

# DUNGEON VAULT MAGAZINE

No. 25

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9 ORIGINAL ADVENTURES  
HIGH RESOLUTION MAPS  
VTT - ROLL20 MAPS

THE BEST CONTENT FOR THE BEST GMs



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# THE SPIRIT OF GREED

The only way I will stop asking for the tribute is if the people of Harrinton pay for the reconstruction of my family tomb. But they won't, will they?

Gordy Pheldan's Ghost

## Delve Level 5 (3,400 XP)

1 ghost  
2 ghastrs  
5 ghouls  
8 zombies

## SETUP

**TREASURE-SEEKERS AND ADVENTURERS** hardly ever say no to exploring uncharted places; the possibilities of finding gold and ancient artifacts are often greater when no one has set foot at the location in question before.

The dangers that come with these journeys and quests are something only the bravest and the strongest can face, though. The rest, which is the majority of folks, must find other ways to deal with trouble or danger. Most flee. That is the strongest survival instinct. Whenever a place stops being safe or hospitable, it isn't strange for people to look for another place to live. But a few others learn to fight back and recover what is theirs. A few others use negotiation tactics to reach reasonable terms. And a few clever ones adapt. They learn to live in a new world with new, harsher rules. It does not matter what people do. The objective stays the same: survival.

## GORDY PHELDAN'S GHOST

**THERE IS** A small town that goes by the name of Harrinton. It is located near the River of Feathers, north of the capital. The good people of this farming community are a great example of brave men who chose to adapt rather than abandon their land and the place they call home.

It all started a few months ago. At the Pheldan's family tomb. The last of their family died 50 years ago and left no heirs. One day, for reasons unknown, the spirit of Gordy Pheldan came back from the dead. His ghost became angry and full of grudges after witnessing the state of his family's tomb. He could not believe his bloodline was lost forever and no one cared for them anymore.

Fueled by anger and wrath, the ghost reanimated other family members in the tomb and raised a small army of restless undead. They reached Harrinton a few hours later. Fortunately, Gordy has agreed to parley.

## IN TERMS OF GREED...

**GORDY PHELDAN'S GHOST** threatened to unleash the zombies and ghouls in the town unless he was compensated for the people's insolence. In his mind, they are responsible for the current state of his family tomb. And, strangely, he also blames the people of Harrinton for letting the Pheldan bloodline disappear and be forgotten.

The poor villagers agreed to bring a monthly tribute to the Pheldan's tomb to appease the ghost. But the town's leader is sick and tired of being ignored by the capital while being under threat by enemies. The authorities offer a hefty bounty of 3,000 gp to brave heroes who can get rid of the ghost and the small army of undead he created. The recovery of the past tribute is part of the job.

### 1. ENTRANCE

*After traveling east of Harrinton for a few hours, the heroes find Gordy Pheldan's family tomb.*

The tomb's entrance door is locked (DC 20 Thieves' Tools). The two 30-foot-corridors to the east and west end in decrepit alcoves with mundane stuff and a door.

**Key.** The characters find the key to area 7 if they take a minute to search the place (DC 16 Investigation).

### 2. ANTECHAMBER

This room contains two small, wooden tables. There is a dagger, wax for letter seals, and documents with administrative information about the people buried here.

**Obituary.** There is a section of the wall with intricate inscriptions of some of the most important people resting here. The name of Gordy Pheldan is among them. One of the bricks with a name can be pushed to slide part of the wall and reveal a vault (DC 18 Investigation).

### 3. COLLAPSED TOMB

*Six standing sarcophagi rest within the narrow wall alcoves. The entire north wall of this chamber has collapsed, revealing two dark, shifting tunnels.*

Some innocent Pheldan souls came back from the dead. One **ghast**, two **ghouls**, and three **zombies** emerge from their enclosures and attack any intruders. They chase enemies outside this area and fight until slain.



#### 4. RUINED OFFICE

This room used to be a small archive like area 2. Cave-ins destroyed it and connected it to the cavern network.

#### 5. CAVERN NETWORK

One **ghoul** and three grunting **zombies** roam in this area. They fight trespassers until slain. One of the alcove walls from the chapel (area 6) has collapsed and created an extemporaneous connection between these areas.

**Caverns.** The heroes may enter the dungeon from area 5 if they find the caverns on their way (DC 15 Survival).

#### 6. THE PHELDAN CHAPEL

*Six wooden benches and columns flank a fine, blue rug that shows the way to a small altar. Zombies and ghouls loom forth from their enclosures as a ghostly, shadowy figure coalesces from the palpable shadows.*

The characters meet Gordy Pheldan's **ghost** here. He greets the heroes saying: "The tribute is one week late and now you come. Will you parley or fight like brutes?"

**Kill the Undead.** The characters do not want to hear what Gordy has to say or have no intention to negotiate with a ghost. Gordy's ghost, a **ghast**, two **ghouls**, and two **zombies** fight fearlessly until slain. The heroes can return the people from Harrinton the gold they surrendered in the past few months (see **Features of the Tomb**).

**A Possible Negotiation.** The characters agree to talk with Gordy. After minutes of complaining, the ghost explains he will stop the attacks on Harrinton if they agree to rebuild his family's tomb and perform a holy ceremony so all Pheldan can finally rest (see **Development**).

#### 7. EAST ARCHIVE

This area is locked (DC 20 Thieves' Tools). The characters find official documents, diaries, and books about the Pheldan family if they explore the place. The characters find 29 pp and a *magic scroll of lesser restoration* if they search the area well (DC 16 Investigation).

#### 8. WEST ARCHIVE

The documents on the wooden desk display intricate details of all the tribute that has been brought here since Gordy Pheldan's ghost started to terrorize the people of Harrinton. The characters find two *potions of healing* if they search the area well (DC 15 Investigation).

### DEVELOPMENT

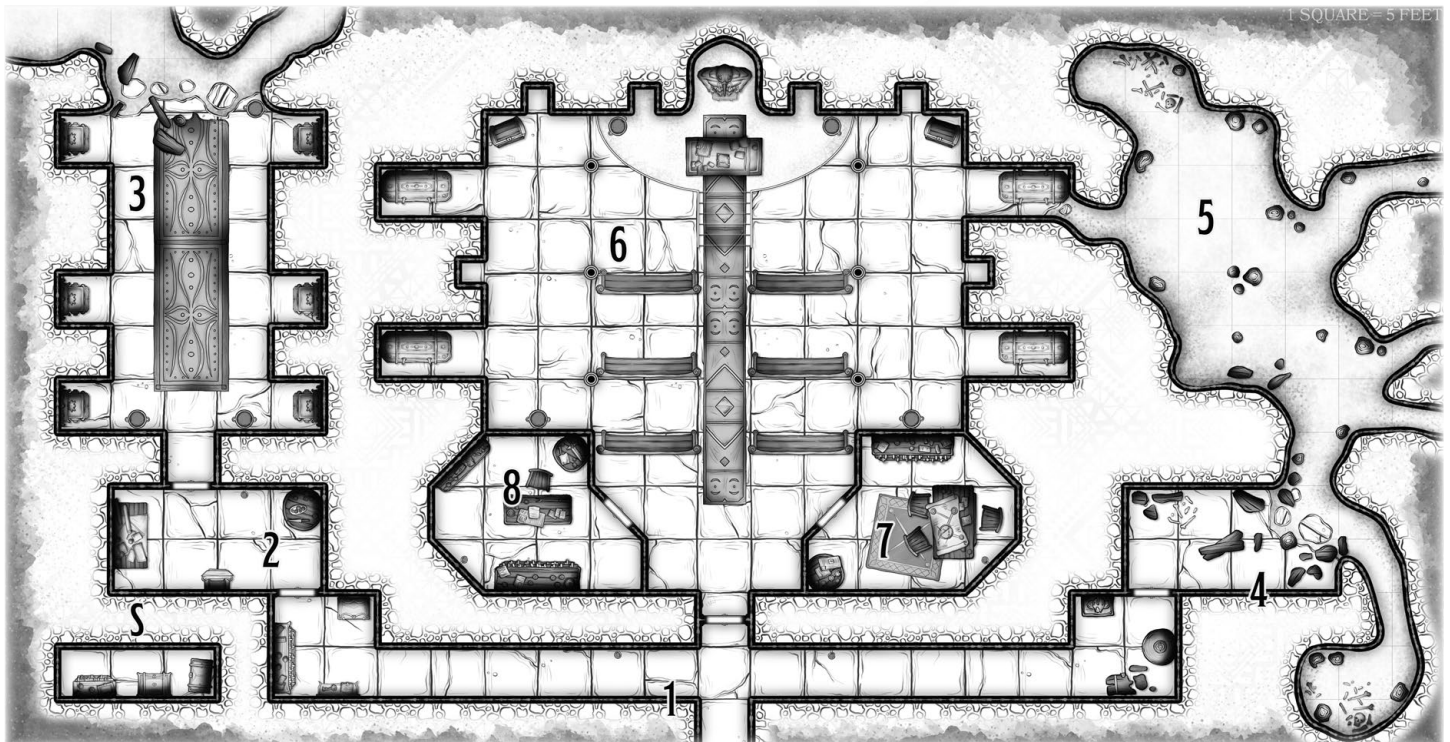
**THE CHARACTERS MAY** choose to eliminate the undead at the tomb forever or to negotiate with them. If the tomb is rebuilt as promised, Gordy's ghost stays true to his word and all the dead go back to their eternal slumber.

The people from Harrinton expect the characters to return everything they gave as tribute in the past months. Failing to do brands the heroes as wanted criminals.

### FEATURES OF THE TOMB

**Lights.** The sconces feature *magical flame* spells. The magic fades in seconds after the torches are removed.

**Treasure.** Area 2 contains 2,000 gp worth of coins, silverware, and fabrics. There are 1,346 gp worth of treasure that did not come from Harrinton's tributes. The heroes may keep this if they defeat all undead in combat.



# TIGERPAW CASINO

You should have stayed at home. No one comes to my establishment to accuse me of falsehoods and walks away unscathed. You shall perish tonight!

Ariadne Sasaki

## Delve Level 4 (2,000 XP)

1 cult fanatic

1 priest

4 thugs

1 veteran

## SETUP

**THE CRIMINAL UNDERWORLD** in the great cities is not under the control of the forces of law. The city watch, the royal service, and even private contractors have little to no power in the slums and the darkest districts. Criminal families and clans that go back for generations, just like the royals, have utter control over these areas. A direct confrontation against such groups would mean civil war. Thus, the forces of the law often collaborate in an uncomfortable truce with the underworld factions. It has always worked like this and it is unlikely to change. In the capital, the most influential group is the Tigerpaw Clan, led by a merciless woman named Ariadne Sasaki.

Rumor has it that Ariadne is a cruel woman with little patience for failure and fools. A strict overlord that rules with an iron fist and roots out anyone who stands in her way. She commands an army of thugs and enforcers that fulfill her objectives in and out of the urban underworld. However, Ariadne Sasaki owns several establishments in the city. The most popular of them is the Tigerpaw Casino. The place is a paradise for money laundering and embezzlement of illegally-acquired assets. Alas, Ariadne has close ties with many high-ranking politicians and nobles. Her influence is so vast that important folks and nobles come to ask her for her blessing for all kinds of business endeavors and before the passing of new laws.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

**ARIADNE'S RECENT ACTIVITIES** oppress the commonfolk in the districts near her establishments. A coalition of citizens has risen against her enforcers with little to no effect. Many innocent people have perished while resisting the cruel actions of the Tigerpaw Clan. Now, the citizens offer a bounty of 1,800 gp to put a stop to Ariadne. She is to be arrested or executed at the Tigerpaw Casino, her flagship business and hideout.

## History Check

**DC 14:** *There are urban legends that speak of Ariadne Sasaki's origin. She is a foreigner from the north. She arrived in the capital decades ago and rose to popularity in the lowest circles as the most efficient assassin. They called her the 'Creeping Death', as she stalked her prey without faltering for days until she completed the assignment. Years later, she started her clan from nothing.*

**DC 18:** *There have been a few dozen attempts on Ariadne's life in the past decades. Most from within her organization. They thought a woman was unfit for leading such a large underworld organization and tried to seize her power. They all paid with their lives at the end of Ariadne's blade. Today, she is always escorted by thugs.*

## 1. MAIN HALL

*The large, windowless casino is filled with play tables, roulettes, and all kinds of gambling parlors for customers to lose themselves to the night.*

Anyone with money to splurge can enter the Tigerpaw Casino without much hassle. Two **thugs** escort visitors from the entrance to the reception where they can exchange their gold for casino chips with Ariadne's profile etched on them. Each visitor must purchase a minimum of 50 gp worth of chips. After the exchange, all clients are left alone to explore the crowded casino.

## 2. THE BAR

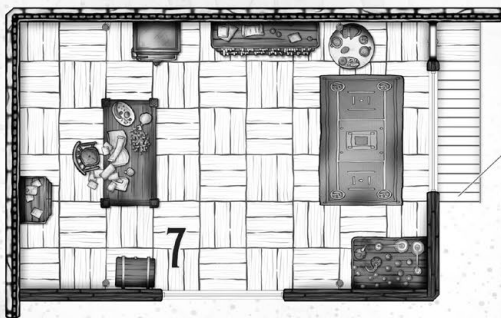
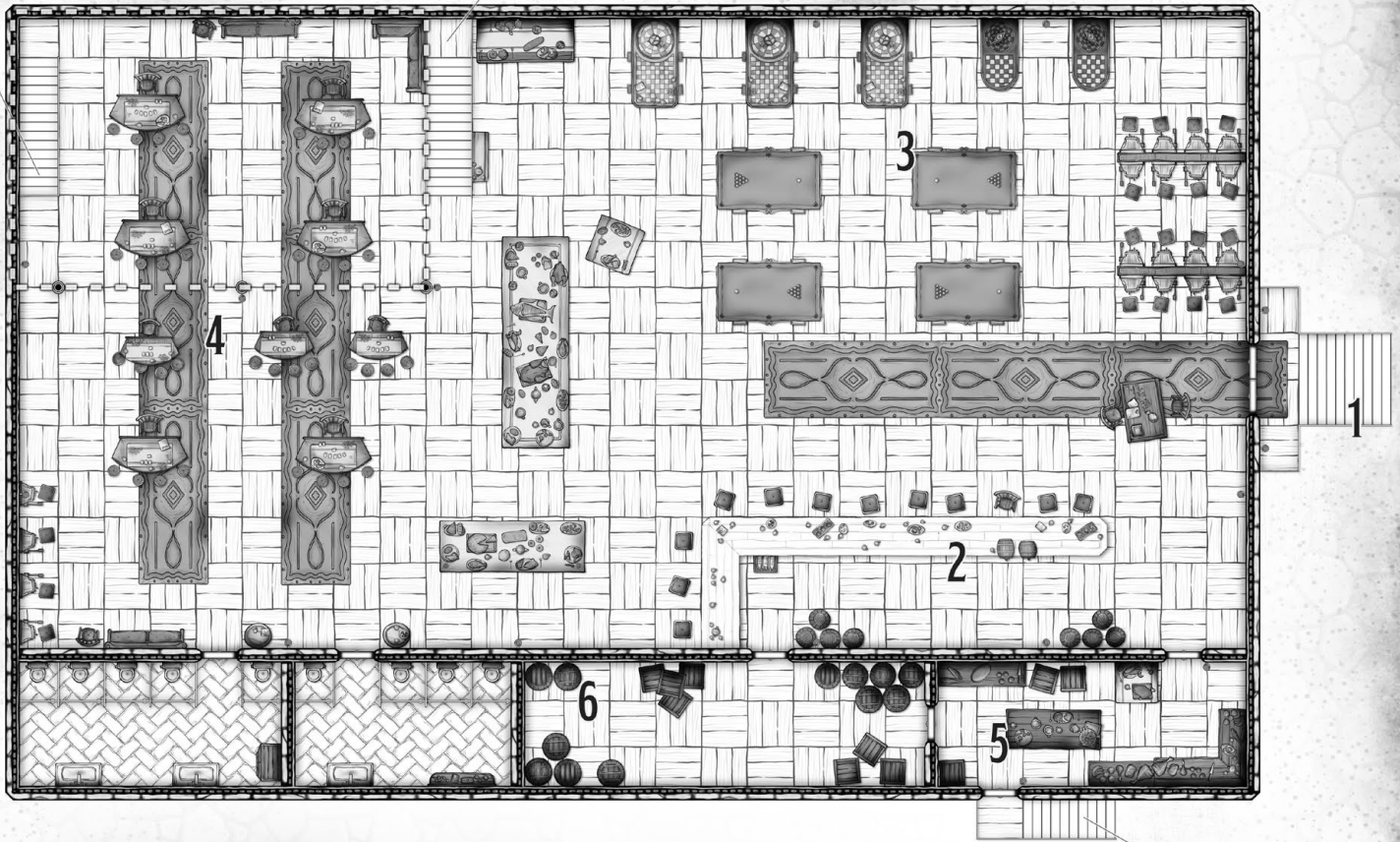
Three elves (**commoners**) work at the bar. They supply an endless amount of alcoholic drinks for all visitors at no cost. The elves are talkative but they are loyal to the Tigerpaw Clan and won't speak ill of Ariadne or the clan. If handled by a persuasive individual (DC 17 Persuasion), the elves reveal that Mrs. Sasaki is currently in her office because a group of high-ranking citizens is scheduled to visit the casino in a few hours. She always accompanies them during their nights of splurging money.

