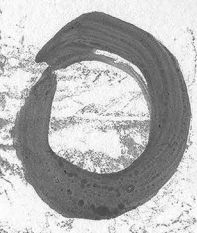


DUNGEON VAULT MAGAZINE

No. 51



Designed for use with

ShadowDark RPG



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INTRODUCTION

PLAYING THE DUNGEON MASTER

You have the most important task. The GM is the table's narrator and organizer for a good game. You must take care of the narrative and adjudicate the party's actions. You transform these words into a living thing.

Here are a few guidelines to help you make this happen:

You have the Power. You make the decisions about the adventure progress and how the group interacts with NPCs, creatures, and the setting's elements. You are encouraged to improvise and change things. We encourage 'Rule 0': the GM is the **sole authority**; the rules can be adjusted or disregarded by the GM to favor the story.

Give Them a Good Challenge. A good challenge does not necessarily mean lots of battles. Try to give the group what they crave the most. A role-playing situation like a tough negotiation, an interrogation, or calling a favor may be as intense as a full-blown battle.

Do not Stall. Feel free to provide hints, clues, or a helping NPC to get back on track. Hints and clues may present themselves as 'ideas' or 'thoughts' the characters have. An alternative method is to introduce an NPC who will provide a veiled suggestion to the characters directly and serve as the 'GM's voice' from inside the story.

CREATING AN ADVENTURING PARTY

There are no alignment requirements for this adventure. A matter of taste, we also recommend doing away with darkvision. If you play with a new batch of PCs, ask the players why their character are together and acting as a team. This will help the game go smoother and it will give them a few cues on how to interact with each other.

ABOUT LINEARITY AND PLAYER AGENCY

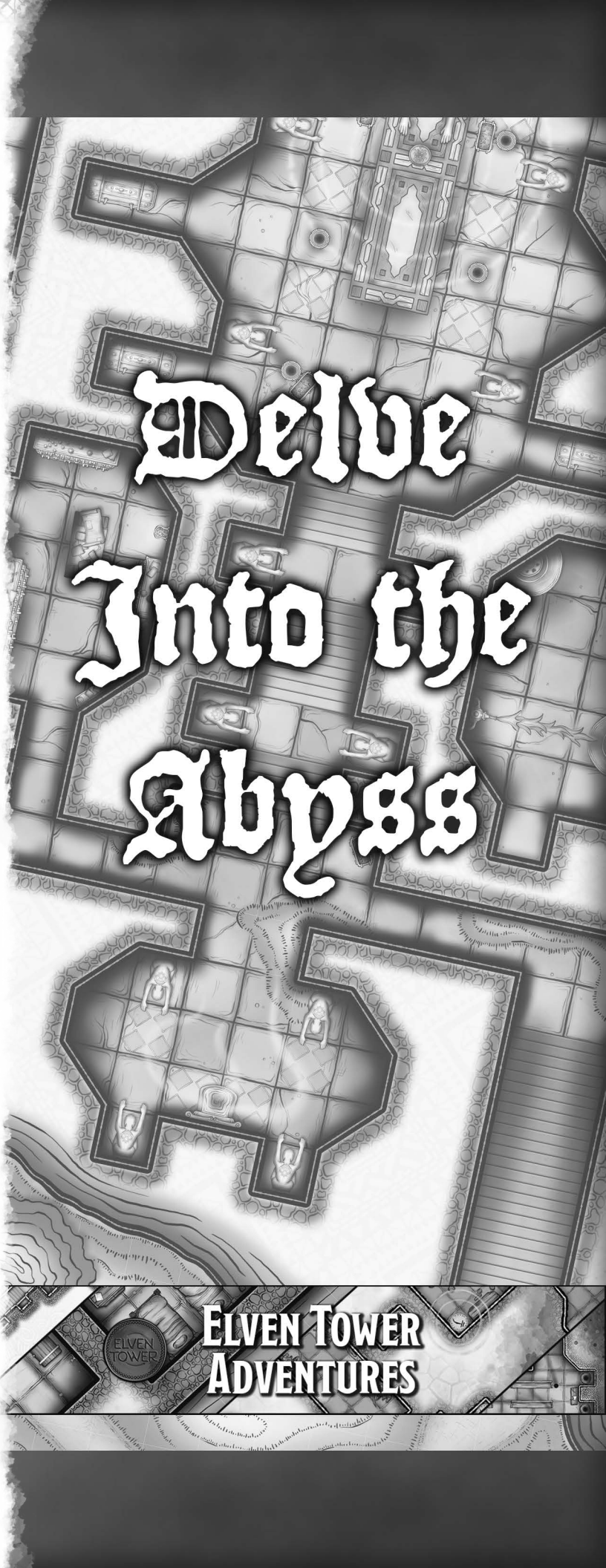
The options in this adventure are not exhaustive but there is a limited amount of information or options a module can include. This adventure, as written, is somewhat linear but the intention is not to constrain players' creativity and options. We have included what we believe are the most likely courses of action in the adventure.

ABOUT NOTATION

Some events or things described in this document express their odds of happening in this format: "1-in-6", "2-in-6" and so on. This means that the GM rolls a d6. Rolling the first number or less means success.

There is a 2-in-6 chance of finding the hidden door.

This means that a player or the GM rolls a 1d6, on a result of 2 or lower, the hidden door is found.



ODD VENDORS

CELERI OF THE GLEN

Che path curves through a quiet grove, where a curious figure awaits: a faun with a playful glint in his golden eyes and a bushy, curled beard that dances with his every nod. His goat-like legs allow him to prance with ease as he navigates uneven ground. A woven vine basket, nearly as wide as himself, teeters on his back, brimming with vibrant fruits, odd-looking vegetables, and bundles of fragrant herbs tied with twines and lace.

With a disarming smile, he introduces himself as Celeri of the Glen, a humble vendor of “*nature’s rarest blessings.*” Celeri’s produce is anything but ordinary; he swears upon the Green Mother herself that each item in his basket has been cultivated through unique whispers of ancient tree spirits. His items are as vibrant as they are potent, enticing with their gleaming hues and subtle glow. Four delicious items stand out:

▶ **Starpetal Peach.** A violet fruit that sparkles faintly. Consuming it grants the eater keen night vision for 1 hour, but leaves them with an insatiable craving for sweets.

▶ **Laughing Carrot.** This bright orange, slightly twisted root pulses with a gentle, warm hum. Those who eat it find themselves bursting into uncontrollable laughter at random intervals, though it has the beneficial side effect of curing any mild poisons.

▶ **Echoing Squash.** A plump green gourd with faint markings resembling sound waves. Eating this squash allows the user to mimic any voice they have recently heard for up to 1 day. Alas, the incredible ability fades abruptly at sunset.

▶ **Mirthberries.** A handful of pale green berries that, when eaten, boost the eater’s charisma and persuasive charm for 2d3 hours. Unfortunately, the mirthberries leave a lingering, vinegary aftertaste and a foul breath that lasts until dawn.

HOW TO USE?

When adventurers move from place to place in search of adventures, they meet all kinds of people and personalities. Each of the following characters is meant to spice up the journey, provide unique items or services, and perhaps serve as a building block for the world-building effort in your home campaign. Have fun!



OREN, THE TRUTHSAYER

Waiting around a bend in the road, an unusual figure perches atop a broad-horned ram, his silhouette stark against the evening sky. The man is bald, his head gleaming in the twilight, with a beard as thick and silver as frost. Clad in weathered leathers, he holds a large, wide goblet of deep red wine, which he sips with casual elegance as he observes the travelers with a sharp, knowing gaze. His ram stands unmoving; its immense, curling horns statuesque. Its rider's eyes glint with mischief and wisdom.

He introduces himself simply as Oren, the Truthsayer. His voice is low and steady, carrying an air of mystery. *"I sell truths,"* he says, swirling his goblet. *"Ask any question, and I shall answer. But my price is one of your own truths—something you've held back, something unsaid."* His smile is inviting yet challenging, and his eyes seem to pierce into hidden depths.

Oren claims truthfully that he can answer any question put to him, though his answers are often layered with symbolism, leaving the interrogator to wrestle with its meaning. In exchange, he demands a confession: a secret, a buried truth, a hidden feeling. Oren waits, unwavering, as if daring each adventurer to face their inner shadows. Only truth shall pay for one of his truths.

Once the trade is made, Oren, the Truthsayer delivers his answer with solemnity, taking a slow sip of his wine to seal the exchange. When he departs, he leaves only faint hoof-prints and the weight of truth lingering in the air. The characters may encounter Oren, the Truthsayer only once during their lifetime.



ELAM, THE KEEPER OF BALANCE

In the dusty roadside, a humble man with rough-hewn clothing and weathered hands walks alone. He carries a fard of wheat balanced on his back, a well-used sickle tucked at his waist, and a small set of brass scales in his hands. His eyes are calm yet piercing, an unspoken promise of wisdom gleaned from years under the open sky. Introducing himself simply as Elam, the Keeper of Balance, he offers justice—swift, impartial assessments of any quandary or dispute. With quiet confidence, Elam explains his service: in exchange for a single copper piece, he shall weigh the troubles brought to him, providing a fair judgment and wise counsel, devoid of favor or prejudice. He listens with unwavering attention to each person's dilemma, his eyes moving from speaker to speaker, as if weighing their words upon his unseen scale.

Once the copper piece is given, he considers the problem, often posing questions that cut to the heart of the matter, guiding those before him to see both sides clearly. His counsel is straightforward, unclouded by emotion, though it may sometimes sting. Elam leaves each seeker with a sense of quiet clarity. The characters may encounter Elam only once during their lifetime. The vendor is, in truth, a good-aligned deity taking a stroll in the Material Plane. For him, it is an amusing practice...



MATRON OF RAVENS



BY
DEREK
RUIZ



LEVEL 4 ADVENTURE

IMMERSIVE SHADOWDARK RPG ONE-SHOT
ADVENTURE FOR THE GREATEST OSR GAME

ADVENTURE PRIMER

Twice a year, during the winter and summer solstices, a rune-marked threshold in a nearby hill opens. The eerie entrance leads down a stairway to a holy shrine named the Crypt of White Ravens. Its deity, often portrayed as a slim, robed woman wearing a skull mask, is said to be the guardian of death and fate. This is the Matron of Ravens. People believe she can see the future and knows the time and manner in which all mortals shall eventually perish.

When the shrine's door opens, celebrants and cultists come to pray. Lowly peasants and daring explorers come too, from time to time. The commoners often seek information, a glimpse into their future. Legend has it that a few fortunate ones are allowed into a secret area known as the Sanctum of Ravens. There, the goddess imparts her otherworldly knowledge to mortals.

OATHS AND PROMISES

MANY INNOCENTS FALL into the trap of trusting that the Matron or Ravens parts with her knowledge willingly; all exchanges come with a steep price. All who seek the matron and have their prayers answered must recite the *Oath of Dark Feathers* to swear allegiance to the guardian of death and fate. Henceforth, they are in allegiance with the matron and shall be witnesses to her will.

Should they fail to keep this promise, as sworn in the *Oath of Dark Feathers*, their souls are forfeit. A trinket to be collected by the Matron of Ravens at her convenience. Some of these oath-breakers are given a choice, legend says. Either they die a painful death, or their minds are flailed into dedicating their remaining days to worshiping the Matron of Ravens. Neither is a great outcome. They are forcibly transformed into mad cultists.

On the other hand, those who keep their oath are blessed by the matron. This boon comes in many forms and cannot be negotiated. The goddess of fate gives only what is needed for the recipient to reach their destiny.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THE CHARACTERS' PAST deeds bring them to Brilshire. There are rumors of the upcoming solstice, the gathering of the Matron of Ravens' followers, and the few brave ones seeking their fate in the Crypt of White Ravens.

THE FEVER

Brilshire's ruler, King Wened, worries about a dark fever slowly unleashing upon the commonfolk. The royal alchemists have failed to cure it. Willing to try unorthodox methods, the king summons the characters after hearing of their past deeds. In an audience, the characters are commanded to visit the Crypt of White Ravens and find a way into the inner sanctum. The king wishes the characters to find a cure for this malady despite the royal alchemist's claim that the Matron of Ravens does not heed such demands. King Wened offers 2,500 gp as payment.

If the characters later speak with Salaar, the alchemist, he believes that the goddess shall lead them to their already predestined fate. Salaar thinks free will does not exist and that the goddess cannot provide a cure.

FOR THE CHILDREN

A veteran soldier of Brilshire's city watch, Eallard Phames, is undergoing tragedy. His wife and five children fell to the strange fever that already threatens to decimate the city. Sarah, his youngest child, passed away a few days back. And the rest show no signs of improvement. Desperate for a solution, Eallard believes that the Matron of Ravens can show him how to overcome this challenge. Eallard is resolute in finding the Sanctum of Ravens to commune with the goddess.

In a tavern in Brilshire, Eallard overhears the characters' intent of visiting the Crypt of White Ravens during the solstice. He offers his sword to the characters for the chance to find a way to save his beloved family.

RUMORS

d6

Details

- 1 Peasants believe you can learn the manner and time of your death in the Sanctum of Ravens. Alas, most believe only the bravest and most resilient are allowed. Many have gone into the dungeon but they were never heard from again.
- 2 A homeless man claims to have learned the time of his death. He claims the matron foretold his death 25 years in the future.
- 3 City guards have noticed the presence of hooded outsiders near the city. Many believe they are Matron of Ravens' cultists.
- 4 Some believe that, after gaining the Matron of Raven's favor, she has the divine power to grant any wish.
- 5 People speak of a young woman who used magic to kill two cultists last night. The evil men pursued the woman and tried to abduct her but she used magic to defend herself. No one knows this was Joane Runn, an oath-breaker of the raven goddess.
- 6 Traveling merchants whisper that foul bandits hide in the hills between Brilshire and the entrance to the Crypt of White Ravens.

THE OATH-BREAKER

A **YOUNG WOMAN** named Joane Runn visited the Sanctum of Ravens four years ago. She sought the Matron of Ravens' power to learn the art of magic. Joane had a personal vendetta in a nearby city. Through the power of the matron, Joane became a proficient mage in record time and used her power to end the lives of two criminals who murdered her parents a decade ago. The Matron of Ravens then directed Joane to a farmstead to take the life of a farmer who broke his oath to the matron a year ago. Joane went there and almost killed the groveling man with a fire spell before she noticed an infant cowering under a table. She was about to bestow on that child the same pain she suffered when her parents were killed.

EALLARD PHAMES

Human soldier

Eallard Phames has served in Brilshire's city watch since he was old enough to hold a sword and a shield. He started in the trenches as a lowly squire and has, slowly but steadily, grown in expertise and reputation. After returning from a campaign against King Wened's enemy in the south 10 years ago, Eallard married his wife Jenna. The recent death of his youngest, Sarah, paints his soul and visage with pain and grief. Eallard Phames is desperate to save his diseased wife and the rest of his children.

Manner. Eallard moves and speaks with the poise and confidence of someone willing to risk anything.

Ambition. Eallard wants to earn the matron's favor to save his family. Perhaps even to bring Sarah back to life.



JOANE RUNN

Human mage

Bolstered forward only by a strong sense of self-preservation and the greed for arcane knowledge, Joane Runn is a mage, unlike most others. Her magical skills were bestowed over a short period by the Matron of Ravens so that she could become a strong arm to its otherworldly will. Alas, Joane refused to bring pain and suffering to others and broke the *Oath of Dark Feathers*. She has been pursued by murderous cultists for months and has been relegated to a fugitive's life.

Manner. Joane's hunched posture and stuttering voice give others a false sense that she is harmless.

Ambition. Joane wants to become even more powerful. She believes the Matron of Ravens can make it so.



Adventurers Wanted

His Majesty, Brilshire's Light and Wisdom, King Wened, summons all sellswords and mercenaries! A cure to the deathly fever must be found. Glory and wealth await those who succeed.

Those brave enough to delve into the Crypt of White Ravens and meet the gaze of the goddess of fate shall be greatly rewarded with gold and titles. Help Brilshire remove this blasted curse so a new dawn can come tomorrow.



CRYPT OF WHITE RAVENS

The path of those sworn to the Matron of Ravens is marked with dark feathers and thin, gilded threads that lead to their unavoidable fate.

Dungeon Inscription

RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	Four thugs arrive at the dungeon. They care not for the Matron of Ravens; instead, they wish to look for treasures or valuables, and steal from anyone inside. These thugs may antagonize the characters, other visitors, and the cult followers.
2	Loose debris detaches from the crumbling ceiling, hitting a random hero. They take 2d6 damage (DC 12 DEX check).
3	The heroes disturb the nest of a scarab swarm . The puny insects flee if they are reduced to half their Hit Points.
4	Four spectral figures of long-dead oath-breakers (shadows), forcibly in the service of the goddess after their deaths, pass through walls, appearing suddenly to ambush the party. When attacking, they recite the <i>Oath of Dark Feathers</i> .
5	A swarm of ravens approaches through the dungeon. The ravens ignore those who kneel to the Matron of Ravens.
6	A traveling merchant sets up shop a few hundred feet outside the dungeon, seeking to profit from travelers and cultists alike.
7	Four raven guardians approach the characters and demand their immediate surrender to the goddess' will, attacking if refused.
8	Three cultists approach. They shall not allow tomb-plundering or more than two people to dine with the dead (see area A13). If Joane Runn is present, there is a 3-in-6 chance they recognize her; this revelation brands the characters as heretics too.



REACHING THE THRESHOLD

THE JOURNEY TO the hillside where the entrance is located takes a 2-hour ride. The well-trodden path to the strange door is well known by the locals and there is ample evidence of people going there in the past few days, in preparation for the approaching solstice.

► **Brigands.** Low-life thieves prowl the area leading to the dungeon. The characters are approached by a group of eight **thugs**. Their leader is a man with a grafted hook instead of a hand named Jorl. He orders the characters to surrender half of their possessions. The thieves let them alone if the characters comply. Otherwise, they fight but flee if reduced to half their numbers.

THE ENTRANCE

THE PATH LEADS to a metal door on the rocky hillside. The door features detailed engravings of the stars in alignment. A magic-user knows these markings, they are the arcane portrayal of the solstices (DC 15 INT check). On the day of the solstice, at the fourth hour of the afternoon, the rune-marked door glimmers and opens. Many travelers and cultists gather by the entrance. They file inside without quarrel when the magical door opens. The threshold remains open for 1 day before it closes again. If creatures fail to leave the dungeon after this period, they are teleported out (see **Permanency**).

Level 4 Dungeon

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a Random Event every 2 crawling rounds and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some areas feature lit braziers, the rest are in darkness. Denizens of the dungeon are **dark-adapted**.

► **Traps.** When triggered, any device or trap described below magically resets at the next solstice. Those in damaged chambers malfunctioned long ago.

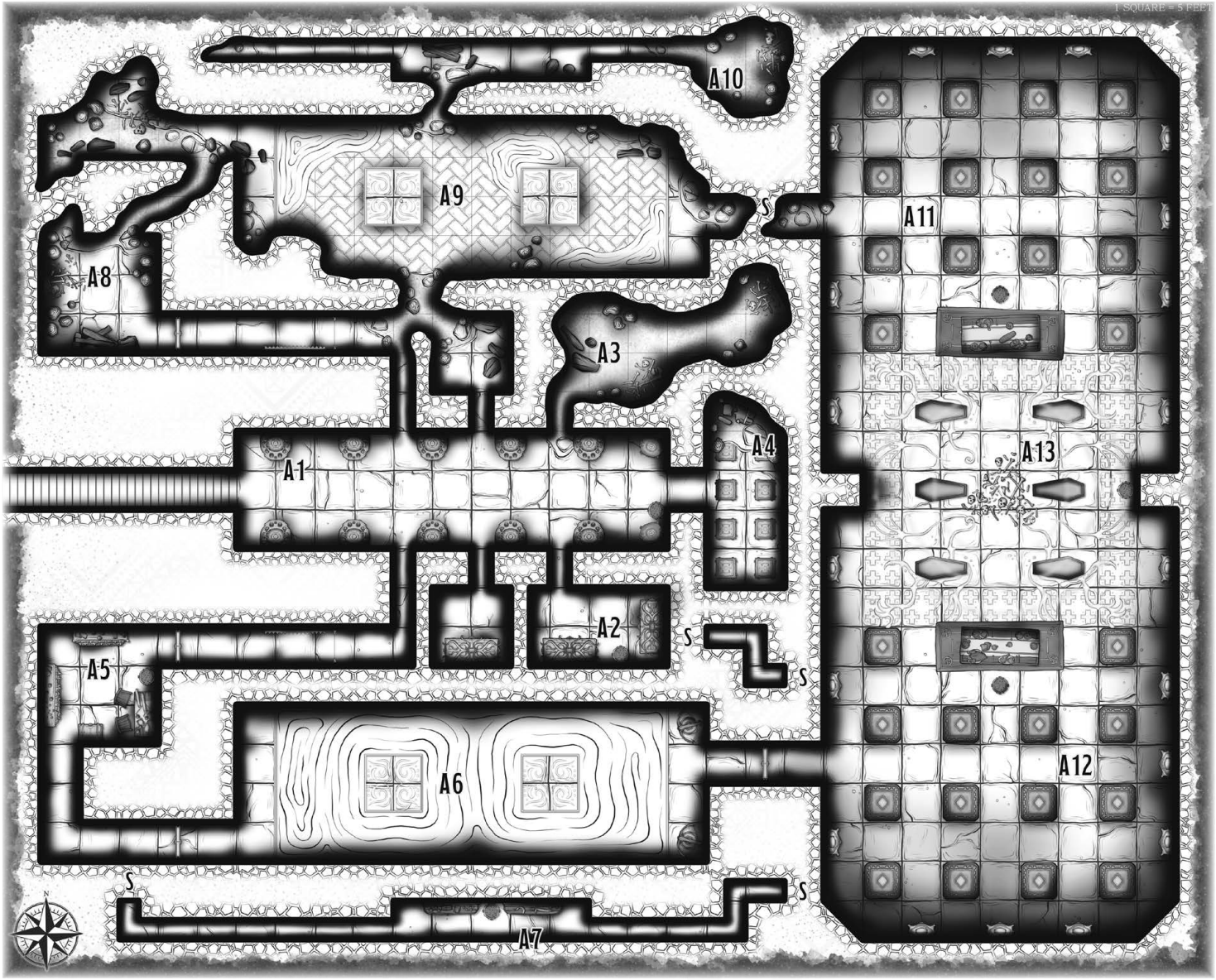
► **Guardians.** The dungeon denizens are magically created. When defeated, they reform at the next solstice.

► **Permanency.** Creatures inside the dungeon after the solstice ends are teleported outside (no save). This effect deals 2d6 INT damage, which might be lethal.

