

DUNGEON VAULT MAGAZINE

No. 33

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10 ORIGINAL ADVENTURES
HIGH RESOLUTION MAPS
VTT - ROLL20 MAPS

Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG



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600 + Maps

Foundry VTT

100+ Roll20 Products

ELVEN TOWER ADVENTURES

DUNGEON MAP PACK VOL. 2

WEB OF HATRED
LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE



WELCOME TO SHADOWDARK RPG

We are Elven Tower, a small team of Mexican creators who illustrate medieval-fantasy maps and write great adventures for each of them. We have been operating for over six years in the TTRPG market and have crafted 650+ cartography pieces and a similar amount of written content for them. The bulk of our recent work now consists of adventures and content for **Shadowdark RPG**.

This supplement contains many of our **Shadowdark RPG** creations. Nine low-level, original adventures; each features amazing cartography pieces. And an extra goodie, a neutral, one-page dungeon that can be ported to any fantasy system.

We compile our monthly creations into our popular *Dungeon Vault Magazine*. Within, in addition to our in-house creations, we feature paid guest writers to supply all kinds of additional content: player options, GM material, monsters, etc. Shadowdark 3rd-party content creators are sure to appear in our magazine soon!

Fresh Shadowdark RPG Content

HEART OF FLAMES

Those that wield the Heart of Flames have the cinders within them kindled and reforged. Alas, the power that comes from it cannot be easily controlled.

Tome of the Secret Flame



Old forge-masters from dwarvish societies required the hottest fire to feed their mithral forges. Through mighty incantations that bound elemental spirits to their hammers and the flames of their hearts to the forges, they created the *Heart of Flames*, a fabled relic that contains a pure ever-lasting flame. The *Heart of Flames* is empowered by whoever wields it. It sets the wielder's soul to flames and feeds from this fire. Or so the legend says...

Many a dwarven hero possessed the *Heart of Flames* during the heroic exploits that made them historical figures. It was also used to light the grandest forges in the dwarven halls; used to craft legendary items and weapons. In time, the dwarvish kingdoms succumbed to greed in terrible wars to control the mighty artifact. The *Heart of Flames* was hidden in a dwarven tomb near a human town. It awaits to be unearthed once more.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Retrieval. The characters seek the power of the *Heart of Flames* to defeat a formidable foe. Rumors of the relic's location lead them to the caverns in area 2 (0 XP).

Bounty. A mage named Selesnya offers a reward for retrieving the *Heart of Flames*. The wizard teleports the party to the magic circle in area 1 (60 gp, 3 XP).

Earthquake. A cave compound near the forest is the epicenter of recent seismic activity. The bailiff hires the characters to explore it and find a solution. He provides a map that leads to a set of stairs in area 3 (40 gp, 2 XP).

RUMORS

d6	Details
1	Sudden earthquakes have grown increasingly stronger during the past years, causing worry and dismay.
2	A flame-worshipping cult was vanquished six years ago. They hid in the strange underground compound.
3	Myth has it that the relic ignites the wielder's heart and grants them the power to beat insurmountable odds.
4	A daring explorer visited the dungeon a year ago and came back with tales of lava rivers and deadly guardians.
5	This land was long ago ruled by dwarvish clans. They prayed to ancient fire deities to kindle their forges.
6	Elvish scholars came decades ago claiming to seek the <i>Heart of Flames</i> . They perished exploring the dungeon.

Level 2 Adventure

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

► **Fire Power.** The unstable, magic aura in area 9 causes frequent earthquakes and enhances the casting of certain spells. Fire spells are cast with advantage.

► **Lava.** It is too viscous, submersion is not possible. Contact with it deals 1d8 damage per round (no save).

► **Light.** Some areas have braziers or faintly glowing lava; the rest are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Secret Areas.** Close inspection of an area for 1 crawling round reveals a hidden iron lever, if any. Pulling it reveals a narrow passage into the hidden chambers.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A giant bat swoops from the dark ceiling and attacks a random creature. It fiercely fights to the death.
2	A gelatinous cube approaches and attempts to consume a random character. The ooze is almost invisible.
3	A sudden magic pulse from the <i>Heart of Flames</i> puts out all fires and light-sources in a 2-mile radius.
4	1d4 dwarven skeletons approach the characters. The axe-wielding undead are fearsome warriors.
5	The <i>Heart of Flames</i> causes an earthquake. Debris falls on a random character (1d8 damage, DC 15 DEX check).
6	A giant leech drops from the ceiling and attempts to attach to the character wearing the least armor.

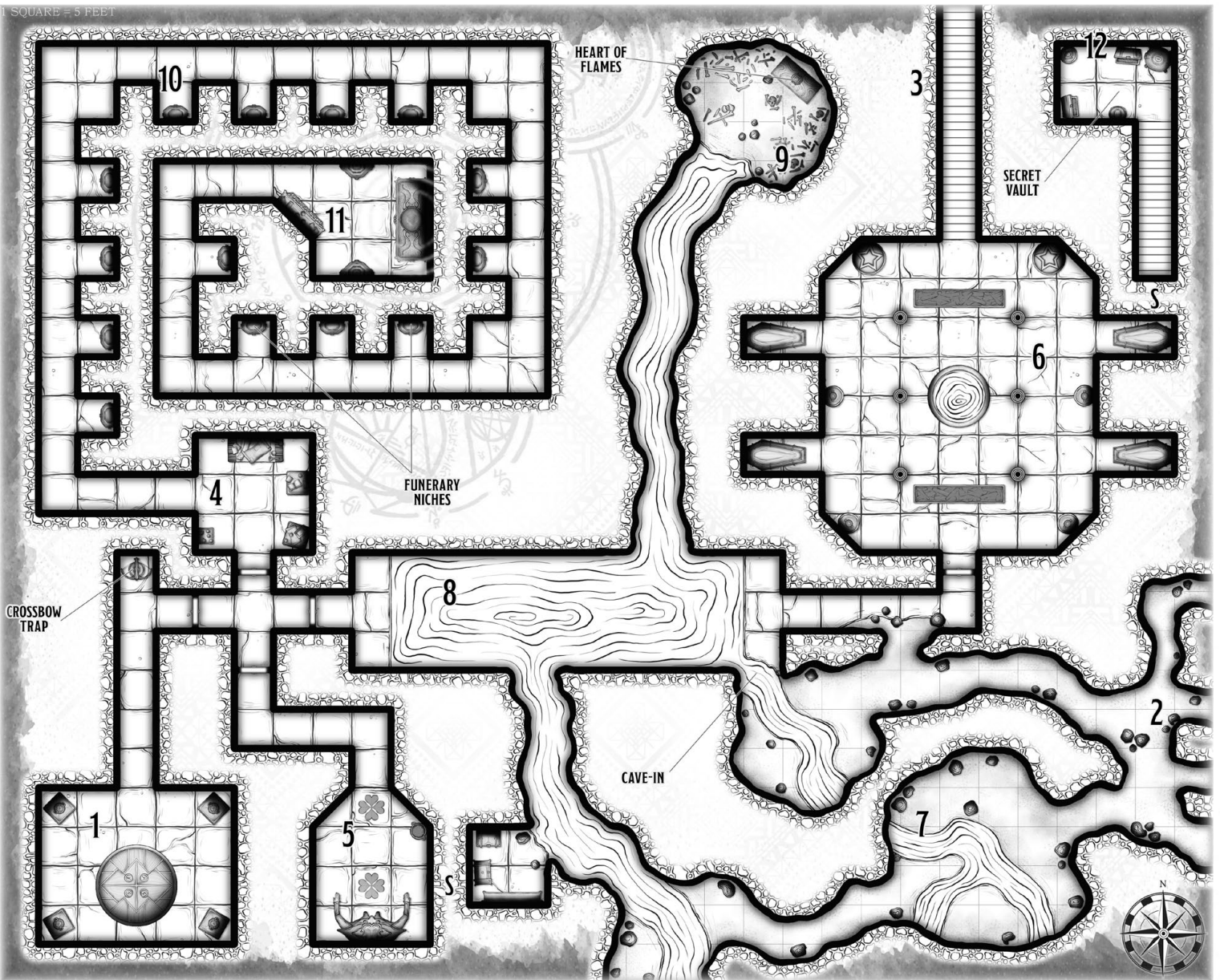
1. TELEPORTATION CIRCLE

Four clay vases on stone plinths surround the one-foot-tall, rune-inscribed, stone circle on the floor.

► **Teleportation.** The characters may enter the dungeon by teleportation if they were hired by Selesnya. The teleportation causes a longing sensation in them.

► **Crossbow Trap.** Stepping into the dark hallway triggers the automated crossbow to fire multiple bolts. Creatures in front of it take 1d8 damage (DC 15 DEX check).

► **The Vases.** Collectively, the vases contain seventeen finger bones. An ancient dwarvish legend says that those who wielded a legendary artifact would offer a finger as an offering to Ord, the Secret-Keeper (DC 18 INT check).



2. THE CAVERNS

The cool cave air is quickly replaced by intense heat from the tunnels ahead. The faint, crimson light further out suggests the presence of molten rock.

► **The Rumors.** The characters may enter the dungeon from here by following the legends of the *Heart of Flames*. A cavern near the forest leads to this location.

3. ENTRANCE STAIRCASE

From a ruined entrance in the forest of which only eroded boulders remain, the stone staircase descends 150 feet into the depths of the earth. As the characters proceed, a rising heat assails their dark descent.

► **Bailiff's Map.** The characters may enter the dungeon from here by following the bailiff's directions and map to the dilapidated entrance in the forest depths.

► **Carvings.** The walls are carved with the images of dwarven kings; their hearts depicted as raging flames.

4. RUINED ARCHIVE

The rotten remains of wooden furnishings and tomes are nothing but ashes on the ground. All that remains are a few magically-warded scrolls on stone plinths.

► **Preserved Scrolls.** If studied for 1 crawling round, The scrolls tell the tale of a warrior with a heart of fire who single-handedly defeated two stone giants.

5. SHRINE TO ORD

A statue of Ord the Unbending, the Wise, the Secret-Keeper stands proud with its arms spread wide.

► **The Statue.** This is Ord as dwarf cultures know him. They believe Ord is the prime force that empowers their magical artifacts and forges (DC 13 INT check).

► **Honest Prayer.** Praying to Ord for 1 crawling round earns a character a **luck token**. If a character prays for benefit without true faith, the statue's eyes shine bright and the character is dealt 1d6 fire damage (no save).

6. CHAMBER OF GUARDIANS

A shallow pond of lava in the center of the chamber is flanked by sarcophagi on alcoves and golden vases on stone plinths. A carving on the ceiling depicts ten dwarves worshipping a giant, floating heart in flames.

► **The Pond.** The lava is more fluid than its counterpart in area 8. Submersion of a living creature in the lava pond causes a painful, immediate death (no save).

► **The Enclosures.** Each stone casket contains the bodily remains of a dwarven blacksmith. If opened, the sarcophagi release four angered dwarf **skeletons**.

► **The Vases.** Each vase contains a potion of *protection from energy* (fire). They can be used to traverse the lava-immersed areas as long as the user maintains focus.

7. LAVA CAVERNS

The cave-in in area 8 created these lava streams which further increase the seismic activity in the region. A half-exposed vault is hidden by one of the streams.

► **Treasure (3 XP).** The seemingly inaccessible vault contains 10 gp, 100 sp, and two **immovable rods**.

8. THE LAVA PIT

A 40-foot-long, lava-filled pit fills this chamber. Cave-ins have caused some walls to collapse outward.

Crossing the lava without the magical protection from area 6 is a dangerous ordeal. The lava is so viscous that dropping objects into it may be used to craft a temporary path across the molten rock (DC 15 DEX check).

9. THE HEART OF FLAMES

The glowing Heart of Flames lies surrounded by the scorched remains of those who got here and perished from the lethal wounds trying to control it.

► **The Heart.** Only dwarves can wield the *Heart of Flames*. Other creatures that touch it drop to 0 HP and start dying (DC 18 CON check). It ignites the dwarf's soul and allows marvelous feats worthy of legends. The true power and reach of the *Heart of Flames* are left to the GM's discretion as its impact is dependent on the overarching campaign. The item should be pivotal to the campaign's completion. Dwarvish tradition dictates that upon their death, the user's remains should be brought to the empty niche to rest among their legendary peers.

10. DWARVEN CRYPT

Thirteen dwarves who once owned the *Heart of Flames* are interred in the spiral-shaped crypt. One niche remains empty. Each niche is marked with a name and a short description of the person's greatest achievement.

► **Treasure (0-2 XP).** Plundering the funerary niches yields 1d6 gp and 2d10 sp per burial place explored.

11. TOMB OF THE WARRIOR

A lavish, opulent sarcophagus dominates the chamber. A 3-foot-wide, glimmering emerald-like gem is embedded on the rune-carved, silver-inlaid stone lid.

► **Lore.** The only copy of the *Tome of the Secret Flame* is in the bookcase. It contains a recount of all those who wielded the *Heart of Flames* and their deeds, which vary from the mundane to those only available to deities.

► **The Guardian.** If the characters ransacked any of the niches in area 10, the **ghost** of Arbrank emerges to stop the characters in their tracks. The *Tome of the Secret Flame* claims Arbrank used the fire within him to craft a mighty hammer and destroy an entire goblin civilization.

12. SECRET VAULT

The narrow passage leads to a staircase that descends to this vault. It contains several stone containers.

► **Treasure (3 XP).** The stone enclosures contain 40 gp, 300 sp, 1,200 cp, two *scrolls* with random cleric spells, two *potions of healing*, and a *pearl of power*.



THE DEMON DOOR

I have heard all kinds of stories about this place. The only thing I know for sure is that it is dangerous, and these threats must be stopped.

Sir Roldan



Some things are better left untouched, unbothered. Just like some facts are better off forgotten, left behind. However, ambition and curiosity, or a combination of both, are often the primary reason for unleashing formerly trapped danger or chaos. An explorer opens a door within a tomb. A sorcerer who pronounces the incantations on a piece of parchment. Or a sneaky rogue grabbing a ruby from the eye socket of a demon statue... All had their reasons, good or bad. But, ultimately, the consequences of these actions and how they are dealt with are what matters.

A PATH TO THE ABYSS

A **POWERFUL WIZARD** thought he could master the power of demons years ago. He created a door between worlds, joining the Material Plane with the Abyss, the demon plane. After dealing with a couple of demonic entities from the foreign, dark plane, the mage realized his mistake. He used all his might to seal the planar connection, unsuccessfully. All he could manage to do was to place a magical door. The demon-shaped gate blocks the way but the portal between both worlds remains.

The wizard left and never came back, fearing someone could point fingers at him. A coward at heart who could not face and mend the consequences of his actions. Now and then, abyssal demons manage to cross the Demon Door, the name given to this place over the years.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

THE DEMON DOOR is located a few miles too close to Hoban City. The demons were easy to defeat in the past, but lately, the city guards have struggled and many have perished fighting the deadlier demons that the magical door summons forth. The authorities offer a bounty.

Protectors. Sir Roldan, captain of the city watch, hires the characters. They must deal with any threat and make sure the demons stop coming (40 gp, 3 XP).

Retrievers. The characters are hired by Dr. Julius, a scientist and historian. The man needs them to retrieve all books, tomes, and documents from the library near the demon door (area 4). He cares little about the demons or the danger they represent (30 gp, 2 XP).

RUMORS

d4 Details

- 1 Some people say that the creator of the door lived in Hoban City but left out of shame for what he did.
- 2 The locals say that the door is impossible to close. Somehow, demons keep coming regardless of what they try.
A party of heroes was hired for the same job some weeks ago. They never returned. Some claim they simply found the task too hard and left. Others believe they died trying... and that their bodies should be near the gate.
- 3 The last demon to cross the door and reach the city killed half a dozen guards before being defeated.

Level 3 Adventure

► **Danger.** Risky. Check for a random event every 2 crawling rounds and after loud noises (1-in-6 chance).

► **Whispers.** Standing before the demon door is not for the faint of heart. The mental toll (see area 2) is high. And demons' voices can be heard at all times.

RANDOM EVENTS

d4 Details

- 1 A black, acidic tar pours from a crack in the ceiling on someone's backpack. It dissolves a random item inside it.
- 2 The characters hear a deep, guttural voice speak without making a sound; they hear the message in their minds: "What do we have here? Visitors? Open the door so we can meet face to face. Come on, don't be shy now..."
- 3 The characters draw the attention of a **spider swarm**. The arachnids flee if reduced to half their hit points.
- 4 Two **giant rats** were looking for food here. The characters interrupt their search and they become hostile.

1. ENTRANCE

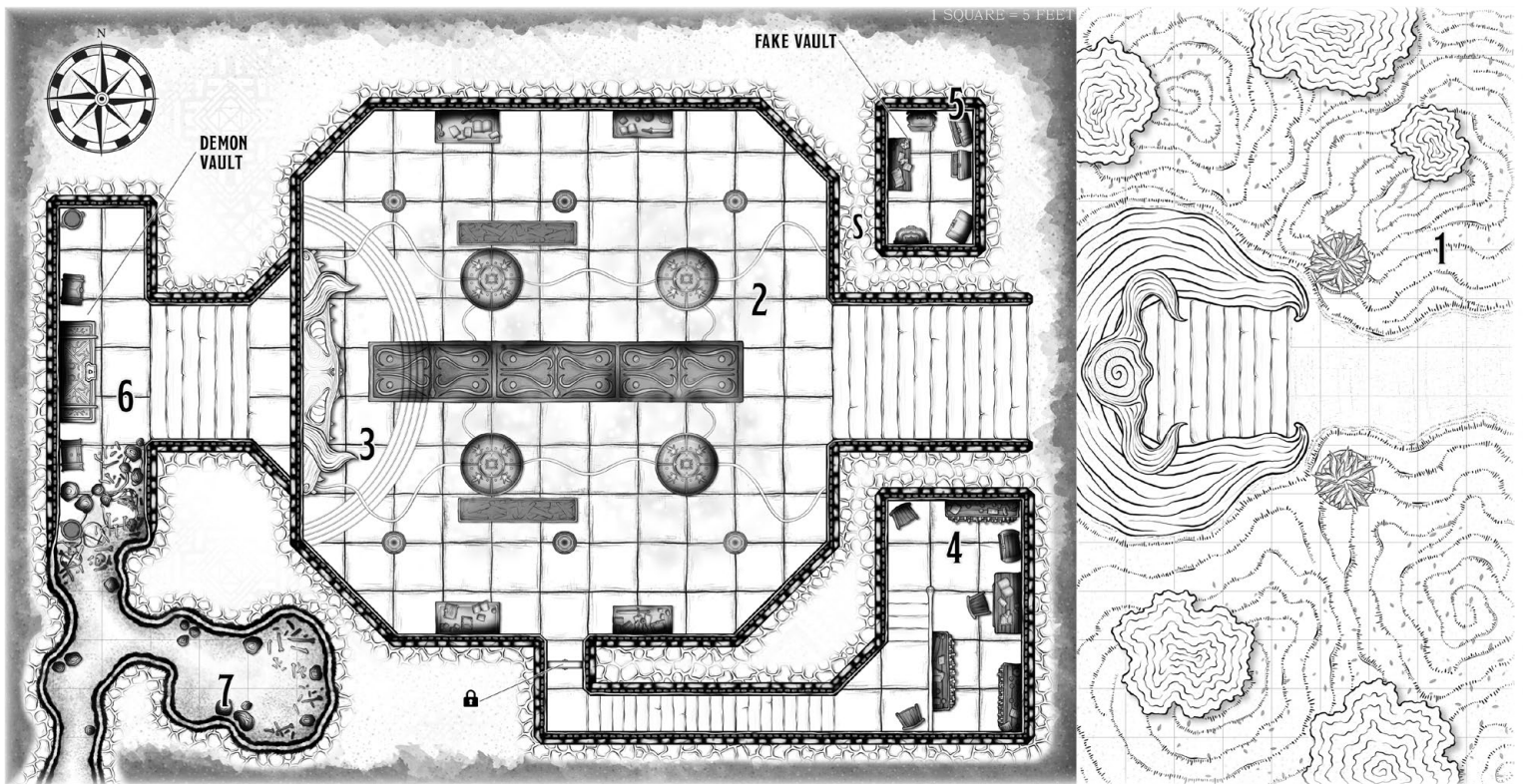
It is a three-day journey from Hoban City to the cave where the demon door is located. If the characters do not travel cautiously, three **dretches** attempt to ambush the characters just before they descend to area 2.

DRETCH

Pig-faced demons with long claws and a terrible stench.

AC 12 **HP** 10 **ATK** 1 claw +2 (1d6) or 1 gas, **MV** near, **S** +2, **D** +0, **C** +2, **I** -2, **W** -1, **Ch** -3, **AL** C, **LV** 2

Gas. All in near DC 12 CON or blinded for 1d4 rounds.



2. CHAMBER OF DARK MEMORIES

The demons' evil corruption from the Abyss materializes in the shape of dense mist. All living creatures in this chamber must overcome a battle in their minds.

► **Dark Mist.** Breathing in the mist triggers a vivid remembrance of one's darkest memories and deepest secrets, aiming to hurt one's soul and cause mental damage (DC 14 WIS check). Creatures that fail to withstand this mental test lose half their hit points.

3. THE DEMON DOOR

The face of a demon made of jade stares at all visitors. Its eyes seem to follow all living creatures before them.

► **A Traveler.** The characters come at the right time to witness a demon cross the gate. The **vrock** fights against the fabric of reality and pushes through the demon door. And just like a creature swimming out of an oily substance, the winged abomination manages to cross over. The demon is exhausted from crossing the door as if the effort took a great deal of its energies. But even at half its strength, it attacks all living creatures it sees until slain.

VROCK

A wagon-sized, monstrous, four-limbed, filthy vulture with mangy feathers and hard midnight-blue skin.

AC 12, HP 15, ATK 2 talons +3 (1d6) or 1 screech, MV near, S +2, D +2, C +2, I -1, W +1, Ch +0, AL C, LV 3

Screech. All enemies in double near DC 12 WIS or DISADV on checks and attacks for 1d4 rounds.

4. DEMONIC LIBRARY

The characters need to bypass the lock on the door to gain access to this area (DC 14 DEX check).

► **Hard Truth.** If the characters spend 1 **crawling round** reading the documents here, they learn of a ritual that can seal the demon door forever. However, the cost of this magic is high. The soul of a willing individual must be offered as part of the ritual's components.

5. FAKE VAULT

A section of a wall can be pushed aside to reveal this secret area (DC 14 WIS check). An explosion occurs if any chest is tampered with (1d8 damage to all in the room, DC 14 DEX check for half). There is nothing of value.

6. DEMON VAULT

The characters may cross the door if they wish. There is a treasure worthy of heroes, countless gold, and magic items. Too bad they cannot ever turn back (see below).

7. CAVERNS OF THE ABYSS

The remains of the mercenaries hired before the characters are here. Their blind, stupid ambition for more brought them here. Only gnawed bones were left of them.

DEVELOPMENT

THE DOCUMENTS IN area 4 show how to cross the door. However, the door disappears behind the characters upon entering the other plane, the Abyss. Their greed and foolishness have great costs. More demons approach. The heroes' survival is in the GM's hands...

KETHAR'S ELEMENTAL SECRETS

World-building and original spells by Ian James Arnott



"I have seen the raw power of the elements, and it is both awe-inspiring and terrifying. But to unlock their secrets is worth any price."

A magic has always been an ancient mysterious force, stirring the hearts and minds of those who seek to harness its power. Countless generations have been enchanted by the idea of wielding incredible magic and shaping the world around them. Among the many powerful wizards whose legacies continue to fascinate and inspire, one stands out above the rest - the great Kethar, an ancient mage whose obsession with elemental power knew no bounds.

Kethar was a wizard of unparalleled dedication and intelligence, but his single-minded pursuit of elemental magic led to his ultimate downfall. His legacy lives on through the spells he developed, which are so potent they were almost too dangerous to use. Despite the risks, some adventurers seek out Kethar's ancient magic, hoping to wield the elemental powers he so fervently pursued. But they must tread carefully, for Kethar's cautionary tale serves as a reminder of the dangers of unchecked ambition in the pursuit of power.

ELEMENTAL OBSESSION

ENTRANCED BY THE raw power of nature and the elements, Kethar would spend countless hours, days, or even weeks lost in wonder. His investigations would cause him to miss meals and lose interest in how he looked. He would spend his time studying the elements' every movement and seeking to unlock the secrets they held within. And as the years passed, Kethar's passion for elemental magic and everything that had to do with them only grew, until this passion consumed him entirely.

With unrelenting dedication, Kethar delved ever deeper into the properties of air, fire, water, and earth, determined to uncover the hidden powers that lay dormant within and among them. Through endless study and experimentation, he developed spells of such power that they were almost beyond his control. Despite the many injuries suffered in pursuit of his arcane knowledge, Kethar would not stop his pursuit of ever-greater understanding and created improved versions of the spells.

As his obsession with elemental magic grew, Kethar found himself increasingly isolated from the rest of the world. Further and further, he withdrew from society, consumed by his unquenchable desire to master the elements. And yet, for all his formidable power and knowledge, Kethar remained blind to the dangers that lay ahead, heedless of the tragic fate that awaited him.

No one knows what happened to him. Kethar's fate remains a mystery, and while most believe his pursuit of power killed him, a few outliers believe he still wanders the world in search of greater knowledge.



ELEMENTAL TOMES

WITHIN THE TOMES that have been discovered lie two of Kethar's most formidable spells: Kethar's Violent Hurricane and Kethar's Flashfire. These spells are so imbued with elemental power making them incredibly dangerous to wield. The spells' sheer force is a testament to Kethar's obsession with the elements and the lengths he was willing to go to unlock their secrets.

KETHAR'S VIOLENT HURRICANE

Tier 3 Wizard

Duration: Instant

You gather the wind around you, creating a powerful storm within a near cone in front of you. Each creature in the area must make an STR check versus your last spellcasting check. On a failed save, each creature in the area takes 4d6 bludgeoning damage and is pushed to a far distance from you. A creature takes half damage on a successful save and is not pushed.

