its point of impact. Every other round (2,4,6, etc.) that it does not fire on, it rotates 45 degrees counterclockwise and reloads. It has enough ammunition to fire 30 times.

The shots fired from this mechanism can strike any creature within a 10' wide path from the direction it is fired, striking the first creature or object in its path.

The bronze key sits freely atop the flechette volley mechanism, bouncing a tiny bit with each activation, but not enough to cause it to fall off. The door on the west wall remains locked (DC 20 Dexterity check with thieves' tools) until the key is obtained.

5. CHAPEL OF CHANCE

Access to this chamber is possible through **Area 3**, and through **Part 2, The Various Routes**.

This small crypt wasn't part of the Gauntlet when first built, but The Umbers have turned it into a shrine to their demon-god. It also serves as an initiate's first test of loyalty. Cultists come here to pay tribute and beg favors of Nakresh, in return they offer tribute in the form of coin, magical treasure, or nothing at all. Those who offer nothing gamble with their lives.

A skeletal servant of Nakresh guards this room, holding one of the keys needed to unlock the vault of spoils and also offering up a game of chance to those feeling particularly bold.

When characters enter, read the following aloud:

Littered with rubble, this chamber is brightly lit by three large braziers on its south wall with doors to the west and east. To the north sits a crumbled sarcophagus turned into a makeshift throne. Upon it sits a blindfolded skeleton, it turns and tilts its skull curiously at you as you enter.

The skeleton sits motionless and will look at and offer a roll of the dice it holds to each character only once. The skeleton does not speak and if threatened or attacked it vanishes in a burst of shimmering particles. After all characters have either rolled, passed, or made an offering, the skeleton sits back in its seat, dormant until its next set of visitors.

When the characters approach the skeleton:

The skeleton holds its thumb and index finger in a circle, with its other three fingers fanned upward and places it over its blindfolded eye as if it were a monocle. Looking at you, its other hand extends forward holding two blank dice carved from bone in its palm.

These **dead man's dice** the skeleton holds are useless if rolled separately. If they are taken from this room they vanish in a puff of iridescent smoke after crossing the room's threshold.

The braziers in this room are meant for offerings, the brazier on the left has piles of coins, jewelry, and other valuables at its base. The brazier on the right holds a collection of small magical items such as enchanted daggers, wands, scrolls, and the like. The brazier in the center only has a shallow velvet-lined box at its base.

Characters who wish to make an offer to Nakresh may do so by leaving 20gp or more worth of valuables, any magical item, or by offering nothing and rolling the dice offered by the skeleton into the velvet lined box.

For those who do roll the dice, consult the following table and feel free to get vivid when describing to them what happens to their character:

2d6	Dead Man's Dice Effect
2	Death. Succeed on a Constitution saving throw or die immediately, only to rise within 24 hours as some variety of ghoul (DM's discretion).
3	Sickness. Vomit and become poisoned until completing a long rest.
4	Hourglass. Age 10 years, instantly.
5	Covetous. Overcome with desires for others' belongings.
6	Decay. Reduce max HP by 6.
7	Luck. Roll again twice, applying both effects (only happens once per character).
8	Visions. Gain inspiration.
9	Quickness. Gain advantage on your next Dexterity saving throw.
10	Brawn. +1d4 bonus damage on physical attacks until completing a long rest.
11	Wealth. A mundane item in the character's bag is turned to gold.
12	Favor. Gain advantage on your next 3 skill or ability checks.

The first character making an offer of gold or magic is rewarded with the key by the skeletal servant and also gains a +1 bonus to all die rolls for the remainder of the adventure. Subsequent offerings grant characters advantage on a single check of their choice before the adventure's end.

Those who attempt to steal from the offerings amuse Nakresh greatly, the sheer audacity required to steal from the shrine of a god dedicated to thievery begets divine intervention. If this happens, the character who perpetrated the act is affected by one random result of the dead man's dice, regardless of any further rolls.

Should the skeleton leave after being threatened or attacked, it still leaves a key behind. However, this key is cursed (Arcana DC 17 to detect), inflicting disadvantage to any attack rolls or checks made by the first PC to pick it up, an effect which lasts until the party reaches 6. **The Hive.**

6. THE HIVE

This final trial focuses around being able to kill or outwit whatever guardian lurks within it. The Hive is a circular chamber, dank, and filled with refuse and rubble. It is lined with mottled windows, outside of which hang the corpses of those who have come before and failed. Kept both as a grim reminder to those who make it that far, and as a means of storage for feeding whatever beasts currently reside as The Hive's guardian.

The guardian can be chosen randomly from the following table, or determined ahead of time by the DM.

d8	Hive Guardian
1-2	Cloaker
3-4	2x Mezzoloth
5-6	2x Otyugh
7-8	Grick Alpha, Grick



Creatures. Every time the party retreats and returns to this area, roll for a new guardian monster.

Room Features

The perimeter of the hive is a ledge that raises 10 ft. above the floor of the rest of the chamber. Stairs on the north and south ends lead upward to this ledge. The floor below is strewn with rubble, sewage, offal, or whatever other bits the DM finds appropriate for the guardian, and is considered rough terrain.

At the center of The Hive is a pedestal, containing the final key required to open the doors to the vault of spoils. At the north end of the chamber atop the staircase is a massive brass door with 5 triangular keyholes, each must be filled with working keys in order to open **G. The Vault of Spoils**.

If characters can manage a way to retrieve the key from the pedestal and open the door without fighting the guardian, or do so while it is distracted, restrained or simply attacking them, know that the door opens very slowly. It takes a full four rounds to open high enough for small-sized creatures to fit through.

The room is fairly straightforward, depending on the particular enemy the party faces. You may want to adjust the following descriptive text accordingly:

You enter into a huge circular chamber, mottled glass windows line its circumference atop the ledge you stand on, looking down into an arena of filth below. Outside those windows you see a small sea of corpses, hung up on hooks in various states of decay.

After looking around the room for a moment:

A mechanized hatch high above opens, as a few corpses fall from above, their bones shattering on the surfaces below. A roar/bellow/rumble/growl vibrates the air...

Treasure. The creatures have no treasure, as it is in area 7.

7. THE VAULT OF SPOILS

The vault is straightforward; should the characters reach this room, describe it as follows:

Before you is an impressive chamber, filled with coins, jewelry, baubles, clothing embroidered with golden thread, magical weapons, wands, scrolls, statuettes, and just about anything else you can think of.

Afterward, provide them the opportunity to search around for the **Shroud of Tiberesh**, give them a minute or two, describing whatever grandiose or odd things they sift through before reading the following aloud:

A thick shroud of burlap cloth lies here amidst some scrolls and other papers. Faint stains mar its surface that could vaguely resemble a face.

Either a *detect magic*, a successful DC 14 Arcana check, or a DC 13 History check should reveal to the characters that this is the item they're looking for. If proof is needed, any injured characters may hold the shroud near one of their wounds and feel it numb their pain. The characters should use their *scroll of recall* to get back to Spinel.

Characters can bring the corpses of any fallen friends when using the scroll. If things went particularly well with Spinel earlier in the adventure, she will attempt to see if the *Shroud* will bring them back to life.

After the characters have used the *scroll of recall* proceed to Part 4.

PART 4: THE CON

After using the recall scroll the characters find themselves instantly transported to the basement of Spinel's dwelling. She is there, Etiryp is there with his mother, and they are hovering over the boy.

You've arrived just in time! Spinel's feathers are ruffled and molting from stress. She rushes to you, "do you have it? Oh, a mother begs you!"

The characters should now turn over the *Shroud of Tiberesh* to Spinel. If they attempt to make further bargains with her, or refuse to give her the item she becomes extremely angry with them and demands the *Shroud*. Reduce their reward by half.

Once Spinel has the *Shroud* read the following aloud:

Spinel takes the shroud and places it over Etiryp's face. Slowly, you see the petrified portions of his body recede and turn to flesh once again.

Tears run down Galena's face. She turns to Spinel and says, "Thank you, thank you so much for saving him. My baby, he's going to live!"

Spinel gives a warm hug to Galena before seeing them up the stairs and out of the basement. She turns to you, a glint in her eye. "You have served Sister Starkfeather well! Lord Nakresh will be very pleased."

Let this settle in with the characters for a moment, and if they inquire further Spinel will tell them she was genuinely concerned, although the boy wasn't hers, and that this will further help Sister Starkfeather secure her victory against Lord Vermin in the upcoming trials. She asks the characters if they'd care to assist her further, or join with her and the Starkfeathers. Together they could rule this city!

Spinel provides the gold and items as promised during their initial discussion, and even tosses in a little extra gold as a consolation if they are feeling too betrayed.

"Awww, here you go, keep your chins up, you could have done worse! You could have accidentally helped that filthy little Derro, Zheita!"

If They Hold Back. In the event that the characters did not bring back the *Shroud* or attempt to keep it, Spinel, Galena, and 3 other hidden **cultists** attack, fighting to the death.

Creatures. The party is highly unlikely to survive against this group. Feel free to use a high-level spell as a demonstration to prove this to them, and give them a second chance to turn over the *Shroud*. Spinel (**archmage**), Galena (**assassin**) and **cultists** (3)

Treasure. The creatures have their gear for treasure, that is all.

Should the Party Flee. Spinel tracks them and teleports after them later, to recover the Shroud with prejudice. It should be an unpleasant encounter. If they give up the Shroud and just flee, she hunts them later, helping their enemies for a year.

If They Fail. In the event that the characters did not return the shroud because they failed the trials or felt they could not survive, Spinel and Galena are greatly disappointed; they search the characters' belongings and then demand they leave. They go on to gather other Starkfeather devotees to get the job done themselves. Etiryp will likely die, however.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

There are now some pretty great threads for you to take and run with in your own Southlands campaign. For example, does the party:

- Attempt to stop Spinel?
- Join up with The Umbers and try and take them down from the inside? Or actually join the Umbers?
- Side with Starkfeather and join up?
- Seek to re-obtain the *Shroud of Tiberesh* for themselves?





BLOOD VAULTS OF SISTER ALKAVA

An adventure for four to six characters of 5th to 6th level

by *Bill Slavicsek*

GM INTRODUCTION

Sister Alkava, one of the priestesses of the Red Goddess, has been utilizing necromancy and blood magic in an effort to impress her superiors in the priesthood and to garner the attention of the Elders of the Principality. To these ends, she created the Blood Vaults. She developed not only a method for prolonging the storage of fresh blood, but a way to draw power from the sacred Blood Cauldrons she uses in the storage process. That power motivated Sister Alkava to postpone the unveiling of the Blood Vaults and keep the news of her success to herself. She tasted the power, tested it, drew it into herself. And she found the power intoxicating.

This year, as part of the Festival of the Verdant Tower, Sister Alkava collected the requisite tribute of blood from the people of the village of Karvolia. Unlike in previous years, however, none of the blood donors returned from the donation site. Moreover, the village elders have just been informed that a second tribute is required, and they have been commanded by the priestess of the Red Goddess to send another dozen young men and women to the edifice of stone that looms on the cliffs overlooking the village—the dreaded Blood Vaults of Sister Alkava.

The village elders, afraid of the Red Goddess and the vampiric Shroud-eaters but even more fearful of losing more of their young people to the Blood Vaults, quietly put out the word that they are willing to pay adventurers handsomely to find a way to make this second tribute pass them by. Unfortunately, by the time the brave adventurers respond, the latest set of donors has already entered the Blood Vaults and is being prepared for the donation process.

SUMMARY

The player characters must infiltrate the Blood Vaults, rescue the intended donors, and confront Sister Alkava—finding a way to stop her before her power grows too great to contain.

The adventure begins with a meeting with the village elders and the acceptance of a quest to save the young men and women who were recently marched into the Blood Vaults. Once inside the glorified mausoleum, the player characters explore the Blood Procession, the

Blood-Letting Chamber, the Donor Pens, the Storage Alcoves, and finally the Blood Cauldron Sepulcher, the massive chamber that Sister Alkava has turned into her seat of power.

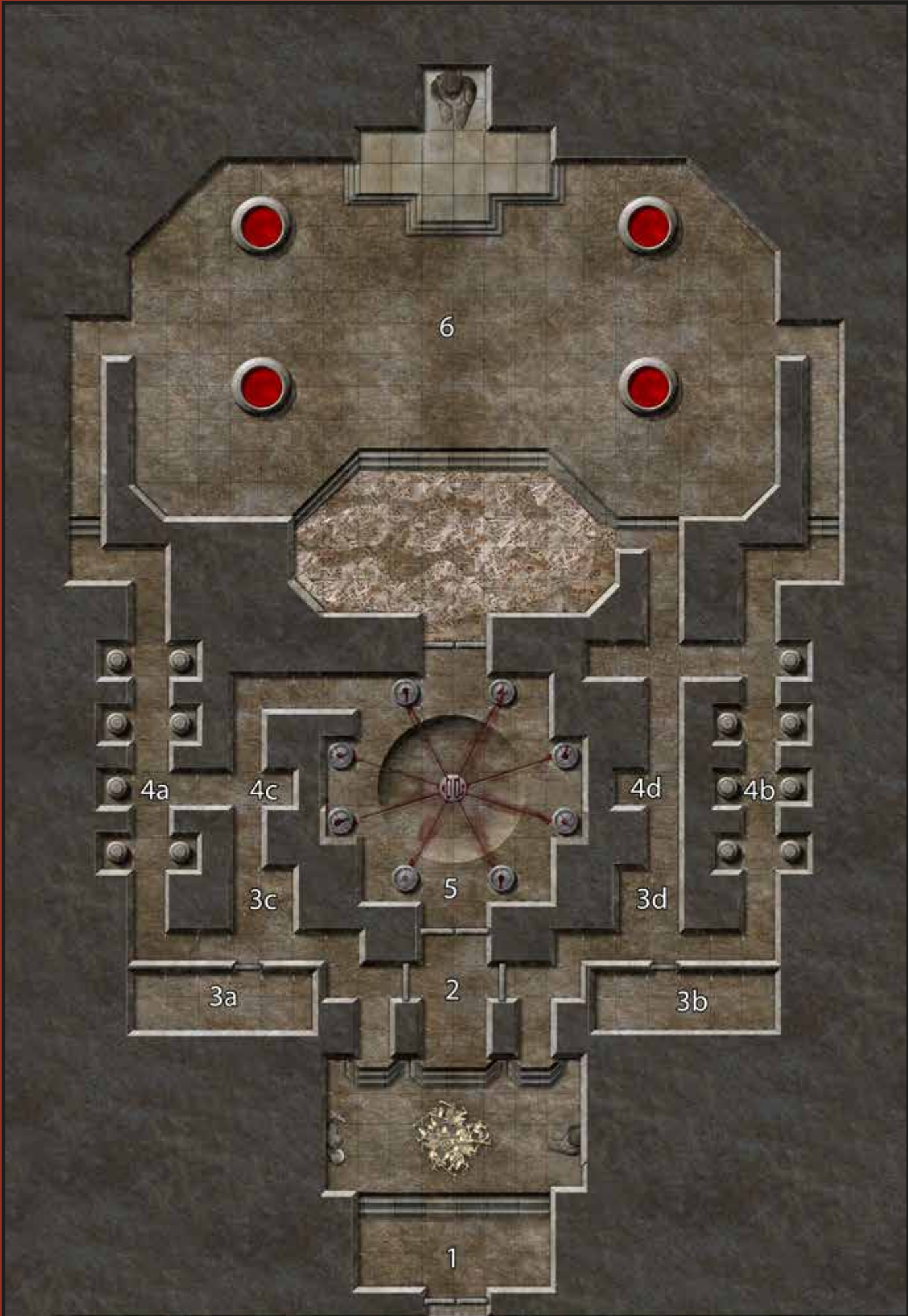
ADVENTURE HOOKS

Beyond the usual desire for reward, adventure, and experience, the player characters could have a variety of other reasons for deciding to aid the village of Karvolia. Here are a couple of examples.