► **Companions.** Eallard Phames (**soldier**) and/or Joane Runn (**level-3 wizard**) may accompany the party.

SWORN CULTISTS

MANY FOLLOWERS OF the Matron of Ravens are in this level of the dungeon. Not all of them antagonize the characters as each has their own commands and goals to achieve. Some have only come to pay their respects to their godly matron. Alas, some have been tasked with limiting the dining ceremony in area A13 while others were given the specific job of capturing Joane Runn. In some cases, they may even act against one another.



A1. HALL OF OFFERINGS

Rows of gilded vases on plinths and the floor line the walls; a handful of visitors and zealots walk among them. A person explains to the characters that all pilgrims are expected to make an offering here by placing something in any of the vases. Four **cultists** are praying in the hall but they ignore the characters unless attacked or if the characters attempt to plunder the holy vases.

► **Treasure (1 XP).** Collectively, there are 15 gp, 240 sp, and a silver bracelet (25 gp) in the gilded vases.

A2. TOMB OF NOBLES

Two ornate sarcophagi, the resting place of warriors of the Matron of Ravens, lie in the room. Plundering the tomb causes the enmity of cultists in the dungeon.

► **Secret Door.** Pulling a hidden button (DC 12 WIS to spot), reveals a secret tunnel that leads to area A12.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** The enclosures contain 75 gp, 130 sp, a +1 *dag*ger, and a level-3 Wizard *spell scroll*.

A3. CRUMBLING CAVERN

Seismic movement caused a tomb similar to area A2 to collapse; little remains of its enclosures and structure.

► **Remains.** Studying the bones scattered around for 1 **crawling round** reveals they are a few years old; poor visitors slain by flesh-eating insects. A **scarab swarm** attacks whoever stays long enough to inspect them.

► **Treasure (1 XP).** The heroes find a half-buried gold locket (35 gp) after defeating the aggressive insects.

A4. HALLOWED CRYPT

Limestone slabs on the floor mark the spots for an underground crypt. The slab inscriptions speak of grandiose, priest-like people who devoted their lives to the Matron of Ravens. The north end of the room is partially collapsed; the two crypts there are inaccessible.

► **Plunder.** Cracking open these tombs is a grave insult (DC 9 INT). If any is opened, seven **zombies** emerge from the vertical shafts under the limestone slabs.

A5. CRYPT ARCHIVE

The poison dart trap in the hallway leading to this area was disabled by the cultists. Once a year, the goddess commands two **cultists** to update books in this chamber with a list of visitors of both area A13 and the sanctum (area B8). The characters are told that only two people can dine with the dead (area A13). If they accept, two of them are allowed to continue. Two more cultists stand by the south door. They allow the characters through the secret door to area A7 (DC 9 WIS to spot it).

► **Teleportation.** Reading key documents in the archive for 1 **crawling round** reveals that the teleportation magic, after the solstice ends, causes severe mental trauma.

A6. BLOOD POND

Inspecting the pond's contents reveals it is watered-down blood (DC 12 INT check). The Primordial runes on the walls claim it is the blood of those who gave their lives to further the Matron of Ravens's will. To cross, the characters must vault over the bloody fluid to the platforms (DC 12 STR check). The automated crossbows start shooting when any creature enters the chamber.

► **Crossbows.** Each one shoots a bolt at a random creature per round (+3 / 1d8, AC 13 / 10 HP). Creatures struck by the bolts have disadvantage in jumping checks.

A7. SECRET PASSAGE

This narrow tunnel connects areas A6 and A12. The tunnel widens in the middle, where a brazier burns.

► **Treasure (1 XP).** On two wooden shelves, there are some valuables among worthless trinkets: two *potions of healing*, an iron container, an iron hook, and a dagger.

A8. DESTROYED LIBRARY

The hallway east of this room has a poison dart trap activated by pulling a trigger thread (DC 15 WIS to spot). The darts fly 4 seconds after triggering the trap. Creatures in front of the holes take 1d8 damage (DC 12 DEX).

There was once a library here but the walls collapsed a long time ago. Nothing remains of the bookshelves, tomes, and scrolls that were housed here.

► **The Explorer.** A fellow pilgrim named Gillhad (**peasant**) is here, exploring the moth-eaten remnants of books (**Reaction**). Gillhad may reveal to the characters that his brother came to the crypt two years ago but failed to exit in time. The hapless man's mind was never the same after he was teleported out of the Crypt of White Ravens.

A9. THE PLIGHT OF THE RAVEN GUARDIANS

The crumbling chamber once housed a large pond of scarlet fluid; puddles of it still linger. Ominous, feathered figures meander and lament in the empty pond.

Six **raven guardians** walk aimlessly in the room. Each is a chimeric abomination. Half raven, half man. In their whimpering laments, they reveal whatever promise they made to the Matron of Ravens but did not keep. The raven guardians ignore the characters unless they attempt to dig their way to area A11 (see below) or if attacked.

► **Debris.** Two characters with spades or similar tools can dig out the debris to open the way to area A11. This task requires 1 **crawling round** and a DC 12 STR check.

A10. LAIR OF THE MAD MAN

During last year's solstice, a man was not teleported out of the dungeon. For six months, the man survived by eating vermin but his mind is shattered. He does not remember his name and his communication skills are lackluster at best; he is mad. Today, four **cultists** of the Matron of Ravens encountered the wanderer here.

Two cultists want to kill the man, claiming his overstay is an insult to the goddess. The other two argue that the man's stay in the dungeon could only be allowed with the goddess' blessing. The haggard man gazes at the two pairs of cultists as they discuss his fate; his face reveals no understanding of his surroundings. If left alone, the two pairs of cultists start fighting to the death. The characters are free to choose either side. If present, Joane Runn takes the side of those defending the poor man.



A11. NORTH CRYPT

Fourteen plinths create a patchwork of passageways on this side of the crypt. Each plinth contains a hundred drawers filled with the ashen remains of a cultist.

► **Niche Contents.** Roll 1d12 when opening a random niche to search for its contents. Each time there is a 2-in-6 chance that a **shadow** materializes and attacks. Contents: 1). A jug stamped with the goddess' seal and profane imagery. 2). a dog's skull. 3). A box of incense powder. 4). A treasure map. 5). A damaged brass bell. 6). A grape-sized diamond (50 gp, 1 XP). 7). An ornate wooden pan-flute. 8). A bear-hide robe 9). A random, level-2 priest *spell scroll* (1 XP). 10). A small ivory statuette of the Matron of Ravens (75 gp, 1 XP). 11). An embroidered green robe. 12). A horse trainer's whistle.

A12. SOUTH CRYPT

This area is a mirrored version of area A11. Use the same description and treasure. If any niche in area A11 has already been searched, the probability of a shadow appearing increases to 3-in-6 per niche explored.

A13. CRYPT OF WHITE RAVENS

Six unmarked sarcophagi flank a mound of humanoid bones in the center of the grand crypt. Two tables are set with warm food and rare culinary delicacies. Flavorful, mouth-watering smells fill the air.

► **Decor.** Intricate mosaics of white ravens decorate the walls and ceiling of this chamber. The white birds carry morsels of bread and meat to souls in the afterlife. A historian knows that such a ceremony of eating people's favorite dishes on the anniversary of their death is a way to commune with them in some cultures (DC 9 INT).

► **The Sarcophagi.** The enclosures contain nothing but a thick layer of dust. Their contents are strewn about the chamber's center and have been for centuries.

► **Zealots.** Two **cultists**, one **knight**, and one **apprentice**, all of them cultists of the Matron of Ravens, are in the room. In addition, seven neutral **peasants** have been allowed to access the inner sanctum. If more than two characters come here, it is assumed that they forced their way in and a battle commences. They yield if reduced to half their numbers. If any of these cultists reach area B1, they may rush to area B8 and lock the gate to impede the characters' passage (see **New Arrivals**).

► **The Fugitive.** If Joane Runn is present, she is recognized immediately but she attempts to parley her way into the inner sanctum. She claims that, as she has gotten this far, it is only fair that the goddess of fate decides since Joane intends to visit her shrine. The matrons' followers care not for her request as she has slain many of their friends. The cultists attempt to capture Joane Runn.



DINNER WITH THE DEAD

The mound of bones vibrates and floats as the remains coalesce into six skeletons. The undead beings motion to the visitors to approach the tables and eat. The skeletons eat too. Alas, their hollow bodies cannot contain the chewed food; it falls to the floor.

The tables and the delicious food appear magically at each solstice. There is enough food for up to thirty adults.

► **Tradition.** Many believe that the spirits of the dead return to the Material Plane, led by the smell of their favorite food, and commune with their loved ones. It is known that disrespecting such a tradition or its participants is a terrible insult and must be avoided (DC 9 INT check).

► **The Skeletons.** The pelvic bones of each skeleton are engraved with arcane runes. A spellcaster who inspects them infers that these were the founders of the Matron of Ravens' church (DC 12 INT check). The skeletons do not fight, even in self-defense. If attacked, the ritual ends and the Sanctum of Ravens cannot be reached.

► **Development.** Those who eat with the dead without disrespecting the ritual are magically teleported to the Sanctum of Ravens' entrance hall (area B1).

Oath of Dark Feathers

Matron of Ravens, Goddess of Death and Fate, I
pledge my soul to you. I embrace the quiet cer-
tainty of the grave, accepting your rare gifts.

Through me, your will shall become a reality. I
shall honor the gilded threads you weave, guiding
those, whose time has come, toward their fate.

I shall obey without question, for in your wisdom
lies truth, and in your shadow, I find purpose. By
your hand, I shall walk the path between life and
death, bearing witness to your timeless dominion
until my final breath joins your eternal flock.

My soul henceforth is in your caring hands...



SANCTUM OF RAVENS

“We shall not suffer the presence of oath-breakers. You made a promise to the goddess and failed to keep it. Hence, your worthless life is forfeit”

Meorise, Champion of the Raven

Mloyal follower of the Matron of Ravens, Meorise, is her chosen champion. The spiritual leader of the congregation aids others in their strange, fate-seeking, zealotry for the goddess of fate. Champion Meorise (**level-3 Wizard, drow**) is harsh and cruel when exerting the Matron of Ravens' will. Her discipline and stalwart attitude are why the divinity chose her to lead the otherwise disorganized nature of the followers of the Matron of Ravens.

Meorise and four cultists teleported into the Sanctum of Ravens before everyone else as soon as they reach area A13. They pray before the raven-shaped effigy in area B8 when the characters still explore the Crypt of White Ravens. Meorise wears a crown-like helm with a bronze effigy of the goddess of fate on top. The *Raven Helm* marks Meorise as the 'Champion of the Raven', a position of power she has held for four decades.

THE RAVEN HELM

A high, bronze helm with an intricate raven's effigy.

Bonus. You get a +2 magical bonus to AC.

Benefit. You can transform into a **swarm of ravens** once per day. The effect may last up to 8 hours.

Curse. Only the Champion of the Raven can wear this helmet safely. Worn by others, it imposes disadvantage on all checks and cannot be removed without magic.

NEW ARRIVALS

WHEN THE DINING ceremony in area A13 occurs, the cultists there attempt to take part in it, even if the characters previously defeated them and they surrendered. All participants are teleported to area B1. However, the cultists arrive at the entrance hall 1 minute before visitors. This allows the cultists to rush to area B8 and warn Meorise in case someone disregards her rules and approaches. Meorise orders her followers to close the gate to area B8 so that the characters and other visitors cannot reach the effigy and commune with the goddess of fate.

Conversely, if no cultist is allowed to participate in the dining ritual, the characters shall find the gate to area B8 open; Meorise and her cultists pray silently inside.

B1. ENTRANCE HALL

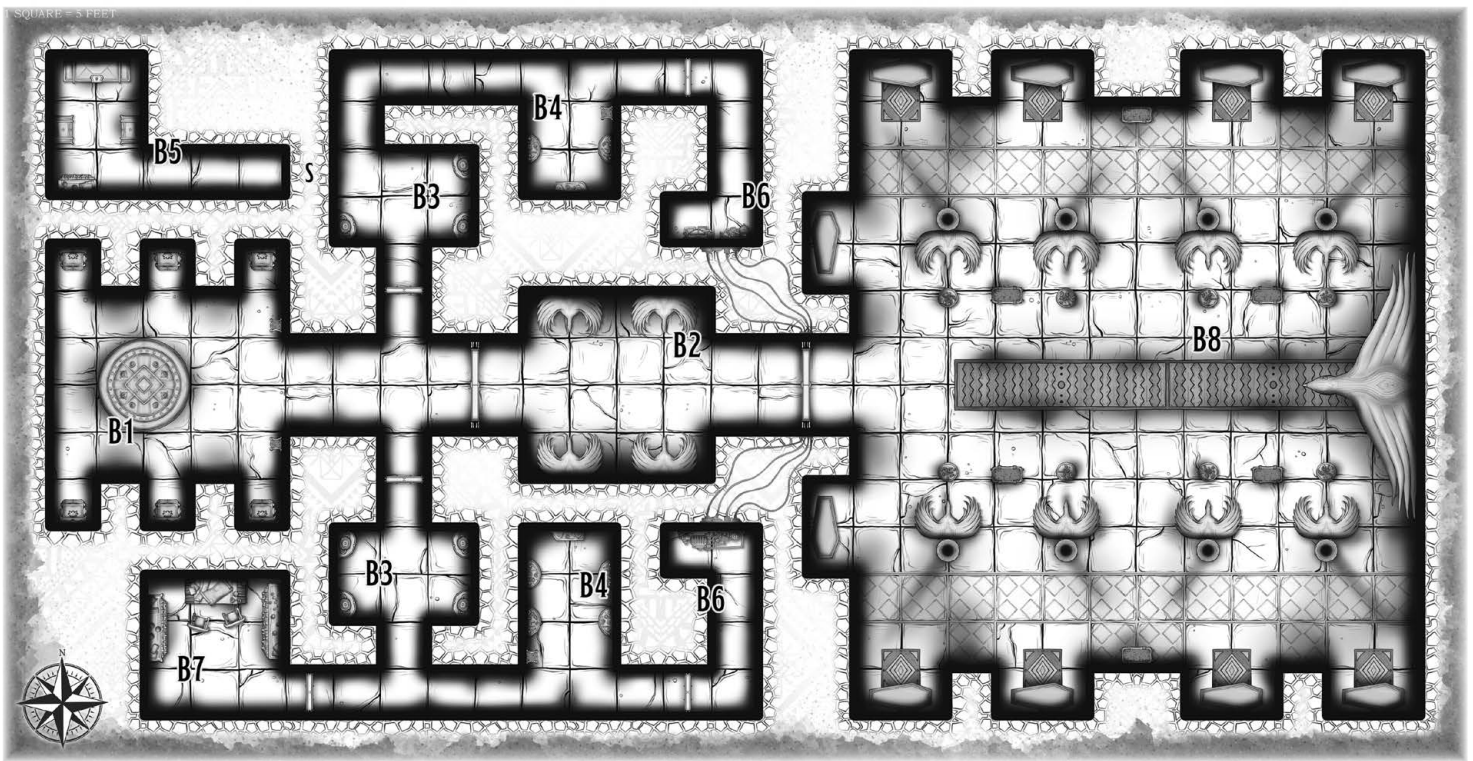
The world shifts in a sudden conflagration of energy and light. The crypt and the eating skeletons are replaced by a smaller chamber with a rune-carved magic circle flanked by six standing sarcophagi.

If any cultists took part in the dining ritual, they are teleported before the characters, divided from their group (see **New Arrivals**). Their foot-prints lead east, toward the now closed gate in area B2 (DC 12 WIS to spot).

► **The Circle.** It becomes dormant for 1 hour after the party arrives here. After that, any creature that stands on the circle is teleported back to area A13 safely.

► **The Sarcophagi.** Inspecting the enclosures for 1 **crawling round** reveals that they are empty, mostly a decorative piece. A *detect magic* spell reveals fine, eldritch runes etched on the lids, though. After reading them, a spellcaster knows their purpose is to teleport living creatures out of the dungeon after the solstice ends. The spell draws power from the teleported people's minds.





B2. HALL OF RAVENS

Four granite effigies of flying ravens flank the way to a tall double door made from a dark, metallic material. The door is engraved with the goddess' likeness.

The doors to area B8 are closed if cultists came here before the characters. Upon closer inspection, it is revealed they are made of adamantine; they cannot be destroyed.

Door. A master thief can pick this door (DC 18 DEX). Operating the machinery in both areas B6 opens it too.

Visitors. If the seven **peasants** from area A13 are here and the door is closed, they blame the characters for being locked out of the inner sanctum. Two bang on the closed door, begging to be let in. The others antagonize the characters and may even attack them (**Reaction**).

B3. ASHEN URNS

Gilded urns, marked with dozens of family seals, rest of stone plinths in the corners. Each produces a low-pitched hum; an almost unheard, mellow vibration.

The urns contain the ashes of dozens of people, loyal followers of the Matron of Ravens. The urns also lure hermit and lonesome spirits in the region to come.

Each time the characters pass by any of the chambers labeled B3, the seals in the urns light up and a ghostly manifestation is conjured in the center of the room.

► **Strange Ghosts.** Roll 1d8 in the **Strange Ghosts** table when the party passes by through rooms. The **shadows** may be friendly or aggressive. They have advantage against *turn undead* effects. They fizzle out after 1 **crawling round**. They cannot leave the Sanctum of Ravens.

STRANGE GHOSTS

d8

Details

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | This ghost holds a tome, endlessly turning its pages. The scholar offers knowledge if his cryptic mutterings are deciphered (DC 9 INT). He says the goddess grants no wishes, something he would have liked to know. He claims the matron cannot change the future ;she does nothing but lead people to their predestined fate. |
| 2 | This widow screams in despair, her voice echoing through the tomb. The Matron of Ravens took her husband's life. She must be approached with caution, as her grief can turn to sudden violence toward the living. |
| 3 | Once a noble knight, he is now a ghostly figure who protects the crypt. He offers guidance if respect and loyalty to the goddess are shown. Otherwise, he fights to protect the inner sanctum from infidels and tomb-robbers. |
| 4 | Regal yet wrathful, she floats demanding retribution for her murder centuries ago. This queen made a promise to the goddess that was not kept. The matron's agents eventually caught her and took her life. Still, in the afterlife, the noblewoman feels she has been unjustly wronged. |
| 5 | Dragging heavy spectral chains, this ghost groans in torment, attacking anyone who comes too close. His chains must be broken to set him free. Alas, only Meorise, Champion of the Raven can grant this eternal freedom. |
| 6 | A friendly spirit who plays soft, haunting music on a spectral flute. He becomes hostile if his performance is interrupted. He claims his pan-flute, a family heirloom, is buried somewhere in the Crypt of White Ravens. |
| 7 | A peaceful spirit who offers to heal the wounds of adventurers. In return, she asks for a flower to be placed on her grave (B11). She heals 3d6 HP or a curse. She can do this twice. She haunts the heroes if they fool her. |
| 8 | Two spirits, twins, playfully challenge adventurers to solve their riddles. If answered correctly, they reveal a hidden cache under a stone slab (150 gp, 2 XP). If wrong, they lose their minds and attack the characters. |

B4. TRINKETS OF INFIDELS

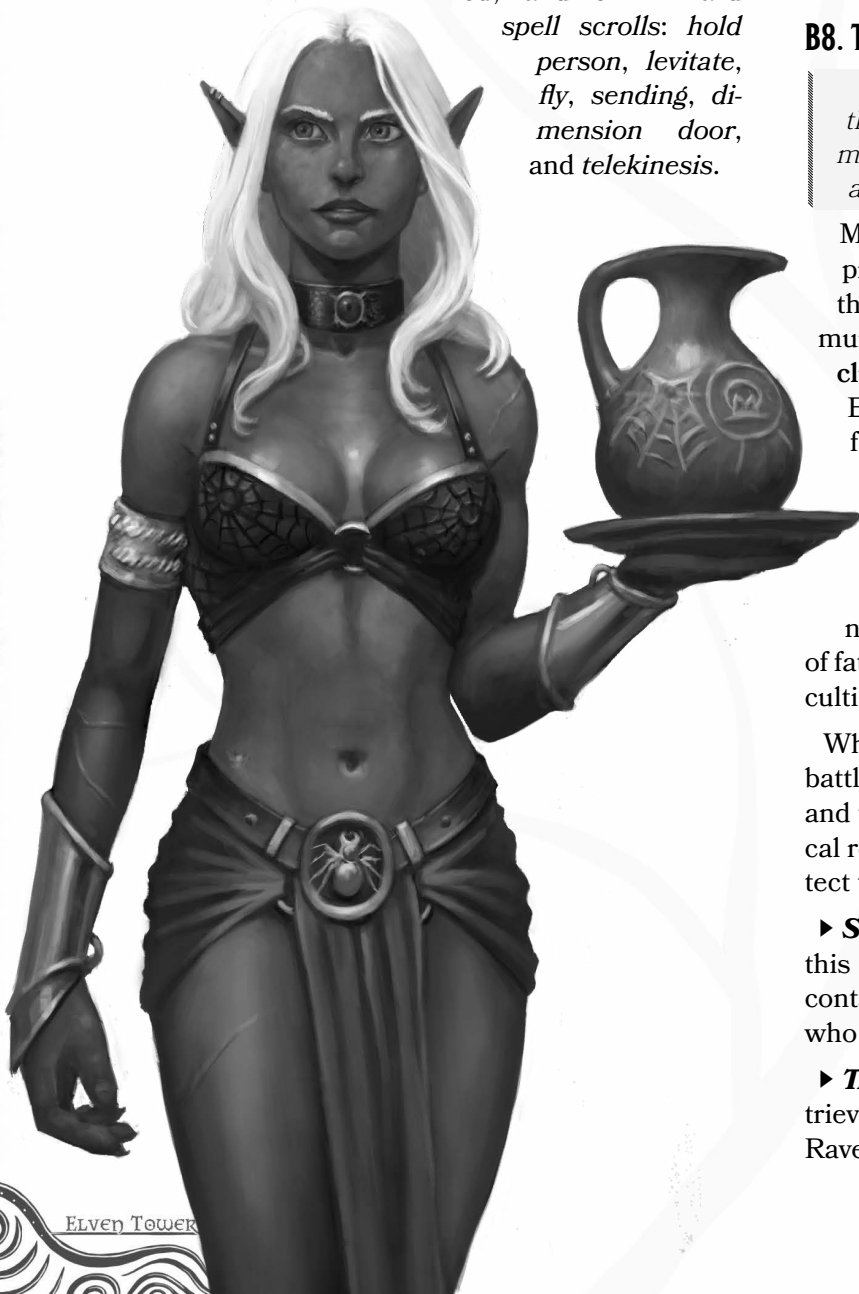
Stone shelves on the walls are littered with dozens of strange, curious objects of no apparent value. Each time an oath-breaker is caught and disposed of, an item on them is removed and brought here at the next solstice.

