

# DUNGEON

## GAUNTLET Edition

No. 36



10 GAUNTLET ADVENTURES  
HIGH RESOLUTION MAPS  
VTT - ROLL20 MAPS

Designed for use with

# ShadowDark RPG



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# WELCOME TO THE GAUNTLET!



his edition of Dungeon Vault Magazine focuses on gauntlet adventures. A gauntlet (or funnel) is a one-shot adventure where each player controls at least four level-0 characters. These are NOT adventurers. They are not scoundrels looking for glory or apprentice mages seeking knowledge. They are well, peasants. Normal people from farming settlements and small cities. One may be a baker, another a farmer, a very lucky one, like a guard or soldier, might even have some combat training. Alas, all of them are fragile and may not survive for long in the Shadowdark.

Nevertheless, because of extreme necessity, curiosity, helping their loved ones, or sheer foolishness, these village folk seek to change their stars. They stand by the entrance of a dungeon; about to step into uncharted territory, most likely, the place of their deaths.



## GETTING STARTED

FOR A GAUNTLET adventure, each player rolls 4 random characters or more. They are fragile and are not expected to survive for long. Level-0 characters are found on Shadowdark page 14 but they are as follows:

***Beginner's Luck.*** They can wield any gear or use any magical item without restriction until 1st level.

***Creation.*** Level-0 characters gain access to Stats, Ancestry, hit points equal to CON modifier, Background, Alignment, and starting gear (randomized).

***Advancement.*** Upon surviving their first adventure any remaining level-0 characters reach 1st level.

# CRYPT OF ENDLESS AGONY

Oh, there's treasure in the crypt. Enough to change the fate of anyone who gets it. Are you brave enough to seek glory and fame? Or are you weak?

Brett, the Collector

**F**ew places are feared more than the crypt of King Agmenon, commonly known as the Crypt of Endless Agony. Legend has it that King Agmenon was a despicable warlord in life. His greed for conquest was such that he spread his army too thin across his territories. Ultimately, this spelled his demise as a coalition of kingdoms confronted his spread-out battalions and destroyed them one by one. Before the capital was stormed, King Agmenon turned to his must-trusted advisor, Brett, the mage.

The mage promised immortality to King Agmenon. Desperate, the king accepted. However, Brett betrayed him and bound his spirit to the crypt's throne. Brett is a doomed necromancer that became immortal at a ruinous cost too; all so that he could inflict his vendetta on the king. When the capital was taken, King Agmenon was nowhere to be found. When they tried to plunder the king's crypt, they were driven away by undead guardians and the ghost of the king himself. The place was abandoned and forgotten. What remains are cautionary tales and a promise of great treasure. The crypt has not yet been plundered. The crypt's door is synced with the stars and opens twice a year. It opens during the equinoxes.

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

**Seeking Change.** A group of peasants gathers by the hearth in the packed tavern. The legend of King Agmenon's crypt is known, as well as the days when it opens. The crypt's door is expected to open tomorrow night. It has been so long since anyone attempted to visit the place that some believe that whatever dangers lurked within have long vanished or become broken. The promise of life-changing wealth and fame causes people's eyes to glimmer in the warm light of the tavern hearth.

**The Collector.** A mysterious figure has come to town. He calls himself Brett and speaks in a strange, old-fashioned dialect. Brett claims to carry a key to King Agmenon's vault; one he tracked down for years. He offers a share of the treasure to brave peasants seeking to change their lives forever. Unbeknownst to all, this is the same person who once aided King Agmenon to become eternal. Brett, the Collector, brings hapless people to the crypt from time to time to siphon their souls to power the arcane wards that have protected the crypt for ages.

## Level 0 Gauntlet

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas have braziers with permanent *light* spells; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Aura of Decay.** Once per hour, a random item carried by the party becomes rotten, rusted, or crumbles to dust.

## RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	One <b>zombie</b> approaches the party and attacks. The undead monster wears tattered pieces of armor.
2	Four <b>peasants</b> carrying torches and shovels approach. They were brought by Brett, who promptly disappeared.
3	King Agmenon's voice says: "Ah! You've come, finally. It's been so long since anyone came by. Hurry to my throne room. You must aid me and shall be rewarded."
4	Three <b>goblins</b> aware of the legends came to seek treasure. They are unsure about the party ( <b>Reaction</b> roll).
5	A strong wind current blows through the caverns, snuffing out fires and any uncovered light sources.
6	The outline of a pressure plate obstructs passage, if triggered, an axe swings down. It deals 1d6 damage unless the target jumps out of the way quickly (DC 14 DEX). King Agmenon ( <b>wraith</b> ) momentarily breaks free from the throne, emerges from a nearby wall, and attacks a random character. Unless they react quickly, the wraith uses its Death Touch attack (DC 12 DEX check).
7	
8	All undead abominations in the crypt howl and laugh in a maddening symphony. The noise lasts 1 <b>crawling round</b> .

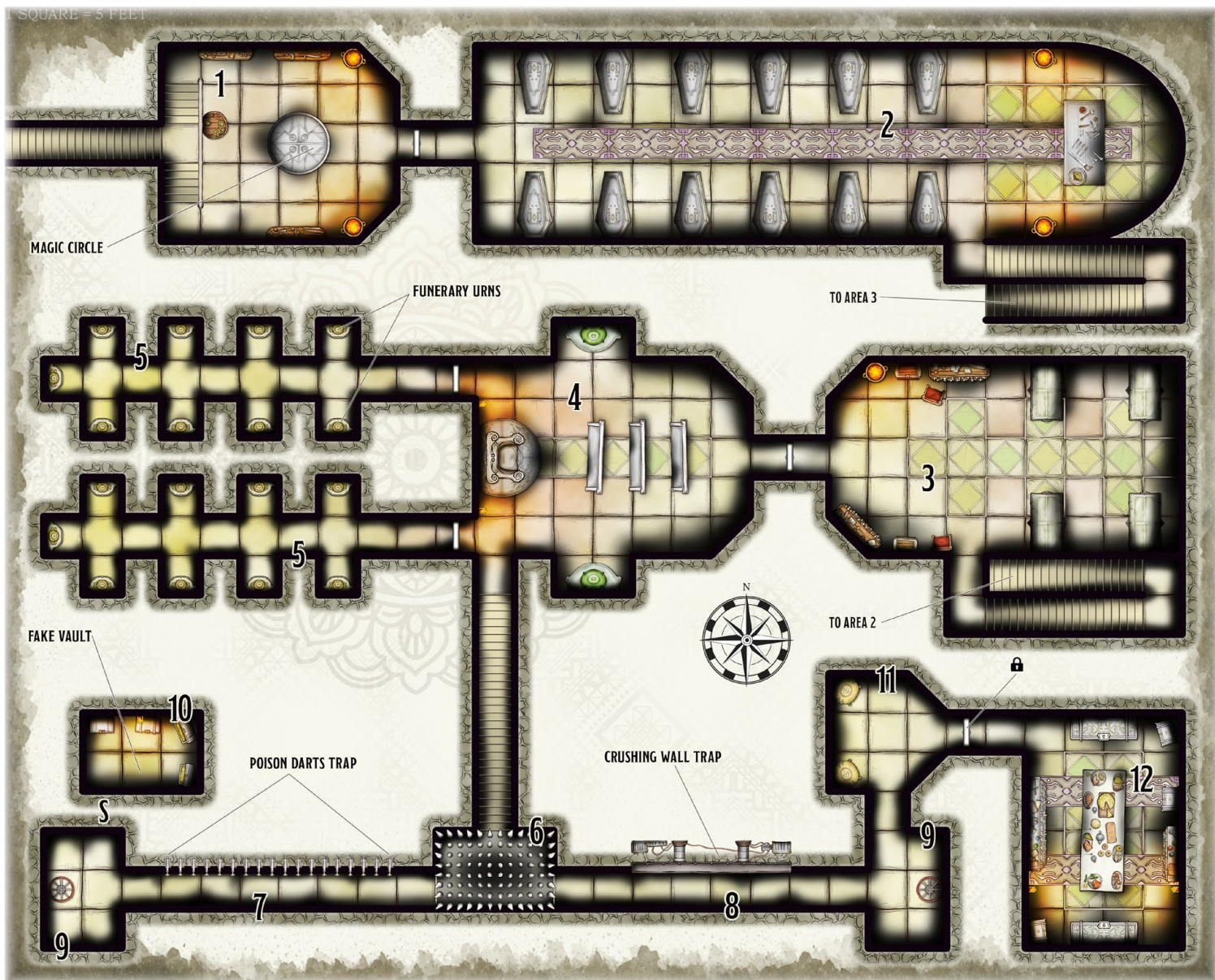
## 1. ENTRANCE HALL

*The equinoctial door-gate descends to a lonely landing. A glowing circle on the floor ebbs with strange energies that flutter above it in the reactive ether.*

The east door is marked with King Agmenon's sigil and these words: "*Stay away, thief of wealth and secrets.*"

► **The Shelves.** Worthless trinkets are spread across three shelves, if searched for 1 **crawling round**, the characters find one oil flask, a bag of caltrops, and 7 sp.

► **The Circle.** The circle runes spell a prayer for Ord, the keeper of secrets (DC 11 INT check). If a character meditates on the circle for 1 **crawling round**, they earn a **luck token** and a one-time use of the *cure wounds* spell.



## 2. GHOULISH DOOM

Twelve ornate sarcophagi flank the way to a warmly-lit altar by the faraway, curved wall. A strange, deafening hum comes from the stone enclosures.

► **The Enclosures.** Each box produces the hum with a different volume. They are a diversion as the only silent sarcophagus contains a **ghoul**. When the party inspects the other boxes, the ghoul emerges (DC 10 WIS). On a fail, the ghoul surprises the intruding characters.

► **The Altar.** The characters find this on the altar: a gem (5 gp), a lantern, two torches, and a *potion of healing*.

## 3. CHAMBER OF GUARDIANS

The sarcophagi are empty. They once held the king's guard remains but an adventurer defeated them.

► **The Bookcases.** The characters can learn of King Agmenon's demise by reading these books. It is also revealed that the mage Brett, made the king an undead spirit and bound him to a throne; a grim betrayal.

## 4. THE AGONIZING KING

The ghostly apparition of a crowned king sits on the throne. It tries to step away but is unable to. The reddish eyes of King Agmenon shine fiercely.

► **The King.** The reasons for Brett's betrayal are lost to history, but King Agmenon (**wraith**) still remains here. The desperate spirit is a dangerous foe but it is bound to the throne and can only attack adjacent characters. As long as they stay away, the characters are safe. The king begs the party to liberate him. He claims there are two valves nearby that can be turned to release him. In exchange for this, King Agmenon offers a map to the location of his legendary blade (see **Development**).

## 5. THE FUNERARY URNS

Two alcove-filled hallways contain eighteen gilded urns with the ashen remains of King Agmenon's royal family. Each of the urns can be sold for 4 sp. Alas, plundering any of the areas causes a single **shadow** to appear. The shadow does not pursue if the urns are left in the crypt.

## 6. THE GRUESOME DESCENT

The stairs next to King Agmenon's throne descend into darkness. If the characters are smart enough to throw a torch down, they see the iron spikes at the bottom. Otherwise, they are clueless about them. When a character steps on the seventh step from the top, all the steps slant downward. It turns the staircase into a downward chute. All creatures currently on the stairs descend rapidly and become impaled unless they grab the walls for dear life (DC 12 DEX check). Those who fall take 1d8 damage.

## 7. THE WALL OF IDOLS

*The north wall of this chamber is packed with strange clay idols of men and animals. All the clay figurines have large, gaping mouths and eye sockets.*

► **The Holes.** Careful inspection of the holes for 1 **crawling round** reveals that some of the eye sockets and mouths feature a clockwork mechanism behind them. A character can disarm the device (DC 12 DEX, disadvantage without tools). Failure triggers the trap (see below).

► **Poison Darts Trap.** A pressure-sensitive tile halfway through triggers a barrage of darts to fly from the countless orifices when pressed. Creatures in the hallway are struck and take 1d4 damage (DC 12 CON check).

## 8. THE CRUSHING WALL

*The north wall of this chamber is made of metal. There is no apparent reason as to why it is different.*

Careful inspection of the hallway for 1 **crawling round** reveals dragging marks on the granite floor and the orifices in the ceiling where the portcullises fall.

► **The Wall Trap.** Crossing the hallway without care causes two grated portcullises on either side to fall; thus blocking off both exits. The wall pushes southward and crushes whoever is here after 2 rounds. A character outside can obstruct the wall's movement with a large object or disarm the mechanism (DC 12 DEX, disadvantage without tools). Whoever stands between the portcullises is crushed to death. The metal wall retracts after but the mechanism requires maintenance before working again.

## 9. THE ARCANES VALVES

Each of the valves is etched with arcane markings. Closing both of them releases King Agmenon from the throne. Such an irresponsible action incurs terrible consequences for the world (see **Development**).

## 10. FAKE VAULT

Pushing a brick button in area 9 (DC 10 WIS) reveals the presence of this chamber. However, what appears to be a treasure-filled room is nothing but a magical illusion.

## 11. THE VAULT DOOR

Darkness coalesces as the mage Brett (**shadow**) appears by the vault's door. His undead existence depends on slaying people here and siphoning their souls. Such is the price he pays for apparent immortality. Defeating him leaves nothing behind except for the main vault key.

## 12. KING AGMENON'S TREASURE HOARD

*A hero's feast and a great treasure await in King Agmenon's vault. The survivors are sure to thrive now!*

The magical feast changes each day and is safe to consume. The food is delicious. The vault contains 120 gp, 260 sp, 1,200 cp, a *potion of healing*, a wizard spellbook, a gilded holy symbol, and a *hat of the hound*.

## DEVELOPMENT

**THE PEASANTS EMERGE** victorious from the crypt. A life of adventure awaits those who survived. The wealth they gained from the crypt shall help them fund their training and acquire the gear needed for a life of adventure. If the characters were fooled by King Agmenon into releasing him. The bygone king's spirit flees the crypt. He is a foul entity that shall wreak havoc upon the world. The king does not forget the characters' help and is true to his word. He leaves a treasure map that leads to his fabled blade. Finding it is an adventure for another day...



# THE DOOR OF AGES

The only thing greater than a man's arrogance is his ambition. Both the leader and the bum shall find their demise when if their dreams surpass their reality.

Old Popular Saying

**A**ges, wizards, and priests are capable of wonderful feats. Even the abilities of a simple apprentice are impressive enough to mesmerize the masses. Thus, becoming a powerful mage user comes with great responsibility. In the wrong hands, the ancient spells' magic, divine or arcane, has the power to change the world as we know it.

But there is something stronger than fire, and more elusive than wind. Time. It cannot be stopped or defeated. Many have tried to understand time better and some few even attempted to travel to the past or the future helped by magic. Some may call their findings "great revelations" but in the end, they all perished in the process and gained nothing. But perhaps not all is lost.

## CADMUS ATHAN'S DOOR

IT WAS ABOUT three months ago when a lightly severe earthquake caused a couple of landslides in the mountain range next to Harrington, a small northern settlement. A cavern's entrance was revealed and a strong magical aura was unleashed. In just two weeks, acolytes, apprentices, adventurers, and whatnot came asking for a certain Cadmus Athan, a door, and great treasures.

It is a small town and gossip travels quickly. Soon, everyone learned the story of Cadmus, a mage of yore who built a door that has the power to take you back or further in time, show you the future, and make you filthy rich. Whoever wants to know more ought to gear up and travel to the recently-unearthed cave entrance.

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

**Opportunity.** The people of Harrington cannot believe their eyes and ears. The foreigners in their home ask about riches and treasures that, as per them, are located nearby. If this Cadmus mage's treasure is real, why should the folk of Harrington leave it all to foreign hands?

**Offer They Can't Refuse.** A mysterious man approaches a group of villagers that gossip about the recent events. The man offers each 5 gp if they can search the cave and retrieve a golden key. (This is more money than any of the peasants have ever had). They can keep anything else they find there. He shall wait for their safe return.

## Level-0 Gauntlet

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every 3 crawling rounds and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas of the dungeon feature braziers with permanent magical fire. The rest of the rooms are bathed in darkness. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

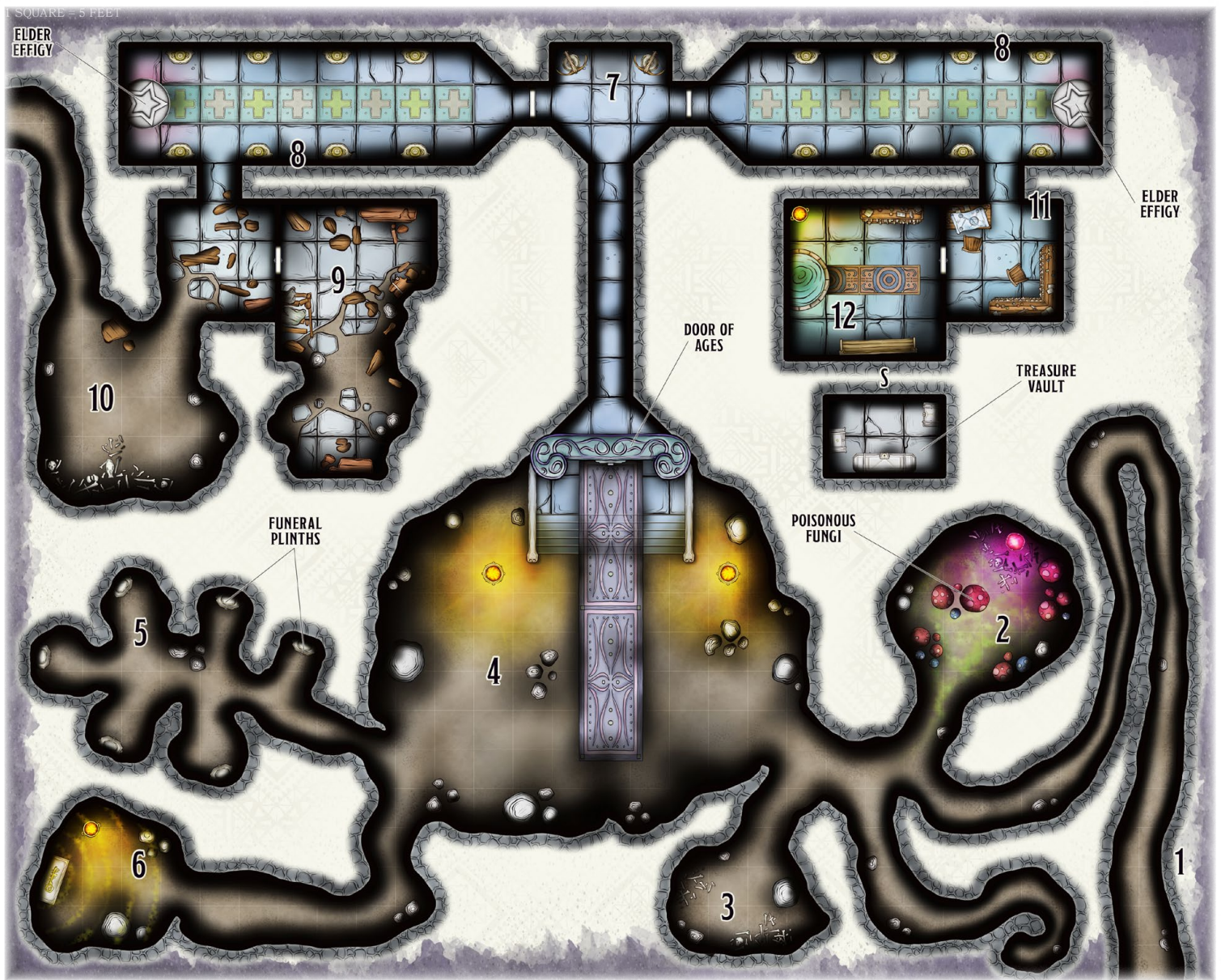
► **Time.** The *Door of Ages* has true power. Beyond the magical threshold, time does not work naturally. The east side of the dungeon (areas 11 and 12) are in a constant shift to the past and the present. Hence, they remain impeccable (see map). On the other hand, areas 9 and 10, the western side of the dungeon, are in the distant future. Cave-ins and the passage of time have destroyed most of these chambers. This magic is beyond the peasants' comprehension. The characters have no means or resources to stop this from happening.

► **Aging.** The characters shall experience the same when they cross either of the corridors (area 8). Their bodies shall age or rejuvenate, depending on which side they walk on (read area 8 for more details).

## RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	An unstable magical orb floats around but approaches no one. If interacted with or touched, victims rejuvenate 2d10 years (DC 11 CON). This may incapacitate them.
2	A 90-year-old man approaches slowly ( <b>Reaction</b> check). He crumbles to the ground and dies after 1d6 rounds.
3	A fine thread lies ahead. If tripped, a boulder falls, dealing 1d8 damage to a random character (DC 11 DEX).
4	Two <b>skeletons</b> come out of their enclosures in area 5. They sense the living flesh of the characters and chase them. The undead monsters fight until slain.
5	The peasants stumble upon an evil <b>knight</b> . The man shall not share the treasure and wants to keep half what the peasants have. He may be swayed ( <b>Reaction</b> check).
6	The characters are struck by a current of magical air. All of them randomly rejuvenate or age 1 year. No save.
7	A strong wind current blows through the caverns and halls, snuffing out fires and any uncovered light sources. A character can protect a single source (DC 12 DEX).
8	The peasants stumble upon a sad and confused 7-year-old girl, Sasha Hills. She claims that she is an explorer and that she is not a child. She begs the group of adults to find a way to help her go back to normal.





## 1. CAVERNS AND TUNNEL

The recent cave-ins revealed a cave in the mountains. And today may be the characters' lucky day, for their journey toward the Door of Ages is calm and uneventful.

► **Vermin.** A **swarm of spiders** attacks intruders. However, the arachnids do not pursue. They stay in the tunnel and bite whoever is fool enough to fight them. The insect swarm flees when reduced to half their hit points, or if a torch is thrown at the swarm's core (thrown torches are destroyed regardless of if they hit or not).

## 2. FUNGI CAVE

A bed of bones litters the far end of this cave. A dangerous kind of fungus grows here. Any interaction with it makes the fungi release lethal gas spores.

► **Poison.** Whoever touches a mushroom triggers the release of spores from all of them. All creatures within area 2 are intoxicated and start coughing blood. They take 1d4 damage (DC 12 CON for half).

## 3. GNAWED BONES

One of the characters may identify the marks on the bones as rat bites (DC 12 WIS). A **swarm of rats** inhabits the walls of this cave and attacks intruders. They flee and hide when reduced to half their hit points.

► **Treasure.** If the rats are scared away, the characters find a backpack with the following items: a shortsword, a rope 60', a crowbar, a mirror, and four torches.

## 4. MAIN CAVERN

*A massive gate blocks the way. A rug embroidered with symmetrical patterns presents the Door of Ages.*

Two braziers flanking the door illuminate the cavern. Roll once for a **Random Event** when the characters reach this area. Roll for a second time if they investigate the *Door of Ages*. The magical gate cannot be opened by ordinary means. The characters fail if they try to open it by force, or by using thieves' tools. The wondrous key located in area 6 is the only means to open it.

## 5. IMMORTAL GUARDIANS

Cadmus did not create this place alone. He had the help of colleagues and close friends. Obsessed with his work and objectives, he did not care when some of them lost their lives to his cause. And he did not bother to return the bodies to their families. Instead, Cadmus created immortal guardians with the corpses of his former friends.

Each plinth contains the bones, remains, or ashes of one of Cadmus's helpers. A **skeleton** forms from the bones in each plinth when they are tampered with. The first two plinths are ready to be looted if **Random Event** number 4 has already occurred (see below for details).

► **Treasure.** Each plinth has better loot than the last, as long as the characters want to keep fighting. The first has a small gem (3 gp), and the second a lantern. The third has a leather armor, while the fourth has a grappling hook and 10 iron spikes. If the characters defeat the fifth skeleton, they find a bastard sword. And they get a crawling kit if they search the sixth and last plinth.

## 6. KEY OF AGES

This magical key opens the *Door of Ages*. But the key's surface is imbued with powerful energy. The key must be manipulated with gloves or a piece of cloth. Otherwise, whoever touches the key rejuvenates to the first hour of his life, or ages to the last hour of his life. No save.

## 7. CORRIDOR OF FATE

The characters open the door. Treasures and wealth beyond their wildest dreams are waiting for them. There is a pressure-sensitive plate that triggers the crossbows at the end of the corridor (DC 13 WIS). If the characters fail to see it, two bolts (2d8 damage) hit the first of the characters. The trap resets after one minute.

## 8. CHAMBERS OF TIME

This is where one may witness the true power of the *Door of Ages*. The golden jugs contain arcane ether, the purest form of magical energy. The elder effigies at the far end of each chamber are infused with the essence of Ord, the god of magic and knowledge. And the central tiles feature a universal sign that represents time.

► **East.** Living creatures that walk toward the east effigy rejuvenate 20% of their lives for each pair of golden jugs reached. For instance, a 48-year-old man would be 9 years old when they reach the end of the room.

► **West.** Living creatures that walk toward the east effigy get older by 20% of their current age for each pair of golden jugs reached. For instance, a 48-year-old man would be 86 years old when they reach the effigy.

Panic may get the best of the characters and make them flee. Touching the elder effigy infused with the essence of Ord brings them back to normal.

► **Jugs.** Each jug is valuable (250 gp) but dangerous when touched (DC 13 CHA). On a failure, characters suffer the same fate as with the *Key of Ages* (see area 6).

## 9. STUDIO (FUTURE)

This area used to be similar to area 12. But magic causes these chambers to advance in time, more and more each day. There is nothing of value here.

## 10. CAVERN (FUTURE)

Cave-ins and earthquakes that were still not supposed to occur for hundreds of years created this cave. Three **darkmantles** extinguish all light sources and attempt to ambush the characters from the dark if they approach.

## 11. STUDIO (PAST)

Cadmus's documents, books, and research is here. None of the characters understand anything, but this may be the basis to begin a wizardry or clerical career.

## 12. LIBRARY (PAST)

The books and scrolls in here are valuable to any mage and researcher. The secret vault (DC 14 WIS) contains enough wealth and gear to fund an adventuring life.

# DEVELOPMENT

**SOME DIED, BUT** a few of the peasants make it out of the dungeon alive. However, Harrington looks different, smaller. After some confusion, the characters learn that they find themselves 100 years in the past. How to go back? They must stay in this time, become stronger, and find a way. But that is an adventure for another day...



# Friends in Dark Places

Quick and Easy Rules for Retainers and Hirelings



By Jordan Rudd

# INTRODUCTION

**SHADOWDARK INTENTIONALLY OMITTS** rules for retainers and hirelings to enhance the “dark and lonely” vibe as opposed to having 20 paid henchmen used as trap fodder à la TSR-era of D&D. Still, they may also be useful in Shadowdark RPG to fill out small parties or to just have someone watch the horses while you sneak around in a hole searching for treasure. As with all things, use your judgment and do what is best for your game table.

