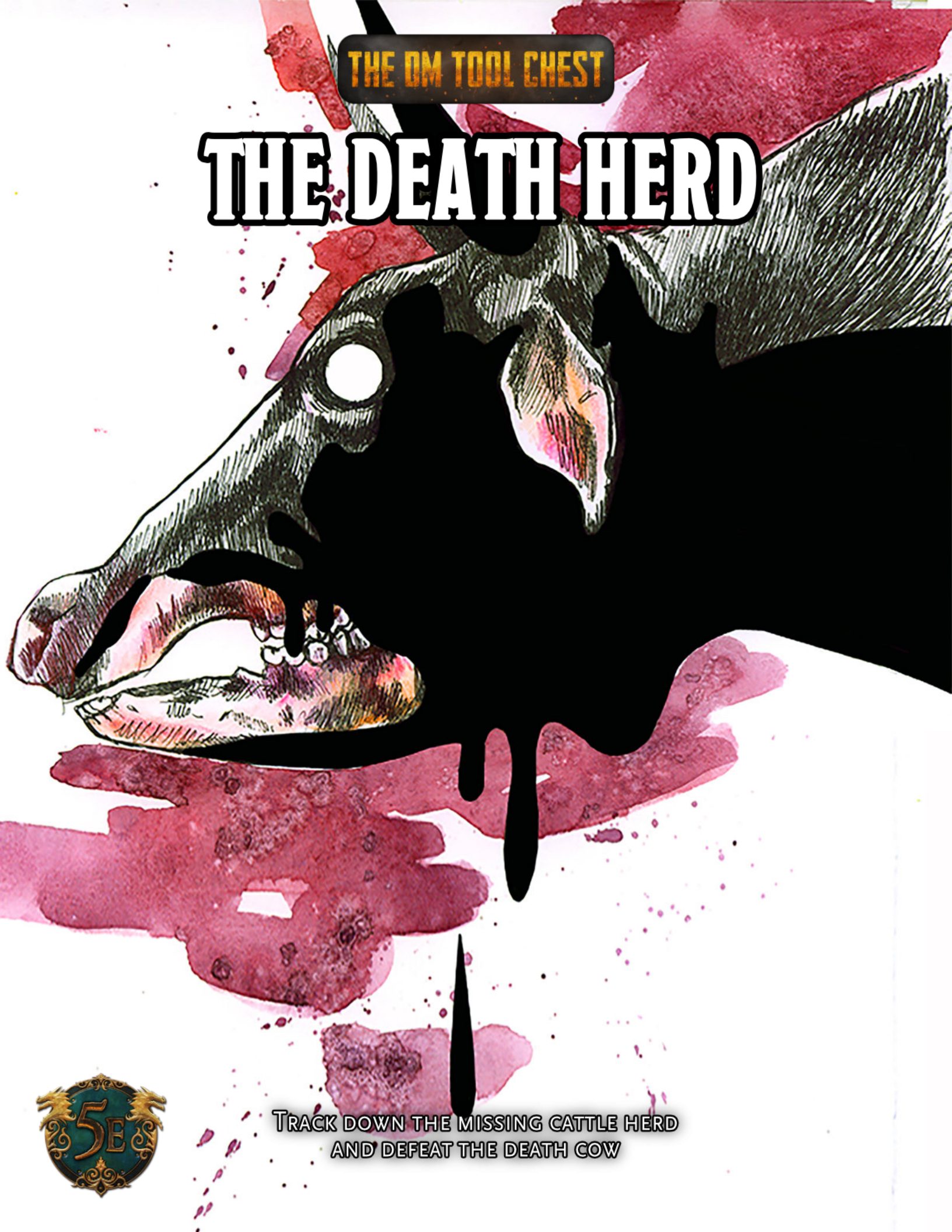


THE DM TOOL CHEST

# THE DEATH HERD



TRACK DOWN THE MISSING CATTLE HERD  
AND DEFEAT THE DEATH COW





## THE DEATH HERD

**T**he *Death Herd* is a Fifth Edition adventure intended for **three to five characters of 2nd to 4th level** and optimized for **four characters with an average party level (APL) of 3**. A local rancher is frantically looking for his herd of cows that went missing during the night. His prize cow Bessy was among them, and the annual festival to the gods is next week. The herd's tracks are easy to follow and lead to the entrance of an ancient labyrinth. Inside, the adventurers must overcome deadly traps, puzzles, and ancient guardians. Eventually, they must face the true villain: Bessy the Death Cow. This adventure takes place in the [FREELANDS CAMPAIGN SETTING](#) but fits into any existing campaign with only a few modifications.