► **Guardians.** The objects lack personal or monetary value but they are important to the Matron of Ravens. Each time a trinket is touched, a **wraith** materializes to attack the thief. If a person dies this way, a wraith takes an item from the carcass and places it on a shelf.

B5. SECRET VAULT

In area B3 (north), there is a hidden button that opens a passage to area B5 when pushed (DC 15 WIS to spot). It contains three stone coffers and a narrow bookcase.

► **Treasure (6 XP).** The room contains 480 gp, 790 sp, one *potion of healing*, a map of both levels of the dungeon (level 1 appears with the north side intact), a *+1 chainmail*, an *immovable rod*, and six Wizard spell scrolls: *hold person*, *levitate*, *fly*, *sending*, *dimension door*, and *telekinesis*.



B6. DOOR MACHINERY

In the two narrow passages labeled area B6, there are clockwork and eldritch apparatuses that control the lock of the inner sanctum. Both sets of machinery must be operated to release the lock (DC 12 INT check). On a failure by 5 or more, the machines overload and explode. Creatures within 15 feet take 2d6 damage (DC 15 DEX). Even if they overload, interacting with both sets of machinery opens the path between areas B2 and B8.

B7. LIBRARY OF THE MATRON

A scholar, Harold (**peasant**), is tasked with guarding the ancient documents here; they once belonged to the cult's founders. Harold fights to protect these documents but is a coward at heart. If he takes damage, he yields and begs for his life. Such a display of cowardice brands him an oath-breaker in the goddess' eyes.

► **Treasure (3 XP).** Ten books in the library are unique and can be sold to a university for 250 gp. There are four tier-2 Priest *spell scrolls*: *augury* and *zone of truth*.

B8. THE INNER SANCTUM

Two rows of granite statues of flying ravens flank the huge effigy of the Matron of Ravens. The mammoth-sized raven statue overlooks the chamber with an otherworldly gaze that numbs the mortal mind.

Meorise (**level-3 Wizard**) and four **cultists** are here praying. If only two party members come here with the rest of the petitioners, they are allowed to commune with the Matron of Ravens (see **Adventure Conclusion**). Such a course of action is unlikely as both Eallard and Joane, if present in area A13, would push for the whole party to be allowed into the sanctum.

If cultists from area A13, which partook in the dining ceremony, come here to warn Meorise about the characters' intrusion (see **New Arrivals**), they are ready to confront the party and cannot be surprised. Here, under the gaze of the goddess of fate, no cultist dares stand down and surrender. These cultists fight like caged beasts to the death.

When Meorise, Champion of the Raven, is defeated in battle, the will of the goddess takes her battered body and transforms it into the **Avatar of Ravens**. This physical representation of the goddess is the last effort to protect the Sanctum of Ravens from the characters.

► **Sarcophagi.** Ten stone enclosures line the walls of this chamber, behind the rows of sturdy pillars. They contain the decrepit remains of a warrior of the faith who gave his life to the Matron of Ravens in martyrdom.

► **Treasure (3 XP).** After combat, the characters can retrieve the *Raven Helm*. Only the new Champion of the Raven shall obtain its powers (see **The Raven Helm**).

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

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

COMMUNING WITH THE GODDESS

Two characters commune with the goddess in peace. Or they defeat everyone in the dungeon. Thus carrying out their predestined fate, known by the goddess. She sees strength in them, something to be used. To learn their fate, each participant must make a promise to obey the goddess and recite the *Oath of Dark Feathers*.

Characters that do are in alliance with the Matron of Ravens henceforth. In exchange for their loyalty, the goddess shows them a glimpse of their future. The GM is encouraged to include in this vision elements from future campaigns like magic items, important NPCs, or events that are yet to pass. The goddess does not grant wishes.

THE SOLDIER AND THE FEVER

If asked about the terrible fever that threatens Brilshire, the goddess reveals that it shall take 30% of the city's population and nothing can change that fact. But the worst of it will be over in less than 2 weeks. King Wened pays the 2,500 gp reward (6 XP) as promised but soon falls sick. The king perishes five days later, leaving the city's leadership with a terrible power vacuum.

If Eallard Phames lives, he learns that his wife and two more of his children shall perish from the fever in the coming days. Overcome with grief and pain, the soldiers' reaction is uncertain. Roll 1d6: 1-3). He falls to the floor crying, a broken man. 4-5). Resolute in the goddess' vision, he accepts his family's fate and becomes a loyal follower of the Matron of Ravens. 6). Eallard becomes mad and attacks all other people around him.

A NEW OATH

If Joane Runn lives, she offers loyalty to the goddess but refuses to impose on others the hardships she experienced in life. The Matron of Ravens accepts her as she has proven her bravery in coming here to face her fate. If no character becomes the Champion of the Raven, Joane Runn is offered this position. She accepts greedily.

A NEW CHAMPION

If Meorise dies, the Matron of Ravens requires a new champion. This is a position of power within the organization that comes with great power but great sacrifice too. Characters who prove themselves in battle are singled out by the goddess and offered this role. The champion can wear the *Raven Helm* and shall be respected among other followers. Twice a year, on each solstice, they must return here to pray and protect the sanctum. Their lives shall be dedicated to the Matron of Ravens.

THE WILL OF THE GODDESS

ONE OR MORE characters accepting the Matron of Ravens as their patron soon marks their path in the world. Especially if one becomes the Champion of the Raven. Like other followers, these characters soon experience visions with the goddess' will. They are bound by the *Oath of Dark Feathers* to serve as the goddess' arms in the Material Plane. The matron does not negotiate nor explain her goals. Commands are given and obedience is expected. Otherwise, the characters shall be branded oath-breakers and considered heretics. Alas, the characters' future deeds are adventures for another day...



Avatar of Ravens

A 15-foot-tall slim, feminine, hooded figure. The physical representation of the fabled Matron of Ravens wears a skull mask that hides her facial features.

AC: 13

HP: 33 LV7

ATK: 1 scythe +6 (1d10) or 1 spell +5

MV: Near

S:+5 D:+1 C:+2 I:+2 W:+1 Ch:+3

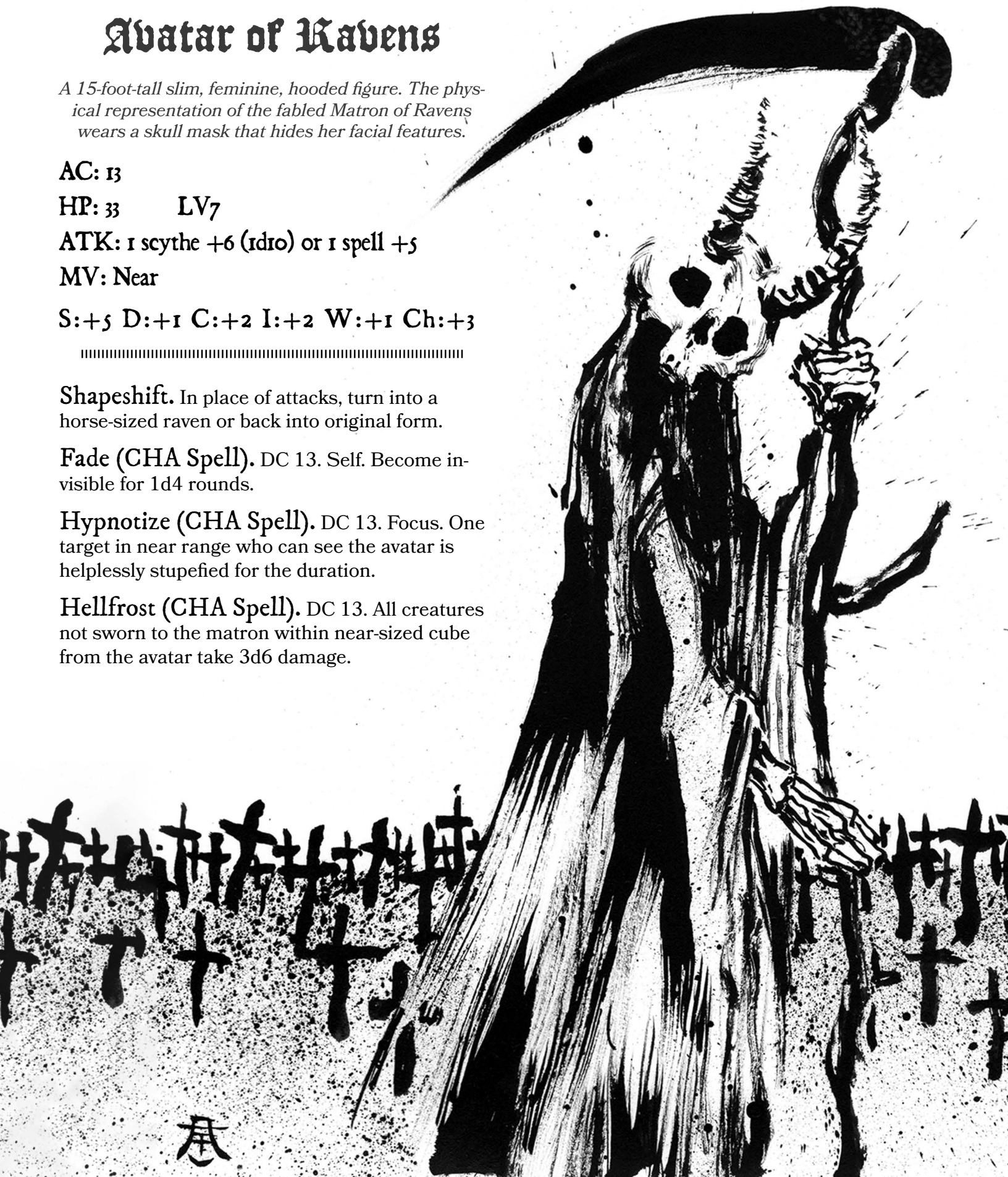
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Shapeshift. In place of attacks, turn into a horse-sized raven or back into original form.

Fade (CHA Spell). DC 13. Self. Become invisible for 1d4 rounds.

Hypnotize (CHA Spell). DC 13. Focus. One target in near range who can see the avatar is helplessly stupefied for the duration.

Hellfrost (CHA Spell). DC 13. All creatures not sworn to the matron within near-sized cube from the avatar take 3d6 damage.



Gourmet Dungeon

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Gourmet Dungeon - Chapter 2

Mandrake Kakiage Giant Bat Tempura

Ingredients

- 3 mandrakes (3)
- 1/2 lb of breast meat
- 1/2 lb of fish (1)
- 1/2 lb of flour
- 1/2 lb of sauce
- 1/2 lb of oil
- 1/2 lb of salt
- 1/2 lb of pepper
- 1/2 lb of ginger

Preparation

1. Cut off the giant bat's head and tail. Chop it into small pieces.
2. Soak the meat. Mix it with the seasoning in, and let it rest.
3. While grilling the mandrakes, pull its limbs off first. Peel the skin and scrape the darker parts.
4. Fry an egg into the water, add some flour into the mix, and clump and put the mandrakes in.
5. Fry the mix when it's done.

D&D 5e + Shadowdark



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Beastman of Madness

A towering humanoid with abnormally long limbs. Fur and scales cover its twisted shape. Its maddening, pallid eyes locked in a blood-freezing stare.

AC: 11

HP: 37 LV6

ATK: 1 staff (near) +5 (1d8) or 1 spell +4

MV: Near

S:+4 D:+1 C:+2 I:+1 W:+1 Ch:+2

.....

Impervious. Immune to non-magical weapons.

Vanish (CHA). DC 13. Self. Become invisible for 1d4 rounds.

Hellish Fire. DC 13. All within a near-sized cube extending from the beastman 3d6 damage.

Dracle of Insanity

An amalgam of eyes and mouths in wrong sizes and positions, twistedly fused by sinew and bone.

AC: 16

HP: 43 LV9

ATK: 1d3 otherworldly rays

MV: Near (fly)

S:+3 D:+4 C:+3 I:+3 W:+3 Ch:+3

.....

Ray. 1/round each, target one creature up to 1,000 pounds (up to two on same target).

Rend. DC 13 DEX or 3d8 damage.

Confusion. DC 13 WIS or attack a random ally within near.

Stun. DC 13 STR or paralyzed for 1d4 rounds.



1. Desert Camp

The perfect place to set up camp is outside the dungeon. The characters' hirelings and guards can stay with the travel supplies here.

2. Door of the Sun

The double doors engraved with the sun deity's sigil are locked. An adventuring locksmith can use fine tools to bypass the clockwork machinery that keeps the doors in place.

3. Dungeon Library

The bookcase contains accounting ledgers and logs from the time when Varlix Donovan made his fortune as a merchant. The documents are enchanted and cannot be read without first dispelling the confusion enchantment.

► **Pitfall Trap.** By an empty chest, the trapdoor drops creatures to their deaths in area 7.

Varlix Donovan's Ghoul



4. Archive of Visitors

The names and deeds of all visitors are logged by an ancient spell in the books of this chamber. Hundreds of names are already logged in, including the just-arrived characters' names.

► **Pitfall Trap.** By an empty chest, the trapdoor drops creatures to their deaths in area 8.

5. Upper Hall

The grand opening overlooks Donovan's treasure room below. The glint of gold is hard to miss. A levitating platform can be used to descend 40 feet to area 6. Six skeletons coalesce from the decrepit remains on the pedestals.

6. Treasure Room

Countless gold ingots lie against the walls and surround the headless effigy of a demonic creature; rows of stone pews before the statue.

► **The Ingots.** Touching any ingot incurs a terrible curse. The thief dies or is cursed with uncontrollable greed. They covet any valuables except for the gold ingots here, which are left in the dungeon. Bringing the effigy's head from area 10 lifts this curse for everyone.

► **Guardians.** Varlix Donovan's Ghoul, eternally cursed to guard his wealth, and six skeletons unearth themselves from the mounds of gold ingots. Donovan issues a single warning and advises the characters to leave at once. If the characters remain, the undead fight.

► **Treasure.** After the curse is lifted, anyone can take the gold ingots. Alas, this uncanny hoard of wealth is enough to unbalance any kingdom and to draw unwanted attention.

7. West Trap Room

Creatures that fall from area 3 become impaled in the spiked pit. The engines spew flame jets to those restrained in the spikes.



8. East Trap Room

Creatures that survive the fall from area 4 and the impalement still must confront the soaring bolts from the three automated crossbows.

9. Machinery Room

Wonders of clockwork machinery whistle and roar in this room closed off by iron bars. Turning off or destroying the devices stops the deadly machines in areas 7 and 8. But it also stops the levitating platform in areas 5 and 6.

10. The Demon's Head

A discorporeal headpiece stands on a pedestal; its demonic face grins and mocks. Placing the head on the statue in area 6 lifts the curse of greed that so worries the local townsfolk.

► **Guardians.** Three ghouls emerge from the standing sarcophagi when anyone touches the effigy's head. The undead fight without mercy. Even if Donovan's Ghoul was defeated in area 6, its body reforms here once more to defend the headpiece from the characters' intrusion.

► **The Head.** The character who carries the head to area 6 risks being possessed by the grinning demon. Only those of strong minds can withstand the demon's mental onslaught.

11. Font of Wisdom

The runes of the sun deity are engraved in the soft limestone of the stoup in this room. Its crystalline water has healing powers that can cure any wound. Donovan purchased it from an angelic entity, or so the legend says...

12. Secret Vault

Only the most astute find this hidden room. While piling in comparison with the treasure in area 6. This room contains the following:

► **Treasure.** The chests contain 600 gp, 950 sp, two *potions of healing*, and a treasure map.



Start Your Adventure



Hearken, brave souls!

Seek ye glory and renown? Step forth, for a perilous quest awaits! Venture into darkened depths where dread and treasure lie entwined.

Face fiends and sorcery, that thy name may echo in the halls of legend.

Riches untold and honor everlasting shall be thine, if thou art bold enough to seize it.

Let not fear stay thy hand; come forth and claim thy destiny!



THICK BLOOD

The Gnoll Ascension



BY
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LEVEL 5 ADVENTURE

**IMMERSIVE SHADOWDARK RPG ONE-SHOT
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ADVENTURE PRIMER



The Pale Blood Cult, a deranged faction of gnoll worshipers, has spread terror across the Oak-en Valley. Their vile practices involve abducting villagers and travelers, dragging them into the dark, where they are sacrificed in grotesque rituals. The cultists use their victims' blood to perform dark incantations, empowering themselves with sinister magic. The Pale Blood Cult has sown chaos in the region, raiding settlements and leaving behind destruction and despair. Their evil influence has disrupted trade routes and forced many smaller communities to abandon their homes in fear of what lurks in the night.

The capital city of Lysander's Reach, the seat of power in the region, has suffered increasingly severe attacks on its outskirts. With the city's outlying defenses strained, it becomes clear that these gnolls pose a greater threat than mere banditry or raiding; they seek to drown the land in blood and corruption. The Pale Blood Cult's dark magic starts to warp the land, with strange, unnatural phenomena occurring in areas closest to their hunts. Unwilling to allow the capital to fall into disarray, Lysander's Reach calls for heroes to form the vanguard of a counterattack, issuing a decree for the bravest and most skilled adventurers to confront this evil.

THE TEMPLE OF THE PALE GOD

SCOUTS HAVE IDENTIFIED one of the cult's main hideouts. Once an ancient place of worship, the temple has been twisted into a lair of darkness where the gnoll cultists and their twisted leaders gather. The lower level houses the Altar of the Pale God, surrounded by an intricate network of canals carrying a stream of thick, pale blood used in the cult's foul rites. This accursed place has become a stronghold for the cult's most fanatical followers, including sinister celebrants and evil mages who seek to unleash even darker powers. The city needs someone to delve into the temple's depths, confront these fiends, and cleanse the land of their corruption.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THE AUTHORITIES OF Lysander's Reach issue a desperate call for heroes, offering a handsome reward to those brave enough to confront this evil. The mission consists of exploring the defiled Temple of the Pale God, where ancient stone corridors run with streams of thick, pale blood, and dark rituals strengthen the gnolls' power. The temple must be cleansed, and the cultists vanquished before their corruption spreads further. Constable Kent offers a reward of 2,000 gp to motivate strong heroes.

REVERBERATIONS

Blood spells are unpredictable and one of the most chaotic forms of magic. Unforeseen results are not uncommon. This translates into beasts made of living blood, or animated corpses. Even the gnolls themselves have not been spared; a few unlucky ones have been grotesquely mutated by the dark magic. These mutated gnolls are larger, more savage, and imbued with malevolent power, making them a terrifying force on the battlefield. The abominate gnolls threaten not only to spread the cult's corruption far beyond the Temple of the Pale God but also to leave a trail of horror and decay in their wake.

COMMON ENEMIES

The gnolls' raids and kidnappings have affected many people, not only in Lysander's Reach. A few of them have nothing left to lose and shall gladly march with the heroes against the hyena invaders (see next page). Consider their personalities and the main drive of these NPCs; they have personal objectives and/or agendas.

THIS IS PERSONAL

Perhaps, one of the heroes comes from Lysander's Reach or one of its nearby towns. Maybe they have lost a loved one during the recent confrontations. Having a personal vendetta against the gnoll invaders is a perfect way to get the characters involved (GM's choice).

RUMORS

d6

Details

- 1 Lysander's Reach is on edge—some say the king is preparing to evacuate if the cult manages to breach the city walls.
- 2 Gnolls worship a blood-soaked god who whispers from beyond the grave, promising endless power if enough blood is spilled.
- 3 Rumor has it that Lira Hillfoot isn't just out for revenge; she has learned some dark alchemy and is somewhat interested in the obscure rituals employed by the gnolls. Without her realizing it, her curiosity might get the best of her when the time comes.
- 4 Seraphine bears a strange mark on her skin that glows faintly at night. Some claim that sooner or later she will turn, as though the cult's magic is still inside her, taking control. She denies these rumors but does not know for sure (see **Tainted Blood**).
- 5 The mutated gnolls are not merely accidents of magic—they are deliberately transformed to serve as the cult's elite shock troops.
- 6 Garrick is driven by more than just revenge; some say the cult left him alive because they cursed him in secret.

LIRA HILLFOOT

Halfling alchemist

The resourceful hobbit herbalist, lost her younger brother when he was abducted during a nocturnal raid. Though the townspeople urged her to grieve and move on, Lira refused. She gathered her courage, honing her skills in stealth and poison, determined to avenge her brother. Currently, she seeks to accompany the heroes to confront the cult directly, hoping to find closure and perhaps even save others from a similar fate.

Manner. People have always underestimated my abilities. I prove my worth to others at every opportunity.

Ambition. My brother meant everything to me. I must do everything I can to honor his memory and show those gnolls who they messed with. I shall avenge my sibling.



SERAPHINE AELENDRIAL

Elf priest

During a pilgrimage, she and her fellow clerics were ambushed by the gnoll cultists, and she barely escaped with her life, but not without being marked by the foul blood magic. She was cast out from her temple after being tainted by the cult's dark magic. Seraphine yearns to reclaim her honor and rid herself of the lingering corruption. The heroes' quest is her chance for redemption and to strike back against the evil that sullied her name.

Manner. She speaks little; her current situation is a burden on her self-esteem. She keeps her head down.

Ambition. Nothing is more important than regaining my status and station at the church. I shall do all within my possibilities to help you defeat those gnolls.



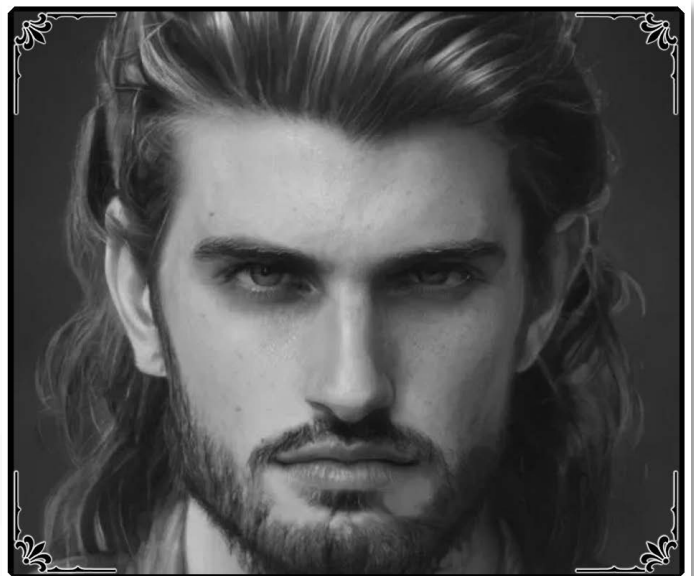
GARRICK WANTON

Human soldier

Garrick, a rugged mercenary, had his entire company slaughtered by the Pale Blood Cult while guarding a caravan. The memory of his comrades' horrific deaths haunts him. The gnolls spared him only to let him spread the word of their cruelty, mocking him as he fled. Garrick has been seeking revenge ever since, sharpening his blade and hunting any sign of the cult's movements. For him, this mission is not just about gold; it is about erasing the shame and guilt that gnaw at his soul.