**Retainers** are NPCs that have class levels and associated skills. They are mercenaries and sellswords that accompany the PCs during any reasonable dungeon-delving activities including combat. They will not travel with parties whose average level is lower than their own.

**Hirelings** are zero-level NPCs. They are normal townsfolk looking to make a few coins but not willing to die for the cause. They follow the PCs after the way is clear, and only fight to defend themselves. Good for holding torches, taking care of horses, or carrying extra loot and gear.

**Max Number:** A PC may have a number of hirelings and retainers up to 3 + their CHA modifier, minimum 1.

## RULES FOR RETAINERS

**Cost:** Retainers expect a share of treasure found. The % offered affects CHA checks made for hiring and loyalty.

**Hiring:** Make a DC 9 CHA to successfully hire someone. On a modified or natural 1 or less, the NPC has ill will towards the party. If the result is 20 or greater, future loyalty checks are rolled with advantage.

**Equipment:** Retainers come with weapons, armor, and class-specific equipment (thieves’ tools, holy symbol, etc). Anything else must be supplied at the PC’s expense.

**XP:** Retainers gain experience at ½ the rate of the PCs.

**Loyalty:** Make a DC 6 CHA if the retainer is exposed to something particularly dangerous or lethal, and after the conclusion of each adventure. On a failure, the retainer leaves and cannot be recruited again.



Offer	Hiring and Loyalty Check Bonus
1/4 Share	-4
1/3 Share	-2
1/2 Share	0
2/3 Share	+2
Full Share	+4

For treasure shares, the easiest way to calculate is to divide the amount of treasure found by the total number of shares. So if you have 4 PCs and one retainer that receives a ½ share, and you find 450 gp that’s 4.5 shares. One share = 100 gp. The players get 100 gp each and the retainer gets 50 gp.

# RULES FOR HIRELINGS

**Cost:** Hirelings expect a daily wage. The amount offered affects the CHA check made for hiring and loyalty.

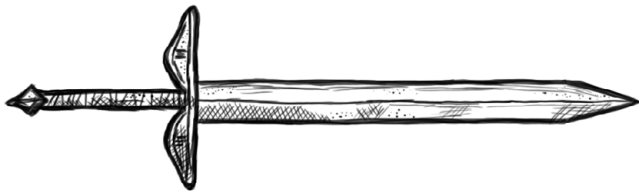
**Hiring:** Make a DC 9 CHA to hire. On a natural 1 or less, the NPC has ill will towards the party. In case of a 20 or greater, future loyalty checks are rolled with advantage.

**Equipment:** Hirelings come with their clothes, mundane stuff in their backpacks, and maybe a walking stick or a knife. The rest must be supplied at the PC's expense.

**XP:** Hirelings gain no experience.

**Loyalty:** Make a DC 12 CHA if the hireling is exposed to something particularly dangerous, and a DC 9 CHA at the end of each adventure. On a failure the hireling leaves and cannot be recruited again.

Offer	Hiring and Loyalty Check Bonus
1 SP / day	-4
2 SP / day	-2
5 SP / day	0
1 GP / day	+2
5 GP / day	+4



## SAMPLE RETAINERS

### NIBS - GOBLIN FIGHTER

AC 13 HP 6 ATK 1 greataxe + 5 (1d8) or longbow +4 (1d8) MV near

S +3 D +2 C -1 I +0 W -2 Ch +1 AL L BG Scout

**Talents** Keen senses, weapon mastery (longbow), +1 melee/ranged attacks.

**Eqpt.** Greataxe, longbow, leather armor, shield, arrows.

**Personality** Nibs is attractive and refuses to wear any shirt with sleeves. She's cocky, foolhardy, and impatient. She knows her skill with a bow is highly valued and won't accept less than 1/2 the share of the treasure.

### HIRALIA - ELF THIEF

AC 13 HP 4 ATK 1 dagger + 1 (1d4) or short bow +3 (1d4) MV near

S -1 D +2 C +0 I +1 W -1 Ch +0 AL N BG Urchin

**Talents** +1 ranged attacks, backstab (3x dice), thievery.

**Equipment** Dagger, shortbow, leather armor, arrows, thieves' tools.

**Personality** Hiralia keeps a low profile. She wears a cloak over her armor and keeps her weapons hidden. She's discrete and keeps an eye on the exits. She's keen to get out of town and rolls to hire her are made at +2.

### HIROK - HALF-ORC PRIEST

AC 11 HP 5 ATK 1 longsword + 3 (1d8) MV near

S +1 D +0 C -1 I +1 W +2 Ch -1 AL N BG Apprentice

**Talents** Mighty, spellcasting, +1 melee attacks.

**Spells** (Tier 1) *cure wounds, light, turn undead*

**Eqpt.** Longsword, leather armor, shield, holy symbol.

**Personality** Hirok wears the symbol of Gede proudly over his plain but impeccably neat clothing. He's humorless and stern but also kind and considerate. Hirok is a man of his word. Loyalty checks for him are made at +2.

### NORBERT - HALFLING WIZARD

AC 13 HP 2 ATK 1 staff + 1 (1d4) MV near

S +1 D +1 C -1 I +3 W -1 Ch -1 AL L BG Apprentice

**Talents** Stealthy, spellcasting, +1 wizard spellcasting checks.

**Spells** (Tier 1) *feather fall, magic missile, protection from evil*

**Equipment** Staff, spellbook.

**Personality** Young Norbert sports a patchy beard to avoid being mistaken for a human child. He's quick with a joke but nervous and seems genuinely surprised when his spells work. He lacks courage and loyalty checks when exposed to something dangerous are made at -2.



# FOR THE LITTLE ONES!

A response from the city won't come fast enough. We are alone in this. I beg you to consider: They are our future. If anything, risk your lives for them!

Varina, Respected Matriarch

**T**he plights and tribulations of life can only be endured when the light of hope shines on those who struggle day by day to make ends meet. Most people find this light in their beloved offspring. All challenges are worth the effort when the benefits are to be reaped by one's children. They are beacons of happiness and the reason to give one's best.

## THE HELLISH FLUTIST

**AN OBSCURE DEMON** named Oogulen came to the Material Plane through a cursed altar in a cavern. Now, despair runs rampant in the secluded settlement of Varlington as all children below 12 years of age are gone; the twenty-four children left their homes in the middle of the night and delved into the wilds. Two brave hunters followed suit and saw a strange entity, shrouded in shadows and playing a pan flute, leading the little ones into a cavern in the woods. They dared not confront the befoul creature. The nefarious demon plans to consume the poor children's souls. Help from the capital's authorities shall not come soon enough. It is in the hands of the peasants, mostly the affected parents, to do something...

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

**For the Children.** The lowly peasants involved in this adventure are parents. Their children were lured by Oogulen. The characters have a strong motivator to risk it all to save their offspring from a terrible fate. None of them are adventurers or particularly brave but the circumstances at hand make them attempt the impossible.

**Deep Loss.** One or more of the characters involved lost a child in the past. The terrible grief transformed them, a trauma that has not yet healed and may never do. These empathetic individuals are determined to help the other grieving parents recover their families to save them from the terrible loss that has assailed them for so long.

**For Glory.** The bailiff and his men are bound to come sooner or later. It may be too late when they get here and many believe that whoever stands out and rescues the children may draw the bailiff's attention. Well-paid work, a knighthood, or an apprenticeship might even be an option for people who demonstrate that they can steel themselves against adversity and fight for a just cause.

## Level 0 Gauntlet

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 crawling rounds and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Inside the dungeon, areas 3 and 6 have lit braziers; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Smells and Sounds.** A pungent stench of sulfur, blood, and rot pervades the dungeon. The sounds of children laughing, crying, and whispering nonsensical messages appear to come from all places at once, making it difficult to discern their source or location.

## RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	A <b>swarm of bats</b> gathers and flies toward the cave exit. They ignore the characters but retaliate if attacked.
2	Four <b>peasants</b> from a nearby town carrying torches approach. They have come to help find the children.
3	A <b>dretch demon</b> coalesces in front of the party and attacks while admonishing the party in Diabolic.
4	All the children in area 7 scream in terrible pain as Oogulen siphons a fraction of their life force.
5	Oogulen's voice is heard in the cavern: " <i>Abandon all hope, you are no match to my unlimited power.</i> "
6	A forest hermit ( <b>peasant</b> ) comes looking for his daughter. The girl was lured by the hellish flutist ( <b>Reaction</b> check).
7	A strong wind current blows through the caverns, snuffing out fires and any uncovered light sources.
8	A <b>giant centipede</b> approaches the party looking for prey. The insect abomination fights until slain.

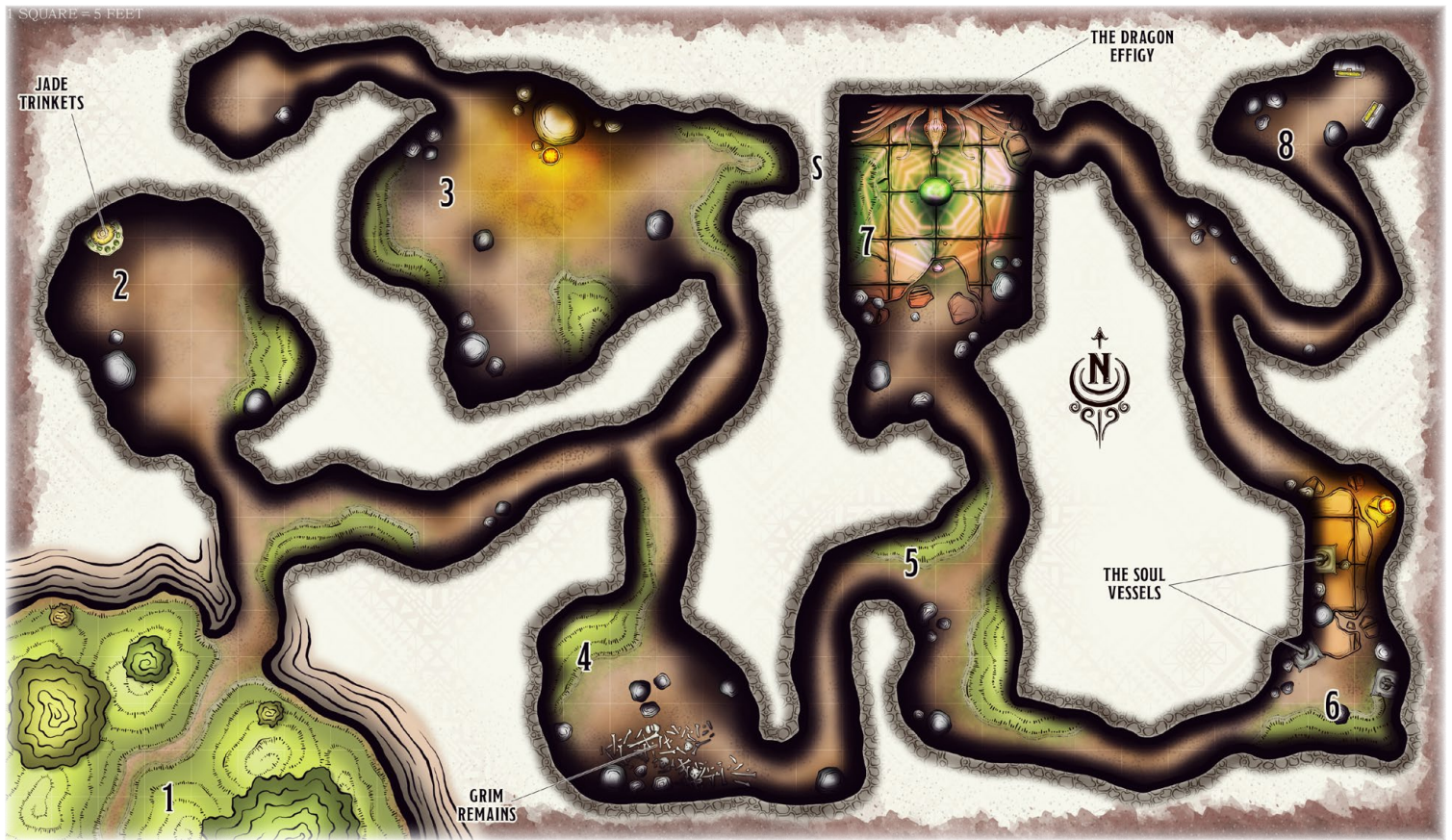
## 1. ENTRANCE HALL

*The well-trodden road from Varlington becomes a faint path through the forest. This road leads to a strange cavern entrance on a squat hill's rocky side.*

It takes the group of peasants a few hours to follow the way to the entrance. Witnesses reported that the kids came this way after leaving their homes that fateful night.

► **The Tracks.** Careful observers notice several tracks of footprints coming into the cavern a day or two ago (DC 12 WIS). An extra set of large-hoofed prints moves around the area, they belong to the demon Oogulen.

► **The Toy.** A wooden horse lies on the grass. It was left as a clue by Martin (area 3) who is unaffected by the luring tune but came along to care for his younger sibling.



## 2. THE JADE TRINKETS

*The dark cavern opens into a roughly circular chamber. A gilded vase surrounded by jade artifacts awaits in the dark. A hum comes from the strange objects.*

A fleeting cult that worshiped Oogulen left these artifacts long ago. Their lair was soon destroyed by a paladin.

► **The Trinkets.** The small jade figurines are carved with the visage of Oogulen. They are magical but the enchantment poured into these stones is just a faint trick to create a constant humming sound. They are worthless.

► **Treasure.** Followers of the defunct cult left some valuables inside the vase. It contains one dagger, rope (30 ft.), a sledgehammer, and nine empty glass vials.

## 3. ENRAPTURED CHILDREN

*Children sit by a brazier and whisper unintelligible babble. They are unaware of their surroundings.*

Sixteen children are in this chamber. Oogulen placed a spell on the brazier that keeps them docile so he can consume them at his leisure. If shaken lightly, the children break out of the mind-affecting spell for a few seconds before they are once again enthralled by it.

► **The Prodigy.** Martin, 9, hugs his sibling Gustaff. He is glad to see adults arrive. The boy is naturally immune to the demon's spells. He tells the peasants about Oogulen's goat-like appearance, its rusty blade, and a knotted whip. Martin could be one of the PC's children (GM's choice).

## 4. THE GRIM REMAINS

*A baleful ossuary lies scattered across the packed soil of this chamber. There are two human skulls.*

► **The Remains.** Careful observers notice that while the spectacle is disheartening, most of the bones belong to small forest creatures and reptiles (DC 12 WIS). The two human skulls are adult-sized and belonged to explorers who died in the caverns years ago to predators.

► **Treasure.** Buried among the remains are a silver ring (10 sp), an oil flask, a crowbar, a backpack, and a club.

## 5. THE AMBUSH

*A child lies face-down in the middle of this chamber. His ripped clothes are stained with grime and blood.*

The poor child, Joseph, lost his life resisting Oogulen after he broke from the luring charm momentarily. The demon placed the child's body here as bait.

**Death from Above.** When a character approaches to examine the body, two **dretch demons** drop from the dark ceiling to attack. The characters can avoid being surprised if they are good observers and notice the abominations hiding above (DC 13 WIS check).

**The Body.** Joseph's body bears a terrible wound under the ribs. A blade cut deep there but it also caused the skin to die off around the wound. It can be inferred that the demon's bladed weapon causes this kind of skin-rotting damage that may be hard to withstand (DC 11 INT).

## 6. THE SOUL VESSELS

Testament to the old demon-worshipping cult, three strange obsidian artifacts remain in this chamber. They are etched with runes in Diabolic that spell obscure prayers to summon Oogulen from the hellish abyss. The souls of three evil priests are contained within. From beyond the veil, they managed to summon Oogulen hoping he would free them from the vessels. However, the demon cares not for their plight, nor is he grateful.

► **The Vessels.** Peasants have no way to understand these artifacts. In the darkness, the vessels whisper maddening sentences. A peasant that studies them may use their obscure revelations to start a wizardry career.

## 7. THE DEMONIC ALTAR

*A cursed effigy sprouts from the north wall. It represents a demonic being. A small crowd of children gathers by a glowing crystal in front of the altar.*

There are eight children around the glowing crystal. Oogulen, the demon, manifests behind it. The demon is angered by the party's intrusion as it was about to finish consuming the children present. Oogulen fights without mercy. During this fight, the demon uses the mind-controlled children as body shields. If the characters are not careful, they may harm the young ones.

► **Secret Entrance.** The characters can surprise Oogulen by approaching through the secret passage from area 3. It is a narrow, debris-filled tunnel (DC 11 WIS).

## 8. THE FORLORN TREASURE

This was once part of a large vault. It collapsed through the eons. Only two stone chests remain accessible.

► **Treasure.** The open coffers contain 24 gp, 360sp, 1,250 cp, a longsword, a *potion of healing*, and a *jewel of barbalt*. This treasure may serve as funding for any survivors to acquire gear, study, and train.

## DEVELOPMENT

**THE BATTLE IS** won and the survivors return to Varlington with a throng of confused and hungry children. This adventure lights a spark of bravery that cannot be ignored. The bailiff offers the survivors the opportunity to become a knight's squire. They dedicate months to training and learning magic-craft to become level-1 heroes.

### OOGULEN, THE DEMON

AC 12, HP 18, ATK 1 rot blade +4 (1d6 + rot) and 1 knotted whip +2 (1d4), MV near, S +4, D +2, C +2, I +0, W -1, Ch -1, AL C, LV 3

**Rot.** DC 12 CON or the injury cannot be healed by natural means. Only magical healing closes the wound.





# THE LOST ARK

To witness Saint Terragnis' Lost Ark is just the beginning. Just imagine the treasures we shall find. You can change your bloodline's future in a moment!

Lord Hendrick



Origin myths of the sacred deities, the Four Lords, all speak about legendary artifacts and ancient spells that cannot be replicated by today's magic skills. Some of these objects have reappeared and changed the course of history for good or evil. Alas, some of them are better left untouched, for the consequences of their indiscriminate use cannot be foreseen. Such is the case for the *Lost Ark*.

## THE KNIGHT'S REMAINS

**SAINT TERRAGNIS WAS** once a human maiden knight. She ascended to godhood and is revered across the realms. Her bodily remains, weapon, armor, and some items of sentimental value were placed in the vessel known as the *Lost Ark*. Since then, these items have become inaccessible, they are one with the ark, which holds great power but none have ever managed to use it. The ark is treacherous and cannot be used for personal gain. Legend has it that the ark can be used as a beacon of arcane energy capable of leveling cities and entire armies. Some historical tragedies are said to be related to the *Lost Ark*. But those rumors cannot be confirmed. Today, the ark lies in a crumbling vault in Golla Desert.

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

**Expeditionary Force.** Lord Hendrick has arrived in Dali Town looking for recruits for his expedition. He claims to have found Saint Terragnis's holy ark. He promises not only to witness the holy artifact itself but also a share of the treasure to be found in the vault. Many peasants preemptively savor the riches to be gained. Even a small share might be enough to change their lives.

Unbeknownst to all, Lord Hendrick plans to use the recruits as ritual sacrifices to gain access to the *Lost Ark*. He has unsuccessfully done so already with two previous expeditions. His mage, Arrendel, claims to have perfected the enchantment to open the *Lost Ark*'s lid.

**Seeking a Blessing.** One or more of the characters suffer from a lethal disease that shall soon end their lives. Rumor has it that the love of Saint Terragnis can heal any condition. These characters seek the *Lost Ark* so that they can petition the godly knight for a spark of her divinity. All so that they can finally heal.

## Level 0 Gauntlet

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 crawling rounds and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Inside the cavern, areas 2 and 8 are dimly lit; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Structural Integrity.** Once per hour and after loud noises, the frail state of the dungeon's structure causes deep cracks to form in the chamber walls and ceilings.

## RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A <b>swarm of rats</b> looms closer. It attacks the smallest creature in sight. They disband if reduced to half HP.
2	A section of the structure collapses under its weight and blocks off a hallway or a 10-foot-wide floor section.
3	Two <b>giant dung beetles</b> emerge from the chasms in area 6 looking for food. They are unsure about humans as a food source and act cautiously at first ( <b>Reaction</b> check).
4	The godly saint's female voice resounds: " <i>Abandon this foolish quest, Lord Hendrick. You shall never wield the power of the Lost Ark. Let these innocent people go.</i> "
5	Two <b>darkmantles</b> use their Darkness ability. Then they plunge from the ceilings and attack nearby creatures.
6	A desert scout ( <b>thug</b> ) followed the expedition underground. He may join the peasant party ( <b>Reaction</b> check).

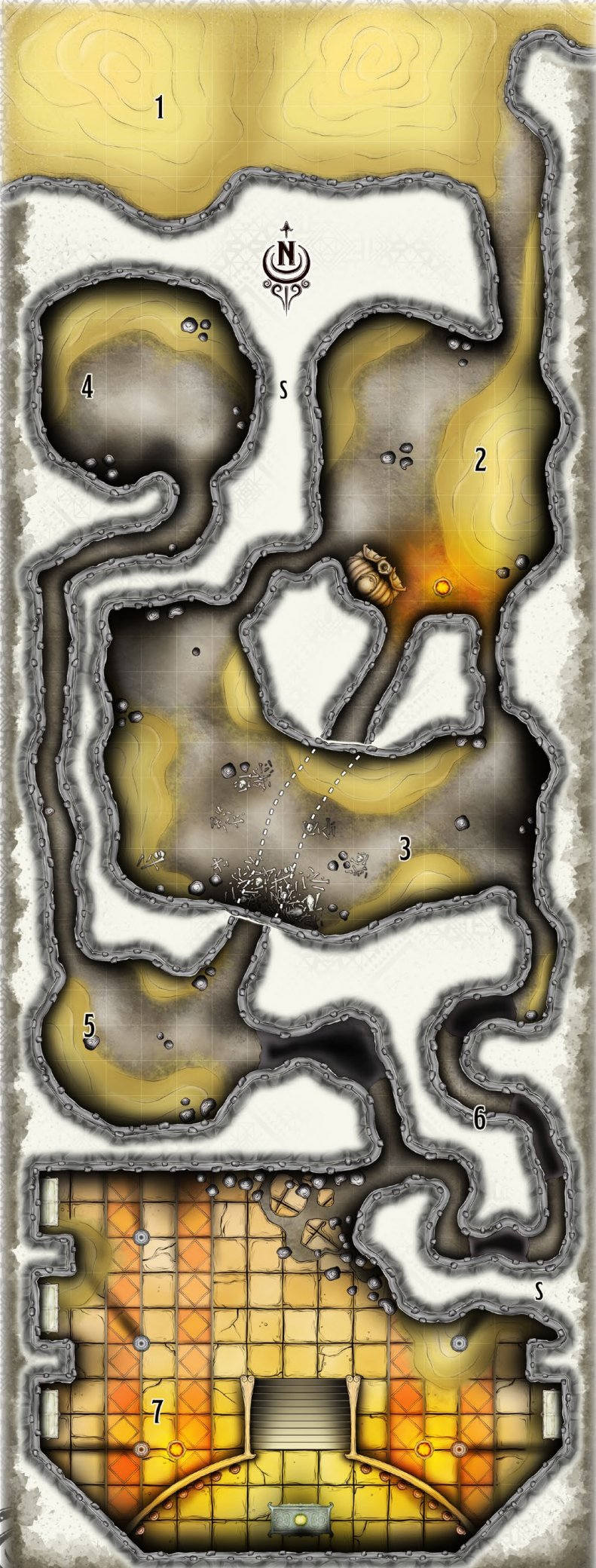
## TRAVERSING GOLLA DESERT

After gathering a crowd of peasants, Lord Hendrick and his entourage set course for the vault in Golla Desert. Lord Hendrick has employed seasoned desert-dwellers that use their survival skills to make the trip a relatively calm affair. The three-day journey takes the expeditionary force to a large rock formation in the desert.

### 1. THE DESERT ENTRANCE

A cavern opening on the rocky side leads into the heart of the formation. Lord Hendrick orders his men to set up camp. They shall delve into the dungeon at dawn.

► **The Tracks.** Observant characters notice a contingent of tracks coming in and out of the cavern (DC 13 WIS). They were left by Hendrick's previous visit to the dungeon. The knight denies such accusations adamantly and claims someone else must have left the tracks.



## 2. SAINT TERRAGNIS EFFIGY

*An intricate limestone statue of an armor-clad fighting woman stands by the uneven wall. The statue wields a large blade; its helmeted face is not visible.*

Devout characters recognize the sigil on the statue's breastplate as that of Saint Terragnis, the beloved goddess (DC 10 WIS). The statue stands on a broken granite tile. This was once a large entrance hall.

► **Rebuking Aura.** Little is left of an ancient protective charm on the statue. All creatures of darkened hearts and ill intentions are faintly pushed back as they walk toward the statue (DC 12 STR). Observant characters notice that Lord Hendrick and his followers push through with a little effort (DC 13 WIS), but they try to hide this.

## 3. THE PAST EXPEDITIONS

*The middle of this chamber is littered with countless bones and skulls. The remains of at least thirty people are spread across the uneven cavern floor.*

These townsfolk were brought from different towns for sacrifice in the past two expeditions. Arrendel spent their souls to cast a spell. Alas, he could not open the ark.

► **Betrayal.** It is here that Lord Hendrick (**knight**) reveals his ill intentions and orders the characters to surrender their weapons or die. Arrendel (**cultist**), and twelve **thugs** draw their weapons. If the characters yield, they are chained and ordered to wait while Arrendel and Hendrick set things up in area 7; three **thugs** stay to guard them. Fighting against the whole group is a foolish task. Fortunately, Hendrick's men do not kill the characters as they are needed alive for the ritual. After being imprisoned, the characters can attempt to overpower the guards here in area 3 or wait to be moved to area 7.

## 4. CRITTER BURROWS

The walls and ceiling of this chamber are dotted with countless 2-foot apertures. This network of narrow tunnels is home to a hive of stingbats. They normally exit the caverns during the night to seek prey in Golla Desert. If a character investigates the openings, four **stingbats** emerge with a deafening screech and attack.

## 5. THE CHASM

The east tunnel leads to area 7. Lord Hendrick's men have already set up rope, pitons, and grappling hooks. If the characters have been imprisoned by the nefarious knight, they are ordered to cross over the chasm (DC 11 STR check with advantage). If the characters arrive on their own, they find two **thugs** guarding the chasm.

► **Treasure.** The thugs carry some travel sacks. The sacks contain two daggers, four torches, an oil flask and lantern, rope (50 ft.), a lute, and Arrendel's spellbook.

## 6. THE TWISTING PASSAGE

*A meandering passage traverses the rocky soil. The floor is interrupted by a seemingly-bottomless chasm.*

If the characters have broken free from their captors in area 3. They may come this way to avoid the thugs in area 5. There are three 100-foot-deep chasms. The characters can attempt to jump across them or push against the close walls to climb over (DC 12 STR). They roll with advantage if they have access to climbing gear.