## 3. GAMBLING AREA

Five roulette tables, four billiard tables, and an arrangement of sixteen slot machines provide endless entertainment to inebriated visitors. A smart individual notices that both the roulettes and the slot machines are rigged to produce a certain result every five games (DC 20 Perception), heavily tilting the odds in the house's favor.

TO BASEMENT

TO OFFICE



STAFF ENTRANCE

TO MAIN HALL



# TIGERPAW CASINO

## 4. BLACKJACK TABLES

*Two rows of card-game tables are arranged from north to south. Those playing utter screams of excitement, anticipation, and despair in equal measure.*

A line of banquet tables separates the blackjack tables from the gambling section (area 3). A squad of waiters keeps the banquet full and everyone's glasses filled.

Ariadne Sasaki's office is over the northwest section of this area, overseeing most of the establishment. A flight of stairs leads to the only entrance. The second flight of stairs leads to the basement. There is a wine cellar and a secret exit that can be used to reach the city sewers. Most people here play blackjack, poker, and a popular local game called Dragon's Tail. At least forty people sit or stand by the play tables, enjoying the night.

## 5. KITCHEN

*Cooks and assistants work tirelessly to cater to all of the casino's visitors. They prepare high-end dishes with rare ingredients. The chef, a cat-folk in red robe and hat, is the captain of this entire operation.*

Baku, the cat-folk (**commoner**), is a renowned chef who used to work at the king's kitchens a few years ago. Many say he has the best palate in the region. His services can only be afforded by the likes of Ariadne Sasaki. Baku is loyal to the clan and doesn't allow outsiders within the kitchen. He reports strange behavior to Ariadne at once.

## 6. STORAGE ROOM

The room stores all kinds of edible goods, alcoholic beverages, and extra furniture for the casino hall. The dark place is in disarray and in need of deep cleaning.

## 7. ARIADNE SASAKI'S OFFICE

*The cruel woman they call the 'Creeping Death' sits behind a large wooden desk surrounded by her loyal bodyguards. Ariadne's gaze is hateful and determined to defend her position of utter authority and power.*

Ariadne's desk is a work of art created by a skilled craftsman. The oak piece of furniture features delicate carvings that display the Tigerpaw Clan sigil and scenes of a blade-wielding woman in varied battle postures.

The casino's earnings are moved each hour from the reception desk to the safe box next to Ariadne's desk. It contains a small fortune, the deed to the casino, and a few trinkets that have sentimental value to Ariadne.

If the characters climb to Ariadne's office to confront her, they find her surrounded by an entourage of two **thugs**, one **priest**, and one **cult fanatic**. Each of them has proved their loyalty to Ariadne more than once and are trusted advisors in her business endeavors. She considers them friends and integral parts of her work.

Ariadne Sasaki does not suffer fools and is not initially open to negotiations. She sees the characters' intrusion as a terrible insult. She draws her blade and charges into battle, along with her bodyguards. The two thugs in area 1 rush to battle two rounds later. If Ariadne drops to half her hit points, she offers a deal. She shall pay the characters double the bounty they were promised in exchange for capturing the leaders of the coalition. If the characters refuse, she flees through the sewers access in the basement described in area 4 to plot her revenge.

## TACTICS

Ariadne Sasaki (**veteran**) does not fear soiling her hands. She draws her blade, curses the characters for their reckless actions, and charges forward. Her entourage of bodyguards tries to protect her from harm. The **priest** casts *spirit guardians* to keep the characters at bay and uses *dispel magic* to nullify any buffs on them or their weapons. The **cult fanatic** casts *hold person* on the strongest character to keep them out of the battle.

## FEATURES OF THE CASINO

**Lights.** Sconces with *continual flame* spells illuminate the casino. The magic fades after one minute if removed.

**Ambiance.** The crowded casino has at least fifty customers in the main hall at any given time. If a battle starts, most of these people flee in a panicked state. There is a 2-in-6 chance that 1d6 **commoners** and 1d3 **bandits** remain to help Ariadne's enforcers out of sheer loyalty or to prove themselves to the Tigerpaw Clan's leader.

**Treasure.** Executing Ariadne or presenting her to the coalition of city-folk allows the characters to collect the 1,800 gp reward. The safe box in area 7 contains 8,600 gp. The small safe box at the reception desk in area 1 contains 600 gp. The underworld and some nobles rise against the characters if they take Ariadne's wealth.

**Injustice.** If Ariadne is arrested, the citizens attempt to behead her the next morning. Unfortunately, they are stopped by the corrupt city watch. They rescue Ariadne Sasaki and restore her to her former position of power.





# EMBRACING PULP!

*A GM supplement about heroic style of play by Alex Rinehart*

Dungeons & Dragons has a long history of pulling from pulp, and there's no better way to revive the genre than in your games! Pulp stories focus on the action above all else, featuring fast-paced drama, over-the-top villains, and high-octane, simple plots that don't leave time for nuance or questions.

**CRITICALLY, PULP TALES** cross genres. They blend sci-fi, horror, fantasy, and romance with things like drugs, crime, and other sordid affairs. These books were cheap, popular, and entertaining. There is certainly a time for a years-long, slow-burning tale of intrigue. But other times you just want to punch a crime boss in the snout, take the money, and run to the next adventure.

The question is: *How you can we bring this genre back?*

## **SIMPLE, ZANY VILLAINS**

It may come as a surprise but none of your campaigns needs a 'Thanosesque' mastermind who plots and weaves together storylines. Just someone comically evil with a straightforward plan. Give me 'Grobnar, the Dog-eater', or Baron Incubus who wants to summon an eldritch horror to usher in a reign of terror. Forget the twists and mysteries, and focus on straightforward villainy that can be stopped with a well-aimed sword.

But even if the villain is easy enough to understand, that doesn't mean getting to them should be painless.

## **CLASSIC TRAPS**

In the wilderness, bring back everything you practiced for when you were in elementary school. For instance, giant pits of quicksand, moats filled with hungry alligators, erupting geysers of hot steam, pits full of angry snakes, and volcanoes spewing out molten lava! Make it a thrilling challenge to jump and dodge from place to place, overcoming the obstacles. Just like with villains, the threat should be obvious, clear, and straightforward. Which is *not* the same as easy to overcome!

## **BOOBY-TRAPPED FORTRESSES**

And once you get inside the villain's lair, there's an opportunity for even more classic shenanigans: bookshelves that hide secret passageways, fake walls, and mirrors that act as spy-holes to another room. Clue-style shortcuts from opposite corners of the house... include it all! Channel your inner Scooby-Doo personality and have staircases turn into ramps, depositing hapless adventurers into basements or cells where kidnapped nobles are waiting to be rescued. Bring out your enormous swinging boulders, spike pits, and wall darts that trigger from a pressure plate on the floor. *SWISH, SWISH*, as the blades pendulum in front of your players, daring them to dive between them for treasures beyond!



## JADED, WITH EMOTIONS ON YOUR SLEEVE

Pulp heroes are just as important as the plot and setting they inhabit. Characters tend to have a lot of history to them, but nothing too complex (are you seeing a pattern?). Let's take for example a broken marriage, an arrest record, or a past better left forgotten. They are world-weary and cynical, but happy to let everyone know it. Hence, old flames may reappear at the worst possible time: if you're a player in a pulp game, talk to other party members about how you might have met each other. Perhaps this is not the first time you work together.

► *Were you married to a member of the team, and this is your first job together since things went bad?*

► *Is a team member responsible for the time you spent behind bars or did they betray you in the past?*

► *Do all people in the group have dark pasts? How far can you trust these people if they're scoundrels like you?*

(Come up with your own questions to stir the situation!) These questions allow you to lead with your doubt, but at the same time, they never stop you from moving forward to the next obstacle. After all, in a fantasy world, there are great treasures to acquire and evil to be vanquished!

## ANYTHING GOES!

Genre is a suggestion in the world of pulp fiction. Forget about what "makes sense" and focus on what's cool. You want ghosts? Great, even Shakespeare had ghosts. Dinosaurs? Aliens? Demonic rituals? Why not?! You name it, you call it. Mix your guns and laser swords and toss them together into a soup. Just remember to crank the intensity up. For instance, light things on fire and make them crash together. Keep the settings interesting and dangerous at all times. There's no budget here, no pressure. So wheel out your best set pieces—your pyramids and ziggurats, your magic portals, and abandoned ancient cities. Dark caves filled with wondrous crystals and scheming foes: there's a place for it all in pulp.

The tropes are classic for a reason. Borrow and steal from everything. Watch an Indiana Jones flick or even Duck Tales. Or stop by a used book store and grab a classic pulp book. It doesn't matter which, just grab a cover that interests you and explore it. Stick with a classic, like Conan or something by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Or grab something more modern, a James Patterson or Craig Schaefer. If you subscribe to *Kindle Unlimited*, it is full of modern stories in the pulp tradition. Forget about politics and the real world. Embrace Saturday morning cartoonish villainy with places like the Isle of Skills. Grab something for inspiration, file off the serial numbers, and make everything large, clear, and in-your-face. It'll be a change of pace that everyone will be sure to love!





# THE ELEGY OF QUEEN AZALEA

Those who gather here to ask Queen Azalea for their favor must first know the suffering and sorrow of her eternal seclusion to the verdant nature.

Old Translation from the Language of Rain

## Delve Level 3 (850 XP)

1 centaur  
1 dryad  
4 sprites

## SETUP

**THERE IS AN** old tale of a woman who gave up everything in her life to truly understand the plights of nature. Queen Azalea was an elvish royal with a vibrant love for nature and the silent and eon-long languages of the trees and the soil. She could almost hear the mute symphonies of the wind against the trees, and the tunes of the ground as it made way for seedlings and worms. But she did not hear it all. Not in her corporeal, humanoid form.

Queen Azalea mustered countless elf mages to help her cast a powerful incantation that would combine her soul with that of the forest and all living beings in the area. Her friends and family pleaded with her and tried to convince her not to go through with this crazy idea. But no one could change her mind. Her determination to become one with nature and become an immortal fixture of the world had no limit. The spell worked and Queen Azalea's corporeal existence ended abruptly. Her soul fused to the largest oak tree in the rainforest which now brandished her fine features on the rough bark.

Those that mourned her passed away millennia later. Their saddened souls became one with the endless rain that falls on the forest. Acute ears can hear a sorrowful, elvish, elegy that speaks of the queen's sacrifice and her unending love for nature and the little forest creatures. Legend has it that pilgrims from all over the world travel to the rainforest to petition Queen Azalea for a cure to an ailment or health problem. The fabled fae spirit is supposedly able to provide a cure to any disease or problem.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

**THIS ADVENTURE REWARD** is not monetary but rather magical. The characters must rush to the rainforest and carry an ill party member or friend. Curing their friend is out of the scope of their abilities and only a higher being can help them. The characters manage to save a loved one from the grasp of death itself.

## History Check

**DC 12:** *There are popular tales of pilgrims who visited Queen Azalea's shrine in the rainforest. They looked for a cure to a strange disease or to heal a person's body. Some stories are down-to-earth recounts while others are fantastic and involve numerous fae creatures.*

**DC 15:** *The old tales are true. There is a shrine in the rainforest where a powerful spirit resides. The spirit of Queen Azalea doesn't help for free, though. Petitioners must endure some trials. A test for the body and the mind. Each test is tailored to the supplicants according to their capacities. Thus, not all trials are the same.*

**DC 18:** *Queen Azalea was once an elf of royal origin. She left her family and friends behind to become one with the rainforest and protect it for eternity. On rainy days, an elegy of her olden days can be discerned from the rain drops. It supposedly hides the secret of a powerful spell.*

## 1. RAINFOREST TRAIL

*After days of traversing the forest, rain becomes a permanent feature near the queen's shrine. A faint melody hides behind the sound of falling droplets.*

The journey through the dense forest is safe from wandering animals or other threats. The queen's forest is a haven for travelers and petitioners. Those who concentrate on the rain sound can make out the hidden tune, the Elegy of Queen Azalea (DC 17 Perception). Dozens of voices sing it with deep sadness in their voices. The faint voices sing in an old form of the elvish language.

## 2. TO THE REALM OF FAE

Two trails split from the main path. The northern path leads to Jade Town, a settlement of fae creatures that are loyal to Queen Azalea and protect the forest. The south path leads to a pond that serves as a portal to the Woodlands Realm. It only functions for creatures that have endured the formidable trials of Queen Azalea.

## 3. EVIDENCE OF FAILURE

A mound of bones lies on the forest soil, half buried. They belonged to two travelers who petitioned Queen Azalea to heal a poisoned friend. Sadly they did not survive the test of the body. A physician identifies marks on the bones as arrow wounds (DC 17 Medicine). They perished from the centaur and the sprites' sharp arrows.

#### 4. ECHOES FROM THE PAST

The bodily remains of past petitioners lie on the floor. They failed the test of the body and died from their wounds. When the characters approach, the incorporeal, iridescent manifestations of three elvish ghosts appear. The elves warn the characters in a dull voice:

*The verdant queen shall only help the strong. Turn back if you doubt your abilities and resolve. But do not fear failure either, your remains shall endure the passage of time and become one with the forest.*

The spirits point to the earthly remains of past travelers that litter the damp soil. The spirits vanish after this.

#### 5. SHRINE OF QUEEN AZALEA

A grandiose oak tree by a glowing pond has grown taller than the rest of the forest. The features of a beautiful elf woman are etched on the rough bark's surface.

Standing on the stone circle by the glowing pond causes the water to glow and several spirits to coalesce.

### TEST OF THE BODY

**FAE CREATURES MATERIALIZE** in the forest glade to challenge the adventurers. One **centaur**, four **sprites**, and Queen Azalea (**dryad**) test the characters' physical resilience. They are spirit summonings that do not die if defeated in combat. After succeeding, Queen Azalea tells them that the test of the mind is harsh and difficult to persevere. Queen Azalea tells them to drink a sip of the glowing pond. The characters then fall asleep (no save).

### TEST OF THE MIND

**THE GLOWING POND** of water is mixed with the great oak's tree sap. Drinking it lets a small portion of Queen Azalea's spirit fuse with creatures who drink it. The test of the mind is a strange mental ordeal. Each character takes the form of a tree in the rainforest and experiences its centuries-long life during this dream. The test lasts a few hours but each character experiences centuries of subjective time in the tree form. Such a test of patience is maddening to some individuals. Each player chooses whether their character is mentally strong enough to succeed. On a fail, the character never wakes up.