Manner. I like to talk about my lost friends at all times. This helps me keep the pain and grief at bay.

Ambition. Garrick needs to avenge his friends or die trying. He shall not allow himself to run once more.



Adventurers Needed

It's been enough! The city of Lysander's Reach calls for valiant heroes!

The evil gnoll cultists that have hurt our people and kidnapped our loved ones hide in the Temple of the Pale God. We shall not tolerate their robberies, the burning of our homes, nor their merciless raids.

All gnolls must be dealt with and removed from this world. We cannot allow their corruption to spread any further. Approach Constable Kent for details about the reward.

TEMPLE OF PALE BLOOD

“I may be marked but ‘tis but a battle scar. I’m fine. I don’t expect you to believe my words, my actions shall speak for myself. We have a job to do”.

Seraphine Aelendrial

RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	A hero presses a button by accident. This triggers a swinging blade trap that deals 2d8 damage to another member of the group (DC 12 DEX for half). If Lira is present, she notices the panel to disarm the trap before it triggers (DC 12 DEX, tools needed).
2	A thick stream of pale blood suddenly congeals into a blood zombie , lashing out at the heroes as they cross a narrow canal.
3	A group of three blood zombies approach, their glowing eyes fixated on the heroes, as they shuffle closer to block the passage.
4	The ghostly apparition of a fallen comrade appears before Garrick. The shadow accuses him of cowardice, it blames him for leaving all his friends behind. This shakes Garrick’s resolve (his next check is made with disadvantage). The shadow attacks!
5	A set of runes suddenly glows on the wall; necrotic energy saps the life force of a random hero (DC 12 CON or lose half HP).
6	The heroes stumble upon a mutated gnoll . The abomination munches on a human leg. It throws it away before attacking.
7	A gnoll brute and three gnolls stumble upon the group of heroes. The brute attacks while the other three cover with arrows.
8	A group of three soldiers , two thugs , and three peasants arrive at the dungeon. They are neutral to the heroes. However, if Seraphine is present, the newcomers accuse her and reveal she was cast away from her faith; they want to apprehend her.



BEFORE LEAVING

THE HEROES ARE approached by Seraphine Aelendrial, an elf. She offers her services as a healer (**Level 3 - Priest**). Nevertheless, she insists on tagging along if they refuse, stating her faith calls upon her. She does not reveal her past or how she was cast away from her faith.

REACHING THE GNOLLS’ HIDEOUT

FOLLOWING A TRAIL of blood-soaked soil and twisted roots, in the forest near the capital, the heroes come upon a hidden ravine, descending through a narrow path. Ahead, the ancient temple looms, its stone walls now marked with crimson runes that pulse with a sickly light, as though the very stones bleed corruption.

► **Sentries.** The heroes can approach unnoticed if they find a way to conceal their scent. On the other hand, this is the gnolls’ territory, thus increasing their chances of catching intruders off guard. Three **gnolls** and one **gnoll brute** attempt to ambush the adventuring party (DC 12 WIS to spot them and avoid the ambush).

► **Prisoner.** After combat, the heroes hear Lira Hillfoot calling for help from a wooden cage. She had hoped to sneak her way into the gnoll’s lair but the gnolls caught her scent. The brave halfling (**thief**) wishes to tag along. If the characters refuse, she follows them from afar.

THE FORMER TEMPLE

THIS PLACE WAS built by a long-gone civilization that venerated a sea dragon. They believed in being reborn with water. They would employ the bottomless basin in the nave (area A8) to perform a rebirth by drowning.

Today, the gnolls have defiled every single room within the temple. They use the canals, which once transported holy water, to gather their victims’ blood and bleach it with their foul rituals. They have placed traps and turned a couple of chambers into laboratories of madness.

Level 5 Dungeon

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

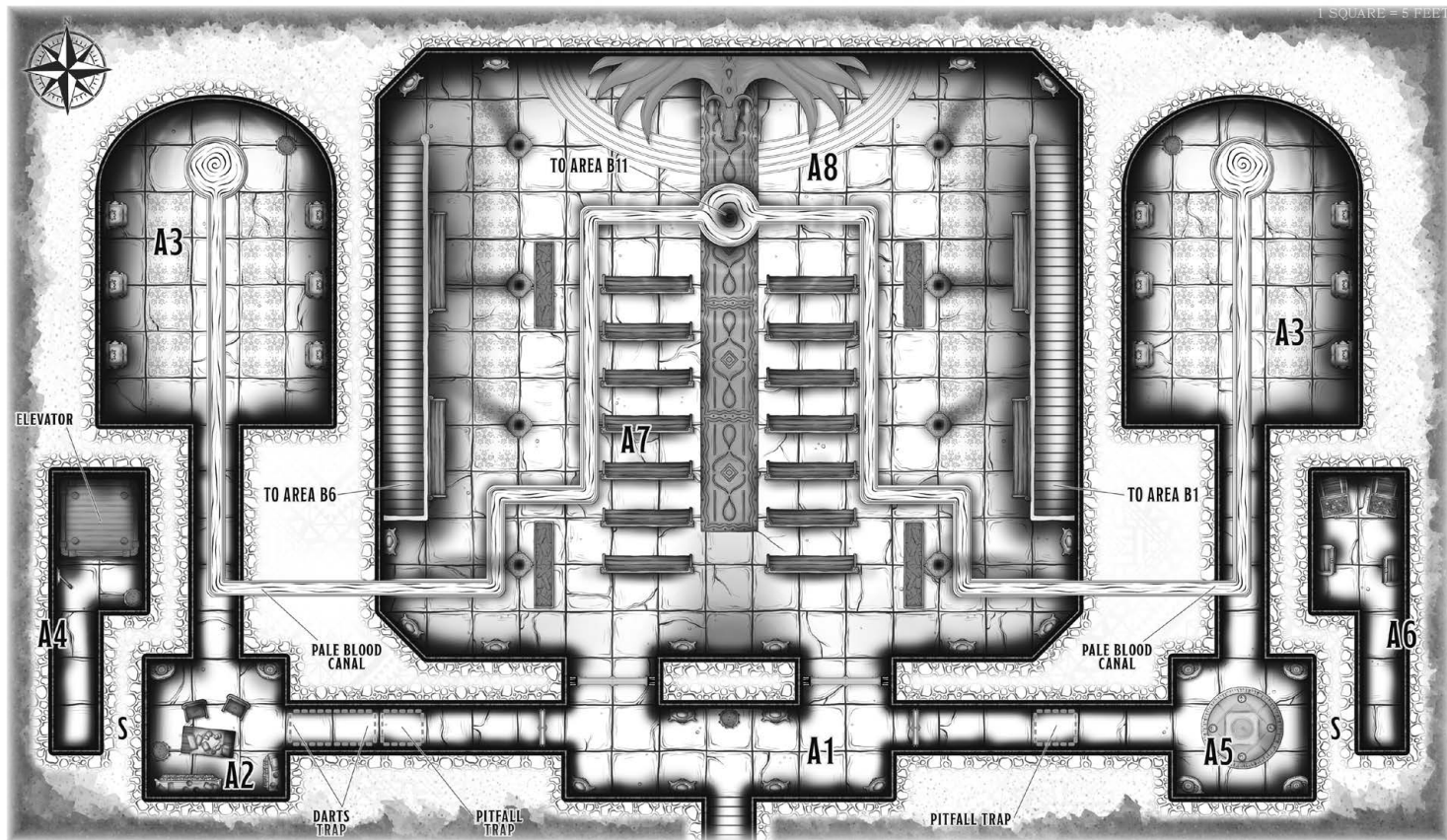
► **Light.** Some areas feature lit braziers, the rest are in darkness. Denizens of the dungeon are **dark-adapted**.

► **Secret Chambers.** Hidden buttons must be found to reveal areas A4, A6, and B5 (DC 12 WIS to locate).

A1. TEMPLE’S ENTRANCE

After a 40-foot-descent, the brazier’s light reveals four doors and six sarcophagi that line the stone walls.

► **Locked gates.** The pair of double doors north are locked (DC 15 DEX). The heroes must explore other areas of the dungeon to unlock the path to A7 and A8.



THE JADED SOLDIER

The heroes meet Garrick (**soldier**) in area A1. The poor man does not have the guts to continue this journey alone. Yet, his blood boils with hatred and the desire to avenge his fallen comrades. He tells his sad story to the heroes and explains he has nothing to lose anymore. He asks for one of two things: he begs the heroes to help him get his revenge and regain his honor. Or to straight up kill him, so that he may rejoin his fallen friends.

A2. TEMPLE'S ARCHIVE

Consider the following two traps before the heroes get to see what the temple's archive holds (see map).

► **Pitfall Trap.** The first person who traverses the corridor triggers the pressure plate and may fall (DC 9 DEX). Failing the check by 5 or more means they fall 40 feet and die impaled (area B9). Otherwise, they fall on the edge of the pit, taking 3d6 damage and likely surviving.

► **Darts Trap.** Poison darts fly and hit two random heroes when they traverse the corridor. If they cannot resist the toxin (DC 12 CON), they take 1d6 damage and their next attack or check is done with disadvantage.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** The archive used to have a visitor's log, religious books, and scrolls. The gnolls have defiled most of it. Spending 1 **crawling round** searching, yields 35 gp, 238 sp, two random Tier-1 Wizard *spell scrolls*, and a silver key; it can unlock the gates in A1.

DUNGEON'S BLOOD CANALS

The blood is transported in 3-foot-tall stone canals (see isometric map). This means that heroes need to succeed on a DC 9 STR check to walk or jump across them. Failing this check means the person falls and gets drenched in pale blood. The viscous sensation and the heavy clothes give disadvantage in all checks until they spend 1 **crawling round** cleaning themselves up. Each time that living creatures fall in the blood there is a 2-in-6 chance a **blood ooze** spawns (it has the stats of a **black pudding** but has a pale crimson color).

A3. MIRRORED FONTS

These two chambers are identical. They feature three sarcophagi standing on each side of the central canal. The pale blood accumulates within the circular pool.

One **gnoll** and one **gnoll brute** guard each of these areas. In the second round of combat, two **blood zombies** come out of the sarcophagi and attack all creatures. If the heroes throw enemies into the blood or mess with it, a **blood ooze** can spawn (see **Dungeon's Blood Canals**).

A4. ELEVATOR ROOM

The elevator descends 40 feet to the lower level. But the heroes must find this area first (see **Secret Chambers**). The elevator can hold up to four medium-sized creatures; it lands in area B6. Using the elevator from below removes the need to find the secret passage.

COMPANIONS WITHIN THE DUNGEON

Consider the following to make the best of the NPCs.

1. **Lira Hillfoot.** The brave halfling may find traps before others. She does not take the vanguard, she prefers to stay in the dark. She always prefers a silent approach and sneaky strategies. She does not know her brother is still alive (area B10) If things look dire, she saves herself and flees.
2. **Seraphine Aelendrial.** The priest acts normal and does her best to help the heroes at all times. She seconds Lira in taking a slow pace. However, Seraphine ignores the grave danger she represents for others. The festering corruption in her blood reacts to the cultists' dark rituals (see area B6).
3. **Garrick Wanton.** The soldier wants his revenge. He is thirsty for combat and because of this he kicks doors and looks for trouble. The heroes may appease him and talk him out of this foolish attitude that affects everyone (DC 12 CHA).

A5. TELEPORTATION CIRCLE

► **Pitfall Trap.** Use the same rules presented in area A2. The victim lands in the eastern area B9 (see map).

Any person with little knowledge of the arcane identifies this as a teleportation circle (DC 9 INT). A spellcaster can copy the rune pattern for future purposes.



A6. SECRET VAULT

The gnolls have not found this room. Perhaps the heroes have more luck (see **Secret Chambers** above).

► **Treasure (4 XP).** The heroes find the following items: a copper flask etched with an owl (30 gp), a set of silk slippers and a robe (35 gp), a fine suit of chainmail (60 gp), a mace inlaid with gold holy symbols (50 gp), a case with three *potions of healing* (150 gp), and 763 gp.

► **Bottle.** The heroes find a strange bottle with a tiny humanoid inside. The strange creature sits in a fetal position, grabbing his legs tightly (see **The Bottled Entity**).

A7. CHURCH NAVE

The church nave is lined with benches and towering columns etched with faded symbols of a defiled god. The pale fluid flows sluggishly through carved channels on the floor, painting everything in pale red.

The heroes find three **gnolls** and one **gnoll brute** listening to a gnoll **cultist** conducting a dark ceremony. Eight non-combatant gnolls (**peasants**) sit on the benches. The gnoll cultist starts an incantation. If the heroes fail to interrupt the cultist for two rounds, at the start of the third round, he summons a **blood ooze**. See **A Battle of Three Sides** below for more details about this battle.

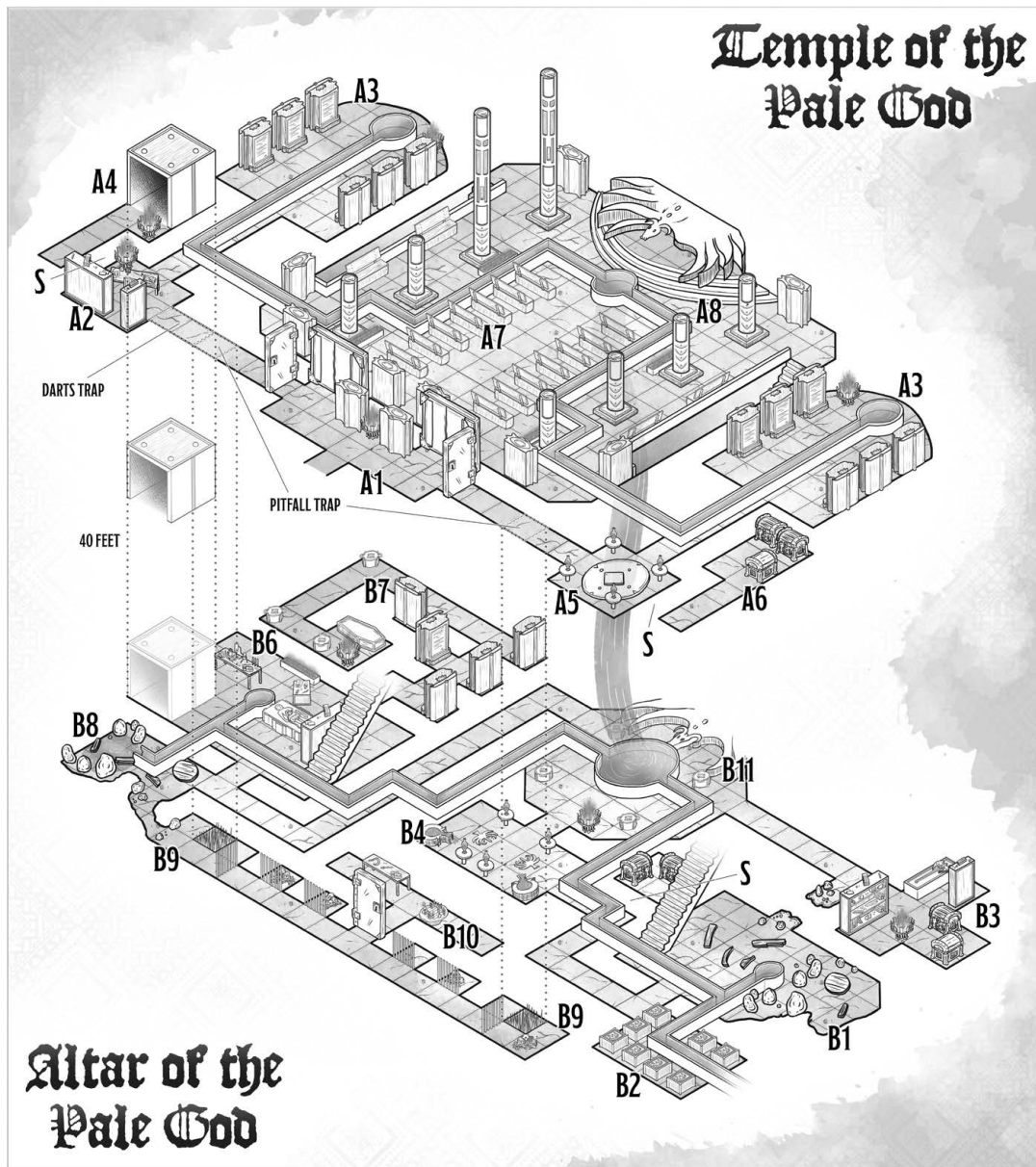
A8. TEMPLE OF PALE BLOOD

The heroes can descend to areas B1 or B6 from here. Unlike areas A3, the central pool of blood pours its contents down while magically maintaining its level. Prisoners are thrown into the pond as fuel for the cult's dark rituals. The heroes take no damage if they descend from here but get drenched (see **Dungeon's Blood Canals**).



THE BOTTLED ENTITY

A tiny figure sits pathetically. The entity's eyes are hollow, glowing faintly with a soft blue light as if pleading for release. The glass is covered in faint runes that keep the entity bound, with a pale, pulsing energy that flickers whenever the figure attempts to speak. Once a powerful mage, he was trapped eons ago as punishment for delving into dark magic, his soul was magically shrunk and confined within the flask. The heroes can use a *dispel magic* spell to remove the runes or shatter the glass using a blessed weapon. This releases the mage's soul; his ghost may return the favor one day (GM's choice). Nevertheless, breaking the bottle in any other way triggers a curse; a **gibbering moulder** is set free. The abomination is all that remains of the mage's soul.



A BATTLE OF THREE SIDES

THE SEA DRAGON'S followers, resting within the sarcophagi, have had enough. At the start of the third round of the confrontation in area A7, six **zombies** come out of their enclosures. They wear robes showing the sigil of their religion. A hero versed in history might know it (DC 12 INT). Seraphine, if present, identifies its origin too.

► **Friend or Foe.** A person who knows this sigil remembers their motto: "*In sacred waters, I shall be reborn.*" Saying it out loud causes the zombies to act neutral toward the characters and attack only the gnolls. Otherwise, the undead attack all living creatures in the area.

► **Reinforcements.** On the fourth round, three **gnolls** come up the stairs from area B6 after all the commotion. However, one of them suffers a horrible transformation mid combat. Deformed, it becomes a **mutated gnoll**.

DEVELOPMENT

THE HEROES CAN access the lower level in different ways. They can either use the elevator (A4) or descend the stairs (A7). But they can also fall from a trap (B9), or even from the central pool of blood (B1, see maps).

► **Blood Magic.** The gnolls perform dark rituals in areas B1, B6, and B11. They may all affect the heroes' journey in one way or another (see **Blood Rituals**).

► **Prisoners.** There are six prisoners trapped in the cells (B9). They are meant to be used as fuel for the gnolls' incantations. Lira's brother is among them.

► **Possible Allies.** The heroes shall encounter more of the former denizens of this temple in areas B2 and B7. If they are wise and know how to befriend them, they may gain precious allies in their quest to defeat the gnolls. Seraphine's presence is a great boost for this to occur.



Prison of Blood.

“Blood of the mighty fallen, flow and bind, strength from the scarlet sun, to darkness confined.

Veins run dry, but unholy power shall rise, in the Pale God’s name, let the lifeblood despise.

Spill forth the essence, let the rivers run red, by sacrifice given, the living are bled.”

ALTAR OF PALE BLOOD

“By the power bestowed in me by our all-mighty patron, the Pale God, I shall punish your transgression. Surrender, and I shall grant you a swift death.”

Gnoll Cultist

The heroes must explore the lower section of the dungeon to deal with all the gnoll cultists and/or their creations. Take into account all the NPCs that still travel with them. Lira may be reunited with her brother, for instance. Seraphine will know the truth about the corruption in her body (see **Tainted Blood**), and if Garrick has made it this far, he may be rewarded for his courage (see area B7).

BLOOD RITUALS

CULTISTS CONDUCT DARK rituals in the following three areas at the same time. When the characters reach the dungeon’s lower level, they may have the chance to save at least one of the innocents to be sacrificed and stop at least one of the rituals. Because of the nature of the dungeon and how the characters decide to reach this level, it may be impossible for them to stop all three blood rituals. However, the rituals occur simultaneously.

► **Area B1.** A gnoll **cultist** and five **gnoll** followers chant around the pool of pale blood, attempting to open a door to the abyss, the realm of fiends. They pour the blood of an innocent woman into the pool. If successful, three **barbed devils** are summoned forward. They roam the temple, hunting the heroes with a thirst for blood.

► **Area B6.** Noticing the potential in the strength of the mutated gnolls, the cultists perform a dark ritual to transform several gnolls into their mutated versions. A gnoll **cultist**, guarded by two **gnoll brutes**, says the magic words while four gnoll subjects slit their veins above the pool. They also spend the lives of two poor farmers as fuel. If the ritual is completed, the dark magic backfires. All gnolls and people involved die, their bodies explode and all their blood becomes part of the dungeon’s flow. Two **blood oozes** spawn from this horrible event.

► **Area B11.** A gnoll **cultist** and six **gnoll** followers hold an unconscious man over the large pool of blood. The man’s body is gravely cut; they are draining his blood. They do so until the man dries out to complete their dark ritual. If uninterrupted, this incantation causes the gnoll cultist to obtain otherworldly powers from the Pale God, and becomes a **mage** (1/day, it can transform a regular gnoll into a mutated gnoll). This new leader shall hunt the intruders and imprison them too.

B1. WRECKED LABORATORY

Rubble, debris, and pieces of wood are scattered all around. A smell of sulfur fills the air. And yet, the ominous river of blood remains untouched, intact.

A mage may recognize this mess as the result of a spell gone wrong (DC 9 INT). However, this did not stop the gnoll cultists from trying their dark magic again. If the heroes get to this area first and defeat these gnolls, they interrupt the summoning of fiends (see **Blood Rituals**).