► **Secret Passage.** Finding the crumbling passage and clearing the way in 1 **crawling round** allows the characters to surprise Lord Hendrick in area 7 (DC 13 WIS).

## 7. SAINT TERRAGNIS LOST ARK

*On a 10-foot-tall dais, a gilded chest decorated with etched runes and precious stones glimmers with sacred light. The mad mage stands by the coffer.*

Unless some of them have already been defeated in battle. Lord Hendrick (**knight**), Arrendel (**cultist**), and seven **thugs** are here. If the characters have been brought here in chains, they are set by the stairs in front of the *Lost Ark*. The mage, Arrendel holds a scroll with the ritual that shall take the characters' lives and open the ark.

If the characters arrive here on their own, Lord Hendrick is surprised to see they have freed themselves. The knight orders Arrendel to cast the ritual while he and the thugs hold the party back. The characters have five turns to reach Arrendel and stop the spell. See **The Befoul Ritual** for the possible outcomes of this adventure's climax.

## THE BEFOUL RITUAL

**IF THE SPELL** is cast, Lord Hendrick grins with greed as Arrendel finishes. The characters feel their breath abandon their lungs as their life force is used to power the spell. The *Lost Ark's* lid opens to reveal a blinding yellow light. The warmth of Saint Terragnis protects the characters and allows them to survive this ordeal.

In the meanwhile, lightning and tendrils of arcane energy emerge from the enclosure toward Hendrick, Arrendel, and his goons. Their skins melt like tallow down to the bone and their bodies are reduced to charred remains as the *Lost Ark* closes, leaving the party intact. The characters survive thanks to a force beyond their understanding. The artifact before them is an antiquity from the bygone past that cannot be wielded by mortals.

## THE HEROES SUCCEED

**IF THE CHARACTERS** stop Arrendel, the mage fails to contain the dangerous magic and his body is torn apart by tendrils of arcane force. Half of Hendrick's men lose morale and flee in a panic. To make it out of this, the survivors must defeat Hendrick in deadly combat.

The characters return home with treasure from Lord Hendrick's caravan and followers. Enough to acquire better armor and weaponry and fund learning magic. Characters looking for healing are cleansed from any ailment after the battle. Should any of the characters attempt to open the ark's lid, they experience the same foul fate as Lord Hendrick; a tasteless reward for unrivaled greed.



# THE TORCH CARRIER

By Elven Tower and Domille's Wondrous Works

Designed for use with

**ShadowDark RPG**



**LEVEL-0 GAUNTLET**

**A SHADOWDARK FUNNEL ADVENTURE ABOUT FINDING A CHAMBER MADE OF PURE GOLD**

# ADVENTURE PRIMER

We are all adventurers, we can all be heroes. Perhaps, you only need to find a reason to abandon your current way of life and dream of greater things.

Old Saying



Some events mark someone's life so greatly that it changes them fundamentally. The death of a loved one, the destruction of one's town, or the loss of something cherished. The weak become strong, or the naive acquire wisdom. But sometimes, these events have nothing to do with one's surroundings. On some extraordinary occasions, people change their lives through their very actions.

The poor shall always dream of wealth and wish better lives for their offspring and their future generations. Hard work is honest and well-regarded, but the payoff is too slow for the most ambitious of hearts. Thus, the rumors of a room made of gold were big news to the village folk living their simple lives in Touchstone.

## THE THREE MORTAL SPHINXES

IT WAS HUNDREDS of years ago when three sphinxes violated the code of their strict society. They shared forbidden secrets with humans, elves, and dwarves. The high authorities of the sphinxes branded them as traitors. And their punishment was to become mortal, like the people they shared their sacred secrets with.

The outcast sphinxes did not resent subduing some weaker minds and amassing followers. They plotted their revenge for years, but eventually, they could not defeat time. Despite their ridiculous wealth, they never got around the perfect vendetta. They became old, frail, and lost any will to fight. They perished after some decades in the world of mortals. Their followers' lives changed thanks to them. The sphinxes were buried like they wanted, just like they instructed. But of course, the magical creatures were prepared for mankind's betrayal.

## THE CHAMBER OF GOLD

THE SPHINXES' TOMB has a room with a giant golden statue, gold-inlaid columns, and balconies with golden railings. Two golden braziers, red velvet curtains with golden thread decorations, and even gold inlays on the floor tiles. All this was amassed through the decades in the Material Plane. Some of the people that knew about this place tried to steal the gold. But the sphinxes placed traps and eternal guardians unbeknownst to anyone but them. To this day, the treasure remains untouched.

## THE RUMORS AND CURIOSITY

IT WAS A few weeks ago when travelers from afar arrived at Touchstone with incredible news. There is a room made of pure gold! And it is located nearby. The magnitude of these claims caused the rumors to spread fast. And soon, mercenaries, travelers, and even historians came looking to be part of history, or at least be a witness of the following developments.

And so, a couple of groups of heroes went into the woods but never returned. Researchers waited for their hired investigators who were never heard of again. But perhaps another party shall be more fortunate.

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

Level 0 Gauntlet

### TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Right before the common folk started to feel fear and shun the place where everyone disappears, a large group of travelers passed through Touchstone. A group of farmers, merchants, and village folk hears about the room made of gold and cannot resist the urge to investigate. They pack what they can and delve into the forest. The naive folk believe they have what it takes to find that golden chamber. Or at least they hope that the mercenaries that went before them already did the hard work.

### THE SPHINXES' LEGACY

A spectacle-wearing, finely-clothed man gathers a group of villagers. He asks them to retrieve an ancient tome filled with sphinx's lore and wisdom. He promises to pay 10 gp each, which is more than enough to change their luck if they spend this money wisely. Plus, he says they can keep anything else, including the golden room.

## RUMORS

### d4 Details

- 1 A tribe of elves in the woods venerate an ancient sphinx goddess. The woods features eroded statues as proof.
- 2 None of the people that delved into the forest came back.
- 3 The chamber of gold is an overstatement. The treasure is true but it comes in the shape of coins and jewels.
- 4 A hero named Tristan will most likely find the treasure.

# THE TOUCHSTONE

It's like a checkpoint. Right in the middle of the road, between the capital and Sunny Hill. It's a touchstone! I will die before calling this place Drake's Pass

Random Local

**T**he road zig-zags through the woods and traverses the entire forested area. At first, this spot would only be occupied by some travelers or the sporadic merchant cart. With time, more and more travelers opted to make camp here and take advantage of the tree-protected spot to rest a bit.

When the time came to give the location a name, a knight named Drake had just become a folk hero. Thus, Drake's Pass was the chosen title. But long before the knight's exploits, people would refer to this place as the Touchstone. And even though the formal name is Drake's Pass, "*The Touchstone*" is the name that stuck.

## THE CHECKPOINT

**ABOUT THREE DOZEN** people work or live in this small arrangement of buildings next to the woods. Some of these people sleep for a few days here and then return to Sunny Hill, the nearest town, to their real homes.

Lots of faces come and go through the main road and not all of the travelers stay to say hello. But the nice folk from Drake's Pass try their best to be remembered. Because for their community to thrive, they need to grow their customer base. They attempt to increase the number of people that stay in town by giving gifts, providing good service, and brandishing a big smile at all times.

## SET-UP

**THE PLAYERS START** the Gauntlet here. They are free to decide if their characters are locals, or if they are travelers passing by. Either way, the village folk gather to try their luck or are hired to enter the woods (see **Adventure Hooks**). Before they leave, they are free to ask around and meet some of the NPCs at The Touchstone.

### Town Features

► **Events.** Check for a **Random Event** each time a new area is visited. There is a 4-in-6 chance for an event.

► **Activity.** Several sell-swords and adventurers are staying for a day or two. They prepare for their mission. They seek the chamber of gold everyone talks about.

► **NPCs.** Have Amanda and Sir Korry look for the characters if, for any reason, they do not visit areas 3 or 7.

## RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	An armored man approaches from the north. The first person to come back from the woods! However, he crumbles to the ground when he arrives. His body is all burned. He used the last of his strength to return.
2	Two elf sages wearing tribal clothes and paint on their faces warn all mercenaries and travelers. They say that only death awaits those who seek the sphinxes' gold.
3	A young man wearing leather armor and wielding a sword comes asking for Tristan. He is told that the man has already delved into the woods. The young lad hurries into the forest hoping to find him. The characters are free to talk to him. His name is Harry ( <b>peasant</b> ), and he is happy to enter the forest accompanied by more people.
4	Two bad men ( <b>thugs</b> ) approach the characters and demand that they tell them all they know about the chamber of gold, or else... The men leave if told what they want to know. In case of a fight, the coward bandits plea for their lives if they are reduced to half their hit points.
5	A <b>brown bear</b> comes looking for food. The beast is neutral if 10 pounds of food are offered to it. Otherwise, it becomes hostile but flees when greatly injured.
6	One of the characters loses consciousness for a few seconds. During this time, they have a vision. They see a giant statue made of pure gold. Then, everything is covered in fiery flames. They wake up sweating.

### 1. WEST ROAD

Artennia City is situated to the west. From here, it takes travelers three days to reach the capital walls. The characters that are not locals may come from there.

► **Regret.** Kent and Shane (**peasants**) wait by the road. They had planned to go look for the chamber of gold but got cold feet in the end. They offer the gear they had bought for their mission for a reduced price. The characters may acquire two crawling kits for 5 gp each. They may be convinced to change their minds once more if the characters offer them to tag along instead of going alone.

### 2. THE CHECKPOINT'S INN AND TAVERN

A crew of half-a-dozen people works in this establishment. A tall, thin woman with short hair and muscled arms is the owner. Julia is happier than usual due to the high traffic in town. Even if the mercenaries do not stay the night, most of them stop for drinks. One or a couple of the characters could be Julia's employees.



### 3. AMANDA LAKE'S HOME

Amanda (**peasant**) is the town's treasurer, appointed by the Duke in the capital. She is ambitious and wants to witness the discovery of the chamber of gold herself.

► **Favor.** The woman approaches the characters. Seeing the large group of people planning to delve into the forests, she asks them to please take her with them. The characters are free to accept her company or not.

### 4. DRAKE'S WARES

The characters can purchase gear for their mission. They can obtain any item from the Basic Gear list but there is a 10% chance that the store does not have what they asked for at this moment. Roll once for each item.

► **Gift.** The store owner, Guillaume, gives the characters a random item from the Basic Gear list worth 1 gp or less for each 5 gp spent in his store, provided he has it.

### 5. THE TOUCHSTONE

This well was one of the first things to be built in Drake's Pass. Before this place got its name, people would call the well the Touchstone. The water supply became a point of reference to determine how far one was from the capital or Sunny Hill. To this day, people avoid using the knight's name when talking about this place.

► **Treasure.** If the characters spend enough time inspecting the well, they might spot a small hiding spot in the inside wall (DC 12 WIS). A stone brick can be removed to reveal a hole. Inside, there is a leather bag with 8 gp, a dagger, a crowbar, and a 60-foot hempen rope.

### 6. DRAKE'S STABLES

Horses and mules for rent. They are used to reach the capital or Sunny Hill faster. A man named Willy is in charge of these mounts. However, the service does not apply to the woods. The characters cannot make use of these mounts for their quest. But perhaps they can help Willy, the horse master, in another way.

► **Wild Horse.** A beautiful, strong black horse is upset and uncontrollable. Willy asks the characters for help in case they know their way with horses. One of the peasants may try to calm the horse (DC 11 WIS). If they fail by 5 or more, the horse kicks them and they take 1d6 damage. The DC to calm it down increases by 1 for each failed attempt. If they succeed, the grateful shop owner gives them a crawling kit to help them in their quest.

### 7. SIR KORRY'S HOME

A retired knight but he still works for the crown. He is the eyes and ears of the government in Drake's Pass.

► **Frail Bones.** Sir Korry wishes to be part of the mission and remember his prime days. He uses the stats of a **knight**. However, each time he succeeds in an attack or a check, the next one must be made with disadvantage. The characters are free to accept his company or not.

### 8. EAST ROAD

Sunny Hill is situated almost two days from here. Sitting on the floor and eating fruits are the two elf sages from **Random Event** two. They offer tea and fruits to the characters while making emphasis on their warning. There is only death within the ruins in the forest, they say.

# THE HALL OF SPHINXES

There is only one elemental force that may represent a sphinx's wisdom and strength. Fire. Embrace the flames and be bathed in eternal, fiery warmth.

Inscription on the Wall

**N**t was hundreds of years ago when the three sphinxes were punished and cast as mortals. They roamed the Material Plane for years. Thanks to their cunning and superior understanding, they gathered followers and persuaded them to build a tomb to keep their treasures when they died.

And this is how the Hall of Sphinxes came to be. Cave-ins and earthquakes destroyed the original entrance. But the place can be accessed through some cave tunnels.

## THE JOURNEY

**THE CHARACTERS DELVE** into the forest. Depending on their interactions, they may be accompanied by some allies: Harry the soldier from the **Random Events**, plus Amanda and Sir Korry from areas 3 and 7. Their journey is uneventful and they find it easy to follow the many tracks left by others. They find the tunnels in half a day.

## THE SPHINXES' TREASURE

**THE TREASURE IS** true. The tomb is filled with valuable items, coins, and magical artifacts. However, the sphinxes knew that mortals would not resist the urge to steal all their treasure once they were gone. Thus, they placed magical traps, defensive measures, and protective spells. They could never get their revenge, but at least their treasure would be safe, even after their deaths.

## THE TORCH BEARER

**IT IS SAID** that sphinxes' hearts are made of arcane fire. They were immune to their traps because the dungeon would sense their fire. But today, their spells have faded a little. Holding a torch makes the apparatus believe the sphinxes are present. The magic causes torch bearers to have advantage on all checks versus traps; the torch's fire is perceived as a sphinx's heart. The characters may discover this on their own or understand it (see area 6).

### Area Features

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas feature braziers with magical fire; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

## RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A friendly ghost appears before the characters. The spirit speaks to the peasants: " <i>I am Hayden. Listen to me. Leave. Nothing but death awaits those who seek the sphinxes' wealth. No one will ever find it. No one...</i> "
2	A <b>ghoul</b> from area 5 is not satisfied and looks for more living creatures. The characters stumble upon the hungry undead. The abominate ghoul fights until slain.
3	A brick on the wall can be pushed because it moves inward. If the characters decide to push it all the way they trigger a trap. Poison darts hit two characters at random. They take 1d8 poison damage (DC 12 CON check).
4	The characters find a small book on the floor. The diary belonged to an explorer of another group. It contains a recapitulation of their mostly uneventful journey. However, on the last page, the author wrote that somehow, the dungeon has a strange interaction with fire. He claims that, for some reason, danger eludes the torch bearer.
5	Thick webbings stand before the characters. The webs are 20 feet wide; they may cover a corridor entirely. The characters can burn the webs carefully (DC 10 DEX). On a fail, they alarm the <b>swarm of spiders</b> . The insects flee if they are reduced to half their hit points.
6	The characters find two dead adventurers. Their bodies are half-eaten. But their leather armors and longswords are still salvageable. One of the deceased carries a backpack with half of the contents of a crawling kit.

### 1. CAVERN TUNNELS

The travelers find many footprints that take them to these tunnels. The cavern network is long and dark. The characters have a 50% chance of arriving in the dungeon from one of the two labeled-1 areas (see map).

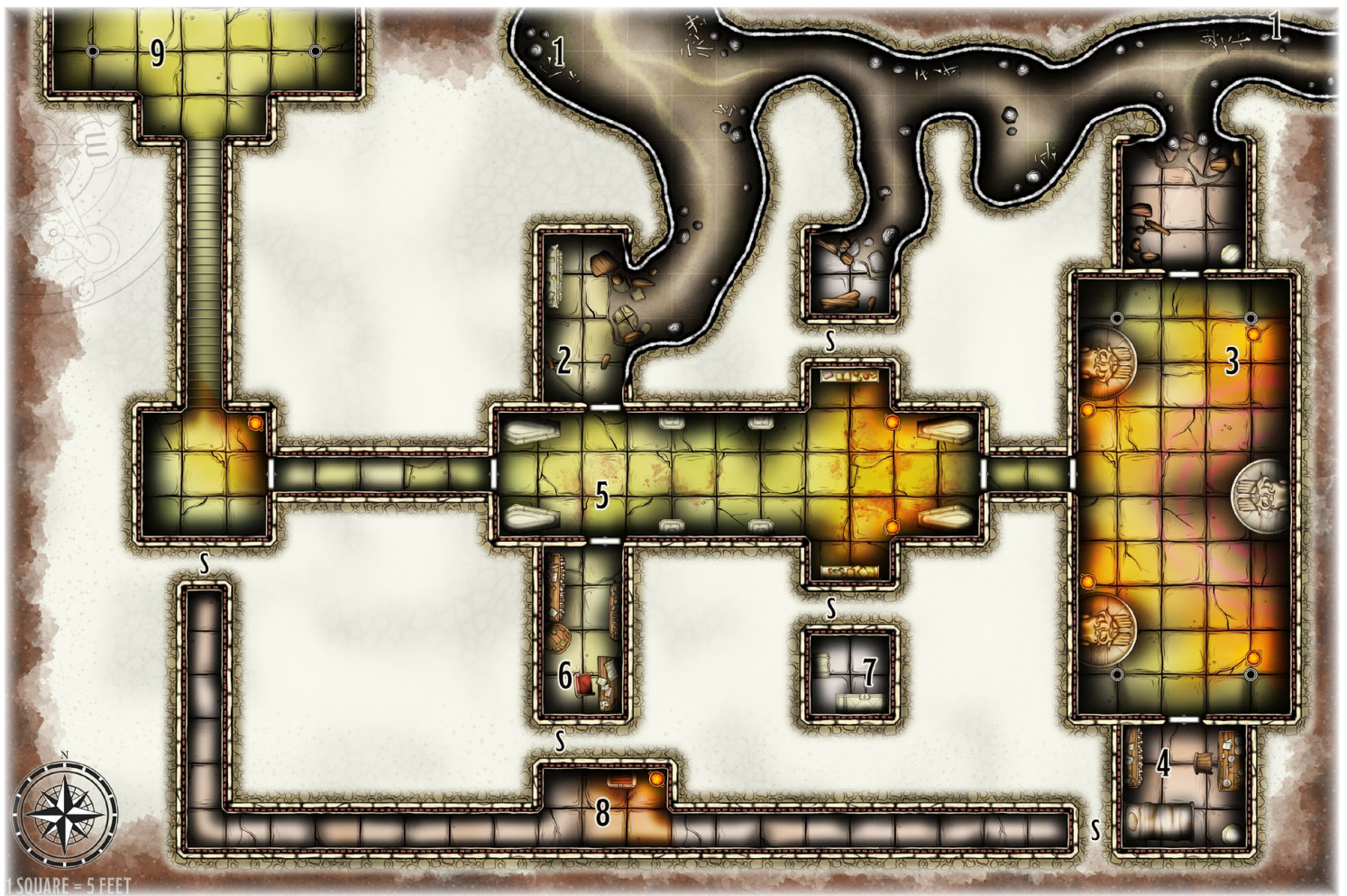
► **Path.** A seemingly empty room at the end of a tunnel features a hidden connection to area 5 (see map). But this secret passage is covered in rubble and debris. Clearing the blockade takes three **crawling rounds**.

### 2. DILAPIDATED ROOM

Only a stone shelf resisted the passing of time and cave-ins that destroyed the east wall. But its contents did not have such luck. Moths and other insects have eaten most of the books' pages. But there is one thing valuable here.

► **Treasure.** The characters may spend 1 **crawling round** searching the moth-eaten documents and find a long-forgotten *potion of healing* lying behind the shelf.





### 3. HALL OF SPHINXES

*Four stone columns by each corner accompany the three sphinx statues leaning against the walls. An aura of uneasiness and dread fills the mortal minds.*

These are the tombs of the three mortal sphinxes. The characters may learn their names by reading the steel plaques on their bases: Alela, Sahalini, and Sunvati.

► **Treasure.** The tombs have secret compartments underneath. The first two contain 147 gp, a silver dagger, a shortsword, a golden bowl (15 gp), a pearl (40 gp), a bag of rare spices (15 gp), and a gold pin (20 gp). If the characters feel lucky and open the third, they find it empty and a **zombie sphinx** comes out of the enclosure. The monster fights until slain but it does not leave this room.

### 4. HAYDEN'S STUDIO

Magic maintains this place clean and untouched by time. Reading the diary and documents in this room reveals it all belonged to Hayden, the sphinxes' right hand.

► **Protection.** If the characters spend a **crawling round** reading Hayden's documents, they may discover the dungeon's special property. The dungeon protects the hearts of fire. A clever character might infer how this can be used in their favor (DC 11 INT). See **The Torch Bearer**.

### ZOMBIE SPHINX

*A leonine mockery of a majestic creature. An empty carcass with broken wings and a cold, dead stare.*

**AC 12, HP 16, ATK 1 claw +4 (1d8) or 1 spell, MV near, S +3, D +0, C +1, I +0, W +1, Ch -1, AL C, LV 3**

**Arcane Burst (WIS spell).** DC 11 WIS. All targets in near take 1d8 damage.

### 5. UNDEAD GUARDIANS

*Eight corpses lie on the floor of this room. Two of them do not look human. A man on the ground speaks when he hears the noise of people coming.*

The characters find Tristan, a local folk hero. He explains that the undead monsters were too strong; his men died before him but he somehow managed to kill the two. He is gravely injured and will die in the following minutes unless he receives magical healing soon.

Another sarcophagus opens after the brief introduction. A **ghost** emerges to finish the job. The undead attacks all injured creatures first and it fights until slain.

► **Harry.** If the young lad is present, he protects Tristan with his life. After combat, he asks to become Tristan's squire if he survives. Otherwise, he mourns his death.

## 6. LIBRARY

This room contains books, documents, and scrolls with lore about the sphinxes. The characters may spend one **crawling round** reading this to learn about the three mortal sphinxes from almost three hundred years ago.

The characters find the book they were hired to find here (see **Adventure Hooks**). They learn why the sphinxes were punished. But most importantly, they confirm the existence of the treasure, and they also find a book with a map of the dungeon. It does not reveal any traps or defense devices but the last room is close (see map).

► **Treasure.** The characters may spend one **crawling round** searching the place to find 18 gp, a scroll of *cure wounds*, and a scroll of *protection from energy*.

► **Trap.** There is a 25-foot-long corridor toward area 9 (see map). There are bones and ashes all over the floor. It smells of charcoal and putrefaction. Both the north and south walls feature small holes all over their surfaces. The last tile hides a pressure-sensitive plate (DC 12 WIS). If pressed, fire jets burn to death everyone within.

## 7. SECRET VAULT

The characters find this room if they notice a small concealed passage behind the desk in area 5 (DC 12 WIS). They must crawl inside and they must do so one by one.

► **Treasure.** The chest contains 291 gp, 7,329 sp, a mithral chainmail, and a spell scroll of *fireball*. After about a minute, two **ghouls** come out of their enclosures back in area 5.

## 8. SECRET HALLWAY

The characters find this hallway if they notice the hidden levers while exploring areas 4 and 6 (DC 12 WIS). Pulling either reveals a passage into the secret area. The far end connects to area 9 through another hidden passage.

► **Chest.** This wooden chest is locked but can be easily opened (DC 9 DEX). It contains five torches, a leather armor, a dagger, a spear, and a crossbow with 5 bolts.

► **Trap.** A human corpse cut in half lies on the floor 15 feet before the hallway's exit to area 9. A clean cut split the body, leaving a massive pool of blood. The walls feature narrow openings where something could move in a pendulum motion. An almost invisible tripwire triggers the trap (DC 13 WIS check). The blade moves so fast that whoever stands below is cleanly cut into two pieces.

## 9. ANTECHAMBER

This chamber's ceiling becomes higher and darker as the room opens up to give place to a large passage. The walls of this area feature washed-out paintings. One of them portrays a crowd of people beside mountains of coins and gold. A second one shows the same spelunkers transporting the goods. They carry wooden chests and large leather bags of treasure. The third depicts fire. The people's little outlines can barely be seen behind the flames. And the last picture only shows gold. In it, the sphinxes' treasure hoard is intact and complete.

## DEVELOPMENT

The characters found it! The sphinxes' treasure room lies before them. They are close to discovering more gold than they could ever imagine. Regarding the possible NPCs that might be accompanying the peasants, consider the following:

- **Tristan and Harry.** The young boy loses all confidence if his hero is not present. Harry says that perhaps this was not such a good idea and decides to turn back. On the other hand, if Tristan is healed, Harry stays as his squire and the two see the adventure through. Tristan is thankful to the characters.
- **Sir Korry.** If the characters are not motivated or low in morale. The experienced soldier gives them a speech about honor, bravery, and glory. Sir Korry tells them to rally and push forward to glory!



# THE CHAMBER OF GOLD

Knowing when to stop is one of the most difficult traits for a gambler. When luck is on your side, it usually makes you blind. Your gains will seem nothing..

Gamblers' Saying

**T**he three mortal sphinxes died of old age but they still spent a few hundred years in the world of mortals. They amassed wealth and gold believing it would serve to fund their vengeance project. But in the end, their mortal lives drained them of motivation and their determination dwindled.

## CARVED ONTO THE ROCK

HOWEVER, DURING THEIR time in the Material Plane, the sphinxes' followers had enough time to do their bidding. And one of their biggest projects was to build their treasure room. They would melt most of the gold they obtained and add it to this underground chamber. It was carved onto the hard rock below the woods.

The sphinxes died eventually. But they correctly predicted that the same men that built their treasure chamber would betray them once they were not present. Their magical wards and eternal guardians, to this day, have done their job at keeping the sphinxes' gold untouched. And the lavish treasure room is no exception.

To top it all, this treasure chamber has a still-not-triggered lava trap intended to kill intruders right when they believe they have succeeded (see **The Eternal Fire**).

## RANDOM EVENTS

### d6 Details

- The characters see a memory play out before them. Two men carrying sacks filled with treasure struggle to move back to the entrance. Halfway through, they are struck by endless falling flames and liquid fire. The smoke dissipates and the memory ends. It is all an illusion.
- The characters find a pre-cast spell scroll written in Common. Whoever reads it is affected by a *protection from energy* (fire) spell for 1 minute.
- Eight **peasants** arrive some minutes after the characters. Some are injured but they are happy to have reached the end of the dungeon. They start boldly exploring the gilded chamber as long as they do not meet any resistance.
- A **giant bat** looks for prey. The beast attacks the character standing farthest away from the rest of the group.
- The characters find a chunk of solid gold on the floor. It belongs to one of the columns. It is worth 250 gp.
- One of the columns features a lever on its back side. Four **zombies** come out from a closed alcove when the lever is pulled. The undead fight until slain.