- **It's All Relative.** One or more of the PCs grew up in Karvolia and has a beloved relative among the donors sent to the Blood Vaults. For these PCs, the mission is extremely personal.
- **A Matter of Church and State.** One or more of the PCs has been sent to investigate Sister Alkava by either the priesthood of the Red Goddess or the Elders of the Principality. In the case of the former, Sister Alkava's superiors grow increasingly concerned that they haven't heard from their priestess in months. They worry that Sister Alkava has gone rogue, and for good reason. The priesthood wants to know what Sister Alkava is up to, and they want her brought back to the Temple of Aprostala to answer for her infuriating silence.

In the case of the latter, the Elders of the Principality know that Sister Alkava was close to a breakthrough in necromantic techniques. When her regular reports stopped arriving, they feared that she had stolen the research for her own purposes. This cannot be allowed to stand.

- **Rebellion.** One or more of the PCs belongs to a secret group of freedom fighters working in the shadows to topple the governments of the undead. In particular, they seek to weaken or even end the rule of the vampires of the Principality. When they receive word of Sister Alkava's experiments to extend the Shroud-eaters' ability to preserve and store fresh blood, they know they have to destroy the process. And when they learn that the blood can also be used to increase the power of the vampires, they know that they must stop at nothing to put an end to Sister Alkava and her necromantic plans.





THE VILLAGE ELDERS: A REQUEST FOR AID

The adventure begins as the player characters are spirited away to a back room of the Bleeding Crow Tavern to meet with Karvolia's council of elders.

The back room of the Bleeding Crow Tavern smells of stale beer and old smoke. Lanterns hung at intervals along the walls provide muddy illumination, as there are no windows to let in either light or fresh air. Three ancient villagers study you from across a large wooden table—two men nursing tankards of ale and a woman who occasionally sips from a goblet of wine.

The elders present to meet with the PCs include the angry Tanner Grimm, the nervous Olan Forn (who owns the tavern), and the stern Lady Bestin (who is neither noble nor courtly, but earned the honorific by virtue of her age, her wealth, and the respect the villagers heap upon her).

The three take turns explaining the situation in Karvolia, relating what they know about Sister Alkava (which isn't much), the Blood Vaults, the secret work she's been performing these past few months, and the details of this year's Festival of the Verdant Tower.

"Our initial tribute was accepted," Lady Bestin explains, "but none of the donors returned from the Blood Vaults. When Sister Alkava demanded a second tribute, we knew drastic measures had become necessary. Save our young men and women, and a coffer of rare gems will be yours."

The elders offer a small coffer of gems worth 2,000 gp—a fortune as far as the villagers are concerned—if the PCs can save the twelve young men and women who were marched off to the Blood Vaults less than twenty-four hours ago.

Before the PCs make the trek out of the village and up the hill to the looming Blood Vaults, they might want to find out more information by talking to other people in the village. In general, the villagers appear nervous around the adventurers and suspicious of their motives. They trust the village elders, though, and are willing to discuss certain matters, at least to some small degree. If the PCs approach the villagers politely and do their best to put them at ease, they can learn the following information:

- Sister Alkava is a Red Sister, a priestess of Marena, the Red Goddess.
- The priestess came to the village a few months ago and immediately began her work to renovate the old Sanguine Shrine and turn it into the Blood Vaults.
- Blood Vaults have been popping up throughout the Principality as storehouses for the Shroud-eaters, but the villagers have reason to believe that Sister Alkava's Blood Vaults are special.
- The villagers suspect Sister Alkava is a necromancer, due to the supplies she has commandeered from the village in the months she's been working in the old shrine.

- The village has faithfully provided blood tributes in the past, but this is the first time their loved ones never returned after making their offerings.
- A second tribute was ordered by Sister Alkava. Another dozen young men and women have been escorted to the Blood Vaults—perhaps also never to return.
- Sister Alkava has at least a few living assistants, including a bugbear and a stony goblin.

THE PATH TO THE BLOOD VAULTS.

A well-traveled path leads from Karvolia up the hill to the cliffs overlooking the village. There, a looming edifice of stone that resembles a huge mausoleum seems to watch the village like a malevolent gargoyle. The final approach to the Blood Vaults, a cobblestone trail that cuts through the trees and winds directly to the massive stone doors, is protected by a hulking **ogre zombie** that Sister Alkava called forth specifically to guard the way.

The ogre zombie has been ordered to keep the villagers away while Sister Alkava finishes processing the most recent tribute. It bellows and blusters, deliberately swinging wildly to drive the PCs away as they try to approach the doors to the Blood Vaults. If the PCs attack the ogre zombie, however, it ignores its orders to do no harm and tries its best to injure or even kill the intruders.

ENTERING THE BLOOD VAULTS.

The cobblestone path leads up to a massive set of stone doors set into the walls of a massive stone structure. Gothic flourishes decorate the walls, but the bas relief of the Red Goddess carved into the doors strikes anyone who views it as both impressive and disturbing in its details.

The locked doors require a successful DC 15 Dexterity check to pick the complicated lock. Moreover, Sister Alkava placed a trap upon the lock: DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to spot the trap and DC 10 Dexterity check to disarm it. A PC who attempts to unlock the doors without spotting or disarming the trap triggers a poison needle that springs out of the lock and deals 2 piercing damage and 11 poison damage. The injured PC must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or suffer an additional 11 poison damage.

Once the PCs deal with the trap and the lock, they can enter the Blood Vaults.

1. ENTRY CHAMBER

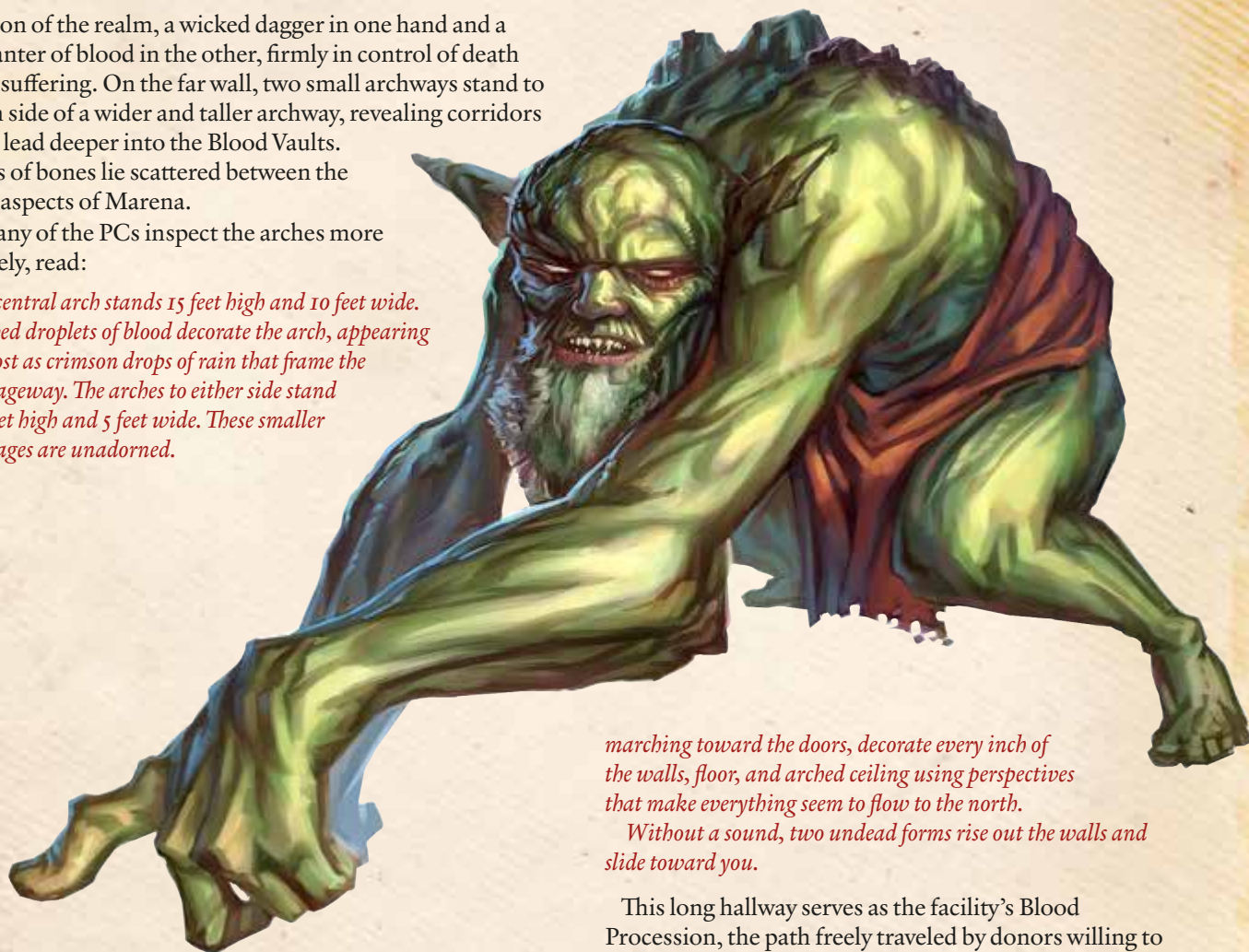
A small vestibule leads up into the main portion of the Entry Chamber, a 20-foot-tall room with three arched openings that provide access into the facility.

Tall statues on the right and left walls portray different aspects of the Red Goddess. The statue on the right depicts Marena as the goddess of sex and childbirth, showing an alluring temptress clearly pregnant beneath her filmy gown. The statue on the left represents the goddess as the

patron of the realm, a wicked dagger in one hand and a decanter of blood in the other, firmly in control of death and suffering. On the far wall, two small archways stand to each side of a wider and taller archway, revealing corridors that lead deeper into the Blood Vaults. Piles of bones lie scattered between the two aspects of Marena.

If any of the PCs inspect the arches more closely, read:

The central arch stands 15 feet high and 10 feet wide. Carved droplets of blood decorate the arch, appearing almost as crimson drops of rain that frame the passageway. The arches to either side stand 10 feet high and 5 feet wide. These smaller passages are unadorned.



Any PC who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (History) check recognizes the central passage as the Blood Procession of the Red Goddess, the traditional path taken by supplicants and other donors intent on making an offering of blood to Marena and the Shroud-eaters.

When the PCs begin to climb the stairs into the main portion of the Entry Chamber, the bone piles animate and form into four distinct **skeletons**, each prepared to defend the Blood Vaults from intruders.

Treasure. One skeleton wears a tattered pouch on a threadbare belt that holds a transparent piece of pale blue quartz. A second skeleton has a small, round chunk of blackest obsidian stuck into its right eye socket. These gemstones are worth 10 gp each.

2. THE BLOOD PROCESSION

The central, 10-foot-wide corridor beneath the 15-foot high arch leads to a set of double doors made of stone. Smaller stone doors separate the wide corridor from the eastern and western passages.

Carvings on the double doors show the Red Goddess at the head of a blood procession, arms outstretched, welcoming supplicants and donors ripe with rich, warm blood. Lifelike paintings of even more donors, packed tightly together and

marching toward the doors, decorate every inch of the walls, floor, and arched ceiling using perspectives that make everything seem to flow to the north.

Without a sound, two undead forms rise out the walls and slide toward you.

This long hallway serves as the facility's Blood Procession, the path freely traveled by donors willing to give their blood to support the Elders of the Principality.

Two **specters** haunt the Blood Procession, remnants of donors who died in the process of providing sustenance to the Shroud-eaters in years past when this was still a Sanguine Shrine. The specters, composed of undying hatred fueled by their untimely deaths, strike at any living creatures in the hallway that aren't under the protection of Sister Alkava—in this case, the player characters.

3. DONOR PENS

The eastern and western passages leading away from the Entry Chamber and the Blood Procession provide access to the Donor Pens where Sister Alkava keeps supplicants prior to sending them into the Blood Letting Chamber (area 5 on the map).

Area 3a: Male Donor Pen. A dark, dank chamber accessed through an iron gate in the western passage contains the two male supplicants who have not yet been sent to the Blood-Letting Chamber. Olak Forn, son of the tavern owner and village elder, and Bruf Gaeron, an apprentice at the blacksmith's forge, cower in the cell as the **domovoi** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 122) guard (a stony goblin) watches from the shadows of area 3c. The domovoi enjoys taunting and terrorizing the supplicants.



If the domovoi hears the sounds of battle (against the skeletons or specters or both), it prepares for the intruders by casting *invisibility* so that it can strike with surprise if the PCs approach its location. It won't leave its post unless ordered to by either Sister Alkava or the **bugbear** guarding area 3d.

Area 3b: Female Donor Pen. A dark, dank chamber accessed through an iron gate in the eastern passage contains the two female supplicants waiting to enter the Blood-Letting Chamber. Ara Kellt, daughter of the village brewer, and Jolla Rann, who operates a small tailor shop, stand defiantly in the cell, badgering the bugbear (in area 3d) and demanding to be released immediately.

The young women's constant demands make the bugbear increasingly angrier, almost to the point where it's ready to swing open the gate and throttle the two supplicants. If it becomes aware of the PCs, it calls for the domovoi and rushes to attack. (The bugbear is slightly smarter than the tougher domovoi and has become the de facto leader of the pair.)

Secret Doors. Secret doors set in the north walls of areas 3c and 3d open onto hidden passages that lead deeper into the Blood Vaults. The domovoi and the bugbear don't know about these secret doors, since they date back to when the place was a Sanguine Shrine. A PC can spot a secret door with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check while searching the chambers where the bugbear and domovoi spend the bulk of their time.

Treasure. The domovoi confiscated the pouches that belong to the two male prisoners. They contain gemstones and coins totaling 120 gp. The bugbear keeps a *potion of healing* hidden in an old rotting boot resting in the east corner of area 3d.

4. STORAGE ALCOVES

Alcoves in the eastern and western passages contain huge stone urns that stand about 4 feet high and almost 5 feet wide. These urns hold much of the precious blood that Sister Alkava collected during this season's festival. Strange arcane symbols decorate each urn and its heavy stone lid. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check lets a PC determine that the markings aid the magic that somehow keeps the blood fresh and pure. A DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check also allows a PC to determine that the magic links each of the urns to some other vessel of power elsewhere within the Blood Vaults. When the PCs enter one of these areas, read:

Alcoves line the passage ahead. All but one of these recessed spaces contains a large stone urn, its top covered by a heavy stone lid. Strange symbols decorate each urn, unreadable runes that seem to vibrate if you look at them too long. A faint metallic tinge hangs in the air.

Area 4a: Western Alcoves. Every alcove except for the one containing the secret door holds one of the massive urns. A DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check is required to lift one of the heavy stone lids so the PCs can peer inside an urn. Thick, rich blood, magically fresh and as viscous as when it spilled from a supplicant's veins, fills each urn.

If the PCs examine the empty alcove, they have a chance of finding the secret door with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

One of the storage urns (marked with an "x") contains a **blood elemental** (*Deep Magic 12: Blood and Doom Magic, page 17*), a creation of Sister Alkava's necromancy that has been growing within the enchanted blood. The creature dislodges the heavy lid and flows out to attack while the PCs search the empty alcove or when they pass by the blood elemental's urn.

Area 4b: Eastern Alcoves. The urns are the same as the ones described in area 4a, and the secret door can be found as described above.

The storage urn marked with an "x" in this hall contains a blood elemental. It dislodges the lid of its urn and flows out to attack while the PCs search the empty alcove or when they head toward the northern passage.