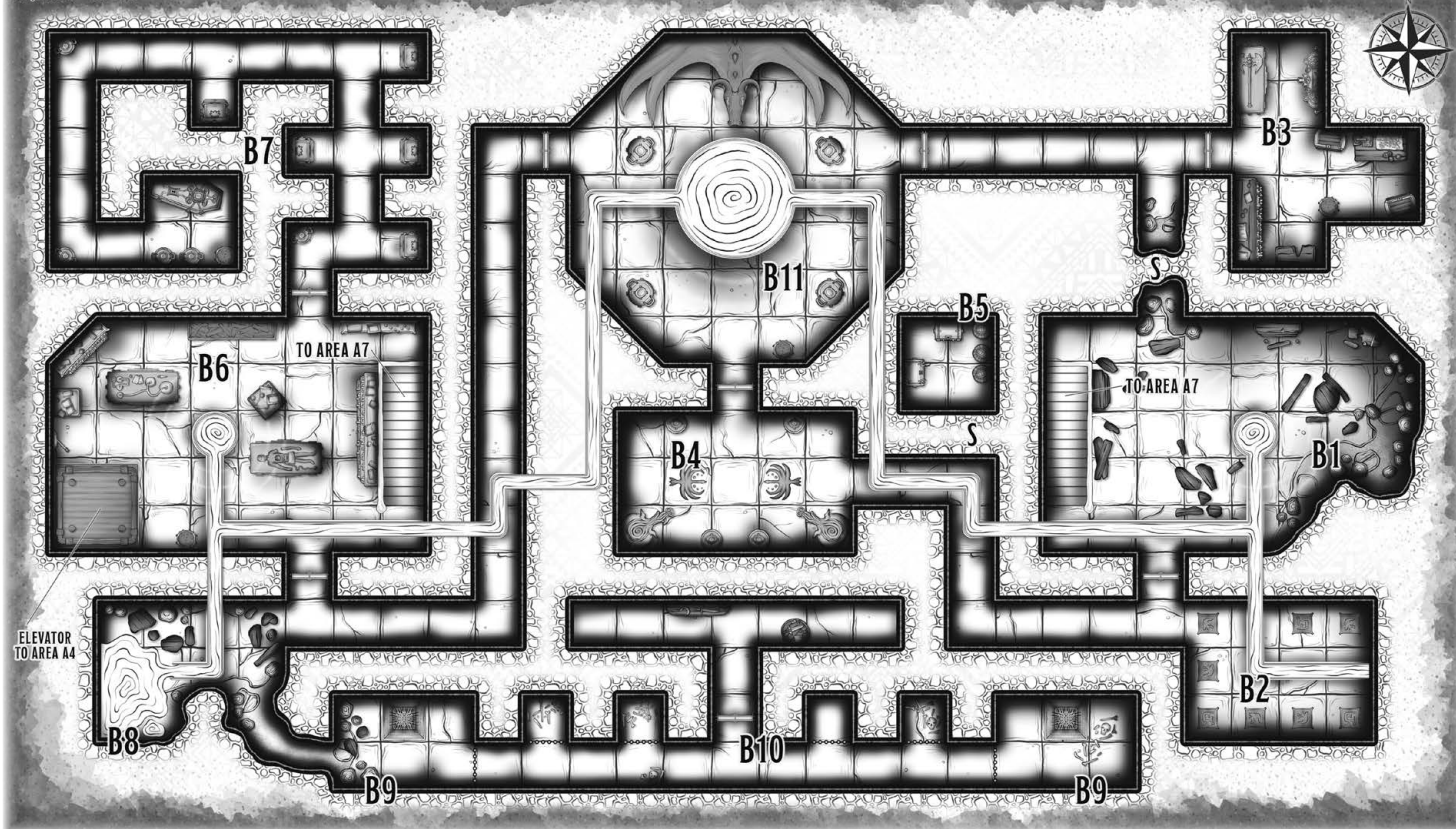
► **Weak Wall.** The heroes may notice they can remove the large boulders and rocks from the north corridor to pass through (DC 9 INT and 1 **crawling round**).

B2. SEA DRAGON FAITHFUL

This room houses the ashes of many followers of the former temple’s faith. Each plinth is the resting place of at least a dozen faithful. Gnolls do not come here.

► **Angered Spirits.** Four **shadows** appear. The heroes may recognize the sigil on the plinths and walls (See **A Battle of Three Sides**). Saying their motto out loud makes them neutral. If the heroes speak ancient Elvish, they may persuade the shadows to fight the gnolls alongside them (DC 15 CHA). Seraphine succeeds this check if she is present and allowed to parley with the spirits.





B3. TEMPLE'S OFFICE

► **Treasure (2 XP).** The room features a desk, a shelf, and a couple of chests. The heroes find a nice, steel double-edged greataxe (15 gp), a pair of popular books (10 gp), and several leather bags with coins (128 gp total).

► **Treasure (3 XP).** The heroes may spend 1 **crawling round** to search the room thoroughly. The search yields one *potion of healing*, a random Tier-1 Priest *spell scroll*, and two random Tier-1 Wizard *spell scrolls*.

B4. CHAMBER OF CLEANSING

Two intricate inlays of the ancient dragon god face each other on the floor's center. Two fountains pour water clear that vanishes before touching the ground.

► **Purpose.** Gnolls have left their mark in this area too. It smells bad, the walls are stained, and gnoll fur is scattered all around. They do not grasp the magical purpose of this chamber. Still, a priest recognizes this setup as an area to erase one's sins and heal one's body (DC 9 INT). Seraphine, if present, is quick to point this out.

► **Cleansing.** Once per day, a divine spellcaster may use this room and only two people may benefit from the cleansing each time. The priest must commune with the area for 1 **crawling round** and both participants must stand on the sea dragon seals. Both participants recover all their Hit Points, and they are healed from one disease or curse. Seraphine's mark disappears and she is no longer subject to the corruption (see **Tainted Blood**).

B5. SECRET ROOM

The gnolls have not found this room. Perhaps the heroes have more luck (see **Secret Chambers** above).

► **Treasure (3 XP).** They find two lustrous pearls (40 gp each), a bundle of five blue dragon scales (5 gp each), an eyepatch made of batwing leather (30 gp), and a magic wand, random Tier-1 Wizard *spell scroll* (100 gp).

TAINTED BLOOD

SINCE THE MOMENT the gnolls attacked her group, Seraphine's blood became corrupted. She has not felt any different or experienced any symptoms. This keeps her focused but she ignores the danger this means.

► **Trigger.** The corruption in Seraphine's blood reacts to the lab (area B6). The evil scrolls, the corpse on the table, and the number of dark rituals performed here turn this chamber into the root of all evil. It does not matter if the heroes visit this area first and attempt to stop the ritual being cast here (see **Blood Rituals**).

► **Outcome.** The heroes get to area B6. Seraphine looks around, her head throbbing. She screams while her blood seeks to abandon her body. She bleeds from all the orifices of her body and falls to the ground. Then she rises as a **blood zombie** in the following round.

► **Solution.** To save Seraphine, she must be cleansed in area B4. A *protection from evil* spell prevents her death, but she still falls to the ground after bleeding out.

B6. GRUESOME LABORATORY

A macabre scene unfolds with a central stone table where a mutilated, half-transformed person lies strapped down. The shelves hold ancient tomes and bloodstained scrolls detailing foul rituals and forbidden dark magic. Nearby, rusted torture tools coated in dried blood and bits of flesh hang ominously from hooks, their edges gleaming in the dim torchlight.

If the heroes get here first and defeat the enemies, they unconsciously prevent a ritual from backlashing. Thus stopping the creation of blood oozes (see **Blood Rituals**).

Regardless of their timing, this is the area where Seraphine's blood reacts to the evil in the dungeon. This room could be her last stop (see **Tainted Blood**).

► **Elevator.** The heroes find the secret area (A4) by using this elevator to return to the upper level.

B7. ALCOVES OF ETERNAL REST

A twisting corridor with several alcoves housing standing sarcophagi ends with a small room. An emerald-inlaid sarcophagus is illuminated by a single brazier.

► **Dragon Knight.** The heroes summon the ire of a **wraith** if they attempt to open the sarcophagus. The undead knight attacks relentlessly but its disposition may change if Garrick is present (see **Garrick's Reward**).

► **Angered Spirits.** Three **shadows** block the heroes' path on their way back to area B6. These enemies do not appear if Garrick was rewarded by the undead knight (see below). If Garrick is not here, the heroes may befriend them in the same way as described in area B2.

GARRICK'S REWARD

The spirit of the dragon knight can sense Garrick's feelings, even after death. The wraith appears but acts neutral toward the characters. A spectral voice says while it points at Garrick: *"You have lost everything. A dead man walking among the living. And yet, you sought no bridge to jump from, nor found solace in vices or excesses. May this gift help you succeed, be it obtaining your revenge, or being granted eternal rest."*

The wraith vanishes and the sarcophagus opens. Inside, Garrick finds a jewel-encrusted **+1 longsword** and a beautiful **+1 shield** with a similar pattern engraved in it.

These are Garrick's. He is happy to keep both items. Any attempt to rob him turns him hostile. If this occurs within the dungeon, the **wraith** appears to defend him.

B8. FLOODED RUIN

This chamber was destroyed by a cave-in long ago (DC 12 INT to notice). The blood spills on the floor; the canal is abruptly interrupted and broken. Half the room is flooded with pale, thick liquid. There is nothing of value. If the heroes linger too much in this area, they draw the attention of a **swarm of spiders** on the walls. The insects flee when reduced to half their Hit Points.

B9. SPIKED PITS

The heroes may fall when traversing the corridors to areas A2 and A5. Survivors of such a loud fall draw the jailer's attention (see Area B10). He has the key to the cells.

B10. CELLS

Sitting on the floor, the jailer (**gnoll brute**) plays cards with two other **gnolls**. They react to sounds coming from area B8, or people falling from areas A2 or A5.

► **Bars.** There are six sections blocked by rusty, iron bars. The bars can be bent with force (DC 12 STR).

► **Prisoners.** Six people (**peasants**) are scattered in the cells (GM's choice). Lira's brother, Fawkes, is here. All of them are too weak and famished to help in any way.

B11. ALTAR OF PALE BLOOD

If this is the first area the heroes visit when they descend to the lower level of the dungeon, they may prevent the gnoll cultist from obtaining dark powers (see **Blood Rituals**). Whatever the case, the heroes must deal with all the gnolls in the dungeon to complete their mission.



ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

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

DEFEATING THE CULTISTS

The heroes defeat the groll cultists and come out victorious. Constable Kent pays the heroes the agreed-upon reward (5 XP). The saviors of Oaken Valley are received with a great feast at Lysander's Reach, and a week-long celebration at the capital. The agents of Saint Terragnis carry out a cleansing ceremony for the entire temple.

THE SEA DRAGON FAITH

After the cleansing of their temple, a few faithful return from long pilgrimages to restore the place. It takes the faithful a couple of months to rebuild. In the end, they opt to seal the entrance and allow the dead to rest.

LIRA'S BROTHER

The siblings reuniting is a touching scene. They hug each other and Lira kisses her brother's forehead lovingly. This puts her in a dilemma because finding Fawkes was all she wanted and putting him at further risk would ruin both his and her efforts to stay alive. If the heroes escort her to the exit to allow them a safe escape, she promises to reward them back in town.

During the celebrations in the capital, Lira keeps her word and finds the heroes. She pays them 400 gp and offers her services as a thief and infiltrator.

SERAPHINE

If the elf priest makes it out of the dungeon alive, she is grateful to the heroes. If her condition presented a problem to the heroes in any way, it is up to them how to deal with her. She hopes that her actions and decisions are enough for them to trust or at least understand her.

Sooner rather than later, Seraphine finds a way to remove her corruption mark in case she did not do so in the dungeon (see area B4). With this, she does not only clean her name but she is allowed to return to her faith. However, she feels somewhat betrayed and believes they turned their back on her instead of providing help. She looks for the heroes after the celebrations in the capital and asks for a spot in their group. She still wishes to be a warrior of faith, but she wants to do so surrounded by people she can call friends, not colleagues.

HEROES OF OAKEN VALLEY

The characters become popular and their status as heroes becomes a magnet for jobs. From retrieving a missing horse to avenging the son of a guild's boss who messed with the wrong people. Perhaps, the characters will even have the help of new friends or allies.

GARRICK

Removing all the gnolls from the temple is a cathartic event for Garrick. Outside the dungeon, with teary eyes, he drops to his knees and cries in silence. In a strange way, he is happy, and he is at peace. He may not fully recover, ever. But his wound is a little less painful.

After a few minutes, he regains his composure, stands up, and thanks the heroes for everything. He removes his armor and hands over the beautiful sword and shield given to him by the knight's spirit. He explains he does not need them anymore. Garrick claims his soul is finally at rest and in no need for more violence. He wishes to become a farmer or a store owner and lead a simple life. Nothing the heroes say can make him change his mind.

THE PALE GOD CULT

The heroes do not know this but the gnolls were but a fraction of the Pale God Cult's power. Gnolls are prone to evil deeds and chaotic actions that draw too much attention. But other members of this ominous operation are more cunning. Drow, evil dwarf clans, and even humans remain behind the scenes, plotting and scheming. The gnolls were part of these plans; the heroes' intrusion shall not be forgiven, nor forgotten easily. However, these confrontations are adventures for another day...



STATBLOCKS

Blood Zombie

The blood zombie has its flesh pale and rotting, with viscous, congealed blood oozing from open veins like thick tar. Its eyes glow with a sickly red hue.

AC: 10

HP: 12 LV2

ATK: 1 slam +2 (1d6)

MV: Near

S:+2 D:-1 C:+1 I:-2 W:-1 Ch:-3

.....

Undead. Immune to morale checks.

Relentless. If reduced to 0 HP by a non-magical source, DC 15 CON to go to 1 HP instead.

Blood Tracker. The zombie can track living creatures with blood unerringly within a mile.



Gnoll Brute

A humanoid hyena with massive muscles. Its long, sharp claws are the size of butcher knives.

AC: 12 (leather)

HP: 18 LV3

ATK: 2 claw +5 (1d8+2)

MV: Near

S:+3 D:+1 C:+2 I:-1 W:+1 Ch:+0

.....

Rage. 1/day, immune to morale checks, +1d4 damage (3 rounds).

Bloodlust. +2 damage with melee weapons (included above).



@ John Latta

Swamp Dragon Cult

“Understand that this cause is greater than you. And let it be known that the swamp dragon shall come forth to strike you down if you refuse to join us!”

Featured Product

BEST ELECTRUM SELLER

THE SWAMP DRAGON CULT
By Elven Tower and Maps 'N' Quests
Designed for use with ShadowDark RPG

SWAMP DRAGON CULT
LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE
ONE-SHOT ADVENTURE

VTT MAPS INCLUDED

In The Swamp Dragon Cult, the characters start their life as adventurers and their first stop is Strasterton. They quickly learn that a group of cultists has been terrorizing the capital and its vicinities for a few months now. Word is that the dragon in the local swamp region is their protector.

The characters are hired by the capital's authorities and they shall meet several NPCs during their stay in town. They learn about an upcoming attack on Eight-Towers Keep, which is close to the cultists' hideout. On the way, they can make a detour to meet Azmagolkellos, the dreaded black dragon.

This is an adventure that has the heroes become the saviors of Strasterton and many other small settlements. They shall be the main authors in the eradication of the cult. However, they could meet the dragon's rage if they are not careful. The options are many, but one thing is certain. The poor people of Strasterton need the characters' valuable help to get rid of the nefarious Swamp Dragon Cult.

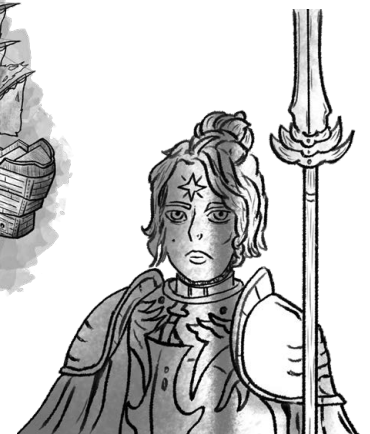
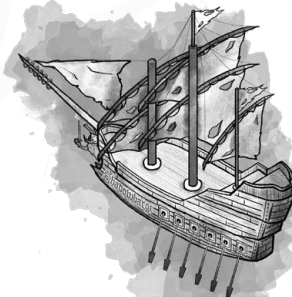
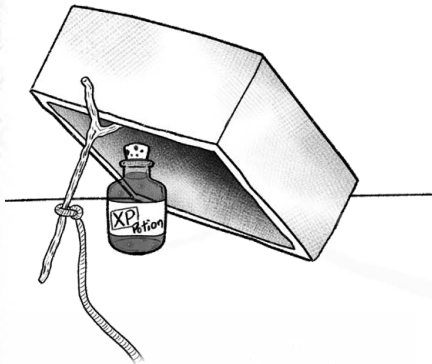
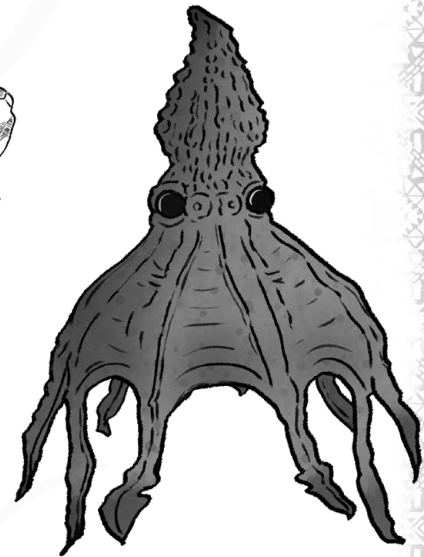
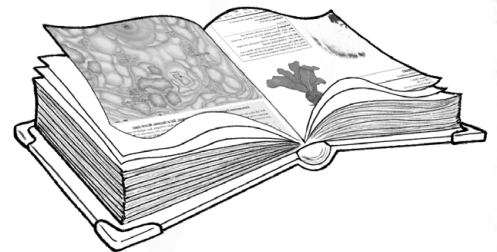
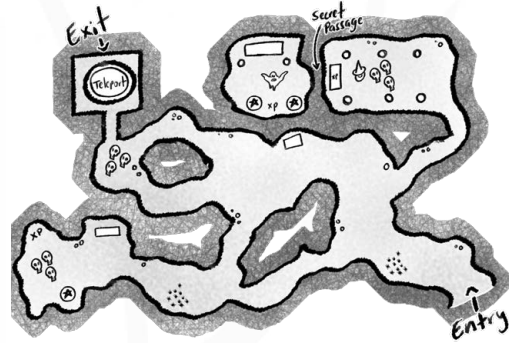
THE SWAMP DRAGON CULT
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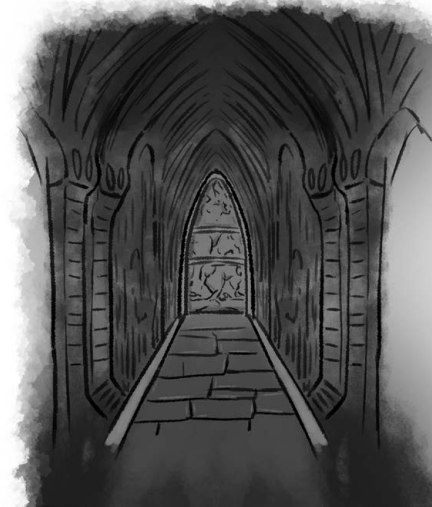
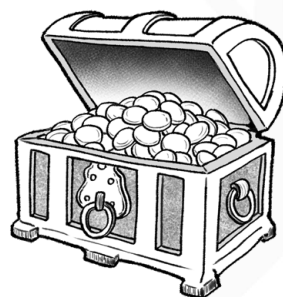
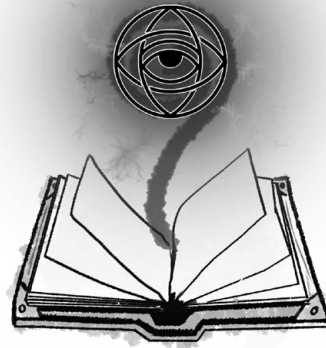
LEVEL 1 ADVENTURE
AN INTRODUCTORY SHADOWDARK ADVENTURE ABOUT BATTLING A DRACONIC CULT

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INKTOBER SPOTLIGHT

Illustrations by Arthur Rouise





Brilshire



Brilshire, a bustling coastal town where the River Glimmer meets the vast Azure Sea, is a place of beauty and strife. The town thrives on maritime trade, its docks teeming with merchant vessels and fishing boats. Narrow cobblestone streets wind through the heart of Brilshire, lined with timbered houses whose bright colors reflect the town's lively spirit. Yet today, beneath its cheerful facade, a tense silence pervades; the shadow of impending conflict looms. Tomorrow's prosperity is in doubt...

At the town's highest point stands Brilstone Keep, an ancient fortress hewn from gray stone, its tall spires catching the light of both sun and moon. Here resides Lady Elara Windrider, Brilshire's resolute ruler. A former knight of great renown, Lady Elara is as wise as she is fierce, beloved for her compassionate governance and deft hand in diplomacy. Her sea-blue eyes now gaze towards the southern hills, where scouts report a band of marauding orcs gathering. The ravagers are led by the notorious warlord, Grolmak Bloodthirst.

The threat has rattled Brilshire's citizens; merchants barricade their shops, fishermen mend nets not for the sea's bounty but to fortify defenses, and families huddle in prayer at the temple of the sun. Lady Elara has mustered the town's militia and noble knights, donning armor under her watchful stare. She stands as Brilshire's shield, rallying her people with promises of resilience. The air crackles with both fear and defiance, for the clash between the orc invaders and Brilshire's stalwart defenders shall soon begin. Mercenaries and sellswords are summoned by Lady Elara to help defend the town.

1. The best warhorses in the region are bred by Jonah Stormhead in this farm. As it is located south of Brilshire's wall, all the mounts and tools have been moved to the city or used by Lady Elara's knights. The farmstead is expected to be raided and burnt down by the ravaging orcs.
2. The gnome apothecary, Berk, refuses to abandon his shop and claims to be too old to run away from brigands. Hundreds of glass and clay vials litter his shop; alchemical reagents for potions and salves. A persuasive individual can convince Berk to seek refuge behind the town walls if offered help to move the most valuable crates of ingredients.