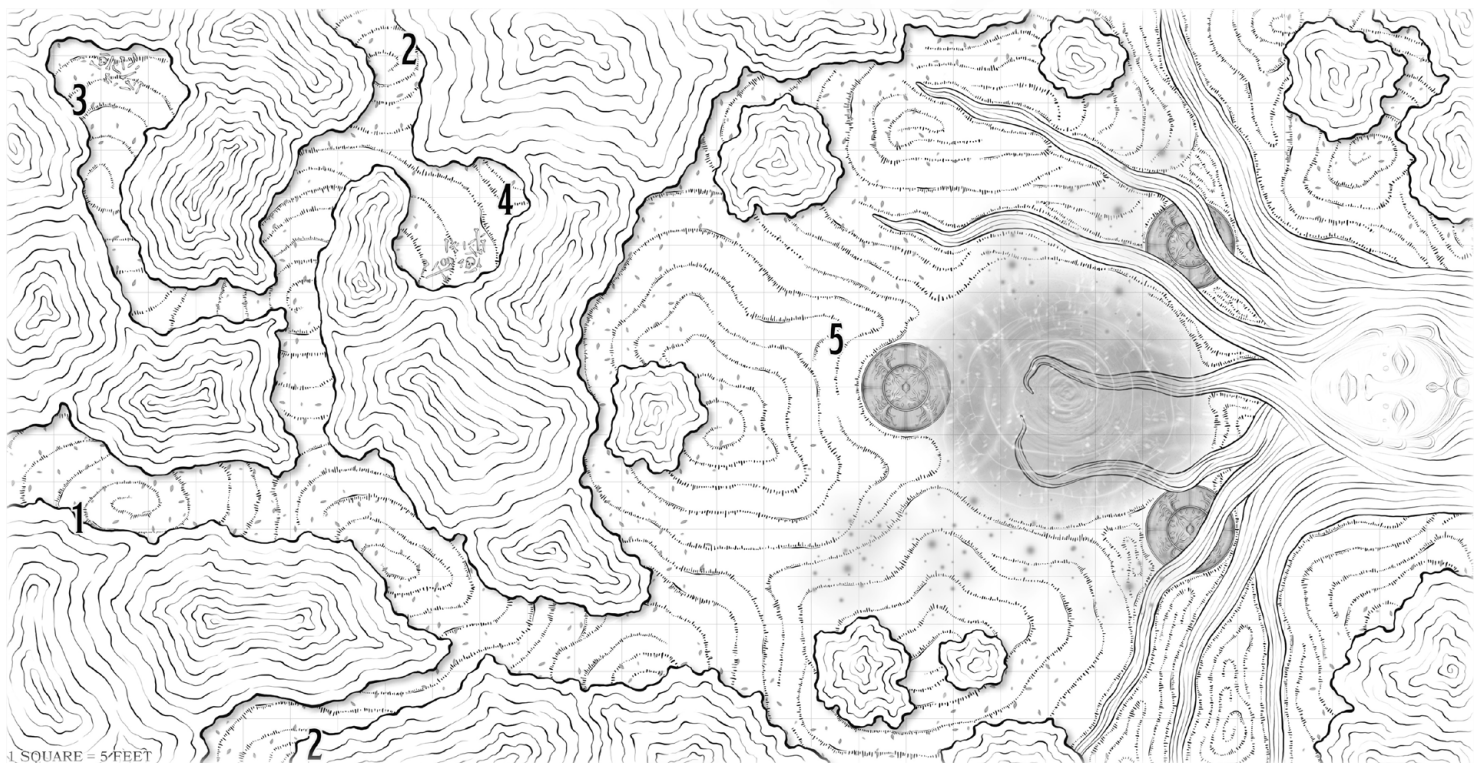
### ADVENTURE FEATURES

**Terrain.** The region around Queen Azalea's shrine is verdant and overgrown. Walking through the narrow passages in the forest is considered difficult terrain.

**The Untouchable Trunk.** The large oak tree that houses Queen Azalea's spirit cannot be touched. A magical force pushes all physical objects outward. It can be felt as far as 20 feet as a wind-like force. It becomes gradually stronger the closer an object moves toward the trunk.

**Lights.** Swarms of fireflies fly around the pond by the sacred tree. They provide dim light during the night.

**Reward.** Enduring both tests earns the queen's favor. Her magic can heal any disease, neutralize any poison, regenerate any body part, or cure petrification. The healed individual is branded with the queen's sigil on their chest. The creature bears this mark from now on.



# BLOOD ON THE SAND

The one survivor barely speaks when asked about that day. “You’ll hear them approach with their horrible shrieks. There is blood on the sand”, He said.

Worried City Guard

## Delve Level 5 (4,125 XP)

1 chuul  
9 giant crabs  
4 beak horrors (hook horrors)

## SETUP

**THE UNFORTUNATE EVENTS** of the world, calamities, or catastrophes do not always have a culprit. Sometimes, the natural flow of things causes dangerous situations for people. For instance, a natural disaster can change the lives of farmers forever. There is little they can do to change or stop it. And such an event has no one to blame. They are just some of life’s many, many challenges.

## A NEW ERA

**THE WAR IS** over. And for the first time longer than they can remember, the nice people of the White Sands Coast lead peaceful lives. Months of calm have allowed them to bloom as a society. New farms and homes start to bloom outside the city walls again. Little by little, the White Sands Coast returns to its prime, before the war.

However, this peace came with a lot of responsibilities. It is hard work to make a town or city thrive. And times after a period of war may be peaceful but the toll to pay for years of violence is high. The land changes. Animals come back to the forests where armies marched and camped. Bees return to the flowers that died under the weight of dead bodies. And the beasts that left these territories go back to their old migrating routes.

## OLD HABITS

**PINO-THEPA IS ONE** of the dozen small settlements of the White Sands Coast. This one is the closest to the beach. Before the war, it was famous for its cozy inns where visitors could enjoy incredible massages and spend some well-earned vacations swimming, resting, and drinking exotic beverages. After the war, people started to return to Pino-Thepa. What they ignore, is that an entire flock of hook horrors chose a spot near the beach to migrate and build their nests. The first poor tourists had no way to know they would become the first victims.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

**THE AUTHORITIES OF** the White Sands Coast have received numerous reports of attacks in Pino-Thepa. People that visit the beach are attacked by feathered monstrosities. A squad of four guards was sent to investigate but none of them returned either. External help is needed now. A reward of 2,000 gp is made public.

The characters hear about the offered bounty or are contacted by a friend on the White Sands Coast and come to Pino-Thepa for the job. They are given directions to the beach. And perhaps, one of the characters already knows useful lore about the place:

### History Check

**DC 12:** *It is normal that people think of going back to Pino-Thepa beach now that the war is over. The small town always was a great spot for tourists and visitors.*

**DC 16:** *Before the war started, many years ago, the news of some poor folks attacked at Pino-Thepa beach reached the authorities of the White Sands Coast. After some investigation, it was discovered that the tourists had walked into the lair of some local beasts known as hook horrors. The city deployed some troops and covered the entrance with rocks. The problem was solved.*

### Nature Check

**DC 12:** *The White Sands Coast is home to many kinds of flora and fauna. One of the indigenous predators of the territories is hook horrors. However, these beasts tend to live underground or near dark cavern networks.*

**DC 16:** *Rare sightings of a new kind of hook horror were reported some weeks ago in the capital. As per the report, the new breed can bear sunlight. Allegedly, but not yet proven, it was said they can also take flight...*

## APPROACHING THE BEACH

**AFTER LEAVING PINO-THEPA,** they must walk for about 10 minutes to get to area 1. It is suggested that they go during the day, when the hook horrors’ sight is weaker, as per common knowledge. Only the breeze and the crash of the waves can be heard. An observant character may notice important details, though (see below).



### Perception Check

**DC 14:** Some large, wide rocks rest about 30 feet beyond the smaller ones at the seashore. However, on a closer look, these are the shells of creatures trying to hide so they can ambush their prey when they get close.

**DC 16:** The hook horror tracks near the palm trees just appear and lead to the caverns. No tracks lead the way back on the sand. Whatever lies within the caves did not walk in. It arrived by flying and landed on the beach first.

### 1. THE BEACH

The beach contains plenty of palms and boulders. If the characters fail to notice the threat and approach the seashore, they are ambushed by one **chuul** and nine **giant crabs**. They flee if reduced to half their HP.

### 2. BLOOD ON THE SAND

*The white, shiny color of the sand changes closer to the caves. The blood on the sand becomes thicker and more abundant at the entrance.*

The presence of the crabs and the chuul is not surprising after the many days of bloody sand and the smell of death (DC 12 Intelligence). Before the characters cross the caverns' threshold, they hear the horrible shrieks of numerous beasts inside. Anyone with a brain can understand they are a warning not to trespass.

Two **hook horror** males survey their home from the sky. They fly in circles a few hundred feet above (DC 18 Perception). If the characters ignore the warning and trespass the monsters' lair, the two males land behind them to block their escape. At the same time, the two **hook horror** females inside charge to defend their eggs.

**Beak Horror.** This new breed of hook horror (see image below) uses the same stats as its regular counterpart but consider the following changes:

- Smaller, leaner. HP: 60 - Fly speed 30 feet.
- No climbing speed. Their lighter bodies make them more fragile. AC: 14 (natural armor).
- No blindsight. Retain their darkvision of 120 feet.
- Eagle eyes. They can discern anything from the sky at a distance of up to 400 hundred feet.
- A raven's mind. Intelligence of 13. They are not mindless beasts (see **An Unexplored Alternative**).
- No Multiattack. However, the beak horror can use its Action to do any of the following:

► **Beak.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

► **Impale.** (Only against prone targets) *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 22 (4d8 + 4) piercing damage. If a Small or Medium creature dies from this attack, its body remains impaled at the monster's beak until it takes an Action to remove it. It cannot attack other targets while a victim remains impaled.

► **Stunning Wings.** The beak horror bats its wings with massive strength. Any creature in a 10-foot-long line in front of the monster is knocked prone (DC 12 Strength). Creatures take 1d6 bludgeoning damage and are stunned for 1 round if they fail by 5 or more.

### 3. BLOOD AND BONES

*The stench here is unbearable. Guts, bones, and giant bird droppings have rotted for days or weeks.*

Staying in this area for more than one round is enough to make anyone empty their vowels (DC 13 Constitution). Countless human and animal bones lay on the floor.



#### 4. HOOK HORROR NESTS

*The blood trail continues to this area of the caverns. Two circles of sand covered with twigs, feathers, bones, and stones form weird-looking nests. Several oversized eggs rest on their centers.*

There are seven eggs divided among both nests. If any of the characters know about the topic, they notice the eggs are a few weeks away from eclosion. But they will surely not survive without their parents (DC 16 Nature).

**Profit.** One of the characters might know, thanks to their questionable connections, that hook horror eggs are a well-appreciated item in the black market of the capital. It is said that it is an ogre's kitchen delicacy. Each egg may be sold for 500 gp each to the right buyer.

**Pet.** One of the characters could opt to raise one of the beak horrors as their exotic pet. This is not out of the scope of the adventure, but any details on the raising and training of the creature are up to the GM's discretion.

#### 5. HIDDEN TREASURE

*A whole chamber hides beyond all the rocks and rubble. Three stone chests lie in the dark. They look as if they have not been touched in decades.*

The characters only find this treasure if they notice the weak spot on the cavern's wall (DC 16 Investigation).

**Treasure.** The characters stumble upon some forgotten pirate's loot. There are two dozen bottles of rum (1,200 gp), a wooden box with several containers with rare spices (450 gp), and some worthless strange objects stored in flasks. There are a couple of leather bags of gold and some small precious stones (1,345 gp).

### TACTICS

**IF NO ONE** approaches the seashore, the crabs wait for the heroes to fight the beak horrors, who often steal their food. They attack the heroes right after they defeat the feathered beasts, in case that happens. The beak horrors fight to the death defending their eggs, inside or outside the caverns. They won't flee under any circumstances. This encounter may be avoided, though (see below).

### AN UNEXPLORED ALTERNATIVE

**IF A DRUID**, a ranger, a barbarian, or any character with a strong connection with nature is present, they may attempt to negotiate and speak with the beak horrors. The monsters do not speak but understand the Common language. They are intelligent enough to understand that humans won't stop attacking until they leave. The beak horrors' priority is their eggs' safety so they accept to move their nests elsewhere and feed on animals only. The heroes get rid of the monsters without violence.



# BLOSSOMING DEATH

'Tis sad... more than anything. We did not ask to be born. We just came to be. Are you here to end our life? The life that was just given to us? Why?

Snowdrop, Bone Tree

**THE CONCEPTS OF** life and death vary depending on the people or culture that studies them. Some people believe in the transcendence of souls. The immortality of mind, they call it. Other cultures honor their dead with rituals and ancient magic. It is not rare for them to speak with those who do not walk among the living anymore. And some believe that death is just the beginning of a new life. The finish line and the start of a never-ending cycle.

## BACKGROUND LORE

**THIS ADVENTURE TAKES** place in Crimsonwall, the capital of the Northern Kingdoms. The hundreds-of-year-old city is home to almost two-hundred-thousand people. But more than a third of them live beyond the walls. Like most large cities, Crimsonwall has a garrison with numerous troops, a well-established government, several guilds, and an entire underground network of sewers.

One of the thousands of people that live in Crimsonwall is a scientist named Matby Bilsen. Today, he is almost fifty years old; his mind and sanity have seen better days. For decades, he studied the growth of plants, trees, and fungi. He became an expert on the topic and performed various somewhat successful experiments. He was known in town for his incredible flowers and plants.

Matby's abilities allowed him to create the unthinkable. With his great knowledge, care, and his secret ingredients (magical components), he managed to make a living selling his beautiful creations. He could create plants with eerie shapes. He had multi-colored flowers that changed their hue throughout the day. Some of his fruit plants had medicinal properties. And he even created a humanoid plant servant once. Although it only lived for 48 hours before collapsing. Some say Matby is a genius.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

**THE AUTHORITIES OF** Crimsonwall offer 3,000 gp to anyone who can stop the horrible plant monstrosities coming from the sewers. The survey reports describe three consecutive days of attacks and numerous city losses. Captain Jayde cannot allow any more of his men to die in vain. He asks the heroes to eliminate all visible threats and arrest the culprit if any. He offers an additional 1,000 gp if they produce a scapegoat to hang in public.

## BEYOND THE ORDINARY

**FIVE DAYS AGO**, while he was promenading, the deranged scientist stared in awe at fungus growing from an animal carcass. He was thus enraptured that he started to experiment with similar phenomena. He isolated and empowered with subtle spells a rare fungal entity. He experimented with it on trees, plants, fungi, and moss patches. The monsters coming from the sewers were created by Matby Bilsen. The city's authorities ignore this. The guards only managed to contain the threat.

### History Check

**DC 14:** *There is a man in Crimsonwall that sells beautiful plants with impossible properties. People claim he is a scientist but that he made a better living selling plants.*

**DC 18:** *The scientist goes by the name of Matby Bilsen. With his abilities, he uses arcane components and creates new breeds of magical plants. Perhaps, this person knows something about the plant monstrosities.*

## FINDING THE CULPRIT

**IF THE CHARACTERS** have the mind to visit Matby's business and home, they find them empty. Both places have been abandoned for a few days (DC 14 Survival). Captain Jayde begs the characters to gather all the info they need so they can get to the sewers fast (see Map 1).

### 1. ENTRANCE

The upper level of the sewers is partially destroyed, with overgrown nature, moss, rubble, and debris scattered all around. The city prefers to spend its limited sewer budget on the lower level where the sewer machinery is.

### 2. THE SKELETON TREES

*All the nature in this area is green on top but becomes ivory white at the trunk and root level. Branches move but do not follow the wind. Flowers turn and gaze at visitors with inhuman eyes that sprout from their cores while skeleton-plant humanoids come forth stumbling from the thickness of the white trees.*

The characters encounter Matby's creations here. These abominations are responsible for the city guards' deaths. Strangely, they wish to parley (see **Sentient Beings**).



## THE DARK DESCENT

IF THE HEROES descend through the well, they reach area 6 in a couple of minutes. The heroes may get lost if they take the south path (DC 17 Survival). On a fail, two **ochre jellies** block their path before they reach area 11.

## SENTIENT BEINGS

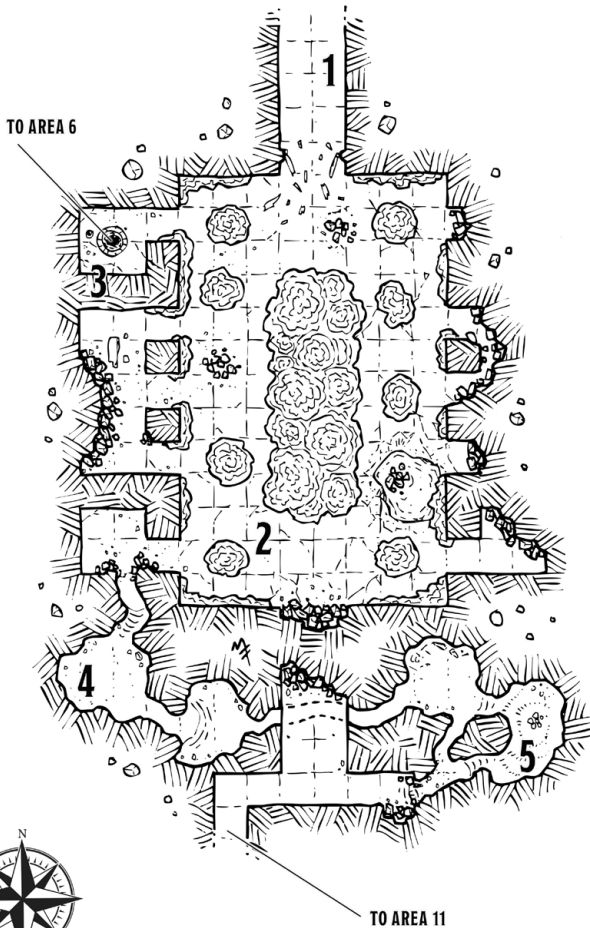
IF THE CHARACTERS attack the meandering creatures in area 2, eight skeleton plants (**skeleton**), four mounds of dead leaves and fungi (**zombie**), and three bone trees (**ghouls**) defend themselves fearlessly. Snowdrop (**ghast**) fights too but begs for mercy and tries to parley.