After casting this spell, your body is left with cracks and bruises. If you cast it more times than 1 + your CON modifier per day, you must succeed on a DC 13 CON check or be stunned until the end of your next turn.

KETHAR'S FLASHFIRE

Tier 5 Wizard

Duration: Instant

You become engulfed in flames. A deafening explosion emanates from you, incinerating everything in a near radius. Each creature within the area of effect must make a DEX check vs. your last spellcasting check, taking 6d6 fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Any flammable objects that aren't being worn or carried in the area are incinerated.

In addition, you must also roll a DC 15 DEX check. On a fail, you take full damage from the spell. This is dangerous magic, and the heat from the explosion is so intense that not even you are immune to its effects.

KETHAR IN PLAY

KETHAR'S RELENTLESS PURSUIT of power and the cautionary tale of his downfall can be incorporated into tabletop roleplaying games in various ways.

One option is to include Kethar as a powerful NPC in the game. Perhaps the players encounter Kethar's ghost, who still seeks to unlock the secret powers of the elements, or they come across a group of wizards who have uncovered his tomes and are attempting to harness his powerful magic. Alternatively, Kethar could be an antagonist in the game, using his immense power to further his own goals at the expense of others.

You can use the following adventure hooks to draw the characters into the story Kethar:

► **The Ghost of Kethar.** Rumors have been circulating about strange occurrences at an abandoned wizard's tower deep in the forest. The players are hired by a group of townsfolk to investigate. They soon discover that the tower was once the home of the infamous mage Kethar. However, Kethar's spirit still lingers, bound to the tower by his magic. The players must find a way to lay Kethar's spirit to rest, all while navigating the treacherous traps and puzzles he left behind.

► **The Pretender's Plot.** A powerful mage claiming to be Kethar has emerged, and he has been gathering followers and building an army. The players are hired by a group of powerful wizards to investigate and stop this pretender, as they fear he will use his followers to wage war and seize control of the kingdom. However, as the players delve deeper into the mage's stronghold, they begin to suspect that there may be more to this than just a simple power grab.

► **Kethar's Legacy.** The players discover a lost tome containing the ancient spells and research of Kethar himself. However, they soon discover that the tome is cursed, and Kethar's spirit is bound to it, seeking to be freed from his eternal prison. The players must delve deep into Kethar's past and find a way to break the curse, all while battling powerful elemental forces that seek to stop them. Will they be able to harness Kethar's ancient magic and use it for good, or will they fall prey to the same obsession that consumed the great mage?



TOMB OF HURAM

By Elven Tower and Dungeon Baker

Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG



LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

A LOW-LEVEL SHADOWDARK ADVENTURE ABOUT EXPLORING AN ANCIENT SEPULCHER



ADVENTURE PRIMER

Some horrible flaws in humankind are their ignorance, their ambition, and their incomprehensible desire to conquer all. But the worst of all is distrust...

Popular Saying



Some people do not belong in society no matter how hard they try. Drunkards, bums, and other kinds of unwanted individuals live in the streets and fill the world with their stench nonetheless. But during the past few years, all these lost souls have heard of Hiram, the man living in Redcain.

It was claimed that Hiram could heal broken minds and mend any broken heart. His words would motivate the lost and the wicked. He gave them a purpose and the will to fight their inner demons and change for the better. The People of Hiram increased in numbers until one day, Crimsonwall authorities started to worry.

The capital rulers did not trust Hiram's entourage at all. And the figures of authority were not the only ones who did not trust the man's strange methods. The commonfolk were divided too. It was a good thing for all to get rid of drunkards and bums but it was hard to contemplate the bigger picture and not see it all like a cult.

HURAM'S TRUTH

THE MAN HAD no secrets. He was just a man with good intentions. Being an outcast his whole life, he just wanted a better fate for others. The people he helped were the first to call themselves "*People of Hiram*", and consider him a prophet of sorts. He led no cult or syndicate with dark motifs. They were only a large group of people that found a reason to change. People who heard the right calling to improve themselves. And Hiram was that reason. He was that call to arms in people's minds.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

IT DID NOT matter how many times Hiram stated his intentions. His charity events, his preachings, the people that spoke well of him, etc. Nothing was taken into consideration. Crimsonwall authorities were tasked with disbanding Hiram's throng of low-lives and would-be criminals and arresting him. Despite his attempts to calm the others, avoid weapons, and parley, Hiram failed.

His people ended up attacking the guards to prevent them from arresting him. Sadly, it was exactly what the city wanted. They unleashed the full weight of the law on the poor people. Many died and others were arrested. Worst of all was that Hiram was killed in the conflict.

THE END OF HURAM

IT WAS ONLY after the damage was done that the authorities realized that Hiram was loved in Redcain. No one had a valid reason to think ill of Hiram or his intentions.

Hence, to keep people calm and leave this matter behind, Crimsonwall authorities did not throw Hiram's body in a ditch. An awkward burial ceremony was held. Hiram's body and some followers were interred a few miles from Redcain. The sepulcher was used in wartime and has seen better days. The city chose this tomb to bury everything behind and forget about all this.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Level 3 Adventure

IN THE END, Hiram's soul could not find peace. It surrendered to darkness and evil a few months ago. He became a shadow of himself and reanimated the dead around him. These monsters subconsciously travel to Redcain and attack the living. They must be stopped!

FORGIVENESS

The characters are hired by High-priest Ulrich. The holy man begs them to ask Hiram's spirit for forgiveness. He believes love and understanding are the keys to appeasing his soul and helping him rest (10 gp, 1 XP).

A MONSTER IS A MONSTER

Magnus Fling, Redcain's bailiff, hires the characters. Their job is to destroy all undead and make sure the tomb is safe to be used again in the future (40 gp, 4 XP).

RUMORS

d4 Details

- The characters overhear some women whispering. They claim the undead are sent by the gods as a punishment for hurting Hiram, an innocent, honest, faithful man.
- A filthy, smelly homeless man approaches the characters. He claims he knew Hiram in life and that he misses him.
- A guard tells the characters that Crimsonwall authorities did not want Hiram because they believed he would become a strong political figure if they allowed him.
- A farmer claims Hiram had magical holy powers that allowed him to convince others and gather the masses.

REDCAIRN

The guards just came and demanded obedience, no questions asked. How could they do that? The People of Hiram rightfully defended themselves.

Arnold, the Miller



he capital of the Northern Territories, Crimsonwall, is surrounded by several settlements and smaller towns. These farming communities hope to thrive and provide their neighbors with the best things they can produce. Redcain is famous for its mining exports. The prominent mining guild makes sure that entire wagons worth of iron and other ores are exported week in and week out.

Redcain is a few days from the capital on horseback. This is where the characters start their adventure. They arrive at the mining community after finishing another quest or they pass through here on their journey toward the capital. Either way, they shall be approached by Magnus Fling or by High-priest Ulrich (see **Adventure Hooks**). They are hired to pay a visit to Hiram's tomb.

REDCAIRN AND HURAM

THE FARMERS AND townsfolk remember Hiram well. He was beloved and admired by most. The peasantry speaks well of him and remembers his good deeds. They recall that just six months ago, Hiram and his followers would gather in the Tree of Words (see below). His inspirational talks motivated people. He helped them forget about their problems and aim for greater things.

The characters also hear other people say bad things about the *People of Hiram's* former leader. They say that the man's entourage was composed of criminals, thieves, and all kinds of unwanted people. However, no one has proof that Hiram or any of his followers harmed anyone in Redcain. The people in town can only vouch for him and come up with proof of their good actions and deeds.

Features of the Town

► **Smells and Sounds.** Redcain has a great mining operation but it is still a farming settlement. The smell of manure is strong. The singing of birds, cows mooing, and other animal sounds accompany everyday life.

► **Events.** Check for a random event every time the characters visit a new area or meet someone new.

► **Atmosphere.** People in Redcain are kind and social. They are friendly to visitors and new faces. However, the undead attacks that started a couple of weeks ago have caused the poor villagers to become scared and jumpy.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A person approaches and says: " <i>Heroes? Don't you dare make good, unless you want Crimsonwall's authorities all over you... This world is backward, I'm telling ya'...</i> "
2	A woman from her window yells " <i>At last! Heroes. Bailiff Magnus spoke the truth! We're going to be fine.</i> "
3	An acolyte from High-priest Ulrich's entourage approaches the characters and gifts them a flask of holy water.
4	Screams outside, and people running home. A group of four skeletons climbed the wall and sneaked into town!
5	The characters stumble upon a town soldier defending himself from two bandits who want to avenge Hiram.
6	A villager tells the characters that a brave young man in the garrison is eager to help. His name is Kimmich.

THE ATTACKS

THE GUARDS IN Redcain are not the same men from Crimsonwall that came to detain Hiram months ago. These are less-experienced soldiers. The undead assaults from the tomb already start to surpass their forces. The town desperately seeks external help.

THE WATERMILL

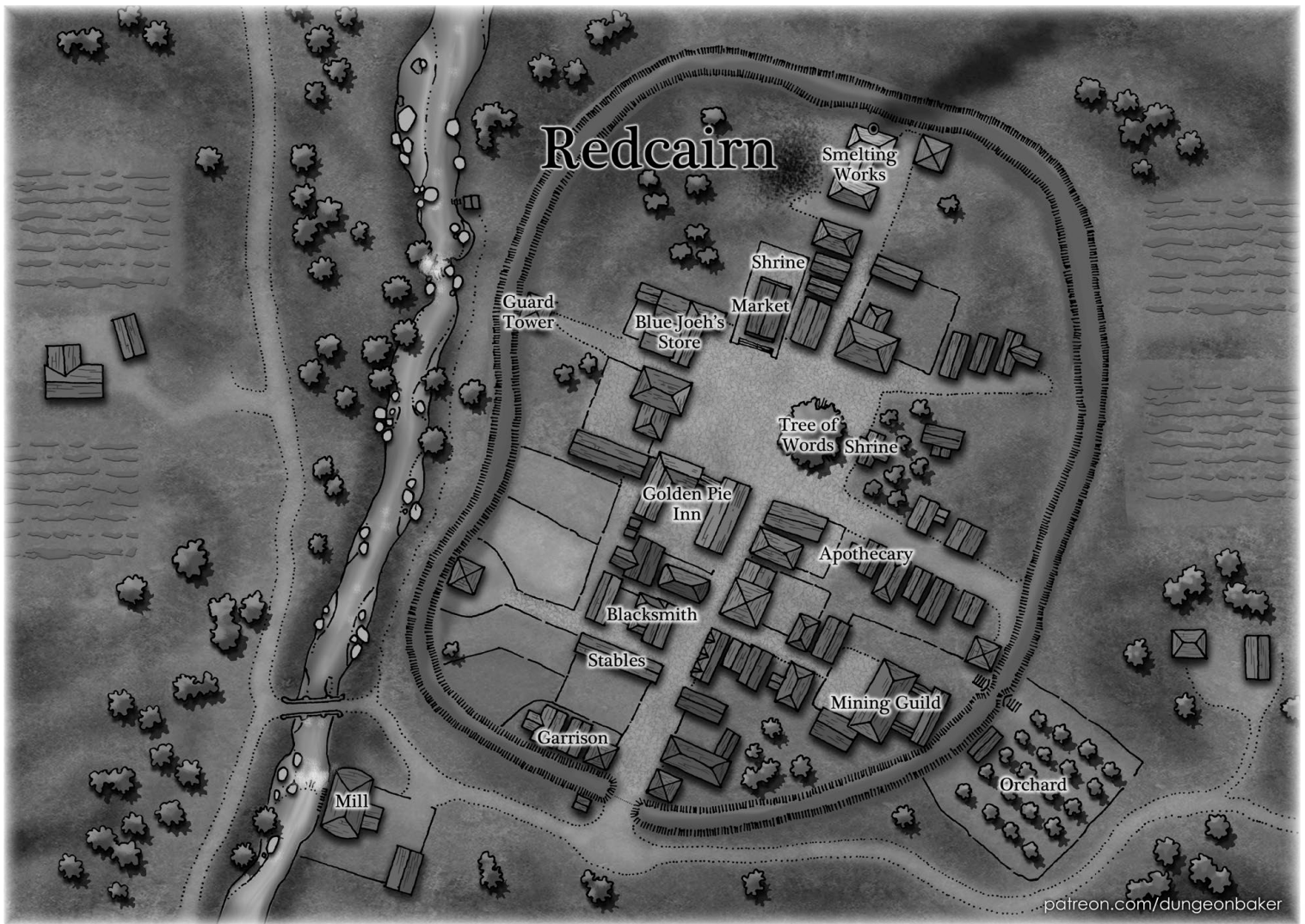
A man named Arnold runs the mill. His nephew Bobby is a good-for-nothing who loves ale. Arnold wishes Hiram was still around; he claims that Bobby changed and became a better version of himself when he listened to him. Since he is gone, Bobby went back to his old ways.

► **Bobby.** The young man sits by the river throwing stones. He is drunk. If approached, he complains about Hiram not being around anymore. He believes it was all his fault. He claims he should have been a better man...

GARRISON

The men in the garrison are tired and scared. They have contained the undead coming from Hiram's tomb successfully for the past few weeks. But they have sustained many injuries, and their morale is low. They confess they may not be ready to fight if things continue like this.

► **A Brave Man.** The characters meet Kimmich here. He is a town guard (**soldier**) but he is tired of waiting for the danger to come. He begs the characters to let him go with them to the tomb. He wants to put an end to this.



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BLACKSMITH

The characters may purchase wooden and iron weaponry here. The blacksmith, Jonas, is a large, bulky man with hairy arms and a well-trimmed beard. Redcain miners bring so much ore and coal to the local smith that Jonas never runs out of raw materials to work with.

MINING GUILD

This is, by far, the most important building in Redcain. There are guards stationed here at all times. The authorities in Crimsonwall take the mining business seriously. The current situation has forced the soldiers here to leave their posts; this is worrisome. A lot of gold and important documents are stored in this compound.

► **Heroes.** The characters arrive at the perfect time to spot three **bandits** breaking into a back window. The guards supposed to be here are on patrol duty around town to prevent a surprise attack from the undead.

SMELTING WORKS

These are the ever-working smelters of Redcain. Some of the ores are processed into ingots for easier transportation here. They are then shipped to the capital.

MARKET

The market's manager is Hannah. She is a religious figure in town and a good friend of Ulrich. The characters may purchase food and mundane stuff at a discounted price if they were hired by High-priest Ulrich.

APOTHECARY

The local remedies come from Solin, a thin, venerable man. If the characters inform him of their mission in town, the apothecary is more than happy to give them a pair of *potions of healing* as a gift for their efforts.

SHRINES

Redcain allows for all commonplace religions to be practiced. In the chapel, there is a lavish, silver-inlaid shrine dedicated to each of the Four Lords; following the same fashion as in the capital, Crimsonwall.

TREE OF WORDS

Redcain villagers come to this tree to preach and pray. It is believed that the tree sprouted and is nurtured by the endless wisdom of each of the beloved Four Lords. Any faithful character that stays 10 minutes in deep meditation before the magical tree earns a **luck token**.

BLUE JOEH'S STORE

Blue Joeh owns this store. He earned this moniker a few years back. He got poisoned from eating bad berries and his skin turned blue for a couple of days. No one in town could stop calling him '*Blue Joeh*' ever since. Fortunately, Joeh has grown fond of the nickname over the years.

The establishment offers a little more variety than Hanna's market, but Blue Joeh's Store does not offer a price reduction, unlike its counterpart. However, Joeh could use the characters' help with something. In exchange, there is a different nature of reward (see below).

Quest (1 XP). Blue Joeh hates Sir Derrington's guts. And he suspects the knight had something to do with Huram's fate. He kindly asks to challenge the former knight to a duel. He just wants to see the man lose and eat dirt. The character who does it earns one **luck token**.

GOLDEN PINE INN

The only inn and tavern in town. The establishment is owned by Sir Derrington, a former knight in the capital. He is around his sixties and has the temper of a bull.

Sir Derrington had a big part to play a few months back when Huram was killed in an attempt to arrest him. The former knight used all his influence and power with his old colleagues in Crimsonwall to organize Huram's detention. He did not care about who he was. The only thing that he worried about was the increasing number of unwanted individuals nearby his business.

If asked about the subject, Sir Derrington shares his opinion eagerly. He could not be happier to see Huram gone. He despised the bums that followed him. He drops the subject if the characters are on Huram's side.

DEVELOPMENT

THE CHARACTERS MAY not stay as long as they want in Redcairn. The more areas they visit, the more people they shall meet, and the more they may learn about Huram. Despite his detractors, Huram was loved, and neither he nor his entourage ever harmed other people.

The town is divided. However, the characters are free to come up with their conclusions or deductions about Huram's true intentions, alleged powers or abilities, and what exactly happened to him during the arrest.



This adventure belongs to a series of collaborative projects that involve other Patreon creators. This one-shot adventure features work by [Elven Tower](#) and cartographer [Dungeon Baker](#). Check out his [Patreon page](#) for great cartography and inspiration!



THE RUINED TOWER

We cannot allow you to go there and destroy what remains of our guide, our hero! You cannot understand what he meant to us, and you never will.

Huram's Zealot



during times of war, everything is used, and all resources are exhausted. An ancient tomb is usually left alone as a sign of respect for the dead. But war changes the order of priorities.

Hence, several decades ago, Crimsonwall had a military outpost tower built right on top of a tomb. They built a staircase that allowed them to employ some of the underground chambers as a hideout. This strategic spot was heavily contested and the tower was destroyed.

The war ended twenty years ago. But it was only two months back when Huram's remains, buried in the tomb beneath the tower, came back to the world of the living.

REACHING THIS PLACE

THE CHARACTERS MAY stay a maximum of two days in Redcain before their employers ask them to do the job they were hired for (see **Adventure Hooks**). The ruined tower is two days away on horseback from the town. It is an uneventful trip to the tower's clearing near the woods.

Features of the Site

► **Events.** Roll on the Random Events table below three times. First when the characters arrive. A second time when they investigate the tower ruins. And one last time when they are ready to descend into the tomb.

► **Ruins.** Little remains of the military outpost. Most of the rubble and stone blocks were removed from the area to be repurposed elsewhere. The tomb is found below.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Three bandits explain to the heroes they want to pillage the place. They offer to share the bounty if they help.
2	A brown bear crosses this clearing with its two cubs. If approached by anyone, it becomes hostile and attacks.
3	Two ghouls and one skeleton attack the characters exploring the area. The undead just came out of the tomb.
4	An itinerant merchant stumbles upon the characters. He offers his wares before leaving toward Redcain.
5	Two soldiers from Crimsonwall catch up with the characters. They were sent by the bailiff to help and make sure the undead and their source are destroyed.
6	High-priest Ulrich sends an acolyte to remind the heroes of the job: heal Huram with love and understanding.

FOR HURAM!

MOST PEOPLE, INCLUDING some of Huram's detractors, believe that what happened to him was excessive, unfair. The burial ceremony could not stop these angry men from gathering, plotting, and scheming. Their grudge and thirst for revenge gave birth to a whole new group. These people called themselves Huram's Zealots.

THE TOWER SURROUNDINGS

THE CHARACTERS ENJOY a clear day and warm weather when they reach the dilapidated tower. A group of Huram's followers hides in the treetops while others keep their positions on the high ground of the nearby hills.

This group of Huram's followers lives in the woods near the tower. They find themselves in a great dilemma. They know the undead coming out of the tomb is not a good sign. But they do not want to destroy Huram's remains. On the contrary, they believe there must be a way to heal his soul and help him find peace in the afterlife.

ZEALOT

A black-cloaked, wild-eyed fanatic. His gaze expresses an incredible determination driven by mad thoughts.

AC 13 (chainmail), **HP** 8, **ATK** 1 club +1 (1d6), **MV** near, **S** +1, **D** +0, **C** +0, **I** +0, **W** +1, **Ch** +0, **AL** C, **LV** 1

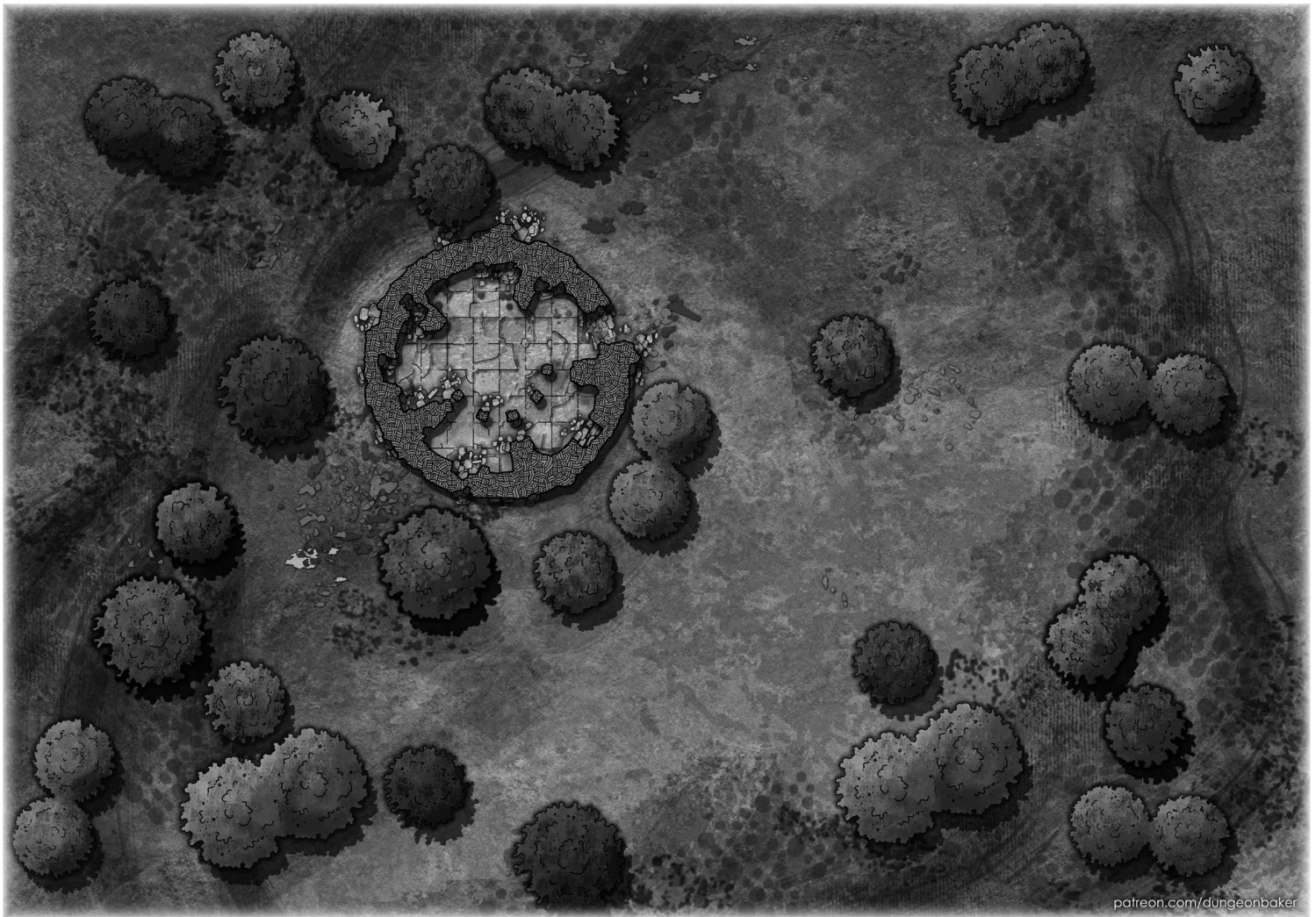
Fearless. Immune to moral checks.

Backstab. Deal x2 damage against surprised creatures.

CONFRONTATION

IF THE CHARACTERS do not spot Huram's Zealots (DC 12 WIS check), the protectors of the tomb surprise them when they find the entrance to the tomb. Four **zealots**, three **bandits**, and four **peasants** surround the heroes and demand that they leave. The characters must defeat them in combat if they want to access the sepulcher.

► **Alternative.** If the characters were hired by High-priest Ulrich, they may state so out loud. In the end, Huram's Zealots want the same thing: find a way to heal Huram's spirit and stop him from reanimating the dead. However, this alliance triggers an event (see below).



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THE FRIENDS WE MAKE...

THIS ENCOUNTER OCCURS only if the characters and the zealots come to an understanding and decide to work together. It does not matter if the characters lied to avoid the confrontation. A booming spectral voice is heard in the entire area while rabid undead come out of the tomb:

"And now my former friends and allies unite with foreign scum! Must I still be insulted in the afterlife? I shall not remain with my arms crossed this time. Rise! RISE, my brethren! Take the lives of these filthy traitors. I, Huram, shall have my sweet revenge!"

Six **skeletons**, three **ghouls**, and two **wights** emerge from the tomb to eliminate all living creatures while the characters hear Huram's speech echo all around.

► **Outcome.** Huram's Zealots understand they must fight and use force to have a chance at healing Huram. They are true to their word and fight along with the characters. However, the undead target the traitorous peasants first. The characters are not likely to save everyone in this encounter. The zealots make a **Morale** check if things go sour. See **Development** for more information.

GHoul

Gray-skinned, slaving undead with a whipping, blood-dripping tongue and a flat reptilian face.

AC 11 HP 10, ATK 1 claw +2 (1d6 + paralyze), **MV** near, **S +2, D +1, C +2, I -3, W -1, Ch +0, AL C, LV 2**

Undead. Immune to morale checks.

Paralyze. DC 12 CON or paralyzed for 1d4 rounds.

DEVELOPMENT

THE CHARACTERS COULD enter the tomb with some allies in case they team up with the zealots unless all of them die fighting, flee, or the characters kill them.

► **The Descent.** There is a hole inside the broken tower by a wall, the spot where the undead come up to the surface. However, the place has been abandoned for a long time and the tunnel does not reach the entrance of the tomb anymore due to a cave-in (see dungeon map below). The characters must descend 50 feet through the narrow shaft to enter Huram's tomb. This access shaft gets them to **Ruined Corridor** (see map).

