

THE IVORY IDOL

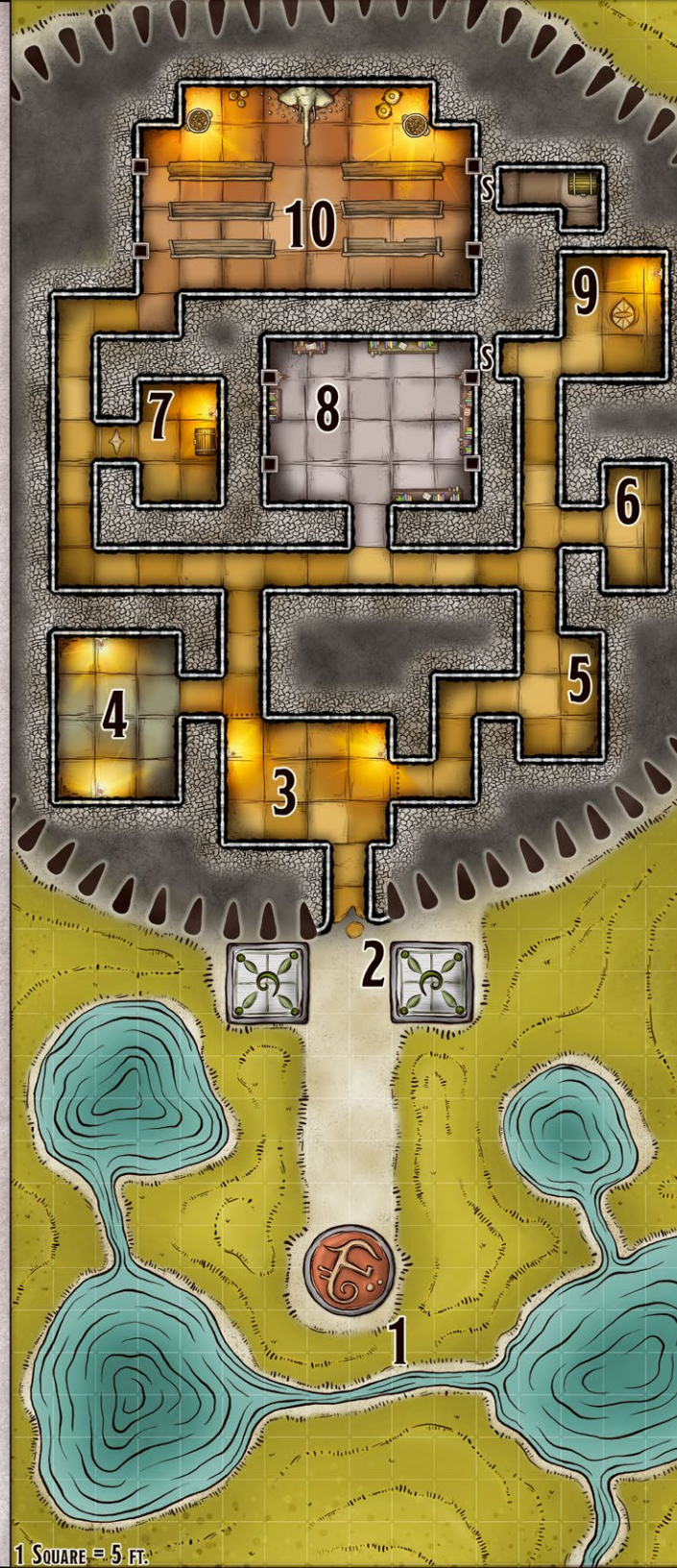


he situation is dire! Winter approaches but the local farming communities have fewer workers as days go by and no one finds a solution. The nature of the problem is so foreign that no one knows how to deal with the increasing desertion rates in the farms.

It all started a few weeks ago. A local beet farmer known as Jolly John visited a strange local stone vestige known as the Ochre Medallion. It is a large circular stone slab with an interesting rune on top. People do not know what it stands for. The medallion was there when humans first settled the area. It is located next to two stone pillars and a flat-topped grassy hill. The location is the source of legends and superstitions but some of the farmers come here often to pray to the goddess of harvests for bountiful seasons.

Jolly John had a weird feeling after he finished his prayers. An inexplicable tingling at the back of his mind. It instructed him to approach the area in between the two pillars. He obeyed. There was no compulsion to analyze his actions or evaluate the source of the instructions. He dug into the steep side of the hill until the wall of stone and dirt collapsed to reveal a narrow passage into the earth. Jolly John entered and came back with a strange stone slab in his hands.