### BACKSTORY

The Windswept Grange is one of the most prominent and well-respected cattle ranches in Summerfall. Each year during the annual solstice festival, they give the local temples a portion of their herd as a donation to sacrifice to the gods and provide food to the poor. This year, their ranch was infiltrated by an emissary from an alternate reality known as a "Death Cow." These beings come from a world where bovines are the dominant species and the Cow Queen rules over all. These creatures can mimic regular cows to hide among them, inciting rebellion and liberation. Their attempts to "rescue" their brethren from the shackles of the ranches and farms typically fall on deaf ears, but this time the cows of Windswept Grange listened.

Bessy the Death Cow has led a group of the ranch's cattle to an ancient dungeon nearby, where she is attempting to activate an old portal back to her dimension. She knows that her time is limited, and

adventurers will soon track down the missing herd, so she has reactivated the dungeon's defenses to give her more time to unlock the ancient vault that protects the portal.

### ADVENTURE SUMMARY

A local rancher hires the characters to retrieve his missing herd of cattle from an old dungeon outside of the city of Summerfall. The location was supposed to have been cleared out by adventurers long ago, but someone has reactivated the traps, and it's now too dangerous for the ranchers to enter. The characters must fight through the dungeon while searching for the missing bovines. They eventually face a Death Cow, a creature from another plane of reality sent to "liberate" the herd.

### ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are a few ways to get your characters hooked into this adventure:

**Local Gossip.** The local tavern is abuzz with conversation about Windswept Grange's cattle herd going down into an old ruin outside of town. Someone reset the ancient traps, and the ranchers are afraid to go inside after one of them was severely injured. Who would steal the cows meant for the festival of the gods and hide them behind such deadly traps?

**A Divine Need.** The local temple has reached out to one of the devout characters and requested their assistance. A local ranch was tending the herd meant for this year's sacrifice at the festival of the gods, but they've gone missing! The ranchers have tracked the cattle to an old ruin just outside of town, but traps and other dangers protect it. Will



the adventurers please retrieve the sacred herd in the name of their god?

**Heroes for Hire.** A notice has gone out that the Windswept Ranch is looking to hire adventurers to enter a nearby ruin. Someone has stolen their herd of cattle and is hiding behind the ruin's traps and the dangerous creatures inside. There is an offer of 300 gold pieces to the party brave enough to retrieve the stolen herd.

## GETTING THE QUEST

However the characters get hooked into the quest, they are directed to meet with Donny Buckley (LG human **commoner**), owner of the Windswept Grange. He and his ranch hands have camped outside of the temple of Miriadis, an ancient ruin that was abandoned and supposedly cleared out by adventurers long ago. When the characters reach the temple entrance, read aloud the following:

The road out of town eventually turns down a dirt path leading into the nearby hills. It takes just over an hour to reach the wooded spot where you find half a dozen ranchers in wide-brimmed leather hats standing around a cookfire preparing food. A cluster of overgrown stones is the only indication that a structure once stood in this location. One of the ranchers looks up from his conversation and starts to walk your way. He's a grizzled man with a bushy white beard and sun-leathered skin. Worry creases his brow, but his eyes shine with hope as he raises his hand in greeting, "Well met, friends? Are ye here to help?"

The older rancher is Donny Buckley, and he relays the story as he knows it. He can share the following information:

- "Me and my family have been raising cattle in these parts going on almost a hundred years. We provide the yearly sacrifices for the annual festival of the gods to provide food for everyone.
- "Two nights ago, we woke to find the herd was just gone! I grabbed up the fellers to track 'em down, and the tracks led us to this here old ruin."
- "Everyone knows about this ol' temple, but no one's been here since some of you adventurin' folk cleared out some beasties 'bout ten years back."
- "Of course we went in, we ain't no cowards here, ya see. But next thing we know someone steps on somethin', and rocks are fallin'. Gerald over there almost had his head bashed in! I thought it best to call in some professionals, and here ye are!"
- "I got about a dozen head of cattle missin', includin' my star Bessy! You'll recognize 'er by the blue ribbon collar she wears. She's more valuable than all the rest."