THE SHUNNED TOMB

They did not trust me! They did not trust my loyal friends. Why can't we see beyond the physical barriers created by our meager minds and eyes?

Huram's Ghost

War leaves deep scars. This tower was destroyed in a gruesome battle. Some people say it was foretold because this military outpost, a sign of war and violence, should have never been built on top of a tomb, a sacred resting place. The tomb was defiled and used as storage... And two months ago, the dead in there were disrespected again when Huram and his followers were interred.

They may be just stories, but Huram's dark spirit coming back to life to reanimate the dead around him could as well be yet another augury, another sign that all the decisions made about this place were wrong.

A CALL FROM THE VEIL

THE CHARACTERS HEAR a spectral voice when they enter the tomb. They are not welcome here:

"And somehow, they want to put an end to me again. History tends to repeat itself. But this time I won't let that happen. I shall have my revenge. And there is nothing you useless cur can do to prevent this!"

Tomb Features

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

► **Details.** The tomb was originally built by elves who worshiped Gede. All chambers feature elvish runes, paintings, decorations, or engraved inscriptions.

► **Light.** The entire dungeon is bathed in darkness. Only the Temple has light. All denizens are dark-adapted.

► **Magic Aura.** A *detect magic* spell perceives the powerful dark energy coming from the north of the tomb.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d4 Details

- 1 A **giant bat** swoops from the dark ceiling and attacks a random creature. It fiercely fights to the death.
- 2 1d4 **skeletons** approach the characters from behind. The undead are fearsome warriors and fight until slain.
- 3 Two **ghouls** attempt to surprise the characters hiding in the dark. They attack the character with the least armor.
- 4 The characters draw the attention of a **spider swarm**. The arachnids flee if reduced to half their hit points.

ENTRANCE

This was the original tomb's entrance. The characters may approach and admire the carvings on the walls. They are washed out and partially erased over time. They depict elves carrying their kin. They transport the bodies and cross a threshold with beautiful runes.

STORY WALL ROOM

The walls, ceiling, and columns of this chamber are meant to tell the story of the elves of yore that inhabited these lands before the arrival of men. Only fragments of these tales can be understood from what little remains of the carvings, paintings, and stone-written tablets.

► **Enemies.** Three **skeletons** and one **ghoul** attack the characters when they explore this area. The undead arrive from the Long Tomb to the east (see below).

LONG TOMB

Each of the columns in this chamber features custom compartments on their surfaces. They are small niches, the ashes or bones of century-old elves still rest here.

► **Enemies.** The enemies shown in **Story Wall Room** (see above) are here if the characters have not yet encountered them. The chamber is empty otherwise.

► **Treasure (0-2 XP).** The characters find 40 gp, 300 sp, 1,200 cp, and two *potions of healing* in the caskets. However, two **shadows** and one **wight** emerge from the remains to attack whoever defiles their resting place.

TOMB TREASURE

This area is supposed to fool tomb robbers and thieves. Tampering with the chest at the end of the room triggers a poison dart trap (4d8 poison damage, DC 13 CON check for half). There is nothing of value here.

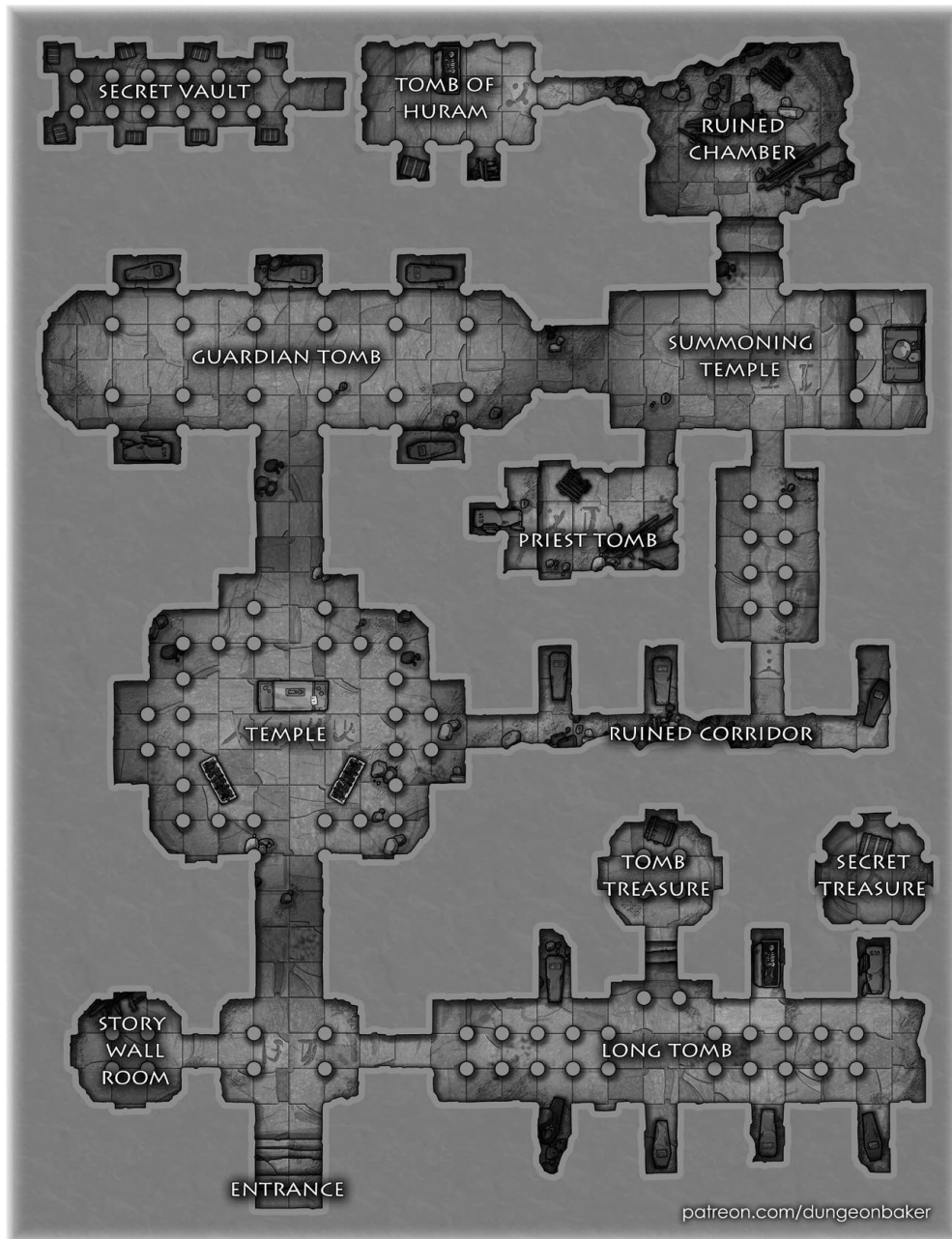
SHADOW

Sentient shadows in the vague shape of a human.

AC 12, HP 14, ATK 2 touch +2 (1d4 + drain, MV near (fly), S -4, D +2, C +2, I -2, W +0, Ch -1, AL C, LV 3

Undead. Immune to morale checks.

Drain. DC 12 CON or target's STR reduced by 1. At 0 STR, the target dies and becomes a shadow.



SECRET TREASURE

The characters must explore behind the last sarcophagus to find this chamber (DC 13 WIS check). A brick button can be pushed to slide a wall section inward.

► **Treasure (0-2 XP).** Exploring this area yields 100 gp, an ironwood longbow engraved with silver leaves (35 gp), a gold censer with hooded skeletal figures (70 gp), and an oil painting of a famous halfling bard (85 gp).

TEMPLE

The elves who built this tomb performed funerary rituals for their dead in this chamber. The walls show washed-out, incomplete frescoes depicting their ceremonies.

► **Light.** Two braziers light up whenever a living creature steps into the room. They feature magical fire that produces no warmth. Their magic can be dispelled.

RUINED CORRIDOR

The vertical shaft in the tower ruins is cut short by a dead-end. A large hole is the only way into the tomb. The characters enter the dungeon after they descend 10 ft. from there.

There are three sarcophagi in individual alcoves. The characters land on top of the middle one. A **wight** comes out and fights until slain.

PRIEST TOMB

An elvish priest was buried here. The frescoes and inscriptions in the area portray his pious deeds in life.

► **Treasure (0-2 XP).** Defiling the priest's sarcophagus yields 15 gp, a green crystal statuette of goddess Gede (50 gp), and a beautiful mace inlaid with holy symbols (50 gp).

GUARDIAN TOMB

This is the resting place of mighty elvish warriors. Three **wights** stand in the darkness. The characters may avoid them by ignoring this room and reaching Huram through the **Summoning Temple** (see map).

► **Aura.** A *detect magic* spell reveals that one of the undead holds a magic blade (*shortsword of the thief*). If the characters want it, they must defeat all three wights in combat. The warriors fearlessly fight and chase around the dungeon.

► **Treasure.** The characters may search this place after combat. They find a pair of pearls in a silver lockbox (90 gp), a tier-2 cleric spell scroll, a lantern made of stained glass (80 gp), and a suit of plate mail shaped like a minotaur (130 gp).

HURAM'S WRAITH

A shadowy ghost seething with anger and malice. It is unsettling to see what remains of a once-good soul...

AC 13, **HP** 26, **ATK** 2 death touch +4 (1d8 + life drain, **MV** near (fly), **S** -4, **D** +4, **C** +0, **I** +0, **W** +0, **Ch** +3, **AL** C, **LV** 5

Undead. Immune to morale checks.

Incorporeal. In place of attacks, become corporeal or incorporeal.

Life Drain. 1d4 CON damage. Death if reduced to 0.

SUMMONING TEMPLE

This chamber was formerly used to summon kind fey spirits and communicate with one's ancestors. What remains of the paintings and inscriptions on the walls are proof of that. A current of cold air comes from the north when the characters cross the threshold toward the **Ruined Chamber**. A bad omen caused by Huram's spirit.

RUINED CHAMBER

The passing of time and a couple of landslides made little work of this room and its contents. The characters must squeeze one by one through the west tunnel to reach the **Tomb of Huram**. Same thing if they retreat.

TOMB OF HURAM

The corruption and evil coming from Huram's remains can be felt the closer one is to the narrow chamber. **Huram's wraith** says with a rasping, guttural voice:

"You defeated my faithful followers! I will not underestimate you again. I shall slay you myself!"

► **The Choice.** Whatever kindness inhabited Huram's soul is hidden deep below corruption. The characters can handle this encounter with force or love. Two **shadows** materialize to aid Huram if the characters decide to fight. Otherwise, the heroes are required to explain to Huram they are sorry for what happened, and how people treated him. Plus, the characters must prove they are not Huram's enemies by withstanding two rounds of attacks without any form of retaliation. Only then will they ignite the small spark of good in Huram's soul that can heal him. See **Adventure Conclusion** for more details.

SECRET VAULT

After the confrontation with Huram, the characters may search the place for secrets. But even if the characters find this hidden place (DC 13 WIS check), they find all chests empty. This vault was sacked a decade ago.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTERS REACH the end of this adventure. And now they must face the consequences of their deeds.

ERADICATING EVIL

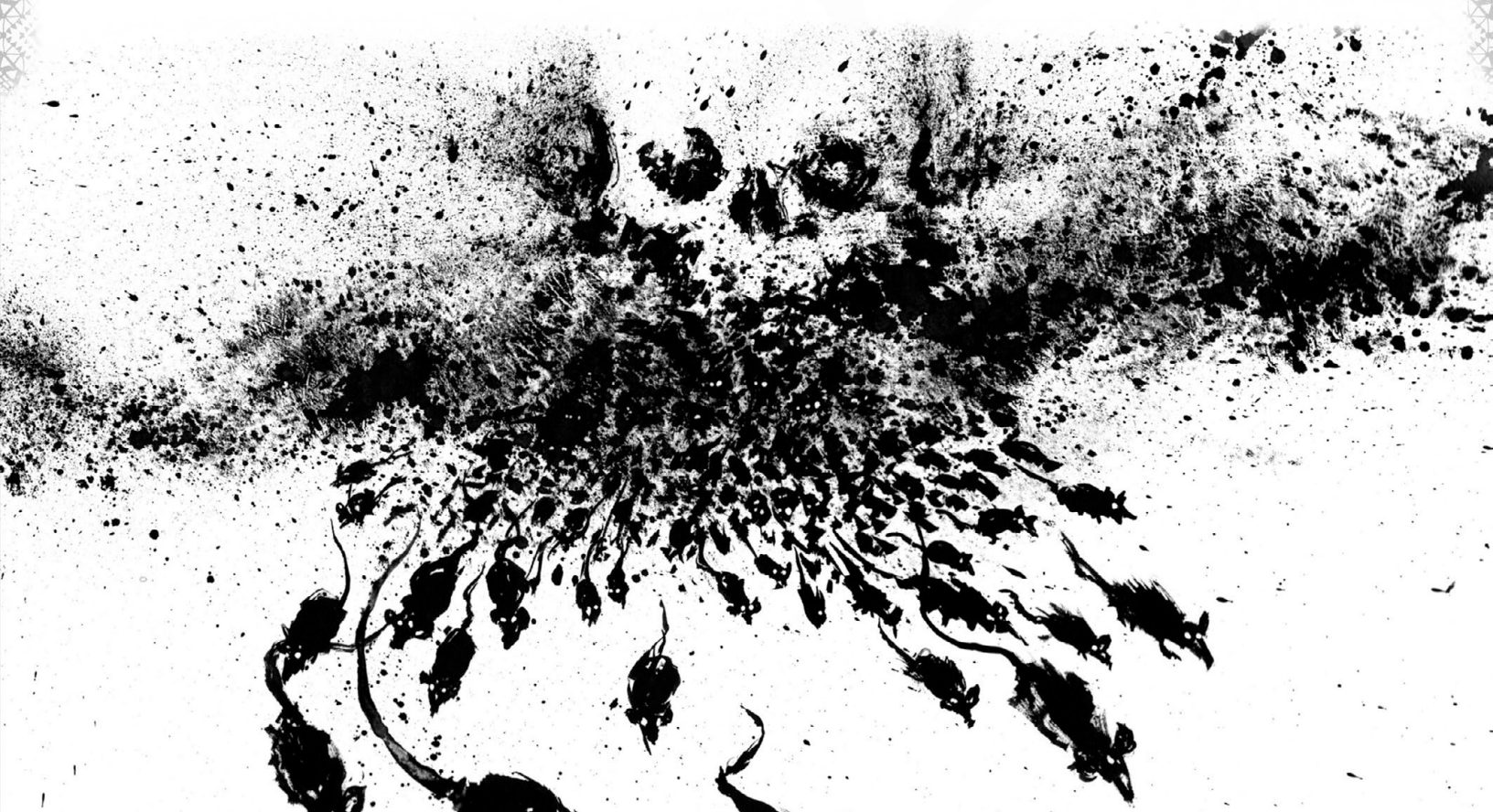
The characters do what they were hired for. They ignore the zealots' warnings, they hack through the undead enemies, and they eliminate Huram's spirit so that he cannot harm anyone ever again. If an alliance occurred, the zealots try to stop the heroes from destroying everything. Magnus Fling, however, is happy to know the threat has been dealt with. Redcain throws a celebration feast.

THE POWER OF LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

The characters trust High-priest Ulrich's words and try a different approach. They do not use violence when fighting Huram's spirit and prove that mankind still has good people. With their act of love and kindness, Huram's wraith becomes a friendly white ghost and says:

"Thank you for reminding me of who I truly am. I was blinded by hatred. I can find peace now..."

After that, it glows in a warm, golden light and then vanishes. The characters earn a **luck token** each. High-priest Ulrich will be delighted to hear the good news. The zealots do not have a reason to be angry anymore.



OSSUARY OF LADY MARIA

They tried to keep me away from the world of the living. Their desperate methods confirm that only I can keep the fiefdom clean of such low scum.

Lady Maria Ornatt

There was once a ruler so feared that the lands in her stead suffered under her iron fist. Lady Maria Ornatt inherited her father's fiefdom and immediately changed her family's legacy. To her family's dismay, it became apparent that Lady Maria despised her father's methods; she judged them lightly-handed and ineffectual. Lady Maria wholeheartedly believed that the only way to truly control a region was through coercion and deeply-ingrained fear.

For twenty-two years, until Lady Maria was assassinated in her bed, she commanded the fear and respect of all lords and townsfolk in her realm. Historians now believe she overstepped with her harsh methods and earned the enmity of too many in court. When she was found dead, the powers-that-be arranged for her remains to be placed in a magically-protected ossuary. Her bones were spread across four chambers: an incantation impedes any manner of revivification or magic to contact the dead.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

The Blade. The characters seek Lady Maria's fabled sword, *Misty Dawn*. It is said to have formidable powers and may aid them in their future missions (0 XP).

Release. A scholar named Talla hires the party to escort her to Lady Maria's Ossuary. She is a distant relative and wants to release Lady Maria's spirit (100 gp, 10 XP).

Wreaking Havoc. An obscure faction covertly hires the characters to dispel the arcane locks that contain Lady Maria's remains in the ossuary (80 gp, 8 XP).

RUMORS

d6	Details
1	Maria Ornatt was once a hated ruler who would vindicate her peers and apply gruesome punishments.
2	The ossuary's main hall is often visited by pilgrims and tourists. Other chambers are strictly off-bounds.
3	Rumor has it that Lady Maria's fortune is hidden in her sarcophagus but no one dares plunder it.
4	A few foolhardy teenagers went into the forbidden chambers in the ossuary and never came back.
5	Some people claim to have heard the ancient ruler's voice in the main hall during the full moon.
6	History books claim Maria Ornatt was a good administrator but her severity earned her the populace's hate.

Level 5 Adventure

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

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

► **Magic Interference.** All healing spells have a 4-in-6 chance of failing within Lady Maria's Ossuary.

► **Undead Bolstering.** The timeless guardians within the ossuary are immune to the *turn undead* spell.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Acidic brine pours from a crack in the ceiling on someone's backpack. It dissolves a random item inside it.
2	A group of tourists arrive in area 6 and read historical recounts about Lady Maria, they stay for 8 hours.
3	A sudden gush of howling wind puts out all light-sources. The dungeon's lights turn back on after 1d4 hours.
4	1d3 shadows rise from the vases in area 1 and seek the nearest living creature to drive them off the sepulcher. A ghost appears and claims to have arranged Lady Maria's murder centuries ago. He begs the characters to leave her putrid spirit be. Otherwise, the ghost attacks!
6	A thief, Lara, claims to seek Lady Maria's vault and offers to join the party in exchange for a share of the hoard.

1. ENTRANCE HALL

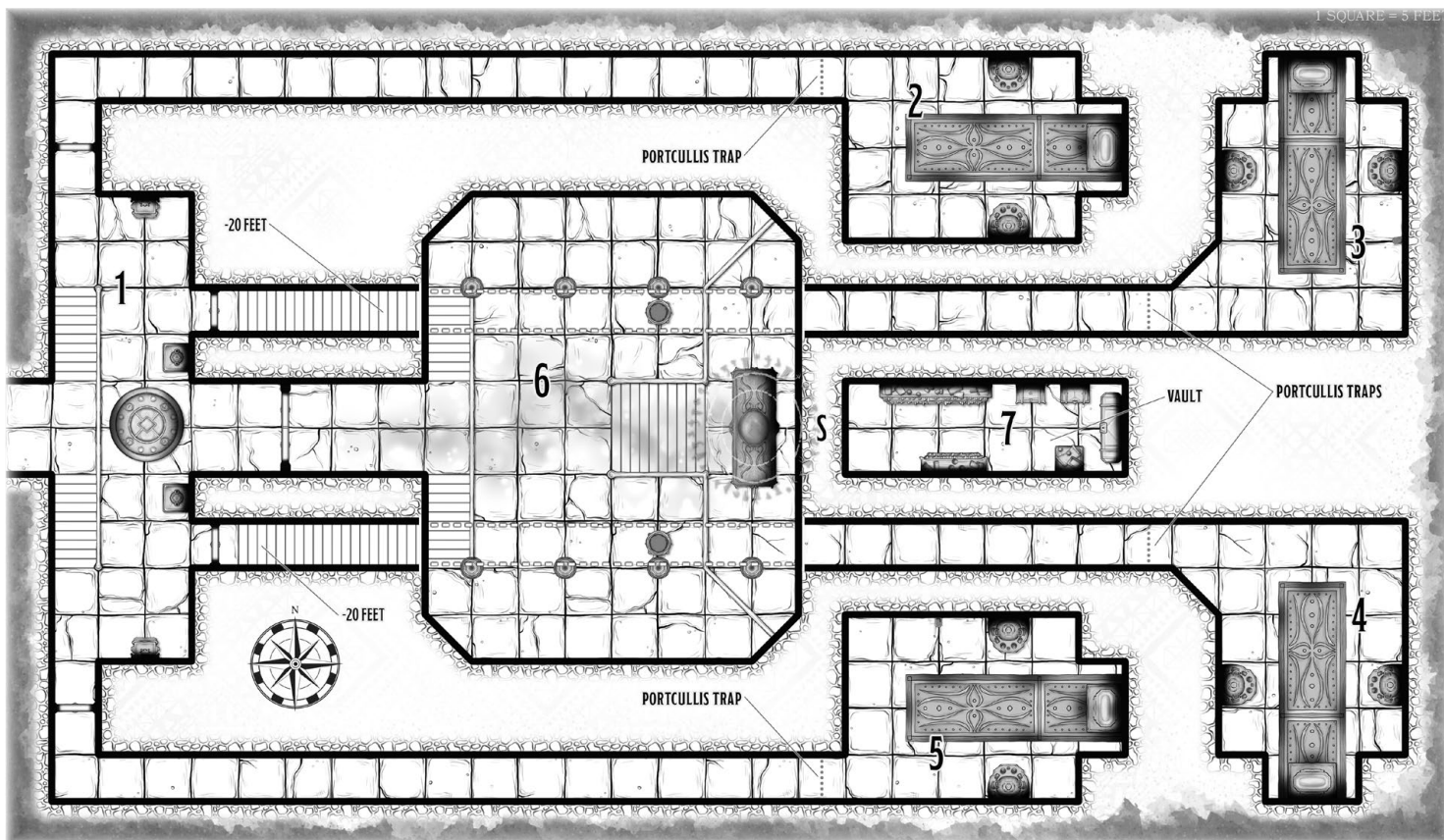
A dark tunnel leads to a grim hall. A pair of standing sarcophagi and clay vases surround a stone circle.

► **Getting Here.** The townsfolk lead the characters to the Ornatt family's mausoleum. In there, a marked passageway leads into the ruler's private ossuary.

► **The Sarcophagi.** Tall, engraved, stone enclosures that contain the remains of trusted bodyguards of the Ornatt family. If Lady Maria's remains are liberated, two ghosts emerge from the caskets and attack the living.

► **The Vases (4 XP).** Each vase is marked with the Ornatt family sigil. They contain unmarked ashes. A gold ring (40 gp) is hidden among them (DC 14 WIS check).

► **The Circle.** The intricate runes etched onto the circle are a teleportation sigil (DC 16 INT check). It can be recorded for future use of the *teleportation* spell.



2. NORTHWEST NICHE

A stone enclosure is flanked by two plinths that contain a golden vase and several small jade trinkets.

Each of the niche chambers (areas 2-5) is roughly the same in contents. Each features a portcullis trap that activates and causes the undead guardians to appear.

► **Portcullis Trap.** Coming within 10 feet of the stone enclosure causes the portcullis to fall. The gate can be lifted (DC 17 STR). Otherwise, it resets after 1 hour. Three **shadows** materialize and attack the trespassers.

► **The Trinkets.** The jade pieces are stuck to the surface. They contain the anti-healing enchantment that pervades the dungeon. Unless a *dispel magic* spell is cast on the trinkets, the enclosure cannot be opened.

3. NORTHEAST NICHE

Gnawed bones lie scattered by the dark corners of this chamber; the grim remains of unfortunate visitors.

► **Portcullis Trap.** When the portcullis falls, six **skeletons** eerily coalesce and attack the trespassers.

4. SOUTHEAST NICHE

This room is a mirrored version of area 3. However, there is evidence of past meddling by trespassers. Studying the chamber for 2 **crawling rounds** reveals that a person tinkered with the portcullis and tried to disable it.

► **Portcullis Trap.** The protective ward here has malfunctioned. The portcullis falls but no guardians appear.

5. SOUTHWEST NICHE

The jade trinkets in this chamber feature an additional ward. If dispelled, they glow crimson red and ignite in a ball of fire before becoming inert. Creatures slow to react and step away take 4d6 damage (DC 17 DEX).

► **Portcullis Trap.** When the portcullis falls, five **wights** are summoned forth from the void to defeat the party.

6. THE SOUL CONTAINER

A lavishly decorated sarcophagus on a raised dais radiates a green-tinted glow in the ominous chamber.

Visiting this chamber before dispensing the magic in the jade trinkets in areas 2-5 is a dull affair. The enclosure is closed and no mortal means can pry it open.

► **Liberation.** Regardless of the characters' motives, dispelling the wards in areas 2-5 frees Lady Maria from her centuries-long imprisonment. True to the rumors, the vicious woman has only grown more severe and terrible in death. Lady Maria's spirit (**wraith**) and two **ghasts** emerge in a fit of rage. They attack mercilessly.

7. LADY MARIA'S VAULT

Exploring the enclosure in area 6 for 1 **crawling round** reveals a hidden button within. Pushing it causes a wall section to move aside and reveal a passage to this area.

► **Treasure (10 XP).** The chests contain 70 gp, 200sp, 1,200 cp, two *potions of healing*, an *amulet of vitality*, and Lady Maria's legendary blade, *Misty Dawn*.

GORGON IN FAIRFLOW

By Elven Tower and Dungeon Mapster

Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG



LEVEL 4 ADVENTURE

A MID-LEVEL SHADOWDARK ADVENTURE ABOUT UNCOVERING A TERRIBLE CONSPIRACY

THE GORGON

ADVENTURE PRIMER

Please, it's all the gold I could gather. Something rotten eats at the core of our poor city. I don't know who is guilty but surely you can root them out.