## TORCH BEARER REMINDER

The magic that protects those that hold fire also works within the treasure room. Whoever holds a torch while exploring this area has advantage on checks and saves. This applies too to the last trap (see **The Eternal Fire**).

## Area Features

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every two **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** There are braziers with magical fire in area 1 and beside the king's statue (area 5), but they do not illuminate the whole chamber. Denizens are **dark-adapted**.

### 1. THE STEPS AND GATE

*The large cave is cut by a 20 feet tall wall. Two golden statues flank the only gate going forward. They stand 20 feet above, beyond a set of stone steps.*

The gates are closed. The characters must climb up the stairs and find a way to open them. The sphinxes left an inscription on the surface of the gates; to be read by intruders after their deaths. The old message says:

*"Alela, Sahalani, and Sunvati's gold lies beyond. This shall fund our vengeance someday. May the flames destroy all those that rob us of our revenge!"*

The characters must push the gates with all their strength to open them (DC 15 STR). The check succeeds automatically if four or more people push together.

► **Treasure.** The characters may spend two **crawling rounds** to chisel a few small pieces of gold from the statues or the braziers (150 gp). The statues are too heavy to be moved and it would take weeks to break them all into small enough pieces to be transported out.

### 2. MAIN HALL

The entire chamber is visible from this area. Fourteen columns with gold bases flank the central pool. And an obsidian three-step dais holds a massive golden statue.

► **Treasure.** There are many thin golden flower inlays on the main hall tiles (see map). It takes three **crawling rounds** to remove the sandstone around them to be removed. The gold found on each flower is worth 200 gp.

### 3. POOL OF PENITENCE

*The water is clean and transparent. The walls beyond the columns, under the balconies, show vivid frescoes. One of them depicts leonine, winged creatures relaxing in the water. Another one shows the water polluted and green; with skeletons bathing in it.*

The characters may infer the obvious by looking at the images. The magical pool shall not harm sphinxes. But any other living creature is perceived as an enemy.

► **Poison.** The crystal-clear water becomes dark, green, and poisonous whenever a non-sphinx being is submerged in it. Living creatures take 1d8 damage per round they spend within the body of water.

► **Treasure.** The peasants may use empty flasks to store some of this magical water. The liquid heals magical creatures but it is harmful to mortals. Each flask of water can be sold for 100 gp to the right buyer.

### 4. UPPER CORRIDORS

*Standing at a height of 30 feet, the two hallways flank the central pool from above. Several steel beams hold the railings, which are made of gold.*

The characters may climb to the balconies when they explore the treasure chamber. The curtains at the end of the room can be used to climb down (DC 11 STR). On a fail, the climber stays suspended in midair. Failure by 5 or more means they fall and take 1d6 damage.

► **Treasure.** The characters may spend two **crawling rounds** to break loose a half-foot section from the golden railings. Each chunk of railing is worth 100 gp.

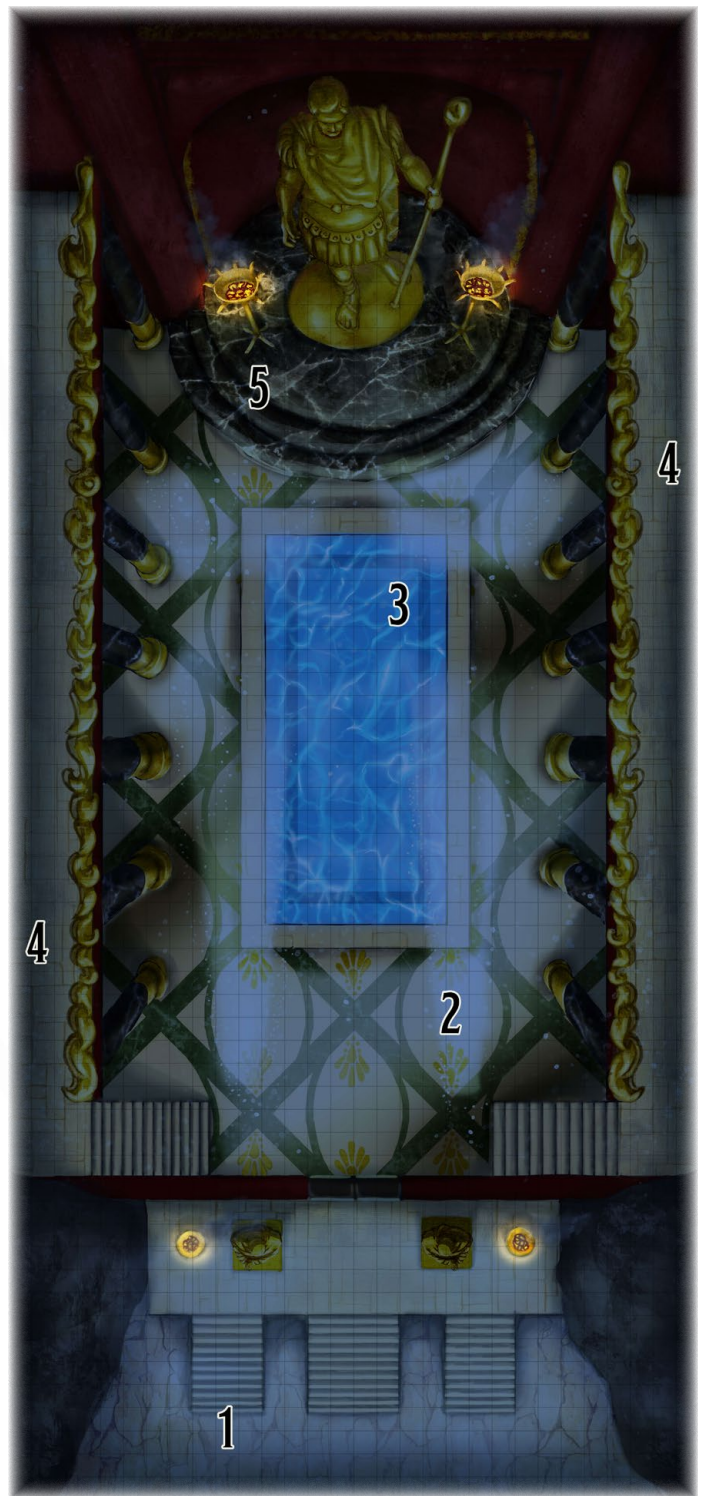
### 5. KING PRESTON'S STATUE

*The statue of a man holding a scepter-torch. He wears kingly robes and holds a royal posture. The obsidian dais supports its colossal weight.*

A person well-versed in history may recognize King Preston's face and famous pose (DC 12 INT). The king of the southern territories a hundred years ago. The sphinxes played mind tricks on him. They would feed him ideas of debt and late payments. The king let go of his most valued possession thinking only this could pay his due. The sphinxes never got rid of the statue because it reminded them of their biggest success in the world of men.

### THE DUNGEON PHASES

This dungeon chamber features a five-phase lethal fire trap. Once triggered, each phase lasts one combat round. This means the entire treasure chamber turns into a pool of lava in four rounds. Be mindful of the characters' positions the moment the trap is triggered. Only some of them might make it alive to the end.



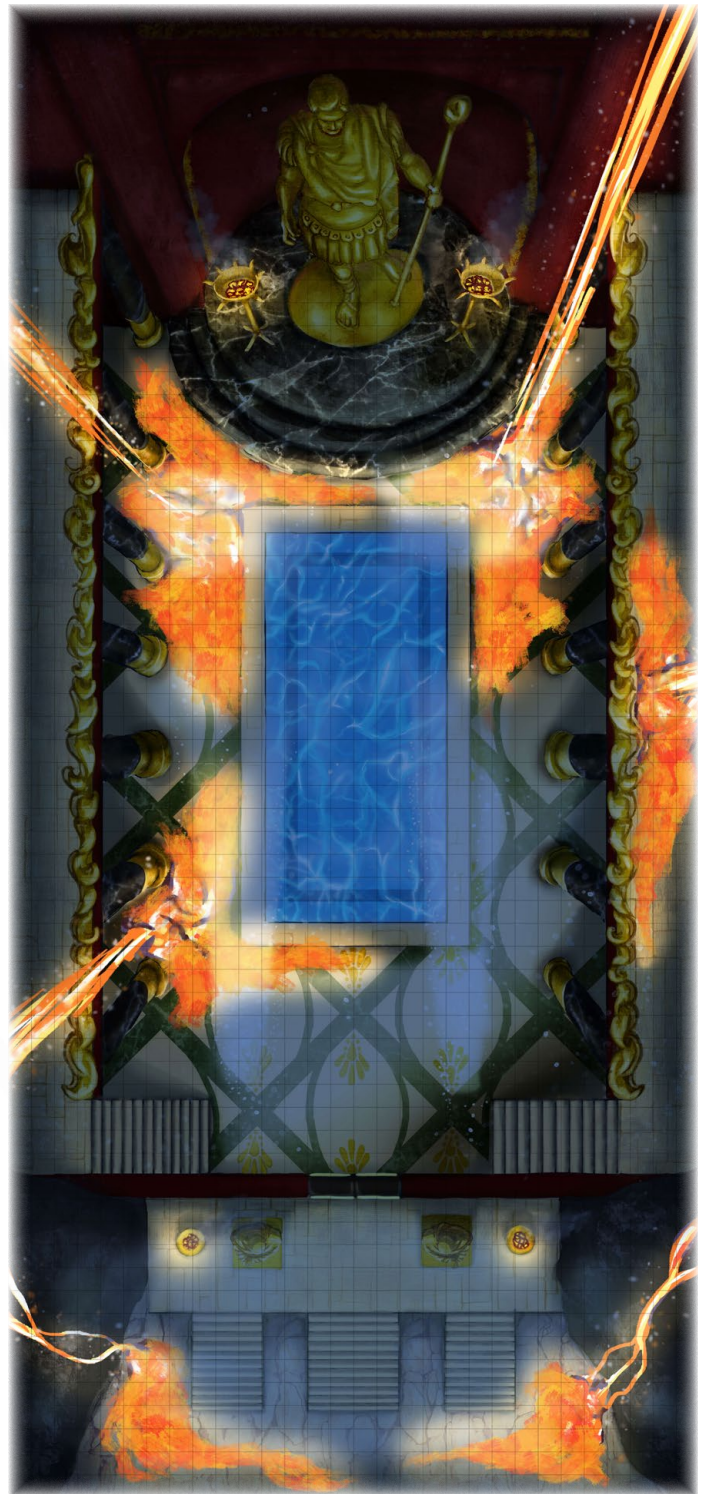
## THE ETERNAL FIRE

The sphinxes feared their gold would be free for the taking when they were gone. They did not want anyone to take what they worked so hard to build. They would rather see it all destroyed than in the hands of thieves.

► **Trap.** No one shall ever leave with this gold. Interacting with or touching the king's statue triggers the trap. Molten lava and crimson-red liquid fire start to pour from above (see **Phase 2**). Count combat rounds to know when to switch phases (see **The Dungeon Phases**).

## PHASE 2

**THE TRAP HAS** been triggered and that means at least one of the characters is near the statue. Whoever is inside the room must move fast or the lava will soon block any possible way out (see **Phase 4**). There is no need to jump or cross lava pools during this phase. But for those unfortunate to be exactly below the two first spots where lava starts pouring, they must succeed on a DC 11 DEX check or die. The rest of the characters can move freely and seek refuge from the lava or bolt to the entrance.

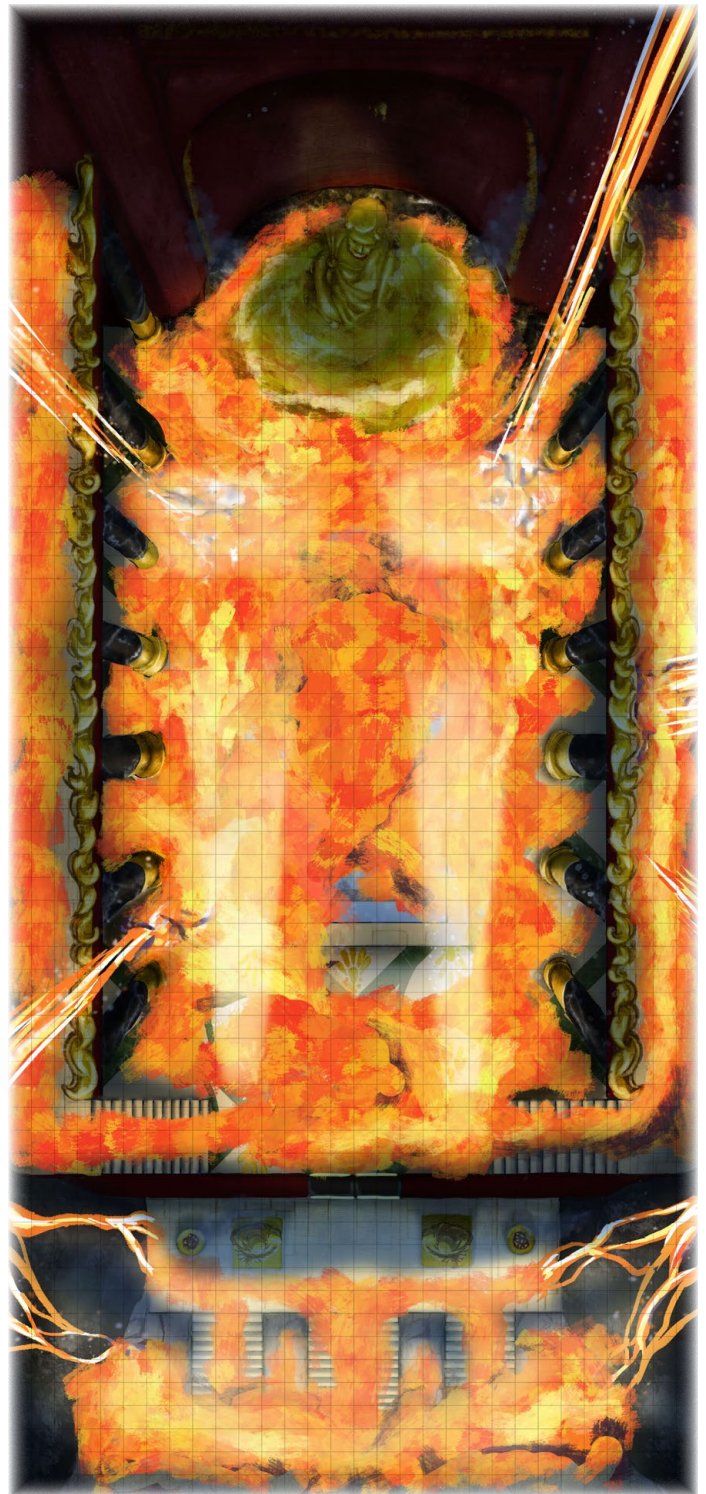
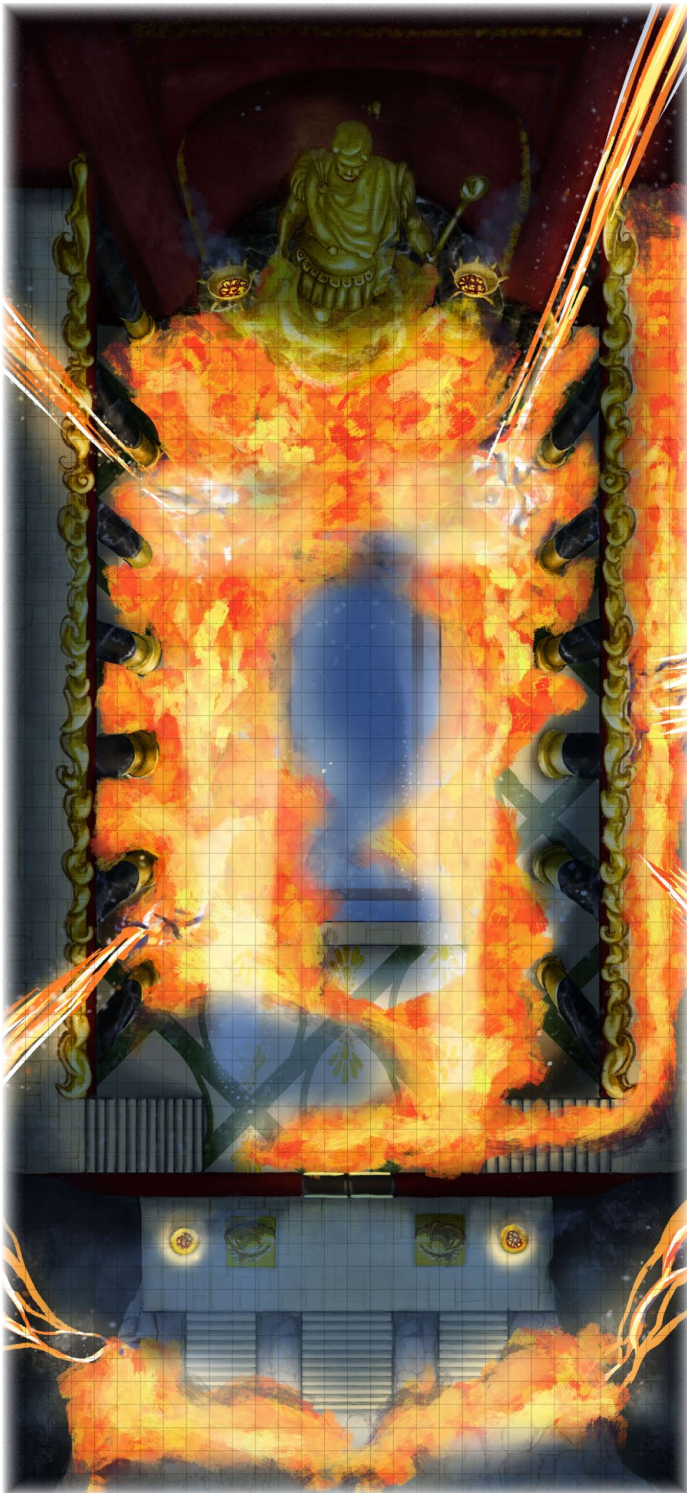


## PHASE 3

**ALMOST HALF OF** the chamber and some of the entrance flood with lava. The eastern balcony is not safe ground anymore. Lava falls from above in more sections of the chamber. Again, creatures that stand below the pouring lava must succeed on a DC 11 DEX check or be burned to death. Creatures in area 1 can still make it out before the two lava rivers join into one. Staying within the chamber does not look like a viable option anymore. Jumping into the cursed water is also lethal (see area 3).

## PHASE 4

**MORE LAVA POURS** from above. The flames roar sound as if the entire ceiling were to give in at any second. King Preston's statue shrinks. It becomes shorter as it melts from its base up. It is too late for any creature within the chamber to make it out alive. They shall be consumed by fire sooner or later; the only entrance is blocked by hot crimson liquid. For the characters still in area 1, they must jump across 10 feet of lava to return to the Hall of Sphinxes (DC 11 STR). They die burned on a fail.



## PHASE 5

**THE DESTRUCTION OF** the treasure chamber is what follows the final phase of the trap. The balconies give in when the columns burn. The massive kingly statue becomes a viscous pool of gold. The characters that survive notice that the lava soon finds its way to them. The living flame advances slowly but firmly. The survivors must keep running toward the exit. The lava jeopardizes the structural integrity of the compound. This means the peasants must run until they find the exit or die crushed.

## ESCAPE

Once the characters come out of the treasure chamber, they must keep running to have a chance at staying alive. All runners must succeed on a DC 10 DEX check. This check is made with disadvantage if the peasants have both hands occupied. Torchbearers are immune to this. On a fail, they trip, fall, and are crushed by the crumbling dungeon or consumed by flames. Otherwise, they reach the woods safe and sound after running for dear life for a few minutes. They barely escape, with the dungeon's entrance getting destroyed and blocked behind them. Smoke and ash follow suit after them.

## ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

**THE CHARACTERS REACH** the end of this adventure and face the consequences of their deeds.

### SURVIVORS!

Not all of them live to tell the tale. But some of the peasants ran for their lives and escaped the fire. They may possess some of the sphinxes' treasure, which is more than enough to fund any adventuring operation.

### NEW FRIENDS

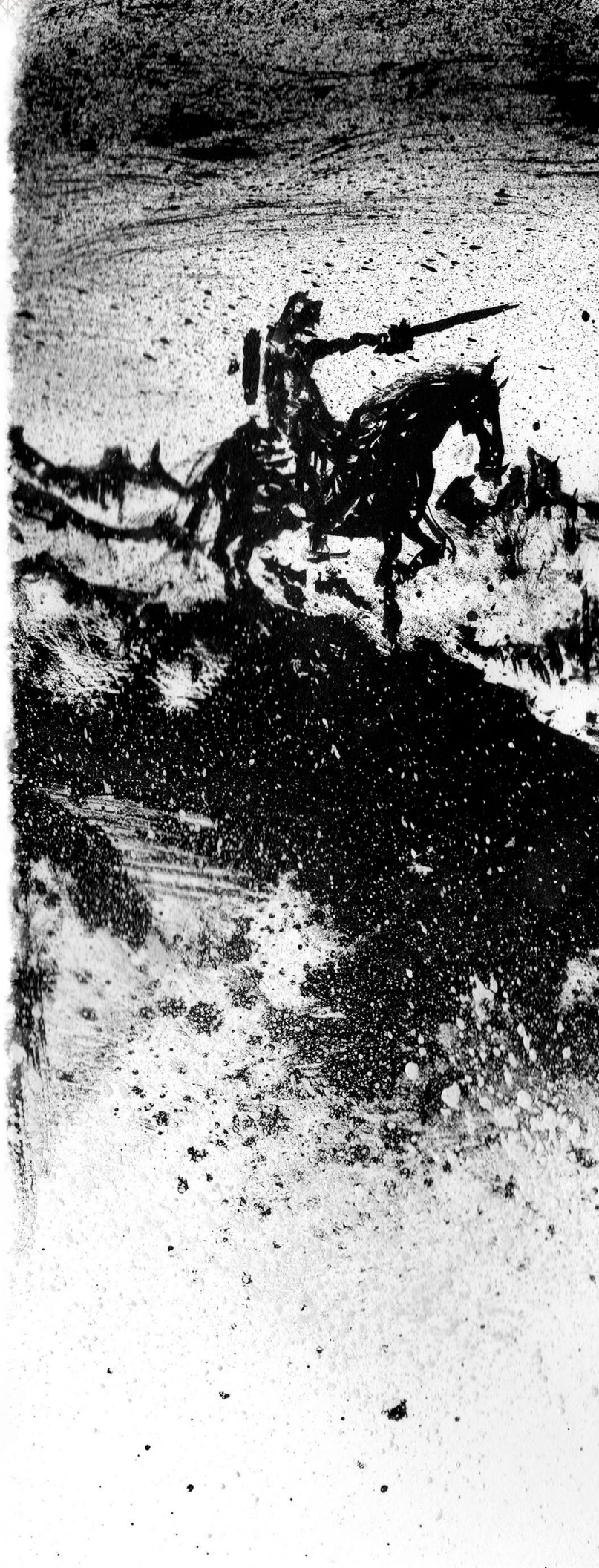
The characters may come out of the dungeon with new friends, depending on their actions and decisions. Tristan and Harry, if present during the treasure chamber's exploration, bolt to the entrance immediately and they make it out of the dungeon on time. They remain friends with the characters after this great experience but the duo seek new adventures on their own.

Sir Korry on the other hand, finds it hard to move with his armor and trips toward the dungeon's exit during the escape. If none of the characters stop to help him, he dies. But whoever turns back to help him up must repeat their save (see **Escape** above). If they succeed, Sir Korry is forever in their debt. The veteran sheds a couple of tears, stating that he wants to be a hero again. The loyal knight quits his job in Daniel's Pass and begs his savior to allow him to be their sworn lifetime protector.

In case the characters were hired, the man in spectacles is true to his word and pays them if they have retrieved the book he wanted. Their feat will not go unnoticed; the powerful individual shall be interested in hiring these resourceful explorers for a future project.

### THE REST OF THE TREASURE

The characters found the famous chamber of gold but most of the treasure was destroyed by the lava. Maybe they managed to retrieve some of it, but the rest of the fortune is buried in the woods. Would it be wise to dig it up? That is certainly an adventure for another day...



# WRITING YOUR WAY OUT OF A PUZZLE

A GM supplement about puzzles by Joshua Lovett



**P**uzzles are for many people the most challenging element of an RPG. When prepared in the right manner, puzzles and intellectual challenges become a rewarding and thrilling addition to exploration, investigation, and even combat. Nevertheless, there is very little to no guidance in RPG source materials to write puzzles. Though books are filled with monsters, items, and fantastic locations, GMs are largely on their own when it comes to creating puzzle encounters. Thus, this article provides varied guidelines to create your own puzzle encounters.

When puzzles fail to perform, it is typically because they are either poorly presented, badly balanced, or lacking in rewards. Breaking these down individually reveals three guidelines for writing puzzle encounters.

## 1. PRESENTATION

**WHEN YOU THROW** a puzzle at your players, you should have a clearly communicated, immersive method for presenting it. Players often fail to recognize a puzzle encounter without explicit instruction on it.

Introducing a puzzle can be evident or obvious: a cipher carved into a wall, an ogre offering a riddle from underneath a bridge, a pile of numbered tablets that must be rearranged in a certain order... the list goes on. But some puzzles are more difficult to recognize, such as those given during combat or exploration.

If a monster has a particular weakness or pattern characters should discover, descriptions and clues are not going to be enough. Prime your players *before* combat encounters to look for the puzzle (e.g., finding a letter that explains that the monster or enemy has a crippling phobia). This way, players will listen to your descriptions during combat, trying to discover their enemy's weaknesses. This can also be done using player inventories, by giving players items that prove useful only later.

During exploration, I dislike the habit of thoroughly searching every room for bits of treasure. Give players directives to search certain rooms, look for specific famous artifacts, or uncover well-known secret passages. Presenting specific targets to investigation is essential to keep players engaged and motivated.

## 2. RE-BALANCE

**PUZZLES REQUIRE AN** in-game method for re-balancing, i.e., giving players hints. How does the GM give the players a hint to a riddle without breaking immersion? Combat encounters are one of the easiest things to balance: die rolls can be fudged, and hit points can be modified on a whim. Exploration challenges are similar: DCs can change without issue. But puzzles are different.

It is an ugly feeling to help stuck players solve some puzzle by giving more and more information, feeling more and more like you are meta-gaming, which you probably are. An immersive, and believable method for giving hints can be the difference between creating an awkward gimmick or a memorable puzzle.

The easiest (and laziest) option is literal hints; an NPC offers their own opinion to guide players. This is obvious and can feel like pandering, yet it happens too often simply because GMs have not prepared anything better. A superior method must be immersive and prompted by the world. For instance, stuff the area with hints and expect players to correctly interpret one out of every three clues. Or place a solution somewhere, but limit players' access to it, e.g., a fellow prisoner knows the code to the combination lock but is in a far-away cell, and ambient noise makes it too loud to hear them; if players need a hint, they will have to come up with some way to communicate with their distant cellmate.