EVENTS

d8

Details

1. Eight thugs arrive in town pretending to be refugees from a raided hamlet. They bid their time and try to rob houses during the attack.
 2. When the orc band approaches Brilshire. A rainstorm breaks. It lasts for the duration of the confrontation with Grolmak Bloodthirst.
 3. Lady Elara, escorted by four knights, patrols the town bolstering morale and spreading a vision of hope to the locals who stayed.
 4. Dozens of refugees from raided hamlets to the south arrive in Brilshire. They bring ghoulish tales of the orcs' savagery.
 5. A hundred people threaten to flee to the west, fearing Brilshire's destruction. A brave warrior may instill hope in their crushed hearts.
 6. A corsair ship with two dozen brave sailors docks in town, paid by Lady Elara. The mercenaries are fierce but not particularly loyal.
3. Ginner, a commonfolk shoemaker, gives refuge to southern exiles in his home. Four of them were branded by the orc attackers before escaping. Their backs bear a terrible X-shaped wound made with a knife. The hapless survivors claim it was the orc chieftain himself who marked them.
 4. The town's tavern and inn is a cauldron of visiting mercenaries, refugees, and gossipers. The owner, an elf named Hareind, offers free ale and salted bread to all to help the defense effort. Adventurers looking for a place to stay are welcome in the Lonely Griphon for tonight.
 5. Townsfolk and refugees fight for the chance to hide out at sea in one of the many ships and barges in town. They believe that, even if Brilshire falls to the orcs, they can return to port after the sacking of the town. They expect the following days to be the harshest for the lowly peasantry.
 6. The adventurers' guild is closed. Mercenaries have either fled to the west or joined the ranks for the town's defense. If adventurers come asking, they are sent to the wall ramparts to find Randell Copperfist, the guild's leader. The retired adventurer is ready to defend his hometown.
 7. Ten valiant peasants gather at the library. They are resolute in defending this repository of wisdom and history from the book-burning orcs. They beg passing mercenaries to join them in keeping the library safe.
 8. If the town walls are breached by the orc marauders, Lady Elara orders all combatants to retreat to the Keep's Bailey. Castle defenders can take advantage of the double gates to rain arrows, oil, and rocks on the orc attackers. The orcs attempt to climb the keep's wall with tall ladders.



Brilshire

Seat of Lady Elara Windrider



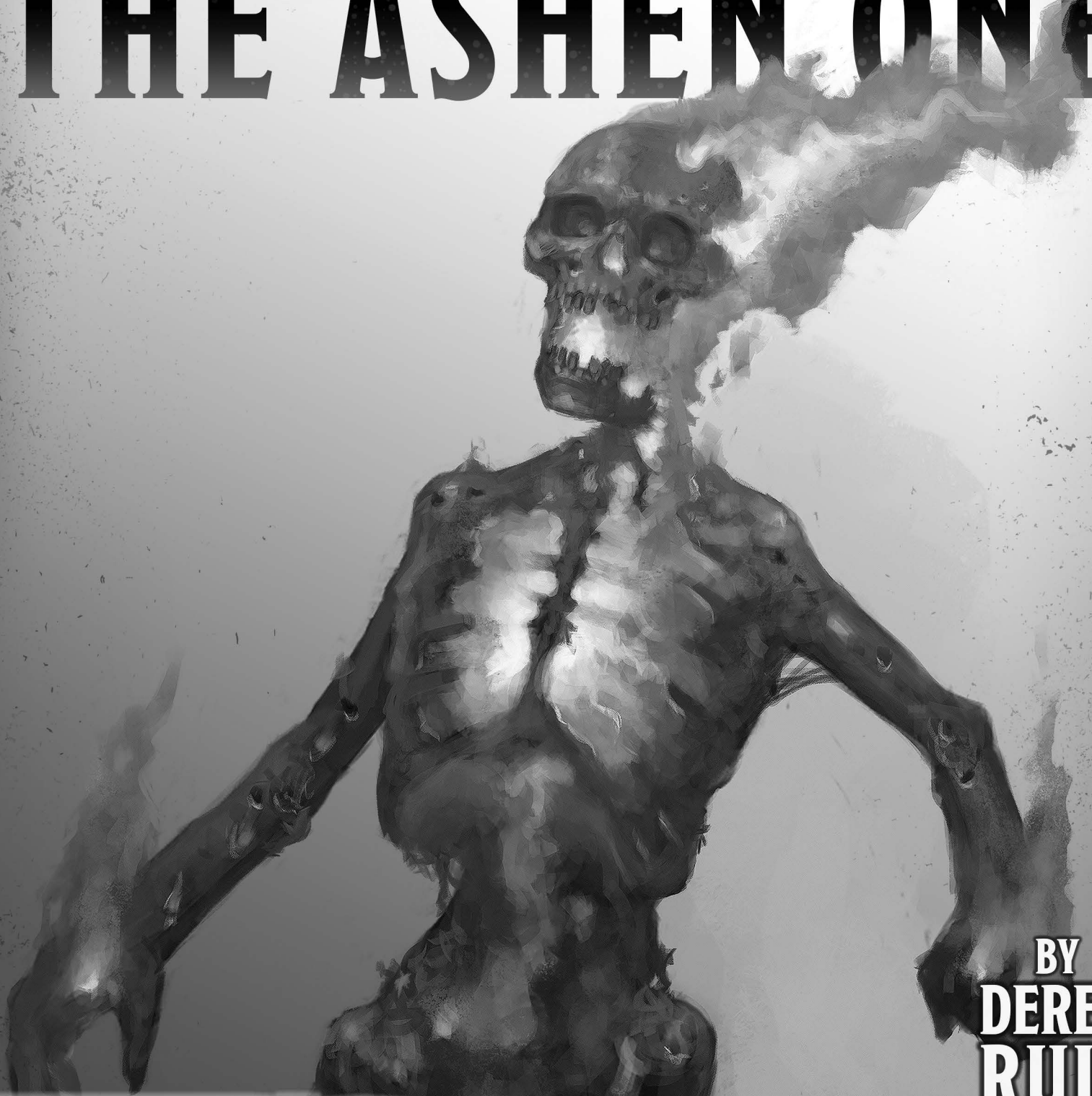
1. Stormhead Steeds
2. Berk's Apothecary
3. Ginner's Home
4. The Lonely Griphon
5. Town's Docks
6. Adventurers' Hall
7. Brilshire Library
8. Keep's Bailey
9. Keep's Courtyard
10. Brilstone Keep

9. Courtiers and nobles have their residences in the keep's shadow. If the orcs, led by Grolmak Bloodthirst, manage to ram the keep gates into the ground, a desperate conflict ensues in the courtyard. Combatants loyal to Lady Elara form ranks to resist the orcs' attack while cowardly nobles fight to escape from the keep in a wild craze; many perish during this battle unless adventurers step out of the battle to aid them escape. Such a brave action earns the nobles' friendship and debt.

10. Brilstone Keep is a fortified manor that has never been taken by enemy forces. It is the last ditch for Lady Elara and those loyal or foolhardy enough to still stand fighting against the orc forces. Along the narrow hallways and wooden arches, the battle is desperate and merciless for both sides. If all is lost, Lady Elara's knights attempt to use a secret escape tunnel to flee the lost city.

If the battle is won, adventurers on Lady Elara's side become local celebrities as the town's ruler honors them with knighthood titles and a banquet. Brilshire's immediate future is a long path of rebuilding and healing. Many families are broken; many shall not be heard of again. Even so, the survivors are grateful to the brave adventurers...

CHALLENGE OF THE ASHEN ONE



BY
**DEREK
RUIZ**



LEVEL 5 ADVENTURE

**IMMERSIVE SHADOWDARK RPG ONE-SHOT
ADVENTURE FOR THE GREATEST OSR GAME**

ADVENTURE PRIMER



n a time lost to history, a mage of unfathomable ambition rose to power, wielding secrets that bent the very fabric of reality. His name has faded from memory, yet his title remains etched in dread: *'The Ashen One'*. When alive, he pushed beyond the limits of flesh and soul, unraveling mysteries that other mages only dreamed of. He sought eternity not in life, but through an existence as something neither dead nor alive. In an undead form of ashen hues and spectral decay, he is kept alive by forbidden spells and a desire for others to seek the treasures he left behind.

In his final days of mortality, the Ashen One crafted a secret lair: an arcane, tower-like structure hidden deep beneath the earth, accessible only by teleportation spells whose runes are shared through dreams and omens.

THE BLOODFALL SHAFT

THE ASHEN ONE'S abode is named The Bloodfall Shaft. Within this sprawling dungeon lie caches of treasure, mystical relics, and the tomes containing the Ashen One's most potent arcane secrets. Yet, the mage left a twisted stipulation: none may take his treasures unchallenged. Those who covet his secrets shall pay with blood.

Driven by some inexplicable urge, the Ashen One occasionally reaches beyond the veil of his darkened sanctum, sending out whispers through shadow and spell. His summons entices scholars, warriors, and ambitious mages, filling their minds with visions of treasures beyond reckoning. The Ashen One watches, dispassionate yet intent, as adventurers arrive, lured by dreams of wealth and magic. Many have entered the dungeon seeking fortune or forbidden knowledge; few have ever returned. The labyrinth is littered with their remains, each a grim reminder of the mage's ruthless challenge. Still, rumors whispered in shadowed taverns and arcane halls say that the Ashen One waits for a champion to conquer his deathly trials and face him in a final test.

ADVENTURE HOOK

THOSE WITH ACCESS to secrets and whispers of wealth know that the Ashen One beckons all to visit the Bloodfall Shaft in search of wealth, knowledge, and renown. Adventurer Guilds, famous scholars, and court mages know of this call but few dare entertain the risk. Any mage with access to the teleportation runes can cast the spell to open a portal into the Bloodfall Shaft. However, it is known that the teleportation spell to exit the dungeon is guarded by the Ashen One; very few have managed to acquire it and escape with their lives from the dungeon.

Lyanna Gax, a master thief, has long awaited this call. Lyanna has heard of the characters' past deeds. She is also not vain or foolish enough to believe she can take on the Ashen One's challenge by herself. She writes a letter to the characters explaining that she has access to the teleportation runes to visit the Bloodfall Shaft. She wishes to raid the dungeon but not alone. While she is interested in a ceremonial blade said to be hidden therein, the *Bloodletter's Knife*, She is willing to share the rest of the treasure found. The letter summons the characters to a dark alley in the docks district of a nearby town.

THE LEGENDARY THIEF

Legends speak of Nysara, the Quick, a rogue with an iron will and eyes like silver coins, who teleported into the Bloodfall Shaft seeking fortune and forbidden knowledge. Her tales say she danced through the traps, evaded prowling undead, and outwitted arcane wards with clever misdirection and nimble fingers. Nysara climbed to the 3rd level of the dungeon, where she claimed a single artifact—a ring of eerie black stone. Sensing her limits, she fled, escaping mere moments before the Ashen One's wraith-like presence descended upon her. Though she returned alive, her hair turned white overnight, and she never spoke of it again.

RUMORS

d6

Details

- 1 People speak of a famous thief named Nysara who explored the Bloodfall Shaft and escaped; this was decades ago. Nysara took an onyx ring from the dungeon and is believed to be the only one who has retrieved any of the Ashen One's possessions.
- 2 Two years ago, a platoon of thirty mercenaries teleported into the Bloodfall Shaft, never to be heard from again.
- 3 Many believe that no treasure is hidden in the dungeon; that it is a death trap designed by a psychopathic, sadistic mage.
- 4 A mage named Barraster Jinnock hired a couple of sellswords recently with the intent to visit the Bloodfall Shaft. The former court mage has a reputation of being an adept magician but also of being a cruel and despotic individual.
- 5 Ancient tomes speak of the Ashen One's greatest treasure: The magic staff that he used when he was still a mortal man.
- 6 The teleportation runes to access the Bloodfall Shaft change. They can only be used to get inside the dungeon.

THE OPEN CHALLENGE

THE TALE OF the Ashen One's challenge has woven itself deeply into the tapestry of mercenary and adventuring cultures across the realms, inspiring both fear and ambition for generations. Though the Ashen One's dungeon is hidden and elusive, whispered legends and scarce records keep the tale alive. Adventurers of every rank hear the story of those who attempted the perilous journey, some enticed by visions of wealth and arcane power, others fascinated by the dungeon's notorious puzzles and deadly trials. It is said that the Ashen One's treasures include relics capable of unraveling enchantments, altering fate, or bending reality itself—rumors that fuel a relentless stream of challengers decade after decade...

LYANNA GAX

Half-elf thief

Lyanna Gax was abandoned by her elf father because of her mixed heritage. Lyanna grew up an urchin in the big city. She learned the craft of thievery to survive. Her father is an elf judge whose reputation would be ruined if she rose to prominence as the greatest thief of all. Lyanna sees in the Ashen One's challenge the means to become famous and to bring disgrace to her father's honor-bound family. It is only fitting that the *Bloodletter's Knife*, hidden in the Bloodfall Shaft, is of elvish craft.

Manner. Keep talking... The more you speak, the more I know of your desires and of your weaknesses.

Ambition. I must acquire the *Bloodletter's Knife* to secure my reputation as the most skillful of thieves.

THE FAILURES

Those who enter the Bloodfall Shaft and fall to its merciless trials are cursed in body and soul, becoming part of the dungeon's haunted tapestry. The Ashen One's dark magic strips them of their flesh and dispossesses them of their bodies. This magic casts their spirits into twisted, shadowed forms that drift and coil through the shaft's frigid halls. These shadows retain the memories of their failure, their once-strong wills shattered and bound to endless suffering. Unable to speak, they can only writhe in despair, drawn to any living soul that enters the Bloodfall Shaft in a vain attempt to share their torment. The Ashen One watches, satisfied, as his failed challengers fuel the dungeon's spectral defenses and woe.



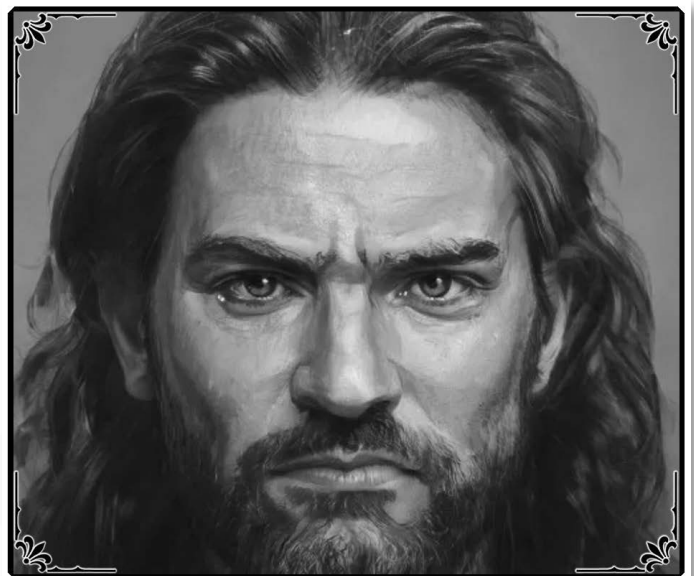
BARRASTER JINNOCK

Human mage

Formerly the court mage of a minor lord, Barraster Jinnock was relieved from his position after his laboratory was exposed to the public. He conducted despicable experiments on prisoners to further his knowledge of blood magic. Barraster has become a lone mage since then. The Ashen One's call could not come at a better time; Barraster has spent his remaining gold to hire desperate mercenaries. He promised the sellswords a sizable share of the treasure found in the Bloodfall Shaft.

Manner. Be careful who you dare speak to. I am Barraster. I shall not waste my time with the likes of you.

Ambition. The Ashen One... His secrets and power shall be mine. My return will be marked with blood...



Let's Make a Deal

My name is Lyanna Gax, I am in possession of the teleportation runes required to visit the Bloodfall Shaft. It is an arcane vault filled with deadly traps and mighty guardians. Together we can succeed. The odds are in our favor.

If you are interested in glory, wealth, and renown, meet me at the docks. In the alley behind the fishery. I seek but a magic dagger hidden in the dungeon. All else we can share equally...

THE BLOODFALL SHAFT

“Yes... Yes... New souls for my collection of ambitious adventurers. Death is cheap here. You shall soon be hopeless as you have come to meet your end.”

The Ashen One

RANDOM EVENTS

d8	Details
1	A group of three thugs and four (scholars) peasants arrive in the dungeon. The scholars expect the place to be rid of troubles; they followed Barrister and his mercenaries. The scholars want to study the dungeon in depth. They are neutral to the heroes.
2	A set of runes suddenly glows on the wall; necrotic energy saps the life force of a random character (DC 12 CON / 2d6 damage).
3	All magical braziers and light sources fizzle out after a dispelling magic pulse. The braziers ignite again after 1 crawling round .
4	Two shadows of failure drop from the ceiling and target a random character. They prioritize the same target during the fight.
5	A golden flower sprouts from the ground. If eaten, it restores 2d6 Hit Points (DC 12 INT to identify its kind and what it does).
6	A hero presses a pressure plate by accident. It triggers a swinging axe trap that deals 2d6 damage to a random party member (DC 12 DEX for half). If Lyanna is present, she notices the panel to disarm the trap before it triggers (DC 12 DEX, tools needed).
7	The sound of a bell marks the moment when, for 1 crawling round , the teleportation spell in area A1 activates. The unwise may step on it thinking it is the dungeon's exit but it is a trap. It teleports creatures to a random spot in a random plane of existence.
8	The Ashen One materializes next to a random character and attacks with its Life Drain ability before disappearing again.



MEETING LYANNA GAX

THE HEROES MEET their mysterious employer in a dark coastal district. Lyanna steps from the shadows, hooded and silent, to greet the characters. If the characters agree to share the treasure fairly while letting her keep the *Bloodletter's Knife*, Lyanna gives the characters a scroll with the teleportation runes. Lyanna may also share the following information:

- Lyanna is bolstered by a personal vendetta against her father, who is a powerful elf judge.
- The Bloodfall Shaft is a tower-like compound with deadly traps and immortal guardians.
- The teleportation runes are a one-way trip into the Bloodfall Shaft. The way back remains uncertain.
- Lyanna tells the story of Nysara, the Quick. She grew up hearing tales of this legendary thief. Her dream is to one day be as famous as Nysara.

REACHING THE BLOODFALL SHAFT

A SPELLCASTER DETERMINES that the runes on the scroll are a teleportation spell pre-cast (DC 9 INT). Any spellcaster can trigger this teleportation spell to reach area A1; it requires no advanced arcane knowledge to use it. The spell causes a portal to open. Crossing it leads to area A1. After the characters cross over, the portal closes and the scroll runes become useless and inert.

Level 3 Dungeon

► **Danger.** Unsafe. Check for a **Random Event** every 2 **crawling rounds** and after loud noises (4-in-6 chance).

► **Light.** Some chambers feature iron braziers with *light* spells, the rest are in darkness. All magical braziers turn off simultaneously once every 2 hours (or when **Random Event 3** occurs). They remain off for 1 **crawling round**. Denizens of the dungeon are **dark-adapted**.

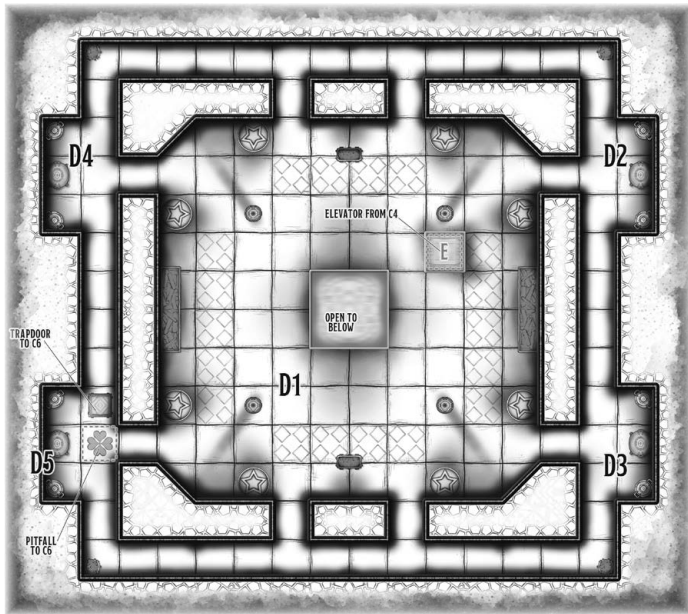
► **Secret Chambers.** To reveal areas A3 and C3, hidden buttons must be found in the adjacent rooms (DC 12 WIS to locate). Pushing them causes a section of the wall to slide inward and reveal a narrow passage.

► **Traps and Devices.** There are mechanical and magical apparatuses in the dungeon designed to kill. If thwarted or destroyed, all traps are rebuilt and reset at dawn.

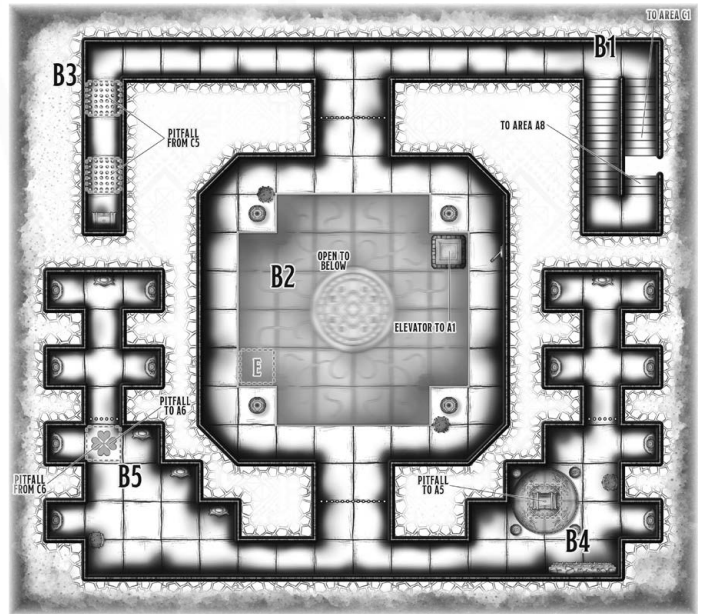
► **Elevators.** Floating stone platforms can be used to move between the different floors. When the characters first arrive, the first elevator is stuck in area B2. A lever next to it must be used to activate it. The second elevator is stuck similarly in area C4. The third elevator, which climbs to area D1 and the final confrontation with the Ashen One, is readily usable in area C4.

► **Fall Damage.** Each story is 30 feet apart and each 30-foot increment deals 2d6 damage (DC 15 DEX for half). Creatures that fall from the central shaft in D1 take 6d6 damage when impacting the floor of area A1.