Father Donovan



ut of the primordial fears that assail mankind since the beginning of time, one stands out as particularly vicious. Most are afraid of the devilish entity that can turn a person to stone with its gaze. Such being has many names: the medusa, the crone, the gorgon. It is commonly portrayed in paintings and carvings as a winged human female with living, venomous snakes in place of hair. Its most dangerous feature was its ability to turn those who looked into her eyes to stone. Legend has it that those who fall victim to a gorgon's gaze are forever gone. Some scholars theorize of an antidote but all evidence remains inconclusive.

THE MOUNTAIN GORGON

A GORGON NAMED Valeska lived in a series of uncharted caverns under a mountain range. She reigned unimpeded. Valeska commanded the respect and fear of several goblin and dwarvish tribes. For decades, the arrangement worked. Valeska, the gorgon queen, was aware of the underground dwellers' contempt when they came to pay her tribute. They showered her with gifts and riches to appease their ruler and escape the terrible fate of becoming a stone statue. However, one day the goblins and dwarves rebelled. They came at Valeska with mirror shields and fighting strategies that avoided looking at the gorgon directly. Some of them were still turned to stone but Valeska was unable to stop them all. They stormed her underground palace and drove her off the mountain.

A NEW HOME

VALESKA TRAVELED FOR 6 months before moving into the underground depths of Fairflow, 3 months ago. She has decided to have a less prominent profile and attempt to rule from the shadows. Things changed fast. These days, in Fairflow, important individuals know of the mighty gorgon under the city and respect her as the de-facto ruler while maintaining a facade of normalcy.

People suspect that things are amiss but believe that a criminal organization is behind it all. Innocents have gone missing, politicians have been replaced, and taxes have been increased steeply without any real reason for doing so. Covertly, a few individuals seek answers as law-enforcement forces are believed to be involved.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Level 4 Adventure

HIRED BY THE COMMONS

The commonfolk in Fairflow's extended districts, represented by Father Donovan, discreetly offer a bounty for investigating the strange happening in the city and tracking down the criminal mob leader (40 gp, 4 XP).

SEEKING THE SPIRITS

Varden, a city watch soldier, suspects that his superiors are in on the strange conspiracy occurring in Fairflow. He has heard of the characters' exploits and summons them to the tavern in Fairflow's High District to share his scandalous suspicions that the captain and the mayor must have colluded with the criminal guild (0 XP).

MONSTER HUNTERS

A dwarf named Balka tried to track Valeska since she left her lair in the mountain range. Her tracks went dry near Fairflow. Balka offers a reward on behalf of Clan Harken for bringing the gorgon's head as a trophy (60 gp, 6 XP).

RUMORS

d10 Details

- 1 A human statue lies to the south of Boat House, at the bottom of the canal. Jack, the miller, might know about it.
- 2 The former mayor was replaced 3 months ago. Mayor Gontti disappeared one day. The new authorities claim he had to leave in a hurry but no one saw him leave town.
- 3 Captain Carlsen suddenly became strict and merciless when collecting taxes and tithes. He has grown deaf to the townsfolk's needs, caring only about the money.
- 4 The new mayor, Perkins, and a group of new Speakers passed new laws that negatively affect the low classes.
- 5 No one has seen Bartosz, the court wizard, in weeks. His magical door-gate won't let anyone inside his tower.
- 6 Despite the bad rumors, there is little crime in Fairflow.
- 7 The jailhouse under the town hall is empty. People arrested for any alleged crimes simply disappear.
- 8 Jack, the miller, claimed he saw something until Captain Carlsen paid him a visit. Now, he is silent and obedient.
- 9 There has been an increase in traffic of barges to the east. Merchandise is always well covered in rags.
- 10 An old legend of a devilish woman with evil eyes and snakes for hair has resurfaced recently for some reason.

FAIRFLOW

Strange happenings go down at the Boat House. I've seen many a suspicious skiff leaving at night with covered cargo. They leave through the east canal.

Varden

Fairflow is a small city that was settled along the riverbanks of the Blue Stones River. At the city's heart, engineers have modified the river flow through the use of canals that redirect the flow and direction. In some areas of the thriving borough, people move on skiffs and barges. The Blue Stones River flows from the north into Fairflow's canal network and then exits through the east. Many merchant barges sail east to sell their wares in the dozens of smaller settlements that exist downstream.

The High District of Fairflow (depicted on the next page) is where the most important individuals in town reside and work. The mayor, the captain of the city watch, the court wizard, and dozens of wealthy individuals call this place home. The High District is surrounded by nine other burghs (not illustrated in the map), commonly referred to as the Extended Districts. The commonfolk, the peasantry, and the lower classes live there.

Valeska arrived 3 months ago and bullied the rulers into submission. Those who refused became the first statues in her newfound lair. The remaining scaffolding of government bows to her whims. Many out of fear, a few out of sincere admiration and zealotry. The rulers have illegally raised taxes and tithes without the crown's consent. The surplus of gold and goods is siphoned out of Fairflow through the east canal and into Valeska's Lair under the city. The gorgon's lair was once an extension of the jailhouse when the city was founded but an earthquake cut that section of the compound off. Now, it is only accessible through a side tunnel outside of town. The barges appear to leave town but they bring the goods to the tunnel and ship the goods back into Valeska's Lair.

Village Features

► **Events.** Check for Random Events each time a new area is visited. There is a 3-in-6 chance for an event.

► **Weather.** Fairflow is in a region with a temperate climate with mild summers and rough winters. There is a 4-in-6 chance it rains each day during the rainy season.

► **Ambiance.** People in Fairflow are worried about the recent happenings but unable to do anything about it while its government colludes with Valeska. Most people do not know. Those who do are too afraid to talk.

RANDOM EVENTS

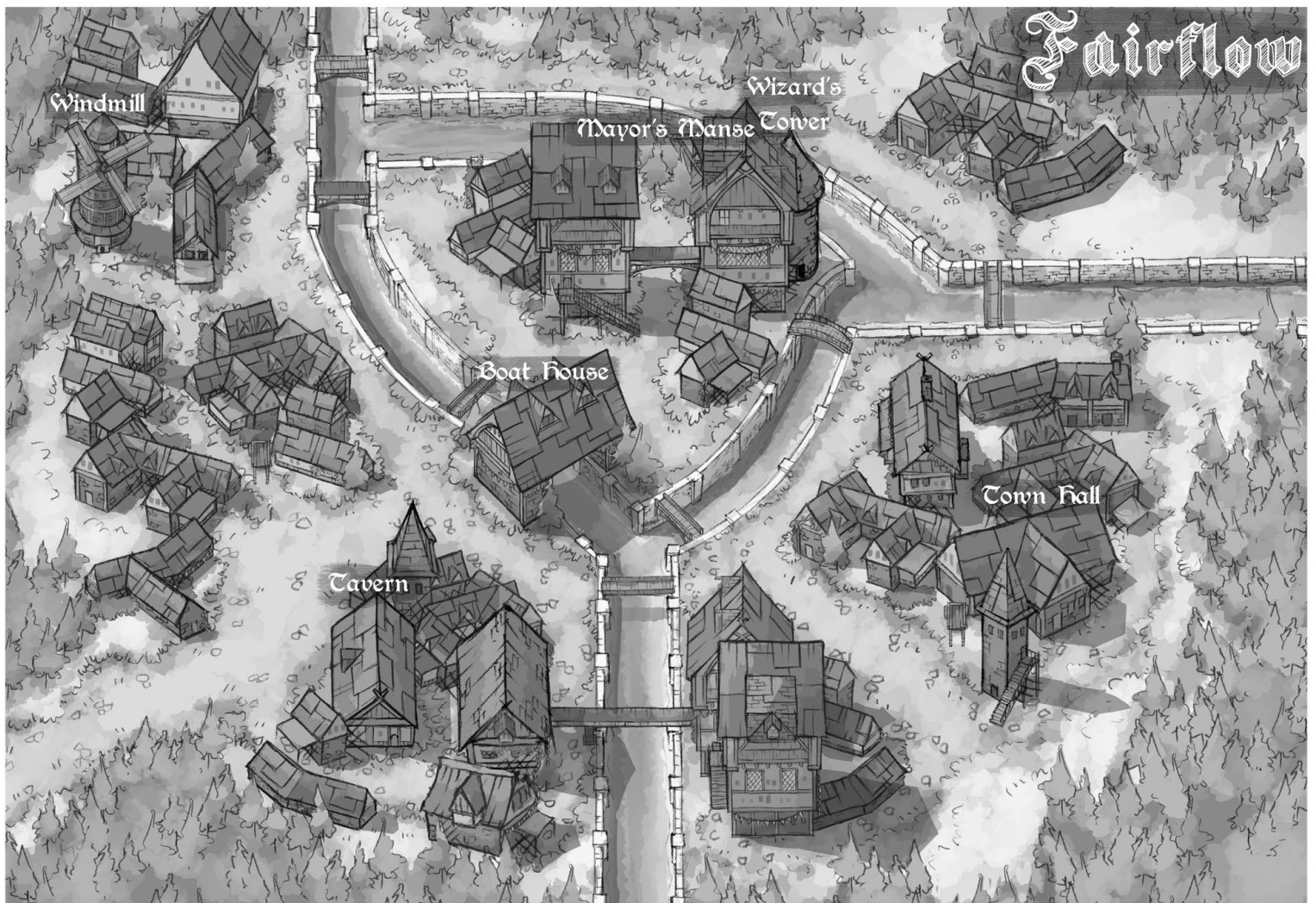
d8	Details
1	A court courier arrives with a tax caravan. The mayor invites him in but the tax man never leaves. Captain Carlsen then drives the caravan off using force.
2	Four soldiers surprise the characters and demand they surrender half of their wealth as a ' <i>special foreigner tax</i> '.
3	The mother of Carmine, a missing soldier, asks for help. Her son was on a merchant barge when last seen.
4	Two men are hanged for refusing to comply with the new taxes in front of the Town Hall. The grim audience watches but no one dares defend the poor fellows.
5	A statue that closely resembles Tarnish the local beer brewer is found near the tavern. The man is missing.
6	A random character feels a strong compulsion to explore the wizard's tower. This is Bartosz asking for help.
7	A crowd gathers outside the Mayor's Manse asking for more lenient taxation. Captain Carlsen (knight) shows up with ten soldiers and disperses the crowd violently.
8	Four dwarves from Clan Harken arrive in town looking for a gorgon. Hours later, Captain Carlsen tells them lumberjacks up north saw it in the forest. They leave.

TAVERN

The plights in Fairflow do not appear to assail the patrons of the unnamed tavern in the High District. Many wealthy individuals can withstand the higher tithes and many have found a way to mutually benefit from Valeska's reign. Both Father Donovan and Varden (see **Adventure Hooks**) await the characters' appearance. Upon meeting, they invite the party to a private booth to converse. The priest knows little about the current affairs but Varden shares his suspicions of Captain Carlsen's involvement with whatever the criminal faction is doing. Varden also assures them that many people have gone missing near the Boat House across the street.

WINDMILL

A week ago, a man refused to obey the captain's orders. The captain and a hooded person visited him and brought him to the Boat House at night. The poor lad was turned into stone and dropped into the canal. Jack, the miller witnessed this after leaving the tavern. He started talking about it until the captain visited him and threatened to have him suffer the same treatment. Jack fears for his life. So, he may only share what he knows if the characters inspire confidence (**Reaction** check).



BOAT HOUSE

The Boat House used to provide local transport and accessibility to merchants but it was closed off to the public weeks ago. The foreman, a man named Haldo, is happy with the new arrangement as he takes some of Valeska's riches on the side for himself and his crew. They currently load a barge to move silver and export goods to the gorgon's lair tonight. The characters are not allowed inside. If they insist, the twelve laborers (**peasants**) attempt to subdue the characters and bring them to Carlsen.

The contents of the barge are part of the shipment that the crown expects within two weeks but that Valeska plans to keep. It is worth 300 gp in assorted goods.

TOWN HALL

Each one of Fairflow's nine extended districts is represented in the Town Hall by an elected Speaker; with the Mayor presiding over the gathering. They make the laws that have so changed the life of the peasantry in Fairflow. Civilians are not allowed into running sessions. It is known that the only person that votes against the new developments is Speaker Vadra. Despite her position and opinion, Valeska ordered that she be left alone as a facade. Alas, there is little she can do on her own.

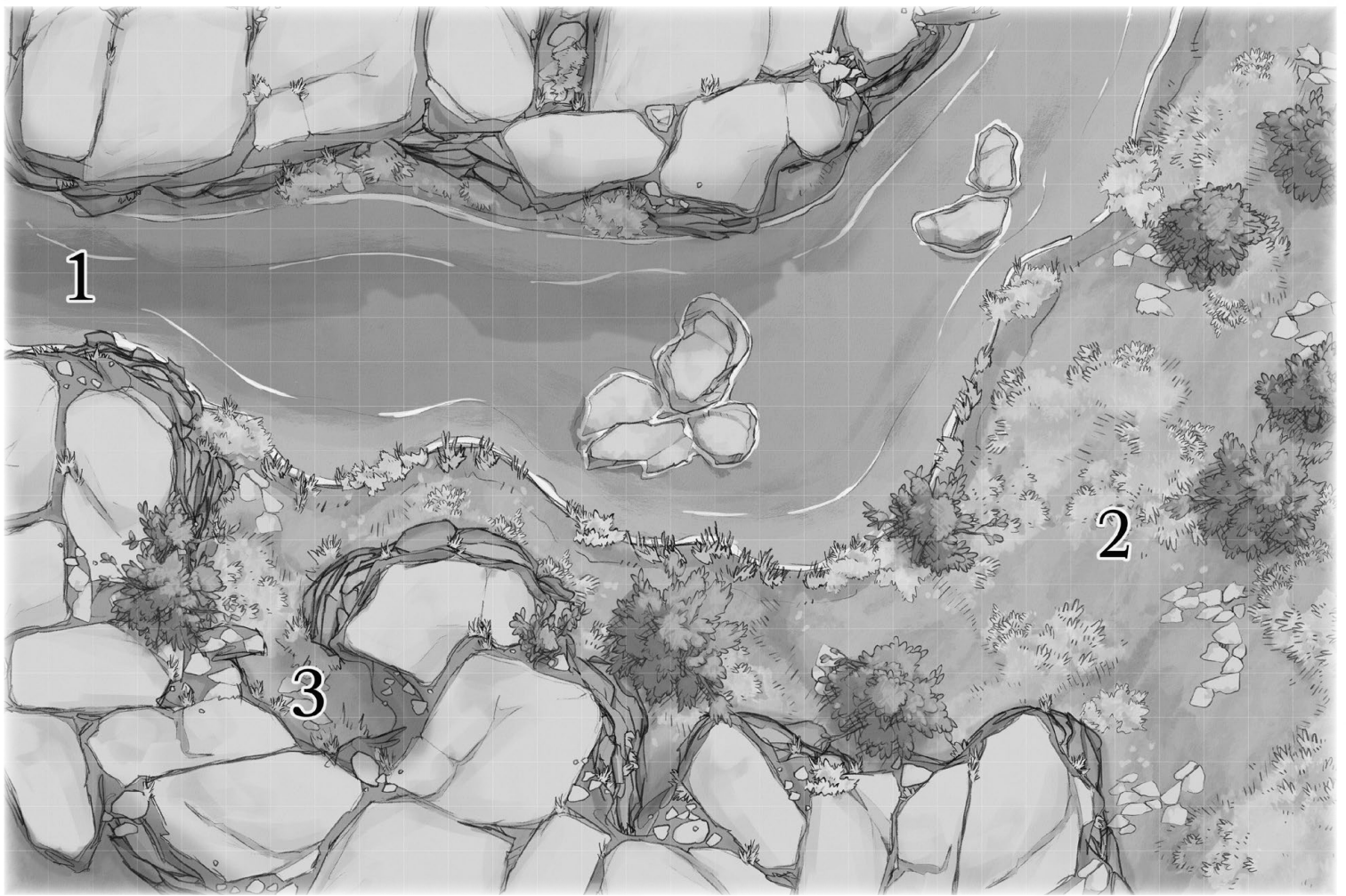
MAYOR'S MANSE

The mayor can only be reached by requesting an audience. A successful **Reaction** check allows the characters to secure an audience within 1d4 days. If confronted, Mayor Perkins denies any accusations and claims that he and his peers follow the crown's commands; advising the characters to travel to the west to petition the crown to change things. He is always guarded by six **soldiers**.

WIZARD'S TOWER

Days after Valeska arrived, the previous mayor defied the gorgon. Before being turned into stone, he managed to tell her that she was no match for Bartosz, the wizard. Valeska came to the tower and had a fierce confrontation with the mage. Bartosz tried to use a binding ritual on Valeska but the spell was reflected by the gorgon's abilities and he became trapped in a specially prepared containment vase. The tower's door is sealed magically. A spellcaster can open it with a DC 15 spellcasting check.

Bartosz (level-3 wizard) is freed by opening the vase that rests in the entrance hall. He is starving, has 1 HP, and STR of 5. Still, he offers to help. He confirms the presence of a gorgon in Fairflow and how dangerous her gaze is. He doesn't know where her lair is located.



THE RIVERSIDE SMUGGLING

SEVERAL TRAILS OF evidence point to the Boat House and the secretive shipments sent downstream. The characters may come here on a boat, following one of Foreman Haldo's barges, or follow the barge on land. They find people loyal to the gorgon by the riverside, half a mile from the city gates. The crew unloads the boat into a cart to bring the goods to the hidden tunnel (area 3).

1. BLUE STONE RIVER

Beyond the city canals, the Blue Stones River becomes a slow-flowing stream along a 20-foot-deep fjord. The average depth is 30 feet except by the beach-like riversides. The fjord is too narrow for full-length oars or to extend large sails. Most vessels use short oars and poles to navigate the narrower sections of the rocky buffs.

2. THE RIVERBANK

The crew has orders to arrest any witnesses. If the characters have not yet encountered Foreman Haldo (**peasant**), he is here. There are six **peasants** and two **soldiers** with him. During the fight, if any become demoralized, they surrender and claim they acted under duress. They say Captain Carlsen has a nefarious ally that can turn people into stone. Foreman Haldo does not yield. He curses those who reveal any secret information.

3. THE HIDDEN TUNNEL

The underground passage is half hidden by rocks and greenery. The mine-like tunnel was originally built as a secret escape route for the mayor and other important officials. It connects to the lowest level of the jailhouse under the Mayor's Manse. It was seldom used and got eventually blocked off after an earthquake cut off access to that level. Valeska is mildly irritated by all the moving around to get to the lair so she has demanded Mayor Perkins open up the blocked corridors to avoid using the canals at all. The masons claim removing the debris without caution might cause a collapse. Still, they work faster than recommended under the threat of death.

The half-mile tunnel leads to area 1 of the Gorgon's Lair. The characters find two blocked-off tunnels that lead up to the upper levels. Careful inspection reveals that seismic activity destroyed them (DC 14 INT check).



This adventure belongs to a series of collaborative projects that involve other Patreon creators. This one-shot adventure features work by [Elven Tower](#) and amazing cartographer [Dungeon Mapster](#).

THE GORGON'S LAIR

Pitiful mortals... Thou shall not dare stand in my way and thwart my ambitions. Look into my eyes and understand your position. Thine lives are forfeit.

Valeska, the Gorgon



After coercing the local governance into submission, Valeska settled her lair in the difficult-to-reach level of the jailhouse, deep beneath the Mayor's Manse. The higher levels were too overt for her taste and did not include the useful barracks and interrogation rooms found herein.

The secrecy of the lair is useful but the hassle of the secret tunnel and the river transportation downstream has turned from a convenience to a complication to settle matters and pass down orders. Mayor Perkins has a team of masons at the higher levels trying to dig their way down here and create a more direct passage. The masons' prompt work has caused the structure to become unstable (see **Structure Integrity** below). The dungeon is unlikely to collapse on its own but the mining explosives found in area 5 may be used to precipitate this event, should the characters find it a plausible strategy.

Dungeon Features

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

► **Light.** Some chambers have braziers with permanent light; the rest are dark. Only the gorgon is dark-adapted.

► **Structural Integrity.** Any explosion, ponderous magical burst, or an extremely loud noise may cause the structure to shudder. Loose debris falls on a random creature and deals 3d6 damage (DC 15 DEX check).

RANDOM EVENTS

d6 Details

- | d6 | Details |
|----|--|
| 1 | Captain Carlsen (knight) and two soldiers move toward area 1 to reach the secret tunnel. They speak about moving merchandise downstream to sell elsewhere. |
| 2 | Four soldiers approach the characters from the cells (area 7). They are loyal to Carlsen and attack on sight. |
| 3 | A man bearing wounds of torture has escaped. He approaches the characters. Carmine has been missing for days. He was on a merchant barge and saw the operation on the riverside. He refused to obey Captain Carlsen. |
| 4 | The characters stumble upon a petrified soldier with a scared visage who displeased Valeska only hours ago. |
| 5 | Two dwarf guards approach. They were sent by Clan Harken to investigate the gorgon. They join the party. |
| 6 | Two soldiers come from area 1 hauling a bound man crying for help. He is brought to area 7 for questioning. |

1. ENTRANCE HALL

The long, descending staircase leads to a landing and carries on further down. The cracked masonry of the walls does not inspire confidence in its structure.

The characters' arrival may alert the distracted guards in area 2 (see below) unless they are careful and attempt to approach stealthily (DC 13 DEX check).

► **The Walls.** Inspection of the masonry for 1 crawling round, reveals that the whole compound is unstable and prone to collapsing. The inspection also reveals the seal of Saint Terragnis on some blocks. It is a human custom to mark jails in such a way (DC 14 INT check).

2. BARRACKS

The chamber contains a makeshift dining table, a checkers board, and stacking bunk-beds by the wall.

Two **soldiers** and four **guards** are in this room. Some rest while others eat and play checkers. If surprised, there is a 2-in-6 chance that the group surrenders as they are unarmored and their weapons are sheathed. One of the guards attempts to escape down the stairs to area 7 to alert the rest of the garrison. If that occurs, the men there ready their crossbows for an ambush (see area 7).

3. LATRINES

The dark chamber contains a latrine with wooden scaffolding consisting of four seats. The pungent smell is stomach-turning and eye-watering; almost unbearable.

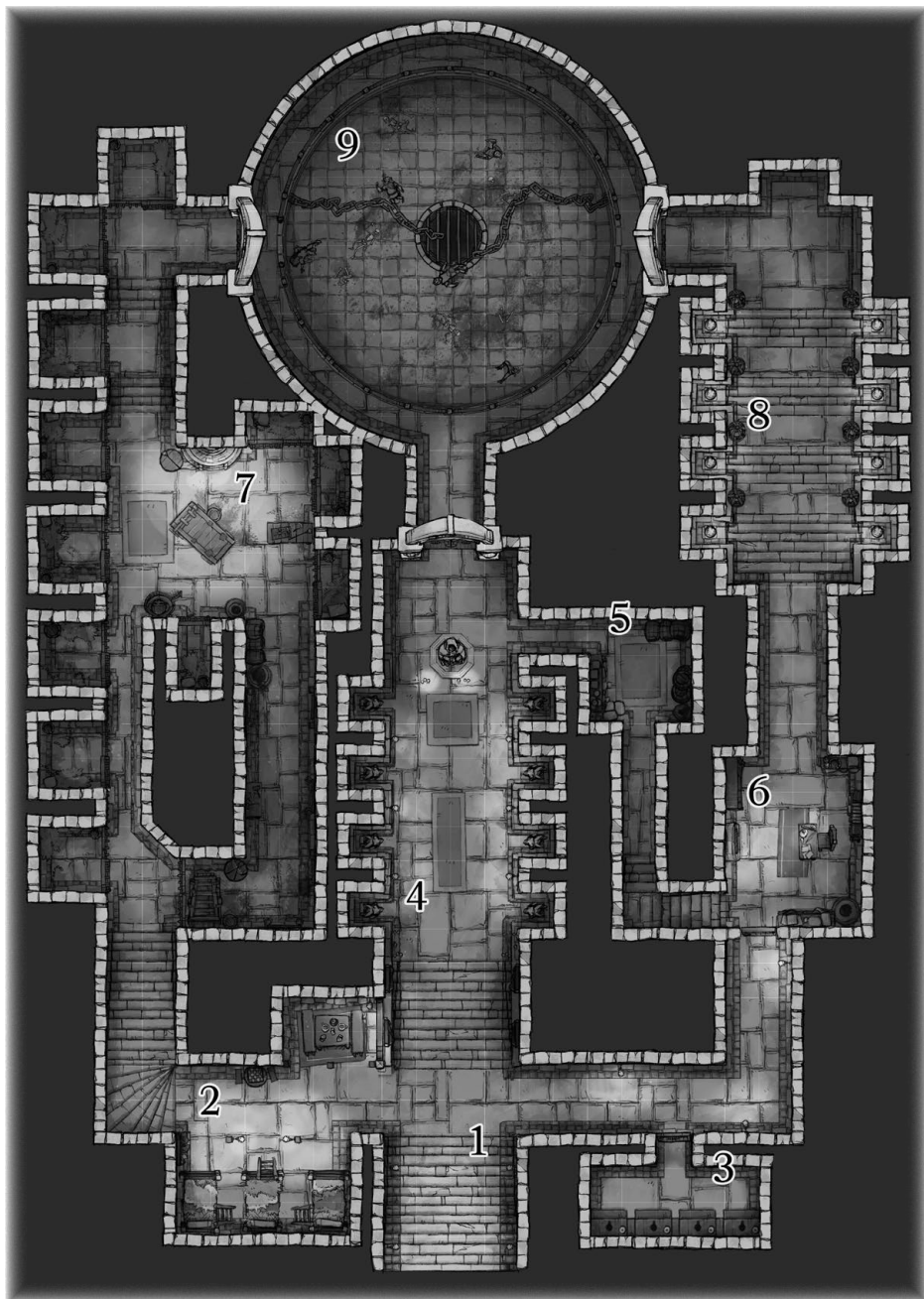
► **Treasure (3 XP).** A soldier has stolen valuables from area 5 and stored them in a metal box under the seat of the easternmost latrine seat. It contains 20 gp, a golden bracelet (15 gp), and a ceremonial dagger (10 gp).