**Plants.** Use the noted statblock for each monster with the following changes: they are plants. Swords or shields if any, are replaced by claws and natural armor. Abilities are described as if they were empowered by the magical forces or nature. For instance, bone trees paralyze through spores in the same way a ghoul does with a bite.

However, if the heroes do not attack at once, one skeleton plant speaks. Snowdrop, their leader, steps forward and speaks with a spectral, raspy voice:

*“Tis sad... more than anything. We did not ask to be born. We just came to be. Are you here to end our life? The life that was just given to us? Why? Know that, just like you, we would defend ourselves from others that mean us harm, would you not? Know that, we shall fight for our lives if forced to. But truly, we just want peace. We want a chance to... live.”*

See **Friend or Foe** below to know the consequences of whether the heroes fight or listen to Snowdrop’s speech.



### 3. UNUSED WELL

*Rusty steel handles forged to the well’s wall form a ladder. It descends 40 feet into the darkness.*

Captain Jayde mentioned the well is the fastest way to reach the underground sewers levels. After the recent cave-ins, the pathways to the south are now a dark, network of caverns that take five times longer to descend. See the details of the way down in **The Dark Descent**.

### 4. DEATH PROVIDES

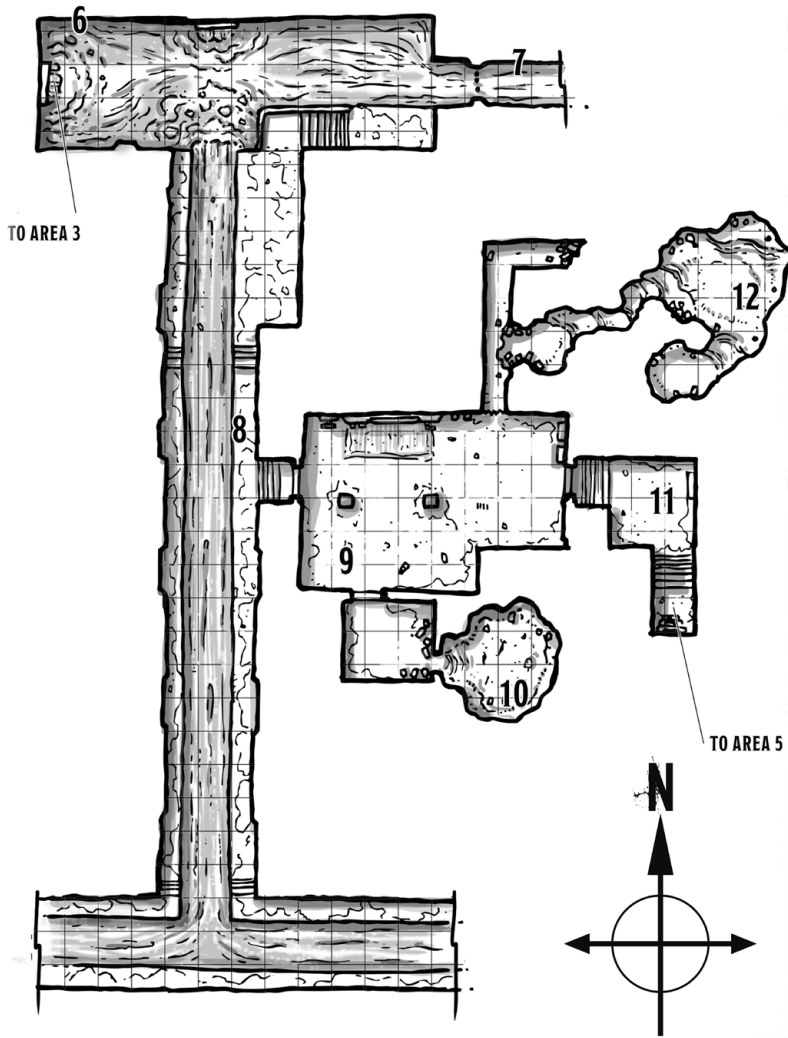
*The bodies of the city guards that fell in battle are here. Thousands of critters walk over their half-eaten corpses. A few gnawed bones litter the cavern.*

If the characters disturb the insects while they eat, three **swarms of centipedes** attack them. The critters flee if they are reduced to half their hit points.

### 5. LOST TREASURE

Recent cave-ins created these parts of the dungeon. If the characters take a minute to explore this place (DC 18 Investigation) or if they use a *detect magic* spell, they find an *immovable rod* that has been lost here for eons.





## FEATURES OF THE SEWERS

**Lights.** There are no light sources in the sewers. The maintenance team brings oil lamps when they come.

**Water Flow.** Creatures in the water are dragged to the steel bars where they stop abruptly and take 2d6 bludgeoning damage (DC 13 Athletics). If they resist, they may swim at half speed to grab a ledge to climb out.

### 1. CITY'S SEWER NETWORK

The descent through the well's ladder is dark and uneventful. The heroes must jump into the water, though. The well leads to the westernmost side of area 6.

### 2. STEEL BARS

*The lifeless body of a person floats by the bars. Bones are showing where whole body parts were eaten. Small, ravenous fish splash all around.*

Two **swarms of quippers** feast on the floating corpse. If characters are dragged by the water (see **Features of the Sewers**), they are attacked as well. The carnivore fish do not chase non-bleeding creatures beyond the bars.

### 3. SEWER CANALS

*The voice of a man chants an incantation in an ancient tongue. The sounds of cracking wood, moving leaves, and the unsettling, cracking scream of a tree come from beyond the door next to the stairs.*

These levels are in much better condition than their counterparts above. The east door is locked (DC 16 Thieves' Tools) but the heroes may hack it down or attempt to force it open with sheer strength (DC 18 Athletics).

### 9. A DERANGED MIND

Matby became scared and traumatized when the sentient plants talked to him. It was too much for him to witness this; he desperately sought a way to undo it.

The scientist came up with a way to replicate the experiment but erase the sentient factor and succeeded. The mindless plants do not speak but obey all of Matby's commands. If the characters attempt to talk with Matby, his yelled replies are deranged and insane. Four skeleton plants (**skeleton**), six mounds of dead leaves and fungi (**zombie**), two bone trees (**ghouls**), and Matby (**druid**) fight. See the **Conclusion** for Snowdrop's involvement.

## FRIEND OR FOE

If the heroes kill Snowdrop and all the plants, they descend to the sewers with no information on Matby. However, if they hear Snowdrop out, they learn the following:

- Matby created Snowdrop and most of the other plants a few days ago. They are sentient beings that mean no harm to others unless attacked.
- Matby's ambition did not stop. He wanted complete control over the plants. Snowdrop and their friends retaliated and resisted so he left them here.
- In the sewers below, the crazy scientist has created a mindless version of them. He can command those plants to do his bidding. Snowdrop and their friends have defended themselves against Matby's goons from the south, and the city guards that came from the north in the past few days.

Snowdrop begs the heroes to stop Matby, their creator, and the new mindless abominations with him. If the characters did not kill any of Snowdrop's kin, the plants offer to help confront the crazed Matby (see **Conclusion**).

This adventure belongs to a series of collaborative projects that involve other Patreon creators. This one-shot adventure features work by [Elven Tower](#) and [Miska Fredman](#). Check out their Patreon pages for tons of adventures and great cartography!

## 10. ARCANE MYCELIA

*This room contains worthless tools and maintenance equipment for the sewers. A recent cave-in revealed a small cavern with bio-luminescent fungi.*

This breed of fungus is a rare arcane component for spells and powerful druidic concoctions (DC 17 Nature / Survival). A *detect magic* spell also reveals the faint magical properties of the fungi mass. The characters may gather all the healthy 'shrooms in 10 minutes (500 gp).

## 11. OLD RUINED PATHWAYS

If the heroes take the south path to descend to the sewers they eventually get here. Their confrontation with Matby occurs in the same way as it is described in area 9. However, if the heroes arrive from here, Matby attempts to flee when the battle turns against him. If able, he escapes through the southern sewer canals.

## 12. KOBOLD RUINS

*The caverns have sets of steps that were carved on the rough rock soil. They seem too small for humans.*

A clever character recognizes the steps perhaps belong to a by-gone civilization of goblins or kobolds (DC 14 Intelligence). If the heroes spend 10 minutes searching this place (DC 18 Investigation), they find an ancient, golden draconic medallion (350 gp), a small bag with 300 gp worth of diamond dust, and an opal (150 gp).

# CONCLUSION

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

## A JOB WELL DONE

The characters do not negotiate with Snowdrop and get rid of all of Matby's creations, sentient or not. They manage to arrest Matby and bring him to Captain Jayce unscathed. The heroes are paid 4,000 for an impeccable job and are invited to Matby's public execution the next morning. The characters may never learn what they could have accomplished if they had just listened.

## AN INFANT RACE

The characters hear Snowdrop out and protect him and the sentient plants from their mindless counterparts and Matby. Regardless of whether the characters arrest the druid or not, Snowdrop asks them to help them adapt to their new life and introduce them to the world. They name themselves the Barkvory race. Crimsonwall historians and researchers are more than glad to help them. This altruistic quest shall be an adventure for another day (The details of this are up to the GM's discretion).

## LOOSE ENDS

If Matby manages to escape, he will remember the faces of those who ruined his plans and projects. He shall return with more powerful monsters and take revenge!



# THE TAUNTERS

*An urban criminal faction by DM Ninetoos82*



The Taunters are Pamor's most powerful thieves' guild. If something illegal takes place in the City of Shores, the Taunters will have a hand in it, and if they don't? Well, then woe betide the fool who crossed them.

Come one, come all! The Taunters don't see race or creed. As far as they're concerned, a crook's a crook.

Once upon a time, the Taunters were Thought Thieves and the most notorious of rogues, spoken of in hushed tones and considered only a myth by most. This of course was all part of their power and only those with the most powerful minds and strongest of wills survived their initiation. Those who did survive became masters of psionic abilities, able to enter a person's mind and take whatever information they chose. Amongst the few who know of the mysterious group, they would say that you were lucky if the Taunters left anything of yourself.

Now, however, the Taunters appear to be little more than a band of thugs and scoundrels. A large group, outweighing their nearest competitor with between one to two hundred members in Pamor. But of course, one doesn't list oneself as a thief on the census; does one?

## CORE PRINCIPLES

To be one of the Taunters is to askew the law of the land, but that does not, by any means, imply that they are without morals or a code, regardless of its values.

## INDEPENDENCE

In the modern world, every man must stand for himself. The rich are the real thieves and only the strong survive. A Taunter sees the world this way. Call it what you like, for a Taunter, success is only for those willing to take it!

## PRAGMATISM

Planning for a rainy day is all well and good but a man's gotta eat. And although few adhere to religion, most Taunters pray to Ryuna, the Goddess of Luck. This is because they believe it never hurts to cover your bets.

## FREEDOM

Taunters are pretty straightforward people. So long as you ain't dangling from a rope or chained up to a wall, the world's your oyster. You're a Taunter, go taunt.

## LEADERSHIP

The real identity of the Taunters' leader remains unknown to this day. He is called the Stanchon (*Stanche-own*). This reclusive leader decides the path of the Taunters and he is responsible for ensuring that everyone profits from jobs, from their organized coups, and the organization in general. Only the Day Master and Night Master know Stanchon's identity. The two of them run the Taunters' day-to-day business (or night-to-night). Dolling out Stanchon's instructions and tips to the leaders of the main groups within the Taunters.

## STRUCTURE

The Taunters are divided into four main groups. Each of these sub-divisions has its own leader.

### THE BRAWNS

This group is by far the largest and least secretive of the Taunters. They provide muscle in high numbers, they run protection rackets, and also act as highwaymen (and women) on the roads that lead into the City of Shores.

The kind of NPCs found within this group would be **bandits**, **thugs**, and **berserkers**. They are led by the mighty Kaladan (CN, male dragonborn **gladiator**).

### THE CONS

The Cons are the charlatans, shysters, and tricksters. If the Watch is investigating a con being run, a heist underway, or a scam taking place, one can conclude it has nothing to do with the Cons; these guys are as slippery as a recently caught eel. They leave no tracks.

The kind of NPCs found within this group would be **nobles**, **spies**, and **acolytes**. They are led by the illusionist Quiller, the Red (N, female gnome **mage**).

### THE LIFTERS

There is not a safe, vault, or strongroom that these thieves cannot force open. These make up the burglars, pickpockets, and tea-leafs of the Taunters.

The kind of NPCs found within this group would be **scouts**, **spies**, and **goblins**. They are led by the exotic beauty Takisha (CG, female human **assassin**).

## THE PENSIEVES

Little to nothing is known about the most secretive group of the Taunters. Few amongst the guild itself are aware of its presence, and those that have heard of it believe they are simply a legend to keep the rank and file in their proper place. A complete mystery for commonfolk.

They are real, however, and although far fewer in number and certainly less active than the other groups, the Pensieves are by far the most profitable. These Pensieves are the last of the great Thought Thieves.

The NPCs found in this group could be any of the above or none of them (see **pensieve acolyte** statblock).

They are led by Morthos Ambition, about whom little to no information is known. The leader of mysteries.

## TAUNTERS HEADQUARTERS

The Taunters have dozens of hideouts, safehouses, and bases hidden in plain sight all over the portside metropolis of Pamor, but it is widely known that they have no established headquarters. People started to believe this because of the Thought Palace stories and rumors.

As tall a tale as any that has ever been spun by the Cons, the story goes that the leaders of the Taunters never meet in person, in secret, or otherwise. Instead, the rumors claim that they meet within a fortress made of pure thought. There is no proof of this to this day, though.

It is said, albeit only in whispers, that anything can become real in this place of ideas and that the Stanchon can bring anything into reality simply by wishing it true.

## GUILD PERKS

It is not out of the scope of an adventurer's life to become a member of the Taunters. They would gain certain benefits but they all, of course, come with a price.

**Special Assignments.** A member of the Taunters might be asked to help with an ongoing heist with the Lifters. Or perhaps enforce some brutal justice with the Brawns. They might be assigned to attend a masquerade ball to help the Cons. Or they might even, should they be so gifted, be invited to work with the Pensieves. The Taunters know how to reward a job well done.

**Stolen Goods.** A Taunter would have access to a syndicate of fences for selling stolen goods or even sourcing a particular magic item or piece of information. Use this as an alternative adventure hook for your campaign.

**Lying Low.** If the characters need to lay low after a dangerous quest, the Taunters can offer safety and solace while the heroes are being looked for. A place in a safe-house or protection for an important NPC perhaps. The Taunters will surely ask for something in return.

## PENSIEVE ACOLYTE

*Medium humanoid (any race), any neutral alignment*

**Armor Class** 13 (leather armor)

**HP** 33 (6d8 + 6)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+2)	14 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+0)	10 (+1)	14 (+0)

**Skills** Arcana +3 Deception +4, Persuasion +4

**Senses** passive Perception 11

**Languages** Common. Can communicate telepathically with any creature within 30 ft.

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Stillness of Mind.** The pensieve has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

**Innate Spellcasting (Psionics).** The pensieve spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components:

(At will): *mage hand* (the hand is invisible), *vicious mockery* (1/day each): *command*, *inflict wounds*, *shield of faith* (1/day each): *detect thoughts*, *hold person*, *spiritual weapon*

### Actions

**Multiattack.** The pensieve acolyte makes two attacks.

**Psychic Dagger.** *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) psychic damage.

Pensieve Acolytes are the lowest ranks of the Pensieves and as such, they have only managed to fashion their thoughts into daggers. But they are still sharp and lethal.

Nonetheless, a Pensieve is unlikely to face an opponent in open combat. They'd rather use deception or manipulation. Such powers make them a far more dangerous foe. They always shift the field to their advantage.





# CURSE OF THE OBSIDIAN IDOL

Ask and you shall receive the tools to do it. But fail on your task and your life shall be forfeit. Your soul shall be imprisoned in a delicate obsidian effigy.

Old Adage

## Delve Level 6 (4,900 XP)

1 knight  
6 shadows  
2 wraith

## SETUP

**EMPOWERED TO SUCCEED**, mortals go to unimaginable lengths to fulfill their dreams. Few obstacles can stop a determined individual. But when that happens, the insurmountable weight of failure and sorrow is strong enough to crush any person. Few climb out of the bottomless pit that lifelong failure is. And those who do become disgusting husks of their former selves.