The stone was small enough he could carry it under his arm. The day after, Jolly John brought the stone to the town square and showed it to everyone. The people loved the stone and thanked Jolly John for bringing it. An observer would notice there was something wrong. People's interest in the stone appeared to have no reason whatsoever. They wanted to



see it, carry it, and, some of them, even kiss it. The iridescent orange-tinted stone produced such an effect on them. Jolly John and some people left that night with the stone and have not been seen since. They all returned to the underground complex where their minds and souls are now prisoners. Once a week, a person from the new faith goes out to another town with the stone to conscript even more people. The stone appears to have some kind of hypnotic power. It does not affect everyone but it has caused so many people to leave the farms that the autumn harvest may well be ruined if people do not return to work soon.

According to unaffected victims, the stone appears to be a 1-foot-diameter orange quartz mineral. One of its sides features red glowing runes. Though the language is unknown, people remember being able to read it. It says:

*Long is the grasp of the
Ivory Idol. Come to the
unending light and thrive.*

The cryptic message appears to be ingrained in everyone's minds. The unaffected remember it in the same way. Twenty-five adult people and five children have disappeared so far.

AN UNNOBLE CAUSE

A local lord from a disgraced noble family named Faradis Effil believes this crisis may persuade other noble houses to favor his interests, if handled in the proper manner. He recently put up a hefty bounty to gather brave warriors or mercenaries.

The mission is simple: The adventurers must access the strange temple, handle the hypnotized townsfolk in the way they want, and recover the fabled orange quartz-stone.

Lord Effil does not care about the missing farmers. His only motivation is the potential political influence. He plans to show the stone to other nobles, especially their children. He expects those people to act in the same way as the farmers and abandon their manors, flee into the wild, and reach the temple. The noble houses shall lose their bearings as their heirs, wives, and patriarchs are missing. Lord Effil will then have them “rescued” and gain the favor of important houses.

AREA DESCRIPTIONS

1. THE OCHRE MEDALLION

A permanent fixture of the land, the Ochre Medallion is a circular stone slab with a large rune. It appears to be aligned with the two stone pillars but its use is lost to time. Four adult farmers with farming implements stand by the medallion. They attack anyone who dares enter the temple. The hypnotized farmers cannot be reasoned with.

2. TEMPLE ENTRANCE

Two large stone pillars flank the temple entrance. The pillars feature eroded and unreadable reliefs and runes on their sides.

3. BARRED DOORS

Two sets of improvised iron bar gates block the way into the two exiting hallways. The iron bars are pressure-fixed from floor to ceiling. A person may push through them with enough strength or appropriate tool

4. MEDITATION ROOM

Two adults and one child sit on the floor of this chamber. They appear to be asleep. The signs of malnourishment are present in all of them. If disturbed, they do their best to restrain and capture the unwanted visitors but they are unarmed.



5. CHILD GUARDS

Four children with knives guard this chamber. They lack the strength of adults but offset it with an inexplicable rage when they attack.

6. PICTURES OF THE PAST

An empty chamber, the walls decorated with frescoes from floor to ceiling. The paintings depict groups of people that worship an elephant-shaped entity from beyond the veil. The followers appear to follow the alien god without question in all paintings.



7. A TRAP FOR FOOLS

The room features a single wooden chest. The chest contains 150 gold coins from a coinage so old no one recognizes the face on them. Stepping on the decorated stone tile by the entrance triggers an explosive rune that affects all adjacent squares too. The trap resets after an hour.

8. THE IVORY LIBRARY

Five bookcases of different lengths contain a large number of books in an unknown language. The books feature ivory hardcovers and gold-plated sides. Three of the missing farmers guard this location. They stand by the walls unmoving but attack any people approaching the shelves. The books, if

translated, are a collection of literary classics from a forgotten culture. A secret door by the northeast corner leads to **Area 9**.

9. ZONE OF TRANSCENDENCE

A person who meditates while sitting on the rune on the floor communes with the spirits beyond the veil. It is possible to ask a question at the risk of losing one's mind to the ineffable beings on the other side.

10. GRAND CHAPEL OF THE IDOL

Ten people sit on the benches of the chapel. They appear to pray and pay no attention to visitors. The altar features a large ivory idol in the shape of an elephant. It glows warmly in the braziers' light. The fabled orange quartz-stone lies below the elephant's muzzle. People who enter the room are subject to the hypnotic power of the stone. Only strong minds can withstand the psychic onslaught that broke the farmers' minds. Those who fail become mental thralls to the Ivory Idol.

When anyone comes within one foot of the orange stone, it glows and starts beating like a heart. The quartz-stone bestows the Ivory Idol a semblance of life. The ivory monster is a formidable opponent. Any remaining mental thralls step in to aid the Ivory Idol against the intruders.

A secret passage leads to a hidden vault. The wooden chest contains 450 gold coins and a scroll with a ritual to summon the idol.

CONCLUSION

Lord Effil's plan is full of loopholes. He assumes the stone does not affect him or his mercenaries. Should this happen, he is the one in need of saviors. On the other hand, good-hearted adventurers may choose to free any surviving farmers. Removing them from the temple ends the enchantment. With their help, they can later denounce Lord Effil as the cold-blooded ruler he is.