This hall has one additional guardian. A **wight** stalks the corridor, patrolling from the top of the northern passage to the beginning of the eastern alcoves and back again. Anyone who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the blood-covered but obviously fancy scabbard attached to a belt around the wight's waist. (See Treasure, below, for more information.)

If the wight spots intruders, it immediately attacks.

Areas 4c and 4d: Hidden Passages. The secret doors here can each be found with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

Treasure. If the PCs examine the urn in the western alcoves that released the blood elemental, they find an opaque yellow pearl worth 100 gp resting at the bottom of the blood-filled urn. The urns in the eastern alcoves contain only blood.

The wight wears a +1 *short sword* in a scabbard at its side. Though a favored weapon in life, the wight appears to have forgotten all about it and never uses it to attack.

5. BLOOD-LETTING CHAMBER

Doors depicting the Red Goddess at the head of an elaborate blood procession open to reveal the large, domed Blood-Letting Chamber. Here, Sister Alkava and her servants collect blood for use in her necromantic experiments, instead of for the Elders of the Principality as was originally intended. When the PCs push open the doors or enter via the secret passage from the west, read:

The domed chamber features a concave floor with rivulets carved into the stone that lead to a central drain. Eight tall metal cylinders, about the height and circumference of a large

man, hang on chains suspended from the domed ceiling. Space remains between the bottom of each cylinder and the highest point of the curved floor, where the carved channels begin. Blood drips from holes in each cylinder's base, pooling beneath it before flowing down the rivulets and into the central drain. A clockwork automaton moves from one cylinder to the next, prodding each with a long wooden pole so that it swings upon its chain.

In order to extract every drop of blood from the donors, Sister Alkava constructed these exsanguination cylinders. The eight cylinders each contain one of the young men and women who came to the Blood Vaults as part of the second call for a tribute of blood donors. The clockwork **fellforged** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 182) prods and swings the cylinders to ensure every drop of blood falls into the collection rivulets in the floor. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check lets a PC hear the muffled, fearful whimpers of pain emanating out of a swinging cylinder.

When the PCs arrive, three of the donors have already succumbed to the blood-letting and have died, but if the PCs hurry they can still save the remaining five.

To rescue a donor, a PC must move next to a cylinder and use an action to open the hinged door and set the victim free. By the time the PCs reach them, rescued donors are unconscious from the loss of a lot of blood. Once freed, a donor must be stabilized or healed within 3 rounds or he or she succumbs to the wounds caused by the exsanguination cylinder.

Any donors still inside the cylinders 3 rounds after the PCs entered the chamber must make a death saving throw at the start of every subsequent round. They have each already failed one save so far. On a third failed save, a trapped donor dies.

When a metal cylinder is opened, a PC can see that the interior features hundreds of short, razor-sharp spikes designed to pierce the surface of the flesh and allow blood to freely flow. Holes in the floor of the cylinder give the blood a way to escape and drip into the collection rivulets carved into the floor of the chamber.

Necromantic spells cast upon the drain sends the collected blood directly to the Blood Cauldrons in area 6. If characters spend a moment to watch the blood flow into the drain, they see the blood swirl, fill the drain, and simply disappear.

Defenders. A fellforged, a clockwork construct given sentience by a captured wraith, tends to the exsanguination cylinders for Sister Alkava. It ignores the PCs until they either attack the fellforged or try to free one of the donors from a cylinder. When either of these conditions is met, the fellforged attacks.

At the beginning of the next round after combat begins, a vampire spawn loyal to Sister Alkava rushes into the chamber through the northern doors to help defend the exsanguination cylinders. It doesn't care what happens



to the fellforged. It only wants to protect the blood donors until every drop of blood has been fed to the Blood Cauldrons in the next chamber.

Rescuing Blood Donors. For every blood donor the PCs save, including those kept in the donor pens, the PCs gain 100 XP. No extra experience is awarded for donors who die, either from exsanguination or by some other means.

6: BLOOD CAULDRON SEPULCHER

The massive chamber in the northern section of the Blood Vaults is the Blood Cauldron Sepulcher. When the PCs approach the doors to the sepulcher, read:

The carved stone doors show an image of Marena the Red Goddess in all her power and glory, providing the blood that sustains the undead and keeps the realm safe. She stands amid huge stone cauldrons that overflow with precious blood.



When the PCs open the stone doors, or when they approach the sepulcher from the passages to the east or west, read:

The massive chamber is divided into three distinct areas. A grim entryway fills the southern portion of the chamber. Bas reliefs of skeletal forms jut from the walls and reach down from the ceiling, while the floor itself appears to be made of a carpet of bones. Stairs rise out of the bones to the central area.

The central area contains four large stone blood cauldrons. Blood bubbles and undulates in the cauldrons as magical energy sparks along the rune carved floor.

A cross-shaped dais in the center of the northern wall features a magnificent and terrifying statue of the Red Goddess. And kneeling before the statue, her head bowed in prayer, is a priestess in blood-stained robes—Sister Alkava.

The climactic battle in the sepulcher can be complex due to everything happening in this chamber. The action is divided between the three key threats here: 8 **skeletons**, **wights**, and **Sister Alkava** (use the **Emerald Order Cult Leader** from *Tome of Beasts*, page 421)

Skeletons. When the PCs step onto the bone-covered lower level of the sepulcher, Sister Alkava's first layer of defense springs into action. (The skeletons don't activate if the PCs arrive at area 6 by way of the east or west passages.) Read:

The bone covered floor shifts and rumbles. Suddenly bones rise up and fly together, assembling to form eight distinct skeletons. The skeletons turn empty eye sockets toward you and rush to attack.

The skeletons attack the intruders as Sister Alkava continues to pray at the statue of the Red Goddess. If the PCs remain in the lower level, they can deal with the skeletons without any other interference. But if any of the PCs step into the central portion of the sepulcher, the next layer of defense is activated.

Wights. When any of the PCs enter the central region of the sepulcher, read:

The churning blood in the nearest stone cauldron bubbles over and a head rises out of the crimson depths. Blood flows down its face and neck as dead eyes open wide. The rest of the body emerges as blood continues to run down its arms and chest. Then the wight opens its mouth and screams.

The first round in which any of the PCs enter the sepulcher's center region, the wight inside the nearest cauldron emerges. It screams a terrible, mournful wail, an indication that it realizes the fate that has befallen it. These four wights were created from the bodies of some of the villagers who arrived as part of the first tribute, used to power the Blood Cauldrons and prepared in case Sister Alkava needed undead defenders. It shambles toward the nearest PC and attacks.

In subsequent rounds, Sister Alkava uses a bonus action each round to call forth another wight. She does this each round until all four wights have come into play. She can

alternatively use a bonus action to activate the skeletons (two at a time) if the PCs didn't step into the lower level.

Sister Alkava. Sister Alkava is a priestess of the Red Goddess and a necromancer of skill and power. Once completely loyal to the Elders of the Principality, her experiments with preserving and empowering blood have made her hungry for even more power and glory. She hopes to achieve a level of power that will either make the Elders offer her a place of prestige in the Principality or force them to leave her alone. Regardless, there's no way she's going to let a group of foolish adventures interfere with her plans.

The entire sepulcher has been designed to augment and enhance Sister Alkava's power. She continues to pray before the statue of the Red Goddess until one or more of the PCs enters the central portion of the sepulcher. Then she rises and turns to face them. She never addresses the PCs directly. Instead, she carries on a conversation with the Red Goddess, a one-sided monologue in which she comments on the actions of the PCs, describes her own role in the events, and otherwise prays for guidance and support. Here are some samples of what she might say:

"Look how they storm about our holy sepulcher, Red Goddess."

"Red Goddess, grant me your blood and your power!"

"That one insults you, Holy Mother. Let me smite him for you."

"I think that one would be perfect as a meal for my blood elemental."

"Their blood is not worthy to fill these cauldrons, Crimson Mother."

The Blood Cauldrons have been necromantically enchanted to increase Sister Alkava's power. Each Blood Cauldron provides Sister Alkava with the following benefits: +1 AC bonus, 25 temporary hit points, and 1 extra action each round. So, while all four cauldrons are active, Sister Alkava has a +4 bonus to AC, 100 temporary hit points, and 4 extra actions every round. (Damage always targets temporary hit points first, if they are available).

Sister Alkava acts normally on an initiative count of 13. She can use her extra actions on initiative counts 20, 15, 10, and 5.

When the Red Sister uses an extra action, crimson energy rises out of one of the cauldrons and flows into her. She then releases that energy as either an extra move or attack action.

Destroying the Blood Cauldrons. If the PCs realize that the priestess draws power from the Blood Cauldrons, they can deny her some of that power by destroying the enchanted vessels.

Each Blood Cauldron has AC 10 and 20 hit points. When a cauldron is destroyed, Sister Alkava loses one point of bonus AC, 25 temporary hit points, and 1 extra action (starting with initiative count 20, then 15, then 10, and finally 5). If all the cauldrons are destroyed, she loses all the associated bonuses and benefits.



CONCLUSION

After defeating Sister Alkava and her minions, the PCs should return to the village and claim their reward. The village elders remain true to their word. They hand over the coffer filled with gems totaling 2,000 gp if the PCs bring back proof that Sister Alkava has been defeated, news regarding the fate of the village's young men and women, or if they return any of the rescued donors safely back to the village. The more victims from the second tribute they were able to save, the more grateful the elders are toward the PCs. In addition, the PCs receive 100 bonus XP for each villager rescued from the Blood Vaults.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

What happens next depends on the relationship the PCs have with either the Red Goddess or the Elders of the Principality. Do they destroy the Blood Vaults? Do they try to restore the site to gain favor with the priesthood? Or do they report Sister Alkava's activities to the Shroud-eaters in hopes of earning an additional reward from the ruling class of vampires?



CARRION SHRINE OF QORGETH

An adventure for five 6th-level characters set in the Western Wastes

by James J. Haeck

GM INTRODUCTION

Qorgeth's fanatical undead followers await a messenger from their dark master. They whisper blasphemous prayers at blood-drenched altars in total darkness, their profane chants calling Qorgeth's demonic emissary to the mortal world. The unspeakable evil that now threatens Midgard's Western Wastes was awoken by the well-intentioned mistakes of a man named Petring, a loving father who was seduced by Qorgeth's lies. It falls to a party of PCs to undo his cataclysmic mistakes and protect Midgard from the coming of a demon prince.

SUMMARY

This dungeon can be used to conclude the adventure began in the *Pit of the Dust Goblins* and continued in the *Crypt of Green Shadows*, or as a standalone adventure. This adventure is most cohesive if the PCs are familiar with the children Rennie and Linde from the *Pit of the Dust Goblins* adventure and have heard of Petring, their father.

Petring was once a butler who served the lord and lady of Feycastle, but withdrew from service when he began experiencing apocalyptic dreams; every night he saw Anax Apogeion, one of the Great Old Ones that menace the Western Wastes, swallow up his little town. He prayed to every god he could think of, but only Qorgeth responded. The demon lord manipulated Petring into corrupting the corpses of Feycastle's ancient dead into his own undead servants. When Petring began to resist, the undead Wormhearts subdued him, his usefulness outlived, and continued their profane quest to summon the malakbel, a demonic messenger said to spread the corrupting word of Qorgeth until such time as the lord of worms can be summoned himself.

MONSTERS

Some of Qorgeth's undead followers use NPC statblocks; these creatures also have the following traits:

- Their type is changed to Undead.
- Their Armor Class is reduced by 2 and they gain vulnerability to radiant damage.
- They gain the Undead Fortitude trait, as a zombie.
- Their attacks deal an extra 1d6 necrotic damage.

FACTIONS

A number of parties with divergent goals occupy the shrine's chambers, all presenting their own challenges to the PCs.

Wormhearts

Qorgeth's most devoted servants, the Wormhearts, long to hear what they call "The Utterance of Certain Decay," a word of power sacred to the Writhing Prince. The malakbel demon they are summoning will deliver it unto them. The wormhearted suffragans animated by Petring's misguided rituals singlemindedly pursue the task at hand: summoning the malakbel or killing their enemies, in order of immediate importance. If Qorgeth's minions claimed any of the artifacts in the Crypt of Green Shadows, they are used against the PCs by the **wormhearted suffragans** in Area 8.

Prisoners

A number of prisoners—living, dead, and undead—are being held as sacrifices for the Wormhearts' summoning ritual. As a demon lord, Qorgeth demands living sacrifices, but as Prince of Decay, he also hungers for dead flesh. The zombified corpses of the living suit his needs well. Those prisoners who have not yet been ceremonially prepared and slaughtered are too weak to escape on their own, but can reward the PCs if they are saved and returned home (see Area 4).

Petring and his Children

Petring has a special role in the Wormhearts' ritual: bait. Qorgeth's minions have been commanded to lure his innocent children and their heroic protectors to the ritual as grand sacrifices. Petring is a captive and longs for freedom, but is tormented by guilt for what he's done. If sufficiently motivated (see Area 1), he joins the PCs and helps thwart the Wormhearts' profane scheme. Rennie is a precocious six-year-old and is full of childish bravado, though it crumbles to panic at the first sight of danger. Ten-year-old Linde is a well of quiet determination, and her courage can grant inspiration to one PC when they need it most. All three are human commoners.





ADVENTURE HOOKS

As your players' GM, you know best how to involve the PCs in this adventure. The following adventure hooks are provided to inspire and assist you.

- **A Missing Father.** Following the adventure in the *Crypt of Green Shadows*, the PCs learn that Rennie and Linde's father created a secret passage leading to a shrine beneath the crypt. Only their swift intervention can save him.
- **End of Act I.** A demon-summoning ritual is the perfect capstone for the lower levels of a long-term campaign. If the campaign isn't Qorgeth-focused, the Wormhearts may be the militant religious arm of an evil empire or the secret heart of the corruption infesting a church of purity and light.

Unless otherwise noted, all areas in this dungeon are devoid of light. The descriptive text in this adventure assumes that the PCs have darkvision or a light source.

The PCs descend two flights of crude earthen steps leading to a cramped passageway, clearly only designed for one person's use. Immediately before them is a room lit by flickering torchlight.

1. INNOCENT ALTAR

At the base of the stairs is a tiny chamber dug out from the surrounding earth. Looming in the center of the wall opposite you is a stone carving of a massive worm's toothy mouth. Through the mouth is a dark tunnel, and in front of it is a stone altar. A motionless man is shackled to the slab. His fine silken clothes are spattered with blood and muck. Two torches flicker dimly on either side of the altar.

The man shackled to the slab is Petring, and this shrine is of his own creation. The caverns just behind the gaping maw were entirely created by the undead created through his rituals. He is unconscious, but stable at 0 hit points. If revived, Petring awakens in a state of panic, but he is calmed by a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check or the sight of his children. Unshackling him requires a DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check or a DC 18 Strength check.

The Children. Rennie and Linde love their father dearly and are terrified by what has happened to him. They beg recalcitrant PCs to forgive him and refuse to leave his side. If the PCs wish to bring Petring into the dungeon with them, Rennie's eagerness may prove dangerous, though Linde's resolve can grant inspiration to a character once per day.

What Petring Knows

- He built this small shrine because for weeks he received apocalyptic dream-visions. The Great Old Ones converged on Feycastle and destroyed everything and everyone. He gave in and created this shrine, which was shown to him in a dream. The tunnels through the worm's mouth aren't his creation at all.

- He is a prisoner of the undead priests that Qorgeth used him to create. They are conducting some damn awful magic in the tunnels, and he doesn't know why he's kept out here.
- The Wormhearts keep talking about some "Uttering of Sudden Doom" or something, and said that they want a demon to tell it to them.
- Other prisoners are being kept in the tunnels somewhere. Some are alive, others are undead.