An ancient, ageless, demonic entity pondered this subject for decades. Marveled by the determination of humankind, the demon tinkered with ways to lure them and seduce them with hollow promises. To offer them something of apparent value that would undoubtedly bring them closer to their demise. The demon had limited influence in the world of men but through clever spells, incantations, and its agents in the Material Realm, a cursed shrine in the forest depths was built. In its center, a deformed, looming, obsidian statue rises among the desiccated trees. Rumors about the shrine were spread to lure hapless people into the forest depths. Kneeling by the strange obsidian effigy, people prayed and made all kinds of wishes to the obscure figure. A spectral voice answered their prayers with a magical contract:

*You've come this far to ask for help. I shall aid you but the price is steep for those who have all to lose. Fail this quest and your soul shall be mine to keep. Succeed, and you alone shall reap the benefits...*

And so, countless people have come throughout the ages to recite their ultimate wish. The obsidian idol always provides the tools or abilities to fulfill their desires but the individuals must work and succeed by themselves. Some have done so and are better for it. But true determination is a rare quality; most people ultimately failed despite having the tools to achieve victory. Their souls now reside in one of the twelve obsidian trinkets that surround the strange demonic statue. Myth became a legend and now people in the area think the place is cursed.

## THE MOURNING KNIGHT

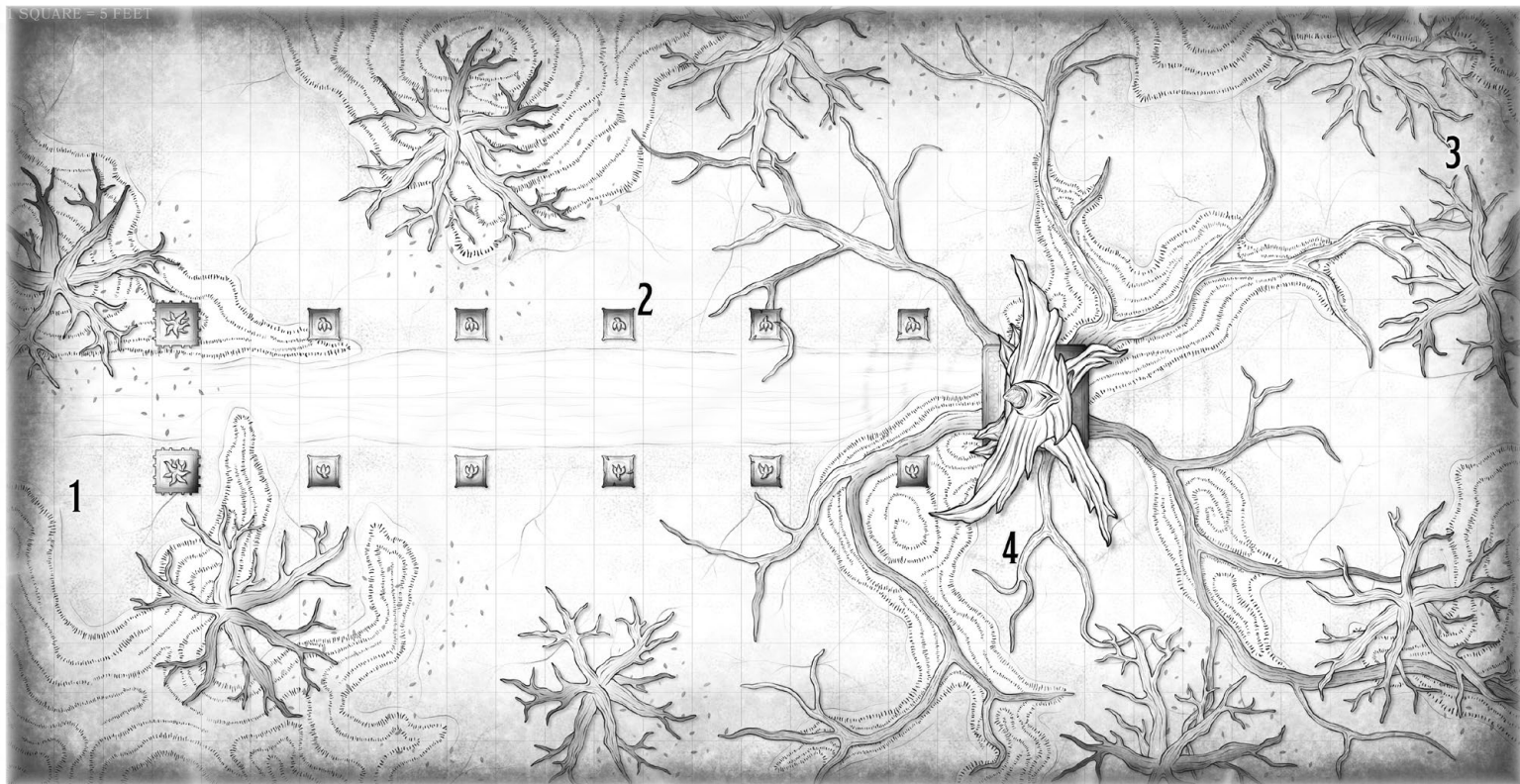
A **RETIRED KNIGHT** mourns the untimely death of his only son. Sir Garret is a renowned warrior and a hero of war. His son, Dante, could not endure living under his father's shadow as he failed to live up to the expectations of everyone around them. Dante heard the legends about the cursed idol in the Shriveled Forest and its ability to make people's desires come true. He visited the obsidian statue and desired to be better and more respected than his father, Sir Garret. The statue gifted young Dante a magical sword and promised it would be enough to earn him such success. Weeks later, Dante and two friends tried to collect a best-hunting contract and found their way to the lair of a ravenous chimera. The three young men died horrible deaths fighting the merciless monster.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

Sir Garret offers a reward of 1,000 gp to escort him to the obsidian idol's statue where he intends to find a way to bring his boy back to life. He means well his mental state makes him susceptible to the demon's ploys.







### History Check

**DC 12:** *The legend of the cursed obsidian idol is a cautionary tale that often describes a person asking for wish to the statue in the Shriveled Forest. The wish is always misconstrued and turned on the petitioner, causing terrible results. The moral of the story is that cheating one's way around hard work always leads to unwanted results.*

**DC 15:** *The children's tale is based on something real. There is an obsidian shrine in the depths of the Shriveled Forest where countless pilgrims have traveled to pray to a strange figure that historians cannot identify. The results of these prayers are unknown.*

**DC 18:** *Obscure elvish tomes describe that an otherworldly entity can communicate through the obsidian effigy. People are rewarded for their devotion but it is understood that their souls are the true currency here.*

### 1. THE SHRIVELED FOREST

The characters accompany Sir Garret through the forest to find the obsidian shrine. The demonic aura in the shrine causes all plant life within a mile to shrivel and die. The characters approach the shrine in this grim scenario of desiccated trunks, dead plants, and the skeleton remains of numerous forest creatures. A *detect magic* spell reveals a faint aura of necromancy that grows stronger as the characters approach area 1.

Careful exploration of the forest reveals that animals in the area leave deformed footprints; their droppings also indicate dehydration and bad health (DC 14 Nature). Strangely enough, a narrow trail leads east. This path takes the characters directly to the obsidian shrine.

### 2. THE OBSIDIAN TRINKETS

*Two rows of granite plinths hold a decadent collection of obsidian figurines. Each roughly resembles a headless human form. The trinkets produce a warm glow that paints objects around them scarlet.*

The souls of countless individuals lay trapped inside the obsidian figurines. Looking into any of them for at least 1 minute allows a person to see the tormented faces of the souls trapped within. One hour of meditation allows for telepathic communication with them too. Alas, most souls utter unintelligible nonsense as their minds have gone insane after their eternal imprisonment.

The souls can be released by destroying each trinket but only adamantite tools or weapons can achieve this. Attempting to damage any of the obsidian figures causes the guardians to appear at once (see area 4). Souls thus released depart to the higher planes and are available for resurrection magic after one year of rest.

### 3. BLIGHTED FLORA

The forest features all manners of flora and fungal life. However, within 100 feet of the obsidian idol, the few remaining living organisms have adapted to withstand the aura it radiates. Some have grown resistant to the magic, while others are infused by it. Resistant plants can be crafted into gear and potions that bestow resistance (necrotic). The necromancy-infused plants are poisonous and deadly to consume. They can be processed to produce *Torpor* poison (DC 16 Nature). Ingesting this substance causes nausea and incapacitation.

## 4. THE OBSIDIAN IDOL

*A faceless, fallen angel's statue rises as tall as the desiccated trees that surround it. Trails of heavy mist erupt from its cracked, glass-like surface. Its lack of facial features resembles a bottomless abyss.*

Creatures within 50 feet of the obsidian statue suffer from a strange psychological effect (DC 15 Wisdom). Those affected feel their steps grow heavier as they approach the statue and have a soul-crushing certainty that the statue's faceless gaze follows them around.

Within 20 feet of the statue, the characters and Sir Garret hear the telepathic call of the demonic entity that offers them the tools or power to achieve their goals. Any character can make a wish if they want to. This effect is as powerful as the *wish* spell but the demon is in complete control to decide how to 'help' or 'aid' the character. Ultimately, it is understood that the price for failure is the character's soul, forever imprisoned in the trinkets. The GM should carefully decide how to fulfill the characters' requests to steer them in the right direction while keeping the possibility of their utter failure.

## SIR GARRET'S DEMISE

**THE MOURNING MAN** requests the resurrection of his son. As it is in the demon's power to grant this. The demon gifts the knight a necromancy-infused blade and asks him to exchange his son's life for the characters'. In addition to the blade, the statue's guardians emerge to help Sir Garret succeed. Two **wraiths** and six **shadows** materialize and attack. Remorseful, but determined, Sir Garret (**knight**) turns on the characters and charges!

## DEVELOPMENT

**SIR GARRET ACCEPTED** the demon's evil offer as a last resort to bring his son back to life. For the demon, this is a win-win situation. The characters' souls shall be free for the taking if the knight succeeds. If he fails, the demon keeps both the boy and his dad's souls. And, in this scenario, the heroes could still want the devil's bargain.

In case the characters succeed and defeat poor Sir Garret and the undead creatures, the knight's soul is forfeit. Even if the characters spare his life and attempt to arrest him, the knight is still bound to the demon's contract. After his defeat, Sir Garret's soul is ripped from his body and stored in one of the obsidian trinkets.

Should Sir Garret prevail and defeat the characters with the demon's aid, the characters' souls are imprisoned in the trinkets forever. The demon is uncannily true to its word and brings young Dante back to life.

## FEATURES OF THE FOREST

**Terrain.** Square partially occupied by roots, trunks, or plinths is considered difficult terrain.

**The Statue.** The obsidian idol can be damaged and destroyed with weapons or tools. However, the magic stored in the trinkets is used to repair it each dawn. The statue cannot be destroyed before the trinkets.

**Lights.** Sunlight cannot pierce the necromancy aura in this part of the Shriveled Forest. Only the warm light that the obsidian trinkets produce can be seen in the shrine.

**Reward.** Sir Garret carries the 1,000 gp he promised to the characters as he truly intended to pay them.



# TREE OF LOST DREAMS

The landscapes and events of all dreams are real. They did occur somewhere; and the tree holds all their significant meanings. You shall learn that here...

The Elder Oneiromancer

**GENERATION AFTER GENERATION**, the subject of dreams has enraptured the minds of all manner of scholars, researchers, magicians, and even higher beings like fae creatures and dragons. There is something about the oneiroscape that eludes the mind. The fleeting remembrance of dreams after waking up. The impossible landscapes and the strange interactions with the world. It all seems so vivid, and yet, most people discard it as a play-trick of the mind; a past-time of the resting brain.

But some enlightened individuals are privy to the truth. That dreams are in some way real because the sleeping mind journeys to a strange place where the force of will and thought have the power to change the landscape and shape its laws. They call it the Dream Realm. It is a place most people have visited, but only with their minds.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

*Tree of Lost Dreams* is a level 7 adventure that begins with one or any combination of these hooks:

### DREAMS OF THE GREAT TREE

One or more of the characters have a vivid dream where they visit a large hollow tree and meet with a robed figure. The strange being gifts them an ornate, flowery, copper key that feels meaningful in the dream. Upon investigating it, the characters learn about the Tree of Lost Dreams in the depths of the Crabapple Forest.

### FINDING THE TRUE MEANING

Use this adventure as the stepping stone on a larger quest in your campaign. As the GM, you may use this adventure to give the party important information about the quest at large through the form of cryptic visions or half-remembered dreams. The dreams are vivid and leave a sense of longing and desire to know more. After looking into the subject, the characters learn that an obscure figure known as the Elder Oneiromancer resides in the Crabapple Forest and has the gift to re-live dreams and interpret the meaning of oneiric experiences.

### LOOKING FOR THE GATE

The characters look for a way to physically travel to the Dream Realm for reasons pertaining to their overarching campaign. Looking into it, they are sent to look for the Elder Oneiromancer in the Crabapple Forest.

## THE LEGENDARY TREE

**THE TREE OF** Lost Dreams is a temple dedicated to the Dream Realm. It is located in the Crabapple Forest, on the edge of reality; adjacent to the faraway realm of oneiric journeys. It is home to a strange, ancient cabal of otherworldly elders that can interpret dreams or allow others to see their dreams more clearly. Within the great hollow tree, the elders pose riddles and test visitors.

Scholars think they do this to root out those who are unworthy of achieving higher understanding. But their guess is as good as anyone's. The true motives and objectives of the oneiromancers are unknown.

### History Check

**DC 14:** *The grand hollow tree is home to a brotherhood of strange mages that call themselves 'the oneiromancers.' Rumors say that they give meaning to dreams and allow people to commune with their inner selves.*

**DC 18:** *An old elvish tome claims that a portal to the Dream Realm is guarded by the oneiromancers in the tree. It is the only gate in the Material Plane.*

## REACHING THE TREE

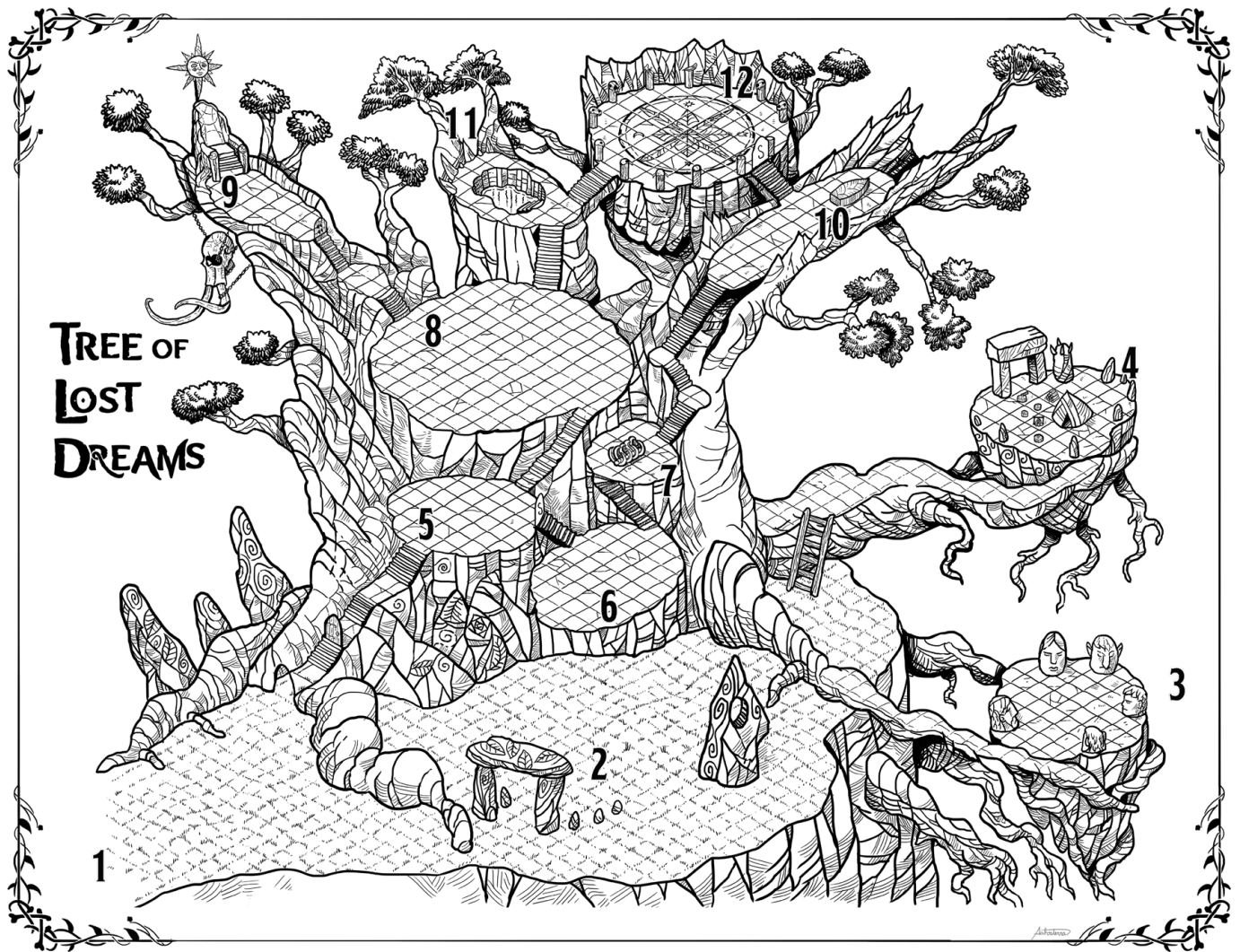
**THE JOURNEY TO** the tree is uneventful and dull. Crabapple Forest is inhabited by mostly harmless creatures and reclusive fae beings that remain out of sight.