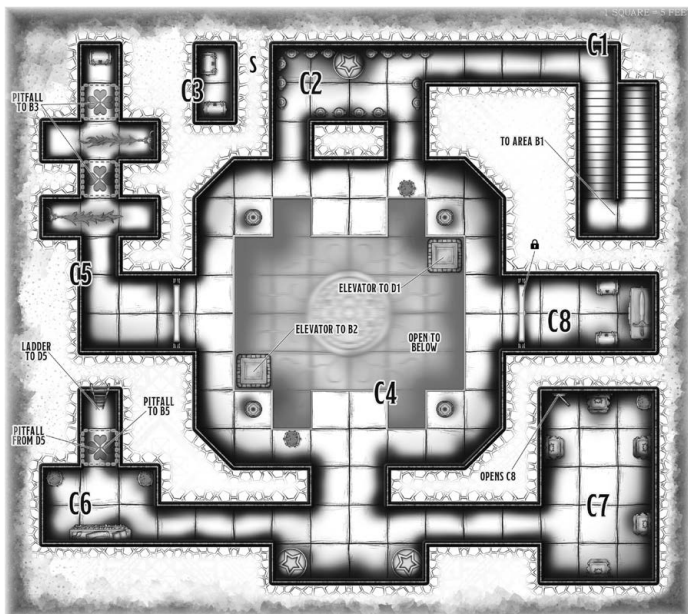
FOURTH LEVEL / D1-D5 (TOP)



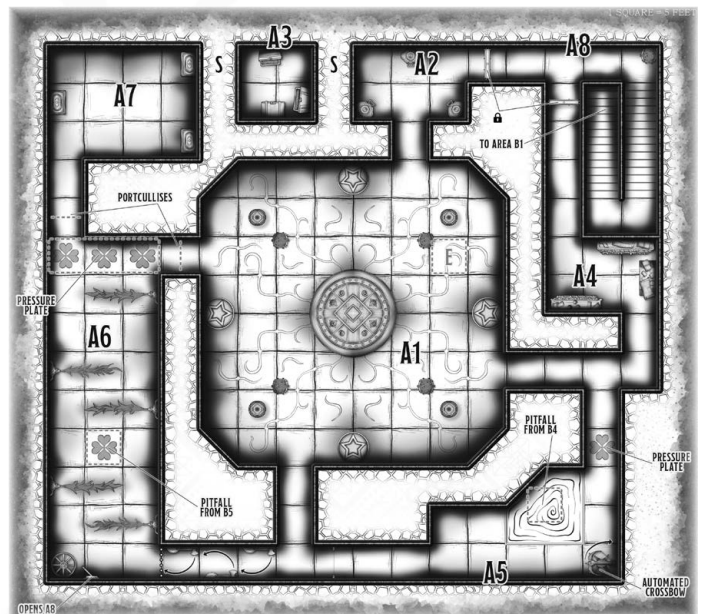
SECOND LEVEL / B1-B5



THIRD LEVEL / C1-C8



FIRST LEVEL / A1-A8 (ENTRANCE)



FIRST LEVEL - A1-A8

AFTER STEPPING INTO the magic portal, the characters experience vivid visions of swirling colors and kaleidoscopic vistas before appearing by the magic circle of area A1. They are not the first, other adventurers have come into the dungeon too. In addition, Barraster Jinnock and his mercenaries are already on the second level.

A1. ENTRANCE HALL

Four statues of hooded mages surround the magic circle. This chamber has a 30-foot-tall ceiling. This is the bottom of a 4-story shaft. The highest level is over 100 feet above, lit by a pulsating magical light.

► **The Circle.** A mage that studies it for 1 **crawling round** notices that the runes slowly shift. It cannot be accurately used more than once. Clever mages also notice a despicable trap in it that causes those who step in it to be teleported to random places (see **Random Event 7**).

► **Climbing.** An almost impossible, or lucky, throw of a grappling hook to one of the pillars in area B2 allows characters to climb to the second level (DC 18 STR).

► **Guardians.** When the characters teleport into the dungeon, three **shadows of failure** emerge from area A6. These people came with Barrister a couple of hours ago but lost their lives to the traps in that chamber. Their modern attire and equipment can still be discerned in their new form (DC 9 WIS to spot).

A2. THE THREE VASES

Three gilded vases lie by the walls of this chamber. A bronze plaque on the wall reads: "Choose a vase wisely to find the way forward." Alas, this is a deception.

► **Explosive Runes.** Each vase is branded with barely visible magic glyphs (DC 12 WIS to spot, or *detect magic*). Lifting any of the gilded lids triggers a fiery explosion. All creatures within 10 feet take 3d6 damage (DC 12 DEX for half).

► **Footprints.** There is evidence of Barraster's group passing through this door only hours ago (DC 12 WIS).

► **The Door.** The door is made from adamantine. Its lock is a marvel of clockwork engineering (DC 18 DEX to pick). It can be opened with the lever in area A6. If Lyanna Gax attempts to pick the lock. Passing or failing this check bolsters or stains her confidence for the rest of the adventure (see **The Thief**).

THE THIEF

Lyanna Gax (**thief**) is brave but the Bloodfall Shaft may constitute an overestimation of her skills. The challenges in areas A2 and A6 may put her skills on display. If she succeeds in either, her personality becomes overly confident and daring. On the contrary, failing in either chamber dents her self-image; she becomes elusive, inner-gazing, and over-reliant on the characters.

A3. SECRET VAULT

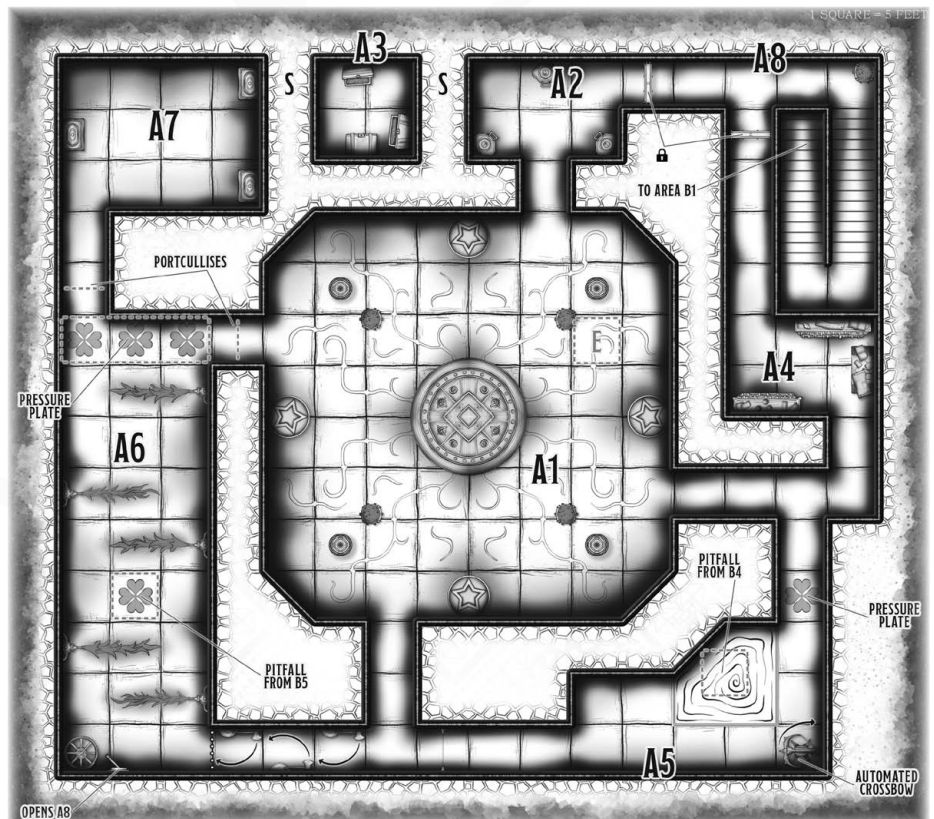
The chamber contains three coffers filled to the brim with treasure. The chamber has not been found before.

► **Treasure (3 XP).** The chests contain 450 gp, 1,250 sp, two *potions of healing*, and a flask of *magic ink*. If Lyanna is present she would like to keep the magic ink.

A4. ARCHIVE OF LIES

Two bookcases appear to have legitimate literature about the mage that was once the Ashen One and the dungeon, there are even maps of the Bloodfall Shaft. However, all information derived from these documents has been slightly altered to cause misinformation and overconfidence (DC 15 WIS to notice the ruse). On a fail, characters that study these documents have disadvantage in future checks related to whatever they inquire about. In addition, the maps are inaccurate and meant to confuse.

► **The Door.** The adamantine door that connects to area A8 is identical to the one in area A2.



A5. ACID POND

The chamber contains a roughly 10-foot acid pool. It is 10 feet deep. Creatures that become fully immersed in the acid take 1d6 damage per round and an extra 1d6 after climbing out of the corrosive pond. The pitfall trap in area B4 drops creatures into this deadly pond.

► **Remains.** The remains of a member of Barraster's group lie at the bottom of the acid pond, barely visible. Only a few bones remain but they slowly corrode away. The poor lad fell to the pitfall trap in area B4.

► **Automated Crossbow.** The device shoots one bolt per round (+4 / 1d8 damage). It is triggered by the thread line in the west hallway or the pressure plate in the north hallway. The crossbow has a range of motion of 90 degrees so it can shoot at any creature in the chamber.

► **The Apprentice.** A student named Jarla (**apprentice**) hides in the room with a cloaking spell. A *detect magic* spell or keen senses (DC 15 WIS) reveal her location. Jarla came with three other adventurers but they were all slain by the undead guardians and the traps in area A6. If the characters seem welcoming, Jarla offers her services. She prefers whatever course of action that leads the party out of the Bloodfall Shaft. She has had enough.

► **The Map.** If Lyanna is present, she notices a hidden trapdoor on the ceiling and claims it is a pitfall trap. She advises the party to draw a map to avoid that location in the next level. Whether they comply is up to them.

A6. CHAMBER OF FIRE

This chamber is the epitome of sadistic traps. There are five flame-spewing devices, three swinging-axe traps, falling portcullises, and a dungeon-high pitfall trap that encompasses areas A6, B5, C6, and D5.

South Entrance. The south door has visual access to the lever but is blocked by iron bars and the swinging axes traps. The axes are triggered when a creature comes within 5 feet of the iron bars. Creatures in the area take 1d8 damage (DC 12 DEX check). The iron bars can be bent with sheer force (DC 15 STR).

North Entrance. Stepping into the 15-foot wide pressure plate (see map) causes two portcullises to fall, potentially splitting the party. Creatures standing where the portcullises fall can choose which way to jump. Slow characters take 1d10 damage as the portcullis catches them (DC 9 DEX). The portcullises can be lifted by exceptionally strong heroes (DC 18 STR) or by operating the wheel valve by the south wall. A thief can also use fine tools to disarm the mechanism from within and cause it to rise toward the ceiling (DC 15 DEX check).

Flame Engines. Every few seconds, following a strange rhythm, each engine stops to reload. Characters can then move in either direction to avoid the flames (DC 12 DEX). If caught by the flame jets, the character takes 1d6 damage. A thief can also use fine tools to disarm the engines (DC 12 DEX). Failure by 5 or more causes the clockwork engines to explode, they deal 2d6 damage to all creatures within 10 feet of any device.

Pitfall Trap. Creatures falling from area B5 reach the middle of this chamber. Creatures can fall as high as from area C6, or even area D5, as this pitfall shaft encompasses the whole dungeon (see isometric map).

The Fall. During the characters' first visit to this area, a member of Barraster's group falls from B5. The mercenary, Arthur, dies if left without aid. If healed, Arthur (**thug**) claims his employer Barraster has treated the rest of the team as expendable cannon fodder.

A7. HALL OF SURVIVORS

Three stone monuments await in darkness. On their flat surfaces are etched the names of all those who visited the Bloodfall Shaft and escaped with their lives. Nysara the Quick is among those names; this proves her legendary exploits from long ago. If Lyanna is present, her resolve is reinforced by finding proof of her hero's deeds.

A8. FIRST LEVEL LANDING

A set of switchback stairs climbs 30 feet to area B1. When the characters first arrive at the Bloodfall Shaft, this is the expected way to reach the second level. The two doors to this area are opened by the lever in area A6.



SECOND LEVEL - B1-B5

THE HEROES OUTWIT the Ashen One's traps and guardians on the first floor and ascend to the second level. The mage Barraster Jinnock was here moments ago but climbed to the third level. The characters can interact with him when visiting area B2 for the first time. Fearing competition, the mage has blocked off the passage on the stairs to area C1 with a spell (see below).

B1. SECOND LEVEL LANDING

Two sets of switch-back stairs connect areas A8, B1, and C1. When the characters first come here, they cannot continue toward area C1; it is blocked by a magical barrier. Barraster Jinnock used a *spell scroll* to cast a modified version of the *wall of force* spell. The barrier lasts for 4 **crawling rounds** after the characters discover it.

B2. CENTRAL SHAFT (2ND LEVEL)

A 5-foot-wide walkway lines the walls of the central shaft. 20 feet above, on the third level, two floating platforms can be seen by the walkway (see area C4).

► **The Elevator.** Pulling the lever by the east wall activates the elevator that descends to area A1. The elevator can fit up to two medium-sized creatures.

► **Iron Bars.** Iron bars block access to this area north and south but some of them were bent outward by Barraster's mercenaries when they passed through here.

► **Undead.** After the characters reach this chamber, three **shadows of failure** emerge from the south hallway. The undead monsters attempt to push the characters into the central shaft (2d6 damage, (DC 15 DEX for half).

► **The Mage.** After the fight, Barraster Jinnock (**Lv.4 Wizard**) shouts at the characters from above (area C4). The mage beckons them to seek refuge and to abandon the dungeon. He does not wish to share any of the treasure. If the characters ask Barraster to remove the magical barrier in area B1 or activate the elevator to the 3rd level, the mage laughs in their faces and casts *magic missile*. If the characters retaliate, Barraster orders his four remaining **thugs** to shoot their crossbows at the characters once (+0 / 1d6 damage).

► **Climbing.** Climbing attempts with ropes are impossible while Barraster and his thugs guard area C4. They cut the ropes and keep the grappling hooks.

B3. TRAP FOR THE GREEDY

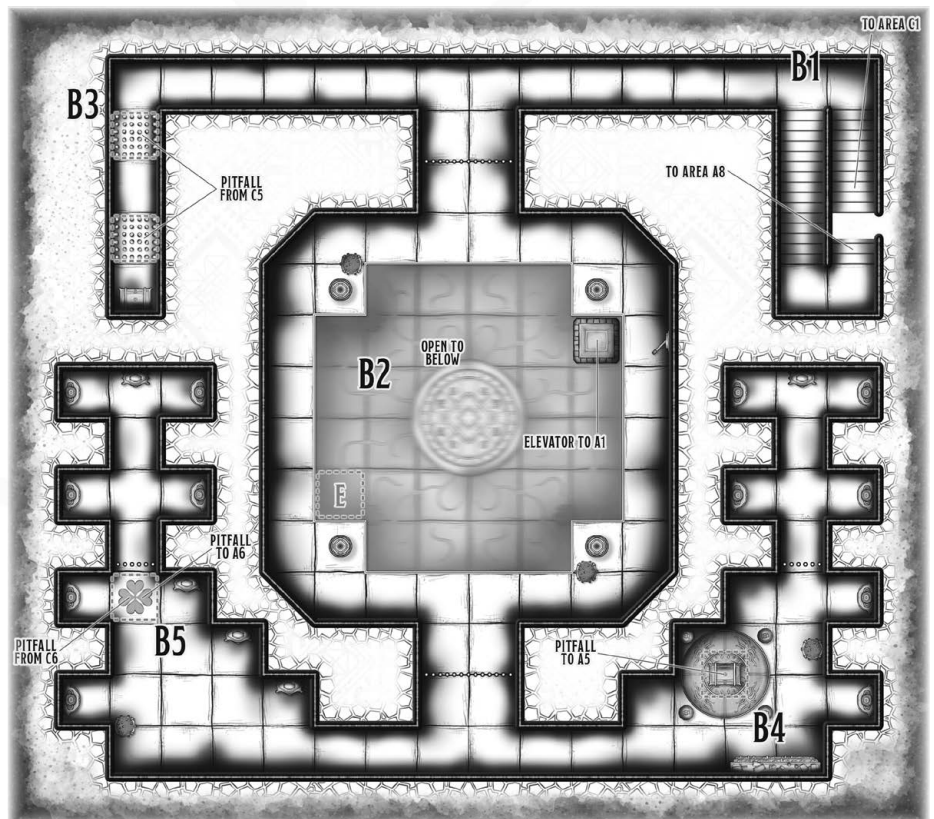
The grim hallway is interrupted by two spiked pits. The sharp spikes shoot up and retract randomly. A corpse is impaled in the spikes. A dying man leans on the treasure chest at the end of the trap-filled hallway.

The dying man by the chest, like Lyanna Gax, tried to prove himself as the best thief. His name is Karl. He jumped over the spiked pits and was about to inspect the chest when Barraster and his mercenaries came. The mage ordered one of his thugs to cross the pits to attack Karl. The thug lost his life in the first pit when the spikes shot up and caught him. Angered, Barraster used his magic to attack Karl from a distance, leaving him to die by the treasure chest both of them wanted.

► **The Pits.** A careful jump is required to vault over both pits (DC 12 STR or 1d8 damage). In addition, creatures who trigger the pitfall traps in area C5 fall here.

► **The Thief.** If left undisturbed, Karl perishes after 1 **crawling round**. If healed, the thief is grateful. He regrets coming to the Bloodfall Shaft alone. If allowed, he joins the characters as he seeks revenge against Barraster. He reveals the mage still has four companion mercenaries.

► **Treasure (4 XP).** The impaled mercenary carries a leather purse with 15 gp and a *potion of healing*. The stone chest contains 160 gp, 1,430 sp, an *amulet of vitality*, a *+1 spear*, and seven *Wizard spell scrolls* (one of each): *feather fall*, *invisibility*, *misty step*, *web*, *lightning bolt*, *protection from energy*, and *sending*.



B4. EASTERN SEPULCHER

A stone chest with gilded inlays stands on a rune-inscribed circle. Beyond it, clay urns rest on plinths. A funerary custom seldom seen in modern times.

► **Pitfall Trap.** A creature that steps in front of the chest triggers a trapdoor under the enclosure (DC 12 DEX to jump away). The creature falls 30 feet into the acid pond in area A5. The chest bears an incantation that keeps it in place, floating until the trapdoor resets. If the characters drew a map of the area, as suggested by Lyanna Gax in area A5, they have advantage on this check.

► **Strange Apparitions.** The souls of particularly resilient adventurers are drawn to the clay urns. They perished in the Bloodfall Shaft but have resisted the transformation into shadows of failure, to some extent. Roll on the **Strange Shadows** table when an urn is touched.

► **Treasure (2 XP).** The chest, if opened after the trap is triggered, contains two ceremonial daggers (30 gp each), a *potion of healing*, a *potion of vitality*, and 80 gp.

B5. WESTERN SEPULCHER

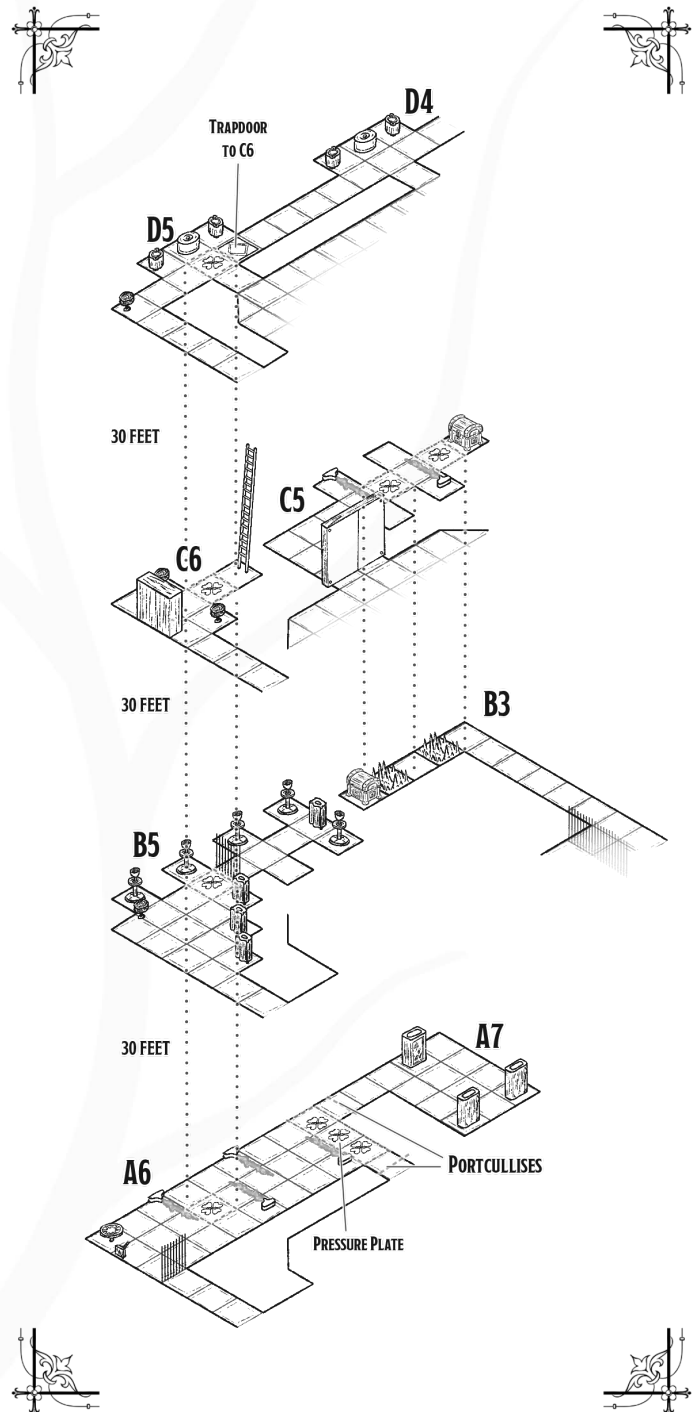
The marked spot on the map features a pitfall trap that drops creatures to area A6 when triggered by weight (DC 12 DEX to jump away). Creatures that fall take 2d6 damage. Careful observers notice a hidden trapdoor in the ceiling, 30 feet above (DC 15 WIS to spot). It leads to area C6, which in turn is connected by another hidden trapdoor in area D5 (see isometric illustration).

► **Strange Apparitions.** Strange souls are drawn to the clay urns in this chamber. Roll on the **Strange Shadows** table when an urn is touched, as in area B4.

► **Treasure (1 XP).** Behind one of the clay urns, there is an ornate quiver with seven *+1 arrows*.

THE WAY FORWARD

Due to Barraster Jinnock's obstruction of area B1, the characters are bound to spend 4 crawling rounds in this level. When the time is up, the *wall of force* blocking the stairs to area C1 disappears with the sound of a loud church bell. The characters are free to ascend, but the mage and his mercenaries also get ready to ambush the characters when they reach area C4. The despicable mage already suspects his forces are insufficient to confront the Ashen One. He plans to subdue the characters in combat and enlist the survivors.