### 3. SUFFICIENT RISK/REWARD

**PUZZLE ENCOUNTERS SHOULD** offer incentives besides bypassing them. Players should never feel like they have to get *through* a puzzle in order to get *to* combat. Puzzles should not function as a blockade between encounters. Instead, a puzzle challenge should be as engaging and rewarding as any combat encounter.

I often see hundreds or thousands of experience points given for a typical combat encounter, but maybe only 75 for solving a puzzle. If you want players to choose to solve a puzzle rather than attack it, they must be rewarded appropriately. Give them lots of experience—and if the puzzle is during combat, give them extra experience points or treasure as a reward for the additional brainpower they used under the stressful circumstance.

### SAMPLE 1

**ENTERING THE NEXT** room of the dungeon, the characters see a beautiful yet creepy grand piano, draped with cobwebs. A skeleton sits in front of it, hands pressed to the keys as though it wasted away while playing. On the music rest is sheet music, however, the notes have been scribbled over and only the words remain...

The ancient spirit of a long-gone adventurer is trapped within the piano keys. These must be pressed in a certain order to free the ghost, and the order is hidden within the provided song lyrics. An old note written on the back of a washed out papyrus says, *“Some dark force binds me to this bench. I fear I shall never escape this place if I do not discover the correct order of the notes.”*

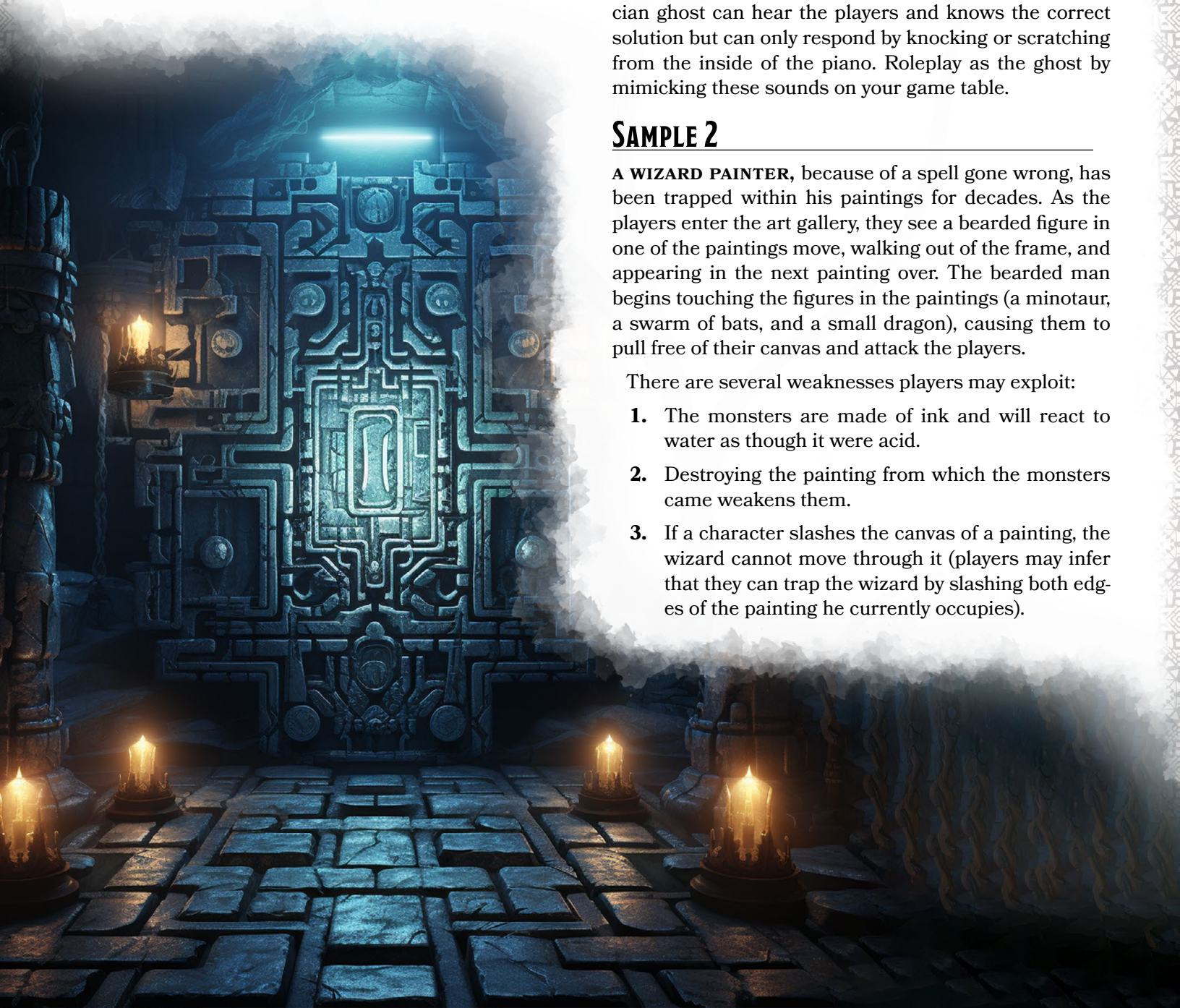
If players begin to struggle or lose steam, the spirit within the musical instrument “wakes up”. The musician ghost can hear the players and knows the correct solution but can only respond by knocking or scratching from the inside of the piano. Roleplay as the ghost by mimicking these sounds on your game table.

### SAMPLE 2

**A WIZARD PAINTER**, because of a spell gone wrong, has been trapped within his paintings for decades. As the players enter the art gallery, they see a bearded figure in one of the paintings move, walking out of the frame, and appearing in the next painting over. The bearded man begins touching the figures in the paintings (a minotaur, a swarm of bats, and a small dragon), causing them to pull free of their canvas and attack the players.

There are several weaknesses players may exploit:

1. The monsters are made of ink and will react to water as though it were acid.
2. Destroying the painting from which the monsters came weakens them.
3. If a character slashes the canvas of a painting, the wizard cannot move through it (players may infer that they can trap the wizard by slashing both edges of the painting he currently occupies).



# THE HORRID DESCENT

You shall comply, as you have no other option. You either participate and do your best or you stay back and starve to death. Your choice, ultimately...

Darlen, the Mage

**A**ges and scholars debate the differences between sentient races and wild creatures. Biological and mental contrasts are easy to discern and gauge. Others are shrouded in overlapping concepts where the veil between sentient and wild is difficult to sort out. Darlen, a powerful mage who is well-versed in this subject, believes that the fierce, self-preservation instinct found in all animals, lives although in a dormant state, deep within sentient beings.

Self-preservation is present in all thinking creatures, but the animalistic violence of a trapped animal is seldom seen in humans, who often break under stress and indulge in other behaviors like self-pitying, begging for their life, or fear-paralysis. Still, Darlen believes this wild instinct can be coerced to appear when people are exposed to the right circumstances and environment.

## THE EXPERIMENT

**DARLEN HAS DESIGNED** a sort of obstacle course filled with deadly guardians and traps. Without mercy and focusing only on his research and optimizing the experiment site, he subtracts peasants from their homes via magic, puts them in the closed demi-plane, and gives them no other option but to attempt to survive. He has performed this experiment twice already, resulting in the needless deaths of twenty-seven people. Now, he is ready to bring the third group into his artificial dungeon.

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

**Taken by Force.** The characters suffer terrible misfortune. They have been chosen at random by Darlen, the mage, to be part of his experiments. With powerful magic, the mage put them to sleep and moved them to the demi-plane. The peasants shall awaken in strange circumstances and with no recollection of how they came to this strange, apparently-underground place.

**Spies Among Us.** Consider this second adventure hook for up to two party members. They are contacted by a cloaked figure who roughly explained the self-preservation experiments and offered them a deal. *“Be a part of this experiment voluntarily, reach the end, and betray any other survivors. If you kill one of them, I shall take you under my wing and teach you my magic.”*

## Level 0 Gauntlet

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 crawling rounds and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas have braziers with permanent *light* spells; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Demi-Plane.** It takes 2 crawling rounds to remove a limestone brick with shovels from the wall to open a passage. Beyond the dungeon wall, there is nothing but a gray empty void. It cannot be traversed by mortals.

## RANDOM EVENTS

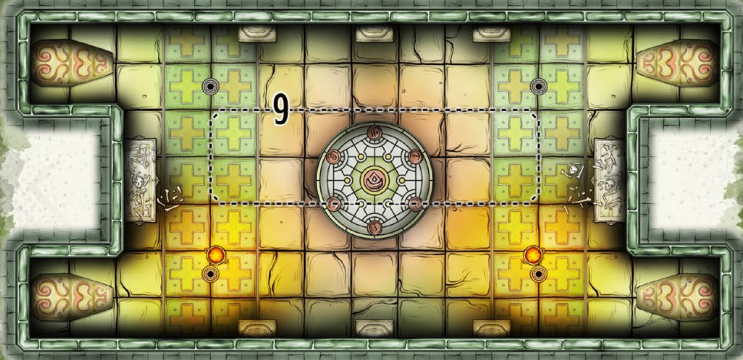
d6	Details
1	The mage's voice says: <i>“Do not falter. I have faith that some of you have what it takes to push through.”</i>
2	A set of bones drops from an opening in the ceiling. They belonged to one of Darlen's past victims. A hollow dart pierces the hip bone. Foreshadowing the trap in area 6. A <b>shadow</b> appears before the party ( <b>Reaction</b> check).
3	If friendly, it reveals he was also forced into this experiment. He died when he fell from area 8 to area 9.
4	A fine thread lies ahead. If tripped, a spear erupts from a nearby wall dealing 1d6 damage (DC 12 DEX check).
5	A glowing rune on the wall stands out. If touched, magic creates an exact copy of the person. The doppelganger is scared and believes to be the original ( <b>Reaction</b> check).
6	Arcane forces glimmer as a person is created from thin air. The person belongs to the previous group of victims and has been returned from stasis ( <b>Reaction</b> check). Their group got as far as area 6 before all of them died.

## 1. DESCENDING STAIRCASE

*As the stupor leaves and consciousness returns, an empty chamber with a single, descending staircase is all that can be seen. Memories of reaching this place are cryptic and elusive. Nothing about that is certain.*

The party of peasants was magically trapped in this demi-plane by Darlen, the mage. They were put to sleep and teleported here to participate in the mage's deranged experiments of self-preservation. The party carries whatever items were randomly generated during character creation and a trinket of sentimental value (PC's choice).

The only way forward is the stairs that lead to area 2. The cold, limestone-brick walls are decorated with geometric patterns and etchings of stars and moons.



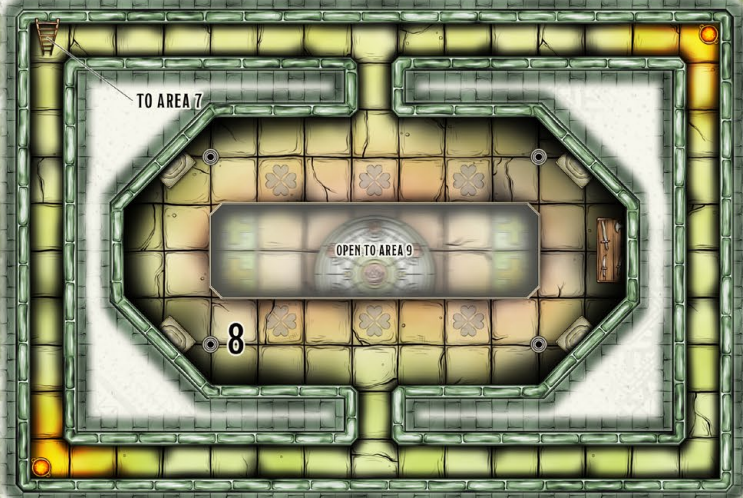
## 2. WELCOME HALL

The stairs lead to a large pillared hall overseen by a defaced statue of the goddess Gede. The statue's visage has been crudely replaced by Memnon's sigil.

When the characters arrive, the sigil on what should be Gede's face glimmers. The mage's voice then says:

*Welcome to my humble abode. You have been chosen as test subjects. You need not know what my purpose is; only that you are trapped and the way back to your lives is at the bottom of this dungeon. Take what you want as you progress. Good luck and godspeed!*

► **Treasure.** Each of the four gilded vases is worth 2 gp. Each one contains a single, randomly-generated item from the Starting Gear table (SD, page 33).

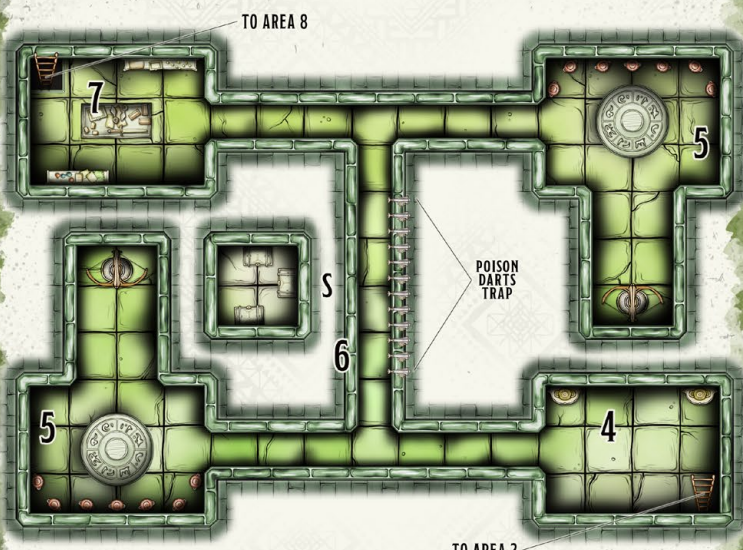


## 3. THE ARCHIVE

The chamber contains two bookshelves with a recount of Darlen the mage's past two experiments. There is not enough information to warn the characters of any threats. But it does contain a list of twenty-five people previously kidnapped by Darlen. All of them are marked 'dead' except for one person labeled as 'in stasis'.

► **Abjuration Aura.** An enchantment protects the documents and scrolls in this chamber. If any are damaged or destroyed, they reform after 24 hours without harm.

► **Treasure.** Searching the room for 1 crawling round yields two torches, a magnifying glass, and a crowbar.

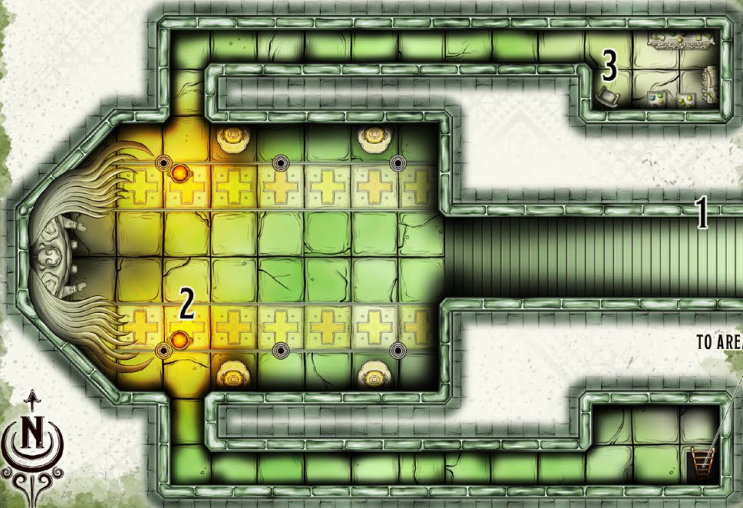


## 4. THE MYSTERY SALVES

The chamber contains two plinths. Unmarked, gilded vases rest on them. If inspected, both contain an iridescent, lustrous fluid. A bronze plaque on the wall reads:

*What can fill a room without taking up any space?*

If a character states the answer (*light* or *darkness*), the fluids change nature. One is clear and blue, the other is dark and tainted. Drinking from the blue one heals any damage. It can be used once per day. Drinking from the dark one burns the innards and causes 1d6 damage (DC 11 CON check). Without answering the riddle, drinking from either vase incurs a 3-in-6 chance of it causing either effect. They randomly change each minute.



## 5. CIRCLES OF MEDITATION

The chamber contains a rune-etched circle, seven clay urns, and an automated crossbow trap.

► **Crossbow Trap.** Approaching the crossbow or stepping on the meditation circle facing it causes it to shoot. The bolt deals 1d8 damage. Stepping on the circle with the back to the crossbow does not trigger it.

► **Meditation.** Spending 1 crawling round on the circle grants the person a one-time use of the *augury* spell.



## 6. HALLWAY OF DEATH

*Stone flower-buds decorate the east wall while dozens of punctures dot the opposite surface. The outline of a secret door is visible in the middle of it.*

The length of this hallway is crisscrossed by a dozen fine threads of different lengths and angles. They are barely visible under torchlight. A character can cross the hallway with extreme care not to trip any of them (DC 11 DEX). Alternatively, the party may attempt to trigger them from afar. The first thread is 10 feet into the hallway. Upon triggering them, poison darts are shot from the stone flower-buds. All creatures in the corridor take 1d6 poison damage (DC 12 CON for half).

► **Secret Chamber.** A character can spend 1 **crawling round** to find the brick button that allows access to this chamber. It contains a 70 gp, 250 sp, a *potion of healing*, three torches, an oil flask, and a shortsword.

## 7. THE ARMORY

The chamber contains a shaft that descends to area 8 and several stone surfaces. In this chamber, the characters find a longsword, two daggers, a set of leather armor, a shield, a rope 60 ft., and a crossbow with six bolts.

## 8. THE FACELESS GUARDIANS

*A large aperture on the chamber's center leads down to a lower chamber. Four standing sarcophagi; the lids decorated with runes, slowly begin to open.*

Four **zombies** emerge from the enclosures. They wear the tattered clothes of peasants and townsfolk. They were brought here in life in the first group of test subjects. The undead abominations attempt to push the characters toward the center and down to area 9.

## 9. THE HOMEBOUND PORTAL

*A detailed magic circle of stained glass and mosaic borders is surrounded by several sarcophagi. Two stone plinths hold grim mounds of human bones.*

This chamber is 30 feet below area 8. Creatures that fall here take 1d8 damage (DC 12 DEX for half). Otherwise, the characters can descend with ropes in 1 **crawling round**. The bottom chamber is desolate and silent.

► **The Bones.** The remains were recently cleaned; they bear countless bite marks left by insects (DC 11 INT).

► **The Standing Sarcophagi.** Inspecting any of the enclosures reveals the crawling sound of hundreds of scarabs within. Opening any sarcophagus triggers the others to open too. A flesh-eating **scarab swarm** emerges from the enclosures and attacks all living creatures.

► **The Corner Sarcophagi.** Darlen's voice is heard when any of them is opened: *"Bravo! You are the most successful subjects so far. The path back home is close. One last trial and you shall be free."* The inert bones on the plinths clatter as they coalesce into four **skeletons**.

## RETURNING HOME

**AFTER OVERCOMING ALL** challenges, the magic circle glows. Survivors may step on it and be instantly transported back home with whatever items they can carry. Despite the terrible circumstances of this event, it lights a spark of adventure in all survivors. They train and become would-be adventurers. Perhaps the characters' primary motivation is to enact revenge on Darlen, the mage. It will not be easy to track the elusive magic-user. Alas, confronting him is an adventure for another day...



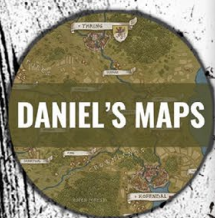
# A DREAM OF ALCHEMY



By Elven Tower and Daniel's Maps

Designed for use with

**ShadowDark RPG**



**LEVEL-0 GAUNTLET**

A SHADOWDARK FUNNEL ADVENTURE ABOUT THWARTING AN EVIL ALCHEMIST'S PLANS

# ADVENTURE PRIMER

All have betrayed me because they do not understand that all advancement comes at a cost. It shall all be worthwhile in the end. If only all would comply...

Rowan, the Alchemist



Countless generations of mages and researchers have tried to traverse the labyrinthine paths of the ancient art of alchemy. Some reactions and concoctions are known but after a certain point, alchemy becomes one of the most intricate subjects to study; few competent alchemists have walked among men. Transmuting common metals into gold is the foolish dream of most apprentices. While the real masters understand that such a goal is petty and uninspired. Their ultimate achievement is always the creation of *void crystals*, a theoretical material capable of cutting through matter, transmuting materials and souls, and even manipulating people's thoughts as if they were just another ingredient in an alchemy machine.

## THE DREAM OF ALCHEMY

AN ALCHEMIST AND mage, Rowan, recently acquired a tome titled *On the Nature of the World*, by an elvish researcher who conducted his experiments thousands of years ago. Rowan now strives to work on the tome's subjects to perfect the creation of the *void crystal*. Rowan lived in the City of Sabras where he is a renowned apothecary and a healer. However, he took advantage of people's trust and conducted alchemical experiments on those who came seeking help or medicine. Rowan believes that the ends justify the means and that when he perfects his *void crystal*, he shall easily revert any harm caused to the townsfolk. In his spare time, Rowan prepared a salve that can heal the peasantry. He shall release it when he finally succeeds. To protect his research, Rowan promised life-lengthening potions to the people in power in the city. They secretly cover for him.

### IT IS PERSONAL

In the following chapter, some people in the City of Sabras are given special motivations to be a part of the impromptu expeditionary force. During character generation, the players are free to consider these NPCs as prospects for their gauntlet party. To choose them, proceed with character creation as usual but keep the ancestries, gender, names, and motivations described below. Characters not chosen are willing to accompany the party on their expedition to Redstone Island too.

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

### Level 0 Gauntlet

THE FOLLOWING ARE generic adventure hooks that any character can use to be involved with this adventure. Individual hooks are provided for the special characters described in the city's description (see *It is Personal*).

#### PETTY REVENGE

The alchemist abandoned the City of Sabras weeks ago, leaving behind a crowd of dissatisfied clients, friends, and creditors. The characters seek justice but the bailiff and the watch refuse to pursue or prosecute Rowan. Most people give up but a small group of individuals have been deeply affected by the alchemist's selfish actions. This group of peasants is ready to track the scholar down and enact justice with their own hands.

#### DEBT COLLECTORS

Rowan borrowed 260 gp from Lord Thintsdale, a local banker, to fund his alchemy laboratory on Redstone Island. Rowan promised to pay back as he would be able to make gold out of thin air later on. However, the banker has grown tired of waiting and the authorities refuse to collect the debt. He offers a hefty reward and easy credits to whoever collects the debt. Some peasants rise to the challenge, aspiring for wealth and a brighter future.

## RUMORS

d6	Details
1	Rumor has it that Rowan is not only an apothecary but also a powerful mage. Some people barged into his shop when he practiced arcane spells and incantations.
2	People claim the apothecary owes over 350 gp to several creditors. However, the bailiff has declared that none of it can be collected as long as Rowan is away from the city.
3	A family of five all contracted a debilitating condition after consuming Rowan's remedies. They can barely walk and other healers claim to be unable to help.
4	Since Rowan started giving people strange remedies, the population of homeless decreased considerably. Most of them perished from exposure or skin ailments.
5	Andria, the court mage, believes that Rowan is after a legendary and theoretical substance, the <i>void crystal</i> .
6	People believe that acquiring Rowan's recipe book would change everything as his secrets would be widely known.

# THE CITY OF SABRAS

Don't you get it? We simply cannot prosecute Rowan while he is so far away. Please understand and desist from this foolish errand. Do not pester me...

Bailiff Darius

**T**he jewel in the desert, the basket of the region, the oasis of Redstone Desert. The City of Sabras is a sprawling settlement built on the shorelines of the Sabras River delta. It is a commerce hub that all ground and maritime routes visit on their comings and goings around the arid region. The walled city has been successfully defended from sea raiders for decades. It stands as a place where people can aspire to build something lasting and meaningful. Numerous people from smaller desert settlements move to the City of Sabras to seek better opportunities.

## INGRAINED CORRUPTION

**THE CITY OF** Sabras is ruled by Duke Garlington, a corrupt noble sworn to the Redstone Crown. However, the capital is so far away to the south that the duke has complete autonomy to manage this region as he sees fit, with little to no interference from royal agents.

Rowan and the duke are the main culprits for the events that occurred. The alchemist had an audience with the duke and explained to him his goal of perfecting the *void crystal*. Rowan claimed that human trials were necessary and that the consequences on the population could not be prevented. But he promised Duke Garlington that it would all pay off in the end. Rowan convinced the duke that after crafting the *void crystal*, he would be able to transmute gold and extend his life and those of his family or allies indefinitely, making him the eternal ruler of the City of Sabras. The duke, inebriated by greed, accepted the consequences of Rowan's experiments and instructed all city officials to prevent the prosecution of Rowan, despite the townsfolk's malaise. Alas, the people's discomfort has risen to intolerable levels.

### City Features

► **Events.** Check for a **Random Event** once per day and when visiting a new city area (3-in-6 chance).

► **Climate.** The City of Sabras is a green jewel in the desert. Sabras River becomes a delta when reaching the ocean. The region is fresh and humid thanks to this.

► **Religion.** Most townsfolk revere the Four Lords. Temples and chapels dedicated to these deities are located in each district. People are devout, god-fearing believers.

## RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A heated throng of <b>peasants</b> march in the streets toward the bailiff's office ( <b>Reaction</b> check). They demand the pursuit of Rowan. At the head of the march, there are four people with at least one shriveled, unusable limb.
2	A blind vagrant begs for food. If approached, he claims he was the blacksmith until he visited Rowan last month for an eye infection. The alchemist's remedy blinded him.
3	A sewer outlet explodes suddenly, injuring a passing person. The exhaust smells of sulfur and the water is impregnated with oily substances. People blame Rowan.
4	In a square, the duke's spokesman declares that while Rowan is on Redstone Island, nothing can be done about him. The people are disgusted with the hypocrisy as the City of Sabras has a strong maritime presence.
5	Fishermen claim to have seen strange, enlarged sea-life in the recent weeks since Rowan left for Redstone Island. Alas, some people became sick after eating them.
6	The bailiff and watchmen arrested a group of mariners who decided to sail to Redstone Island to bring Rowan to justice. It is clear that the authorities cover for him.

## 1. SABRAS CASTLE

*20-foot-tall, granite walls surround the fortified edifice. The flags of Sabras and the crown fly on the highest towers; a source of pride to the townsfolk.*

The characters are unlikely to secure an audience with the duke (1-in-6 chances per week) as they are not influential or important in the City of Sabras. In case they do, the duke disregards any accusations of corruption, if mentioned. If required, the duke orders the arrest of any quarrelsome individuals until Rowan succeeds.

► **The Bailiff.** Darius tells the characters to get lost if they request him to act against Rowan. The bailiff shamelessly declares nothing shall be done. He does not fear the opinion of the peasantry as the duke has promised he too shall be rewarded for his loyalty.