2. MOUTH OF QORGETH

Inside the worm's mouth are two earthen tunnels; the eastern is sealed by a stone door and the western is blocked by a wall of stinking flesh. Flies buzz throughout this chamber.

Both tunnels lead to the Heart of Qorgeth, but only the western path is currently used by the Wormhearts. Petring has been dragged through both tunnels countless times, and knows that prisoners are being held in the west, but doesn't know why the undead priests don't use the eastern passage anymore. He also knows that the Wormhearts always say a certain phrase before opening doors in this place. He can't remember it very well: "Vosh tilloobum Qorgeth dar." A successful DC 14 Intelligence check reveals that he is trying to speak the Abyssal phrase "Qorgeth's messenger will come," correctly "Va'ash tar'rupan Qorgeth ta." This phrase protects the speaker against the infestation trap on the walls of flesh along the western path.

Eastern Door. The eastern path was locked down when the furious earth elementals rose from the soil and killed a Wormheart, setting its many undead thralls free. The iron door to this tunnel bears an ominous circle of Abyssal sigils, surrounding what looks like a handprint of dried blood. It is also locked, requiring a DC 15 Dexterity (thieves' tools) check to unlock.

Inflict Wounds Trap. The eastern door bears a deactivated trap. A successful DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check puzzles out that a character can reactivate the trap by either casting *inflict wounds* on the door or by self-inflicting 5 damage and placing a bloody handprint within the ring. When this inflict wounds trap is active, the next creature to touch the door instantly takes 3d10 necrotic damage. After being triggered, the trap becomes inert until recharged by blood or magic.

Western Door. The western path is blocked by a wall of rotting flesh. Tiny, grotesque helminth worms audibly pop through its flesh as they writhe through it. A door is visibly carved from the wall, with a handle of bone protruding from the flesh. The door is unlocked and can be opened, but the opener may be victim to its Infestation Trap.

Infestation Trap. Parasitic helminth worms, like those that live within the wormhearted suffragans' flesh, have infested this wall of flesh. A creature that touches the flesh or attacks it without first speaking the word of power must

make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, they are infested by parasites. An afflicted creature can't regain hit points and its hit point maximum decreases by 10 (3d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the affliction reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, the victim dies. The affliction lasts until removed by any magic that cures disease.

3. THROAT OF QORGETH

The walls and floor here smell rank, like a decaying corpse, and the ground squelches beneath your feet—and you realize that this chamber isn't made of stone at all. All around you is a cavern of rotten flesh, and four humanoid corpses partially protrude from the walls and ceiling.

If living creatures enter this room without a wormhearted suffragan for an escort, a group of four undead **thugs** drop from the ceiling as a single **wight** pulls itself out of a squishy orifice on the floor.

Walls of Flesh. The northern door of this chamber is crawling with helminths and has an Infestation Trap identical to the one in Area 2. Touching the walls, ceiling, and floor of this chamber is viscerally disgusting, but not actually harmful.

Secret. The lifeless head of a giant worm protrudes through the northern wall, its jaw clenched tight like an iron vise. A successful DC 20 Strength check is required to force its jaws open. The decaying worm “tunnel” leads to the cells in Area 4, allowing sneaky creatures to ambush the undead guards there.

4. RIBS OF QORGETH

Massive, yellow-white ribs grow from the floor and pierce the walls, creating three separate cages. All are filled with bodies, and you can see movement in one, hear breathing from another, and see only motionless bodies in yet another. Three figures in full armor with ghastly white skin stand guard between the doors in the north and south.

A trio of **wights** protect the Wormhearts' future sacrifices from living intruders. They were once mortal worshipers of Qorgeth trapped in undeath by some damning bargain, and exist solely to drain souls from their living foes and transform them into undead abominations, just as Qorgeth did to them. They do not immediately notice intruders from the secret passage in Area 3, but prolonged noise, even whispers, draws their attention.

Cages. The northwest cage is filled with corpses. The northeast cage holds five placid **zombies**. The southernmost cage is filled with three living creatures. The first is a dust goblin raider named Wristsnapper, who

has no concept of subtlety or a “stealthy escape.” Her fellow prisoner is the last human captive from Feycircle, a grizzled hunter named Klegg who accepts rescue but tries to secretly kill Petring with a hidden knife for bringing this calamity upon his town. The final prisoner is Nevamira, an elfmarked adventurer from Dornig. She was staying in Feycircle to investigate the Crypt of Green Shadows when the blight hit.

Walls of Flesh. This chamber is made entirely of flesh and smells of vomit and acid, as if the stone itself was transmuted into a giant digestive organ. The walls drip





with corrosive ooze that deals 1d10 acid damage to anyone who touches it, and the helminth-infested door is identical to the Infestation Trap in Area 2.

5. SHATTERED RIB OF QORGETH

The fleshy walls of this room ooze black, metallic-smelling ichor. A giant curved bone the color of spoiled milk has been turned into an altar in the north of the room. You can hear the shuffling of multiple creatures coming from the tunnel to the north.

Upon examining the altar:

This altar is caked with dry blood and covered with torn toenails, atop which rests a small clay bowl of squirming helminth larvae.

If the PCs enter from the south, two **wormhearted suffragans**, (*Tome of Beasts*, page 410) arrive from the northern passage, each dragging two corpses. They hiss when they see the characters and one spends its first action to cast *animate dead* to turn the corpses into zombies, while the other begins by casting *hold person* on the best-armored PC. On subsequent rounds, one wades into combat while the other casts spells. The undead minions use the Help action whenever possible to grant the suffragans advantage on its helminth infestation attacks.

If subdued, the Wormhearts mechanically repeat, “We await the messenger of the Devourer. We await the Utterance of Certain Decay.”

6. PIT OF CORRUPTED EARTH

This wide, stone chamber suddenly drops off into a pit of dark soil. The movement in the pit is subtle, but you can see three large mounds of earth churning through the pit with the speed and energy of swarming hornets.

Unlike the rooms in the western passage, Areas 6 and 7 are made of stone and dirt, not rotting flesh and bone. The pit is 20 feet deep, with no obvious way in or out. Dozens of corpses were tossed into this pit for later use before this passage was sealed. The three mounds of dirt that move slowly within the pit are **earth elementals** that have been driven mad by the corruption in these caverns, and bits of rotting human limbs protrude out of them. When an elemental is killed, the two **zombies** inside it emerge and attack the nearest living creature.

Trapped Door. The northern door of this chamber is made of thick stone and bears a circle of Abyssal sigils and an uncharged *Inflict Wounds* Trap just like the door in Area 2.

Secret. A character who makes a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check on the raised lip around the pit notices a dimly shining hunk of onyx protruding from the north wall. A DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that it is a receptacle for necrotic energy. When the gem takes at least 10 necrotic damage, it slides into the wall and creates a tunnel leading north into Area 7. The stone has 50 hit points.

7. GARDEN OF HANDS

Dozens of skeletal hands protrude from the dirt floor of this cavern, grasping and reaching as if for something just out of sight. Some have their bony fists clasped tight around the motionless bodies of worms as long as your arm. There is a stone door to the north.

Each 5-foot square in this room is filled with undead hands; a space filled with hands is difficult terrain. Whenever a creature enters or examines a new space, roll 1d6 + 2 to determine the number of hands. The hands make a grapple attempt whenever a creature enters their space, gaining a +1 bonus on its check for each hand in the space. If the hands successfully grapple a creature, it is knocked prone and takes 2 slashing damage for each hand in its space at the beginning of its turn.

A space can be cleansed of hands by dealing 20 damage. The hands are vulnerable to fire damage and immune to necrotic, poison, and psychic damage. A space cleared of hands is no longer difficult terrain, but new hands sprout out of the soil 2 round later.

Trapped Door. The northern door of this chamber is made of thick stone and bears a circle of Abyssal sigils and an uncharged *Inflict Wounds* Trap just like the door in Area 2.

8. HEART OF QORGETH

The walls of the tunnel fade from dull grey and black to bright, bloody crimson. The walls pulsate, and the bass notes of a thunderous heartbeat rumble through the cavern. Soon, the sound is all around you. The tunnel curves and you emerge into the atrium of a massive, beating heart. At the far end of the chamber swirls a vortex of color, sickly green morphing into puce and then gangrenous black and yellow. A pile of bodies

Four wormhearted cultists of Qorgeth stand in small ventricles on the sides of the chamber, their heads lowered and chanting demonic verses. Each one is surrounded by a half-dozen corpses, already sacrificed. In the center of the atrium is the undead priest leading the incantation. Beside it is a coiled purple worm.

The Wormhearts’ ritual need only continue for 30 more seconds before the portal at the far end of the room stabilizes, allowing the **malakbel demon** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 78) to emerge. The ritual can only be stopped by killing or otherwise incapacitating all three **wormhearted suffragans** (the ritual leader and the cultists in the southernmost chambers) and both undead **cult fanatics** (in the northern chambers). The **young purple worm** (use **giant constrictor snake** statistics) protects its master, but is not important to the ritual.

If the ritual is halted, Qorgeth’s power instantly begins to collapse. Any remaining undead disintegrate and the fleshy, necrotic walls of Areas 3, 4, 5, and 8 wither away to nothing, causing these rooms to collapse after 1d6 rounds, dealing 10d6 bludgeoning damage to any creatures within them.

If the ritual is completed, the malakbel tears through the portal in a burst of radiant, black flame. The malakbel delivers a message to the cultists when it appears—the Utterance of Certain Decay.

“The Writhing Prince, Lord of Decay, Devourer of All Things, will be reborn into the world of the living on the night when a consul of the Free City devours the heart of her rival. This knowledge is now known, and you have served your purpose, loyal servants. Embrace your reward.”

After delivering the Utterance, the malakbel attacks the undead servants of Qorgeth, granting them the decay they sought to bring to the world. Its Abyssal radiance probably makes short work of the Wormhearts, after which it turns its attention to the PCs. Depending on the size and strength of the party, they may be able to overcome it, at which point the Carrion Shrine of Qorgeth begins to crumble as if the ritual had been halted. If they flee from the malakbel, it allows them to escape, preferring to see them sow fear and chaos by spreading rumors of Qorgeth’s return.

CONCLUSION

The Carrion Shrine of Qorgeth is the jumping-off point for a longer, Qorgeth-themed campaign. GMs looking to use it as a standalone adventure or a conclusion to a trilogy of short adventures can exclude this new plot hook; instead, the Wormhearts intended to summon Qorgeth himself, but underestimated their power, and summoned a malakbel that sought only to destroy them.

Petring and his children can be returned to their wife and mother in the refugee camp, reuniting the family. If the PCs deem Petring worthy of punishment, it is their duty alone; none else know of his transgressions. The undead minions of decay had no use for wealth, but the villagers pooled together what money they had left to give the PCs a reward of 500 gold in mixed coinage and family heirlooms.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

The worms and their masters are gone from Feycircle, the dead are at peace, and life is returning through the purified fairy ring. Rebuilding Feycircle may still require adventuring into the blighted Wastes. The prisoners from Qorgeth’s shrine could all use assistance getting back home, and are fairly wealthy; managing the personalities of sarcastic Wristnapper and aristocratic Nevamira is an adventure of its own.





THE LEYSTONE OF THE INDIGO STAR

An adventure for five 7th-level characters on the edge of the Western Wastes and the Magocracy of Bemmea by *Mike Shea*

GM INTRODUCTION

The interrogation of the rogue wizard, Askalan, by the magocracy of Bemmea exposed his creation of unstable magical artifacts built in a ruined ley-line conduit. This Leystone, built by the mages of Vael Turog, had been dormant for centuries until Askalan discovered a way to power it. Now, after his untimely death, the Leystone's unstable power continues to grow at the edge of the Western Wastes. The magocracy hires the characters to find the awakened Leystone, uncover the mystery of this growing power, and return the source of the power to Bemmea for study.

Please note, it is highly recommended that the adventurers include at least one spellcaster trained in Arcana.

BACKGROUND

Askalan Graydust wasn't much of a wizard. Ignored by his superiors in the magocracy of Bemmea, Askalan had been sent on missions of little import and long travel for two decades. Upon one of his journeys to the edge of the Western Wastes, Askalan witnessed a miracle. A star fell from the sky, burning violet across the black night. At the crash site he found a being who looked like a newborn baby, though its strange, semi-translucent skin revealed a network of glowing, dark purple energy. Even the baby's eyes burned with violet light. He called the child the "Indigo Star."

Slipping away from the magocracy of Bemmea, Askalan raised the child and studied its strange origin. Three years after finding it, he found the key he needed to unlock the Indigo Star's incredible power. Buried within the sands of the Western Wastes on the northwestern edge of the Field of Doors, Askalan found the remains of a ley-line conduit built over a thousand years ago by the mages of Vael Turog. For two years Askalan restored the Leystone, learning its secrets and rebuilding its arcane conduits. Two years later, he placed the Indigo Star within its heart. The conduit flared to life, drawing energy from the ley lines that had long lay dead within the sands of the Western Wastes.

Askalan used the power of the Leystone to forge magical artifacts well beyond his skill. Returning regularly to Bemmea, he sold these items to unsuspecting wizards. Now these wizards have begun to die, their arcane energy devouring their bodies in a plague once thought

eradicated centuries ago in the fall of Vael Turog. The magocracy arrested Askalan and interrogated him. Though they learned of the existence of the empowered Leystone, Askalan died from the very arcane plague he brought back to life.

Now the magocracy has hired a band of adventurers to locate the Leystone and return the source of its power to Bemmea.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure begins when **Finnius Kalarex**, agent of the Magocracy of Bemmea, meets the characters in one of the city's glass gardens. Finnius wishes to hire the characters to locate the ruins discovered by Askalan. The magocracy wishes to disable the Leystone before its power grows too great to control and learn what they can from the source of that power.

In order to locate the Leystone, Finnius gives the characters a ley line-sensitive chime and the use of a teleportation circle to take them closer to the edge of the Western Wastes. Before they use the teleportation circle, a band of fanatics from the Sons of Vael Turog attack the characters in the hopes of stealing the chime and taking possession of the Leystone themselves.

Once they have defeated the fanatics, the characters travel into the Western Wastes and to the Leystone. Within the ruins, the characters must bypass the Leystone's protections and defeat those creatures who still reside there. During their exploration, they learn of Askalan's research into the Indigo Star. Near the end of their journey, the characters must choose what to do with the Star before facing the Leystone's final threat, a void dragon named Ixaranum. With that foe defeated, the characters return to Bemmea and face the results of their choice.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Characters can get involved in this adventure in many different ways. The following three hooks give examples of story threads that might draw the characters in. Tailor these hooks to suit the origins and drives of the characters, or develop your own adventure hook based on their backgrounds and the history of the Leystone.

Premonitions of a Growing Power. One of the characters becomes overtaken with premonitions of a





terrible growing power within the Western Wastes. They see a black spire piercing up from the earth and hear the sounds of screaming echoing in their minds. They learn that Finnius Kalarex of the Magocracy of Bemmea might have answers to their premonitions.

A Favor for the Magocracy. Characters with ties to the Magocracy of Bemmea receive a summons from Finnius Kalarex. Finnius asks to meet the characters at the Twilight Gardens of the Academie Arcane in the city of Bemmea.

The Dark History of Vael Turog. Characters discover the dark history of Vael Turog, the fallen city of mages before the Great Mage War and their experiments twisting the ley lines. Their research catches the eye of the Magocracy of Bemmea which summons them to aid in a mission of mutual interest.