STRANGE SHADOWS

1d6	Details
1	This ghost claims to have visited the Bloodfall Shaft hundreds of years ago, he died in the acid pond.
2	An ethereal man claims to be the greatest thief of all time. Lyanna remarks this could not be, as he perished in the dungeon. The man becomes enraged and becomes a shadow of failure . It prioritizes Lyanna Gax.
3	Once a noble knight, the ghost says the Ashen One in the fourth level is a mighty opponent. The knight laments that his companions became terrible undead apparitions.
4	An undead adventurer claims to know where the Ashen One's staff lies hidden. He claims a secret vault in the third level is the resting place of the fabled artifact.
5	The ghost of a paladin struggles to keep its baleful transformation at bay. It takes 1 crawling round for the poor soul to lose this fight and become a shadow of failure .
6	A grinning specter tells the characters the manner of his death. He claims to have inspected a gilded vase on the fourth level when he fell 90 feet to his death.



*Fools!
You shall not
survive my challenge,
You worthless mortals...*

THIRD LEVEL - C1-C8

AFTER THE ARCANES barrier in area B1 fizzles out, the characters can ascend to this level where the cruel mage Barraster awaits. In addition to their antisocial competitor, the characters shall find deadly traps and great treasures in the third level of the Bloodfall Shaft.

C1. THIRD LEVEL LANDING

The stairs in this level descend to area B1. The granite floor in the stone tile next to the stairs is decorated with delicately carved runes; they were drawn by Barraster.

► **The Glyph.** Barraster left an explosive rune trap for the characters. A *detect magic* spell reveals the evocation magic glyph. A spellcaster can carefully erase the runes to render them inert (DC 12 INT). On a fail, or if a person steps on it, they take 2d6 damage (DC 12 DEX).

C2. ROOM OF PRAYER

A limestone statue of a hooded magician dominates the room. Sixteen clay ewers surround the effigy.

► **The Statue.** Careful study of the effigy and the runes carved on its smooth surface reveal this is a representation of the deity Ord, the Secret-Keeper (DC 9 INT). A divine aura surrounds the statue. Spellcasting characters that spend 1 **crawling round** meditating before the statue recover the use of a lost spell and gain a **luck token**. If at least one character does this, an ethereal manifestation of Ord appears before the party. The deity denounces the Ashen One as an abhorrent practitioner of the magical arts; disowning his deeds. The otherworldly avatar beckons the characters to banish the Ashen One from existence.

C3. SECRET VAULT

The narrow chamber contains two stone chests. The south chest features a poison needle trap. Whoever opens the lid triggers a small needle to shoot out and inject a deadly poison into their hand (DC 12 CON). The character drops to 0 HP and may die if left unaided. If Lyanna Gax falls to this trap, she becomes deeply ashamed of her own failure. She regains her composure if the *Bloodletter's Knife* in area C8 is retrieved.

► **Treasure (5 XP).** The room contains 490 gp, 2,800 sp, a *potion of healing*, a set of +1 *chainmail*, and the *Staff of Ord*. This magical artifact may change the tide of battle against the Ashen One.

C4. CENTRAL SHAFT (3RD LEVEL)

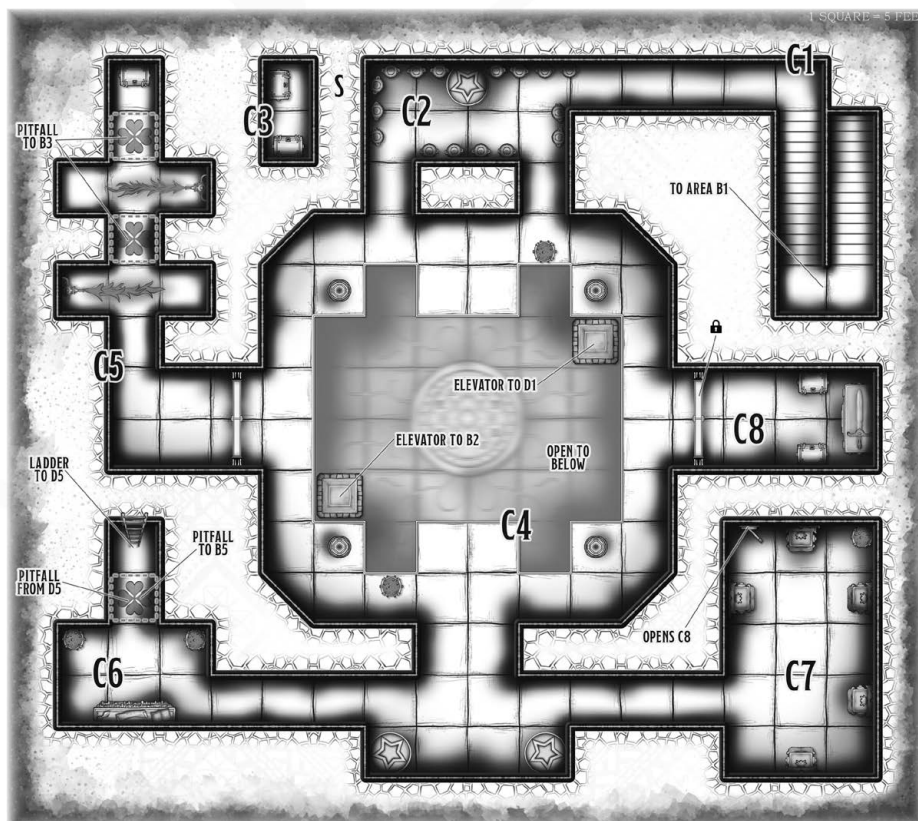
After the characters and Barraster interacted across this area and area B2, the mage ordered one of his companions to ride the elevator to area D5 to scout the area. The man never came back and is presumed dead.

► **The Elevators.** Stepping on the floating platforms activates any of the elevators. The western one descends to area B2 while the eastern one ascends to area D5. The elevator can fit up to two medium-sized creatures.

► **The Mage.** When the characters enter this area, Barraster (**Lv-4 Wizard**) and three **thugs** await in the south hallway. Barraster bellows to the characters an order to surrender. The mage assures them that if they comply, they can be rehired and repurposed as mercenaries.

► **Negotiation.** If both parties agree to parley, Barraster offers to hire the characters for the same fare as his mercenaries. He offers 5 gp per day of service and a fair share of the treasures in the Bloodfall Shaft. If the characters agree to Barraster's terms, the mage even brings out contracts to sign. Barraster treats the characters as expendable pieces in a game. Lyanna Gax does not like this but complies if the rest of the party goes along. Alas, if area C8 is opened after, the mage grabs the *Bloodletter's Knife*. Enraged, Lyanna charges toward him.

► **Conflict.** If battle breaks, Barraster casts *web* to impede the characters' movement while his thugs prioritize wizards and priests. Irremediably drowned by pride and self-importance, Barraster fights to the death.



C5. TRIAL OF BITTER FIRE

A stone chest awaits at the end of a perilous hallway. Flame jets shoot into the passageway following a strange rhythm. Everything in the room spells risk.

► **The Flame Jets.** To reach the chest, a character must avoid the fire jets or take 1d8 damage (DC 15 DEX). A character can spend 1 **crawling round** studying the pulsating rhythm of the flame jets to roll with advantage.

► **Pitfall Traps.** Two stone tiles in between the flame jets conceal cleverly-hidden pitfall trapdoors (see map). Characters that step on them fall to the spiked pits in area B3 (DC 12 DEX to jump away). Characters take additional 2d6 damage from the fall, apart from the damage described in area B3. After being triggered, the trapdoors remain open to area B3 until they reset at dawn.

► **The Chest.** Unfortunately, the chest has been empty for a long time. The legendary thief Nysara, the Quick found a magical, black-stone ring in this enclosure.

C6. SECRETS FROM A BYGONE ERA

The room contains a stone bookcase. A *detect magic* spell reveals an abjuration spell that protects the documents from the passage of time. If a character spends 1 **crawling round** inspecting the documents, they learn the ancient lore of the Ashen One (see **Adventure Primer**). Armed with this knowledge, all characters gain a **luck token** for the confrontation against the Ashen One.

► **Pitfall Trap.** The marked spot (see map) features a pitfall trap triggered by weight (DC 12 DEX to jump away). When triggered, the trapdoor in area B5, directly below, opens too. Creatures that fall reach area A6 and take 4d6 damage. Observers notice another trapdoor 30 feet above (DC 15 WIS to spot). It leads to area D5. If the party keeps an accurate map of the area and is aware of the danger, they can vault over the marked spot.

► **The Ladder.** The stone tile after the pitfall trap features an iron ladder that climbs to area D5. This passageway can be used to sneak up on the Ashen One.

C7. GUARDIANS FROM HELL

Six standing sarcophagi branded with the Ashen One's sigil await vigilantly. Between two of the sarcophagi, on the north wall, there is a metal lever.

► **The Guardians.** Bound to the stone enclosures to guard the access to the Ashen One's grand vault, five **dretch demons** emerge from the sarcophagi and attack. The pig-faced demons alternate using their Gas ability to keep as many of the characters blinded as possible. It is in their nature to prioritize attacks against spellcasters.

► **The Lever.** Pulling this lever causes wall machinery to stir and the adamantine door to area C8 to open.



C8. THE GRAND VAULT

► **The Door.** The door is made from adamantine. Its lock is a marvel of clockwork engineering (DC 18 DEX to pick). It can be opened with the lever in area C7. Lyanna dares pick this lock only if she succeeded in picking the lock to area A8, in the first level of the dungeon.

► **Treasure (6 XP).** The chests contain 350 gp and 700 sp. In addition, the *Bloodletter's Knife* rests on a stone table. The knife is large enough for a giant to wield but it reduces in size to fit whoever wields it. Lyanna Gax reaches for it. If the characters take her coveted treasure, the thief antagonizes the party and fights for it.

THE BLOODLETTER'S KNIFE

A dagger of exquisite craftsmanship, etched with runes of power and shallow canals for bloodletting.

Bonus. +2 dagger. Can be wielded only by a Thief.

Benefit. You deal double damage on attacks against creatures who are unaware of you. On a hit, the target has a gaping wound that bleeds for 2 rounds. While the wound is bleeding, the target takes an additional 1d3 damage and you regain 1 Hit Point. This effect does not stack; only one wound acts like this at a time.

FOURTH LEVEL - D1-D5

THE CHARACTERS ASCEND to the fourth level to confront the Ashen One. Area D1 is the battlefield for this confrontation. If the characters take the elevator from area C4, the battle begins immediately (see **Frontal Attack**). However, if the characters use the ladder in area C6, they can ambush the undead mage.

D1. HALL OF THE ASHEN ONE

Eight statues of the Ashen One line the walls of this grand hall, a testament to the gargantuan ego of the undead mage. The opening in the middle leads to the base of the Bloodfall Shaft and toward certain death.

The guardian of this dungeon, the Ashen One, awaits the characters to test their combat prowess, magical skills, and resolve. The encounter can play out in many ways depending on the characters' actions before arriving. The **Ashen One** is immune to non-magical weapons; the magical artifacts hidden in the dungeon are essential to change the tide of battle in the characters' favor. In the 2nd round after the full party is in the area (see **Elevator** below), two **shadows of failure** join the fight.

► **Barraster.** If the mage (**Lv.-4 Wizard**) is alive and allied with the characters, he is a useful ally in this fight. Alas, the Ashen One prefers to attack spellcasters, Barraster Jinnock may not survive this fight.

► **Elevator.** Using the elevator from area C4 places starts the fight immediately. Only two people at a time can use the floating platform, making the battle tough for the first characters to arrive. It takes 1 round for the floating platform to move up and down again.

► **Frontal Attack.** The **Ashen One** attacks the first to arrive on the elevator immediately with cackling laughter. The staggered arrival of party members makes this fight a veritable challenge.

► **Ambush.** Reaching the fourth level with the ladder in area C6 provides the party the chance to assemble the full party before attacking the Ashen One. In addition, they can emerge into area C1 from multiple entry points to attempt an ambush. Areas D2 and D4 offer additional resources to fight the Ashen One.

► **Success.** After defeating the Ashen One, the circle in area A1 activates. Creatures that step on it return to wherever they were before the adventure.

D2. THE BOUND APPRENTICES

Three gilded vases inscribed with runes await in a dark alcove. Two of them shake from time to time.

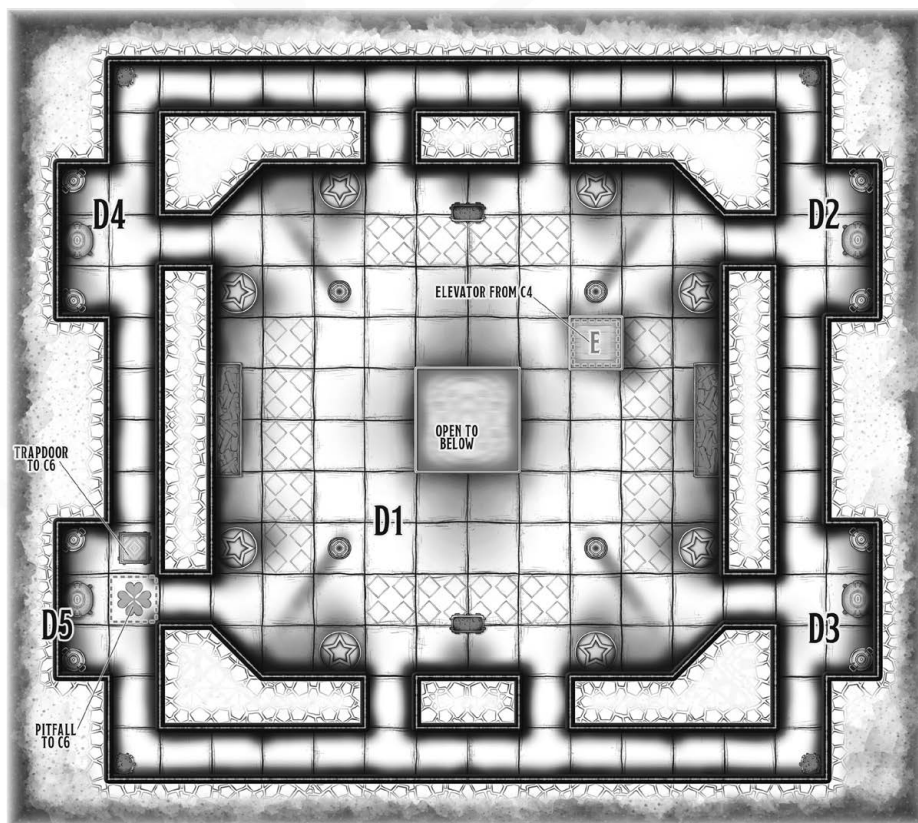
A spellcaster who studies the runes determines they are meant to bind an entity inside the vases for eternity (DC 12 INT). If the runes are defaced or the lids lifted, two people coalesce from thin air. The two strangers were apprentices of the Ashen One a long time ago. Their master betrayed them and bound them to the vases. The apprentices recall that every few decades, the Ashen One comes to them to relish in their abandonment and despair. Both feel a deep hatred for the Ashen One.

Grateful for their freedom and eager for revenge, He'ershingen and Mosiken (**apprentices**) offer their magic to the characters to fight the Ashen One. Both speak the Common tongue but have a thick accent from a bygone era. The third vase contains a mound of ashes.

D3. SECRETS FROM FAR AWAY

The three vases in this chamber are engraved with delicate carvings that form a complex map across the three pottery pieces. A careful observer notices the patterns that form the map (DC 9 WIS to spot). If the characters take the vases with them after the adventure or spend 1 **crawling round** copying the map, they can keep it.

► **A New Adventure.** Runes on the map spell the location of a mighty, life-changing treasure. It is something the Ashen One desired but never could attain.



D4. BOUND ADVENTURERS

The vases in this chamber are arcane containment devices, similar to the ones in area D2. Alas, Those trapped here were once adventurers who dared delve into the Bloodfall Shaft. For obscure reasons, the Ashen One decided not to kill them and instead bound them to this prison. Over a long time, dozens of people have been stored in here for the Ashen One's amusement.

► **The Runes.** A spellcaster determines that these enclosures are meant to hold dozens of bound entities (DC 12 INT). Defacing the runes or removing a lid has a 50% chance per vase of releasing a bound adventurer or a spirit (Roll on the **Strange Shadows** table).

► **Adventurers.** Up to three adventurers can be freed if the odds are right (one per vase). Their names are Alexander (human **soldier**), Ermenalla (elf **apprentice**), and Jiruthia (dwarf **thug**). They are confused but thankful to the characters. Due to their fragile mental state, the three of them have disadvantage in Morale checks.

D5. FALLS AND PASSAGES

The area contains three decorative vases filled with sand, a deadly pitfall trap, and a secret trapdoor.

► **Pitfall Trap.** The marked spot (see map) features a pitfall trap triggered by weight (DC 12 DEX to jump away). When triggered, the trapdoors in areas C6 and B5, directly below, open too. Victims fall the height of the dungeon, reach area A6, and take 6d6 damage. If the party keeps an accurate map of the area and is aware of the danger, they can vault over the marked spot.

► **The Trapdoor.** The stone tile next to the pitfall trap features a hidden trapdoor (DC 12 WIS to spot) that conceals a ladder to area C6. The party can climb to this level using this ladder without alerting the Ashen One.

ADVENTURE CONCLUSION

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

THE BLOODFALL SHAFT

After the Ashen One's demise, the teleportation circle in area A1 can be used to exit the dungeon. The portal leads the characters back to their world. The structural integrity of the Bloodfall Shaft quickly deteriorates after its guardian is defeated. The teleportation runes to access it never renew and the magical place slowly fades into oblivion. Whatever treasures or souls are still in the dungeon after the characters leave are lost forever.

THE THIEF

If Lyanna Gax survives the adventure, she keeps the *Bloodletter's Knife* and whatever other treasure the party agrees to share with her. Soon after the party returns from the Bloodfall Shaft, they rise to prominence among adventurers and mercenaries as the ones who finally vanquished the Ashen One. Lyanna Gax takes advantage of this momentary fame to shroud herself in vain glory by calling herself the greatest thief of all. While the title is disputed by many, her goal of bringing shame to her father and family does succeed. The elvish judge does his best to distance his reputation from her but is ultimately forced to renounce his position out of public shame.

THE MAGE

If Barraster Jinnock survives the adventure after hiring the characters in the dungeon, he pays them the wage of 5 gp each and asks for all the other treasure. If he thinks some items can be useful for his goals in the future, he lets the heroes keep them. The characters' deeds in Barraster's service are adventures for another day...



STATBLOCKS

The Ashen One

An undead abomination made of charcoal-black bones with a core of hellfire within its ribcage.

AC: 11 (16 with arcane armor)

HP: 20 LV₅

ATK: 1 death touch +4 (1d4 + life drain) and 1 spell

MV: Near AL: C

S:+3 D:+1 C:+2 I:+3 W:+0 Ch:+2

.....

Greater Undead. Immune to morale checks. Only damaged by silver or magical sources.

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

Arcane Armor (INT Spell). Self. DC 12. AC 16 for 2d4 rounds.

Fire Blast (INT Spell). DC 12. Far, one target. 2d6 damage. Cancel (INT Spell). DC

Throw Ashes (INT Spell). DC 12. Target within near is blinded (Focus).



Shadow of Failure

A sentient shadow in the vague shape of a hooded human. In its onyx eyes, the shame of a failed lifespan can be glimpsed, if only for a fleeting moment.

AC: 12

HP: 14 LV₃

ATK: 2 deathly touch +2 (1d4) and 1 scream

MV: Near (fly) AL: C

S:-4 D:+2 C:+2 I:-1 W:+0 Ch:-1

.....

Undead. Immune to morale checks.

Scream. A single creature within double near DC 12 CHA or paralyzed for 1d3 rounds.



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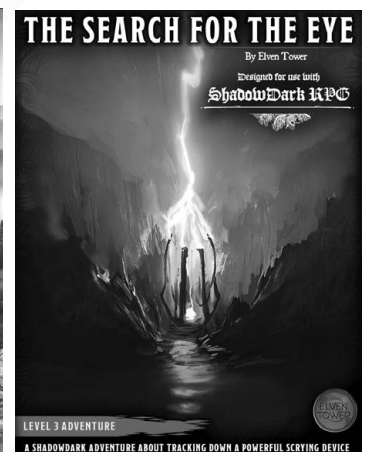
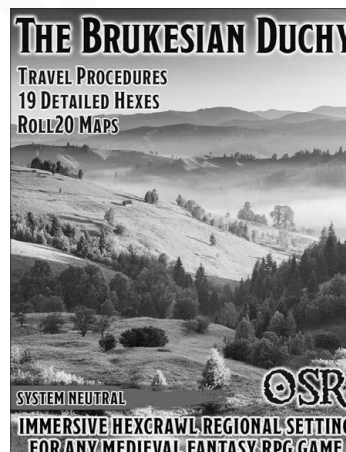
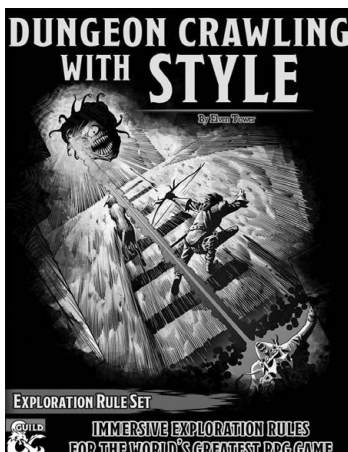
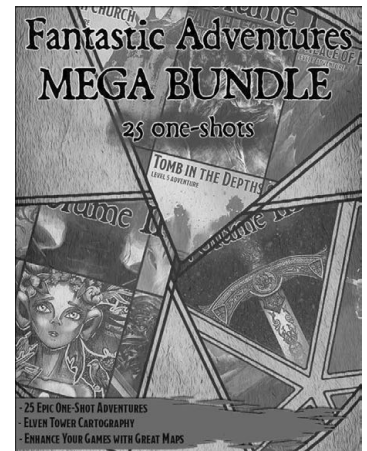
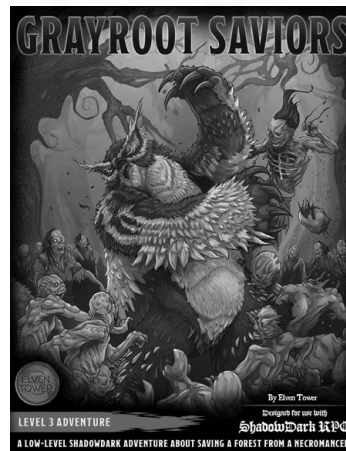
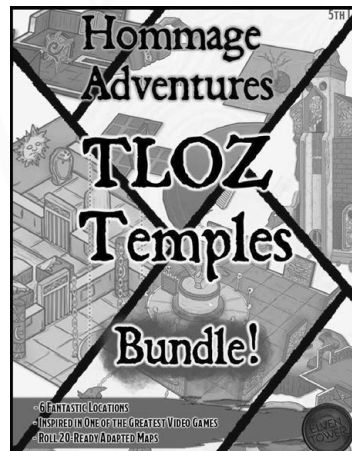
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