### 1. ENTRANCE BY THE ROOTS

The tree of dreams sits on a cliff-top, its roots branch out from the solid stone as if grasping for air. Druidic carvings on the exposed roots and rocks display the dreams of countless individuals. A door in between the roots leads up to the tree. The elder's throne in area 9 is barely visible through the thick mist that envelops the tree.

### 2. TERRACE OF MEDITATION

Several rock formations in the area form a crude observatory. The movements of astral bodies and their names are scripted on the old stones. Careful investigation of the runes reveals that there is a gate in the tree that only activates during the equinoxes. The nearest one is in 2 weeks. There's a 2-in-6 chance that a satyr from area 4 is found meditating by the ancient observatory.



### 3. VOICES FROM THE PAST

*Five 3-foot-tall, stone heads form a circle in a chunk of rock suspended in mid-air, supported only by two roots. The heads' eyes move as if following the wind.*

The souls of five elf scholars inhabit these rocks. They are experts on the subject of dreams as they have dedicated countless years to study here in the tree. They cannot, however, give the characters the true interpretation of a dream. If the characters stay to converse, they can learn the story of the tree about the oneiromancers.

### 4. VISITORS' CAMP

There is a permanent camp at the end of a thick root that supports a chunk of flat rock. At any given time, there are at least three other people in the camp. Satyrs frequent it because their village is less than a day away. A satyr and an elf play dice and bet who will be the first to have an audience with the elder. From them, the characters learn that all petitioners must succeed in the elders' tests if they are to secure an audience in the throne room.

### 5. THE SPHINX'S RIDDLE

A **gynosphinx** sleeps by the door to area 8. She is a guardian of the magical gate in area 12 and poses riddles to visitors to prove their wits. When the characters arrive at her chamber, she says the following:

*I bear the weight of sparks, but do not catch alight.  
I feel the blows hammers, but back I do not fight.  
Of weaponry, I'm made the same, but I bear no bladed edge.  
I bear the weight of arms of steel upon my head.*

The answer is 'Anvil'. If the characters guess it right, the sphinx lets them through. Otherwise, the only way through requires defeating the sphinx in combat. She Teleports to area 12 if dropped to a third of her hit points.

### 6. ROOM OF DREAMERS

This secret room contains five straw beds where the oneiromancers sleep. Their bodies are weak, fragile, and overgrown with vegetation and roots. A healer knows they could not walk or move at all if they woke up. Still, they breathe and live. Slaying the oneiromancers in cold blood here prevents their appearance in area 8.



## FEATURES OF THE TREE

**Lights.** A neutral magical light shines in each chamber within the hollow tree. It cannot be turned off.

**Secret Doors.** False walls slide inward if pulled to reveal a narrow passage to a new section within the tree. Areas 6, 7, and 10 can only be reached this way.

**Magical Aura.** A *detect magic* spell reveals strong conjuration auras that come from areas 9, 11, and 12. These auras can be perceived from as far as 300 feet.

**Mind Over Matter.** Within the tree, the laws of physics are mutable if a strong enough mind attempts to bend them. Any creature can concentrate to attempt to change the nature of reality (DC 20 Wisdom). Anything can be attempted but the GM is the sole judge of the scope and reach of this mental manipulation of the world.



### 7. THE DRAGON'S REMAINS

The bones of a dragon lie in this room. The dragon's name was Vargeillan. He came to dream with the elders centuries ago and perished after a lifetime of dreaming. Vargeillan can be encountered in the Dream Realm.

### 8. CHAMBER OF FATE

Two dozen creatures lie sleeping on the floor of this chamber. They dream with the aid of the oneiromancers and have total control of their experience in the Dream Realm. The five oneiromancers manifest here to test the characters' resolve in the form of two **mag**es, and three **cult fanatics**. They are incorporeal apparitions that fade out if they are defeated. Surpassing this test allows the characters to speak with the elder, use the Pond of Remembrance, and access the Gate to the Dream Realm.

### 9. THRONE OF THE ELDER ONEIROMANCER

After proving their worth in area 8 the characters may speak with the Elder Oneiromancer. This cryptic entity can allow a character to relive a dream to learn more from it or it can interpret puzzling revelations from past dreams. With the elder's blessing, any character can sleep on the floor of area 8 to travel to the Dream Realm and have enhanced control over common dreams.



This adventure belongs to a series of collaborative projects that involve other Patreon creators. This one-shot adventure features work by [Elven Tower](#) and [Fernando Salvaterra](#). Check out their Patreon pages for tons of adventures and great cartography!



## 10. THE ELDER'S RESTING PLACE

A single flowery enclosure keeps the physical body of the Elder Oneiromancer. It is in the same state as those in area 6. Slaying the elder in cold blood here prevents its appearance in area 9 (see **Conclusion**).

## 11. POND OF REMEMBRANCE

The shallow pond in this chamber is fed from the Tree of Dreams sap. The water-like substance creates strange reflections that shift. Creatures can look into it to see any event in their lives. The projections cannot be changed. They are true representations of the event that creatures can use to learn more from their past.

## 12. GATE TO THE DREAM REALM

A magical circle dominates the center of the roof-less chamber. Intricate patterns of flowers and greenery decorate the circle's fine gold inlays. Creatures can stand on the circle to activate it. This triggers a *gate* spell that leads the characters to the Dream Realm. This is a physical journey, not a dream. The laws of nature there are mutable and strange. They should be careful.



# CONCLUSION

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

## THE HALL OF ROOTS

The Elder Oneiromancer reveals that the characters' presence in the Tree of Lost Dreams was foretold in oneiric premonitions long ago. The elder possesses a flowery, copper key that is said to allow access to a fabled location in the Dream Realm known as the Hall of Roots. The elder insists that the characters are fated to go there in their lifetime. The nature of the characters' involvement in these events remains elusive, even to the Elder Oneiromancer. Should the characters wish to know more, the elder instructs them to travel to the Dream Realm to consult a dragon sage named Vargeilan who was a visitor of the tree centuries ago.

## THE MEANING REVEALED

If the characters have come here to unveil the significance of a recurrent dream that they experience, the Elder Oneiromancer can help them understand it. If the dream is remembered well enough, the elder knows the meaning and is free to share it. Otherwise, the character must sleep on area 8 to experience a guided dream. The elder accompanies them and allows them to see things more clearly. Thus exhibiting its true meaning.

This development requires preparation on the GM's part. The dreams and their hidden meanings should pertain to the overarching campaign that the characters are involved in. Acquiring knowledge through dreams or by visiting the Dream Realm is meant to be meaningful. This is the stepping stone through which the characters reach the next stage in their adventuring career or quest.

## THE GATE

The magic circle in area 12 allows the characters to have a planar journey to the Dream Realm. Traveling there is meant to be a high-level adventure. The Dream Realm is not welcoming to physical creatures. Its laws and magical nature may blow on the characters' faces if they are not careful and plan their trip well. Future adventures in the Dream Realm are up to the GM's discretion.

## DESTROYING THE ONEIROMANCER'S LEGACY.

If the characters gain access to the secret areas and slay the oneiromancers in cold blood, the legacy of their work is destroyed. All dreamers in area 8 wake up, and the elder's interpretations are no longer accessible. The Tree of Lost Dreams' fate is sealed. It begins to die and withers within a year. The pond in area 11 dries up and all other magical properties fade out. The gate in area 12 remains, it is now available for all to use. Alas, evil creatures from the Dream Realm notice the unattended portal and soon come forth to wreak havoc upon the world.



# STARRY HORIZON, NAUTILOID

In ways, much is lost of the old sentient nautiloid. However, I've come to love the vessel for its speed and reliance. I can feel it listen to my commands...

Captain Gom Hudley

**T**he commonfolk do not concern themselves with the vast variety of cultures and environments that the multiverse harbors. Why would they? They live their petty, boring lives and still find content in the secluded nature of their existence. But others are more ambitious, daring individuals. Daredevils that surf the waters of the Astral Sea looking for adventures and forsaken treasures. Magically prepared vessels are required to traverse the strange waters of the Astral Sea. These ships are colloquially known as spelljammers. Powerful floating devices that can transport a crew of brave people to the farthest places in the multiverse. The rarest of them are alive and sentient themselves, the nautiloids. They brandish large shells and countless tentacles. It is known that whoever pilots such a ship must have a close mental link with the strange creature whose body is used as a planar ship.

## THE CAPTAIN'S PROMISE

A renowned captain among the numerous crews that sail the Astral Sea once established a working relationship with a large crustacean creature, indigenous to the ethereal waters. Captain Gom Hudley crafted a nautiloid with the creature's permission and, thus, gained access to a powerful ship. It became the flagship of his pirating organization. Other warring factions grew afraid of Captain Gom's vessel. It was called '*Starry Horizon*'.

The cryptic crustacean once heard the tale of a hidden place in the infinite Astral Sea where more of its kind were free to live in peace. It agreed to travel with Captain Gom's crew as long as the pirate captain pushed the boundaries of known star maps so that they could one day find the fabled home it heard about. The captain promised to look for the place and that their working relationship would end right then. The crustacean would be free to leave and stay with the rest of its kin.

## THE NAUTILOID'S DEMISE

Captain Gom Hudley's possession of the prized ship did not go unnoticed. Multiple factions of pirates, brigands, and even merchant princes took a deep dislike. Born from envy and fear. Alas, a fleet of ships ambushed *Starry Horizon* and dealt lethal damage to the living vessel. Captain Gom managed to steer away from the conflict in a dying ship; looking for a safe harbor to rest and heal.

## THE HALF-LIVING VESSEL

**AFTER CAPTAIN GOM** was defeated, he laid low for weeks trying to heal the wounded crustacean with natural and magical means. He exhausted all resources but the nameless crustacean perished, at least in some way.

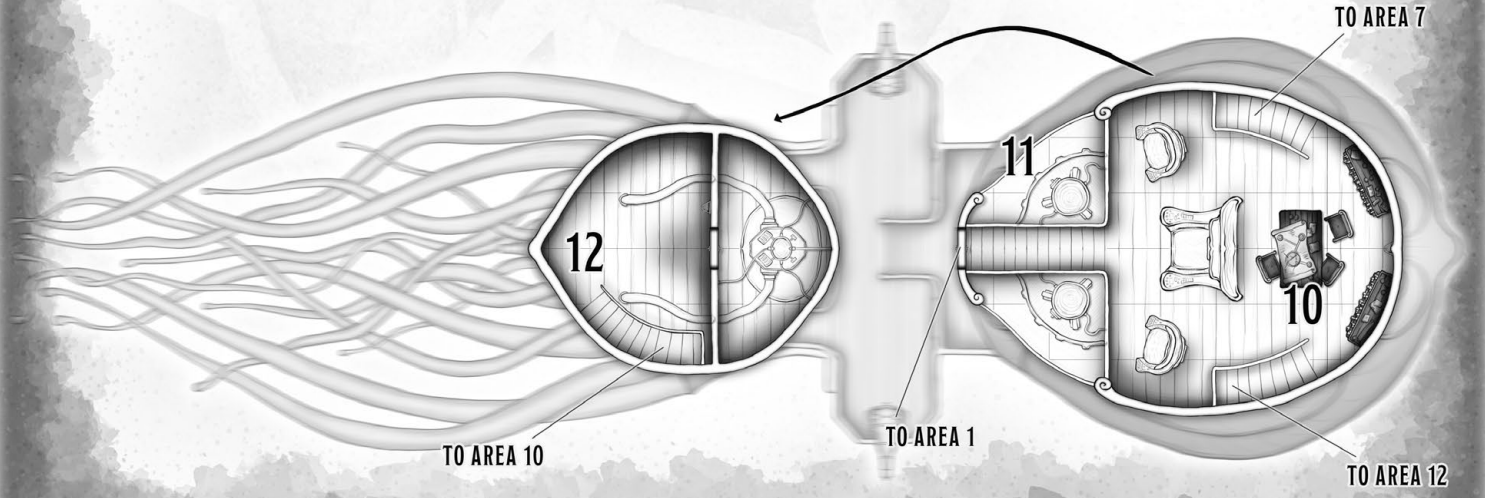
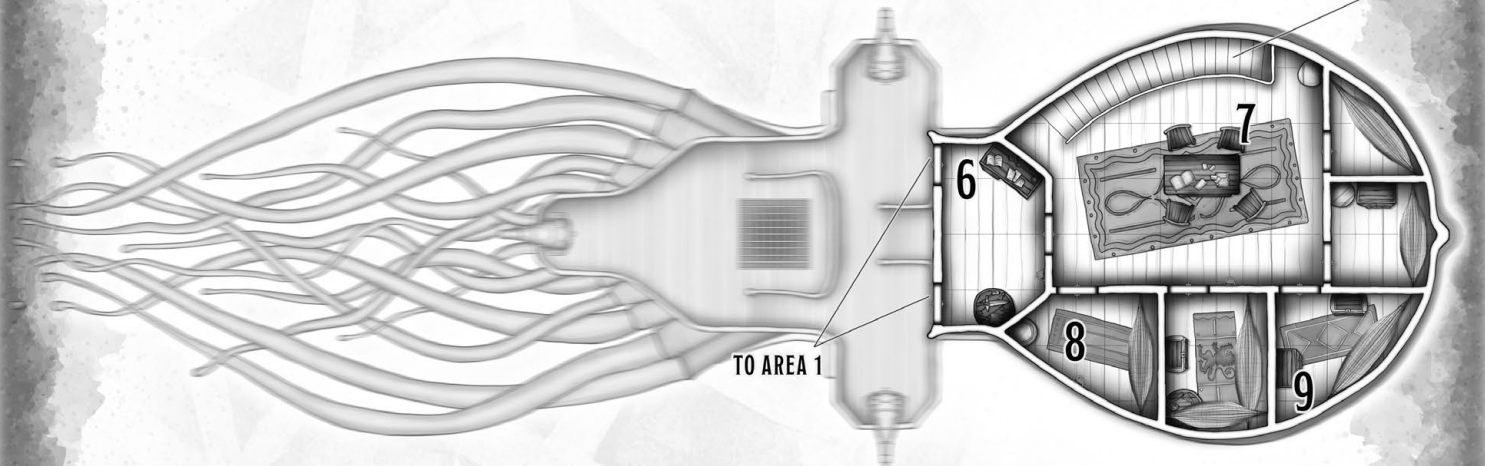
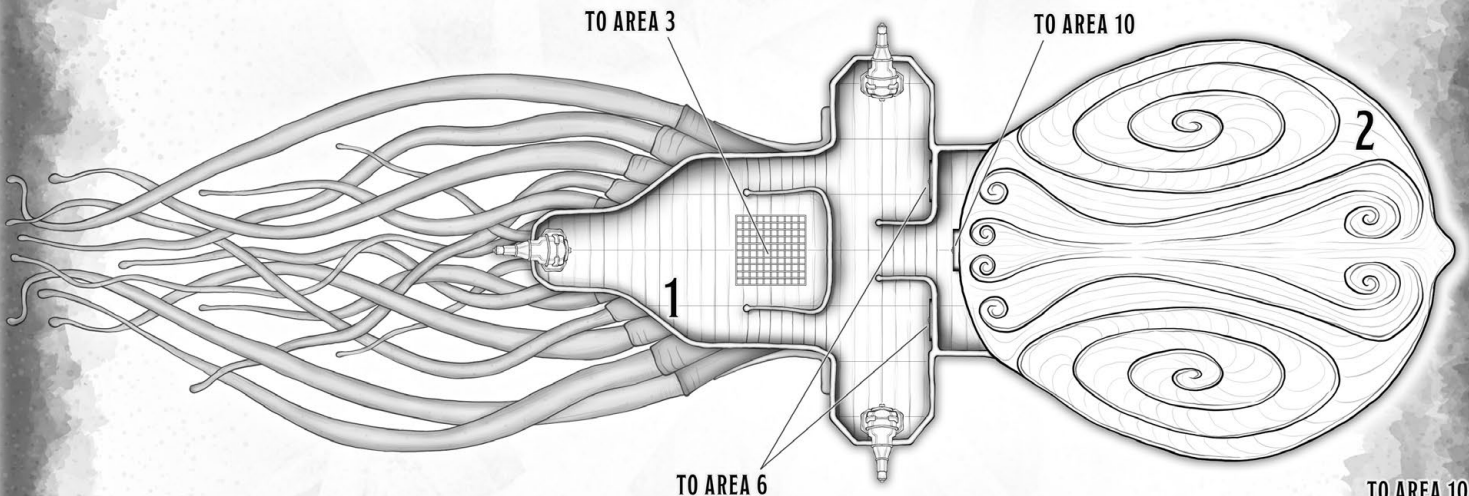
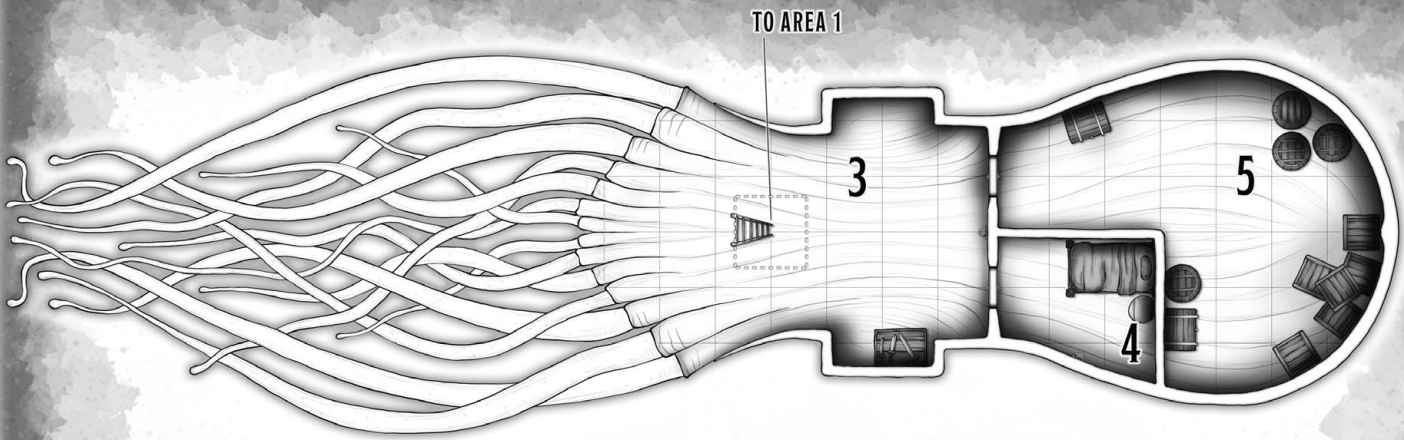
Despite the creature's untimely death, some of its parts remained active and life-like. The frontal tentacles appear to live, the outer shell continues to grow and secrete protective oils, and the inner living walls continue to breathe in and out. Scholars and spellcasters who reviewed this phenomenon could not explain how the brainless creature could still partially live. They theorized that the magic engine that propels the vessel across the Astral Sea may have fused to some of those body parts, allowing them to cheat death. Still, those are only theories.