PART 1: A REQUEST FROM THE BEMMEAN MAGOCRACY

Whichever hook draws them to Bemmea, the characters arrive at the Twilight Gardens of the Academie Arcana. When the characters arrive, read or summarize the following:

Beautiful trees sculpted out of violet glass and deep red crystal line the twisting path of the Twilight Gardens. As the path turns, you see the huge statue of a serpentine monstrosity formed from shining red and black crystals.

"You like our andrenjinyi?" asks a voice from behind you. You turn to see a middle-aged man with short, receding hair, dressed in loose trousers and the silver-embroidered blue silk jacket that marks him as a ranking member of the Bemmean magocracy. "You can't imagine the cost of imprisoning a beast like that." The crystal eyes of the serpent blaze with red light. "Oh, she likes you! I am Finnius Kalarex and I thank you for meeting with me."

Finnius Kalarex takes the characters to a gazebo within the gardens where servants bring fine wine and aged cheese over fresh bread. Finnius makes small talk as they eat, asking them how they like Bemmea and of their former adventures before getting to the crux of his request. At that point, Finnius relays the following information to the characters:

Two weeks ago a low-ranking researcher of the Magocracy of Bemmea named Askalan Graydust returned to the city. He was a poor researcher, often sent on long exploration missions alone. The magocracy never expected much from him. Then suddenly, this mage began to sell magical artifacts of power well beyond him. Those who purchased these items began to die, consumed by their own twisted arcane energy.

After one such foul death, Askalan was arrested and interrogated. His artifacts were examined and while found to pose no great danger in and of themselves, it is feared these items could bring about the return of the arcane plagues of Vael Turog. During his interrogation, Askalan revealed the location where

he forged these items, a ruined Leystone at the edge of the Western Wastes. Before they could draw the location from him, Askalan's cursed body broke apart, consumed by the arcane plague he carried within him. The dangerous power of the Leystone, the mages discovered, continues to grow there after his death.

Finnius asks the characters to find the Leystone and disable the power growing within it. If they agree to help, Finnius will give the characters a small chime capable of guiding the characters to the Leystone. The chime is an item of delicacy and secrecy, he explains, and must be protected.

Askalan will also provide the use of a teleportation circle departing from a small observatory outside Bemmea that leads to a group of standing stones at the edge of the Western Wastes.

For their services, Askalan will reward the characters with one of three wands (lightning, fireballs, or binding) and a choice of three spell scrolls containing wizard spells up to level 4 along with gemstones worth a total of 2,000 gold pieces when they return.

THE SONS OF VAEL TUROG

As they make their way out of Bemmea to the observatory, the characters are tracked by a **spy** of the Sons of Vael Turog named **Sareth**. It is possible that a character spots the spy with a Wisdom (Perception) check versus the spy's Dexterity (Stealth) check. If the characters notice her and track her without being seen, they arrive at a fountain in a plaza. The Sons of Vael Turog have bribed the local guards to leave the plaza alone and plan an ambush there. Should the characters see the spy, they have a chance at scouting out the ambush before it happens. Two **mag**es stand on nearby rooftops, one on each side of the plaza. Two additional **spies** lurk in the alleyways of the plaza.

If the characters do not notice the spy or lose her as they try to track her, they find themselves ambushed as they enter the plaza. The mages hurl **fireballs** and **magic missiles** at the characters while the spies try to attack spellcasters in the party.

The fountain itself is an arcane statue depicting a former leader of the magocracy whose upraised hand spouts colored water into the scintillating pool at the fountain's base. A large crack at the statue's base leaks arcane energy. A character within 5 feet of the statue can attempt to channel this energy as a bonus action with a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check. On a success, the character adds 10 (3d6) force damage to any spell damage they inflict. On a failure, the character takes 7 (2d6) force damage.

If the characters successfully interrogate any of these assailants, they learn that the attackers are from the Sons of Vael Turog and that they seek the ruined Leystone. Before they can get far into the interrogation, investigators of the Magocracy arrive and arrest the assailants with plans to perform their own interrogation and suggest that the characters continue on their way.

TELEPORTING TO THE EDGE OF OBLIVION

A short time later the characters arrive at the observatory. Read or paraphrase the following:

A bronze half-sphere tops a tall stone structure on a hill, its walls cracked from centuries of age. A complicated set of tubes and rods made of brass and glass protrude from the top of the bronze sphere. A large door opens at the base of the observatory. "It's about time you arrived," speaks a raspy voice. "I've been waiting all morning."

The speaker is a thin man, hunched over, and wearing a complicated set of lenses and crystals on a network of iron and leather bands around his forehead. He introduces himself impatiently as Glek, observer of the otherworldly. He watches for fallen stars though he hasn't seen one for over five years. Glek takes the characters to a chamber within the sprawling observatory wherein lies a stone teleportation circle. There, speaking a few words of power, Glek opens up a gateway that blows hot wind through the room and reveals the standing stones at the edge of the Western Wastes.

THE WESTERN WASTES

When the characters arrive at the Western Wastes, read or paraphrase the following:

Hot wind and dust howl through a circle of standing stones looming thirty feet high, their surfaces scoured under the constant assault. Crumbling walls protrude from the cracked earth of the wastes, the last remnants of towns and cities destroyed centuries earlier. The chime in your hand begins to hum, revealing the remnants of twisted ley lines now long dead.

The characters can easily use the chime to triangulate the location of the Leystone. As they travel through the edge of the Western Wastes they might witness many strange sights including huge shambling forms far off in the distance, or see strange arcane patterns form in the clouds above. They might stumble upon a storm of fine bone shards, a gravity quake, or a storm that howls and whispers with the voices of the dead of the Great Mage Wars.

As they follow the continued humming of the ley-line chime, they arrive two days later at the ruined Leystone.

PART 2: THE LEYSTONE OF THE INDIGO STAR

As the characters approach the Leystone, read or paraphrase the following:

The dust of cracked mud blows past, revealing a spire of smooth black stone jutting out of the ground ahead. It rises over one hundred feet into the air like the tip of a knife. A great flood seems to have carved away the ravine wall, exposing the strange structure which must have been buried in the earth for hundreds of years.

A trapezoidal entryway blocked by a pair of heavy stone doors stands at the front of the structure. Stone carvings of stern tiefling faces sit on the surface of each door, their pupil-less eyes staring out over the dead wastelands.

Much of the Leystone lies beneath the cracked earth, yet the upper spire and its entryway stand exposed after years of erosion.

A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the air feels much colder as one approaches the doors. A DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that each door is infused with a powerful necrotic enchantment requiring some sort of key to pass through safely.

Askalan originally found the key to this door when he learned about the Leystone itself. Not being particularly subtle, he buried the key nearby under a stack of flat stones. A character can spot this stack of stones with a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. If they investigate, they find a black iron clawed gauntlet with a strange glyph on the palm. Under the glove is a parchment with the word "power" written on it in Infernal and a note in the trade tongue that reads, "Find a better hiding spot."

The door opens for anyone who places their gauntleted hand on the door and speaks the word "power" in Infernal. Anyone attempting to open the door without wearing the glove and speaking the word takes 36 (8d8) necrotic damage or half damage on a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw. The necrotic energy can be channeled and redirected with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check. A failure results in the creature attempting the redirection to take damage as though they attempted to open it without the glove.

1. THE ENTRY HALL


When the characters enter, read the following:

Scintillating colors shine against the flat black walls of this hall. The left side of the wall looks as though it has melted. The petrified forms of tieflings reach out from the molten stone, their hands clawed and mouths agape in silent agony.

Three large circles have been carved into the floor of the hall, each circle containing a strange glyph. The first of these glyphs glows blue and the second glows violet. The third does not glow and large cracks from the molten walls to the left snake through it, splitting it into three pieces. A gray liquid seeps out from the crack. Two doors line the left wall and a third door sits at the far right side of the hall.

Characters who investigate the runes on the floor may make a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check. On a success, they are able to feel two distinct forms of energy coming from the glyphs. The blue energy feels like arcane cold energy while the violet rune radiates a strange astral energy not native to this world.

If the characters come within five feet of the dead glyph, the gray fluid coalesces into a **gray ooze**. This ooze is large in size, has 100 hit points, and may make four pseudopod attacks.



The closest door on the left is protected with a *glyph of warding* cast by Askalan. A creature can detect the glyph with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. If triggered, the glyph inflicts 27 (6d8) lightning damage to all creatures within 20 feet of the doorway. Askalan himself placed this glyph here using a password that died with him, so the glove will not disarm it.

2. ASKALAN'S STUDY

When the characters enter this room, read or paraphrase the following:

Parchment lay scattered across the floor of this chamber. A large table sits on the far side of the room, likewise piled with parchment. An arcane symbol has been drawn onto the floor in red chalk and a carved statue of a stern female tiefling stands on the northern side of the room. A tangle of bedding lies in one corner among piles of candles melted down to pools of wax.

This room, which once served as the quarters for the commander of the Leystone, had become Askalan's study. Askalan's incomprehensible notes are scattered everywhere. A mixture of mathematical formulas and arcane scrawlings cover the walls, some rubbed out or overwritten. Characters who spend the time to investigate Askalan's notes learn the following:

About five years ago, Askalan came upon a fallen star from the sky above. It glowed with tremendous power. He took it to his home on the outskirts of Bemmea, where he studied it for years, discovering it possessed an alien intelligence.

Then, two years ago, Askalan found this Leystone of Vael Turog, lost during the Mage Wars. It once held tremendous power but now lay dormant. After a year of studying this structure, Askalan learned how to use the fallen star to act as the stone's power source. He placed the stone in a cell and the Leystone came to life.

Characters may dig deeper into Askalan's notes with either a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check or a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) check. On a success, the character who performs the check learns the following additional pieces of information. Anyone who attempts this check and fails takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage as Askalan's madness tears into their minds.

The power cell in which the fallen star now rests sends raw arcane energy into a pair of large brass cauldrons which mix it with a blue fluid. This fluid is sent into the central chamber where the fluid's energy causes a huge black obelisk to spin rapidly, drawing nearby dead ley lines to the Leystone. This spinning obelisk can use the Leystone's power to infuse magic into powerful magical artifacts, but the energy isn't entirely stable.

Spheres of a black, arcane energy-absorbing metal kept within a pair of rooms can be placed in the large brass cauldrons. This draws arcane energy out of the pipelines and slows down the obelisk.

Portions of the chamber were damaged hundreds of years ago when the entire Leystone was left active for too long. It melted the stone and killed many of the tieflings who worked within the Leystone. Askalan had to manually place the spheres in the cauldrons to reduce the speed of the obelisk or it might have destroyed the entire structure. He most recently took them out.

Among the notes are two words written in Infernal. They are "Ignite" and "Infuse" and are used to open the doors in areas 4 and 8.

This chamber also contains a copy of a spellbook of Askalan's containing the following spells:

alarm, arcane lock, banishment, chill touch, counterspell, dispel magic, firebolt, glyph of warding, mage armor, mage hand, magic circle, mending, nondetection, planar binding, protection from energy, shield, stoneskin

3. THE CONTROL ROOM

When the characters enter this room, read or summarize the following:

A glyphed circle sits on the dark stone floor. Three large stone blocks cut into angles form a half-circle facing the door. Each of these three blocks contains three brass-lined basins of a strange metallic liquid. The left-most block is badly cracked and the liquid within the bowls has a dark tint to it.

This room served as the primary monitoring room for the Leystone. When unused, all the basins have a still, reflective, metallic liquid within them. When one stands in the circle, however, one can call upon the liquid to form images of various rooms in the Leystone. Activating the basins requires a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Failure on this check results in a powerful psychic feedback that inflicts 10 (3d6) damage to the one attempting the check and anyone aiding them.

On a success, the character performing the check can observe six of the nine rooms of the Leystone including the entryway and chambers 2, 4, 5, 7, and 10. The block that controlled the pools to scry upon chambers 8, 9, and the hallway between them was broken when those rooms were damaged five centuries ago. Any character that attempts to activate those pools with an Intelligence (Arcana) check automatically fails the check and takes 10 (3d6) psychic damage.

4. THE COMPRESSION CHAMBER

When the characters enter this room, read or paraphrase the following:

A violet glow shines across the black stonework of this chamber. A pair of vented iron blocks, roughly ten feet on a side, hum and shake violently. A pair of glass and twisting metal tubes filled with a deep blue liquid feed into the blocks from the eastern wall. Another glass tube filled a glowing light blue liquid feeds into the north wall. A black iron door with the stern face of a tiefling on its surface stands on the north side of the chamber.

The large blocks of iron and stone in this chamber serve to compress the deep blue liquid into a form suitable to conduct the arcane energy coming out of the cell. The infused liquid then flows into the arcane dampener in room 5.

A **spark** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 357) has been living within the iron blocks, feeding off of the arcane residue that flows into the chamber. When the characters enter the chamber, the spark will break away from the blocks and attempt to inhabit an arcane spell wielder if possible. If unsuccessful, it attacks with its innate spells.

A DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check exposes necrotic energy flowing off of the door. The door can be opened by a creature placing the glove found outside the Leystone upon it and speaking the word "Ignite".

Anyone attempting to open the door without using the glove and speaking the password takes 36 (8d8) necrotic damage or half damage on a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw. The necrotic energy can be channeled and redirected with a successful DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check. A failure results in the creature attempting the redirection to take damage as though they attempted to open it without the glove and password.

5. THE ARCANES DAMPENER

A pair of doors leads from room 4 to room 5, creating a buffer between the two rooms. One door must be closed before the other one will open.

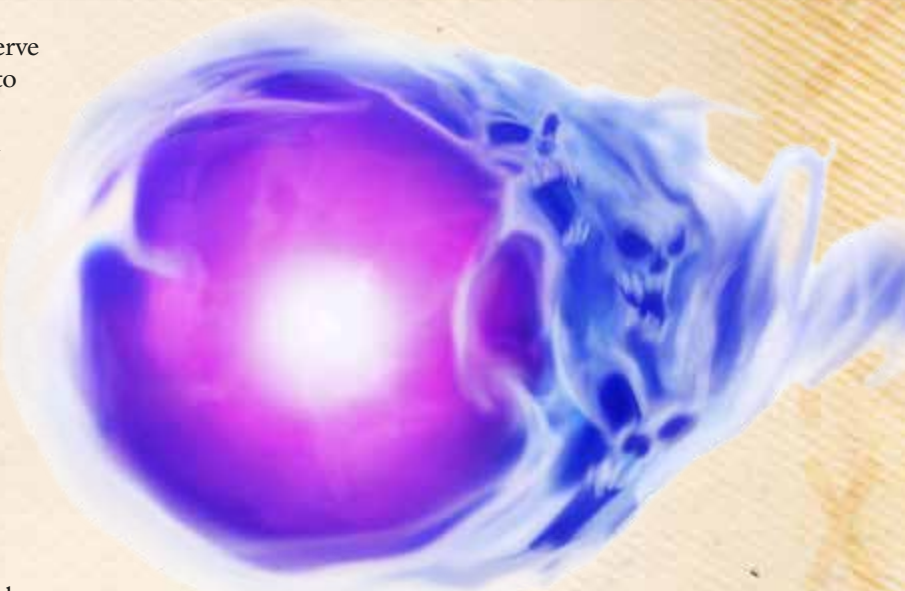
When the characters enter room 5, read or summarize the following:

A large brass orb sits atop a black stone platform in the center of this room. Glass tubes filled with a glowing blue liquid run from the sphere to the eastern and southern walls. Another tube filled with a scintillating violet energy flows into the sphere from the north wall.

The top of the sphere appears to be open, and above it hangs a canister of brass and glass attached to a complicated network of metal supports. A black orb floats in the center of the canister. A panel of glyphed metal sits on the eastern wall.