## MIRIADIS RUINS

This ruin was once a temple dedicated to a god whose name was lost to time long ago. The stone walls were torn down, and some can still be found in the foundations of older structures in Summerfall. All that remains are a series of small rooms that once made up the basement and crypts of the temple, picked clean by scavengers and treasure seekers over the centuries. The chambers have been host to bandits, monsters, and the occasional group of local youths sneaking out to dance and drink out of sight.

Hidden within the ruins is an ancient shrine that held the gateway between the material plane and the bovine world that the death cows control. The priests here worshipped nature and especially cattle. They allied with the death cow race long ago and operated a portal for the bovine race to enter the material plane. Bessy knew of the ruin's secret and brought the herd with her to try and reactivate the old portal. She failed to open the gate and is now trapped within, unwilling to admit defeat.

## GENERAL FEATURES

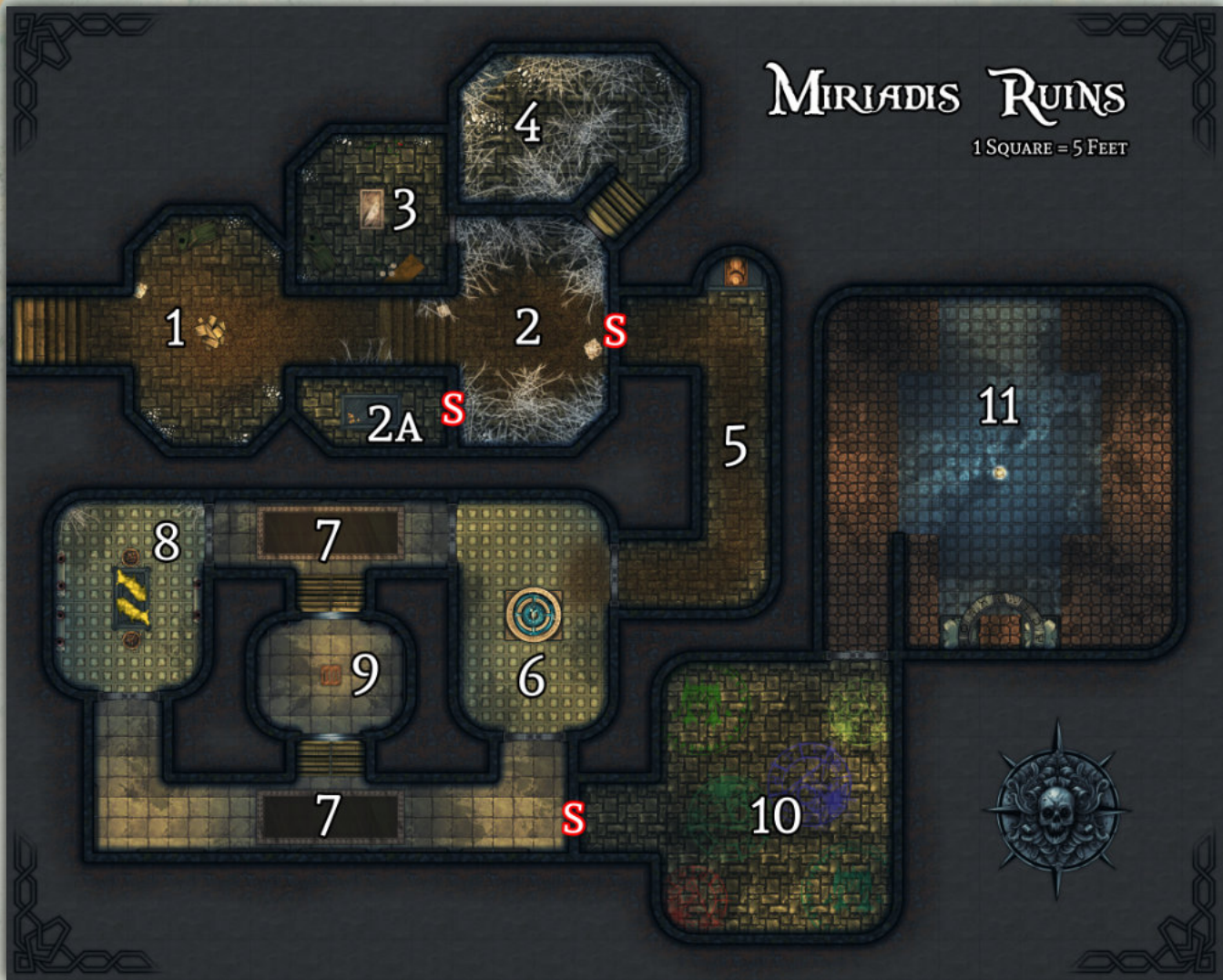
These general features are prominent throughout the ruins unless otherwise noted in the area descriptions:

**Ceilings, Floors, and Walls.** Ceilings are 15 feet high in the rooms and 10 feet high in the passageways. The walls are made from rough-hewn granite, and the floors of tiled brick.

**Doors.** Doors are made of stone set on iron pins inset in the walls. Each has an AC of 17, 18 hit points, and is immune to poison and psychic damage.

**Lights.** There are no sources of light except as noted within the adventure text. The provided location descriptions assume the characters have their own light or assisted vision.





## KEYED LOCATIONS

The following descriptions correspond to the keyed locations on the provided map of the ruins:

### 1. ENTRANCE

This dusty chamber is filled with old cobwebs. Several niches in the walls stand empty with no hint of what they might have once held. The walls themselves are covered in graffiti. Small bits of debris and refuse are scattered around, some old and some newer. A pile of bricks sits in the center of the room below a hole in the ceiling.

The pile of bricks are from a trap that the ranchers triggered and caused them to flee. A character with a passive Perception of 12 or higher or who succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices clear bovine tracks marching through the room and into area 2. The debris is worthless trash that was left behind by various kids who used this room for gatherings.

### 2. TOMBS

When the characters enter this room, read aloud the following:

A flight of stairs leads down into a room filled with thick webbing. A path in the center of the webs appears to have been broken through and ends at a bas relief of a bull-headed humanoid on the eastern wall. Worn plaques line the southern wall, and doors exit to the northeast and northwest.

These plaques are tombstones of the former clerics of the temple. The tombs were disturbed and emptied long ago. A character who is proficient in Religion and succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check recognizes the titles as religious ranks.

**Hazard: Webs.** The northern and southern thirds of the room are covered in thick webbing that is considered difficult terrain. Each creature that starts its turn in the webs or that enters them on its turn must make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is restrained as long as it remains in the webs or until it breaks free. A creature restrained by the



webs can use its action to make a DC 12 Strength check, with a success resulting in no longer being restrained. The webs are flammable. Any 5-foot cube of webs exposed to fire burns away in 1 round, dealing 5 (2d4) fire damage to any creature that starts its turn in the fire.

The ettercap in area 4 becomes aware of the party's presence if any of the webs are disturbed. It prepares an ambush by hiding on the area's ceiling and waits 10 minutes before attempting to leave and ambush from behind.

**Bas Relief Door.** The minotaur carved into the eastern wall has been defaced with paint by local youths to resemble a clown. A *detect magic* spell cast on it reveals an aura of abjuration magic. It is an *arcane-locked* door that can be opened with the password "Victory" spoken in bovine. It can be forced to open with a successful DC 25 Strength check or with thieves' tools and a successful DC 25 Dexterity check. A *knock* spell suppresses the *arcane lock* for 10 minutes and lowers the DC of the checks by 10. The door can also be also opened by pulling the lever hidden on the altar in area 4. Once opened, the door swings upwards for 1 minute, opening the way to area 5 for 1 minute before swinging closed again and reactivating the *arcane lock*. The door can be opened easily from area 5 by lifting a handle set into the door on that side. The *arcane lock* only affects opening it from this area 2.



**Secret Door.** The secret door to area 2a can be found with an active search and a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. A light breeze comes from behind a false tombstone that can be opened with a successful DC 15 Strength check.