Captain Gom decided to keep looking for the strange place in hopes that the crustacean's kin could find a way to heal it back to full health. The captain carried on with his pirate life for a few decades until he was wounded in the calf and had to forcefully retire. His pirate days were over. During these long years, Captain Gom experienced vivid dreams where the crustacean would communicate with him. It told him stories from the Astral Sea and thanked him for continuing the search for its ancestral home. The captain believes that the creature can still communicate but dreams are the only means it can reach him. No one else has had these dreams, though.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

The characters have grown in importance and reputation in the area. So much so that Captain Gom Hudley has taken an interest in them. The retired adventurer summons the characters for an audience to offer them a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The pirate requests that they take the *Starry Horizon* and push the boundaries of the charted paths in the Astral Sea. They must travel far and wide in the hopes that they find a place where other crustaceans like the one that the ship is made of live.

The pirate probably won't be alive to witness their success. It is up to the characters to choose how to seek this place. Captain Gom trusts that the crustacean will communicate with the new captain through dreams soon...



## History Check

**DC 14:** *The Starry Horizon is a popular vessel among the warring factions that sail the Astral Sea close to known locations in the charts. It is sure to attract unwanted attention from all kinds of criminals.*

**DC 16:** *Nautiloids are rare. Apart from the Starry Horizon, there must be less than 10 in circulation. The engine requires refueling once a month. Missing this deadline might cause the ship to drift into uncharted waters.*

## 1. MAIN DECK

The nautiloid's main deck's surfaces and handrails are made from an artificial polymer that is as hard and durable as tempered steel. The grated opening in the deck is the only way down to the lower deck (area 3).

There are two lateral harpoon guns and a front-facing one on the deck. A person can operate any of them to shoot ballista bolts or harpoons. Captain Gom used the harpoons numerous times to capture enemy vessels.

**Harpoon Gun.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Bolt Hit:* 12 (3d8) piercing damage. *Harpoon Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage and the target becomes tethered to the Starry Horizon.

## 2. CRUSTACEAN SHELL

The crustacean's conch shell varies in width but it is 2 feet wide at its narrowest point. It has a spiral shape with countless crenelations and naturally-occurring patterns. The shell bears the scars of countless battles. When the shell breaks, the creature's healing mechanism fills the opening with molten silver and mother-of-pearl. The fine silvery cracks cover the entirety of the shell, contributing to its natural beauty and artistic imagery.

## 3. LOWER DECK

The flooring of the lower deck is formed from the crustacean's lower body. The floor and the walls are alive. Toward the vessel's bow, the floor and walls are divided into dozens of hardened tubes. They are the base of the nautiloid's tentacles. Irregular vibrations from the tentacles' involuntary movements can be felt at all times here.

## 4. LOWER QUARTERS

Captain Gom Hudley moved to this room five years before retiring after noticing that the dream communication with the crustacean happened more often when sleeping here. Captain Gom believed that being closer to the creature's base had such an effect but it was only a way to explain the enhanced dreaming.

Creatures that sleep here have their first oneiric vision after a week. In this preliminary communication attempt, the crustacean displays images of its adventures with Captain Gom Hudley and of the fabled location that the captain and it have spent their lives looking for.

## 5. CARGO HOLD

This is the ship's cargo hold. Supply crates, barrels, and all manner of cargo are held here. The walls of this chamber move in and out as if breathing. The cycle lasts 5 minutes and the chamber becomes 20% smaller at the end of the cycle before reverting to its normal size.

The characters must understand the nature of the chamber to avoid their cargo being moved around at best, or crushed by the moving walls at worst.

## 6. ANTECHAMBER

The small room contains a weapons table and a small desk with entry journals and cargo manifestos. Two paintings decorate the walls of this chamber. The first one depicts Captain Gom holding a recently caught fish, as long as he is tall. The second painting portrays the Starry Horizon soaring through the skies.

## 7. LIVING AREA

A central chamber for resting or recreation. It contains a table with four wooden chairs. The walls are decorated with hand-drawn images of Captain Gom and his crew, presumably. Etched on the stern wall is the phrase: *"I promise you we will find it, take what it takes"*.

## 8. CAPTAIN'S CABIN

This was Captain Gom's cabin before he moved to the lower deck to better hear the cryptic messages that the crustacean sent him from time to time. A portrait of him, young and smiling, hangs on the wall. The character that takes the title of captain is expected to rest here. After using the cabin for at least three weeks, they experience their first communication dream. In it, the crustacean attempts to explain Captain Gom's promise.



## 9. CREW CABINS

The four cabins can house up to three crew members with additional hammocks. Each of the cabins contains the bare necessities like a night table or a chest.

## 10. THE BRIDGE

Three steel seats dominate the bridge, the central one is considerably larger than the others and is reserved for the nautiloid's captain. The seats' arms contain complex buttons and mechanisms to pilot the ship. The captain can perform all actions from the main seat but two other people can help with smaller tasks by using the secondary seats. The shell's outer casing bow-side features two one-way windows over the planar engines.

It is expected that a spelljammer captain is a spellcaster but anyone familiar with sailing can use the seat controls to communicate with the ship and control it. Behind the control seats, there is a planning table with updated charts of the Astral Sea and numerous unexplored locations near known regions. Captain Gom makes a point to gift these valuable maps to the character. The old pirate insists that the maps are priceless to an explorer.

## 11. PLANAR ENGINES

Right under the control seats, the planar engines roar like thunder when the ship is ordered to achieve full speed. These delicate arcane devices are capable to propel the ship through the Astral Sea and into the outer planes if needed. They are state-of-the-art magic devices that other vessel captains would kill to acquire. The Starry Horizon had a different engine originally but Captain Gom took these from a captured vessel 7 years ago.

## 12. ENGINE ROOM

The engine's energy source must be replaced once a month to keep the ship's flying capabilities in order. A half-pound adamantine ingot and a few gallons of Astral Sea water are the engine's fuel. The water is consumed by the engine and must be replaced constantly, an automated process when sailing in the Astral Sea.

The adamantine ingot, however, is a rare commodity that the ship's captain must keep in mind at all times. It is a top priority to avoid running out of fuel.

## FEATURES OF THE NAUTILOID

**Smell and Sounds.** The stench of shellfish permeates all areas but the odor becomes unnoticeable after a few hours on deck. The lulling sound of slow breathing from the walls and lower deck can be heard in any area.

**Lights.** The sconces feature *continual flame* spells. The magic fades in seconds after the torches are removed.

**Magical Censor.** The ship recognizes its crew members. Other creatures that attempt to cast a spell while on the ship are hit by arcane noise that causes them to lose the spell and miss (DC 16 Concentration). In addition charm spells from all sources automatically fail.

**Enhanced Healing.** Rest within the quarters is magically enhanced. Creatures gain advantage on saving throws against diseases and poisons.

**Self-Healing.** The living parts that remain (shell, tentacles, walls) heal at a fast rate. Deep cracks, tears, or holes seal up and heal within 1 or 2 weeks.





# THE MIRROR OF SNAKECHARM

*A compelling adventure by Viel Nast*

## INTRODUCTION

**THE SMALL TOWN** of Swampville was plagued recently by a curse. Many well-respected citizens have been turned into snakes! The town is a prosperous cultural and commercial center with only one problem: a huge swamp that lies to the south. An evil witch claimed it as her adobe and, being sinister and greedy, she is selling her services to equally evil and malicious partners. She can permanently turn an individual into a vile snake for a high amount of gold. A spell that no magic can cure!

## GETTING INTO THE ADVENTURE

**THE NUMBER OF** citizens that are being transformed into snakes is growing alarmingly and the good people of Swampville grow anxious. No matter what they do to protect themselves nothing seems to work. Illegal sales of charms, potions, elixirs, and pendants soared, and the services of arcane and divine users are in high demand but still, there is no effective protection.

In the last months, a flock of different groups of people has arrived in the town and the PCs may have been with them, use the table below:

Roll 1d6	Event
1	One of the characters is from Swampville and wants to help
2	A fellow from their past or backgrounds asks them to investigate.
3	A frightened merchant asks them to accompany him in addition to his escort.
4	A weird person from a snake-worshipping cult asks the characters to accompany him within the swamp.
5	An old sage wants to study the event and needs assistance.
6	The duke of the region pays a huge sum to anyone who can solve the mystery and save his subjects.

As they arrive in the town, a howling of anguish hovers over the usual noises of the merchant town. A woman holds a snake and claims that it is her husband!

## SWAMPVILLE

The characters can talk to the people from Swampville and begin picking up rumors using the table below:

Roll (d6)	Rumor has it that...
1	There is an evil witch in the swamps. She knows black magic and is the one responsible for all this trouble (true)
2	The ancient snake god that lives in the swamp has punished us (false)
3	A curse may be the source of these snake-related events (true)
4	The transformed people were all successful merchants and vendors with many enemies... (true)
5	A plague is coming when all will be turned into snakes and then killed by wild animals! (false)
6	The transformations of all the victims happened at night (true)

If the party has magic users of any type or level, they realize soon that they are unable to reverse the curse or cure the poor people. Nothing can be done to save them.

## DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTIGATION

The characters are approached by the families of the victims and other scared villagers asking for help. After some time in the area, the characters learn that the common thing all victims had is that they were successful and rich merchants. The follow-up of their investigation leads to some suspects. Under enough pressure, one of them admits to going to the swamp and paying the witch a huge sum to "punish" his business partner for cheating. The rich plot against the rich to position themselves better in the future market. They destroyed each other.



## THE GRIMOIRE AND THE MIRROR

The characters get ready to leave and investigate the witch in the swamp. But just before heading for the swamp to track the hag, the wife of one of the victims gives the characters a grimoire she found in her husband's library. She says that when the snake transformations began, her husband, a rich merchant of books and parchments, had acquired this book to protect himself but didn't read it. He was transformed the same day.

The book was written two centuries ago. It narrates the same events that happened in an unknown town. The people of that ancient town faced the same threat but failed to trap the witch, and thus, she turned them into snakes and the town and all its treasures remained there forever (adventure hook). The witch is immortal, and her magic is powerful. The only way to break the curse is to trap her using her black magic against her.

### MIRROR OF SNAKECHARM

The old grimoire explains the way to trap a demon or witch into an artifact called the "*Mirror of Snakecharm*".

The characters can also read the instructions to create such a mirror. They must acquire pure silver binding, and line the mirror's back with the snakeskin of her victims. The mirror must then be shaped into the image of a woman using hair and clothes that belong to the witch. Then, the last and possibly the hardest step, they must lure the witch to transform her own reflection...

After learning all this, the characters must travel into the swamp and pretend to be clients. They must pay the witch to lure her into town. The characters must take advantage of her time away from home to steal her spare clothes as well! Then, the characters must find an abandoned house, place the mirror inside, and prepare the mirror to speak the incantation. The witch shall be asked to transform a "woman" living alone in the house.

Hopefully, the witch will enter the house and curse the first person she sees. By the time she realizes the victim is herself in a mirror, the curse will have rebounded on her. When the witch is turned into a snake, all the other curses lift and the people from Swampville return to normal. There is one condition, though. The hag must remain a snake forever for the cursed villagers not to revert to their slithering shapes. The heroes must find a way to keep the transformed witch safe and alive.

If the witch fails and gets cursed by her own magic, she's filled with grudges and hate. The snake-witch will do what it can to take her own life. This is because if the witch perishes, her soul would be free and the cursed individuals befall the same fate again (adventure hook).



# SERENITY

Now, I did a job. I got nothing but trouble since I did it, so let me make this more than abundantly clear. I do the job. And then I get paid...

Mal' Reginald

**T**he Astral Sea is home to some of the most complex life forms. Some call it the sea of doors because it is also a pathway, a door to enter most planes of existence. For a while now, pirates, scoundrels, and sailors of this no man's land have learned to navigate the vast seas on new ships called nautiloids, spelljammers, or astral boats.

Having one of these vessels is enough reason to procure strong muscle or security. They are cherished vehicles of incredible energy and power. This is because the living squid or the nautiloid monster within the ship forms a link, a symbiotic relationship, not only with the vessel itself but with the person commanding it. This mental link holds great importance to both parts.

## JUST "SERENITY"

**THE NAUTILOID SHIP** called Serenity and its captain, the 7-foot-tall man by the name of Mal' Reginald, have traveled the Astral Sea together for more than two decades now. Their time together has been full of thrill and suspense. Over the years, he has gathered a group of skilled people he calls a family. They are his crew. And to all people that call his ship "The Serenity" he kindly smiles but never fails to correct them: "Just - *Serenity*".

## TELL THEM I AIN'T COMING BACK

Long ago, Mal used to work for the Great Guild of the Material Plane. He would do small jobs and go from point A to point B for small sums of money. But one day, he could not avoid a great belt of asteroids and crashed. A large crustacean creature found his ship, floating adrift in the Astral Sea. The rest is history. Since then, Captain Mal Reginal quit his old position at the guild and became a one-man enterprise. He loves his new life and he would risk anything to save a member of his crew.