4. HALL OF SAINT TERRAGNIS

Eight stone cherubs on stone plinths hug the walls and flank a 10-foot-tall statue of Saint Terragnis. The knight's emerald gaze appears to follow the faithful.

► **Blessing.** A faithful follower of the sacred knight who spends 1 crawling round praying earns a **luck token**.

► **Cursed Treasure (3 XP).** If a person dares steal Saint Terragnis's emerald eyes (15 gp each), they are cursed for 27 days to roll all checks with disadvantage.



5. STORAGE ROOM

The room contains wooden crates and barrels stacked from floor to ceiling and bunking shelves.

Trading goods and a small amount of coinage are stored here by Valeska's goons in recent weeks. The gorgon has ordered Captain Carlsen to set up merchant routes to turn this into gold. Alas, the captain is a slow partner.

► **Explosives.** A crate of mining explosives can be used in any large chamber to bring collapse the structure. The fuse string is 15 feet long, making detonation a truly dangerous affair (DC 18 DEX check, see **Conclusion**).

► **Treasure (6 XP).** The room contains barrels of grains and wine (30 gp), sacks of flour (10 gp), porcelain pieces (100 gp), a box of spice (70 gp), 10 gp, and 250 sp.

6. INVENTORY ROOM

A woman named Innara is Carlsen's accountant for this operation. She also is a corrupt Speaker at the Town Hall.

► **Innara.** The amoral woman (**peasant**) claims to be here under duress if confronted and begs to be 'rescued'.

► **The Books.** Innara profits from Valeska's goals and as long as she plays along, she can illicitly enrich her estate by cooking the books and deceiving the gorgon. A careful study of the books for 2 **crawling rounds** reveals that she embezzles 10% of the proceeds.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** The room contains two crates of fine wine (20 gp each), seven sacks of grain (10 gp), and a leather sack with 4,600 cp.

7. CELLS AND TORTURE CHAMBER

The room contains twelve cells and a rich assortment of torturing devices which have seen recent use. Half the cells are occupied by witnesses of the recent supply runs and by soldiers who refused to obey Captain Carlsen.

Seven **guards** and two **soldiers** are in this room. If they become alerted of the characters' intrusion, they turn over some tables as makeshift covers and set up crossbows on them pointing toward the south stairs (area 2). These soldiers are loyal to Captain Carlsen and do not betray the cause. Nothing scares them more than the gorgon and the prospect of becoming petrified.

8. DESCENT OF DESPAIR

Poor men clamor for mercy from inside eight hanging cages along a descending staircase. The lads bear gruesome marks of torture and mistreatment.

Six men were placed here after they refused to obey Captain Carlsen and the subsequent torture session. Half of them were members of the city watch, the rest are innocent witnesses of the captain's nefarious activities.

If released, the prisoners are too weak to leave but they are grateful to their mysterious saviors. They also warn the characters of Valeska, the gorgon. She is often found in the large, round chamber below. The prisoners claim that she has used her petrifying gaze on some prisoners but would rather bully the rest into submission. That is why Captain Carlsen has kept most people alive.

9. THE GORGON'S LAIR

A round chamber with a 30-foot-tall ceiling and a grated shaft in its center. Scattered bones, dismembered parts, and petrified people litter the grim room.

Macabre spectacles were once held in this location. Prisoners condemned to death were pitted against terrible beasts for entertainment while the rich placed bets on who would last longer. All this was done in secrecy and was Fairflow's deepest secret a few years ago until the last mayor put a stop to it. Now, Valeska calls it home.

Valeska (**gorgon**), Captain Carlsen (**knight**, unless the party fought him elsewhere), and four **guards** await the characters here. By now, the gorgon is most likely aware of the attack on her lair by the characters. She is surprised by their boldness and foolhardy behavior but her primordial disdain toward mankind prevents her from being afraid. Alas, if the battle turns deadly, she tries to parley and offer a cut of the operation but does not yield.

GORGON

An immortal woman of striking features and green eyes with coiling snakes for hair and scaled skin.

AC 14, **HP** 38, **ATK** 1 snake bite +6 (1d6 + poison), **MV** near, **S** +2, **D** +1, **C** +2, **I** +2, **W** +3, **Ch** +4, **AL** C, **LV** 8

Godborn. Hostile spells targeting the medusa bounce onto the caster unless they pass a DC 15 check to cast.

Petrify. Any creature (including the gorgon) who looks directly at the gorgon, DC 15 CON or petrified.

Poison. DC 15 CON or go to 0 HP.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

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

THE GORGON IS DEFEATED

The gorgon lies defeated and a city-wide conspiracy comes to light. If the characters return to the surface with prisoners and evidence of the mayor and the captain's collusion with the gorgon, the commonfolk revolt and retake control of the city. Speaker Vadra earns the recognition she deserves and is elected mayor while all her competitors are put behind bars and replaced. Father Donovan and Varden are grateful to the characters and commend them for their heroic exploits in the dungeon. Mayor Perkins and Captain Carlsen are sentenced to death by hanging the next morning at the Town Hall.

If Fairflow's populace learns the heroes kept the stolen goods under the manse, they call for their arrest.

THE MAYOR'S MANSE COLLAPSE

Detonating the explosives causes the underground jailhouse and the Mayor's Manse to collapse, killing everyone there, the gorgon included. Characters who fail the DEX check are too slow to exit and lose their lives. Fairflow's response to such an event is mixed unless the characters have evidence of Mayor Perkins's involvement.

JOURNEY TO THE DWARVISH HALLS

Balka, the dwarf, congratulates the characters on their success. She begs the characters to accompany her back to the dwarvish halls under the mountain range to receive the full hospitality of the dwarven clan leaders.



THE IMPORTANCE OF LEVELING UP THE PARTY

Tips for system-neutral GM prepping by Lefteris Stefanis



The last session was a success. The dragon was slain, the princess rescued, and the loot collected. Most importantly, the characters got to level up! Now everyone is looking forward to testing their new abilities in the next adventure that you, the GM, are charged with selecting.

Regardless of whether you are writing or creating original material, or choosing from the vast variety of quality products available out there (Dungeon Vault Magazine being no exception), you will need to account for the level your players' characters are currently.

You might think that this is simply a technical exercise of adjusting the encounter difficulty by adding or removing enemies, changing creature statistics, replacing creatures altogether, fine-tuning the trap DCs, adjusting the loot, and so on. One may go so far as to suggest that any adventure can be modified to any level just by applying careful encounter rebalancing math.

In this article, we will consider some critical story-driven aspects that you might want to keep in mind when picking out the next challenge for your party. A good way to do that is by asking the right questions.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE HEROES FAIL?

THE MOST IMPORTANT element of the story that is affected by changes in level is the scope. Scope represents the stakes in a particular mission. For instance:

- Low-tier quests impact the lives of a handful of people or may inconvenience a town.
- Mid-tier quests affect the livelihood of important stakeholders in the region and may affect cities and geopolitical relationships between regions.
- High-tier quests are typically 'save the world' scenarios or even transcend the scale of the material world by moving to extra-planar exploration.

Sure, defeating huge, strong monsters is fun, but gaining access to story lines that can influence the game world in an increasingly meaningful way is at the core of playing an epic fantasy game. And the level system you choose to use goes hand in hand with this concept.

WHY ARE THE HEROES INVOLVED?

THE HEROES' EXPLOITS do not go unnoticed by the world around them. Novice adventurers are usually little more than glorified mercenaries, folk heroes, or simply admired for being at the right place at the right time. As character level increases, so does the public awareness of their unique skills or shortcomings.

This is a very strong tool to use when selecting an adventure hook. Anyone could be hired to clean out a rat-infested basement, but when the tavern proprietor learns that the heroes survived the infamous Labyrinth of Infinite Pits, they may decide to share their secret map to the Hidden Caves of Doom for a cut of the treasure.

Similarly, as characters gain more renown, they appear as dangerous foes to villains who go to great lengths to either hide their agenda from them or exploit the heroes' fame to approach them and track their movements.

Consider this a rule of thumb: the higher the level of the party is, the more personalized the adventure hook should be. A group of heroes who tends to put themselves in harm's way to save innocents is a prime target for a devil seeking pure souls for their collection.

A survival adventure that starts with a high-level party being imprisoned for example, should be careful enough to provide a good reason why the bad guys would take the risk to capture such a powerful group of individuals. Does the lich in charge need them alive to slowly transmute their life force to its homemade energy crystals? Has it built a prison specifically designed to deal with the characters' abilities and spells to get back at them for foiling its previous plan for world domination?





WHO ELSE IS INVOLVED?

THE WAY KEY NPCs react to the player characters can also be an important factor when you consider the party level. Many GMs use the standard “quest giver/authority figure” NPC role to provide guidance to the players and reward the characters upon success. Although there is nothing wrong with using this kind of “father figure” in all tiers of play by simply swapping out the town’s mayor for a major deity, you should not be afraid to break out of this trope and adjust the character and non-player-character relationship based on the tier of play.

In mid-tier adventures, the main NPC stakeholders may look to the characters for guidance and lean on their experience to make important decisions as the story unfolds. In even higher levels of play, the heroes have earned a reputation and renown. They could be considered community leaders that have to identify problems and figure out the best course of action by themselves.

For instance, an adventure that features Aarganathor, the god of war, tasking the heroes with finding the Blade of the Apocalypse to battle an unknown ancient evil set to annihilate the planet, truly has a high-level scope. But what if the same adventure starts with the party’s high-level diviner getting a glimpse of the future that no one else has predicted and needs to decide how to share this vision with the world without causing a panic?

Or perhaps, the Enclave of Stern Watchers decides to assassinate the King. And then offer the weight of the crown to one of the characters, begging them to stop a war that will bring a century of pain to the realm.

CONCLUSION

NEXT TIME YOU think of a storyline or browse your list of ready-to-use adventures, I urge you to keep these questions in mind. Selecting an adventure that better fits your players’ current level tier will keep them more engaged. Do encourage them to take an active role in the fantasy world you are crafting together, and impart the feeling that as their character grows in power, their role in the community, and the entire story thrives alongside it.



EXORCISM AT THE MILL

I cannot hold the demon anymore. Great Ord, have mercy on my soul! May the little one survive this ordeal. Deliver us from the fiery onslaught of the abyss!

Priestess Alana

The miller, a peasant man named Vance, turned out to have a knack for magecraft. The town's wizard took him under his wing and taught him some simple spells and basic arcane knowledge. Vance grew bored of the menial spells and his progress has languished over the years. However, since he learned to detect magic auras from afar, he noticed one coming from a spot near the watermill. Vance dug up a leather-bound tome that contained spells unlike anything the wizard ever taught him; forbidden magic.

Vance viciously devoured the book's contents and learned magic beyond his capabilities to control. The apprentice, seeking to become stronger, summoned forth a demon to imbibe its power. The demon refused his attempts and possessed Vance's younger daughter Ilya. Possessed Ilya assassinated her family before Priestess Alana arrived to contain the demon. The priestess has waged a battle with Ilya for 2 days and is soon to falter.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Exorcism. Bishop Ordalla knows that Alana is in danger. He offers a bounty on behalf of Ord's church for aiding the priestess at the watermill (40 gp, 3 XP).

Demon-Hunters. A mage named Garlondth offers a reward for binding a demonic abomination on a magic bottle. The demon is at the local mill (50 gp, 4 XP).

Missing Cargo. Shipments from the watermill have stopped; people sent to inquire have disappeared. The bailiff hires the characters to investigate (25 gp, 2 XP).

RUMORS

d6	Details
1	The miller is a mage apprentice on the side. He has shown off prestidigitation tricks in the past few months.
2	A strange, leather-bound tome was found buried near the mill. Vance, the miller, has grown reclusive since.
3	Vance, is married to Tara and has three children. The two sons are old enough to work at the mill.
4	Neighbors have seen strange, pulsing, green and red lights at night coming from the mill's top story.
5	Tara asked the local priest for help a fortnight ago. She claimed he had grown 'strange' but found no solution.
6	Legend has it that an ancient necromancer once ruled this region with terrible magecraft and an iron fist.

Level 5 Adventure

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

► **Light.** Inside, some rooms have torches, there are few windows; the rest are dark. Demons are **dark-adapted**.

► **Shrieks.** The possessed child in area 11 utters gruesome, skin-crawling howls as if under severe pain every few minutes. They are heard within 50 feet of the mill.

► **Unhallowed Ground.** A *detect magic* spell reveals a strong flux of arcane energies coming from the mill's top floor. The aura is similar to that of teleportation spells. This rift is responsible for the demons lurking around.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	A vrock swoops down from the darkened skies. It uses its screech attack to incapacitate its prey.
2	The floor cracks open and six dretches ooze out of the reality-bending opening. The rift closes moments after.
3	A sudden, magical pulse from area 11 puts out all fires and light-sources, magical or not, in a 2-mile radius.
4	Four acolytes of Gede arrive at the watermill to track down the demonic apparition. They offer to help.
5	3d10 peasants arrive at the mill to demand prompter shipments. They leave in a panic if they see a demon.
6	An angel (seraph) materializes and warns the characters of the incoming danger. It offers to help in the next fight.

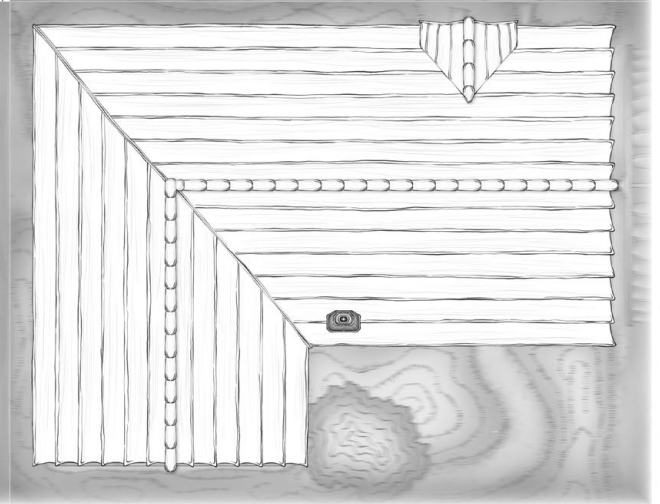
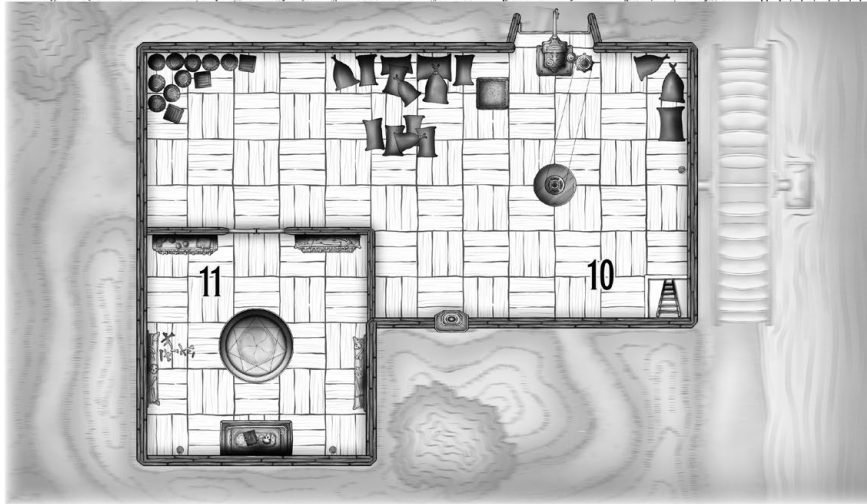
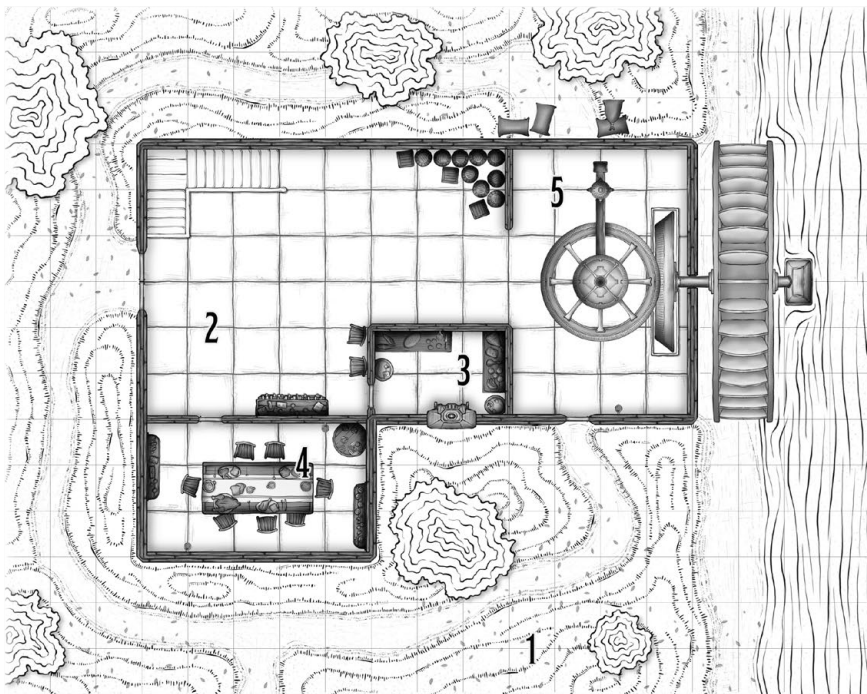
1. THE SURROUNDINGS

The three-story watermill stands by a once mighty river. It is now barely strong enough to power the enormous wooden wheel. The only opening on the higher floors is the winch window on the north side.

► **The River.** The meager flow is caused by a natural deviation of the river upstream (DC 13 INT). It is due for an artificial re-routing of the water to fix the mill's capacity.

► **The Winch.** Normally used to lift grain sacks to the third floor, the characters can use the rope of the winch to easily access the building from area 10 (DC 12 STR).

► **The Tracks.** Inspecting the area for 1 crawling round reveals many people have entered the mill recently but none came out. Conversely, there are strange, varied-sized, deep-clawed footprints from the demons.



2. ENTRANCE HALL

Wooden crates and barrels are stacked against the walls of this mostly empty chamber. A dire, bubbling sound comes from the southeast corner door.

► **The Containers.** Most contain wheat flour ready for shipping. One barrel is half filled with sulfur salts. They are a key ingredient in summoning spells (DC 15 INT).

3. KITCHEN AND LARDER

Most edibles in the kitchen have gone bad. Only three grain sacks remain. An iron cauldron bubbles in the fire. Demons came here earlier, ate some of the rotten food, and set up the foul, demon-summoning kettle.

► **The Cauldron.** An abyssal rift brews in the cauldron. When the characters approach, the cauldron boils impossibly hot and melts the iron, releasing its contents. Four **dretches** emerge from the boiling substance. Two more dretches come out of it after three rounds.

4. DINING ROOM

A table for seven is set. Several rotten dishes, fruits, and vegetables rest on the stained mantelpiece. A mound of gray dust covers one of the wooden chairs.

► **The Dust.** A spellcaster identifies salts and elements commonly found in living beings (DC 14 INT check). These are the remains of one of Vance's sons; it is all that was left after possessed Ilya killed him.

5. THE MAIN WHEELS

A complex arrangement of water-powered gears and spokes takes up most of the space. Only the largest bevel gear connected to the water wheel is turning.

The machinery works as intended as the largest gear moves with the water flow. Pulling an iron lever by the central spoke lowers the horizontal, secondary bevel gear and powers the millstone mechanism above. The machinery is kept like this when not in use.

6. SECOND STORY LANDING

The landing contains two sofas and a small table with apples and a banana rotting on a plate. A mound of gray dust covers the sofa by the southern wall.

► **The Dust.** A spellcaster identifies the dust contents in the same manner as in area 4 (DC 14 INT check). These are the remains of Vance's eldest son; it is all that was left after the possessed Ilya slayed him.

7. BEDROOM

Vance's three children slept here. Three beds are clearly lived-in while the north-most one appears to be a spare one. The wardrobe contains common work clothes.

► **Treasure (1 XP).** A hidden box under one bed (DC 16 WIS to find) contains Vance's sons' savings. A leather pouch contains 16 sp, 640 cp, and a small ruby (10 gp).

8. MASTER BEDROOM

Rotten innards and dry blood are stuck to the east wall as if a creature had exploded against it. Part of the gruesome spectacle has stained the bed linens.

► **The Gore.** If studied for 1 **crawling round**, a spellcaster identifies faint hints that this was once a human being. These are the remains of Tara, Vance's wife; all that was left after possessed Ilya cast a foul spell on her.

► **The books.** Several tomes on the bookshelf are about nature and simple arcane subjects. Vance's apprentice spellbook contains five random tier-1 wizard spells.

9. THE MILLSTONE

The upper half of the machinery in area 5 powers the millstone. A chute from the third story is used to dump grain into the millstone for grinding. The central shaft, when connected by the lever in area 5, carries its torque upward to the winch clockwork mechanism above.

10. THE WINCH

The central shaft is connected to a series of gear wheels that power the iron and bronze apparatus by the opening in the north wall. It stands still unless the lever in area 5 is activated. The winch is used to lift grain sacks to be poured into the wooden container. The bottom of the box features a hole that leads to the chute in area 9.

11. CHAMBER OF SUMMONING

A hooded woman and a young lass stand on a 3-inch-tall stone circle inscribed with a heptagram. Each struggles as they appear to have a magical duel.

► **The Women.** Priestess Alana and the possessed Ilya have fought for 2 days. The priestess is glad to see the characters arrive and announces that she cannot hold the demon much longer. She faints as the demon abandons the child's body and physically manifests in the Material Plane. The **glabrezu** that Vance summoned is finally free to roam unimpeded. The demon attacks. If reduced to one-third of its HP, it attempts to flee. The little girl, Ilya, is unconscious but unharmed. She remembers nothing but strange dreams of the past few days.

► **The Tome.** The grim tome that Vance encountered rests on a stone-lined plinth. It is leather-bound and features copper clasps. The book is titled '*On the binding of outward entities*', by Argannetrus. Knowledgeable mages know that he was once a terrible overlord and that this book has been lost for ages (DC 15 INT check). They also know that the book's reappearance and use must have triggered some arcane alarms. Zealots and opportunists might soon come to claim the fabled tome.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** On the shelves, there is a leather pouch with 10 gp, 190 sp, a *potion of polymorph*, a *potion of invisibility*, and a *potion of healing*. Within an engraved mahogany box, there is a *ring of feather falling*.



Catacombs of Endless Greed

People often meddle with things they should not. Ambition and greed are two of the worst flaws in the weak minds of pitiful mortals. They pillage tombs and plunder the dead. Most religious figures claim that lost souls with no values or self-respect cannot contain themselves and fall prone to these questionable activities.

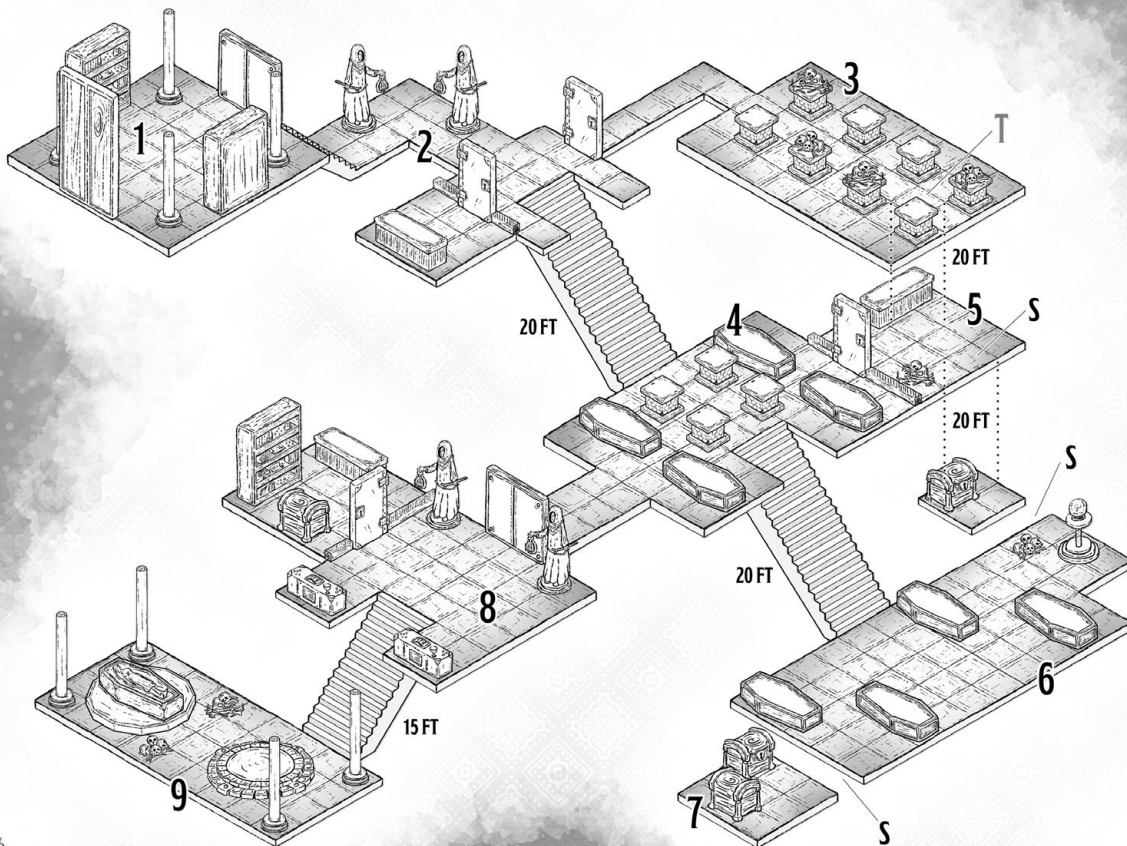
Driven by thoughts of glory, mortals end up angering forces beyond their comprehension releasing demonic entities after messing with their ancient prisons. The bottom line is that this is bound to keep occurring. Alas, the proclivities of adventurers shall not change any time soon. And the treasure hidden in the world's tombs and mausoleums remains there for the taking! Such is the case of the catacombs found a few miles from Safehaven. This resting place belongs to a long-gone royal family, the great Albers. The remains of Helena Albers, a renowned knight, and protector of the realm, are buried here. Many of her relatives accompany her in the afterlife, thus sharing these chambers with her. They were figures of authority, guild leaders, or people who held strong political standing. It did not take long for robbers to come.