## 2A. HIGH PRIEST TOMB

A light breeze from a crack in the ceiling ripples the thick layer of dust covering the floor of this small chamber. A cluster of melted candles sits atop a simple square coffin in the center of the room.

**Sarcophagus.** A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Strength check or multiple characters with a combined Strength of 25 or more can lift the stone lid. Inside are the remains of an ancient high priest wrapped in cloth and wearing a golden circlet with bull horns extending out of the brow (worth 50 gp) and clutching a rusted iron mace engraved with a maze-like pattern. The circlet is a holy symbol.

**Encounter: The Disturbed Dead.** Touching the skeleton remains instantly brings them to life with pinpoints of green fire in the skull's eye sockets. It wields only the iron mace in its hands (+4 to hit, 5 (1d6+2) bludgeoning damage).

## 3. EMBALMING CHAMBER

A stone table with thin gutters running along its sides stands in the center of this room. Glass from broken wine bottles lies scattered about the floor, and a small pile of wooden cups and ragged blankets sit thrown into one corner.

The priests used this room to prepare the bodies for interment in the tombs.

**Treasure.** A character that searches the table and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices an almost imperceptible symbol carved onto one corner. Pressing this symbol opens a secret panel in the tabletop. The compartment can otherwise be found with a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Investigation) check and opened with a successful DC 20 Strength check. Inside the small panel are a collection of silver embalming tools worth 50 gp.

## 4. WEBBED ALTAR

The door to this room has a large bull's head engraved onto it and opens by pulling the ring in its nose. When the characters enter this area, read aloud the following:

A short flight of steps leads down into a room covered in thick webbing. Wrapped in the webbing is a freshly dead cow with its throat torn out. Two short rows of broken



pews face an altar adorned with a bull's head. The wall behind the altar is a faded fresco depicting a pasture filled with a herd of cows under a blue sun.

**Hazard: Webs.** The webs in this room are the same as those in area 2.

**Encounter: Ettercap Lair.** An ettercap made its home here recently and has been eating a cow it managed to snare from the back of the herd as it passed through the bas relief door in area 2. If the characters touched the webs in area 2, the ettercap prepares an ambush to attack the first character down the stairs with its web attack. Otherwise, stealthy characters can take the ettercap by surprise as it's distracted by eating its meal.

**Altar.** A character that searches the altar and succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers the bull's head on the front twists to the side and opens to reveal a hidden lever. Pulling this lever to the side unlocks the bas relief door in area 2.

## 5. HALLWAY

A ramp leads down into a broad, dusty hallway. The herd's tracks continue down the corridor. A niche in the northern wall holds a giant statue of a rearing bull.

**Trap: Fire-Breathing Bull.** A pressure plate is in the center of the hallway (as noted on the map). A character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices the outline of the plate and old scorch marks on the walls. Wedging an iron spike or similar item into the crack prevents the plate from depressing and triggering the trap. Placing more than 20 pounds of pressure onto the plate triggers a 15-foot-long stream of fire to shoot from the bull statue's nose. Anyone caught in the area must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 11 (2d10) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

## 6. MINI-MOO

Anyone listening at the door to this room hears shuffling and muffled mooing sounds. When the characters first enter the chamber, read aloud the following:

A stone fountain portraying a pair of dancing cows dominates the center of this chamber. The pool is full of sparkling water that cascades from their udders. Faded frescoes depicting green open pastures adorn the walls. Three small cows amble about the room, mooing at you as you enter.

The three shrunken **cows** (see Appendix, their size is Medium) were reduced by drinking from the fountain.

Bessy left them behind as she guided the rest into area 10. A character proficient in Animal Handling that succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Animal Handling) check can lead the cows. If a character speaks to the cows with a *Speak with Animals* spell or similar effect, they warn them about the fountain's power and express that they just want to go home. They hint that something is not right with Bessy but are not intelligent enough to say what that means.

**Shrinking Fountain.** A *detect magic* spell cast on the fountain reveals an aura of transmutation magic. A creature that drinks the water must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be reduced as per an *enlarge/reduce* spell for 24 hours. This effect can be removed by a *lesser restoration* spell or similar effect. The water loses all of its power 1 minute after being removed from the fountain.