The metal panel controls the pillar which can lower the canister into the brass sphere. Someone can control the panel with a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check. Failure results in the pillar moving haphazardly, dropping in too quickly and emitting a burst of arcane energy into the room. Any creature in the room when this occurs takes 28 (8d6) lightning damage or half damage on a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw.

When the panel drops in, the blue and violet light begins to fade and lowers the power being fed to the obelisk in room 9.



6. THE RUNOFF POOLS

When they enter room 6, read or paraphrase the following:

Two large pools of a glowing green liquid sit in the floor of the chamber illuminating the melted stone around them. One of these has overflowed and bolts of black lightning arc from the molten stone on the south wall to the western pool of green liquid. Large pipes on the northern wall drip more of the green liquid into the pools.

The green liquid in this chamber is a by-product of the arcane fluid flowing through the Leystone. It is filtered out by the brass sphere in room 7 and fed through these pipes into the pools.


Any living creature that touches a pool takes 18 (4d8) acid damage and 18 (4d8) lightning damage or half damage on a successful DC 15 Constitution saving throw.

Arcane instability has created a malevolent pool of the liquid that forms into a **black pudding** that glows green instead of black. When a creature gets within 10 feet of the south-western corner of the room, the pudding animates and attacks.

7. THE DAMAGED ARCANES DAMPENER

Unlike the doors leading to room 5, both doors leading to room 7 have been destroyed. When the characters enter room 7, read or summarize the following:

The walls of this chamber have been warped beyond any others in the Leystone. A tarnished bronze sphere sits on a cracked stone pillar in the center of the room. Three glass tubes feed into and out of the bronze sphere, one a shining blue feeds into the south wall, one a brilliant violet comes in from the west, and one a dark thick green leading to the east. The top of the bronze sphere appears open and bolts of energy spontaneously erupt from the brass sphere arcing into the nearby walls. The wreckage of



twisted brass hangs from the ceiling and a glass canister capped by brass sits on the floor nearby. A sphere of perfect blackness sits in the center of the glass canister.

Unlike room 5, this room is badly damaged. The glass canister must be placed into the brass sphere manually while simultaneously disrupting the arcing energy pouring out of the sphere. Doing so requires a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check by one creature and a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check by another. Failure on either of these skill checks results in a blasting arc of arcane energy. Everyone within the room takes 28 (8d6) lightning damage or half damage on a successful DC 14 Dexterity saving throw.

When the canister is placed into the sphere, the violet and blue light dims. If both canisters are placed in both spheres in rooms 5 and 7, the energy pouring out of the arcane cell lowers considerably and the obelisk in room 9 begins to slow down. The cell in room 10 can now be safely opened.

8. ENTRYWAY TO THE OBELISK

When the characters approach this hall, read or summarize the following:

A pair of large doors stand on the western end of this T-shaped hall. A carved tiefling face stares out from each door, one male with its mouth open in a silent roar, and one female with eyes of brilliant sapphires. In many places, the smooth stone walls of these halls appear melted and almost organic. A single petrified hand reaches out from the molten stone, its fingers tipped in long claws. The walls and floor of this hall vibrate from some powerful but unseen force.

These doors are heavily protected, requiring the glove to open as well as the password found in room 2. A DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check shows that both doors are heavily protected with abjuration magic. When a living creature gets close to the doors, both doors say "speak the word and enter" in Infernal. If someone attempts to open the doors without speaking the proper word, or they fail on a DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check to try to bypass the doors, the male door breathes out a blast of fire while bolts of lightning arc from the eyes of the female door. Those within 30 feet of the door take 35 (10d6) fire damage and 35 (10d6) lightning damage or half damage on a successful DC 16 Dexterity saving throw.

A character wearing the glove found outside of the Leystone can open the door by placing their hand on the door and saying the word "Infuse" in Infernal.

9. THE CHAMBER OF THE OBELISK

When the characters enter this room, read or paraphrase the following:

A powerful wind roars around this vast chamber. The walls of the chamber angle inward as they soar to the full height of the Leystone's central spire one hundred feet above. A huge black obelisk floats and spins in the center of the chamber so quickly that its sharp edges blur. A large shadow swirls around the top of the obelisk far above.

Below the spinning obelisk sits a circular shining metal table on a large circular dais, its edges marked with carefully etched glyphs. Two large glass tubes of shining blue liquid feed into the bottom of the circular dais.

This large obelisk is the primary force that draws ley lines to the Leystone. It acts as a conductor for that power and channels it into the metal table. Every few minutes a bolt of brilliant violet energy will arc from the bottom tip of the obelisk to the top of the table. Anyone who gets in the way of that arc will take 75 (10d6 + 40) force damage. If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, it is disintegrated. This damage can be negated with a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw.

A DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals that the obelisk is spinning too fast to draw any sort of stable magic. In fact, if the power of the Leystone is not reduced within the next few weeks, the obelisk will lose its stability and explode, destroying the Leystone and everything around it.

The power of the obelisk has drawn a **young void dragon** named Ixaranum, who feeds off of the escalating energy of the obelisk. Currently, Ixaranum swirls around the top of the obelisk in a shadowy form. A DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check can reveal that the shadow swirling above the obelisk appears to be sentient.

If the characters have successfully removed the Indigo Star from the arcane cell in room 10, the dragon drops down onto the floor of the chamber and demands they give the Star over to it. If they agree, it devours the Star, roars in ecstasy, and returns to its home in the void.

If they fight Ixaranum, the dragon begins the battle by breathing out its Stellar Flare breath. If they have brought the Indigo Star with them, the Star will stand in the way and absorb the energy of the breath weapon. The characters will realize that such an effort will destroy the Star and if they wish, some of the characters can push the Star out of the way and take on the full breath weapon themselves. Otherwise, the Star is destroyed by the attack but absorbs Ixaranum's breath weapon damage completely.

10. THE CHAMBER OF THE ARCANE CELL

When the characters enter this room, read or paraphrase the following:

Violet light shines across the black stone of this chamber. A glass-encased sphere held by a metal scaffold swirls with violet energy. Large glass tubes filled with the same violet energy emerge from the brass enclosure and flow into the walls south and east. A large iron vent sits in the center of the floor.

As you stand in front of the orb, the silhouette of a hand presses up against the inside of the glass, four long fingers reaching out for escape from the torment within.

If the characters have not yet placed the arcane dampeners into the brass spheres, they can sense that tremendous energy still flows out from the sphere and through the tubes. It is painfully clear that any attempt to



break into the sphere will meet with catastrophic results and destroy the entire complex and anything within it. The power feeding out of the cell must be lowered before it can be opened.

If the arcane dampeners are in place in rooms 5 and 7, the arcane energy isn't nearly as dangerous and the sphere can be cracked open. A purple liquid bursts out from the sphere and flows into the vent on the floor. The Indigo Star falls to the ground and pushes itself up.

The Indigo Star appears to be a child of five years. Its head is hairless, its skin pale, and its limbs seem longer than they should be. Its eyes shine with violet light. The Indigo Star does not speak any language known to the characters but will follow their instructions.

The characters have a few potential choices in this chamber. They might choose not to crack the sphere at all and leave the structure as it is. If they do so, the structure will explode as they make their way back across the Western Wastes. Instead, they might choose to bring the Indigo Star back to the Magocracy of Bemmea or perhaps slay the Star here. Slaying the Star causes no catastrophe, the Star's luminescent blood flows from its body into the vent, forever losing its arcane luster.

If they bring the Star back out with them to chamber 9, Ixaranum demands that they let him devour the Star.

At the end of the adventure, if the characters treat the Indigo Star well, it pierces into its own chest and draws forth a glowing violet stone. It then hands this stone to the character who best treated it. This stone acts as a *luckstone*. Otherwise the stone is left over after the Star's death.

CONCLUSION

This adventure can conclude in a few different ways, all centering around the choices the characters make in relation to the Indigo Star. The characters might decide to set the Star free to wander into the Western Wastes, a choice that likely will not kill the Star but might have other unseen consequences. They might choose to sacrifice the Star to Ixaranum. They might choose to destroy the Star themselves, fearing the power it contains. They might choose to bring the Star along with them, hiding it from the magocracy of Bemmea which can lead to many future adventures. Or they might simply choose to bring the Star back to the magocracy as instructed. None of these choices are wrong and each choice has the potential to lead to future fantastic adventures.



PALACE OF THE WIND LORDS

An adventure for 5 7th-level PCs set in a flying city in the Southlands

by James J. Haeck

GM INTRODUCTION

An ancient palace constructed by the mighty Wind Lord Boreas has a new master: the gnoll sorcerous matriarch Odjanbago and her clan—the Archthieves. With the flying Sky Palace at her command, Odjanbago’s legendary clan of thieves and killers have cast a shadow of fear over the Southlands’ northwestern desert. All tremble in fear of the Archthieves, from the jinnborn tribes of the Dominion of the Wind Lords to the priests of Bastet in Nuria Natal. Even lords of Midgard’s Seven Cities grow uneasy at their mention. Whether they hail from the Southlands or elsewhere in Midgard, the PCs must shoulder the responsibility of ending Odjanbago’s reign of terror.

SUMMARY

The Palace of the Wind Lords, also known as the Sky Palace, was once a retreat for Boreas the North Wind. When Boreas betrayed the Wind Lords and departed for the Northlands, the magic that supported the palace began to fade, and the city that once surrounded the palace has been dashed upon the earth below. When Odjanbago and her gnolls discovered the flying fortress, only the central palace remained. Odjanbago battled the palace’s last owner, a djinni named Leyla, and trapped her within a magic crystal.

No matter the PCs’ reasons for entering the Sky Palace, an army of gnolls, demons, and evil witches stands between them and victory.

MONSTERS

Some of the gnolls use NPC statblocks; these creatures also have the following traits:

- Their type is changed to humanoid (gnoll) and they can only speak and understand Gnoll.
- They gain the Rampage trait, as a gnoll.
- They gain darkvision out to 60 feet.
- They gain a bite attack that deals 1d4 piercing damage plus their Strength modifier. This attack has a +5 bonus to hit.

FACTIONS

The flying city currently hosts several different parties, all at odds with one another and possibly the PCs as well.

Gnoll Archthieves

Odjanbago, Archthief matriarch, uses the power of her captured djinni to slake her thirst for power and stroke her massive ego. Her gnolls aid her out of abject fear, not loyalty—though the promise of fabulous wealth also keeps them in line.

Leyla

Leyla is completely at Odjanbago’s mercy. She has no will of her own, but hates the gnolls with every fiber of her elemental being. Even death would be a welcome escape from servitude. Djinni are predisposed to twisting the intentions of their masters’ wishes, but if rescued, Leyla considers herself honestly bound to anyone who delivers her from this torment.

Aechatta

This elemental gearforged was once a free air spirit before being bound by humans to a physical form. He led a party of adventurers in an attack on the Sky Palace about one week ago, but their raid ended disastrously. With his metal body crippled, Aechatta simply wishes to gain the power to emancipate his spirit and return to the Plane of Air.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

As your players’ GM, you know best how to involve the PCs in this adventure. The following adventure hooks are provided to inspire and assist you.

- **Theft.** Baron Raúl Cazagoza of Capleon has been robbed! The extravagantly wealthy lord of Capleon—one of Midgard’s Seven Cities—paid handsomely for an ivory-white Mharoti camel, believing that the beautiful beast possessed magical powers. Not long after the money and the camel changed hands, the Archthieves and the Sky Palace descended upon the baron’s caravan and stole his prize. He already sent a team of mercenaries to reclaim it, but they never returned. He is willing to pay a king’s ransom to retrieve the white camel.
- **Hunting the North Wind.** The ascended Wind Lord Boreas was exiled from the Dominion of the Wind





Lords and was reborn as a dark god in the northern tundras of Midgard. Adventurers from both Midgard and the Southlands have reason to want Boreas's power diminished, as he often visits his ancient home in the Southlands to wage war against the other Wind Lords and their followers. Rumor has it a blade of the south wind, a weapon fashioned to slay the North Wind, was locked within the Sky Palace after Boreas fled the Southlands.

- **Three Wishes?** A popular rumor says that the fearsome Archthieves have been able to terrorize the Middle Sea region with impunity because they have a djinni in their service. If the PCs have need of a wish, an ally may know where they can find one.

The PCs approach the palace by its tether, an anchor currently weighed atop a sandy bluff overlooking a murky lake. The trek up the hill is simple enough, but the sphere of whirling air keeping the Sky Palace aloft creates vicious sandstorms around its mooring.

Sandstorms. Any outdoor area within a half mile of the palace, including bridges between palace rooms, is scoured by sandstorms. All creatures within a sandstorm have disadvantage on ranged attack rolls and Wisdom (Perception) checks. Creatures with a nonmagical fly speed must land at the end of their turn or fall in a direction of the GM's choice.

Falling. The Sky Palace is floating 100 feet above a small lake. If a creature falls from the palace, they may make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw to twist towards the lake. A creature who falls in the water takes half the usual falling damage.

Clearance. Rooms within the Palace of the Wind Lords are 100 feet tall unless stated otherwise, and the hallways between rooms are little more than unrailed bridges exposed to the elements. Doors are 40 feet tall and 20 feet wide. Huge-size or smaller creatures must make a DC 15 Strength check to open or close a door, though all interior doors are left open enough for one Medium creature to pass through. The palace was clearly constructed for a massive being, perhaps Boreas himself.

1. CLIFFSIDE MOORING

You push through the howling sandstorm to the top of a rocky bluff. Above you looms the silhouette of a flying palace; a magnificent ruin of crumbling walls and broken battlements, surrounded by a perfect sphere of howling wind. At the top of this cliff is an anchor the size of a bull, linked by a sturdy chain to the citadel hovering above you.

Before the Sky Palace dropped anchor here, this cliff overlooked a gentle oasis 50 feet below. Another 50 feet above the cliff is the palace itself. Creatures cannot easily fly within the sandstorm that surrounds the palace, but may climb the anchor's chain. A climbing creature moves

at half their usual speed, and must make a DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check at the beginning of each of their turns to hang on.

2. CRUMBLING GATE

At the top of the palace's mooring is an arched gateway tall enough to accommodate a savannah giraffe with room to spare. Its monumental doors are shut; engraved into their crumbling, cloudy-white stones are hundreds of djinn and winged soldiers, their scimitars drawn and their faces leering down at you. The lower engravings have been crudely altered to depict cackling, hyena-headed gnolls instead.

A character who examines the doors may make a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. On a success, they discover that the door is very slightly ajar, just enough to fit a crowbar or another small tool into the gap.

Attempting to force open the massive doors requires 1 minute of work and a successful DC 20 Strength check; creatures making the check without a crowbar or similar tool do so with disadvantage. Failure by 5 or more alerts the gnoll gatekeepers inside, giving them time to retrieve the *horn of alarum* and hide behind the statue of Boreas (see Area 3).

3. GRAND GATEHOUSE

Beyond the Sky Palace's enormous threshold is a gatehouse dominated by the towering statue of a winged old man, his long hair and shaggy beard blown in all directions by a wild gale. While the gatehouse and its furnishings are made of the same cloudy stone as the gates, the statue is carved from solid, unmelting ice. A cold wind surrounds the statue. There are doors to the northeast and northwest.

If the PCs infiltrated the palace without alerting the gnolls within (see Area 2), add the following:

Four mangy, hyena-headed humanoids bark and cackle at one another, squabbling over a zebra haunch in front of the statue. On the floor near them is an ivory bugle, forgotten in the scuffle.

The four gnolls in the gatehouse have abandoned their guard duties to fight over rations. Their *horn of alarum* (see next page) has been dropped halfway between the base of the statue and the main gate. The gnolls have a passive Wisdom (Perception) of 5 for the next 2 rounds while they squabble.