## CANNOT TAKE THE SKY FROM ME

Serenity's crew has had to prove their worth more times than they wished. Mal' Reginald has grown a reputation for being bold, intrepid, and reckless. But at the same time, contractors and employers know that Mal is a man that always delivers. And even though hired pirates attack Serenity in hopes of snatching it almost once per month, Mal Reginal always lands safe and sound.

## SETTING THE SCENE

**NAVIGATING THE ASTRAL** Sea is something that adventuring parties and mercenaries of good renown end up doing sooner or later. It is not rare for Mal' Reginald to hire external help whenever he has a difficult job at hand.

The characters may already know captain Mal' Reginald from a past adventure. He might be an indirect contact, the friend of a friend. Or perhaps, Serenity's captain is the one who has heard of the characters' reputation.

## ADVENTURE HOOK

Use one or any combination of the following adventure hooks to have the characters be part of Serenity's crew.

### THE TRAIN JOB

Mal' Reginald contacts the heroes. He sends them a message to their ship, town, or to the place they are staying at the moment. He briefly explains that he was hired for a heist job. A vehicle fueled by fire and air elemental beasts that travels the Astral Sea. Fast as an arrow.

Captain Reginald needs some extra muscle; the job is dangerous and he does not wish to put his entire crew at risk. He offers 2,000 gp up front and 20% of the profits (negotiable), if and once the job is completed.

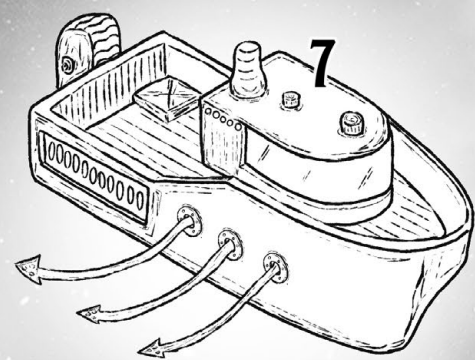
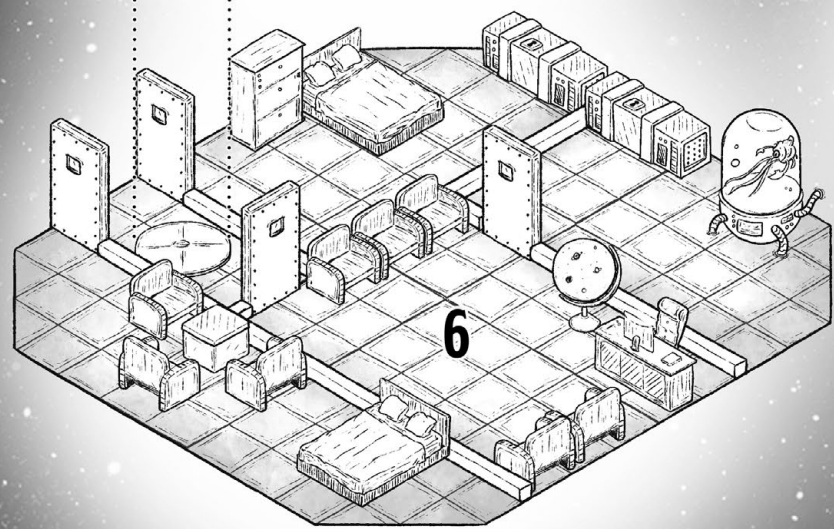
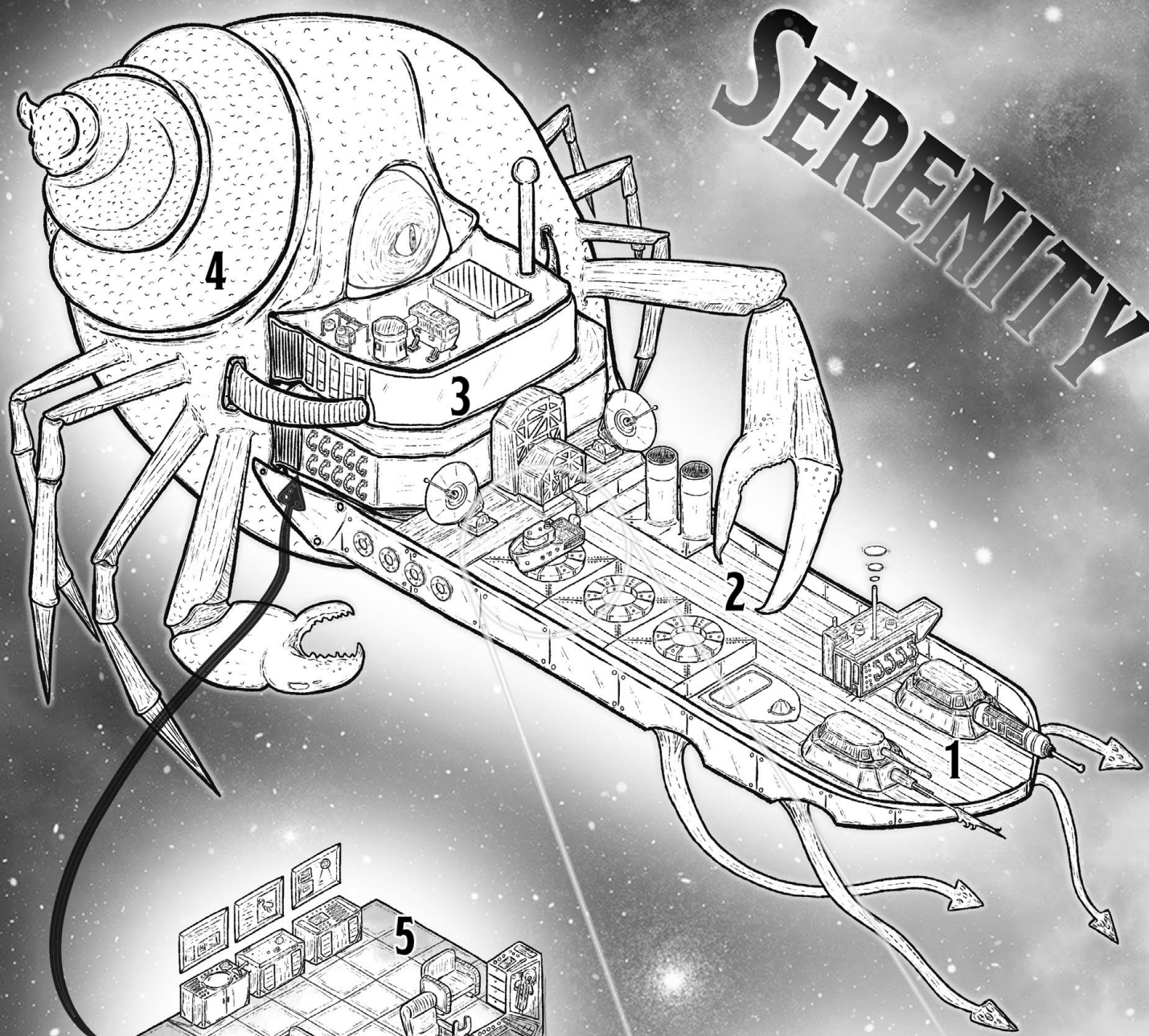
### OUT OF GAS

The characters travel to the Astral Sea on their vessel, by teleportation, or by any other means available. They receive an emergency message from captain Reginald before stumbling upon Serenity, almost motionless. The massive boat floats in the vast astral ocean thanks to its giant crustacean legs. The characters can find a way to help the captain or the means to take advantage of his unfortunate situation. Mal' shall not forget their choice. It shall have future consequences (see **Development**).

### HEART OF GOLD

The characters are hired to stop and arrest Mal' Reginald, an astral pirate who left the Great Guild of the Material Plane. The heroes are loaned a vessel to navigate the Astral Sea and some pointers to track and find Serenity. The heroes shall find great resistance and a man who knows his way around words (see **Development**).

# SERENITY



*Individual Vessel*



## History Check

**DC 14:** *Nautiloids are rare, expensive ships that can travel the Astral Sea at great speeds. These boats feature a thick shell that protects them, and tentacles to help them move through the astral waters. There are rumors of such a ship that goes by the name of Serenity.*

**DC 16:** *Serenity is led by captain Mal' Reginald. He used to work for the Great Guild of the Material Plane many years ago. Now he is a wanted man for several reasons. He made many enemies by leaving the guild. His ship Serenity is one of the most powerful nautiloids around. And although he has made plenty of friends and built a great reputation in the past two decades, he had to cross some dangerous people along the way to accomplish so.*

### 1. A NAUTILOID LIKE NO OTHER

Serenity is a bit larger compared to other nautiloids. Its shell is not exactly a nautiloid, and the astral beast within is more like a crab than a squid. This makes the ship heavier, therefore slower. But Serenity's hull has never been breached before and no other nautiloid can compete with Serenity's massive, armored crablike pincers.

Two complex mechanical guns face toward the front. A person can climb inside the cabin of any of them to operate them. The following are the three possible attacks that can be made operating Serenity's weapons.

**Harpoon Gun.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) piercing damage and the target becomes tethered to Serenity. This is usually used against other boats and vessels.

**Cannon Ball.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 27 (6d8) bludgeoning damage.

**Particle Beam.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 66 (20d6) force damage. If this damage reduces any target, creature, or object, to 0 hit points, it is turned to fine gray dust. This weapon requires one hour of recharging before reuse.

### 2. MAIN DECK

The main deck of Serenity holds the main weapons, the engine exhausts, on-deck access to the engine and lower deck, and the individual landing pods for ships. Two radars are on the search for signals or lost messages. Captain Reginald dubbed these "calls of duty".

### 3. CONTROL ROOM, CABIN, AND LOWER DECK

Captain's Reginald crew comprehends five people and they are often here. The pilot is Washburn. One of the best on the field. Zoey is the captain's right arm, a former member of the guild too. Kay-Lee is the ship's mechanic and J.N. is the crew's weapons expert and muscle. And the negotiator member of the team is Baccara, a diplomat. She has saved the captain's gut many times.

### 4. NAUTILOID

The beast in Serenity is a complex creature. It has a single central eye, it is joined to the ship just below it, tubes and steel joints fused to the shell or going inside it. And the six legs and two pincers grow from the reinforced shell, not from under it. The front tentacles work as natural radars for the beast. They slither in the air, capturing vibrations, and send their findings to the bridge.

### 5. CONTROLS

Three people can operate the controls of Serenity at any given time. The pilot has access to all this from his seat but sometimes the job requires the others to take some of the controls and let Washburn drive.

### 6. LIVING ROOM, KITCHEN, BREEDING CHAMBER

The crew can relax, have a meal, or rest in some of these rooms. The most important area here is the breeding chamber. The capsules here are an ongoing experiment that captain Reginald hopes to become rich from. He uses some of Serenity's crab blood to attempt to recreate its species through magical means and science.

### 7. INDIVIDUAL VESSELS

Some of the juvenile nautiloids created from the breeding chamber have been used as prototypes for small, individual boats or ships. Serenity has two of these prototypes. They are fully operational but their energy is limited. They have reduced fuel capacity.

## DEVELOPMENTS

The following are follow-up ideas for the adventure hooks presented in this adventure. The GM is free to alter or modify how things occur or what happens next.

### THE TRAIN JOB

The train belongs to the Great Guild of the Material Plane. If the heroes' faces were seen during the heist, the characters are now wanted targets, like the captain.

### OUT OF GAS

The heroes make an incredible new friend if they help Serenity's captain and his crew. However, if they choose to steal his ship or rob him, Mal' Reginald becomes their worst enemy. He shall hunt them forever while he lives.

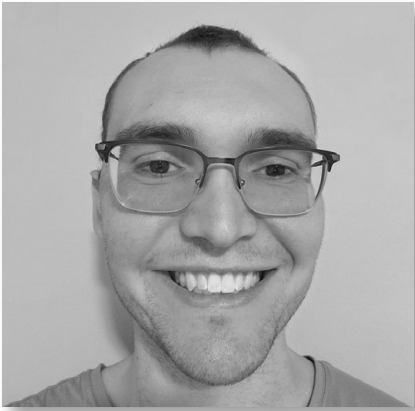
### HEART OF GOLD

Captain Reginald resists the attack and captures the characters. He forgives them and lets them live under one condition. Do a job against the guild for free.

If the heroes arrest the captain, he tries to talk his way out and prove that letting him and his crew go will be more profitable in the future. If that does not work, he swears he will find them once he comes out of jail. And he will, but that is an adventure for another time...

## ALEX RINEHART

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Alex Rinehart (he/him) runs monthly ones-shots of various indie games for friends and strangers alike. For the past 2 years, this has been in his discord server, [The Hartland](#). If you'd like to try a new game, stop on by! When he's not running games, Alex is usually playtesting his own, or writing adventures for the systems he loves. Last year he released [Gratitude: A Horror Game](#), over a dozen classes and hunts for the Slayers RPG, and launched a Kickstarter for [Cyberrats](#), an upcoming game about cybernetic rats trying to save the world from an alien invasion. You can find Alex on [Twitter](#), or his previously published games and adventures on [Itch](#).



## DM NINETOES82

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Hi, I'm Tim. I'm a Dad, Writer, Dungeon Master and Teacher. I'm also lazy as all hell and trying to balance being a good DM with everything else I wanna do can be difficult. That's why I started making simple, straight forward 5th Edition content that will have you running a game in no time.

You can find more information about my work at my [Instagram](#), [Patreon](#), and personal [Website](#).



## VIEL NAST

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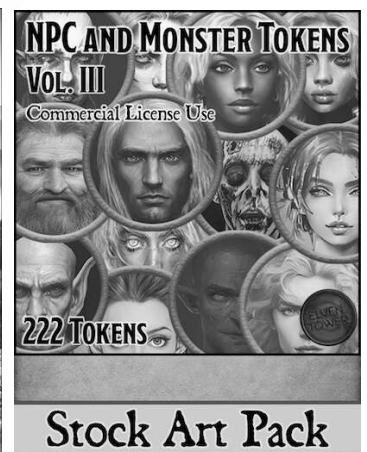
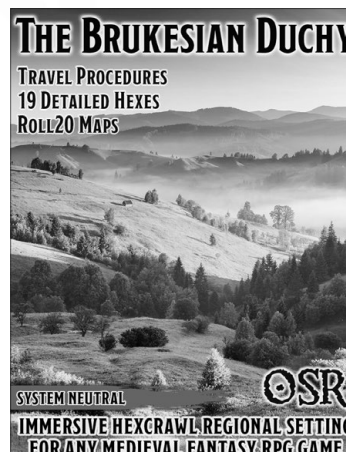
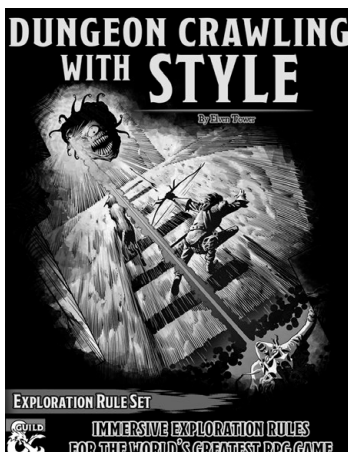
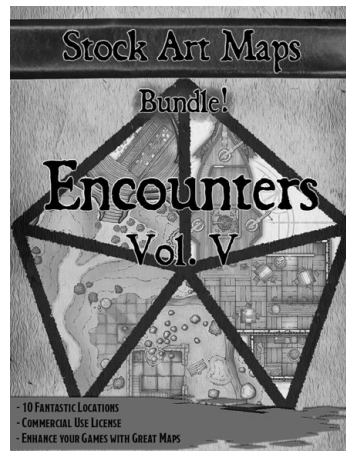
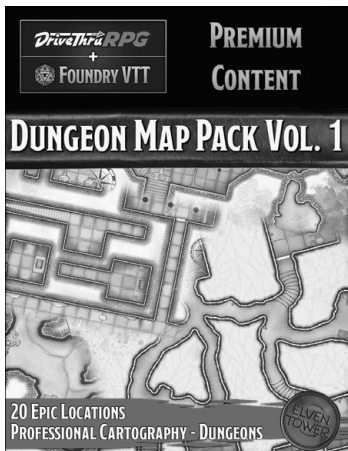
Viel "Talbot" Nast has loved all things epic since 1990. Epic metal, epic fantasy and TTRPGs! He has created the epic fantasy world of Land of Oyr and via the company Talbot Epic Press has published five books in his world. Writing anything about RPGs has become a growing passion in the last decade or two! You can find more about him and his works in his [official blog](#), his [Facebook Page](#), and his [Amazon Book Store](#).



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