But of course, the Albers knew their family would be a great target for pillagers, and therefore, they placed magical protections and wards. These safeguarding measures punish greed and selflessness. Those who visit the catacombs to pray and pay their respects may even leave with a small blessing, granted by the same magical devices set by the Albers. The stories say that many have tried to steal from this place but failed. And the few survivors claim that the ghosts and spirits of the unsuccessful tomb robbers roam the halls of the Albers catacombs to this day. Perhaps, it is time for dauntless adventurers to reach the remains of Helena Albers and overcome their defenses.

1. It is an uneventful trip from Safehaven to the catacombs. The characters must enter a beautiful mausoleum. Inside, they find the door to the dungeon (area 1). Two shelves contain books and tomes with the Albers' history and achievements. It is truly a shame the bloodline is no more.
2. Two statues of *The Lampbearer*, a lower deity, light the way through the catacomb corridors. A small room features a stone container with old clothes and fabrics. This is a *mimic*, trained to attack whoever opens it.

3. A slow, humming sound accompanies whoever enters this chamber. The bones and ashes of many of the Albers rest on short, lavishly-engraved, funerary plinths. A group of three *skeletons*, one *zombie*, and two *shadows* attack the characters if they defile this burial place to take the valuables (8d6 gp, a silver ring (20 gp), several bars of aromatic incense (10 gp), and a ruby (50 gp). Creatures that fail to notice the pitfall trap trigger the foul contraption and fall 20 feet into the hard, granite floor of area 5.
4. The walls and ceiling of this chamber feature washed-out frescoes and imagery of some of the most famous Albers in life, Helena among them. The sarcophagi bear small, silver plaques inscribed with the names of the deceased. Three *zombies* and one *ghoul* come out of the enclosures and attack the characters with fierce, merciless savagery. The undead fight until slain and chase intruders wherever they go. If the characters search this area after combat, they find an assortment of fancy fabrics, pieces of silverware, and other trinkets that belonged to the Albers. The entire lot is worth 450 gp. The double door that leads to area 8 is locked.
5. A decrepit *skeleton* roams this chamber. It fights whoever falls through the trap. Otherwise, it joins the undead in area 4 to fight alongside them if a battle breaks out. Careful inspection of the floor tiles reveals a secret trapdoor that leads to a 20-foot-deep shaft with a chest (see area 6).
6. Four ravenous *ghouls* protect this area. Once defeated, a mysterious, silver key can be retrieved from the sarcophagi. Two sections of the wall slide aside when the right brick is pushed. They allow access to areas (see map). The room with the single chest contains 5d10 gp, two *potions of healing*, and a random tier-2 wizard spell scroll. The crystal ball at the end of the room is a magical artifact that shows many of the Albers' memories and life achievements. This artifact is one of the Albers' most precious possessions. It is worth a small fortune to the right buyer (3,000 gp). The characters earn the enmity of a *wraith* if they mess with the artifact.
7. If the characters find this secret room, they find a hoard of 278 gp, 1,784 sp, a *sentient dagger*, and three random tier-1 cleric spell scrolls. When the heroes step out, four *shadows* float before them and attack!

8. The gate is locked. But one of the sarcophagi in area 6 has the key for it. If the characters do not have it, they must use tools or brute force to open it. Two statues of *The Lampbearer* flank the way. The side chamber is a small library with books and tomes about the Albers.
9. Standing on the circle activates the magic runes. Helena's spirit appears and can be talked to. Surprisingly, she is not mad to see intruders and robbers. She is happy to know there are strong warriors in the world, willing to confront the horror stories they hear. Surprisingly, Helena believes wealth is better off in the hands of the living; she never agreed with these lavish resting places. The characters may leave with their hands full, including Helena's magic sword and armor. But only if one of them can defeat Arcturus, the former **Protector of the Realm** in single combat. If the characters do not accept her terms and attack together, two *ghasts* and two *shadows* appear to even things out.



BOLESHIVKA

Ah! Finally, you're here. We've been expecting you. Take this badge and get to work. Find as much information as you can and bring back our water!

Stephanie

Water is the most valuable resource for settlements. That is if they are to become cities in the future. Water is paramount for life to survive. People, animals, trees, plants, and even the grass from a prairie. All require Adam's ale to persevere, to live on. Without it, life would be lost.

The case is no different for the people of Boleshivka. Water from the Tolsky River keeps their economy running and the lives of the villagers thriving. They started as a tiny hamlet of ten people but in only two years, Boleshivka has more than tripled in size. And today, close to 200 hundred heads work the farmlands.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

THE WATER IS polluted and the water flow has diminished. It is so dirty even the animals get sick from it. No one knows what causes this but the problem has persisted for five days already. A solution must be found quickly; the water reserves cannot hold much longer.

The authorities ignore that the culprits a large group of gnolls are. The pack of hyena-folk dammed the river upstream and pollute the water. They intend to drive the people of Boleshivka away as they grow weaker and sick.

Investigators. The characters are hired and asked to travel to Boleshivka as soon as possible. They are informed of their polluted water supply and their mission is to ask around the village to find clues of what happened, find the culprit, and seek a solution (30, 3 XP).

RUMORS

d6	Details
1	People in the village claim that they have been hearing strange howlings at night for the past month or so.
2	A farmer tells the adventurers that something ate half of one of his cows. He suspects a bear roams the area.
3	A young boy says he heard two adults talking about a merchant who was attacked by barbarians nearby.
4	Two local guards believe the capital is too far away from Boleshivka. This makes it difficult to send help when trouble occurs; royal aid may still take a while to arrive.
5	A villager claims that he saw a werewolf, a wolf standing on two legs, stealing food from the mill two nights ago.
6	A kid claims that he found a human finger in the water yesterday. His parents threw it away. He cannot prove it.

Level 2 Adventure

► **Events.** Risky. Check for a random event every time the characters visit a new area (3-in-6 chance).

► **Smells and Sounds.** A strong smell of manure comes from the pig sty. The stench travels across the river and to the tavern (area 7). The sounds of farm animals can be heard throughout the day. Crickets and stars are the only friends to be found during the starlit nights.

► **Bridges.** Two stone bridges are used to cross the water. The river is 10 feet deep at its center. People used to bathe in it and wash clothes but now it is not possible.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	Four bandits look for people to rob and things to steal. They do not expect the characters to be present.
2	The largest pig escaped from the sty! It tramples the characters unless they catch it (DC 14 STR check).
3	An itinerant merchant arrives in town. He offers simple wares but carries two random magic items to sell.
4	A mastiff barks at the characters a little but its owner, a man in traveling attire, gets a hold of the dog. He is a tracker. He says his dog picked up a foreign scent.
5	The characters stumble upon two wandering gnolls while they walk through town after sunset.
6	A brown bear approaches looking for something to eat. It leaves if the characters offer enough food. Otherwise, it becomes hostile but flees if reduced to half its hit points.

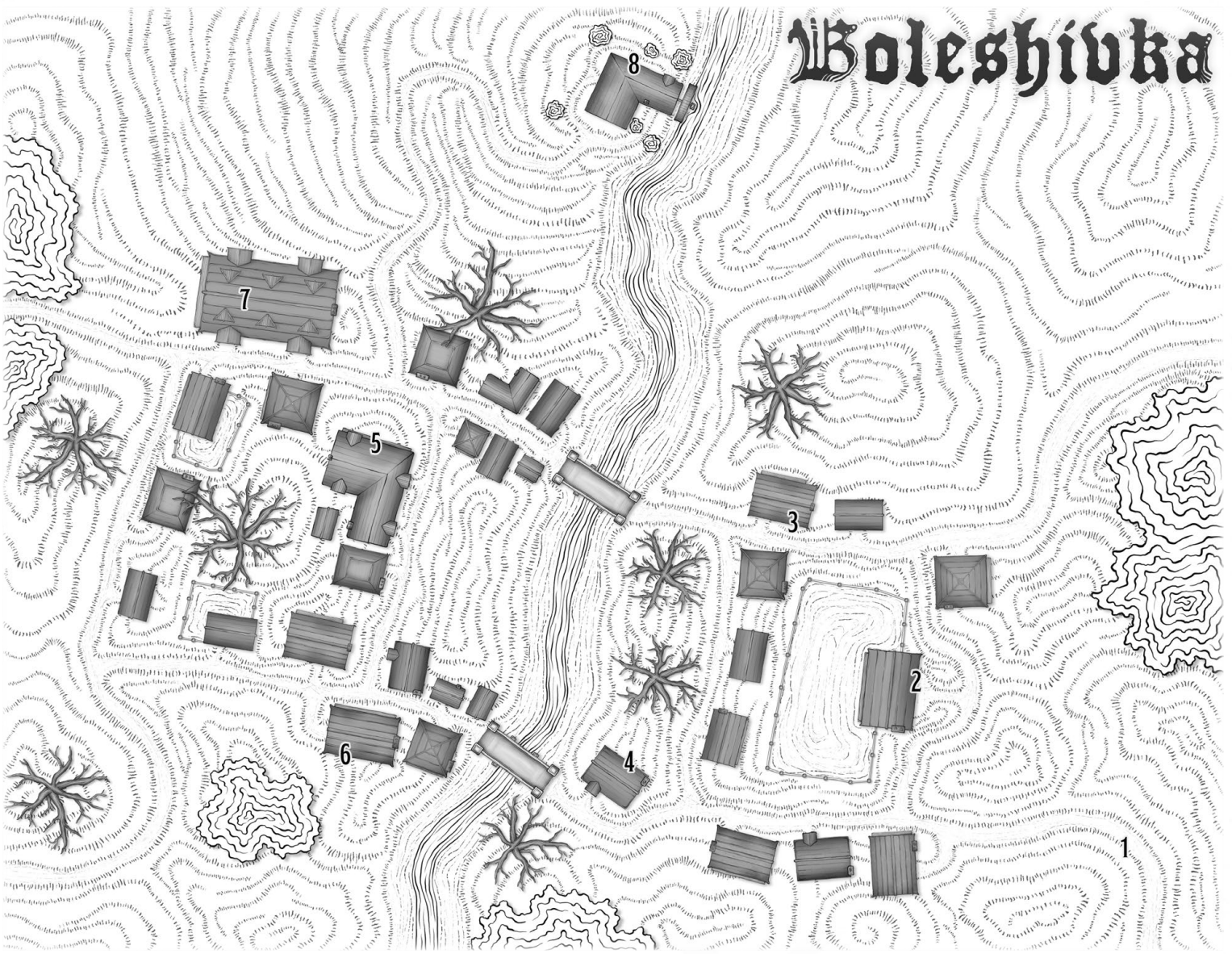
1. MAIN ROAD

The stench of pigs is the first sign for travelers that they are close to their destination, Boleshivka.

It is an uneventful trip for the characters. A person waits for them at the side of the road. They are expected.

► **Stephanie.** A tall woman wears armor with the crown's sigil. She informs the characters that her mission is to stay in town as the eye of authority while they do their job. She tells the characters they may stay in Boleshivka's Tavern and Inn (area 7) for as long as they need, while they run their investigation. She confirms they have the authority to ask around and interview anyone. She gives them a copper badge that identifies each character as a representative of the crown. These may facilitate the villagers' cooperation and disposition.

Boleshivka



2. PIG STY

Several pigs oink and squeal happily in the mud. Three people do their daily chores around the sty. They stop their duties when they see the heroes.

One of the main sources of income is its high production of livestock. Pigs look amazingly healthy and large. The pig breeders in Boleshivka are sought for their high-quality knowledge and incredible ways with swine.

► **Fat Bella.** Harold, the main pig breeder, is desperate. One of his most beloved sows is sick and he does not know what to do anymore. He has tried everything in his repertoire. With deep sadness, he tells the characters that he might be forced to make a horrible choice. The sow can be healed with magic. Any spell that removes a disease works for this purpose. If the characters help heal Fat Bella, they are each awarded a **luck token**.

► **Clues.** The pig breeders tell the characters that the water contains a large amount of oily fur. They believe a hairy abomination must be the source of the pollution.

3. MAGNOLIA'S HOME

A wooden sign reads: "Some reap what they sow. I sew what you tear - the best seamstress in town".

Magnolia earns her living sewing all kinds of fabrics and materials. She is the best in town. At the same time, she is the only seamstress in Boleshivka so her sign is both right and wrong. The characters can have her mend and repair any piece of clothing or traveling gear.

► **Clues.** Some clothes she mended had claw marks. They belonged to a pair of travelers found dead near the town yesterday. "Wolves?," Magnolia says, full of doubt.

4. "OLD KNIFE"

This small home belongs to a venerable man whom everyone calls 'Old Knife'. No one knows the man's name but he was an adventurer in his bygone youth.

► **Clues.** The man's knees hurt. And Old Knife, sitting on a rocking chair, claims that means monsters roam nearby. The characters are free to believe him or not.

5. BOLESHIVKA'S WARES

A large establishment crammed with shelves displaying all kinds of items and tools. A smiling bald man stands on the other end of the polished counter.

One of the largest buildings in town belongs to Raymond, a short, bulky man with a shaved head. His shop, the tavern, and the mill belong to the capital. Raymond works for the city and makes a living running this place.

► **Clues.** A pair of merchants were attacked before reaching town. Their belongings were confiscated and repurposed to benefit the community. Some of the stuff from the incident is for sale or given for free (empty flasks, mended pieces of clothing, and other mundane stuff). However, Raymond gives the heroes a small patch of fur. He says they gathered it from the scene and the dead. This is gnoll's pelage (DC 14 INT check).

6. PIPPIN'S RESTAURANT

The smell of food and freshly baked bread is almost strong enough to hide the pig sty's stench. A staff of five serves twenty to thirty patrons during meal time.

Pippin is a merry halfling with a broad smile. But, in times of stress, he becomes the most annoying little fellow. The moment he sees the characters, he jumps into their way to beg for their help and explain how his 5-star restaurant will not make it without a clean water supply!

► **Clues.** He brings the heroes a small basket with things he retrieved from the polluted river. A human finger, patches of thick, oily fur like the one Raymond has (see above), and a fragment of a claw are among the items. The characters inch a step closer to the truth.

7. BOLESHIVKA'S TAVERN AND INN

Despite the town's size, thanks to the many business opportunities, there are often people staying here.

The largest building in town is the tavern. When the characters show Stephanie's badge to Bubba, the keeper, a room is prepared and drinks are brought for them.

► **Clues.** Bubba is glad to see someone taking care of the town's situation so he tells the characters something he is not supposed to say: the capital sent troops to attack the barbarian tribes up north. This was done without provocation from the northern tribes 2 months ago.

8. BOLESHIVKA'S MILL

Kelly, the miller, is bored and depressed. The grain and valuables were stolen during a robbery two days ago. With the polluted water and the town stopping in its tracks, she sits idle. The heroes bring a smile to her face.

► **Clues.** Kelly happily beckons the characters to show them the paw tracks that go north. She hopes this helps them find a solution to Boleshivka's water supply.

THE GNOLLS

GNOLLS ARE RESPONSIBLE for the stream's state. The gnolls' camp is located two hours to the north. The gnolls polluted the river because the capital's troops attacked them for no reason and want to drive them off their lands. This violates a treaty they signed years ago (the gnolls have the paperwork). The characters are free to parley and trust what they say or come with their weapons drawn, attack, and ask questions later. Either way, that confrontation is an adventure for another day..



STEALING IS (NOT) ALWAYS BAD

*Tips for importing rules from video games by
Vladimir 'El Vlado' Rodríguez*



It cannot be contested that D&D, the OG of TTRPGs, came to revolutionize entertainment as it was known. It has influenced many people and their creations. One of its strongest influences was on video games, and if one looks closely at that Fantasy which is not Final or Quest for the Dragon, one can easily see the influence Dungeons & Dragons has had on them (some monsters even come straight from the bestiaries). However, the reverse is true: video games can influence tabletop games as well.

Here you can find a couple of optional rules influenced by video games, presented in game terms for TTRPGs.

1. SOCIAL LINKS

PERSONA SERIES

AT FIRST GLANCE, the Persona series looks as disconnected from a medieval-themed game as anything can be, with its modern setting and Jungian psychology-based fantasy. However, there is one aspect of the Persona games that is timeless: Social Links.

NPCs in the Persona games give you side-quests. If completed, your rapport with them increases. This gives you in-game benefits. So, including Social Links in your games gives players an incentive to interact with NPCs, in the hopes of benefiting from this relationship.

Another thing about Social Links in Persona games is that they become more powerful as you deepen your relationship with people and this is represented by levels. In a TTRPG, a good number to represent the bond is 5, and it is recommended that Game Masters make their table when the characters first become interested in an NPC and start to nurture a relationship with them. Benefits are up to Game Masters, but it should be enough to interest the players. These bonds could work for the entire party. A couple of examples are given below.

SOCIAL LINKS BY LEVEL - GANDALDORE, SECLUDED ARCH-WIZARD

Lvl	Bond	Requirement	Benefit
1	Acquaintance	Bringing him a requested minor material component or ingredient he needs.	He buys strange and unusual things from the party to use in experiments.
2	Casual Friend	Bringing him a requested living creature.	He can identify any magical items the party brings at no cost. Gives free lodging at his tower too.
3	Close Friend	Helping him get a hold of a specific spell on a scroll, or teach him something new.	He can buy and sell minor magical items and gives the party access to his library for research purposes. He may even lend a book or two.
4	Intimate Friend	Helping him get a difficult-to-obtain, major material component or ingredient.	He can cast and teach any spell in his repertoire to the party or give an item to them for free.
5	BFF	Saving his life or giving him an ancient artifact, he has been searching for all his life.	He appears at the last minute and helps the party personally in a moment of dire need.

SOCIAL LINKS BY LEVEL - JOHN SMITH, VILLAGE BLACKSMITH

Lv	Bond	Requirement	Benefit
1	Acquaintance	Make a good purchase at his workshop.	Get a 10% discount.
2	Casual Friend	Bring more customers to his workshop	Get a professional opinion of any metal object at no cost. John's expertise is such that he can identify magical items just by looking at them.
3	Close Friend	Do John a small favor, like saving his store or bringing him special materials.	Get a 25% discount at his workshop. Get a "friend of the Smiths Guild" badge, which gives a 10% discount at any blacksmith in the country.
4	Intimate Friend	Going on a quest for him, like recovering his father's hammer from bandits.	Get equipment from his workshop at cost (50% discount). Being able to get info on special equipment locations or clues about ancient artifacts.
5	BFF	Saving his or his family's life.	Get a custom magical weapon, John's life's work.

2. BYPRODUCT CRAFTING

MONSTER HUNTER SERIES

FORGING A BLADE from an iron golem, under the flames of a fire elemental, quenched in dragon's blood: that is the stuff of fantastical legends. The Monster Hunter series portrays a world where humans make all their belonging and even housing from different parts of slain monsters. This has been explored in many systems, but not deeply.

If GMs want to include this crafting in their games, they must decide how much they want players to benefit from this. Maybe, there is no magic at all in your game, and any special equipment must be crafted from monster parts. Or maybe the parts are used in equipment-crafting, for special qualities. Giving the parts a value can reduce the need for monetary rewards. Monster parts can also work as single-use material components for spells. Players will be more than happy to help poor villagers if the monster attacking their crops will provide them with hard-to-find ingredients. Below are some examples:

ACIDIC SLIME

The liquid from an acidic slime can be recovered in glass bottles and used as throwing acid. It can also be used in metalworks to purify the metal, making any metallic object under such treatment more durable.

SHAMBLER

Carnivorous plants with a lightning affinity. Each one has 2d4 special leaves that work as an extra material component when casting lightning spells. Using one adds one damage die to any spell that is electricity-based.

DRAGONS

Huge dragons are a treasury of components. Using the best scales from a huge dragon, an armorer can craft heavy armor for a medium creature. Dragon wings can be used in the crafting of robes, sails, and tarps. Both are immune to the type of energy the dragon exhaled with its breath weapon, and partially protect the wearer from such energy. Jerky made from drying the heart's meat works as a potion that temporarily strengthens the character. 3d4 of such special jerky can be made from a single heart. The bones can be used instead of wood in crafting weapons, and they can help the wielder in social situations with beings that respect strength.

However, wearing anything made from a dragon in front of other dragons automatically earn their enmity, unless the dead dragon was their natural enemy.

These notes can be added to monsters, and a successful check related to the monster can inform savvy characters of such resource-harvesting opportunities.

3. GROUP ACHIEVEMENTS

MASS EFFECT

THE FIRST GAME in the memorable space opera had one small aspect that none of its sequels carried: achievement bonuses. Some of the achievements in the game had a tangible, rule-affecting effect in any following playthrough. This means that, if you used a special ability many times with one character, in subsequent playthroughs, you would get access to more options at character creation, or you would get a bonus when using certain abilities. So, how to include this in a game?

You could give more options for character creation, like access to psychic characters after defeating an army of subterranean aberrations with mental powers. Or maybe a lost, dying race was saved by the party, allowing them to use this race in new campaigns. This gives the group a greater sense of achievement when their old adventures still have an effect after years of finishing them!

With these examples, enterprising GMs shall undoubtedly think outside the box to adapt the features of their favorite games into their campaigns!

Byproduct Crafting



GRAYROOT SAVIORS



By Elven Tower

Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG

LEVEL 3 ADVENTURE

A LOW-LEVEL SHADOWDARK ADVENTURE ABOUT SAVING A FOREST FROM A NECROMANCER

ADVENTURE PRIMER

The blight... it slowly drains the life of our beloved Grayroot Forest. It all comes from the old ruins; I've seen the strange, hooded man disappearing therein...

Sianna, the Dryad



Few can ever know the secrets hidden in the deep time before the present age. What little survives of those primordial times takes the form of vague legends and even less precise myths. Even scholars spend decades rummaging through inaccurate written records trying to glimpse reality but several truths of life remain a mystery.

From all lore available and what little they can gather, it appears that a terrible battle took place in a region now called Grayroot Forest. Two beings of ineffable power clashed and made the region barren for centuries. One was defeated and placed in a timeless prison. The prison crumbled after thousands of years as nature grew back into the area. A great forest grew and countless fey creatures moved in. The ruins of the ancient prison lie there, half-merged with nature. The vessel, the Core of Despair, contains the ancient evil and is unbreachable. It was withstood the passage of time as it was designed to do.

GREED FOR POWER

A MYSTERIOUS FIGURE came to Grayroot Forest seeking power. A human necromancer, Lord Zidannis, has closely followed a trail of clues back to these woods. He came looking for the ancient ruins buried deep within the dense trees. His suspicions were confirmed after deciphering the runes around an arcane vessel. Lord Zidannis perceived the power trapped within but he lacked the power to break the seal. Hence, he spent months devising a complex incantation that would siphon the life force of Grayroot Forest; a ten-mile radius of utter destruction to attain enough force to crack the vessel. Lord Zidannis plans to imbibe the being's power little by little, and become an entity of unparalleled might.

As the forest started to weaken, fey creatures and a tribe of underground goblins gathered and tried to drive him away. The necromancer mercilessly raised dozens of undead abominations from ancient remains under the soil, victims from a bygone war to stop them. The forest denizens struggle against the fearsome undead creatures. Some undead groups have even emerged from the forest and attacked the nearest city, Canterville. Travelers are attacked by them too. The situation has reached a point of inflection, something must be done soon to thwart the necromancer's dire, nefarious deeds.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Level 3 Adventure

A BOUNTY CONTRACT

Bailiff Anthon, from Canterville, worries about the sudden undead coming from Grayroot Forest. He offers a sizable reward for delving into the perilous region and putting an end to these attacks (50 gp, 5 XP).

A CALL FOR HELP

Sianna, the dryad, sends a telepathic call to like-minded individuals and summons them to Grayroot Forest, Sianna claims the forest is soon to perish if the mysterious hooded man in the ruins is not stopped. The dryad offers a fey-made magical relic as a reward (5 XP).

THE FLAME OF HEROISM

Sensing the incoming danger, the *sword of radiance* in the Moonlit Mound manifests in the dreams of a worthy character. The vivid dream shows the undead in the forest and the location of the legendary sword. The party must hurry and reach it before the full moon (4 XP).

RUMORS

d10 Details

- 1 People believe some animals in Grayroot Forest can speak. Though they rarely do so in front of humans.
- 2 The shunned ruins in the forest depths are said to contain a primordial evil trapped within. Legends warn against meddling with such affairs from eons ago.
- 3 The undead hordes that emerge from the forest brandish sigils and seals not seen for at least a thousand years.
- 4 Loggers and hunters say a sentient animal named Pepperstripe is the guardian of the forest. However, they don't agree on whether the creature is a bear or an owl.
- 5 Legend has it that a fabled blade is hidden in Grayroot Forest. It was crafted by gnome artisans.
- 6 A hooded man has been seen wandering the forest.
- 7 A dwarven legend speaks of a great battle that took place where the forest now stands. A great evil was defeated.
- 8 Gnome spirits gather dance and pray in a place known as the Moonlit Mound during the full moon, in the forest.
- 9 A tribe of troublesome goblins lives in caverns under the forest soil. They inconvenience travelers in the area.
- 10 The undead abominations have targeted sentient fey creatures in the forest as if following a clear command.

FOREST IN DANGER

I owe you my life, fair beings. After the recent events, I did not expect help to come from mankind. I apologize for my dire preconceptions about your kind...