Alert. If the gnolls discover the PCs, one scraggly whelp remembers his orders and rushes to grab the *horn of alarum* and blow it (requiring an action) to alert Odjanbago to the intrusion. If the matriarch is alerted to the PCs presence, two **invisible stalkers** uncoil from the icy statue of Boreas and wait until the PCs have let their guard down to ambush the most vulnerable character.

After the *horn* is blown, Odjanbago uses scrolls of sending to alert the gnolls in Areas 4 and 9, and the sand hag in Area 5 to prepare for intruders.

HORN OF ALARUM

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

This ivory horn is decorated with engravings of trumpeting elephants. The horn is designed to be blown by a creature other than the one attuned to it. It produces no sound when blown, but instantly alerts the attuned creature of the direction of the creature that blew the horn as long as that creature is on the same plane of existence.

4. DINING HALL AND THE SHIPWRECK

This chamber is filled with the wreckage of what was once a lavish dining hall. Dishes of all shapes and sizes litter the room—some human-sized, others the size of humans! The devastation seems to have been caused by the single-masted ship that smashed through the chamber's walls. The wrecked ship takes up most of the room, and its hull is torn open. The sound of cackling gnolls echoes from inside the ship, and you see a trio of gnolls outside the ship, tossing around a metal leg. You can see the sandstorm raging outside the smashed walls, but it does not enter inside the palace walls.

About a week ago, a wooden ship named the *Reddenwick* was caught in the Sky Palace's sphere of wind and plucked from the Western Ocean. The vessel smashed into the walls of the dining hall and is now lodged here with its belly torn open. Three gnoll **berserkers** are playing a game of toss-and-catch with a dismembered gearforged leg outside the ship.

Inside the *Reddenwick* are four gnolls, three **bandit captains** led by a musclebound **gladiator** named Gurzinbago, the Archthieves' second-in-command and prideful sister of matriarch Odjanbago. Gurzinbago wields a *+1 flail*. The gnolls are in the main hold of the ship, searching through the cargo and filling their pockets with gold taken from the slaughtered crew. Baron Raúl Cazagoza's stolen white camel is inside this ship (see "Aechatta," below), and the gnolls are here to return it to Odjanbago. Eight human corpses can be found throughout the ship, plus the legless body of a gearforged named Aechatta.

Aechatta. This air elemental gearforged **veteran** was the leader of the first adventuring party hired to reclaim Baron Cazagoza's prized camel and captain of the *Reddenwick*. His legs were torn off by the Archthieves when they slaughtered his crew, and he has been feigning death ever since. If the gnolls are killed or otherwise eliminated, he stops feigning death and tries to get the party to help him: he accepted Cazagoza's offer to rescue the camel for an ulterior reason. Aechatta is an elemental gearforged—an air elemental spirit unwillingly bound to a mechanical body. He seeks the djinni Leyla, fabled master of the Palace of the Wind Lords, in the hopes she can return his spirit to the Plane of Air. Without his legs, he can do little to help, but he begs dearly for the PCs' aid.

Treasure. The gnolls are laden with loot: 150 gp in coins and semiprecious gems.

5. GARDEN OF SALT AND STONE

A cloud of whirling sand engulfs this open courtyard. Through the sandstorm, you catch a glimpse of three tall standing stones in the southeast. The wind whistles through holes in the stones, and they sing a quiet, despairing melody.

If the *horn* was blown:

You briefly see the delicate figure of a young woman chained between the standing stones. She turns to face you and you briefly see her tear-streaked face before she is engulfed by the sands.

If the *horn of alarum* was not blown:

You see a cloaked figure with wispy white hair in the east of the room. It turns toward you and you can just barely see its withered face before it vanishes into the sandstorm.

This aged creature is a vile **sand hag** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 245) named Mambinn. If the *horn of alarum* alerted Odjanbago, then the hag already disguised herself as the djinni Leyla, bound in chains by her wrists and ankles to three standing stones. If not, she assumes her disguise as soon as the sandstorm conceals her, appearing as a beautiful woman with icy blue skin barely visible through her spiral-patterned headscarf.

The open-air garden was once green and filled with tall cedar trees, sweet myrrh, and flowering saffron. Since Leyla's capture, it has become a sand-blasted plain of worn stones and withered plants. The sandstorm here restricts visibility to 30 feet to creatures without blindsight or truesight in addition to its other effects. In the west of the room is Leyla's boudoir, but a sizeable chasm was created near the bedroom when the *Reddenwick* crashed into the palace. A creature who unwittingly steps into the chasm must make a DC 20 Dexterity saving throw or fall 100 feet to the water below.

Mambinn's Deception. The sand hag Mambinn joined the Archthieves for the chance to spread chaos and misery on a massive scale, and her approach to intruders is no different. Pretending to be the benevolent Leyla, she promises to grant her rescuers three wishes each if they free her from her enchanted chains. She claims the "magical key" is in her boudoir, lying through false tears. She urges the PCs to watch out for the crevasse between her and the bedroom, but uses a "shape earth" spell to close it up—in reality a *major image* designed to look like part of the crevasse is closed up.

Mambinn's chains are a *major image* as well. Trying to break them or unlock them with the key from the boudoir instantly reveals the deception. When found out, Mambinn calls six **anubians** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 113) from the sand while she uses *invisibility* and flees, hoping to ambush the PCs in another room of the GM's choice.



6. LEYLA'S BOUDOIR

The djinni's boudoir has all the trappings of a lavish bedroom, but all the beautiful portraits, quilted bedsheets, and silk nightgowns are ragged and torn. Despite the squalor, the walls shine with all colors of the rainbow, glinting as the light shifts. A DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check on the walls reveals that the mirror-like walls are actually coated with motionless prismatic beetles. A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a silver key hidden stabbed into a shredded portrait of Leyla. Touching the key causes the entire room to explode in a flurry of wings and flashing light as four **prismatic beetle swarms** surge from the walls to devour the nearest living creature.

Treasure. Looting Leyla's chamber yields four sapphires each worth 100 gp and one ethereal robe that glows like silver, moonlit fog. It is nonmagical, but worth 1,000 gp.

7. PILLARS OF SALT

The still stagnant air here tastes of salt. Even the roaring wind outside sounds muted and distant. In the northeast is a fifty-foot-tall ice statue of Boreas, looming imperiously over two dozen perfectly-white petrified worshipers.

Two **salt devils** (*Tome of Beasts*) lurk at the base of the statue. They are bound to follow Odjanbago's orders; if the *horn of alarum* was blown previously, the gnoll matriarch ordered these devils to kill all non-gnoll intruders. If the *horn* was not blown, they cannot attack unless the PCs strike first. They sarcastically mock the PCs, hoping to goad them into violence.

Worshipers. At the height of Boreas's power, he commanded a cult of thousands. The two dozen petrified worshipers here were transformed into pillars of salt, smote in the midst of prayer by a higher power when Boreas departed for the Northlands. A pillar disintegrates into fine grains when touched and the creature that touched it is cursed by a *bestow curse* effect of the GM's choice.

Grand Door. The ornate stone doorway to the throne room (Area 10) can only be opened by a powerful gust of wind, such as the *gust of wind* spell or an attack from the *blade of the south wind* in Area 7.

8. HOUSE OF MYSTIC CRYSTAL

Your skin tingles with the ineffable sensation of magic. A twenty-foot-tall, sky blue crystal hums with energy in the center of the room, its surface crawling with turquoise insects. In its center floats the silver hilt of a sword with no blade. Several bookshelves have been forcefully knocked to the ground and dozens of books and scrolls are strewn across the sandy floor. Three colorful carpets lay rolled up tightly in the southeast of the room.

The insects crawling on the storm crystal are three **manabane scarab swarms** (*Tome of Beasts*, page 374) that

feed on the crystal's magic. Inside is the hilt of a *blade of the south wind* (see below). The crystal weighs 4,000 lbs., has AC 5, 100 hit points, and has immunity to all damage except bludgeoning damage from magical attacks.

Magic Carpets. The three rugs in the southeast of the room seem to be *carpets of flying* when identified, but are actually *rugs of smothering* that envelope any would-be fliers.

BLADE OF THE SOUTH WIND

Weapon (greatsword), very rare (requires attunement)

This silver hilt has no blade, and deals 1d4 bludgeoning damage. An attuned wielder can speak the command word to summon a greatsword-sized blade of wind. The sword has a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls and is light enough to be wielded in one hand. The blade can be summoned and dispelled as a bonus action. As an action, you can expand the blade into a *gust of wind*. You cannot use this ability again until next dawn.

9. ARCHTHIEF BARRACKS

This barracks is thick with the scent of blood, carrion, and wet fur. Seven hastily-constructed wooden bunks line one of the walls. The floor is strewn with gnawed bones, and a group of armored gnolls are batting them around like toys.

This structure is divided into two rooms—Areas 8 and 9. If a battle takes place in one room, the occupants of the other hear it.

Twelve **gnolls** and two gnoll **knights** make these barracks their home and are so fearful of their matriarch that they never leave unless ordered. At any given time, seven are awake and playing, gambling, or fighting. The other half are in their bunks and awaken if combat breaks out in Area 8 or 9 or if the *horn of alarum* was blown within the past hour.

Treasure. Beneath each of the seven bunks is a small footlocker containing 3d6 gp and a *potion of greater healing*.

10. WINDBORNE ARMORY

The distinctive scent of myrrh and patchouli invades your nostrils when you open the door. A single talisman-draped gnoll sits cross-legged amidst a heap of swords and daggers, a smoking censer in his lap. Around the gnoll stand racks of spears and blades and suits of metal and hide armor.

This structure is divided into two rooms—Areas 8 and 9. If a battle takes place in one room, the occupants of the other hear it.

This gnoll **cult fanatic** has an AC of 16, has 66 hit points, and has an additional +1 bonus to all saving throws. Smoke emanates from his *censer of controlling air elementals*, which has the following additional property:

If you spend your action concentrating on the censer, you can animate up to 5 unattended weapons as **flying swords** which act on your initiative. If you do not spend

your action concentrating, the weapons fall inert at the end of your turn.

Treasure. The gnoll wears +1 studded leather and a ring of protection, and possesses an unconventional censer of controlling air elementals.

11. THRONE OF THE ARCHTHIEF

A throne fit for a god towers before you. A mortal-sized staircase leads to the seat of the throne and a smaller throne has been constructed on the seat of the larger. On this throne sits a gnoll of incredible size—nearly ten feet tall—covered in scars, war paint, and ruby beads. In her lap is an orb of sky blue crystal.

If the PCs enter without stealth or are detected:

The gnoll stands, still holding the crystal orb, and howls with laughter. “E’ cannit believe yer still alivin!” she shrieks gleefully. “Your eyes see Odjanbago, Archthief! Tha master a’ tha djinni’s crystal! Ya grovel, now!”

Odjanbago (a gnoll **mage**) lusts for domination. Even false groveling appeases her and makes her willing to negotiate. Conversely, any hesitance or opposition from the PCs instantly drives her to anger. She holds the crystal aloft and uses her action to bark, “Djinni. Last wish. Give your life to kill tha intruders.”

A deep crack appears on the side of the crystal, and a cloud of **rotting wind** seeps out of the crystal as the captured djinni Leyla begins to die. Every 2 rounds on

initiative count 20, another rotting wind emerges from the crystal. After the third rotting wind is created, the crystal shatters and Leyla dies. Only touching the crystal—becoming its new master—and wishing to save the djinni’s life can save her.

CONCLUSION

If Leyla is saved, she grants the PCs three wishes (total), though one wish was already used to save her life. (She apologizes, but “it’s an Unbreakable Law.”) She begs them also to set her free so that she can return the Sky Palace to its former glory, potentially leaving only a single wish left for altruistic PCs. If the PCs spend their last wish on freeing Aechatta as well, Leyla is stunned by their selflessness and offers to serve them willingly for a year and a day. Leyla’s power has been diminished by her recent brush with death, and must turn down unreasonable wishes the GM considers beyond her power.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE.

If the PCs want to claim the Sky Palace itself as their prize, they must spend one of their wishes to give one character mental control over the palace, just as Odjanbago did. If the PCs intend on returning Baron Raúl Cazagoza’s prized white camel, it may just be an albino beast. On the other hand, what would happen on the return journey were the camel truly imbued with supernatural power?



HASS



THE UNDYING TOURNAMENT

An adventure for five 8th-level PCs set in a subterranean city of the ghouls

by James J. Haeck

GM INTRODUCTION

Within the darakhul city of Gonderif, at the nadir of a thousand-foot-deep chasm, is the site of a vile tournament where Gonderif's most rebellious slaves and war prisoners are forced to fight to the death—and through undeath after undeath—until only one living champion remains. Whether they came as captives or as liberators, the PCs must survive the Undying Tournament.

SUMMARY

The slaves of Gonderif outnumber their ghoulish masters ten-to-one. Any slave brave enough to try and lead a rebellion is sent to the Undying Tournament, where they are “mercifully” promised freedom from slavery if they are the last prisoner standing. No one trusts this promise, but the insidious seed of hope has been planted in their hearts—there is a chance at freedom.

Depending on how PCs come to Gonderif's slave pits, they may or may not be forced to fight in the Undying Tournament; if they avoid detection, the tournament may not occur at all. Slaves and captives of many different races exist in the pits, and clever PCs may be able to overcome the racial tensions between the factions and unify a revolt against their undead jailers.

MONSTERS

The other imprisoned slaves use NPC statblocks; these creatures also have the following traits:

- They have 3 levels of exhaustion, giving them disadvantage on ability checks, halving movement speed, and imposing disadvantage on attack rolls and saving throws.
- They have no weapons or armor; their AC is equal to 10 + their Dexterity modifier.

FACTIONS

Gonderif contains a few factions with their own interests, requiring only a little pressure to come to blows beyond what is intended for bloodsport.

Corpse Tearers

Both Gonderif and the Undying Tournament grounds are protected by the Corpse Tearers, one of the darakhul

Imperial Legions. The Corpse Tearers have a reputation for being easily incensed, and gained their name because of the frequent honor duels between members of the legion. PCs looking to distract legion forces in Gonderif could try to incite chaos among their ranks. All **darakhul** in this adventure belong to the legion and wear mithral scale mail.

Slaves

The tournament grounds are home to 9 of Gonderif's most headstrong, rebellious slaves. PCs will probably not become close with all of them, and you should choose several that interest you as a GM to promote up from “extra” status. All are bound by rare spellbinding shackles (see Area 1).

- **Alejandra**, *chaotic good* human. A grandmother, ex-field sergeant, and **mage**, Alejandra just wants to see her family in Zobeck again. She is terrified of Vordu and refuses to fight with him.
- **Khadamar**, *lawful neutral* mountain dwarf. A young adult, Khadamar is Deskorma's brother and **noble** heir to a small canton in the Ironcrag. He always pursued human-style diplomacy over traditional dwarven combat, and is willing to work with anyone to escape.
- **Deskorma**, *neutral evil* mountain dwarf. Khadamar's younger sister, a seasoned and power-hungry **gladiator** who is next in line for the throne and wants to see her brother fall in the tournament. Deskorma wishes for the tournament to go on, and aids no escape plans unless she convinces a PC to kill her brother.
- **Vordu**, *chaotic evil* derro. A wild-eyed, truly insane **assassin** who wants nothing more than to see the darakhul burn. If the PCs help him escape, he buries a dagger in their backs as a parting gift. Tries to speak in limericks, but isn't very good at it. He sees Temmy as a rat to be kicked around.
- **Temmy**, *lawful good* kobold. A **commoner**, but an expert trapsmith, even when using mundane materials in poor conditions. She cheerfully works with anyone but the dwarves; to her, they are almost as bad as the darakhul.