► **PC - Lady Annia.** One of the duchess' ladies-in-waiting has heard enough in the castle to know that the nobles conspire with Rowan. She resents the alchemist since her sister contracted a terrible lung disease that threatens to take her life any day now. Lady Annia is ready to seek justice by herself if there is any hope of saving her sister. She steals a dagger from the duke's room.

# THE CITY OF SABRAS



## 2. CASTLE SQUARE

The richest and most exclusive establishments in the City of Sabras are located here. One of them is Rowan's apothecary shop, which was sacked by the populace a week ago. Lord Thintsdale's bank is here too (see **Adventure Hooks**), he is close to bankruptcy after Rowan borrowed so much money for the Redstone Island project.

► **Apothecary shop.** Little of value can be salvaged from the ransacked store. 1 hour of searching yields 5 sp, an oil flask, and used a medicine case.

## 3. RI'ER MOUTH TAVERN

The tavern is a popular stop for visitors and merchants. It is owned by a dwarf named Akiri. The place is famous for its out-of-the-ordinary ale; the recipe is thought to be a dwarvish secret that Akiri's family guards closely.

► **PC - Akiri.** Weeks ago, Akiri visited Rowan to purchase some mineral salts that are one of the ingredients for his homemade ale. Alas, that batch of ale had good taste but it caused a severe allergy on all who tried it. Akiri's reputation took a hit. Half the clientele blame the alchemists while others blame Akiri's brewing skills.

## 4. TEMPLE OF COMBRIS

The largest temple of the Four Lords. This particular temple is named after a warrior martyr, Saint Combris. He gave his life to uphold the ideals of his faith. The temple is a welcoming place to all people and ancestries.

► **PC - Peter.** He is an acolyte assigned to the temple's medic ward. Peter has spent weeks caring for those affected by Rowan's nefarious treatments. After witnessing so much suffering, Peter has decided to act and join whoever is willing to bring the alchemist to justice.

## 5. NORDOK WAREHOUSE

The elf-owned warehouse is one of the most important hubs for travel and commerce. Now, agents of the castle inspect all departures and merchandise to make sure Rowan, the alchemist, is left alone to work.

► **PC - Farland.** The docks' worker witnessed the arrest of mariner friends that tried to depart for Redstone Island to arrest Rowan. He knows that the authorities have the piers on lock-down to protect the alchemist. Farland knows the docks well and can easily prepare and steal a vessel to bring a group of people to Redstone Island.



## 6. SHIPWRIGHT

Most vessels in the City of Sabras are designed if not built by Salas, the best engineer in town. He is a gifted craftsman who has designed better and better ships in the past two decades. Salas was arrested a week ago after lending a fast vessel to a group of vengeful mariners who sought to reach Redstone Island. Bailiff Darius was particularly cruel during the raid and arrest.

► **PC - Carl.** The apprentice shipwright and Salas's Son. Carl is furious with Bailiff Darius and his shameless protection of Rowan's crimes. Carl has heard terrible things about the treatment of inmates and fears for his father's life and well-being. He seeks revenge on Rowan and the bailiff. If it were left to Carl, both of them would die in the city gallows as soon as possible. A fitting punishment for their involvement in so much suffering and cruelty.

## 7. EASTEND GROCERIES

The compound features two granaries and a warehouse for edibles and food products for the region. Most farms ship their produce here where it is bought and then redistributed across the City of Sabras. All distribution shipments have stopped for a week now. The establishment buys a pesticide gas to deal with vermin from Rowan's apothecary once per month. The last batch caused the food to become poisonous. All who eat it become catatonic and unresponsive. A scholar tries to cleanse the food without success. The threat of famine is serious.

► **PC - Arthima.** She is a warehouse worker. Arthima brought home some food as soon as it was sprayed with Rowan's pesticide. It caused her two little siblings to become sick with the contaminated food. After other healers in town failed to cure the lads, she is quick to join any expeditionary force to Redstone Island to help them recover. She is ready to risk it all for her siblings.

## 8. SAILOR'S SUPPLIES & MORE

Owned by an entrepreneurial halfling known as Lucky Jack, Sailor's Supplies & More is a purveyor of all manner of items needed at sea: long-lasting ration bars, scurvy tablets, wooden barrels and crates, rope, and iron implements for vessels. Business has been slow for the past few weeks as all outgoing vessels have to spend a considerable amount of time passing the bailiff's inspections. The current state of affairs impacts the city's economy but the nobles appear to not care about this, even though their incomes are also affected by this.

► **PC - Armin.** A worker in the supplies shop, Armin wishes to open his own supply establishment but requires a considerable amount of money to fund it. The recent plotting of assailing the alchemist's base in Redstone Island is a perfect opportunity to earn this money.

## DEVELOPMENT

**THE PATCHWORK GROUP** of characters is ready to part for Redstone Island. Their mission: arrest Rowan, ransack his laboratory to find cures for the sick, and maybe even make some money in the process. Farland (area 5) has a vessel ready and knows the piers well enough to find a moment to sail without risk of being interrupted.

The maritime expedition sets out before dawn without the knowledge of Bailiff Darius. It takes the party four hours to traverse the sea and reach Redstone Island. A small, abandoned pier with a single boat awaits them. The only trail leads to an ancient dwarvish hall that Rowan, the alchemist, has repurposed as his laboratory.

The corrupt bailiff becomes infuriated after learning of the party's departure. He sends an interception party later the next day but the characters have the upper hand.



# REDSTONE ISLAND LABORATORY

I am so glad you're here! My kind have not the power to stop the alchemist. But I'll help how I can! The naive man deals with a force that is best left alone.

Allarinni, the Fairy



Redstone Island was once the home of a small dwarvish population. Little is known of their culture as they abandoned the island through their underground tunnels centuries ago. A large rock gate, eroded and damaged by exposure, is the only evidence of the dwarvish presence on the surface.

After the dwarves abandoned the area, the island became the home of seafaring fairies. The minute fey creatures spoke once with Rowan after they detected the toxic fumes coming from the laboratory. They ordered him to stop his experiments. The alchemist dismissed them and told them not to pester him any further. The fairies threatened to attack but the mage shot a few arcane bolts at them before taking refuge in the laboratory.

After their unsavory encounter, Rowan crafted an arcane contraption that functions as a *grounding enchantment* (see **Area Features**). With it, most fairies are afraid to confront Rowan because the apparatus severely impairs their movement and abilities. They are afraid.

► **The Boat.** If the characters inspect Rowan's boat for 1 hour, they find 5 sp, 58 cp, three torches, an oil lamp, a backpack, six candles, and a set of leather armor. In addition, if the characters sabotage or disable the boat, they prevent Rowan from escaping, as he is bound to do if the battle is lost. To prevent him from using the party's boat, the characters must hide their vessel or disable it temporarily with tools or knots (DC 11 DEX check).

► **The Trail.** The seldom-traveled path leads from the pier at the beach, through a forested region, and to the dwarvish gate. The region is undeveloped and overgrown. Only wildlife and the fey live here (DC 11 INT). It takes the party 1 hour to reach the end (area 1).

## Area Features

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every two crawling round and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Alert Sensors.** Rowan set up hidden runes near the gate. They are almost-invisible runes on the soil (DC 11 WIS check). If a character steps on them, Rowan is alerted of their approach. Otherwise, they are undetected.

► **Grounding Enchantment.** In the laboratory, and within 40 feet of the gate, creatures cannot fly. All flying movement ceases. Creatures fall and must walk.

## RANDOM EVENTS

d4	Details
1	A bright green light followed by a cloud of eye-watering gas erupts from the large gate. Grass and plants shrivel when in contact with the noxious cloud. It clears soon.
2	A <b>boar</b> approaches the area in a fit of rage. It can be calmed down if given at least 10 pounds of food.
3	An awakened <b>dire rat</b> approaches the party cautiously ( <b>Reaction</b> check). It is inclined to blame the humanoid for the strange gas exhaust but may be swayed to help.
4	The arcane contamination causes two <b>rot flowers</b> to burst from the ground within reach of the party (DC 12 DEX check to jump away). The flowers' gas toxin may be harvested with bottles for future use (DC 13 INT check).

## 1. THE TRAIL'S END

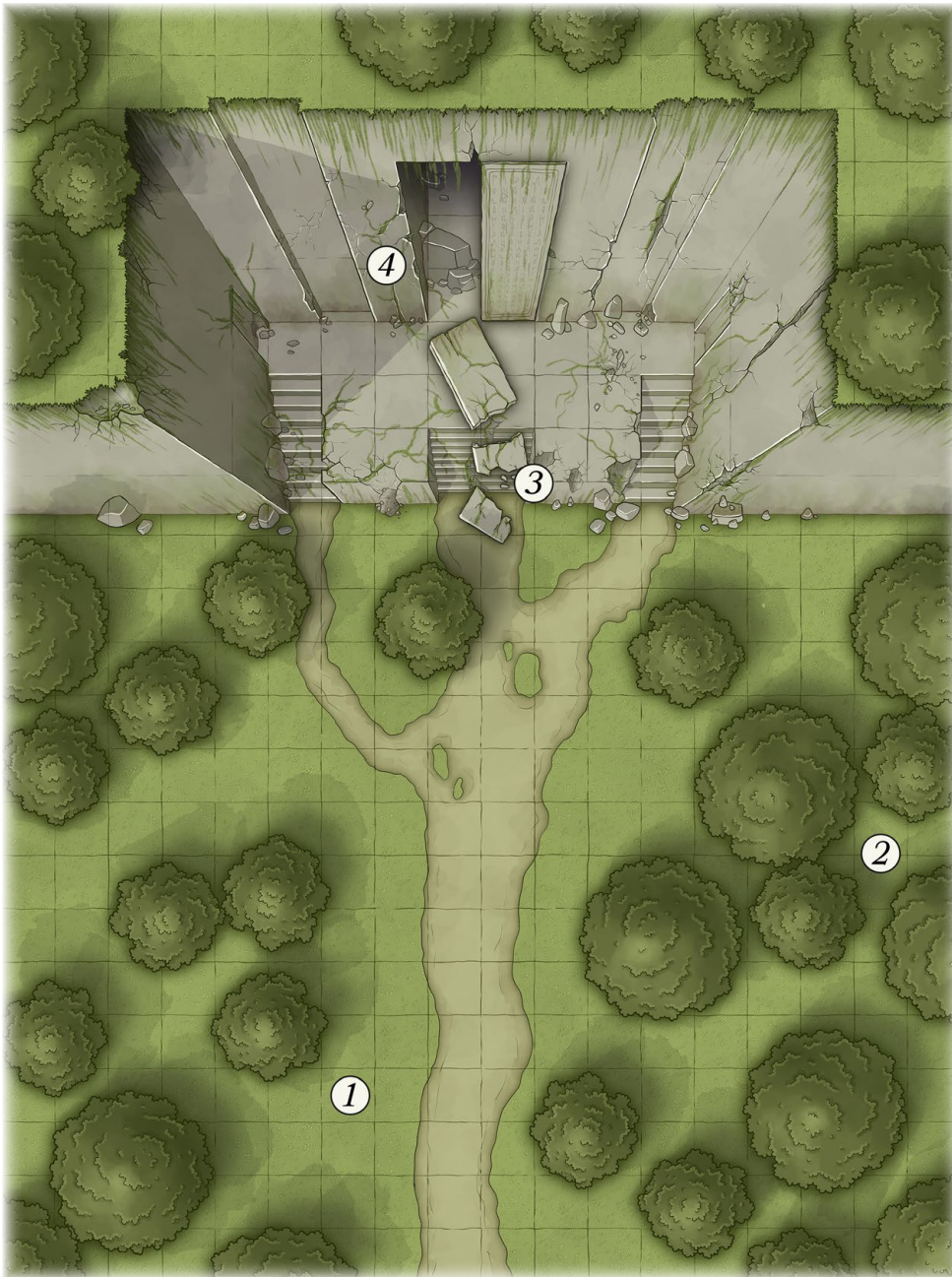
*The trail ends by a crumbling, eroded, granite construction of impressive geometry. The 20-foot-tall gate at its center stands open, one of the stone doors lies in pieces in front of the colossal construction.*

The stone doors and the base of the construction are etched with faded-out runes. They cannot be read from here as the erosion has rendered them almost illegible. Approaching is necessary to learn more about them.

## 2. UNEXPECTED ALLIES

A party of eight 1-foot-tall humanoid creatures approach the party of peasants. The **fairies** cannot fly this close to the gate. The needle-wielding fey are inclined to be friendly. Unless the characters are openly aggressive, the fey welcome their arrival as they need help. Their leader introduces herself as Allarinni. If the characters are eager to converse, the fairy tells the characters about the conflict they have with Rowan. The wood fairies are not surprised to learn that people in the City of Sabras also have their quarrels with the troublesome mage.

The fairies explain they cannot fly in the compound's vicinity and thus have not dared venture into the laboratory. However, Allarinni steps up to the challenge and offers to accompany the party on foot. She is eager to find a way to disable the *grounding enchantment* so that other fairies can more easily aid the party. Other than that, they have no information about the laboratory or the dwarvish compound; old superstitions prevented them from exploring the dwarvish tunnels in the past.



### 3. THE GREAT STEPS

*Each of the eroded stone steps is decorated with intricate runes in Dwarvish. They are washed out; a careful study is required to make sense of them.*

A character that knows Dwarvish reads in them a recount of the dwarves' arrival looking for mithral veins under Redstone Island. They stayed for a time until the mines ran dry. They left after that, disliking the island.

Some of the steps are marked with alert sensor runes (see **Area Features**). The characters who stumble up the steps without caution have disadvantage in seeing them.

If Allarinni is present, she remarks that no fairy dared approach the gate as she does now. While her words sound brave and proud, she is unmistakably afraid.

### 4. THE GATE

Beyond the doors, a 10-foot-wide hallway leads into the dark depths of Redstone Island. The stench of Rowan's alchemical efforts is strongest in the entrance hall.

► **The Door.** The door collapsed decades ago. Careful inspection of the stone hinges reveals that water erosion rendered them unusable (DC 12 INT check).

► **The Illusion.** If the characters activated any of the alert sensor runes, an ephemeral projection of Rowan appears before the entrance when they approach. The characters know him by sight in case they were affected by his criminal activities. The illusory Rowan tells them to be gone as there is no hope for them to stand against him. Rowan does not wish to cause more harm than is necessary for the scientific breakthrough he seeks. At least, that is what the illusion claims.

► **The Guardians.** If the characters press further, an alcove opens to free two **zombies**. The abominable undead attack all living creatures and fight until slain. The encounter occurs even if the alert sensors were not triggered. In that case, Rowan remains unaware of the characters' approach.

► **Treasure.** Each zombie carries a rusty sheathed shortsword.

## THE DWARVISH HALLS

**IN THE DARK** dwarvish tunnels, the characters encounter an underground compound equivalent to a large castle next to a network of countless mining tunnels. When the dwarves left, they took with them everything of value, in addition, the place has been explored many times since. Nothing else can be found here except for the wall runes that tell more of the dwarvish tribe that came.

► **Finding the Lab.** The characters must traverse the endless tunnels to find Rowan's laboratory. The characters either follow the stench of his experiments or find faint footprints on the dusty halls (DC 10 WIS). Or they can systematically sweep and map the compound until they find the wing he remodeled as his foul lair. This leads the characters to the laboratory doors in area 1.

# THE ALCHEMY LAB

ROWAN, THE MAGE, is tinkering in the workshop (area 3) if he is not aware of the characters' approach. Otherwise, he moves to area 10 to protect the delicate devices that he believes are capable of crafting the *void crystal*.

Rowan is the only other person in the laboratory. Only undead and automatons make him company here. The former apothecary finds the character's intrusion tasteless and bothersome as he is busy at work. Rowan's arcane forges in area 10 are meant to produce *void crystal* soon but some refinement in the machines is still necessary. Rowan believes he might reach his goal in a few weeks at the latest. Still, he has no way to know for sure.

## Dungeon Features

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a **Random Event** every two **crawling round** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Areas 2, 7, and 10 have active arcane devices that radiate bright light as a byproduct of their varied functions. Other areas feature unlit torch sconces.

► **Aura of Silence.** The devices in area 10 are so loud that Rowan created a magical aura of silence that also reaches area 9. No sound from those areas can be heard outside. The other way around works in the same way.

► **Grounding Enchantment.** In the laboratory and halls, creatures cannot levitate, float, or fly. All aerial movement ceases. Creatures fall and must walk. Disabling the floating machine in area 7 stops this effect.

## RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A fine thread lies ahead (DC 11 WIS). Tripping it causes a spear to burst from the wall, impaling whoever stands on the spot. It deals 1d6 damage (DC 12 DEX for half).
2	The arcane devices in areas 2, 7, and 10 malfunction for a moment and stop producing light for 1 minute.
3	Bailiff Darius's interception party arrives at the laboratory. Four <b>thugs</b> and a scribe ( <b>peasant</b> ) order the characters to drop their weapons to be arrested. These goons refuse to enter the silent rooms out of fear.
4	Two automated floor hatches open. A <b>skeleton</b> climbs from each of them. The undead guardians attack!
5	A fairy named Lardinni ventures into the lab on foot and catches with the party. It fights alongside Allarinni.
6	A person notices a hidden panel on the wall. A clockwork apparatus with many levers lies behind. Operating the levers causes the machine to pour liquid into a glass vial. The effects of drinking this concoction are randomized (1d6). <b>Blue</b> (1), the drinker is healed of all damage. <b>Green</b> (2), the drinker takes 1d4 damage. <b>Yellow</b> (3), the drinker has advantage on all checks for 1 hour. <b>Pink</b> (4), the drinker grows 1d6 inches taller. <b>Red</b> (5), the drinker becomes blind but gains an echolocation ability for 1d6 days. <b>Black</b> (6), the drinker gains the use of a random Wizard spell; they can use this spell for 1d4 days.

## 1. ENTRANCE HALLWAY

*The exquisitely-carved stone hallway leads to a pair of doors engraved with the sigil of a dwarvish clan.*

*This was once the home of wealthy dwarves.*

Rowan recently repurposed one of the best-preserved areas as his laboratory and temporary home.

► **Poisoned Needle.** The door knob features a clockwork trap that pushes a hollow needle when the knob is turned. If operated with care, the character can hear the machinery slowly moving to trigger the trap (DC 12 DEX to disarm). If triggered, it deals 1d6 damage.

## 2. HALL OF WARDS

*A clockwork device moves and produces light. It floats 5 feet from the ground. A marvelous trinket.*

This device maintains the alert sensors on the dwarvish gate. Disabling it causes the runes to disappear. Touching the trinket with bare hands or metal objects causes an electric arc to jump and deal 1d4 damage (DC 12 CON). Insulated materials like wood, fabric, or leather can be used to touch it. This causes it to malfunction: it vibrates, turns off, and falls to the ground.

## 3. WORKSHOP

Read the following if Rowan is unaware of the party, otherwise, the mage waits for the party in area 10:

*A robed man holds fine bronze instruments and tinkers with a strange clockwork device. It is Rowan, the culprit of all sorrow and pain in the City of Sabras.*

Rowan is surprised to see visitors but does not hide his anger at being invaded. Thus, he commands the peasants to leave at once lest they wish to see his magic. If the characters insist, the battle with Rowan starts here. If dropped to half his hit points, Rowan attempts to flee to area 10 to take his arcane devices and escape.

► **Treasure.** The room contains a pouch with 36 sp, a dagger, a hammer, ten sheets of paper, and an ink vial.

## 4. AUTOMATON GUARDIAN

This room features an automaton guardian (**animated armor**). It is embedded on the east wall and appears to be part of the room's decoration (DC 11 WIS to notice). When a person comes within 5 feet of it, it detaches from the stone wall and attacks intruders until slain.

## 5. KITCHEN AND LARDER

The room contains numerous cooking implements and ingredients. The tools and food move on their own slowly as a masterful dinner prepares itself. The meal is ready 1 **crawling round** after the characters come here.

► **Treasure.** The larder contains five bottles of fine wine that can be sold for 10 gp each to noblemen.



## 6. ROWAN'S QUARTERS

The mage's room contains a bed flanked by two potted plants, a chest, and a desk. It is tidy and well-organized.

► **The Chest.** It contains 308 gp, 1,486 sp, a *potion of healing*, a silver ring (5 gp), and Rowan's spellbook.

► **The Desk.** Intricate arcane blueprints of the mage's clockwork devices are found here. The most complex one describes the apparatuses in area 10. The characters cannot understand these arcane recipes. The tome *On the Nature of the World* is open on a page that describes the *void crystal*. It claims the artifact can perform alchemical miracles and manipulate people's thoughts.

## 7. THE GROUNDING DEVICE

The den is overtaken by a complex arcane machine similar to the one found in area 2. As long as this device works, no creature can fly within the compound. It can be disabled in the same manner as the one in area 2. After this is done, Allarinni, the fairy, takes flight and continues aiding the party airborne. Two fairies come to help the party in 1 **crawling round**. The rest are still too scared to come, even without the enchantment.

## 8. STORAGE CHAMBER

The chamber contains an array of unmarked wooden crates, barrels, clay vases, and a set of shelves. The room is a storage space for surplus ingredients and alchemy materials and tools. The room is in disarray.

► **Treasure.** If the characters spend 1 **crawling round** inspecting the area, they find ten glass vials, a set of tools, a crawling kit, a *healing potion*, and a flask of oil.

## 9. SILENT ANTECHAMBER

This chamber is in complete silence (see **Dungeon Features**). Rowan carries a bracelet that makes him immune to this silencing effect when activated.

► **The Mirror.** A 3-foot-tall silver mirror hangs on the east wall. It is magical. When a person stands before, the mirror functions as normal for a moment before twisting the reflection. The divination mirror predicts the person's future within 1 year. Some characters may see trained heroes or mages in their reflection as future adventurers. Others shall see only death and rot. The GM should use creative descriptions based on recent deeds to make these predictions. Some may still be wrong...

## ROWAN, THE MAGE

*Robed with iridescent attire and wearing a silver circlet, the man's unwavering determination shines in his eyes.*

**AC 11, HP 18, ATK 1 spell +3, MV near, S -1, D +1, C +0, I +2, W +0, Ch +0, AL C, LV 3**

**Arcane Armor (INT Spell).** Self. DC 12. AC 15 for 2d4 rounds.

**Blast (INT Spell).** DC 12. Far, one target. 1d8 damage.

**Cancel (INT Spell).** DC 13. End one spell affecting a target within near.

**Snare (INT Spell).** DC 13. Focus. One humanoid target within near paralyzed for duration.

### 10. THE VOID CRYSTAL FORGE

*Three floating, clockwork devices shoot ebbs of ephemeral energy tendrils in between them. The arcane trinkets work in surprisingly utter silence.*

If the characters trigger the alarm sensors, Rowan waits for them here. The mage is ready, he carries a bracelet that nulls the aura of silence for only him. He can hear the characters approach while the party would still be unaware of his ambush. Rowan fights fiercely but ultimately attempts to escape if reduced to one-fourth of his hit points. He uses a special wrench to grab the floating clockwork devices and makes a run for his boat.

If the characters come here undetected, the silent room is empty and they can tinker with the forge.

► **The Forge.** Three peculiar, floating, clockwork devices work together to craft the elusive *void crystal*. They are more advanced than the ones found in areas 2 and 7. Each features a multitude of levers, buttons, and orifices. Rowan works with them daily to perfect their crafting capabilities, so far without clear success. They can be disabled in the same manner as those in area 2 but as they are more unstable, they break when making contact with the ground. If that happens, there is a 1-in-6 chance that they explode. Creatures within 5 feet take 2d6 damage (DC 11 DEX). Disabling any of the artifacts causes the other two to become dormant, they stay afloat but stop shining. A character may steal these devices for further study. Alas, they shall not comprehend their functioning for years unless they dedicate their life to studying the knowledge in *On the Nature of the World*.

► **The Vats.** Three varnished wooden bats by the walls contain a concoction capable of healing the nefarious effects of Rowan's crimes in the City of Sabras. The vats are labeled as '*Rowan's Cure-It-All Salve*'. The vats are mounted on wooden bases with wheels. They can be easily pushed through the dungeon, the dwarvish halls, the forest, and into the characters' boat.

## ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

**THE CHARACTERS REACH** the end of this adventure and face the consequences of their deeds.

### ROWAN IS DEAD

The characters outwit Rowan in combat. If the characters return to the city with the apothecary's body and the medicine, the populace is grateful and happy to be saved. The corrupt authorities attempt to arrest the characters for murder but the crowd defends them. Under the threat of civil unrest and after exposing themselves even further as corrupt officials, the bailiff orders his men to retreat to Sabras Castle to guard the duke.

It takes a few weeks for the order to be restored, in the meanwhile, Duke Garlington demotes Darius and orders a covert inquiry into the characters' identities. The duke may take revenge on them later, or take advantage of their resourcefulness for future goals of his.

### ROWAN IS ARRESTED

If the characters bring the former apothecary alive, the populace is happy to be saved and demands the man be beheaded in the Castle Square. Bailiff Darius and his men try to 'rescue' the mage from the crowd but are pushed back forcefully. Civil unrest wins and the populace finally rebels against the authorities. The bailiff is too slow to react and is slaughtered in the city streets.

The mage is beheaded at dawn one day later. The ceremony is held by Duke Garlington and a newly-appointed bailiff; one more attuned to the people's needs. The duke later declares that like other civilians affected, he too was a victim. The duke claims to have been mentally influenced through the use of potions, hence his recent disinterest in the sorrows of the City of Sabras.

### ROWAN ESCAPES

The mage manages to reach his boat and leaves. The characters are still welcome in the city if they bring the cure for their ailments. The bailiff does not order their arrest as he is unsure about the mage's well-being.

The mage, inebriated with rage, shall plan his revenge against the puny peasants. He is especially enraged if the characters stole his magical trinkets. However, he decides to lay low and consider his options.

### THE GREEDY BANKER

Lord Thintsdale pays a visit to the characters a day after their arrival. He expects to be paid the 260 gp that Rowan owed. If the characters pay up, the banker lets them keep 50 gp. Soon, an adventurers' guild offers to train the characters in martial and arcane arts. They may soon be heroes. If the characters hide or refuse to pay, the banker hires a skilled group of mercenaries to collect the debt. Alas, that is an adventure for another day...

# The Bands of Power

When powerful mages, forge masters, or artificers create great relics or artifacts, they often bring more havoc and chaos than good. This is because evil exists everywhere. It is just a matter of time before a necromancer, a criminal guild, or the spoiled son of a king gets their hands on these marvels. In the wrong hands, magic to build is used to destroy. And the energy to cure or heal is bent, twisted, and used to cause harm. They transform these artifacts into weapons, and thus, many of these items end up hidden or lost. Branded as forbidden, the creators of these relics of the past worked hard so that they stay forgotten. The *Bands of Power* are a suitable example of a great invention that fell into the wrong hands.