## 7. WRECKING HALL

Both areas marked with this location number are described in the same way. The southern hall holds a secret door as noted below.

Bas reliefs of wooded hills and cattle herds cover the walls of this broad hallway.

**Encounter: Minotaur Guardians.** A **minotaur skeleton** stands at the base of the staircase leading up to area 9. It charges and gores any who enter this hallway. **Secret Door.** A character who searches the walls of the southern hall and succeeds on a DC 15 Investigation (Intelligence) check finds the secret door to area 10. It opens by pressing on the nose of a large cow in the bas relief. A lever located in area 9 also opens the secret door.

## 8. GOLDEN CALF SHRINE

A pair of golden calf statues stand proudly on a marble block in the center of this room. Marble pedestals holding painted clay pots stand against the walls. The domed ceiling is painted to resemble a night sky.





A character that is proficient in History and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the stars in the painted ceiling make up strange constellations that are not of this world.

**Encounter: Golden Calves.** The two **golden calves** (they use the **animated armor** stat block) come alive if a creature touches them or any of the clay pots in this room.

**Treasure.** The golden statues are worth 100 gp each once they are inert. The clay pots in the room contain a random amount of coins totaling 2d6 gp, 4d8 sp, and 6d10 cp. One of the pots also holds a small iron key that unlocks the doors to area 9.

## 9. SHADOW GALLERY

The doors to this chamber are locked and open with a successful DC 15 Strength check, with thieves' tools and a successful DC 15 Dexterity check, or with the red lever as described below. The key that opens both doors is in area 8. When the characters enter this room, read aloud the following:

This oval chamber has doors exiting to the north and south. A mosaic covers the walls displaying a massive city scene with arching towers and colorful markets. A pedestal in the center of the room holds four small levers with a colored stone embedded above each.

A character with a passive Perception of 15 or higher or who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices that the city scene shows cow-like robed figures walking on their hind legs as the city's citizens.

**Levers.** The colored stones from left to right on the pedestal are Red, Blue, Black, and Green. Pulling on one of the levers has the following result that only activates once each before the lever does nothing:

- The red lever flings open both doors to this room. If the minotaur skeleton is still in the Wrecking Hall (area 7), it charges up the stairs and into this room.
- The blue lever releases a cool mist from the ceiling that heals 1d4+2 hit points to any creature in the room that breathes it in.
- The black lever activates four minotaur-shaped shadows that peel off the walls and attack the party.
- The green lever opens the secret door in area 7 (southern hall) that leads to area 10. The characters can hear the rumble of it opening through the southern door in this room.

## 10. LOST HERD

Glowing arcane symbols cover every surface of this chamber. An engraved stone door exits to the northeast. Packed into the room and loudly mooing is a herd of cows.

A character proficient in Arcana and who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes the arcane symbols as a complex conjuration spell. If the check succeeds by 5 or more, they can determine it to be a *gate* spell. The symbols glow faintly and fill the room with dim light.

**The Herd:** There are eight **cows** (see Appendix) in this room. They are waiting for Bessy to open the portal in area 11. Each follows a character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Animal Handling) check per cow. This check is done with advantage if the characters use grass or hay to lure them. Otherwise, they stubbornly stand in the room and move to block the path to the door. Any hostility towards the cows results in a stampede as they rush out towards the front exit. Cows under the effects of a *speak with animals* spell are in awe of Bessy and excited. They are also hungry and impatient after waiting for so long.

## 11. PORTAL CHAMBER

The door to this chamber automatically closes and locks with an *arcane lock* spell 1 minute after being opened. It opens by using the password "Eternal" spoken in Bovine. It can be forced open with a successful DC 15 Strength check or with thieves' tools and a successful DC 15 Dexterity check. When the characters first enter the room, read aloud the following:

A long ramp leads down into a large domed chamber lit by a flickering lantern sitting on the floor in the center of the room. The dome is painted to resemble a night sky with three moons in the center. A cow wearing a blue ribbon with a gold bell is quietly staring at a ten-foot-wide stone ring engraved with a maze-like pattern on the southern wall.