Calmed Slaves

Of the 625 slaves in Gonderif, about half of them have undergone a procedure called the Calming. A calmed slave is murdered as cleanly as possible—without damaging



muscle or bone—and reanimated as a mindless, obedient undead. To the darakhul, calmed slaves are generally preferable to living ones, but they are costly to create and decay prohibitively quickly unless properly preserved. The wealthy Duke Radu Kopecs, lord of Gonderif, uses calmed slaves as laborers and janitors for the Undying Tournament. PCs that disguise themselves as darakhul can fool the undead thralls into performing tasks for them.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

As your players' GM, you know best how to involve the PCs in this adventure. The following adventure hooks are provided to inspire and assist you.

- **Escape.** The PCs are captives of the Ghoulish Imperium, and have been sentenced to fight to the death in the Undying Tournament. As 8th-level characters, they were likely captured as prisoners of war, either from a surface raid or because they were captured attacking a darakhul outpost. If you choose this adventure hook, the PCs awaken in chains in Area 1, stripped of their gear (see Area 5).



- **Rescue.** A friend or ally has been captured by the Imperium. The PCs learn through divinations or reconnaissance that their friend has resisted the ghouls at every turn, and has been sentenced to fight to the death in the Undying Tournament in Gonderif. The same intelligence that delivered this news also tells of a secret aboveground entrance into the tournament grounds. If you choose this adventure hook, the PCs make their way into the tunnels that lead into Area 10.
- **Revolution.** The Imperium must fall! Striking at Gonderif will cripple its production of weapons and armor, hamstringing the Imperial Legions. With the Corpse Tearer legion protecting the city, a direct assault is ill-advised, but an intelligence report states that Duke Radu Kopecs, lord of Gonderif, is attending an event called the Undying Tournament. Assassinating him will likely incite a revolution among the slaves and send the city into chaos. If you choose this adventure hook, the PCs make their way into the tunnels that lead into Area 10.

All areas within this location are completely dark, unless illuminated by another source.

Total Party Kill. If the PCs are all reduced to 0 hit points during an escape attempt, they are not killed outright. Instead, they are knocked unconscious and returned to their cells. When they awaken (at 1 hit point) they have time for one short rest before the tournament begins.

Undying Tournament. The tournament begins 6 hours after the start of the adventure, if an escape attempt has not been made. Three loud blasts of a horn heralds the arrival of Duke Radu Kopecs and his retainers, as four dozen ghouls spill into the coliseum (Area 10). At this signal, six darakhul (see *Tome of Beasts*, page 216) enter the PCs' cellblock and usher them into the Staging Area (Area 7), where they are prepared for combat.

The rules of the tournament are explained to them: In the first round, each character is pitted against a wild beast in single combat. In the second round, the survivors fight one-on-one until only half remain. The final round is a free for all, with the last creature standing declared the victor. Magic is not permitted in the tournament, as enforced by each combatant's *spellbinding shackles* (see Area 1).

The ghouls do not reveal everything about their cruel sport to the victims, however. For more information, see *Running the Tournament*, in Area 10.

1. SOUTHERN CELL BLOCK

Slate gray walls. Cramped, iron-barred cells. The pervasive smell of urine mixed with corpse rot. And an incessant dripping sound from somewhere just out of sight. If you didn't know better, you might think this cell block is one of the Eleven Hells.

If the PCs were captured by the darakhul before the events of this adventure, they awaken here locked in separate cells without any of their equipment. Their

equipment is stored in a chest in Area 5. They are restrained by rare *spellbinding shackles* (see below). Any cells not occupied by PCs contain captive NPCs of the GM's choice (see "Factions," above).

Despite being coated in mildew and dried gore, the cells are sturdy, requiring a successful DC 30 Strength or Dexterity check to open (each check takes 10 minutes). A patrol of two **darakhul** (see *Tome of Beasts*, page 216) from Area 5 passes through this cell block once every two hours, alerting the rest of the guards if the prisoners have escaped either their cells or the block.

Doors. Both doors in this room have a complex internal lock, requiring a key held by the Masked Warden (Area 6), or a DC 30 Strength or Dexterity check to open.

SPELLBINDING SHACKLES

Wondrous item, varies

While bound by these mithral shackles, you cannot cast spells below a certain level. The spell level, along with the Strength DC required to break the manacles or Dexterity DC required to pick the lock is determined by the item's rarity, as shown on the table. The chain binding the manacles can be broken or removed without ending this item's enchantment; only breaking the manacles themselves ends the anti-magic effect.

Rarity	Spell Level	Escape DC
Rare	3rd or lower	20
Very Rare	5th or lower	25
Legendary	7th or lower	30

2. CROSS HALLS

This hall echoes all hours of the day with screams from the torture chamber to the west, only ceasing when the Undying Tournament is in progress. The noise masks any violence perpetrated here. The east and west doors are unlocked, but the north and south doors require a DC 30 Strength or Dexterity check to unlock.

3. TORTURE CHAMBER

This is a room of suffering, filled with implements of torture designed to strip a being of its willpower. The screams of one poor prisoner, stretched out on a rack and struck repeatedly by a ghoul's lash, ring through the room. Their wails seem to shake the foundation of the room, rattling chains and causing iron maidens to shudder. The three ghouls gleefully torturing this prisoner do not notice your entrance.

One NPC of the GM's choice (see "Factions," above) is stretched on a rack, being whipped by three snarling **darakhul**. Four **ghouls** hang by thumbscrews in the north of the room—the reanimated remains of fatally tortured prisoners. They tear out the screws and attack when commanded.

Treasure. An iron pot filled with liquid gold bubbles over an open fire against the western wall. The gold inside is worth 100 gp.

4. NORTHERN CELL BLOCK

This dingy cell block is cramped and filled with slaves—most of whom are already corpses. One living prisoner glances fearfully at you as you open the door, but its expression changes from one of fear to one of confusion when it realize that you aren't a ghoul at all!

The cells in this block are populated by any NPCs the PCs have not yet met (see "Factions," above). Any empty cells contain the rotting carcasses of the tournament's previous victims. Despite being coated in mildew and dried gore, the cells are sturdy, requiring a successful DC 30 Strength or Dexterity check to open (each check takes 10 minutes).

A patrol of two **darakhul** from Area 5 passes through this cell block once every hour, alerting the rest of the guards if the prisoners have escaped either their cells or the block.

5. MONITOR HALL

This guard post is brimming with armed ghouls. Over a dozen darakhul prison guards are sparring, gambling, and telling gruesome stories, while a handful of other ghouls are keeping the room clean and fetching items for the guards. Several ghouls sit around a table; one is scribbling notes inside a hefty ledger.

If the PCs began as prisoners, read:


Another ghoul is trying on armor and weapons that have been haphazardly thrown into a rusty chest—your stolen equipment!

This guard post is the center of Corpse Tearer activity in the slave pit. At any given time, 5 **darakhul** and 10 **ghasts** (about half the total garrison) are drilling, sleeping, or killing time here. They see this tournament as a gross excess and would rather be defending Gonderif itself. The other half of the guards are patrolling the grounds, keeping watch in the Sentinel Tower (Area 6), or watching an animal fight in the coliseum (Area 10). If combat erupts here, one ghoul rushes to Area 6 to alert the warden.

The guards here are tended to by a small staff of calmed slaves (see "Factions," above). These 4 brain-dead **ghouls** tend to their undead masters' every whim, as long as the commands are simple enough for them to comprehend. Any slave that has undergone the calming is conditioned to recognize all undead creatures and anyone who wears the Corpse Tearers' uniform as a master.

Ledger. A ledger on the table assigns certain slaves to fight certain animals in the first round of the tournament. The list reads:

- Old human – Tiger
- Dwarf male – Giant Boar
- Dwarf female – Elephant
- Derro male – Winter Wolf
- Dragon runt – Lion
- New arrivals – Wyvern



Treasure. If the PCs began this adventure as prisoners, then their equipment is stored in a rusty, unlocked chest in a corner of this room. The chest also contains an additional 3,000 gold in tribute given to the legion. A rack of vials on the table also contains 5 *potions of greater healing* and 3 *potions of greater restoration*.

6. SENTINEL TOWER

A winding staircase climbs five stories to the top of this tower. You ascend the staircase to the top, but the pervasive smell of the undead still lingers here. Two ghouls look out over the edge of the tower, unaware of you, using large glass lamps to cast a beams of ghostly green light into the prison yard. A golden font filled with tiny bones rests on a pedestal in the center of the tower.

This 50-foot-tall tower has a clear view of everything within the slave pit, save for the inside of the prison itself. A spiraling staircase leading to the top takes up most of the tower; no landings exist between the ground floor and the top. At all times, 4 **will-o'-wisps** shimmer at the corners of the tower. Instead of shining light in a radius, the wisps shine a 40-foot-long beam of light that is 5 feet wide, with an additional 40 feet of dim light beyond that. These wisps are trapped in enchanted glass and cannot move or take the attack action. The 2 **darakhul** atop this tower cannot see beyond 60 feet with their darkvision, and must have these “searchlights” to scan the grounds.

In the center of the tower is a golden font emblazoned with the frightful crest of the Ghoul Imperium. Inside the font is a small heap of tiny bones and platinum-plated teeth. This **bone collective** (see *Tome of Beasts*, page 39) is the Masked Warden, the sadistic hive mind behind the Undying Tournament and keeper of the slave pit. She usually exists as a swarm of bones and teeth, and only takes singular form if intruders enter her tower, the alarm is raised, the tournament begins, or she decides to personally torture one of the imprisoned slaves (Area 3). In this singular form, the Warden drapes her humanoid frame in a shadowy cloak and hides behind a bone-white mask.

Treasure. The golden font holding the Warden’s bones is worth 1,500 gold, and her platinum-plated fangs are worth 100 gold each (3,200 gold total). A single master key rests beneath her remains; this key opens all locks within the complex.

Levers. Two levers on the east and west of the tower open the portcullis in Area 7 and the northern door in Area 10, respectively.

7. COLISEUM STAGING AREA

Eerie green light flickers across the walls of this cave, cast by globes of light that dance around the cavern. The walls of the cave are lined with suits of armor and racks of gladiatorial weapons. At the far end, a heavy portcullis bars the passage between you and the coliseum.

This small cave is wedged between the prison and the coliseum, and is dimly lit by ghostly *dancing lights*. The light glints ominously on the bare steel of the armor and weapons that line the cave walls. The weapons’ handles are caked with dried blood from dozens, if not hundreds of contestants that died holding them in tournaments past.

Portcullis. This portcullis can only be opened by pulling a lever in Area 6. Its bars are wide enough for a Tiny creature to fit through, and requires a DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check to climb.

Armament. The selection of weapons and armor here is limited, but not excessively so. All simple weapons can be found here, and there is a 75% chance a specific martial weapon can be found as well. There are twelve sets of nets and tridents, as well as ten gladii (short swords). All forms of light armor can be found here, and there is a 75% chance a specific set of medium armor can be found as well. There is one set of plate armor.

Tournament. If the PCs are brought here to prepare for the Undying Tournament, their darakhul captors do not enter the chamber, but lock the door behind them. The PCs are the first to arrive, followed by any NPCs that were in their cell block, then NPCs in the Northern Cell Block (Area 4). Whatever resolve those NPCs had falters here, and emotions run high. Vordu the insane derro assassin may try to eliminate the competition early by murdering one of the PCs here. The chains on the characters’ *spellbinding shackles* are removed, though the manacles still inhibit spellcasting.

8. ANIMAL PENS

If the foul stench of death weren’t enough, this wide pen smells also of decaying animal fur. A strange herd of assorted animals shambles around this enclosure.

These pens hold wild animals used in the first round of the Undying Tournament. All of these animals are zombies, granting them the Undead type, immunity to poison damage and the poisoned condition, and the Undead Fortitude trait (as a **zombie**).

The zombified animals here include an **elephant**, a **giant boar**, a **tiger**, a **lion**, a **winter wolf**, and a **wyvern**. They hunger only for living flesh and attack any living creatures that enter their pen.

Treasure. There is no treasure in this pen, but eliminating some or all of the animals in secret before the Undying Tournament may allow some characters to survive the first round of the tournament.

9. LIFT

This circular platform is wide enough to hold about ten people in close quarters, and its stone surface has been worn smooth through countless years of use. It is attached by stone gears to tracks running up the length of this shaft.

The lift is a circular platform connected to an old piece of derro engineering from Gonderif's glory days. Pulling a lever on the platform causes it to rapidly ascend towards the city above, reaching the city in about 30 seconds.

10. COLISEUM

Secret. A small rocky outcropping in the southeast corner of the arena conceals a secret passageway to the surface, made by the only prisoner ever to escape Gonderif. If the PCs infiltrated the slave pit, they begin inside this tunnel.

The sand in this wide arena is spattered with dried gore. Gray stone juts out of the sand in places, and the rocky ridge surrounding the arena has been crudely carved into benches for spectators.

If the tournament is in progress, also read:

On the benches you see two cheering masses; to the south, a group of ragged, emaciated ghouls. This event may well be the only joy in their wretched existence. To the north you see a regal ghoul dressed in verdant finery, wielding a golden scepter, and holding a golden bowl. He is protected by an armed bodyguard.

Running the Tournament. The Undying Tournament is split into three rounds, with enough time between rounds for the PCs to take a short rest:

In the first round, each PC and NPC faces an undead animal from Area 9 in single combat. The animals faced by the NPCs are described on the ledger in Area 5, with the PCs names left blank. The ledger can be sabotaged, but as written has Alejandra face a **tiger**, Khadamar a **boar**, Deskorma an **elephant**, Vordu a **winter wolf**, and Temmy a **lion**. The PCs are to fight against a **wyvern** together as a special event. Following a battle, all corpses are left in the arena.

In the second round, the survivors fight to the death. Try and pair as few PCs together as possible; ideally, no more than one pair of PCs must fight. All corpses are left in the arena.

In the third round, the remaining combatants fight in a free-for-all. There is a twist, however: after 3 rounds, a wave of necromantic energy sweeps through the arena, reanimating all humanoids who have died so far as **ghasts**. They attack the nearest living creature.

The last surviving creature is congratulated, then personally slain by Duke Kopecs, "freeing" them from an eternity of undead servitude.

10A. DUKE'S SEAT

The highest and best-protected seats are reserved for darakhul nobility, with a special seat reserved for Duke Radu Kopecs, a darakhul **noble**. When the tournament is in session, the duke is flanked by a **darakhul** bodyguard that can use its reaction to become the target of one ranged attack targeting the duke. If the Masked Warden (a **bone collective**) is still alive, her golden font rests beside the duke. They are tended by four calmed **ghouls**.

10B. BEGGARS' SEATS

Dozens of pathetic **beggar ghouls** (see *Tome of Beasts*, page 213) fill the cheap seats. They are an excitable mass and are easily swayed by displays of power. Most of these ghouls are laborers treated barely better than living slaves, and would leap on the opportunity to seize power from their duke if both the Masked Warden and the duke's bodyguard suddenly fall under attack.

CONCLUSION

The Undying Tournament can be a standalone adventure or the beginning of a high-level war or espionage campaign with the Ghoul Imperium as major villains. NPCs like Alejandra or the dwarf nobles may be powerful allies if the adventurers return to Zobeck or the Ironcrag cantons.

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE.

If the PCs did not discover the secret exit out of the slave pit, and instead rode the lift into Gonderif, their escape may have only just begun. Consider using the Ghoul Outpost lair from the *Book of Lairs* to represent their escape from the Flesh Tearer legion through the mining tunnels of Gonderif.



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