It was hundreds of years ago, in the northern territories ruled by the ancient dwarf lords when Gorrifrey, a skillful fire master forged the bands for their king. They are encrusted with two dozen rubies of different sizes each. The face of the bygone king is sculpted on their surfaces. The ancient dwarven magic in the bands gave the king abnormal strength, vitality, and stamina. The intricate spells cast into the bands would help him outlive all his contenders.

The bands caused unrest in the kingdom. Word traveled fast, and it did not take long for assassins to appear. The king was murdered, and the bands stolen. Civil war followed, and before they knew it, all those involved forgot why they were fighting in the first place. The bands were stored away and were soon forgotten, hoping no one would ever seek their might again.

The arcane bands got lost in time hundreds of years ago. They remained hidden for a long time. All until a mage named Hartvigg perceived their energy. Hoping to find out more about them but not to risk his skin, he hired a group of brave villagers in the closest town to help him explore the vault. Hartvigg claims the bands must be hidden somewhere inside. He describes what path to take in the woods and how to find the ancient dungeon's entrance.

1. The villagers follow the directions and reach the entrance. A staircase descends into a large hall. A pattern on the floor dominates the area. Bone mounds move and four skeletons form and attack. If the characters step on the trap (see map), they are dropped 30 feet and into area 5.
2. Books, tomes, and scrolls that pertain to ancient research about magical items and artifact creation are found here. There are two random magical potions and a few hundred coins in the chests. A container features a false bottom. If the characters find this secret way, they may descend to area 7.
3. A lavish shrine to a dwarven god. The deity is represented in the shape of a rune-etched anvil flanked by two fonts with crystal-clear water. Two secret passages exit this chamber. One of them is a trapdoor that leads to area 4. The other one leads to a vault with chests. There are pieces of adventuring gear. Two longswords, a set of leather armor, a backpack, five torches, two bags of caltrops, two 60-foot-long hempen ropes, and one dagger.

4. The characters must find the trapdoor in area 3 or descend from the trap in area 1 to continue further into the dungeon. Characters that walk down this corridor and fail to notice the concealed trapdoor are impaled in the spike pit below.

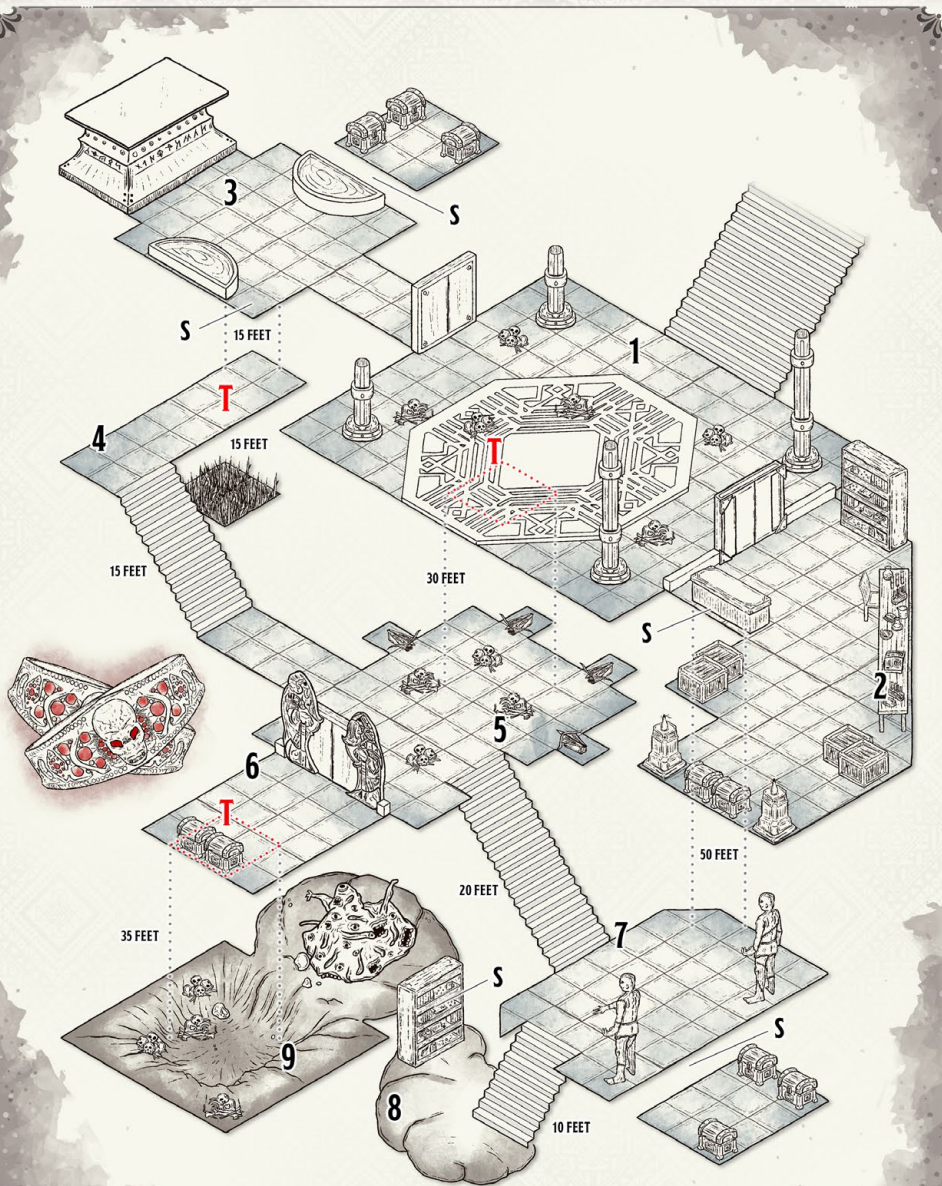
5. This landing features alcoves with four mounted, automated crossbows. The bolts fly whenever living creatures enter the chamber. They reload magically every 2 minutes. After the crossbows shoot, four skeletons form from the bone mounds and attack intruders without mercy.

6. A massive dwarvish gate blocks this area. Four people have no trouble pushing it open. The chests by the far wall do not exist, they are a clever illusion. A trapdoor lies below the illusory chests. If the characters approach recklessly, they fall through the chute and land in area 9. They could alternatively throw rocks or a similar object to both reveal the illusion and trigger the trapdoor to open safely.

7. When the characters descend, they awaken the guardians. A pair of horrid abominations. Different body parts put together in a gruesome display of necromancy. Despite their large size, the flesh zombies move very slowly and have even lower reflexes. The characters can easily outrun them and find a strategy that keeps them at a safe distance. A secret vault hides behind the far wall. If the characters push the right brick, they find a small hoard: 217 gp, 3,719 sp, a dozen pieces of silverware, jewels, a couple of rings, a bracelet, and many bags of fine herbs and spices (1,890 gp).

8. The dungeon's lowest level is made of caves. There is a hidden passage behind the bookshelf. The characters find it by moving the old, useless history books and tomes.

9. Falling through the trap in area 6 alone means certain death. The *Bands of Power* are inside the monster. The poor, scared, remaining villagers may have seen enough; they have an option when they arrive from area 8. Escape with their lives and abandon their foolish dreams of adventuring. Or confront the spawn of nightmares to have a possibility to become heroes. The gibbering moulder must be defeated to retrieve the *Bands of Power*. The tormented souls of all who died getting the bands live within. What will the soon-to-be heroes do with the power of the bands if they succeed? The answers to that question are an adventure for another day...



# The King

A Shadowdark Class  
By Taylor Seely-Wright





# The King

*Hither came Conan, the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandaled feet.*

**Weapons:** All weapons

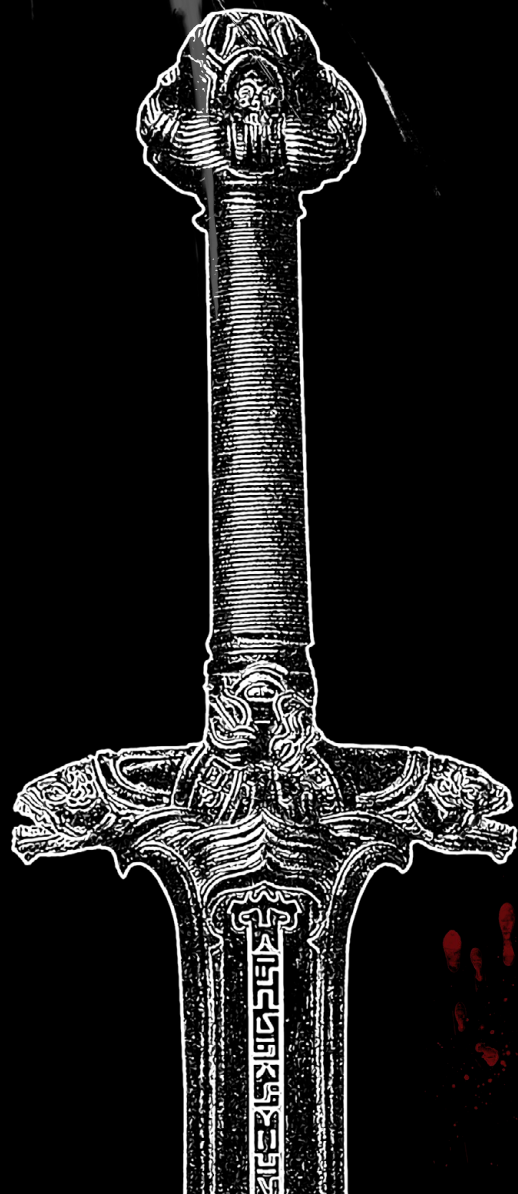
**Armor:** None

**Hit Dice:** 1d12

**Gigantic Mirth's.** Your gold can only be spent on food, drink, and carousing. When you carouse, you purchase the largest party increment you can afford.

**Mighty Thews.** Any melee or thrown weapon wielded by you deals 1d12 damage.

**Road of Kings.** You'll wander many roads in your lifetime. At levels 1 & 2, roll on Thief King Talents. At levels 3 & 4, roll on the Reaver King Talents. At levels 5 & 6, roll on Slayer King Talents. At levels 7 & 8, roll on The King Talents. At level 9 and above, roll on any of the Thief King, Reaver King,



## THIEF KING TALENTS

2D6	TALENTS
2	You steal 1 random magic item, GM's choice
3-6	You can climb, sneak and hide with advantage (re-roll if duplicate)
7-9	+2 Strength or Dexterity score
10-11	+2 on initiative rolls
12	Choose a talent or gain +2 to distribute to ability scores

## REAVER KING TALENTS

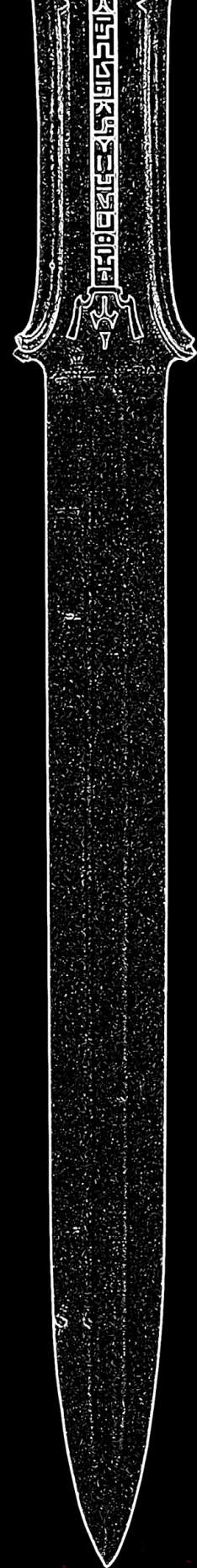
2D6	TALENTS
2	Your carousing dice increases one size (d8 > d10 > d12)
3-6	When you slay a creature the first time in combat, its allies test morale (reroll if duplicate)
7-9	+2 Strength or Constitution score
10-11	Gain +1 attack and damage on your mighty thews
12	Choose a talent or gain +2 to distribute to ability scores

## SLAYER KING TALENTS

2D6	TALENTS
2	Gain proficiency in all armor
3-6	You have advantage on Strength checks against opposing forces, like wrestling a snake, or breaking down a door (re-roll if duplicate)
7-9	+2 Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution score
10-11	Gain +1 attack and damage on your mighty thews
12	Choose a talent or gain +2 to distribute to ability scores

## THE KING TALENTS

2D6	TALENTS
2	The opportunity to claim a kingdom presents itself. You depart from the adventuring lifestyle to seize your destiny and become an NPC under the GM's control
3-6	After falling to 0 hp, you remain conscious (re-roll if duplicate)
7-9	+2 Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution
10-11	You attract a sellsword to fight by your side. Each time you roll this talent, you gain another sellsword. Name them. Having one or more sellswords gives you +1 dice to your mighty thews. When you are struck in combat, you can instead direct the blow to one of your sellswords, killing them. Your sellswords follow you at all times. They are loaded to capacity, their gear is worthless, and they refuse to perform menial tasks. If a sellsword dies, you can replenish your lost followers during your next session of carousing
12	Choose a talent or gain +2 to distribute to ability scores



*What do I know of cultured ways,  
the gílt, the craft, and the lie? I, who  
was born in a naked land and bred  
in the open sky. The subtle tongue,  
the sophist guile, they fail when the  
broadswords sing; Rush in and die,  
dogs— I was a man before I was a king.*

*— Robert E. Howard*

# THE AXE OF DREAMS



By Elven Tower

Designed for use with

**ShadowDark RPG**

**LEVEL 0 GAUNTLET**



**A MID-LEVEL SHADOWDARK ADVENTURE ABOUT RETRIEVING A WORLD-CHANGING ARTIFACT**

# ADVENTURE PRIMER

The blood spilled stains all generations to come. There shall come a day of reckoning when the call for blood is heard in your progeny's hearts.

Adages of the Axe

**N**t was long ago when a mighty warrior walked among common men. Few remember his earthly name, Antares. He was once like his peers, but the vigor of battle and the constant amount of lives he took with his legendary axe was such that even the deities took notice of his exploits. Ramlaat, the Horde, god of barbaric deeds was impressed by the man's knack for violence. The deity offered this warrior an embrace that brandished him as his. It was both a blessing and a curse. The warrior's abilities to paint the battlefield crimson red were enhanced. But in exchange, Ramlaat would claim the warrior's strength for whatever purpose suited the obscure god. This claim extended not only to Antares but to his descendants too.

Antares became a legend. The man who became death's right hand. The murderer of hundreds. The scythe that scourged the world. Still, he was not immortal. Age took its toll and when experience could not offset the physical frailty that comes with old age, Antares retired. He lived his last years in lavish seclusion, wealthy beyond belief. The hero died in bed, surrounded by family and friends.

## COLLECTING THE DEBT

**ANTARES'S DEEDS ATTRACTED** a cult-like following. Those loyal to him built a lavish sepulcher and deposited his remains therein, along with his fabled weapon. Yearly pilgrimages to Antares's tomb became a custom for a few decades until all those who knew him perished too. All that remained became myths and hearsay.

No one except for the warrior himself knew of the binding contract with Ramlaat. The warrior, bloodthirsty and greedy, cared not for it as he would not be inconvenienced by its consequences. Antares had thirty-seven children, all of whom became wealthy after his passing. They were successful and thrived for generations. To this day, no one knows how many are descendants of the great warrior, but a great deal of them live in Spearhome. After hundreds of years, Ramlaat has decided to collect the debt. Antares's axe, serving as an arcane focus, is a beacon that issues a calling to all of the warrior's descendants. They all experience a vivid dream that features the great axe in different ways. They become so powerful nothing can withstand their will. Soon, many peasants shall delve into the forlorn sepulcher.

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

### Level 0 Gauntlet

#### DELUDED MINDS

Among those who experience the dream, there is a group whose blood is the purest and who cannot resist its calling. These peasants fill an ember spark within their hearts. This burning desire calls them to visit a strange cavern on the hill behind Spear Keep. These peasants grab what they can and embark on this perilous quest.

#### DREAM OF WEALTH

A minority of peasants present is not a direct descendant of Antares. Still, it does not escape to them that the legendary warrior's tomb has not been ransacked yet. Who can tell what manner of treasures lie hidden in there, ready to be stolen. Thus, a few people join the dangerous expedition with only greed pushing them to attain new heights. This newfound wealth may change their lives.

## RUMORS

d8	Details
1	There is a narrow cavern at the base of the hill behind the Spear Keep. Children dare each other to visit it as they think it is haunted. A strange stone door lies at the end, it is marked with strange runes no one can read.
2	Hundreds of years ago, a warrior named Antares single-handedly defeated an invading force, in his last glorious battle. He settled down and Spearhome came to be.
3	There is a local myth that half the town are descended from a single person, a great man they claim. This is why it is common to call people 'cousin' in Spearhome.
4	People believe there is a treasure hoard buried underneath Spear Keep. Many have tried to find it for decades.
5	Fleeting cults to the evil deity, Ramlaat, become influential in the region from time to time. So far, none have been able to gain much power but they keep arising.
6	Some people have experienced a dream in which they plunge into a battlefield. They murder dozens of invading soldiers. (3-in-6 chance one of the PCs had it too.)
7	People recall the fact that a group of researchers came 8 years ago to explore the caves behind the keep. They could not cross the door at the end. It was jammed shut.
8	Dr. Galders, an archaeologist, is in town. He is curious about the strange dreams. The scholar wishes to accompany the most enthusiastic dreamers into the cavern. Dr. Galders shall bring some of his scholarly assistants.

# SPEARHOME

Well, cousin. I didn't dream all that but people are losing their shoes interpreting their dreams, longing for wealth, and finding out how to find that fabled axe...

Adrai, Innkeeper

**F**ounded in wartime, the town of Spearhome was bathed in blood and guts from the beginning. Its strategic location along the Blue Jewel River made it an attractive place for fortified outposts and barracks. The ancestors of today's townsfolk all shared an era when you had to be a brave warrior to aspire for something in life. It is here, in the river shorelines, that the legendary warrior Antares fought many times shrouded by Ramlaat's blessing.

Centuries later, people still have that belligerent nature and no-nonsense attitude but life is calmer and slower. The locals started having the strange dreams 10 days ago. They have grown in strength and vividness for a small group. The calling they feel to go explore the crypt behind Spear Keep cannot be ignored anymore. Brave, or rather foolish, people get ready for this expedition.

## Town Features

► **Events.** Check for a **Random Event** each time the characters visit a new area in Spearhome.

► **Unrest.** Half the people have experienced the axe dreams. Not all of them with the same intensity. For some, it is just a meaningless thing. For others, it is an unavoidable calling. Still, everyone talks about them and compares their experiences and feelings about them.



## IT IS PERSONAL

In this chapter, some people, native to Spearhome, have had particularly vivid dreams about Antares's fabled axe. They are ready for adventure. In character generation, the players are free to consider these individuals as prospects for their gauntlet party. To choose them, proceed with character creation as usual but keep the ancestries, gender, names, and motivations described below. Characters not chosen are willing to accompany the party on their dungeon-delving expedition too.

## RANDOM EVENTS

### d6 Details

- 1 Eight **peasants** arrive in Spearhome from the east. They came because of the premonitory dreams. Their grandparents moved away from the river town decades ago.
- 2 Acolytes of Ord's church clamor in the streets that the dreams are an evil scheme but none believe them.
- 3 A deluded individual (**thug**) has a psychotic break after last night's dreams. He attacks the party on the streets.
- 4 Dreamers who had a mild experience claim that the dreams are a godly revelation. They start gathering to pray to the sacred axe but refuse to visit the dungeon.
- 5 A crown inspector joins the expedition. He claims all relics recovered from the dungeon must be taxed accordingly. He goes to log all findings and taxes 15%.
- 6 A rare purple petal flower, the *warrior's breath*, grows and blossoms all over town. It is interpreted by superstitious people as a sign that times of war are coming.

## 1. GOLDMAN'S TANNERY

*A two-story wooden building surrounded by drying and tanning racks. The stench from them can be perceived before the tannery is within sight.*

The humble establishment is the largest exporter of leather goods in the region. This is a proudly family-owned business that provides many jobs.

► **PC - Jan Goldman.** Usually content with his honest hard work at his father's tannery. Jan had a dream in which he wields the mighty axe and is regarded by everyone in town as a folk hero. People love and admire him. Through his valiant deeds, Jan brings pride and renown to Spearhome. Jan brings his fleshing knife to Rusty Steel Inn and is eager to join the expedition. Despite his father's disapproval of this rash, unplanned decision.

# Spearhome



## 2. THE GRANARY

Produce and grain from the extensive farmlands that surround Spearhome are brought here for storage and distribution. The keep has priority over other locations.

► **PC - Darmint.** A warehouse hard worker, Darmint had a dream in which the axe raised his station to that of nobility. Dreaming of abandoning a life of poverty and lacking for good, Darmint embarks on this quest.

## 3. ARDEN'S FINE STEEDS

*Breathtaking stallions graze around the stables. A man in a leather coat works tirelessly on changing the horseshoes of two beautiful specimens.*

The tradition of horse-breeding in this establishment provides the best steeds to nobles and soldiers.

► **PC - Alan.** The competent horse groom had a dream in which he rode the most magnificent warhorse to battle. Alan and his steed worked as one and pierced the battlefield like an arrowhead. Alan takes a few days off to pursue this dream. He thinks it is worth fighting for.

## 4. DIANA'S APOTHECARY SHOP

*The shop is surrounded by countless potted herbs, flowers, and fungi baskets. The fragrances of all of them mix into a strange mind-numbing cocktail.*

This purveyor of homemade medicines and salves is owned by a middle-aged apothecary and scholar.

► **PC - Diana.** Both a gardener and an apothecary, Diana had a dream in which the fabled axe gave her extraordinary healing powers. Diana is a selfless healer and she cannot let go of the opportunity to help others with such power. She shall do anything to attain this goal.

## 5. MARKU'S FOUNDRY

The master blacksmith can be heard hammering away most of the day. In the last years, the shop specializes in custom armor pieces with artistic finishes.

► **PC - Arthur.** As a blacksmith apprentice, Arthur does not aspire for much. But in his dream, he commands the respect of many powerful warriors. His desire for respect and admiration pushes him to seek the weapon.

## 6. RUSTY STEEL INN

*The three-story wooden building is one of the largest in Spearhome. Today, a crowd gathers in preparation for the quest at hand. At least two dozen people are willing to visit the hill cavern to seek the dream axe.*

This is the suggested location to begin this adventure module. Those interested in following the dream calling have gathered here before the quest. If the scene lasts too long, feel free to roll for a **Random Event** while the gathering takes place. Adrai, the innkeeper, is happy to host the gathering because it is good business. She did not experience the dream and cannot relate to those who did but is eager to hear the dream tales of her patrons.

Alas, as the expedition is ready to set out, six **spawn of the axe** burst through the floor planks and attack the dreamers. The undead were once killed by Antares.

## 7. HOUSE OF WORSHIP

The temple is dedicated to Ord, the deity. Most of Spearhome worship this god and visit the temple twice a week.

► **PC - Virlag.** An acolyte in formation, Virlag had a dream in which he used the influence of the legendary axe to bring more people to Ord's church. He hides his experience because the high priest has declared the dreams as evil machinations of evil. Virlag believes that after retrieving the axe, his superiors shall understand.

## 8. TOWN MARKET

The stalls and shops in the usually crowded market lie empty as most people are occupied in conversations about the dreams or in the House of Worship, praying for the end of the foul night experiences.

## 9. TOWN BARRACKS

While military traditions slowly erode and are abandoned, the town still has a strong militia. Half the garrison is from the capital, stationed for the season.

► **PC - Tarley.** The low-ranked soldier abandoned his post to be at the inn for the gathering. In his dream, he was given the highest military rank after getting the axe. With it, he could command thousands of troops into battle. Being low-born, he cannot ever aspire to such a high station. Perhaps Antares's fabled axe can change that.

## 10. SPEAR KEEP

*The tall spire of Spear Keep climbs to the sky from the hilltop. It looks like a buried pike against the sun.*

Mayor Dartalent rules over Spearhome. He is wary of the recent craze but does not believe that the populace's delusions are a danger to anyone. At least for now.

► **PC - Annia.** The young cook had a dream in which he was prominent enough to marry the mayor thanks to the magic axe. She abandons the keep to seek the artifact.



## SPAWN OF THE AXE

*A decrepit skeleton still wearing broken armor and a rusty blade. Crimson vengeance shines in its eyes.*

**AC** 12 (broken chainmail), **HP** 2, **ATK** 1 shortsword +1 (1d6), **MV** near, **S** +1, **D** +0, **C** +2, **I** -2, **W** +0, **Ch** -1, **AL** C, **LV** 0

**Undead.** Immune to morale checks.

**Relentless.** If the spawn is reduced to 0 HP by a non-magical source, DC 17 CON to go to 1 HP instead.



# HALLS OF THE FABLED AXE

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I wonder at the marvels we shall find within. Surely, we will uncover facts about Spearhome's tumultuous past.

Dr. Galders



The expeditionary force sets out unimpeded from Spearhome. Apart from the characters, a few other dreamers and Dr. Galders's entourage come along (see **Rumor** No. 8). Seven scholars and scribes accompany him. They are no warriors and attempt to flee at the first sign of danger.

## ANTARES'S TOMB

**THE OBSIDIAN DOOR** has been closed for centuries. It opened when the dreams began, waiting to welcome those who share Antares's blood and heritage. The call of Ramlaat has brought the characters here. It is expected that one of them shall follow the path of the ancient warrior and once more flood battlefields with blood.

### Dungeon Features

- ▶ **Danger.** Deadly. Check for a **Random Event** every **crawling round** and after loud noises (2-in-6 chance).
- ▶ **Light.** Some chambers have braziers with permanent **light**; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.
- ▶ **The Calling.** Escaping may not be an option for those who experienced the dreams of the axe. A strong urge to find the artifact takes over their will (DC 13 WIS).

### RANDOM EVENTS

#### d8 Details

- | d8 | Details  |
|----|--|
| 1  | The dreamer <b>peasants</b> arrive at the crypt from Spearhome. They were late to the inn gathering but also wish to find the axe. They are a baker and a hunter.                    |
| 2  | A fine thread lies ahead (DC 11 WIS to notice). Tripping it causes a ceramic axe to swing by. It deals 1d6 damage (DC 12 DEX). The axe can be taken and used.                        |
| 3  | Four <b>spawns of the axe</b> emerge from below and attack the dreamers. They speak a long-forgotten tongue.   |
| 4  | A sinister, raspy voice says: " <i>You shall achieve glory. You must only push forward and grasp it. It is yours.</i> "  |
| 5  | An <b>acolyte</b> of Ord arrives at the dungeon. He declares the expedition blasphemous and threatens to bring Ord's fury upon the dreamers. He may be bought off (10 sp).           |
| 6  | A half-hidden panel on the wall can be opened to reveal a compartment with three strong acid vials (DC 11 WIS).  |
| 7  | Two tomb-robbers ( <b>thugs</b> ) arrive at the dungeon. The brigands want a share of the treasure and are willing to fight for it. They may be befriended ( <b>Reaction</b> check). |
| 8  | Two <b>giant rats</b> look for prey. The rodents calm down and leave peacefully if they are given 10 pounds of food.   |

## 1. CAVE BY THE HILLSIDE

The mismatched crowd of peasants, onlookers, and curious scholars gathers by the hillside behind Spear Keep. An irregular opening on the rocky surface leads down a stairway into darkness. Non-dreamers become demoralized while climbing down the stairs (DC 10 WIS check).