PepperStripe

The characters arrive at Grayroot Forest and ingress through the only path into the dense greenery. They soon hear the sounds of a large beast fiercely fighting for its life in a clearing by a rock formation. The owlbear, Pepperstripe, was ambushed by a large group of undead monsters (see area 2). Its allies have perished. Unless the characters intervene, the poor, awakened owlbear is sure to perish like many others of its kind in the weakening forest.

Saving Pepperstripe earns the characters a mighty ally that shall prove useful when approaching the ancient ruins where Lord Zidannis hides. The necromancer trusts that his undead forces shall keep all intruders away.

Forest Features

► **Events.** Check for Random Events each time a new area is visited. There is a 3-in-6 chance for an event.

► **Flora.** Yellow and brown spotting appears on all plant life. A careful study reveals this blight drains all plants and trees' energy and may even kill them (DC 14 INT).

► **Fauna.** Most animals have already begun a tortuous migration away from the forest. The few that remain slowly are afflicted by the same nefarious disease.

RANDOM EVENTS

d4 Details

- 1 A rabbit, an animal messenger for the dryad Sianna, comes to lead the party to the Moonlit Mound. It tells them to hurry and come before the full moon occurs.
- 2 Four hunters (**peasants**) arrive too late to aid Pepperstripe. A fairy led them here in a desperate attempt to save the awakened owlbear. The men leave soon after.
- 3 Six **zombie** stragglers reach the clearing and attack all living creatures. They bear an old, tattered elvish sigil.
- 4 A trio of **centaurs** emerge from the forest attempting to leave the region. One of them is injured, like Pepperstripe, they were ambushed by undead creatures.

1. THE SOUTHERN PATH

The characters and any hirelings they may have on retainer arrive at the rock formation clearing from here.

► **The Journey.** It is a two-day trip from Canterville to this place. The picturesque trip so far is uneventful.

► **The Blight.** Plants in the area bear yellow spotting and root rot. Unless the situation is reversed, all plant life may perish in a matter of days (DC 14 INT check).

2. PEPPERSTRIPE AND THE UNDEAD

Pepperstripe (**owlbear**) was ambushed only a few moments before the characters arrive. He has dealt with a few of its attackers but eight **zombies** still remain. When the characters arrive, Pepperstripe has been reduced to half his HP. Three more zombies jump from the summit after 1d6 rounds (see area 4). After saving the owlbear, it greets the characters in Common and expresses its gratitude. Pepperstripe has not given up on the forest and wants to approach the ruins since the evil mage took refuge there. The owlbear follows the characters and aids them in battles if he is able to move with them.

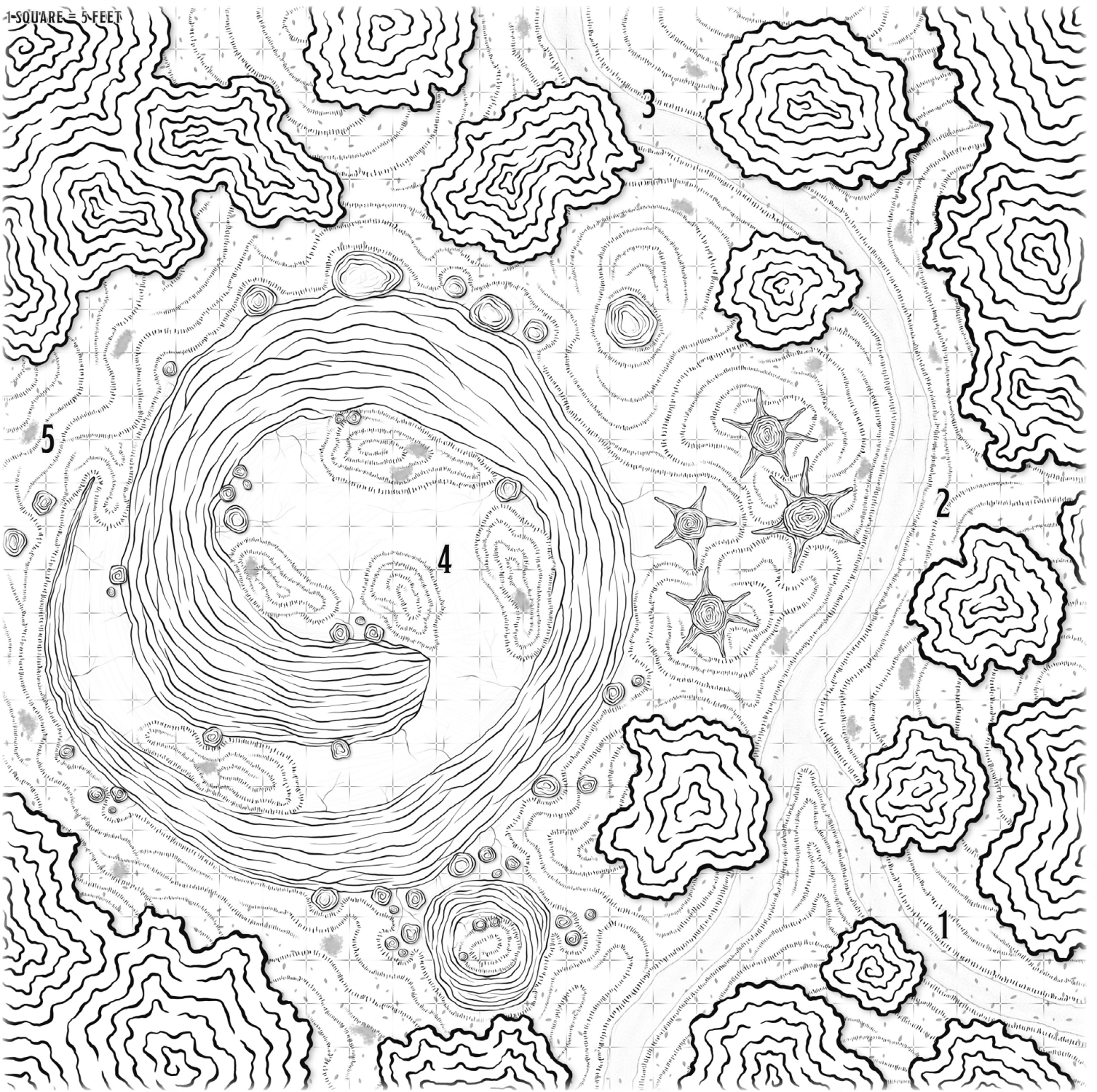
► **The Envoy.** A fairy named Yadinn comes from the west and begs the group to visit Sianna, the dryad. Her tree is located by the Moonlit Mound. Yadinn claims that her friend Sianna knows how to stop the evil wizard.

3. THE WAY NORTH

The forest ruins are located 4 miles north of this location. The path soon vanishes as the way becomes dense and difficult to traverse. Fortunately, the foot-tracks of countless undead beings mark the way to the ruins.



1-SQUARE = 5-FEET



4. THE SUMMIT

The rock formation's crest is unnaturally flattened. Such a structural shape along with the circling ramp are evidence that it was artificially sculpted (DC 14 INT).

► **The Glyphs.** Buried under half a foot of soil and grass, there are strange symbols carved unto the naked stone. The characters find them by removing the topsoil (DC 9 STR check). These mysterious runes were carved by a circle of druids hundreds of years ago. The runes read *'Rest with the Stars'*. Unearthing them all and spending the night here awards each character a **luck token**.

5. THE WESTERN PATH

The unmarked way through Grayroot Forest leads to Sianna, the dryad, and the Moonlit Mound. It is located half a day from this location. The fairy Yadinn (see area 2), may aid the characters find the way there.

If the characters choose to go there, they shall acquire the legendary gnomish blade that hides therein. It is instrumental in defeating Lord Zidannis in the forest ruins. The fairy Yadinn, tells the characters that the necromancer is impervious to all attacks. Yadinn and Sianna both believe the sword may be the only way to defeat him.

THE MOONLIT MOUND

It is our legacy and the proof of our superior craftsmanship. But beware! The gift of fire is not something to play with. The blade comes with a ruinous price.

Lanziver Fizzlemane



Long time ago, gnomes of Clan Fizzlemane boasted of possessing blacksmithing skills superior to those of the most renowned dwarvish clans. The dwarves went to war with them when the Fizzlemanes demonstrated forging skills beyond their expectations. The dwarves accused them of stealing their secrets and incantations and vowed to vanquish their bloodline. Most gnomes of Clan Fizzlemane were pursued and disposed of in time, but the clan's most wondrous creation remained hidden. The legendary *sword of radiance* has lain in the small dungeon under the Moonlit Mound since that grim era.

The dryad Sianna lives less than a hundred feet from the mound, where her father tree grows. For ages, Sianna has conversed with the gnome ghosts that come by the mound. The gnomes have told her the stories of the mighty blade that is hidden within. Due to her nature, Sianna is unable to leave the forest. All she can do is try to bring the characters to the Moonlit Mound so they can acquire the blade and use it to confront Lord Zidannis.

Area Features

► **Events.** Check for Random Events each time a new area is visited. There is a 3-in-6 chance for an event.

► **The Moon.** It is the full moon. The astral body is visible even during the day, low near the horizon. This is the only time the *sword of radiance* may be retrieved from area 6. Gnomish ghosts meander the area.

► **Undead Bolstering.** A magical aura protects the gnomish apparitions. Undead in the area are immune to the *turn undead* spell (even Lord Zidannis's ones). In addition, non-hostile gnome ghosts cannot be harmed.

RANDOM EVENTS

d4 Details

- 1 The *sword of radiance* beckons: 'Free me from mine own prison. Togeth'r we shalt vanquish the yond'r wizard.'
- 2 A dozen gnome ghosts march and dance in a single file. They chant about the coming full moon and ignore other creatures in the area. They cannot be harmed.
- 3 1d6 **skeletons** stumble from the denser forest regions following the party's scent. They charge and attack!
- 4 A **wraith** materializes from ethereal mist. It bears a resemblance to Lord Zidannis but the characters ignore it.

1. THE ROAD HERE

After hours of traversing the uncharted greenery, a narrow path appears half a mile before the Moonlit Mound. The path slants upward as the terrain gains height, the forested area becomes less dense, and the way opens into a clearing. The rocky mound stands ahead.

► **The Full Moon.** The characters arrive here on time for the full moon and the gnomish apparitions that dance, converse, and protect the *sword of radiance*. Depending on your setting, there may be many moons and plenty of other opportunities to retrieve the fabled blade.

2. THE NORTHERN PATH

The narrow trail traverses a dense section of Grayroot Forest and reaches a glowing glade known as Parsil Town. Only a few days ago, it was a thriving hamlet of fey creatures like elves, fauns, and centaurs. It is desolate now. If the characters stay at the Moonlit Mound for more than a day, the last stragglers come this way looking to leave the forest: a centaur and four fauns.

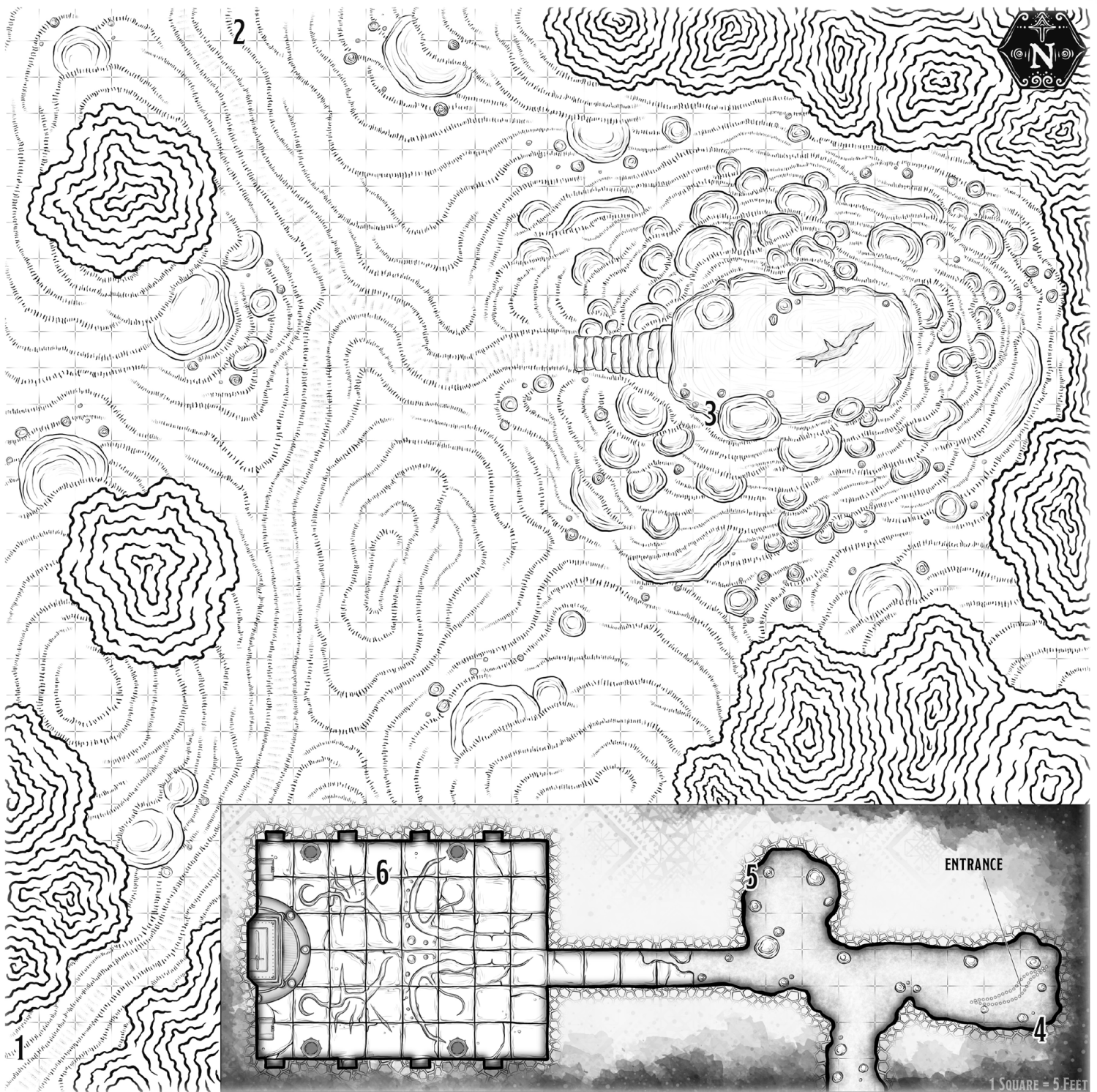
3. THE MOUND'S SUMMIT

Sianna, the dryad, awaits the characters by the crack atop the Moonlit Mound. This place is as far as she can be from her father tree. She bears a deep slashing wound on her thigh, evidence of a recent attack. Sianna claims the undead almost killed her last night but she prevailed.

► **The Legend.** Sianna claims that a blade of purging fire is hidden deep within the mound. The gnomes have told her so many times. After she mentions this, the ghost of a gnome blacksmith appears before the crack.

► **The Gnome Ghost.** The apparition introduces himself as Lanziver Fizzlemane. He claims to be the creator of the *sword of radiance*. Lanziver agrees that the time is right for the blade to be wielded by a worthy individual but he warns that his kin placed dangerous wards in the vault below. The undead gnome blacksmith says only the strongest shall prevail in this merciless Test of Steel.

► **The Descent.** The crack opens to an irregular, 50-foot-deep shaft into area 4. Climbing down is a dangerous affair due to the restriction in movement (DC 14 STR check). On a fail, there is a 2-in-6 chance that a hapless character falls to the bottom and takes 4d6 damage.



4. THE LANDING

The cavern is in pitch darkness. Looking up, a sliver of light is visible through the crack in the Moonlit Mound.

► **Walls.** Careful inspections reveal cave-in sections of a stone structure that used to be here (DC 14 WIS). Sigils of gnomish craftsmanship are carved in some blocks.

► **Tracks.** There is evidence of the passage of large, multi-limbed, insectoid creatures (DC 14 WIS check). They come to and from the southern cavern. If the topsoil is removed, the bones of small critters are revealed.

5. CRAWLERS IN THE DARK

The half-interred remains of a human explorer lie by the north wall along with a few pieces of iron and copper.

► **The Remains.** The bones were cleaned off by insects and critters. There are deep biting marks on some bones; the person perished decades ago (DC 17 WIS).

► **Lurkers.** Two **cave creepers** live in the caverns. They are, however, wary of approaching light sources. Still, if the characters move into the south cavern, the abominable insects emerge in a frenzy of rage and hunger.

6. THE TEST OF STEEL

A blade of exquisite craftsmanship rests on a silver and mother-pearl inlaid pedestal. It is flanked by two stone chests and four fiery, blazing, iron braziers. An ephemeral gnome ghost materializes by the far wall.

The gnome is Lanziver Fizzlemane, the creator of the *sword of radiance* and the sole judge of anyone claiming to be worthy of wielding it. He informs the characters that they may yet leave, empty-handed but unharmed. Otherwise, the perilous Test of Steel must begin.

► **The Test.** The braziers erupt with raging fire as a clay-like substance emerges from the walls and ceiling and coalesces into a towering guardian. Two gnome spirits drenched in fire materialize by it wielding hammers. The **clay golem** and two **azers** (half HP) fight the characters until slain. Once defeated, Lanziver concedes that the characters have proved themselves. A character with a lawful alignment may step up to take the legendary sword from the plinth. When touched, the blade's voice says: "*Timeth hast cometh f'r us to vanquish evil in this po'r state. Alloweth us traveleth into the dark depths.*"

► **The Braziers.** The iron braziers are magical but they become inert when the *sword of radiance* is removed from the pedestal as they derive their energy from it.

► **Treasure (6 XP).** The chests contain 40 gp, 250 sp, and 1,500 cp. In a leather pouch, there are two *potions of healing*, a *potion of vitality*, and an *amulet of secrecy*.

SWORD OF RADIANCE

A sword with a glimmering ruby in the opulent, engraved pommel. The blade appears to be translucent.

Bonus. +2 bastard sword. Cannot be wielded by undead or creatures not of a lawful alignment.

Rebuking. You have advantage on attacks against undead creatures with this legendary sword. You can use the sword to cast *flame strike* once per day (+4 bonus).

Invoke Flames. You can invest your life-force into the blade to ignite its fire. By spending one-third of your hit points, the blade is replaced by radiant flames. For 1 **crawling round**, it deals 2d6 fire damage. The blade can force this effect onto you at its choice when fighting undead or demonic threats (DC 18 WIS check).

Death in Flames. Desperate times require desperate measures. You can forfeit your soul and feed it into the blade to achieve great might. For one 1 **crawling round**, the blade deals 4d6 damage and you become impervious to all forms of physical damage. At the end of this period, your body is consumed by the *sword of radiance* and turned to gray ashes. It is a hero's death, only the bravest and most selfless are worthy of it.

Personality. Lawful, valiant, and foolhardy. Forged by the finest gnome blacksmith, Lanziver Fizzlemane, the blade has the ultimate purpose to uphold the name of Clan Fizzlemane as the best weapon crafters ever.



THE CORE OF DESPAIR

Step away, meddlesome mortals. You are about to witness the birth of a god. After I consume what's in the ancient vessel, all shall hear my name and despair.

Lord Zidannis

In the aftermath of a terrible clash of primordial forces, the Material Plane healed its wounds over millennia. The remains of a foul entity were interred in a vessel designed to withstand the passage of time. But outlandish power can unravel its protecting wards, releasing the vessel contents. Lord Zidannis has managed to absorb a fraction of the primordial energy. Enough to make him an outstanding foe: he is immune to all damage. Only the *sword of radiance* can burst through this protection (see **Confrontation**). Lord Zidannis created a powerful undead named Pestilence (**ghast**). Even when destroyed, it regenerates and may appear multiple times in the dungeon.

Dungeon Features

- ▶ **Danger.** Risky. Check for a random event every 2 crawling rounds and after loud noises (3-in-6 chance).
- ▶ **Entrance.** The characters may enter the dungeon from areas 1, 3, 5, or 11, at random (roll 1d4).
- ▶ **Greenery.** Shrubbery, dark-adapted grass, and moss grow in between floor tiles in most dungeon chambers.
- ▶ **Light.** Some chambers have braziers with permanent light; the rest are dark. All denizens are dark-adapted.
- ▶ **Secret Areas.** Close inspection of an area for 1 crawling round reveals the presence of a hidden door and the means to open it; pulling levers or removing debris.

RANDOM EVENTS

d6	Details
1	The Core of Despair pulses and drains the strength of Grayroot Forest. Fey beings and elves take 10 damage.
2	An awakened giant frog named Vraskus has come to kill the mage. It joins the characters in their quest.
3	The characters experience a vision (DC 13 WIS). A primordial titan fights a snake whose coils extend to the horizon. The titan vanquishes the snake with an axe.
4	Pestilence (ghast) and one skeleton approach and attack savagely. This event may occur multiple times.
5	2d4 goblins approach (Reaction check). Their leader, Mukkash looks to avenge his sibling who was killed a few days ago by Lord Zidannis's undead goons.
6	Two would-be adventurers (soldiers) approach. Phil and Arthen wish to earn renown by killing the mage. They beg to join the party if they can share the gold and glory.

1. LOWER EMBANKMENT

A fissure on a rocky formation opens to a dilapidated chamber from this low region of the forest. A cool wind current blows from the depths of the dungeon.

There is little evidence that undead creatures have used this entrance recently (DC 9 WIS check). Plant life in this area has withered and is mostly dry and dead.

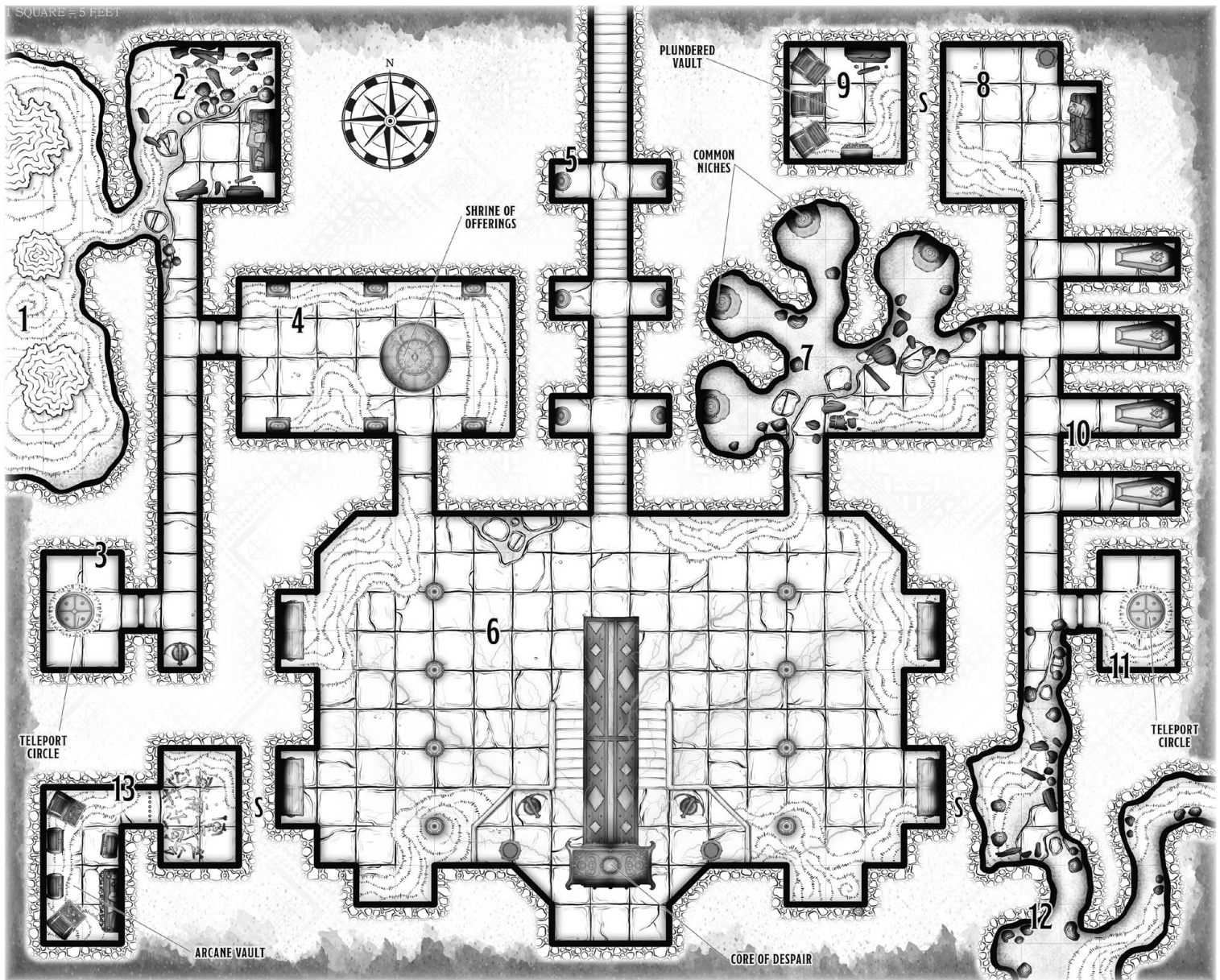
2. DILAPIDATED ARCHIVE

A wooden desk with a few scrolls is surrounded by mounds of debris, rotten planks, and loose stones.

▶ **The Desk.** A *detect magic* spell reveals that a protective aura wards the desk against the passage of time. The scrolls on it tell the tale of a mighty titan who slew the serpent of time and trapped it in a vessel (DC 15 INT).

▶ **Treasure (1 XP).** A leather pouch hidden under the rocks contains 15 gp, 65 sp, and a topaz (4 gp).





3. WEST TELEPORTATION ROOM

Sigils and runes arranged in a circle on the floor glimmer intensely even after all this time in the dark.

If the characters enter the dungeon through here, as they explore the neighboring forest, they experience sudden nausea and lose consciousness while walking in the forest (no save). They awake in this chamber unharmed.

4. SHRINE OF OFFERINGS

A glimmering aura shines around a stone, magic circle flanked by six pewter-inlaid, funerary plinths.