This chamber once housed a portal between the material plane and the bovine plane. Unfortunately for Bessy, the power source was depleted over time and now does not have enough energy to power the *gate* spell. Frustrated by this fact, she knows the ranchers wait outside, and she has been attempting to come up with a strategy to fight them.

If the characters are wary around Bessy or show hostility, read aloud the following:

The cow looks at each of you before closing her eyes and sighing deeply. She suddenly says, "I guess you hairless apes are smarter than the rest of your kind. This will not do. You will not stop our exodus!" The cow rears high as her muscles shift, and she stands upright on her hind legs. A greatsword appears in her hooves, and she lets out a loud moo!

**Encounter: Bessy the Death Cow.** Bessy is a **death cow** (see Appendix, she also speaks Common) and waits



for an opportunity to surprise the characters before revealing herself. She attacks with her war moo ability first and maneuvers herself to use her bovine master ability to call in any cows remaining in area 10. Bessy fights to the death and, once defeated, collapses with her dying words spoken in Bovine being, “I failed you, my queen... I am sorry...” before exploding.

**Treasure.** The gold bell on Bessy’s collar is worth 25 gp, and the lantern on the floor is enchanted with a *continual flame* spell. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check on the stone ring uncovers a secret panel that opens to reveal a *ring of the bull* (works the same as a *ring of the ram* except with a spectral bull’s head).

## CONCLUSION

If the characters defeat Bessy and get the herd out of the ruins, Donny Buckley and his ranchers return them to the Windswept Grange. They are shocked to hear about Bessy and start to eye the rest of the cows nervously. Donny declares he’ll bring his men back here to fill in the rest of the ruins just in case more creatures appear. Any promised rewards (see Aventure Hooks) are happily paid to the characters, and Donny gifts the golden bell from Bessy’s collar to the party if they give it back to him.

If the party fails to defeat Bessy, she eventually leaves the ruins in disguise with the rest of the herd to continue her plot. She leads the cows on a stampede during the festival of the gods that kills many citizens. A band of heroes who are more competent than the characters stop Bessy once and for all.

## APPENDIX

### Cow

Large beast, unaligned

**Armor Class** 10 (natural armor)  
**Hit Points** 15 (2d10 + 4)  
**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	3 (-4)	8 (-1)	4 (-3)

**Senses** passive Perception 9

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 1/4 (50 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus:** +2

**Charge.** If the cow moves at least 20 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with a gore attack on the same turn, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) piercing damage.

#### ACTIONS

**Gore.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

## CREDITS

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**Interior Illustrations:** Shutterstock, [FAT GOBLIN GAMES](#)

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### DEATH COW

Large monstrosity, lawful evil

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)  
**Hit Points** 90 (12d10 + 24)  
**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	8 (-1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

**Saving Throws** Str +6, Con +5

**Skills** Animal Handling +4, Athletics +6, Perception +4

**Senses** passive Perception 14

**Languages** Bovine

**Challenge** 5 (1,800 XP)

**Proficiency Bonus:** +3

**Bovine Master.** A death cow can take control of 1d6 cows located within 30 feet of it as per the *dominate monster* spell. Cows controlled in this fashion do not receive a Wisdom save, but are controlled automatically.

**Cattle Guise.** A death cow can voluntarily appear as a normal quadrupedal cow, indistinguishable from a normal cow. It can transform between cow and death cow form instantly. Its weapons only manifest in bipedal form. The *true seeing* spell will reveal the death cow’s true form.

**Death Throes.** When the death cow dies, it explodes, showering all creatures within a 30-foot radius with scalding blood and chunks of burning meat. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

**Secret Speech.** Death cows speak in a strange tongue called Bovine that normally cannot be learned by non-cows. Those who wish to learn the language must succeed on a DC 20 Intelligence check and have a willing death cow as an instructor.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The death cow makes one bite and one greatsword attack.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

**Greatsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) slashing damage.

**War Moo (Recharge 5-6).** The death cow unleashes a deafening moo. All non-bovine creatures within 30 feet of the death cow that can hear the moo, must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw and be deafened for 1 minute and take 28 (8d6) thunder damage on a failed save, or half as much damage without being deafened on a successful one.



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