## 2. THE OBSIDIAN GATE

*A 10-foot-tall slab of obsidian etched with strange, glimmering markings bars the way. In the past, no explorer or thief managed to go past this point.*

▶ **The Markings.** The sigil of Ramlaat, the barbaric, is etched on the door (DC 12 INT check). Surrounding it, the runes in Diabolic say: "*Here lies Antares and his irk. They were blessed by chaos and destruction. And thus, they brought them to our world. Stay away lest your life is spent.*" Dr. Galders is proficient with Diabolic.

▶ **The Calling.** When any creature that had the axe dreams touches the obsidian door, it vibrates and slowly slides outward to reveal a passage to area 3.

## 3. ENDLESS FONTS OF ACID

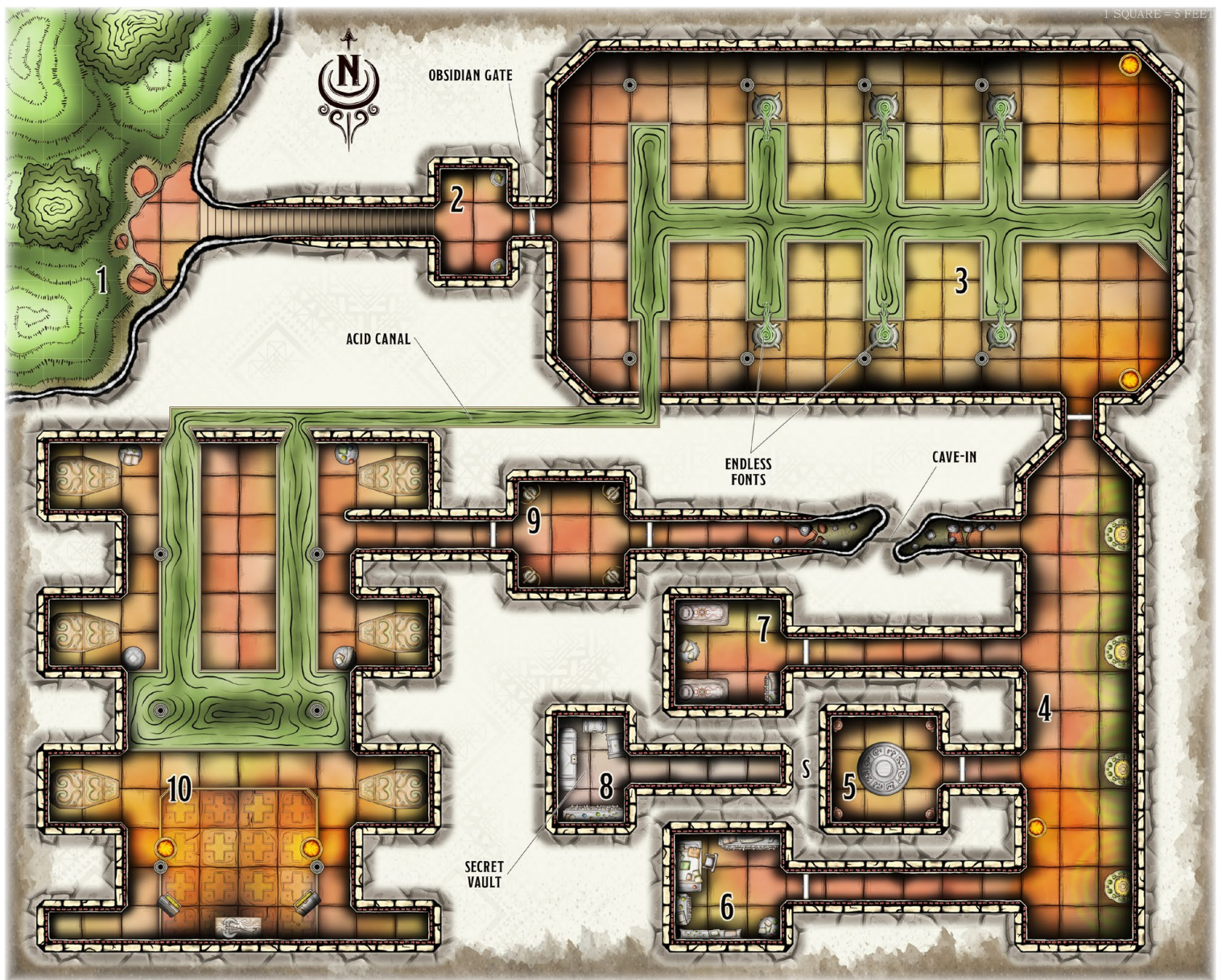
*Six ceramic, pitcher-shaper fonts pour a greenish fluid into a series of canals. The liquid slowly flows out of the chamber through an opening. The bottom of the canal is littered with eroded bones and stones.*

▶ **The Murals.** The walls are decorated with intricate murals that portray a mighty, axe-wielding warrior fighting faceless soldiers and abominate monsters. A dark spirit hovers over him as if guiding his every move.

▶ **The Fonts.** The magic receptacles create an acidic substance. However, the magic that powers them has lost its potency after centuries. Creatures that come in contact with the acid for three or more rounds take 1d4 damage. Exposure for less time deals no damage.

▶ **Guardians.** The souls of those murdered by Antares can feel the characters coming to this place to claim the axe. Five **spawns of the axe** break through the granite walls and attack all living creatures. In an old form of Common (DC 11 INT) they repeat: "*Cursed is the world if the wielder of Ramlaat's axe is allowed to return.*"

▶ **Treasure.** At the bottom of the canals, there are 5 gp, a dagger, a longsword, and four iron crossbow bolts.



#### 4. SHRINES OF THE PENITENTS

The long hall contains four limestone shrines that radiate a pulsing, faint glow. Small malachite containers and gilded vases rest on the shrines. Some of them appear to vibrate or hum, from time to time.

► **The Ashes.** Each of the malachite boxes contains the ashes of a single warrior. The person was murdered by Antares but their heroic death was worthy of a place of honor here. If a character studies the shrines for 1 **crawling round**, they can hear the whimpering of those who failed to slay Antares. The spirits tell the story of their last hours of life until their death in combat.

► **The Vases.** Each of the vases contains a dose of a clear concoction. The effects of drinking are varied and occur in the following order: (1) - The drinker can see in the dark for 1 hour. (2) - The drinker takes 1d6 damage (DC 11 CON.) (3) - The drinker falls unconscious for 1 hour. (4) - The drinker can cast *power word kill* once.

#### 5. THE ARCANE CIRCLE

The central, 1-foot-tall granite circle is embedded with arcane runes and scripture that prove elusive to most peasants. It is a teleportation circle that can be used to travel to the tomb by powerful wizards (DC 14 INT).

#### 6. ARCHIVE OF ANTARES

The room's contents are protected from the passage of time by a powerful spell (DC 14 INT). It contains two bookcases and a work table with scrolls, ink, and pens.

► **The Warrior.** Studying the contents of this room for 1 **crawling round** reveals the story of Antares and his pact with an otherworldly entity. The historical recounts reveal the extent of Antares's exploits in battle. If Dr. Galders is present, he claims these books are unique and valuable to the right vendor (80 gp for the whole lot).

► **The Ritual.** One book includes the *ritual of release*. The spell that can break Ramlaat's grasp on Antares's bloodline. The characters cannot cast this spell yet.

## 7. TOMB OF ACOLYTES

*Two lavish, silver-inlaid sarcophagi rest in this chamber. The lids have a circular removable section.*

The two acolytes that transported, embalmed, and buried Antares's remains in the crypt earned a place of honor here. Their bodies have unfortunately suffered a hideous transformation under the recent influence of Ramlaat. They are currently trapped in the enclosures.

► **The Sarcophagi.** Removing the circular lid-top of either sarcophagus reveals a **ghast** inside the box. The aggressive undead shifts inside the container enraged but cannot exit the box on its own. If the whole lid is removed, the ghast is free to leave and attack the living.

## 8. SECRET VAULT

Pulling a granite brick on the west wall of area 5 opens a narrow path to this chamber (DC 11 to notice.) The chamber contains several stone coffers with treasure.

► **Treasure.** The chamber contains 10 gp, 2,500 sp, 37,642 cp, one *potion of healing*, a ruby-hilt dagger (10 gp), a set of chainmail, a shield, and a warhammer.

## 9. AUTOMATED CROSSBOWS

This chamber can be accessed from area 10 or by clearing out the debris from the east hallway that connects to area 4. The characters can clear the rubble and soil using shovels or similar tools for 1 **crawling round**.

► **Crossbows.** The pressure-sensitive tile in the center of the room (DC 12 WIS to notice) triggers the crossbows to shoot when stepped on. The crossbows can be disconnected from the device under the room with tools (DC 12 DEX). Each bolt deals 1d6 damage (DC 10 DEX).

## 10. THE AXE OF DREAMS

*The coveted-by-all, fabled axe lies on a plinth by the far side of this chamber. Lavishly-decorated sarcophagi and acid canals stand before the prized artifact.*

► **The Canals.** The acid canals are 10 feet deep and can be jumped across (DC 12 STR check).

► **Guardians.** When the party arrives, the lids of the six enclosures are pushed to the side to release one **ghoul** and five **spawns of the axe**. The undead monsters push creatures into the acid canals whenever possible.

► **The Axe.** Whoever reaches the legendary axe first claims it and becomes the vessel for Ramlaat's blessing (see **Conclusion**). This may well cause party members to fight among themselves to reach it. When one succeeds, the preternatural calling to seek the weapon that all felt suddenly disappears. The weapon has a master now.

► **Treasure.** The two stone chests by the plinth contain 100 gp, 390 sp, a *bead of force*, and a *goblin bomb*.

## CONCLUSION

**THE CHARACTERS REACH** the end of this adventure and face the consequences of their deeds.

### THE CHOSEN ONE

When a person reaches the axe and wields it. They become the vessel for Ramlaat's blessing and the new owner of Antares's axe. For the rest of the encounter, the person cannot die and has advantage on all attack rolls with the axe; a foreshadowing of future martial prowess. The vessel must train to become a Fighter to be worthy of the axe's power. Soon, they shall unlock its true might. The chosen one shall become a tool of the evil deity. The character will be a force to be reckoned with.

### THE RELEASE

The *ritual of release* found in area 6 can be used to break the bond with Ramlaat while keeping the powerful axe. Dr. Galders knows a magical mentor that, with his recommendation, can impart arcane training to any survivors in the party. With time and experience, a member of the party may achieve the power to cast this ritual.

### BACK TO SPEARHOME

The premonition dreams stop after the axe is claimed. In Spearhome, the event takes on a myth-like quality, and a new festivity is born. Once a year, the *Night of Remembrance* is celebrated to talk about the axe dreams.

If the characters fought among themselves for the axe, survivors understand that the artifact coerced their actions. Still, the wounds and deaths of that grim moment may accompany them forever after. As they begin their adventuring life, there may be some debts to pay yet...



# THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

There are some unique things in the world that are not proven to be true, but the legends keep them alive. Such is the case of the Philosopher's Stone.

A Tale of Wonders, Vol. II

**T**he legend of the *philosopher's stone* and its immense power eludes even the most powerful mages. Some apprentices get obsessed with the study, research, and life-long hunt for this elusive rock. But they never succeeded. They all perished trying and never got their hands on the stone that could bestow eternal life, erase their problems, or grant their every wish. But perhaps it was not all in vain.

## THE GRAND SEARCH

**EACH TIME ANOTHER** person withers away seeking the *philosopher's stone* their whole lives, it does not all go to waste. The overall research, lore, and known facts about the stone's location increase. The rumors grow. Thus, the next crazy explorer, mad mage, or stubborn scholar that wishes to find the fabled artifact builds upon previous knowledge. There are journals, notes, and ancient scrolls laden with clues. And today, these hints and glimpses of the stone's whereabouts have reached the people in Heartstone. The kind of news needed to kindle a spark of heroism, or stupid ambition, in the hearts of a farmer, an innkeeper, or even a stable boy.

## REASONS TO LEAVE HOME

**Ambition.** A group of villagers gathers. They all heard the rumors of a strange place in the woods where a rock that grants wishes is kept. The thing is serious; cloaked figures and armored travelers talk about this too. If the villagers want to be part of this, find some treasure, or even be the ones that find the stone, they must move fast. They want to change their lives. Be rich, live in a castle, and have servants. Make their wishes come true...

**A Pure Heart.** Three priests or Ord gather a group of villagers. They say the *philosopher's stone* has never been found. It comes in the shape of a fable. A myth to reveal ambitious hearts. They claim the stone shall never show itself to the wrong individual. One must not want the stone for selfish purposes. Only those that abandon their wish to possess it shall be able to hold it. The priests ask the group to act as guardians, to protect the *philosopher's stone* from the wrong hands. They offer 4 gp each. Their job is to explore the ruins and confirm the stone is there, protect it, and inform the priests.

## Level 0 Gauntlet

► **Light.** Some areas have braziers with permanent *light* spells; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

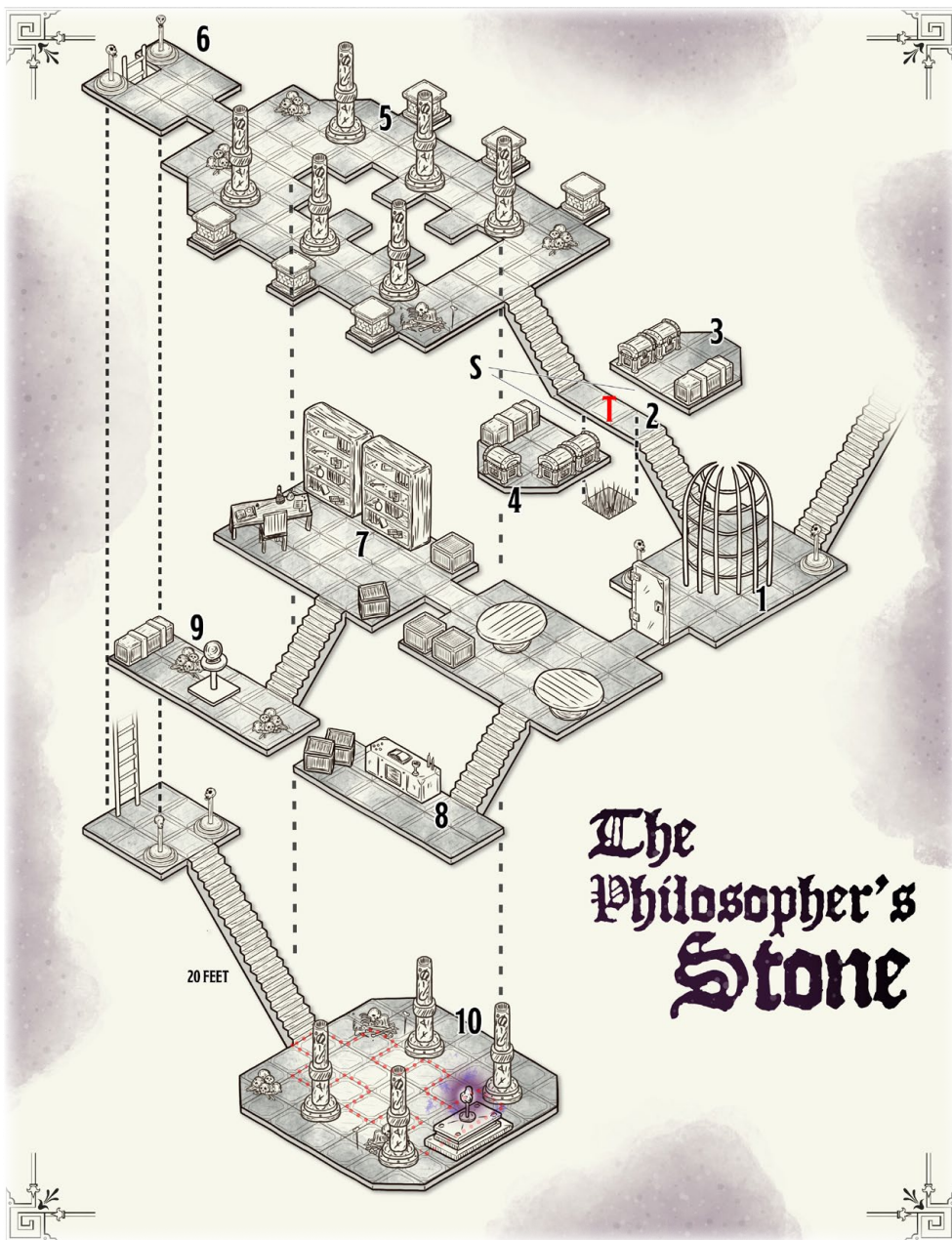
► **Aura of Wonders.** The power of the magical stone makes strange things happen within the dungeon. Each time the characters enter a new area, roll 1d6.

- 1 One of the characters at random becomes stronger. They have STR 20 for 1 hour. They feel incredible. (Repeatable, change the stat to DEX, CON, and so on).
- 2 Gold coins start pouring out of a hole in the wall! It takes a minute to gather 117 gp from the ground. This triggers a **Random Event** (see below). This event is repeatable.
- 3 The magical stone senses fear in the villagers. Sir Hills (**knight**) arrives and says he was sent to protect them. He is sincere; he gives his life for any of the villagers if the situation arises. However, if he is asked about his origins or pressed to tell them who sent him, he stares at the void for several seconds before vanishing in thin air.
- 4 A sword appears in the hands of one of the characters. The **+1 longsword** glows blue in the dark. The blade becomes dust if it leaves the dungeon (repeatable).
- 5 A **+2 chainmail** appears on one of the characters. It becomes dust if it leaves the dungeon (repeatable).
- 6 A character learns how to cast a spell. Roll 1d12 to determine which Tier 1 Wizard spell they know. They can cast it two times before they forget. This event is repeatable.

► **Danger.** Deadly. Check for a **Random Event** every **crawling round** and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).

## RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Four <b>peasants</b> carrying torches and improvised weapons approach. They also came looking for the fabled stone. They are wary of other spelunkers ( <b>Reaction</b> check).
2	A fine thread lies ahead. If tripped, a boulder falls, dealing 1d8 damage to a random character (DC 11 DEX).
3	A strong wind current blows through the dungeon, snuffing out fires and any uncovered light sources.
4	A glowing rune on the wall stands out. If touched, magic creates an exact copy of the person. The doppelganger is scared and believes to be the original ( <b>Reaction</b> check). The copy vanishes when they leave the dungeon.
5	A lonely explorer ( <b>thug</b> ) followed the expedition underground. He may join the peasant party ( <b>Reaction</b> check).
6	Two automated floor hatches open. A <b>skeleton</b> climbs from each of them. The undead guardians attack!



## The Philosopher's Stone

### 1. LANDING

The characters find the ruins in the woods without trouble. Many came before them and it is easy to follow their tracks. However, no footprints return to town...

They descend a long stairway and into the dungeon. A large cell holds an **invisible stalker**. The monster is magically bound to the cage and cannot leave. Strange sounds can be heard coming from inside the seemingly empty cage. If any of the characters sticks their hand or head inside, the stalker attacks without mercy.

### 2. CORRIDOR

This pathway features two secret chambers, one on each side (DC 11 WIS to notice). Pushing a brick reveals both vaults. But the pressure-sensitive plate in the middle is better concealed (DC 13 WIS). Creatures that step on it fall 15 feet and die impaled at the spiked pit below.

### 6. SECRET LADDER

Magic conceals the opening on the floor and the ladder. From the threshold, the characters do not see the ladder by the far end of the room. To see the ladder, a character must stand exactly before and between the two pedestals with skulls. Then, they can descend to area 10.

### 7. STUDIO

The characters ignore who built this place but they may learn a little of its origins. If they spend 1 **crawling round** reading the books here, they learn that a man named Artorius used to look for the *philosopher's stone* but failed. This was his hideout. The documents seem to imply the stone is not here. However, something in the dungeon is certainly causing strange, magical things to occur. The documents do not say what it could be, though. It seems that Artorius experienced no strange phenomena here.

### 3. FAKE VAULT

Both vaults look identical but this one is a trap. The chests and containers are illusory. When they are interacted with, the room bursts into flames and everyone inside takes 1d8 damage. There is little time to escape the flames (DC 9 DEX).

### 4. TREASURE VAULT

This vault has no defense mechanisms or traps. The characters find three chests and one coffer.

► **Treasure.** Characters find a couple of leather bags that contain 186 gp, 3,752 sp, and 1,963 cp. There is a dagger, a 60-foot-long hempen rope, a lantern, three empty flasks, two sacks, and a rusty shield.

### 5. MAIN HALL

A large chamber with funerary plinths on each of the six small alcoves. Six columns flank an irregularly-shaped opening in the floor. When the characters approach the far end of the chamber (area 6), one **shadow** coalesces and attacks.

► **Hole.** The 140-foot-deep chasm leads down to area 10. The walls are sanded and smoothed down. Whoever falls through the opening has a gruesome death. In combat, the enemies attempt to push intruders toward the edge to make them fall.

## ARTORIUS'S RESEARCH

ONE OF THE last researchers. Artorius did not find the real *philosopher's stone* but he used his life work to create a less powerful copy of it. The characters may learn who Artorius was by reading the documents in area 7 but there is nothing written about his invention. If the characters reach area 10, there is nothing that stops them from thinking they have found the real thing.

The truth is that Artorius created this copy to cause other explorers and hunters to get lost for a while or even perish on the way. He did this to have fewer competitors and be the one who finds the real *philosopher's stone*.

### 8. ALTAR

There are wooden boxes, crates, and other containers with old fabrics, torn clothes, broken utensils, small tools, and other mundane materials. However, if the characters spend 1 **crawling round** filtering the useless stuff, they find some valuable items: a crowbar, five torches, flint, a bag of caltrops, a mirror, and a pole.

► **Holy Meditation.** The characters may recognize the religious implements on the altar and see Ord's trinkets (DC 11 INT). If any of the characters spends 1 **crawling round** praying or meditating, they earn a **luck token**.

### 9. CRYSTAL BALL

The container in this room has a false bottom (DC 12 WIS). The characters find a *potion of healing* below. A person must spend 1 **crawling round** meditating with the crystal ball to see something. If they do, they see a man placing a glowing stone on a stone plinth, turn around, and leave. The ball shows nothing else.

### 10. THE STONE

*The bottom of the dungeon feels cold. An aura of uneasiness invades the minds of those that come.*

*The far end of the room features a rune-inscribed plinth holding an otherworldly glimmering gemstone.*

*The gazes of skulls on the ground seem to stare and follow the creatures that move within this chamber.*

The characters reach the bottom of the dungeon. They can feel the power of the stone before them caressing their skin. But just before they can approach or do anything, the scattered bones move, and three **skeletons** form. They fight the intruders until slain.

► **The Stone.** The magic of this forgery is enough to fool the greedy. The characters may fight among themselves to be the first to grab the stone. On the other hand, their job could be to protect it (see **Reasons to Leave Home**). Either way, they are up for a surprise. The stone is just an imitation. And, Artorius saved the best for last. See **Development** for details about these two outcomes.

## DEVELOPMENT

► **The Magic.** Artorius's powerful artifact only works inside the dungeon. But even if the characters are pure of heart, leaving the dungeon erases all magic effects or things created with the forged *philosopher's stone*.

**Blind Ambition.** A character grabs the stone. The rock turns dark and stops glowing. Its magic shuts off and it becomes a piece of black coal until someone with a pure heart grabs it. This is unlikely; the peasants came under the pretense of finding treasure and changing their lives.

**Protectors.** The characters inform the priests before messing with the stone. However, the priests were impostors! The three **bandits** accuse the peasants of trickery when the stone becomes coal. A pure-hearted person may be revealed if characters fight to protect the stone.

**A Pure Heart.** One or more of the characters wanted to protect the stone from the robbers and therefore may use it. Alas, it only works within the dungeon. If this is an imitation, where could the real one be? Finding the true *philosopher's stone* is an adventure for another day.





## **JORDAN RUDD**

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Jordan is a lifelong fantasy/sci-fi nerd but discovered TTRPGs later in life. He's making up for lost time by writing adventures and supplements and GMing whenever he can. Find Jordan's creations over at [Itch.io](https://itch.io)



## **JOSHUA LOVETT**

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Joshua Lovett (he/him) first played Dungeons and Dragons when he was seven and wrote his first dungeon at nine. It was terrible. During a long hiatus from roleplaying games, he began writing YA fantasy and adult realistic fiction. He has been published in his college newspaper, a local newsletter, and most recently Glint Literary Journal.

Running TTRPG games during the pandemic gave him new ideas for roleplaying, some of which are included in this article. During his sessions, he enjoys social deduction games with endlessly complicated political dungeons. They often cause headaches and mildly strain friendships.

You can find more information at his [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), or [Website](#).



## **TAYLOR SEELY-WRIGHT**

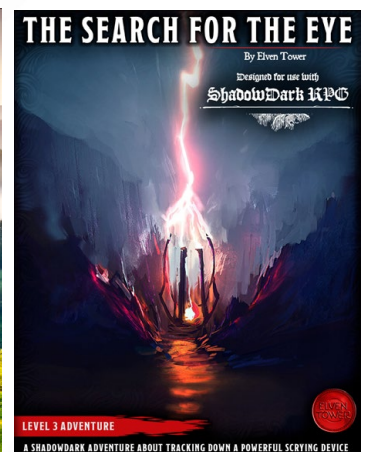
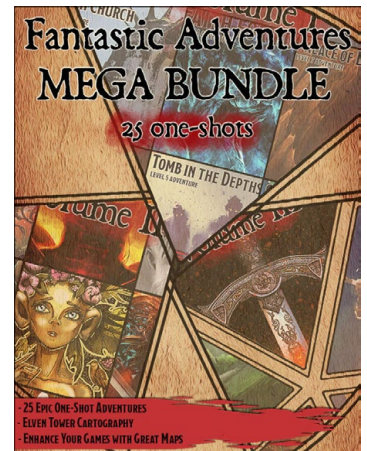
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Taylor has been playing games for 15 years and whose tastes veer towards gonzo, over-the-top nonsense. He lives in Canada with his wife, cats, and loved ones. Open a copy of Shadowdark RPG and whisper his name three times to make him appear. You can find his creations on [DriveThruRPG](https://drivethrurpg.com).

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