Primordial runes tell the story of elemental beings who forfeited their lives to empower an arcane prison of great power. A creature that meditates on this circle for 1 hour dies and their energy empowers the vessel (DC 13 INT). Alas, this would only delay Lord Zidannis by 1 week. Approaching the circle causes five **shadows** and Pestilence (**ghast**) to emerge from the plinths and attack.

5. DESCENT OF DESPAIR

A long staircase descends into the depths of Grayroot Forest flanked by alcoves with empty brass vases.

If the characters enter the dungeon through here, they find an arched gate marked with primordial runes by a somber, large hill. Countless footprint tracks of undead lead to and from this entrance in recent days.

PEPPERSTRIPE IN THE DUNGEON

THE OWLBEAR HAS a life debt to the characters and aids in combats as best he can during the dungeon-crawl. However, it is too big for some narrow passages and hallways in the dungeon. Pepperstripe can squeeze through most places but it takes him 1 **crawling round** to do so. Because of this, he may be late to some encounters or not participate in them at all. The characters can, of course, slow their pace and wait for Pepperstripe as he moves around, at the risk of triggering more random events.

6. THE CORE OF DESPAIR

A coffin-like container with a 2-foot-wide crystal on its lid is the source of lightning, smoke, and a gleaming aura of arcane forces. Two mounted crossbows flank it and four sarcophagi await in alcoves by the walls.

Lord Zidannis is in *gaseous form*, a spell he can maintain indefinitely thanks to the power of the Core of Despair. The necromancer watches the characters from afar and awaits their departure. He manifests the second time they return here (see **Confrontation**).

► **The Core.** Inspecting this artifact reveals it is a container, a prison (DC 16 INT check). Common magic cannot break the seal but it is somehow weakened. Someone has tampered with the Core of Despair and is close to breaking the warding seals and releasing its contents.

► **The Smoke.** It moves in strange ways (DC 15 WIS). A *detect magic* spell reveals it to be a spell. Alas, only a *dispel magic* spell may disturb this incantation.

► **The Sarcophagi.** They contain mounds of silvery ash. They were once the companions of the great titan that imprisoned the serpent of time eons ago.

Lord Zidannis



7. THE COMMON NICHES

Four irregular alcoves were dug from the weakened walls of this chamber. Therein, tarnished copper urns etched with crude goblinoid script await in the dark.

When goblin tribes discovered this dungeon, they found here a caved-in tomb that they soon repurposed. When people in their community die, their ashes are brought here for storage. They come to pray often too.

► **The Urns.** They contain mixed ashes. The script in Goblin reads '*And let light perpetual shine upon them*'. The line is common in goblinoid culture (DC 13 INT).

8. THE FROG'S BLESSING

Vraskus, the awakened **giant frog** from Random Event 2 is here unless they already accompany the party. The scrolls on the table are written in Sylvan and contain a fey warding spell. Vraskus claims he can attempt it but it requires the characters to sacrifice 30 gp of valuables.

► **The Blessing.** Vraskus casts the spell, the valuables are destroyed and 1d4 characters are blessed. For 1 day, the next time they would suffer damage, it is prevented.

9. PLUNDERED VAULT

This vault was found and sacked by the goblins tribes years ago. It occurred soon after they created their burial site in area 7. Nothing of value remains.

► **Visitors.** When the characters return to area 8 they encounter four dagger-wielding **goblins**. They are scared and want to negotiate. They are Mukkash's scouts (see area 12) and help convince their leader to join the party.

10. TOMB OF GUARDIANS

Four stone, pewter-inlaid, and lavishly decorated sarcophagi rest in 15-foot-deep alcoves by this long hall.

The enclosures are a trap. Each lid is engraved with the words *Love, Endure, Dare, and Live*. When opened, each has an effect that occurs regardless of the opening order.

► **First - Love.** A random creature within 30 feet becomes enamored with another. *Restoration* heals it.

► **Second - Endure.** A cloud of poisonous gas erupts from the box and as far as 30 feet. All creatures take 4d6 damage when breathing it (DC 15 CON check).

► **Third - Dare.** A **wraith** and Pestilence (**ghost**) emerge from the sarcophagus. They are immune to *turn undead*.

► **Fourth - Live (4 XP).** The stone enclosure brims with treasure. It contains 30 gp, 50 sp, 460 cp, one *potion of healing*, and a soft leather *hat of the hound*.

11. EAST TELEPORTATION ROOM

If the party enters the dungeon through here, their arrival occurs in the same manner as described in area 3.

12. GOBLIN CAVE WARRENS

The ancient structure has decayed after eons. Several walls have collapsed, giving way to dark caverns.

The tunnels lead to an underground network of tunnels inhabited by the goblin tribe. If the characters venture into the caves, they encounter five **goblins**. One is Mukkash, their chieftain, unless he was already encountered in Random Event 5. Mukkash seeks to avenge his sibling, whom the necromancer killed. The goblins may well ally themselves with the party (**Reaction** check).

13. ARCANE VAULT

Mounds of bones stand before an iron bar gate. A perilous lightning enchantment on the bars killed them all. Creatures that touch the bars take 4d6 lightning damage (DC 17 DEX check). A tinkerer or a spellcaster can neutralize this trap with a *dispel magic* spell or by disarming the device with tools respectively (DC 16 DEX check).

THE CONFRONTATION

THE DREADED NECROMANCER, Lord Zidannis is amused at the characters' persistence and is confident he shall not be stopped. The necromancer is immune to all damage until he is hit with the *sword of radiance*; then all damage applies. **Lord Zidannis** raises his hands to summon forth several undead minions. Two **skeletons** rise to operate the mounted crossbows by the vessel. Two more **skeletons**, one **shadow**, and Pestilence (**ghast**) materialize close to him. This is a lethal encounter that the characters have little hope to survive on their own. But if the characters have played their cards right, they may be accompanied by Pepperstripe, Vraskus, Mukkash and his goblins, would-be adventurers Phil and Archten, and even the legendary *sword of radiance*.

LORD ZIDANNIS

A wizened magic-user crackling with arcane power. A glimmering field of magic surrounds his pale body.

AC 12, **HP** 40, **ATK** 2 spell +6, **MV** near, **S** -2, **D** +2, **C** -1, **I** +4, **W** +2, **Ch** +1, **AL** C, **LV** 9

Death Bolt (INT Spell). DC 15. One target of LV 9 or less within near DC 14 CON or go to 0 HP.

Enervate (INT Spell). DC 14. Focus. One target within near is stupefied for the duration.

Necrotic Blast (INT Spell). DC 14. 3d6 damage to all within a near-sized cube within far.

Mithralskin (INT Spell). Self. DC 14. AC becomes 18 for 5 rounds.

Void Step (INT Spell). Self and up to 4 willing targets. DC 15. Teleport up to 100 miles.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

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

THE NECROMANCER DEFEATED

The Mage. When Lord Zidannis is defeated several things occur: all undead in Grayroot Forest collapse into dust, the energy-siphoning spell is interrupted; a fraction of the stolen life-force is returned to the forest and its denizens, and the Core of Despair is secure once more.

The Vessel. It is damaged, something that may be abused by evil beings later on. Repairing it is a quest in itself, something the characters may decide to do later on.

The Region. Grayroot Forest begins the road to a speedy recovery as plant life heals and fey creatures slowly migrate back to Parsil Town, their home.

The Dryad. If the characters visit Sianna, the dryad thanks them for saving Grayroot Forest and gifts them a *pipe of the rolling hills*, a powerful family heirloom.

A Hero's Feast. When the characters report to Bailiff Anthon in Canterville, they are paid the agreed-upon reward and a feast is thrown to honor their exploits.

The Awakened Fey. Pepperstripe, the owlbear, and Vraskus, the frog, invite the party to Parsil Town for a celebration on the next full moon. They and other fey in Grayroot Forest consider the characters good friends.

LORD ZIDANNIS ESCAPES

WHEN THE NECROMANCER is soon to be defeated, he attempts to use his Void Step ability to teleport miles away and flee. He has been thoroughly humiliated. Lord Zidannis vows to take revenge. Alas, his revenge on the characters is an adventure for another day..



THROUGH THE LAYERS OF HELL

Not a dungeon with a beginning or end. 'Tis a never-ending maze of caverns, tunnels, and a few empty chambers. A way out? Maybe in another layer...

Fragment of The Hell Chronicles - Tome III

The realm of devils is no place for mortals. The dwellers of the several layers of hell do not forgive any trespassers. Despite it being a suicide mission to come to the place of immortal monsters; it is usually the other way around. Devils spend their lives looking for ways to interfere or mess with the Material Plane. The most powerful devils can create doors between worlds and walk among humans, assuming the size and shape of an amicable humanoid.

DEVILISH CRIMES

IT NEVER ENDS well when devils cross the door-gate and invade the Material Plane. It does not matter who wins. Murders, bloodshed, and horrible magical battles that scar the land are sure to come if a devil finds its way into the world of men. And when the opportunity arises, devils may work together to deal a devastating blow to their enemies. For instance, kidnapping a king.

ADVENTURE SCOPE

THIS IS A mid-tier adventure that requires the characters to travel to the plane of devils, the Layers of Hell, to save the king. The heroes have a decent standing with the authorities of the realm and are considered trusted advisors and great warriors of the kingdom. Otherwise, they would not be summoned for this crucial quest.

The heroes are in Harrowem, the capital. Sylja, the court wizard, summoned the party to task them with saving His Majesty, King Owen IV. Sylja opens a portal to the Layers of Hell when the heroes are ready. The GM should change any of these names to fit their campaign.

RUMORS

d4 Details

- 1 A crazy rumor that a superior race disguised as normal people control the city is surprisingly popular these days.
- 2 People have had nightmares since the king was kidnapped. This horrible thing occurred five nights ago. On their way to see Sylja, the characters hear people claim that the king's most loyal advisor is a traitor. The gossipers do not specify who this person is, though.
- 3 The heroes have heard that Harrowem is not what it was some years ago. Some people are glad to see the king gone and expect someone better to take his place.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Rescue. The characters must travel to the Layers of Hell. Sylja perceived the king's heartbeat with a powerful spell; This allows her to create a gate that shall take the heroes close to His Majesty (100 gp, 8 XP).

Level 6 Adventure

► **Danger.** Deadly. Check for a random event every **crawling round** and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Hell is dark and dangerous. All areas the characters visit are dark. All denizens are **dark-adapted**.

► **Dark Beacons.** Besides the lack of light sources, this hellish place moorland is filled with dark beacons (see map). Torches, lamps, or any other light sources are sucked by these braziers of dark ether. Once per day, each beacon can dispel one light source within 30 feet.

RANDOM EVENTS

d8 Details

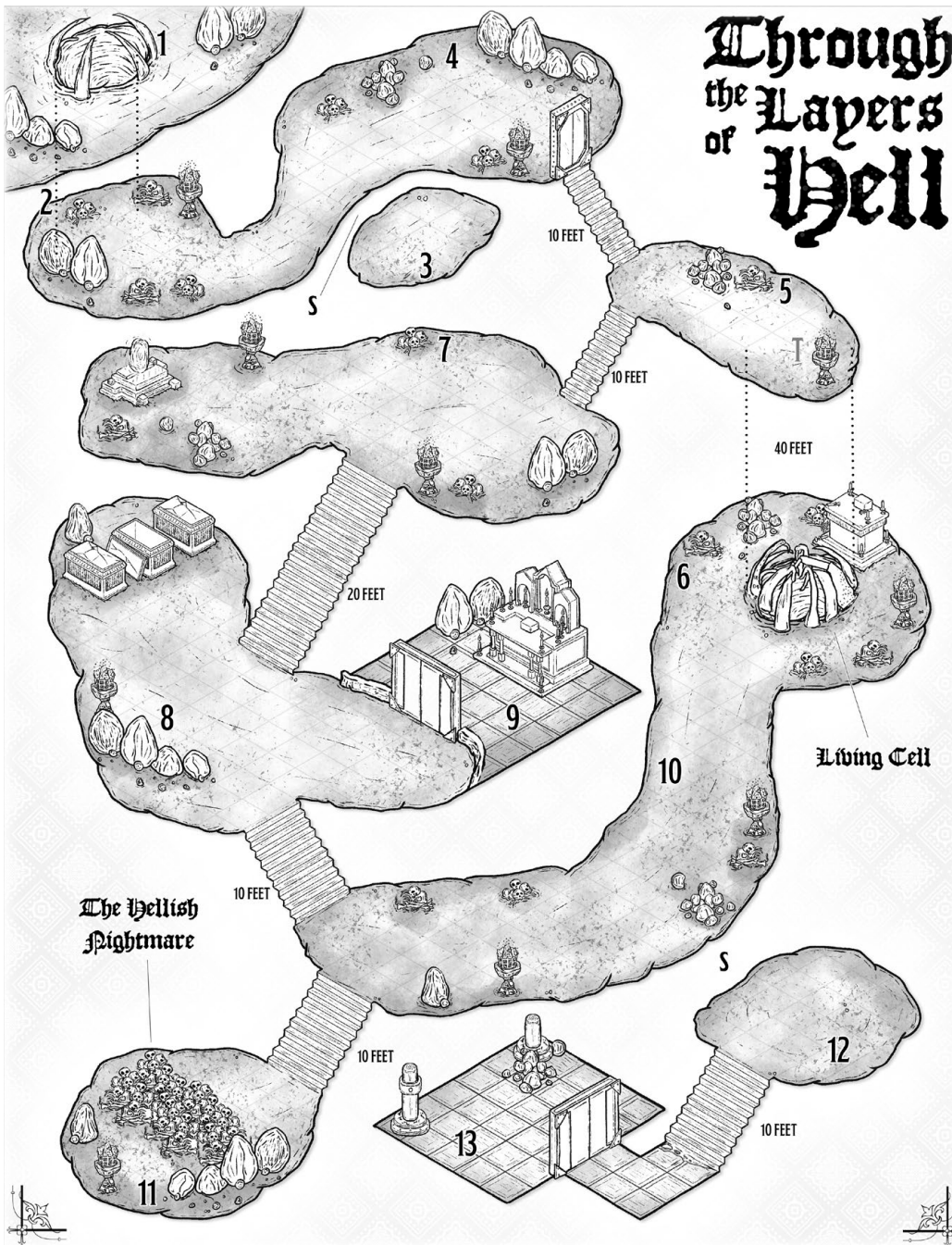
- 1 An **imp** appears and offers the characters a mighty boon in exchange for their soul. If a character agrees, they gain two levels. Their soul belongs now to an archdevil and the contract was signed in hell. They may never leave.
- 2 A devilish leech (**giant leech**) drops from the ceiling and attaches to the character wearing the least armor.
- 3 A sudden earthquake makes rocks and debris fall on the characters. They take 2d6 damage (DC 15 DEX check).
- 4 1d20 **skeletons** rise around the characters and attack!
- 5 A **gibbering moulder** approaches from the depths. The stench of blood or the noise has brought it to this place.
- 6 The screams of a man echo through hell. Cruel visions of an agonizing man flashes into the characters' minds.
- 7 The very fabrics of the world tear apart and a **nightmare** appears. It tramples at the heroes with flaming hooves.
- 8 The characters must face fire itself. A **greater fire elemental** follows their tracks and fights until slain.

1. ACCESS TO THE LAYERS (ENTRANCE)

Sylja is the last thing the characters see before crossing the portal. A thousand colors dance around while they traverse the planes. They land safely here.

► **Sylja's Device.** She gives the heroes a small compass that points to the king's heartbeat. Before the gate of teeth, the trinket points downward (see map).

Through the Layers of Hell



3. HIDDEN AREA

Some valuables have been lost in this small cavern for ages. The characters find 178 gp worth of coinage from a bygone era (DC 13 INT), a ruby (200 gp), a dragon-bone ink-pot and quill, and a stained glass beetle.

4. DEVILISH THOUGHTS

When the characters try to open the door to area 5, they are struck by thoughts of madness. Their minds are assailed by hell itself (DC 14 WIS check). On a fail, the victim becomes hostile toward all living creatures around them for 1d4 rounds. They may repeat the save at the end of each of their turns.

5. DESCENDING

The journey through hell continues. Sylja's device still points downward, the heroes must descend even further. If the characters decide to explore this area, they may spot the pitfall trap (DC 15 WIS check).

► **Pitfall Trap.** Victims take 6d6 damage and remain restrained and trapped within the monster cell (see below).

6. MONSTER CELL

The person trapped within the cell can try to free themselves. However, they have disadvantage on all checks and attacks.

The Cell. With enough time, this living beast will eat any victim. For each round spent within, the victim must succeed on a DC 12 STR check or be swallowed whole by the beast and die. Increase this check's difficulty by 1 each time they pass. The victim breaks free when they succeed. The cell has AC13 and 30 hit points.

7. LOWER LAYER

The characters find two **wights** and eight **skeletons** here. The undead attack the characters on sight.

Hellish Portal. Each minute, a **skeleton** emerges from this door. There are 2-in-6 chances that a **wight** comes out instead. A *dispel magic* spell disables the summoning gate for 24 hours. The portal is superior magic that cannot be destroyed by means available to mortals.

2. LANDING

Descending through the gate of teeth deals 2d6 damage (DC 14 DEX check). The soil is littered with gnawed bones. Carcasses, skulls, and cruel derisions to life scattered around the filthy soil. The heroes meet the first of King Owen IV's kidnappers and guardians here.

► **Dorogzogon.** A **barbed devil** waits for the party to descend before approaching. Dorogzogon states its name, it stands in the characters' way and mocks their mortal souls and current predicament. When combat starts, two **imps** appear to help their devil comrade.

► **Hidden Area.** The characters find this area if they spot the weak spot on the wall (DC 13 WIS). It takes one **crawling round** to remove the rocks to form a path.

8. SARCOPHAGI OF SOULS

The characters hear cries for help while descending the stairs to this area. They come from the sarcophagi at the end of this chamber. When the characters approach, they can almost feel the pain and agony of thousands of souls. If the characters touch the sarcophagi or defile the dead in some way, three **wraiths** materialize and attack them.

► **A Good Deed.** A religious character may pray and help these lost souls. They must spend 1 **crawling round** communing with the spirits to find a way out of hell for them. Doing this earns the characters a **luck token**.

9. DEVILISH SHRINE

The gate to this area is a blood passage. This is a horrible contraption of a door that exists in hell. To open it, a living creature must make a blood sacrifice. If they agree to lose 1/2 of their total hit points, they may enter. It is a magical door and only those who give blood may pass.

► **The Shrine.** An altar to venerate devils, the rulers of hell. Standing before it grants visions of devils cutting off their fingers or entire limbs. The ultimate offering to their gods of chaos. The characters are free to make a gift of this nature and receive a devil's favor. If they sign this blood contract, they become allies of hell. They become more powerful than ever, but may never leave.

10. DESCENDING THROUGH HELL

The monster cell (area 6) rests at the end of this large cavern. Lost souls fly about 20 feet above. They utter nonsensical gibberish or repeat themselves over and over. The spirits are harmless and do not attack.

► **Zernuth.** A **horned devil** is the characters' next opponent. Zernuth introduces itself, it wants the heroes to know the name of the one who ended their lives. Two **barbed devils** appear to help their foul master.

11. MOUNTAIN OF NIGHTMARES

The characters stand before a being from another reality. An awakened, giant mound of skulls and bones starts advancing and covering as much ground as it can. The monster tries to push the heroes into the cell (area 6).

HELLISH NIGHTMARE

A relentless, mindless giant pile of skulls and bones that swallows everything in its path.

AC 12 **HP** 18, **ATK** 2 slams +3 (1d8 + engulf), **MV** near (climb), **S** +2, **D** -1, **C** +1, **I** -3, **W** +1, **Ch** -3, **AL** C, **LV** 2

Undead. Immune to morale checks.

Engulf. If it hits with both slam attacks (DC 14 DEX) or engulfed. Victims take 2d8 damage each round and have disadvantage on all checks and attacks. The nightmare can have two creatures engulfed at a time.

12. THE TRAPPED KING

Sylja's device points the characters to this secret area. They must spend 1 **crawling round** removing rocks and debris to reveal the tunnel to area 12. A blood gate (see area 9) stands between the characters and the king.

► **Plot Twist.** His Majesty, King Owen IV, is tied up. He is in horrible shape but has no lethal injuries. The characters are almost ready to go when the king says:

No! Did she send you? She planned all this from the beginning. And the only ones who could challenge her are you. You were hired to die, not to save me! Sylja is a devil, that woman is THE devil incarnate.

Sylja appears behind the heroes, showing her real self (**cubi devil**), and confirms everything. Her plan was for the heroes to perish in hell. She thought they would die faster. Four **imps** fight with her in battle. However, this adventure may have a different end (see **Conclusion**).

CONCLUSION

THE CHARACTERS REACH the end of this adventure. And now they must face the consequences of their deeds.

► **Heroes.** The king is saved and Harrowem returns to normal. With Sylja gone, all devils disguised in the city leave. Half the court is nowhere to be found. The characters cut the snake's head and avoided a calamity.

► **Hell's Allies.** If the heroes accept an imp's deal (**Events**) or make an offering (area 9), Sylja claims they have shown their true selves. She orders them to kill the king to officially sign their allegiance. If they agree, the heroes become hell's agents. The implications of this are massive. The GM is free to deal with this as they see fit.





IAN JAMES ARNOTT

Aspiring author and TTRPG enthusiast. Publishings include the adventure book “[Shadows of Ravenswood](#)” and upcoming titles include the “Tales of Encounters” volumes. While studying software engineering, writing is his creative outlet, along with game development and a fondness for music and working out. You can find more about Ian James on his [website/portfolio](#) and [Twitter](#).



LEFTERIS STEFANIS

Lefteris has been a steady GM since 1994. His favorite part of the game is finding innovative ideas for adventures and connecting player story arcs on long running campaigns. He contributes to his local D&D community by co-organizing massive gaming events and introducing new players to the hobby. Two of his original adventures: “Dusk Tower” and “Honey and Cinnamon” were awarded 2nd and 1st place in the 2014 and 2015 Greek Adventure contests. You can find the English version of [Dusk Tower](#) [here](#).



VLADIMIR ‘EL VLADO’ RODRIGUEZ

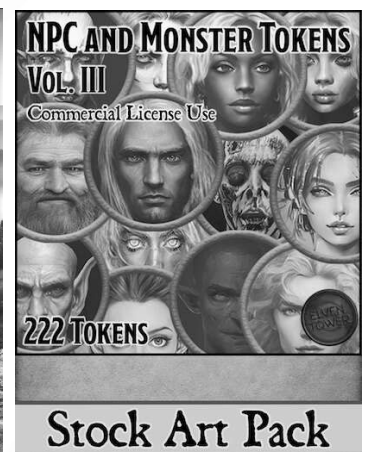
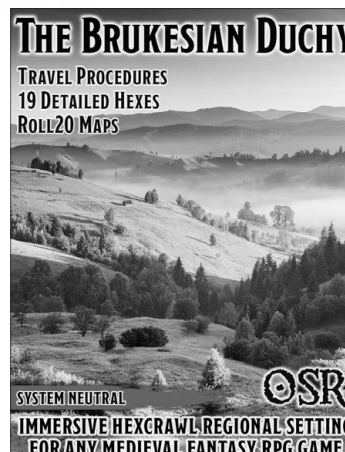
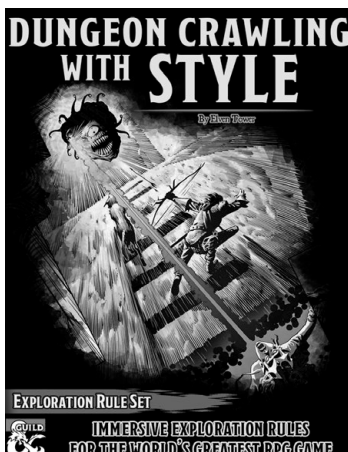
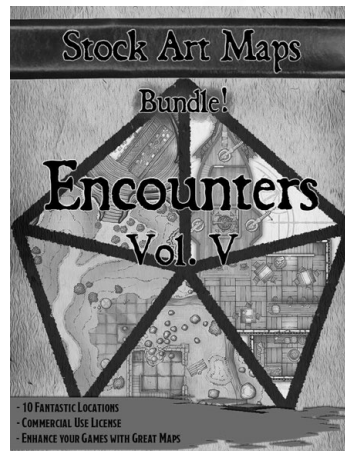
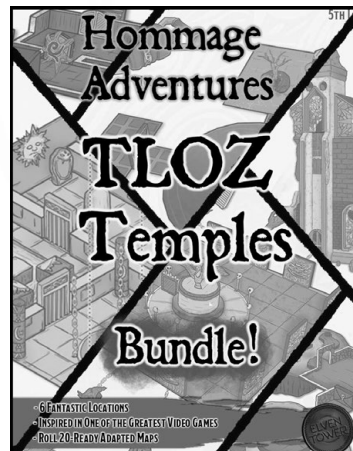
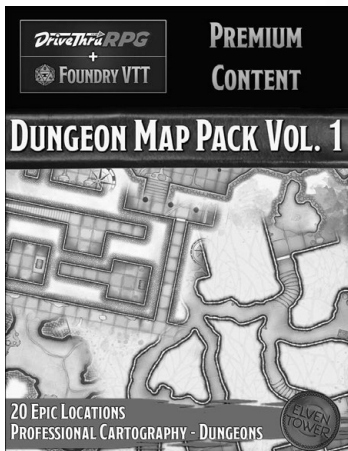
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Lifetime achievements include being married by a wrestler and fathering two wonderful children. Open for commissions.

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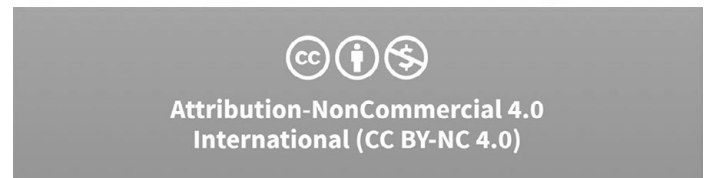
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